

ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE

DOWN TO EARTH: AN ALCHEMICAL HERMENEUTIC ARTS-BASED SELF-
STUDY

by

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Thy Womb Jesus

Bless my eyes to see tenderly

Bless my ears to listen softly

Bless my voice to speak truthfully

Bless my heart to receive grace

Let me nourish and be nourished by the life that is You in me

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my Willow Tree
And the Mystery that exists between us.

And to my husband Harvey,
Whose strong and constant love
Freed me to go where I needed to go.

Abstract

This research has occurred over a twenty-one year span, most intensely during this past year. At twenty-six years old, after sighting a Bent Willow Chair, I became completely enchanted with creating with the willow tree. During the same period I moved to Northern Saskatchewan where the willow tree in its boreal forest eco-system awakened in me a new spirituality. This thesis tells the story in the power of this awakening by engaging in the questions, “How does the willow tree call and reclaim the feminine voice? What is the power in this reclamation?”

The willow tree invited me to enter an imaginal place where I always felt the presence of an ancient matriarch who held me in her wisdom, compassion, peace and unconditional love. This space became my lifeline. Eco-Art Therapy and storytelling lead the path to the cornerstone of my literature research, Jungian depth psychology. Diving deeply into the archetypes at play in both the silencing and reclaiming of my voice has been entirely transformational. The transformation has occurred in the realm of healing a split between masculine and feminine values. What began for me as an enchanted encounter has now embodied my way of life as a woman.

Keywords: eco-art-therapy, archetypes, sacred feminine, Black Madonna, anxiety, hysteria, attachment, imaginal space, willow tree, womb

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And thank-you to my Mother whose presence is forever in my heart and who I somehow know is healing along with me.

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Chapter 1

The Question

This research is a hermeneutic arts-based study of a deepening relationship to feminine voice and the willow tree. The question I pose is two-fold. How does the willow tree call and reclaim the feminine voice? What is the power in this reclamation?

An Overview of the Chapter Contents

In the first chapter I will describe my life experiences that are significant to this thesis project and how they pertain to the disciplines of art therapy and depth psychology. In Chapter 2; I will situate this work within the larger context of art therapy and depth psychological literature. Methodology makes for the content of Chapter 3, and Chapter 4 providing the results in the form of a narrative along with the art process that went into answering my questions. A summation of the thesis process is presented in Chapter 5 along with implications for further research. Throughout this thesis project I will use story-telling and artistic dialogue to create a series of art pieces that act as a visual representation that complements the textual representation.

Re-search: A Four Dimensional Spiralling Framework

The text of this thesis is presented using the image of a spiral, ever expanding upward and outward in a progression of space, place, time and experiences yet centered around past beginnings. I am constantly reflecting backward upon my life in order to go forward. This inner to outer ever expanding cycle speaks to the way I live my life. I need to stay in my reflective, percolating inner world until clarity reveals itself. Because of the way I process my movement toward clarity, it has been only recently that I have been able to write about my process in a linear form. Significant tension between my inner to outer ever expanding cyclical process of reaching understanding, and the linear form of written

text has been a challenge.

I begin at an ending of this self-study process. This is only one of several endings however, which is reason for phrasing the previous sentence using ‘an ending,’ it is one moment within the spiral form of reaching further understandings. T.S. Eliot refers to such a spiralling pattern in his poem *Little Gidding* when he says,

We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time.

(Eliot, 1942)

The reason I share these thoughts with my readers at the onset is twofold. First I wish to emphasize the importance of holding fast to our soul work and trusting that what we are seeking will be revealed. Secondly, though our soul work may feel very lonely, I know I have not been alone in this process. The Divine Mother, through a gamut of ways, continuously let me know of Her presence. Just as my sacred tree is named, Willow, so is my daily reminder to will my will low for this is where She dwells. The depths we need to travel are all in Her territory.

Naming an archetypal image: The Cassandra Complex: Living with disbelief

For many years I have been working with the willow tree, both literally and metaphorically. I feel a guiding presence from the tree that consistently provides me with a healing experience; as medicine for my mind and body. I have been able to name many of the ways the tree heals and guides me but it wasn't until the discovery of Schapira's book *The Cassandra Complex: Living with disbelief* (1988) that the healing crystallized within me. With complete awe and humility I saw, after all these years that I had now in

my possession both a symbol and a name for my dis-ease and the healing cure.

Cassandra is a tragic figure in Greek Mythology. She was one of the daughters of Hecuba and Priam, the queen and king of Troy. They had nineteen children in all, Cassandra being one of their youngest and most beautiful. One day while at Apollo's temple, the god appeared and promised her the gift of prophecy if she would sleep with him. Cassandra accepted his gift, but then refused to keep her end of the bargain. Enraged by rejection Apollo begged Cassandra for one kiss and when she agreed he spat in her mouth instead. This cursed the gift he had given Cassandra and from that moment onward although she held the gift of prophecy no one would ever believe what she said. Because no one listened to her with belief, in frustration and emotional isolation she became hysterical. (Schapira, 1988)

Analytical psychology currently understands the archetype of Apollo to emphasize thinking over feeling, and judging over perceiving, whereas the archetype of Cassandra emphasizes sensing, insight or intuition which are seen as aspects of the feminine. In the context of my research these archetypal metaphors at play in Cassandra's dilemma enable me to reflect upon my own experiences and the healing influence of the willow tree on my dis-ease, namely, healing the split between Cassandra and Apollo in my own psyche.

Leaving Apollo for the *Cathedral* of a Bent Willow Chair

For over twenty years now I have been on my own heuristic inquiry, or in my words, following an inner-sense. This quest began at my first Teachers' Convention in 1993, when my eyes set sight on a bent willow chair. What my eyes saw and my body experienced affected the course of my life from that moment onward. I was seized and entered a world of ancient mother and innocent child. Within a few months I took a workshop in making my own bent willow chair and then began my efforts to create on my

own in what was to become a successful fifteen years of running my own business, Return to Rustic. David Abram (1996) beautifully describes my awakening at this time.

To touch the coarse skin of a tree is thus, at the same time, to experience one's own tactility, to feel oneself touched *by* the tree. And to see the world is also, at the same time, to experience oneself as visible, to feel oneself *seen*. . . . We might as well say that we are organs of this world, flesh of its flesh, and that the world is perceiving itself *through* us. (*The Spell of the Sensuous*, p. 68)

At this time I was also moving from the city where I was raised, to teach in a small town in northern Saskatchewan. This decision was significant as it marked my leaving of the Apollo archetype that dominated my upbringing which left me feeling I had nothing of value to offer. This leaving provided me with the space to be on my own and begin a dialogue with myself. I was used to the ease of entertainment that came with city life and in this small town, entertainment was minimal. There was no escaping myself. But the forest, just like the bent willow chair enticed me to enter into its world. When I did, something consistently happened to me. I could feel a voice, always feminine, loving, comforting and guiding me on my life's path. It was here that I needed no escape, as I found my mind could be stilled and I awakened to a grounded awareness that comes with peace.

I reclaimed an ancient meaning and in the process felt an affirmation of my own sense of awe, wonder, and regal position. The feeling that my experiences were the beginnings of a new theology for me contrasted with a felt return to the ancient meaning of *cathedral*. I delight in the origins of the word cathedral as it literally means chair. The word *cathedral* comes from Latin *cathedra*, meaning an easy chair (principally used by

ladies)," also metonymically, *cathedrae molles* meaning "luxurious women;" also "a professor's chair;" from Greek *kathedra* "seat, bench," from *kata* "down". (Online Etymology Dictionary)

Within a few years I moved to Edmonton and started my own business, 'Return to Rustic.' Over the course of ten years I have fashioned hundreds of willow pieces, taught many others how to create with the willow tree, visited schools as the "Willow Lady" and performed my children's stories of "Grandma Willow." It would bring me joy to share the countless stories within these years, but that would not honour what I feel is my call in this research on the recovery of the divine feminine voice.

Working with the willow tree has always felt like a call and response relationship and I found support for this sense of relationship in Robert Romanyshyn's book *The Wounded Researcher*. (2007) Romanyshyn refers to research as "a vocation, a response to an inner call" (p.118). Due to the depth and breadth of experiences over the years it has been a significant task to distill the call in response to my thesis, but what has been clear for me from the beginning is the willow tree's medicinal healing in my life as she has always felt like the Great Mother to me.

After ten years of self-employment as "Grandma Willow", and responding to an inner call, I entered the master's program at St. Stephen's. It was after all these years of co-creating with the willow tree that I could now immerse myself in a greater depth of understanding, that is, in the soil of both my own and the tree's root system. I speak of the soil and my roots as a metaphor of the unconscious and repressed aspects of self.

As I unearth my true voice, I see many parallels between my experience of disbelief in my voice, of being silenced, and that of the silencing of the divine feminine voice. Years of spiralling around the willow and her medicine has brought me to a place of

crystallization. The willow so graciously and continually offers her healing balm to the wound created by living for so long with disbelief and without voice.

Getting to the roots of our human wounds was always at the forefront of my studies at St. Stephen's. I was continually searching in the text books for wisdom that felt similar to what I received from the willow tree. I somehow knew that the willow tree was calling me to my own root system and I was looking for guidance within spirituality and therapeutic theories. It was in the disciplines of art therapy and depth psychology that I encountered the wisdom I was seeking. I could then start to braid with the three healing modalities or tools rooted, as I felt myself to be, in the natural world. These three are the willow tree, art therapy and depth psychology. Specific to my research are these threads; the properties in the willow tree, archetypal Feminine Principles found in Post-Jungian depth psychology and art therapy as the visual manifestation of my inner being. Each of these healing philosophies provides extensive guidance towards health and healing. I have spent considerable time and energy drawing similar threads from each discipline so as to create my own response to healing and overall well-being.

Eco-Art Therapy and Depth Psychology

The cornerstone principle in homeopathy is "Let likes cure likes." Homeopathy actually derives its name from the Greek, homeo, meaning similar and pathos, meaning suffering. Homeopathic physicians cure through the use of similars. A substance that can produce disease in a healthy person is used to elicit a healing response in someone presenting with a similar disease. Beverley Gray (2011) provides her readers with an expansive resource on northern herbs, plants and trees that can be used for medicinal purposes. She says this of natural medicine,

Usage and treatments were developed empirically by trial and error. Many ancient

herbalists believed that plants had been stamped with the image of their properties by God and that those who gathered the plants might understand a plant's use by its visual characteristics. This system of belief is called the *Doctrine of Signatures*.

(*The Boreal Herbal*, p. 25)

I recognize the similarity between the *Doctrine of Signatures* and archetypal depth psychology as the place where most of my longing to create comes from. For example, Carl Jung (1953) speaks to this similarity in his explanation of archetypes.

In religious matters it is a well-known fact that we cannot understand a thing until we have experienced it inwardly, for it is in the inward experience that the connection between the psyche and the outward image or creed is first revealed as a relationship or correspondence like that of sponsus and sponsa. Accordingly when I say as a psychologist that God is an archetype, I mean by that the "type" in the psyche. The word "type" is, as we know, derived from "blow" or "imprint"; thus an archetype presupposes an imprinter. (*Psychology and Alchemy*, p. 14)

Archetypal depth psychology, with its influence from the thinking of Classical Greek and Renaissance worlds, has also been one helpful resource in deepening my understanding of my own individuation process. However, I agree with Griessel and Kotze (2009), that the traditional, classical Jungian psychology has become limiting in post-modern times, and more recent models of the Self can offer structures that may be helpful. Relevant aspects of these structures will be presented in the literature review.

Another Jungian psychoanalyst, Marion Woodman, has provided me with immeasurable wisdom on the recovery of Feminine voice and wisdom. In her text *Leaving My Father's House*, Woodman describes what I identify as my unfolding relationship with the willow tree when she explains feminine consciousness.

As her branches reach up to the sun, her roots are reaching down to the moon. She is touching into the unconsciousness in her own body, finding a sliver of a moon and allowing its light to illuminate her cells in its own time. What begins as possibility moves into her core. The new moon becomes half, three-quarters, whole, until every cell is excited with silver. The unconscious mother who sleeps in the incestuous bliss of Eden is no more. The conscious Mother, present in every cell of her body, is present moment by moment, nourishing, stimulating, making every moment new. She is the energy that supports the virgin. Without Her, the head tries to feel without the heart and falls into self-betrayal. With Her, the unconscious death wish is transformed into love. (1993, p. 206)

The Willow called to me just as the herbalists claimed in the *Doctrine of Signatures* and I found a living language of healing within Jungian Depth Psychology. What seals my sense of truth is the action through creation with my own two hands, or art therapy. In her text, *Art Is a Spiritual Path*, Pat Allen asks a big question, “How do we listen to hear what is aching to be made manifest through us” (2005, p.38). In listening to the willow tree, I responded with my own ache to manifest what I needed to hear.

Carl Jung supports this way of listening when he says, “Often the hands know how to solve a riddle that the intellect has wrestled with in vain” (Sonoka, 2006, p.1). Thus it is often difficult to transfer knowledge into spoken or written words as my ‘signature’ is a tree. This has certainly been my experience of learning, knowing and expressing in language, or in words. The work of my hands kindles a confidence in my intelligence, an intelligence of mind, body and soul.

Searching for a Conceptual Framework: An Imaginal and Embodied Willow-Womb

“Imaginal world” is a phrase that I will often use in this work. It is a term used by

Carl Jung and Henry Corbin to describe that “locality” that is neither the concrete reality we normally experience in our waking state nor the realm of thought and spirit (2007, p.147). It exists between matter and spirit, an existence and location which speaks to my experience of the Willow Tree and my felt presence of being stilled so I could hear what I knew.

More recently, Romanyshyn and also Hillman speak of the imaginal world. Romanyshyn (2007) describes the imaginal world as an intermediate world between the sensible and intellectual. It is within this space that hands and willow, words, language, forms and knowing that I discover meaning. As well, James Hillman (1975) speaks of the imaginal world as the world of soul, neither of spirit nor of matter, peopled by gods and goddess, and daimons. He goes on to situate soul as the whole world being ensouled and thus not separate as one creature is to another. (Re-visioning Psychology, p.102) I will provide further discussion of the imaginal world in my literature and methodology chapters.

As I continued to read, re-read and reflect, it seemed I could layer my life onto each page of Schapira’s *The Cassandra Complex: Living with disbelief*. What is particularly significant to me is the similarity between the author’s model of healing and a model I created some time ago titled, ‘Willow Wisdom’ (see methodology).

When beginning my research I needed to establish some structure and thus I created a list of principles I came to ‘live by’ through my years of co-creating with the willow tree. I can see now, in large part, my work with the willow has been to create a nurturing womb that contains; holds and grounds my body with all the energy of the wounds of living with disbelief. Working with the willow has come to mean that the willow has become inseparably both the wound and the cure.

Such willow wisdom is not only imaginal, but is as well, literal. The womb is the mlliteral place in my body, the container, where I've carried the wounds from my lineage and it is where I enter the imaginal willow's healing call that comes from the earth, or womb of the divine feminine.

Containing and Framing

To understand Cassandra, it is necessary to understand what was at play in both the Greek culture and family life of Cassandra. It was the bronze-age in the second millennium B.C. and the Greeks were experiencing a major turn from matriarchal to patriarchal culture. Thus, there was a significant decline in feminine values. The goddess as a supreme deity was now being replaced by Apollo. (Schapiro,1988)

Cassandra's mother, Hecuba, clearly embraced Apollo who is said to have fathered two of her nineteen children. Yet Hecuba is also known as the dark feminine herself, who worshiped Hecate, the patroness of witches (Schapiro, 1988). The implication contained in the myth is that Hecuba is capable of love, yet she also has a dark side. The myth of Cassandra and her mother speaks to my own experience learned in relationship to my mother who, like Hecuba, devoted herself to Apollo's masculine principles.

My mother was the eldest daughter of fifteen children, raised in a conservative Catholic family entrenched in clear roles for men and woman. I often heard her referred to as my Grandmother's 'right arm' and the second mother to her younger siblings. Her only respite from all the demands was her cherished time alone with a book.

My mother never escaped child rearing. Within a short time after leaving home she married and gave birth to my brother, with me following a little over a year later. My father tragically died when I was three years old, leaving my mother, at twenty-six years old, a widow with two small children. My mother's identity was shaped by repressing her

own needs so as to meet the needs of others. Because of the onslaught of these demands I was continually left in a double bind with my mother which was the genesis of my own experience of dichotomous tension and anxiety. I could neither have my emotional needs met or express frustration in not having my needs met. No matter which way I went, towards her or away from her, I lost.

Schapira explains, “Cassandra is totally abandoned when she does not sufficiently mirror her mother’s need to be needed” (p. 32). This emotional abandonment caused significant anxiety for Cassandra which only added to her difficulties as her mother did not have the ability to contain her own anxiety, much less that of her daughter. Schapira continues, “The mother could neither fill the child’s needs nor tolerate the negative effects which ensued” (1988, p. 34). To believe me and thus accept my needs as her child, my mother needed to come to an acceptance of her own psyche’s unmet needs. In her time and place, with her devotion to the Apollo archetype she was unable to do this. “Our culture is informed by Apollonic consciousness. Identified as we are with the positive value of this viewpoint, it may be difficult to see Apollo in a negative light. Nonetheless, he casts a very dark shadow” (Schapira. 1988, p. 9). We see in *The Cassandra Complex*, the emphasis on understanding this and the attention required for healing at the earliest stages of human development.

For me, the effect was similar to Cassandra’s experience. Living with disbelief of my experience of being and my knowing, I was lost, torn, and split, living within the darkness of Apollo’s shadow.

It is interesting to note that Apollo’s influence grew in the same time period as Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, with whom he is associated, and that this was a time of transition from the old matriarchal order to the ‘new’ patriarchal order. Although times of

transition are more readily identified “after the fact,” our time period today may be said to be similar, that is, a time of transition. Living as I did, time of transition or not, I appreciate the implied anxiety associated with Schapira’s citation from Rollo May’s book, *The Courage to Create*,

Rollo May describes [Apollo’s] archaic period as a time when the Greeks were experiencing the anxiety of new possibilities, of expanding outer and inner limits – psychological, political, aesthetic, spiritual. . . . In such a period of change and growth, *emergence* is often experienced by the individual as *emergency* with all its attendant stress. (Schapira, 1988, p. 24)

When one experiences change, or growth with the attendant sensory, cognitive, emotional states common to experiences seen to be an *emergency*, there is considerable tension. Historically, women exhibiting characteristics we now associate with extreme tension were thought to have disorders associated with the womb, then later, by the seventeenth century, these disorders were thought to be associated with the brain. By the eighteenth century psychological trauma was introduced as a causal factor. Throughout time, derivations of the word *hysteria* were commonly used to label behaviors deemed to be “deprived of reason” (Schapira, 1988, p. 39).

Hysteria is not a common word in today’s culture and generally feels quite derogatory and outdated.

It has been deleted from . . . [the] Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders as a diagnostic category on its own. . . . In Jungian terms, we see an animus-identified ego which is split off from, and erected largely in defense against, a powerful negative mother complex. (Schapira, 1988, p.9)

In reference to Cassandra and in keeping with the imagery of myth, Schapira

presents this aspect of her conceptual framework as suffering “from a lack of feminine ego containment - in effect, she had no womb” (p. 37), or , in keeping with traditional teachings of the past, Cassandra suffered from a “wandering womb” (p. 37).

Weaving with the Felt Experience

Once I was introduced to the idea of the wandering womb and understood history and mythological imagery as a background to hysteria. I understood my hunger for the fibre arts, specifically felting and weaving.

I was finding a tangible way, with fibre, to contain, to bind, and tie my wound of hysteria. My hunger reached towards the touch of raw wool and spun yarn. I had woven with willow for years and now longed to take part in the ancient fibre arts for the willow’s voice is also there.

My research became a re-searching. Two interesting associations emerged as I looked into the etymology of the word religion. Popular etymology among the latter ancients and the interpretation of many modern writers connects it with *reliigare* “to bind fast”, or “place an obligation on” or “bond between humans and gods”. I was binding myself to the divine feminine within me. As well, included in the etymology of the word religion is “go through again” (in reading or in thought), from *re-* “again” and *legere* “read”. (Online Etymology Dictionary)

As I re-searched I wove, as I wove I re-searched, binding myself to my truth, to my womb and to the Womb of the Divine Feminine. Marie Louise Von Franz (1993) speaks to my experience when stating,

Similarly, in every new child there is a living mixture of psychosomatic elements which reorder themselves according to a certain pattern and make a new being in a most mysterious form. This mystery of the way in which a child again becomes a

whole from inherited psychological and physical patterns is what is referred to in feminine weaving. (*The Feminine in Fairly Tales*, p.46)

The Gift of Anxiety

I enter the study of hysteria, seeking to understand how it exists in me and our modern times through a feminist point of view. Anxiety and associated tension has been a life long struggle for me as I know it is for many others. According to the Mood Disorders Society of Canada twelve percent of the population will experience an anxiety disorder in their lifetime. (Mood Disorder Society of Canada, n.d.). I am not claiming anxiety and hysteria are one in the same. I can only claim what I have come to know for myself: Following my anxiety has led me to my roots in this exploration of hysteria.

Robert Romanyshyn encourages me in this exploration. I appreciate his view of anxiety as a signpost, supporting my long held belief in anxiety being a call to self-care. Addressing our complexes, though difficult territory, is a significant act of self-care. Anxiety is a common theme throughout *The Wounded Researcher* (2007) and I appreciate how Romanyshyn invites researchers to expose our anxious ways as a gift to humanity. He quotes John Beebe's opinion of anxiety in research as, "a proper starting point for the discovery of integrity." Beebe continues on to say, "Only recently have I begun to realize that this experiencing and examining of anxiety is an ethical process in which . . . one's infinite obligation to the other is expressed" (2007, p. 343). As Romanyshyn puts it, "for the ways in which we construct the world are the ways in which we encounter and marginalize ourselves and others" (2007, p. 343). It is my heartfelt hope in sharing my disease and how I am healing, readers may benefit.

The potential for deep listening to oneself and one's complexes occurs in the artistic dialogue. It is in the imaginal space in between the art and myself; that I am able to get to

the roots of my anxiety, specifically the hysteria. The Willow tree and surrounding ecology initiated me to the power of the imaginal space. It was here with the physical matter of both hysteria and womb, that I entered the world of play and felt safe to create new possibilities for my life. Here existed my connection to the Divine Mother where I attached to Her with the tools of creativity and together built a home for me to heal and grow. Before this precious awakening, it was indeed rare for me not to be clutched by some level of anxiety. Shawn McNiff in his text *Arts-Based Research* (1998) illustrates the importance of understanding the art mediums we work with. “The medium is not simply an agency through which thoughts and emotions pass. It is a major participant in the process of expression and as Marshall McLuhan suggested, it may even be the alpha and omega of the message” (1998, p. 70). The willow tree is indeed my alpha and omega, the medium and the message.

The Voice of the Womb

After a few years of operating my business, Return to Rustic, I felt a longing to write a children`s story about what happens to me when I am with the Willow Tree. The motivation came when I was given the opportunity to perform as “Grandma Willow” at a children`s festival. The story flowed from me with ease, as it was written in just a few sittings. I believe this ease was due to my years of ruminating on what surfaced in me when in the company of the willow and speaks to the ancient voice and innocence I heard when I first saw the bent willow chair. In her text, *Art Is A Way of Knowing*, (1995) Pat Allen speaks of this sacred space when she says, “There is a sense of power and sacredness in allowing our inner voices to speak aloud and receive witness. The language of parable, story, and metaphor, which for most people arrives only in dreams if at all, begins to feel more natural in our waking state” (1995, p. 24). I needed to write my

metaphorical story or myth, as a medium to communicate with others this healing voice. The privilege of sharing this story with many people over the years has sealed Her voice within me.

