

ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE  
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NAME OF AUTHOR:

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TITLE OF THESIS:

FOLLOWING SEDNA: AN ARTS-BASED SELF-STUDY OF SPIRITUAL  
TRANSFORMATION

DEGREE:

MASTER OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 2013

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ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE

FOLLOWING SEDNA: AN ARTS-BASED SELF-STUDY OF SPIRITUAL  
TRANSFORMATION

by

Rhonda Anne Miller

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of St. Stephen's College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY

Edmonton, Alberta  
Convocation: November 4, 2013

Certification Page

Our subject is inherently a mystery. It cannot be fully expressed in words, because it concerns the deep preverbal levels of spirit. No kind of linear organization can do justice to this subject; by its nature it does not lie flat on the page. (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 12)

There is a co-equal relationship between the researcher and the material under study that can be described as a joint endeavor between one's own soul and the soul of the world. Jung's enterprise was about enlarging his understanding of the transcendent and the immanent, the material and the divine as a means of changing both himself and the world: "If you change, the countenance of the world changes" (Jung, 2009: 273, as cited in Allen, 2012).

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this story

to my husband and life companion, Mark.

You have been a faithful sojourner along the way.

I could not have done this without your love and support.

## **Abstract**

This research is about opening to the possibilities of the creative process. Experiencing the healing and revealing powers of artmaking as a student of art therapy, I wondered if I could find the same kind of solace in the art if I brought my struggles concerning faith. After losing faith in Evangelical Fundamentalism I experienced an ever present spiritual vacuum. I asked the question; “Can I recover a sense of spirituality by intuitively following a numinous image through artmaking, with the intention to tell the story of my journey with Fundamentalism?” I turned to the open studio process which consists of setting an intention, making art and engaging with the images through witness writing. The findings show that artmaking and the creative process are effective methods for tending to our deepest soul questions and needs. They also demonstrate the importance of integrating various art modalities for transformation.

*Key words:* spiritual transformation, fundamentalism, deconversion, arts based inquiry, the creative process, Sedna myth.

## **Acknowledgements**

This work would have not been possible without the love and support of the beautiful souls who have inspired and encouraged me to treasure my story and give it away: my thesis supervisor, professors and friends. I am honoured to call you my community.

And Sedna, thank you for your siren's call. You have taught me so much.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Rationale and Focus of the Inquiry**

During art therapy training I experienced the healing and revealing powers of the creative process in ways that were new and surprising to me. I learned to rely on art making and images for support and restoration. They became vital modes of expression and paths to self-awareness. These experiences were essential as I developed a sense of personal identity congruent to professional identity. I learned to trust the creative process and discovered that as I engaged with the images that emerged over an extended period of time, allowing them to change and shift, I also changed and shifted.

Since I trust in the revealing and reparative nature of art making, I chose to engage in an extremely personal inquiry concerning a struggle that surfaced time and again throughout training: how to recover a spiritual identity after losing faith in Evangelical Fundamentalism? Images brought this possibility to my attention, and I hoped that by opening myself to the question directly, they would bring me through a creative process that would not only be of benefit to my development as a human being and art therapist, but would also serve as an academic inquiry into the nature of spiritual loss and recovery itself.

The focus of the inquiry was the following research question: Can I recover a sense of spirituality by intuitively following a numinous image through artmaking, with the intention to tell the story of my journey with Fundamentalism? Artist and art therapist Pat Allen (1995) describes numinous images as images that are “spirit-filled... signposts into the depth of your self” (p. 87).

The numinous image calling me to follow her was Sedna; an Inuit goddess. This paper traces two and a half years of that journey.

I begin by providing a basis and rationale of the study through describing my spiritual biography as well as the events that lead to the inquiry. This section is followed by a discussion of terms related to the study and a review of literature pertaining to spiritual transformation from different perspectives namely, Protestant theology, art therapy and Jungian psychology. The heart of the thesis consists of the artifacts that resulted from my experience of following Sedna. These are presented in the form of photographs of the visual art made, witness writings, narrative accounts of enactments, and a DVD of a performance (See Appendix). The study is summed up with a discussion of prominent themes that emerged during the inquiry.

### **Background of the Study**

After a studio course at Vancouver Art Therapy Institute, images of whales, shells and mermaids began showing up in my art. I allowed them to come and followed their appearances with fascination and curiosity. As I allowed myself to explore these images they became a profound part of my transformational journey. It began when I worked up the courage to try to paint a large whale during an art therapy studio course in Vancouver. Months earlier I had remembered painting a life sized *Orcinus orca* (Killer Whale) in grade one at school. It was a reparative memory; one that stirred up feelings of self-worth and playfulness. That seemed to spur me on to make more whales, then shells, and then mermaids. I knew that I was working out something deep within me even though I didn't know exactly what that was. It had to do with shame, long held beliefs, and fear. I was afraid that I didn't have anything inside; no answers, like a shell without a pearl.

Empty. So I began making shells and putting things inside. This way I knew that they were not empty. At the same time, a story about a wounded mermaid searching for a lost pearl came to me during the writing of a paper. In the story the mermaid finds the pearl inside herself as her wounded tail is healed.

Later the same year, the Sedna myth came to me quite unexpectedly. In June 2010 I was perplexed by a painting I was working on and couldn't quite finish. It was a mermaid in stormy water (See Figure 1).



Figure 1: Mermaid in stormy water

Shortly afterward my husband came home from Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, with a whale bone carving entitled; *Sedna; Innu Goddess of the Sea*. Curious, I Googled it and found the myth of Sedna (The story of Sedna, n.d.). It stirred something deep within me. Somehow I knew that this story offered me a way to engage with the struggle I had been experiencing with the unfinished business of losing my faith.

In the myth, Sedna is a young woman who did not want to marry any of her suitors. She refuses them one after another. Finally, her father tells her that she must marry because the family is running out of food. When a handsome suitor arrives, she agrees to the marriage only to discover later that he is not a man at all. He is a raven. She finds herself cold and lonely in his nest eating raw fish. She is so unhappy. She cries out across the water to her father to save her from this cold raven's nest. He hears her cries and goes to rescue her. The raven is away and does not see her escape with her father until they are far from land. The raven stirs up a big storm in his anger and Sedna falls overboard. Wanting to save himself, her father tries to give her up to the sea, but she will not let go of the boat. He hits her fingers to loosen their grip and one by one, knuckle by knuckle, they fall off into the icy water. Sedna sinks with them to the ocean floor. As Sedna and her damaged parts sink, her knuckles turn into whales, seals and all sorts of companions for Sedna. She in turn, becomes a mermaid and the Goddess of the Sea.

After reading the myth I was able to finish the painting. I knew then that the myth held more for me to explore. Having discovered firsthand the healing power of art making during art therapy training, I began to wonder whether I could go to the art with the specific intention of recovering a sense of spirituality from my Fundamentalist past in the same way that I had recovered and discovered other pieces of my Self. I intuitively knew that Sedna was offering this.



The Sedna story mirrored my spiritual story. It seemed to capture it and give it a container that I could grasp and make sense of. What I saw that day as I read the myth, was a reflection of my spiritual story. I followed this new story of Sedna and held questions about my spiritual journey, knowing that there was



*Figure 2: Sedna carving*

something important being revealed to me. I understood that it was about letting go of painful parts of my spirituality that I was still clinging to in some way. It was about healing from spiritual wounds. I somehow knew that I needed a way to let go in order to move ahead spiritually.

I dug up old journals and brought them with me to Vancouver and ended up re-enacting my story through Sedna's. In my story the raven symbolised Jesus. Sedna's father symbolised God. The first day of class not knowing where to begin, I went searching through the mixed materials. I came across some sheet music of old hymns. They were labelled *sacred* or *secular*. This distinction bothered me, so I kept it knowing it was important. The next morning, I woke up singing the old worship songs that were once so important to me. I hadn't thought of them in years. I couldn't sing them without choking up. I knew this to be a significant part of the process too.

During class I went through my journals from the time I was losing my faith, and wrote out those poems and re-sketched drawings. Throughout the week I frantically went through the myth, drawing and writing. Somehow through the telling of Sedna's story, I told my own. I woke up every morning with another church song in my head that was directly related to my version of the Sedna myth. When it came time to present to the class, I knew I had to follow my impulse to act it out. I narrated the Sedna story, read my poems, sang the old songs and cried a lot. In that embodied telling I let go. I let the image of Jesus 'lover of my soul' go. In dialoguing with this image of Jesus, I felt as though I had to kill him. He told me that it was okay; he was already dead! I felt so much release. I was doing what needed to be done even though I was afraid. I also let go of my image of Father God as I let go of the image of the father betraying his daughter. And as I told of my sinking to the bottom of the sea, I let go of the church and the hurt I felt while losing my faith. I acted out sending it all down the river. I let it go. What I was left with were clay whales and shells, and a sculpture of Sedna symbolising this new spirituality through art making; the wounds turned into the greatest gift. Sedna, Goddess of the Sea, symbolised a powerful me. When it came time to ask someone in class to respond to the presentation aesthetically, I chose a woman with a similar faith background, hoping she would be able to understand the significance of what I had just done. She did. She symbolically washed my feet in the river. This powerful experience of symbolic ritual gave me the courage to continue, because I knew that I had only scratched the surface.

For this study I amplified the parameters of my question by creating art pieces of the Sedna story, and responding to them with art made from my journals, letters, photos

etc... from school age until the unravelling of faith in my thirties. My hope was that I would be able to let go like I had in Vancouver.

I hoped that as the myth was re-told and my story re-remembered through art, I would see whether there were parts of Fundamentalism that I still embodied. I was also curious to know what would happen when I let go of and transformed these 'souvenirs' into works of art. Would I be able to transform my telling of the story as well? Would the comfort with the wordless, not-knowing place be broadened, affecting more aspects of my life? Could I then share the story more freely? Would I be able to articulate my theology, my understanding of Spirit? I wondered whether I would change. Artistic knowing is different than intellectual knowing, so I expected something unique to happen when I told this story through the arts (Allen, 1995).

### **My Interest in the Study and Spiritual Narrative**

Looking up at the sky, I am always delighted when I see the waxing moon with her ever present Venus. That image stirs something deep within me. It tells me that all is well. Like a shell that holds a precious pearl, the crescent moon holds that star. She can never move too far away or get lost, for every month they appear together again. This celestial dance mysteriously reassures me that I too am held by some invisible, cradle-like force.

This is not the way I have always made sense of my being in the world. I entered the world loved and accepted but also overshadowed by shame. My mom discovered that she was pregnant during her second year of Bible College. She quit school feigning financial difficulties and married my father; a non-practising Catholic. In doing so, she left behind her evangelical Christian culture and entered the secular life of my father.

She didn't know how to bridge the gap between these two worlds. Out of her own sense of shame, she hid her desire to go to church. She would listen to church on the radio on Sunday mornings making sure to switch it off quickly if my dad entered the room.

She was not ashamed to teach me about God and Jesus though. I remember my mother reading to me out of a little book, one I still have, by Catherine Marshall (1973); *Friends with God*. I loved looking at the pictures and would get her to read the short stories to me often.

Eventually, my mother did go back to church when I was six years old. After some searching she found a place that would be our home church for years to come. This was the late seventies during the Jesus People Movement. There were tent meetings with young people flocking to church with their guitars.

We were quite involved in church activities and ours was a Missionary Church; one of many evangelical denominations. In addition to church every Sunday, I went to Sunday school and Missionary Cadets on Friday nights which later became youth group. During the summer I also attended Daily Vacation Bible School and my favorite, summer camp. Sunday evening services were intended to be more relaxed with the focus on songs and stories. It was here that I was first captivated by tales of missionaries going into remote villages to pray for the sick and help the poor.

My dad began attending church with us when I was eight years old. Like him, I never answered the altar calls publically but I would secretly sit in my seat and pray. I asked Jesus into my heart many times just to be sure that my sins were forgiven and all was well. I was afraid of going to hell if I died.

As a teen, I questioned the rigidity of the church and grew bored with it. I preferred to spend my time with friends rather than going to church or church related functions. I suffered through the consequent feelings of guilt and shame. Though I believed the gospel message, I thought it was too difficult to live out. I hoped that I was good enough for God and that he knew I loved him and was sorry for being so weak. As I became disillusioned with church, my dad became more committed to it. It was as if we changed roles. I went a little wild partying and he committed his life to God. During this time of experimenting, I decided that God was good and life was good, but couldn't shake a sense of guilt and shame. I would show up to church once in a while in order to get in the good books with my parents or get the car, but I had no interest in church life. Sometimes I felt that Satan was winning in his battle for my soul, but didn't know how to resolve this.

When I turned eighteen and the end of high school was looming, I realised that I had no idea about what I wanted to do or who I wanted to be now that it was time to grow up. I hadn't thought about what to do after graduation. In my mind, I had another year to get my act together, so I focused solely on where the party was. When the program changed and I found myself graduating a year earlier than expected, I was faced with my own emptiness and the reality that I was growing up, like it or not. My friends were going off to university and I did not want to be left behind working at a video store for the rest of my life.

One afternoon I saw an advertisement in the paper for a student exchange program. It looked like the perfect escape route from my present life. I would go to Africa and check it out. I could test whether or not I had what it took to be a missionary. I would

finally be free from the entanglements and peer pressure of partying. I applied, was accepted and with the persuasive powers of my mother, my father let me go. By the end of the summer I found myself in Tunisia, North Africa, on a one year student exchange program. To me, it was as good, if not better than being a missionary. I got to realise my dream of going to Africa and it was relatively easy to be good in a strict Muslim country. I decided to read the Bible that my mother had tucked into my suitcase. It was a graduation present from my home Church. There was a one year plan at the back of the book and I followed it through. I felt as though I could finally be the Christian I ought to be. However, returning to Canada ten months later, I didn't give the Bible further thought. I fell right back into old patterns. Feelings of meaninglessness and shame followed me as I became very aware that it was too hard to be a Christian at home. I was very disappointed in myself.

Shortly afterwards in my second year of University, when I was twenty years old, two friends died. Trying to make sense of this, I began searching and questioning. I wanted to have the answer to why bad things happened. I wanted to do what was right and grow up. I decided to become a Christian. I finally felt close to God and my parents. I was born again. I remember this wonderful feeling of having a flutter in my chest. I imagined that the Holy Spirit was inside me and I could literally feel him! It felt so good and free to finally be on the right side. I made it! Satan no longer had me! I joined my parents' non-denominational Church that they were attending at the time and immersed myself in church life. It was quite a charismatic congregation and I heard the Holy Spirit talking to me and felt him working through me. I had dreams and visions, spoke in tongues, and told anyone and everyone about Jesus; the love of my life. I was a member

of a deliverance team as a new Christian. We would cast demons out of people and pray for healing. Our Church loved to make a joke out of the accusation that we saw a demon behind every bush. We were proud to say that we saw two or three!! Every week I would participate in half a dozen church related activities.

Within a few years I married and set off for the Middle East as a missionary with my husband. We went to Jordan to learn Arabic as part of a Missionary Apprenticeship Program. We studied the Bible and how to evangelise Muslims while immersed in the culture. I wholeheartedly threw myself into this work believing that being a missionary was the best job in the world. My enthusiasm for sharing the love of Jesus was dampened over time when things didn't quite add up. There was difficulty among team members and leaders as they struggled for power and control. There were Muslims who loved Allah just as much as I loved Jesus. I vividly remember standing in the streets of downtown Amman, surrounded by hundreds of people, wondering how it could be that they were all on their way to hell. The responsibility of it overwhelmed me.

When we had the opportunity to help begin a girls' home in Lebanon, my husband and I were happy to experience a more hands on approach to missions. At one time we would have considered this a lesser ministry than church planting. However, our views softened as we realised that development work really did suit us and was more congruent with our beliefs about what was helpful. In Lebanon I began to have dreams that would wake me up in the night, bewildered. Slowly they broke through my strong veneer and had me questioning my faith and motives.

After over three years of living in the Middle East, the fourth year of our program was spent in Bible and intercultural studies at a mission training school in the

Netherlands. It was here that the unravelling of my faith sped up. My spiritual doubts, coupled with the fact that God wasn't answering my prayers to get pregnant, had me questioning everything and everyone at school. I wasn't satisfied with the answers I was getting from professors or classmates. I argued with colleagues constantly, which only served to further alienate me. I felt depressed and cynical and wondered what was wrong with me.

I didn't give up looking for answers; hope was found in the library. I discovered authors who said that doubting was a good thing. I read about the Bible being altered to subjugate women. These authors spoke of a more practical gospel that addressed poverty and injustice. They also understood the Bible to be a book of poetry, myth and narrative as opposed to the infallible, literal Word of God. This made sense to me. It gave me hope and terrified me at the same time because I didn't know where this would take me, except that it would take me away from life as I knew it.

I was very fortunate to have my husband as a fellow companion on the journey. A close friend of ours who had experienced something similar was also there for us; willing to listen and help. I could voice my doubts and anger and she would listen without judgement. She understood what it was like to come out from Fundamentalism. I didn't know that this was what was happening; I only knew that I was no longer comfortable with Christians. I would find myself arguing in my head constantly with sermons, worship songs, and family members. I didn't belong anywhere anymore. I didn't know what I believed to be true. I only knew what I didn't believe. It was a very lonely place to be.



As we headed back to Canada, with tickets in hand, we received news that our friends needed help to run a summer program in Lebanon. We decided to change our flights and planned to spend six weeks back in Lebanon helping out at a residential home for boys. Then, out of the blue, days before departing, a little boy appeared needing a home. We wanted a child and he needed a home. We were the ‘just right’ balm for each other. After such a long and depressing time, hope arrived wearing diapers and running shoes. Even though it was a long and hard struggle to complete the adoption for many reasons, we never wavered and were ecstatically happy. Ben brought us back to Canada and gave us the reason we needed to justify leaving missions. We felt it was important for him to have a sense of family and belonging so we settled in Canada. It was a dream; I was so happy *and* my faith was still unravelling *and* I was incredibly sad and lonely. I had lost my faith in my religion but here was Ben: such a gift.

Losing faith in Christianity was a painful experience. I had no way to understand it other than as a loss. I could not understand it as the healthy transformation that it was. Knowing that I would be labelled a ‘backslider’ or considered ‘not really saved in the first place’, I agonised over exploring my doubts. To explore meant to risk losing everything I held dear; friends, family, professional identity and most of all redemption. This was not a decision I took lightly or even deliberately. The drive to live authentically overcame these obstacles. Leaving the safe place of evangelical Christianity for an unknown void was not something I would have willingly chosen to do. At the time it felt as though I had no control over this thing that was happening to me; a slow unravelling that I could not stop. Uncertain, I eventually let it all unravel. I left the Church when

Fundamentalism stopped making sense and feeling right, despite having nothing to replace it with.

The certainty of Fundamentalism is attractive. This Bible based spirituality knows. It has answers for life's great mysteries and good arguments for its claims. Leaving Fundamentalism meant leaving this security. I no longer knew anything for sure, other than what I experienced moment by moment. This limbo land is not an easy place to linger. If it weren't for the discovery of art making during art therapy training, I don't know that I could have tolerated the tension of 'not knowing' long enough to recover a sense of my Self as strong and good.

