

Listening Deeply:
A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Older Adults
in Relation to Place

by

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Abstract

While living alongside Grandma's stories of growing older in a small rural town in Australia, I became interested in the stories she told in her living room and what it meant to grow older in a place Grandma called home. As I thought narratively about her stories, I woke to the possibility that her stories of experience were being told within places which also reflected their social, cultural, and institutional significance. The opportunity to explore these experiences drew me further into narrative inquiry and a study in which I engaged with three women—Pauline, Alison, and Sue—who were 80 years and older. My research puzzles, informed by the stories I lived alongside Grandma, both as a granddaughter and nurse, included seeking meaning and understanding in older adults' stories of experience, particularly those relevant to growing older, stories to live by, and place.

As part of the conversations with participants, I gathered field texts which consisted of transcripts, photographs, and memory box items. The narrative accounts were co-composed with participants. Laying the narrative accounts alongside each other, I identified narrative threads which spoke to stories of remembering, imagination and playfulness, stories to live by, personal belongings, moving, feeling safe, and a sense of "not yet". Together, these threads weave the fabric of place. It was equally important that the stories that participants and I co-composed and chose to tell in the final research texts challenged the status quo of perceiving older adults as a burden, and spoke

creatively to the personal, practical, and social significance of our negotiated research texts. The research text describes the tensions in stories between my Grandmas', my professional stories, and society's and participants' stories of what it means to grow older in relation to place.

I realized at times I perceived older adults arrogantly, and the stories I lived alongside Grandma of "aging in place" and successful aging became my personal stories of what growing older in relation to place should look like. However, my relationships with Pauline, Alison, and Sue called me to pay attention to my arrogance, and by living alongside their stories, my past understandings shifted significantly and I realized who we are is deeply connected to place. I learned to embrace change within myself and to accept it as ongoing; not only in myself but also in people who surround me. Finally, I learned it is through co-composing stories with participants that I was able to shift narrative care to core care in my nursing practice. By doing so, care begins with experience rather than a person's age, clinical disease, or diagnosis.

Preface

This dissertation is an original work by Roslyn Maree Compton. No part of this dissertation has been previously published. The research project, of which this dissertation is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Listening Deeply: A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Older Adults in Relation to Place, No. Pro00034430, January 30, 2014.

Dedication

Where Do I Belong?

*Do you not know that I am a mother of three?
I have joy in my grandchildren
Wave to golfers across the way
I play cards with my friends
Attend church and volunteer*

I am social you see

*Do you not know that I live alone?
I sit on my front porch and read
Knit and make teddy bears for overseas
I walk to the mailbox
My garden is in bloom*

I am active you see

*Why do you not see me?
I am a 95-year-old woman
Brought here by ambulance
A fall at home and a weak heart
Have isolated me*

I am crying you see

*Why don't you sit and visit with me?
Chat and share your stories
Love and dreams that you have
Give mine back to me
For my freedom I have lost*

I am here you see

Roslyn M. Compton



Image: Thinking¹

An Ode to Eternity

The rocky road of life
Is smoothed by God above
He sends to you a family
To pave their way with love
On the road to eternity

Grandma
(J. Valda Boutcher)
Monday, August 17, 2009

¹ The images and figures are from my personal collection.

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Chapter 1

A Beginning Story

I dialed Grandma's number by heart, but with a slight hesitation. "Will she be able to hear me today?" I asked myself. "Will her hearing leave us both frustrated and upset, as she struggles to understand what I am saying?" I wondered what she would tell me, and whether I was willing to listen to her usual story of being too old and living too long.

After several rings, Grandma answered the phone. She told me it was her lunchtime, and I could picture her sitting in the recliner in her front room, with the TV tray set up and the television on—loud, of course. I wondered if her neighbours could hear it as well. Maybe they were away, as they were retired and often travelled to visit their grandchildren.

Our conversation shifted into old stories, and together we sang one of our favourite songs, "The old grey mare ain't what she used to be." This time, I noticed the melody was flatter and our words were losing their enthusiasm and laughter. I began to wonder if Grandma was growing old.

But she was old. “93 years, 1 month, and 4 days to be exact,” Grandma said. She also said, “It isn’t worth it.” What did she mean by “not worth it?” I hesitated to explore what she meant. I wondered if she was referring to the present and her experiences of growing older far away from family. I was not sure I was ready to hear her stories, and her words hung between us.^{2,3}

Is there ever a right time or place to tell a story? I often pondered this as I thought about Grandma’s told and untold stories of growing older in her home. As I listened to Grandma, I remembered our times lived alongside each other and imagined what “place” really meant to her. I also began my journey into my understanding of place, which has gained momentum as I wrote this dissertation and began to understand what it meant for Pauline, Alison, and Sue to grow older in relation to place.

Coming to Place

“I have been working to change the way I speak and write, to incorporate in the manner of telling a sense of place, of not just who I am in the present but where I am coming from, the multiple voices within me.”

(hooks, 1990, p. 146)

² personal reflection, Spring 2010

³ Conversations with Grandma were not tape-recorded. I wrote field notes as part of these conversations. It is these field notes that form the basis of my writings in relation to Grandma, and all the stories I tell or write are reflections of my experiences.

As a child, I would lie on a blanket, staring up at the night sky. When I closed my eyes and the darkness surrounded me, I was able to imagine my place. In my place the green grass stretched out almost forever and eventually merged into fields of golden wheat. Beyond the fields were mountains with tall peaks reaching up into the sky; this place seemed without boundaries.

Daytimes, with my younger brother in tow, I explored every square inch of our family farm. On foot, on bike, or on go-kart, we would race down the lanes, through the paddocks, and in and out of the trees, mapping out the terrain and playing imaginary games. Sometimes, we would sit quietly and watch the emu and her chicks or stand frozen as a snake slithered by, only to later swap stories of how brave we had been. Together, my brother and I created a small place of our own under an old pepper tree, where we built a little house from materials left over from recent renovations of our family home. Inside, the dirt floor was levelled and we laid down carpet remnants. It was in our little house that I began to imagine a home-place: a place of my own to return to year after year; to imagine, to dream, and to be.

Off the farm, I had another childhood place I called home. It was where Grandma lived in town. Because we lived out of town, I often stayed with Grandma to attend after-school activities and sports on weekends. At her place, I learned another way of being. Living in town called for different rules and regulations and ways of behaving, and I also learned about relationships and difference.

It had been another frustrating day at school, marked by math problems and an English assignment I failed to understand. I often felt the teachers compared me to my sister and my cousin. My cousin and I were the same age, yet our similarities stopped there. My cousin was smart, just like my sister, but I was different. The differences between us plagued my day until finally the bell rang and I was able to escape into the sunshine and head toward Grandma's car. It was so easy to spot at the front of the school. It was big and white, and it offered a cool place to nestle into on the short drive to her home.

As I got out of the car and headed to Grandma's front steps, my day at school was forgotten as we hugged each other and rubbed foreheads in greeting. Grandma prepared our snack of homemade biscuits and juice, and we settled on her front porch to watch the golfers across the way hit little white balls down the fairway. I could feel my whole body relax as we watched the golfers and the cars going past.

Grandma and I talked about her roses, the clover that continued to grow unwanted in her grass, and the clouds that

were hanging over the mountains, promising an evening shower if the winds shifted. I knew the rhythms and the content of these conversations. They reassured me that being smart at school wasn't all that mattered. Through her words and actions, Grandma nurtured my understanding that everybody was different, and it was okay for me to be myself.

Once I grew up and moved away, the place to which I returned, and continue to return to, became imaginary as I realized I had a need to construct a place that embodied my identity (Twigg, 1999). My imaginings were storied constructions, whereby “[I] actively combine[d] bits and pieces of experience to form rememberings” (Sarbin, 2004, p. 11) about my farm and in-town places. It was through these connections that I was able to place myself in reference to present and absent occurrences in the world (Sarbin). My placement of self inspired me to reconstruct my imaginary place, with the flexibility to rename it as my understandings about the person I am in connection to place deepened. Without imagining, Caine and Steeves (2009) suggested, “there is no possibility of becoming. Imagining makes us take the risk of being alive, of being real, while also being imaginative and improvisational” (p. 10). Consequently, my stories may be incomplete, although “I recollect in a way as faithful as possible to the memory itself” (Crites, 1971, p. 300).

I realized my places, my relationships, and the person I am, as well as the person I am becoming, shaped the voices within me. To deepen my understanding and meaning of my places and relationships, I returned to the “worlds” I shared with Grandma and the stories we lived alongside each other. It was here Lugones (1987) reminded me that to find meaning and understanding I needed to lovingly travel to Grandma’s “world”⁴ and to

see with her eyes . . . [to] see both of us as we are constructed in her world . . . [and to] witness her own sense of herself within her world. Only through this travelling to her “world” could I identify with her because only then could I cease to ignore her and to be excluded and separate from her. Only then could I see her as a subject even if one subjected and only then could I see at all how meaning could arise fully between us. We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking. So travelling to each other’s “worlds” would enable us to *be* through *loving* each other. (p. 8)

As I reflected on the experiences and places of my childhood and later years, I realized my understandings were tentative and incomplete. I turned to narrative inquiry to “seek ways of enriching and transforming . . . experience for [myself] and others” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42) in an attempt to

⁴ For Lugones (1987), “travelling to someone’s “world” is a way of identifying with them . . . [and] only when we have travelled to each other’s “worlds” are we fully subjects to each other” (p. 17).

understand what Grandma was referring to when she spoke of growing older in her place of home. As I remember my childhood and the places I shared with Grandma, I understand how these have shaped me and will continue to do so. I recognize how my movement in and out of places influenced my tellings and retellings of stories. I am aware I am central to the place I created in my imagination, “which gives credence to alternative realities” (Greene, 1995, p. 3), and through my intentional travels with Grandma, Pauline, Alison, and Sue, I continue my search for a place called home.

Coming to My Inquiry Place

Grandma’s home became a meaningful place where we shared many stories. Initially, they were about her life as a grandmother and mine as a granddaughter. As we both grew older, our stories shifted to include my professional role as a nurse; our roles as volunteers; and relationships, motherhood, education, and travel. However, our stories did not explore what it might mean to grow older in another place or how home and place might be defined. I wonder how my experiences lived alongside Grandma influenced my understanding of growing older in relation to place.

Thinking about place, I remembered Rybczynski’s (1986) analogy of comfort being like an onion. Maybe place could also be described as an onion.

At first it

appears simple on the outside, but it is deceptive for it has many layers . . .

. If each layer is described separately, we lose sight of the whole. The

layers are transparent so that when we look at the whole [place] we see not just the surface but also something of the interior. (p. 230)

Therefore, for the participants and I to understand place, we had to attend to the layers and also the whole, and remember that to pay greater attention only to one layer “it is possible to lose sight of the whole concept itself” (Moore, 2000, p. 208). It is here I wondered how older adults named these layers to define place as home.

FN⁵ (The Passing . . .)

May 17, 2011

Grandma and I sat and talked about what tomorrow might bring, and as we grew older, I became aware that for Grandma, tomorrow was less important. We began to enjoy each other’s company for the moments we had in the present, rather than the moments we might share in the future. Often, I did not want to tell future stories because I did not want to imagine life without Grandma. Sadly Grandma died today, but she remains present in my memories, and as I look around me, I wonder what she would have thought about today—a cloudy start with sunshine on its way,

⁵ Field notes (FN) will appear throughout my dissertation. They include my reflections, memories, and stories of experiences that have been brought forth through my journey.

tulips opening in my garden, and new leaves growing on the trees. Despite Grandma's death, spring and renewal abound, and with them, hope—hope for new directions, new thoughts, and new understandings. Also, with her death came the realization that my dream of living alongside Grandma's stories of growing older in a place she called home would never become reality.

With Grandma's passing, it became necessary for me to re-imagine my original dream of her and her friends being participants in my research. I realized I would need to begin the research in Saskatchewan, Canada, where I had moved 10 years earlier, a place Grandma had never visited except through our letters, photographs, and conversations. By not returning to my in-town place to do my inquiry, I also became aware I would need to engage in conversations with older adults with whom I had no relationship. These new participants also lived in a place where I only partially understood what it meant to grow older. I was most fearful about moving my research to this new place. I was concerned I would lose the purpose for my research, particularly the one relevant to seeking meaning and understanding of Grandma's stories about growing older in a place she called home.

The stories I lived alongside Grandma were unique and personal. However, as I entered the research field and engaged in conversations, I became aware of tensions in stories between my Grandma's, my professional stories,

society's, and participants' stories regarding what it means to grow older in relation to place. I see these new stories as gifts, because each participant's story has invited me to think differently and deepen my understandings. Possibly, my new understandings are nurtured by my inquiry being in a place where Grandma had never visited. Here, there are no reminders of Grandma, or places we visited together, or stories shared in special places. I pause and wonder if the absence of a shared place with Grandma has changed my memories and the stories I told about Grandma growing older in relation to place.

Chapter 2

Older Adults and the Practice of Narrative Gerontology

FN (What's old?)

I phoned Grandma regularly, but her hearing was going, and sometimes we laughed at what she thought I said. Her mind was sharp, and she was still busy with her friends. She was 91 years old. Grandma told me about those friends who had recently died and of another who was doing so well for being old. One friend was 94 years old. “Now,” Grandma said, “That is getting old!”

As I reflected on Grandma's words and considered the potential differences between being 91 years old and 94 years old, I wondered when older adults might consider themselves to be old. Using the life table criteria, Denton and Spencer's (1999) research suggested old age could be shifted to 70 years; however, they did not foresee this number remaining stagnant. Their research, supported by Health Canada's Seniors Independent Research Program, clearly identified that as mortality rates continue to fall, the definition of *old* would need to be revised, since a constant definition over time would no longer be realistic.

Armstrong (2003) and Rimer's (1998) research identified additional markers concerning when an adult defined him- or herself as being old. An adult's definition of old age includes the following: the criteria for old age rising as the adult ages (it was considered 10 years later for individuals aged 60-plus

than for those under 30 years old); a consistent association with becoming a grandparent; and the recognition that as the number of centenarians increased, old age would no longer be thought of as 80 to 90 years old.

With ambiguity in the literature and my experiences, I decided to abandon the term *old* and instead refer to older adults as *growing older*, rather than *getting old* or *aging* (Randall & McKim, 2008). Aging, in most Western cultures, is “portrayed as a time of decline, DEPRESSION, withdrawal, and lassitude” (Gergen, 2004, p. 274). Aging is often interpreted as being specific to the older adult, and it assumes a trajectory with milestones predetermined by theory and expectations fulfilled as each milestone is accomplished (Gadamer, 1989).⁶ However, the concept of growing older implies continuity and indicates it is not just a characteristic of the older adult, but of every individual. Growing older implies both a back-and-forth motion and an inward and outward journey of discovery (Bateson, 2000; Behar, 1996).

⁶ I am aware that current research in the area of gerontology focuses predominantly on the biological (objective) aspects of aging (Hazan, 1994, Randall, 2011). In particular, aging research and literature propagates two dominant stories of aging in western culture—the story of “decline” (Gullette, 2004, Schachter-Shalomi & Miller, 1995) and the story of “successful” or “healthy aging” (Baltes & Baltes, 1993, 1990, Doyle, Mc Kee, & Sherriff, 2012, Ferri, James, & Pruchno, 2009, Rowe & Kahn, 1987). However, I do not wish to be entangled in the web of the dominant stories or theories of aging (Atchley, 1989, Cummings & Henry, 1961, Erikson & Erikson, 1997, Havighurst, 1963) within a Western culture, as they do not align with the focus of my work: inquiring narratively into older womens’ stories of experience and inviting them to inquire into what it means to grow older from their own unique and personal perspective. Andrews (2009) indicated, “once people are asked about ageing and the meaning of ageing—as opposed to being told how they can escape it—stories, and more stories abound” (p. 79). These stories may stretch our understanding of growing older beyond our experiences and our culture and invite us to listen to diversity.

As I defined my research puzzle, I realized my understanding of older adults was influenced by nursing science, which is “systematically organized into general laws and theories for the purpose of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena of special concern to the discipline of nursing” (Carper, 1978, p. 14). In relation to older adults, this understanding is often developed from studies influenced by presuppositions about aging the researcher imports from his or her surrounding society, which is often middle-aged, white, and Caucasian (Tornstam, 1992). It appears the term *older adult* is influenced by the postmodern period where it is romanticized and changed, dependent on the marketing ploy of the culture in which the old reside. Often, older adults are referred to in generic ways, such as *older people*, *elderly*, *of advanced age*, *elders*, or *geriatric* (Arora et al., 2007; Dobrzanska & Newel, 2006; Marengoni & Cossi, 2006; Walsh & Bruza, 2008; Williams, Remington, Foulk, & Whall, 2006), and more recently, Wilson (personal communication, May 08, 2009) suggested the term *older adult* should replace all previous terms.

The labelling of people as old, aged, or “those” people contributes to them being depersonalized and marginalized. In nursing, splitting people apart through labels may limit a nurse’s ability to interact with labelled people as whole people (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Similarly, labelling and marginalizing often helps to maintain the status quo and discourages meeting people with attention and respect. It is also my experience that it discourages playfulness, creativity, and imagination in the role of a nurse, as some select to live out precomposed stories

of aging rather than seeking meaning and understanding of individual experiences of growing older and co-composing new stories to live by.

I pause here to consider the relationship among attention, respect, and understanding stories as already being lived, told, relived, and retold during and beyond an inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Understanding stories as always in the making calls me to attend closely to who I am in relationship to others. It is also important to attend to social, cultural, and institutional narratives told within places, as these narratives shape peoples' unfolding lives. Consequently, "to ignore, neglect, or disregard something, or to dismiss it lightly, thoughtlessly, or carelessly is to not respect it" (Dillon, 1992, p. 108).

As I considered Dillon's (1992) words concerning attention and respect, I thought about nursing and its practice of labelling people as old or geriatric. Nursing practice is often unable to shift its focus from the outcome to the individual and possibly makes "world"-travel⁷ difficult. Without "world"-travelling, however, it becomes difficult for nurses to negotiate a relationship, which supports a shift from seeing the individual as aged, a disease, or a diagnosis, to a storied life (Allen, 2004; Lugones, 1987).

Crites (1971) suggested the way people speak is not only a product of individual choice or cultural expression, but also "bears an imprint of a time and a

⁷ Here again I refer to "world"-travelling from Lugones' (1987) understanding, whereby "travelling to someone's 'world' is a way of identifying with them . . . [and] only when we have travelled to each other's 'worlds' are we fully subjects to each other" (p. 17). In becoming fully subjects to each other, we travel to each others' worlds in loving ways and not with arrogant perceptions.

place” (p. 291); therefore, the definition of growing older that is common today may not be the same definition that future generations consider relevant.

Furthermore, individuals adapt the definition of growing older to their own uses and expectations. These expectations may propagate societal stereotyping of aging, which may segregate, constrain, and force older adults into dependent people (Hazan, 1994).

However, with older adults “acting as embodied and social beings, [they] can reclaim meanings of age through the stories they share” (Yamasaki, 2009, p. 588). The inside perspective of aging perceives growing older as a conscious and potentially creative process and not merely as following a trajectory of aging or getting older (Randall & McKim, 2008). This perspective has its roots embedded in narrative gerontology, which values the uniqueness, individuality, dignity, and humanity of the lives of older adults (Kenyon, Bohlmeijer, & Randall, 2011).

Taking a narrative gerontological approach to understanding growing older encouraged me to pay attention to how culture and time influence personal and societal assumptions relevant to growing older (Tornstam, 1992). It also advocates there is no end point at which we “arrive” at old age. Inadvertently, current theories of aging have a tendency to homogenize the aging experience and focus on maintaining, rather than developing, older adults’ possible selves, including “ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become and what they are afraid of becoming” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954).

Some older adults may have opportunities to address the multiple realities and fragmentation of growing older in a sociocultural and diverse society through the stories they decide to tell as well as when, where, and to whom they tell their stories as they travel across “worlds” (Lugones, 1987). The stories of experiences shared during travelling may bump up against arrogant perceptions, which see some older adults as a disease, a diagnosis, or a burden, rather than as “lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions” (Lugones, 1987, p. 18). As a narrative inquirer, to travel to the “worlds” of Grandma, Pauline, Alison, and Sue in loving ways, I needed to pay attention to the stories we told about ourselves and about each other (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Murray Orr, 2010).

Growing Older: The Canadian Landscape

The phenomenon of growing older.

With the first baby boomers reaching the age of 65 in 2011, the older-adult population is growing exponentially. Rapid population growth and a decreasing fertility rate are evident in both developed and most developing countries. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2009) states, “aging is a global phenomenon. The world’s elderly population—people 60 years of age and older—is the fastest growing age group” (p. 1).

As I met Pauline, Alison, and Sue in their “worlds,” I could hear the voices of “found” communities⁸ (Nelson, 1995, p. 24) describing older adults as

⁸ According to Nelson (1995), dominant stories live within “found” communities. These communities often compose institutional, cultural, and social narratives relevant to growing older,

problems. By perceiving older adults arrogantly, society fails to see them individually and begins to approach their care from a reductionist problem-solving perspective (Reed & Clarke, 1999). However, statistics indicate the nation's population of people 65 years of age and over has steadily increased since the 1960s. Today, 15.3% of the nations' population is 65 years of age and over, and this percentage will continue to increase at a rapid rate as the baby-boom cohort begin to turn 65 (Statistics Canada, 2013). In addition, by 2031, population projections for Canada indicate 9.6 million people will be 65 years old and over, with approximately 53% of older adults being women, which equates to 24% of the projected total female population (Milan & Vezina, 2011).

Of particular interest to the inquiry was the substantial rise in the population of older adults in the 80-years-old-and-over cohort. For the past 30 years, this cohort has experienced the highest increase over the national average, with more women than men reaching the age of 100. In 2001 there were 11 centenarians per 100,000 persons; however, by 2013 this number had substantially increased to almost 20 centenarians per 100,000 persons (Statistics Canada, 2013).

Nationally, the age structures of provinces and territories appear to be influenced by differences in fertility and immigration and changes in interprovincial migration. Currently, Nunavut's and the Northwest Territories'

which become the dominant stories. The authoritarian nature of these stories excludes or oppresses the telling and attending to people's stories who live on the margins.

populations are the youngest in Canada. The Atlantic Provinces have the highest proportion of persons 65 years of age and over and the lowest share of youth. In 2013 Alberta had the lowest proportion of older adults, at 11.2%; in Saskatchewan, the proportion of persons 65 years of age and over was 14.4%. For Saskatchewan, the smaller proportion of older adults compared to other provinces is greatly influenced by the recent population growth of younger immigrants seeking employment.

Emerging trends: Growing older at home.

For the older adult, remaining in his or her own home is the most preferred residential situation (Bradley & Longino, 2009), and for many reasons, they will select to age-in-place: for example, their family may live nearby; they are familiar with their neighborhood and community; they participate in local volunteer or recreational organizations; and they have ties to local restaurants, amenities, places of worship, and social and civic clubs.

Grandma's, Pauline's, Alison's, and Sue's preference to continue to grow older in their private home supports the current trend in Canada, whereby 92% of older adults 65 years of age and over currently reside in private homes (Statistics Canada, 2014a). There has also been a marked decline in older adults living in collectives, particularly among adults over 85 years of age. In 2011 statistics indicated that 35% of women over 85 years of age lived in collectives, compared with 41% of women in 1981 (Statistics Canada, 2011).

However, compromising the older adult's desire to age-in-place is their ability to access many essential services within their community, such as government offices, physicians, cultural centres, and private or public businesses (Patterson, 2004). Furthermore, with declining populations in smaller communities, some services may no longer be available at a local level. In Canada, over two-thirds (69.7%) of the population currently live in census metropolitan areas (CMAs)⁹ (Statistics Canada, 2014b), but the proportion of the population of persons 65 years of age and over residing in non-CMAs (17.9%) continues to be higher than the proportion residing in CMAs (14.2%). On the home front, over the past 10 years the proportion of people 65 years of age and older living in Saskatoon has reached 11.6%; for Regina, this proportion is 12.6% (Statistics Canada, 2014b).

Moving to new places.

The journey I lived alongside Grandma in relation to place always centred on her need to remain in her home until she died. To help me understand the concept of moving in the later years, I turned to the works of Lawton and Nahemow (1973), Wiseman (1980), and Litwak and Longino (1987).

Specifically, Lawton and Nahemow invited me to consider the influence of

⁹ Statistics Canada (2009) defines a census metropolitan area (CMA) as “census geographical unit consisting of one or more adjacent municipalities centered on a large urban area (known as the urban core). The census population count of the urban core is at least 100,000 to form a CMA. To be included in the CMA, other adjacent municipalities must have a high degree of integration with the central urban area, as measured by commuting flows derived from census place of work data.” (para. 11) Non-CMAs are urban areas with a population less than 100,000. Rural areas, excluding reserves, are all areas lying outside urban areas. They have a population of less than 1,000 (Statistics Canada, 2009).

environmental press, which they described as the behavioural and affective responses evoked by the interactions between the individual and their environment. By paying attention to these responses, the relationship between the individual and their environment can be jointly considered. As Perry, Andersen, and Kaplan (2014) identified, “more recent scholarship in this area has focused on causality and more on the transactions between individual and environmental factors, as well as on the importance of addressing the temporality and processes of adaptation” (p. 77).

Wiseman’s (1980) theoretical model of the elderly migration process attempts to linearly identify the triggering mechanisms, indigenous factors, type of movement, destination selection, and migration outcomes that influence the residential movement of older adults. The model considers the push and pull factors that may trigger older adults’ decisions to move. Push factors for the older adult may include, “independence loss, loss of spouse, and environmental stress . . . [and the pull factors may include] retirement amenities, relocated friendship and/or kinship networks, ‘successful’ relocation by friend(s), and environmental amenities” (Wiseman, 1980, p. 145). In addition, his model described a category of stayers: older adults that voluntarily or involuntarily decide not to move, reflective of their limitations and personal resources. However, more recent research (Cuba, 1991; Haas & Serow, 1993) indicates many older adults contemplating migration may have already preselected their destination,

suggesting there is no preference in the sequence of deciding to move and destination selection as Wiseman's model indicated.

Building on these findings and Wiseman's (1980) model, Litwak and Longino (1987) take a more developmental view of migration. Their life-course framework suggests older adults' first moves are reflective of amenities moves (including four mild seasons, recreational and cultural activities, housing costs, and overall cost of living), and their second and third subsequent migrations are assistance moves. These moves may be initiated by the onset of disabilities or crisis situations that prompt the desire or need to be closer to friends, family, and/or support services, including institutionalized care (Litwak & Longino, 1987). Litwak and Longino also confirm that moves may not occur in this order, and that some older adults may never move.

In consideration of these theories relevant to moving as we continue to grow older, Reed and Clarke (1999) call me to the "construction of ageing; that is the idea that we have about old age as a period of decline and decay" (p. 209). In doing so, Bateson (1994) reminds me to see growing older with peripheral vision, because to narrowly focus only on combating the diseases of growing older blocks attention in seeking meaning and understanding of what it means to move as we continue to grow older. By seeing peripherally, the depth of my understanding will be richer because I will no longer see older adults moving only in relation to health challenges, but also in relation to their increased need for or maintenance of autonomy and control, beliefs, attitudes, physical environment,

and social pressure (Löfqvist et al., 2013). The decision to move then becomes an integrated understanding of older adults' life histories and attachment to place, and not an isolated event (Cutchin, 2001). As Löfqvist et al. (2013) states, "thoughts and reflections are certainly present with or without the actual experience of moving" (p. 925).

Narrative Gerontology

As I contemplated how I could more deeply explore Grandma's, Pauline's, Alison's, and Sue's stories, I turned to narrative gerontology.¹⁰

In contrast to the biomedical paradigm that dominates societal perceptions of aging in general, a narrative gerontology appreciates that lives are in many ways "texts" that are socially constructed—and co-authored—amid our relationships with others within a wide range of narrative environments, larger stories, and master narratives—families, friendships, cultures, creeds, etc. In this way, it opens up a theoretical space for appreciating the poetic complexity of later life and for seeing aging as a process, potentially, of *growing* old and not just getting old. (Randall, 2011, abstract)

Turning to narrative gerontology encouraged me to journey alongside older adults in my personal and professional "worlds," paying attention to what it

¹⁰ For me, narrative gerontology recognizes that older adults and those involved in their care have different experiences and multiple understandings and meanings, which influence nursing care (Risjord, 2010). For a more in-depth understanding of narrative gerontology, please refer to Ruth and Kenyon (1996) and Kenyon, Ruth, and Mader (1999).

means to grow older in relation to place. In relationship with participants, I had an opportunity to narratively inquire into the experiences of growing older; that is, participants' unique and individual experiences and what these experiences meant to them (Kenyon et al., 2011). Guiding the inquiry were the assumptions of narrative gerontology described by Kenyon and Randall (2001).

Assumptions of narrative gerontology.

“The first assumption is that storytelling is a fundamental aspect of being human” (Kenyon & Randall, 2001, p. 4); therefore, “human beings not only *have* a lifestory, they *are* stories” (Kenyon, Ruth, & Mader, 1999, p. 41). These stories exist within each person's memory and imagination, and by paying close attention to the content of these stories we may begin to understand our *self*. Possibly, through the “intricate, dynamic process of remembering and anticipating, interpreting and interrogating” (Randall, 2011, para. 2) and travelling to each other's “worlds” in loving ways, rather than with arrogant perception (Lugones, 1987), participants and I began to attend to our stories of growing older and what it meant to live by and with these stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

“Second, lives as stories are made up of both facticity and possibility, which means that, in principle, human lives are open to change” (Kenyon & Randall, 2001, p. 4). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest change becomes a possibility through the telling and living out of stories and, further, through modifying these stories of experience to retell and relive new stories. In the field, I awoke to the difficulties participants had in composing forward-looking stories

(Freeman, 2011). Sometimes Pauline would say, “I don’t think I have anything valuable to say” or Alison would ask, “Does anything I say help you in your work; am I saying the right thing?” I realized the composition of participants’ forward-looking stories might have been impeded by their belief that there was no value or knowledge to be revealed in telling their stories of ordinary experiences (Dewey, 1981a). I continue to wonder if current cynical, indifferent, pessimistic, social, cultural, and institutional narratives also further support these beliefs, silencing the retelling and reliving of stories told by older adults (Andrews, 2009; Gullette, 2004; Miller, 1985; Schachter-Shalomi & Miller, 1995).

Taking a narrative gerontological perspective, Freeman (2011) described the inability to compose forward-looking stories as “narrative foreclosure” (p. 3), whereby people gather the conviction that the stories of their lives are essentially over. By taking a turn to narrative inquiry to understand what it meant to grow older, I was able to negotiate new meanings with participants and their stories and re-open some past stories, through retelling and reliving, to compose new stories to live by (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Interwoven with these stories were forward-looking stories (Freeman, 2011) composed through the participants’ involvement in the worlds of their children, family, and friends (Rowles, 1978).

Assumption two invited me to reflect on my nursing practice and to consider other ways of providing care through narrative care, which acknowledges and respects the stories of older adults as being “ultimately as important as the provision of food or shelter or medication” (Kenyon et al., 2011,

p. xv). Narrative care is not something added to caring for older adults; rather, it is a change in the way of providing care (Ubels, 2011). This change may promote a willingness to integrate interdependent relationships into nursing care and also an understanding that nursing care can begin with experience, therefore offering an alternate perspective to labelling individuals as diseases or diagnoses.

“The third assumption is that, from a narrative point of view, the meaning and nature of time are connected to our lives as stories” (Kenyon & Randall, 2001, p. 4). Here, Kenyon and Randall (2001) referred to clock time, which is the past, the present, and the future; and storytime, which is influenced by facticity and possibility. Sometimes, tensions may arise between our feelings of being either “on time” or “off time” when we compare ourselves to lifespan development theories, which in turn inhibits us from imagining possibilities and composing further stories to live by (Bateson, 2010).

“Fourth, our lives seen as stories involve four interrelated dimensions, which include, on the one hand, our personal story, and on the other hand, the larger story that we live within” (Kenyon & Randall, 2001, p. 4). This larger story may be a “grand narrative, an unquestionable way of looking at things” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 22), which may influence the stories we tell or choose not to tell about growing older. This assumption awoke me to the borderlands among the sociopolitical, economical, sociocultural, interpersonal, and personal landscapes in which the participants lived. Remaining open to retelling and reliving stories provided participants with an opportunity to seek

meaning and understanding of the unique ways “our lives do or do not make sense to us” (Kenyon & Randall, p. 7).

“Finally, the fifth assumption is that, as fundamentally interpersonal beings, we are, paradoxically, creating our personal story in a context that is larger than our individual selves” (Kenyon & Randall, 2001, p. 4). Assumption five gently reminded me to remember that even though participants and I shared and co-composed stories, we were never privy to the “whole truth” of the stories we lived by, either those of others or our own (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kenyon & Randall); our stories were always lived and told in the midst (Clandinin & Connelly).

The given assumptions always located me in the midst of what it means to grow older through inquiring into the experiences of participants. Each person’s story is unique and nongeneralizable. In listening and attending to and with stories, I “resist the temptation to put it all together into an analytically consistent and comprehensive framework privileging certain voices and silencing others” (Gubrium, 1993, p. 62).

Chapter 3

Turning to Narrative Inquiry

*“Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story . . .
is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience.”*

(Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477)

For Connelly and Clandinin (1990), narrative inquiry is “both a phenomenon and a method” (p. 2). Narrative inquirers engage in seeking meaning and understanding of experience through the stories people tell and by writing narratives of experiences. Therefore, narrative inquirers recognize “that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2).

Deepening Connelly and Clandinin’s (1990) earlier work, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) suggested that while experience is the starting point of narrative inquiry, it is also “an exploration of the social, cultural and institutional narratives within which individual’s experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted” (p. 42). As I thought narratively about the stories I had lived alongside Grandma, I woke to the possibility that her stories of experience were being told within places, which also contributed to their social, cultural, and institutional significance. The opportunity to explore these experiences drew me further into narrative inquiry, as it provided an opportunity to bring forth older adults and their places into the larger context of what it means to grow older (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Experience—The Phenomena under Study

Clandinin and Connelly's understanding of experience has its roots firmly planted in Dewey's (1938) pragmatic philosophy. Central to Dewey's theory of experience is situation, which is specified by two criteria: interaction and continuity. "*Interaction* refers to the intersection of internal and existential conditions" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 417). To return to understanding place, I am aware place is created through internal conditions, which include feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetics, relationships, dreams, and the environment (existential conditions).

Dewey's (1938) criterion of continuity implies "experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). Dewey, and Clandinin and Connelly (2000) concur; experience occurs on a continuum; therefore, all experiences have a history, a present, and a possible future. When I returned to both my town place and my farm place as an adult, I became aware of my past experiences in and of those places. As a beginning narrative inquirer, I wondered how these experiences shaped and influenced Grandma's present and future experiences with old and new places. It was also this criterion that drew me further into understanding growing older as a continuous experience.

Dewey's (1981c) conception of experience indicated that the unfolding of experience was always in the midst of the social, personal, and material environments, and experiences "are transformed through the human context they

enter, while the live creature is changed and developed through its intercourse with things previously external to it” (p. 251). These interactions “make possible a new way of dealing with [life, community, world], and thus eventually creates a new kind of experienced objects, not more real than those which preceded but more significant, and less overwhelming and oppressive” (Dewey, 1981b, p. 175).

As I thought about transforming experiences and people being changed by their interactions with these experiences, Greene’s (as cited in Teachers College, Columbia University. Press Room from the Office of External Affairs, 2001) discussion concerning flunking retirement captured my attention. During a presentation, Greene described urging her listeners to “recommit [themselves] to opening situations in which people can make their own choices as they come together, situations in which they can make themselves heard as they move to bring about a new community and so to recreate themselves” (para. 7). Furthermore, Greene encouraged her audience to remain open and to use their imaginations. By pursuing questions rather than answers, she hopes to give to others that “not yet feeling, of ‘being on the way’ and that the question is still not answered . . . [she wants others] to love the question and the wonder and mystery of it” (para. 15). Here, I felt Greene echoed Dewey’s (1981c) thoughts concerning experience; that is, experience is always lived in the midst. As human beings in relationship with others temporally and socially, experiences are always unfolding, and through narrative inquiry, these experiences may be continually explored.

Through a narrative inquiry lens, I saw a possibility for understanding growing older from a different perspective: a perspective of possibility and change, which evolves from a storied landscape. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) support this perspective through their understanding that experience occurs on a continuum and includes personal, social, cultural, and institutional narratives. Over time, the meanings of these narratives will change; hence, “our social science knowledge is, like the things we study, something ‘in passing’” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19). Therefore, by maintaining a constant focus on experience and encouraging the telling, living, retelling, and reliving of stories, narrative inquiry is a way of honouring lived experiences and enriching and transforming experiences individually and socially (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space

Dewey (1938) described that at the heart of experience are people in relation, contextually and temporally. Drawing upon Dewey’s (1981b) conceptualization of experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) identified that experience involves people interacting temporally, socially, personally, and in relation to place. For Connelly and Clandinin (2006), these terms define a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space in which “studies have temporal dimensions [past, present, and future] and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). It is this space that makes an inquiry narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000).

Furthermore, Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) suggested that the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) “prompts researchers to both question explanations and meanings constructed and provide the audience with accounts that uncover and reveal such questions of meaning, value, and integrity” (p. 21). Working within this space, I was able to attend to the personal and social dimension of the inquiry. In this dimension and in relationship with participants, I explored their shared stories of experience and nurtured a deeper and more complex understanding of the stories they lived by¹¹ (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

As I thought narratively about the stories we live by, I returned to a thought I expressed in my beginning story. There I wrote: “*I wondered what she would tell me, and whether I was willing to listen to her usual story of being too old and living too long.*” Now I have awoken to the possibility that I was not sensitive to Grandma’s stories; hence, I did not hear how they changed through their recounting. Narrative inquiry has called me to listen differently and to attend “to the stories already being lived, told, relived, and retold” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 418) by Grandma and me.

¹¹ For Clandinin & Huber (2002), “identity is a storied life composition, a story to live by. Stories to live by are shaped in places and lived in places. They live in actions, in relationships with others, in language, including silences, in gaps and vacancies, in continuities and discontinuities” (p. 161–162).

Coles (1989) suggested we all carry “with us stories on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them” (p. 30). It is in the telling of our stories, which includes reaffirming, modifying, and creating new stories, that we seek meaning and understanding of our experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is in collaboration that the retelling and reliving of stories may occur. I realized this may be difficult, as stories are also told in a time and a place, influencing what may or may not be shared, making it even more difficult to retell stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Temporality.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described temporality as “when we see an event, we think of it not as a thing happening at that moment but as an expression of something happening over time. Any event, or things, has a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future” (p. 29). Future stories may be more difficult for some older adults to explore, as they may define the future in terms of being more immediate. While recognizing participants’ understandings of temporality, I too wanted to understand how place shaped growing older and intertwined with how growing older was further shaped by temporality.

Place.

Throughout a narrative inquiry, multiple places may be identified and explored as stories unfold. Some places may be brought forward into the present, as participants travel backward in time and place and tell stories from their memories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Yet, other places may no longer exist,

or never did exist, except in the memory and imagination of the storyteller. These places may be a recollection of memories blended together over time; hence, they become a place of their own—an imaginary place. This place may be termed fictional; however, it may also appear very real in the mind of the storyteller as he or she drifts among places and blurs the boundaries.

As a narrative inquirer, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest I always live in places situated in the midst, and places are also in the midst of stories. Consequently, the stories of places are always in the process of becoming, and the specificity of place to me as a narrative inquirer is important. I cannot escape place, and during an inquiry I “need to stay awake to how place shifts the unfolding stories of lives” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 70).

A sense of place.

Over time, the stories I listened to in Grandma’s front room came to be about growing older in her home. Looking back through a narrative inquiry lens and a three-dimensional space, I understand her stories were composed through her experiences, this included Grandma no longer being the President of Associations; but she continued to remain active within these organizations. At the age of 91, she decided not to drive anymore; instead, she accessed public transportation and accepted offers from friends to attend appointments, church on Sundays, and social activities. As her hip pain increased, she required support services to clean her home and tend to her garden; however, she continued to water her potted plants on her front verandah.

My awareness of the shifts in Grandma's stories highlighted my understanding of the connection between who Grandma was in relationship to others and place. Through her stories, I recognized Grandma as "a person, as an interdependent being, as both separate from others (independent) and connected to others (dependent) at the same time; that is the enlarged view of what it means to be a person" (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005, p. 79). I also understand it was through Grandma's interdependence that she could name the places in which to grow older, and also continue to integrate her presence, through social relationships within her community (Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992) into the places she loved.

Throughout my research, I have paused to reflect on Grandma's stories of living in her place as she continued to grow older. I now appreciate the importance of our ability to name places and to define the person we are and who we are becoming. My thoughts continue to be influenced by Crites (1971), who suggested the person we are, "the *way* [we] speak, dance, build, dream, embellish," though culturally particular, also "bears the imprint of a time and a place" (p. 291).

From reading Crites' (1971) work, I understand Grandma's later stories possibly became her mundane stories. Crites identified these stories as ones we tell, see, or hear in a place, and often they explain "where [people] have been, why things are as they are . . . [and] mundane stories are also among the most

important means by which people articulate and clarify their sense of [their] world” (p. 296).

As Grandma grew older and her world became defined by the four walls of her front room, she told her mundane stories to others who pervaded her private and public spaces.¹² Sometimes these stories contradicted her sacred stories, the stories through which she created a sense of self and the “world” in which she lived (Crites, 1971). In these stories, some family members, the community nurse, and the volunteers questioned Grandma’s ability to name the place in which she wanted to continue growing older.

FN (Concerns)

I was home again. I was there to live alongside Grandma, to breathe her air, and to share her journey. Some family members, the community nurse, and the volunteers were concerned she would fall, that her yard was too big, and that she was isolated and needed supervision. Grandma was concerned about losing her privacy, the freedom of her yard, and the view from her verandah. She was told to move to a hostel just down the street, only a block or two from her home. Grandma and I talked of this place, and I

¹² According to Twigg (1999), “certain areas of the house are public areas, relatively open to strangers and guests; others are private, used only by those who live there” (p. 388). The ordering of these spaces may be interrupted by growing older; at times, spaces may require reordering or become somewhat blurred along the public/private continuum.

saw her becoming unsettled and upset. She had been there to visit with friends, as a volunteer to the elderly, and also as a guest after a hospital stay to regain her strength and a couple of pounds. “No privacy,” she said, “no space for dreaming, no gardens to tend, and no view; I will not go to this place they want me to go.”

According to Grandma, the hostel just down the road, threatened to wipe out her sense of place¹³, sense of belonging, and sense of self because the hostel did not resonate with her. The hostel held neither her past nor her present stories of experience, and she assumed her future stories in the new place would be composed by others who possibly perceived growing older arrogantly (Blunt & Varley, 2004; Lugones, 1987; Tuan, 1991).

For Grandma, the people travelling into her front room might be described as agonistic travellers who attempted to conquer her “world” (Lugones, 1987). In these moments, those who entered did not seem to enter with loving playfulness (Lugones). They did not come with openness and creativity, nor did it appear they stepped outside their perspective and understanding of what it meant to grow

¹³ Hummon (1992) explains, “sense of place involves a personal orientation toward place, in which one’s understandings of place and one’s feelings about place become fused in the context of environmental meaning” (p. 262). When embedded in the literature, a sense of place is a multidimensional, overarching construct, which includes the dimensions of place attachment, place identity, and place dependence. For further clarification of these dimensions, see Trentelman (2009).

older, to see Grandma's world through her eyes instead of their own. At that time, I too entered Grandma's world without loving playfulness.

FN (Eyes of a Nurse)

I sat and watched Grandma inch to the front of her chair and prepare to stand; she needed to use the toilet. Slowly, she lifted herself out of the chair, steadied herself, and walked down the hall. I had watched her make this trip many times, and I took this opportunity to remember her and I jostling each other down the hall to see who would get to pee first. I remembered our laughter and our cheers, as one of us closed the toilet door just ahead of the other.

As I drifted among my memories, I assumed my role as a nurse. I assessed Grandma's gait, the distance to the toilet, and the absence of handrails and her walker. My assessment was initiated by the perceptions of others who had recently pervaded Grandma's home, and others began to compose a different story for her of growing older in another place.

In my role as a nurse, I might be rendered not playful. According to Lugones (1987), I might have become not playful because I entered Grandma's

“world” by establishing an environment with “agon¹⁴, conquest, and arrogance as the main ingredients” (p. 17). For me to playfully enter this new “world” would have been foolish. I assumed that to support Grandma to remain in her home, I would need to demonstrate good sense and judgment grounded in my role as a nurse, rather than in the role of a grandchild who deeply loved her grandmother. I continued to wonder about the tensions called forth in me as I took on these different roles.

As I contemplated Lugones’ (1987) words and my previous assumption, I wondered how my childhood memories of Grandma’s front room could shift my lack of playfulness in my role as a nurse and the current stories I was hearing of growing older. As a grandchild, I wondered how I might have invited others to travel into Grandma’s “world” with loving playfulness, “which involves openness to surprise, openness to being a fool, openness to self-construction or reconstruction and to construction or reconstruction of the “worlds” we inhabit playfully” (p. 17).

Today, the words *front room* invite me to reflect on my sense of place and the many stories lived and told alongside Grandma, and how their complexity has come together to nurture my stories to live by (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Our stories reminded me of where I came from. Furthermore, as I returned to my memories of Grandma’s home, I once again heard her multilayered stories of

¹⁴ I interpret Lugones’ (1987) use of agon in this quote as referring to a protagonist. Often, the people who entered Grandma’s home came with a particular idea or agenda in relation to her choice of the place in which to grow older.

growing older in her place. I am now aware I have never been fully able to explore and understand the depth of her story within the story (Crites, 1971). These stories included Grandma's mundane and sacred stories coming together to define her place in which to grow older. Once again, I wondered about older adults' understandings of experience in relation to place.

The Four Directions in Narrative Inquiry

The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space encouraged me to focus in four directions to more fully understand Grandma's story of her experience of growing older. Therefore, to inquire into experience, I travelled *inward* toward feelings, hopes, and moral beliefs and values; *outward* toward the environment and how it influences experience; and *forward* and *backward* through past, present, and future stories of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Parallel and intertwined with my travels were the participants' travels as they inquired into their experiences. Our travels were further influenced by the questions we asked in each direction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Thus, when one is positioned on this two-dimensional space in any particular inquiry, one asks questions, collects field notes, derives interpretations, and writes a research text that addresses both personal and social issues by looking inward and outward, and addresses temporal issues by looking not only to the event but to its past and to its future. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50)

The Purpose and Research Question in Narrative Inquiry

One of the methodological principles [Clandinin and Connelly] were taught in quantitative analysis courses was to specify hypotheses to be tested in research. It does not work like that in narrative inquiry. The purposes, and what one is exploring and finds puzzling, change as the research progresses. This happens from day to day and week to week, and it happens over the long haul as narratives are retold, puzzles shift, and purposes change (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 73).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest narrative inquiries are always about a wonder or a research puzzle. A research problem indicates that a question and an answer are expected, whereas narrative inquiry “carries more of a sense of a search, a ‘re-search,’ a searching again . . . continual reformulation of an inquiry than it does a sense of problem, definition and solution” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). My narrative inquiry also began with a research puzzle.

With my interest in seeking meaning and understanding in Grandma’s and other older adults’ stories of experience, including those relevant to growing older, self-identity, and place, Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) understanding of narrative inquiry supported me to embrace the idea that stories evolve over time. Therefore, neither a person’s growing older nor their stories are static, as meanings and understandings are continually sought amid unfolding experiences (Coleman, Ivani-Chalian, & Robinson, 1999).