It was because of this voice I knew Alchemical Hermeneutics to be the just right methodology for my thesis. Romanyshyn's words embody the essence of my research. "It is also the path of the researcher who enters the work via an alchemical hermeneutic method. Taking on a topic by which one is addressed (vocation), the researcher enters a ritual space (*mundus imaginalis*) in which—by the fires of love, and in the presence of a guide—he or she is both deepened by the work (transference level), and worked over and transformed by the work, even becoming the work and living it in an embodied way." (2007, p. 272)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Power in Myth: - Mystery in Myth-story and Mist-story

The overarching theme and the focus of my literature review lands in the world of myth found in my creation of Grandma Willow, depth psychology and art therapy. I propose it is within the imaginal landscape that myths are created with their living archetypal figures of the soul. The year I discovered the willow tree I was given the book, *Women Who Run With the Wolves* written by Jungian Psychologist and Storyteller, Clarissa Pinkola Estes. It was within these pages that I discovered the power of myth to awaken to the inner truth of our personal stories. As Estes informs,

Fairy tales, myths, and stories provide understandings which sharpen our sight so that we can pick out and pick up the path left by the wildish nature. The instruction found in story reassures us that the path has not run out, but still leads women deeper, and more deeply still, into their own knowing. The tracks which we all are following are those of the Wild Women archetype, the innate instinctual Self. (Estes, 1992, p. 6)

What is poignant for me is the parallel in the research of Estes and that of my own. I followed the willow tree to the woodlands, whereas Estes tracked the wolves. Estes' explains,

The title of this book, *Women Who Run With the Wolves, Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, came from my study of wildlife biology, wolves in particular. The studies of the wolves *Canis lupus* and *Canis rufus* are like the history of women, regarding both their spiritedness and their travails. (1992, p.4)

Earlier in my discussion I spoke of willow as an initiation or introduction to a form of religion, its etymology meaning bonds between humans and gods, binding, going

through again in reading or in thought. The etymology of myth comes from French *Mythe* (1818) and directly from Modern Latin *mythus*, from Greek *mythos* "speech, thought, story, myth, anything delivered by word of mouth," of unknown origin. Myths are "stories about divine beings, generally arranged in a coherent system; they are revered as true and sacred; they are endorsed by rulers and priests; and closely linked to religion. (*Dictionary of English Folklore*, Oxford, 2000, p.254)

Mythology is predominant in my way of listening and learning so as to bring about a life giving experience. Jungian depth psychology and art therapy are two of the main doorways where my longing for life meets with life giving presence. The voice of Grandma Willow is my life giving presence. She is my archetype for the Great Mother or Sacred Feminine who calls me to my spiritual potential. Writing the children`s story and the creation of Grandma Willow embodies the art or creation of my Myth.

In their text, *The Power of Myth* (1988) authors Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers converse on the importance of preserving myths within our current times. They speak to the life giving quality of myth in this exchange,

Moyers: Myths are clues?

Campbell: "Myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life."

Moyers: "What we are capable of knowing and receiving within?"

Campbell: "Yes"

Moyers: "You changed the definition of a myth from the search for meaning to the experience of meaning."

Campbell: "Experience of *life*. The mind has to do with meaning" (1988, p. 5).

I appreciate Campbell`s distinction between the experience of *life* and the mind`s experience of meaning, and his insight regarding the role of myths as clues to our spiritual

potentialities.

In my thesis quest through depth and post-Jungian, archetypal psychology with its associated reference to myth, and through art, I have explored words that would convey the life and meaning of the presence I feel when I am with the willow tree. Words you will come across in this research piece; imaginal, numinous, sacred, mystical, mystery, transcendent, transformation, and phenomenon. Though this quest has enhanced my knowledge and language development, it has also felt like I am trying to provide the ‘just right’ explanation of my experience.

I humbly retreat time and again into my humanity and bow once again to the simplicity in my own love story. The call to love is the voice of the willow tree. Her presence is love, peace, compassion, and endless kindness. All of this research is my attempt to share a language of love, a language that is congruent with my core self, where Grandma Willow dwells. Here, within the world of academia, I feel the need for the archetypes of Apollo and Cassandra to meet in the hope that thinking and feeling can be on equal footing in our quest for knowledge. This meeting is part of a healing love story that is the *life* I hear in Joseph Campbell’s words.

Grandma Willow – My personal Myth

I wrote this myth eleven years ago, and to this day I feel calmed, soothed and stilled by its words.

A long time ago the people of the Marshland enjoyed being alive. They found joy in everything about life. Eating, sleeping, working, laughing and dancing were part of every day. Most importantly their joy was found within themselves and each other. There were lots of games, stories, hugs, arts' and crafts, even wrestling around. Nobody ever felt left

out. It didn't occur to anyone that they didn't belong. Each Marshlander felt loved, appreciated and celebrated for just who they were.

One day a stranger from the west hobbled in upon the Marshland. He had been walking for a long time and was in need of food and rest. The friendly Marshland people greeted him warmly and welcomed the tired stranger to their village. They were excited and waited eagerly to hear his stories.

He came from the land of wide open spaces where a low brush tree could be seen from miles away and a visitor spotted walking the day before they arrived. The stranger left his community because no one felt happy anymore, only sad and lonely. He explained that there was a time when his people were very happy, and lived well together. Not anymore, ever since the adults didn't have time to play, tell stories, and listen to the children. What happened was the Great River had dried up some years ago and all the adults had to work every day, sometimes into the night to find ways to bring water back to their village. Even though the water has returned and the river is flowing full again, the adults are too scared, so they keep working at making sure there will always be water. It has been so long that now all the adults have forgotten how to have fun and play. The whole village is sad and lonely, so much so that the Great Council decided to send someone on a journey to find out how to fill the lonely space inside. "This is why I am here, explained the stranger, "you are the fifth community I have encountered. The other four sent me on my way because they thought I was too strange. I had almost given up, but I saw in my dream last night that I was heading Northbound and woke up feeling hopeful again."

After filling his belly full and drinking more tea than any one had ever seen before, he eagerly began his questioning of them, with the hope that they could help him feel less lonely.

At first his questions were simple and answered joyfully as the stranger wanted to know about their daily life. But soon the gracious hosts thought his questions were becoming odd, but answered as best they could, often with a giggle. The giggle was their way of expressing both their delight with assisting their guest and confusion for the silliness of his questions. Why was he questioning the obvious? Questions about why they all lived together and how was it that they smiled so often? Did they ever want to leave the Marshland or do they not tire of the same activities day after day? The weirdest question of them all included a word called lonely. None of the villagers knew what lonely meant so they asked for a more detailed explanation, "You know," he replied, "feeling lost and empty, wanting to fill yourself up with something." "You mean with food?" guessed one eager villager. "No not food or drink, the loneliness only returns," sighed the stranger. "Then what?" exclaimed his audience. "That is what I hope you can show me." And with that he slowly walked to the guest hut, dragging his feet all the way.

"What can we show our guest so that he doesn't look so sad anymore?" they asked one another. The Marshland felt like a buzz of questions for quite some time trying to discover more about this lonely word the stranger brought to their village. Though try as they might, no one could understand how you could feel empty after filling your belly full!

The more they discussed this new problem, the less time they spent playing, dancing and sharing stories amongst themselves. Finally one of their young cried out, "You keep talking but it doesn't feel good like a story. Why is there no time for fun and stories?" The

elders realized that the child brought to their attention something very significant. When they could not answer her question and realized that their heads were starting to hurt and their tummies ache from thinking too much, they decided to get some help. Once thanking the child for her wisdom it was decided to seek the guidance of Grandma Willow and get back their fun!

Grandma Willow lives deep in the Marshlands core where she daily busies herself with cleaning the water with her gigantic root system, using the debris for energy to create clean air for all to enjoy. She is constantly growing new saplings to help her with her work and for the Marshland people to create baskets, brooms, furniture and crafts, to name a few. Her bark is used by animals and humans alike, as it cures tummy aches, headaches, and the many other aches of the body. Hundreds of birds and insects make their home in her branches and no one ever worries about not having enough because Grandma Willow is always creating more. Grandma Willow loves everyone and everything about life. For the Marshland people she has always been a source of wisdom and joy. She invites them to sit and be held within her strong, smooth rounded body and listen, not just to her, but the Silence.

Back at the Marshland the process of picking sticks is well underway. The four that pick the stick that is most curvy will set forth on the journey to Grandma Willow.

With lunches packed, the lucky four hopped into the riverboat and headed North towards the Babbling Brook. They were curious about what the Brook would be babbling about today . . . Just the thought of it made them chuckle. As the boat approached the Brook the travelers noted that the brook seemed to be babbling louder than usual. Once entering the brook's mouth they heard a little too clearly what all the commotion was about. Apparently Grandma Willow had sent the Tree-bud fairy, her special helper, to the

brook to let it know that Spring would be coming a week earlier this year. Thus, she needed extra water for all the new pussy willow saplings. "A week early," the brook busily babbled. "I'm simply not prepared. Goodness me, rocks need to be moved, the beaver needs to clean its dam, and what to do with all this year's drift wood? Oh my, Oh my!" proclaimed to exasperated brook. "Don't fret dear friend! We'll help you on our way back!" called the voices in the boat as they traveled swiftly over and down the stream.

Soon the travelers noticed a change in their surroundings. Things looked familiar yet felt different. Within moments they drifted into the garden of bull rushes and lily pads and knew they were approaching Grandma Willow's home. As they approached the shoreline the welcoming, strong and raspy voice of Grandma Willow was heard and the hearts of her visitors leapt with excitement and love for their dear friend.

"What brings such sweet company on this cool and crisp day?" The visitors broke out all at once with their version of what had happened to their community since the lonely traveler had arrived. "Oh my goodness, such concerns you each have," stated a compassionate Grandma. "ssssshhhh.....ssssshhhh. I will hear each one of you, but first come closer and sit on the moss between my roots, rest your heads, and let my dear friend Wynd caress away your concerned minds and bodies. As her guests rested, Grandma Willow lovingly wrapped each in her branches. Her guest began to feel soothed by the Great Tree's deep breaths. As she exhaled she sang a quiet hum...hum...hum.

Sometime passed and each awoke to dusk settling in and a warm fire attended to by the Tree-bud fairy. Her eyes danced with delight as she offered the villagers her famous cattail soup with birch bark bread for dipping. After filling themselves full; a chorus of thank-yous, and your welcomes, were exchanged. A chuckling Grandma Willow felt so

pleased with the rest-filled satisfied faces of her guests. "So my dear friends," she began, "let us now discuss the matter of concern to you."

The villagers looked back and forth at one another with a bewildered expression on their faces. No one could remember the cause of his or her concern. "Oh my goodness . . . Oh goodness me . . . My oh my . . . Goodness gracious," left their lips along with apologies. Grandma Willow lifted a branch to show a sign for silence. "No need to be sorry, my friends. Let me ask you a question instead. How does each of you feel right now?" After a moment's pause she heard four excited voices state one after the other. "Never better, truly wonderful, I want to sing a happy tune, so happy, so happy!" "Well then maybe your concerns have been taken care of." replied Grandma.

They all agreed with Grandma Willow but were sent by their community to help with a problem, so they had to go home with something! Maybe they could make up a story they thought while getting up to go back to their boat. Just then, Tree-Bud Fairy came to the rescue and reminded her friends of the lonely traveler. A great deal of relief was expressed and the full story of the lonely traveler was then told to Grandma Willow. "OOHHH," cooed Grandma, this man sounds so lost and lonely and he is trying to find his way by asking many questions and hoping that there is an answer that will fill the lonely place inside. "Yes. Yes" exclaimed the four in an excited chorus. "But we don't have the answers for him. We don't know about this "lonely" he speaks of. Grandma Willow gently responded, "No, you and your people are fortunate. Up until this time, the way you live has not been questioned. Tell me how it feels to not have the answers for your new friend?" They agreed it didn't feel good and gave them a headache from thinking too much.

Grandma Willow softly continued, "When you arrived, I invited you to sit around me and allowed Wynd to caress away your aches and pains. You had a good rest and then thanks to Tree-Bud, were fed and warmed by the fire. Yes, they all smiled and patted their tummies. "When I asked you about the reason for your visit you couldn't remember, and your aches and pains are now gone."

They all stared at each other with a surprised look on their faces. Then one spoke. "You mean that we can come for a visit whenever we are not sure and getting aches in our bodies from thinking too hard on our own?" "Oh goodness me, you can come for a visit anytime, but especially when you are not sure about something . . . and please come before you get aches and pains requested Grandma Willow."

"Can we go home and bring the lonely traveler to you?" asked one hopeful villager. "By all means. You can let anyone know about me." answered Grandma.

The friendly Marshland people raced back to the village and asked the lonely traveler to come with them. After resting with Grandma Willow for a time the lonely traveler was reminded, along with many other visitors with aches and pains from too many questions and worries, that we are perfect just the way we are and we have everything we need inside of ourselves. Once we know this we can have some fun!

Listen to nature my friends, and you may hear Grandma Willow whispering "Remember to visit me often...even when there are no aches and pains."

The End



Figure 1: Grandma Willow

Schapira Meets Grandma Willow

From this point forward the format of my literature review is staged around Laura Schapira's model for the healing the Cassandra complex. Her model follows five stages of analysis outlining the process of ego and animus development characterized by a particular goddess/god from Greek mythology. The ego is the feminine container for the psyche whereas the animus is the masculine part of the female's personality. I will apply the relevant literature to each phase of analysis, thus providing the reader with a body of wisdom for their own reference.

Because Schapira includes Freud's developmental stages in her model I wish to provide the reader with a brief understanding of what Freud believed was at the core of human development, the libido. The libido is defined as the "physiological and emotional energy associated with the sex drive. The concept was originated by Sigmund Freud who saw the libido as linked not only with sexual desire but with all constructive human

activity. He believed that psychiatric illnesses were the result of misdirecting or suppressing the libido.” (Libido, n.d.)



Figure 2-a: Libido

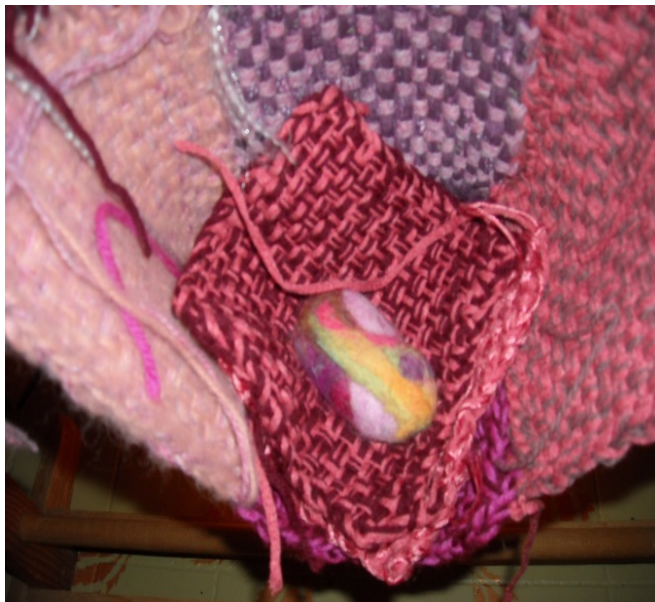


Figure 2-b: Reclaiming the Libido

While researching the origin of the word libido I found the root meanings to be significant with regard to the understanding of hysteria. Freud coined the term libido from the word libere which means, to be pleasing or to please, and the old English version lufu

which means love. Freud first spoke of libido in his *Selected Papers on Hysteria*. I feel both saddened and encouraged by this discovery. Freud spoke of the qualities of wanting to please and love as the cause of the psychiatric disorder or hysteria. I muse for some time with this knowledge and wonder how such positive qualities could become so harmful. This thesis certainly gives voice to my musings but what specifically comes to me in regards to the libido are the roots of love and pleasing nature. (Online Etymology Dictionary)

This piece was created twelve years ago when I began exploring with different art mediums as a way to heal. While exploring chakra energy in my body, to my surprise, I had a knowing sense of innocence saying “I am here”. Years later I can see this as the art leading me to my core wound.

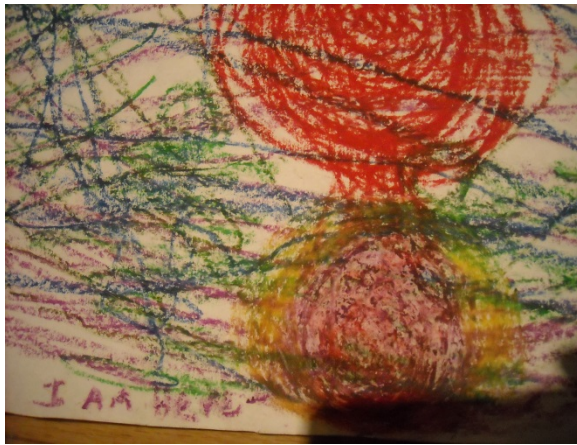


Figure 3: I Am Here

Acknowledging the beauty in these roots leaves me with a felt sense of my original goodness. A deeper awareness comes to me as a statement of permission to keep more of the love and pleasing for my internal sense of well-being rather than giving it away to the external environment. Re-routing goodness is bountifully more hopeful than trying to fix something that is not tangible

Depth Psychology: Schapira's Model

I wish to comment on the density of this model as it is one that I have come to accept as a living model to be worked with throughout life. Its depth and breadth is immense as each stage can embody significant developmental spans throughout life. Schapira identifies her model of healing as a work in progress and thus not meant as a prescription, but a guiding method towards the healing of the Cassandra Complex. She explains that even though the model is presented sequentially, "in actual experience they do not occur in such a neat, linear succession. Rather they interweave..." (p. 76).

My experience is parallel with her words. I am in the continual flow of vertical and horizontal movement that feels held within a cyclical container. One needs to be quite mindful of pacing that comes with breadth and depth. I need to allow for the necessary space to absorb the imaginal vertical sun god while he penetrates the horizontal earth goddess in me. As well, when the waves of grief surface from my depth, my recovery is found in stillness. I know when I am 'out of pace' when I feel dizzy and tired. I continually remind myself not to push, that I will be fine, even if I miss the thesis deadline to graduate. I can't do this work in order to meet a deadline but to stay attached to my own inner process. This brings me to the circular world of the woods and Schapira's first phase.

The first phase or intrapsychic developmental task of Schapira's model is the "disidentification of the ego from the patriarchal animus" (1988, p.76). The dominant archetypes at this stage are Athena and Zeus. Schapira explains, "Athena was extraverted, intelligent, active, honest; a father's daughter, born out of Zeus's head. She was much admired by Apollo. But it was Athena who let Cassandra be raped in her temple in the shadow of her statue" (1988, p. 81).

Here is the core of the Cassandra woman's curse, the severing of herself, her body, her heart, her womb/centre from the neck down. Shinoda-Bolen (1984) refers to this severing when she discusses Athena's Medusa effect, "This was a monster with serpents instead of hair, whose terrifying appearance turned to stone anyone who gazed on it." (p. 101)

We live in a culture dominated by Apollo consciousness, where according to Schapira (1988) "The ego, a caricature of Apollo—dedicated to, yet bound by, order, reason, truth and clarity—disavows itself of anything dark and irrational" (p.10). Staying attached to one's "dark and irrational" feminine in an Apollo driven culture requires the depth of listening to the continual call for consciousness. It is truly the ongoing and ever present devotion to the inner love story. I created this piece after witnessing two men verbally attacking one another in front of two small children. I saw the fear in the children's eyes and wanted to go to them but it was not safe to do so. The void I felt within me expressed itself as the emptiness and fear of the un-mothered (Fig 2).



Figure 4: The Mortified Wound

My Myth begins with entering the Marshland where I engage in the possibility of 'a community that lives well together'. To live well within my own inner community requires the welcoming acceptance of all my archetypal members. For this acceptance to

occur I need the right place and space to dwell. Due to the predominant element of water in the marshland, mist is a common occurrence. The water saturated mist of the Marshland is the ‘just right’ place for my own archetypal story to unfold. The story begins in my body where my Mist Story is my entry into the Mystery.

Once again I play with the metaphoric possibilities between nature’s eco-system being one and the same as my own body. Mist is a vapour created when the water is warmer than the atmosphere. “Mist is a phenomenon caused by small droplets of water suspended in air. It can occur as part of natural weather or volcanic activity, and is common in cold air above warmer water, in exhaled air in the cold, and in a steam room of a sauna.” (Mist, 2009)

Alchemical Mist

The combination of heat and water are fundamental to our traditional notions of what constitutes alchemy. The first step in alchemy is the heating of the vessel which contains the ‘just right’ material within. This material is referred to as the *prima materia*. In his text *Psychology and Alchemy* (1968), Jung speaks of this elusive material. The basis of the *opus*, the *prima materia*, is one of the most famous secrets of alchemy.

This is hardly surprising, since it represents the unknown substance that carries the projection of the autonomous psychic content. It was of course impossible to specify such a substance, because the projection emanates from the individual and is consequently different in each case. (p. 317)

He then goes on to encase his understanding of this psychic quality within the realm of the Divine. “To understand this properly, one must open wide the eyes of the soul and the spirit and observe and discern accurately by means of the inner light. God has lit this light in nature and in our hearts from the beginning” (p. 322).

Alchemy is clearly at work within my literal and metaphorical relationship with the willow tree and its eco-system. It is my Tree of Life that allows for the rising from the silencing of my feminine voice and offers ongoing medicine for me to stay attached to my own womb/centre. The willow is my projection of my own autonomous psychic content, which emanates from me. If voice is silenced, if voice is disbelieved, or unheard, then where does voice go? For me, it is the willow, an archetype of Gaia who hears, listens and believes. I project upon willow my own psyche, which becomes no longer silenced or disbelieved.

Contained By the Trees

After leaving my life in the city to move north, amongst the vapours or mist emanating within the wooded forests I began to separate from my Athena driven personality, attaching to another source of wisdom, a felt bodily wisdom. By following an inner call to live in the forest I was able to find a sense of containment in my body. This containment was provided by my felt experience of the surrounding trees. It was the same peace and containment I experienced a few months earlier while creating my first bent willow chair. This time allowed for a strengthening of my feminine ego by releasing the hope that others in the outside world could provide me with what I needed, a nurturing vessel to contain me. Schapira explains, “Archetypally, the “vessel” is associated with the feminine, with a receptive capacity, the womb. On a personal level, a woman’s psychological vessel is her ego. Cassandra had a weak vessel. This was her tragic flaw.” (1988, p.17)

Because of her birth from the head of Zeus, the Athena woman has a deeply afflicted relationship with the feminine aspects of Self, that is, her womb/centre. Athena needs to stay in ‘the head’ so as to control the environment within her body, specifically her terror

and anguish. The suffering is due to the effects of the negative mother complex. Schapira conveys,

The hysterics' afflicted relationship with her personal mother, who tends to be a narcissistic animus-possessed woman with little connection to her own femininity. She is unable to provide a holding environment for her daughter's needs, which the mother experiences as overwhelming demands. (1988, p. 63)

Thus the daughter needs to stay in Zeus' domain, her head. This is her only choice if she is to survive the pain of the rejection by her own mother. It is within this realm of survival that the morbid complex or false self is constellated.

Head and hands: A somatic environment

Schapira's use of archetypes gives us one voiced image that connects the somatic eco-system of a silenced individual when she connects the imaginal and mythical with the ancient diagnosis of "hysteria."

This choking sensation was known as the *globus hystericus*. The other parts of the body suffer "by consent," which occurs via a "sympathetic interaction" from the afflicted womb with a secondary organ, making the latter a "partaker of grief," or through some noxious substance such as "vapors." The term vapors in fact originated at this time and later became synonymous with hysteria, but is also reminiscent of the gasses thought to emanate from the chasm at Delphi—the vapors from the womb of Mother Earth. (1988, p. 41)

Schapira discusses hysteria as "the anxiety response of the inadequate ego, unable to contain and process an influx from the unconscious" (1988, p.41). This influx is experienced as a 'clash' or sustained succession of contradictory voices.