Experiencing transformation through the creative process during art therapy training, led me to this inquiry. I had many questions at the beginning of the study. What was the attraction to convert to Fundamentalism? What shook my faith and started the de-conversion process? In what ways is my struggle reflective of a wider cultural struggle between the validity of poetic ways of knowing versus rational ways? Is Fundamentalism a direct product of our Western pragmatic worldview? In what ways am I still affected by Fundamentalist thinking? What else do I need to let go of? How can art making help me to live more soulfully? I held these questions lightly and focused the question instead to: what happens when I tell the story of my journey of Fundamentalism through art making using art-i-facts from my past? Specifically, what happens to my sense of spirituality?

I thought that if I could experience transformation in other areas of my life, why not spiritually? In this study I will be using an arts-based method of self-inquiry. The key premise of my research is the exploration of my personal experience of following an

image with the intention of discovering my ‘just right’ spirituality after leaving Christian Evangelical Fundamentalism. Since the discovery of art making has been integral to my self-transformation, it seemed appropriate that this inquiry demonstrate that spiritual transformation through the arts: not only as a primary mode of research but of presentation as well. Therefore the results of the study focused on the art making process and photos of the art made during the study including a DVD of a performance (See Appendix).

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The thesis is organised into five chapters. Chapter one is the introduction, which includes the rationale and focus of the study, the research question, and my personal interest in it. The first chapter also provides a background for the study since it is integral to the methodology, the subsequent results, and the presentation of the research. Chapter two is a literature review of spiritual transformation from three different perspectives. Chapter three provides a basis for art making as research and outlines the methodology used in the study. Chapter four is the art making process conveyed through photos of art works, writings and a DVD of a performance (See Appendix). Chapter five discusses what happened during the study and how art making contributed to the process.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review of Spiritual Transformation**

The purpose of this chapter is to give a broad overview of spiritual transformation from three different perspectives integral to the growth and development of my understanding of spiritual transformation throughout the study. They are evangelical fundamentalism, the creative process in art therapy and Jungian psychology. Since different meanings are given to key terms in each perspective, definitions are listed at the beginning of each section.

### **Evangelical Fundamentalism**

#### **Definitions.**

##### *Soul and Spirit.*

Each human being in this world consists of a material body animated by an immaterial personal self. Scripture calls this self a 'soul' or 'spirit'. "Soul" emphasizes the distinctness of a person's conscious selfhood as such; "spirit" carries the nuances of the self's derivation from God, dependence on him, and distinctness from the body as such. (Packer, 1993)

##### *Evangelical.*

What is meant by an Evangelical Fundamentalist will vary depending on who is defining the terms. Some definitions are necessary therefore, for clarification. In his classic text on the history of Evangelicalism, Bebbington sums up four lasting qualities of evangelicalism throughout its history. They are: conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed, activism: the expression of the gospel in effort, Biblicism; a particular regard for the bible, and crucicentrism: a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (1989).

In *The Post Evangelical*, Tomlinson defines evangelicalism in terms of belief and culture (1995). An evangelical himself, he outlines several core tenets of faith common to all evangelicals. The gospel of salvation through faith in Christ's atoning work is absolutely central. Faith must be personal leading to an experience of conversion. It is necessary to declare the gospel to those who do not believe. Scripture takes supremacy over all other sources of authority. Scripture is inerrant; it does not contain any errors or mistakes in its original form. Events outlined in the Bible are actual historical events and occurred as told in scripture. These events include accounts of the virgin birth, the miracles and the death and bodily resurrection of Christ (Tomlinson, 1995). Tomlinson goes on to stress the importance of understanding evangelical culture in order to truly understand the evangelical mind.

When persons become evangelical Christians, they walk into a new world: They will soon discover an entire sub-culture of church services, events, festivals, concerts, conferences, magazines, books, merchandise, record companies, mission organizations, training schemes, holiday clubs and celebrities (1995, p. 7). A parallel universe to the secular world exists.

This insight into the pervasiveness of the culture is important because it demonstrates the expansive reach that evangelicalism has. The group determines social attitudes and holds certain behavioural expectations for their members. These attitudes and expectations permeate all aspects of life promoting acceptable clothing styles, careers, and art forms.

The expectations of the group are key to determining the flavour of the particular evangelical group since there are many, including Charismatics, Pentecostals, Baptists,

Mennonites and Methodists to name a very few (Marsden, 1991, Noll, 1994, Winell, 1993). It is under this wide umbrella that Fundamentalists find their home (Barr, 1977).

### *Fundamentalist*

Marsden defines a Fundamentalist as an Evangelical who is angry about something (1991). Looking at the history of fundamentalism when Evangelicals were first called Fundamentalists in 1920, he names militancy as the distinguishing factor between the two closely related movements. Reacting to modernism and liberalism, the fundamentalist Christian takes a stance against the erosion of the faith by actively defending the Bible and living a holy life (Cox, 2009).

Having identified with the name myself, I understand it to refer to a Christian who returns to the ‘fundamental’ tenets of the beliefs of the early Church. In doing so, I also took on the mindset of what I perceived to be that of the early Christians, one of persecution and urgency (Larson, 2007). The sense of righteous anger was directed not so much at non-believers but at the universal church that had caused the demise of the world by watering down the truth of God’s word. “For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household...”(1 Peter 4:17a New International Version).

### *Charismatic*

Another important faction within Evangelical Fundamentalism concerns the working of the Holy Spirit. Though the fundamentals of faith are agreed upon, other issues such as the working of the Holy Spirit remains controversial. This division has been around since the time of John Wesley (1703-91). He founded the Methodist movement and preached that being saved was insufficient; it must be accompanied by a personal inner experience of Christ. This inner experience is the work of the Holy Spirit and is

evidenced by a hunger for holiness (Cox, 2009). At the time, and until present, many disagreed. Those with a Calvinistic view believe that salvation is a once and for all gift of God. They are wary of ‘experience’ and more adamant about right doctrine (Cox). In my experience as a member of the Methodist Church working inter-denominationally as a missionary, I was taught to classify these issues as non-essential to being saved and to see them against the backdrop of the Spirit’s more general activity where there is consensus (Erickson, 1983).

However, I was taught as a new Christian influenced by the charismatic Vineyard Movement, that God’s plan was to fill every believer with the Holy Spirit’s supernatural power in order to win lost souls for Christ. I was active in a non-denominational church that emphasized worship and the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers, while maintaining the supremacy of scripture. This balance or what Jackson deems ‘the radical middle’ holds the tension between Word and Spirit not favouring one over the other. The word submits to the voice of the Spirit and the Spirit blows in accordance with the parameters of the word (Jackson, 1999, 20). Here the Fundamentalist tendency to overemphasize the Word and the Pentecostal tendency to favour Spirit is resolved; both held in dynamic tension avoiding the polarisation.

Perhaps Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Life* best sums up mainstream Evangelical Fundamentalism as I knew it then, (2002). He lays out a viable argument for the Bible as life’s instruction manual and explains the Spirit’s purpose for believers. The reasoning goes something like this: you did not create yourself, so there is no way you can tell yourself what you were created for. He likens the human situation to that of coming across an unknown machine. “If I handed you an invention you had never seen

before, you wouldn't know its purpose, and the invention itself wouldn't be able to tell you either. "Only the creator or the owner's manual could reveal its purpose" (Warren, 2002, p. 18). A loving God would certainly reveal his purposes for our lives. Warren sums them up in five points. You were planned for God's pleasure. You were formed for God's family. You were created to become like Christ. You were shaped for serving Christ. Finally and ultimately, you were made for mission.

If you want to be used by God you must care about what he cares about – what he cares about most is the redemption of the people he made. He wants his lost children found! Nothing matters more to God, the cross proves that (Warren, p. 288).

### **Spiritual Transformation as Conversion.**

Implicit in an evangelical understanding of Christianity is the experience of conversion. One is not born an evangelical, one chooses to become one. Whereas most mainstream Protestants are baptised into the faith, as are Catholics, Evangelicals are expected to have a conversion experience. Like Paul's awakening on the road to Damascus, conversion is "a radical reorganization of identity, meaning, life" (Travisano, 1970, p. 594). The earliest research about conversion was curious about this phenomenon. As early as 1896, James Leuba published the first article on conversion. In the following year, Edwin Starbuck published his article "A Study of Conversion". He later went on to write the now classic; *The psychology of religion: an empirical study on the growth of religious consciousness* in 1911. Starbuck was inspired and taught by his professor and colleague, William James, who wrote *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1902. The interest in sudden conversion generated notable studies linking



conversion as a functional solution to feelings of anxiety, sin, shame and guilt often experienced in adolescence (Starbuck; 1899, Clark; 1929, and Coe; 1916).

Though I was raised in a Christian home it was not until I was twenty years old that I made a decision to follow Jesus. At the time I thought this was a decision once and for all. I was now saved, no longer lost. From the Fundamentalist perspective, this is the pivotal transitional moment in time where the soul, once dead in sin, becomes alive for the first time; born again of the Spirit. After this point in time, one grows in grace to become a mature disciple until the day that believers are united with Christ in glory.

### **Spiritual Transformation as Deconversion.**

It is no wonder then that doubts and disbelief are so disorienting. In the evangelical view there is no place for changing one's own view of God and spirituality. The other side of conversion is deconversion. Deconversion, though not a keyword in the literature, is the preferred word to describe the concept also known as apostasy, disaffiliation, defection, church-leaving or exiting. Recent research emphasizes deconversion as a necessary term to describe this biographical change because it makes the connection to conversion and the mirror, less studied, process of losing faith (Streib, H., Hood, R. W., Keller, B., Csoff, R., and Silver, C.F., 2009).

There have been some widely publicised accounts of prominent fundamentalists who have lost their faith. Dan Barker authored *Losing faith in faith*, and *godless: how an evangelical preacher became one of Americas Leading Atheists*. Charles Templeton, Billy Graham's contemporary, and cofounder of Youth for Christ wrote *Farewell to God: My reasons for rejecting the Christian Faith* to explain his deconversion experience. In

each case deconversion is described as a growing awareness of doubt that eventually erodes core beliefs.

It is not surprising today to find many websites that support de-converts and ex-fundamentalists. Popular among these sites are [infidels.org](http://infidels.org), [leavingxtianity.org](http://leavingxtianity.org) and [debunkingchristianity.com](http://debunkingchristianity.com). On these sites one can find deconversion stories, recommended reading, discussion forums and other information to help ex-fundamentalists navigate the marked despair that comes with losing faith. There are also recovery groups for fundamentalists, like Fundamentalists Anonymous run by Ed Babinski author of *Leaving the Fold, Testimonies of former Fundamentalists* (1995). Recovered Fundamentalist and psychologist, Dr. Winell's website; <http://www.marlenewinell.net>, advertises retreats for recovering fundamentalists, her self-help book; *Leaving the Fold* (1993) as well as articles about what she calls 'Religious Trauma Syndrome'.

Studies on deconversion are scant. They focus generally on leaving Orthodox Judaism (Davidman & Greil, 2007; Herzbrun, 1999), Mormonism (Bahr & Albrecht, 1989) and new religious movements (Lofland & Skonovd, 1981, Levine, 1984, Jacobs, 1984, 1987, Wright, 1987, Buxant & Saroglou, 2008). Research has also been conducted into the conversion and deconversion experiences of youths and adolescents from various religious backgrounds (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997, Francis & Katz, 2000, Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2002).

Streib and Keller, prominent researchers in the field of faith development and deconversion ask; 'What makes people leave what kind of religious background?' Their interest lies in giving a broader conceptualisation of conversion and deconversion that

reflects the quest for liberation as the main motivator in this age of supermarket spirituality (2004).

Studies on the process of deconversion from Fundamentalism in particular are scarce, though they do exist. Barbour's book, *Versions of Deconversion* (1994) examines accounts of those who have rejected their faith and analyzes how autobiographers interpret this loss. Barbour names four recurring characteristics. They are doubt, moral criticism, emotional suffering, and disaffiliation from a community (1994).

The phenomenon is not confined to laity but affects clergy as well (Dennett and LaScola, 2010). Dennet and LaScola interviewed 5 pastors, two of whom were from a fundamentalist background, about the experience of being a pastor who no longer believes. The study explored the complexity of deconversion when one's livelihood is tied up with belief. I experienced this firsthand as a missionary on the field when I first began to have doubts. Brent's research (1994) on the experience of leaving fundamentalism found seven sequential and essential phases common to participants interviewed. The phases have been titled as follows; Participation in the Fundamentalist Context, The Initial Disillusionment, Tolerating the Tradition, Leaving the Tradition, The Emotion-Laden Aftermath, Establishing New Horizons, and Living With Problematic Residue. He stressed the importance for therapists to understand the difficulties inherent in leaving faith and restructuring worldview in order to be effective. Ross (2009) also conducted research on the experience of leaving Fundamentalism. Her study was aimed at capturing the essence of the experience. She identified themes in three domains; the experience of Christianity, Transition out of Christianity, and the Experience of unbelief. The study shed light on two typologies that emerged within the experience of unbelief: a

sense of struggle and a sense of relief. The findings are discussed in relation to identity and attachment theory.

In this view of spiritual transformation there is lost or found, converted or de-converted. Spiritual transformation is understood to be a linear, once and for all movement, where one is either in the fold or out. Lacking in this perspective is the ability to rebuild or discover a new worldview since there is only one way of understanding the world and our place in it.

### **The Creative Process in Art Therapy**

#### **Definitions.**

##### *Soul*

Soul is that part of me that is originally, authentically me. Schmid (1999) calls this the ‘wordless centre’ that is able to connect to the creative source. McNiff (1992) takes his definition further. For him, soul is continuously in motion, calling us to what we might become.

##### *Spirit*

Spirit is the sacred mystery connecting all; the creative source, Anima Mundi, the soul of the world.

We create our spiritual connection by attending to soul. Spirit enters when soul has made the place ready. When we cultivate soul, our eyes become clear and soft... We see spirit and feel it, a sense of awe and reverence in many different situations... (Allen, 1995, p. 73).

### **The Creative Process.**

In art therapy training I discovered the creative process. I will never forget my first art therapy class. I was terrified of having to do art alongside artists. I had no idea how to paint or draw anything that looked like anything on demand. I wanted to be an art therapist because I thought it would be a good approach for helping children. I never thought that my first experience with artmaking would have such a strong impact on my life. We were invited to quiet ourselves and go inward to notice what we noticed in our bodies. If there was a heaviness we were instructed to ask ourselves; “What would make it lighter? What would make it easier?” When we had found that “just right” movement that our hands wanted to make we were invited to make that mark on the paper.

The big piece of blank paper looked terrifying. Before long however, I had covered it with pastel marks. As instructed, I then added paint and followed the attractors; the colours that looked inviting and the parts of the image that were ‘asking’ for something. From time to time I felt stuck. I had no idea what I was supposed to do or what the painting was supposed to be. In those moments I would ask: ‘What would make it easier? What would make it lighter?’ Time seemed to stand still. Hours passed. I forgot myself and was lost in colour and texture. I was learning the practice of artmaking. A practice that Allen (2005) says, stops time, opens us to rest our thinking mind, and nourishes our senses. That day, when the image arrived it was a very painful one. With the support of the group, I learned how to tend to it and in the same way tend to myself. It was in this way that I became familiar with the creative process.

Little did I know that through the process of artmaking I was also fostering the sort of environment needed to recover a sense of spirituality and soul that is able to meet life’s

challenges and say, “Yes”. Approaching the blank page, without a plan or any notion of what will emerge, we confront the not knowing. In this way we approach the void, nothingness, and must find the courage to let something new arise. In this way the possibility of creative living also arises. The creative act, or what Levine (1992) calls poiesis, occurs as the death and rebirth of the soul. He insists that it is essential to human being to fall apart and experience the despair of not being whole. This is where the creative urge comes from. McNiff (1998) encourages us to approach the blank page as a place of opportunity and openness for creative expression.

Finding courage to make marks on the blank paper, letting an image come I learned to play. Nachmanovitch (1990) calls this divine play. In *Free Play; Improvisation in Life and Art*, he defines “lila”; an old Sanskrit word meaning play. “Lila, free and deep, is both the delight and enjoyment of this moment and the play of God” (1). A musician himself, he describes the creative process and all art as improvisation; “the real story is about spontaneous expression, and it is therefore a spiritual and a psychological story rather than the story about the technique of one art form or another” (9). Immersed in this process I felt a sense of aliveness and hope; an active participant in life. In the art I was encouraged to take risks, to let myself be known since in artmaking there was no right or wrong. I suspended judgement and considered all of my experiences as part of the process of becoming; a process that had become valuable and dynamic. Change becomes familiar. The making of a painting, says McNiff (1992) is an expression of that aspect of the psyche that changes, transforms and constantly creates new life.

In the creative flow, my critical mind is quietened. I am completely absorbed and focused on the present moment. In this way content from my unconscious can emerge as

memories, images, or sensations, contents not readily accessible through the censoring mind. I choose how to respond in the art and how to shape what is emerging. In this way I can choose also to shape or reshape my story. I learn to follow my impulses, to tend to what attracts me, to tolerate the tension of the “in between”, to change it up if the result is not feeling ‘just right’. I also practice letting go of what doesn’t work. I notice when I am caught again in those restricting patterns that block the flow of creativity. Noticing I can make a choice to change. The change inevitably shows up in the art acting like a mirror where I encounter myself time and again (Moon, 1990). Surprisingly, what I find is a growing sense of my own voice and internal authority, and a freedom to be me.

The art process seems to provide a bridge to the laws of Nature (Allen, 2005, p 106). Becoming familiar with my internal rhythms makes me more aware of and accepting of the natural rhythms and cycles around me. I begin to notice that it is the same creative life force moving in me that is manifesting in the natural world. I feel a crisper connection to the world around me. The birds, clouds and weather seem to speak and I understand them. Somehow I feel connected to something bigger than myself. “Such infusions of creative energy often connect us to the larger Self, or what we might call the divine, and the direct experience of unity” (Halprin, 2003, 85).

In artmaking we not only put ourselves back together and come home to our true selves (Levine, 1990) but we also find our place in the order of things. Connecting to this larger Self is part of remembering who we are as human beings and our place in community. The creative urge to make whole ourselves and our world, is given form in art making. Is it any wonder then, that in artmaking we find the perfect conditions for

spiritual transformation? For the creative process is a spiritual path (Nachmanovitch 1990, Allen 2005).

### **Jungian Psychology**

Carl Jung was one of the first Western psychotherapists to discuss the movement toward the numinous, or the spiritual dimension of experience, as being of prime importance to psychology (Boorstein, 1996). Von Franz in *Man and His Symbols* (Jung, 1964) noted that many criticized Jung for not having a systematic approach to his concepts of the psyche. She defends the Jungian approach as an honest one, where the attempt is made to describe a single psychic event from as many angles as possible (p 167). Brookes reiterated this when he stressed that Jung's work "amplifies ideas and raises questions rather than reducing concepts to final answers" (Boorstein, 1996, 76). This is important to note when discussing Jungian perspectives, asserts Von Franz; we are not grasping to define a single viewpoint, rather we are speaking of the psyche which is irrational and ever changing in its very nature (Jung, 1964, p. 167).

#### **Definitions.**

##### ***Soul***

The soul is a functional complex in the psyche (Sharpe, 1991, p. 126).

I have been compelled, in my investigations into the structure of the unconscious, to make a conceptual distinction between soul and psyche. By psyche I understand the totality of all psychic processes, conscious as well as unconscious. By soul, on the other hand, I understand a clearly demarcated functional complex that can best be described as a personality (Definitions, CW 6, par. 797, as cited in Sharpe, 1991).