With this understanding, I had the opportunity to explore wonders that changed as my research progressed. My wonders included the following: How do my experiences lived alongside Grandma influence my understanding of growing older in relation to place? How do older adults name the places in which they choose to grow older? Who influences the naming of their places? How do our experiences and places help to define who we are and who we are becoming? How do the social, cultural, and institutional narratives of the social milieu influence peoples' understandings of growing older in place? How might I, as a nurse, attend to experiences in and of places? Furthermore, how can I encourage that the experiences of older adults be central to nursing care?

Narrative inquiry also encouraged me to respond to the call to understand growing older from an individual perspective. Some "older adults may frame their life meaning as a story" (Chapman, 2005, p. 14), and lives are lived and stories are told that are socially constructed through relationships (Randall, 2011). "Narrative inquiry, from this point of view, is one of trying to make sense of life as lived" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 78).

The absence of direct questions may support older adults to live, tell, relive, and retell their experiences through "actions and interactions, thoughts and utterances, artifacts and works of art" (Hazan, 1994, p. 1) with less certainty, as they may not be troubled by the tensions of providing the correct answer. Furthermore, the absence of direct questions in the inquiry may lessen the sense of prying into older adults' stories of growing older and help older adults to tell

their stories without feeling “rushed, threatened, or even violated” by the research process (Weiser, 1993, p. 43).

Bateson (1989) concludes, “goals too clearly defined can become blinkers” (p. 6). Therefore, clearly defined questions designed before entering the research field may become blinkers and interfere with me inquiring into the stories participants and I live by, to find meaning and understanding in our experiences. Bateson reminds me to remember, even though

dissection is an essential part of scientific method, and it is particularly tempting to disassemble a life composed of odds and ends, to describe the pieces separately. Unfortunately, when this is done the pattern and loving labor in the patchwork is lost. (p. 10)

In response to working in relationship with participants, I found myself continually explaining what I was trying to do (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Sometimes, participants would pause and ask me, “Is anything I’m saying useful for your research?” Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest narrative inquirers need to find many places, including response communities, “where they can give accounts of their developing work over time. As the explaining takes place, clarification and shaping of purpose occurs” (p. 73). My ongoing conversation in relationship with participants and my response communities¹⁵ not only helped me to gain a clearer understanding of my research puzzle, but also opened

¹⁵ Throughout my inquiry, my response community consisted of my supervisor and committee members, colleagues, children of older adults, and friends who took particular interest in my research, whether they were older adults or not.

opportunities to explore what was interesting or possible in the field¹⁶ (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Returning to Narrative Inquiry

In the field.

Field texts.

As part of my conversations with participants, I gathered field texts (the narrative inquiry term for data), which consisted of transcripts, photographs, and memory-box items. These formed the basis of my writings and represented participants' and my response(s) to our experience and where we were situated within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My field texts were shaped by my relationship with participants and “the stories being lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 92).

Because my field texts were gathered in relationship with participants, I needed to remain wakeful to them being embedded with interpretations that might have influenced what participants and I selectively chose to pay attention to while in the field. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that what shows up in field texts may also include what I less consciously and deliberately selected, privileged, or made visible or invisible; therefore, my field texts also say “much about what is not said and not noticed” (p. 93).

Journal entries, further field texts, and notes were also written to fill in the spaces created by memories. Therefore, my field texts were plentiful in

¹⁶ The term *field* refers to the time that I lived alongside the participants.

description and also portrayed the relational circumstances of the inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also encouraged me to remain wakeful to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space as I made field texts, and how participants and I were “placed at any particular moment—temporally, spatially, and in terms of the personal and the social” (p. 95).

Artifacts.

My field texts were composed of multilayered stories extended over a period of time. They included artifacts¹⁷ such as shared artwork, photographs, memory-box items, house plans, and documents (Clandinin & Caine, 2007). Telling stories through their artifacts was also a way participants were able to share some of what they were unable to tell through words alone (van den Brandt-van Heek, M., 2011; Weiser, 1993). For me, Grandma’s shells placed on the top of her dressing table at my parents’ home told our stories of sitting at the beach in silence, as we drifted among the waves. Also, for some older adults, language may constrain individual understanding, and “transcending the barriers of language [may give] rise to new forms of understanding” (Tornstam, 2005, p. 58).

The presence of artifacts, including photographs, paintings, and music, in some older adults’ homes may also strengthen and/or speak to their attachment or connection to place “at a level, above basic self-maintenance, where the individual can feel secure about her/his own identity” (Peace, Holland, &

¹⁷ Some theorists differentiate between objects, artifacts, and possessions. For the inquiry, I will not differentiate between these three terms and will refer to all things that can be seen, touched, made, used, modified, held as property or owned as artifacts (Cipriani et al., 2009).

Kellaher, 2005, p. 201). Artifacts may represent significant other places, gifts from relatives or friends, reminders of deceased or living spouses and family members, craft work, and personal interests or achievements, and as Weiser (1993) suggested, we hold onto those artifacts that have the most “intense personal meaning attached to them” (p. 25).

Many artifacts may reflect the older adult’s self and identity to others, as these objects and the manner of their display [may represent] *self to self* (to remind, to reinforce selected aspects of personality), *self to others* (claims about personality and achievements) and *others to self* (visual reminders of absent people, including changing images over time, e.g. of grandchildren). (Peace et al., 2005, p. 202)

Artifacts may also support the older adult to engage in deep reflective and creative thought, and expression and exploration of inner feelings to transform self and others (Hocking, 2000). However, as Peace et al. (2005) suggested, I also needed to remain awake to artifacts participants displayed to please others rather than for reasons of attachment.

Stories in and beyond the photograph frame: Grandma’s familial album.

The photographs in Grandma’s front room tell stories of her life over time. Unlike memory-box items, which may tend to be more abstract, familial albums visually tell stories of relationships, time, and place. My awareness of stories continued to deepen as I engaged with Grandma’s photographs throughout the inquiry. I continued to wonder if her photographs enriched and deepened her

stories of identity and place. I also wondered if the stories Grandma and I lived as represented by her familial album shaped our understanding of relationships, time, and place. Throughout the inquiry, my understandings deepened, and I now know these photographs do shape the stories I continue to tell.

A letter to Grandma

G'day Grandma¹⁸,

It was so wonderful to visit with you last week. I know it was a pity it wasn't for longer, but maybe next time. When I arrived at your place and walked through your front door, I was reminded of the many times I had walked through that door as a child.

Once settled on the little footstool in front of your chair, I slowly looked around your front room, and I was drawn to the photographs on display. Do you know, Grandma; many of these pictures haven't been moved since they entered your home? I am always drawn to the photograph in the white frame on the small table as you enter the kitchen; it is the one of your daughter, my aunt, taken sometime before her untimely death. Have you ever

¹⁸ This is the type of letter that I would write to Grandma.

noticed that my mother has a very similar picture of your daughter, sitting “just so” on a small table near her front door?

The Pixie portrait of my siblings and me—I am sure it was taken when my brother was 2 years old—has always intrigued me. Why haven’t you updated it with a more recent photograph? I know you have received many since it was taken. Maybe this photograph remains in place because it captures my sister, my brother, and me in our childhood during a period in which we spent much time together with you in your home—the centre of our world in town. Do you remember your place buzzing with laughter and busyness created by your five grandchildren, and how we managed to squeeze into three beds without complaining? I wonder if it is these memories that keep our portrait in place, unchanged over time: a reminder of past relationships interwoven into the very structure of your home.

I noticed you have added a new photograph to those on the table under the window; it is of your son holding his first grandchild. As I looked at the photograph, I wondered what you saw when you looked at your smiling great-grandchild, nestled in

the arms of her grandfather. I also noticed a new picture frame resting against the table leg at the end of your room. It has many photographs in it of people and places I did not recognize—most, you explained, were of your family from years past or small snapshots of your children when they were young. As I knelt down on the floor to look more closely at the photographs, I wondered about the choice of the pictures and the relationship between each one resting side by side in the little squares of the collage mat. Next time I visit, I hope you will tell me about these pictures and how they come together to define place for you.

I am out of time again. I will phone you in the next couple of weeks to hear your reply to my letter, as I know your fingers are not cooperating at the moment and writing is difficult for you.

Many hugs and kisses to you.

Roslyn



Image 1: Empty table

It is from memory that I recall the scene described in the letter, because today when I entered Grandma's front room, although her chair was slightly skewed to face the front door, she was not sitting there. The pictures were all

gone, and the small table where the photograph of my aunt previously sat was empty.

Following Grandma's passing, I gently removed the photographs from her front room, which had been their home for most of my life. Some pictures had a special place in the room—some on tables in formal frames and others close at hand without frames, continuing to reside among the letters and envelopes in which they came. As I removed each photograph, I placed it in a pile, depending on which family member it belonged to. Some pictures were placed in a separate pile to enter into a family album, and others were put into envelopes to be sent to children of Grandma's friends captured in the image.

As I removed a photograph from a frame, I became aware of a story: each frame had many photographs layered behind the glass. These pictures were unrelated, with a mixing of families, events, places, and years occurring. There appeared to be no sequence to the layering of photographs; however, I gained a sense that each picture was too important to be removed from its frame, yet another picture needed to be put on display.

Even though I had gazed at many of these photographs over the years, it wasn't until I gently removed the layered photographs from their frames that I became aware of the people and the places within the pictures and their stories. Unfortunately, I will never be privy to some of the stories, for they died with Grandma. My mother and my uncle were unable to tell the stories of some of the pictures, and at times even questioned the identity of the person or the place

captured by the camera's lens. Who were these others that lived among the familial pictures in Grandma's front room? Where were the places, and how were they important to her? What stories did these photographs have to tell about Grandma's travels into the "worlds" of others? What did they tell about her sense of meaning of place?

While we were packing up Grandma's things, we found boxes of photographs that had neither made their way into frames nor been put on public display, at least not in my memory. My mother said she remembered some of the photographs - they had been on display in her childhood home on the farm. Others, she remembered, hung on the walls of her grandparents' home in the city. I began to wonder what stories these photographs told of Grandma's past and if they could be woven into present and future stories. I continue to ponder these questions and wonder about the untold stories now that all her photographs are packed into a chest and stored in my uncle's spare room.

Pividori's (2008) work suggests to me that Grandma's pictures possibly kept her memories alive, bringing her past, present, and future together. Furthermore, Hirsch (1997) suggests that photographs may create a social and historical space to which Grandma might have travelled through her memories or imagination to pause and reflect on relationships, family, friends, places, time, and her life story. Through her reflections, there is a possibility Grandma may have assembled and read her photographs differently, supporting her to compose a further life (Bateson, 2010).

When I thought about the relationship between photographs and place, I wondered if photographs define a place of our own, thus contributing to our sense of self and also to the way other people see us. The photographs in Grandma's front room rarely moved, and I wondered what stories were told by the selection and position of her photographs. Throughout the inquiry, I paid attention to the presence or absence of photographs in the lives of participants.

My wonder encouraged me to return to the mundane and sacred stories (Crites, 1971) each of us carries, to consider how they may come together through photographs to create a sense of place. Upon reflection, I realized the photographs in Grandma's front room defined it as a special place, constructed from childhood memories of my town place and present memories of living alongside Grandma as she continued to grow older. For me, Grandma's front room became a place (Tuan, 1977) infused with meaning from my experiences shared with her. Today, even without the presence of Grandma and her photographs, her front room remains, in my memory, unchanged.

Through the inquiry, participants and I had the opportunity to inquire into photographs. Some photographs were prominently displayed on their walls or on shelves in their living rooms, and others were in albums stored in boxes not yet unpacked following a move. On occasion, their photographs brought back a mixture of emotions, and I was reminded to inquire gently and in relation with participants as they began to compose stories of place and relationships from their family albums.

Co-composing in relation.*Interim texts.*

As I engaged in reading and rereading field texts in relation with participants and my response community, the shaping of field texts into research texts occurred through the writing of interim research texts. These texts were situated in the field texts, and they were “designed to be shared and negotiated with participants” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 133). Furthermore, the interim text was influenced by my experiences and understandings, which were laid alongside the experiences of participants.

Sometimes, the interim texts were composed alongside the field texts, as I engaged in the process of pulling forward patterns, tensions, and narrative threads (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2010). These texts took different forms and remained open and tentative. Their openness was intended to invite participants to say more about their stories where silence or gaps existed (Clandinin et al., 2010). While engaging in the process of writing the interim texts, I imagined possible narrative threads and how they were unfolding among the stories being lived and told throughout the inquiry.

In sharing texts, I also opened opportunities for participants to return to familiar ground and rediscover something not previously seen or draw out new possibilities for understanding and finding meaning in experience. However, negotiating interim texts was tension filled, because our stories bumped up against stories of growing older within communities. In these bumping-up places, I

needed to be mindful that I represented participants' voices and their experiences, and not to prioritize my voice or that of individuals or organizations that represented public policies or and social and healthcare services (Minkler, 1996).

Through the process of sharing interim texts, I sought transparency and lived out my relational commitments to participants, while recognizing there are always other possibilities, other interpretations, and other ways to explain stories of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To help me seek and understand possibilities, I became a part of a response community consisting of my peers who study narrative inquiry and my supervisory committee. Because my inquiry took me away from this community, I also established one closer to home. These people were older adults from the community, colleagues, and close friends. Our conversations helped me to see possibilities, as each member told stories, listened to the stories of others, heard responses, and gave stories back to each other in such a way that new insights were also shared (Clandinin et al., 2010). Through this process, I had the opportunity to deepen my understanding of experiences in and out of the field and to write rich and detailed field, interim, and final research texts.

Final research texts.

In co-composing final research texts (known as results in other research methodologies), I was reminded of my ethical responsibilities to represent the experiences of participants in such a way that the audience did not easily misconstrue, misread, or misinterpret participants' stories of experience relevant

to growing older (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2003). It was equally important that the stories participants and I co-composed and choose to tell in the final research texts challenged the status quo and creatively questioned policy, social movements, and daily community living (Fine et al.) by speaking to the personal, practical, and social significance of our negotiated research texts. Also, unlike other research methodologies, narrative inquiry does not aspire to be value free, and the final research texts were complicated by the messiness of co-composing (Caine & Steeves, 2011).

A Reflexive and Reflective Methodology

According to Clandinin and Caine (2007), narrative inquiry is an ongoing reflexive and reflective methodology. As a narrative inquirer, I needed to pursue and understand my experiences before, during, and long after an inquiry.

Reflexivity and reflectivity are a means by which I explored trustworthiness and integrity in my choice of methodology.

It was reflexive practice that encouraged me to pause, reflect, and reposition myself in my stories and those co-composed alongside participants. Because these stories were co-composed, it was important for me to consider the consequences of retelling stories and to begin to think morally with stories (Carter, 2007). In returning to my stories of my farm and town places, I became aware that these stories were co-composed with my parents and Grandma. In retelling these stories, I paid particular attention to my relationships with people

in these places and how they influenced the stories I told or those I chose not to tell.

Reflexivity invited me to attend to my autobiography (Cardinal, 2011). My autobiographical narrative beginnings emphasized the centrality of myself in the inquiry and supported my understanding as a responsive being, thus helping me listen to and attend with participants' stories authentically, with my heart and my body (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994).

Returning to my field texts of Grandma's story, I engaged in the journaling of my life story as lived alongside her. Through my journal, I explored our relationship, the told and untold stories we shared, the places we visited or imagined, and my acceptance of her growing older, subsequently gaining a greater awareness of how I told and retold Grandma's stories and a stronger ethical need to attend to her stories with integrity.

My journaling challenged who I knew Grandma to be, which denied that Grandma was old or in need of support. When I examined my denial more deeply, I recognized that my awareness of change in the places Grandma and I shared and continued to visit was minimal; hence, I also expected growing older meant Grandma would remain equally unchanged. Consequently, my journaling fostered self-reflection, particularly around place and identity, and encouraged me to invite Grandma to tell further stories. These stories often created discord and enlightenment at the same time, and their tellings gave us an opportunity to enrich

our relationship and understanding of place and to co-compose new stories to live by (Caine & Steeves, 2009; Clandinin et al., 2006).

This deep personal reflection was necessary as a narrative inquirer to seek understanding from my stories, including their complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty, before entering relationships with participants. Reflexivity also opened up a space, which invited participants and me to be vulnerable and to share understandings, to explore our interdependence, and to support an ethical approach to the representation of their stories in the final research text.

Ethics of Narrative Inquiry

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) encourage narrative inquirers to attend to ethics throughout an inquiry, as “ethical matters shift and change as we move through an inquiry. They are never far from the heart of our inquiries no matter where we are in the inquiry process” (p. 170).

Relational methodology.

To enrich and transform experiences as a narrative inquirer, I entered relationships with participants; consequently, I “cannot work with participants without sensing the fundamental human connection among us; nor can [I] create research texts without imagining a relationship to you, [the] audience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 425). For Clandinin and Connelly (2000), “relationship is at the heart of thinking narratively. Relationship is key to what it is that narrative inquirers do” (p. 189).

Issues about consent.

As I returned to a previous field note regarding Grandma and the opinion of others who thought she should move into a hostel just down the road, I became aware of many possibilities for the inquiry. Grandma and I could have sought meaning and understanding in what it meant to move, or we could have engaged in conversations concerning the power of family and making decisions as an older adult. Alternatively, we could have explored her loss of privacy¹⁹ and vulnerability within the shifting landscape of growing older.

These possibilities awaken me to the tensions of composing texts during the inquiry. As I turned inward, I bumped up against tensions concerning representing shared stories; turning outward, there were issues concerning audience and form; and always, “there is tension, as [I] consider[ed] how to represent the situatedness of the inquiry within place” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 139). The possibilities and tensions I describe indicated the research puzzle to which participants consent may be broadly articulated in narrative inquiry, and at times, the phenomenon cannot be named at the outside of the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). While exploring these possibilities and tensions during and after the inquiry, I was reminded of the continual need to negotiate relationships with participants as I moved back and forth among the

¹⁹ I never inquired into Grandma’s reference to privacy during our conversations. However, I surmise that she was referring to the places of her home, once private, intimate, and relatively hidden from others, becoming more public, as service providers entered her home in response to her needs (Twigg, 1999).

field, field texts, and research texts as we negotiated the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Identities of others.

Also embedded in the field notes are the identities of others I see as central to Grandma's story. As Mellick and Fleming (2010) indicated, while participants may give consent, the identities of others central to the story may be disclosed without their agreement. For example, in telling Grandma's stories about her struggles in refusing to move into a hostel, the "aggregation of separate details" (Mellick & Fleming, 2010, p. 307) within her story disclosed the identity of several others, including family members and, potentially, the name of the hostel within her community.

Those others in Grandma's story were not invited to review my field notes. Ethically, this posed a dilemma as I attempted to represent her story in its richness and to gain a deeper sense of my research puzzle. To remove any section that involved another person would have left the story disjointed. However, to include them in the story exposed others to the risk of harm or the possible implication of a mistaken identity. During the inquiry, I also learned that the ongoing negotiation between participant and inquirer can take a different route after the death of a participant. Bergum (1994) indicates the telling of participants' stories and my stories are guided by relational ethics. These ethics attend to the inherent nature of knowledge that is "constructed through understanding the person, not as an objective body (a 'thing,' a heart, a uterus or a

liver) but a living person where body and self are one” (Bergum, 1994, p. 73). As a narrative inquirer, I accepted that this knowledge is unique to the individual, the experience, and the context. These are complicated ethical issues that needed to be consistently attended to throughout and after the inquiry.

Negotiating stories.

The relationship between the participants and me as researcher, and the environment and the social milieu, shifted my interactions with them as mere subjects to co-inquirers and co-composers in the research process. The co-composition of stories in narrative inquiry “focuses on connectedness, engagement, and involvement with the other” (Bishop, 2005, p. 116) and reflects the ongoing conversations between participants and me in the creation of field, interim, and research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). By returning these texts to participants, I was negotiating how their lives and our relationship might be represented in the final research text. As we read and reread texts in relation, my questions to participants were

not so much, Have I got it right? Is this what you said? Is this what you do? Rather, it is something much more global and human: Is this you? Do you see yourself here? Is this the character you want to be when this is read by others? These are more questions of identity than they are questions of whether or not one has correctly reported what a participant has said or done. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 148)

Kerby (1991) suggests our imagination can fill in the gaps left vacant by our recollections, sometimes leading us to tell and retell stories differently each time, as our memories rarely unfold in the same way each time we revisit them. “In this back and forth motion, we are constantly forced to shift our focus, from close to distant” (Blew, 1999, p. 119), from the past to the present and future. The movement of focus in the four directions called me to be attentive to the story and participants’ emotional responses that signaled their location within the story, its storyline, and its time and place at the moment of its telling (Downey & Clandinin, 2010). Furthermore, what participants chose to tell me was influenced by their memory, the importance they placed on each memory, and its relevance to their present social context, time, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Chafe (1998) encouraged me to remember that the telling of stories through language “is always going to be imperfect and incomplete” (p. 271) and “the experience itself may be more constant through time than any shape it is given by a particular verbalization” (p. 270). Consequently, the academic world may need to fundamentally shift its methodological boundaries pertaining to truth, reality, and lies (Banks, 1998) and to accept stories of experience told by older adults. As Anaïs Nin (as cited in Quinney, 2001) stated, “there are few human beings who receive the truth complete and staggering, by instant illumination. Most of them acquire it fragment by fragment, on a small scale, by successive developments, cellularly, like a laborious mosaic” (p. xiv).

Relationships.

At all times, during and beyond the inquiry, narrative inquiry called me to consider alternate views and build relationships with participants with “curiosity, interest, passion, and change” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 29), all the while caring deeply about participants and the integrity of our relationship. More importantly, new stories evolved through the retelling of stories after the passing of Grandma; however, the composing of these stories was always guided by my memories and my deep ethical responsibility to our relationship. As Lopez (1990) so eloquently said in his story of *Crow and Weasel*:

the stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other’s memory. (p. 48).

Not knowing where the story may lead in narrative inquiry encouraged me to pause and contemplate my ongoing relationship with participants. Ethically, I am responsible for being available to support them to pick up the pieces during and after the inquiry. This may also include providing an opportunity for participants to reflect on the research experience.

A deeper understanding of experience may take time, space, and further support for some older adults to compose forward-looking stories (Huber, Clandinin, & Huber, 2006) that may shift the existing cultural, social, and institutional narratives (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009) relevant to growing older.

Consequently, participants and I needed to renegotiate the meaning of the future and how our understanding of future interplayed with telling stories that “fashion a *life* that is dignified and worthwhile” (Freeman, 2011, p. 18).

As a nurse ethically supporting the participants to find their voice through the inquiry, I might encourage the development and implementation of nursing theory and care that emancipates, rather than that which controls the patient and his or her care. To do so would require me to listen and attend to and with older adults’ stories by being present through a deep and multilayered relationship, built on dignity, mutuality, companionship, patience, and trust (Bateson, 1994; Lincoln, & Guba, 1989).

Study Specifics

Until Grandma was in her 80s, I never thought about her being old or what the experiences of growing older meant to her. Rarely did we engage in telling stories about growing older in place; rather, her stories were often interwoven into the stories she lived by. However, as her 80th year became her 83rd year and then her 85th year, our conversations began to shift. They began to include stories of wanting to age in place and how her home defined who she was within her community.

According to my reading of Relph (1976), Grandma’s home expressed her individuality and presence within her community, and it was a place from which she looked “out on the rest of the world” (p. 83). Her attachment to her home brought forth multiple experiences, responses, and affections, which nurtured her

sense of respect and responsibility to care for her home “both for itself and for what it [was] to [her] and to others” (Relph, p. 38).

As Relph (1976) said,

home is the foundation of our identity as individuals and as members of a community, the dwelling-place of being. Home is not just the house you happen to live in, it is not something that can be anywhere, that can be exchanged, but an irreplaceable center of significance. (p. 39)

Here again I am drawn to Basso’s (1996) understanding that places become significant as we are able to name them. By naming them, they cannot be moved or replaced; they remain solid and present within our world. Throughout the inquiry, my understanding that it is within the geographical landscape that our sense of home and our identity may be embedded (Basso, 1996; Twigg, 1999) has deepened. Because of Grandma’s relationship with her home, including the possibility that her home defined her to herself and to her community (Relph, 1976), I wonder if this relationship born of familiarity spurred Grandma’s strong sense to remain in place even though her immediate family had moved away.

With the current phenomenon of older adults living into and beyond their 80th year, I wonder how their stories of experience unfold in the midst of societies that struggle with the concept of growing older (Gullette, 2004). Stemming from my puzzle, my research included three women 80 years and over, who I invited to participate through purposive sampling. I engaged in conversations with Pauline, Alison, and Sue, who were living in their own homes

in Saskatchewan, Canada. These women were neither verbally nor cognitively impaired. Our conversations were more than “just verbal communications: touch, movement, the written word, [artifacts], and even silence [had] a place in [our] dialogue” (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005, pp. 128–129).

In addition, I wrote field notes in response to our telephone conversations and emails exchanged outside our arranged conversations. These exchanges encouraged further sharing of artifacts: attending mass with Pauline and driving through her old neighbourhood to visit significant places (her old homes, her children’s old school, and the local shopping district) that came into being as she named them during the inquiry; looking at old photographs of previous homes with Alison and visiting her in her new home; and discussing travel souvenirs and natural healing remedies with Sue. These conversations deepened our relationship, inviting me to step further into their “worlds” and to pay closer attention to the tensions between their stories and the stories I lived alongside Grandma.

Meeting the inquirers.

With the passing of Grandma, I realized I would not be doing my PhD research with her and her friends; rather, I would be looking for participants in Canada. It was a very daunting prospect. People said I would have no difficulty recruiting participants; however, I wanted participants to whom I had some connection. My memories of conversations with Lynne, Maggie, and Julie about their mothers and my understanding of who these women were from their

daughters' perspectives prompted me to ask them if they thought their mothers would participate in my research. I remember waiting anxiously for Pauline, Alison, and Sue to accept my invitation and the relief I felt when they all accepted and we began the inquiry.

My conversations with Pauline began in the living room of her apartment within a seniors' complex. Our initial four conversations were audiotaped and transcribed. We met once a week for several months, then biweekly for several more, and then tapered down to monthly as the final research text was negotiated. As our relationship deepened, I picked Pauline up and to go out for supper or coffee, and at times we were joined by my good friend Sally, with whom we played cards. It was difficult to negotiate going out with Pauline, as I was often met with resistance. She thought she was being a burden; however, with reassurance, Pauline began to eagerly accept my invitations. On one occasion, I took Pauline to see her doctor and then out shopping. For me, this engagement with Pauline deepened our relationship and was a turning point in my understanding of the stories I lived alongside Grandma.

Since the inquiry, Pauline and I have remained in relationship. Recently, we shared a meal with Sally and another friend at my dining room table. I still remember making arrangements for this supper, because the intention was to bridge a relationship between Sally's friend and Pauline. Sally's friend had similar interests to Pauline and lived close by, supporting the possibility that

Pauline may begin to build friendships outside of the seniors' complex in a community in which she still felt a stranger.

Alison and I met three times in my living room over a span of 6 months. Our conversations were audiotaped and transcribed. When her home was completed, I drove to Brookes to visit Alison and see her new home. Moving our conversations into Alison's front room invited new possibilities. It was here I learned about her family album, the story of her new sofa and loveseat, and the choices she had made in deciding on the design and layout of her new home, which she had begun to call "a home for a senior." It was while visiting with Alison that I returned to memories of Grandma and her deep desire to remain in her home until she died.

It was on a warm summer's evening down by the river while watching people who had come to dance that Sue and I first met. We did not meet again until Sue returned from her summer away visiting with her daughter Kerry in Massachusetts. This time we met in her condominium, and our conversations unfolded in her living room over a period of 8 months and included four initial conversations that were audiotaped and transcribed. During our conversations, I learned to attend to the voices within me, to care for stories, and my deep ethical responsibility for giving them away where they are needed.

Revealing the inquirers.

Pauline, Alison, and Sue were all born into the same generation in Saskatchewan, Canada. Here they grew up and continue to grow older in a

province where they were once children and, later, where they married and raised children of their own. With the passing of their husbands, they have found themselves seeking new places to call home. How to introduce these three women to my audience has caused me great tension. I have thought about describing them as being women over the age of 80, widowed, and living independently. However, I found myself hesitating because Pauline, Alison, and Sue did not focus on these characteristics during our conversations. Therefore, I decided to ask them to introduce themselves, so here they are: three women of Saskatchewan who came to my research telling very different stories about their experiences of growing older in relation to place.

Pauline.

I'm a retired housewife, a mother of five children

I'm 85 years old

I started working when I was 43 years old

at the bowling alley

before working, I was shy and quiet

I enjoy meeting people

I play cards, read mystery books, and call bingo

I'm an active volunteer in my community

I firmly believe in the Catholic religion

the rosary, mass, and the Divine Mercy prayer

I have eight grandchildren and five great-grandchildren

We keep in contact through email
I'm an old "Saskatchewan girl"
I need the four seasons
I've been widowed for 11 years
My friends are my own age
I like my own company
I like to watch sports on TV
curling
baseball when the Blue Jays are playing
I support the Roughriders
I was an avid golfer during my 50s, 60s, and 70s
And I never used a golf cart
I now watch golf on TV
My childhood games of softball
were interrupted by the need to milk the cows
I was an "invisible" type of person
An avid walker and independent
My husband worked away a lot

(December 4, 2013)

Alison.

Well, I'm a widow for one thing . . . I'm an elderly lady . . . I'm retired

I can't think, I can't think, what would you say?

I'm in fairly good health, I'm a diabetic definitely, and I do have high
blood pressure, I do have some health problems . . .

I'm getting older. I'm only 80-and-a-half: I'm going the other way now
toward 81; I'm leaning toward 81

But now that I'm over 80, I look at every day as a gift . . .
every day that I feel well

I would never change my religion, I'm a Catholic . . .

I should have put that first

I have 12 children . . .

Even before I married I thought I wanted to have a big family

My sister and I were the youngest in the family . . . there was six

I stayed home and my youngest sister went away to school.

I felt I should stay home and help my parents . . .

They were getting old

I did work at different things, but then I got a job teaching,

I did that for 1 year . . . I was going out with my husband then, we
married . . .

I was pregnant . . . I stopped teaching then . . .

I wanted to be on the farm and make my garden

I'm a farm person.

I like to grow vegetables

read pioneering books on my Kindle . . .

I like to cook homemade soups

I never moved far

(December 7, 2013)

Sue.

I'm a loner . . .

I never ever fit in

I never worked really

not outside the home . . .

with all these years I've been thinking and feeling, and wanting,

it's just coming out now

I'm not good at small talk.

Get your teeth into something and I'll talk to you

I love cats

I've been going to India since '92,

2 months of the year . . .

the only time I felt a sense of belonging was in India . . .

I don't think I'll be going back anymore . . .

Well I don't feel the need, and I'm in my 80s,

and so now I will just see what's here

I'm born in '31

Always thinking that I have to take care of my kids

Well I'm busy

but at this age I do maybe a third of what you do in a day

I'm a sewer

I always sewed most of our clothes . . .

My first love really is sewing, I knitted all our sweaters

Maybe I'll put up an easel . . . do a little bit of some art work . . .

I did oils and I did some acrylic . . . painting I have to work at

I have to be very healthy at this age to be able to do these things

I'm very project oriented

We were talking about this the other day,

about old people, you can't

take away their hope

I don't read fiction

I [want] information, you know I [want] to feed my mind

Raised Mennonite . . .

I didn't fit, I just didn't fit

I got married at 18 . . .

I was very young and I moved into a district where I couldn't relate

to the people around me, and they couldn't relate to me either . . .

I wasn't a real farmer's wife,

I didn't know cows and stuff

When you know something is right

Something in your heart pushes you,

You just do it . . .

Every answer has a spiritual base

I am creating, I am writing . . .

My book will also stir up some people . . .

Push some buttons I should say

I'm very visual

I was so curious I wanted education

To be dependent on others that is difficult

We create our own reality

I live so much in the present . . .

Past is the past . . .

That's why we're on Earth, to know ourselves

I always asked why am I

what am I to do,

why am I here

(July and December, 2013)

The voices within the narrative accounts.

The interim and final research texts were negotiated in relationship with Pauline, Alison, and Sue during our conversations. Reading and rereading my field and interim research texts, I thought more deeply about how I was going to represent participants' voices and my voice within the final research text. I wanted to ensure that the three dimensions of the inquiry space were visible to the reader, and along with this the complexity of the stories told, lived, retold, and

relied throughout the inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). I also wanted to include the tensions and interruptions in the final research text, which included the detours Pauline, Alison, Sue, and I took alongside each other as we explored our geographical places and a place deep inside ourselves.

As I lived alongside the participants, my field notes and interim texts, and my narrative beginnings, I was further embedded in my ethical obligation to present the stories of participants “as closely as possible to the essence of what and how they shared” (Ely, 2007, p. 569). It was somewhere on this journey that I decided to capture the voices within my final research texts through different fonts. By now, you have already met my voice - it appears in Chalkboard font, chosen because it encouraged me to imagine writing freely with pencil and paper. The second font in the following chapter is Century Gothic, and it is the voice of participants. The font is easy to read, and participants could read their narrative accounts unimpeded by complex letters. At times, you will see Times New Roman, Chalkboard, and Century Gothic interweave as our stories unfolded and I attempted to capture the stories of participants as we became co-inquirers in the research.

In considering the representation of participants’ thoughts and feelings in the final research text, I returned to a quote by Sarton (1973) who wrote, “ I have written novels to find out what I *thought* about something and poems to find out what I *felt* about something” (p. 41). At times, participants’ stories called for poetry because it encouraged incomplete phrases, single words, trailing ideas, and

white spaces. Within this open format, I was invited to express our stories freely, without being restricted by grammatical formalities. Hopefully, the open spaces invite the reader to pause, imagine, tell, retell, live, and relive their experiences alongside ours.

Chapter 4

Pauline's Story: Interrupting

A Letter from Grandma²⁰

March 14, 2002

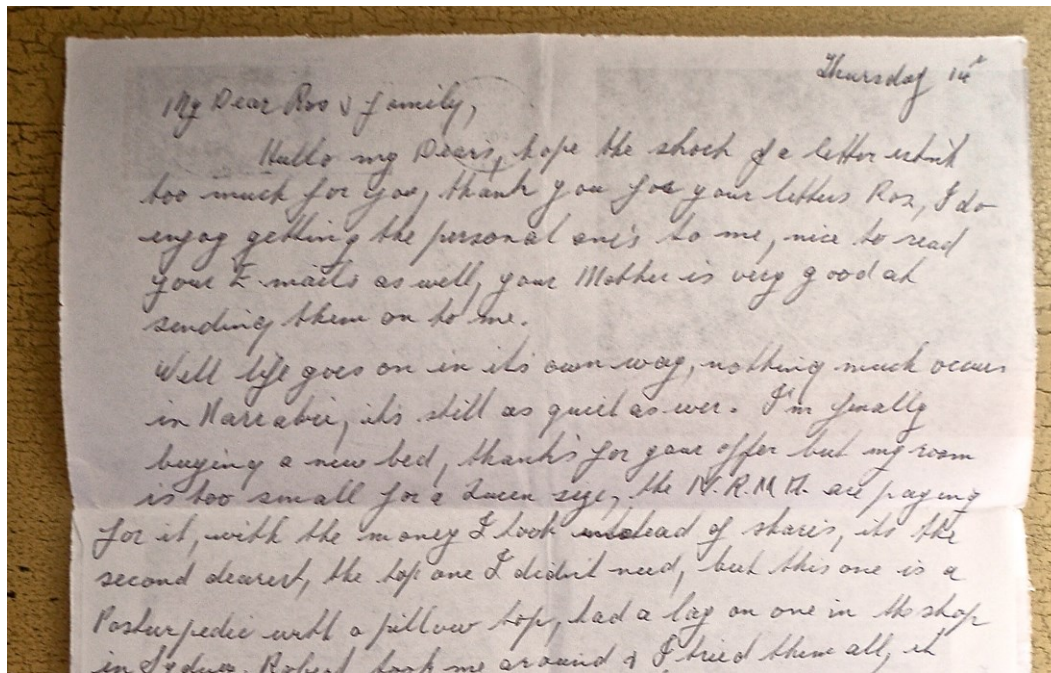


Figure 1: Letter, March 2002

“My Dear Ros & family,

Hello my Dears, hope the shock of a letter wasn't too much for you, thank you for your letters Ros, I do enjoy getting the personal one's to me, nice to read your E-mails as well, your Mother is very good at sending them on to me.”

As I prepared to write Pauline's narrative account, I returned to my memories of stories lived alongside Grandma and to the many letters handed back

²⁰ These letters are photographs of original letters I received from Grandma over the years.

to me in a shoebox after Grandma died. Each letter showed signs of being taken from its envelope more than once; some were stained with sticky fingers and others with their folds well worn. I also reread the letters Grandma sent me, and like hers, they have been lovingly refolded many times. Several letters made me smile and laugh, and others caused tears and heartache as I remember the times, places, and friendships Grandma and I shared.

As Grandma grew older, the number of letters we exchanged began to dwindle. More often, I would write letters and we would connect by telephone because her fingers found it too difficult to grasp a pen. Our conversations gave Grandma an opportunity to respond to my letters and to tell her stories. Unlike our letters, our words were not captured in ink, and with the passing of time, our conversations are becoming distant memories.

A Letter from Grandma

December 6, 2010

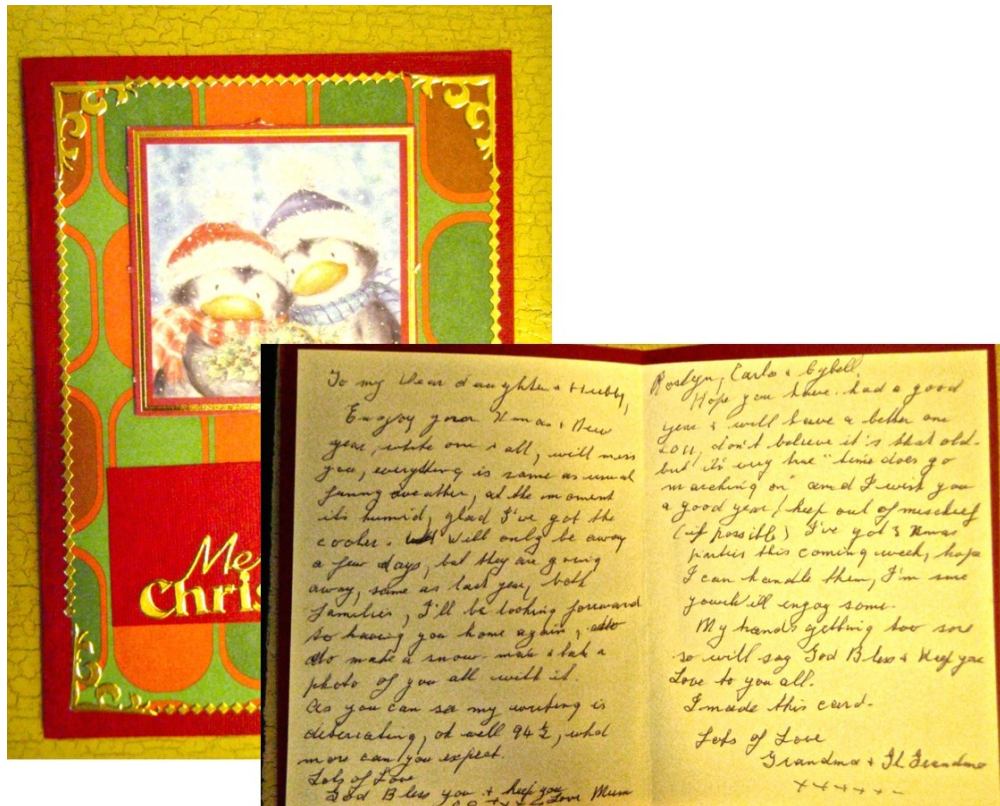


Figure 2: Letter, December 2010

“As you can see my writing is deteriorating, oh well 94½, what more can you expect.”

Rereading Grandma’s letters reminded me of the importance of letter writing to our relationship and how our letters captured many stories. I began to think about them differently as I engaged in conversations with Pauline. I entered Pauline’s apartment with memories of Grandma. Folded within these memories were our letters. These memories inspired me to write Pauline’s narrative account as a series of letters to her. Each letter represents Pauline’s stories, and

interwoven into these are snippets from letters exchanged between Grandma and me.

Our First Meeting

FN²¹ (Cold, dark night)

Where do you live?

Quickly

I flip the pages in the directory,

it isn't far.

Memorizing the details

I dash out into the cold

dark

night

turn right,

turn right again,

your building should be on my left.

Left -

²¹ Field notes (FN) will appear throughout the narrative accounts. They include my reflections, memories, and stories of experiences that have been brought forth through my relationship with the participants.

it has the wrong name.

Out onto the road

another left

another wrong name.

Panic, I'm going to be late . . .

A yellow building,

a memory of descriptions,

turn into the driveway -

this isn't the one.

But wait,

on my right

there it is -

your building

I'm late

I remind myself

next time,

bring a map

an address

maybe come in the daylight.

Dear Pauline,

Writing this letter to you today has me reflecting on my first experiences of being a researcher and how our relationship began. The first evening I drove to your home, I felt confused and lost. Not only was I lost in a neighborhood I didn't know, where the streets went in circles and where the apartment buildings all looked the same, I was also lost in my role as a researcher. I thought I had clearly defined what the purpose of my research was; however, as I pulled into the parking lot outside the main entrance to your building, I began to wonder.

My wonderings slowed my pace as I walked to your front door and I began a conversation in my head, *“How did I get connected with you, and why have you agreed to meet with me to discuss your participation in my research? Your home wasn't a single dwelling—would this matter to our research? The complex you lived in offered meals and activities—could this mean you might not be independent? I too remembered in that moment that your building was a symbol of everything my Grandma could not accept about growing older: it was a*

place of communal living and a place where independence could be lost. With Grandma's stories ingrained into my being, could I listen and attend to your stories with an open mind and discover new possibilities and new stories of growing older in a different place?"

I have known your daughter for several years; she is a friend of my good friend Sally. On several occasions, I have heard your daughter share stories about you—your activities, illnesses, and travels. At some point, a new story began to be told about you moving and what options were available. This was of great interest to me, as I was sharing similar conversations with my Grandma.

The stories your daughter shared didn't give me the impression that you were being coerced into moving. I wondered if your desire to move was prompted by poor health or an inability to cope on your own anymore. The choice to move out of your home because you wanted to never even entered my mind.

You will never imagine my surprise when I finally met you at a financial-planning gathering sponsored by a big corporation. As you walked toward me with your daughter, I admired the way you were dressed and your interest and enthusiasm in your surroundings. You were neither frail nor in need of assistance. In many ways, you were my perfect image of a grandmother: you were small and unpretentious, and your white hair was the perfect grandmother colour. You radiated warmth, comfort, and a sense of well-being. My impression

was that you were comfortable in who you were, even in a room filled with people many years younger than yourself.

Our dinner conversation spanned many topics, and my interest in you deepened. I wondered if I would ever have the pleasure of meeting you again. You also made me think about my grandma. Like you, she would have attended the session with me out of curiosity and a desire to share in the things I was interested in. As I thought about Grandma I wondered why you came to the gathering and how I could arrange to see you again.

When Grandma passed away, I knew I would have to find participants to take part in my PhD research. My memories of our conversation at the gathering and my understandings of who you were from your daughter's perspective prompted me to ask your daughter if she thought you might participate in my research. It was with trepidation that I waited for your reply—what if you declined?

Opening the main entrance door to your complex, my doubts about being there increased. Two women sitting in the foyer with their walkers close at hand greeted me. There was a menu for the evening meal posted outside the elevators. I could hear Grandma telling me that moving into a hostel would be the beginning of her losing choices, and the menu became the symbol for all the choices that could be lost. However, I decided I would meet with you, and somewhere within our conversations I might find the purpose of my research and possibly begin to

understand your stories of moving and gain some understanding of why Grandma had refused to move.

The walk from the elevator to your *room* took me down a hall with handrails and walls painted in healthcare peach. It wasn't that your complex smelled like an institution, but the colours and handrails reminded me of nursing homes and dependent older adults. The silence was deafening, and your hallway was empty of all aspects of life. Like apartment buildings I had been in before, each door looked exactly the same. However, the small nameplate on the wall and an "OK"²² sign hanging from each door signaled to me that these doors weren't like those other doors; rather, they were doors that opened into the rooms of older adults. I wondered how each person who lived there was able to identify their own room or announce to visitors anything about who they were as individuals. As I walked toward your door, I wondered who you were, where you had been, and how this place shaped who you are becoming.

Grandma's front door came to mind as I walked to yours. Her door was solid, aged by the sun to a burnt orange, and had no door handle—a doorknocker in the middle filled that purpose. The last time I opened Grandma's front door, I was greeted by a familiar smell and many memories we shared in her home. With some reservations, and many confusing thoughts, I knocked on your door. While

²² At 9:00 p.m., the resident hangs his or her "OK" sign on the outside of the door. This indicates to the person assigned to doors for the evening that the resident is OK. If the sign is not hanging, the person on doors is responsible for contacting the nurse to check on the resident. At 9:00 a.m., the resident removes the sign—if the sign is not removed, the nurse checks on the resident.

knocking, I decided maybe I had come to your place to hear and attend to a different story about growing older: a story Grandma never shared, and a story I could not imagine co-composing with her.

I wait outside your door,

listening,

thinking,

summoning courage.

You open the door,

smiling,

warmly,

inviting me in.

I enter,

and so too, do the memories of Grandma.



Image 2: Behind Grandma's front door

You could never imagine my relief when you opened your door and I saw it wasn't a room, but an apartment. I quickly scanned the layout and noted you had a complete kitchen with an oven, a lounge room, a bedroom, and a bathroom. I began to relax and I silently reassured myself to

take a deep breath; everything was going to be okay.

That railings and peach paint don't always signify an institution.

Finally, as I sat down on your couch, I silently prayed, "Please, let Pauline agree to participate in my research. I have lots to learn from this woman."

Negotiating New Places

Dear Pauline,

Thank you again for joining this research project alongside me. Our conversations have made me think really hard about place. I wonder about the geographic places within our lives and also the transitions between places.

Today, I am wondering more about moving places as we grow older.

FN (Moving)

Prior to meeting with you today, Maggie and I talked about transitions, not only about moving places, but also about the changes I was currently making in my personal life. As we talked, I wondered how conversations around transitions change as we grow older, in particular choices about places and moving places.

I remember many past conversations with Grandma concerning my moving to different places. Often, our conversations were about me moving in search of life experiences, building my career, and providing my family with better

opportunities. However, underlying our conversations were also our disagreements. My grandmother thought I moved too often, too far away, and for too long.