The holding environment is the birthplace of a healthy ego. If this environment is lacking, it becomes the birthplace of anxiety. In his text, *Self Psychology*, Kohut (1991) speaks of this somatic holding environment as the place contained in love. The proponents of self-psychology profess that we experience our first forms of love and hate through our relationship with our parents.

The theory of Object Relations suggests that our experience of love and hate first appear in our infancy and that we associate our mother's ability to comfort and feed us with love and a sense of safety. When our infant needs are left unmet we come to associate this with a sense of frustration. This frustration leads to a splitting of the mother into two, the good mother who satisfies our needs, and the bad mother who frustrates us by not meeting our needs. The True Self and the False Self become consequences of the child's met and unmet needs as explained by Michael St. Clair in his book, *Object Relations and Self-Psychology*, (1986). He states,

Object relating comes about when the mother lets the baby find and come to terms with the object (breast, bottle, and so on). The True Self has a Me and Not-me clearly established. [Where as], if the environment is not safe, the infant may respond with compliance. This compliance could lead to the isolation of the infant from its own spontaneous and life-giving core. (p. 71)

This necessary split from one's life-giving core initiates the development of the False Self. I understand my anxiety to represent the space where a clash occurs between my true and false self. Without a healthy ego or holding (containing) environment, anxiety is a call to listen to the voices in the clash and decide which voice feels most congruent to my authentic stance within the sacred feminine container. Encountering this clash and hearing a call to listen is as Griessel and Kotze (2009) say, not something that was readily

open to women of previous generations, such as my mother's. "Modern women feel different tensions in their struggle for individuation" (p. 204). I agree with their further analysis when they describe the woman who has a "spirit which immerses herself in the psychic atmosphere and the spirit of her time, and often, in the collective unconscious" (p. 205). Griessel and Kotze use the same descriptor as other Post-Jungian writers in naming this as the

archetypal structure of the Medium/Medial woman, a structure which is the "alchemical transformational goddess who yields and transforms, representing a driving creative force in the psyche. . . . The Medial woman's consciousness and ego mediates the objective psyche for herself and other, and she often inspires others to become conscious of their own psychic contents. (p. 205)

Schapira continues and elaborates on what I experienced as a "clash", or tension.

Of course, another attribute of the dark goddess is mediality. While the natural superior function of the hysteric is intuition, her essential mediality is not cultivated or even sanctioned by the patriarchy. If anything, her medial nature tends to be exploited or scapegoated. She learns early on to hide it or use it to shape-shift. Her ego is neither strong nor permeable enough to utilize her natural gift. (1988, p. 62)

In the Boreal Forest of northern Saskatchewan, it had become relatively easy for me to shape-shift my 'intuition', that inner knowing and creative felt sense that I had for so long attempted to still and to silence.

One of the ways that I found to help me listen to the ‘voices’ of the felt senses was through the creative process. Jungian Psychologist, Sonoko Toyoda (2006) speaks about the importance of our hands as they are the main tool in the creation process. She shares, “of course, hands are part of our bodies, and yet they seem to be wiser than any other part except for the brain. It might be important for us to consider that our hands “connect” our minds and bodies.” (p. 4). When I engage my hands on behalf of my healing, regardless of the outcome, there is often an inner sense of gratitude that supports the endeavour to find my clarity.

I decided that I needed to draw what I perceived as the negative or hateful voice in the clash of tensions. I believe I now had enough ‘womb’ or what Sonoko refers to as “ground water” when she is explaining how our hands connect us to feminine spirituality. She refers to feminine spirituality as “a sort of “groundwater” that is transmitted from a mother to a daughter, a kind of intuitive insight, or a type of transcendent wisdom beyond rational thinking. I perceive this type of wisdom not as primarily intellectual in nature but rather something that is connected to the body and that in turn connects women to nature” (2006, p. 5).

A Re-Turn to Myth

I had the tools I needed, my own two hands, and within the Mystery or Mist Story of my own inner nature I was able to welcome the morbid complex, what I named as *my Christian Witch*, to listen to what she had to say. This dialogue is entered in the results chapter along with the art. (see figure 7)

In her text, *Leaving My Father`s House* (1993), Marion Woodman relays my exodus of Apollo`s domain when she tells the story of a young princess` journey into feminine consciousness.

Expelled from Eden, Allerleirauh runs to the forest and does the only thing she can do. She falls asleep in a hollow tree. Her feminine instinct tells her that her survival depends on returning to the womb of nature. To do this she has to retire from society at the court, from the King, from all the images that were projected onto her. She covers her true identity with the soot of shame and guilt and makes herself invisible in the dead skins of her father`s kingdom. (p. 17)



Figure 5: Inside the Hollow of the Tree

Retiring from the society where you live can be a frightening, strange and confusing undertaking. I liken it to immigrating without moving away. The willow tree's presence has been my imaginal portal where I discover creative ways to both live and not live in society. This is a daily endeavour. In my northern home in the woods, I felt the imaginal presence that called me to create. This voice was of an old woman, an imaginal witch who lived in the forest and I longed for her tutelage. I felt she was my true Mother and I greatly needed her. Pinkola-Estes (1992) personifies this voice when she says,

This old woman *La Loba* is the quintessential two-million-year-old woman. She is the original Wild Woman who lives beneath and yet on topside of the earth. She lives in and through us and we are surrounded by her. The deserts, the woodlands, and the earth under our houses are two million years old, and then some. (p. 34)

She goes on to support the core self, “As the hag-maiden, she shows us what it means to be, not withered, but wizened. Babies are born wizened with instinct. They know in their bones what is right and what to do about it. It is innate” (p. 35). I experience Grandma Willow to be a close kin to *La Loba*.

I lived in the north for three years, and brought the northern experience with me when I moved to Edmonton. Soon into my move I started my business Return to Rustic. Living in Edmonton provided a softer edge to my personal isolation since more social options were available to me. Ironically, I felt less isolated when I was back in the woods to harvest the willow. My anxiety ignited with people, especially in groups. To be so lonely and not be able to enjoy being with people is discouraging to say the least.

Encouragement was close at hand as I discovered an authentic stance within me when I was teaching workshops or at craft sales. I didn't have to be forever heading to the woods to find peace, but was now finding a way to bring the woods to my experience with people. This was a significant time of listening and developing self-trust that enabled me to relate more from a contained ego. In her text, *Betrayal to Trust and Forgiveness* (2001), Beth Hedva welcomes us to approach a new knowledge from the tree image. “The word treow (truth) literally means tree. Trust is fruit from the Tree of Life. It is time for us to take the next bite. Use the image of a tree in your meditations as a template for developing Self-trust” (p.17).

Part of my research included reading the text, *Like a Tree* by Jean Shinoda Bolen (2011). The pages are filled with myths and stories of how trees, women and tree people can save the planet. I was immersed in the Cassandra Complex when I read the book and this made for a special sweetness in the treasure I arrived at in the myth of Daphne and the Laurel Tree. Shinoda-Bolen narrates the tale of the Laurel Leaf tree, an evergreen whose leaves are aromatic when crushed. “Laurel leaves were used in Apollo’s religious and prophetic rituals. Since the laurel is evergreen and produces no fruit, it is thought to be like a virgin, which Daphne was” (2011, p.138). Daphne is known as an earth goddess who worshipped Artemis. She is seen as a tree nymph and priestess of ancient Delphi. When Apollo spotted Daphne (sound familiar?) he fell in love with her. All of his efforts to woo her repelled Daphne which made Apollo want her even more. A chase began where Apollo’s fire of love and lust pursued Daphne through “countryside, across fields, into woods and marshes, as a hound pursues a hare” (p.138). Eventually Daphne became exhausted and when she was about to be taken over and raped by Apollo she began to pray to her father, Peneus, the river god. Just as Apollo seized her, her transformation began,

a deep languor took hold of her legs, her soft breasts become enclosed in thin bark, her hair grew into leaves, her arms into branches, and her feet that had been so swift were held to the ground by roots. She was transformed into a laurel tree. Apollo was devastated, wept, and made the tree his sacred emblem. (Shinoda-Bolen, 2011, p.139)

One way or another he was going to possess her. Since that time laurel trees and leaves have been used in festivals in his honor, making crowns, while naming winning poets as Poet Laureates. I am stilled speechless by this myth as it resonates at my core. So as to

stop the Apollo archetype from overtaking me I became a willow tree! The mystery as to how I have literally lived this myth without ever reading one word is completely awe-inspiring to me.

I find a framework for this phenomenon in Case and Dalley's (1989) discussion on the infant's core self as present from birth or before. They explain that such an observation is in keeping with Jung's belief in the presence of a primal self from birth or before. This primal self is a potential wholeness, holding the possibility of Being accomplished or realized through the lifelong process of individuation. Case and Dalley go on to discuss other theorists who support the evidence of an archetypal pattern at work. My Grandma Willow story comes from this place of core self, the place of knowing *Mist Story*, the space of my own love story. My work has been to trust so to listen and learn from my core self, and to thus allow my own archetypal unfolding.

Schapira introduces the next underlying archetypal image dominant in an early phase of individuation as that of the relationship between Demeter and Persephone. Persephone's world is altered as she is torn from the meadow (field) of her mother Demeter and she finds that she is a cold, dark place – Hades' place, a place "beyond mother" (Griessel and Kotze, 2009, p. 195 referring to Schapira). Schapira's own explanation of the myth is to state that

Hysteria is characterized by remissions and exacerbations. Whenever the patient's ego is overwhelmed by an influx of indisputable shadow material, the Demeter/Persephone is reconstituted in order to firm up the ego boundaries and stop the womb from wandering. (p. 92)

The story imparts some of the sense of terror and anxiety accompanying such a transition. The narrative of this transition from a sunny, warm and welcoming space to a cold and

dark underworld is going to induce the reader or listener's empathy for the characters' anxious experiences.

Enter the Lonely Traveler: My Descent into Hades far too soon

I was born into the landscape of the character I think of as the "Lonely Traveller." The landscape is typical of a land of wide open spaces, where a low brush tree could be seen from miles away. I liken this landscape to Hades as its image creates a sense of similar desolation and sense of separation from my mother. The wide open spaces speak to my inability to attach. My father was not able to be the patriarch for his family. He could not provide us with an arch that would cover and protect his family. This meant my mother had to return to work when I was three weeks old. At twenty-three, with a new born baby girl and a one year old son she returned to full time shift work as a nurse. We were most often left in the homes of babysitters as my father was either unwilling or unable to care for us. I know very little about these years as my mother was not able to talk about this time in her life. It was only when I started to ask questions as a young adult was I able to get bits and pieces of what happened in the years before he died.

I was three years old when my father's body shut down due to alcohol and drug poisoning. He was 27 years of age. My mother followed the protocol at the time of wanting to protect the children from death and thus we were not involved in any way. We were told that daddy went to heaven. I created this children's story as a way to allow my three year voice to speak of her experience. (Figs 6-a-p)