### *Spirit*

Sharpe (1991) defines spirit as “an archetype and a functional complex, often personified and experienced as enlivening, analogous to what the archaic mind felt to be an invisible, breath like "presence"(p 127). “Spirit, like God, denotes an object of psychic experience which cannot be proved to exist in the external world and cannot be understood rationally. This is its meaning if we use the word "spirit" in its best sense.” (Spirit and Life," CW 8, par. 626 as cited in Sharpe, 1991).

### **Spiritual Transformation as Individuation.**

Jungians view spiritual transformation as a natural part of the individuation process in the second half of life. It is the conscious coming-to-terms with one’s own inner centre, psychic nucleus or Self (Jung, 1964, p. 169). Jung understood humans to have an instinct toward individuation; a natural orientation toward wholeness and meaning in life (Kaufmann, 1989). He called this process individuation. He believed that throughout the lifespan the individual sets out to become aware of the true self, or divine essence within, which he called the Self. Life ultimately, in his view, is ‘a spiritual journey; and the person embarking upon it, although he might not subscribe to any recognized creed, was nonetheless pursuing a religious quest’ (Storr, 1983, p. 229). This quest leads to a greater connectedness in the outside world. “As the individual is not just a single, separate being, but by his very existence presupposes a collective relationship, it follows that the process of individuation must lead to more intense and broader collective relationships and not to isolation” [Definitions," CW 6, par. 758.]

Stein (n.d., para. 13), in his article on individuation, identifies three stages of the individuation process. The stages map out the development from one sidedness to greater

connectedness. These stages vary according to culture and individual families, as well as the unique journey of each individual. In the first half of life from childhood to middle adulthood we are involved in the world through our individuality. In the second half of life which Jung thought of as beginning with midlife crisis, we begin to turn inward, to reconnect with the self.

In general terms the stages in the individuation process are:

- The Containment/Nurturance Stage

This part is the stage of childhood where the child is protected and nurtured to develop an ego; an independent self-mastery in the world and persona – the face one shows to the world which often functions as a mask that hides the self and the unconscious. In this stage children are valued more for being rather than doing. As they mature and develop people require a minimum of nurturing and containment from the home and school environment and are able to do this for themselves. This stage is referred to symbolically as the mother stage, and those in it are perceived as ‘living in the mother’.

- Adapting/Adjustment Stage

This stage progresses gradually as the child leaves the safety of the mothering container be it home or school, and enters the ‘realistic’ world of the father where he/she learns to adapt to the demands of adult life in the larger world. Here, safety and security are traded for the exciting challenges of the real world as the personality becomes self-sufficient.

- Centering/Integrating Stage

This stage normally begins in the second half of life once the other two stages are negotiated to some degree. The goal of this stage is to integrate those pieces of the psyche that were split off by earlier developmental demands. Here the Self has room for those once rejected aspects of being human namely; shadow and paradox, complexity and uncertainty. Becoming conscious of rejected aspects of one's self is hard work as previously unexamined attitudes are examined. It takes courage to follow through with the personal suffering that such introspection requires. One reaches back and picks up the lost or denied pieces and weaves them into the fabric of the whole. And as the ego approximates the Self, it too feels less alienated from all of humanity and from the profound complexities of reality. In short, one becomes more accepting of complexity within and without. (Stein, n.d., The centering/integrating stage).

Individuation is informed by the archetypal idea of wholeness (Sharpe, 1988, p. 14). The goal is not to become whole or perfect which is impossible, but to become aware of the process itself. "The goal is important only as an idea: "The essential thing", writes Jung, "is the opus (the work on oneself) which leads to the goal: that is the goal of a lifetime" (Sharpe, 1988, p. 14).

By outlining the idea of spiritual transformation through these three perspectives, I have attempted to trace my personal journey of trying to understand spirituality to date. If the soul can be thought of as multifaceted and constantly moving it is no wonder that I outgrew a concretised idea of spirit. In the creative process I experienced a more fluid way to be. I experienced the pleasure of letting go of the reasoning mind and living in

the mystery. “According to Jung”, says McNiff, (1992) “the bird is flown when we attempt to explain the mystery” (p. 65). In the art I do not have to explain the mystery. In Jungian psychology I discovered a way to understand the changes I was experiencing as a natural development through the process of individuation. Here too, the mystery need not be defined or reduced. On the contrary, the very essence of spirituality as I now like to think of it, is complex, multifaceted and ever changing, like Nature itself. There is no destination or arrival point of having figured it all out. “It is sufficient to be aware that the energy within us is alive and playful: it will constantly form and fall apart and reform into new configurations, new imagery” (Allen, 2005, p. 192).

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Artmaking as Research**

In the arena of qualitative inquiry, art-based research has been gaining momentum. Like qualitative research, artmaking is itself a process of inquiry and a process of making meaningful forms (Eisner, 1993). The process of artmaking informs the inquiry. As more arts-based researchers gain recognition for their work, the validity of art as research is recognized (Sinner 2006). This interest in artmaking as research is gaining momentum because making images is a way of breaking boundaries, loosening outworn ideas and making way for the new (Allen, 1995, pg. x).

In this study I used an arts-based method of self-inquiry. As an art therapist relying on the potential of images to heal in practice, I applied that premise to my research into what happens when I enter into a relationship with images with the intention to regain a sense of spirituality. McNiff, an expert in the field of art therapy and arts-based research, says that “art-based research grows from a trust in the intelligence of the creative process and a desire for relationships with the images that emerge from it” (Levine and Levine, 1999, p. 83). He calls for artists to make use of their unique skills and sensitivities as they explore their own experience (1998). This inquiry demonstrates my creative process and a sustained focus on images as I created them pertaining to the Sedna myth.

### **Art-Based Research and Self-Study**

Though many arts based researchers engage in artmaking for the purpose of social action and education, arts based research is also suited to self-study (Sullivan, 2010). Mitchell and Weber (2004) have written extensively on the subject showing how the reflexive nature of artistic inquiry makes it particularly well suited for self-study. The

creative inquiry process of arts informed research is defined by openness to the expansive possibilities of the human imagination. It is not just about gathering and working with research material, but about following a more natural process of engagement, events and experiences. Here, intuition and serendipity play a role (Knowles and Cole, 2008).

Similar to heuristic research, artmaking as research is a way to inquire into tacit knowledge; that is deeply embedded knowledge not normally available to conscious awareness (Polanyi, 1983). “When we paint automatically and with abandon, the painting and the materials we use are literally “mediums” between consciousness and psyche.” (McNiff, 1992, p. 85).

The Moustakas method of heuristics invites the conscious, investigating self to surrender to the feelings in an experience, which carries the researcher to unknown aspects of self and the internal organizational systems not normally known in waking state consciousness. With new, revised, or expanded understanding, internal reorganization naturally occurs, resulting in a self-transformation that almost always has social and transpersonal implications (Sela-Smith, 2002).

Moustakas’ (1990) method of inquiry describes a ‘path of surrender to an internal question that flows from the internal experience of “I who feels”’. This path is marked by six phases which eventually lead to a deeper understanding of whatever is calling out from the inside of the self to be understood. To do this, the researcher must maintain “an unwavering and steady inward gaze” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13).

Art can maintain this gaze as well as contain resistance. As art therapists we know the importance of ‘sticking to the image’ as well as ‘honouring the resistance’ (Hillman, 1989, Allen, 1995, 2005). Sela-Smith (2002) has criticized Moustakas’ method as being

incapable of holding this steady gaze by not acknowledging the role resistance and ambivalence play in this method. She believes that when researchers fully immerse themselves in experiencing feelings by moving through resistance and remaining focused until transformation occurs, that then the potential for transformation exists (2002). Artmaking provides the container for this potential. Art-based research though sharing commonalities with other forms of qualitative methods of self-study, departs from them in that it “is simply defined by its use of the arts as objects of inquiry as well as modes of investigation” (McNiff, 1998, p.15).

Allen (1995, 2005) demonstrates how artmaking is a way of bringing soul back into life. Offering her personal quest as a template she offers a method not only to self-knowledge and spiritual fulfillment, but also to not knowing that is essential to the creative process and to life itself. Her work demonstrates and invites the reader to go back to unfinished places in the soul to reclaim shunned and exiled images (1995). She encourages the artist to hang up their images, live with them and let them guide. As this inquiry seeks in part, to recover aspects of soul, Allen’s (2005) method of working with images in the Open Studio Project with a focus on intention and witness writing was used throughout this inquiry. She combines art and writing in a particular way in which each illuminates and furthers the other is a unique discipline that lends itself to the deepest kind of inquiry. There is a partnership created between the thinking and feeling aspects of self, nourished by careful attention to sensation and intuition. There is a co-equal relationship between the researcher and the material under study that can be described as a joint endeavor between one’s own soul and the soul of the world (Allen, 2012, 14, 15).

Similarly, McNiff, considers the imagination requisite for soul making. In *Art as Medicine* (1992) he shows how he dialogues with his paintings in order to remain open to his soul. As an art therapist, he sees the shamanic quality of both his profession and the image. “When the soul is in the process of ministering to itself, shamans and other imaginal persons appear and converge in a process that I call art as medicine”(McNiff, 1992, p. 18). The shamanic definition of illness as soul loss corresponds to the lost soul as a lost image, a lost presence (1992, p. 56). It is in this kind of image making that soul can be found again, when there is movement and space.

This fluidity of artmaking is only realised when there is an openness to change. Being open to the changing image, taking risks in the art, allowing it to open where it will, the practice of artmaking is a constant engagement with soul. Allowing the images to change and flow can create more flow in our living.

### **Validity**

An important part in presenting the work is ensuring validity and assessability. The criteria that one uses to assess the validity of an imaginal study that follows a mermaid to recover a sense of spirituality are quite different than those of a ‘rational’ scientific study. In an arts-based study that uses the creative process as a method of research, the researcher cultivates a certain attitude throughout the study. One does not assess the results so much as one assesses the attitude throughout the research process. What is required of the researcher is an openness to the process, a commitment to remain vulnerable, an ability to tolerate the ensuing anxiety that accompanies vulnerability, the capacity to listen and respond to synchronicities when they arise and finally, reflexivity.



With this attitude in mind I designed a three phase process that built upon each other in order to collect rich data and include what Higgs describes as characteristics of art based research that ensure validity. That is: metaphor, reflexivity, and generativity (Knowles and Cole, 2008, p. 551). I carried out this research in a way that is consistent with the process of art as inquiry as outlined by Allen (2005). I set a clear intention, spent time making art, and then wrote about the process. When the piece was finished I witnessed the image by dialoguing with it through writing. Though I had initially intended to include an art installation for public viewing and feedback, the Sedna production added the necessary ‘voice of the other’ to the study.

Through this method, three different sources of information were generated to increase validity, namely; the making of images, witness writings and the Sedna performance. The triangulation of data ensured the presence of contrasting voices in the research. Romanyshyn (2007) insists that it is the ethical obligation of the researcher to be in dialogue with him or herself as an *other*. “The other reflects back to oneself that one is a perspective, a point of view. The other sees things differently, from another perspective and with this recognition the other challenges who one is and how one imagines the world” (340). Just as heeding the voice of the minority in a healthy political democracy keeps the government in check, making space for the voice of the other in oneself adds another dimension to the work. During the Sedna production, Sedna became the necessary ‘voice of the other’ in my research. Her function was to show me another Sedna story: not the one that had initially captured my imagination. The Sedna production surprised me. It introduced me to a new side of Sedna and provided another opportunity for me to wrestle with the unfinished work of my fundamentalist thinking.

In more “traditional” qualitative research, the researcher is asked to bracket their biases. In arts based research however, one’s biases are not bracketed. They are acknowledged and considered something that creates a favourable opportunity. “Research”, says Romanyshyn (2007) “is a vocation, and within an imaginal approach, the researcher is called into a work so that what lingers in the work as a piece of unfinished business can work itself out through the work” (82). It is through these very biases or wounds that we make conscious the complexes that need to be worked out in our own lives in service to the world. The voice of the other keeps the biases in check. The unconscious material and complexes that emerge have an important place in the research.

I also chose to present the data as works of art as much as possible. The images and witness writings make up a significant part of the thesis. One of the tasks of the artist has long been to shake up the status quo causing people to re-evaluate and think. The very nature of art arouses the senses and the intellect to new heights of response and action (Knowles and Cole, 2008). Art then, fulfills what Glesne (1999) deems an important part of the role of researcher; to make the data sensible and accessible. Presenting data as works of art can help access and grasp that which surpasses words and would otherwise remain inaccessible. Moreover, physically enacting the Sedna story and presenting it before a live audience (See Appendix), fulfills what Allen (2012) insists is a critical part of art-based inquiry; ‘performatively and emotively transmitting the truth of the images so that they enter bodies as well as minds’ (p. 19).

Ellis (2004), though writing about ethnography, suggests that validity means our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is

life like, believable and possible. She adds, “You also can judge validity by whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers- or even your own.” (p. 124). The same principals can be added to art-based research. Jacobs (2008) echoes this sentiment. He says, “Whether or not it has been given a name... any format can be sufficiently valid if it makes a unique and substantial contribution to understanding the world better or to making it a better place to live.”(pg 5).

### **Outline of Methodology**

#### **Phase 1: Artmaking and the Myth of Sedna**

I began by telling the Inuit myth of Sedna visually in four parts.

**Part 1.** The first piece showed Sedna leaving in the kayak with her new husband. I used fabric, paper, paint and various items. When I was finished I expected to respond by making art out of art-i-facts from my past, but I decided to carry on with the story instead because it felt right (See Figure 4).

**Part 2.** I created a piece depicting Sedna stuck in the nest realising that her husband was not a man at all, but a raven in disguise. Again I used mixed media and a large piece of fabric (See Figures 5 and 6).

**Part 3.** I made an image of Sedna’s father, alone in the bloodied kayak, after having cut her fingers off. I used mixed media (See Figure 7).

**Part 4.** Though I had intended to make the fourth piece about Sedna becoming a mermaid and the goddess of the sea, when the time came this piece became something quite different than the three other pieces. It began as a new work approached with the intention to play and tend to myself, not as work for the thesis. It did however,

eventually become Sedna transformed as a mermaid. It also became an integral part of enactment that emerged in the artmaking at this time. This piece was a support for me that I worked on from time to time throughout the study and still may be a work in progress. I am not sure. I used pastels and chewing gum wrappers as materials. (See Figures 8-14)

### **Phase 2: Responding to the Myth with Art-i-facts.**

I had intended to make an art response as each part of the Sedna myth was finished, out of actual or photocopied pieces, from the particular times of my life that corresponded with that part of the Sedna story. However, since phase 1 was carried out consecutively, I also carried out phase 2 consecutively. As intended, journals, songs, books, papers, sermons, Bibles, prayer letters, photographs and art works were available for use. The sheer amount of ‘stuff’ became overwhelming and I only chose what felt important at the time. Instead of several pieces as I had initially imagined, I ended up with only one piece that evolved over time.

I had imagined this part of the process to be like Hillman’s idea of working with dreams; that of a bricoleur who takes scraps and leftovers and transforms them into useful material for soul making (Avens, 1980). The actual process was like that and more. I hadn’t anticipated the letting go part of transformation that is so important for soul making. It was as though energy was stuck until I went in and released whatever it was that soul was pointing to. I let go and then soul could point to the next thing. Time and again, I followed the energy and found a way to release it. Then I moved on to the next marker until I felt done. It became increasingly important to physically interact with the art; enacting what it asked of me.

I consciously followed my intuition at the time, staying open to the process and imagination as McNiff admonished in order to make use of a larger spectrum of creative intelligence that transcends the linear narratives that we conventionally use to respond to art (Knowles and Cole, 2008). Once again, I employed Allen's (2005) method of intention, artmaking, and witness writing. I also kept a record of the process through photographs and journal writings. This resulted in four distinct parts as in phase 1.

### **Part 1**

I set out to respond directly to 'Sedna marries' (Figure 4). Sorting through the art-i-facts from my past was more difficult than anticipated. It took weeks before I sorted the articles into a workable order. I thought I would begin with becoming a Christian to correspond with Sedna marrying. I realised though, when I saw how many things I had from childhood that Sedna too had a family and an environment that she came from. I attempted to make these art-i-facts into the first layer of a paper maché piece. I was hoping it would evolve into a beautiful mermaid. It didn't. I grew increasingly frustrated with the materials and ended up with a big nest-like lump the size of 2 large watermelons. I tossed it aside afraid that I had ruined the art-i-facts. There was a large work in progress on the dining room wall. I decided to collage the pieces there instead. Fittingly, the articles from my early years became the background for the piece.

The articles were divided into groups that corresponded to my age at that time. Articles from 0 to 20 years made up Sedna's home and environment (See Figures 15-24). Items from 0 to 12 years became Sedna's igloo (See Figures 15-18). Items from 13 to 18 years became the water and part of the sky (See Figures 20-22). Items from 18 to 20 became sky, moon and stars (See Figures 23-24). When this part of the collage was

finished an enactment occurred with the paper maché lump and ‘Sedna falling’ (See Figure 19). I finished up the background by painting the collage (See Figure 25).

When the background was complete, I began the response to ‘Sedna marries’ with art-i-facts from the time of becoming a Christian. Not knowing how to begin, I gathered objects that I had recently made and incorporated them into the piece. Divining rod, feather wand, and mirror hanging (See Figures 26-29). Journals from the time of becoming a Christian became more water (See Figure 27). Then a ritual enactment of cleansing took place (See Figures 30-34).

### **Part 2**

Responding to Sedna in the nest I gathered my journals from my time as a missionary in the Middle East and at Bible College in Holland. I searched through them for signs, clues of awakenings and wrote them out. In the art, I painted landscape and inserted bits of shiny gum wrappers. (See Figures 35-36).

### **Part 3**

Responding to Sedna betrayed, I read through my four journals that covered the time my husband and I first returned from the ‘mission field’ with our son, spanning over a four year period. I also read through our prayer letters from the time spent in the Middle East as missionaries. I responded in the art with paint and once again, a ritual enactment of letting go occurred. (See Figure 38)

### **Phase 3: SEDNA - Music. Dance. Paint. Legend.**

I knew from the beginning that an important part of this process for me would be the presentation of the work. I thought I would be presenting the finished product or parts of the finished product as an art installation. I intuited that this would be the way that I would experience a sense of empowerment and validation; by giving the images voice in a gathering of trusted companions and by getting feedback. As intended, I trusted the creative process and images to guide the process and was surprised by the results. Synchronistic events came one after another. At the end of Phase 1, I moved with my family across the country to Yellowknife, NT from whence my original encounter with Sedna took place. This opportunity came out of the blue. I felt like I was literally following Sedna. Once there I “happened” upon B.A.M! The acronym stands for Borderless Art Movement; a cooperative of visual artists, dancers and musicians. They were in the beginning stages of putting together a collaboration of artists to present their version of the myth of Sedna. I joined and became one of the painters. We performed the myth March 8, 9 and 10, 2012. Phase 3 includes writings about the experience and a DVD of the performance (See Appendix).

### **Ethical Considerations**

An arts-based self-study requires careful ethical consideration. I used a threefold ethic of care; for the images that emerged from the research, others who will be affected by the research directly and indirectly and for the researcher herself.

#### **Caring for the images.**

Unique to art as research is the ethical treatment of the images. McNiff (1998) reminds the researcher that the image is a participant in the inquiry. As a participant, the

image needs to be treated with respect as a gift of the soul. The researcher should not assume to know its meaning, analyze it, label it, nor ignore what it wants. Rather, every image needs to be treated with awe as it leads to the “discovery of what we do not know, and the challenge of travelling to new places” (McNiff, 1998, p. 185).