A Letter from Grandma

October 31, 2001

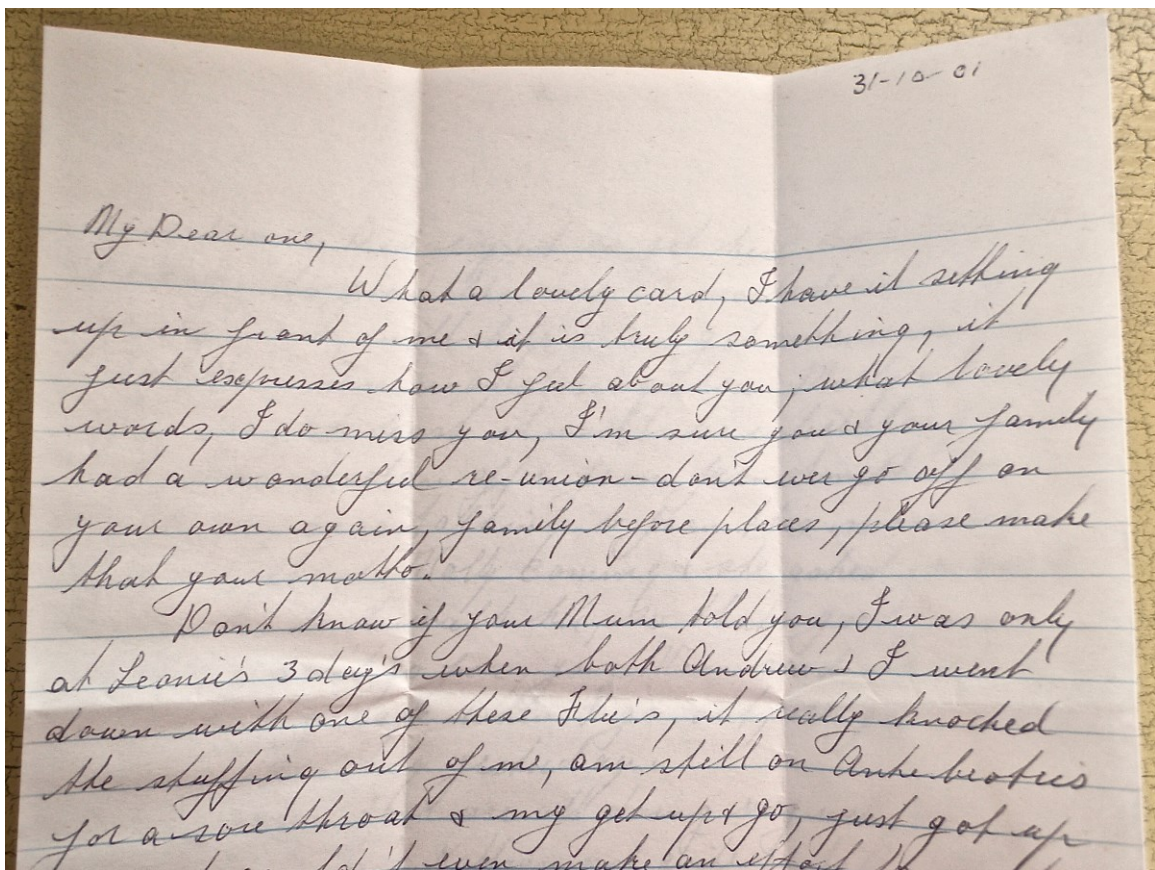


Figure 3: Letter, October 2001

“I do miss you, I’m sure you and your family had a wonderful re-union—don’t ever go off on your own again, family before places, please make that your motto.”

During my conversations with you, I was aware of a word repeating in my mind—*transitions, transitions, transitions*. I paid closer attention to the stories you shared about your decisions of moving from one place to another. You said, “I never felt bad about moving out of the house because it was a big house and when the children were gone, we found out it was just too much . . . the yard was huge and we didn’t have a riding mower, just the push thing so we just found it was just too much and I never missed it. I’m not one to latch onto things. They don’t mean that much to me.” Your words made me think about a nostalgic notion of home as well as a sense of rootedness, and I wondered what you thought about this. You and your husband decided to move out of the home you had built together because you no longer wanted to look after the garden, attend to the maintenance, and have the responsibility of home ownership. Instead, you rented downtown in a neighbourhood unfamiliar to you. You enjoyed walking everywhere and being close to your daughter’s home. You and your husband became active grandparents and frequently cared for your grandson, taking him for walks along the river and to Kinsmen Park to play.

As I write this letter to you, a smile twitches at the corners of my mouth. I recall your stories of taking your grandson for walks. You spoke about loving the people who frequented the area and how the “cars would all stop for miles to let me go across . . . instead of having to dash across” as you pushed

your grandson in his pram. During the first year and a half you and your husband cared for your grandson, you "spent a lot of time at that park, Kinsmen Park. I rode that train a lot." We talked about your children's memories of the park; in particular, "how they still talk about how they liked that merry-go-round. It was a rickety old thing." I enjoyed the stories of your grandson wanting to go to his auntie's house on the other side of Kinsmen Park and how you often carried him there only to find that she'd be out and you'd "have to walk back all for naught and then he was really tired." These stories spoke of your close relationship with your family and your enjoyment of living downtown. You said you recalled summers more than winters, because Kinsmen Park rides were closed in the winters, and snow made the pathways along the river difficult to push the stroller. With so many memories of times shared with your grandson in the park, I was surprised to hear you say you haven't gone by it since moving from there. It made me think about the place we come to know through the relationships we have. Would the park be different if your grandson had not been with you?

The move downtown was followed by a move to a new neighbourhood because "[your] husband decided it was too costly for living right downtown and he said we could buy a condo for what we have already spent in those 3 years." Unfortunately, the option of purchasing downtown was not available at the time your husband was looking to buy, as most

places downtown were rentals and very few came up for private sale. During our conversation, we both found it very interesting that 20 years later, private ownership downtown is strongly encouraged, and many old buildings, including old warehouses and hotels, are being refurbished into condominiums. Wandering past the developments downtown today, I wonder if you dream about living downtown once again. This musing is prompted by your comment that at one time, you would have bought back your old family home. But in the next breath, you said you never regretted selling it and moving.

You described the new place your husband decided to purchase as a condominium in another part of town.

It was a bank foreclosure

It made sense

It was in a new neighborhood

It meant new bus routes

It was a really, really good price

He said we can't not take it

We looked at it

It was a northern wing

It was fairly dark

It was a really, really good price

The condominium had a balcony, which received 2 hours of sunshine a day; however, it failed to support your desire to grow geraniums in pots. You said you put your geraniums out on the balcony and “the poor things would climb all the way through the bars and try and crawl up the side and so far . . . they’d start out good, but then they’d have to try and they’d move . . . So yeah it was a bit dark but you know we got used to it because in the summer when it was hot . . . we didn’t have the heat.”

It was this particular statement about the new condominium that caught my attention. We live in Saskatchewan, and the summers are so brief. A cool, dark apartment hardly seems enticing when I reflect on all that you were giving up by moving somewhere because your husband thought it was a good financial decision. I wonder how you ever adjusted to the darkness. The escape from summer heat must have also meant long winters in a cold, dark place. You answered my wondering with the comment, “although the condo was in a north wing it really wasn’t that terribly dark, not too bad with good lights.”

FN (Warmth and sunshine)

As you spoke about the benefits of your cool condominium, I found it very difficult to attend to what you were saying. I kept returning to my memories of Grandma's home situated on the hot plains of northern New South Wales. Her home had an east/west aspect, and the sun rose in the kitchen window and set on the front verandah. Her living room and bedroom boasted large windows through which the afternoon sun streamed in. I remember going to visit Grandma and finding her sitting on the front verandah soaking up the sunshine, particularly in the winters. Her home was filled with sunshine and heat in the summer, which became sunlight and warmth in the winter. It is these memories that collide with your stories concerning the benefits of a northern-facing condominium in Saskatchewan. Missing from your stories were any expressions of discomfort about moving from a place of sunshine and close proximity to the things you loved to do to a place of darkness that didn't even encourage your geraniums to grow. Where are these stories?

Your stories of moving prompted me to think about my situation and the inevitable move out of the home my husband and I renovated over the past 10

years. I know I must move on because our marriage has come to an end, but unlike me, my husband is unable to say goodbye to the family home and move out. He dwells in the past: the hours spent labouring to make this home our own, the small and large renovations, the mosaic ceiling in the dining room, the small shed my father built, and the garage my husband always dreamed of. I too have attachments to these things, but they are not places in which I want to continue to dwell. Without love, these things and their personal significance become lost—the place feels empty.

The enormity of owning a home on my own settled on my shoulders as you talked about realizing you no longer wanted to live in your condominium. I remember you saying, “No, I mean I did my own work, but it was getting so that, I just found it was getting a little bit much too, and then it needed painting . . . and Lynne said, I think she helped me twice, and she said that’s it Mom, I am not doing it again, you got to hire somebody.” And, “there was more than that, things started needing fixing, and I then I thought I don’t need that, and I didn’t really want to own anymore. To me I’ve never, my husband did all the business, and when he died suddenly I didn’t even know how to shop for groceries.”

I paid greater attention to your words as I thought about my situation. My husband hadn’t died suddenly, but I felt as though our separation was a death and

I too would be in the situation of needing help from others to maintain the home, should I decide to stay. Our home was 53 years old, and I could see the writing on the walls—ongoing maintenance would be required, and could I really do it on my own? So, like you, I began the search for a new place to call home.

Getting About

Dear Pauline,

During our recent conversation, you said, “So I didn’t mind it but then I moved to Lawson, well that was learning how to use different buses . . . and then that wasn’t too bad. But now I’ve moved here, I never came to the east side with my husband . . . There was no reason for us to come to the east side I bet I didn’t go out for about 3 months.” You mentioned asking a lady that you knew in the condo if you could go with her one time she went out. I was taken aback when her answer was “oh no, I like to go by myself.” You showed great courage and determination when you said, “I get it, I’ll do it on my own.” What would have happened if you hadn’t had that courage or previous experiences of using a public bus? I know the complex offers a bus to the local mall, but you also mentioned you couldn’t wait the 2 hours for it to come back. I wonder why the bus is scheduled to return in 2 hours. As you say, “I don’t usually have that much to buy and what do you do? You sit on the bench like I see they all do, they’re finished in about 20 minutes and they have this

hour and 30 minutes to wait and I said no, I'm too impatient, I can't do that." I wonder if the residents of the complex could renegotiate the bus schedule to accommodate their needs more effectively. I think to myself how quickly in this moment I draw forward the nurse in me. Once again, I am reminded of your determination to maintain your independence, and you indicated your bus pass helps to keep you independent. Writing this, I smile as I hear you say, "I have a bus pass. It's funny, every year I think about buying a year pass . . . and I'm kind of giggling to myself, I'm trying to beat the odds. Well at my age I'm not getting younger."

Your experiences of moving to unfamiliar neighbourhoods with new bus routes caused me to wonder about your choice not to drive when you were younger and the later effects of this decision on your ability to go shopping or participate in social engagements. You said, "I took driver training, and I really didn't like it, and I'd get so confused in my directions . . . and you know, it really was, it was scary for me to even think about it and so I just chose not to." I find it amazing you never drove, particularly when your husband worked out of town and left you at home, without a vehicle, raising five children. You said you walked everywhere or took the bus if you needed to travel out of your local area. But things were not close to you. Even though you lived in a small neighbourhood, you said, "it was three long blocks to the bus, and on the corner we had a little corner store

where you just got the odd little thing." I can't imagine managing a household without being able to drive. How many miles did you walk in a week, and how did you navigate the winter paths with five small children? I'm drawn to your comment about your children: "they walked to school, they walked to swimming, they walked to St. Mary's hall to do anything, any activities they had to, and it was just a way of life."

FN (Getting about)

I think back to when my daughter was small. She never had to walk anywhere and often refused to walk. I would hoist her up onto my hip and soldier on. Yes, it was difficult in the winter, and many times I thought we would slip and fall on the ice. Now she is 15 years old, and she continues to be reluctant to walk anywhere.

Last Monday, my daughter got her learners licence. I nervously handed over my car keys and gently encouraged her to drive. She was as reluctant to drive as she was to walk. I found myself wondering if she would be like Pauline and not drive. In later years, what will be the consequences of this choice made at such a young age? And then I think about my friends who never learned to drive. Today, they rely on public transport, reside in

cities, and their choice of activities are coordinated with friends and transport timetables. As my friends grow older, how will they negotiate transportation, particularly if they return home to their rural communities to retire or care for their parents?



Image 3: Big old Ford

A Letter from Grandma

October 31, 2001

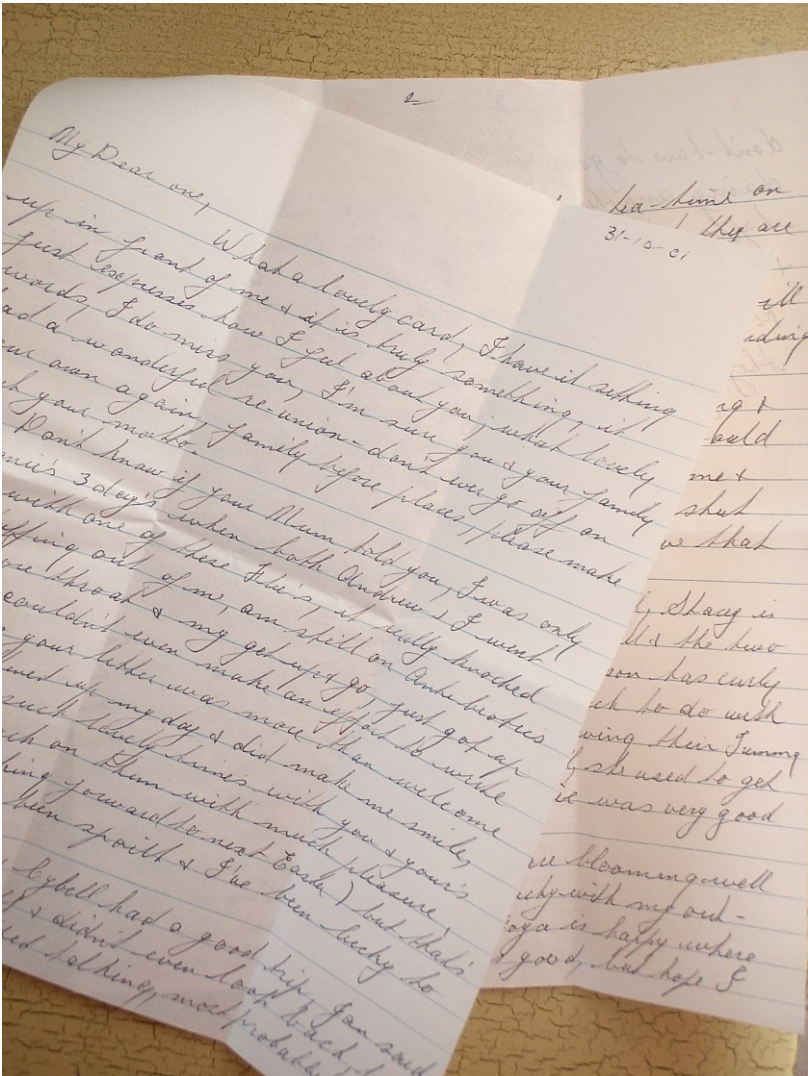


Figure 4: Letter, October 2001

“Beautiful day here 32, roses all blooming well & everything looks nice, I am lucky with my outlook here, both back and front, Joyce is happy where she is at Shangri-La, which is good, but hope I don’t have to go there, got 8 months to go before doing another driving test, but anything can happen before that, I just live from day to day & try to make the most of it.”

Grandma's letter reminds me of the time I went with her to her annual driving test when she was 93. We woke early that morning, and silently I wondered if this day would mark the beginning of her life without a driver's licence. I recall her backing the car out of the garage, double-checking the distance between it and the gates at the end of the driveway, and driving down the road toward the unknown future. On the way, she talked about her fears of not hearing the instructor, missing a direction, making a wrong turn, not seeing a sign in time, or forgetting how to parallel park. They were all real fears, and I had no idea what to say to her. For reassurance, I smiled and told her she had nothing to worry about; her driving to the test was perfect. I waited . . . She returned from her test smiling—she had passed for another year. However, 6 months later, she chose to stop driving. The big old Ford remained idle in the garage, only taken out by family members when they came to visit. The public bus was not an option for Grandma; however, volunteer drivers, friends, the community bus, and the local taxi service ensured that my grandmother attended her appointments and social activities. Sadly, her usual visits to

have coffee with friends became just memories from a time when she drove.

Smaller Places

Dear Pauline,

FN (Too far away)

Today, Grandma and I had a long conversation. Her hearing was excellent, yet she said, "I'm feeling cranky today. I am alone, and yet I have family. Everyone is so far away—what use are they?" Grandma declined invitations to visit with her friends, even the one that was having her 97th birthday at the end of the week. "She's lucky, she has family," Grandma says. Grandma briefly mentioned moving to Canberra. "At least I would have family close by and great grandchildren to visit me." We explored this in greater depth, but her statement had no substance. I assumed it was a fleeting thought with no plan attached. Maybe I should have stopped to listen more deeply to what Grandma was trying to say.

I returned to our conversation from the other day and picked out pieces to help me understand that your move from your condominium was well planned and something you knew would happen. Even with family living close by, you

still felt the need to move into something more manageable. Interwoven with this, I also hear of you not wanting to be a burden to your family, particularly your daughter, as you came to realize that you couldn't do all that was necessary "and that the son that lived in Saskatoon died . . . as my husband did. So I had nobody really, because Jon, Lynda's husband . . . I don't know if he knows how to hammer a nail." With the realization and acceptance that you "had nobody really to give me advice or anything . . . I thought well, OK time to sell and I don't regret it at all."

It was interesting to hear you describe the two apartments that were vacant in this complex when you decided to move. The first apartment, you said you "couldn't live in because it was on a slant." You described the slanting effect as rooms that were like triangles with walls that closed in on you. This apartment had a view of the bowling alley and also the street where you could see the comings and goings of people, buses, and cars. However, you chose the second apartment because you needed to live in something square, exchanging the first apartment's view for a "building that doesn't move."

The building across the way has balconies, and I wondered why you hadn't moved there. You had previously spoken about your condominium having a balcony and your interest in growing geraniums in pots, and unlike their northern aspects, the balconies across the way face west. I can't help but imagine

the beautiful flowers you could be growing during the summertime on one of those balconies. However, as I gazed out your window, I saw no activity on the balconies across the way. There is an occasional patio set or outdoor chair posing behind the guardrails; however, during my visits, I have never seen anybody out there. You said, "they come out in the evenings sometimes, the odd one. Not too many of them do. I never used mine either, my balcony." As our relationship grew, I came to realize you are truly not bothered by the lack of a view from your window and that you have little time for gazing out the window anyway.

A Letter from Grandma

December 10, 2003

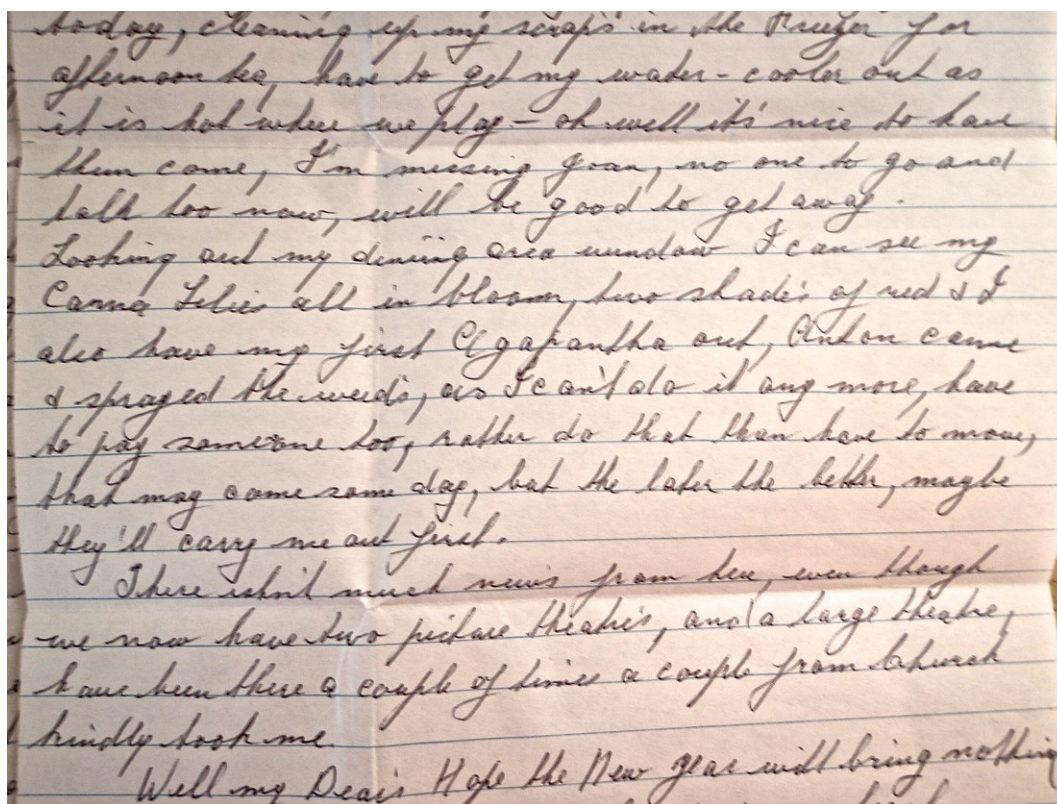


Figure 5: Letter, December 2003

"Looking out my dining room window I can see my Canna Lilies all in bloom, have shades of red & I also have my third agapanthus out. Anton came & sprayed the weeds, as I can't do it anymore, have to pay someone too, rather do that then have to move, that may come someday, but the later the better maybe they'll carry me out first."

Further into our conversation about moving, you described the process of downsizing from 1150 square feet, two bedrooms, to "500 and something" and only one bedroom. Happily, you claimed the smallness of your new place "suits me fine too because the less space the less work. I'm not a

workaholic by any means.” But you suggested the smallness of the place would be tight for a couple. Looking around your apartment, I couldn’t imagine a couple living in the same amount of space. I wondered what has shaped your thinking about space. You also said there aren’t any two-bedroom apartments in your building and that you wondered if your married friends “find it tight quarters.”

Your stories of your friends suggested they spend most of their time together in their apartment. “You never see them, Bill doesn’t go out . . . Veronica, she doesn’t really either. She comes to bingo because she’s involved, she calls, but other than that she doesn’t play cards.” You suggested, “maybe they love being together . . . I find that the togetherness when you’re a couple does not mean that you have to be with somebody 24 hours a day.” Your comment made me think how much relationships and space are intertwined. During our conversation, we identified they could possibly use their bedroom during the day for somewhere to read or watch a different television program. But you indicated you’ve “never been a bedroom person, I only go in there at night.” Of interest to me was the story you told about “later on in life we never slept together because my husband would snore and I couldn’t sleep.” I wondered how your friends managed these intricacies of married life and how they found alone time in a space designed for one person.

Listening to these stories, I wondered why complexes such as yours assume older adults only need one bedroom, whether for a single or a couple. Possibly, it was the era the building was constructed at a time when many older adults were widowed. Coming and going from your apartment, I have noticed a number of common areas off the hallways. These are open places that offer little privacy or comfort for an individual or a couple. The one closest to your apartment has a jigsaw puzzle in progress on a table near the window, indicating that someone spends time in that place. However, I also noticed the lighting is poor and the decor uninviting. I wondered how these common areas could be redeveloped to provide people with a place to go to outside their apartments to pursue hobbies, spend time on their own, or socialize with others. I wondered if you would like these places to be redeveloped. At the same time, I realized I would not seek out these common areas to fulfill my need for additional space. Once again, I heard Grandma speaking about the hostel down the road and how it provided no privacy and no space for dreaming.

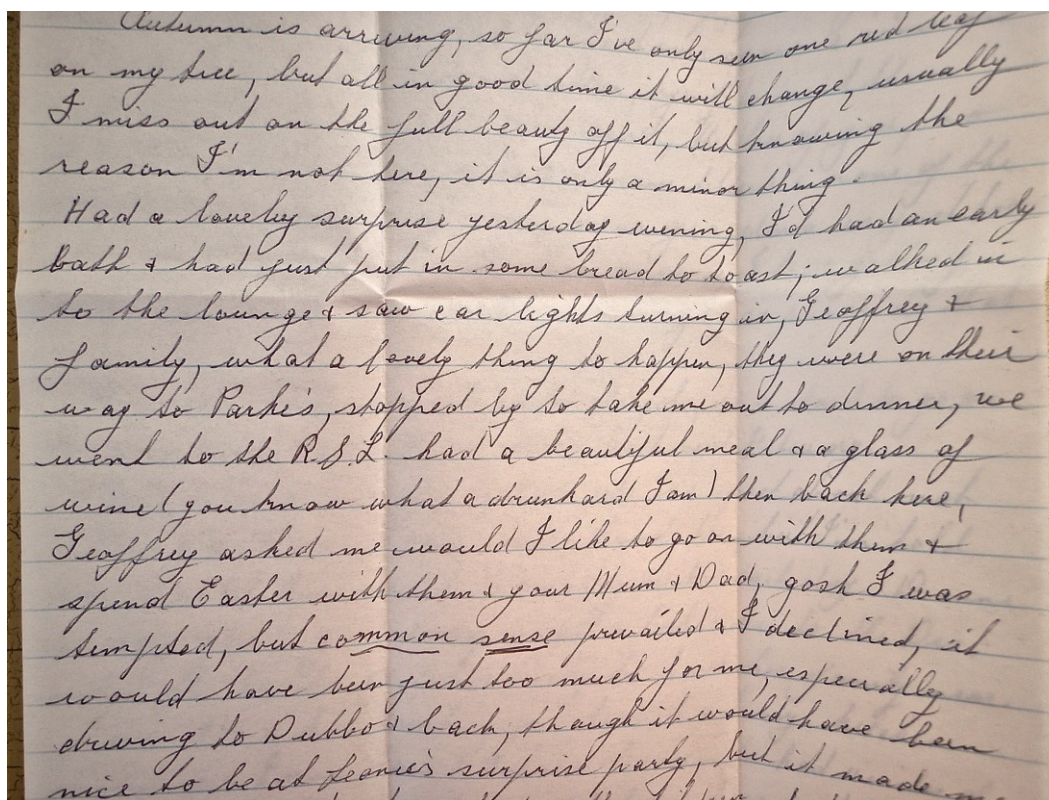
Stories alongside Friends

Dear Pauline,

While you were sharing your stories about deciding to move, I remembered Grandma's stories about not moving and the joys she experienced when family visited her in her own home.

Letter from Grandma

April 18, 2003



Autumn is arriving, so far I've only seen one red leaf on my tree, but all in good time it will change, usually I miss out on the full beauty of it, but knowing the reason I'm not here, it is only a minor thing.

Had a lovely surprise yesterday evening, I had an early bath & had just put in some bread to toast; we walked in to the lounge & saw car lights turning in, Geoffrey & family, what a lovely thing to happen, they were on their way to Parke's, stopped by to take me out to dinner, we went to the R.S.L. had a beautiful meal & a glass of wine (you know what a drunkard I am) then back here, Geoffrey asked me would I like to go on with them & spend Easter with them & your Mum & Dad, gosh I was tempted, but common sense prevailed & I declined, it would have been just too much for me, especially driving to Dubbo & back, though it would have been nice to be at Len's surprise party, but it made me

Figure 6: Letter, April 2003

"Had a lovely surprise yesterday evening, I had an early bath and had just put in some bread to toast; walked in to the lounge & saw car lights turning in, Geoffrey & family, what a lovely thing to happen, they were on their way to Parke's stopped by to take me out to dinner, we went to the R.S.L. had a beautiful meal and a glass of wine...."

During our conversation today, I heard my grandma's words echoed in the stories you are living alongside your friends. Some friends, like Rita, you described as being unable to move because, "she says you know, when I move, they're not going to come and visit me." Rita has 12 children,

and you “think there’s nine of them living in Saskatoon . . . and they come on weekends and she’s busy making supper for them and what have you and she’s not really that well to do it but I said, why are you doing it and she said, well I haven’t got the heart to say no because I’m happy that they’re visiting me. I said well you’re very fortunate.” I wondered why Rita thinks her children will no longer visit her if she moves into a complex like yours. But, as I sat on your couch, I found it hard to imagine your family gathered in your tiny living room and sharing a meal in a place designed only for one.

You also told me a different story in which Rita speaks of knowing she has to move but not knowing when. You said you “can only kid with her because really she has to make her own decision,” but you also said, “Well, you should move when you still are able to enjoy a place . . . I can’t tell you you have to move but to me I feel that, why would you wait until you’re really old and ill to move into some place that you’re not going to stay very long because you may have to move again.”

Rita’s story brought to my mind a conversation I had a couple of days ago with a friend. Her parents realized they need to move into assisted living, but my friend’s conversations with her parents about moving has created great tension between them. I remembered asking you, “At what age do you think

people should start talking about moving?” You replied, “I don’t know if there’s an age. I really don’t know, you see when I moved it wasn’t ‘cause of my age, it was just I didn’t want to own anything.” As I reflected on the stories you told about Rita and my friend’s stories about her parents, I was drawn to something you said at the end of our conversation. You said that you “think 80 is not bad because I think I was 81 or 82 when I moved. To me it still was the right time to move but for some people maybe, I don’t know, I really don’t know what kind of decision you have to go through, but it’s certainly not illness because by then it’s really too late.” At the time you told me this, I was startled because it is when older adults become ill that healthcare providers often begin to compose a different story that begins with, *“you need to look for someplace else to live as you are now no longer able to live in your home . . .”*

FN (Alone)

I’m sitting in my office upstairs, writing this narrative account and thinking, “This PhD is a lonely journey.” I can feel the presence of others—my dogs sleeping on their cushions and my daughter sitting in her room next door talking on the telephone with a friend—yet I feel alone. I have this need for someone to sit beside me, to share my journey as I think out loud and write these

letters to Pauline. As I think about how alone I am feeling at this moment, even surrounded by others, I begin to wonder how Pauline feels in the evenings, watching television on her own. During our visits, I have heard residents coming and going from their apartments and the sounds of their televisions as I have walked down the hallway, yet my body feels an aloneness, and I resist the urge to call out, "Is anyone there?"

"Things"

Dear Pauline,

Today you told me about deciding what to move with you as you downsized from your family home, to rental properties, to your condominium, and finally this apartment.

You indicated you're "not fussy about stuff, material things just don't do much for me." You attributed this to not having a lot of choice in what you purchased as a couple. Your husband would "go out and suddenly he'd come home and say I bought so and so. We didn't shop together much or anything, so I was brought up that way; I lived that way, and it didn't bother me." Yet as I listened to you, I also heard another story interwoven between your words. You spoke of a garage sale, which

you held when moving from the family home into the rental downtown. You suggested some things were sold by mistake—"nobody had no business going in there to take the hair rollers out"—and you spent time thinking, "where the heck is so and so." I was saddened to hear your bell and spoon collection, your favourite crystal glasses, and a plate collection were not wanted by your family and found new homes among strangers. Now that these pieces are no longer present, I wondered about the stories that will never be told: stories about your travels, the excitement of adding a plate to your collection, or the occasions you drank wine from your favourite crystal glasses.

For me, your story about your grandson and the Christmas tree underscored the reality of your move:

But he felt so bad

But he said

Grandpa, where are we going to have our Christmases?

We had a big rumpus room downstairs

Christmas had always been there

It's not gonna be the same anymore

Where are we gonna have Christmas?

Grandpa said

don't worry, we will think of something

Yeah, he was upset about the move

But we said

we have to move

He was 13 years old

FN (Christmas Tree)

Maybe Pauline's words about her grandson and the Christmas tree resonated so deeply with me because of my childhood living at the farm and going out into the bush to pick out a Christmas tree. As my sister, brother, and I grew older, we looked for bigger trees from which we could cut off only the top as our Christmas tree, leaving the remainder to grow. Since moving away from the farm I have maintained the tradition of a live Christmas tree. Today my Christmas trees are selected from ones grown on tree farms, each one uniform and perfect. As my daughter and I decorate our tree, I tell her my childhood stories of

going out and choosing a Christmas tree. Writing this I realize the live Christmas tree symbolizes my farm place and my memories of green grass stretching out almost forever, eventually merging into fields of golden wheat and beyond, into the mountains with their tall peaks reaching up into the sky.

I wonder what new family traditions began that first Christmas celebrated in your rental downtown. Where did the Christmas tree stand for the festive season? Did anyone tell stories from past Christmases celebrated in the downstairs rumpus room of your old home? Further into our conversation, you talk about your Christmases in your condominium and how “there’d be 20 of us a lot of the time, when everybody showed up.” These stories led to describing how you decided to stop cooking Christmas dinner and how your family didn’t agree with this decision; and the changes of the place of Christmas dinners after the death of your son and then your husband. Christmas was no longer only at your place, but sometimes you “go to Calgary to my son’s, and I go to Edmonton to my daughter’s, and I went to Nelson when my other daughter was there, I’d fly there sometime, but the majority of the time I guess it’s at Lynda’s.” I was saddened to hear that with the changes of place and the absences of family members what was once a strong family tradition of celebration in your family home, “you got to thinking I just don’t like Christmas anymore . . . because there’s

always somebody missing." And as I gazed around your living room, I realized the impossibility of ever celebrating a family Christmas in your new place. It is too small. But if we imagined your place differently you could put up a Christmas tree near the window and share Christmas supper in the common area across the hall.

I was surprised to hear that the couch you brought with you wasn't the one you preferred; rather, you would have liked to have brought your sofa bed. You described the couch as "just too big and I would like to get it out but they had such a hard time bringing it in . . . they just about couldn't get it in the elevator, then they had to almost carry it up by hand" and that the couch doesn't provide additional space for company when they visit from out-of-town. Lynda encouraged you to bring the couch because she thought you could lie on it more comfortably when reading or watching television. You described how you and Lynda bought the couch and its matching chair and it was the only piece of furniture you bought during your marriage. Its matching chair, "a green and mauvey kind of thing," now resides at Lynda's home. Could she have wanted you to take the couch for sentimental reasons? Now the couch is ensconced in your living room; yet I wonder, does it create an esthetic unrest in a room in which you spend many hours. Do you imagine buying a new couch that warmly invites you to sit in your living room?

Then there were the personal items; particularly the clothes you sorted and gave away. I can't imagine downsizing your clothes from three closets to one, not because you wanted to but because there wasn't room in your new home.

FN (Special clothes)

I never thought about Grandma being well dressed. She had an interest in clothes that, until recently, I neither appreciated nor understood. Often I would wait for her to change out of her house clothes for her "going down the street" clothes and wonder why it was necessary. All I could see was the time and effort the changing process required; however, even at the age of 94 Grandma felt it was most important to be "tidy" when leaving the house. I couldn't imagine her downsizing her wardrobe to fit into a smaller space. It seemed to me each piece held equal importance and even those she no longer wore had an important story which kept them in her wardrobe. After Grandma died her clothes were sorted and neatly folded by my mother and me. Several pieces made their way into my suitcase and today I wear these pieces and feel Grandma wrapped around me.

Mass on Sundays

Dear Pauline,

I am very excited about the possibility of you and I returning to your old neighbourhood to attend Mass at St. Mary's Church. I was most interested to hear that after being gone from your old neighbourhood for more than 20 years, you had thought about moving back into it following your decision to sell the condominium and move into a complex for older adults. You said, "I was telling somebody I really think I would like to move back . . . maybe Columbian Manor which is that one they built right across from St. Mary's Church But my kids wouldn't hear of it because 20th Street is still to them a very unsafe place."

During our conversation, you shared why you thought you might have liked to move back into your old neighbourhood. You described it as a friendly and welcoming place and attributed this to having "moved in when our kids were small, so when they joined all the activities in the church hall and stuff you know . . . you got to know people in that way." However, you also indicated that once your children grew up and moved away, it was harder to interact with others and meet new people. I felt that you weren't really given an opportunity to explore the options of moving back into your old neighbourhood because others questioned, "Why you would want to go there? There's hardly anybody that you know there anymore

because as you get older, our age, we all moved out to senior homes or to different places.” But as you talked, I felt you continued to have a desire to move back into your old neighbourhood just “to see a familiar face . . . [but] it dawned on me that I probably wouldn’t see anybody there that I knew, so I gave that up.” Even as I write this I wonder what different stories might you have told had you moved back into your old neighbourhood and been greeted by familiar faces at Mass on Sunday?

FN (Faces in the congregation)

Pauline sent me an email today with the times of Mass at St. Mary’s church. This made me realize how important returning to her old neighbourhood was to her. As I read I wondered if we should go Saturday evening or Sunday morning. Suddenly, choosing the right time to attend Mass took on greater significance: what time would her friends be going – these “faces” from her past which she expected to see in the congregation?

I recalled attending church with Grandma, first as a small child and later just before she died. I relived my experiences of attending Grandma’s funeral in the church that I grew up in. As I looked out across the congregation, many familiar faces looked

back at me while I shared stories of living alongside my
grandmother. These faces had looked upon me my entire life.
They had grown older as I had grown older alongside them; yet
standing there in the church I felt like the child I had once been.
What did they see when they looked at me? Who did they see?
Who did I want to see among the people in the congregation? Who
does Pauline want to see when she goes back to St. Mary's?

A Face

I see a face,

She's looking at me. Who does she see?

Who am I seeing?

Is it you as a young mother?

Is it me as an old woman?

Who is she that we see?



Image 4: Empty seats

I look again at the photographs I took at Grandma's funeral. There were pictures of her friends walking away from the church and a picture of her empty chair in the front row. Its emptiness spoke to me. Would Pauline see many empty seats when we attended Mass and how would she respond to the experience? I hear Pauline reply,

“because of the age you are and if I was that age, I would still see a lot of people there, but not anymore.”

A familiar face did greet you at Mass on the Sunday you and I attended St. Mary’s Church. A man boldly stepped forward and took your hands in his, and a warm exchange occurred between you two. You told me about the man and that your husband had worked with him. While you told this, I remembered you told me earlier about never feeling as though you belonged to the church near the condominium you and your husband bought. Unlike St. Mary’s Church, St. Anne’s was too far to walk to from the condominium so you had to take the bus. I was shocked to hear you say that when you asked a man from your condominium building if he could give you a ride, he replied, “well no, we don’t like to go at a certain time, we just go whenever we feel like it so we don’t want to promise that we’d be going.” Your comment to yourself at that time, “I could see your point but I thought it’s not very Christian of you” echoed my thoughts and further demonstrated your feeling of not fitting into your new community.

Unlike the man from your complex, you were offered a ride to church by a couple from the complex across the road. While you were waiting for the bus one Saturday the husband stopped to offer you a ride because “I see you in church, just get in the car and we’re going there.” I said, “well the bus is coming soon,” he said “never mind” he says, “get in the car,” and

he's not even from our condo . . . so I went with them for a long time and then of course I said would you mind terribly if this other lady went? They said no, no, no, that's fine, so then we were able to catch a ride that way." As you spoke of being offered a ride to church, I was reminded of a letter I had recently re-read from Grandma. People from church often picked her up and took her to activities within her community. Without them I wonder if she would have been able to remain actively engaged in her community.

A Letter from Grandma

December 10, 2003

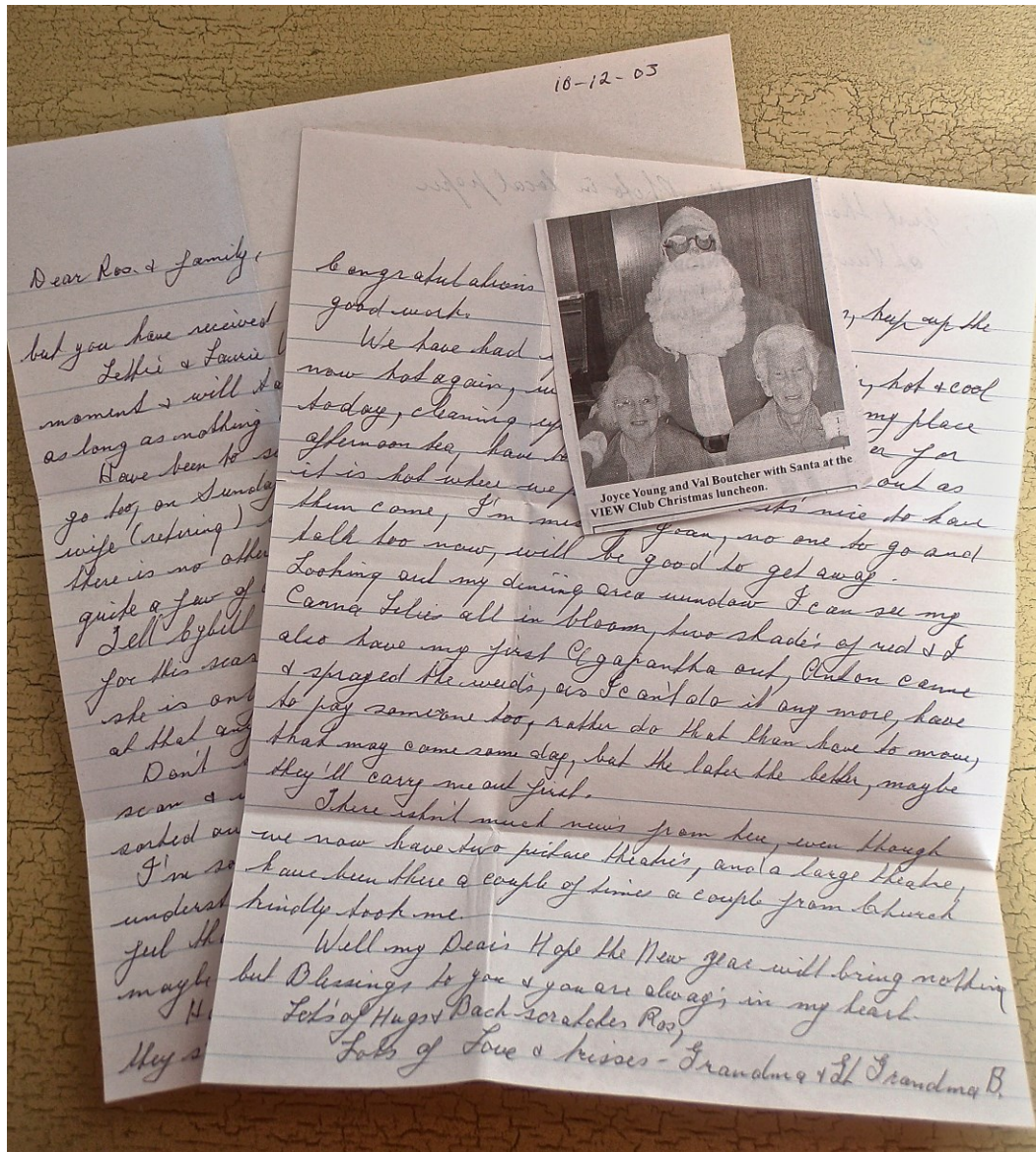


Figure 7: Letter, December 2003

“There isn't much news from here, even though we now have two picture theatres, and a large theatre, have been there a couple of times, a couple from church kindly took me.”

I felt this man's offer to take you to church would help you settle into the church community, but your additional stories made me question my assumption. After your husband died, you said, "I had no contact from them [St. Anne's church]. I know he was being buried out at St. Mary's, but there was nobody there that offered to give me any support or anything. And yet there was one lady who phoned me so I know that the word had gotten around." You suggested your husband was antisocial so you didn't get to meet very many people in the condominium complex and eventually you "didn't go out that much either because you just don't do that much on your own." I began to understand why you had never developed lasting relationships among the residents of the complex.

Towards the end of our conversation about attending today's mass at St. Mary's, you drew comparisons between the service and their service at the church you currently attend. You said the acoustics at St. Mary's had always been terrible and the combination of the poor acoustics and the noise of the children meant you had difficulty hearing and participating in the service. Previously I had wondered about the absence of children at your current church and how it might isolate you from younger generations. As you described your difficulty in hearing, I realized that possibly the absence of children in the church meant that you were able to worship and share in the rituals of the mass. Leaving St. Mary's

a comment you made caused me to smile: "don't ask me to go again, the service goes for an hour. Ours is only half an hour."

The Old Neighbourhood

Dear Pauline,

The drive we took through your old neighbourhood last week was very interesting. We drove down your old street and you pointed out the house you first lived in with your husband and then the home you built together across the street, as well as one your brother-in-law built next door. You decided to build on the block across the street because "my kids said no, we can't move away from St. Mary's School because that's our school and we want to go there." I noticed the school was quite a long way from your home and the church even further. I couldn't imagine walking to either in the depth of winter. When we stopped outside your previous home, you spoke about feeling forced to move from your home due to the "type of people" moving in. You said "the reason we left was because there was a lot of, well we got broken into three times . . . three times in the house and once in the motor home and it was just getting to be kind of a bad neighbourhood so we left" and you didn't feel safe living at the end of the street next to the railway line. You said that the police were often sitting in their cars in the vacant land that lay beyond the tracks. Rather than being reassuring, the police presence

appeared to unsettle you and did nothing to increase your sense of security in your neighbourhood.

Sitting in the car outside your old home, we talked about the people who had lived around you. You even mentioned that once, when you drove past your old home, you thought you would "buy it in a minute if it was on the market. But I know it's an old house, maybe I wouldn't have, but it looked really good." Your neighbors appeared to have had a significant presence in your life, but you didn't mention anyone in particular except for one friend who lived down the street. However, the importance of the people around you was highlighted by your comment that your children were very upset when you and your husband decided to sell and move downtown. Looking out at your home from the car, you expressed amazement at how big the trees had grown that you had planted along the property line. You also spoke of a weeping willow that had once grown in the front yard which, upon deciding to sell your home, your son dug up and replanted at his place.

FN (Trees)

While Pauline talked about how huge the trees had grown in her old garden, I returned to my memories of my last trip with Grandma to the farm where I grew up. It was the trees I noticed the most as I drove through the farm gate and around the perimeter of the house yard. Each tree had been planted by my

parents and tended with great care. I noticed how they had grown, but I also was saddened they were no longer cared for. Some trees were missing branches and others were leaning over. It was the gaps between rows that I was drawn to the most. These spaces were once trees and they reminded me of the gaps in my life where people from my childhood had come and gone as I moved further and further away from the farm.

From your old home we drove to the school. It was with great interest that you surveyed the new school built on the old school grounds. It wasn't until we pulled up in front of the school I realized I had been there before, not to this school, but to the old school. I had taught piano to children at St. Mary's school during the time I volunteered for the Inner City School Music Program. We shared our memories of the old school and I enjoyed our conversation. It was wonderful to have this connection to your past and to my present. It let me see into a very small piece of your life which you had lived in your old neighbourhood. I also wondered what the demolition of the old school meant to you as you described your disappointment when your children didn't want to go to the old school and collect a brick during its demolition. I now wonder if you wanted a brick for yourself as a reminder of a significant place from your past.

It was interesting to listen to you describe 20th Street as it was during the time you lived in the neighbourhood. The Pawn Shops had been abundant and

their decrease in numbers over the years appeared significant to you. Once again I was reminded of your dependence on the public bus service, as most places you frequented along 20th Street were a great distance from your home. Your familiarity with the area, even many years later, made me wonder once again why you hadn't returned to the neighbourhood, either when you and your husband had decided to purchase the condominium or when you decided to move into a complex for seniors. My wondering deepened when you commented your new neighbourhood continued to remain unfamiliar to you and you were unsure of where to go to purchase necessary items.

Prior to you leaving your old neighbourhood, you indicated that the culture was beginning to shift with the arrival of many Filipinos and Portuguese. You said they were house-proud, "lived very frugally . . . and hard workers." From our conversation, I gained insight into your acceptance of people for who they are and your "love of meeting people." You "were very friendly" with a Portuguese couple who moved in across the street. These were the only people you really mentioned that your husband socialized with. "They made wine and my husband loved to go and help them taste." You mentioned you were invited to their daughter's wedding, yet you lost contact with them after they moved to Calgary. I wonder how many people you have lost contact with since leaving the old neighbourhood and whether not being able to drive has greatly influenced this loss.