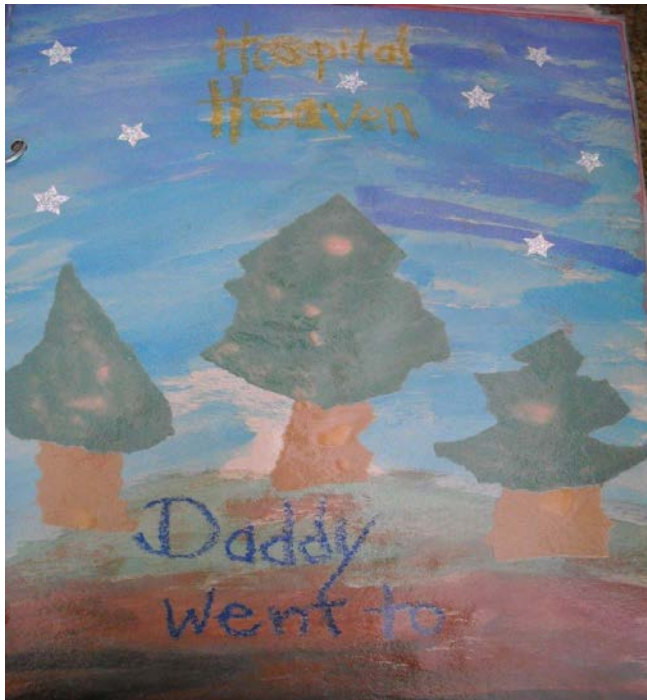


Figure 6-a: Hospital Heaven



Figure 6-b



Figure 6-c



Figure 6-d

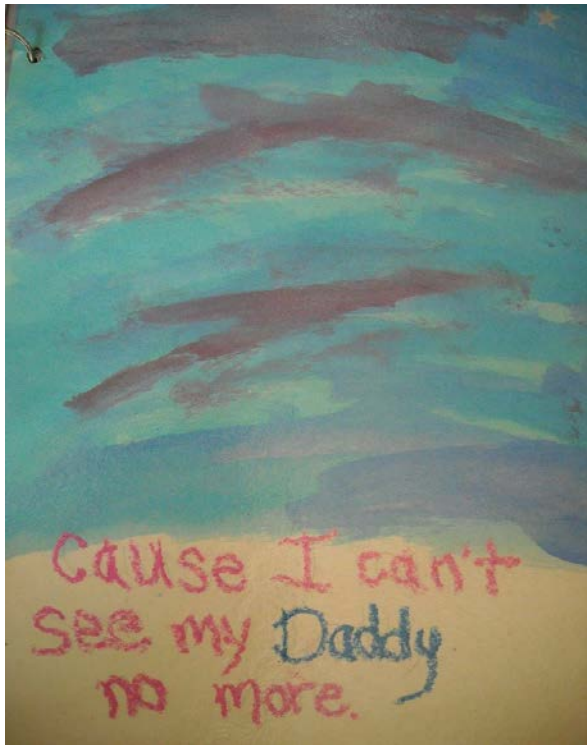


Figure 6-e

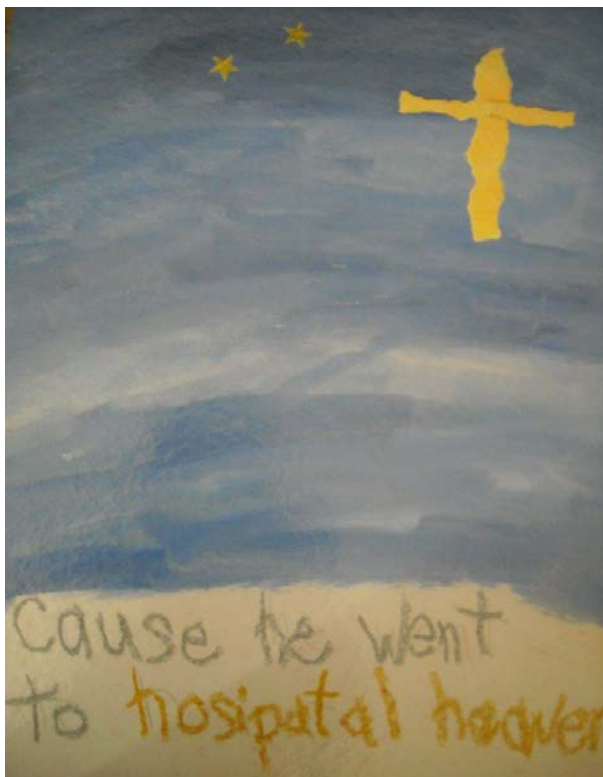


Figure 6-f

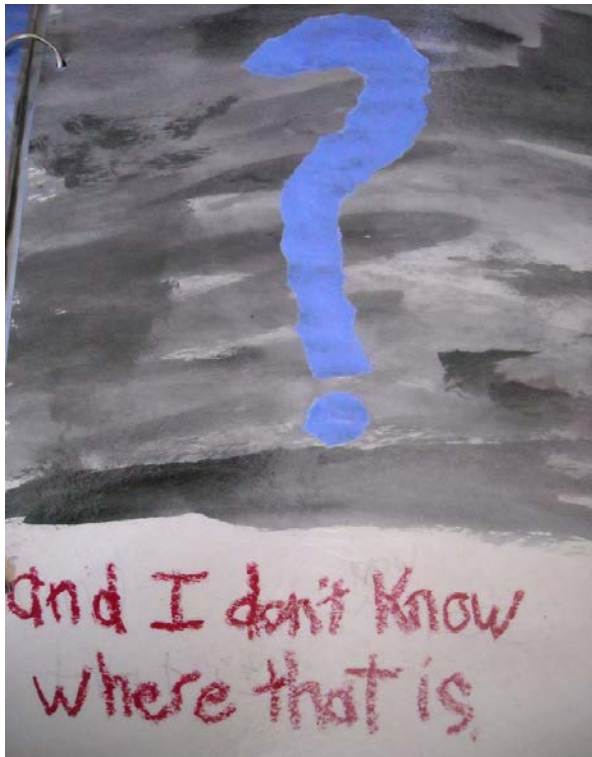


Figure 6-g

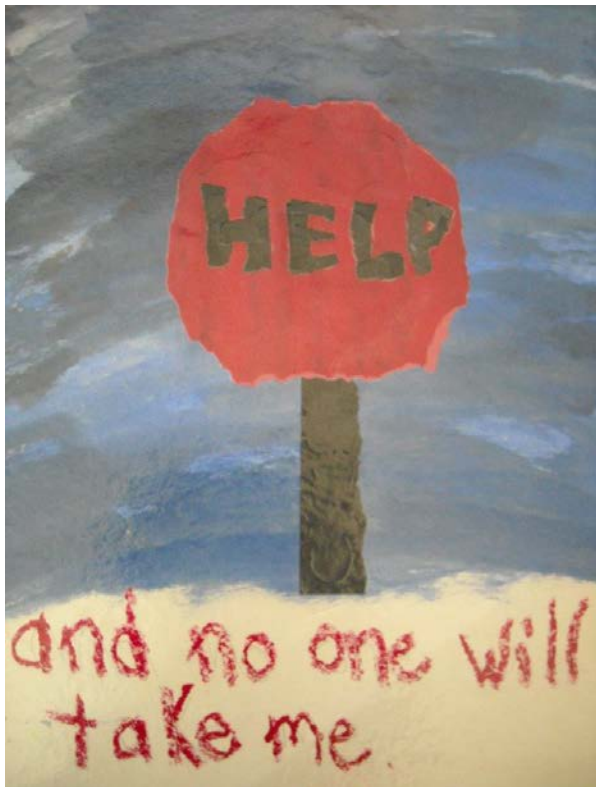


Figure 1-h

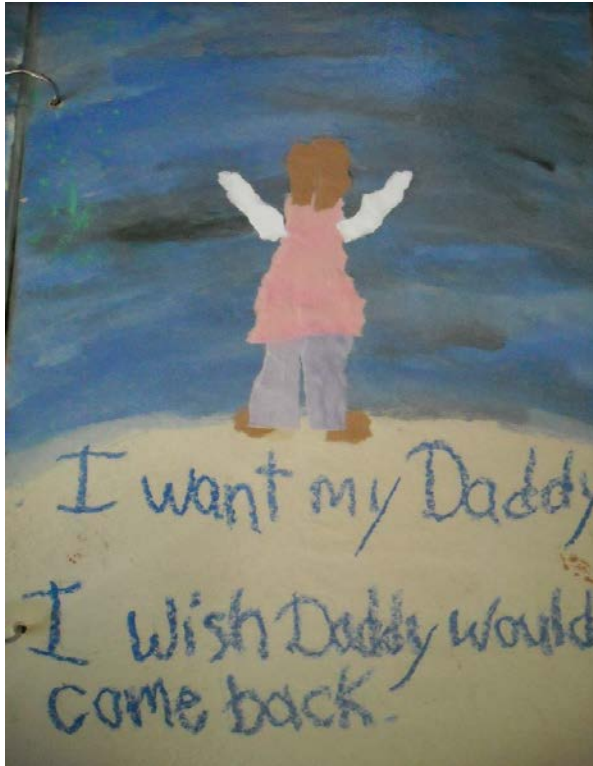


Figure 6-i

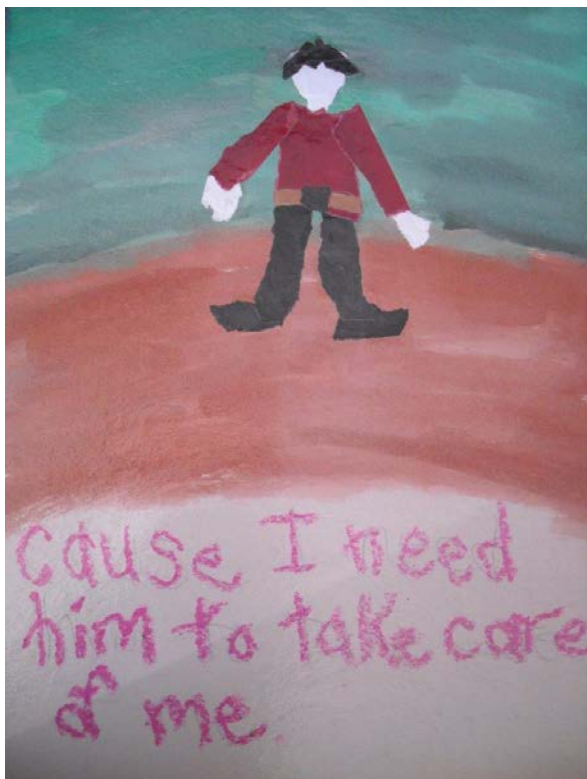


Figure 6-j

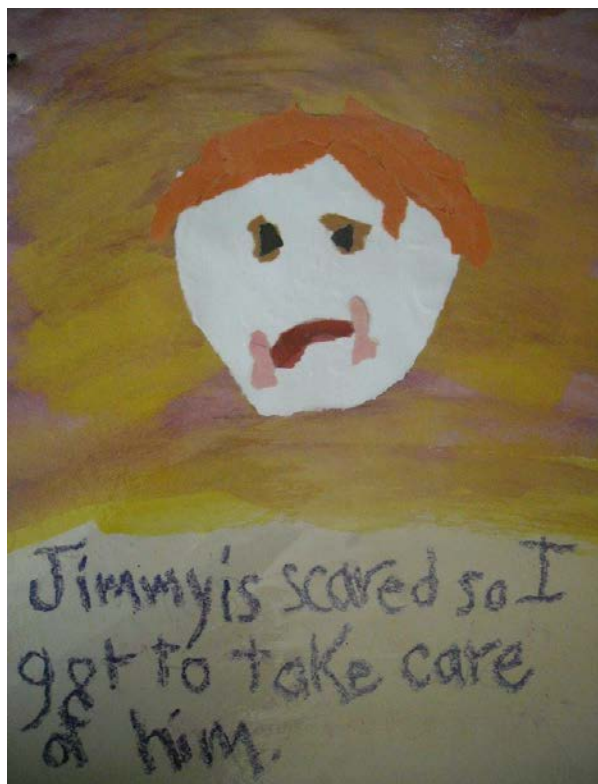


Figure 6-k

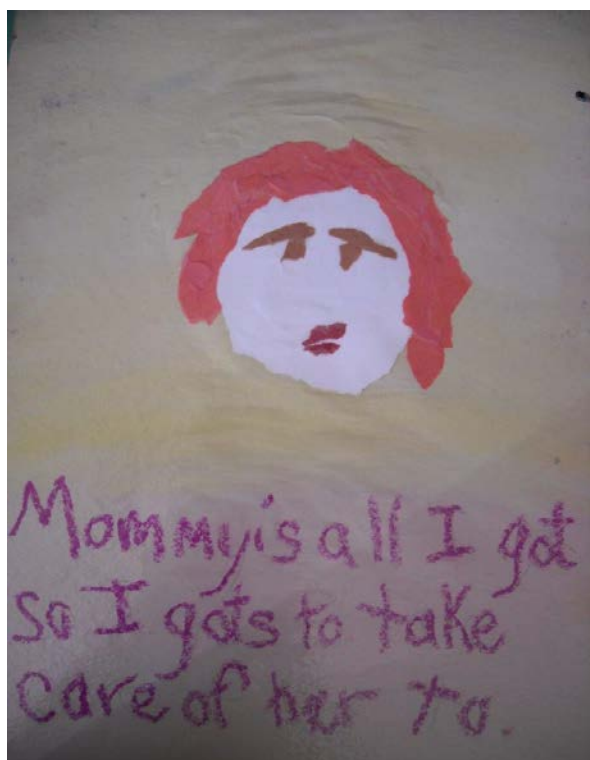


Figure 6-l



Figure 6-m

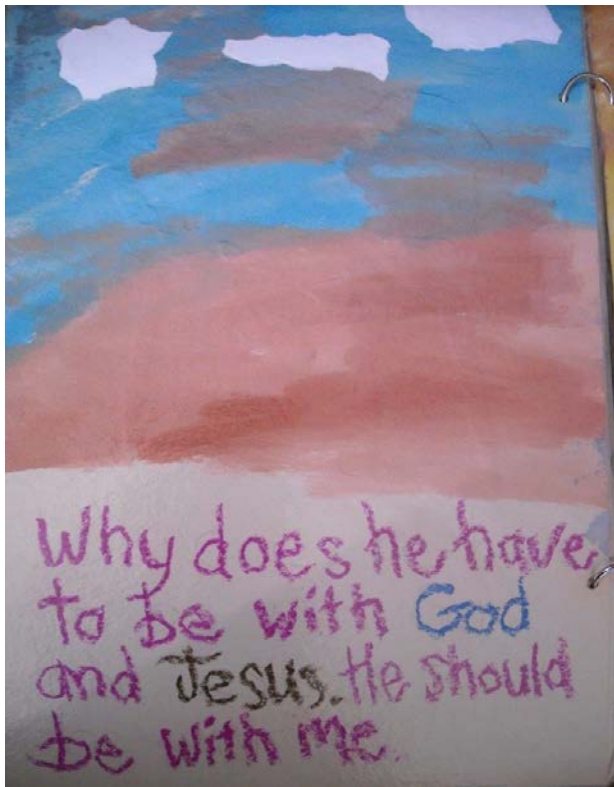


Figure 6-n



Figure 6-o

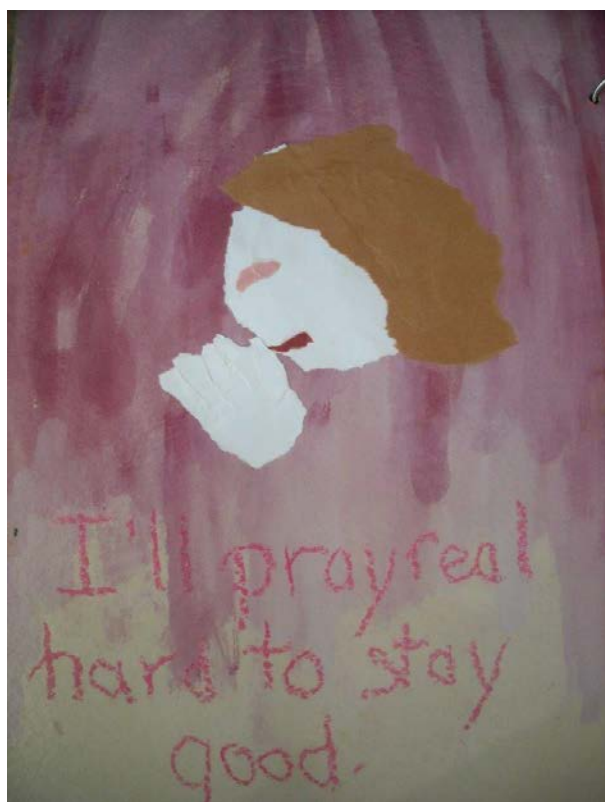


Figure 6-p

My mother had raised many of her younger siblings and now, she was raising her babies predominantly on her own. My later conversations with her confirmed what I already knew, pregnancy and motherhood were not what she wanted at this time in her life. It was, in her words, what she thought she was supposed to do.

Woodman (1985) supports me in reconciling my wounds with my mother when she describes an unconscious grief that resides in the daughters of what she refers to as *puella* women, “usually a ‘father’s daughter’ whose dream for herself was cut short by the reality of marriage and family.” (p.35) Woodman goes on to explain that this kind of woman is unable to bond with her daughter, and that daughter suffers for life from “a profound sense of despair, a despair which becomes conscious if in later years she does active imagination with her body and releases waves of grief and terror that resonate with the initial, primal rejection.” (p.37) This is the grief of all the un-mothered daughters, which I believe my mother was as well, all the way back through the matriarchal lineage.

It was interesting to read what Anodea Judith (1996) says of pre and post-natal experiences when she says,

If the mother is fearful or resistant to being pregnant her muscles will contract and the womb will be tight around the fetus. The growing child does not get a sense of freedom, safety, or being wanted. She contracts her own being even as she is physically growing at a rate faster than any other time. Contraction becomes a normal way of being, an energetic statement of withdrawal from life.” (p. 81)

The results in all this contraction are an excessive surge of energy to the upper body, as the child has no container or womb for the pain of being unwanted. She must disengage from her feelings which connect her to her core self. The head is the only safe place to dwell. Judith (1996) describes this in another way. “An excessive chakra is too cluttered to

be functionally useful. Like a traffic jam, the chakra is blocked by overcrowding, and the energy becomes dense and stagnant.” (p.19) Judith goes on to explain how this overcrowding blocks the throat and affects the ability to communicate with clarity.

Since her body was constricted, she had difficulty handling too much charge or excitement. If this occurred, she would become confused by the upward current of energy overcharging the upper chakras and flooding her with too much information without a way to sort it out. The limiting and grounding aspects of the lower chakras were not available to her, as she basically lived in fear. (p. 82)

This fear speaks of my anxiety around speaking thus reinforcing the silencing. This has resulted in a spilling out in speech which lends itself to the emptiness of being misunderstood and disbelieved. Schapira (1988), informs us that

any inadequacy in this symbiotic stage has especially disastrous consequences for the medial type for whom the first and crucial step in all ego development is identification. Maternal failure at this stage impairs not only the child’s ego but also the ego-Self axis, giving rise to a deep sense that her essential being is not acceptable” (p. 68).

It is here that the morbid complex takes form. Schapira provides an explanation of the morbid origins found in the words of Carl Jung,

The complex has an abnormal autonomy in hysteria and a tendency to an active separate existence, which reduces and replaces the constellating power of the ego-complex. In this way a new morbid personality is gradually created, the inclinations, judgements, and resolutions of which move only in the direction of the will to be ill. The second personality devours what is left of the normal ego and forces it into the role of a secondary (oppressed) complex. (1988, p.61)

Coming to terms with my internal oppressor has been an ongoing call to love this archetype as she is rooted in protecting me from extensive pain and felt sense of attack from an external environment.

Schapira provides ample evidence to uphold her belief in the negative mother complex as the root cause of the medial woman's hysteria or wandering womb. The complex constellates with failure, despite her innumerable attempts, of the daughter to attach to her mother. Our home lacked both a Matriarch and a Patriarch. I was born into a Hysteric genealogy or as my story amplifies, "the land of wide open spaces." I believe the hysteria was conceived in the misogynist teachings of the Catholic Church that dominated the homes of both of my parents. Schapira speaks to this when she says, "Cassandra personifies the archetypal conflict between matriarchal and patriarchal values, both vying for supremacy and with no eros to connect them. Hysteria has long been a manifestation of this psychic split" (1988, p.37).

The Christian Witch: Formation and Dissolution

At this point in my research I would like to introduce *The Christian Witch*.



Figure 7: Christian Witch

I see the makings of my *Christian Witch* when I wrote *Grandma Willow* in 2003. At that

time I had no knowledge of models or stages being followed in my conscious mind. I later found it fascinating to discover Ann Ulanov had written an article titled “*The Witch Archetype*” (1977), and a book titled *The Feminine in Jungian Psychology and in Christian Theology* (1971). Ulanov links the archetypal image of the Witch and suggests that there is a constructive and compensating function that makes sense in the context of anger that she found in her woman patients. She hypothesized that

relating to the Witch may be helpful as a woman gains the ability to “be assertive, and to isolate herself from the crowd and collective values, to retreat into a dark, introspective solitary place of renewal, and discover her own power, sexuality, and full self. . . The Witch possesses such potency because she signifies the rejected and negative (personally and culturally) aspects of the Feminine, currently crying out for redemption (the so-called “dark side”). (Griessel and Kotze, 2009, p. 206)

Case and Dalley (1989) add to the pattern that I perceive as I am transforming.

Instead of the confidence of knowing that others are interested in them and will provide food, comfort, warmth and love, they may repress desire for this and develop a second skin of self-dependency and an omnipotent belief that they can be self-sufficient. (p. 43)

In the story of Grandma Willow we see the beginnings of my Christian Witch archetype contained within the omnipotent belief system of the marshland people as they try to help the Lonely Traveller. We hear of his rejection by other communities and how very tired and hungry he is from his long journey. He attaches to the community from a helpless state, just like a small child. When they did not have the answers he needed, he sulked away on his own. This concerned the community to such an extent that they all descended into a state of loneliness.

I see here the workings of an innocent one denying her own needs in the hope to help her caregivers. Sadly, just as the marshland people came to experience, this was not possible. The good news here is the child is believed and her wisdom guides the way to Grandma Willow wisdom instead of the withered Christian Witch.

Persephone and Demeter's story speaks of the mother daughter separation and the profound loneliness that ensued with both maiden and mother. Hades is the space and place of loneliness where the morbid complex can take over due to the extreme pain of this separation. Schapira states, "The experience of the terrible, destroying, devouring mother, that is, the 'dark' aspect of the maiden. In hysterics, this is postulated as being split off and forming a morbid complex which persecutes the ego" (p.62). Schapira provides direction towards the dissolution of the morbid complex by allowing for the rightful initiation of Persephone to take her throne as goddess of the underworld.

The archetypal image underlying these transitional phenomena is the omphalos. This is the egg/womb/breast-shaped stone sacred to the Greeks and held to be the navel or center of the earth. Whenever Mother Earth was worshipped, there we may expect to find the omphalos. (p. 91)

I liken my own experience of the omphalos to the Willow Tree in Spring with its pussy willow buds, shaped like eggs, attached to the womb. This is the season of Persephone's rising from Hades. With her pomegranate seeds she returns to the upper world to be reunited with her Mother Demeter.



Figure 8: Omphalus

Life plunged me deeper into Hades when cancer invaded my mother's body in 2007. It was during this time that I was able to take my rightful throne within the underworld. Time and again I went to my mother, with my own eggs of love and my mother and I were able to seal our love a few days before she died. This seal has filled my heart time and again and bestowed the vital love necessary for the dissolution of my Christian Witch.

Healing Duality between Being and Doing

During the period of my mother's dying I reconnected to the image of the Chalice. When I received news that my mother's cancer had returned I went to the art studio and as you can see in Figure 9 there is a chalice or womb in between to figures that are myself and my mother.



Figure 9: The Chalice

While doing this piece I spontaneously followed my arm in the creation of the chalice. At the time I had no idea why I created this chalice, only that I was certain it needed to be there. I eventually came to see this chalice as the Willow Tree that represents the healing of the split between my mother who was forever doing, and me, who wanted being to come before doing. I made this collage for my mother six months before she passed away. She told me that she gazed at it often and it brought her peace.

The study of subjective knowledge has been very helpful in trusting my inner guidance system. I am encouraged by the authors of *Women's Ways of Knowing*, who support my way of being,

For many women, the move away from silence and an externally oriented perspective on knowledge and truth eventuates in a new conception of truth as

personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited thus we are calling the next position *subjectivism or subjective knowing*. In fact, the subjectivism is dualistic in the sense that there is still the conviction that there are right answers; the fountain of truth simply has shifted locale. Truth now resides within the person and can negate answers that the outside world supplies.”(p.54)

It is encouraging to see this articulation of my own inner guidance system. I also delighted in the discovery of the Holy Grail/Chalice story found in *The Power of Myth* where Campbell (1988) explains,

The Grail was brought down through the middle by the neutral angels. It represents that spiritual path that is between pairs of opposites... and so the impulses of nature are what give authenticity to life, not the rules coming from a supernatural authority--that's the sense of the Grail. (p. 244)

The willow tree has provided the angelic medicine of neutrality time and again. By holding fast down the middle, I was able to settle enough of my own duality so as to allow for the healing that took place before my mother died.

A sense of foreboding is felt in Schapira's introduction to the next therapeutic phase. Naturally, the dark face of the goddess is not so easily dismissed. But after a positive maternal container is established, one is better prepared to meet this terrible aspect. Archetypally, Persephone becomes ready for the rape/initiation by Hades, so she can eventually take her place as queen of the underworld. (1988, p. 92)

Rape is a hard word to place comfortably in my psyche. Jean Shinoda Bolen (1984) provides the insight into the necessity for rape as a 'wake-up call' for the psyche of Persephone to grow.

Usually Persephone women avoid anger. They do not want people to get mad at them. They feel dependent on the generosity and goodwill of others who they correctly perceive as more powerful. Therefore, they often treat their mothers, fathers, husbands, employers, and teachers like patrons whose good graces need to be courted. (p. 217)

I perceive the rape or initiation is essential for Persephone to stand in her own power, significantly her medial abilities that will allow her to be therapist/guide for others in their own descent to Hades. “After Persephone emerges from the underworld, Hecate was her constant companion. Hecate, Goddess of the Dark Moon and the Crossroads, ruled over the uncanny realms of ghosts and demons, sorcery and magic” (Shinoda-Boden, 1984, p. 219). Hecate is the goddess of the medial realm.

The Therapeutic Stance of Being Rather Than Doing

As we see in the story the journey from Marshland to Grandma Willow is a bumpy boat ride over the babbling brook. This has certainly been my experience of my transition from Teacher/Artisan to Art Therapist. Just like the babbling brook, I have struggled with feeling that there is too much work to do with so little time, or from a therapeutic stance, to enter into a being with others in experiencing significant grief and not try to fix what is happening. Schapira gives voice to my struggle when she says,

No matter which way she turned, Cassandra was neglected, attacked or asked to give up her identity in order to mirror another. Because of her medial nature, she was used as a projection field, but she lacked the ego boundaries that would have allowed her to disidentify [sic] from what others wanted her to be. (1988, p.35)

Allowing others their pain instead of trying to fix their experience is an act of respect. Letting another know that they have what it takes to both feel and heal their experience. This has also allowed for a deeper journey into my own felt experience of Hades.

Understanding the importance of my medial aspects has spearheaded my healing and provided rich clarity for the further development of my boundaries. I now have a place for what I am “picking up” in my outer environment. Words by Jungian analyst Alex Quenk particularly resonate with my social anxiety due to my sensitivity of the outer/external environment. He discusses hysteria as “the result of her extreme extraverted feeling and intuition.” And then goes on to attribute this extreme to “a lack of introverted judgement.” (Schapira, 1988, p. 67)

I see here the excessive libido, or need to please for the Cassandra woman. The so-called ‘dark side’ of the Witch is “crying out for redemption” (Griessel and Krotze, 2009, p. 206). Excessive energy takes the form of anxiety as she will feel safe once the outer mirror affirms her feeling and intuition. Schapira quotes Toni Wolff’s viewpoint as to the lament of the medial woman and gives reasons for the gift I found with the willow tree and the space and silence from people.

The medial woman is immersed in the psychic atmosphere of her environment and the spirit of her period, but above all in the collective (impersonal) unconscious. The unconscious, once it is constellated and can become conscious, exerts an effect. The medial woman is overcome by this effect, she is absorbed and moulded by it and sometimes she represents it herself. She must for instance express or act what is “in the air,” what the environment cannot or will not admit, but what is nevertheless a part of it. It is mostly the dark aspect of a situation or of a predominant idea, and she thus activates what is negative and dangerous. In this way she becomes the carrier of

evil, but that she does, is nevertheless exclusively her personal problem. . . . The overwhelming force of the collective unconscious sweeps through the ego of the medial woman and weakens it. (1988, p. 53)

In order to live with the overwhelming force of the collective unconscious, returning to the trees is my way of being mothered and protected by family. I need to do this literally so as to incarnate a nourishing inner family. In her book, *Tending the Fire*, (2004), Ellen Levine explains my process in her discussion of transitional objects and transitional space. She describes the relationship of the child with the transitional object when this object occurs in “an intermediate area where the child can exercise control. The child has rights over the object; it must never change or be changed; and it must survive loving and aggression directed toward it by the child” (Levine citing Winnicott, 2004, p. 6). The transitional object provides an “intermediate area of experience and restores the illusion of omnipotence, of oneness with the mother, by magical control” (2004, p. 62).

Co-creating with trees was my way of hammering and weaving myself back to my Divine birthright. I experience the forming of my business, Return to Rustic, as my creation of transitional space with the outer world. Levine explains,

The transitional object retains its aliveness and symbolic character because it participates in a continuous flow between the absence and the renewed presence of the object. The transitional object temporarily fills up the absences. It is an absent-presence and as such can be a field or container for all kinds of imaginative activity. (2004, p. 63)

As I re-built myself, I found an authentic way or transitional space to merge with the outside world. I now find my transitional space to be the studio, the ever expanding play range within Art Therapy. My art, or creating with my own two hands, remains the transitional object that constantly is broadening the way I experience myself within the world.

Entering Grandma Willow's Eco-System

I have been working with containing my medial energy for many years and it wasn't until I entered my awareness of the womb as the willow tree did I find a container to work with by releasing the difficult energy I receive from the outer environment. After a particularly difficult session with a child during my practicum a few years ago I went to an afternoon studio session with other expressive art therapists. It was here I entered the imaginal space where I sat with the composting abilities of the willow tree. What emerged was the Willow Lily with her story of how to release the negative energy from my body and how this energy is taken care of by the cosmos. (See Figure 10).



Figure 10: Willow Lily

My personal healing, along with what I have witnessed in others, provides ample evidence to an archetypal pattern at work. Woodman (1997) speaks to this pattern, “If, however, we are able to recognize the Great Goddess in her role as the *transformer of energy*, then we can trust, even if we don’t know where we are going. The blackness will reveal its gold. Sometimes with humor, sometimes with bluntness, and even harshness, sometimes with tenderness, she will both challenge and guide.” (p.38)

I awoke to this pattern through the willow tree and continue to find support as long as I remain willing to see into my body’s dark rich earth. I fully enjoy and liken my journey, especially in the last few years, to this passage by eco-therapist/author, Shepherd Bliss, in his appreciation of the sweet darkness. He conveys this thought,

Endarkenment is an essential, often-maligned aspect of the birth-to-death cycle.

What goes into my compost pile has many colors, including green, yellow, red, and even purple. What comes out is darker—brown or black. I regularly bring in manure as fertilizer to feed my soil; it also nourishes my soul. ‘Shovelling shit’, as farmers call it, has been a pleasure. Waste is properly handled, is regenerating. (*Eco-Therapy*, 2009, p. 180)



Figure 11: Tending to the Root Chakra

Digging into the dark can be done individually and collectively. One of the positive experiences of researching and writing this these has been this discovery. Having to read and being given direction for the finding of thinkers and writers has been a form of digging in the dark for me. For example, discovering *Wild Feminine* in this past year has been hugely affirming of what I came to know through my process of creating the Willow Lily. Kent (2011) centres her work on the connection between a woman's reproductive system and her overall wellness. She discusses the ability to work with energy much like the willow's root system.

The quality of energy flow in the female pelvis, including the flow of each ovary, the uterus, and the vagina, impacts a woman's overall vibrancy. Like nutrients drawn from the soil that are essential for a plant's growth, the flow of pelvic energy through a woman's root determines the vitality of her womanhood. The root of her body contains a woman's creative energy system, which included both the first and

second chakras (energy center that regulate core identity and creative expression) and the energy of her pelvic bowl and female organs. When a woman understands how to utilize this system, she can change or cultivate the energy she holds in her center. (Kent, 2011, p.14).

Schapira (1988) asserts this call to the awakening of the dark goddess.

Through the ages, the dark goddess has made attempts to assert herself but the patriarchy has managed to repress her each time. So she has stayed underground, hiding either in the shadows of esoteric religion (kabbalism, alchemy, Wicca) or in the unconscious, breaking through in the form of psychopathologies such as hysteria and what we now call borderline conditions. (p. 36)

Hiding, just like Daphne, I found safety in the tree, but safety can turn stagnant if one is now safe but chooses to remain hiding. I heard the willow call, “Be the Tree”. It was time to consciously face Apollo and the healing practice of staying attached to my womb.

The words of Joseph Campbell (1991) connect with a significant piece in my healing intent when I was writing “Grandma Willow”. He said,

The wound of my passion and the agony of my love for this creature. “The only one who can heal me is the one who delivered the blow. That’s a motif that appears in symbolic form in many medieval stories of the lance that delivers a wound. It is only when that lance can touch the wound again that the wound can be healed (p243).

I set the intent to experience this symbolic healing Campbell is speaking of, when I began to weave with cut up strips from my mother’s clothes. It has felt like a co-creation of love between my mother and me which I refer to as my second skin (See Figures 18a &b)

Be Stilled and Know: Images of the Dark Goddess

Being stilled by the dark goddess is the way to leave my anxious mind and attaching to the feminine knowing wisdom within by body. This wisdom roots me in my knowing and routes the way I live my life.

Grandma Willow welcomed her visitors and responded to their anxious call by providing reassurance that she will listen to each of their concerns. When I am telling the story I wave a long willow branch, back and forth over the group when Grandma Willow speaks. This is a blessing that the children instantly respond to with apt attention. The visitors are then invited to come closer and sit and the moss between my roots, rest their heads and let 'Wynd' soothe their concerned minds and bodies. Grandma Willow then sings her song, "hum, hum, hum" as she waves her branches, gathering each one into the stillness of silence. When her guests awaken time seems at a loss, and the concerns are no longer.

This is my experience of imaginal space, a place and space somehow out of time where healing takes place due to the presence of Grandma Willow with all of her being. In his book *Quantum Healing*, Deepak Chopra speaks of the "realm of silence" where "the real war is not between the head and the heart. Something deeper, in the realm of silence creates our view of reality" (1990, p.158). Grandma Willow, in her realm of silence has perpetually shaped my reality leaving me filled with a delight like the light that dances on the dew of the new green leaves securely attached to the depth of the ancient tree. This is truly what brings meaning to my life. The giving and receiving from Her realm of silence.

Just as a baby in the womb can hear her mother's voice, I attached to the voice of the sacred feminine in the willow that holds me like a loving womb. This voice spoke in silence just as Mary of Magdelene spoke of the silence in *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*,

“for it was in silence that the teacher spoke to her. These meeting between Logos and Sophia reverberate in realms of both words and silences. Happy are those who have ears to hear the Teacher’s words; Happier still are those who have ears to hear his silence.” (Leloup, 2002, p.157).