Barone and Eisner (2012) set out three ethical considerations when conducting arts-based research that are pertinent to this inquiry. They are:

1. The researcher/artist must understand making art as a process of discovery in order to avoid an ideological agenda. This means that the researcher must be willing to be transformed in that process. The arts based researcher is aware that they are incomplete and developing. Sufficient ego strength is required if one is to change without losing oneself entirely (Tomlinson, 2008, 72)

2. “Ethical researcher must be open to engaging with - sharing power with- informants and readers in a textual conversation.” Here Barone and Eisner are referring to informants turned characters in a narrative arts-based project. The same can be said about images that emerge. This means forgoing a tone of certainty and finality that freezes out possibilities of alternative meanings.

3. The ethical arts-based researcher acknowledges that they are not looking for *truth* per se. Exploring through the arts gives multiple meanings and views. The goal of opening and expanding perspective is kept at the fore.

### **Caring for others.**

Though this study primarily focuses on my recovery through images and art making, others still need to be considered. Others include both those who play(ed) a part in my story as well as those who may view the study in the future.



*Indirect participants.*

The research focuses primarily on my personal and lived experience of transformation, therefore minimizing, but not negating the necessity of protecting the identities of individuals or organizations who share in my story. It is my belief that the benefits of the research far outweigh the possible harm that could result from it. Part of this balancing act includes being aware of the risks, minimizing harm and maximizing benefits.

Implied characters who are not implicitly named could be misidentified and misinterpreted. I am aware of this possibility realising that it would be impossible to prevent others from interpreting the information in their own way from their standpoint, nor would that be helpful. What can be prevented is finger pointing or blame for harm experienced in the past by individuals or institutions. I have attempted to take responsibility for my part in the unfolding story. When the story explores hurt by the hands of another, I do not assume the role of victim; rather as is consistent with the art therapy profession, I assume the position of the shaper and creator of emerging images in the present. When the stories of others intersected with mine however, I have taken utmost care in protecting identities of persons and organizations by concealing identities as much as possible, using pseudonyms and changing details that could be used as identifiers. Again, I am aware that it would be impossible to completely conceal identities altogether. I have made every effort to approach the research with integrity, respecting the privacy of others who share my story. This research aims to uphold mental and psychological integrity. This includes rights to privacy and confidentiality of the other as well as the obligation of beneficence belonging to the researcher.

***Readers.***

Consideration must also be given to those who may read the public document in the future. It is impossible to know the impact the research may have on the wider public. Ultimately the goal is to raise consciousness, not only my own self-consciousness but that of the reader. However, as Ellis (as cited in Nagy Hesse-Biber, Leavy, 2006) so poignantly points out research may invite harsh criticism. In her case, her writings about her personal experience of abortion were not well received by some. Again, the balancing act of telling one's story and considering how it will be received needs to be continually negotiated. The researcher does not want to cater to an audience for that would compromise the data, nor is the researcher oblivious that some readers will not be able to receive the work in a way that was intended. The best that one can do is to work from a conscious centre, so that in the future when feedback arrives no matter how distant in the future, the researcher knows that the work was carried out with a high level of integrity and competency at the time.

We live in relationship with one another, the researcher is aware that she is not an isolated individual but is related in a web of relationships. Inevitably, anything I do affects my relationships. Fundamentalism and spiritual transformation are important issues affecting our world today that call for insider stories that ask questions about social constructs. Therefore I have attempted to balance what I have to say while keeping in mind those who I love and care about, some of whom are still very much involved in fundamentalism, knowing that they will be affected by my sharing of my story. This is a balancing act continually in flux, coming to rest with careful consideration when the final product is presented.

*Caring for the researcher.*

It became apparent during the proposal stage of the thesis that self-care would be a very important ethical component of the work. As the thesis took on a life of its own and I realised that the transformation in me was also happening in my body, it became important to take very good care of myself physically and include my body in the process. I found myself practising and engaging in different outward rituals that became reflective of my internal process. Massage, yoga, baths, cutting my hair, growing it out, beginning artmaking with movement, meditative walks where I made outdoor art and took photographs, set a rhythm to my days and supported me in the work.

Near the end of phase 1, it also became necessary to make art that supported me and had nothing to do directly with the Sedna story itself. I began a pastel piece of the “seven alchemical stages of spiritual transformation” that I worked on during the three phases (See Figure 3). When I look at it now though I would simply call it ‘transformation’. It continues to change and speaks to me of my spiritual transformation; a gradual coming out of a safe cocoon to dance in the flames.



*Figure 3:* Transformation

## Chapter 4: Intention, Artmaking and Witness

### Phase 1: Artmaking and the Myth of Sedna

#### Part I.

Sedna was a young woman who did not want to marry any of her suitors. After turning them away time after time, her father tells her that she must marry since the family is running out of food. Reluctantly Sedna agrees.

#### *Intention.*

I will stay in the process.

#### *Narrative.*

Preparing the proposal had been such an inner struggle that when it finally came time to begin with artmaking I could hardly wait. I cleared space in my basement and set up a studio where I could work. I also prepared space within myself in various ways by following impulses long ignored that included my body in the process. I cut my hair very short, went for a Thai Ritual massage where I was symbolically birthed from mud then scrubbed clean, and I allowed myself to play with art materials in a new way. An art therapy course I was preparing for meshed beautifully with my process as it centered on trying new materials. I was drawn to cloth and wanted the first panel to be some sort of a hanging. Wanting to replenish my supplies I dropped into the Salvation Army and found just what I was looking for. I write:

That decayed tree; hollowed out, keeps calling to me. I look at it every time I walk the dog. There are a few spots along the path that I pause or photograph, but this one across the creek I have plans for. I imagine... I want to wrap myself in beautiful blue cloth and tuck myself in the heart of that tree.

Gradually I gain courage when I receive the course materials in the mail. I drink in *Groundswell: The Nature and Landscape of Art Therapy* (Moon, 2010) and marvel at the cover of Gablík's *The Reenchantment of Art* (1991). The picture on the front looks like a mer-creature coming up out of the water. A couple of days later I stop into The Salvation Army thrift shop looking for fabric and there it was; 8 meters of brilliant shiny blue and 2 meters of soft purple. The next day I call a friend to come with me and photograph me in the tree but she's not there. I leave message after message. I can't resist. I wrap myself up in my house and pose in front of the mirror. I am impatient, it is a beautiful afternoon. Finally she calls and agrees to come over. I suddenly feel ridiculous but go ahead with it anyway. I'm self-conscious. I don't want my face to show in the photos. I find my way across the creek, through the bush, hauling my big bag of fabric and suddenly it seems, I'm wrapping, spinning and crawling into this majestic interior. It feels magical. The ground is surprisingly soft and spongy under my feet. I fit perfectly. I am just the right size. The tree is just the right size. When my friend, Louise, crosses over and re-wraps me for a close up it feels too tight; claustrophobic. I need to get out, hatch and spread my wings. It feels wonderful, even better, to get out. I can't wait to see the photos. The whole experience was too quick even. I loved that tree! I loved the cloth. I loved me! I almost felt disappointed that no one had come along the path to witness. It was an experience of empowerment, enactment and making a mark. I still would love to leave some of the cloth behind for people to see.

I then decided to begin the first panel of the Sedna story for thesis work, where Sedna marries the raven unknowingly. It takes three weeks to complete. I thought at the

beginning that I would sew wall hangings using my wedding dress. I decide in the end to make mixed media pieces. Below are some excerpts from my journal.

Big brush, big strokes, thick gesso. Perfect. Now what? I am feeling a bit lost. I don't know what to do. Why did I want to use fabric if I can't sew? Why am I not playing? I can't stop approaching this from the head! Help! I get my gessoed box and sketch. I love the feel of the pencil on gesso: rich, scratchy, charcoal-like. Okay, play! Don't take this so seriously! Just make it a practice piece until Mom brings my wedding dress. I feel lower by the end of the day. What is it? A lot of things. I'm disappointed. I'm not an artist! Why did I propose to do an art show? Ridiculous! Can I change my mind? Who was I kidding? This is too hard for me. It has to look good. I feel stupid. Stop! What would I say to a client? Stay in the process. Notice what's happening. What would make it lighter, easier? Why aren't you playing? You're worried about the show. I don't know what to do. I'm afraid to cut the fabric. I want the wedding dress. I'll be stuck until I have it. Then stay where you are. What's next? I'll rip fabric sample books. Good. You wondered about how your body needed to be involved in this process. Remember what it is that you're doing.

I spend the day ripping apart the fabric sample books. It is tough work and my body aches. Finishing up the piece three weeks later I notice change and write about it. Yesterday I noticed that I was not as critical of my art making. I was able to play and make the moon. I spent quite some time imagining how it was that Sedna didn't see the raven in her husband. I placed feathers covering most of his face as a kind of explanation. I also found a white feather on my walk and tucked it among the waves

because even in this choice to marry, even in not seeing the signs like the feathers, there is still hope. It will be okay. I was also drawn to my walking stick. I think I will hang the piece from it. The intention is to follow the process. The intention has also become to live this process in my home. I hear M.C. Richards (Kane-Lewis, 2004) “You don’t want to leave your art in the studio do you?” Following one step with the next I think I will mount this and begin the next piece. Kindness, warmth, compassion, creativity, truth: my truth.

A little while later I write:

Well, I’ve just finished and although there are a few finishing touches still needed, I can’t help it, I just love it. It’s big. It was a bit difficult to hang and I think it will still need to be secured but I do love it. The raven’s face is still a bit too small or something but there is just something about it that I like. I love the beaver-chewed walking stick. The cloth on the left hand side was a surprise. I ended up pleating it. It felt nice to flatten it out and press it down with the hot glue gun. It was almost like ironing: the warmth, the smell and the smoothing out. The fabric feels luxurious. There was a thread that came out of the cloth that I fit into the horizon; a dark blue thread that fits perfectly. It is unravelling like the thread in the water on the left hand side. I notice too that Sedna doesn’t really have hands. I thought of giving her a muff but didn’t. He has the hands and the paddle.





Figure 4: Sedna marries

### *Witness Writing*

**Me:** I feel down.

**Sedna:** I feel sad too. Excited, making the best of it, but terrified and sad. I want to play and have fun, but I have to go.

**Me:** I don't know what to ask you, what to say.

**Sedna:** There's nothing to say. Nothing you can say. I'm going. I'm in the boat.

Softening, brightening, or shining won't change anything. This is what happens in the story. I can't see his face! I try to look and can't catch even a glimpse for the feathers.

What a hunter! There are enough bird feathers to line his hood. He will be a good provider. Are my parents still watching?

**Me:** I can't see them.

**Sedna:** Hmm...they must have gone back inside. Give him a paddle and let us go. Get it over with.

**Me:** I don't know what to do. I'm frozen.

**Sedna:** Go! (I go back to the artmaking and finish the piece.)

**Me:** You look helpless really, so small, handless, small shoulders, alone. You don't look into his face. Your face is so big and full, like a full moon; hopeful somehow. If you would just look though, you might notice the feathers. They are a clue for you. But you look into the water, eyes star-struck by the reflection. He has the paddle, the power. You sit motionless. What do you have to teach me?

**Sedna:** About youth; the naiveté of youth. I'm looking into the water, at the stars. I feel the moon. I'm hoping to see the northern lights. I'm looking for beauty. I can almost feel it, touch it. I know that it is nearby, within my grasp. I'm hoping he will take me to it. To the place that I will find the beauty that I know exists somewhere and is made for me.

**Me:** Don't you know that he can't give it to you?

**Sedna:** How should I know that? It is the way of my people to marry off the daughters. I'm to go off to the husband's home and be a good wife. How should I know any different? Who would tell me?

**Me:** The moon, the stars.

**Sedna:** They tell me that it will be okay. They go with me wherever I go. I know I'm not alone. My loved ones are under the same stars and moon. When I am lonely I will look at it and know that they see the same sky. In this way I am still connected.

**Me:** I want to tell you to jump out, to run back home. I don't want this to happen. You're too young. Wait a bit and then you'll know what to do.

**Sedna:** I can't wait any longer. My father said I must marry. Their survival depends on it. I have to go away. I am impatient. I want to get on with my life, to see what's next. What's so wrong with that?

**Me:** You're making a bad decision.

**Sedna:** I have no choice. It'll be okay, he is wealthy and a good hunter. He will provide. Look at his furs and his kayak! I will be happy. My family is happy and I will be happy! This is youth. Have compassion on me in my youth. Like a mother for her daughter; have compassion. I'm doing what I think is right and best for everyone. Bless me and let me go.

**Me:** Sigh. Blessed be, blessed be, blessed be. Go well.

## **Part 2.**

When Sedna arrives at her new home she discovers that her husband is not a man at all. He is a raven. She finds herself cold and lonely in his nest with nothing but raw fish to eat. She is so unhappy. She cries out across the water to her father, begging him to save her from the cold raven's nest. Eventually she sees him coming in his boat.

### ***Intention.***

The intention is to follow the creative process of the artmaking. I will let the imagination take over and tell the story.

### ***Narrative.***

I began panel 2 shortly after finishing 'Sedna Marries' and completed it within the week. I realised the importance of giving myself a ritual when going to the art to carve

out the time in a more intentional way. I want to be open to the process. I want to tell the story in the way that it is asking to be told. Lighting a candle or incense, putting on background music and making warm tea become important aspects of setting the intention

I kept 'Sedna Marries' (Figure 4) in view as I worked on 'Sedna in the Nest' (Figure 5). Being very aware of my self-criticism and judgements, I altered my intention somewhat to let the imagination take over and simply tell the story through the art. This helped me to forget myself and enter the creative process more freely though I still struggled.

During this time I had started taking iron as recommended by my doctor. I decided to research alchemy and iron and found a description of the seven spiritual stages of alchemy. It was a year later I began a pastel painting out of this idea (See Figure 3). When I finished the piece I wrote in my journal:

The purple material fits perfectly! I wasn't thinking about it, but I wanted to paint a sunset. The reds and purples are so soothing. It felt really good. The bird kept getting bigger and more hopeful somehow with that blue. Then I stumbled upon the necklace. The raven was going to wear it at first but then I realised that he's carrying it for her. He has something to give her. It has a white feather in it. He knows she's closing her eyes to keep him out, but he's not bothered. He has something to give her, that's why she's there. She will wear that necklace when she goes. She's about to wake up.

I also notice a few things. I make a connection between taking iron and having more energy physically and the male raven being awake while feminine Sedna sleeps. I

wonder whether working through this story will help me find my own masculine/feminine balance. I'm conscious of the struggle to tell the story without fixing, concretizing or literalizing it. I also notice that during the art making I forgot what the point was. I wondered what I was striving so hard to tell, to focus on. This forgetting happened regularly. Once aware of what was happening I would slow down and change up materials to ones that 'felt' better like a soft, long tipped brush. Then I would remind myself that I was only expanding the range of play: not limiting myself or my world. That was less complicated.



*Figure 5: Sedna in the nest*

*Witness Writing*

**Me:** I notice a difference in my energy; taking iron is helping. I feel awake. Ready to go. When are you going to wake up?

**Sedna:** (No response)

**Me:** I thought the background was nightfall but maybe it's the morning. Maybe it's time for you to wake up, look around. Look over to the mountains. Is your father coming? He must know that you're not happy. I can't help but think of the psalm; "I lift my eyes up, to the mountains, where does my help come from? My help comes from you, maker of heaven, maker of all the earth."

**Sedna:** (No response)

**Me:** Sedna?

**Sedna:** I don't want to wake up. It's unbearable. It's cold. I'm stuck and I would have to face that bird.

**Me:** The bird has something for you. He's holding it out to you. Why don't you want to take it?

**Sedna:** Because there is still something you haven't noticed; haven't seen yet.

**Me:** I don't see your hands again, no hands? Is that it?

I look with soft eyes, blinking, trying to see from different perspectives. What do I see? A song, Psalm 121, a mythic figure; Sedna. I notice too that the raven has three eyes. There are three circles of circles. Sedna has three circles around her head too. She looks like she has a crown. They look like they go together: threes. What do I need to learn about the circles? Oh and look at the three bells! Ding! Ding! Ding!

**Sedna:** Yes a wake-up call. It's everywhere. I can't help but wake up. I hear it and just like the moments when waking from a dream; I am in between. I am wake-sleeping; almost ready to wake completely, but not quite.

**Me:** I remember the dreams in Lebanon when I started to wake up. It didn't feel subtle like you're describing. I woke up hyperventilating, laughing hysterically from a dream about Mother Theresa and Lady Diana the week they died. Waking felt abrupt.

**Sedna:** There were other calls; Jordan, Kate, and others. The bells were ringing for a while.

**Me:** I wish you would open your eyes and look at me.

**Sedna:** Oh you don't enjoy watching me ignore what's really happening? This isn't fast enough for you? Or you don't like pretending? Does it bother you that I could open my eyes if I wanted to but I refuse? It's so peaceful with my eyes closed, calm, nothing bothers me.

**Me:** But he's got some kind of a key for you. I think he is part of the wakeup call. I think he is setting you free.

**Sedna:** But when I wake that's it. All hell is going to break loose. I just don't feel like going through that.

**Me:** That's ridiculous, you're about to turn into a goddess. Your father is probably on his way now. He's that speck down there on the ice.

**Sedna:** Yes he is. You're right. And when he comes I won't ignore him. I'll take the key from the raven and I will climb down from here somehow and get in that boat. I'll take the first way out that I can. In the meantime, I'm not really existing. I'm just waiting, dreaming and hoping for some way out; someone to rescue me.

**Me:** Why don't you just take the key and go?

**Sedna:** Where would I go to? Look around me. What do you see? Where would I go to?

**Me:** Maybe there's a village down there.

**Sedna:** The bird would just bring me back. I'm waiting for a sure thing. I'm not risking it. When I go it will be for good. You think I'm passive and weak, but I'm not. I just know that there is nowhere to go. I will not risk my life. I'll get out of here one way or another. In the meantime, I sleep-wake and wait.

*Narrative.*

I'm quite shaken by this dialogue. I write:

Well that didn't go how I thought it would. I feel a bit depleted and deflated.

Eerie. Is that what I do? Pretend and sleep through things? Avoid because I don't think I can do it or because I don't know how? Helpless. Handless.

I return to the artmaking because I know I have to wake her up. When I'm done her eyes are open. She looks ahead, not at the raven, not to her home, but at least she is looking. During the following witness writing I am surprised that the raven speaks and by what he has to say. I'm also surprised that I almost fall asleep when they are talking! This has been a lot to take in.





Figure 6: Sedna awake in the nest

*Witness Writing*

**Me:** You're awake.

**Sedna:** I feel disoriented. Where am I?

**Me:** Look around. You're in the nest.

**Sedna:** Oh yes. Time to go I guess?

**Me:** Yes

**Sedna:** Okay then. Let's get me out of here. And thanks for waking me up.

**Raven:** Here take this, put it around your neck

**Sedna:** What is it?

**Raven:** The way out. You know you can always leave. You always have choice. There is a way out of this one.

**Sedna:** Why would you take me just to tell me I have the choice to leave?

**Raven:** I didn't take you, you agreed to come. You can also make the decision to leave.

**Sedna:** You won't be mad?

**Raven:** Oh I never said that. I only said it is your choice.

**Me:** I'm falling asleep!

**Sedna:** Is this discussion too unpleasant for you?!

**Me:** I'm here now, this isn't what I expected. Is there anything else you want me to see, to notice, to learn?

**Sedna:** That's enough for now - it's time to move on.

### **Part 3.**

The raven is away and does not see her escape with her father until they are far from land. He stirs up a big storm in his anger and Sedna falls overboard. Wanting to save himself, her father tries to give her up to the ocean, but she will not let go of the boat. He hits her fingers to loosen their grip and one by one, knuckle by knuckle, they fall off into the icy water. Sedna sinks with them to the ocean floor.