After visiting your old neighbourhood last week, I think I understand why you didn't move back there when you were looking for a seniors' complex. In our conversations we returned again to the importance of feeling safe in your home. You described, "never locking our doors, it was just such an easygoing way of life, and nobody ever came in. It was the days of the milkman with the horse, and the kids used to run around and find grass to feed him . . . but things have sure changed. Now you don't leave your doors open or unlocked, almost living in a prison." Moving into the complex on the east side of town appears to have given you the security that you described from your past. "Oh I feel pretty safe here, and I often go and do my laundry I don't lock my doors, but some do and some don't, some don't lock it at all, some keep their doors open to let more air in." Maybe it was safety you were searching for when you were looking for a seniors' complex, and if it had been offered in your old neighbourhood I feel you would be telling a different story today. This story might possibly have been told from your living room in an apartment nestled within a neighbourhood familiar to you, and allowed you to attend mass at St. Mary's Church. Would this story be one of coming home? But then you say, "Everything is so convenient here you know. I guess that I'm so happy that I made that move because I could be someplace

where I'd have to walk maybe a block or two blocks to the bus and in the wintertime, it's not that warm."

Sharing Letters

Dear Pauline,

It has been several months now since I last shared any of my writings with you. At that time, you said you would prefer not to read anything until I had finished your narrative account. Since then I have written sporadically. My time has been divided between many experiences, one of which has included moving into my new place and beginning my new life as a divorced woman and a single mother of a 15-year-old girl. The stories you have told about deciding to move, downsizing, and relocating out of familiar surroundings have resonated with my stories. Unlike you though, I didn't decide to move out of my old neighbourhood. My friends remain close by and the roads I travel daily remain the same. I wonder if my stories of moving influence how I listen to and attend to your stories. As I wonder about these interactions I realize it is time for me to approach you again and to ask you to read the letters I have written to you. I feel a need to engage in a conversation with you, not about whether I have gotten your story right; rather, do you recognize yourself in the stories that I have written and do they say to others what you would like them to say?

Prior to coming to your place today, I spent a restless evening reading and re-reading the letters I have written to you. I was very nervous about the possibility I had misinterpreted your stories. As I read the transcripts from our

conversations I could hear your voice; yet, I wondered if the stories I had paid attention to in writing your narrative account were the ones you would have chosen. I wasn't only concerned about what you would think: re-reading my stories woven into yours left me feeling vulnerable. I wondered what you would think about my stories and were they the ones I wanted others to read about me.

It was with trepidation that I handed over my writings to you during our visit this evening. I wasn't even sure how to ask you to read what I had written. I wanted us to read them together but at the same time I didn't want to read them at all. My biggest fear was that you would refuse to continue our relationship because I had gotten it all so very wrong. Or maybe you would refuse to read anything and I would never know if what I had written were the stories that you wanted told. When you took the manuscript from me, I realized that there was no turning back. You were going to read the many pages, but in your own time. You looked amazed when you flipped quickly through the pages: "*You wrote all this about me . . . are you sure you didn't make anything up. I didn't think I had so much to say,*" you said. Your words deepened my fear of having misrepresented you in the stories I had told.

Leaving your apartment I reminded myself I had remained true to my deep ethical responsibility to our relationship and to our stories. Thinking about my responsibility, I was drawn to a passage I have read many times in a children's storybook. This passage reminds me to take care of your stories and to give them away where they are needed. The author, Lopez (1990), also believes that stories

are put into our memories to help us stay alive. I believe our stories and our relationship have greatly contributed to my new understandings of what it means to move to a new place as we continue to grow older.

Places from the Past

Dear Pauline,

During our conversations I asked you if you “*had been back to the house that you grew up in?*” I’m not sure why I asked, as your stories had never indicated an importance for revisiting places from your past. Maybe it was my need to understand my feelings since Grandma’s death about returning to the place in which I had grown up. You responded “my brother was a real nutcase about going back” and that you have accompanied him on more than one occasion. You also said there might be a possibility of taking another trip this coming summer to continue the search for your grandparents’ graves. You know “they’re buried in either one of the two churches close by, but we have walked and walked and can’t find them.” One church you described as being locked up except on Sundays, which created an image in my mind of a small country town with a dwindling population and an increasing vulnerability for vandalism.

Your childhood family home appears to have experienced a fate similar to that of the church. Now only a shell stands and you admitted you weren’t even sure if it was the old family home. Possibly your lack of nostalgia for this place is influenced by the short amount of time you lived there with your family.

However, you did say, "I couldn't believe the little house that we lived in . . . even my brother said I can't believe that is the place we lived in. It didn't seem that terribly small to us at the time 'cause we were all young." Your comment about small made me realize small and big are so much influenced by our perceptions. It is interesting you and your brother have only visited one place from your childhood and you explained, "we haven't gone back to the other ones. Well, there'd be people living in them I would suppose. This was just an empty shell."

Our conversation came to an end with you telling a story about your boss and his experience of visiting the home where he grew up with his brother. At some point in our conversation, I remember you telling me you went to work in a bowling alley for many years. It is interesting you don't speak about working outside the home very often.

Going Back

They talked about a big house

But it really wasn't

They imagined it

They were quite disappointed

They said you should never go back

It isn't the same

My return to visit the farm from my childhood mimicked your boss's experience.

I took Grandma for a drive

I should never have done that

'cause it just wasn't

it didn't seem right

Your final words, "I said that is the last time I'm doing that," summed up our conversation and suggested to me that sometimes it is better to leave some places from our past to our memories and imaginings.

Travels Lead Back to the Prairies

Dear Pauline,

Past Travels with Grandma

Do you remember

the flight we took

the great adventure

the excitement on our faces

the rush of the cool morning air

do you remember

the rising sun
the changing colours
the sounds of the morning
the tensions within

do you remember
facing each other
sharing the moment
suspended in time
hovering over the earth

do you remember
the quietness within
as our adventure ended
our desire to continue
our calls to something new

I do remember
through pictures and memories

conversations and laughter

I remember the hot air balloon

its folding and ending in memory of you

is this the adventure you remember too?

I wrote this poem a couple of years ago. It is about my travels with Grandma and it invites me into the stories you tell about travelling to faraway places, first with your husband and later with your sister and friends.

The importance of travel in your life became evident during a conversation about a good friend of yours who lives on the other side of town and “because I have no way of getting there, we see each other once a year.” To keep in touch, you phone each other, until you “go on this trip to North Dakota . . . we usually like to go in May.” Sadly, your friend’s poor eyesight has contributed to her deciding not to go anymore because “if something happened on the trip she’d have to pay a lot of money . . . she’s in her 80s and I think the insurance goes up . . . she said I don’t think I will be going on any trips.” I wonder if this means you will no longer see each other, possibly remaining in touch only by the telephone. I also wonder if this marks the end of you joining future casino trips because without a person to share a room, the cost of travel suddenly becomes too expensive.

FN (A voice on the phone)

A Letter from Grandma

November 4, 2006

my worst day & guess what no wasting & why because
 it is actually "training" started to pour yesterday, we
 are all hoping it is the beginning of a break in the drought
 it's the worst we have ever had since whites came here,
 so sorry for people involved in it for their livelihood.
 The beauty of the lake, was that sunrise or sunset, it is just
 so lovely, you have been blessed with the lovely scenery
 around you. your Mother gave me a quick call a short
 time ago, just to say hello, nobody knows just to hear
 the sound of her voice, what it does for me, this getting old is
 not what it is all cracked up to be, but I'm lucky to
 be able to do as much as I do, we must be thankful for
 small blessings, hope you can read my writing. Say
 Hello & give Carlos & Phil a big hug and a kiss from me,
 No word from Jackie yet, any day from now on, they
 are going to ring Gage when Jackie leaves for hospital & she
 is going down, it is only 2 hours for her, so she could
 get there in time, hope all goes well. Still light rain -
 My roses have been nice this season, especially an orchid
 last year, didn't do much this, but

Figure 8: Letter, November 2006

"Your Mother gave me a quick call a short time ago, just to say hello, nobody knows just to hear the sound of her voice, what it does for me, this getting old is not what it is all cracked up to be, but I'm lucky to be able to do as much as I do, we must be thankful for small blessings"

Christmas was fast approaching and I found myself at a loss as to what gift to buy Grandma. The gift needed to be small as I had to post it from overseas, but I wanted it to be a cherished gift

symbolizing my love for her. I remember her telling me she had everything she needed and small trinkets, though beautiful, collected dust. It was while I was re-reading a letter from Grandma I decided to gift her 12 telephone calls. When I made the first call after Christmas the excitement in Grandma's voice left me feeling as though I had given her the best Christmas gift ever. As I think about the many telephone conversations I had with Grandma over the years, I now appreciate the importance of hearing her voice and how our relationship often depended on our telephone calls to keep us connected during my many travels.

You described another trip you and your husband took to Poland in the mid-70s, "to visit, to meet my aunt." This trip certainly speaks to your adventurous side. You described Poland as being "still under Communist rule and you have no idea how backward the poor country was. The people had one horse with a wagon, and usually you'd have two horses pulling it . . . There was nothing, no groceries in the stores . . . we'd go there and there'd be some limp lettuce and some carrots. There was no meat or anything." Your interest in Poland continued after your visit; first with your cousin coming over to stay with you and then with you taking Polish lessons for two winters. As with many people who are bilingual,

you had lost your ability to speak and understand Polish once your mother died because you no longer had anyone to speak it with. You also visited Switzerland during this trip; however, you described yourself as feeling hemmed in by the mountains and you missed the flatness of the prairies.

For me, I think the trip that defined your attachment to Saskatchewan was the 1 month tour you took with your sister to eastern Canada just after your husband died. Initially you told your sister "no, I'm not ready, I don't think so, that was about 2 months after he died. But she said oh please, so I said well alright." Your memories of the trip involved a lot of sitting on a bus watching the scenery go by; first the prairies and then "all you saw was rock and water." I found it very difficult to hear you say "when we hit Winnipeg, everybody cheered to see flat ground" because as you described the joy of seeing flat ground, I was lost in my memories of sitting on the sand with Grandma watching the waves roll in and out.

FN (Rhythms of the Ocean)



Image 5: Saluting the ocean

Grandma and I spent many afternoons watching the waves roll in and out across the sand and pound onto the rocks. Often we sat in silence, each lost in our thoughts. I found myself imagining I was like a wave, so free, so flowing, and so unique. I wondered if Grandma was remembering a time from her childhood when she lived by the seaside. She had spent many years enjoying

the water, the waves, the rock pools, and the squeak of the sand as she walked over it.

Upon marriage, Grandma moved to the flat, black soil plains of northern New South Wales, far away from the beach. The seaside became a vacation place for her and her family. It was a place where her parents lived, a place to take her children to, and a place of power and beauty.

As Grandma grew older, we would visit the beach near my parents' home. Here, I watched Grandma relax and breathe deeply as she entered the rhythm of the waves. The ebb and flow of the water appeared to take away her pain, her discomfort, and her age. Her expressions softened and her smile broadened. Sitting together on the sand with our toes buried deep, I could feel Grandma's love for the ocean seep into me, just as the water seeps into the sand. As the seepage occurred, Grandma became a place within me. After she died, I continue to visit the seaside to sit and watch the waves and feel her closeness.

Your other stories about travel including, "we went to Arizona about 3 years in a row and not to stay. One time we stayed a month that

was 3 weeks too long. It just wasn't our thing. So we just said no, we're Saskatchewan-ites," tells me about your place being defined by the prairies. You even wondered why you didn't move away from Saskatchewan, possibly to Alberta or British Columbia to be closer to your siblings, but you suggested you hadn't moved away because "it just didn't really occur to us and then the kids were small, then we got older and I just thought no." Exploring these stories together, you frequently returned to the flatness of the prairies and how it attracts you and how it clings to you when you travel. The need to see off into the distance is evident in your stories; yet as I look out your living room window, I see the mountains portrayed by the building next door and I feel hemmed in. I wonder why you didn't move into an apartment that offered a view of the prairies and its living skies. Or maybe, like your sister-in-law's photographs of the scenery from her trip to Calgary, you do not need to see the prairies from your window. Possibly, the flatness of the prairies invites you to imagine your place without any visual interruptions. As you asked your sister-in-law "what are you showing me, there's really nothing," she responded "There's nothing . . . I wanted to show it."

Engaging with Others

Dear Pauline,

FN (Flowers on the wall)

I started ballroom dancing last Thursday evening. It was the first social activity I have attended in many years. Among strangers I felt naked and exposed as I stood nervously on the dance floor. It was obvious many had come with their partners and others were there with their friends. I too had come with my friend; yet this did little to stop the memories of being a young adult standing at the periphery of the dance floor. I remember trying to dissolve into the walls of the dance hall, praying nobody would approach me to dance. However as I watched the dancers, I admired how their bodies moved as one. Their movements were fluid and confident and adhered to the sequences of the dances – the waltz, the foxtrot, and the rumba.

Last Thursday evening, as I stood on the dance floor I became aware that my memories were ingrained into my body. I felt like a young adult again, awkward and unsure. A man approached and I knew I had to step out onto the dance floor. Standing in

position, I could feel his upper arm beneath my left hand and my right hand was grasping his. The music began and so too the writing of a new experience on my body.

Remembering my first few weeks of ballroom dancing, I wondered if your feelings were similar when you moved. You spoke about the new residents in your complex and how some never leave their rooms or participate in the activities. At other times, you described how new residents were unaware of the preferences of others.

Seats of Comfort

We sit

We are used to sitting in one chair

Two new people

they plop themselves anyplace

in somebody else's chair

to ourselves we speak

“you can't sit there. That's my seat.”

unwritten rules, unspoken hurts

it doesn't bother me,

I'll sit elsewhere

but one of the gals over there,
she loses hers every time . . . beats her to it.

Surprised and stunned

she said she doesn't care

she said oh it doesn't matter

it must be a popular chair

Speak, because

for a whole year and a half, she sat in that chair.

If he was told

I'm sure he would feel bad

Seats of Comfort describes an innocent unawareness of the rhythms of communal living. It is these aspects of communal living that I often wonder

about in relation to growing older in a place shared with others. I wonder how people become aware of these rhythms if they do not engage in social activities. As you described, "there's always something to do here. So as I said, you can be as busy as you want or not. And I find that, like today, I went to the ear place and then I was 10 minutes late for the general meeting, and then was supper, and then rosary, and then you came . . . Well yeah, my day goes so fast." But it wasn't always like that for you. You said, "it wasn't from the start, I didn't know, it was a different kind of life, but it took me awhile." Throughout I heard you describe your "love for meeting people;" but what about others who don't share this love? How do they learn the rhythms of a new place? I wonder if they remain flowers on the wall, too nervous to step out onto the dance floor and learn the steps of the new dance.

You have told me stories about the many activities that you participate in, both inside and outside your complex. Your week sounds very busy and echoes your interest in being engaged with your community. Your activities include a friend from outside the complex visiting with you in your apartment on Friday which is often followed by lunch out, participating in exercise classes once a week, attending rosary daily and church on Sunday,; and, if you remember, you go to "coffee break at 1 o'clock on Wednesday. It just completely goes out of my mind. I don't know why, except when it's my turn. I

make notes all over, make sure that I have my stuff in the fridge so really it's a reminder." Sometimes you claim you feel as though you have to participate in activities; yet really you would like a day off. "Like you know, I have to go to bingo on Mondays, I have to go to cards on Tuesday because they won't let me alone because they need people in there, and then you are here on Wednesdays . . . but if I wanted to be a hermit, I would resent the fact that I had to go."

FN (Attending Activities)

Grandma also told stories about attending activities which she did not necessarily want to. As a family, we strongly encouraged Grandma to attend these activities, but I now pause to wonder why we thought they were so important. Did we want to ensure Grandma remained active and engaged in her community or did activities fill a space occupied by our guilt: the guilt of not being close by and unable to visit her regularly? As Pauline spoke about wanting a "day off," I remembered Grandma saying sometimes she too didn't want to go out. Like Pauline, she often felt unable to refuse.

Letter from Grandma

October 29, 2008

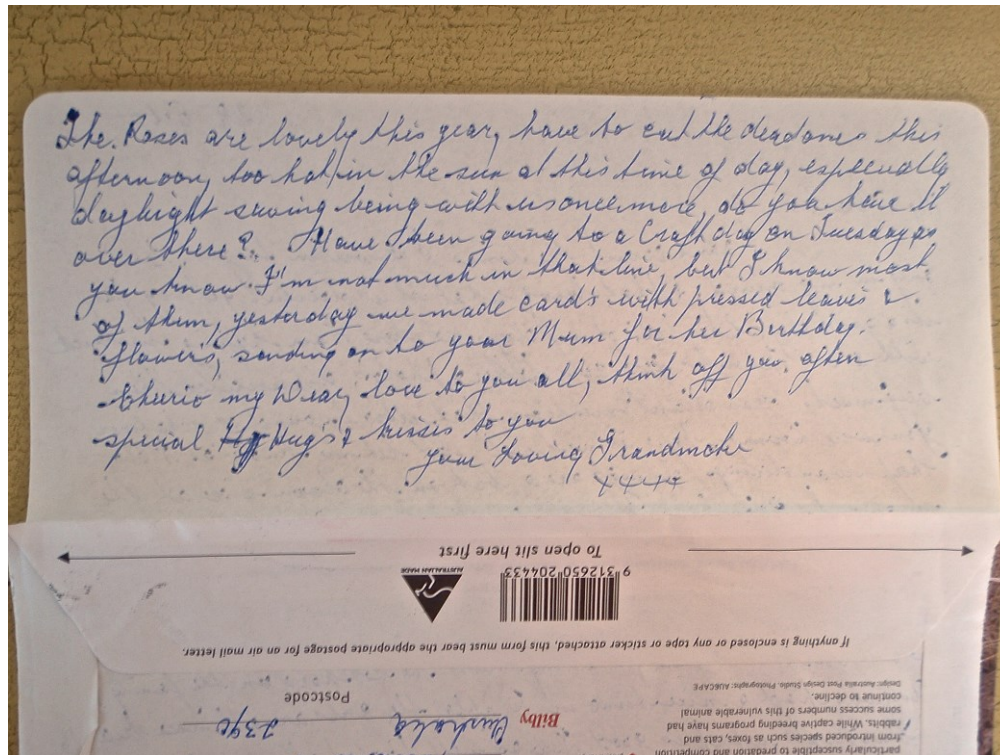


Figure 9: Letter, October 2008

“Have been going to a craft day on Tuesday as you know I’m not much in that line but I know most of them, yesterday we made cards with pressed leaves & flowers, sending one to your mom for her birthday.”

Some people may never settle into a new place, some people may require more time. Arlene is such a person. You said, “She’s fairly new, about 3 months . . . and it sounded like she moved and didn’t want to, and she just says she wouldn’t join in on anything . . . She might need time, I don’t know . . . I see that she came down to the meeting today.” I understand you think it is important for others to participate in

activities, as you feel it may help them settle into a new place. For some, it is their refusal to participate in “doors,” the process of being assigned a week to check each door on your floor for the “OK” sign at 9:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m., which may discourage others from welcoming newcomers into the community. You suggested that by not participating, other residents “have to look after them because we are doing our part, and I keep thinking well then we should ignore them, but I said well, that’s not very nice . . . I don’t think it is very fair.” I can appreciate your frustrations of living in a community in which others are not actively engaged in participating which then “puts the onus on us” which may build resentment towards other residents.

There appears to be many activities organized for you to attend within the complex; however, I wonder about impromptu social gatherings between residents. As you say, “you really don’t go to each other’s apartments . . . usually it’s a doorway thing you know. Like if I wheel Liz, who’s in a wheelchair, I wheel her to her door and she opens it and then I go back to my room.” While you were telling me these stories, I was reminded of Grandma’s home and how it was a gathering place for her friends. Often during my visits, her friends would stop by for morning tea and a conversation or maybe a game of Canasta.

A Letter from Grandma

December 10, 2003

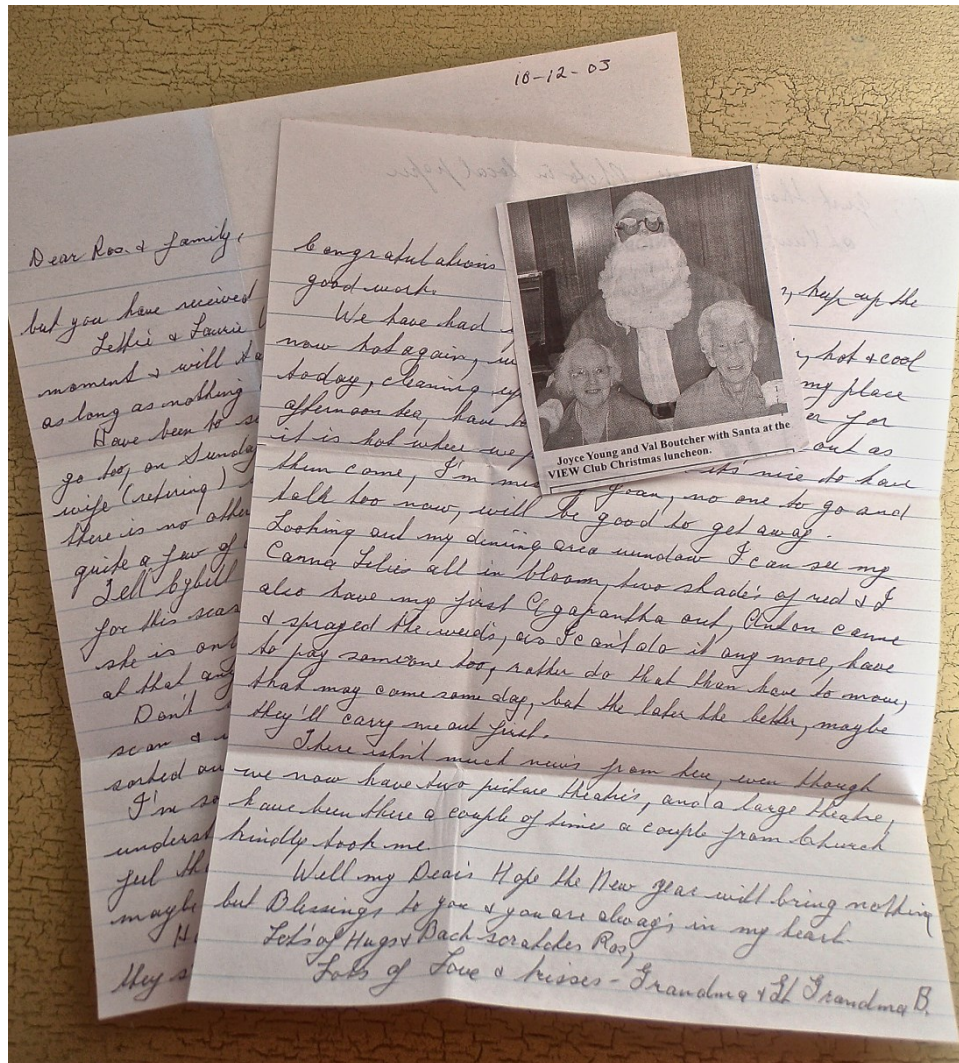


Figure 10: Letter, December 2003

"We have had ups and downs in the weather, hot & cool now hot again, we are playing cards at my place today, cleaning up my scraps in the freezer for afternoon tea, have to get my water cooler out as it is hot where we play – oh well, it's nice to have them come, I'm missing Joan, no one to go and talk too now, will be good to get away."

I wonder if communal living increases the need for older adults to maintain a private place where they can retreat and not be in the public eye of others. Is this place their home? Or are your places too small to support social gatherings, therefore restricting your interactions with others to the communal areas within the complex. Or maybe, as you said, "I don't like to entertain in my home anymore, there is nothing here . . . and you don't get to know anyone better by going into their places." If this is so, then your experiences in the dining room bring forth new wonders. I have always considered meal times as a social event, an opportunity to get to know people and to learn new things. Yet as you told about eating with others, I was alarmed to hear that you sat at a table with two women who bored you. The opportunity to change tables appears to be dictated by the kitchen staff who serve meals to places rather than to the individual who sits in the seat. You described "feeling like little kids. At 4.30 p.m. you go down to supper, at 5.00 p.m. you start eating, and you wait 20 minutes between soup and the main meal." Furthermore, you described your dining experience as being rushed by the kitchen staff because you sense they need to be somewhere else. In response to your boredom with your table companions, you have taken to bringing a book to read while waiting for your meal and between courses. You even suggested that reading at the table is becoming a new trend in the dining room.

You also tell about missed opportunities for social interactions between residents. Just last week there was a major football game televised, but no one

had invited others to come together in a common area to watch the game. You even mentioned there is a television in the dining room, which “we used to be able to turn it on when the Roughriders were playing or curling . . . but then somebody complained that there shouldn't be a television . . . and the dietitian just decided that it shouldn't be on during meal times.” The dietitian even suggested, “if you wanted to watch a game you can have a tray and bring it to your room,” which was exactly what many residents did for the recent game. Stories such as these make me feel angry as they support institutional narratives of imposing rules and regulations on older adults in a place they are supposed to call home.

FN (The Game)

Sunday came around and the big game was on in the afternoon. My daughter asked if we were going to watch the game over at my girlfriend's house. I was taken by surprise, as neither of us knew a lot about football and I had never watched a game. My daughter phoned Sallie who agreed it would be great fun to have company to watch the game. As I made supper Sallie and my daughter sat on the couch, at times in excited anticipation, and at others nervously waiting for the opposing team to make a touchdown. Suddenly I realized the excitement of the game was

being fueled by the presence of another and I wondered with whom was Pauline sharing the excitement with. Had she decided to pick-up a tray and take it back to her room to watch the game alone?

The New Place

Dear Pauline,

Over the course of our conversations you have shared many stories about your new apartment which have caused me to wonder if you are truly happy in your new place. You spoke of being unwell since moving in “cause that’s 2 years in a row that I’ve had bronchitis or pneumonia.” You thought the dust that came through the antiquated heating and cooling system had caused your illnesses. About 2 months ago your heating and cooling system was replaced in your apartment. I was most surprised to see the new system during a visit, and also disappointed to see its installation still remained incomplete and the heat wasn’t ducted into your bedroom as of yet. You said there was no need to get flustered with the delay, because really, there wasn’t a lot you could do about it.

You also suggested your illnesses could have been caused by mold as the result of your living room window leaking water “in heavy rain, and then I have to put all kinds of plastics on my windowsill.” The test for mold proved negative and an outside inspection of the air-conditioning system was

inconclusive. However, the windowpanes in your picture window had been replaced due to the moisture collecting between the panes. It was during our conversation about the window that you mentioned your enjoyment of fresh air, and “in fact, I open them in the winter when it’s kind of nice, I just need fresh air.” This led us to another conversation about your past condo having a balcony and how the sliding doors let lots of air in and you had the opportunity to go outside without leaving your apartment. Once again, I heard you speak about a balcony and I wondered why you hadn’t moved into a complex that offered them.

Aside from the dust coming in through the old vents, you also expressed a concern that “rugs to me are always dirty. And I don’t know, this thing might have been here 20 years, I don’t know.” With your asthma and reoccurring chest infections, I can appreciate your need to have your apartment dust free. You described vacuuming the rug frequently; yet you did not feel as though it was clean. As you said, you took out the rug at your condo and put in laminate because “it was something that we could wash.” You have asked your daughter to shampoo the carpet, but she said “mother, you just moved 2 years ago and they shampooed I’m sure.” You spoke of not wanting to “push too hard . . . maybe I’ll get down on my knees and scrub.”

Your words, "it drives me crazy" tell of your frustrations with the flooring and the dust. But also, they told your story of feeling pushed into choosing an apartment that really didn't suit your needs because you were afraid of where you could live if your condo sold immediately. The only other apartment available at the time did have linoleum; however, it was the "end one and it's kind of on a slant . . . didn't have rugs . . . but I didn't like the shape." Recently, management began to replace the rugs with linoleum as people vacated their apartments. You wondered if you could ask to have your rug replaced now; however, you were unsure if there would be a cost associated with your request. I wondered what happened to your request because your rug has not been replaced.

At a recent general meeting for the residents, you said the general manager indicated "they're going to be remodeling . . . [not your apartments, though you wished they were] but the kitchen part, some of it and making a lounge out of some office down there . . . they'll move a TV in there and probably the shuffle board and stuff." I was surprised to hear you say, "It doesn't make sense why, but that's his daydream. It may not happen in our lifetime. He's talking like it's going to happen next year, but I don't know." Your words made me wonder if the residents of your complex have been engaged in the planning and decision-making process. I can also see the benefits of renovating the common areas,

particularly when you said, “you really don’t go to each other’s apartment.” I wonder if the size of the apartments really limits having friends over, particularly for those who have a walker or a wheelchair.

Aside from the age of the building and your allergies, our conversations about the meals served in the dining room concern me. It appears there have been several meetings to discuss the menu; however, the general consensus is people are “not very happy with the meals.” Your stories about how you chose to move into this complex were intriguing. Originally, you had put down your “name for the residence which is on the other end,” but when you came to look at the suite the woman asked you, “why are you moving from one residence to another, why don’t you come into assisted type living and then you don’t have to shop much for groceries and stuff?” Prior to looking at the suites, you had already decided you didn’t want to cook anymore, so “when I had the chance to do it this way I said that’s it, that’s what I’m doing.” But, you also said you might have chosen a different complex had you known it provided an option to “sign up for a meal any time I wanted . . . I might have gone for it because they were bigger suites, they have balconies.”

Finally, the story you told about your mother needing you to “come and do her wash, change her sheets, and clean up, and my husband and I did her groceries, and she relied on that” helped me

understand your reluctance to ask for help or rely on your children. Sometimes you say your children do ask if you need anything, and your reply is “no, when I need you I’ll let you know, I’m saving it.” I wonder what you are saving it for, particularly after your comment, “as you age you just don’t need as much . . . it’s getting less and less that I want or need anything.”

Maybe, your decreasing wants and needs have allowed you to live with rugs that you feel are dirty, a leaky window, dust, no balcony, and meals that nobody is very happy with. I wonder, too, if it is your reluctance to ask for help that prevents you from moving into a different apartment and not the “charge of \$250, which is a stopper, I wouldn’t pay that ‘cause I don’t think that that’s fair;” or, as you once said when I asked, “do you think you would move again?” “No. Well if I said that my kids would all run away.”

Sometime Soon, I’ll Write Again

Dear Pauline,

Re-reading the letters I wrote you, I wonder if your narrative account represents your stories to the depth that you wanted others to understand you and our relationship. At some point I had to decide to stop writing. Unlike Shields (1993) who suggested a poet knows when a poem is ended, “*because it lies flat, taut; nothing can be added or subtracted*” (p. 71) the representation of your stories is not so simple. Your stories interweave with my stories which I have

lived alongside Grandma and now you, and through our living alongside each other we have begun to tell new stories to live by. I know your stories will never be complete, nor will they ever lie flat and taut. So as time passed I understood that no matter which story I chose to include in your narrative account, there would always be another story.

Your stories have given me an opportunity to more deeply understand the stories I lived alongside Grandma. As you told your stories, my memories of other places, times, and people were triggered which pushed me to explore my understandings differently. You challenged me to see the opportunities that exist when older adults move places. Prior to listening to your stories, I deeply believed older adults, like Grandma, should remain in their homes and moving places was really a last resort for them.

A Letter from Grandma

October 29, 2008

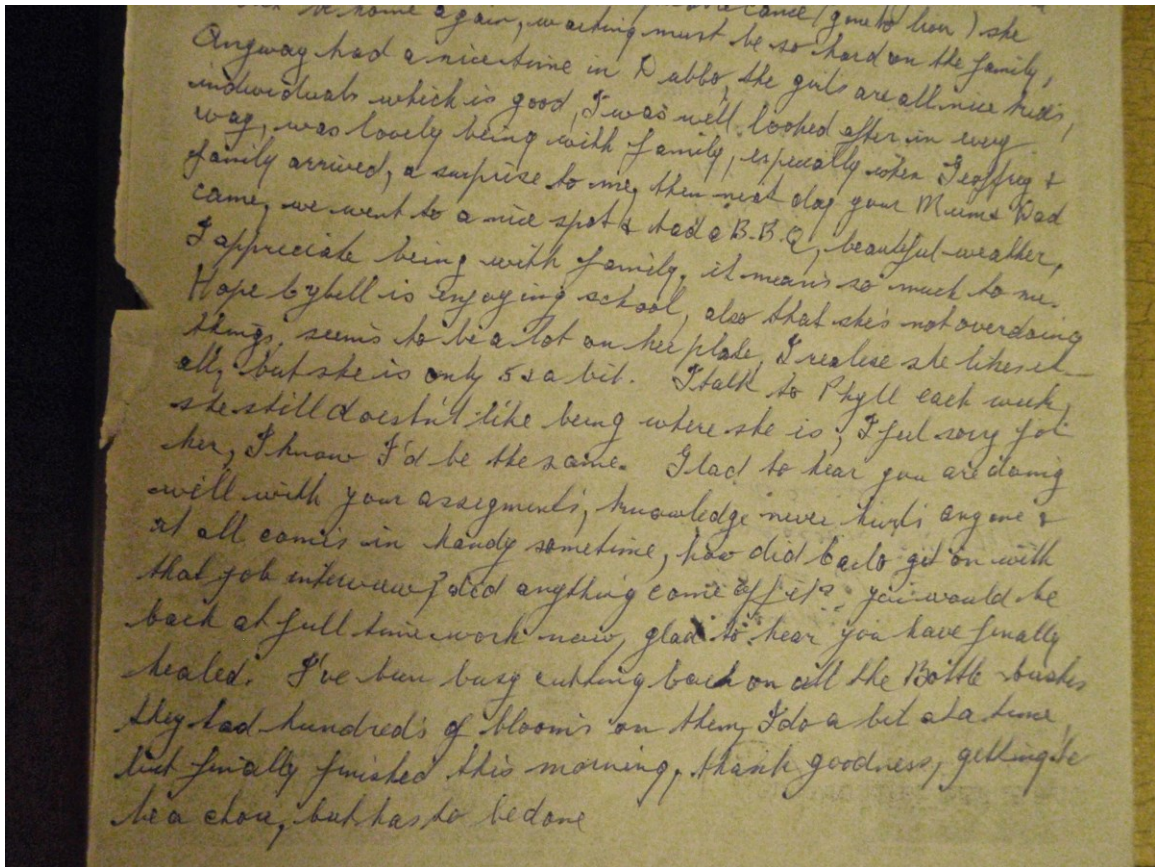


Figure 11: Letter, October 2008

"I talk to Phyll each week she still doesn't like being where she is, I feel sorry for her, I know I'd be the same."

However, I have begun to understand this is only one possibility.

Travelling to this new place of understanding also brings with it an element of fear. The unknown is not a comfortable piece of clothing in which to travel, and I may need to take many more journeys alongside older adults before meanings can be found and words given to explain my understandings. It is during these

multiple travels to make meaning that I now understand why I need to remain in relationship with you, as it is in relationship that we can continue to explore stories of growing older in relation to place.

As I was leaving your apartment last week, I reflected on my first letter to you and my memories of walking into your complex for the first time.

it no longer mattered

you lived in assisted living

the peach paint no longer spoke of healthcare

the rails, the walkers, the names on the doors

independence they now say

but,

the smallness of apartments, the need of repair

growing older they continue to say

yet,

the menu, the OK signs, the activities calendar

we are community they now say

FN (Changing understandings)

As I wrote my last letter to Pauline, I thought about how my relationship with Pauline has interrupted the stories I have lived alongside Grandma. My wonders have deepened to include an understanding that possibly Grandma did try to engage in telling a different story about growing older in relation to place. I revisited a letter in which Grandma wrote:

A Letter from Grandma

September 2, 2001

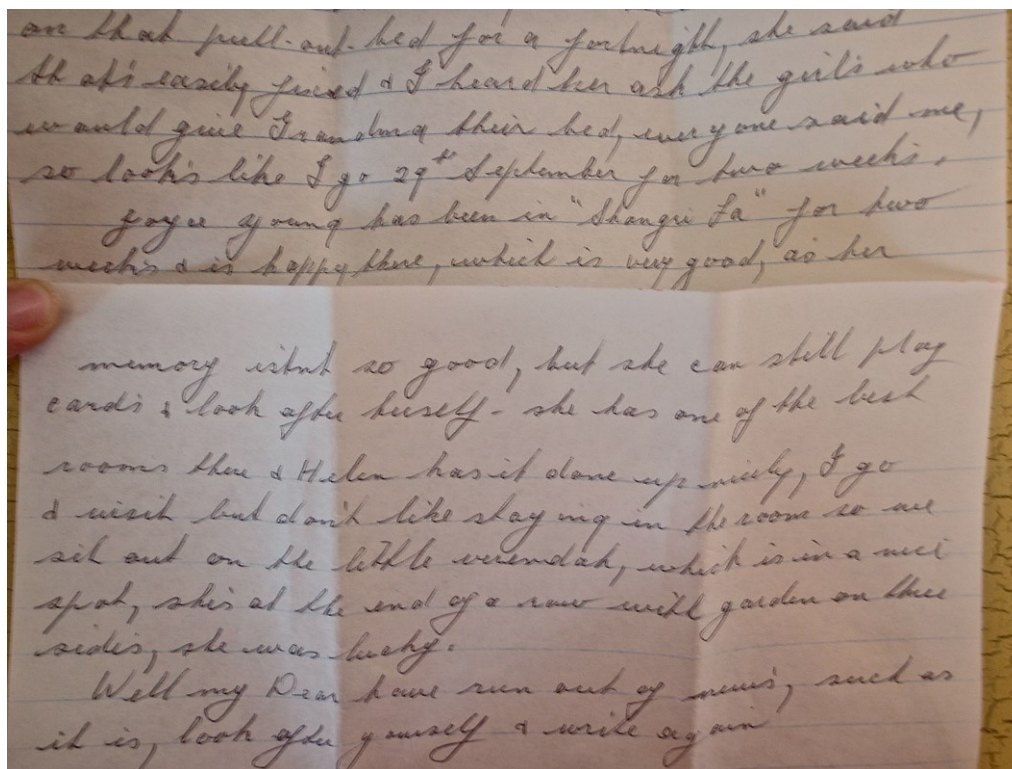


Figure 12: Letter, September 2001

“Joyce has been in “Shangri-La” for 2 weeks & is happy there, which is very good, as her memory isn’t so good, but she can still play cards & look after herself, she has one of the best rooms there & Helen has it done up nicely, I go & visit but don’t like staying in the room so we sit out on the little verandah, which is in a nice spot, she’s at the end of a row with garden on three sides she was lucky.”

In this letter, Grandma recognizes moving into the hostel “just down the road” doesn’t mean that a person is no longer independent. There is also a possibility; she might be lucky to have a view like Joyce. This small piece in her letter also opens a door to the possibility that my grandmother may have moved. My grandmother’s words also speak to her need to sit on a veranda and admire the view.

Pauline, I have most enjoyed sharing stories with you and attending with a different story of growing older: a story which Grandma could never have shared with me because I was not ready to attend to a story of growing older in a different place. I am forever grateful for your openness, warmth, and wisdom.

Chapter 5

Alison's Stories: The House that Alison Built

As Maggie shared her stories of living alongside her mother building her new home, I also became aware of a different story being told by others. Many times, these stories described Maggie's mom's pursuit of building a new home in her 80th year as being selfish, unreasonable, and inconsiderate. Nelson (1995) calls me to attend with Maggie's moms' stories, not with the arrogant perception (Lugones, 1987) of "found" community members; rather, with an openness to re-imagine stories of growing older in a place one chooses to call home.

I was very excited on the day I finally met Maggie's mom. I knew this was a wonderful opportunity whereby I might re-present Maggie's mom's experience in relation to place to the social milieu and challenge a current perception that building homes belonged to generations younger than Maggie's mom. Maggie and I perused our calendars alongside her mother's medical appointments which were booked later that month in town. It took us several attempts before we were able to coordinate a conversation between Maggie's mom and me. Finally, we were able to confirm a date and we decided Maggie would bring her mother to my place for the initial conversation.

I felt very impatient while I waited to meet Maggie's mom. I knew Maggie's mom had medical concerns and I found myself slipping into my role as a nurse, tormenting myself with a string of "what if" questions: what if Maggie's mom got sick, what if she had a fall, and what if her health interrupted her ability

to finish building her new home? At a deeper level, my impatience was fuelled by Maggie's departing comment, "Mom's not too sure if she has anything worthwhile to add to your research."

On the first day Maggie and her mom came to visit me, I was surprised when I realized I didn't even know Maggie's mom's first name. Maggie had always referred to her, as "mom" or "my mother." As I think about it now, I'm not sure why I was so surprised. I, too, never use my mother's first name during conversations with friends. I remember welcoming Maggie and her mom into my home and our brief introduction to each other; "This is my mom. Mom, this is Roslyn," Maggie said. We then became very busy with hanging up coats and negotiating our way towards the living room, being careful not to trip over my two very excited dogs. Between their yapping and our casual conversation, the opportunity to request a formal introduction escaped. I found myself in a very awkward moment as I pondered the question, "how was I going to ask Maggie's mom her name?".

After a brief period, Maggie announced she would be back in an hour's time. She had errands to run and she thought we might like to be alone. I'm not sure how Maggie's mom felt about her daughter's departure, but I felt very nervous and could feel the tension building in the pit of my stomach. What if Maggie's mom and I had nothing to say to each other? How were we going to fill an hour? Unlike meeting at a coffee shop or in Maggie's mom's home, neither of us could easily leave the situation. Maggie's mom and I settled into recliners in

my front room and faced each other. I offered her coffee or tea, and I know she declined both, but I don't remember how we began our conversation. What I do remember was my first impressions of Maggie's mom: she was a woman very much engaged with her family.

Maggie's mom was keen to talk about her new home, her 12 children, her travels, and her family's recent experiences with the flooding in Alberta, so I need not have worried about how we were going to fill our time together. My dog Jorja also helped to keep the conversation going. She had decided to curl up on Maggie's mom's lap and when our conversation lulled, Maggie's mom's attention was drawn to Jorja and she talked about her daughter's dog, which was also a Yorkshire Terrier. As the hour passed quickly, Maggie's mom and I agreed to continue our conversation the next time she came to town to visit with Maggie. As Maggie and her mom walked out my front door and down the driveway to the car, I realized I had still never asked Maggie's mom her first name. It was with great relief that I found her name on the consent form she had left signed on my table. Her name was Alison.

During our initial conversation, Alison confided that one of the reasons she wanted to tell me her story was so that I could write a book which she could then give to her children. Initially, Alison's conversations were about being a farmer's wife, a mother, and her current stories of growing older and building a house. As our relationship deepened, so too did Alison's stories. As Maggie

once said to me, “my mother must be becoming more comfortable with you because she is no longer worried if she is saying the right thing.”

With the deepening of Alison’s stories about the places she had lived during her lifetime, the possibility of writing her narrative account as a chapter book became a reality. In imagining how Alison’s chapter book would unfold, I was drawn to a children’s storybook *An Angel for Solomon Singer* written by Rylant (1992). As Alison described her experiences of building a home, choosing paint colours, and deciding on the finer details of deck location, window finishings, and furniture, I found myself re-reading pages of Rylant’s book. Eventually, I realized Alison paralleled Solomon Singer’s story, but unlike Solomon, who built his perfect home in his imagination, Alison was engaged in the process of building her home in real life. Alison named her home, “A Home for a Senior.” Influenced by Rylant’s book, I decided to represent Alison’s stories in the format of a chapter book, with each chapter written in the first person.

The House

that

Alison Built

Prologue

My name is Alison. I’m not sure how old you are, but I’m 80-and-a-half; you could say I’m leaning towards 81. I think I should tell you first, I’m a Catholic and I would never change my religion. I’m

a mother of 12 and before I even married, I knew I wanted to have a big family.

What else can I tell you about me . . . Let's see . . .

I'm in fairly good health, 'though I am diabetic and I do have high blood pressure. I guess I have some health problems, but I am getting older. I try not to let these things get in my way; I have a house to build. I call it a home for a senior because that is what it will be: a home for me. But that is another story and I will tell it very soon.

Now, back to what I was saying. Besides being older, and a Catholic, and a mother of 12, I am a farmer's wife. Actually, my husband died 12 years ago so I guess I am now a widow. And I don't live on the farm anymore. There I go again—that, too, is another story.

I did work outside the home for a while. That was a very long time ago. Before I met my husband, I was a teacher at a small country school for 2 years. We were married at Easter and by the time fall came, I was pregnant with my first child. I decided I was going to stay home and make a garden and raise my kids. I'm sure you're wondering about me having 12 children. Well, I'm sure you're too young to remember the book, or maybe it was the

original show, *Cheaper by the Dozen*. Anyway, I can remember going to see the show and thinking: wouldn't it be nice to have 12 kids. I have since learned that sometimes you've got to be careful what you wish for.

I've always lived on a farm in Saskatchewan . . . well, not always on a farm. There was a time we lived in town because farming was really bad. That was in 1978. We moved into Kilman for 2 years—my husband, our six children at the time, and me. Oh, there was another time we lived in town; but there I go again, I'm getting ahead of myself.

Now, you're probably wondering why I'm telling you this story at all. Well, last summer I met the author of this book. Her name is Roslyn. She has known my daughter, Maggie, for several years and I know they talk about me. They are both nurses you see, so I know they talk about my health and I am sure they now talk about the house I am building. I don't think many people get to meet someone my age that is building a house.

Now, back to meeting Roslyn. Maggie asked me if I would like to meet Roslyn because she was doing research for her PhD on the experience of older adults in relation to place. Maggie is also doing her PhD, so I thought I might find out more and maybe I

could help. I wasn't sure if I really had anything worthwhile to say and I was very nervous about saying the wrong thing. I decided I might like to participate, so when I was in town visiting with Maggie she took me over to Roslyn's home.

All that is now in the past, and I have told Roslyn my stories. She says it is now time to write them for you to read. So let me begin to share my stories about place with you. Don't worry if you are unfamiliar with rural Saskatchewan, you won't need to travel very far because I never moved very far from the farm where I grew up.

I think I should also mention to you that as you read my stories you will come across Roslyn's stories. These will appear at the end of each chapter under "An Author's Note." Roslyn said that as I told her my stories she often thought about her own experiences and she thought you might like to read these as well. Perhaps our stories might invite you to remember and share your own. In some ways, my chapter book may never be finished because you might also want to write your own author's note. I'm sure you have your own stories to tell about place.

Let's begin and see where our stories about place take us . . .

Chapter one:**The farm.***I*

Like I said before, I was a farmer's wife. Before that I was a farmer's daughter. Before I begin to tell you more about me, maybe I should tell you a little bit about my parents.

During the First World War, both my parents were Belgium refugees living in England. My mother and father met during the war and became engaged. But they didn't get married straight away. My mother and her mother travelled to Canada to join her father who was homesteading in Saskatchewan. It was 2 years before my mother returned to England to marry my father.

After my parents married, they returned to Belgium but work was difficult to find. Eventually my father got a job working for the Belgium Congo in Africa, and my mother and my two older siblings travelled to Saskatchewan to live with my grandparents. My father remained in Africa for 3 more years. I think those years were very long.

Anyway, time passed and my father eventually came out to Saskatchewan and joined my mother and their children. During his time in Africa he had saved enough money to buy the farm I was

raised on. My mother had four more children after they bought their farm. I never really lived with my older siblings because they were both away from home from the time I was very little. When I was 9 my older sister went to the convent. Even after my younger sister went away to school, I still lived at the farm. I felt like I should stay home and help my parents, they were getting older you know.

I lived on that farm up until I went to teach in the small rural school. It was right near my future husband's family farm.