Mary of Magdalena was the one voice in my Catholic upbringing that resonated with my own. I always felt I somehow knew her and now experience her within me at her rightful place of lover to Christ. I believe this connection to be what the alchemical tree of life claims as, what is above is so below. Magdalena is my first image of the dark goddess below, the roots within my womb awaiting conception with the sun god above, or the Christ. I know her to be the woman who anointed Jesus with oil. Claremont De Castillejo (1997) speaks of the connection with this anointing and the tree of life when she says,

One must have lived near the Mediterranean to feel the deep significance of oil. It is pressed with hard labour from the bitter inedible olive, fruit of a wild tree which has been drastically pruned. It is plunged into deep water to be purified, and when it raised to the surface clear and greenish-gold it becomes a staple food and fuel for light. It is not for nothing that kings are anointed with oil, for it is a symbol of spiritual transformation. (p.56)

These images speak impeccably to me of the process of individuation. Claremont DeCastillejo invites her readers to keep this oil ever present in their lamps and to do so is to stay in relationship with life in whatever field. Be this God, art, another person, nature, or one’s own inner masculine. This oil is essential so not to be burned up by the patriarchal spirit of the intellect or physical activity. If our feminine lamp is continually refueled, wholeness ensues, filling us with the beingness of life that illuminates the way for

others. “This flame is Love. Love is wholly beyond us. It alights upon us and illuminates our lives only when the opposites meet.” (1997, p.57) I hear similar echoes when Schapira (1988) discusses the inner connection of the Masculine and Feminine, Her ego is the medium. The Apollonian animus carries the message,

the Logos Spermaticos, the fertilizing spirit which comes to her through the ether. Her medial instrument, that body/mind/emotional complex we call the famine ego, picks up and vibrates with the message. She smells it, feels it, senses it, holding these kinesthetic impressions, gestating them until a gestalt forms. (p.140)

Until the gestalt forms, one can feel like being inside a pressure cooker. Creativity releases the tension or pressure in this experience and allows us to stay in the process until clarity is made clear. Expressive Arts Therapist, Paulo Knill refers to this as the crystallization theory. In the text, *Foundations of Expressive Arts Therapy*, (1999), Knill explains,

The crystallization theory is concerned about the elucidation in the artistic process from its inception to the ongoing interventions and final interpretative activities. One of the major objectives in this process is the finding of the most appropriate material, structure, form and frame in an adequate discipline to elucidate the content coming forth. (p. 47)

Bringing form and / or voice that is helpful in “elucidating”, articulating or re-presenting the knowing that wells up through the ‘body/mind/emotional complex’ is a challenge, and these writers have been helpful as I make my way through this research process.

I find great inspiration in other authors who have tracked their way to the dark goddess and her life giving voice for our time. I would love to continue to provide their

words of discovery but will suffice with a passage from *The Black Madonna Within*. The author, Tataya Mato (1994), provides drawings, dreams and reflections on her healing of her torturous childhood in Nazi Germany. She says this of the black soil below and cosmos above, “The great presence within has become my friend. I feel carried and unconditionally supported. This core-experience of my existence I like to call the Great Mystery. In my dreams it wears the face of the Black Madonna.” (p.16). And like Tatayo Mato this research and my work as an art therapist at the Cross Cancer is my response to the continual call, “I accepted my fate and acknowledged my vocation as a shaman of the Black Madonna.” (p.5)

Lastly, words from the great Carl Jung in the text *The Earth Has A Soul* (2002) in a letter to a friend when he says,

There is a star. You must go in quest of yourself and you will find yourself again only in the simple and forgotten things. Why not go into the forest for a time, literally? Sometimes a tree tells you more than can be read in books. (p. 6)

And remember Grandma Willow when she says, “Remember to visit me often, even if you do not have any aches or pains.”

Chapter 3: Method and Organization

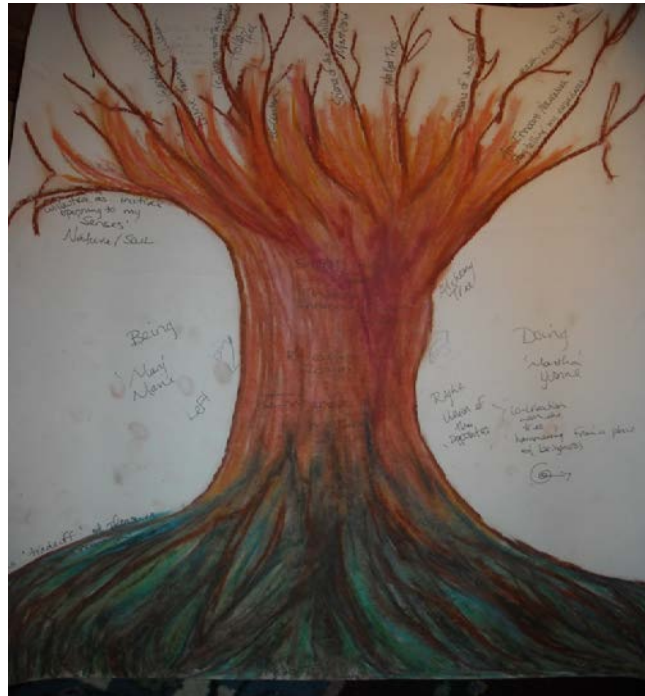


Figure 12: From Water to Fire

Research Approach: Union of Being and Doing

At our first meeting about two and a half years ago, I placed the above oil pastel drawing in front of my thesis supervisor Anne Hill. I announced that this was my thesis, how the split between being and doing within me is somehow healed by the willow tree. There are many words placed on the drawing that provided some structure. I also wrote what I call Willow's Wisdom and needed to find a methodology that allowed for the just right fit. I knew I would follow an Arts Based Methodology, but was also looking for therapeutic theory that grounded me in the art.

After what felt like the exploration of every other qualitative methodology I discovered *The Wounded Researcher* (2007) and Robert Romanyshyn's alchemical hermeneutics, a methodology of researching with soul in mind. Finally the 'just right' moment arrived when the willow tree in me said "Yes", and post-modern Jungian

psychology became the ground I was seeking in both my life and my thesis.

I hope to contribute to a body of knowledge that inspires the feminine to surface from silence through the imaginal realm found in art making and depth psychology.

Methodology: How I felt my way through the Complex/Myth

In her text, *Art Is A Spiritual Path*, Pat Allen asks a big question, “How do we listen to hear what is aching to be made manifest through us” (2005, p.38). I am compelled to bring some of this ache to my thesis work and it was essential to find a methodology that allows for this aching to be made manifest. What is equally essential is to have found a methodology that provides a safe and sacred container for me to do this work. I now have a felt sense of the beginning and more importantly an ending in sight.

Alchemical Hermeneutics is the methodology that best serves my voice. In what I experience as ground breaking in the area of research is found in Robert Romanyshyn’s text, *The Wounded Researcher, research with soul in mind*. He has created a methodology that allows for soul to be included in psychology. For me this allows for the fullness of my Feminine Voice to be communicated. He states, “Writing down the soul seems to be matter of the researcher’s heart being in tune with the spirit and nature of the work” (2007, p.17).

Alchemical hermeneutics is a research method developed by Robert Romanyshyn and Veronica Goodchild (2007, p.263). Rooted in depth psychology and informed by hermeneutic phenomenology, it is a research method “in service to the soul and its ancestral, archetypal voices” (2007, p.2). It is a way of working that *understands* and supports the soul as an independent domain of reality. This method takes into account critical thinking and the logic of situations as well as the influence that the unconscious exercises in interpreting a lived experience. However, the method goes beyond

appearances as it recognizes and gives validity to feelings, dreams, creativity, synchronicity and intuitive modes of knowing and listens to the way the soul speaks through symbols or images. It also gives voice to the soul's way of communicating in the form of the researcher's own symptoms and pathologies. These are all valid ways of knowing. The alchemical concept of the method is reflected in the fact that, in the process of the work, the researcher undergoes a process of personal transformation similar to that found in the accounts of the alchemists of long-ago.

I undertook this process by following the symbolism of the willow tree as my alchemical tree of life. Romanyshyn joins the branches with the roots with these words, "The foundation of research with soul in mind serves two masters as it were: the ego mind with its demands for intellect, scholarship and truth, and the soul with its demands for feeling, art and eros" (2007, p.21).

I have chosen this method based on my belief that in order for real and lasting positive change to occur the focus has to begin with the inner process. The interior locus of control is crucial in creating a fertile existence. Sandy Sela-Smith (2002) speaks to this conviction when she states, "With new, revised, or expanded understanding, internal reorganization naturally occurs, resulting in a self-transformation that almost always has social and transpersonal implications." (p. 59)

Responding to the Soul's Call

The willow tree claimed me many years ago and I surrendered time and again to her tutelage. I now give myself to this methodology as it feels like the same surrender to my soul. *The Wounded Researcher* is a direct expression of what it proposes, "a work chooses one as much as one chooses it and there is always that felt gap between what one says and what haunts one as wanting to be said" (2007, p.16). It is not just a book about research in

its traditional meaning. Instead it brings research into the realm of the soul, that re-searching is a soul activity, its way of searching again for what has been lost. The quest is a finding that is a re-finding, as it is in therapy with soul in mind. As Romanyshyn explains,

Thus, psychological re-search with soul in mind is a form of therapy, just as therapy is a form of re-search. Or better still, both are a form of “e-ducation,” in a way of being drawn out of oneself into soul, into the soul of one’s work and/or the soul of one’s life. (2007, p.16)

Through my own image making, I stay in touch with the divine nature in me. Through alchemical hermeneutics I engage in a process of personal transformation. I am remembering all parts of myself in the alchemical hermeneutic process of creating with the willow tree. My communion with the willow is the invitation for all of me to sit within myself, to be stilled and know. Image making experienced within the Alchemical Hermeneutic spiral is a perpetual re-turn in the light of new learning. In this spiral of returning, “The first direction is not forward into new areas of knowledge. Rather, its first move is backwards, towards what has been lost, forgotten, or left behind” (Romanyshyn, 2007, p.77).

Such a re-turn is also suggested in *Art as a Way of Knowing*, by Pat Allen when she says,

My image making, I have concluded, is primarily an act of remembrance. It is my means to stay in touch with the divine in me. To remember is to re-call, to call back to one’s self what was once central but has for various reasons been obscured. It is to re-member arms and legs to one’s divine nature by taking back and owning all parts of ourselves. The more of our self we own, the less our need for enemies to

embody our disowned darkness. Everything is welcomed by the soul. (1995, p. 19)

We are quite literally re-membered in the hopes of becoming whole again – the forgotten and even the so called “dark side”.

Regenerating A Turn To a New Beginning

Romanyshyn claims that this first move is a work of mourning. “As a work of mourning, research as re-search is a work of anamnesis, which advances by remembering. It moves forward by stepping backwards to regard, recover, redeem, and renew what has been left behind, and in this orientation it opens a space for a new beginning. Re-search with soul in mind thus transforms what we uncritically take for granted by returning to origins for the sake of an *other* beginning” (p. 77).

Polanyi (2006) conveys this power when he says, “Practical knowledge precedes the knowledge of rules, for one must possess a degree of practical knowledge in order to apply rules. One acquires practical knowledge through doing. But how can one practice an art if one does not yet know how to do so? The answer lies in submission to an authority in the manner of an apprentice. We learn by example.” (p.63)

The Divine authority to which I surrender my will or will-low, continues to be a source of gentle, loving, and compassionate wisdom that re-authors my life so that I too can offer her presence to others who need her guidance.

The hermeneutic inquiry begins with the phenomena and moves towards understanding or finding of meaning, rather than to explain, measure, or prove something about the phenomena. (p. 64). Because there is more than one phenomena that I bring to this research, I will be clear to address each question separately as per my outline. I will apply the same process known as the hermeneutic turn to each question. As Romanyshyn describes,

One task of an alchemical hermeneutic method is to deepen the hermeneutic circle by twisting it into a spiral. The researcher, then, follows the arc of the hermeneutic circle, but in such a way that the engagement of the two takes into account the unconscious aspects of the researcher and the work. One consequence of the deformation of the hermeneutic circle is that alchemical hermeneutics is not about making its method more philosophically valid. Rather, it is about making philosophical hermeneutics more psychologically aware. (2007, p.222)

Romanyshyn emphasizes that the method is chosen by the researcher through his or her own complexes that are addressed by the soul of the work, by psyche, by this autonomous reality. Emphasis is placed over and over again on the importance of acknowledging the unconscious complexes in the researcher as to provide necessary validity. He explains,

The image of the neutral observer and/or the dispassionate researcher is built on the fiction of the complex-free person, whose neutrality and dispassion separate him or her from that which he or she studies. It yields a simplistic psychology that leaves the complex psychologist out of the picture. The point I wish to make here is that it is, in fact, through our complexes that we are initially drawn into life, love and work. (2007, p.112)

This statement provided the assurance I needed to proceed with my research in the form of this thesis. It is truly life changing for me to honour my complexes as a guide to a richer existence and meaning filled life.

Phase 1: Cultivating openness through ritual and reverie.

The first phase is the ‘Ritual Space’ or ‘Reverie’. In this first phase the stage is set by cultivating “the mood of reverie, the attitude of negative capability” where the researcher needs to suspend judgement in the form of questioning or understanding the

experience. This allows for “the gestures of hospitality, and the willingness to be a witness rather than a critic” (Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 152). An openness to perception is helpful, in opposition to framing a question in the image of a frame that will be placed over the topic, openness sets aside habits of thought and perception. In a manner similar to working with ‘negative space’ in visual arts, openness becomes an invitation to visual, sensory perception.

Phase 2: Transference Dialogues.

The second phase concerns ‘Transference Dialogues.’ In this second phase the researcher extends an invitation to the *others*, those imaginal beings or presences who have some stake in the work. Romanyshyn guides the re-searcher to four levels within the field of Transference Dialogues that may be addressed specifically: the personal, the cultural-historical, the collective-archetypal, and the ecological-cosmological. At each of these levels, the dialogue provides a way of distinguishing between what the researcher brings to the work from her own complexes and what the work itself has to say.

For me the transference dialogues unfolded in the following way;

Personal Level – I attached myself to my own womb energy through the metaphorical voice of the Willow Tree and creating with the fibre arts.

Cultural- Historical Level – I accepted the archetypes at play in my early childhood through the myths found in the Casandra Complex.

Christian/Catholic Patriarchy – I was able to live more fully from my divine feminine voice through composting old religious beliefs through clay story, and fibre arts.

Collective-Archetypal Level – I related to the negative mother and gave her a persona and voice through drawing and active imagination. The place from which I related to the negative mother I refer to as the Magdalena/Black Madonna/Dark Goddess who is

the voice in the Willow Tree. I continued to dialogue through dream work, story, wet and needle felting and weaving.

Eco-Cosmological Level – I immersed myself in the study of the Willow Tree and its ecosystem both literally and metaphorically.

Phase 3: Mindful waiting as a witness

Next, the researcher needs to wait for what is supposed to happen, until an image presents itself. This image may appear in the form of a mood or bodily sensation, which if witnessed and questioned may lead to further insights.

Indeed, I would say that image, mood, and gesture are a triad and that where one is present so are the others. Mood, image, and gesture bring one into the unconscious depths of the work and any one of them can open the researcher up to the possibilities in the work. (Romanyshyn, 2007, p.156)

I related these moods and bodily sensations in the form of art expressions.

Phase 4: Engaging other

The researcher is now ready to take the fourth step: engaging the *others* in the work. In this step one actively engages the “strangers” in the work by way of Jung’s ‘active imagination’ whereby form is given to this dialogue. Drawing, collage, sculpture, weaving, felting and storying provided the ways I gave form to the formless voices of the *others*.

Phase 5: Moving from witness to critical scholar

Lastly, the researcher moves away from being a witness and towards a critical stance. The word critical does not mean judgement of the work, but a scholarly discussion and reflection of the images and dialogue. Asking the images and dialogue “what do they say about the work” is the reflection that provides a vastly increased understanding of what

the work itself wishes to voice. (Romanyshyn, 2007, p.159) These results comprise chapter 4.

Witness to Willow's Wisdom

The Willow Tree is at the forefront of my methodology. I started my research with the guidance found below discovered in my years working with this prolific tree. Throughout the years the Willow's *doing* or *active* properties taught and mirrored for me my feminine ways of being. I list these here with a visual emphasis on critical words to mark the healing of my wandering womb.

1. Willow Regeneration: New saplings will grow out of the stem after being cut and will grow in abundance out of dead branches. The Willow is my Tree of Life guiding and containing me in the cycles of birth, life, death and re-birth. (Willows The Genus Salix, 1992, p.33)
2. To Blend but not Break: Willow is 80% water, as much as humans contain in their bodies. In this manner, Willow teaches me about flexibility to allow for the release of control. As well Willow guides me in awareness of fluid boundaries, but only to a point, as the willow will break if bent too far. Water represents the feeling function, or moving through the heart. Willow is in direct relationship to the Moon Cycle of Maiden, Mother and Crone wisdom.
3. Binding: Willow has been used for centuries as a binding agent. This speaks to me of my attaching to the Willow Tree and Mother Earth's Wisdom. Indigenous Peoples made Native Baskets and papoose carriers and in this way bound to themselves what they carried. Willow binds the mountain ash tree to the birch tree. In the mythology of a witches' broom, the pole is bound to sweeping branches. (The Tree Mother, 2010, p.94)

4. ASA (salicylic acid): The bark is pain relief: bark as self-protection so as to not absorb the painful behaviours of others. (Salicylate, A New Plant Hormone, 1992, p.799)
5. Tree Bog: Farmers use of willow for manure composting is akin to what I experienced as genealogical healing and my therapeutic stance as described in the Willow Lily. (Willows Beyond Wetlands, 2005, p. 192)
6. Border, Transition places: Willow grows at the border to the forest where the land meets the trees/holding the tension between opposites (chalice).
7. Re-bound Catkins: Sign of Spring where Persephone returns to her mother: warmth is returning. In terms of trauma warmth speaks to the inner resiliency to snap back.

Others Who Engaged in the Stance of Love

I wish to give voice to other researchers that I discovered while seeking substantiation for what I knew about the willow tree. I was elated by the finding of *The Mythological Element in Virginia Woolf's The Waves: Bernard's Vision* (undated) by Dennis Young. In particular, I was intrigued with the section where Young speaks of the Willow Tree and how it fits with the regenerative aspects of the tree of life. Hugo Rahmer, (n.d.) in *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, devotes a lengthy section of his study to a discussion of the mythological significance of the willow tree in Greek and Roman myth, as well as in Christian symbolism. The willow tree becomes symbolically important in *The Odyssey* when Odysseus enters a realm in Hades between life and death. In Greek myth the willow is “a symbol of fresh and bubbly life, and also the womb of death to which all things return.” He then goes on to a passage that took my breath away.

What the ancients especially admired in the willow tree was “its indestructible

power of growth. Without the aid of man it continually bursts into new leaf. Virgil is quoted in *Georgics*: “Without human aid they grow up, by their own power. In fact the word willow is reputed to be derived from this quality of self-regenerative growth. (p.98).

Could this be what I feel in the tree, my own self-generative growth? Yes, I believe so.

The messages of participants engaged in research with McRaith (1984) is another example of feeling a personal connection, engaging with others in an experience and research process that resonates with my own. What is particularly significant to me is how accurately my experience fits with theirs. McRaith (1984) focused her thesis on the topic of *The God in the Tree* where she and the research participants entered a shamanic journey. Each participant wrote messages they received from each tree on their journey. When comparing notes, the similarities were remarkable. She says: “Willow needs water. She drinks it in through her roots; she has deep roots that have the ability to search out and find any water, even a mere trickle.” (1984, p.60) And also,

I saw images of different people sitting below her branches, leaning against her bark, and crying for loss and for lost loves. There is empathy in the Willow Spirit, melancholy. There is no deep sadness, and no anger, just a carrying of people’s memories, and she is okay with that; it is what she does . . . Willow is about feelings. . . She is also creative, the Spirit of the crafter, the artisan. . .deftly bringing life to new things. . . There were many nuances in the Willow experiences, but the over-arching feelings were of gentleness, healing, cleansing and protection. (1984, p.60 - 61)

McRaith mirrors my sensing, feeling and knowing when she describes the willow as “a very feminine tree sacred to the Moon Goddess and the Goddess of the Underworld.

Every year the Willow is cut down dramatically and is reborn in the following season stronger than before-symbolizing rebirth through pain and death” (1984, p.62). I feel a kinship with McRaith when she discusses the Willow Tree’s

ancient associations with the Goddess of the Moon and the Underworld. This was the Sumerian Belili, in 4000 BCE, known as *The Willow Mother*, and to Hecate, Persephone and Circe in Ancient Greece. . . . Willow is a sacred Druid tree, according to druidic mysteries, 2 scarlet snake eggs were hidden with the Willow tree; one of them contained the sun and the other the earth. When these eggs hatched, the universe was born. In spring rituals, this birth was re-enacted by painting and eating hens colored scarlet to represent both the blood of life and the color of the sun. (1984, p.64)

This sounds a lot like Apollo and his twin, Artemis with the two eggs, one containing the sun and the other the earth.

Engaging the *other* also has the potential for experiences that may not resonate with oneself. For example my own awakening to the concept of the *willow tree as a weed* occurred while I was trying to obtain a permit to legally harvest the willow. I had never felt safe pulling off to the side of a road to harvest willow in the ditches as vehicles sped by, so I contacted Alberta forestry to see if I could get a permit to harvest the willow on crown land. After several different conversations I was left without a permit to harvest willow because a permit did not exist. I could go onto crown land with a permit to harvest any other tree, but not willow, because willow was not declared a tree. One gentleman went so far as to call it a weed. I remember the moment when he said this, feeling hurt and incensed I replied, “How is that even possible?” He couldn’t answer other than the tree wasn’t good for much and takes over farmers’ fields. I thought to myself, here is my story

once again. Disbelief returns. How could he not believe as I do in the Willow? How can there be so many people who do not know what I know? What can I say? Do I want to say anything? Would my voice be heard?

Procedures for Observing Ethical Guidelines

Bringing my personal story to an alchemical hermeneutic self-study is a challenge that requires careful ethical consideration of myself and others that intersect with the story. Romanyshyn places great emphasis on ethics in research and promotes alchemical hermeneutics for its high ethical standard due to the transparency of the researcher. He emphasizes the level of conscious awareness that researchers need to affect social change is his statement, “. . . ethics has also become the primary issue at the roots of our epistemologies, for the ways in which we construct the world are the ways in which we encounter and marginalize ourselves and others.” (Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 343) Transparency helps address any concerns regarding the researchers’ personal agenda or unconscious aspects that Romanyshyn claims are at work in all human research.

I have created many images over the years that I have not understood until much later. I will be including some of these images as evidence of the power of art making as direct communication with my soul as well as what Romanyshyn refers to as, “beings of nature and the earth and that which we take to be divine” (The Wounded Researcher, 2007, p. 158

Though this study primarily focuses on my recovery through the imaginal world found in the willow tree, story and art making, others have been continually regarded with conscious care. I have struggled a good deal with what to include in the story of my mother and father, asking several outside sources for guidance on this matter. Ultimately I came to trust that I am speaking from a place of honesty and without blame, I could not

authentically research the recovery of the feminine voice without addressing the reasons for the oppression of voice. In my experience to date, my feminine voice holds deep compassion and concern for all parties involved. I utilize Romanyshyn's standpoint of responsibility when he says,

I realize that ethics in relation to the unconscious is as the philosopher John Riker says, not about taking responsibility but about accepting responsibility. The latter in contrast to the former means that one chooses to be responsible for who one is, knowing that in a large part one has been fated to be this way. (Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 344)

Self Care

This type of self-inquiry requires extra support and adequate self-care. Researching the soul as an act of backward motion or relooking at painful events and asking existential questions is difficult. It allows for a mourning process through the releasing of vulnerable and stored emotions and can leave me quite fatigued. As well, my work as a new therapist in an intense work environment with a steep learning curve can also be tiring. Thus careful consideration to self-care is an ongoing call.