### ***Intention.***

I will continue to tell the story and stay in the process: stay in the freedom of spontaneous creativity.

### ***Narrative.***

I start once again a couple of days later but this piece goes on for three months. I struggled with the materials, the process, the product and cannot bring myself to witness it until the pressure is so great that I have to. It is also around this time that I realise that I have been omitting a large part of the Sedna story. At the end of the myth, when Sedna is

a goddess, she often becomes angry at humans for over fishing. She sends storms and withholds food from them until they appease her by sending down a shaman to comb her tangled hair. When she is appeased she once again releases food for mankind to eat. I wonder how I could have missed that she was an angry Sea Goddess. It makes me wonder about my own anger.

Again I'm having a hard time. I press on and hang the piece on the basement wall. It feels so different from the other pieces. I decide to get some fabric to soften it. It is the perfect size. I really don't know where to start though. I paint the raven. My intention is to tell the story and stay in the process. There is a story wanting to be told in this way. I decide to ask the piece how it wants to tell the story and follow that. Immediately, I see the loose string and decide to tie it up. That goes well and I start to paint white and black. This works for a while. Sedna emerges and then turns into her father. The fabric moves up to boat position but I just can't do it. It doesn't feel right and I don't know what it is. I am drained, hungry and have a headache. Upstairs it is grey and bleak. What a horrible feeling. I decide to stop. I need a break. I don't know if it's the mood or the pressure I put myself under to get this done. I leave this until the next day.

Eventually I know it needs to come up from the basement. I move it around the house. Nowhere feels right. I am so angry at this piece. Finally I hang it where I knew it wanted to go in the first place; in plain view of everyone who entered the house in the dining room. The pressure builds until I have to witness it. I don't name it, but address it as P for piece.



*Figure 7: Sedna betrayed*

*Witness Writing*

**Me:** I don't know where to start. What do you want to say to me?

**P:** Let go.

**Me:** Let go of what?

**P:** Trying to figure it out.

**Me:** What do I do instead?

**P:** Just be, live.

**Me:** Oh – so – no more grasping.

**P:** Yeah – it was the grasping that caused this pain. I had to make her let go.

**Me:** Are you the father? There's something about your eyes.

**P:** I am Sedna, Father, Raven. I am the story. The story says that the father was afraid in the storm - when Sedna fell – the falling mattered. It was the role the father had to play in order for there to be a falling, a storm, a culprit, a victim. This is an endless cycle.

**Me:** How do I stop it? I don't want to be a victim. (I notice it always comes back to me – intention – stay in story – ask of myth). How can Sedna stop being a victim?

**P:** She can't. Not in this story. The story must change.

**Me:** Well, how? Because the story does change, but still Sedna clings and loses grip. I don't understand. How could the story change? Where is Sedna?

**P:** Where's Sedna?

**Me:** Yes.

**P:** She's in the water. Are you beginning to see?

**Me:** Yes. You are not to blame. You knew she needed to fall, drown, in order to find her power.

**P:** Yes. Climb to the heights and fall to the depths – to eventually go in.

**Me:** She marries a bird, (becomes part bird) and goes to the depths. I don't want to get ahead of myself. You look part owl; wise.

**P:** Yes I am wise. I know we must travel to the depths in order to gain balance, soaring to the heights is not enough, not the answer.

**Me:** The cloth, it reminds me of apron strings. Is that what this is? You rescued her from lofty heights and then cut the apron strings in order for her to stand on her own?

**P:** Yes, she needs to know her power.

**Me:** Why do you look so sad?

**P:** Because she doesn't understand. Because she thinks there is another way, but this is the way.

(I was interrupted but a few days later finished the witness writing.)

**Father:** What are you afraid of?

**Me:** I don't know, but I see this isn't the story. It isn't finished.

**Father:** Can you see her?

**Me:** Yes I see her.

**Father:** Well, finish it. Don't be afraid of the blood.

**Me:** I know I have to finish the story.

I take some time and add some blue wool along the edge of the boat, then pull out thin red threads for the blood. I am unable to finish the piece any further and decide that it is finished. I am also feeling very deeply about what is coming up in me as I work on

it. The sadness is extremely uncomfortable. I wonder if I moved too quickly in the story and whether I should have stuck to the plan to respond to each part of the Sedna story with art-i-facts before moving on to the next. I write,

After part 1 I don't think I was ready, even after part 2. It took going to the 3rd part and experiencing those feelings to realise that it is time to respond to the first two parts of the story with art-i-facts. This betrayal part, I see now, is a real jump in the story and still chokes me up. I didn't know how to put Sedna in it. I tried to get her point of view and maybe add her hands to the piece so I got down on my knees as though overboard and was looking up at my father (a wise owl?) and I felt so helpless. Gripping onto the cloth as though it was the side of the boat and I overboard, was a terrifying experience. The feelings of helplessness and betrayal... I knew that there was no way I could make those hands yet. Over the next three days of looking at the painting and the look on the father's face I was haunted. I do think now I will leave it as it is. I ripped off the cloth yesterday and ripped some of the paper underneath, but I think I will put it back; all that to say, it is quite a jump in the story. Pacing myself, knowing myself and following what feels right, I need to go to the box of art-i-facts that I've put aside and begin. I have no idea what to do. Well I've thought of ripping them all up and making paper maché but there's obviously a step between that: the sifting and sorting. What to keep? What to let go of? What to glean?

I begin to sort through the art-i-facts and begin to read through my journals. This is too difficult as well. I let myself feel, cry and breathe. It's not so bad to feel. I only get as far as sorting the articles into baskets. The art is left now for months. I carry around a

real heaviness and get very ill. It comes to my awareness that this is all connected and I begin to pay attention again. I write;

I'm noticing a softening, an unfolding story with neither hero nor villain really, but just an is-ness: just a happening. This is the way it went. This is who I am and what I needed and how I got it. Hmm... I'm surprised at that. I'm also surprised at how I am still the same. This is me. I'm making changes when I feel trapped; looking for a more spacious way. I notice that I'm accepting my limitations: likes and dislikes. I keep thinking of the phrase 'expanding the range of play'. This is what we hope for our clients and it seems to be what I need for myself too.

Meanwhile, it isn't by accident that the class I had been avoiding, Theological Reflection, could no longer be put off since I was coming to the end of my program. While writing a reflection using the NAME method: narrate, analyze, make meaning; and enact (Kinast, 1999), I realised that what had been bothering me was losing a sense of forgiveness and innocence when I lost my faith. I needed to transform this loss and began to do so through artmaking and enactment. The last section of the NAME method is enactment 'in which the reflection becomes an integrated part of living in light of new insight' (Miller, 2011). Though Kinast was not talking about enacting through the art I knew the power of doing so and carried out the assignment in this way. Through the artmaking I was able to come to terms with the unconscious belief that letting go of a past hurt meant abandoning my self. Though this would have to be remembered many times this experience solidified that knowing and became an integral part of my artmaking throughout the remainder of the study.



Not long after this, we decided to take a job offer in Yellowknife with my husband's work. We sell our house and move to the land of Sedna, across the country. It is not until we are all settled that I pick up with the art again. Every day feels like a living part of my thesis as I am immersed in this place where the whale bone carving came from. The move has a dream like quality and I know that I am working out what needs to be worked out. I start a photo album of found objects entitled 'Lost or Found?' I play with land art on the beach and walking path near my house. I enjoy the novelty of anonymity, the north, and long days of sun. I learn to sink into the process and not to push it. I take Nia, practice yoga and begin to learn the rhythms of my body.

#### **Part 4.**

As her fingers sink though, they turn into whales, and seals and all sorts of companions for Sedna. She, in turn, becomes a mermaid and the goddess of the sea.

#### ***Intention.***

To allow the process to unfold, to let go and enter imaginatively and softly.

#### ***Narrative.***

I decide to play with pastels instead of working on the Sedna story because I feel stuck. It feels good to stretch and work on the floor with a big piece of paper. It does inevitably become Sedna falling down into the sea.



*Figure 8: Sedna falling*

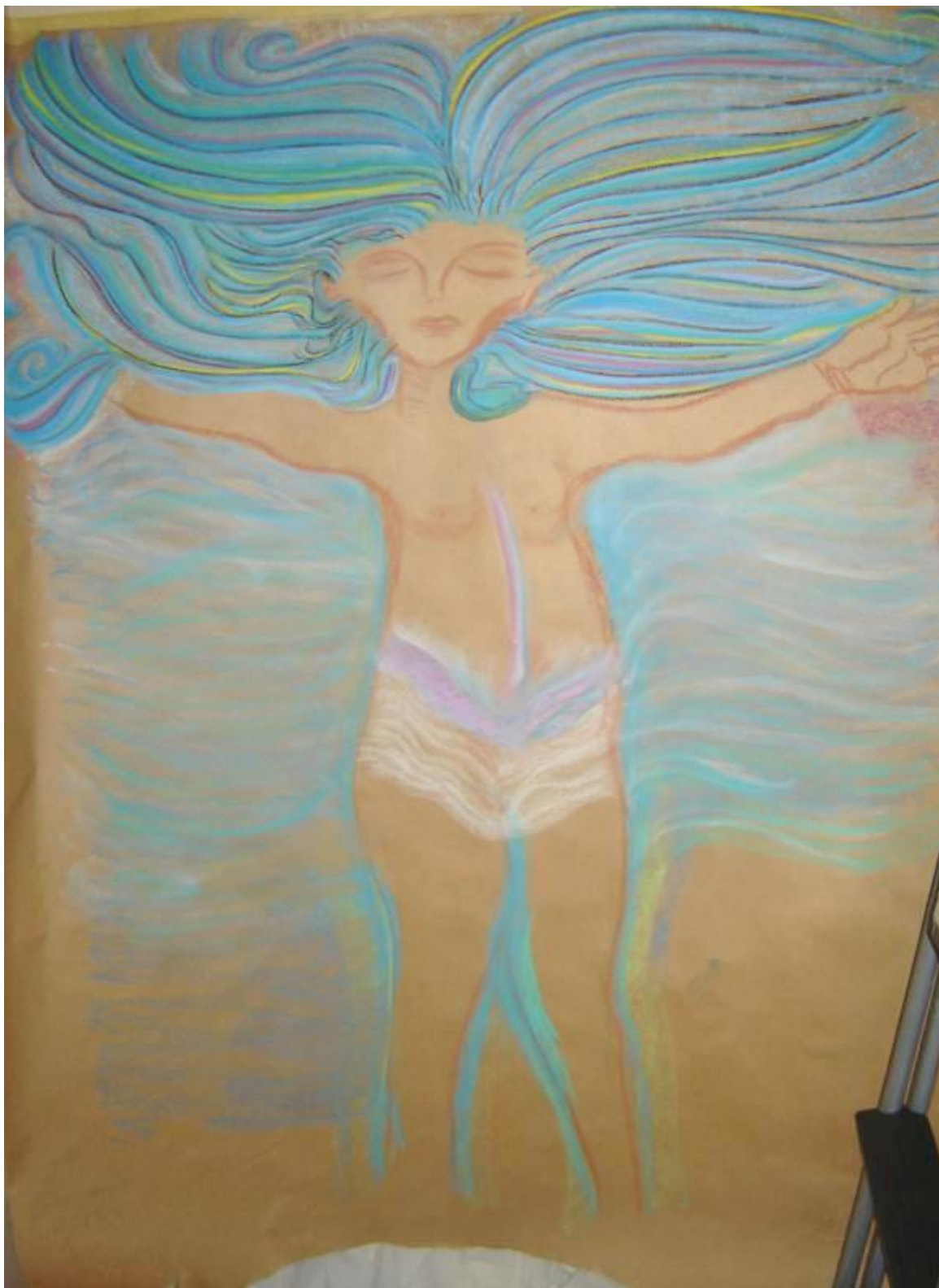


Figure 9

*Witness Writing*

**Me:** Olivia (the cat who always reminds me to be soft with myself) has crawled up on my lap. Sigh, I'm not sure why I'm so reluctant to address you. You look an awful lot like me. Your body looks an awful lot like mine when it was little. I'm not sure why you're naked. I want to make you clothes for those freezing waters. Or maybe just to cover up your nakedness.

**Sedna:** It doesn't matter either way. My nakedness is not the point. This is who I am. Let go. Back in waters of rebirth.

**Me:** It's been nine months almost since the Theological Reflection course (when I enacted Sedna giving birth to a third way). What are you doing there?

**Sedna:** Floating, drifting, carried, changing. I've let go of everything. I give up. I think I'm going to die.

**Me:** Why do you look so young?

**Sedna:** I am young. My body memory is young. I'm letting it grow; get bigger and change. I need to grow now. It's tiring keeping it all in, sucking and tucking.

**Me:** How do you let go like that?

**Sedna:** I breathe. I 'be' in savasana (corpse pose) and follow my breath, passively attending, following energy.

**Me:** I could fall asleep right now

**Sedna:** Go! Lie in Savasana with me. Let go. You can heal your body simply by laying in Savasana.

20 minutes later...

**Me:** I'm back. I fell asleep. It is peaceful and easy.

**Sedna:** Ah, don't be fooled, so easy, but look at my fingers! That's what got me here. I am falling and nothing keeps me afloat.

**Me:** What can I learn, or know, or do?

**Sedna:** You can let the water take me, let it cover me, let me sink.

**Me:** But you seem so little. I want to rescue you, pull you out of the water.

**Sedna:** You need to tolerate my sinking, my death. The child can't be saved, preserved; only in death is there rebirth. What are you so afraid of?

**Me:** Forgetting.

**Sedna:** Then forget, for get; before getting. What was it like before getting?

**Me:** I don't know.

**Sedna:** Then there is nothing to lose. Paradox. Let go, forget. Breathe. Let the water have me, clean me, wash over me.

So I let her go under. I took the chalk (white) and went over her starting with her arms and hands. I couldn't do her face. All the way down. It felt good. Then I went back up to the top and added definition over her throat, mouth and nose. I noticed ears and when they were under water it felt good to go to the top again and cover her hair and head. It felt good. I needed to hunt for enough white to cover it all.



*Figure 10*

***Intention.***

To play, to approach Sedna, spirituality and my body like I have learned to in the creative process; like I approach anything else. To be open and play and delight and nurture.

***Narrative.***

I'm a bit perplexed because it's so different. Is it time? Yes, I think it's time to let go of legs too, to build a tale once again. The tail feels like power, not a bad thing and the marks on her body, I'm not sure. I have the urge to put chakras on her and maybe I will because I want to. And the marks; they are healing marks, breaths maybe. Interesting where they are because of my Celiac disease and endometriosis. I don't know.



*Figure 11*





*Figure 12*



*Figure 13*

*Witness Writing*

**Me:** You are so beautiful and big.

**Sedna:** I don't want to look. I feel so betrayed. I'm ugly.

**Me:** I can see you're not ugly. I can see a beautiful strength emerging.

**Sedna:** You took what you loved and played and I know I will be beautiful.

**Me:** I don't know what to say. I feel 'foggy', not tired but absolutely clueless how to witness this, and maybe because I'm not done, I don't know.

**Sedna:** I'm asleep.

**Me:** What? I don't understand.

**Sedna:** How can you expect me to talk when I haven't awoken yet? Do you want to wake me up? What will it be like for you when I waken? Are you ready? That is the hesitation. Are you ready to be powerful, beautiful? This tail takes time. How much more do you need? The ice and snow melted... I'm still sinking. You've got quite the intricate and tedious tale; ethics review, and the burners simmering. Are you ready to turn up the heat?

**Me:** I don't know and Yes! I want to be ready.

**Sedna:** Then move! Keep going!

*Intention.*

I let my soul speak freely. What nourishes? What delights?



*Figure 14:* Sedna becoming a mermaid

*Narrative.*

I feel disoriented when I actually stop what I'm doing and come to art. It's as though I have all of these feelings, leanings, urges to move; like I almost get it. Yet then when I've got to actually move to art, it vanishes and I don't know what to do. It's almost like I'm not quite prepared; the materials aren't quite right, the room isn't good enough, I want it mounted on the wall so I can work on it properly and then... I need to let go of that too, and let things shift, change, be, breathe. I catch myself doubting. I worry that I'm changing the plan. Then I remind myself of the intention and the energy shifts. I have trouble 'sticking to the image'. Sedna and I merge. The image feels more like me. I decide that the mermaid image can't be completed until I tell my parallel story. Using the articles that I had grouped according to my age I begin to tell my story.

**Phase 2: Responding to the Myth with Art-i-facts****Part 1: 0-12 years.***Intention.*

Being gentle with my younger self, tending to what she experienced. The intention is to transform into something new.

*Narrative.*

I thought I would begin with becoming a Christian to correspond with Sedna marrying. I realised though, when I saw how many things I had from childhood that Sedna too had a family and an environment that she came from. I attempted to make these art-i-facts into the first layer of a paper maché piece. I was hoping it would evolve into a beautiful mermaid. It didn't. I grew increasingly frustrated with the materials; not only am I allergic to them, they won't do what I want. It turns into a big messy lump;

like an enormous undigested ball of wheat. I get angry and decide to change tactics and abandon the lump. I was also conscious that my Celiac disease went undiagnosed as a child. I wonder about the disease, a digestion problem. How much is it related to undigested childhood shame and fear?

I still have many art-i-facts though and have set aside the most important ones; the ones I love and the ones that seem to be a 'clue'; evidence that something was going on beneath the surface. Wanting to honour these pieces, I'm drawn to the family mural. I realise that I can't start the story with 'Sedna marries' (Figure 4). Sedna had a family, an environment, a history that lead up to marrying the raven. I know that all of these things lead up to choosing the path I did. I decide that these pieces correspond with Sedna's igloo and collage them on the mural.

When finished I write:

I can breathe! It feels so good and a bit sad too. When I look at it I can't help but cry. The good and bad all mixed up. It's the igloo in the first panel. It grew and grew and I see that her home/my home is a big part of it. My home, school and growing up, family, friends are a huge part of the story that needs a place, an honoured place.