II

Now, let me tell you the story about meeting my husband and becoming a farmer's wife. My husband and I belonged to the same parish and we met at church. Maybe I didn't tell you this before, but I was raised on the south border of the lake and his parents' farm was on the north side of the lake. If you went across country, our parents' farms were about 12 miles apart. Now you can understand why I said I never moved very far.

After we got married, we moved to my husband's family farm and lived with my in-laws. Because I only moved to the north side of the lake, I was able to keep my friends and I felt as though I pretty well belonged to my husband's community. I still remember driving to their farm. When I looked down from the top of the hill

towards it, I could see the church at the bottom and also the lake. I remember thinking it was the prettiest place in the world.

Eventually my husband and I built our first house on the same farm and we moved in as soon as it was ready. In 1955 we copied the house plan (named after Saskatchewan's Diamond Jubilee) from Beaver Lumber. We didn't have a basement but our friend dug a cellar and made a little foundation. We didn't have running water so we didn't have any plumbing.



Image 6: The farm

Sometime later, we got water put in at the farm and the first thing they did was put water into my in-law's house, the old house.

And then my in-laws went to Quebec to visit relatives. We had to move into their house because it couldn't be left without heat; the plumbing would have frozen. Our house didn't have plumbing or anything, so it could be left empty. We never did move back into the house we built when my in-laws returned from Quebec. Instead, when they moved back they just stayed in the house my husband and I built and eventually they moved it to Zetland. The last time I saw it, it was still there, and it was still being lived in. Now that is another story which I will tell you later.

I suppose we had outgrown our little house by then. I would have liked to move back into it but it was just a two bedroom and we had five children. Actually, we had six because I had the sixth one when we were living in the old house. We lived in that house until we built the new one; we must have had 10 children by that time. Yes, Martha was born there but not Jenny.

III

We did build onto my in-law's old house during the time we lived in it. But it was almost impossible to put plumbing and wiring into it and it was cold in the winter. Eventually we decided to build a new house. It was certainly a busy year that year. We went to

Expo '67, we built the house, and then I gave birth to Martha on Christmas day.

My husband and a friend built our new house from a plan by Nelson builders (I think that was their name; it was so long ago). We actually added to the length because we wanted the rooms a little bigger. It also didn't have a garage in the plans so we added that and then we added another room off the back of the garage which made the roof 60 feet long. It was a plain cottage type building with four bedrooms on the main floor and two bedrooms in the basement. I guess it was about 1,400 or 1,600 square feet. I did have 12 children so I guess we needed a big house.



Image 7: The new house at the farm

As I said before, I had always wanted a big family. I can remember being in school and always thinking how lucky others were when they had a new baby in the family. I guess they had younger parents than mine. When I was having my children, I can remember families having 10, 11, or 12 children. So you see my family really wasn't very different to other families in the area.

I guess I was telling you about building our second house on the farm. We built it right next door to the old house and guess what? When it was finished we just pushed my piano right across and in through the living room door. It was that close. The old

house was then demolished and its place on the farm remains marked by an old lilac bush which grew outside the front window.

I remember replacing the flooring in the house while we lived there. I went to the Co-Op and I bought the cheapest linoleum they had. They installed it when I was out in British Columbia; my daughter was getting married and I went out to help her look at wedding dresses. Well, when I came back I thought, "Oh boy, it's too white, I hate it." And you know, that flooring is still there and it looks good now. I mean, how did it stay nice for that long? It was cheap linoleum and they just laid it over tile. But it's getting old now. Well, I guess it has been there a long time.

IV

I think I was always a farm person and I liked being a farmer's wife. You know, I used to have two stoves on the farm. We had my mother's 24-inch stove and we also had the one we put in when we built the house. I could fill both of them with bread. I used to bake at least 28 loaves a week. Today, I'm sure you can't even imagine baking that much bread, but I know you can imagine the smell of bread baking. There is nothing like that smell is there?

I can't imagine how families can manage raising 12 children now with the way the prices are for everything. But living on the

farm, we pretty well never had to buy stuff. Of course we never bought bread. We made everything and we had all our own vegetables and meats. We even milked cows when we first got married, and for a while there we had pigs in the barn and then we had cats. Those cats sure loved it in there. Eventually, we had to take down the old barn because it was starting to fall down.

I'll always remember the old barn and the mural painted on its back wall. Jane took an old photograph of the barn and embroidered it onto cushions for all of us. Mine sits on my bed; it's very special. Let me show you a picture of it . . . the farm has changed somewhat now because my son has built a new house on the farm and the old trees you see embroidered on the cushion have all gone. They were rotting you see, because after all, they were planted in 1934.



Image 8: The barn

✓

Over time, my children left home and got married. As you can imagine, having 12 children meant I would eventually have many grandchildren and that I have. When they were little, the basement in my house became their playground. I had a room with spare clothes and a closet with all the older clothes and stuff, and the girls still talk about dressing up in Grandma's basement.

Many of my grandchildren grew up together; if I had one grandchild come to stay there had to be three. You see, many were born in the same year, like Roberta, and her cousin Jo, and

Jane's oldest boy Brian. So there was always a bunch of them together.

When my son Jack married, he built a house in our farmyard so I even had grandchildren living next door. I remember having Hannah stay and she would go next door to play with her cousins. She even went to the lake with them during the summer. Then, when Brian graduated, Shauna came with her three girlfriends and stayed with me and one of them ended up marrying Brian. That's how they met, that was Shauna's best friend. She said, "I can't bring any of my friends home anymore, I lost my best friend that way." That's Shauna.

VI

Maybe I should tell you a little bit more about my in-laws moving our little house into Zetland. I guess it was rightfully theirs because we did build it on their land. Yes, if you build on someone else's land, unless you own the land they own the house. But I always thought of it as my house and I really didn't want them to move it into town. I know it wasn't big enough for us, but we could have added on to it. My sister and her husband did—they built much the same house when they got married and then they made it bigger. You can go to her house now and see the line in their

living room where they added on the two bedrooms, made the living room bigger, and added a garage.

Anyway, the house was moved and that was that. My in-laws poured a basement in town and had the house moved onto it. But you know they only lived there for 5 years before my father-in-law died, so in hindsight it really hadn't made any sense to move the house at all. After my father-in-law died, my mother-in-law moved into a seniors' residence and the house was sold.

My father-in-law's sisters-in-laws talked them into moving in the first place. They thought it was unsafe for my in-laws to continue living on the farm after my father-in-law had his first heart attack. "Oh, you can't stay out there, he's going to have another heart attack out on the tractor," they said. Well, he died anyway and you can't be kept alive just by not doing anything, and maybe the exercise was good for him.

My father-in-law was always in the garden. After he moved into town, he would come out and visit us and he'd be in my garden hoeing, or he'd go out on the tractor and out into the field. He loved the farm. I believe he would never have moved into town if he had had a choice; he wanted to live on the farm forever. He had come there as a young man and built that farm up; that was

his home. Thinking about it now, when he moved our little house into town maybe he felt like he was taking a piece of the farm with him.

So after my father-in-law died, my family decided to bury him near the farm at the local church. His parents are buried there and so is my husband. I even have a spot reserved right near my husband. When my son and I were visiting the cemetery recently, he said, "I'm walking right over my future grave site." It is wonderful to think he also wants to be buried so close to the farm.

Now, I guess you want to know what happened to my parents' farm. Well, Mom and Dad stayed on the farm until 1964, I think. My dad was born in 1889, so he was quite old when they moved into town. They bought a very small house in Kilman. I think it was a converted granary with one bedroom, a living room, and a kitchen. So my dad had it built square and put a whole new roof on as well.

My parents' farm was sold because none of my siblings wanted it. My older brother already had his own farm and my younger brother had moved out to Quebec when he married.

An Author's Note

While Alison told me her stories about growing up on a farm and becoming a farmer's wife, I often found myself reliving my childhood and the years before my parents sold the family farm. Sometimes these memories brought moments of joy and I could feel the corners of my mouth twitching with a smile. At other times my memories caused tension deep inside of me. I now know these are my hard-to-tell stories and I continue to hesitate about seeking meaning and understanding of them.

When Alison showed me her photograph of her farmyard and described how the lilac bush marked the site of the old house, I felt a deep sense of loss. The lilac bush took me back to Grandma's front yard and her roses, and I remembered seeing several roses still in bloom when my mother and I returned to pack up her things. One rosebush had four roses in a cluster, each in a different stage of blooming. The four blooms reminded me of the four generations in my family. One bloom was just opening, one was partially open, one was fully open, and one had completed its lifecycle. As I looked at the four roses, I thought about them in

relation to Grandma, my mother, my daughter, and myself. The blooms told their own story and signified the individuality of a life. Somehow Alison's lilac bush and Grandma's roses came together to tell a story about life continuing, even after the end of something very special.

As I write this piece, the aroma of Alison's baking bread still lingers. But is it her bread I smell or Grandma's baking from my childhood? I still remember coming home from school and being greeted by Grandma's baking and the delicious smells wafting from her kitchen. The smell of pumpkin scones still brings images of Grandma cutting out the dough and the taste of the hot scones piled high with butter. Yes, lots of butter, isn't that how grandmas always put it on? Good and thick!

My adult home place would never be a farm. My mother was adamant that none of her daughters would ever be a farmer's wife. I don't ever remember questioning my mother about it, but I knew the life of a farmer was very difficult. However, I was in love with the wide-open spaces and the freedom that they gave me. Over the years my mother has begun to share her stories of never

wanting to be a farmer's wife. I still don't fully understand and I often wonder that if my mother's life had been different, and if some things had never happened, maybe I might have returned to the wide-open spaces of my childhood and found my home nestled somewhere between the fields of wheat and the mountains.

Chapter two:

Time off the farm.

I

Like his father before him, my husband always farmed but we had a shop on the farm too. We sold snowmobiles and chainsaws and my husband also did all the associated repairs and maintenance. I guess it was something for him to do in the winter. He found the winters very hard and he didn't like them at all. Unfortunately, we couldn't go away during the winter months because we had cattle to feed.

The shop also kept me connected with my father. We had a lot of people from the Reserve come to our place (the Reserve was between my in-laws' and my parents' farms). They came to buy eggs from me and snowmobiles and chainsaws from my husband. And they'd ask me, "how's the old man?" you know (my dad)

because they knew him. When my dad got older he used to drive a lot of them around because they didn't have cars and he'd take them wherever they wanted to go. In particular, he took the women because when their cheques came they wanted to go shopping right away. So he'd go with a carload of women to town. At the time, he must have been in his 70s and still living at the farm.

I think the shop was better for my husband than farming. For a while we rented out our land and my husband started to work for a snowmobile dealer in Kilman. A year later we moved off the farm and into Kilman. Maybe I should tell you about living in town.

II

Between 1978 and 1980 farming was really bad so we rented out the farm and bought a service station with a house attached. At that time we had our six youngest children living with us. The oldest six had already moved out and some were even married. I don't ever remember talking to the children about the move. I'm sure life was very different for them living in town. It certainly was for me. But we couldn't have stayed on the farm. We were always struggling to pay the bills or to buy new equipment and small farms didn't pay anymore.

But our move into town only lasted 2 years and then we went back to the farm. I was really happy to go back and once again be a farmer's wife.

III

There was another time my husband and I lived off the farm. It was when my husband got sick. We moved into Saskatoon and we lived there for a year. We bought a condo with our daughter Joyce. She still owns it and I guess I could have moved into it when I decided to move off the farm. But you know it's harder to get to know people in a big town. In a small town you can walk down the street and most people say hello.

We found it difficult to meet people when we lived at the condo. We would go to the mall and there would be all these seniors sitting with each other and I remember thinking how lucky they were to know each other. But because my husband was so sick, we never really got to know people very well. We did meet the people who lived in the condo across from us. They invited us in to see their place and to come and play cards with them. But my husband was never well enough to even do that.

When my husband died and I returned to our farm, I moved back into the second house we had built together. I was never

alone after my husband died because my son and his family were still living in the farmyard.

IV

Five years after my husband died I did become lonely on the farm, especially in the winter. Even Maggie once said I sounded depressed. I was spending a lot of time on my own. Jack's children were starting to leave home to attend university in the city and even Jack and his wife were out a lot, travelling to visit with their children. And my friends were starting to move away too and some died. You know that's the way it was.

I wasn't as healthy either and I wasn't really sure if it was safe to be alone in the country anymore. I was driving 25 miles to see the doctor and the last time I went for my prescriptions I got caught in a snowstorm and that was in the spring. It was one of the worst trips I have ever made in my life. I was pushing snow with my car.

I decided I didn't want to live on the farm anymore. I was finding it too quiet and my daughter Jane suggested I move to Brookes. It was 3 hours from the farm but Jane told me she had found a nice little house in the same block as hers. I looked at the house and I said, "You know, I should do this. I should move." It wasn't like I couldn't visit the farm whenever I wanted. My oldest

son Lionel worked outside Princeton and all I had to do was be in Princeton on a Thursday night and he would drive me to the farm. And then when he goes back on Sunday I can go back with him or I can wait a week and go back with him then, or whenever.

An Author's Note

Alison's stories of farming turning bad in the late 1970s and early 1980s resonated with living on our farm in Australia. As I tentatively explored my memories of that time, I remembered my father building an engineering workshop on the farm, when people began to come and go from our place and the tension that began to fill our home. I now realize those tensions marked the beginning of a new family story.

Many of my family's stories were never shared outside the home. Some were too deep and some too raw and others were never to be shared. During my teenage years the lack of viable crops was causing enormous financial distress among farmers in our district and some were beginning to lose their properties to the banks. Coupled with financial uncertainty, my family was also struggling because of father's accident and my mother's mental

illness. My most vivid memories of this time I would prefer to forget, yet Alison's story caused me to reflect on that time in my life when I awoke to the realization that not all mothers have a mental illness and not all daughters feel responsible for keeping their mothers alive.

Like Alison's husband, my parents' ability to learn new skills and to adapt to life outside of farming pushed my parents to plan a life for my sister, brother, and I away from farming. They told us we would never live at the mercy of the weather or be trapped by the responsibility of owning land; we would get an education and experience a life away from farming. Once again, my mother's words echo in my mind: "You will never be a farmer's wife."

I often wonder what Alison's children thought about moving into town. I remember visiting Grandma in town and having to learn another way of being because living in town called for rules and regulations and ways of behaving that my farm place did not. I never talked about the confusion the changes in places created inside of me. I'm not sure who would have even listened to me. The coming and going between in-town-places and farm places was

an expectation for children who lived out-of-town. But I had the privilege of returning to my farm-place; Alison's children did not. Maybe they shared their stories among themselves. I now wonder who attends to the stories of older adults who move to town from their farm and how do they learn new rules and regulations and ways of behaving that are so different from where they lived before.

Chapter three:

A house in town.

I

Now let's go back to me deciding to move permanently off the farm. I did look at other places to live before I decided to move into the little house just down the road from my Jane's place in Brookes.

I looked in Kilman because I had once lived there, though that was many years before. There was a hospital there and I did know people in the town. But there weren't any places for sale. I also looked in Roseville because I had another daughter living there, but they didn't have a hospital. I looked at seniors' rentals in Roseville because I'm a senior, but they gave me all this paperwork

to fill in and really, they just wanted to know how much money I had in the bank. The places available for rent had a living room into a kitchen, into a bedroom, all in a row. Jack's mother-in-law lives in one in Wanda, so I knew what they were like; they were not big. You know, I didn't want to live in one of them.

I guess that brings me back to the little house just down from Jane's. Jane was doing upholstery for this lady who had built-in couches and she said to Jane, "this house is for sale." It was only five houses down from Jane's and she told me what she wanted for it and I went there and looked at it and I bought it.



Image 9: Five houses down from Jane's

Buying that house made perfect sense. At the time I had so many appointments in Saskatoon and the farm was 3 hours away or if I took the bus, which I usually did, it was 4½ hours. Now I am only just over an hour from Saskatoon and I haven't taken the bus in I don't know how long. You see Jane goes into town quite often so she takes me to my appointments. I still drive all the time around Brookes, but not in the city.

II

My little Brookes house was built in 1962. I think it was less than 600 square feet. It was built in three sections and reminded me of the first house my husband and I built on my in-laws' farm; the house his parents later moved into Zetland. Over the years previous owners had added on a living room and then another bedroom. The main bathroom was in the basement, along with the washer and dryer. Later the bathroom in the basement became a reason for me to move again. That as well as the many steps up to the front door. But I'm getting ahead of myself because that's another story which I will share with you in a bit.

There wasn't a garage when I first moved in and my car sat out in the weather. You get a dirty car when you leave it outside. Shortly after moving in I built a garage and it was sided in white to

match the house. I would never choose white again because it always gets dirty.

Moving to Brookes reminded me of living on the farm. It is very similar country—farming country with trees and rivers and lakes. There are lots of lakes but I haven't seen much of them. I have been to one, to Waskesiu and the surrounding area. That's very nice country.

III

I guess I could have moved back into the Saskatoon condo where my husband and I lived while he was sick, but it's harder to get to know people in a big town. In Brookes everybody knew Jane and the first thing I did when I got there was join the seniors' group and the exercise club both there and at the Catholic church. I met many people there and I also met people when they came into Jane's store. When I first moved to Brookes I would help out at the store. Actually, Jane's mother-in-law also helped in the store before she died. I still go to the store most days for coffee and to visit with my daughter in the afternoon.

My new friends in Brookes are a mixed bunch: some older and some younger than me. I sometimes play cards and I used to play bingo. They quit the bingos but I don't know why. I go to

exercise classes in the winter once a week. When the Catholic Church and the seniors' group had them, I used to go twice a week. Now there are just the seniors. In the summer the classes stop because people can walk and get out and many of us plant gardens.

I don't tend to have friends visit me in my place. I sure visit them in the stores and at the seniors' group. That tends to be where we do our visiting. There are always different churches offering lunches and if there's a soup and sandwich on the offer the whole town goes and you see a sea of grey. We also celebrate monthly birthdays at the seniors' group. Because it's Valentine's Day this month and it's my turn to bring the birthday cake, I have ordered a Valentine cake from the local bakery. They decorate the cakes so pretty for the seniors. On occasion, I play "Happy Birthday" on the piano at seniors gatherings. You know, I need to play as it helps to keep us in tune!

I found it really hard going to a church where I knew no one. But it doesn't take long to meet people. I have met a lot of people and I have even met people from my old parish and the area surrounding the farm. I met one couple at the newcomers' tea which the church holds every 2 years. They were announcing the

different people and where they came from and here's this couple that I've known since I was married. It's a funny, funny world. People turn back up in our lives at different times. I even met one girl who went to school with my children and now she and her husband go to the same church as me. There's also the dental receptionist who used to live near the farm; I've known her since she was a little girl. Yeah, it's a funny world.

IV

I lived in my little house in Brookes for 6 years before I decided I needed something more suitable. My family didn't like it because I had a lot of stairs; they were scared I'd fall and then the main shower was in the basement along with the washer and dryer. They were always scared I would fall in the basement and nobody would know. But that can happen anywhere. I could fall down between the house and the garage and nobody would see me, so what's the difference? You don't get to choose where you fall!

I have thought about getting a pendant, you know one of those buttons you press if there is an emergency. I don't know why I never have; I think I keep putting it off. Jane phones me every day. She'll wait until around 3 or 3.30 in the afternoon and then phone

and say, "Aren't you coming for coffee?" She makes coffee in her store or we will go out for coffee together.

An Author's Note

Many times during Alison's and my conversations I could hear my Grandma's voice echoed in Alison's words. As Alison described the rentals available in Roseville she said, "I didn't want to live in one of them," and I heard Grandma say, "No privacy, no space for dreaming, no gardens to tend to, and no view; I will not go to this place they want me to." As Alison described the paperwork she needed to complete for the rentals available for older adults in Roseville, she said, "They just wanted to know how much money I had in the bank;" and Grandma said, "Can you believe it, they wanted to know my father's last name and his occupation. I refused to fill in the forms." And when Alison described her family's concerns about her falling and the need for her to find another home in which they felt she would be safer, I smiled when she said, "You don't get to choose where you fall!" Her statement brought back memories of my trip home to Australia in 2007. I returned to live alongside Grandma, to breathe

her air and to share her life journey. Some family members, the community nurse, and volunteers were concerned that Grandma would fall, that the yard was too big, and that she was isolated and needed supervision. Grandma too had said, "Just because they have rails at the hostel, it doesn't mean I won't fall. You don't choose where you fall."



Image 10: "Looking out"

Thinking of my recent conversations with Alison and my previous ones with Grandma, I struggle with the concept of

maintaining dignity as we grow older. I feel great tension in relation to the inappropriate questions older adults are asked and the perpetuation of arrogance within the social milieu. As I move forward with my research, I find myself stumbling over the same question, how can I open up space within conversations that invite others to attend with older adults in loving ways and not with arrogant perceptions? It saddens me that I still do not feel any closer to finding an answer.

When Alison told stories about meeting people through the church, not only could I hear Grandma's voice, but also Pauline's and mine. For the four of us, it appeared church provided an opportunity for us to no longer be strangers within our communities. It wasn't until I had left Alison's home that I gave myself permission to revisit my memories of attending church the day Grandma was buried. While standing at the front of the church with my daughter by my side, I looked out onto the congregation and saw the many faces from my past. There were Grandma's close friends, parents of my friends, my Sunday school teachers, and the girl who had played piano, now an adult with a

family of her own. All these people had grown older like me, yet standing there in the church I felt like the child I had once been. I wonder, do each of us return to church to feel young again, as children of God.

Chapter four:

A house for a senior.

I

I did consider other options before I decided to build a new house. I could have kept my old house and renovated it. I asked my contractor about it because Lionel and Jane, my two oldest, said I should build on. But my contractor didn't want to. He said someone else might do it for me but he wouldn't because he would be building on somebody else's problems. There was already a problem with the front door; you could see through cracks at the top and the bottom. But the main problem was the bathroom was in the basement. I did have a half suite, just a little two-piece in my bedroom, which was a lifesaver. But to run downstairs to shower and run downstairs for washing . . . The kids were worried one day I would fall down those stairs and there'd be nobody there to help me.

I also looked at a condo here in Brookes in the retirement center. I had a friend living there but she's moved into Saskatoon as she needed more care. I remember helping her across the street last summer. She was taking little, little, tiny steps, and she was really bent. I was hoping no car would come along quickly. She grew up in this area and her daughter bought her the condo, but it's just a retirement center. So when my friend started to have difficulty getting around, she had to move. The condo was too far out anyway; I could never have walked to town from there. They said there are people that do, but it's a long walk. In the summer I can walk to Jane's store, I walk there every day. And I can walk down the back lane right to Jane's back door. I can also walk to the clinic from here, as it is only four blocks away.

So I decided to build a house for a senior right here on the land I already owned. And I had the money so I thought, why leave it in the bank. Property is always a good investment. Anyway, I didn't see anything in town that I wanted which was under \$250 - \$300,000 and they were all older houses, no better than what I already had. So I still would have had to do all the renovations. Building new was the better way to go.

II

My contractor wanted to demolish my old house. There had been an old Scout Hall across the road which was demolished and the new one was built very quickly. My contractor said, "See how long it takes. One day it's gone, and there's nothing there. You can do that." I just didn't want to . . .

My little house in town was very old but nicely finished inside. I thought it would be a shame to tear something down like that. My in-laws moved the first house my husband and I built into Zetland and I think it's still there and still being used. So I thought someone else might be able to use my little house and I had a mover take it away. He didn't charge me to move it; he said he'd take it on the condition he could sell it, and if he couldn't sell it it would be his loss. Even now I think I would have kept my little house if he hadn't moved it or I would have paid to have it moved. It has since been sold and moved onto blocks a short drive from here. Jane and I went by a couple of weeks ago and it was sitting on its piles next to a basement which had been dug. Maybe the young man who helped move it bought it. At the time, he was very interested. Maybe I will get to see it finished, if I can convince my daughter to drive by it on our way to Saskatoon.

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Image 11: A house for a senior

III

When my husband and I built our previous homes we just copied the plans from a book. My contractor said he wasn't going to buy a plan so he drew one up from a design I picked. I decided on two big bedrooms, an ensuite, a main bathroom, a laundry, a living room, a kitchen, and a dining room. I don't think there's another house like it. People comment on the look of my house; one gentleman I saw yesterday or maybe the day before, I can't remember, said my house sure looked sharp. So many of the seniors have told me they really liked the look of it.

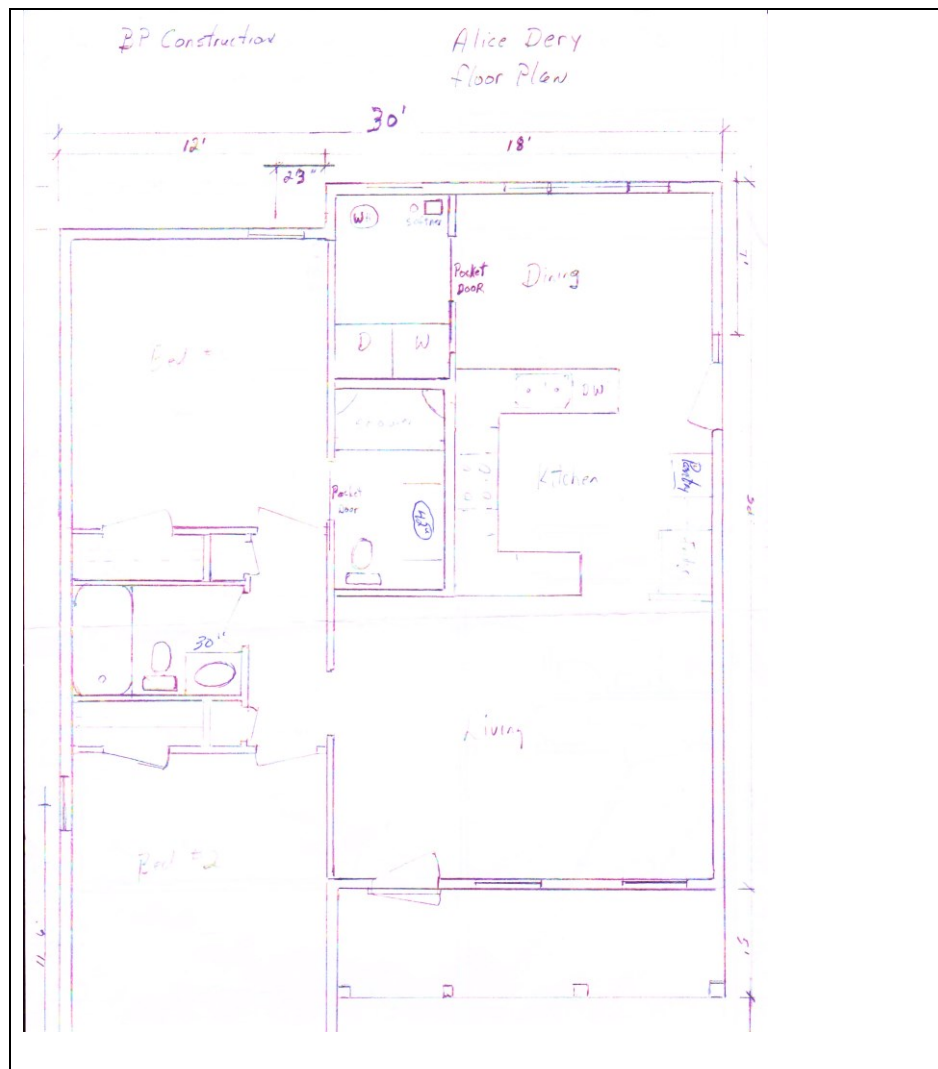


Image 12: The floor plan

There were many decisions to make during the building of my house. I decided not to have a basement, so now I only have three steps to the front door and three steps out the side door to the garage. My washing machine and dryer are on the main floor. I even put in one of those sit-in-showers which I saw in the condos I went to look at. I had the house ducted for the vacuum but I didn't

have it installed. I don't care to haul all those big cords around. I've got trouble with my arms and my wrists and where would I store it. I have a broom closet but it is already full.

I like to cook so I wanted more counter space in my kitchen. My old kitchen was a good size but it didn't have a lot of counter space and only a 24-inch stove and it used to frustrate me because I like to make bread once in a while and it's four or five loaves and that small oven was never big enough. There's nothing like the smell of baking bread; I think that's why I still bake bread. Now I've got a regular sized one like I always had on the farm. I don't have a lot of use for baking, but I love to bake. I like my own homemade soups and stuff better than the canned soup. I put in a dishwasher as well which meant I also put in a water softener because the water is quite harsh here. That reminds me, I have to buy salt for it this week.

I had a verandah put on the front and a landing at the side door. My contractor was going to build it quite small but Jane said that would be no good because where would I set the groceries and stuff while I opened the door. She said I should make it 6 x 8 feet and that's what it is. My verandah out the front is perfect for the summer because it faces north. I couldn't really sit on my old

verandah because it faced south and was always too hot. Last summer I sat out on my new verandah with Jane and we watched the parade go by. I can also sit on the verandah and watch the children play in the park and come and go from the Scout Hall and the swimming pool. When my daughter Martha came to visit from Calgary she said, "Look at all those kids yelling and talking." I said it feels like home to me. I can see the highway and out into the distance. The view is one reason why I didn't want to change lots. I find many of the houses in town are so close together and I have a lot and a half here, so I have more space and I don't feel built in.

I decided on grey siding for my new house. It doesn't match the garage but I wasn't putting white on the house—it showed up all the dirt. In time, I'll have the front siding of the garage changed to grey and maybe I will replace the door. I did mention it to my contractor when he was building my house, but he didn't seem too keen to take on extra work. He was building two houses, maybe three, at the same time. It's very difficult to get contractors out here.

IV

Once my house had been built, I then had to decide on the fixtures and fittings, flooring, and paint colours. I chose lever door

handles and lever taps because they are easier for me to use when my wrists and hands are sore. I chose laminate for the bedrooms and living room, and linoleum for the bathroom and kitchen. It was hard to choose the flooring and I thought I had picked a really nice one for the kitchen, but I'm not crazy about it. It looks too grey. But everyone thought I had made a really good choice, and after they put it in the lady doing the painting said I sure like your linoleum, so I guess it must be okay; it's just me. Maybe the big window in the kitchen just makes it look grey. It reminds me of the time I replaced the linoleum out at the farm. Even though I thought it was too white and I hated it, I did learn to live with it and now it still looks good.

I find the laminate hard to keep nice. I mean when they brought the sofas in the guys took off their shoes, but then I guess their socks made worse marks than their shoes. I'm still looking for an area rug to put down in the living room. It will make the room cozier but I haven't found what I want. I did see a really nice one yesterday when I went looking with my daughter, but I don't know what colour to pick. There was a really nice grey one, but I just wasn't sure.

Now choosing paint colours wasn't quite so difficult. I always go by this: if it's south facing, like my bedroom, it's got to be a

cooler colour. If it's a north room, it should be a little warmer colour. But my living room was kind of a puzzle because it's both north and south facing. Eventually the paint colours came together. I like the colour blue and the bedrooms in my old house were painted blue and the living room and kitchen were painted a pale yellow. But this time I wanted to go with something different. So my bedroom is light aqua and everyone says what a beautiful colour it is. The other room is called shade and the rest of the house is sugar loaf. Sometimes the colour appears to be different, but that is because of the light.

✓

Even after making all the decisions about the design, the fittings, and the fixtures, I still had to make decisions about the furniture because my other stuff was smaller and getting older. I refused to part with my old recliner because I'm comfortable in it and my kids bought it for me as a housewarming gift when I moved into the old house on this lot. Jane says it looks like a little thing stuck in the corner. I think it fits nicely in my living room near the window. I'm thinking of getting it recovered or maybe another chair, but I haven't decided yet.

I like to sit in my chair and read. I can see out the front window and I can see out the kitchen window into the backyard. That reminds me, do you remember the condos I was telling you about here in Brookes? Well, the one I looked at, the backyard looked into the Chevy dealer. The view from the window was of a parking lot with all the cars for sale. I couldn't imagine looking at that every day, not when I have a view across the park here and out into the distance across the highway.

I did bring some of my furniture from the farm and some my husband and I had in the condo in Saskatoon. I brought my old bedroom furniture which I had bought with my teaching money in 1955. It is made of solid wood, not that cheap stuff they use today. My other bedroom suite is out at the farm. I still sleep in my old bedroom when I stay at the farm. They have kept my room just as I left it. I even get to eat my meals at my old dining room table when I visit there. I sold the table to my granddaughter and she had it in Saskatoon, and then when they sold their house they moved from Saskatoon into my old house at the farm. Maybe I will keep the rest of that story for my final chapter in this book.

A lot of my furniture has been dispersed among my children and grandchildren. I hate trying to sell bits and pieces and I didn't

need the money and my family needed the furniture. Like my old dining room table, I also had a piano. I think that piano has moved further than I have. It was out at Maggie's when her daughters were taking piano and now it is here in town at Jane's. I have a little keyboard in my room which I can play whenever I like and it takes up less space than my old piano.

I bought new shelves for the living room to display my family photographs on. In the other house I had lots of places for pictures on different cabinets and stuff, but I don't here. With 12 children, I needed many shelves to make sure everyone was on display. Some of these photographs are pretty old. The one of my husband and I was taken on our wedding day. I do have more recent pictures, but these days they don't come as photographs; rather, my children and grandchildren post them on Facebook. The picture hanging above the sofa came from the farm. It was hanging in my bedroom until yesterday. Unfortunately, when I was plugging in the phone I knocked the other picture down and broke the glass and the frame. The phone, now that is even from the farm. I was given new phones for Christmas but they quit on me. I guess they weren't the same quality as the old phone from the farm.



Image 13: Family photographs

When I think about it now, I didn't do much work when I moved in on Thanksgiving weekend. My daughter and I moved the beds in but most of the other things were delivered and set up. My children and grandchildren have helped to move things into the right place, like the stove and the fridge and the dishwasher. And, they also helped put together the shelves and the table and chairs, the coffee table and side table. You know, most things you buy these days need to be assembled. Thank goodness I have people to help me, otherwise I still probably wouldn't have a dining room table to sit at.

An Author's Note

While Alison told me about building a house for a senior, I travelled deeper into the stories I lived alongside Grandma in a place which she called home. In particular, Alison's stories about each child, grandchild, or great grandchild captured in a photograph now framed and standing on a shelf in her new living room caused me to remember the photographs once displayed in Grandma's front room. There were many similarities between her photographs and Alison's. What caught my attention the most was the age of the photographs. Like the Pixie portrait of my siblings and me which remained on Grandma's table since the time my brother was 2 years old, Alison also had photographs of her children and grandchildren that were many years out of date.

During our conversations, Alison told me about each family member in the photographs she displayed in her living room. Sometimes she would comment that the grandchildren were quite a bit bigger now, such as the family portrait of Maggie and her children which appeared to have been taken at least 10 years ago. The more recent photographs were of grandchildren getting

married or of great grandchildren before their second birthday. What I found most puzzling was the persistence of older photographs, even though the display was recently arranged. I wondered why Alison hadn't updated the photographs before displaying them in her new home. I knew she had more recent pictures, so why weren't they displayed? Possibly, as Hirsch (1997) suggested, both Alison and Grandma's photographs created a social and historical space to which they could travel through their memories or imaginations, to pause and reflect on relationships, family, friends, places, times, and their life stories. Or, as Maggie said during a conversation with me about her mother's photographs, "I find it hard to get rid of the pictures of the children as babies. It is hard to put those memories away." Maybe Grandma and Alison found it equally as hard to put their memories away.

It was while Alison spoke of her decision to have a north-facing verandah that I drifted off to sit with Grandma on hers. Just like the stories Alison shared about the view from her verandah: the park, children coming and going from the Scout Hall,

and the farmer's fields beyond the highway; Grandma once told similar stories. She watched golfers on the fairway across the street, read quietly in the afternoon sun, and attended to her potted plants along the verandah's edge as it became more difficult for Grandma to tend to her garden. Both Grandma's and Alison's stories spoke to their need to see into the distance. Like Grandma once wrote in a letter to me, "when I go and visit Joyce at the hostel we don't like staying in the room so we sit out on the little verandah which is in a nice spot, she's at the end of a row with gardens on three sides." If open places are important to older adults, particularly those who move into town from the farm, I wonder why most places built for older adults do not include a verandah. As Grandma said, "I will not move to this place they want me to because there is no place for dreaming." As Alison said, "the window at the condo in the seniors' residence looked out onto the Chevy dealership. I didn't want to look at that."



Image 14: Golfers across the way

The story Alison told about looking for a rug caused me to quickly slip into the role of a nurse; I perceived her arrogantly and it troubled me deeply. I could hear Alison describe the coziness a rug would bring to her living room; yet, I could also hear my inner

professional voice arguing a rug was a trip hazard for older adults. I felt myself wanting to say, "Would you tape the edges down? Would the rug have a rubber back? How far would it extend out from under the coffee table? Have you considered not having a rug at all?" At the same time, a third voice entered our conversation. It was Grandma, talking about her rug under her dining room table. At one point, the community nurse told Grandma her rug must be removed because it was a trip hazard. Grandma told her the rug had been there for many years, and it would continue to remain where it was.

When I went home to pack up Grandma's things after she died, the rug was still under the dining room table. The tassels around the edge had all but disintegrated, and where the chairs were pushed in and out was threadbare. I now realize Grandma's rug added a depth of coziness to her dining room and it also captured within its fibers the many family stories shared around the dining room table. I took a photograph of Grandma's rug during my last visit and its presence calls me to attend to stories, like Alison's, with love and playfulness. Once again Lugones (1987)

reminds me to be playful in my role as nurse. There are rules within this role; however, there are no rules too sacred to be broken.



Image 15: Well-worn rug

Chapter five:

Coming full circle.

I

After my house for a senior was built and I moved in on Thanksgiving weekend, I found it hard being alone again because I'd been with family all summer. I stayed with Maggie for a bit and I also went out to the farm. I stayed with my son Stewart in Alberta. I just left his place before that big flood came through their town. I

also went out to Ontario to stay with my daughter Annie. I probably stayed with Jane the most during the time my house was being built, because she lived just five doors down from my house site.

Did I tell you I also went on a cruise this past summer? Oh, how I loved it. My family decided to do it for my 80th birthday. Annie wants me to go away on a cruise next summer too. I thought I wouldn't mind the one that leaves New England and travels into Eastern Canada. It sure would be interesting; I haven't been that far east. The farthest east I have been was to the Saguenay region of Quebec.

I was never a snowbird. My sister goes every year to the west of Texas and Annie has a place at Lake Havasu, Arizona. I have been down there as well during the summer and I have also been out to British Columbia to visit with my daughter who lived out there. But really, I think I'm a homebody and I don't really need to spend the winters away from Saskatchewan. I've lived in Saskatchewan all my life you know and I couldn't imagine living year round with sun, sun, sun, and more sun. I couldn't imagine it. I've heard of people who move from Toronto to California and they found it boring after a while because the weather never changed. Yeah, I guess maybe that's the way I like to live. You know I used to drive a

team of horses to school at 30 or 40 below, but kids sure wouldn't do that these days.

Now that I have moved into my new place I don't know if I will travel as much. It will all depend on how I feel. I wouldn't have to worry about pipes and things freezing because I would probably only be gone in the summers. I wouldn't need to get a house sitter either because Jane is close enough and she would check on my place. I don't worry about someone breaking in to my place. Who would want to rob a senior? I don't have anything anyway. But that's the funny part; two men were trying to rob the store and Jane doesn't leave money in there and twice someone has broken into the seniors' complex and they never keep money there either. But the one time, seniors' did have a big screen TV the same as mine and the robbers made off with that. Like Jane says, they're not interested in clothes, they want electronics and stuff that is easy to sell. Things are certainly changing in small towns. Once upon a time a robbery would never be heard of, everybody knew everybody and you just didn't have to worry about it.

II

I have thought about getting a cat since moving in to my new place. I went to the SPCA with my daughter, and boy, there

was a cat there that sure wanted me to take her home. I was patting her and she'd hold her paws through the bars and hold on to my hand; she wanted me to take her home. She was a calico. They have cats at the farm as well so I could have one any time I want. Maggie has a cat I like. She comes out to greet me when I visit. I asked Maggie, "She would come and stay with me wouldn't she?" Maggie said she sure would but her husband wouldn't agree. The cat is a good mouser. She is a nice cat. But I don't know if I will get a cat because I am away a lot so it would be hard for an animal.

III

It's nice having the big spare bedroom and two bathrooms, so when family visits there is plenty of space for them to stay. I have had visitors, but I always tell them they must phone first because I am often uptown at Jane's store. My senior friends all want to come and see my house.

My son Stewart was here last weekend and the weekend before that my daughter Jenny came to stay. Jack from the farm was also here with his family on the coldest day we had in weeks. They were in Princeton looking for parts and they dropped in on their way home. Their youngest son was with them as well because

it was too cold for the school bus to run. My grandson is the only child on the bus these days, so different to when my family lived out on the farm. There were many kids in those days. I guess they are all moving away now.

I still find it very quiet in the evenings, particularly at this time of year. The winter evenings are so long. Unlike at the farm, I do see somebody nearly every day, even if it is only when I go down to Jane's store in the afternoon. I think I might start coming back later from the store, to make the evening a little shorter because I never go to bed before 10 or 10:30 p.m. I tend to watch television or play Scrabble on my iPad. I also have Facebook which I use to keep up with my grandchildren, their travels, and their families. I don't tend to post on it though, maybe just a happy birthday message every now and again. My wrists and hands are sometimes too sore to type a message.

IV

It is great being able to return to the farm whenever I like. It does feel like I'm going home when I go back to the farm but I wouldn't want to live there anymore. The first year I moved off the farm and into Brookes I went back to live on the farm for the summer. I think it was my garden that drew me back because I

had always been on the farm in the summer. Going back certainly helped me to transition from country life to living in town.

Two years ago I spent Christmas at the farm. They even had it in my old house. There were a lot of people there, including my daughter-in-law's three sisters and their families. During the 50 years I lived on the farm, I think we used to have 20 or 30 people for Christmas dinner each year. Then last fall we had a family reunion out at the farm; it was the 10th anniversary of my husband's passing. My daughter Jenny, who lives in Roseville, organized a church service and then we all had a family get together. All my children were there and a lot of my grandchildren. I have a photograph of us all outside the church which I will hang above the television when it gets framed.

But things are now changing . . .

My daughter Joyce is talking about celebrating her 50th birthday at my new house in the summer. She thought a lot of family could come with campers and there are places in the park where you can have meals in the picnic shelters. The kids could then all run wild. She might decide to have it in Regina yet, I don't know, and thankfully, I'm not planning it.

Last Christmas I was going out to the farm where I used to live and then I would have travelled to Maggie's after Christmas to attend a medical appointment in Saskatoon on December 27, but I wouldn't have had enough time. It would have all been too rushed so I spent Christmas at Maggie's home. I don't have a lot of room for a big Christmas gathering at my new place, and I don't like to see my family travel in the winter either. You see, I'm on my own so I can take the bus and have Christmas wherever.

And next Christmas my granddaughter has invited me to spend it with her in her new home in Kilman. I wonder if she will move my old dining room table with her when she moves out of my house at the farm and into her new home. My dining room table has certainly seen many Christmas dinners. It is wonderful to see it still being used by my family.

✓

You know, I can visit any of my family whenever I like. But you know I go for a meal and stuff and these days I find I can't wait to get home again. Building my house for a senior wasn't a mistake. I know some people thought I was crazy building a house at my age. When I said to one person I was building a house, she said why? Well, I thought it was kind of useless to leave my money sitting in the

bank and taking 1% interest. And my children kept saying spend your money, stop trying to save it, we don't need it. You know houses in Brookes are in big demand because there are a lot of people working in the area, particularly towards Princeton. There are also a lot of seniors coming in off the farm and into town. I have a walk-in shower and everything is on one floor, the doors and hallways are wide enough for a walker, and I have a garage. The realtor says I'm pretty well guaranteed \$240-250,000 if I decide to sell, so my little house has been a sound investment.

Brookes is a good town to grow old in. It's only half an hour's drive from Princeton, and we have a big, brand new hospital with an integrated nursing home. The old nursing home used to be just down the road from my place but it was getting pretty run down. Our church has services in the new nursing home and I think there is one there this month which I'll go to. We also have six doctors here in Brookes. There were seven when I first moved here and then it went down to one. But since we got the new hospital more doctors are coming again and people are moving back into the area. I used to be able to walk to the health clinic, but since they moved it I have to drive. I'm still capable of driving and if I can't Jane is close by and she can drive me. I can also get Home Care here in

Brookes and Meals-on-Wheels if I need it. And I don't have to worry about my yard work. My son-in-law cuts my grass and tills my garden. I think I will plant a garden again this year.

By now, you're probably wondering what will become of my old farm. Well, it will turn 100 years old in 2017. My son Jack and his wife still live out there, along with their youngest child who is in Grade 11. I guess I never did tell you; my husband and son built his house many years ago when he and his wife bought the farm. And then my granddaughter is living in my old house, but she will be moving soon into her new home in Kilman. Jack thinks he will then make my old house into a guesthouse. He has five children and they could do with the extra space; his house is too small for that many people.

Everybody still likes to go out to the farm and it is still a family gathering place. I guess one day it might be sold. Jack talks about retiring eventually, but then he says he doesn't know what he would do. He is only in his early 50s so I imagine he will farm for a while, but he does say when the farm reaches its centennial he will quit. Time sure passes quickly; in 2000, 2017 sounded a long time away, but here it is 2013 and it is only 4 more years.

Jack is the third generation to own the farm. I think my family would be very upset if the farm was sold. Maybe my 14-year-old grandson will be interested in farming when he grows up. Just the other day he said, "I want to go to the farm, I like going to the farm."

Maybe there's a chance he will be interested . . . everybody likes to go to the farm.

An Author's Note

Throughout Alison's stories, I often found myself returning in my mind to my childhood farm place. At times, I imagined myself driving back to our family farm and I could smell the dust mixed in with the hot summer's air and I could see the mountains in the distance. My body sensed the loose gravel and I could feel my foot lift from the accelerator as I slowed to take a corner. Along with the dust I could also smell the eucalypt tree and see the river winding alongside the road. That took me to other memories of learning to water ski on the river. I was lost in the memories of us all jostling out of the school bus and running down to the water's edge to get our skis on and to be the first into the ski boat.

But the morning I first drove to Alison's home in Brookes, my memories of driving home were superseded by the sense of being lost within a landscape of unfamiliar whiteness. The road was slick with ice and falling snow accentuating my feelings of being a stranger to this land which Alison called home. There were no mountains in the background; no fields of wheat, no cattle and sheep wandering freely along the edge of the road. The towns I drove through were unnamed places in my landscape, yet they were significant to the stories Alison told. These were places she frequented for shopping, appointments, to visit with friends, and eventually, one small town became the home for her old house. For me to attend to Alison's stories, I first had to learn the names of these places and to see them through her eyes and not the eyes of a stranger.

Sometimes I shared parts of Alison's stories with my colleagues and friends. It never ceased to amaze me when people described Alison's building of her new home as selfish and unrealistic. One person stated, "She should just move into a seniors' residence like the rest of us. Why should she expect

others to take care of her in her own home?" Listening to these stories, I was often drawn back into Grandma's front room and I once again felt the tension created by people's arrogant perceptions of what it means to grow older in relation to place.