I have attended to my own care through regular visits to my Jungian Psychologist whose guidance and support of me both personally and professionally is invaluable. I also needed plenty of time resting in silence and am grateful for my husband and sanctuary that is my home. Keeping my hands attached to the Earth Mother through art making with natural materials is crucial to my process of self-care. Walks in nature with my dog, aptly named Lilith and lots of snuggles with my cat, Kali, offered life giving energy that has been precious. Swimming has also proved to be helpful as kinetic activity in the water provides a release of stress as well as the nurturance of my body being held in the water.

I also made time for regular yoga sessions and visits to my massage therapist and my nutritional needs are supported by my husband who is an excellent cook. I have learned during the process of writing the thesis that being prepared for the difficulties of this work is part and parcel to the task at hand.

Colleagues

I can't imagine moving through this level of vulnerability without my two closest friends who are also art therapists. We have created a sacred triangle of support as we live in different cities that when drawn on a map, literally make a triangle. Being in close contact with these women is sustenance to my being. We each have committed to a tender holding and truth telling with one another that supports my strength to return to my aloneness and inner work. We also have an on-going relationship with each other's art processes.

Thesis Supervisor

My thesis supervisor has been a great support. We have been meeting for over two years now as I have needed this much time to research and distill the work. She has an interest in the work and has been very reassuring throughout the various stages of the work. She continually honours the courage it takes to allow for the vulnerability required to do this work. I appreciate her depth of listening and ongoing tutelage with regards to the writing of the thesis. I also enjoyed our shared stories and laughter regarding the unfolding of our lives as women.

Art Making

To ensure that the art making involved in the thesis is not the only source of art, I allowed for time to create for pure enjoyment and comfort. I especially enjoyed creating with others and have started to learn how to weave which allows for shared projects with

the instructor who is also a friend. I also make time to participate in various creative workshops where I benefit from the creativity of the group.

Space and Time to Write

I, along with my husband, went to Nicaragua for the month of January, 2014. I felt that this was a blessed place to write as had a great deal of space for my writing process. In Nicaragua I was surrounded by the beauty of the tropics and the people who live there. I found it quite profound that I was writing in the country that is situated in the centre of both northern and southern hemispheres. My self-study discusses in detail the healing of the split between mind and body or north and south. The centre is the place where the healing happens. As well, the people of Central America have always held a dear place in my heart. I feel into their way of life and am nourished by their culture, especially its aspects related to primitive folk art.

Underlying this ethic of care is the stance of the researcher who is attempting to answer these questions. It is the researcher who sets the ethical tone in terms of what it means to be human and what it means to grow and heal. In this study it is understood that human beings are shaping beings. Having been profoundly shaped by the willow tree, I offer words by Ann Linnea (1997), "If one becomes utterly still, the earth will speak in a language that can be understood." (p.68). This is my story of listening and learning.

Validity

The language I hear and understand from the willow tree is one that relates to what Henry Corbin's description of "knowing something by becoming it... in which certainty is lived." (2007. p.117). Reading Corbin's work on the levels of knowing was supportive in the concept of validity in this methodology. Romanyshyn's methodology continually challenged me to stay true to the knowing voice and to continue to become it as I write my

thesis. Thus, I experience this work as a passage not a prescribed pattern for others to follow. He calls for a resolute trust in the process of the passage when conducting this type of enquiry. He asks, "How does psychology translate the wildness of soul without taming it or breaking its spirit? How does psychology in its research practices write up its encounters with soul in a way that also writes down the soul? (p. 310)

Finding a structural quality within this phenomenological passage is a challenge and I appreciate the elucidation found in *Truth and Method*. "Dilthey's concept of the structural quality of the life of spirit corresponds to the theory of intentionality of consciousness in that this is not merely a psychological fact but the phenomenological description of an essential determinism of consciousness (Gadamer, 1984, p. 198). This statement is significant because he is opening our thinking to the possibility of a "structural quality of the life of the spirit" and this may disturb the comfortable familiarity established with thought proceeding along the lines of causal continuity. The structural quality of the life of spirit, being embodied necessarily, as it was in Jesus, has a temporal quality to it – not necessarily a linear quality. "Life itself, flowing temporality, is ordered towards the formation of permanent units of significance. Life interprets itself. It has itself a hermeneutical structure."(1984, p.199)

Just what this order is that moves toward the formation of permanent units of significance is, is for us to discover, articulate and demonstrate. I found some encouragement in reading Denise Baker's book, *Julien of Norwich's Showings: From vision to work*. At the time Chaucer was writing, Julian was an anchorite, or recluse, at the church in Norwich. In the 1300's, she wrote of her near-death visions, reflecting and

meditating on her experience has been described in our time as “phenomenological analogues of some belief or doctrine” (Baker citing Moore, 1994, p.11).

Beyond the conservatism of English spirituality of the time and St. Paul’s prohibition against women’s teaching about spiritual matters, was the same as it is today. How does one convey the unity of an experience in written language? Julian used a recursive, cumulative method, interlacing echoes of previous experiences and revelations with new “inward learnings” (Baker, 1994, ----pp.140 and 141). I resonate with her way of articulating her experience from a felt sense of the just right next.

Chapter 4: Results

Making of the Seat of my Soul/ Womb

The process in all of its entirety has been extraordinary for me. Though difficult and at times exhausting, I enter my days with a felt sense of solidity, peace and clarity. The discovery of my hands and heart connection with my willow tree companion has allowed for me to re-enter the human circle as I felt an authentic bridge within myself. Each creation led to the next like a continual pull from within until I was able to get to my core. Pat Allen`s (1995) words touch this experience for me. “Slowly, in the soul’s time, I was able to allow images of that most profound grief to emerge. Without making art I may never have learned at all how to allow others into my experience, how to heal a part of the human circle.” (p. 138)

The Wounds

This drawing came as a result of a dream that occurred during the first year of my re-search on November 23, 2012. There are many layers to the dream which begins with me as a baby. I write, “I feel myself as a wee baby in this dream. All I see is this baby, a skinny and tight baby in the dark. A doctor comes into the room and tells me, ‘you didn’t get enough breath as a baby.’”



Figure 13: You didn't get enough Breath

I know this dream speaks to my felt sense of rigidity within my body. As I draw I connect with an intense fear and desperation to be held. I am aware that since birth I have been holding myself tightly in fear and long to now tenderly care for my body. I commit to allowing more space in my life for my basic bodily needs. I book regular massages, eat foods that bring comfort to my core beginnings (I can't seem to get enough avocados), walk, stretch and be as mindful as I can about taking deeper breaths. Most significantly, I am more attentive to holding myself with tender compassion and kindness when I feel afraid.

My husband and I went to Nicaragua for a month this past January where I felt contained by the landscape and her people. The landscape and culture spoke to me as the realm of the Black Madonna and her voice rang out in the endless volcanoes and equally endless sources of water. For years I have been drawn to primitive and folk art from indigenous cultures in Mexico, Central and South America, especially the images of the

Black Madonna. When I began my research my husband and I wanted to plan a trip to Central America and I felt drawn to Nicaragua. Upon further investigation I discovered the shape and location as significant. The country is literally in the center of North and South America. I see this as a significant symbol in healing the split between head and body. As well the country is shaped like triangle, which for me is the divine mother's womb.

I could fill pages on how connected I felt to the culture and the warmth of the people, but it is in the last few days of our trip that I will share. My husband I and loosely plan our trips and at our trips end we serendipitously found our way to a volcanic crater that is now a lake. To describe what I felt when entering the water would be difficult, as it was a sensation of complete welcoming to every aspect of myself. I immediately knew I was in the womb of the Great Mother and it was there that committed my life to her. On our last evening, with the moon full, I baptized myself from infancy to death. I fully immersed this tight little baby in me allowing her to splay in the waters of complete love. I dove in again and again, each time surrendering my being to the water. And it is with this surrender that I enter each new day of my life.

My Sacred Body

The making of this Church occurred because of a dream. While frustrated and struggling again with boundaries I prayed for guidance before I went to sleep.



Figure 14: The Church of the Sacred Rose

Dream:

I am small child going to my father's funeral in a small town I used to live when I first became a teacher. I am driven to the church in a white van. I don't know the driver but my step-dad is in the passenger seat. For some reason I am left standing alone at the steps of the church, the party in the van having dispersed to an unknown place. I am standing to the right of the stairs and watching many people, mostly unknown to me, file into the church. This is how the community works, everyone goes to the funeral whether they know the person or not. It is a social gathering. I gaze at the church for some time. It is a small ancient looking Catholic church, made from concrete material (stone mixture)

that appears to have been built in the middle ages. There is a Celtic feel to the building. I notice an ornate black metal scroll on the outer wall around the left side of the dark wood doors. As I enter looking for family so that I would know where to sit, I notice that the interior is all dark wood, floor to ceiling. Stacking chairs are being brought out as there isn't enough seating room on the pews for all the people. I continue to look for where to sit as I need to be with my people to grieve. I am so clear of how I need to grieve for my father and I am looking for the outer to allow my sorrow its voice.

I am dressed in a black dress with a purple shawl. I am ready for the funeral to begin, but it never seems to happen. I feel like an outsider at my own father's funeral as I am being blocked by all these people from finding my family and being given no direction from any authority, including the priest, as to when the funeral is actually starting. After more confusion and angst, the funeral is suddenly over and I am outside in the back of the church where people are eating and casually socializing.

The priest is sitting with some angry teen-age girls and I get the message from him that these girls are much more important to him. They need him, I don't. I know this dream is very significant. My body is filled by it. I create the church and my purple shawl the following afternoon at Open Studio with a drawing of me waiting to go inside the church of my father's funeral. I then follow with the actual creation of a purple shawl and miniature building of the church so as to hold a literal funeral for me.

I wrote in my journal two days after Open Studio that I had moved into the metaphor of the church as my body. I hear the answer as to why I remain struggling with having my needs met or expressing clear boundaries in certain situations. I write, "They have taken over my holy temple. What was once a place of worship for the divine feminine, the scroll of the wild rose, was taken over by the patriarchy, the Catholic

Church.” While engaged in active imagination I come to know that I can return with my little girl (inner child) at night to have her funeral, but am not yet able to enter in the day as the patriarchy still believe it is theirs. I also see that the scroll is cryptic and retains many Divine Feminine Mysteries.

This dream occurred over four years ago and I’ve sporadically searched for the meaning of this symbol. Recently, just as I am completing my thesis on the re-claiming of my feminine voice I discover this meaning. The symbol is the Greek letter for gamma which means “speak”. “The Cyrillic letter Ghe was derived directly from the Greek letter Gamma (Γ γ), but the lowercase Ghe is a small version of the capital letter. In the Early Cyrillic alphabet its name was глаголи (glagoli), meaning "speak". In the Cyrillic numeral system, Ge had a numerical value of 3. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ge_\(Cyrillic\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ge_(Cyrillic)) Retrieved March 05, 2014)

Bringing my story in the form of this thesis has allowed for my return to the temple of my body and to speak from my feminine voice not only by night but also during the light of the day.

The Chalice is the Womb

When my Mother passed away I brought home the Chalice Collage I had given her in the last year of her life. I hung it in a central area in our home and the more I witnessed this piece to more I saw the chalice as a womb and an umbilical cord attached to Mystery. (Figure). The following segment consists of the story that eventually lead to the making of my own womb from a conscious place of awareness as to my attachment to the Mystery of the Divine Mother and my own mother who is also with Her.



Figure 15: The Chalice as the Re-generated Womb

I was able to spend the first few weeks of January at home before I was called back to Saskatoon. The first sight of my Mother deeply disquieted my being. I walked into the hospital room right into her gaze that I will never forget. The change in her was palpable in the two weeks since seeing her. Her shivering body and huge brown eyes spoke volumes to me. In the sharpness of their depth I experienced a profound suffering that pierced through my heart. All I could do from that moment on is completely love this precious soul that is my Mom.

She had not been bathed in a few days and I knew this was something I could do for her. She willingly received the warm cloth on her body and allowed me to wash her entire body. Her complete trust in me bathing her made a significant impact on me, she allowed me to love her in all her vulnerability, my way. I was never close to my Mom's body, and after this experience I found myself trusting my hunger to be close to her body. While

caring for her in this way I was able to give myself the attachment I so wanted from my Mom.

My Mother claimed this love, our connection, for me during her final days here on earth. It was on the day we were able to move her to a bed in palliative care, which was both a relief and tremendously difficult. Mom had accepted her death and palliative care was where she wanted to be. I felt fortunate to be the one who went with her in the ambulance to transfer her. As we gently settled in, the music therapist placed herself by the door and began to play her guitar and sing. I witnessed my Mom relax into the music as I began to tack the many pictures of her loved ones onto the bulletin board. While engaged in this activity the musician began to sing, "Give Yourself To Love," and my heart broke open. I left Mom's side as she did not want us crying in front of her and went to the bathroom. I was relieved to feel my heart break open and let the tears come. After a few minutes I heard my step-father come in and my Mom say to him, "is that Marie." She had not been talking much at all, so I quickly wiped my eyes and went to her. She asked my Dad to hold me and he did. I felt something from her that locked me to her and I turned to be with her. She took me in her arms and I then knew what feeling 'locked' me to her, she was completely mothering me. Physically, emotionally, intellectually and from the depth of her Soul, she was mothering me. I had longed for this moment my whole life and drank her in. She let me weep into her frail body and gently stroked my back with her withered fingers while quietly cooing, 'ssh, ssh.' She then spoke and told me that though she didn't like what she was about to say, it was the truth. After her Mom had died, she felt much closer to her. That it was after she died, all that remained was their love, and she suspected this would be the same for me. In that moment I felt birthed by her and fully became her daughter.

Even though Mom had accepted her fate, her personality continued to fight for life. She would try to sit up every few minutes and say, "let's go" like we could physically assist her into heaven. My mother was a force of nature and spent most of her life doing, so lying there having to be still was to say the least, unpleasant for her. My frustration was heightened one day as it felt to me that all of our assistance to help her move or to talk her into relaxing was not helping anymore. I wanted to help her 'let go' and continually responding to her request to 'go' physically did not seem to be what she needed.

I returned to my willow tree, through drawing, with a request to the Divine Mother to help me in this time of transition. As I drew the tree I heard a 'no' regarding the shape of the branches, the up and out shape was not how this tree wished to present itself. I could feel the branches wanting to close in instead of splay outward, with the left side meeting the right at the tree's centre. As I continued to draw I became aware of a message, "be still and know," and felt awesome gratitude as the voice of Divinity presenting herself to me. Within the stillness of the tree I came to know that it was this presence I was to bring to my Mother's bedside, the presence of being, not doing.

From that day forward I sat with my Mom and prayed with my prayer beads that I left with her at night. I prayed over and over for the Mother to help bring Mom Home. It felt cruel to witness my Mom trying to move and not help her, but I knew this was not the help she needed. She died three days later. When I went to see her body hours after she had passed I was no longer viewing the current version of my mother. She looked just like herself thirty-five years earlier with her face having completely transformed into a peaceful state of innocent being.

That night I reached for my prayer beads in my jacket pocket to find that the string had broken. I immediately announced this to my brother and his girlfriend, who calmly

replied. "Oh, that means your prayers have been answered, what have you been praying for?" I asked her about where she knew this from and she replied that it is a commonly held belief in South America. The fact that I was alone with her and Todd when I reached in my pocket was quite serendipitous for me. I had never heard of the gift of prayer beads breaking, and I only started praying with these beads when my Mom's cancer returned. The beads were my way of praying directly for my Mom, only, that no matter the outcome, she knows she is fully with God. The beads broke on the day she died.

When I was a young teen I learned to play the song "The Homecoming" on my piano. This song became my Mom's favourite and one day she requested that I play this piece at her funeral. Every time I visited over the last twenty-five years, I would play this piece for her, more often than once. She would lay her head back into the chair and I would feel so pleased with myself for the joy and rest it brought her. The song provided a deep connection for us, it seemed impossible that the day of her funeral had actually arrived as it was somehow part of our mythology. As I sat to play I prayed and spoke to my Mom, here we are, and began to play. Within a very short period of time I became aware of strength in my body that I had not felt before. This strength was flowing out of me and I felt myself becoming the song, like it was being played through me.

I now regularly ask the Divine Mother to play through me as I sit at my piano in the hospital rooms at the Cross Cancer. I play for Love and feel deeply privileged to be allowed this opportunity. A music therapist gave me the gift of "Give Yourself to Love" and it was with this giving that I play for these precious people.



Figure 16: The Christian Witch's True Message is Love

Allowing for active imagination with my 'Christian Witch' has shifted my interpretation of her from a negative to a positive part of myself. I see this process as significant to a larger theological issue regarding the Divine Feminine standing shoulder to shoulder with the masculine God. I believe my process is part of the significant theological shift in consciousness. Just as I am bringing my repressed or disowned feminine parts of myself to the surface so too are many men and woman who understand the limitations of a single male deity. I believe that the religious patriarchal model is in desperate need of its mate and we are in a time of significant struggle for this to occur.

Our relationships with each other both personal and professionally as well as our connection to our earth require the feminine nurture, wisdom, and tender care in order to

heal. I feel we need to draw from the deep well of the Feminine in order to respond effectively to the issues in our current time. We are out of balance and the kind of restoration required is one of equality in energy and voice.

The 'Christian Witch' appeared a few years ago while attempting to embrace some less than favorable parts of myself. I drew her with the intent to better relate to my shadow feminine self. Her energy is the self-sacrificing, controlling, scolding, righteous, perfectionist parts of me. She represents what I learned from my matriarchal lineage. Women who would sacrifice day in and day out because they believed this is what God wanted from them. This is what we were taught as women in our Catholic tradition. To be good means to give. To give and give and give in order to receive god's love. All this giving is rooted in the belief that we are separated from god and we have to earn our way back into his kingdom. The earning of god's love is the Christian half of my archetype.

My years spent with nature, creating with the willow tree, brought forth many moments of insight and healing. My outer work reflected my inner work. I literally hammered my way through my pain and distortions to create a life that felt authentic. What I missed was a connection to community that felt like-minded and safe. I often referred to this longing as, a soft place to land.

Finding community meant an authentic connection with others. Because of the pagan or witch-like nature of my spirituality, I was very afraid of people's response to me. I truly felt that I would be burned or stoned by the Christians if I spoke publicly of myself as a witch. I would describe this fear to be more like terror. So the witch dwelt in the underground of my psyche and I remained afraid of her. The witch was my way of describing the price that is paid for all the self-sacrificing for god the father.

She holds onto the deep seeded resentment for believing I always have to give to others. As well, she feels mean and sneaky, trying to get her needs met in a manipulative way. She is my voice of freedom from enslaved Christian beliefs. I came to appreciate her more so when I experienced an insight related to my bitterness. The bark of the willow tree is aspirin and tastes very bitter. Aspirin is pain relief. The bitterness was protecting me from my pain. Witnessing the burden of my mother and her mother, taught me that all this giving just doesn't work. It leaves us completely depressed, bitter, and depleted.

Releasing myself from the burden of my matriarchs has felt life-long to me. In my heart of hearts I could not accept a single male deity that I needed to please so as to earn his favor. Even though I did not want this god in my life, he has had a significant influence on how I have lived my days. Trying to figure out the 'just right' way to be so as to feel his love. Oh, how I have wanted this love. Living this way is like a constant drain on one's energy system. It is a state of doing for the wrong reasons instead of being for the sake of life. I know being needs to guide my doing and that being is love.

Immersing myself in my Masters program at St. Stephen's has brought me to head to head with the patriarchal god who kicked me out of the kingdom. I was continually worried that the college would find a reason to kick me out as well. In one of my Art Therapy courses I entered an active imagination dialogue with my Christian Witch. I was feeling controlling, like I wanted to take charge of the group. I felt I had something important to say and there was strong emotion around this want. I tried to listen to what was going on for me. I heard my 'Christian Witch' and pondered why she needed to be here to protect me. I struggled as I wanted to be more fully present in class.

A classmate and friend went out for lunch on the Tuesday and I shared with her my struggle. I told her that I wasn't sure about why I felt the need to control the group. I was

aware of some heartache around the upcoming Thanksgiving week-end. My Mom had passed away a year and a half ago and I was missing her and the ritual she created for our family Thanksgiving. What magnifies the heartache is the loss of the glue she was for our family. Even though these holiday events carried difficulty due to the dynamics of our family, I've realized how important they were to me.

I felt better after sharing and releasing tears with a friend who listened with kindness. When we returned to classroom my attention was immediately drawn to the prayer flags. In my inquiry of the flags I discovered their creator was a woman who lost her young niece in a freak accident. She made the flags out of the little girl's clothing. My heart leapt with emotion as I saw myself doing the same with my mother's clothing. When we returned to the studio to work on our flags I felt at a loss. I could not attach to the many art materials that were available. The only thing my heart wanted was some material that looked like a patch work quilt. As I tried to bring form or shape to a flag I grew more frustrated. I chose to seek out the help of the professor and shared with her my process. When I spoke of my controlling energy, telling her that I referred to this part of myself as the 'Christian Witch' she responded with intrigue as to how this part of myself was trying to serve me. She invited me to allow the 'Christian Witch' to create the prayer flag.

Back I went to my work. As I played with ideas and placement I began to notice the surfacing of another energy. I quickly realized that my pure innocent self was trying to communicate. This confused me as there was nothing about the 'Christian Witch' that felt innocent. I returned to the receptive warmth of my professor. As I spoke of my current 'what now' position, she mentioned that the witch sounds like the one who tried to control the chaos in my family, to regain order. I responded with a clear 'no' that order was not my witches' desire, but love. I could hear my heart sing as soon as the words left my

mouth. I stared into the accepting eyes of my professor and in my innocent awakening stated my new truth. The 'Christian Witch' is trying to serve me so that I can feel love. I returned to my workspace feeling soft towards myself and profoundly grateful for my pure, loving heart and it's protector in love, my 'Christian Witch.'

This new truth brought freedom to my being as it was a step into loving my witch instead of being so terrified of her. As well, some pressure was released around always 'doing good' to earn love. I also left this course with further acceptance and appreciation of my mother. At one point the professor had stated to me that my mother's continual doing was a gift as it taught me not to be this way. This allowed for me to experience my life, and the life of my matriarchs with a new perspective. I am able to carry more softly the sacrifices I have made for love and those I made to earn love and with bitter sweet tears, am able to see this in my mother as well. I am the soft place I have so wanted to land.

The Winter of my Soul – Composting Within a Calm Post

The completion of this thesis is a significant result in my coming to terms with the Apollo and Cassandra archetypes. I did not fully understand the inner resistance I faced over and again when committing to my divine feminine voice found in the voice of the willow tree. During the two years of research I needed to tend to considerable anxiety and deep sorrow in regards to the harm caused by the archetypes of Apollo and the Negative Mother. Even though St. Stephen's has been a safe place for me to learn and grow, I felt convinced Apollo's punishment would ensue, mostly in the form of disbelief and thus disregard of my voice as truthful. I found a good deal of strength and solace when reading theses and dissertations with deeply personal content. I credit the voices who went before me, their courage felt like smooth stepping stones on a precarious and rocky path. This is

the path with which I now turn to look back upon and see that step by step, my fears have been disproven. I have found a receiving audience and it is hard to express the magnitude of change to my inner world. Patricia Monaghan (2002), speaks to this period time in every respect when she says,

“When winter comes to a woman’s soul, she withdraws into her inner self, her deepest spaces. She refuses all connection, refutes all arguments that she should engage in the world. She may say she is resting: she is creating a new universe within herself, examining and breaking old patterns, destroying what should not be revived, feeding in secret what needs to thrive.” (Seasons of the Witch, p. 136)

What has also brought the fullness of the winter season to my life is my work with cancer patients, and their loved ones, including their children. All through the duration of this thesis process I have been working at the Cross Cancer Institute as an Art Therapist (Master’s Candidate). It has been in the structure of those walls where my attachment to my womb has been practiced. I draw a parallel between physical exercise and my work to stay attached to my own womb as I literally feel a new solid muscle at my inner core. I have been creating this strong inner muscle that I did not have much confidence in a few years ago. Being in service for others, without trying to fix, but receive their stories of immense loss and pain is my daily endeavour. There is nothing I can ‘do’ that can take away the anguish of cancer and death, but I can enter into the stories and weave love. I liken this period to these words found in the *Feminine Face of God*.