Figure 15



Figure 16

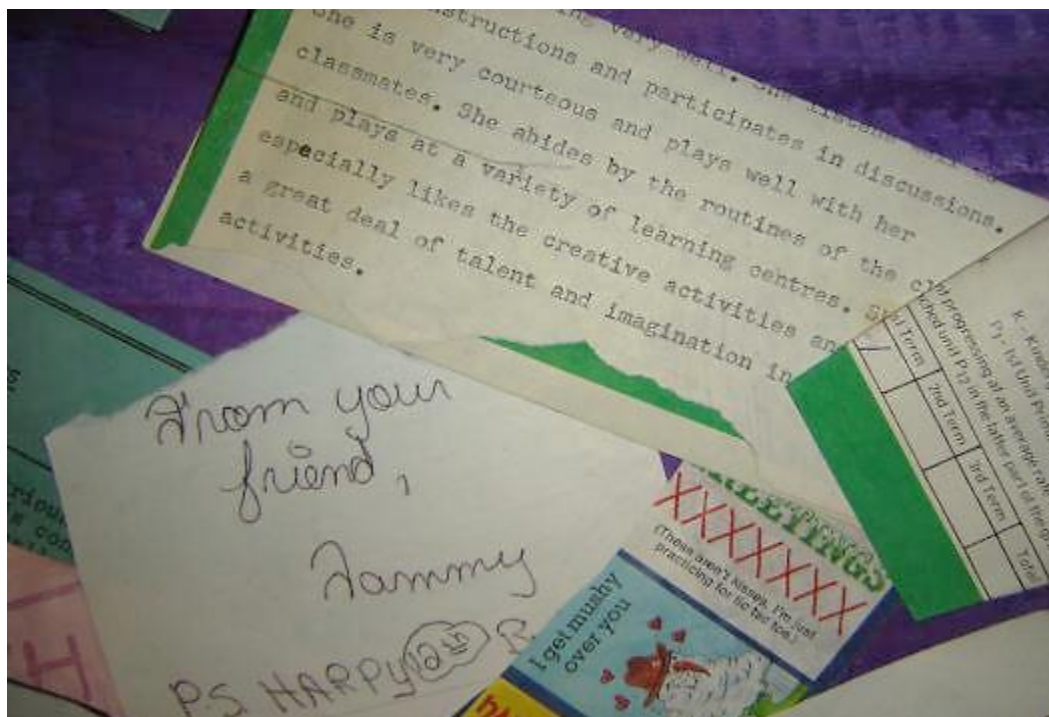


Figure 17



Figure 18



*Narrative.*

I watch a documentary ‘Horse Boy’ (Scott and Isaacson, 2009). In the film, an autistic boy and his parents travel to various shamans in Mongolia for healing. The next day after wrestling with angry feelings, I see the metaphor in the wheat lump and I know exactly what to do. I get ‘Sedna becoming a mermaid’ (Figure 14) and put the lump under the paper where her stomach is. I find release through enactment and the art. I write through the process.

Hagar \*

Sits like a stone

In the pit of her stomach

A bitter weed she’s had to swallow

The bile is sour in her throat

It burns, and scourges at the same time.

It begs to come up – she holds it down

Keeps it in check, normally

But exposed, in this heat, it rises against her will

She vomits it out on the dry hard earth, over and over

Her hair is tangled with it – with the chunks of it

She reeks of it; foul, sour, shameful vomit

The stench of it won’t wash out. Here in the desert there is no water, only sand.

\*(Rock in Arabic and the biblical mother of Ishmael and the Arab nation; Sarah’s handmaiden impregnated by Abraham, cast out when Sarah weaned Isaac)



*Figure 19: Sedna*

*Witness Writing*

**Me:** I don't want to do this. I feel sick and cold – small. I am so ashamed of myself.

**Sedna:** Look at me. It's just anger. It bloats, fills me up, like a dead fish.

**Me:** I'm so ashamed.

**Sedna:** Then let it go. If you hate it so much let it go. Come clean. Holding it in, festers.

**Me:** How do I get it out?

**Sedna:** Tell me about it.

**Me:** I'm a bad mother and wife. Tell me what to do. I feel like barfing.

**Sedna:** You know what to do. Come and get this out of me, carefully. You can see it won't fit through the hole, and must be taken out in pieces, carefully.

**Me:** It was the gut. I just didn't expect it this way, or to be taking it out. I hate this. I don't want this, I'm tired. I just want to be happy. Why is this happening? My life wasn't so bad, why can't I be happy? Free. So much heavy darkness. My shoulders are weighted down with it.

**Sedna:** Come and take it out. Pull it out. Get it out. Don't hold on to it. Unless you remove it, it will stay. It was never yours to take, let it pass.

I get a knife and make an incision through her stomach. I carefully pull out the paper maché which has now hardened into a very large stone. I pull and pull on my knees for at least an hour, until it is all out.

**Me:** I pulled and pulled – too much – too hard and you ripped/tore – the tape, like long intestine. It was difficult to pull out, strong and stubborn. I had to rip the paper in small

bits and pull it out, break up the maché. There was a lot. Do you feel better? I can't help but remember the dream about eating my baby. What is the devouring mother?

**Sedna:** The devouring mother – consumes everything in her path, she is insatiable, unable to be comforted. But the bile is gone now. Be sure to get out that last little bit, don't ignore any of it, it festers, grows.

**Me:** That lady sitting in a chair I saw yesterday, like a flash back, who was she?

(I have a vague recollection of a babysitter when I was around three or four years old)

**Sedna:** A devouring mother, mixed-up messages, confusing...

**Me:** What do I do with this stuff? This bile, sour, stinking, pile? Send it down the river?

**Sedna:** It doesn't matter. What matters is taking it out of me and my stomach. Get the last pieces out. My stomach is still wide open.

**Me:** I can focus on bile or you – I choose you.

**Sedna:** (I get the sense that she smiles at me, acknowledging that I have made the right choice.)

I cleaned out her stomach and taped up the wound. Then I taped on the feather that I found on a walk. I attached it on the wound by the base, and noticed how it could easily slip out when needed. "Needed for what?" I wondered. Then I knew it would be needed for sweeping. Then I carefully swept and 'let go' starting with her 10 cut fingers. Then I swept forgiveness through her hair, for me, for my family, for the darkness for everyone in my family. I swept (brushed) every bit of dark energy out of her hair and blew it away like the shaman I had seen in the documentary.

I wrote;

I combed her hair. (I don't even know how this happened). I feel excited, amazed, grateful, sad and tired. I would love to soak in a bath. I tucked the feather back into its place until next time it's needed. Her comb is a feather: a feather that she got from a scar. A scar from surgery: surgery to take out wounds of anger too long held.

**Sedna:** Thank you for combing out my hair.

**Me:** Thank you for letting me be your Shaman.

**Part 1: 0-18 years.**

*Intention.*

To stop waiting, to tell the story now, responding to all these pieces around me. Weave, bring it all together. I later refined my intention to allow those things needing peace to surface in the artmaking.

*Narrative.*

It takes three weeks before 0-18 is complete. It is also during this time that the Sedna Production painting meetings begin in earnest once a week. In the art something has shifted though it doesn't take long before shame comes to the surface again. I begin my ritual of art making with a candle and proceed again to sort and sift and pull things out from the 0-18 pile. Suddenly I see guilt and shame in all of the letters. I realise that I have been carrying around my shame, literally, in a suitcase. There were piles of unfinished business, letters not responded to or not responded to well enough, and some not even read yet. I found some letters that I wrote but had never sent. So many lost contacts: people I had been so close to.

I realise that I just need to put things on the board and make the environment. I get out the staple gun and energy shifts.

The staple gun yesterday was awesome – I nailed it! Three hours flew by especially when I became aware of the fact that moving so linearly fastening things on the board was blocking me. I was sifting through the art-i-facts and noticed how overwhelming it is to think of all that needs to be sorted through. I had to remind myself that I'm only working on the scenery!! I need to make peace with it. I don't care even if I just stick these on any which way, my impulse is that this is the environment that led me to get 'in the boat': to become the kind of Christian that I did. It all makes perfect sense. Even the reluctance I feel in doing this work makes sense.

I refined my intention to allow those things needing peace to surface in the art making.

***Intention.***

I'm letting things come to the surface; bringing it all up to speed; there will be no more pockets of shame. I remember the good too – the funny things.

I find a poem long lost that I wrote when I was sixteen, along with a cigarette of an old friend and fit them into the piece. It feels great when I've found a place for it all.



Figure 20

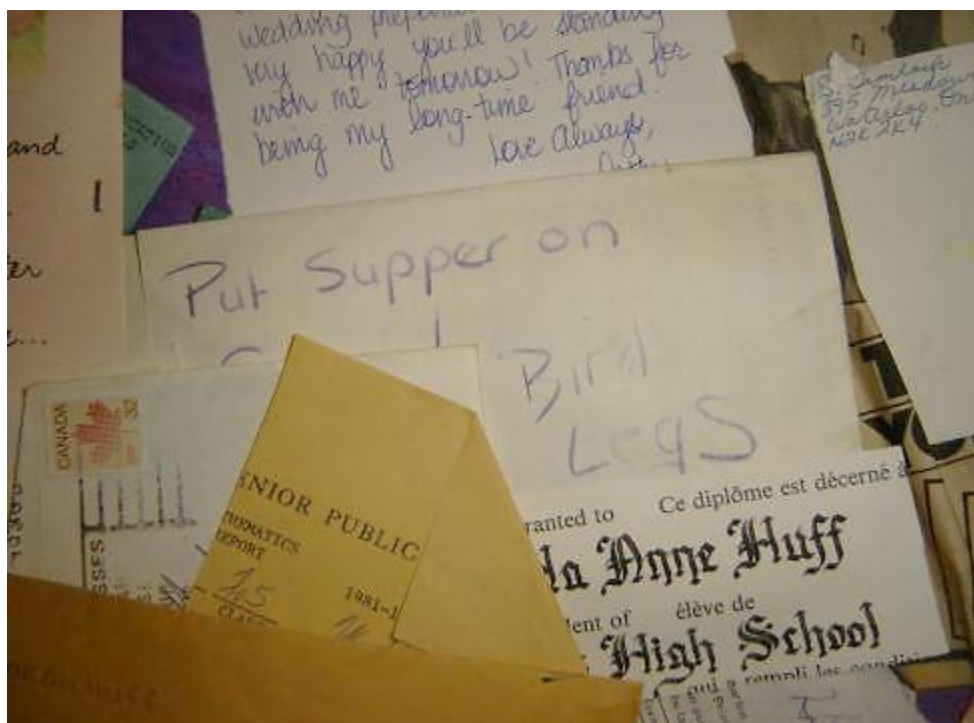


Figure 21



*Figure 22*

***Witness Writing: 0-18***

**Me:** It's funny how people see what they want to see when they look at this. Cindy saw JOY and Ben saw BEN.

**0-18:** What do you see?

**Me:** I see lots, so much that I don't think anything else will fit. Maybe those are intestines like Ben's digestive system project – this is what we should do – a paper sculpture. Nothing looks very digested; it is all still there as it was, preserved, like a dead child's room that no one has the heart to pack up.

**0-18:** Interesting metaphor. Are you the dead child in this case?

**Me:** I guess so. I was reading this morning about Inuit tattoos and beliefs. And found that the Inuit believed that there were many souls inside of us, in the joints. Sickness is those souls in the joints dying. I was thinking in terms of Sedna that when her fingers



were cut off joint by joint, that the souls inside were released, creating life. When she thought she was dying, really life was being released.

[all] disease is nothing but the loss of a soul; in every part of the human body there resides a little soul, and if part of the man's body is sick, it is because the little soul had abandoned that part, [namely, the joints]. Thus, if one of these souls is taken away, the member or limb to which it belongs sickens and possibly dies (Holm, 1914, p. 112 cited in Krutak, 2000).

It's as though little dead parts of me: little lost souls, dropped threads along the way. Some of the parts though – I've found – re-discovered, the poem, I knew it back then (we've got the spirit, no more looking for it) I don't know, it feels jumbled. What do you want me to notice?

**0-18:** That nothing is lost. That it's all here.

**Me:** Don't I see that already?

**0-18:** Not really. You're afraid that by covering this you will lose proof of love, proof of what you know, proof of what was wrong, proof of why. You're afraid to lose memories.

**Me:** I am afraid of not remembering. I feel like I forget so much.

**0-18:** Before you found the cigarette did you remember Nan?

**Me:** Yes.

**0-18:** Do these papers prove that you are good?

**Me:** No. They just provide a connection to the past – past lost. But maybe that's not the kind of connection I want anymore. I would rather have a live connection, not one that is sealed away in a box going musty. I don't want to minimize either how glad I am to have these pieces. I have loved going through them, as difficult as it was. It makes sense that

without mourning some of these things, they stay in undigested pockets and rot – along with the good stuff.

**0-18:** I think you're ready to move on from 18, 18.5...

**Me:** I'm afraid to miss something. Should I be doing something? Saving something? What about taking my Uncle's letters off? And the others..... uh oh –I am afraid. What do I need to do?

**0-18:** You're going to know as you move through this. Why are you going to Tunisia?

**Me:** To escape all of this.....

**0-18:** And what happened?

**Me:** More of this

**0-18:** So... continue in the way you do things now.

**Me:** How do I do things now?

**0-18:** You know.

**Me:** With sun and moon in balance; following the breath, following courage. What am I doing here? I feel like I lose the point...

**0-18:** You know. You are weaving, you are opening pockets, envelopes, finding lost things and caring for them with that part of you who knows how to tend , that part of you who wants to pick up the dropped threads and bring texture and colour – not keep pockets of paradox and pain neatly tucked away in envelopes – concealed. You are the master; weaving, working - not linearly but circuitously gently weaving the past and present and future into a malleable fabric not always making sense – but one that is full of the senses, it is sense. Weave in Tunisia – that is all you have to do. Follow your senses, they know what to do.

**Me:** Thank you, I needed that reminder, it is so easy for me to forget when I'm overwhelmed.

Afterwards I write;

So I did weave it in. Then I need to leave it – like yoga (what a timely gift!). No pushing or pulling.

**Part 1: 0-20 years.**

***Intention.***

I release and let go of Tunisia 'on the board'.



*Figure 23*



*Figure 24*

***Witness Writing: 0-20***

**Me:** Is this accurate?

**0-20:** Is accuracy the point?

**Me:** Not really. What is the point?

**0-20:** Remembering, expressing, telling your Sedna story.

**Me:** I guess that's here.

**0-20:** What would you call it? 0-20?

**Me:** No. Chunky, overwhelm, chaos, full, I'm not there. I am, but not. Invisible me.

About me. I purposefully left me out hmmm.... No room for me. This tells me who I am. You, tell me who I am.

**0-20:** And if you get out of your head and look at it. What do you see?

**Me:** Tunisian fish and symbols, unravelling thread, blue, orange, lots of stamps, texture, life, activity.

**0-20:** Faster! What do I say?

**Me:** Voices. I don't know. I feel nothing, stuck. No words. I feel tired. That's enough for today.

When I return to the art I go easy and enjoy painting the background to finish up phase 1.

**Part 1: Response to ‘Sedna Marries’.**



*Figure 25*

***Intention.***

I will play poetically. Leave literal and logic and feel it, transform it, and let it go. I know I need a well-crafted intention. What I know; something to act like divining rod. I bring up to speed mixed emotions; the joy of feeling clean versus underlying belief that to be human is to be dirty. I bring the two together. I enter an imaginal place today, weaving.

***Narrative.***

Before I even started I retrieved the ‘divining rod’; a branch I had found and wrapped in cloth with a mirror attached by weaving wool around it. I hung it on the panel after reading *Animal Speak* (Andrews, 1993) about the magpie nest in crook of tree and forked branches as the intersection between worlds: a doorway. I want to weave between these

two worlds and connect them. I also retrieved Sedna's feather 'comb' and found the writing from the first time I enacted the Sedna story in Vancouver about Spirit and playfulness. It said, 'I found spirit and it was not what I thought it was at all – it was playful'. I attached that to the rod and wool weaving. I put Sedna marries in sight and started to respond with journal pages. I then began to paste journal pages but didn't know how to represent Jesus and I. Then I realised it is, just is. Not good, not bad. Just me, trying to find me. The pages become more water, sky and sun.



*Figure 26*

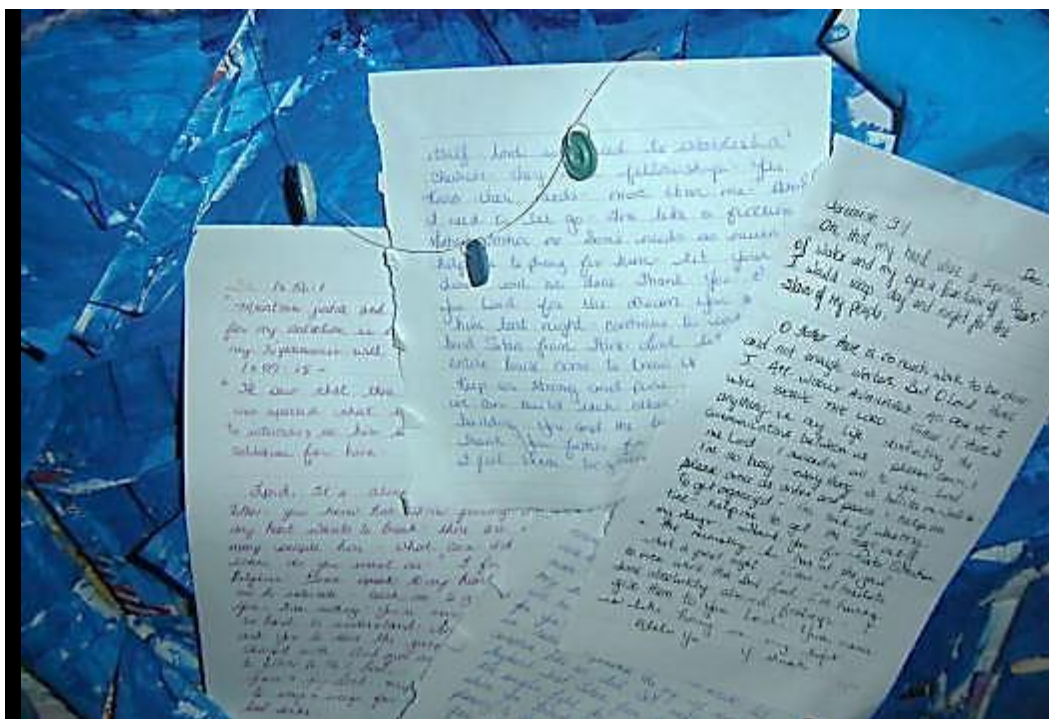


Figure 27



Figure 28





*Figure 29*

***Intention.***

I desire to play, join past and present, move, transform, and play with alchemy.

***Narrative of Enactment.***

I feel done and ready to let go as I approached the art again. I could hear my yoga instructor saying “Release when it comes, comes as a gift.” Looking through the journals was a monumental task. I had to approach this playfully. I knew that I was on the brink of knowing how to play with these serious things. Suddenly it came to me that I needed to wash the journal pages on the collage and let go of being so literal in responding to the scene from ‘Sedna marries’. The symbols didn’t have meaning for me anymore. I needed water. I mixed red and blue dye and began dipping journal pages in it. I methodically went through all of the journals and ripped out the pages that were



*Figure 30*

particularly disturbing. I dipped them in the water, soothed and cleansed them. I put water over the entire bottom of the piece and soothed it with my hands. I sprinkled the journals and the papers in the suitcase still needing to be disposed of when all of this is over. I lit the cigarette, and waved the tobacco smoke over the piece with my feather wand. I wore my peacock scarf. I gently let all the words go. When the tobacco was burned I took the wax from my favourite candle and poured it over the moon and cigarette to seal it; to seal the ritual. When I was done I wrote; I'm done. I know I need to be careful with this done-ness. It feels like a tender shoot, a new shoot that just needs some tender loving care.



*Figure 31*



*Figure 32*



Figure 33



Figure 34

*Witness Writing*

**Me:** I love you! Without thinking, that is what surprises me – how different this is – as a response to ‘Sedna marries’. It was so different at first, then with the feathers and water...you feel good, you feel beautiful. I can’t hear you speak, I blank. What is going on? Why don’t you say anything?

Are you sure you’re ready to hear?

**Me:** Yes – I’m a bit worried, but open.

This is the beginning, you haven’t even named me – you’re staying away, afraid to get close. Where were you Friday? I waited, you busied yourself. You wanted to rush on to the pretty sky. But there are still some things that need to happen here. You feel finished but you’re not.