Alison's stories often paralleled mine during the time of our conversations. Like Alison, I was also in the midst of moving into a new home and I was engaged in the process of choosing flooring, paint colours, fixtures, and fittings. The more I became involved in the building process, the more I became aware of the exhausting nature of making my new place my home. Constantly I found myself wondering how Alison was able to maintain the momentum required to build her home at the age of 80. This invited me to pause and explore the interweaving of our stories about the experiences of building a home. As I considered the future need for wider doorways and sit-down showers, Alison was integrating them into her current home. While I was examining the market values of property, Alison was ensuring her home was a sound financial investment. During the time I was landscaping my yard, Alison was negotiating topsoil, the rototilling of her garden, and

the planting of next summer's vegetables. Living alongside Alison's stories, building a home for herself was no different than me building my home. We both wanted to live somewhere we loved.

In so many ways Alison's stories resonated very deeply with the stories I have lived alongside Grandma. Many times Grandma's voice echoed Alison's words and at times I wasn't sure if it was Grandma or Alison who was telling the story. Remembering Grandmas' stories I also heard Alison describe the availability of services within her community should she need them. At no time did Alison say she'd never move into a seniors' residence or nursing home. She described these places as being available; however, they were presently not of her choosing.

Alison's stories continually remind me that if I wish to find meaning and understanding in her stories of growing older in relation to place I need to lovingly travel to her "world,"²³ and to

²³ For Lugones (1987), "travelling to someone's "world" is a way of identifying with them . . . [and] only when we have travelled to each other's "worlds" are we fully subjects to each other" (p. 7).

see with her eyes . . . [to] see both of us as we are constructed in her world . . . [and to] witness her own sense of herself within her world. Only through this travelling to her “world” [can] I identify with her because only then [can] I cease to ignore her and to be excluded and separate from her. (p. 9)

During our conversations Alison invited me to remember places from my childhood and to travel deeper within myself to seek meaning and understanding from the stories I tell about places. As I began to see her world from her eyes, I also began to understand Grandma’s stories of growing older in her home differently. I have also come to recognize how my movements in and out of places, my farm-place, my in-town place, the places I shared with Grandma, and now the places I have visited with Alison, influence my tellings and retellings of stories. I am once again reminded that stories are always evolving and as narrative inquirers we are always living in the midst.

Chapter 6

Sue's Stories: Journeys to Place

Meeting Sue

In the beginning, *getting to know* Sue didn't occur directly with her. Sometimes, I would overhear her talking in her daughter Julie's garden across the alley. Other times, I *met* her when Julie told me stories about her mother's travels to visit her other daughter in the United States, or her mother's trips to India in the winters, and about a condominium for sale on the river front that would eventually become her mother's home. As Julie told her stories of living alongside her mother, I began to attend to them from a researcher's perspective: what could these stories of Sue tell me about the experiences of growing older in relation to place?

I hesitated for several months before asking Julie if she thought her mother would be interested in participating in my research. I felt anxious about asking her because Julie was a private person who had only shared a small portion of her world with me over the years we had known each other. Our conversations were most often about our children, our homes, her art, and our work. My relationship with Julie was also in transition, influenced by a period in my life when I needed to share my stories about leaving my husband and beginning a new life as a single woman and a single parent. Julie was attentive to my stories and often she shared hers with me which deepened our relationship. As I began to know Julie better, I found the courage to ask her if she felt her mother would be interested in

participating in my research. I was troubled by the possibility that her mother would share stories with me which could weigh upon my relationship with Julie.

Whenever I think about the responsibilities that come with listening to and attending with stories, I am always drawn back to the words Lopez (1990) wrote: “If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed” (p. 48). His words reverberate deep within me and often cause tension as I remember listening and attending to Pauline’s stories, and later writing her narrative account. Some stories Pauline told were being told for the first time and often they exposed the identity of others. That troubled me in relation to Sue. Unlike Pauline and her family, I had a relationship with Sue’s daughter and I was unsure how I was going to care for Sue’s stories and nurture my relationship with Julie.

When I finally asked Julie if she thought her mother would be interested in participating in my research, I anxiously awaited Sue’s response. I was worried about affecting my friendship with Julie. However, I deeply believed that I would know when to give stories away because an ethical relationship with Sue and the co-composing of stories would guide us.

It was a warm summer’s evening when Sue and I finally met down by the river where people had come to dance. As we watched the dancers, Sue and I began tentative conversations about travelling, India, her moving to a new house, and her understanding of place. She said she was writing a book and that she would be gone for several months over the summer, but when she returned she

would be interested in talking more with me. I left our conversation feeling elated because Sue appeared to share my understanding of place: that it didn't always rest upon a geographical landscape and for some people, place was within them.

About a month after Sue returned from her summer away, we met in her condominium, the one her daughter had previously spoken about finding for sale and being perfect for her mother. When I walked into the foyer of the condominium complex, I was struck by the immediate differences between Sue and Pauline's complexes. There was no health care peach paint here and I had no doubts concerning Sue's level of independence. The foyer was modern and inviting with a fireplace to one side and comfortable chairs to the other. I could imagine people sitting in this foyer area, engaging in conversations, decorated with flowers of the festive season. When I stepped into the elevator, I was again reminded that this place was not only for older adults. Notices on the elevator walls described how to change the battery in garage door remotes, advertised parking spaces available for rent, and invited people to attend a Christmas supper hosted by the social committee. As I walked to Sue's door, I did not have the same doubts about Sue's suitability to participate in my research as I'd had about Pauline's when I first entered her complex. Sue's foyer spoke of independence and youthfulness and most definitely not a place of dependency.

During my times with Sue, I was pleased by the many invitations to travel into her world and find new meanings and understandings of place through listening deeply with her stories. Together, we *world* travelled (Lugones, 1987)

and together we entered a relationship that called us to attend to each other's stories in loving ways. It was Lugone's (1987) understanding of world-travelling that encouraged me to write Sue's narrative account as a travelogue: travel through words. This form of representation provided Sue and I with opportunities to speak about travelling to not only geographical places, but also travelling to a place deeper within ourselves. A travelogue also supports the notion that, for some people, place is always in motion and naming a place is influenced by their understandings and those of others around them. Therefore, place may be somewhere for learning about others and also about ourselves.

As I wrote this travelogue, I was also reminded to attend to the voices within me. These voices spoke to my past, present, and future relationships with places, and to the person I was and the person I was becoming. I also learned much about caring for stories and the deep ethical responsibility for giving them away where they are needed. I now realize it wasn't the giving away of stories to Julie, her daughter, that was needed here; rather, it was the giving away of stories to myself. I needed these stories to be told and attended to because I needed "a story more than food to stay alive" (Lopez, 1990, p. 48).

My Trip

Early Memories



Place: Northwest New South Wales, Australia

Weather: Warm summer's night

Somewhere Inside Me

It was getting late and the moon was high outside my bedroom window. Each tiny star twinkled at me through the glass, calling me outside to view them more closely. "It is dark out there," I told the stars and "you know I am afraid of the dark." Still, they went on twinkling as if telling me they had plenty of light to share with me, if only I would venture out into the night. With my heart pounding, I hugged my blanket to my chest and tentatively walked out into the yard. The air was cool and my skin tingled with fear and excitement. Hastily, I laid my blanket out on the grass a short distance from the house as its nearness gave me courage and reassurance.

Finally, I lay down on my blanket and looked up into the sky. Gazing at a group of stars I marveled at their brightness and imagined myself as one of them. "Do you see me?" I asked. "I am that little star huddled among the others next to the very bright star." The darkness remained and I felt it inviting me to imagine

myself as another star. I asked myself, "Could I be that star further afield clustered in the Milky Way, or maybe that big star which appears so close to me I feel like I can reach out and touch it." But wait, my heart was pounding again with excitement.

There, to the left of the moon, was a shooting star flying so swiftly across the night sky. Where did the star land? Does it care? Oh, to be so free! The darkness remained silent. I was lost in a journey somewhere deep inside of me.

Attending to Stories in Loving Ways

When I arrived at Sue's home for our conversation about place and growing older, I had no idea where it would take us. I had a sense my relationship with Sue was going to be entirely different from what I had shared with Pauline and Alison. How different, I wasn't sure, but as Sue asked profound questions, I knew I would struggle to find the words to represent the depth of our relationship. As Sue shared memories of being 6 years old, lying under a maple tree, and asking God "why am I here," I realized our journey was going to venture to a place within us. As Sue talked I felt many emotions: tension as her words called forth images from

my past, discomfort, curiosity, and a strong desire to seek meaning and understanding from some of my hard-to-tell stories. I wondered whether I was ready to listen to and attend to these stories deep within me. If I wasn't ready, could I travel in loving ways, rather than with arrogance, alongside Sue's stories of place? Sitting quietly, I attended to the voices within me and answered yes to my questions. I was ready to begin my journey alongside Sue and I called myself to also remember to attend to my stories in loving ways.



Moving to a new place

Place: Saskatchewan prairies

Weather: Sunny afternoon

Why am I?

There's some things I remember,

baby on the floor . . .

But I won't start there.

Where will I start?

I can see it in my mind

I was maybe 6 or so

I remember

walking down the back lane

shaking my head

thinking

it's not like that . . .

something's different . . .

it's not like that

I was coming home from Sunday school

My father was a pastor

Whatever I heard in church and all . . .

Dad, it's not like that

I entered the yard

Laid down on the grass under a maple tree

I studied the sky

God is there so much

I was always thinking

Why? . . . Why? . . . Why?

Friends say as children

They would look in the mirror

And ask

Who am I? . . . Who am I? . . . Who am I?

Not me.

I always asked

Why am I, what am I to do, why am I here?

Place: By the lake

Weather: Overcast

18 years old, married, and a move

So when I got married and moved to the farm, I always had to go to church . . . felt mostly the reverence and the music . . . and yet there was always something . . . like I couldn't, all of the gossip, and people going to church . . . the afternoon you'd go visiting somebody, there was always so much gossip. It was negativity and stuff. I never could, and I made an effort to join in, but I never ever fit. So for me the farm never felt like home because the cliques, the gossip, and the neighbors who had never experienced other places made it difficult for me to search for an answer to my question, "why am I here?"

A Second Telling: Making Judgments

As I re-read what I said, I feel I was being judgmental, but my spiritual search made me feel as though it wasn't right, something wasn't right. It bothers me to say that. I was judging the people, and who am I to judge anybody.

Calling Forth Retellings

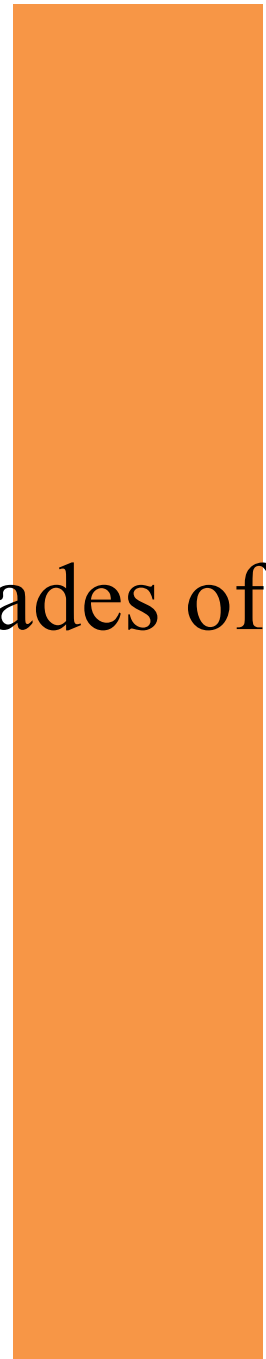
As I attended to Sue telling her story about moving to the farm after marriage and her difficulty connecting with the people

in her new place, I wondered in what way was her sacred story being called forth. Why did Sue feel compelled to criticize herself for being judgmental of others? As Sue continued to explore her feelings and seek new understandings of what it meant to judge, I was drawn inwards to my experiences of being judged. My experiences bumped up against the story Sue was now telling and I felt tension grow within me. This tension interrupted my attending to Sue's story in loving ways. It wasn't until Sue asked, "who am I to judge anybody," that I became aware I had drifted off into my world and left her alone.

This realization abruptly brought me to a place I had shared with Grandma where we sat alone: alone in our thoughts, alone in our actions, and alone in our loneliness. We were living parallel stories, hers of growing older and feeling alone, and mine of living out my depression, alone. As I turned my attention to Sue I was reminded of my place of alone and loneliness. In this place my stories were never told because I feared no one was listening; if they were listening, then not attending; if attending, not

understanding. It was this story, which pulled me from my world
and called me forth to attend with Sue.

Entering Shades of Grey



Place: Somewhere inside me

Weather: Thunderstorm

The darkness: Somewhere after 18

See, OK the farm for me, the lifestyle there was not me, it made me ill. Physical breakdowns . . . emotionally and mentally, and physically, one at a time, to me it was like dominoes . . . I decided I would never say, "no I can't do this, it's too much."

A Second Telling: Expressing Emotions

See, I didn't express myself. I never said what I needed, and how does a man know what I need if I don't tell him?

My Place in the Darkness

Sue and I were in her living room when she told about becoming ill; physically, emotionally, and mentally. I could hear her, but her words became muffled as I found myself travelling to my place of depression. I was unprepared for the intensity and depth Sue's stories were now calling me to travel to. I found myself wondering if I was truly ready to engage with these hard-to-tell stories. I also wondered if Sue was ready.

As Sue continued, I felt myself returning to the darkness, frantically searching for the bright stars that offered light and hope. These stars I remembered from my childhood, sometimes clustered with others or twinkling out on the margins. As I floundered within a place inside me, I reached out for those stars. Even though they appeared to be alone, they were not. Other stars were surrounding them; I just couldn't see their light because they were too far away from me. Sue's stories called me to reach out for these stars, as I realized they represented the people in my life that could help me to find the light to brighten my darkness.

Place: At the lake

Weather: Sunshine and light cloud coverage

You are the company you keep.

I loved my husband very much. He was happy, he worked hard, and he played hard. But the whole community or his friends and that, there were no educated people. You know I wanted information, you know I wanted to feed my mind . . . All I knew was you served a man and so here I was with ideas in my head and 18 and I wasn't that well and I get married.

Then, I get into this community . . . the only community my husband ever knew. You see that's another thing, he never had other experiences. He grew up there on that farm, right there. And one time he said to me, "well you don't have any friends here." I couldn't relate to his friends and the people of the community and I never felt as though I belonged.



Changing Ways

Place: Community by the lake

Weather: Night

52 years old: Death of more than my husband

Well, there's another part of this story. When my husband died I cut everybody off . . .

There was no second telling for this story. I wonder if it was because Sue struggled to find the words to represent the intensity of what occurred in her world when her husband died; maybe, there just weren't any words and the silence became Sue's story for now.

Place: By the lake

Weather: Sunshine with light cloud coverage

A different me.

There are people from my old community that do phone me. After my husband died I would occasionally go to a party; not to go out with a man (that was just kind of disgusting) but because they then thought they had to somehow take care of me or something. It wasn't comfortable. But anyway, there was one woman who invited me to a party that I decided to go to. At the party there was one very religious woman who already had an inkling of what I

was doing or where my thoughts were. She said, "you know Sue, you are the only one in this room who has their spirituality together."

A Second Telling: A Way of Being.

I don't know what she saw in me for her to say that. Maybe I was expressing myself in a different way, not in words. I think I radiate a way of being, we all do, and it can be different at different times, maybe? When I first got married, I remember we were visiting someone and he said to me, "you are so much like your father." So I think who we are was there when we were little. If we could only see the potential in children when they are little, who they really are, and then guide them.

Changing a Way of Being

Prior to the birth of my daughter, I spent 5 years assessing babies and talking with parents about their little ones and what hopes and dreams they had for them. I found myself wondering how their stories would change as the child grew older.

Sue's second telling of a way of being brought stories from my past into my present as I thought about the time after my daughter was born when I realized she was different. When she was 6 her teacher said she needed to learn self-control. When she

turned 8, she had begun to live parallel to her peers. By the time she turned 10, I realized we needed to make choices. I took her to be assessed by a pediatric psychologist. He prescribed a medication that would change her. My daughter and I talked about the medication and she listed what she liked and didn't like about the person she was. Her list of what she liked about herself was what the medication would take away. Her spontaneity, her fun, her need to be alone, and her differentness would all be masked by the medication. Together, we decided she wouldn't take the medication and we would learn how to integrate her differentness into the person she was becoming. Listening to Sue tell her story about a different me, I am called to guide my daughter and to encourage her to see the possibilities her differentness can bring, not only to herself, but also to others.

Place: Somewhere inside me

Weather: Strong winds and cloud

A place of fear.

In a way what's puzzling is that I had so many fears all my life, mostly fears of doing something wrong . . . always trying to be right and do the right thing . . . and what is sin and all that . . . I was also very fearful. I am still not comfortable driving a car, I still have certain fears, and I was afraid of being loved, and so on . . . so afraid of actually doing things even on my own. But, when this opportunity came up to go to India I had no fear of travelling to that place . . . I hadn't travelled alone or anything, and here I found myself planning to travel to India. Somehow I found the necessary information and eventually contacted a temple in Vancouver. They asked me my age, I was 62 or whatever, and they asked if I was healthy . . . what I'm saying is the feeling inside of me was so strong. I just went to India without any fear or anything . . . I was so driven that this was what I had to do. That's the place I had to be. It was the missing piece, the "why am I here" sits in India.

A Second Telling: Doing Something Right.

I was so afraid of doing something right, too. It prevented me from trying things that could be right. So afraid of failure, what

people expected of me I guess. I wonder if I am expressing this right. When you are so afraid of doing something wrong, you just . . . don't do things that could be right, you don't take any chances. It felt so right, for the first time in my life, something felt so right about going to India. And yeah, there was no fear. Now, I would be horrified if one of my grandkids said they were going to India on their own.

A Dichotomy of Words

Ever since Sue spoke about fear and the dichotomy being between love and fear, not love and hate, I have wondered about her perspective. I, too, have journeyed alongside fear and I have many memories of fear influencing my decisions as I travelled through life: fear of failure; fear of making mistakes as a mother, a wife, and a friend; and fear of being different. My journey takes me back to Grandma's words, "I will not go to this place that they want me to go to," and I wonder if it was fear behind her words in relation to not moving into the hostel "just down the road." Was she fearful of losing her independence, her identity, and her connections with her community? Did she fear living out the story

that she imagined for people who lived in the hostel: being forgotten by their families and losing her way in a new place? As I thought more deeply about fear, I came to appreciate the possibility that Grandma feared, rather than hated, the idea of moving into the hostel. If I had invited Grandma to seek meaning and understanding of her fears, I wonder if our conversation could have been different.

Place: Dreaming of India

Weather: Clear and warm

There's identity with place too.

There is identity with place, too. Place gives you your identity. I was Sue; she lives on the lake at the entrance to the park. That is Sue's place. My identity here in the condo is this is Sue and she goes to India. I still feel more at home in India than any place in the world.

I wonder how Sue will begin to describe herself now she no longer travels to India. I also wonder how she will build an identity in a place that appears strange and disconnected from her previous world of living at the entrance to the park or among others attending the ashram in India.



Travelling Places

Place: Finding India

Weather: Hot humid summers day



Image 16: Cows and taxis

1992: Going to India.

At this point in my journey, India became a place called home because I fitted in. When I went in that taxi from the airport and all that poverty and dirt was around me and what have you, I was in such a culture shock, spiritual shock, mental shock, physical shock, the food, everything. But in that taxi, that rattletrap of a taxi, and we were driving down this dirt road dodging oxen carts . . . chickens, and donkeys, and cows, and lots of dogs, so many dogs, oh God . . . terrible honking and whatever. And I'm going home,

I'm going home, I just knew it. So my whole life has been that search: for the why am I here? Before I went to India, I was lost.

I can't imagine what India looked like in 1992. Sue's descriptions and photographs gave me some insight into the place she saw when she arrived for the first time in India; yet, I can't help wonder why she felt like she had come home when the view from her taxi window most certainly didn't reflect the place she had come from, nor the place she was born into, nor the place I expected Sue to call home.



Image 17: Streets of India

2001: Coming to Canada

As Sue spoke about India, I recalled my experiences of moving to Canada which began to intertwine in my mind with Sue's stories as she described her experiences of finding a home in a foreign country. I left Australia as a single woman leaving behind my identity as a wife and a mother. In Canada I began a journey of

learning about myself. With a therapist, I began an intense exploration of whom I was and how my places—my farm-place, my in-town place, and my imaginary place somewhere between the wheat fields, the mountains, and the sea—came together to define the person I wanted to be and the reason I was here. At times I imagined I was sitting at the beach with Grandma, our toes buried deep in the sand. I realize now each place is significant in helping to define the person I am becoming.

As Sue explored her life-long question, “why am I here?” travelling to India, I began to understand place may be continuously in motion. This understanding suggests a place can also be a point from which we move in many directions—backwards and forwards, inwards and outwards (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Therefore, if a place can be both geographical and a place within us, I wonder if society could begin to appreciate that nursing homes might offer a new beginning for individuals to seek meaning and understanding of themselves, their experiences, and their relationships with others, rather than just being an endpoint for growing older.

My wondering leads me to question conversations Grandma and I had on many occasions. If I had been able to talk with Grandma about places being in motion and not just fixed geographical locations, could I have nurtured an understanding that the hostel “just down the road” was not an endpoint but a place offering a different experience of growing older?

Place: Overlooking the river

Weather: Warm summers evening

Places in motion.

That place in India, so far away . . . why do I have the elephant statues and the pictures from India? I had to have something from that place here. I had to have animals from that place, so I bought that giraffe. That woman you told me about who took away the residents' personal quilts haunts me. It is so important to bring something from that place to this place. My India place is in motion. By bringing things here and my memories and the people there, my place is always in motion. Even now in my book, expressing what I learned, learning is still in motion and I can now share it. So the place of India is continuously moving through me—in my thoughts, my learnings, and my sharing.



Image 18: My elephants

"Why do I have the elephant statues and the pictures from India? I had to have something from that place here."

The Coming Together of Two Places

When I stepped off the plane in Sydney from Canada, I felt the sun warm my face. My memories of Australian summer in December soon displaced my most recent memories of snow and cold in Saskatoon, my new place I was learning to call home. I still

remember people speaking around me as I walked through the terminal at Sydney airport. They had the accent of my fellow countrymen. As I drove to Grandma's place through the mountains and across the open plains, I remembered special places, sounds, and scents from my childhood. There was the figtree halfway through "Putty," the winding road from Richmond to Singleton, the bellbirds calling from the treetops, the scent of the eucalypt tree, and the turn-off onto the dirt road leading to the farm. As I remembered I could feel myself moving back into my Australian ways.

After the long drive, I arrived at Grandma's home; we hugged tightly and rubbed foreheads in greeting. As I began to unpack my things, I felt her watching me and finally she said, "You speak with an accent and what is this word 'Eh'?" I wasn't sure what to say to her. Grandma had never travelled to my Canadian home so we had never physically shared this part of my life. I tried to explain to her eh was a Canadian slang word and in Canada, I was told I spoke with an Australian accent. At the time I felt as though Grandma was examining me closely. I wondered if my

travels changed how we related to each other and did my new Canadian home cause me to become a different person; possibly a stranger in my homeland?

I have returned home to Australia many times since that conversation with Grandma. Each time I am told I have become more Canadian. After listening to Sue talk about places in motion, I realize Canada continuously moves through me and I take small parts of my Canadian ways with me wherever I travel. At times these ways make me feel like a stranger in the place I still call home.

Place: Up in the air

Weather: Cold winters evening

A purpose.

If you're thinking about place, that place has to give you something. It has to feed something. You know it has to have a purpose.

The Question of Purpose

I keep returning to read these lines from Sue's story. I'm not sure why her words trouble me. I once knew my place rested in Australia. I knew I had a purpose: I would return home to care for

Grandma, and in so doing I would return to a place I have always called home.

I never lived out that story and since Grandma's death I began to tell myself a new story: I will return to Australia to care for my parents. I now question who I am if I don't live that out. What is my purpose in life? How much has this story influenced the decisions I have made in the past and how will they influence my future, particularly now that I am engaged in building a new relationship here in Canada? I am troubled by the possibility of having to compose another story that questions my life-long purpose of being. Maybe that is why I re-read Sue's words many times. It wasn't the changes in purpose that caused me tension; rather it was the possibility that I may no longer believe in the story I tell.

Place: Somewhere in me

Weather: Clear day

A place of like-minds.

Living here in this condominium in the city, rather than in India, I don't have those like-minded people. I have my Indian

friends here who are like-minded Indians but I don't live among them. Another thing, my experience; going there to that place is so different because being raised as a Christian . . . I always thought there was something else out there. See, my Indian friends, they go there from Canada, most of them are born there, and they go there, visit their families . . . so their whole experience there is so different than mine and being Hindu and I'm a Christian. So they would go there, go to the meetings, and be with their families. I would go there, stay not inside the ashram but outside in an apartment, eat in the restaurants. And in that situation, which you wouldn't do here, you go into a restaurant in this little town where they catered to us Westerners and you met people from all over the world.

The restaurants were such different experiences than I would ever have encountered at home. You would walk in, no empty table, OK, there's one person sitting there or two people, may I join you? Come on, and you meet maybe an archeologist from Holland, a pop singer from Italy, from Brazil a whole band. And this artist from Italy, fantastic . . . but there's the learning again . . . that to me is what I miss terribly, is meeting those people from all over the world . . . And another thing, when I first went there and still, when

you meet all these people you know nobody's last name. You're Sue from Canada, you're Helen from Scotland, you're Lima from Australia, that's who you are. And you meet them and you know nothing, there's no judgment because you know nothing about each other, and you meet on a common ground of those teachings there. This type of travelling was so freeing and it felt fantastic. Finally, I found people who were like-minded. They gave me the gift of self-confidence. They confirmed that they were also thinking similar thoughts to me. I finally felt like my lifetime search was over; I was beginning to find the answers to my questions, "why am I, what am I to do, why am I here?" I also found my place; it was in me. So it's just coming, with all these years I've been thinking and feeling, and wanting, it's just coming out now.

A Second Telling: Meeting New People

Maybe there are like-minded people here in the condominium; I just haven't met them yet. They could be here, who says they can't be. With me being such a hermit, I'm not out there meeting them. Even though my friends who were born in India had a different relationship with India compared to mine, we all had that place in common, we all related to that place in the

same way, so it was very easy to meet them. I didn't have to find them among a crowd of strangers.

And the people in India, we didn't judge each other as we knew nothing about each other. There were no preconceived ideas, therefore no judgments as there was no knowledge of our pasts.

So it's just coming, with all these years I've been thinking and feeling, and wanting, it's just coming out now. What it felt like to me, going to India, was it was the beginning of my life. I felt like I had a purpose and I found that purpose there. My purpose now is to share what I learned there, and live it, which isn't always the easiest part. My purpose is now to write my book and have it published so I can share the teachings of Sai Baba. I didn't realize that until I was writing my book.

Living out Our Learnings

As Sue told me her purpose was to share what she had learned and to live it, I wondered if I too could live out my learnings from Sue's stories. Sitting quietly, I returned to my place alongside patients. Was I deeply listening to their stories or was I distracted by the "noises" that chattered alongside me: stories of

growing older, of becoming dependent, losing loved ones, wanting to be loved, and needing to be included? My journey alongside Sue had moved a place deep within me. I felt this place had always been present, yet hidden from me. Sue's journey of finding her purpose had given me courage to seek meaning and understanding of this place. Maybe at some time in the future I would name this place and move it consciously into my way of being. I wondered what my new understanding of this place meant and how it would influence the person I was becoming.

A Second Telling: Becoming

Your changing relates to how others have to change the way they relate to you. How our entire relationship changes applies to everyone that has known me in a certain way. As you change people around you either change with you or they move to the margins. Isn't that a sign of growth; we are all growing in different directions? From a karmic point of view, we come together for a purpose, or certain learning, and then when that is completed, then we each go on our way for other learnings, which can be alongside, together, or separate from each other.

Embracing Change

But maybe I'm not ready to embrace change and growth right now. The place I once dwelled has become unfamiliar due to so many things brought about by my divorce. I am now a single mother, an owner of a place I am learning to call home, and a person who has to renegotiate friendships. As I listened to Sue tell her story of people needing to change with you or move to the margins, I found myself lost in thought about the relationships that have ended since my divorce. I crave the return of some friendships; yet others cause me to question their value. It is a painful journey and one that reminds me of the many times I have been alone and lost in the darkness. I return to my beginning story and remember as a young child telling the stars "I'm afraid of the dark," yet as an adult I realize I am still afraid of what I let live in the dark.

Re-entering the University

Sue's stories of a world of like-minded people reminded me of my recent journey into the world of university and being a student again. I remember listening to other students' conversations.

“Have you heard . . . ,” “Did you see . . . ,” “What did you think about . . .” Walking down the hall, riding in the elevator, and finally reaching my desk and taking my seat felt like coming home. In this place of like-minded people, I felt a new sense of freedom and also an awareness that my experiences in this place would begin the telling of new stories concerning the person I was becoming. But with these new stories also came tensions. I was also aware that my friends and families in my home-place might not relate to the person I was becoming. There was a possibility I might isolate them and, in so doing, some would drift away. These possibilities became a reality when Maggie said, “I’m glad I’m not doing your type of work, I couldn’t, I don’t want to think that deeply.”



Places to live

Place: Another house in town

Weather: Stormy

Another house at a different time.

Prior to this condo, I did buy another house here in the city in 1990. I moved out of my home at the farm because my son's girlfriend moved in. George was still living at home at that time. I had the house in the city for 4 or 5 years. Moving out and buying that house was a stupid thing to do. I wasn't familiar with the neighbourhood where I bought the house. A woman I knew was selling and I was helping her; buying that house just kind of happened. After I moved, I realized it was a stupid move and that I needed my home at the farm back. You know what? I thought I had to give everything.

And you know what I did? I gave away my whole identity. I left behind my farm, and with that move, I also left behind my phone number, my address, my life as a wife. I felt naked physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally.

I just moved out . . . George and his girlfriend should've moved out you know . . . I thought I would help them you see, because they had nothing. At the same time, there were other things happening in Julie's life, so I bought a big house to make sure

I had enough space for her and her children. Being a mother has always been important to me, whether my children are 25, or 55, or 65, they are still my daughters or son. It doesn't make any difference.

About 5 years later I did move back into my home at the farm. By this time, George had married his girlfriend and things were changing in their lives. They bought a house in Speelay and they moved out.

A Second Telling: Buying That House Was a Good Thing.

In the end, buying that house in the city was the best thing I had ever done. Then it became the lowest point in my life and at that point I was given this opportunity to go to India, for the new beginning of my life. I needed to rid myself of who I thought I was living at the farm and make space for the new person I was becoming through Baba Sai's teachings. While living in the house in the city I created a vacuum in my life which needed to be filled. It was the best thing that happened in my life and I needed that move desperately for my learning.

When I sold the house in the city, the people who bought it said thank you for the condition of the house and how I had left it—clean, painted, and orderly. They really didn't have to do anything.

That gave me such a peaceful closure. That is what I wanted for my farm.

A House after Marriage

“We’ve found a house here in the city and we’re going back to the farm to sell it. We’ll give it 2 weeks, if it sells, we’ll move.” I remember my parents telling me about finding a house in a suburb close to where my husband, at that time, and I had built our first home. As we looked over the plans for our future home, I remember making changes to ensure when Grandma or my parents visited us they would have a place within our home to call their own. Their bedroom would need to accommodate a queen-sized bed and they would need their own bathroom. As we made these changes, I never dreamed my parents would move in with us when the farm was sold. “We’ll just be staying for a little while because we want to get our new place painted, the flooring changed, and a couple of other little things done. It’s so much easier to get them done when the place is empty,” my parents said.

Six months later, my parents were still living in our home. Their place, just 35 minutes away, was completely renovated and

the new furniture bought and arranged in the rooms. Each morning my parents said, "We will move today," and each evening they would say, "we will move tomorrow." I remember wondering why they wouldn't move into their new home. As I attended to Sue's stories about giving up her identity when she moved, I now wonder if my parents were unable to define themselves in an unfamiliar environment surrounded by unfamiliar things.

A Second Telling: Constant Changes

What I'm realizing is that the other day I was thinking about Alzheimer's and dementia, and I was wondering, I want to do these new things but I am having difficulty making the changes. I thought when I moved into this place I wanted everything new. I phoned up the Tupperware lady to buy new Tupperware to replace the 40year-old Tupperware that I had. I never did buy the new Tupperware because I didn't find anything the same as what I had. Is it that we just can't keep up with the changes? Then recently, after coming back from visiting my daughter Kerry, after being away for 2 months I went to Extra Foods, the Interac machine had changed. Three months later they have changed again. Now I just have to swipe my card. At another store, their system is different.

Can you see how older people can't cope with all these changes?

It happens every day, these changes.

A place for sale.

The farm was expected to sell just like that

It didn't

People wanted a cottage by the lake

It's a house

A big machine shed

A big garage

I was attached

My farm needed a certain kind of people

To keep it tidy

It's on the corner there

Everybody goes to the park

Everybody sees it

For 50 years

Everybody went through there

People stopped, we fed them

Doors always unlocked

Someone may need something

It's been an anchor to the area

A man really wanted it

A mechanic

Fixed racecars . . . my big garage would've been perfect

Imagine having old jalopies

Imagine the mess

Another couple

18-month-old twins, 2 more kids

A daycare . . . my studio would've been perfect

He was a mechanic . . . my machine shed would've been perfect

No time for the yard

To be a mess affects the whole area

It's not a farm way out there

I was judgmental

I wanted to do the right thing

I was very conscious of that

I never felt the place was mine or ours

It belonged to the community

Or to God . . .

I was just there

To take care of it

I was proud to have been given the responsibility

As Sue described preparing to sell the farm and move into her condominium permanently, I could feel the tension within her and her sense of responsibility. Her feelings weighed heavily on me as I drifted back to thoughts of my parents when selling our family farm. At first I was shocked they would sell the farm to anyone other than my brother. With shock came the realization I would never return to the farm and relive my childhood experiences. Today it is often with a heavy heart I remember the farm. It was a place of turbulence but also a place that provided me the freedom

to dream. It is my farm-place I return to when I imagine a place to call home. It is somewhere between the mountains and the sea, with green grass stretching out almost forever, merging into the fields of golden wheat, and beyond, the mountains' tall peaks reaching up into the sky.

Place: By the lake

Weather: Sunny

New “caretakers.”

The people who did buy it, they couldn't afford the original price when it was in one big piece. And then once I put the price down and decided to subdivide the house separately kind of, like just 11 acres rather than 30 acres, then the price went down where they could afford it. They love it so much and the man is so fussy, I mean nothing can be out of place around him.

Perfect.

And then the rest of it, where the creek is and that, it's just pasture really, but it's hillside and you see wild plants—that part is nice. But it can't be subdivided, who's going to pay a lot of money for that? And there's no access to it, it's really a wildlife reserve. The deer they live there and they seem to feel so safe there. The

coyotes, the odd fox, the rabbits, and the beavers along the creek, oh wow. He loves it so much, he doesn't own it but he cleans it up way beyond and past his land.

They were the perfect people.

And now he wants to buy the rest of it, as soon as he sells his house in Speelay . . . but what's strange now is his house in Speelay isn't selling either. What is all that about? I don't know.

They're just perfect. They're the right match, it's right for them, they're going to be there a long time.

Place: By the river's edge

Weather: Winter's evening

Releasing the farm.

Do I think it would be strange to go back to the farm? Right now I don't feel that. I'm just happy that they're happy; they can do what they like with it. And I want them to change it. I don't want it to look like I had it. I want them to make it their own. His plans, what he's got are incredible. But I'll just tell you the answer to that question; right now I feel just great about them having it and everything . . . but I haven't been there to see it, to see what they've done you see. And there are still little bits and pieces of my furniture there because they needed to leave their house staged.

You see, I stayed there kind of so long, like I couldn't look after it anymore, I couldn't handle it anymore, so that made a difference in selling the farm as well. Now, somebody else is looking after it, I couldn't do it anymore. Knowing that gives me closure; yes it does, and you release it easier.

Travelling Away from Marriage

As Sue spoke about closure and release, I remember wondering if one needs to happen before the other. Does closure have to happen before release or can they occur simultaneously? Maybe many seasons need to pass before they can occur. Sue told me about travelling back and forth to the farm prior to making her permanent move to the condominium. I wonder if her travels back and forth helped to bring closure and release from a place she had lived for over 40 years.

Now, thinking more deeply about Sue's story, I turn inwards to leaving behind my marriage and the place we called home as a family. My thoughts and memories cause tension deep inside me as I think about the parallels between Sue's moving away from home and my moving away from a marriage. Maybe I don't want to travel

back and forth, maybe I don't want to see the physical reminders of the place I left behind: my friends, my garden, and the traces of the yearly parties, when I left my marriage. Eighteen months have passed since I moved into my new home, yet I still avoid walking down the street of my old place and my heart races when I have to stand on the doorstep and ring the bell to pick-up my daughter when she is visiting with her father. I have closure of my marriage but I do not have closure or release of the place my daughter and I once called the family home.

Place: The art room

Weather: Warm morning sunrise

“Stuff” and hope.

I can't believe how much stuff I collected over the years of living on the farm. Deciding what to keep and what not to keep was very difficult. It took me about 15 years to clean out the house. But then in these last 4 years I was still cleaning out the garage . . . I had a studio with all of these paintings and paints and all that. It's these hobbies that take up space, and then all that stuff. And then I'm a sewer. I always sewed most of our clothes so there are fabrics. And I knitted all our sweaters, so there's knitting. Yet, even if you

kind of know you're not going to do that anymore, there's one thing you can't take away from old people: you can't take away their toy boxes and their hope. So I put a lot of my supplies in the storage room downstairs and one day my second bedroom may become my sewing room and an activities room, and maybe I can get an easel, maybe I'll put it up there and do a little bit of some art work. Now that I have my cornea transplants I have the eyes to see and I now see new possibilities. So I have hope of doing art or crafts. If that doesn't ever happen, I'm satisfying something here, I am creating, I'm writing and writing doesn't take up much space.

Drop Sheets

As I entered Sue's home today, a cream coloured sheet was thrown over the recliner in which I sat during our conversations. I was surprised to see a tower of pastels next to the chair and even more laid out on the kitchen counter. It was my first glimpse of "Sue the artist." It was also my first opportunity to engage in playful conversation with Sue. We laughed about the messiness of working with pastels and the need for the drop sheet to protect her furniture from the colourful dust produced by her drawing. Sue's adventure into drawing with pastels was a new media for her,

prompted by her need to capture the right picture for the cover of her book. She had decided to draw a honeybee and a flower. I did not get to see the drawing and remembered my previous experiences with other artists; I knew Sue would not share her unfinished work with me. I remembered Pauline's place and I wondered if Sue had lived in a complex like Pauline's where would she have pursued her drawing activities without others viewing her unfinished work before she, the artist, was prepared to unveil it? I never did get to explore this with Sue because she quickly moved from talking of drawing the honeybee and the flower to a story about a flower garden. She described the garden in detail including the types of flowers, their colours, and their fragrance; they were the favourite flowers of the honeybee. These flowers had grown in the garden across from her daughter Kerry's house where she had spent the summer. Was Sue sitting in this garden in her mind while she was telling me about it?

Place: Victoria**Weather: Warm Spring day**

I didn't realize how much I needed my little holiday to Victoria. I met with the publisher for my book and the design artist for the cover for my book. I could see the wheels turning as she was listening to me describe what I wanted and she appeared very excited about designing my cover. Her excitement is a good sign.

Yesterday, I actually stayed in my nightie all day, reflecting and absorbing all that transpired in such a short time. I was surprised what just a few days of different scenery can do to recharge a fatigued battery.

Place: Imagining India**Weather: Hot and humid****Many returns to India.**

But talking about place, say when I go to India, I would feel so fulfilled, that's the word. One thing that surprises me about going to India, even with the beggars in the street, the uneven terrain, and cobras lurking any place, I was never afraid and never lonely. Even when I was alone in my room, I never felt lonely. I needed nothing else. I only needed that place, the ashram with Baba Sai, and those people of like-mind. And I felt totally fulfilled.

Feeling Fulfilled

At some point in our conversations, Sue said she would not return to India and I wondered how she would gain a sense of fulfillment if she was no longer able to travel there. I return to stories of travelling with Grandma, in particular a trip we took when she was 77 years old. I remember this with fondness and a deep appreciation for the need of play in Grandma's life. Grandma described this trip as an adventure of a lifetime, shared with a group of young girls with whom I worked with at the hospital, the great outdoors, and me. We played together in clear aqua water from a natural hot spring that appeared as a mirage on the desert landscape. The vastness of the desert mimicked the distances between our ages and experiences. I remember thinking the flowers and the plants in the desert required nothing more than sunshine and enough rain to bring them into bloom. Similarly, my relationship with Grandma and the living out of growing older playfully also asked for nothing more than sunshine and rain, enough to bring forth laughter and happiness. Memories of this trip brought playfulness into my conversation with Sue as I

encouraged her to imagine travelling back to India, possibly with her granddaughter.

Place: Inside my condominium

Weather: Chilly evening

To bed early.

They say I go to bed early

but I don't

I put the television on

lie down on the couch

I fall asleep

It's 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning

I wake

I move to a different couch

Another room

I fall asleep

It's more or less 'cause I'm bored

I sleep

But

I wrote last evening

It got late

I was surprised to be awake

I was thinking

Bored, I was not

I had something interesting to do

I was wide-awake

I was reaching into my memories

I had food for thought

Today, I've been up since 6 o'clock

I am so exhausted

It is late

I am talking to an interesting person

Falling asleep . . . I am not

Liebe and feeling safe.

I learned about Liebe, which means love in German, from my mother. She was an uneducated woman without independence. I never saw affection between my parents or anything like that, but she taught me about love and through her love I learned about feeling safe and through those feelings I have learned about hope. To have hope is to feel safe. That's right, they go together.

And India gave me that hope, even though it probably wasn't the safest place to be at the time.

I remember

cow paths as roads

bullocks stopped and refusing to move

delays

herds of sheep, monkeys, lots of dogs

Dirt

Drinking water

Afraid to drink the water

Driving fast

a little girl
knocking that bottle out of her hand
keep going
don't look back

And people thought, my God
this woman wants to go to India

When you know something is right
something in your heart
pushes you

You just do it.

Sue's stories always remind me to find courage to attend to
what I believe in and to follow my dreams.

Place: A dirt road in India

Weather: Hot

Changes to places.

When I first visited India the dirt was the circumstances of the
time. When I go there now in a taxi, the roads are paved and there

are now four lane highways where the dirt used to be, and there is an odd herd of sheep, but nothing like before.

Place: High above the river

Weather: Summers evening

The river and the setting sun.



Image 19: Facing West

"I had to see the water and the setting sun."

This condo is what I wanted. At my farm I had the water and I had the sunset you see. I had to have that; it had to be here. And this is why I said this is my place. If it didn't exist, I don't know where

I would have moved. When Julie found this place, I really wasn't planning on moving; this pushed me. I had never been in this building, but I had a feeling it was mine. It's all this spiritual side of us, it's intuition, it's the following the heart and something. You don't even know, but something feels right, like that house.

That House

Sue was talking about my new semi-detached. I had recently bought it after deciding to leave my husband. Sue's stories of intuition, spirituality, and knowing when something felt right were the hallmarks of my journey to finding a new place to call home. Once I had made the decision to move out, I looked at many places. I only looked at single houses but they all required substantial renovations. I found myself wondering whether I was capable of doing the work. I asked myself, could I rebuild one of those places into a home?

Then a house no longer seemed appropriate as I imagined myself saddled with a large yard and ongoing maintenance. My daughter was a teenager and would soon enough be moving away.

Primarily, I wanted to be free and something told me to continue looking.

Shortly after, I found a semi-detached I liked and I put in an offer. My daughter didn't like it and said, "I don't want to live there." As it turned out, somebody else had put in an offer that day and I missed out on it. Sue said, "See, you weren't meant to have that one." I think some things happen for a reason, and possibly the semi-detached outside of my old neighborhood wasn't meant to be.

Walking home later that day, I passed a semi-detached I had watched being built, just around the corner from our family home. During my mother's recent visit, she had also been watching it being built. Without even looking inside the place, I knew it was for me. When I phoned my mother to tell her I had purchased that semi-detached with the verandah she said, "you know, when I was walking past when they were building it, I said I'd like to live there someday."

Since moving in, I feel like I have come home. But there is a piece missing. I haven't yet worked out what it is. Maybe it's

because my parents haven't been here yet, or because I haven't had any major occasions celebrated within it such as a Christmas or a birthday, which would make it not feel so new. Maybe I just need more time.

Parallel Stories

This evening Sue and I re-read her narrative account. Sue shared how her writing had contributed to learning so much about herself. She also said she had struggled with condensing ideas and putting things into words so they were succinct. She described the tensions she had with punctuation and her editor's need for grammatical correctness. I could certainly relate to the exhausting nature of writing. Sue's belief that sometimes commas, periods, and new paragraphs interrupted the flow of her ideas resonated with mine. Sue suggested sometimes punctuation made forced relationships that didn't exist between words, and I realized that the times I wanted to invite imagination and playfulness I had used prose and white space within my writings. Towards the end of our conversation Sue said, "We are on parallel journeys, yours and

mine." With those words, I felt a deepening in our relationship and a different way of being with Sue.

People in places



Place: Hallways

Weather: Unsettled

People my age.

I have more in common with people younger than I am, particularly if I think about the people who were in my life out at the farm. But say if I go to India to the ashram, there I get along well with somebody my age because we think similar thoughts; we are like-minded you know. But then for instance, now I'm putting a book together, I'm meeting different people. I know this woman in the condo above me, she's an artist and she's an author. I didn't know until the other day that she has monthly meetings, yeah, a book club. Oh, she's in her 80s and her husband died a year or 2 ago. What I'm saying is now that I'm writing this book, see that gives me something else in common with these people here . . . like-minds and other stuff . . . common interests I should say, so then all the other doesn't have to come out.

Choosing the Stories to Tell

I wondered what "all the other" was that Sue referred to. Were they the stories from her past? If we don't share these stories from our past, I wondered, how do we gain a deeper

understanding which may nurture our travelling to the place within us. As a nurse, I wondered how to encourage the telling of “all the other” by older adults and nurture their understanding of the person they are becoming as they continue to grow older? I also think of the many stories I do not tell and the many stories Grandma never told. I wonder how not telling shapes our relationships with others and ourselves.

A Second Telling: “All the Other”

All the other relates to my private thoughts which I have struggled to put into words for much of my life. Like when I was small and I came home from Sunday school questioning the purpose of my life. How could I explain to my father that I thought there was something else? I know he had dreams of being a publisher of a magazine, but when he migrated to Canada those dreams never became his reality because he became a Pastor of the church. I wonder how he let those dreams go?

Place: The living room

Weather: Slightly overcast

Life around you.

When I bought this place, I didn't know anything about the people who lived here. I didn't look at any other places in the city. I bought this place for the river and the setting sun. I also bought it because I didn't want to be in an over 55 place 'cause I wanted young people around me . . . but I won't say screaming babies exactly . . . and, I love the little dogs here. They're all the little ones, like mostly Shih Tzus are here. I know of four or five Shih Tzus here, that's something about this place. They keep changing their minds about the dogs. They're saying that no you can't have pets and then they'll keep saying yes you can. There are a few people in here that don't want any animals and they, you know, they just object to everything, have some life around you I say. And what these pets do for these people? I like to know there are some animals around. That goes for older people too and it's important for some to keep their cat and stay in their home. It's company; it's love. After my husband died and I had no pets and I remember walking in after coming home from someplace and there was no greeting. Look how nice it is for these old people to come in and their cat greets them at the door, and how it must feel when they are greeted by something that is happy to see them. Older people

are sensitive to little things, which sometimes translates to them not feeling wanted. It's not what you say, it's how you say it, not what you do, but how you do it.