Throughout this time we repeatedly found ourselves facing a seemingly impossible challenge: to give birth and be midwives at the same time. And right from the beginning we knew that this precarious balancing act could be maintained only if we were willing to work in partnership. (p. 5)

My partnership has been found with the Divine Mother and substantiated by others who work in a similar way.

When I began my work in oncology I imagined I would bring in the Mother through Her presence found in the natural world. I quickly discovered that the natural world can potentially harm a patient who is receiving treatment due to the bacteria. I eventually was allowed to bring in dry willow sticks but needed other mediums that felt like the Mother and allowed for simple yet profound creations. This longing led me to felting and weaving. The discovery of raw sheep's wool, hand dyed by a local artist ignited a new way to evoke maternal presence within sterile hospital and office settings. After I learned the simple techniques of needle and wet felting I filled a picnic basket full of luscious wool and included that in my art as healing repertoire. I also made small felted hearts to give to patients in the name of love, who, because of the magnitude of their illness, were not able to create. I referred to these little hearts as the Seeds of the Mother.



Figure 17: Seeds of the Mother

Learning to weave has been a longer process and the rewards are many. Once I

understood the power in the loom and the profound metaphors found in Saori weaving I became compelled to bring this to the Arts and Medicine program. As serendipity works, I stumbled onto two women in a short period of time who were both Saori weavers. One of the weavers taught me the beginning techniques of weaving and the other came to facilitate workshops with me at the Cross.

The philosophy within Saori weaving is in complete harmony with my own and the art therapy profession. It's founder, Misao Jo evolved her principles over much of her adult life, some of which include; all people have their own individual creativity, initiative to create needs to come from within, there are no mistakes, weave with an innocent mind, weavers weave in search of the true self, and there is some great and invisible power within everyone. (SAORI Self Innovation Through Free Weaving 2012)

Misao Jo describes her life's passion, now shared with people all over the world.

We shall weave without restriction or restraint, weaving any way we like. It is a great pleasure to weave in this way, in possession of our true selves. As our society increasingly seeks humanity, SAORI Weaving fits its needs. In a sense, SOARI Weaving is a reflection of the changes of our lifestyle, as each woven cloth has its own life. Each weaving can capture the present moment that we never can take back. A weaving can capture the thoughts and feelings that we have at that time. We can even wear the woven fabric. This is the most luxurious activity for anyone in this era, isn't it? (2012, p.12).

I purchased one of the first Saori looms made in Japan. Written on one of the bottom structural pieces is, "This loom 'Toshi-San' was purchased at the first International Saori Festival in Kobe , Japan and shipped to B.C. Canada in 1990." Toshi means harvest and San is attached to a title of a name to show a sign of respect.

(http://babynamesworld.parentsconnect.com/meaning_of_Toshi.html March 17, 2014)

When I brought the loom home it was placed in our basement beside my piano. I often play and then weave as there is such synchronicity between the two 'instruments'. When I told my therapist about purchasing my loom I announced, "I have a womb in my basement!" We laughed aloud as I heard my 'mistake'. She kindly nodded and said that indeed I now have a womb in my basement. I regularly refer to my loom as my womb when I fully intend to say loom. I catch myself and chuckle, because it is quite simply true. My loom is the literal expression of my womb.

Harvesting the Loom

Our Arts in Medicine program has now purchased Saori looms and we are offering a well-received weaving group. We place the looms in a circle where we weave together the stories of the cancer journey as they are held, related too, felt, and released into the beauty of their weaving. Recently a rather large loom was donated to our weaving group. Once placing the loom in our Arts and Medicine group room it seemed to take up too much space. Somehow this made sense to me that this loom did not belong here as I could visualize it being at the hospital. I could see it sitting there like a bent willow chair, calling out to come, sit, and be.

After many conversations and requests this loom now sits in one of the most privileged areas in the hospital. As people enter the front doors they will see, sitting beside the grand piano in the glory of the atriums sunlight, the loom. We also have volunteers who will sit at the loom and invite patients, visitors and staff to weave with their own intent. Each tapestry will be given to a patient, wrapping each in a shawl of love or given to a generous donor in the spirit of appreciation. Our first weaving group created a community weaving that will be displayed at the Cross Cancer Hospital and many of these

women continue to weave for both themselves and as gifts of appreciation. After sharing my story of weaving with my mother's clothes, the group decided to call themselves 'second skin' as a statement of weaving with love from the inside out.



Figure 18-a: Second Skin - Weaving with my mother's clothes



Figure 18-b: Second Skin - Weaving with my mother's clothes

I can't imagine a more fitting ending than the literal creation of my new skin made by weaving with my mother's clothes. The embodied energy resounds with clarity as I know what I set out to accomplish is completed.

I arrived at the idea to weave with my mother's clothes after our weaving facilitator brought in new material to weave with made out of cut of strips of sari clothing. I was taken by the process of weaving with such vibrant recycled fabric when I was struck with the possibility of weaving with my mother's clothes as a significant part of my thesis process. Around this time I received a dream that felt important to my process.

A Significant Dream:

Dream I awaken to on the morning of March 14th. I am a young woman at the beginnings of the civil war movement. I am walking home one day and see the most perfect house two blocks from my home on Spadina Crescent in Saskatoon which is

across the bridge from the house I was raised in. I am so attracted to the perfect beauty of this house that I approach it, first by looking into the left side of the back yard and seeing a magnificent circular swimming pool covering the whole back area. I move to the right side of the house where there is a white gate. When opening the gate I am surprised to find the pools edge right at the gate. There is nowhere to walk, just swim. I decide to go to the front door. As I am ringing the bell I see through the screen door an older man eating in the front area of the wide open main living space. Windows circulate the back of the house and light up the whole space, making the immaculate clean environment glisten.

The lady of the house invites me in and I see that the swimming pool is also extended to the indoors. I see an area for swimming to my right and the owner tells me there is swimming upstairs as well. I think to myself that swimming upstairs is quite over the top. I then tell the woman how much I love her home and how impressed I am with her ability to keep it so beautiful, clean and organized amongst caring for her family that live there. She is clearly in charge of this domain and responds graciously but without needing to receive my compliment. I feel her having no inner struggles with her role in caring for this home and the people residing in it. As I am backing away to leave I tell her that I would love to buy this home and would she let me know if it ever went up for sale. I feel embarrassed as I say this for there is no evidence around me of a house that is for sale. Sheepishly I leave knowing that even if she did contact me I would never have enough money to purchase such a home.

I am now in a school setting. It feels like being in my elementary school gym, but looks like an old university campus. I somehow know that this is the beginnings of the civil war when the students and teachers decided it was no longer o.k. to oppress black people. White and black people alike were together on this cause. As well, I feel there are

black people that are siding with the whites in power while they betray their own people. Some white men find out about three black women who have been illegally arrested for marching against white supremacy and go to break them out. One of the white men figures this will not be difficult because he is white and will be seen as on the side of power. He will just have to make up some excuse as to why he needs these women to be released. When arriving at the jail the guards ask him if he knows the names of the women. Because he is able to name the one called 'Candy' he is now arrested while the women are freed. The white guards know he is the one who will be killed as he clearly is the leader and the bigger problem. I hear one guard say quickly to the other what a poor schmuck this guy is as he will surely be hung. I then hear a voice coming from a witnessing presence saying that it is this man's fate to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. There is no accident here. Even though this white man does not know the three black women, he is the one that is supposed to take the blame, it is in his fate to do so. This white man has no clue this is his fate to die in this way. He was just trying to use his white power to help. I feel seared by the truth of fate and I know that there is nothing to do but feel my helplessness in this horror of fate.

Included in this dream is also a segment where a woman friend from my early twenties is six months pregnant with a black man's child and I discover that I too am pregnant with a half white and half black child. Harvey, my husband does not want anything to do with the baby stating our decision is not to have kids, and he isn't going to change his mind. When I somehow show him the little dark skinned baby boy by taking him out of my uterus he plays with him and falls in love. I am left deeply content.

The last segment of this circulating dream occurs at a party with my closest girl friends from high school. It is late and we are in a large older home that feels like it was

built in the 20's or 30's. We are celebrating Cara's return from England and very much enjoying our connection to one another. I am also enjoying the flirtation with two different young men where the sexual attraction is strong and I am looking forward to the exchange.

I startle awake from this dream around 6:15 a.m. I think it is very early in the morning as I feel like I need to sleep another few hours. I am disappointed to see that I have to soon get up to get ready for work. This becomes more difficult as the morning duties unfold as I am deep into the density of this dream and I am also experiencing vertigo.

Once I work through the unpleasant feelings of not being able to go to work I rest my head and begin to let myself feel. I am filled with emotion towards the 'fate' of the white man. He had done nothing to deserve this fate and yet it was made absolutely clear to me from 'fate' herself that his death was necessary. This was communicated to me in a matter of fact way of, "it's just how it is". I let myself feel more into fate's reality and yielded to my tears. I could feel the crumbling of the lives due to cancer and there wasn't I thing I could do or more importantly was supposed to do about it. Fate had spoken. I also was quite taken by the fact that the man who died had named the woman he knew as 'Candy'. Somehow Candy feels like Cassandra to me and this man has died for her. Fate stated this as so.

This dream allowed for a deeper crumbling of my own personality structure. I was releasing my habit of re-building the ego's wants and conceding to the Great Kali by allowing and thus being-with the crumbling without having a clue as to why this needs to happen. I place myself in the yoga child's pose...again.

In response to this dream and with an acceptance of fate, I bring up from our

basement the box of my mother's clothing. I tenderly lift each piece to my nose and I am able to still smell her sent. Within the box is the clothing that held precious memories for me with my mom and I allowed myself to linger for some time in these moments. I did not know how I would begin cutting the clothes, as simply starting with the scissors felt too harsh to me.

I decided to pray for guidance and ask my mother if she was o.k. for me to proceed with my idea to weave with her clothes. Within moments my heart experienced a joyful yes. At this same time I saw in my mind's eye to the right of me, a gold thread coming down from the cosmos. I could 'hear' my mom expressing her wish to weave with me.

I choose a pair of her linen pants to begin with. I laid the pants on my dining room table and slowly began to cut the fabric into strips. I was aware of how patient I was with this process as I slowly and carefully went about the cutting. I noticed a tenderness towards myself as I was in no way pushing myself to a completion which is generally what I do as the completion is the place of reward. I questioned this wonderful place of presence and how it was that I could simply be with all that was involved both internally and externally in this task. I heard an answer quite quickly. I often rush through tasks because I am alone in doing them and I don't want to be. Here, I was alone at my dining room table, yet it was completely clear to me that I was not alone. I felt grace surrounding me with the presence of my mother's love.

The knowing presence of my mother's love completely inspired me to move to the loom and begin weaving and I made time over the week-end to begin. By Sunday I had completed the first tapestry which I called my second skin. As I wove the new fabric between my mom and myself I could feel myself more fully shedding our old story in order to live, to embody the truth that is held within my skin, the truth that is attached to

my Mom's love. By the time I began the second tapestry I choose to warp the loom with red yarn so to symbolize the umbilical cord I call the blood song. The blood song is my claiming of the eternal love and attachment to my mother and the great mother that provided, time and again, the golden thread for this healing to occur.

I'm Sorry

I end this chapter with a story that I wrote for my child within. This thesis work is ultimately for my healing and to share what I have learnt through this process. It is especially for the little children who offer forgiveness with such innocent ease and move on with love.