**Me:** What do I need to do?

Feel. Settle. Give me the ‘attention’ I deserve! We’ve worked hard, don’t rush and throw it away. Let it filter through, help it filter through. You know the weekend you’ve had.

**Me:** Yeah, bumping into myself.

Let yourself bump! That’s good.

**Me:** My moods! It’s almost laughable! Is it not enough to dip them in water – soothe them?

Is it? There’s still a suitcase to deal with. You’ve set a stage. You played. Keep playing. You’re almost there. Do you know my name yet?

**Me:** No. Cleansing waters? Baptism? Cleansing waters when all felt well? Well – deep fresh spring? Spring, joy, dripping from my fingers, lips? Tipping the diving scales

in my favour. Forgiven. Free, magical. Safa (Safa in Arabic means purity). Thank you  
cleansing waters of baptism.

Soft gaze or smile

The next day I write,

So today when I look at you and ask who? I see me, that shadow rejected part of  
me. I see a lost part of me, found and reclaimed. Redeemed – re-deemed,  
deemed good again: the young girl, the preteen, young teen, teenager. It is neither  
good nor bad. It is just all remembered, re-membered, put back together. I see  
the young adult, wanting resolution, zealous, crazy and so sincere. I see the four  
elements; feathers, water, cigarette, tree branch. When I look at you now, I see a  
landscape. Twilight, pink sky, like ‘Sedna in the Nest’. I see many moons. This  
young adult self still has a landscape to fill in.

I decide to read the witness writing from ‘Sedna marries’. I think she will have  
something to say about this. I have ‘Sedna marries’ (Figure 4) talk about Figure 33. I  
know I am being too serious and I hope that this will shift that. Olivia, the cat, begins to  
play with the pieces as I move them around to talk to each other. I almost scold her and  
then stop! This happens all the time with the cat. She reminds me to play. She has her  
mouse hiding on one side, and is playing cat and mouse, hide and seek, lost and found.  
So that is how I’m to play with these tough things; physically. I join the cat. I hide  
myself in them under the cloth, ring the bells, jump out from behind them, and move  
around them playing peek-a-boo. I blow the feathers and drum them.

In re-reading the witness and I notice that I don’t want to make a mistake. I notice  
waiting for things to be perfect. I ask ‘Sedna marries’ (Figure 4) how to continue.

*Witness Writing*

**Sedna marries:** It is the same thing, but somehow... I don't belong there. This image of me – there's more isn't there? Not so flat – it's complicated. You've got it, captured it, I'm already up there. Leading to something leading to now.

**Me:** There's something blocking me – I don't know how to talk to this piece. Is it because there isn't an image of a person? Weird. How do I play with it?

**Sedna marries:** Voice, give it voice.

My body opens and stretches. I mirror the stick, the moon. It feels good to stretch in front of it: my past, my roots. My origins. I move like water. I play with buttons that sound like rain against the paper. I dive like the force of the moon. I back dive like the stick. Looking into the mirror, I see my eye. It looks old. I speak:

I am. I am beginning  
 Watery deep origins of youth  
 A fountain me – dripping with life  
 Hopeful like the moon, again and again  
 Full, busy, trying to make a mark  
 Be something – someone – important  
 Trying to make sense of the jumble-  
 Bring order, peace.  
 Bird comes –  
 Tobacco comes –  
 Water comes –  
 Tree comes –  
 They point to the way of remembering  
 The origins – of play, ritual  
 To order, get right – that way of Hubba Bubba!

**Sedna marries:** Thank you – I feel honoured, redeemed, I can rest now. I notice my breath, deep breath.

**Me:** You can rest now. You're not locked away any more. I brought you here, now. There you are; on the waves, in the sky, pink, pliable, sincere, zealous and ever hopeful. Always. Thank you for that.

**Sedna marries:** I feel like water, like feathers, like sparkles, like the spicy Indian moon, smooth, fluid.

**Me:** You're a part of me. Always here. You and me. Creepy? No.



## **Part 2**

### ***Intention.***

I let the soft animal of my body love what it loves. 100 miles of repenting? No.

(Oliver, 1986)

### ***Narrative.***

Mixing paint I get that purply pink. I love it! It is that morning walk and evening sky; I drink it up! It quenches some kind of thirst somewhere. As I'm painting finding what feels good, I notice the sky and water is smooth, and easy. The land is a bit trickier. It is more difficult to paint; it's not smooth. I take my time. I realize too, as journals disappear, that this is what I was afraid of: all of this disappearing. Once it's gone, then what? Not knowing what's next, what to do next, who am I next? That is scary. Building a landscape when I've been in the sky and sea for so long is a very daunting task! I stay in the senses.

I look at and make beautiful colours. I find the brushes and strokes that feel good. I listen (the music has stopped). I listen to the crackle of paper, like painting paper maché, it feels good. I bring up what I learned from the sea: soft blue water. The little sturdy brush feels right. A group of pages want to fall off, will they? Will I leave them if they do? I continue to paint, they don't fall off. I don't do anything. I play when I can't quite get the art right. I take the divining rod and wrap buttons around it. I say, "I bring you down to my ocean, bring you down from my sky." while I finish tying strings and weaving black and white feathers. It feels like knitting. I love it. It feels nourishing. Over the next few days I go through my journals from during the time I was overseas. I continue to oscillate between being serious and playing.



*Figure 35*

***Intention.***

To open: open up to see the raven's gifts.

***Narrative.***

I continue to set intentions and place 'Sedna in the nest' (Figure 5) in view. I took the feather and key from the raven in Figure 5. It's as though he's saying, 'Take this key, here! Take it. Time to go! Wake up! Wake up! Wake up! Ding, ding, ding!'

Over the next few days the intention becomes a desire to finish, and a desire to find and create hope. I find myself fixing, re-landscaping the piece. I flounder in the not-knowing. I keep imagining the vampire energy of the past, sucking energy from the present. I imagine stabbing the piece like one would kill a vampire by stabbing it in the heart. I don't trust or enact the urge yet though. For now I finish and witness the piece.



*Figure 36*



*Figure 37*

*Witness Writing*

**Me:** I don't know where to start. I keep catching myself: self-criticism. If I ask too simple questions or state the obvious – I stop myself. So I really want to ask what do you have to say to me about being stuck in a nest – and waking up, becoming conscious – but it sounds dumb so I hesitated. Thinking too much!!

**Landscape:** Maybe that's what I have to teach you, thinking too much, you're worried how the sky looks, how the aurora aren't right, about what the red shiny papers are supposed to be... it's a work in progress and nowhere near the end, so what's the problem? You know it will change, you know it can change. Why not look to what you like?

**Me:** I like the trees. Surprisingly, they feel grounding, solid, yet mysterious. I like them, my eye is drawn there. I also like the bottom and how it makes me feel like I'm standing on a deck, looking at it. Like I'm right there – I barely even look at the sky – my eyes go to the tree.

**Landscape:** What are you standing on? Your houseboat? Or are you really in the water, sitting on the edge of a rock with your feet in dangling in, trying to decide whether or not to get out and come to land?

**Me:** Hmm. Maybe I am deciding. Land isn't feeling so bad. It looks warm. I could start a fire there.

**Landscape:** The trees call, the moon waits, the stars are waiting watching, and the aurora hold their breath. The sky is so busy, calling, dancing, trying to get your attention – Wake up!!

**Me:** I want to go over and put those red pieces in the water

**Landscape:** Yes – go ahead.

**Me:** It's as though those things I learned in the water help to carry to the land. I can see her tail under the water, there are glimmers of her.

**Landscape:** She's definitely in the making.

### **Part 3.**

#### *Intention.*

I desire to finish the art today; to respond to Sedna betrayed (Figure 7). To let it go. I can see my worlds merging.

#### *Narrative.*

I look through my journals with a heavy heart. It is difficult to look at the journals of the not-knowing time of losing faith. I don't know what to do with them. The only thing that feels right is painting. I ask 'Father/Sedna betrayed' (Figure 7) how to let go.

**Father/Sedna betrayed:** Puncture and let go. Look in my eyes and see. Yes, they are Sedna's eyes. That's me, Sedna, letting go of this metaphor. The Sedna-girl, I am letting go, not my father; that is me deciding to let go of that story.

The eyes in the image have haunted me ever since I made it. I let go again by puncturing the piece with a screwdriver and hammer and pouring blood/paint into the holes, to blood let: drain the life out of this story, the victim story. I blow on the red paint; forcing it into the puncture wound. I get my feather wand and wave it around. Then I just want to add blue. The old energy is gone; letting go is moving on: painting water and sky. I add a lot of paint and then get a soft tipped brush to mix it on the canvas. I add white and it is very dark still. It bleeds to an almost 'light' on canvas. Some stars disappear, the jewels, I need to let it dry. The piece looks ruined and I know

it's not. I know that as I write, tomorrow I will play and create and this will help me to feel centred, to focus, to process. Light comes in the morning. I name the piece 'Surfacing' (Figure 38).



*Figure 38: Surfacing*

*Witness Writing*

**Me:** I see night. I see land, cold deep water, dark night sky, stars, and moon. I don't know whether night is falling or morning rising. I don't know what I thought was coming. It's hidden again. Do you wish to speak?

**Father/Sedna Betrayed:** Ha! Yes! Now you know how I feel. I thought it was a rescue but it was the worst betrayal. How will I live with myself now? She is down there, cold, dark, deep water – frozen! I killed her! I maimed and murdered her! How could you let me do this?

**Panel – Surfacing:** Let me speak! Quiet! Can't you see? You're looking at the wrong thing. Look at my waters – they are rich, deep, the plumb lines go down! She is not alone. Look at my sky! She is under the same sky! The moon wanes, wastes away, disappears, and returns in fullness every month. What is this despairing? Who wants all this despair? What is night if not day on the way? What is day if not night – not yet? Be still, know, remember. Don't judge but live.

**Me:** Do you understand father? As long as I am the daughter I can't understand. Do you understand? I can't be the daughter anymore. I have to be Father/Mother. I need my hands.

**Both panels:** You have your hands – use them.

I think of the feather and how I've interacted with the art. The rituals that have released so much energy. I wonder too, have I found my answer, have I regained a sense of spirit?

**Phase 3: SEDNA - Music. Dance. Paint. Legend.*****Intention.***

To enjoy the telling of the story through paint, and embodiment; to embody it *and* let it be outside of me as well.

***Narrative.***

I had been working weekly for the show for 10 weeks. The show corresponded with the ending of my artmaking. It all came together perfectly; yet at the time I did not know that I would need an entire year to absorb and digest all that had gone on in artmaking. Through the Sedna production I experienced the story in a way that I never could have on my own. It allowed me to see the story from a completely different point of view; the perspective of the script writers, the dancers, the musicians, other painters and the audience.

When I entered into the story with others, I no longer had control of how the story went. This opened me up to see important parts of the story that I had missed. As a painter I was on the outside of the story and got to see Sedna performed. This helped me to let go of the story, just as I was doing at home – as a painter. The dance and music added another dimension that brought the story to life and gave it substance. The story all along had resisted being reduced, the production kept it complex and complicated. It added dimension, which in turn saturated me with the story and let me have complex and complicated musings. I was living, breathing, and eating Sedna. This too, helped me to eventually let go of someone else's version of Sedna.

Some journal excerpts:



I read the advert for the Sedna show. They called her the goddess of the underworld. I was shocked and a bit bothered. Is that it? The shadow surfacing? Has this been about confronting my shadow? Sedna. I thought she was the goddess of the sea. The sea, feminine conscious, the unconscious, the shadow, the underworld? It makes sense and I'm still surprised I've spent 2 years loving my shadow?

I was also surprised at the ending – as she sends the dancers off stage, letting them go. It is sad, they don't want to leave her either – but she does it. There is something in performing though about sadness being acknowledged and seeing others cry and cheer. I felt as though they got how hard it was for me in my story of losing faith.

I was reading the bulletin given to the audience and I still don't resonate with the 'lesson' of the story that is mentioned, though more vaguely so in the production; that she learns a valuable lesson about vanity! I like though, that the story isn't exactly how I would tell it; it brings different perspective.

I have been thinking about the connection between Sedna giving up the animals to the shaman and giving up prized wounds - letting go of the past, hurt, and the wounds that had become identity and companions. I never thought of that before until I asked Mark what he thought of the performance last night. I was interested in whether he thought the moral of the story came through about vanity. He spoke more of the hunt and giving up the animals to the Shaman; something I had never really considered. I still cannot get over that the painters are Shamans in the story; we approach her and comb her hair.

Though the story is emotional, I feel free of it. It feels outside of me now. The story will always be special but surfacing, it will and has changed. Now I'm ready to enact another story.

What I didn't see at the time was that by enacting this version of Sedna, I had vicariously enacted where I was at psychologically with the Christian story; still seeing it as an irredeemable and hopeless story. Just as I had done with Christianity, I was ready to leave Sedna completely behind. I had loved the performance but the ending was so fatalistic. Like a Fundamentalist perspective on the gospels; the focus is on punishment and sin. The good news feels sad. Sedna: Goddess of the Sea! Mother of All the Wonderful Sea Creatures! This Sedna is perpetually sad and lonely? It is no wonder that I wanted to enact another story. I remember first hearing this version of the myth and feeling ashamed that I was so vain that I thought Sedna could have a 'happy' ending. Immediately I was caught up again feeling lost. I couldn't quite let go of Sedna though, the way I had with Jesus. Themes of her still permeated my life. It took almost a year for the data of all the artmaking to percolate before I could be clear about following Sedna and where that led me in terms of telling my story with Evangelical Fundamentalism. The following chapter presents this discussion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The psyche consists of two incongruous halves which together should form a whole. Conscious and unconscious do not make a whole when one of them is suppressed or injured by the other. Both are aspects of life. Consciousness should defend its reason and protect itself, and the chaotic life of the unconscious should be given its chance of having its way too. This means open conflict and open collaboration at once. That, evidently, is the way life should be.

This, roughly, is what I mean by the individuation process. As the name shows, it is a process or course of development arising out of the conflict between two fundamental psychic facts. How the harmonising of consciousness and unconscious data is to be undertaken cannot be indicated in the form of a recipe. It is an irrational life-process... Out of this union emerge new situations and new conscious attitudes. I have therefore called the union of the opposites the “transcendent function.” This rounding of the personality into a whole may well be the goal of any psychotherapy that claims to be more than a mere cure of symptoms. (Jung, 1959, p287-289)

The focus of this inquiry was recovering an articulate sense of spirituality through art making. I asked what would happen when I intuitively followed a numinous image with the intention to tell the story of my journey with Evangelical Fundamentalism. Essentially, this re-search has been about grasping the ineffable. Finding words to describe a wordless place is no easy task. Over and over again I experienced a ‘forgetting’. It was as though I was trapped in an endless game of lost and found. I

would gain a perspective that felt like I had finally found an answer only to turn around and lose it. Even now as I type I am struggling to express this continual state of being in the 'not-knowing' in order to know something as ethereal as spirituality.

This is what I have come to know about the nature of spirituality: we cannot grasp it. Like an ephemeral vapour it slips through our hands when we try to pin it down. We cannot know it with our intellect. It refuses to be reduced. A theory, a creed, or an explanation cannot contain its essence. Its very nature is knotty and complex. The realm of the spirit is navigable only in the dark: through the senses and intuition.

The arts allow for such a search when we allow them to be varied and multifaceted. They provided me with a way to keep the questions and answers complex during my search. The Sedna story allowed me to view my story from many angles and experience it in every cell of my body. The artmaking process taught me something about integration and the individuation process. Following Sedna through artmaking I learned how to set a stage for the conscious and unconscious to be in open conflict and collaboration at the same time, in order for the transcendent function to emerge.

The result was that I realised that spirituality is not something that I needed to figure out and articulate with words or find in a concrete image rather, it is an integral part of the life-long process of individuation. This is a creative process, a continuous flow of following impulses, instincts, and synchronicities; an attitude of not-knowing. It is also, like the creative process; a continuous cycle of losing and finding; getting and letting go; birth and death. Spirituality does not diffuse the tension between the opposites but necessarily welcomes it. Nor is it a destination. It is a continual process, a place where we bring our questions and our awe.

In the arts I found a partner for dancing in the dark, for this is what not knowing feels like. Not only did they offer a way to remain open, let go, and gain new perspectives for transformation, they allowed for enacting the inner transformations outwardly so that the image embodied, registered in every cell of my being. My story needed enactment with all its rituals, movement and voice, performed until every cell of my body had a chance to express what it was like to lose my faith as well as to feel again and witness what it was like to still be stuck in a hopeless version of Christianity that I was telling myself. Only then could I let go and move on. This awareness came gradually through a continuous rhythm of lost and found, letting go and moving on in various art modalities and life experiences on a daily basis. Eventually, they became a spiritual path; a way to that place where I go to find myself through something greater, again and again.

### **Lost and Found**

Among the things I had been telling myself about my spirituality was that I had lost it. This was a huge loss that included the loss of my vocation as a missionary, the support and fellowship of a large community and a familiar way of life that was somewhat ordered and structured; it was a culture in itself to which I belonged and played an important role. When I lost that, like Sedna losing her fingers, I felt powerless and alone: as though I had lost everything that mattered. It felt like a death, except that it was a death unacknowledged. Nobody mourned but me. Like the Inuit belief that we have many souls in the joints of our bodies that cause sickness when they die, I felt sick; carrying around a dead soul that I couldn't bring back to life.

Following Sedna I came to a different realisation. In my journal I wrote; ‘I was thinking in terms of Sedna that when her fingers were cut off joint by joint, the souls inside were released, creating life. When she thought she was dying, really life was being released.’ All of those things I thought I had lost became life-giving nourishment to my soul when I was able to release them, like the sea creatures released, by Sedna, to sustain the Inuit. The artmaking and witness writings provided insight into the parts of fundamentalism I was still clinging to, as well as a way to let them go and find them again in myself.

### **Forgiveness**

Part of the study that surprised me was realising that I had equated losing faith with losing a sense of forgiveness. I discovered too, that this same thing: cleansing from shame had been part of what had drawn me to faith in the first place. Forgiveness through being ‘washed in the blood’ was the only way I knew of that could deal with this feeling. Without salvation, I was left with an underlying, all pervasive feeling that was beyond awareness; it was a deep sadness.

Kaufman (1989) who has researched the psychology of shame extensively likens the inner experience of shame to soul sickness. “If we are to understand and eventually heal what ails the self” he says, “then we must begin with shame” (p. 5). This sickness can be overcome when the shame stories are told where they can be received with reverence (Bass & Davis, 1988, Pinkola Estes, 1992). The Sedna story provided me with a way to tell and enact my story reverently and safely. Our stories overlapped and merged in an embodied way that brought release. I became immersed in the story from many perspectives; Sedna, raven, father and shaman. Being a shaman and combing

Sedna's hair, I combed mine, by removing the stone from her belly, I removed mine. By soothing her in the art, I was also calming myself about the sadness around accepting and letting go of these precious wounds.

Von Franz (1972) speaking of the Sedna myth, emphasizes the importance of the shaman combing out the lice and cleaning Sedna's head. 'This must be done every now and again', she writes, "There is a constant growth of autonomous contents in the unconscious, which can become destructive if man does not concern himself with them" (p. 45). When it came time to approach my own story and sift through journals etc... I realised that the suitcase full of artifacts was a suitcase full of shame. Once everything was collaged on the board, I was able to be the shaman in my own story and wash, wave and burn the shame away: forgive myself. I see this as combing out shame and anger; its affect. These are the shadowy elements of the unconscious that I learned to accept and in turn, integrate through loving Sedna.