Telling Stories Again

This evening Sue and I continued re-reading her narrative account. As I shared my writing with her, I became aware of our stories coming together: what I had chosen to include from her transcripts appeared to be what she wanted to share with others. As I read aloud, I saw Sue absorbed in her stories and sometimes she would stop me and ask "what about . . .," "I really meant . . ." or "did you include . . ." At other times we sat in silence, lost in our memories which the stories were bringing to the present.

Occasionally, Sue would add a comment or further explain something, deepening our understanding of what had been written. Sometimes, her comments echoed what I had written elsewhere in her narrative account. At these times, Sue's comments reassured me that I had deeply respected and attended with her stories. As Sue recounted some of her stories, I appreciated her deep

understanding of herself and her purpose. I also wondered why Sue chose to recount some stories and not others.

I also struggled with decisions about what to write and how to explore our understandings and the meanings of our stories. Sue said “the idea is to keep things abstract—to make people think.” Yet, I could hear Vera, my supervisor, in the background encouraging me to “say more” so I didn’t leave the reader in the dark.

A Second Telling: Untold stories

When I choose not to tell a story, it is often because I don’t want to blame anybody. They did the best they could at the time and with the skills they had.

Place: The foyer

Weather: Gentle breeze

Popping in and new etiquettes to be learned.

The movement of people in and out of my place changed once I moved off the farm and into this condo. It took a while to get to know the people who live in this building a bit, and now what I enjoy, one thing nobody knocks on your door . . . unless you invite them or something but there’s not that just popping in. It’s very,

very private here. It's so unlike the rural areas where you had people popping in all the time. And then you always fed them. It's always, oh, come on in. The coffee's always on. There's always baking. And if you're having a meal, come on in, whether he's delivering fuel or whatever. So here I live a different life. We don't pop in to each other's condos and I have only been inside a few. My good friends are the gay couple down in the corner and I have been invited in a few times.

I do engage with people here in the condo, just in a different way. I sit on the bench downstairs in the foyer and when people come in and go out they may sit and chat with me. In a way, for me it's good. Because I'm not that tidy and if people walk in and I've got stuff all over the place, I don't like it. So it's good. So moving into my condo, I have had to learn a different way of living . . . and there's a little bit of etiquette here and there. Well, when you're not used to living like this and you come from the farm, and then you have to let the people out of the elevator first before you start going in . . . and remember your, oh, yeah, I'm number nine . . . it's the little details that can be so taken for granted once you've been here a while or people who have been here a while, well, you should know this. Or make sure you always have your fob with you.

You don't go out for a walk and not take your fob . . . 'cause people don't like being buzzed or to be called. I mean they're very kind . . . I've never had to but still; you don't want to bother somebody.

As Sue told me this, I realized the similarity to my Grandma. Sue did not want to be a burden or to be seen as old. I wonder how I can interrupt Sue's story and encourage her to tell a new story—one where she possibly defines herself as a contributing member of her community and not as a burden.

A Second Telling: Growing older

I want you to take that piece out about keeping my house tidy. My priorities are in writing my book and not housework. There is no ending to cleaning house, so I just do a bit at a time and I make friends with the dust bunnies. As I have grown older, I have slowed down, but I sometimes find cleaning good for me because I use the time to meditate.

Recently I decided to stop colouring my hair. I've been colouring it for 40 years; it is all white. All of a sudden I feel the timing is right to be white. My sister is 88 years old and not totally

grey yet; she has just started to go grey now. I didn't want to be half and half, I wanted to be all white and that's what I will be now.

While Sue was sharing this story with me, I wondered how the perceptions of others kept her dyeing her hair for all these years. Did dyeing her hair keep her feeling younger and integrated within a society where appearances are important?

A different way of living.

Maybe,

for a younger person

this is fun.

But,

at this age

it's not fun.

Remember,

there's just something else

you have to remember

You have to do this

You have to do that

I'm not used to people

they're around me

all the time

While Sue described getting used to a different way of living, I was thinking about my recent experiences of moving into a semi-detached. I could certainly relate to Sue and I could feel myself nodding and smiling as she continued to describe her experiences.

Place: My living room

Weather: Calm

Noises confirming the presence of others.

Although there are many people living here in the condo, I really don't see that many. I guess it would be different if I were in and out like the people who go to work. Sometimes I don't leave all day; I'm not out of here at all. But I always have a sense there are a lot of people around, even when I'm here on my own. I like it when I can hear the lady upstairs. Sometimes she drops something on her hardwood floor. I know it's hardwood because I have been in her place when I fed her cat. I love cats. I like to hear that there

are people around. There's a 96-year-old—well she doesn't want us to know that—who plays piano all the time . . . that we can hear very clearly. I like to know that I am a part of something and hearing the noises in the building confirms that somebody else is there. As I think about this, I am reminded of my daughter when she was small. All of a sudden she'd come looking for me.

"Mommy, would you make some noise so I know where you are?"

It's a whole different lifestyle living in this condo. When I lived at the farm I would often notice the silence. But in the summers it would be noisy with the boats out on the lake. But with the silence, I think what I miss the most was in the summer I didn't listen to music as there were so many birds. And you'd think, what is that bird? And my eyes weren't that good because that was before I had my cornea transplants, so I couldn't really see the birds. I really miss the birds that I used to hear out at the farm. I do get some here . . . if it's quiet in the morning. My favorite bird is probably the wren.

Place: Hillside by the river

Weather: Sunny

Adjusting to a different place.

I still have the cultivated land left at the farm and a hillside as well. I haven't been back to the farm since August when I

permanently moved in here. The two weekends I was out at George's it was raining and raining and raining, so we never made it out to the farm. I've had this condominium for 4 years, but I have come and gone between summers spent at the farm, 2 months of the winters in India, and short spells here in between my travels to Kerry's. This is my first summer that I have lived here. Since moving there have been a lot of adjustments to make such as finding shopping and just finding new ways of doing things . . . because for me to move from there to here, every aspect of my life and everything I did was different. From where you brush your teeth . . . I still don't know where, I still haven't settled into where I want to sleep. I'm now sleeping on a couch in the master bedroom. My own bed is still at the farm and the new owners are sleeping on it. Their bed remains in their old home which is staged for selling. It still hasn't been sold.

To Matter

Today, as I worked in my garden at my new place, I realized even though I had only moved a block from my previous home, I was a stranger in my new neighbourhood. When gardening at my old place, neighbours would stop by to see what I was doing and to

talk about life: our gardens, kids, the weather, work, and the price of gas; anything really that came to mind. I felt as though I belonged and others were a part of my life. I didn't have to seek out company; it would find me there in my garden. This evening was a new phenomenon. No one came over, there were no idle conversations, and I had no sense of belonging. My new neighbours were behind closed doors. I could see them and I found myself wondering if they thought about who I was.

I know it is a transition in my life, a move "just down the road" like the hostel was from Grandma's; but I felt as though my new place might as well have been on the other side of the city. My old neighbours continued to live their lives, greeting each other on the way to work, on their way home, while working in their gardens, or walking past in the evenings. I imagined these scenes and played them out in my mind as I worked in my new garden. My past hadn't transitioned with me and I felt a sense of loneliness; felt insignificant and unimportant. These feelings carried me forward into the world of older adults. I realized I was willing and

able to integrate into a neighbourhood I had chosen; yet I too struggled to become a member of my new community.

At times, I found myself wandering aimlessly back to my old place to regain a sense of connection and belonging. I also realized I could continue returning to my old place until I was ready to move on. What about older adults who don't have the capacity to return; how do they re-establish their identities within a new place? Pauline said, "You need to make the effort. You need to learn people's names, join in the activities, explore your new surroundings, and have courage." Sue said, "You need to feel safe and have hope." I say, "I just need more time."

Presented In a Certain Way

As Sue described the book she was writing, she said something that caused me to pay attention more closely. "I'm very visual," she said. "I have to have it in pages, also it's not a story, it's pieces that have to be presented in a certain way." Only recently I had a similar conversation with Vera about writing my dissertation, because adhering to APA requirements was causing me great tension. I needed white space, and sometimes that space needed

to be a shade of grey or black; I needed different fonts to represent participants' voices and also mine; I needed incomplete sentences to invite other possibilities, other ways of thinking, and moments where the reader could pause and wonder about themselves; and I needed a way of referencing that didn't interrupt participants' stories. I realized the presence of freedom was not only in my life but also in my writing, and it was what I wanted to represent in my narrative accounts. Sue's words, "presented in a certain way," called me to attend to participants' stories with respect. Her words also encouraged me to pay attention to the stories being told and re-told, lived and re-lived (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) by the reader, who may also be travelling alongside the stories being told by participants and me.



Tips for packing

Place: A small home

Weather: Unsettled

A decorator's mind.

When the new “caretakers” of the farm sell their old place, I will have the money to do the things that I want to do in here, because like everyone else, I like my surroundings a certain way. It kind of drives me crazy living like this. But also going from a large space to a small space, I'm having a hard time learning to live in a smaller space from that large space that I had. This place will be different when I have the money to make the changes. I want to change the front tiles, I don't like the brown ones. I want a fluorescent light with a picture of the sky in it for the front entrance way. I have already found one on the Internet. I would like to paint the walls and then I would be able to hang up my pictures. I won't hang pictures of people though; I don't like the sense that people are looking at me. I need to make this place my own. But you know it's good that I didn't have the money to do more because I would've made some mistakes. I had to be here awhile before making this place my own. Once I make it my own, then I will feel the belonging part.

Leaving Sue's place this evening I felt great tension with past decisions I made when caring with older adults. I have encouraged families to bring in photographs to hang on the walls of their loved ones' rooms and I have walked away in frustration when a decision was made to remove all personal linen from residents' beds in a nursing home where I once worked. Now, hearing Sue's story I realize I did not "world"-travel in loving ways; rather, my assumptions and/or silence gave voice to arrogant perceptions. I return to Rylant's (1992) book and recall Solomon Singer imagining his room while sitting in Angel's café. Like Solomon, Sue was making her place her own in her imagination but unlike Solomon or Pauline, Sue might one day bring life to her dreams.

Place: A road leading somewhere

Weather: Crisp

I need this and I need that.

Once I found myself, I didn't need things. I could go to India for one time up to 4 months, and I was perfectly content living out of one suitcase. I just washed my clothes and I didn't need all this stuff. I was so satisfied with my learning there . . . the like-minded

people and our laughing and our joking and our discussing . . . I didn't really miss anything or my family either. And in fact, it was like I was in another world . . . and I didn't feel the need for the constant connection with home. But that really is life changing and it is one step further into knowing ourselves more deeply. That's why we're on Earth, to know ourselves.

When I moved into my condo, I really didn't take a lot from the farm. Out there, most of the cabinets and shelving were built in, so I had to leave them behind. I will get some shelves built here some day. I did bring the china cabinet with me though. It is small and I will be able to move it with me again. The elephant on the top shelf, I bought that in India. It is very fragile and it can't be moved about or handled. The other things in there are small pieces which link me to who I am and where I came from. The newer pieces, like my elephant, link me to where I am going. There are only a few pieces in the cabinet because too much can become confusing. I need these things as they help me to keep my identity. But some people, they need a lot of things around them and they may become fearful if these things are removed. They may begin to question, if I remove all these things from me, who am I?



Image 20: Sue's China cabinet

"The things in my China cabinet are small pieces which link me to who I am and where I am going."

6 Suitcases

When I decided to emigrate to Canada, I came with two suitcases and I remember what I packed in them: four changes of summer clothes, one pair of jeans, three jumpers hand-knitted by my mother, a couple of sweaters and sweatpants, pajamas, undergarments, two pairs of shoes, a set of queen-sized bed sheets, my duvet and its cover, my pillow, and my teddy bear. There was also a photograph of my daughter and a couple of personal items, which at that time were of great importance. But today, I cannot remember what they were.

Six months later my daughter, and husband at the time, arrived with four more suitcases. I remember being amazed we could move with so little and leave so much behind. We left a storage unit full of boxes of “things” we couldn’t possibly part with, but have never used again. Our home in Australia had recently sold and our “things” were thinned out again. My ex-husband took some things to his parents’ place, some items went to charity, some were given away to friends, and others were repacked into boxes and moved into my parents’ garage over 1,000

kilometers away. Other items went to the landfill. My parents and ex-husband did the packing and made many of the decisions concerning what I should keep or leave behind, but after 10 years of not seeing these things, I no longer have a relationship with them. What remains in the boxes is a mystery to me.

Next year I will visit my parents' and also my things. I found it strange that my daughter asked me to wait to unpack these things until she could be present. I wonder what meaning these things have for her? She was 3 years old when we moved. Could she remember the baby clothes we had kept, her soft toys, or even the dinner set we had served family meals on? I wonder what stories will be told as my daughter and I immerse ourselves in the unpacking of our things.

Place: The spare room

Weather: Warm with a breeze

New things.

The BioMat, now that has changed the whole thing because now I have to find a place to put it. At the moment, it's on the bed in my second room. It needs to move and then I can have that

space for my activities. Kerry said get a trundle bed which you pull out and have it on the bottom, but I'll start with what I have. I have that queen bed out at the farm which I could put there, and then I'll get rid of this one, and then I'll have that space.

I wanted to interrupt Sue while she was telling me about her bed still being out at the farm. I know she talks about the new owners needing her bed and other small pieces of furniture, but I wonder does she also need them to be still out at the farm.

A Second Telling: "Things"

I don't need to go back to the farm and I don't need the things I left out there anymore. I am in a new life now and I have good things happening to me.

Place: Beyond the river bank

Weather: Gusting wind

A temporary place.

I don't think this is my final place to live. I feel that I still have one more move to make.

Too Many Moves

Like Sue, I know I have more moves to make before I find my final place to live. But I wasn't thinking about myself during this

conversation with Sue. I was remembering a very different story about my daughter when she was nearing 5 years old.

She was visiting with her grandparents in Australia when her father and I purchased a house in Canada after deciding we would not be returning to Australia in the near future. We thought the house was perfect because it was only a block down from the place we were renting. I still hear the distress in my daughter's voice when we phoned to tell her we had found a new home. She asked, "do I get to keep my bed this time? Where will all my things go? Will I ever get to see them again?" I realized each time we had moved we had packed up her things and put them into storage and she never did see them again. To our daughter, moving appeared to mean losing everything that was once familiar and beginning a new life in a strange place surrounded by unfamiliar things.

Five years later, my daughter was turning 10. One morning she asked me, "Are we moving again soon?" Her question took me by surprise because there had been no conversations around moving. Instead, we were in the process of renovating our home. I do remember wishing we were moving as the renovations were

taking forever. It had been 8 months since I had a kitchen, and we had been living with the new toilet sitting in the middle of the dining room. I asked her why she thought we would be moving again. She said, "I'm turning 10 this year, and I have moved nine times, so we need to move again." I thought about the moves we had made: there was one when she was 4 weeks old, another when she was 8 weeks old, another when she was 18 months old . . . then there was one when she was 3, then 3½, then 4 . . . Could she really have remembered all those moves? After listening to Sue's story about making one more move, I wonder how many moves my daughter will make and how many of these will involve packing up and moving all her things so she doesn't feel surrounded by unfamiliar things in new places.

Place: The balcony

Weather: Warm evening

Comfort.

I think I should close the glass door, because there's no screen here. I'm not sure what might come in. During the day, it

could be a pigeon. I'm just not that comfortable having it totally open.

When Sue closed the glass door, I was reminded of the many doors I have opened to rooms of older adults living in long-term residences. I wonder how comfortable the residents were with their doors wide open. I wonder if they felt exposed and vulnerable to whoever walked past their room.

Place: The condominium

Weather: Chilly

Friends.

There are 60-some condos in this building and there's another piece about aging and moving. I move into here, it's like going to school in the middle of the school term and here these people are, the girls have their cliques. Maybe they don't need new friends, they already have their group of friends. The only group of friends that I really ever had is in India. I don't have friends here, really. I have some acquaintances, they kind of do what I do, but not exactly, and I'm very focused in a certain direction. And I had one good friend, and she was here a couple of weeks ago, and I

realized all I am for her is a sounding block. I never ever fit in. You see it was my thinking; I really never fit in any place.

I have one friend, he's a man, he's . . . I don't know, 60-ish or something, and you know he's an unlikely person, he sometimes does jobs for me and so on, but our minds just click and like you know and so there's a few people that you can just spend an hour or two and just talking about you know . . . my things, well not things but ideas.

Listening to Sue tell her stories about friends draws me back to the writing of Caine and Steeves (2009). They call me to remember Sue's stories are embedded in a context. I wonder what contexts have shaped Sue's stories and if there is a possibility of co-composing new stories about friendships, drawing from the context of India where she nurtured friendships with others like her.

A Second Telling: Friends

You know, I too am in a clique with my like-minded friends. I guess we all live in cliques, no matter where you go. It is so nice to have friends of the opposite sex, particularly my gay friends down

the hall. There are no demands and it's great. If I need anything, I can just ask them, they say they are there to help.

My Friend Sally

I need you to sit and hold my hand while I write this narrative account. I feel lost and vulnerable, as though my writing is leaving me naked in front of my readers. As we hold hands, our skin-to-skin contact reassures me of your presence, and my vulnerability and nakedness fades to the margins. I now understand, if I can't share my stories and feel vulnerable, naked and exposed, how can I enter a relationship with others and attend with their feelings? How can I travel to their worlds in loving ways as Lugones' (1987) calls me to attend to and with their stories? In your presence I know I can be vulnerable and stand naked in front of you, because you will care for me and my stories and lovingly replace my clothes to re-present to me the person I am becoming.

Place: My imagination

Weather: Hot and humid

India: A memory.

India can exist in my imagination and through my memories I can still feel safe and have hope even if I can't travel to India, to

home. The last time I went to India I knew it would be my last trip. The last time I was there I gave everything away . . . like I had things stored and clothes and saris and what have you . . . they were hard to part with. For me, my journey of physically detaching myself from India began with the giving away of my things. Now that I'm feeling well and if some money comes through, I want to go back. I don't know what I will wear there because I gave away my things and I feel that it does matter what I wear there. And also you know, where ever you travel, you go to England, you know you need a woolen sweater. You look at what the locals wear and you know you need that.

Never Returning

Sue's yearly travels to India reminded me of my yearly travels home. It was through travelling home I nurtured my relationship with Grandma. My travels were another opportunity to see and learn new things, to build memories, and to share Grandma with others. As Sue told her story about not returning to India, I remembered a story Grandma told me during our last trip to my parents' home.

During this visit I became aware of a new story being told by

Grandma. Her story was not told in words; rather, it was told through her increasing silence and my sense she was feeling disconnected from our busy lives. Grandma's new story was finally given words when she and I were packing up her things at the end of our visit. "I will not be returning," she said with a distant look in her eyes, "so we will pack everything." At the time, I didn't have any words to respond and our actions spoke of the possibility Grandma and I would never return to this place I called home.

The following morning we travelled to the airport and began our journey to Grandma's home. As we sat in our seats waiting for takeoff I remember savoring the moment, knowing this had been the last trip Grandma and I would take to visit my parents. I wondered what Grandma was thinking as the airplane taxied down the runway. In the window seat, she sat with her hands clasped together and her body vibrating with excitement; she loved takeoff. With her hands and a smile Grandma said, "up, up, and away."

Place: Massachusetts

Weather: Sunny and warm

A place within a fabric.

I know this fabric is Indian, I can tell it's Indian cotton, this is their cotton, I can feel it. Because it's thin and light it doesn't crease. You know . . . I bought this shirt in Massachusetts actually. So it's funny that I would even buy something Indian because I guess I was still attracted to it. Maybe, when I put it on it gives me a sense of being in India, a sense of place. Maybe I have to think about that too. Why do I look for these clothes like this? Or was I somewhere thinking that yeah, I could wear this to India? Maybe it's a piece that I can put on and feel India and have hope that maybe one day I will go back to the place I call home, a place where I know I fit; a place called India. You know, when I bought the shirt, it was always in the back of my mind I would go back to India.

My place in the breeze.

There,

Can you smell it,

the sea at the end of the breeze?

There,
can you feel it,
the sand between your toes?

There,
can you hear it,
the waves crashing onto the rocks?

There,
can you see Grandma and me,
sitting by the sea?

I know,
I'm here in Saskatchewan,
thousands of kilometers from the sea.

But there on the breeze,
which blows past me,

I return to my place by the sea.

Place: Somewhere deep within us

Weather: Storm warning

Voices within us, Voices within us.

Finally, as Sue and I world-travelled and shared our stories I became aware our stories were becoming one. Sue said, "When you know something is right something in your heart pushes you, you just do it." "Yes. And I think that's when you have to learn to really listen and to trust in yourself. And I think it's really difficult, with the extra 'noises' of life, it's very difficult to pay attention to that voice," I said. "And you know when you get a feeling about something, that first intuitive feeling is the right one, and then you start doubting it. Then you question. Then you question and doubt and maybe I should have done this, that first one, you'll find that will be the right one," Sue reassured me.

Living alongside Sue has not evoked playfulness. Our travels together have caused great tension within me as I bumped up against stories from both the past and the present. But through my journeys with these tensions I have been presented with

opportunities to explore places within me and begin imagining future stories. Sue's stories also invite me to attend to my world and the world of someone else differently. She encourages me to step forward out of the darkness and to face my inner stories which have so often remained silent, and begin to give them voice and bring them into the light. Writing this narrative account has been a journey to a place deep within us. It has invited imagination and presented the possibility that playfulness can enter our lives as we begin to tell new stories of becoming.

Co-composing stories with Sue has constantly reminded me of the need to travel with her in loving ways and not with arrogant perception. Only now do I truly value the reflexivity and reflection encouraged through narrative inquiry; without it, I may never have begun to learn to live with and by my stories. As Sue said, "I have been told to learn to sing, to learn to express myself through singing. I can sing for awhile and then it just hurts." Like Sue, I can write for a while and then it hurts. But I need to seek meaning and understanding among and between these hurts to find ways to love myself deeply. I must learn to attend with my stories in loving ways

so I can travel to the “world” of someone else, not with arrogance, but with love. To do so, I embrace the words Lugones (1987) wrote,

There are “worlds” that we can travel to lovingly and travelling to them is part of loving at least some of their inhabitants. The reason why I think that travelling to someone’s “world” is a way of identifying with them is because by travelling to their “world” we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes. (p. 17)

Chapter 7

Narrative Threads

Once Pauline's, Alison's, and Sue's narrative accounts were written, I laid them alongside one another and searched for resonances that reverberated across and between their experiences in relation to place (Clandinin, 2013). As I thought about the narrative threads, I remembered Sue's story, "A Place Within a Fabric," whereby the fabric of a shirt she bought in Massachusetts gave her a sense of being in India. She suggested when she wore the shirt she could feel India in the cotton of the fabric and return to the place she called home. As Sue described this, I remembered the feel, colour, and pattern of Grandmas' housedresses. They were always lightweight striped cotton, in shades of blue and white, and required little to no ironing.

Walking home after my conversation with Sue, I continued to think about the relationship between fabric and place. When I got home, I quickly ran upstairs to find Grandma's housedress which I had brought home with me after my mother and I had packed up Grandma's things. It is blue and white striped, and the stiffness of the fabric speaks of its newness, because wearing, washing, and drying in the Australian sun hadn't softened it. Putting the dress on, I could feel Grandma's arms wrap around me, I could see her looking out her kitchen window, I could smell cookies baking in her oven, and I could see us sitting on the beach listening to the waves roll in and out across the sand. I understood that bringing Grandma's housedress to my home overseas, I brought with it memories

of places I had lived alongside Grandma. I realized I too could feel place within a fabric.

The metaphor of fabric invited me to imagine weaving multiple threads together to create a fabric. In this sense, place became the fabric in which the narrative threads come together. In considering place as fabric, the warp threads are set up under tension and speak of remembering, imagination and playfulness, and stories to live by. The weft threads go back and forth between the warp threads, and their colours, textures, and patterns create the fabric's artistic feel. Looking across the narrative accounts, the weft threads speak to stories of personal belongings, about moving, safety, and a sense of "not yet."

Threads in the Fabric of Place

The warp threads.

Remembering.

"What we remember at any given time is a reality . . . it is not a matter of losing the past, but the gaining of a new reality in the present." (Quinney, 2001, p. 70)

Interwoven into the fabric of place is the warp thread of remembering. For Pauline, Alison, and Sue their stories about place are intimately woven into their past experiences and their stories to live by (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Within their narrative accounts it became evident their remembering invited them to revisit their past and make sense of their present and compose future stories in relation to a place they call home. Seeing remembering narratively

encourages me to understand memories are not passive “repositories of images of the past . . . [rather, the process of remembering is] active, inventive, and *present*” (Randall, 2011, para. 20).

Through this inquiry, I noticed participants’ stories were greatly shaped by our relationship and their memories of past places and who they were in those places. Randall (2011) suggests, “the significance of *any* memory can never be fully grasped,” (para. 3) and sometimes I could feel the tension between what Pauline, Alison, and Sue remembered about place and the depth of the memories they were willing to share with me. Sometimes tensions captured in silence hinted either to the presence of a story not yet told or unable to be converted into words (Neumann, 1997). I pondered these untold stories and thought of the stories of Grandma’s life she never told. With only silence, I was left to imagine stories of these past events. But I thirsted for the story behind my imaginings. I needed to ask Grandma questions, to seek answers, and to unfold the stories I live by. How do Pauline’s, Alison’s, and Sue’s untold or silent stories shape the people they are becoming as they continue to grow older?

The stories Sue and I shared invited us to travel deep within the warp thread of remembering and sometimes our untold or silent stories were given words and captured in text. Sue’s stories began with her memories of living within a Mennonite community and feeling as though she never “fitted in.” She remembered being 6 years old, lying under a maple tree in the yard of her childhood home, and looking up into the sky and asking “Why am I, what am

I to do, why am I here?" Sue's questions about her purpose in life journeyed alongside her as she struggled to compose new stories to live by in the shadows of depression following her marriage and subsequent move to the farm. There, Sue described struggling to compose a further life (Bateson, 2010) within a community where she continued to feel she didn't fit in. I wondered if her feelings were storied out of memories she refused to forget because they shaped the person she was until she travelled to India.

When Sue's son and his girlfriend moved into her place at the farm she bought a house in town, and it was from here she began to travel to a place within her to find meaning and understanding of the stories she lived by (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As she journeyed deeper, she spoke of finding India, a place she now calls home. It was while she was there she built relationships with like-minded people and experienced a sense of fitting in for the first time in her life. It was through these relationships and her deep connection to India that she found a purpose in her life, and with this purpose she named the place of India home.

Perhaps Sue's memories of travelling to India and finding a place to call home contributed to her ability to compose present and future stories in which she could embrace a positive self-identity. Listening to these stories, I also attended with Sue's story about Liebe²⁴. In her childhood place, Sue remembered learning from her mother about love, hope, and feeling safe. Sue brought these memories

²⁴ In German, Liebe means love.

forward into her present stories about India. She suggested even if she was no longer able to travel to India, her memories of finding the answers to her question, "Why am I here?" helped her continue to feel safe and to have hope in her new place by the river.

Even though Sue shared memories of not fitting in at the farm by the lake, she brought forward rich memories: of enjoying the silence, birds coming to the feedboxes her husband built, and the profound responsibility she felt for the land and its ongoing care fostered during the 40 years she lived at the farm. These stories interrupted her darker stories of living with depression and feeling as though she never fit in with her husband's community.

Thinking of this, I returned to Freeman's (2010) work, because he reminds me to pause and provide Pauline, Alison, and Sue with opportunities to continue telling their stories which may enhance their connections between past and present life experiences. Bringing forth past experiences into the present encourages the sharing of wisdom nurtured through hindsight, as each person engages in seeking new meanings which may have initially been unavailable (Freeman, 2010). I understand that as Sue's and my relationship deepened, so too did the sharing of her memories, enriching both of our lives as well as her understandings of what moving away from the farm meant to her.

As conversations with Sue continued, I gained a deeper appreciation of the 4 years she travelled back and forth—between living at the farm, living at the ashram in India, and living in her condominium. I also understood why it was so

important for Sue's new place to overlook the river and face the setting sun; this brought back memories of the farm and her connection with the land. As we sat together in Sue's condominium one evening watching the sunset, I wondered if the orange colours and the changing light invited her to travel back to the landscape of India. I found myself travelling back to the desert and memories of watching the evening light transition from bright orange to deep purple and finally to darkness across the desert landscape.

While Sue and I co-composed stories and travelled to places within us, I often returned to childhood memories of places: my farm place and in-town place. Within me, I learned to pay attention to what was absent, unsaid, unacknowledged, and unknown in the stories I chose to tell about my childhood (Neumann, 1997). I began to give text and voice not only to the fun times, but also to the difficult ones when I learned about relationships, a sense of belonging, and the importance of having a safe place to return to time and time again. For me, this place was Grandma's home where she taught me a different way of being through our relationship and her sharing of past experiences (Westerhof & Bohlmeijer, 2014).

These stories took me back to Pauline's stories and what she chose to remember about past places in her life. During our conversations, Pauline would sometimes return to her memories of living in St. Mary's where she remembered feeling a sense of belonging. Her memories of living within a community where she felt connected and able to navigate her way independently to activities—Mass

on Sunday, shopping, and appointments—motivated her to return to a community she once called home. Associated with this was the possibility of seeing familiar faces among the congregation at Mass on Sundays and familiarity of the public transport system. However, as the past became the present, her memories were interrupted by the changes that had transpired within her old neighbourhood prior to and following her moving away.

While Pauline shared her memories about places from her past, I attended with her present story of moving to an unfamiliar neighbourhood where she needed to build relationships and navigate new bus routes. Her memories of not having a lot of choice in her life, I was brought up that way, I lived that way, and it didn't bother me, carried forward into her present stories of moving into a seniors' complex. I wonder how Pauline's memories of not having a lot of choice in her life contributed to her moving into an apartment she did not really want, and how the story she remembers living alongside her mother composed her present stories of choosing a place in which to grow older. Pauline told of her mother's need for her to do her washing, change her bedding, clean her house, and do her grocery shopping. Interwoven into these were Pauline's stories of not wanting to be a burden to her children.

I wonder if Pauline chose assisted living as her place to continue to grow older because it would provide services to fulfill her daily activity needs and ensure that her children would not live a similar story to the one she had lived alongside her mother. As Andrews (2009) suggests, "there is a connection

between who one is in old age and who one has been in the years leading up to that time” (p. 80). I now realize my relationship with Pauline required more time and depth before we could begin the journey to seek meaning and understanding about the person Pauline was and the person she was becoming: a widow with the courage and competence to make choices relevant to the place where she imagined growing older.

Alison’s memories of who she had been and who she was becoming were captured in the photographs displayed on the shelves in her living room. Initially I was puzzled about why the photographs remained unchanged, even after they were rearranged on shelving in her new home. However, as Alison storied each photograph from the past and moved each story into the present and proposed future stories for each family member within the photographs, I realized she was creating a social and historical space within her home (Hirsch, 1997; Pividori, 2008).

In attending with these stories, I deepened my understanding of the importance of her photographs not being replaced by more current ones. The photographs of her granddaughters brought back memories of them playing dress-up in her basement at the farm; and the large family portrait, which will eventually hang above the television, continued to invite her to travel alongside memories of wanting to be a farmer’s wife and have 12 children. I came to understand Alison’s photographs opened a window into her memories of past

relationships and places, and her stories about her photographs supported her to compose a further life (Bateson, 2010) as a great-grandmother.

It wasn't until Alison and I re-read her narrative account that I fully appreciated her need for the photographs from her past. Through Alison's sharing of stories about her photographs and why they remained unchanged after she moved, I found myself returning to memories of the photographs in Grandma's front room. In particular, I remembered the *Pixie Portrait* of my siblings and me, taken when my brother was 2 years old. I now see the possibility the photograph remained in place because it reminded Grandma of her past relationships with us which became interwoven into the very structure of her home.

The idea of relationships and photographs becoming interwoven encouraged me to wonder if the stories of Alison's photographs are mirrored in the present outside her front window. Alison had positioned her favourite chair in front of the window where she could see children coming and going from the park, the pool, and the Scout Hall across the street. She said the noise and chatter of the children reminded her of being a mother and of her children when they were little. I wondered if these memories brought forth places from her past, particularly the farm, and how those memories of place shaped the person she was now becoming.

While writing about the importance of photographs in Alison's life, I paused to remember Sue's stories about not wanting photographs of people on her walls. She described feeling like people in pictures watched her; therefore, she

said there won't be pictures of people on her walls. I wondered if Sue felt people in photographs were criticizing her and reminding her she never fit in. I wonder if, with time and a deepening relationship, Sue and I might have discussed her stories about the people in the photographs and begun to co-compose a different story whereby it wasn't with criticism but possibly loving eyes they gazed upon her. Maybe Sue's pictures could have been of people from India—the place she calls home—rather than photographs of relatives which appeared to cause tension for her. Alison and Sue's stories reminded me to pay attention to diversity among older adults.

As Pauline, Alison, Sue, and I travelled across our geographical landscapes and Sue and I journeyed to a place within us, I became aware how our stories changed with the passing of time and developed new meanings through the exploration of our memories. While attending to the thread of remembering, I often returned to my writings and realized that sharing our memories made it possible for integral connections to be formed between past and present places, encouraging our understanding that stories, like lives, are lived in the midst and are connected to what has come before (Clandinin et al., 2010; Freeman, 2010). Reflecting on our co-composed stories, I was invited to dwell differently with my memories, particularly those I shared with Grandma and the stories she did not tell. I learned from Pauline, Alison, and Sue, that even if these stories remain untold, their tellings might occur in unexpected ways, possibly through the

sharing of stories by family and friends; therefore I must inquire gently and invite wonder, imagination, and playfulness.

Imagination and playfulness.

As I returned to Pauline's, Alison's, and Sue's stories of remembering past experiences and of how these influenced their present in relation to place, I remembered Freeman (2010) suggesting our memories are "history. But what shall we make of it? What might the past tell us about the future, and about how we might live?" (p. 191). Contemplating his questions, I was drawn to the possibility that memory is not just about reproducing past experiences, but retelling them with imagination and playfulness (Caine & Steeves, 2009). Sometimes these accounts may even border on fiction.

Thinking about memory in relation to the thread of imagination and playfulness, I returned to Grandma's stories to which my mother responded, "That wasn't how it really occurred." Freeman (2010) suggests the discrepancies, which occur in the retelling of stories from our memories, may be the outcome of imagination and the reliving of experiences differently. I see these as an invitation to playfully world-travel and imagining a different story to live by (Caine & Steeves, 2009; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lugones, 1987). Freeman suggests our composing of new stories involves the delicate process of looking forward and backward as we seek understandings of our experiences. The stories we tell further define ourselves as they are intimately related to who we are, not only in our eyes but also in the eyes of others.

Stories to live by.

“individuality reaches its peak in old age.” (Schachter-Shalomi & Miller, 1995, p. 38)

Over time, our rememberings may change and we may develop new meanings and understandings, and with these comes the possibility that who we were, who we are, and who we are becoming begins to shift and change within the landscape of our lives. During conversations with Pauline, Alison, and Sue, I realized the stories they lived by might not be the same stories told in different contexts, times, or places because they reflected the circumstances in which we were sharing which may have called forth new interpretations. As indicated by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Freeman (2010) we cannot know, and will never know, where stories may lead as they are always lived in the midst and are influenced by our ongoing experiences and understandings.

For Pauline and Alison, the thread of stories to live by is firmly rooted in the soil of the prairies. They are Saskatchewan women. They both described their strong identity with the prairie landscape. During Pauline’s travels to Switzerland, she described feeling hemmed in by the mountains and missing the flatness of the prairies. Another time she remembered being on a bus tour and everyone cheering when they saw the prairie landscape laid out in front of them after they left the eastern coast of Canada.

For Alison, the prairie landscape meant home. She said, “I’ve lived in Saskatchewan all my life you know, and I couldn’t imagine living

year round with sun, sun, sun, and more sun. I couldn't imagine it."

I also realize Pauline's and Alison's stories to live by were influenced by their memories of being mothers and grandmothers and, in particular, of being life-long Catholic women.

Sue's stories to live by did not find roots in Saskatchewan; rather they began when she started to travel to India. Growing up in a Mennonite community, Sue remembered her struggles where she felt she didn't fit in. Later, these feelings continued when she married and moved into her husband's community by the lake. There she storied herself, as "this is Sue, she lives at the park entrance." Unfortunately, Sue was unable to compose a story to live by at her home by the lake, and she found herself spiraling into a world of darkness and depression.

When she moved into town for the first time, Sue continued to struggle to compose a story to live by. Following the move, Sue described feeling stripped of her identity when she left behind her place, her telephone number, and her life lived alongside her husband. Sue described those years as the lost years; however, she continued to return to memories of experience from those years as she sought meaning and understanding of the person she was becoming. Andrews (2009) helps me to understand the importance of Sue returning to those memories, because the person she was becoming as she continues to grow older was nurtured by the person she had been.

Sue believed her stories to live by were interwoven into the fabric of place and she found an understanding of her “self” in India. Trentleman (2009) points to the concept of identity through the notion of “place identity.” Here, Trentleman suggests, “individuals and groups contribute to and shape the identity of places while the places in turn help shape the identities of these same people” (p. 206). It was while living in an Indian community outside the ashram that Sue entered a place in which her stories could be shared with like-minded people who were attentive to her (Nelson, 1995). People at the ashram gave her self confidence by confirming her thoughts and beliefs, and through helping her to find the beginning answers to her questions “why am I, what am I to do, why am I here?”

Sue described that her journey to a place within her began when she was finally recognized as both an individual and also as a community member (Relph, 1976) among the people who came to learn at the ashram. Maybe Sue’s journey into the folds of the ashram community encouraged her to feel secure about her identity, supporting her to name this place as home. I wondered if in naming India home, Sue was able to begin to compose stories to live by and become “This is Sue, she goes to India.”

To further understand the thread of stories to live by, I turned to my relationships with Pauline, Alison, and Sue; and the tensions I felt between the stories I lived alongside Grandma and those I was willing to share. Sarton (1973) says, “every relation challenges; every relation asks me to be something, do

something, respond” (p. 108), and in doing so, my stories bumped up against theirs, particularly Pauline’s. But Sarton (1973) encourages me to pause and examine my life; to begin to see the value of sharing stories lived alongside Grandma and to strengthen the stories I live by. If we look more deeply within ourselves and begin to tell our stories, we may make known something that was once unknown or secret: revelations supporting us to compose a further life. By travelling to each other’s worlds we may begin to understand who we were and are from another’s perspective (Austin, 2001). In particular we may seek meaning and understanding of growing older as being not just about others, but ourselves (Andrews, 2009).

The warp threads: Setting-up the loom.

Our journey into the warp threads of remembering, imagination and playfulness, and stories to live by invited Pauline, Alison, Sue, and I to travel deeper into the fabric of place. The fibers we chose to “draft²⁵” into our warp threads came from the experiences we shared as our relationship deepened. Nelson (1995) suggests our communities of choice provided a moral space for us to explore these fibers and deepen our understanding of place. By attending with my stories lived alongside Grandma I entered places of special significance and engaged in activities of self-discovery. According to Bateson (2000), naming

²⁵ “Drafting” is the process of pulling the fibers to be spun from the bundle of fiber, and thinning them down to form the size yarn you want to spin. The more fibers you draft, the thicker your yarn will be The length of the individual fibers, as well as the texture, type of fiber, and thickness of each fiber will all play a part in how fine or how thick you will spin.” (Karen Poulakos Fiber Arts Studio, 2008, para. 2)

these places was crucial for me because otherwise I may have become a “perpetual stranger in a new land” (p. 226). I wondered throughout the inquiry if Pauline, Alison, and Sue engaged in activities of self-discovery?

It was also in the places of our communities of choice that Pauline, Alison, Sue, and I explored our past and present stories and imagined our futures. These stories were not in relation to the generalized ones of growing older; rather, they remained specific to the person (Nelson, 1995) and the individuality of the textures and designs we were weaving into our fabrics of place. As we drafted the fibers for our warp threads and wove them into our individual fabrics, designs unfolded and I awoke to the multiplicity of each of our lives and how these come together to define whom we are and are becoming (Clandinin, 2013). I continue to wonder: How do we establish our identities within a new place? Pauline said, “you need to make the effort. You need to learn people's names, join in the activities, explore your new surroundings and have courage.” Sue said, “you need to feel safe and have hope.” I say, “**I just need more time.**”

Once again I was reminded that changing out the warp threads of the loom is hard work, but not impossible. The deeper I travel into remembering, imagination and playfulness, and stories to live by within the fabric of place, the more I awaken to the essentiality of paying close attention to the threads chosen.

Our lives, like our stories, are not static and with each telling and retelling we may compose forward-looking stories (Freeman, 2010).

The Weft Threads in the Fabric of Place

With the warp threads set-up on the loom, I imagined the weft threads in the fabric of place. While listening to and attending with Pauline's, Alison's, and Sue's stories these threads became stories of personal belongings, moving, safety, and a sense of "not yet." Even though these threads were prominent in their stories, I became aware the fibers "drafted" to spin these threads varied among participants. By imagining the variations in the threads, each person's fabric of place became unique, deepening my understanding of Sue's description of returning to India when she wore her shirt made from Indian cotton.

Personal belongings.²⁶

"So the room is filled with my life and gives my life back to me." (Sarton, 1996, p. 33)

As Pauline, Alison, and Sue shared their stories about moving, they often spoke of deciding what personal belongings to take and what to leave behind. Often, the weft thread of personal belongings went back and forth between the warp threads of remembering and stories to live by. To understand more deeply the relationship between and among these threads, I turned to the works of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), McCracken (1988), and Wapner,

²⁶ Rather than possessions, I chose to use the word belongings because it does not have the same neo-liberal feel.

Demick, and Redondo (1990). It was among their writings that I began to find an understanding of the importance of personal belongings in sustaining older adults' stories to live by. Sometimes Pauline's, Alison's, and Sue's belongings became "anchor points" for telling past stories of experience and exploring new territories within their fabrics of place.

The stories Pauline shared about her personal belongings still creates a lump in my throat and sadness settles in a place inside me. Pauline said, "I'm not fussy about stuff; material things just don't do much for me." But I wonder about the stories she no longer tells because she has given away her treasures; a spoon collection she put together over a lifetime and her crystal glassware. I wonder what other belongings she gave away while downsizing; first from her family home, then the rental properties downtown, and finally from her condominium to her apartment in the seniors' complex. With each "giving away," I wonder what connections to her "memories and sense of self evoked through personal possessions and artifacts maintained within the home" (Rowles, 1987, p. 341) were also given away.

Many conversations with Pauline took place in her living room. She shared stories about her furniture and the choices she had to make to downsize her personal belongings to fit into approximately 500 square feet. In particular, she dwelt on the story of the couch upon which I sat, telling and retelling, until she finally told me about not wanting to bring the couch; rather, she had wanted the sofa bed from her condominium. She described her current couch as being too

big for the room and she often imagined taking it out and buying a new one perfect for the space. But this conversation always ended abruptly with Pauline saying: “after the difficulty they had to bring the couch up here, at first it didn’t look like it would fit in the elevator, and then they had to take my front door off to get it into the apartment, I couldn’t now ask someone to take it back out again.” Similarly, there is a chair with a footstool that sits in the corner of the living room which Pauline would rather replace with a smaller, more comfortable chair. Once again, Pauline was reluctant to ask someone to remove the chair because she imagined it being too difficult and burdensome.

Adorning Pauline’s walls are pictures of her children, their partners, and her grandchildren. There is also a Crucifix with a rosary draped over it, positioned above the chair Pauline always sat in during our conversations. The rosary had been given to her by one of her children and their presence spoke of the importance of Pauline’s religion in her life. The Crucifix and rosary connected her to memories of attending Mass on Sundays at St. Mary’s Church with her children. While listening with these stories, I more fully understood the significance of Pauline’s faith in her life and the importance of her being able to attend church and prayers at a time convenient to her; not just when others were able to take her.

The rosary also encouraged Pauline to share stories of a time when she and her husband bought the condominium and she didn’t feel like she belonged to

a church community. From these stories, I realized the importance of Pauline moving into the seniors' complex because it had a church attached and an established community in which she could attend Mass and prayers whenever she was so inclined. I now understand the Crucifix and rosary reinforce Pauline's self-image of continuing to fulfill her religious commitments and establish her social identity within a chosen community nestled within the seniors' complex.

In Pauline's kitchen hung a small plaque of folk art about grandmothers. I have fond memories of a similar plaque sitting on Grandma's kitchen windowsill, which reminds me of the smell of baking, noisy grandchildren, laughter, and sharing. I remember looking out Grandma's kitchen window and watching the sunrise over the back paddock; the kangaroos grazing on grass wet with the morning dew, and pelicans gliding to land on the lake's surface. I wonder what memories the plaque brings forth for Pauline and how its presence reinforces her identity as a grandmother.

Alison's new home represents the blending of her past and present personal belongings. Several pieces of furniture are new such as the sofa and loveseat, the breakfast table, and the shelves for her family album; but also many are old. In particular, I was drawn to the story about Alison's bedroom suite which she purchased with her first teaching money. Even though she described the furniture as being more solid than the other suite she chose to leave behind at the farm, I wonder if her choice was motivated by the suite's representation of connections to a formative or essential time in her life (Rubinstein & Parmelee,

1992). At the time she bought it she was beginning to explore a life alongside a husband and fulfilling her dream of being a farmer's wife and raising a dozen children.

Nestled between the new sofa and loveseat is Alison's old chair which was given to her many years prior by her children when her husband became ill and they had to move into Saskatoon for his treatment. The chair's upholstery is well worn and within its fabric I feel many memories of a time when Alison cared for her husband. Possibly, as Rowles (1987) suggests, the chair reminds Alison of her husband and a time when she fulfilled her role as a wife and caregiver. I wonder if it is these memories that keep the chair positioned at the window where Alison sits daily to watch the world go by, read, and connect with her family on her iPad. Maybe the act of sitting in the chair brings memories of her husband into the present and she reconnects with him; to share her present and future stories lived alongside their children and grandchildren, as well as the great grandchildren he never had the opportunity to meet.

Alison shared many stories about giving away her personal belongings to her children and grandchildren when she made the final move off the farm. Some belongings remained in the old house at the farm, and Alison shared stories of sleeping in her old room and being surrounded by familiar things during her visits. Maybe the presence of her personal belongings helped to sustain Alison's stories to live by. Also, through the giving away of belongings—in particular the dining room table and piano to her children and grandchildren—I wonder if the

stories ingrained in their surfaces will unfold over time, bringing forth memories of a mother and grandmother for many years to come.

Sue said, “deciding what to keep was a very difficult decision and it took her about 15 years to clean out the house.” Some personal belongings still remain out at the lake because the new owners haven’t sold their previous home which is staged for sale with their furniture. Other pieces of furniture had to remain at the farm because they were built into the very structure of the house. Still, Sue described not bringing other belongings because she wanted new ones. However, she said it was difficult to make change and many belongings, including her Tupperware, were never replaced.

While sitting in the living room of Sue’s condominium by the river, she shared stories about the fragile antiques in the small china cabinet in the corner of the room. She said they served as reminders of who she is and where she came from. The newer pieces, particularly the elephant on the top shelf, connected her to where she was going. Sue proposed that some people may begin to question, “If I remove all these things from me, who am I?”