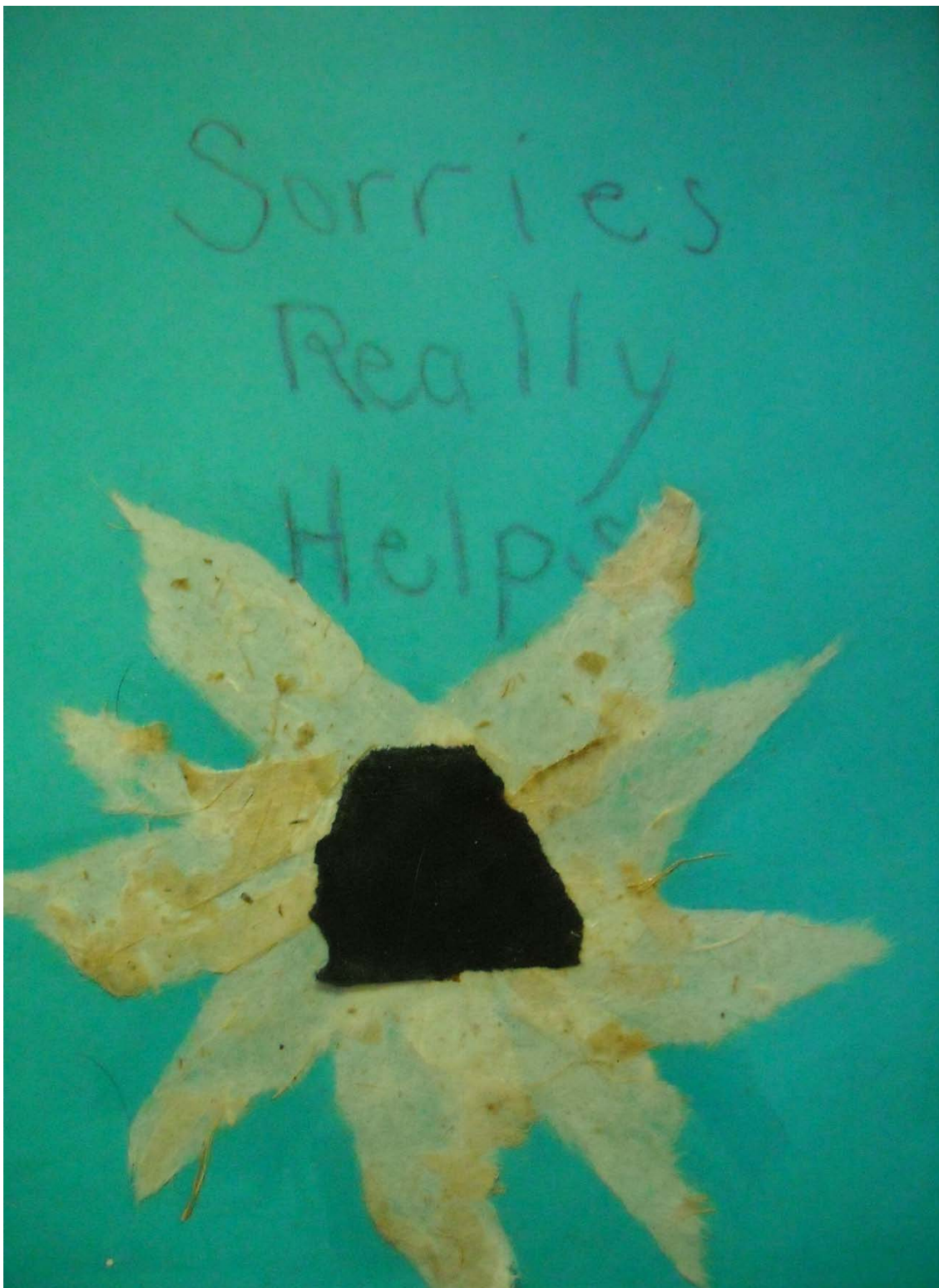


Figure 19-a: I'm sorry



Figure 19-b: I'm sorry



Figure 19-c: I'm sorry



Figure 19-d: I'm sorry



Figure 19-e: I'm sorry

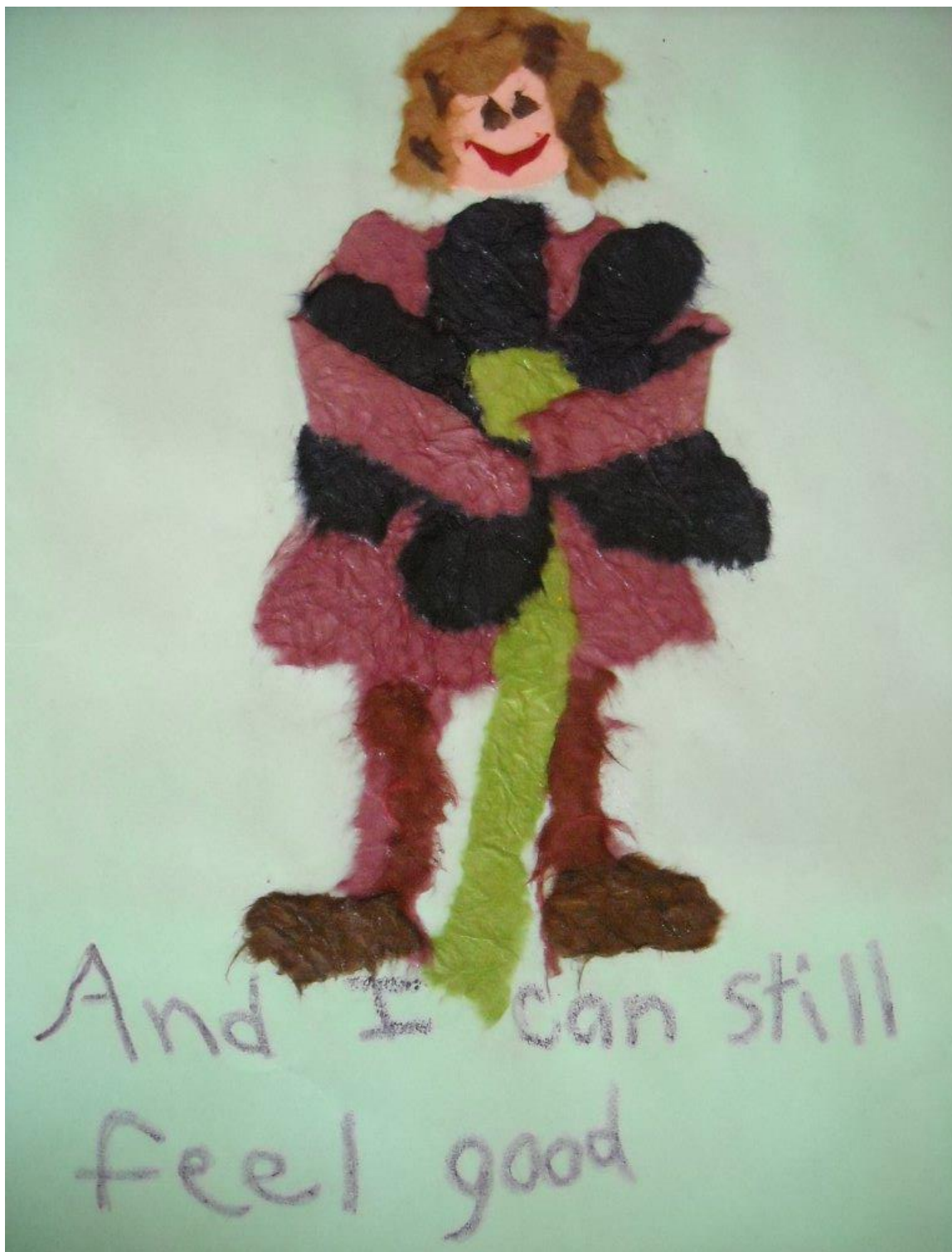


Figure 19-f: I'm sorry

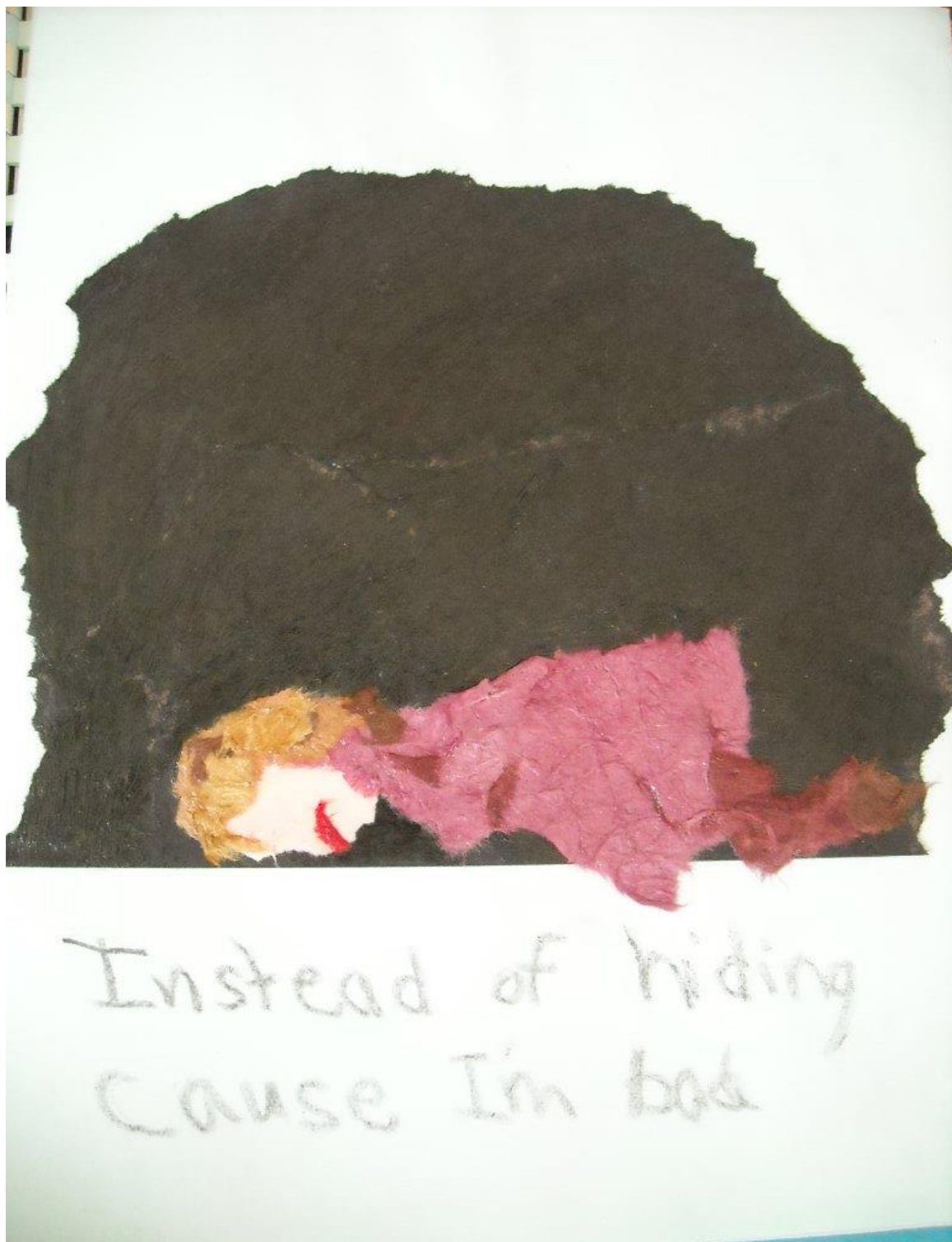


Figure 19-g: I'm sorry

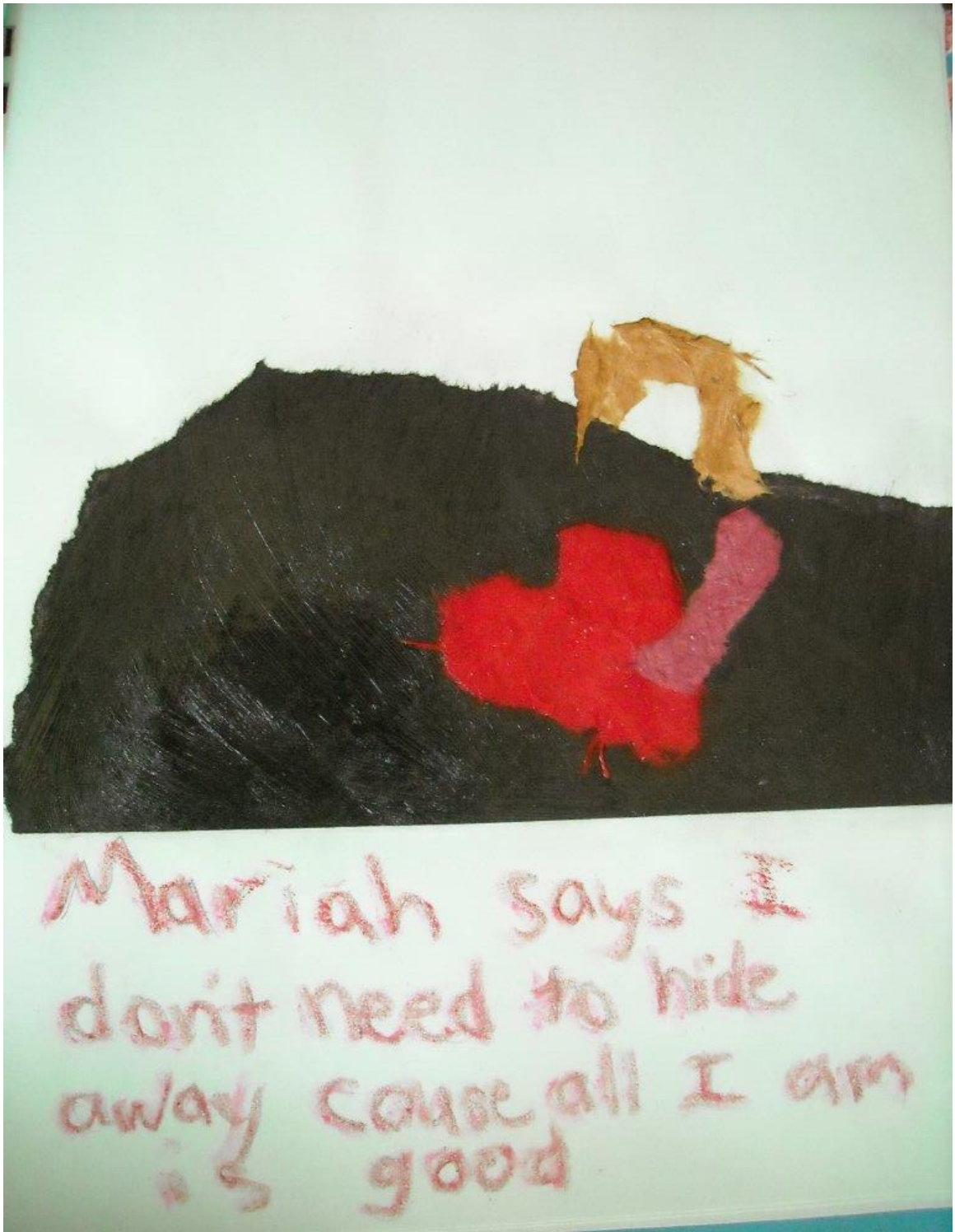


Figure 19-h: I'm sorry



I like Mariah

Figure 19-i: I'm sorry



Figure 19-j: I'm sorry

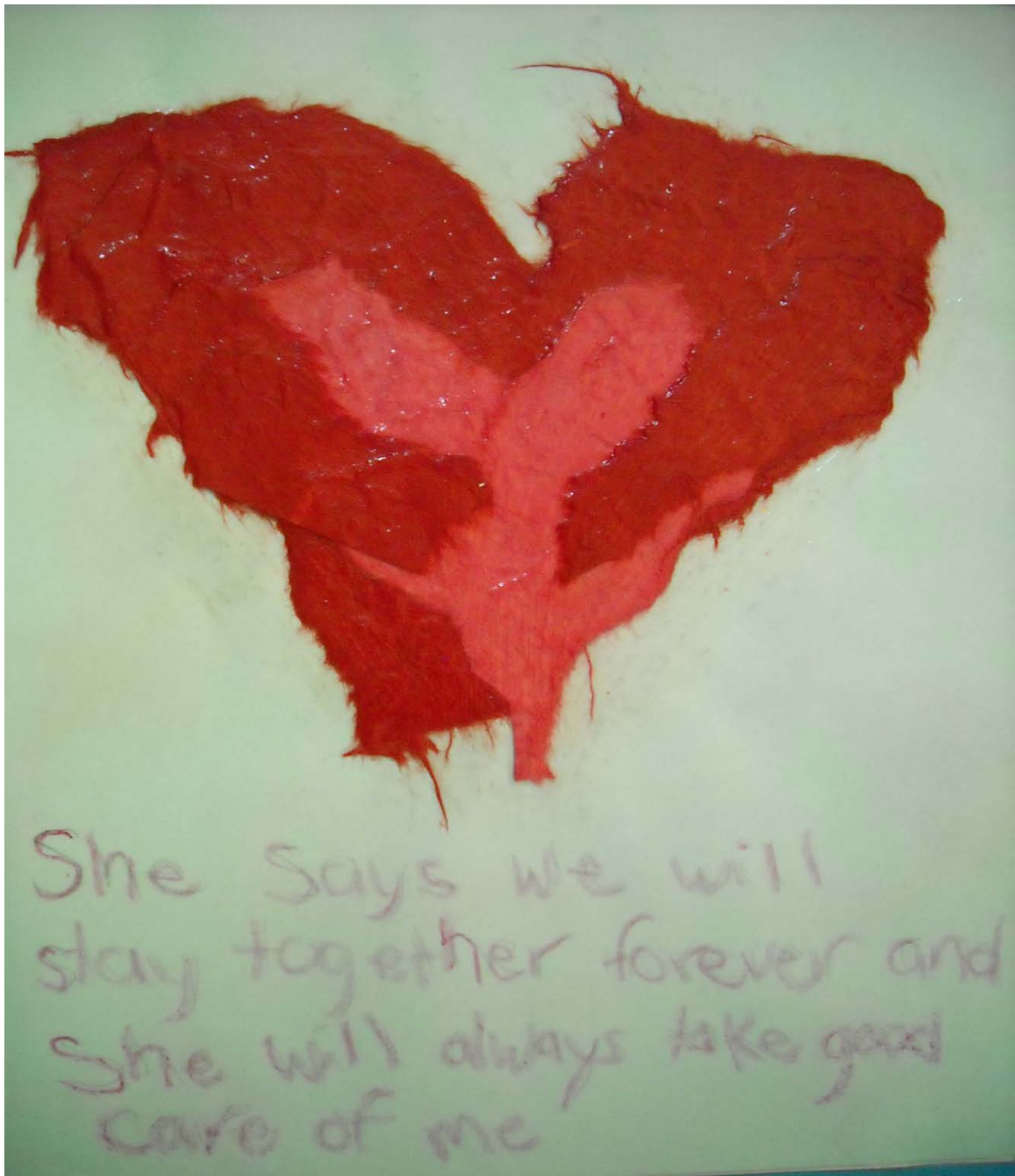


Figure 19-k: I'm sorry

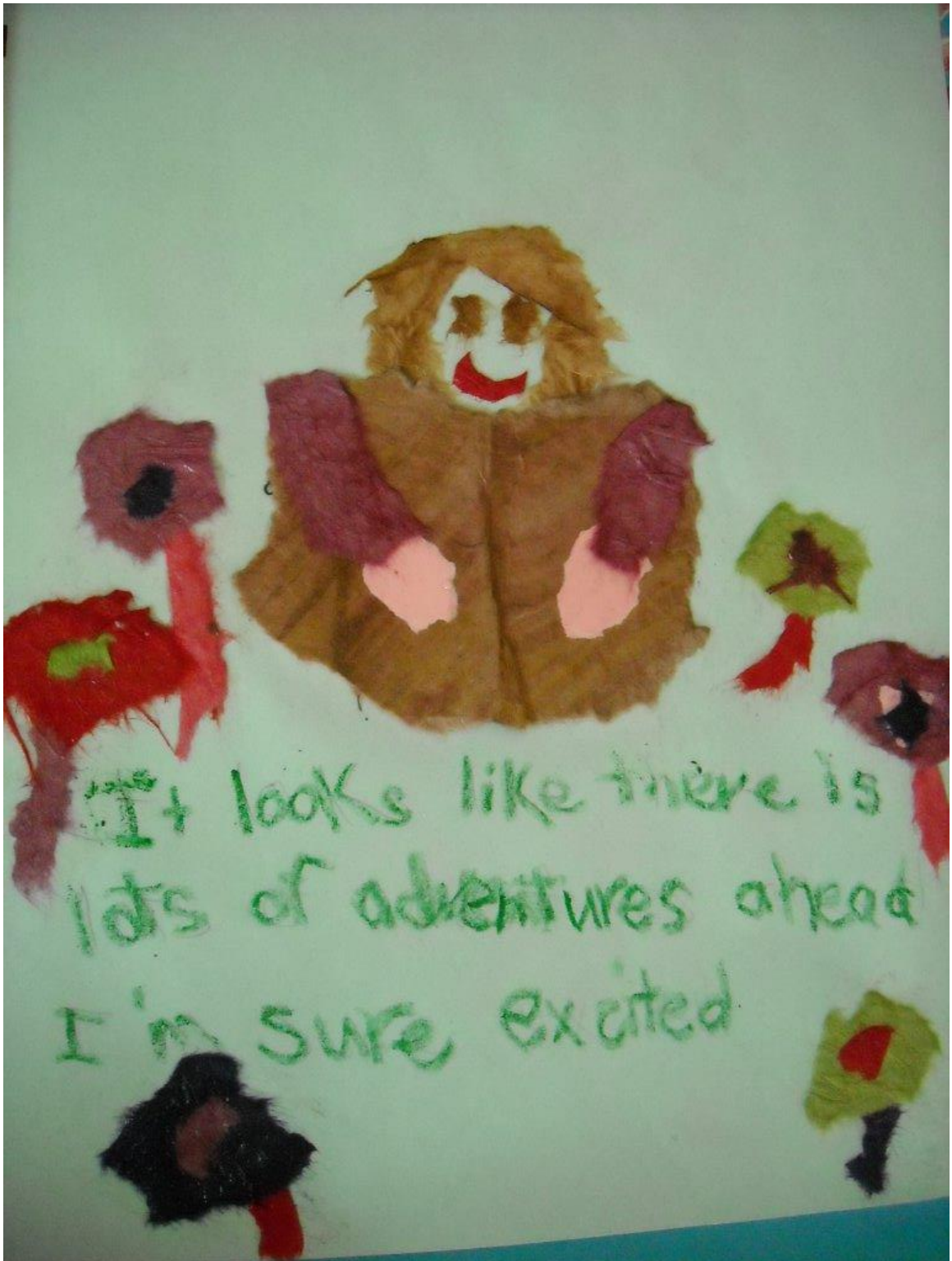


Figure 19-1: I'm sorry



Figure 19-m: I'm sorry

Chapter 5: Conclusion



Figure 20: Feminine Strength

Implications for further research

I completed the second cloth with my mother's clothes on Good Friday. This indeed felt like a good day to complete my personal blood song. Then on Easter Sunday I experienced a blow of hate which hit me hard. Though the hate wasn't directed at me, my heart could not fully distinguish the difference. I spent the rest of the day aware of a numbness, not knowing quite how to move, the aftershock surging in my body. The timing added to the peculiarity as the evening before I was immersed in the re-visiting of Persephone in Hades. This hateful experience provided a real opportunity to feel Hades within me. My thoughts lead to Persephone's inability to move or eat and how that is precise to my current experience. I was left with, so now what?

I choose to enter more fully into my experience of being swept down by hate's blow. I named my mortified state and understood its stone cold presence in my body. This is not new to me at all and yet I am responding in a new way. Instead of being shocked into silence I spoke aloud to the one who was very thoughtless and cruel. I did not speak from a place of anger but a solid presence. I then received myself from a deeper place of kindness, asking for support from my husband as I moved through many thoughts and emotions.

Having not experienced hate like this in sometime I spent time re-visiting how I used to respond. I understood more completely my Cassandra hysteria and spent most of the day tending to myself. I felt mortified, plain and simple and now after this experience of hate's blow I could more fully receive Persephone's/Cassandra's mortification. This is what hate does. As the day ended I prayed for the guidance of Grandma Willow. I asked her to show me how to compost this, show me what to do with this hate that is so cruel, so ugly. Please come to me in a dream. And this is the dream I was given.

I am teaching a workshop to create a bent willow chair. I am in a high school and there are many people present, students and teachers alike. I clearly feel the cliques and wonder how I am going to teach all these separate groups. A strong female teacher tells me there are sixty people. I hear in her tone, no worries, just sixty people. I know I have enough tall and thin flexible willow, actually there is more than enough, but need to take the group out for the large structural pieces. I am looking outside the windows and see a well-manicured lawn with lots of willow trees. Not the ones I prefer to build with, but they can be used for this workshop if we can go and harvest some from each tree.

I can't imagine getting permission to cut the trees but feel desperate as we need the wood. All of a sudden this same strong woman points me in the direction of a pile of

roughly cut thick willow branches that can work for framing pieces. I don't think there is enough but I start to give instructions to each group. I say over and over sixteen inch front legs and 25 inch back legs. I notice the cliques, especially the young male teens not wanting any attention from me, I feel from them that I am to just tell them what to do and get lost. The male teachers seem to have it all under control and the female group of teachers are keen and most willing to get my help.

I am then outside and standing to the right of a man made canal. All of a sudden a killer whale leaps up out of the water. I somehow knew or wished to see whales in the canal and though I had not expected a killer whale I was delighted by this sighting. I then saw the large blue whale that I had hoped or somehow asked for. I feel the whale's incredible strength and weight moving slowly with great ease at the base of the canal. The whale's presence leaves me feeling strong and centered within. A young woman that used to work with me told me that she was off to swim with the whales in the canal. She needed to see where they were going and there was no way she would miss this adventure. Other young men were heading off with her. I tried to stop her saying this was dangerous and that I needed her but she slipped out of my arms and dove right in, leaving me on my own.

It was now night fall and a young boy and his father stood to my right. The father is clearly a broken man, I know he has come right out of prison and I feel his hate He is angry and withdrawn and his young boy just stands there, awkward and innocent. He wants to be part of what is happening but cannot take any initiative as he is waiting for some clue from his dad to take the lead. My heart aches for this beautiful boy and I go down on my knees, facing the horizon at sundown and place my thumbs to my middle finger as if I am in a meditation stance. I then start to sing a song to the boy, about the boy and then sing to the father in a similar fashion. I am facing the horizon the entire time. I

complete the song with a series of Hallelujahs. A silence comes over the workshop and then everyone gets back to work.

We then take a break and when I want everyone to get back to work I place myself in the kneeling position to sing again. Instead of my voice I hear the voice of the father who starts the song and then his boy chimes in with him. I am startled by this man's willingness to sing in this way, from an angry lost soul to a presence of song seems like such a leap. I join in and am taken to a place of sheer bliss as the three of us create a sound that is in perfect harmony.

When I awake I feel a sensual and rich clarity of Mary of Magdalena within me. It is Magdalena who knows the root resonance in her voice's call which invites the harmony in father and son. In this moment I know, this is how the hate is healed.

Magdalena on her knees at the Cross

The ending of this thesis feels like I have indeed arrived at a new beginning. I am enjoying new core strength of attachment to my Self, my own womb that is forever connected to the song of the Divine Mother. Staying on my knees is where my humility meets with grace. It is here that I am clear who is in charge and thus whose voice it is that I follow. My work with cancer patients, their children and care-givers provides me with profound experiences that regularly bring me to my knees. I cannot say enough with regards to how privileged I am to be allowed into people's lives at times of considerable vulnerability. Being welcomed to enter their space during a time of great suffering leaves me deeply appreciative of their trust in me. As well, I am given opportunities to witness the gold within human beings in the gamut of ways they choose to respond to critical illness, massive loss and death.

I took this dream to my Jungian Therapist who welcomed me to see that there is

indeed enough “structural pieces” found in the solid concrete canal. It is in this solid structure that the dark feminine ocean creatures swim through with ease. I regularly feel into the expansive presence and pace of these glorious creatures. The slow swash of their tail sets the tone for a pace that feels just right for me. This settles me to trust my need to stay on my knees with my Magdalene and sing my call to the Divine Mother. This act is the answer to my question, how does the willow tree call and reclaim the feminine voice? This is where I am stilled into my knowing, where I sit on the seat of my cathedral. The work of my thesis has been finding my clarity as to how I can do this in my life and in my professional stance as art therapist at the Cross Cancer Institute. The power in this reclamation is the way I am able to maintain structure or rituals that enable me to stay attached to my own womb; my personal power, where I am attached to the song with the Mother. This is my love song, my blood song.

Recently I have retired Grandma Willow as a children’s performance. Even though I knew I felt finished in this role, I allowed for a conscious goodbye at my precious Northern Alberta International Children’s Festival. Throughout the week it became more and more clear to me as to how finished I am. The week began with rain and continued with rain. There were moments of sun and during one such period I announced to the volunteers that I am taking a quick break to ‘go smell the river’. The next morning one of the volunteers returned and the moment she saw me she blurted, “what is this ‘smelling the river’ you did yesterday?” I was a bit taken aback with her forthright manner and so I responded with a question to become clearer on what she wanted to know. Tears were welling up in her eyes as she stated that she wanted an explanation from me as to what ‘smelling the river’ meant. I gently told her that these were my moments with my Creator, and that when I allow my senses, like smell, to absorb natural life, I feel a oneness with

grace. Tears were now streaming down her face and I asked her if she too could ‘smell the river’. She told me that she wouldn’t put it that way, but yes, she had a knowing as to what I was talking about. She then asked me for a blessing from the Dream Tree Willow Dust.

This was quite an exchange for me. There was resistance in me throughout the conversation. I realized how much I needed to shift into therapist as Grandma Willow and that I could not possibly sustain this presence throughout the day for hundreds of people. To sustain this presence I needed to be in my role as therapist, not children’s storyteller, all day for an entire week. I wasn’t willing to be Grandma Willow for the ‘world’ anymore.

I perceive this experience through the archetypal Tree of Life. I understand myself to have lived my split through significant swings in what is above and what is below without any core centre. This thesis has been my growth and expansion at my core. I no longer need to be ‘above it all’ with Athena’s head serving humanity by giving too much of myself away as Grandma Willow or the Christian Witch. Nor do I need to stay ‘below it all’ as the victimised Cassandra and Persephone. “What is Above is so Below” claims the Tree of Life. My endeavour is to live at the heart of the tree, its centre. This is the place where neither rational brain nor primal body rules my life, but a conscious, stumbling human heart, on my knees continually expressing both my need and gratitude to grace. This is how the willow tree called and reclaimed my feminine voice. John Greer illustrates this reclaiming when he explains above and below in his text, *The Druidry Handbook*,

“These two currents of energy provide the warp and weft from which Druids weave their magic. The solar current stimulates energy centers in the chest, throat, and hands, awakening intellect, abstract emotion, and impersonal awareness. It is symbolically

masculine....The telluric current stimulates energy centers in the belly, pelvic basin, and feet, engendering life, love, passionate energy, and vital force. It is symbolically feminine....Together, they create the universe.” (2006, p.71)

The power in this reclamation is in my trust to bring to both my personal and profession life, what I know. I have been given many affirmations that what I know is needed and appreciated. This has been hugely significant for me within the medical model structure at the Cross Cancer Institute. I experience the symbol of the cross as the intersection of masculine and feminine values, no longer split, but integrated at my heart’s core. My work is to stay conscious at intersection, in a place of core vulnerability and strength.

I carry an interest in furthering my research on how creating with fibre art, specifically weaving, helps people through their journey with cancer. There are many helpful metaphors that have potential to activate emotional health and wellness. I described previously several principles found in Saori weaving, and I also experience others as well. I particularly see benefit in the rhythm in the creation of the weft, the balance of right to left and left to right movements. There is an inherent honouring of both sides of ourselves. As well, I feel a pull to further explore this myth whose metaphor feels potent to me both personally and professionally.

While creating a collage in a studio class a few years ago I came across a National Geographic magazine exhibiting American First Nation peoples. My heart leapt as I recognized tribal attire that I would like to create for myself when I perform as Grandma Willow. As I turned the pages I felt disappointed as to how much had been ripped out, but I found the exact page I needed anyway. There sat in the top right hand corner the crescent moon I had just painted the day before, amongst a frightening scene that was described in

the magazine as “A crooked man is set straight in the Mohawk legend of Atotaroh—a snake haired, physically twisted leader so evil that he made birds fall from the sky.

Calmed by a Hymn of Peace, his hair combed free of snakes by Hiawatha, he became head of the Five Nations. “That is how we do it today, says an Onondaga chief. We take the worst ones and make them leaders so that energy can be transformed into doing good. Dual faces on a comb fragment represent good and evil, a favourite Iroquois theme.”

(1991, p.73)

I knew this picture/story was meant for me, that this was my continual work, the combing the snakes out of shadow so to transform more deeply into my core goodness. As I do this for myself I can then guide others. I placed a picture symbolizing the eye of the storm over the twisted face of the leader. All I needed to see was the crescent moon and the combing the snakes, as my own Hymn of Peace reminding me to remain in the eye of the storm, or as I see now, the intersection at the cross.

I also wish to create for Arts and Medicine an art therapy group that would study the archetypes at play in the cancer journey. Specific to this study would be the engagement of goddess energy as a way to hold the difficulties inherent in diagnosis, treatment and survivorship. I see this as a rich opportunity to bring feminine models of healing into the medical modal.

I see many opportunities for research on the blending of feminine and masculine healing modalities in health care settings. There is a clear movement happening of people seeking beyond our current medical model of healing. I experience many patients looking for other ways to heal and am excited to see the openness to bring alternate healing sources to the treatment of cancer.

I believe my research could be extended by others whose work is similar to my own.

Of particular interest could be how art therapy has allowed me to access stored somatic memory that existed before cognition. Following my dreams and engaging art and storytelling with my non-dominant hand has provided me with a wealth of self-knowledge and personal restoration.

Each time I sat at the computer to work on my thesis I began with a prayer that is written at the beginning of the document. This was my ritual beginning. I now wish to provide these words as a ritual ending to my work. From the Gospel of Thomas with the Greek Gospel of Thomas, in a conversation with Simon Peter, Matthew and Thomas

13 (1) Jesus said to his disciples, "Compare me to something and tell me what I am like."

(2) Simon Peter said to him, "You are like a just messenger."

(3) Matthew said to him, "You are like a wise philosopher."

(4) Thomas said to him, "Teacher, my mouth is utterly unable to say what you are like."

(5) Jesus said, "I am not your teacher. Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring that I have tended." (p. 141)



Figure 21: My first Bent Willow Chair

My first bent willow chair invited me to drink from the bubbling spring that is tended by Mystery. Co-creating with the willow tree was my way of stopping the

victimization of my inner Cassandra and finding the Source of my personal power. I needed a Mother and a Father within and went forth on this significant creation. The archetypal seeds were ready and waiting for me. I believe by tending to our own seeds of knowingness we find all the resources we need to live and thrive. I began this self-study from a surfacing or sprouting place of knowing and now experience myself to have what I need to be stilled and sit in my rooted voice of knowing. As long as I am alive I see myself going to 'smell the river and bow to my willow tree.' I wish to thank-you, the reader, for taking the time to hear my story.

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