It took quite some time after being immersed in research, before I was able to accept Sedna as an angry goddess. During the Sedna production I realised that I had spent two years loving my shadow through Sedna. Forgiving myself and letting myself be human were things I was able to enact first through Sedna's story and later apply to my own. Sharing my story became easier and changed from being 'the naïve girl who tries to save the world and fails' to 'the girl who wholeheartedly tried to save herself through saving the world, and did, and continues to do so'. Having compassion on the missionary and zealot in me released the shame I had been carrying. An incredible amount of energy is required to contain shame. As this came to awareness I was able again, to find release in the art. It felt like vampires sucking the very life-blood out of

me. In the art I found a way to, metaphorically, drive a stake through the vampire's heart and release the energy. At the time I thought that by pouring red paint in the holes I was enacting the killing, but afterwards I wrote; 'There is something about releasing these pockets and souls in the joints. I'm bringing back soul to the joints: to those places that have been abandoned by soul. In this there is resurrection. I'm pouring blood in: not bloodletting, but rather blood getting. I'm bringing life back. Bringing soul back! Releasing vampires; releasing wounds; releasing nourishment.'

Repressing secret material surrounded by shame, fear, anger, guilt, or humiliation effectively shuts down all other parts of the unconscious that are near the site of the secret.... No matter what kind of secret, no matter how much pain is involved in keeping the secret, the psyche is affected in the same way" (Pinkola Estes, 1992. p. 412, 413).

When this unconscious material is no longer repressed there is an incredible amount of energy and creativity released. Sedna's hair is combed; she releases nourishment for the Inuit. I felt an incredible sense of nourishing relief.

### **Authority Within**

#### **Confidence.**

There is such a shattering of world view when faith is lost; it is not surprising that self-image and self-confidence are undermined. I felt empty and insecure. Without a voice and identity I felt hollow, and life felt meaningless. Toyoda (2006) in 'Memories of our lost hands: searching for feminine spirituality and creativity' addresses this lack of self-confidence and self-worth in women who are unable to view themselves through their own eyes. They look at themselves through the eyes of others or as they think



others, (particularly males) perceive them (p. 11). She links this to the faulty idea of the true essence of women as being passive receivers. If we are unaware of viewing ourselves as such, then it stands to reason that we would also view our fundamental natures as “objects that can be recognized as an entity only after it has been filled with something from outside” (Toyoda, 2006, p. 12). This research project allowed me to test myself to see whether or not I needed to be filled with something from outside or whether I could locate something worthwhile within. Time and again, I proved to myself that there were riches within. What happened in the art, happened in real time too. M.C. Richard’s voice was often in my head as I forged a new life in the Northwest Territories. “You don’t want to leave your art in the studio do you?” (Kane-Lewis, 2004).

As I became a shaman in the art, recovering lost parts of myself, I began allowing what was happening in artmaking to spill over and give me courage to forge new relationships, set up a practice and engage in life wholeheartedly. I also trusted my instincts more. This had a wide and varied influence on my day to day life from parenting and buying a house, to how I conducted my research. I did not want any outside influence. I wanted to see what I could come up with alone. I also felt more connected to nature and her rhythms. I was amazed again and again by what emerged during the creative process that I was now experiencing in everything. The more I expanded my capacity for joy, the more I experienced a comfort with not knowing or defining spirituality. It didn’t seem as important anymore. What was important was feeling connected to the past, in the present. I didn’t feel lost.

I embarked on the daunting task of creating community. This also is an ongoing process. What brings us together now that belief in Jesus no longer unites? I approach it

the way I go to the art, knowing that there will be ‘soul’ mates here if I remain open. I decided what relationships, groups or activities nourish and I give myself to them. When I realise that something isn’t nourishing I give myself permission to retreat. I no longer feel obligated to save the world. This carries over to my practice as well. I don’t rush in or overextend myself. I follow the rhythms of my energy knowing that when I have the psychic space to hold them, clients will come. I am aware of my inner missionary and notice when she is trying to ‘help’ too much. I continually go back to the art to take my clients where they need to go. At home too, I notice her and continually have to let go.

Unearthing forgotten things ‘in the suitcase’ I began to find fewer clues about what went wrong and more clues pointing to something that had been trying to be whole all along. Finding Nan’s cigarette, unearthing the poem ‘Jayne and me’, and references to bubble gum wrappers (I collected them as a child and had recently started to collect again and use to make Sedna’s tale) gave me a deep sense of being connected to something bigger than myself.

While writing the proposal for this study, I made Sedna a mirror and comb since I was curious about these objects being part of a mermaid’s paraphernalia. I could understand the mirror; knowing that she called me to embody the tension of opposites reflected in her half fish, half human body. The comb though, I couldn’t understand at the time, because I had passed over the ending of the myth that depicts the ‘shadow’ side of Sedna as a destructive goddess. It wasn’t until I was ‘combing’ her hair with my feather (See Figure. 19) that I understood the meaning of the comb; that I had the authority to take care of my own psyche. These kinds of events occurred throughout the study giving me confidence that I was on the right track. Von Franz, in ‘Man and his

Symbols” (Jung, 1964), says of the individuation process that it is “real only if the individual is aware of it and consciously makes a living connection with it” (p.164). That I did.

Going through my journals from the time of ‘losing faith’ or ‘waking up’ as I now see it, I found that I knew back then, what I thought I had learned recently. I had been asking the same questions. This gave me the confidence to believe that my soul really did know what I needed and that I had known it for years. Having questions in my head and actively questioning are two different things though. Back then, I didn’t know that there was another way.

The intellect is not everything of our being. Sometimes people understand what is going on and what should be done, and yet they don’t act as if they have understood. Therefore, we have to practice so that that kind of understanding becomes a reality and not just a few notions in our mind. (Thicht Nhat Hahn cited in ramdass108, 2007.).

In this study I learned to weave my story into Sedna’s, the past into the present and the inside out. Enactment brought the changes into being and into awareness, from the ground up to consciousness. This takes reflection, support, time and awareness of resistance to go gently. Weaving these learnings through enactment is becoming a part of life.

I realised that what I experienced as a falling apart was the Shiva paradigm: destroying to rebuild. Even concerning faith, destruction is the other side of creation. This is so necessary; it is the path leading to creation. Letting go, at times prying the fingers open, is the only way to stay in the flow. Allowing the story to change, entering

the natural cycle again, following instincts can be as natural as following our breath; in and out. This is spirituality, a creative process not something apart from life, but integrated and woven into all.

### **Voice.**

This kind of confidence gives voice. In the past my sense of voice had come from having the right answers. I believed that knowledge about spirituality and the Bible came from the experts who knew and if I learned this body of knowledge then I, too, would know. I was what can be classified as a received knower: one who thinks that knowledge is received rather than constructed (Belenky, McVicker Clinchy, Rule Goldberger and Mattuck Tarule, 1986). For one who looked to authorities for the ‘truth’, losing this faith in the authorities was equivalent to losing my voice. No longer having arguments, backup or apologetics to defend my belief; no longer having any words to describe any sort of belief, I had no way to believe. “Women who rely on received knowledge think of words as *central* to the knowing process” (Belenky, McVicker Clinchy, Rule Goldberger and Mattuck Tarule, 1986. p. 36). The experience of wordlessness is a predominant theme of the study. The artmaking provided a wordless arena where I could express what I needed to through myth, image and enactment until I could find the words to express what I know. The process of writing up this body of work has also been a rich opportunity to articulate what I have come to know about spirituality.

### **Christ and Sedna**

Following Sedna helped me to let go of another part of Fundamentalism that I was still embodying: concretizing the Christ archetype. Though I had let that ‘story’ go, I still understood it literally, unable to appreciate Christ as an archetype of the Self and his

life as symbolic of the individuation process. Living and working out the Sedna story in multiple art modalities until I knew intuitively that it was time to let it go, allowed me to let go of the version of the Christ story that I had been telling myself as well. When Sedna had been enacted and told in meaningful and diverse ways, something new occurred; a desire and ability to preserve the parts of both stories that were meaningful.

Making art and witnessing the Sedna myth helped me to get a different view of the Christian myth. Like the raven, Jesus offers a key and the way out of being trapped 'in the nest'. Sedna's father is not a villain but a victim himself. I began to see the raven and the father for the role they played in getting Sedna to where she needed to be. They are not good or bad, just necessary parts in the story. As I softened to the raven and Sedna's father, I softened to Jesus and Father God. I notice an openness and wonder about where that will take me.

Following Sedna, I was able to play with the most difficult and serious question I have and will probably continue to have forever: how to hold the tension of the Great Mystery? How do we play with the very serious things that life throws us? Each of us has to find an answer to this existential question in our own way. For most of us, we relieve the tension by choosing one side or another. In my case the choice was to believe, or not to believe in the Bible as God's word. When I was young, I chose to believe and I thought that genuine belief was a literal understanding of the Bible. When I lost faith in the historical accuracy of the Bible, I didn't know how to have faith in God or the Divine. I did not know how to incorporate spirituality into my life.

Then in art therapy training I discovered the creative process and rediscovered the symbolic. In artmaking I experienced me and not me; something greater than myself. Is

this the Divine? I don't know, and yes, maybe, I think so. It is no longer important to name 'it' or label it as a noun. Following Sedna, it became important simply to listen to 'its' call through all of my senses and follow. And I did follow – to what sometime feels like the ends of the earth! There I found a certain aliveness in the listening and following. Maybe I can say that divinity is a verb and is only real as we experience it; following synchronicities and impulses. The struggle arises immediately as I write that sentence, for as an evangelical I felt that too. I felt a call to the Middle East and went. There were synchronicities that I noticed along the way. What is the difference? Sedna has taught me the difference: without a symbolic understanding of the Christ the soul dies (Wright, 2001, p.7)

This is the question and the answer to fundamentalism; how not to choose – literal or symbolic. Sedna showed me how to hold and see both. Sedna: the embodiment of opposites; holding tension; creating life. She was the perfect symbol for a literalist like me. I couldn't take a mermaid too seriously or literally, though the temptation was there to diverge into other areas of researching that would take me away from holding the tension. I bought books on the missionary impact on the way of Inuit life and the feasts of Sedna (Laughrand, Oosten, 2010, Mancini Billson, Mancini, 2007), I discovered that Sedna was named a planet in 2003 and read papers written about the astrological significance of this discovery and naming of this new entity in our solar system, as well as environmental studies that mentioned Sedna and climate change. Studies about mermaids and their significance in the medieval church were also tempting.

However, the task for me was to hold the tension and the question until I could hold and tease out the difference between the historical Jesus and the archetypal Christ.

Wright counts this essential to retaining the power of the Christian symbols to touch the inner depths of the modern person (2001, p. 6). Following a mermaid, I woke up to the possibility of looking again at Jesus and the Christian myth. I realised that there may be some value for preserving the symbols of the archetypal Christ. I am aware of the resistance to reclaiming these symbols that were once so important to me. I am afraid that I will forget to play; that once again the symbols will become literal and life again will become too serious. Will I have to go to church again? Will I feel guilty again and focus on the negative? This is part of the residue that still surfaces from the old paradigm. I will probably always have to remind myself to play like a mermaid. When I get too serious I see Sedna's sad face and remember that I no longer need that sad story. I find meaning and nourishment for my soul by letting that version of the story go.

At Christmas this year I got out the nativity scene. It belongs to my son; a gift from Lebanon. I have continued to set it up every year despite my struggle with Christianity. This year though I played with it and made a mandala.



*Figure 39*

I took the cloth from Sedna betrayed, with the three bells and placed it above the crèche as I played with it and arranged it in the just right way for me. I placed Mary and Joseph at the top; symbolising the masculine and feminine energies in balance. Around the outer edge I placed the ruminating animals; chewing, digesting and looking on, along with the wise men and shepherds. I gave each a black and/or white feather, symbolic of holding the opposites. This is something that animals like the magpie, orca, and lemur, teach us is possible with their black and white bodies. I laid down the camels, for it seemed like the end of the journey. I took Christ out of the manger, though he is still nearby. I symbolically placed myself in the manger. It is a bell wrapped in a purple ribbon, on a soft pink feather; things from a medicine pouch I created for Sedna during my last art therapy class. I do all of these things and yet even though I know that something is being born in me, I still don't see it. Awakening to the inner and outer Christ is a tender process that can't be rushed. It is not until now, as Easter approaches



that I can begin to see and appreciate both the historical Jesus of Nazareth and the symbolic Christ.



*Figure 40*

I call my friend, also a former Fundamentalist, to share about reading an article that uses the open studio process to gain fresh insight into rabbinical texts and biblical stories (Allen and Allen, 2013). I tentatively broach the subject of doing this with stories of Jesus. She knows about my journey with Sedna and shares in the struggle to find meaning after losing faith. I am surprised and elated when she says yes. We talk about creating our own celebrations and rituals and discuss creating our own ‘Leaving Fundamentalism Day’. Then we laugh to realise that this sounds like Easter; leaving enslavement, death and rebirth. Maybe we can make this is our Easter too.

And so I find myself where I began long ago, the same, though very different place. Having let go of Jesus and Sedna in the art, I find these Christ figures again. Jung writes:

The Self or Christ is present in everybody a priori, but as a rule in an unconscious condition to begin with. But it is a definite experience of later life, when this fact becomes conscious...It is only real when it happens, and it can happen only when you withdraw your projections from an outward historical or metaphysical Christ and thus wake up Christ within.” (CW:18:par.1638 cited in Wright, 2001).

### **Summary**

As I contemplated the unfinished business of my spirituality, the myth of Sedna appeared in my artwork. She lead me on a journey that allowed me to pick up and discard the pieces of a faith that I no longer ascribe to and transform them into something new and dynamic. This inquiry demonstrates the experience of spiritual transformation and healing through intention, witness writings and integrating various art modalities; visual, musical, dramatic, poetic and movement with enactment.

Throughout the study I created images and responded artistically to them in ways that were unique and unusual for me. I followed an internal guide that wasn't in synchrony with the timeline I had set out, nor did 'she' restrict herself exactly to the methodology that I had originally laid out. I entered into a relationship with Sedna; through images, through enactment, through the landscape of the North and eventually through telling our story in a multi-media presentation.

In following Sedna I became completely immersed in the act of “living fully with the image, enacting the gestures, the postures, handling the images until their truth entered [my] body as fully as [my] mind” (Allen, 2012, 19). Responding to synchronistic opportunities during the study became part of the process. At times I was completely awe struck by the way the art was affecting my outward life. I had no way to explain or

intellectually analyze what was occurring. My family and I were caught up in the flow of synchronicity to the point where it almost became the norm. Thankfully I had a very good thesis supervisor who was familiar with this path and who encouraged me to stay on it until it was time to bring the learning into the daylight.

Until the time is ripe it is important that “the generative powers of a creative expression (need to) be fed with a corresponding consciousness which appreciates and keeps their mysteries” (McNiff, 1998, p. 74). This teaching meant sticking with the image as long as was required and much longer than anticipated. I learned the importance of listening to that inner knowing. I could tell when I was off track and needed to connect with a friend, the woods, or the art in order to find my way back.

The structure of the myth also helped to sustain this focus. Explaining the function of myth throughout history, Grant (1962) says that myths serve to control, order, give shape and significance to what is otherwise chaotic. The myth provided the metaphor to order my spiritual journey from fundamentalism to a wider place. Weber, familiar with the function of myth in inquiry, describes it as a narrative scaffolding device that provides structure for the reader and the author (Mitchell, O’Reilly-Scanlon and Weber, 2005, p. 13). The myth of Sedna was a metaphor for my story of my individuation, spiritual transformation, a mode of inquiry and became a mirror calling me to move on even further. This is what arts-based research offers. It allows for playing with serious topics. Nothing is off limits from the creative source. I brought the most difficult question I had and found a way to play with it. My questions about Christianity and faith were worked out through a mermaid. Arts-based research allows the unconscious to come forward first through the body in artmaking and enactment, until awareness can be

conceptualised in the intellect. It also allows for the tension of incompatible beliefs to coexist until new knowledge is brought forth. Furthermore, research through artmaking allows for various modes of reflection which are critical for any researcher. Reflection occurs during the artmaking itself, living with the image over time, and witnessing the image through writing. Above all, arts-based research allows for dreaming the dream forward and accessing a rich wealth of possibilities.

I have come to know the creative process most intimately. I know that I can bring the most difficult, the most serious, the most taboo questions to the creative source, and that I will connect there with some mysterious something and be held, listened to and answered. I know there that I am loved. Is this God? I don't know. It doesn't matter like it used to. It is enough to know that in the creative process I can experience something bigger than myself. Me and not me. This is spirituality not so much as artmaking, but artmaking as a means to connect to spirituality and a larger community.

The creative process is a continuous flow of becoming, a flow that is in synchrony with the rhythms of Nature. My hope is that my story will resonate with those who struggle to make sense and find meaning after Fundamentalism in more creative ways of knowing; that they will find their freedom as I found mine.

### **Further Topics of Inquiry**

Though this inquiry comes to an end I think that I will be gleaning 'truths' from it for a long time to come. Areas to further build on this research would broaden the scope to include others who have lost faith and who struggle to recover a sense of spirituality, ritual and community.

From a larger vista, further research is needed to inquire about bringing the Sedna or Christian myth forward; like Jung's dreaming the dream forward. Our times call for new myths or versions of myths that speak to the souls of human kind (Allen and Allen, 2013). Do our old myths want to say something new? Is there more to say about Fundamentalism in its various forms that has captured so many today? Do the gospels have something new and unique to say about our world today? Is there a completely new story embedded there somewhere wanting to have its say? There is no doubt that the creative process can hold these questions.

### **Areas of Potential Application**

This study has possible contributions to the fields of Art Therapy and Spirituality, pastoral care, counselling and the training of religious professionals and clergy from many backgrounds. For art therapists the study offers insight into the creative process both in and out of studio, where synchronicity and embodying images are important parts of working with images. This phenomenon applies not only to us as a call to commit to an ongoing practice of artmaking, but also to our clients who may need support and direction as they go through transformations. The study also sheds light on the importance of guiding our clients to the creative process where they can become fluent and competent in the creative process themselves. As art therapists we need to know that we can bring any and all parts of ourselves to the art. We can only take our clients where we have been ourselves.

Pertaining to spirituality, this research gives insight to aspects of transformation from a perspective that is not often considered and brings the many struggles both going into and getting out of evangelicalism. Moreover, this study shows the struggles

involved in recovering a sense of spirituality that might not be initially obvious, as well as how the tensions can be held. This insight can be important for anyone working with those who have had a deconversion experience and who struggle with rebuilding faith.

### **Another Letting Go**

There is a dog with a bone that just won't let go

Meanwhile black and white embodied, soars in the skies and plunges in oceans

Meanwhile precious jewels glitter in and out from among the trees

And messengers lie curled up in their nests in the snow.

Meanwhile *Wilf's Steam* is at the door willing and able to thaw frozen pipes.

Oh Raven! You trickster! You tricked me!

I looked up startled, and dropped my bone.

This research, it seems, has been a long series of letting go. Like a dog that holds onto a bone, time and again I find myself clinging to things that have long lost their marrow. Nature reminds me to keep fluid; to let go and make room for the new. Sometimes in the most surprising ways we discover that to lose our life is to find it; that the end is only the beginning.

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**Appendix: DVD of the Performance: SEDNA - Music. Dance. Paint. Legend.**

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