Sue’s question pushed me into a place within myself, as I explored my relationship with Grandma and her belongings after her passing. When I returned to pack up Grandma’s things, I remember wandering into each room and taking photographs of what I wanted to be etched into my memories forever. These included the dinner set and placemats Grandma always used; two pictures on the dining room wall which I later learned had come from the farm in 1973 when she

moved into town; her chair on the verandah, and her book and glasses sitting on the table next to it; the rug with its worn edges under the dining room table; and the view from her bedroom, dining room, and kitchen windows. As I recalled taking these photographs, I also remembered the urgency behind taking them because I feared I would lose my memories when her belongings were packed up and given away. Today, I finger the pearls around my neck and remember Grandma encouraging me to wear them rather than keep them in a drawer; I pick up the little frog ornament and travel back to a time Grandma and I shared in Western Australia; and I wear Grandma's shirt and feel her embrace me. Without these personal belongings and photographs, I wonder what stories I might forget to tell my daughter about my life lived alongside Grandma.

Sue's stories about personal belongings introduced me to a new consideration about the importance of some things remaining present in older adults' lives, even if others considered them to be in the way or superfluous. For Sue these items were her fabrics, wool, paints, and other craft materials which she couldn't part with even though she said, "You kind of know you're not going to do that anymore." Sue described them as a symbol of hope attached to feeling safe; "That's right, they go together," Sue said. Sue's hope was that one day she would be able to take her craft supplies out of storage and convert her second bedroom into her sewing and activities room. Her hopes had become possible because she had bilateral cornea transplants and could compose future stories to live by (Bateson, 2010).

Personal belongings and place.

The stories shared by Pauline, Alison, and Sue drew me back to May Sarton's (1996) bedroom and I wondered what it would be like to part with personal belongings collected over a lifetime. Once again I turned to the relationship between personal belongings and stories to live by: to leave something behind might mean leaving behind part of one's story. Without having entered their homes, I may never have been privy to their stories of personal belongings and how those belongings, whether present or absent, shaped and continued to shape the people they were becoming. Also, without their stories I may have never returned to my painful memories of packing up Grandma's things and finding meaning and understanding of the person I became following her passing.

Somewhere in the living rooms of Pauline, Alison, Sue, and Grandma among the retelling of stories in relation to personal belongings were stories about not needing many things as they continued to grow older. Sue described realizing she didn't need to be surrounded by belongings to find home because she felt fulfilled by the company of friends and her learnings at the ashram. Grandma began to put away cherished items because they collected dust. Maybe this comes from the possibility that as we continue to grow older, the degree of liking our favourite things declines (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). This possibility invites me to wonder if there is a right time to begin to give away our personal

belongings. Maybe it is before their stories become forgotten and before we need to move; perhaps, it is afterwards.

With this in mind, I return to the fabric of place and the relationships among the warp threads of remembering, imagination and playfulness, and stories to live by, and the weft thread of personal belongings. If the thread of personal belongings was changed or removed from the fabric of place, not only would the pattern of the fabric be changed, but also the fibers of stories to live by. Looking more deeply, I can see the tension in the warp thread of remembering might also be changed because what we choose to remember (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is influenced by the presence or absence of personal belongings and who we are in relation to these belongings.

Stories about moving.

“old homes are never completely abandoned” (Rowles, 1987, p. 342)

Looking across the narrative accounts of Pauline, Alison, and Sue the stories about moving went back and forth between the warp threads, particularly stories to live by. At the time of my inquiry it was also a story I was living: moving away from life as a wife in a family home we had renovated into life as a single mother and owner of a semi-detached home on the edge of my old community. The moves Pauline, Alison, and Sue made were very different to mine and to each other. Pauline moved from a condominium she once shared with her husband into a seniors' complex; Alison moved from the farm where she had lived for over 50 years into a single dwelling in a small rural town; and Sue

moved from the farm on the lake into a condominium building in the city. The variations in their stories about deciding to move and the places they moved to, highlight the individuality of the fabric of place. Each person's move, including mine, gave us an opportunity to weave new patterns into our understandings of the person we were becoming in our places.

Grandma and I never truly explored stories about moving. In our fabric of place this thread was absent; instead we had tightly woven the thread of "aging in place" to create a very different pattern to represent our understanding of place. As Grandma grew older other people, including the community nurse and some family members, introduced the possibility of her moving into the hostel just down the road. Composing this story by choice was never a story I lived alongside Grandma; neither did I live it alongside her close friends. Jean, Madge, and Ron were still living independently in their homes at the time of Grandma's passing; they were all over 90 years old. When Pauline, Alison, and Sue shared their stories about moving our conversations often created discord and enlightenment at the same time; and their sharing gave us an opportunity to enrich our relationship and understanding of place and to co-compose new stories about moving (Caine & Steeves, 2009; Clandinin et al., 2006).

My conversations with Pauline, Alison, Sue, and my response community opened opportunities to explore what was interesting or possible in the field (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As I reflected on the words I had written previously in Chapter 3, I remembered something Bateson (1989) wrote, "goals

too clearly defined can become blinkers” (p. 6). I now realize that if the research questions had been defined prior to entering the field, the research would have been driven by the question “What motivates you to age in place?” As the inquiry unfolded, I realized I needed to more deeply understand Pauline’s, Alison’s, and Sue’s stories about moving to unravel the threads I had woven into my belief about aging in place being the only option for older adults. It was during the writing of this thread that I awoke to Grandma’s stories of not moving being ingrained into the person I was, and my ability to attend with other possibilities was unimaginable. Even though I could listen to stories of older adults moving to maintain an independent lifestyle (Rowles, 1987), I realized I was not living by these stories.

Pauline’s stories created the most tension with the stories Grandma and I had co-composed about moving. Pauline had chosen to move into a seniors’ complex. Grandma’s belief was that a place like that would cause her to lose her independence, privacy, and space for dreaming. I remember wondering if Pauline would be suitable for my inquiry because not only had she moved, she had moved into a seniors’ complex. The idea that Pauline had chosen to move into assisted living had not occurred to me. I assumed that she had become dependent and frail, and I had storied her as a vulnerable older adult in need of assistance and support. I saw Pauline with arrogant perception and not with loving eyes (Lugones, 1987).

Unlike the stories I had imagined Pauline composing about her move into the seniors' complex she shared very different ones. She never felt bad about moving from the family home into the rentals downtown because her and her husband no longer wanted to care for the yard or have the responsibility of home ownership. Similarly, she said her move into the seniors' complex was also planned, "you see when I moved it wasn't because of my age, it was just I didn't want to own anything," and because she felt she could no longer care for her home without assistance from her family and she no longer wanted to do everything for herself. These stories continue to trouble me because I have difficulty imagining her family members being close by yet unwilling or unable to help her to continue living in her own home. I know I bump up against these stories because Grandma remained in her home with assistance from Home Care, a housekeeper, a gardener, friends, and volunteers. Maybe I didn't want to attend with Pauline's stories of not wanting to remain in her own home and do everything for herself. Once again, I found myself storying Pauline as dependent and living out the story of decline.

Pauline's decisions about when to move called me to attend more closely, particularly when she shared the stories of her friends' dilemmas. One friend wasn't moving because she thought her family would stop visiting her, and another friend was having difficulty with a financial decision in relation to selling her home. Pauline stated, "you should move when you still are able to enjoy a place . . . I can't tell you you have to move but to me I feel

that, why would you wait until you're really old and ill to move into some place that you're not going to stay very long because you may have to move again." Hearing these words, I realized my role as a nurse and my role as a granddaughter clouded the story I attended to in relation to Grandma and moving. Maybe I needed Grandma to remain in her home just as much as she did. By remaining in her place I could keep my image of Grandma as "timeless": she would never grow old. It is with great sadness I have come to realize the possibility that I denied Grandma an opportunity to grow older differently. I wonder if we could have ever come to an understanding that moving into a seniors' complex was not about an ending, but rather a beginning for new relationships and new possibilities.

Pauline's stories about moving into a seniors' complex also resonated with Grandma's. It was easy for me to embrace stories about no privacy, no view, and no place for dreaming, and to continue to live alongside Grandma's stories of staying in her home until she died. Even though Pauline didn't want to attend to the maintenance involved in owning her own home, she wanted a home that was renovated and comfortable. Unfortunately, Pauline's apartment and the communal places within the seniors' complex required upgrading, in particular the carpets, the heating and cooling system, and the décor, furniture, and lighting. It saddened me to remember Pauline saying the upgrades "may not happen in our lifetime." But as I considered the narrative thread of stories to live by, I wondered how she was going to achieve a sense of what Peace et al. (2005) refer

to as “centrality of mastery over [her] micro environment” (p. 204). Without this, I wondered how her forward-looking stories would be composed if her comfort and well-being were not attended to.

Reading Pauline and Sue’s narrative accounts, I often made comparisons between Pauline’s seniors’ complex and Sue’s home situated within an intergenerational building. The foyer at Sue’s place was modern and inviting and she said, sometimes “I sit on the bench downstairs in the foyer and when people come in and out they may sit and chat with me.” These stories invited me to travel back to the times I shared sitting on Grandma’s verandah and watching the golfers across the way, the cars going past, and the setting sun. More recently, they reminded me of my visit to Alison’s new home and her verandah which had become her place “for ‘watching’ events outside and, in turn, ‘being watched’ by neighbors and others who passed by on a regular basis” (Rowles, 1987, p. 341). According to Rowles (1987), their verandah and foyer may “assume special meaning as a focus for vicarious participation in the world beyond the threshold” (p. 341) as Alison and Sue spend more time at home. So with no balcony, no view from her window, and no inviting communal places, I wondered where Pauline went to dream and vicariously participate in the world beyond the seniors’ complex. Maybe it was the church, and at some other time I may explore this with Pauline.

In our conversations about moving, the amount of space within a place was also storied. Both Pauline and Alison described the space within the

apartments of senior complexes as being too small, particularly in reference to family gatherings and living with a partner. Sitting in Pauline's living room I, too, found it hard to imagine her family gathered in her place for birthdays and Christmas dinners. I also remembered walking past many open places within the complex which could offer alternate locations for celebrations if only they also offered privacy and décor which invited guests to sit and visit with each other.

It wasn't only about having people visit that Pauline struggled with; it was also her imagining about couples living in such a tight space: one bedroom, one bathroom, in 500-and-something square feet. There were no two-bedroom apartments available in Pauline's building. During that conversation, Pauline shared the intricacies of married life of couples that grow older together. As Pauline described her and her husband sleeping in separate rooms later in their married life because he snored and she couldn't sleep, I wondered why the assumption exists that older adults only require one bedroom and a small place. But again, Pauline interrupted my thoughts when she claimed the smallness of her new place "suits me fine too because the less space the less work. I'm not a workaholic by any means."

Even after the deepening of our relationship during and following the inquiry, I still wondered if Pauline really chose to move or if her strong desire not to be a burden to her family was coupled with their choice for her to move. As she grew older these feelings may have composed her stories about moving. I asked Pauline if she had thought about moving again and she replied, "No. Well

if I said that my kids would all run away.” Maybe I needed to gently inquire into Pauline’s memories of her mother being dependent that she continued to weave into her present stories to live by: growing older independently and not to be a burden on her family. Possibly, attending with these stories I might begin to more fully understand Pauline’s stories about moving and the person she is becoming.

So I continue to wonder when is the right time to inquire into stories about moving? Maybe if we begin to think about growing older as not something which happens after the age of 65 years but rather as “an expression of something happening over time” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 29), we may remember we all have a past, a present, and a possible future and our forward-looking stories (Freeman, 2011) about moving occur within institutional, social, and personal contexts, further influenced by our experiences (Litwak & Longino, 1987).

Pauline, Alison, and Sue shared their forward-looking stories about moving during our conversations. Sue’s stories began to unfold as she wrote her book describing her spiritual journey. Through her writings she had met different people and seen new opportunities for learning about the people who lived in her condominium complex. Through these relationships, she saw possibilities for weaving herself into the fabric of place: the condominium and surrounding community. However, Sue already talked about moving again. She said her new place was not her final home, because I “feel I still have one more move to make.”

Making another move at some later time resonated with Pauline's and Alison's stories about place. Pauline imagined moving into a different apartment with a balcony, and the possibility of having to move into the nursing home section as she grew older. For Alison, her forward-looking stories included the possibility of selling her "home for a senior" and moving into assisted living if she required support beyond Home Care, Meals-on-Wheels, and family. Listening to these stories, I wandered back into Grandma's stories about wanting to live in her home until she died. I now wonder, what were Grandma's forward-looking stories in relation to aging in place?

Stories of safety.

There were many topics covered in relation to the thread of stories about moving during my conversations with Pauline, Alison, and Sue. In particular, the stories of safety were identified which resonated deeply with me as I remembered the many safety stories told in Grandma's front room by the Community Nurse and some family members. They were about the lack of handrails and grab rails in strategic places throughout her home; the risk she might fall when negotiating the front and back steps; the trip hazards of her area rugs; and her persistence in using the bathtub rather than the shower for her daily wash. Often these stories caused tensions between my roles as a nurse and of a granddaughter.

Conversations with Pauline, Alison, and Sue reminded me of these tensions and also of my tendency to perceive them arrogantly from my "found" community of "being" as a nurse. I can still hear Alison say, "My family didn't

like it because I had a lot of stairs, they were scared I'd fall

They were always scared I would fall in the basement and nobody would know. But that can happen anywhere. I could fall down between the house and the garage and nobody would see me, so what's the difference? You don't get to choose where you fall!"

When Alison spoke these words, I caught my breath because I realized how ingrained my professional stories were in the person I am, even when I am not in my role as a nurse.

A sense of “not yet.”

“there will never be a final story, that each story and experience begs for a new story to be told, for the experience to be retold and also relived.”

(Clandinin & Caine, 2013, pp. 175–176)

The metaphor of fabric presents the opportunity to conceive place narratively. Within the three-dimension narrative inquiry space, the fibers of temporality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) are drafted to become the thread of a sense of “not yet.” When thinking within this space, sometimes tensions may arise between our feelings of being either “on time” or “off time” when we compare ourselves to lifespan development theories, in turn inhibiting us from going back and forth between the warp threads to playfully imagine possibilities and compose further stories to live by (Bateson, 2010). By seeing place as a fabric, I am committed to understanding lives are lived in motion, and growing

older unfolds on a continuum, because lives are always interwoven with new understandings sought amid unfolding experiences (Coleman et al., 1999).

The words “on time” and “off time” called me to remember Greene’s (as cited in Teachers College, Columbia University. Press Room from the Office of External Affairs, 2001) presentation on flunking retirement. She wanted others to pursue wonders, rather than answers, in the hope others would experience the “not yet feeling, of ‘being on the way’ and that the question is still not answered” (para. 15). As I attended with participants’ stories, I began to more deeply understand what Greene was referring to: the possibility things are yet to come as we continue to grow older.

The sense of “not yet” reverberated among and between Sue’s stories of finding her home in India and moving into her new place by the river. In her new place, Sue said she needed more time “before making this place my own. Once I make it my own, then I will feel the belonging part.” Reflecting on Sue’s words, I now understand that place is in motion. Sue helped me to find deeper meaning of this understanding as she continued to share stories about bringing pieces of India—the elephants, the giraffe, and the pictures—into her new place. With these artifacts Sue suggested she could keep her memories and the people of India alive and continuously moving through her, particularly through her thoughts, her learnings, and her sharing.

The Warp and Weft Threads: Weaving the Fabric of Place

During our conversations I sensed there were absent, unsaid, unacknowledged, and unknown stories (Neumann, 1997) living among the warp and weft threads, and sometimes they caused tension within Pauline's, Alison's, and Sue's stories of growing older in relation to place. Sometimes the tension interrupted the telling of our stories as we were also distracted by the stories that reverberated in the communities where we lived. Possibly these stories were co-composed in "found" communities (Nelson, 1995), where the story of growing older in a western culture is dominated by a progression through retirement, towards a "painful diminishment, a rocking-chair existence in a nursing home, and the eventual dark and inevitable end to life" (Schachter-Shalomi & Miller, 1995, p. 2).

Sometimes we were able to shift the stories we were co-composing by deepening our relationship and paying closer attention to the threads within the fabric of our places. The numbers of threads indicate the density of the fabric, and as described by Hockyman (2008) to increase the number of warp threads takes a lot of work, as they require setting up before weaving can commence. Unlike these threads, increasing the number of weft threads only requires more creels to be added to the beam. When I returned to the narrative threads, the warp threads of remembering, imagination and playfulness, and stories to live by also required a lot of work to travel deep into their fibers because they are often ingrained into the person we are. However adding stories about personal

belongings, moving, safety, and a sense of “not yet” takes little work because our experiences lead to the possibility of new stories to tell.

When I think about the narrative threads within place, including stories living among the threads, I wonder if part of seeking meaning and understanding involves telling counterstories because they “allow for the re-imagining of other tellings” (Whelan, Huber, Rose, Davies, & Clandinin, 2001, p. 153). These stories also possibly open a space for exploring the tensions between society’s perceptions of aging and older adults’ stories of the experience of growing older by achieving a “temporary stopping-point that permits the community to act” (Nelson, 1995, p. 37). Re-reading the narrative accounts, I now wonder if Pauline’s, Alison’s, and Sue’s stories of growing older in relation to place are counterstories. Maybe stories of choosing a community within a “found” community, building a house, and finding a place to call home in another country are becoming new stories of growing older. I also wonder if society’s embracement of “successful aging” or “healthy aging” influences the composing of these new stories which then begin to tell the dominant story of decline differently.

It is here I return to the skillful weaving of the fabric of place and the importance of attending to all threads, whether their stories are given voice or remain silent and buried among the warp and weft threads. Without attending to all threads, there is a possibility I may “ignore, neglect, or disregard something, or dismiss it lightly, thoughtlessly, or carelessly” (Dillon, 1992, p. 108), therefore,

not fully attending and respecting participants' stories. Without attending I cannot fully appreciate the intricacies of the patterns Pauline's, Alison's, and Sue's threads weave to create a fabric which uniquely speaks to their understanding of place. Who we are, therefore, is never static if we choose to listen with our stories and imagine new possibilities and take courage in choosing the threads we weave into our fabrics of place.

Chapter 8

Continuing to Weave the Fabric of Place

I'm now taking one last turn in my dissertation to consider the significance of my work. Here I will address the questions of “ ‘So what?’ and ‘Who cares?’ ” (Clandinin, 2013a, p. 35). During the art of weaving, the warp threads are set-up on the loom and the weft threads travel backwards and forward to create the fabric. “The best looms have mortise and tenon joints, which are exceptionally strong and help create a solid structure” (Kronyk, 2013, Section 1, para. 5), and for this inquiry I see the loom representing the personal, practical, and social significances of my work. While living alongside Pauline, Alison, and Sue I was gifted the opportunity to explore these significances. In so doing, I return to my narrative beginnings and reflect on the person I am in the inquiry.

Returning to My Narrative Beginnings

I am 8 years old and I am sharing a birthday party with my cousin who is 4 days younger than I. We are at our Grandma's house in town with all our friends gathered around her kitchen table to blow out the candles on our birthday cakes. It is not strange to be here with friends. They have known Grandma since I was in kindergarten, and some even before that. She has been there to pick me up from school, take me to activities, chauffeur me between friends' houses, and feed me cookies, cakes, slices,

and yes, meals, of course. It is the baking and the delicious smells wafting from her kitchen I remember most. The smell of pumpkin scones still brings memories of Grandma cutting out the dough and the taste of hot scones piled high with butter. Yes, lots of butter, isn't that how grandmas always put it on? Good and thick!

Many years later, in 1990, when I moved into a place of my own, Grandma frequently came to stay with me for prolonged visits, sometimes weeks at a time. I told her my dreams and where my life was going. Together we went shopping and shared cake and ice cream. She was my best friend.

In 1991, I graduated from university with a Bachelor of Health Science Nursing. It was a moment of glory for me when I told Grandma I had my first nursing job in a private nursing home. I was going to provide the best possible care to other people's grandmas and grandpas and ensure they all felt loved and needed. To me, the residents were old; however, I didn't see my Grandma as being old. She lived independently in her own home, driving, and travelling to visit far away places, family, and friends. She was 76 years old.

The year is now 2007. I phone Grandma regularly, but her hearing is going and sometimes we laugh at what she thought I had said. Her mind is sharp; she is still busy with her friends. She tells me about other friends who have recently died and of another who is doing so well for being old. One friend is 94 years old. "Now," Grandma says, "That is getting old!"

Towards the end of 2007 I am home again. I am here to live alongside Grandma, to share her journey, and to breathe her air. It is a journey begun not by choice, but because of the power of connection to family. Some family members are concerned Grandma will fall, the yard is too big, and that she is isolated and needs supervision. Grandma is concerned about losing her privacy, the freedom of her yard, and the view from her verandah. She is being told to move to a hostel just down the street, only a block or two from her home. Grandma and I talk of this place and she becomes unsettled and upset. She has been there often to visit with friends as a volunteer to the elderly and also as a guest after a hospital stay to regain her strength and a couple of pounds. "No

privacy,” she says, “no space for dreaming, no gardens to tend, and no view; I will not go to this place they want me to.”

As I re-read my narrative beginnings, I realize my previous understandings of growing older have significantly shifted through this inquiry. Many times I returned to the stories I lived alongside Grandma and many times I bumped up against what I believed as a granddaughter and what I practiced as a nurse. Through the stories Pauline, Alison, and Sue shared with me, I was invited to journey deep within our fabrics of place and attend more closely to their threads. As our relationships grew, I came to realize we were drafting different fibers to spin our threads, and our weaving of them gave each of our fabrics its unique artistic feel. I came to understand places are open to new possibilities because our experiences within these places encourage us to spin new stories; we begin to weave new threads into our fabric.

At the beginning of the inquiry, I wanted to produce a fabric that was perfect; however, I have begun to see things differently. The surface of my fabric now has loops and loose threads, but the pattern remains in the midst because I am changing out the threads used in the set-up of my loom. I do not feel tension with these imperfections for I see each hole, loop, and loose thread as an invitation for me to be playful, because understanding the complexity of growing older in relation to place calls forth the need for openness, imagination, and creativity. Their presence also provides openings for conversations to continue beyond the inquiry.

Stories Deep Beneath My Skin

A Letter to Grandma

G'day Grandma²⁷,

Guess what? I know there are so many things that it could be, so I'll give you a hint. It has to do with school. Yes that's it; I've just about finished my dissertation. I find it hard to believe myself and what a journey it has been. I sure wish you could have met Pauline, Alison, and Sue and read their stories about growing older and place. I miss you.

As I entered Pauline's apartment for the first time, so did my memories of you. I felt your presence sitting beside me on the couch and I kept wondering what you were seeing and hearing as Pauline shared her stories of living in a seniors' complex. Did you see the healthcare peach paint, or the apartment doors with the name plaques off to the side? Maybe you heard a different story about living in a complex for seniors. Pauline continues to enjoy attending church on Sundays and taking the bus to the shopping

²⁷ The *Letters to Grandma* in this Chapter are a type of letter that I would write to Grandma.

mall. I can see you smiling and I bet you're remembering your many rides on the bus into the city when you used to stay with me. I remember coming home from work and listening to you recount your day on buses and riding on the ferry as it visited the many piers on Sydney Harbour. As I think about these stories now, I can smell the sea at the end of the breeze.

I know this will probably come as a shock to you, but Pauline has maintained her independence and privacy since moving into her apartment. I continue to struggle with the story of growing older in a seniors' complex, and yes, I know it would have been that "hostel just down the road" for you. However, attending to Pauline's stories and also yours, which were sometimes buried between the lines in your letters, I have begun to understand living in a place for older adults would not necessarily have brought an end to your independence and privacy. I hear you Grandma, this would have been a huge stretch for your imagination, but you always had a good imagination. So, what's stopping you from imagining possibilities? Maybe it could have marked the beginning

of composing new stories of growing older in the company of others.

It wasn't until I started writing this letter that I remembered your trip to India in 1979. I found your travel diary in the box of letters I was given after you died. Do you remember the little red book with *My Trip* stamped in gold letters on the front? Your writings of "*bad roads . . . no traffic rules, cows, goats and people walking and on bikes right across the road, you play chicken all the way*" (see *Plate 21*) resonated with the stories Sue shared with me about her trips to India. I think you would have enjoyed meeting Sue and sharing your stories too. I'm sure Sue's photographs would have brought back many memories, particularly of people living in shacks with the goats, cows, dogs, and monkeys wandering the streets. She even has a picture of herself and a friend on an elephant, just like the one of you and Aunty Phil. I find it very interesting that you and Sue chose to travel to India during a time when it was probably not the safest place to visit. I never did think to ask you before, but why did you go there?

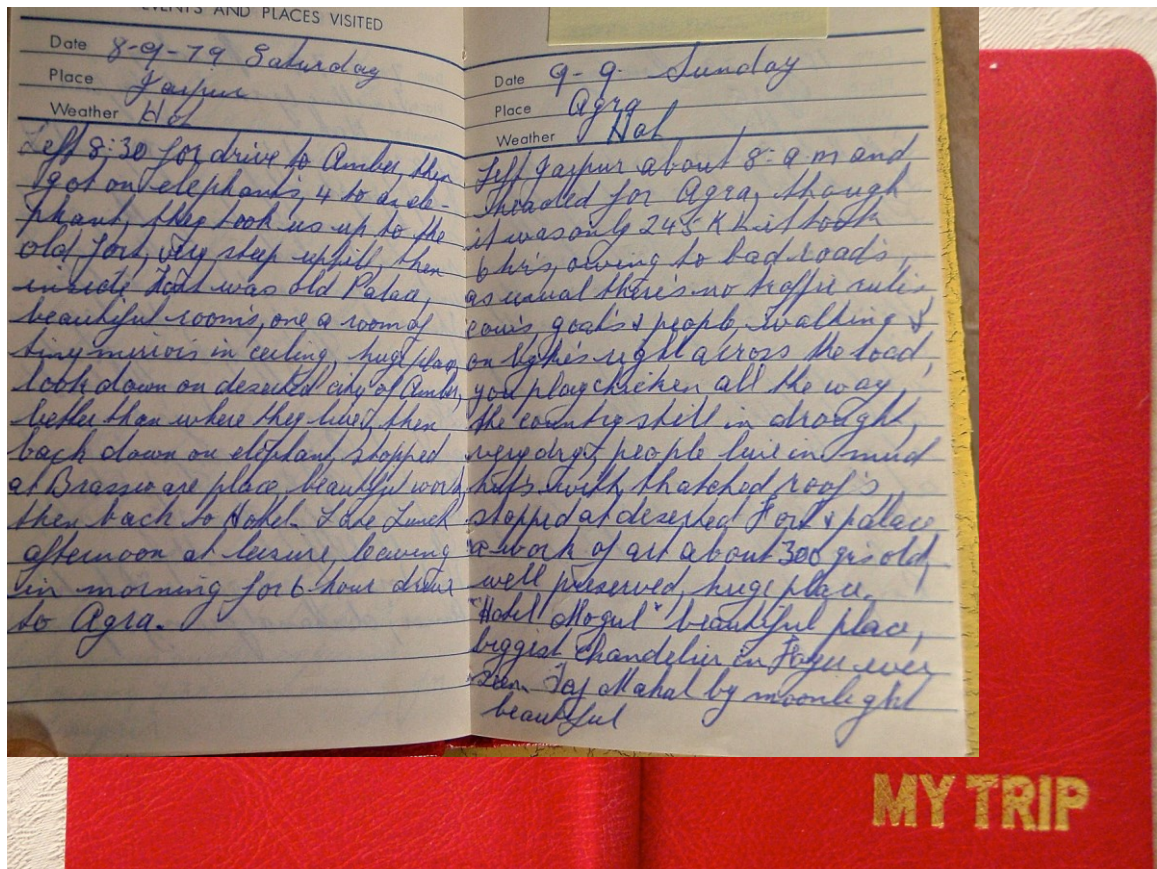


Plate 21: Grandma's trip diary

Like you, Alison has chosen to grow older in her own home.

Well, it isn't the one she has lived in for the past 60 years. You'd be amazed to hear she recently finished building her new home on her old block of land. Yes, a builder came and took away her old home and then built her a new one. I know you would have loved to watch them haul her old house away. You were always fascinated with how they did that. When I saw her walk-in-shower with a seat in each corner, I giggled to myself. I still remember the phone call I

made to you after the Home Care nurse came to demonstrate a bath seat which raised and lowered you into your bathtub. I know you humored us all by agreeing to try that thing out. I'm sure you weren't disappointed when it didn't fit. I bet you would have agreed to a shower like Alison's. I can see you sitting on one of the seats soaking under the spray of the shower.

Alison's home is opposite a Scout Hall and she spends time watching children come and go, just like you spent all those years watching the golfers across the way. I think you would have enjoyed sitting on her front verandah and watching the people go by.

Pauline and Sue's experiences with emails returned me to your stories of going to the library to print out my emails and asking Mrs. Harts to help you reply to me. I know you got so frustrated with the whole thing; emails disappearing into thin air, fingers that wouldn't respond to your commands; and a librarian who lost patience with you. It sure must have been a relief when mom started to mail my emails to you. I just thought emailing would keep us connected so much faster than snail mail! Like you,

Pauline, Alison, and Sue all talked about the importance of family coming to visit and the joys of a phone call from a grandchild, son, or daughter. I sure miss our phone conversations Grandma.

Writing letters and emails just doesn't give me quite the same pleasure as hearing your voice: your excitement, your disappointment, your dreams, and your love for me.

Even though you never did become a participant in my inquiry, the stories we lived alongside each other were never far away. Often Pauline's, Alison's, or Sue's stories gave me opportunities to retell and relive our stories, and I have begun to tell some stories differently. Many times throughout my inquiry, I paused to ask myself if I really listened and attended with your stories about growing older. At times, maybe being a granddaughter as well as a nurse meant I couldn't hear what you were trying to tell me. It is this doubt that now encourages me to pause, listen, and attend with stories older adults are telling me, not only through their words, but also through their ways of being. Maybe their stories will nurture my understanding of growing older and the place you called home.

So I guess it is time for me to say goodbye. It has been wonderful sharing these tidbits from my inquiry with you. I know Pauline, Alison, and Sue would have enjoyed meeting you and swapping stories about growing older and what each of your places meant to you. No doubt you would have also shared your stories of me and I can't help but wonder what you would have told. Until next time, I love you always and send you many warm hugs.

Love,

Roslyn



Plate 22: Riding elephants in India

As I re-read what I wrote to Grandma, I paid closer attention to the personal significance of the inquiry. Prior to the inquiry, I believed I was open and receptive to considering alternate places in which older adults could continue to grow older. I soon came to realize Grandma's stories of "aging in place" lived deep within me, and peeling them away caused great pain and left me feeling raw and exposed. I was not prepared for the journey brought about by my inquiry because I did not believe I was "living under the shadow of the narratives which [were] culturally available" (Andrews, 2009, p. 78). For me, these narratives were always stories of aging in place and somehow I had begun to compose them

alongside stories of successful aging. These combined to become my personal stories of what growing older in relation to place should look like.

Narrative inquiry has awoken me to new possibilities. In particular, Pauline's choice of place in which to grow older pushed me beyond the margins of the stories I had been living alongside Grandma and I entered an unfamiliar landscape. The complex which Pauline moved into provided meals, activities, and supported communal living, and as I entered the foyer I remember hearing Grandma tell me moving into a hostel would be the beginning of her losing her independence. As I now reflect on Grandma's stories and those I heard from Pauline in her living room, I wonder: How did Grandma define *independence* and *assisted living*? Because Grandma received services within her home such as Meals-on-Wheels and housekeeping, I now question my understanding of her as being independent. I wonder how our personal understanding of these words encourage the choices we make in relation to where we will continue to grow older.

It was with Sue I learned to care for myself and to attend gently with the stories written deep within me. Sometimes Sue would share stories which resonated with mine, and I found myself taking them home with me. In particular these included Sue's seeking an answer to the question "Why am I here?" and her darker stories of living with depression. Her stories often created tension between my memories and the stories I chose to tell. At times during the inquiry these tensions immobilized me and I had great difficulty in seeking meaning and

understanding. By turning to my response community²⁸, in particular Vera, Verna, Madeline, Helma, and Laurel, I was offered places in which to share the complexities embedded in the experiences of my unfolding inquiry. While sharing these stories I learned about “responsive ways to be in relationships, and learn[ed] to listen again and again” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 211) with the stories I was hearing, including the ones that lived within me. I began to think about these stories in relation to who I was, who I am, and who I am becoming as a narrative inquirer. They also made me think about how deeply connected the stories of who I am connect to place.

My relationship with Sue deepened my understanding of lives lived in the midst as we travelled to a place within ourselves. I learned about the importance of providing more time to think about the stories we wish to tell, and more time in our relationship to open up space for telling them. Sue suggested you can share what you have learned and also begin to live by stories. I learned about embracing change within myself and to accept it as ongoing, not only in myself but also in people who surround me. We are always growing as we find new ways of learning: alongside, together, or separate from each other. Who we are, therefore, is never static if we choose to listen with our stories and imagine new possibilities.

²⁸ The members of my response community responded to my needs individually. We did not meet as a group due to the geographical distances between us and our conversations often took place through emails, telephone calls, and over lunchtime. Each person fulfilled a specific need at a specific time and sometimes all members were not privy to the whole story.

Reading Old Stories Differently

A Letter to Grandma

Hello Grandma,

I thought you might enjoy these pictures from our recent trip to Mazatlan, Mexico. You would have loved the ocean. The sand wasn't as white as the sand on the beaches in Forster; it's more like the sand in Hervey Bay—coarse and brown. There were very few shells on the beach; however, Cybell did find a couple of treasures to bring home. She has a small shell collection just like yours and I think there are even a couple of your shells among them.

It snowed here last weekend; can you believe it? About an inch or so. Thankfully it melted within 24 hours. About 4 hours east of us it snowed 9"! And they say it is spring. My tulips and daffodils are forging ahead despite the weather, so they obviously know warmer weather is just around the corner. I sure have my doubts though!

I was just thinking the other day; I have been a nurse for nearly 25 years. It still comes as a shock to me and I can't help but

wonder where did all the years go. Do you remember me phoning you and telling you about my first job in the nursing home? I remember wanting to provide the best possible care to other people's grandmas and grandpas and ensure they all felt loved and needed. But I also remember my struggles to see past the healthcare peach paint; the smell of failing bodies; and the faraway look in the residents' eyes. I still wonder what they were seeing as they looked beyond me while I was bathing them. It saddens me to say there were times I didn't see them as grandmas and grandpas; rather, they became helpless bodies devoid of self. Maybe this is what you also saw, Grandma, when you visited your friends in the nursing home. I sure wish I had taken the time to talk about these things with you.

Somehow I think I needed my experience in the nursing home to help me begin to understand how to provide care with patients, rather than to or for them. As I have become more comfortable in my role as a nurse, I have learned to move beyond the tasks of nursing and engage in conversations with patients. I share many of our stories Grandma, including the time we went to the Great

Barrier Reef, your driver's test, and the variety of roses you grew in your garden. During these conversations I learn many things about patients and I begin to see them not as diagnoses or diseases, but as people who have experiences to share with others. This is often when I miss you the most and I wonder if others are taking the time to listen and attend with stories of older adults in their lives.

You know Grandma, being a nurse isn't easy. You always said I did things the hard way and maybe this is also true about the way I want to nurse. I can still hear you saying I move too often and too far away, but it has been through my travels I have learned the most about the way I want to nurse. Each time I have interacted with different landscapes, places, cultures, people, and health care systems, I have learned more about the person I want to become as a nurse. These experiences encourage me to sit and listen with the stories people tell. It probably comes as no surprise to you that during handover at the end of my shift, I share more about peoples' lives than their diseases. Sometimes my colleagues ask, "How do you know all this?" and I say, "It's because I take the time to listen."

It is here I remember the poem I wrote about you at the beginning of my PhD. journey. I'm sure you remember it too. So often I want to share this poem with my peers, particularly the last stanza,

Why don't you sit and visit with me?

Chat and share your stories

Love and dreams that you have

Give mine back to me

For my freedom I have lost

I am here you see

If I did share my poem with others I wonder if I could encourage a shift in nursing practice, whereby caring with the person becomes more significant than caring for their disease. I can then imagine a 95-year-old woman with a weak heart, brought in by ambulance after a fall at home being no longer isolated within the healthcare setting; rather, she becomes a partner in her care with stories of experience to share and enrich the caring experience, not only for herself but for the nurses caring with her. This is the nurse I am

becoming Grandma, and I think I am strong enough to lead others on this journey of attending with people and who they were, are, and are becoming as we continue to grow older.

Well, it has begun to rain outside and I think I should go and over-seed the grass. Every year I'm amazed how the grass survives under the snow all winter, and as soon as it melts, with only a hint of sunshine and warmth in the soil, the grass manages to turn green. I'll phone you at the end of the month and I look forward to hearing all about the things you have been doing.

Much love and warm hugs always,

Roslyn

While working as a nurse throughout the inquiry, whether I was working at the bedside on an oncology unit, or at the cancer clinic, or teaching within a nursing program, I began to pay closer attention to how I practiced nursing. Many times I struggled within a system that constantly called me to attend to a disease or diagnosis rather than the person. I became frustrated as I witnessed older adults being left in their beds because it was too difficult or took too long to mobilize them into a chair by their bedside. Sometimes patients would say it had been several days since they had taken a walk and they were concerned how they would manage on their own following discharge. It was these stories I shared

with my peers, because as a nurse and narrative inquirer in relation with patients I am called to ethically care for, and with, their stories.

Possibilities for Nursing Practice: Narrative Care

By taking a narrative turn in my nursing practice, whether in the classroom or at the bedside, I have deepened my understanding of narrative gerontology. I now know it is possible to shift nursing care away from being goal-focused, which strives for a patient's independence, self-reliance, and responsibility for him- or her- self at the earliest possible moment (Carper, 1978), to interdependent care which recognizes narrative care as core care²⁹ (Kenyon et al., 2011). However, making a shift in my nursing care has not been an easy journey and I continue to experience tension with current care practices which focus on doing to or for patients.

The shift to interdependent care may also be difficult for patients. While listening with Pauline's, Alison's, and Sue's stories, I also heard their reluctance to ask for assistance, particularly from their families. For example, Pauline doesn't want to ask for help until she really needs it, and Sue described her son as always available, however, she doesn't want to ask for anything because he is very busy with his own life. I wonder how I can encourage conversations between patients and myself to deepen our understandings of interdependent care.

²⁹ Narrative care acknowledges and respects the stories of older adults as being "ultimately as important as the provision of food or shelter or medication" (Kenyon, Bohlmeijer, & Randall, 2011, p. xv).

Today narrative care has become integrated into my being as a nurse and I nurture nursing care that begins with experience, rather than a person's age, clinical disease, or diagnosis. This shift became possible when I no longer decided which patient's needs I responded to. Rather, it was in collaboration with patients that care decisions were made, personal identities sustained, and stories of experience attended to. The conversations I shared with Pauline, Alison, and Sue helped me to nurture my understanding of narrative care and embed it deeper into my practice. Even though they shared stories about their health challenges, these did not become the focus of our conversations. It was at these times I remained mindful of being a narrative inquirer first and a nurse second. By doing so I attended with their stories of experience rather than their health challenges and together we began to co-compose stories about growing older, differently.

Co-composing new stories with participants opens up the possibility that older adults may no longer be treated as an object of care. Rather, nurses and patients can inform and be informed by each other supporting an interrelated and relational approach to providing nursing care (Sarris, 1993). I wonder how do we, as nurses, nurture therapeutic relationships with patients which are inclusive of personal and relational stories. This may only become a reality if a relational space opens up between the nurse and the patient where they may come together, develop authentic relationships, cross boundaries, explore borderlands, and build chosen communities (Cameron, 1992; Nelson, 1995).

While living alongside Pauline, Alison, and Sue, I struggled with interrupting my need to do to or for them by becoming an advocate. These struggles became most poignant as Pauline shared her experiences of living within an assisted living complex. She told of the dietician deciding television would not be allowed during mealtimes, the seating arrangement in the dining room being directed by the kitchen staff, and the ongoing delays in the renovation of the communal spaces within the complex. While listening with these stories I wondered how I could advocate for change. Also, how could I encourage the facility's management to hear Pauline's voice and the voices of the other residents? Through Pauline's stories, I awoke to what is needed to become an advocate for patients; I need a strong voice and an ability to collaboratively negotiate new understandings and relationships. In addition, I need to attend to the place in which stories are told because different places shape the meanings and understandings of stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

It was in the relational space between Pauline, Alison, Sue, and myself I learned to explore

existential and moral questions that cannot be easily answered, that won't go away, that pose themselves time and again whenever life takes a turn, when we realize that we are growing older, when we take care of others, and when we have to rely on caregivers. They are the questions that deal with love and loss, with faith and fear, with time and truth. (Ubels, 2011, p. 320)

In particular, Pauline's stories of moving to unfamiliar neighbourhoods and living with a husband who she described as antisocial; Alison's experiences of people describing her as selfish, unreasonable, and inconsiderate because she had decided to build a new home in her 80th year rather than move into a seniors' complex; and Sue's experiences with depression and her stories of living within a community where she didn't fit in called me to sit quietly, listen to, and attend with their told and untold stories before I inquired into their experiences and how they influenced the person they once were, are, and are now becoming. It was during the times of silence that I had an opportunity to travel deeper into my experiences and gently question the stories I lived by (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

As I think about moving existential and moral questions into nursing practice, I return to Cameron's (2004) work. Here she describes the challenge of making time to "recognize and respond to the call of this moment while much vies for our attention elsewhere" (p. 54). If we are too rushed or respond too quickly, these moments are lost and so are the moments for deepening our understandings of experience. I am reminded of Alison's story of wanting an area rug for her living room. Many questions came to mind as I listened, "Would you tape the edges down? Would the rug have a rubber back? How far would it extend out from under the coffee table? Have you considered not having a rug at all?" However, if I had rushed in with my questions, Alison may never have

shared the reasons for the area rug and her need to create an atmosphere of coziness in her new living room.

On occasion, our conversations were not easy and I have learned to travel to a place within me to find the strength to listen to and attend with these stories. Sometimes I return to the poem I wrote about Grandma, particularly its first stanzas where I wrote,

Do you not know that I am a mother of three?

I have joy in my grandchildren

Wave to golfers across the way

I play cards with my friends

Attend church and volunteer

I am social you see

Do you not know that I live alone?

I sit on my front porch and read

Knit and make teddy bears for overseas

I walk to the mailbox

My garden is in bloom

I am active you see

The words of this poem call me to attend with older adults' stories from the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, in particular the time and place stories are told, retold, lived, and relived (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Sitting with Sue in her living room, I learned about who she was in different places such as "I was Sue, she lives on the lake at the entrance to the park," and "this is Sue and she goes to India." Like the stories Grandma told, Sue understood herself differently in each of her places and often drew on these memories to understand the person she was now becoming, especially since being unable to return to India. While sharing her stories, Sue invited me to also consider the person I was or am in my places.

During these times, I learned about feeling vulnerable and exposed because I did not necessarily want to return to some places. It was my discomfort which awoke me to the possibility patients experience similar feelings of discomfort in places of care. Most often I feel this discomfort during the times I bathe their bodies and they begin to tell their stories of lives lived elsewhere. I wonder if it is my touch or the private space of the bathroom that brings forth these stories. Sometimes, I felt we were both naked and vulnerable as we shared our experiences and imagined our futures. However, as I learned to inquire gently into the stories Sue and I co-composed about who we were or are in our different places, I have also learned to nurture a deep connection with patients and began to

see myself not as separate from them, but rather as mutually implicated in the becoming of a different way of providing nursing care (Barad, 2003).

Possibilities for Nursing Practice: Attending to Place

As I looked across the resonate threads of the narrative accounts, Pauline, Alison, and Sue identified remembering and stories to live by were clearly connected to place. While attending to these threads has shaped my nursing care, I also look to them as I help people think about place. The threads within the fabric of place shift over time, and they are always lived in the midst and are shaped by the larger cultural, political, and institutional narratives participants live within and bump up against.

Nursing Knowledge

Not only did my narrative turn change my nursing care, it also invited me to journey across the landscape of nursing knowledge. Through the inquiry, I entered a different place where I began to understand nursing knowledge is incomplete and I now embrace Bergum's (1994) understanding that the inherent nature of knowledge is "constructed through understanding the person, not as an objective body (a 'thing,' a heart, a uterus or a liver) but a living person where body and self are one" (p. 73). With attentiveness, openness, and creativeness, I continue to seek new meanings and understandings of my knowledge and practice as a nurse, and have come to appreciate they are both an approximation open to interpretation, rather than accuracy expected or sought (Kuhn, 1999) because knowledge is unique to the individual, the experience, and the context.

It was the stories Pauline, Alison, and Sue told about moving that caused me to wonder about lives lived according to a theoretical trajectory. Pauline's comments in relation to deciding when to move, "I don't know if there's an age. I really don't know . . . I really don't know what kind of decision you have to go through, but it's certainly not illness because by then it's really too late," caused me to wonder when is the right time to inquire into stories about moving. If we begin to think about growing older as not something happening after the age of 65 years old, but rather as "an expression of something happening over time" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 29) we may remember we all have a past, a present, and a possible future and stories about moving occur within institutional, social, and cultural contexts, further influenced by our experiences (Litwak & Longino, 1987).

I have come to believe theories are never complete, as "completion is an end or culmination that closes, without access and without passage" (Nancy, 2005), possibly limiting older adults from developing their own understanding of what it means to grow older. Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) work encourages nurses to not see

[patients] as univocal, not tied to one theoretical structure or mode of behavior that would leave them with the appearance of being unidimensional. We, and our [patients], live and tell many stories. We are all characters with multiple plotlines who speak from within these multiple plotlines. (p. 147)

To accept the continuity and fluidity of nursing practice, nurses may need to consider the multiplicity of voices, both for their patients and for themselves and “learn that people are never only (nor even a close approximation to) any particular set of isolated theoretical notions, categories, or terms” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 145), because growing older is a human phenomenon not isolated just to individuals 65 years of age or older.

Narrative inquiry has introduced me to the possibility nurses are in a position to adopt a critical social justice lens in understanding growing older beyond an individualistic perspective (Reutter, 2000). According to Mol (1998), “Western countries . . . privilege clinical diagnosis” (p. 276); however, by attending to older adults’ stories of experience, nurses may advocate for alternate ways to question relevant political assumptions (Austin, 2001) including social, cultural, and institutional narratives. When I entered the foyers of the assisted living complex and condominium building where Pauline and Sue lived, I paid attention to the different stories told by the décor, furnishings, and residential notices posted inside each building’s elevators. Pauline’s foyer hinted at the story of decline through its healthcare peach paint, institutional fixtures and fittings, and a daily menu developed by the complex’s dietician. In contrast, Sue’s foyer’s décor, fixtures, and fittings were modern, warm, and inviting and the notices on the elevator walls were relevant to every day concerns. I wonder: How will nurses nurture older adults’ forward-looking stories if the places in which they live sustain stories of decline?

To adopt this lens into nursing practices, nurses will need to listen to and attend with older adults' stories by being present through a deep and multilayered relationship built on dignity, mutuality, companionship, patience, and trust (Bateson, 1994; Lincoln, & Guba, 1989). During the inquiry, I was afforded the opportunity to build relationships with Pauline, Alison, and Sue and listen to and attend with their stories. However, I was also cognizant of the stories their daughters and society were telling of them and the tensions between these stories. When I paid attention to the bumping up places within these stories I wondered: Who is the patient I am attending to when providing care? Is it the individual, the family, the community, or a combination? And when I am attending, with whom am I building a deep and multilayered relationship with? Whose voice am I hearing? I now realize that at times I was hearing both my professional voice and the arrogant voice of society and I wonder to whom does my loyalty lie when providing nursing care?

As I begin to travel to the margins in loving ways, rather than with arrogant perception (Lugones, 1987), telling and attending to experience may contribute to the equalization of power and the overturning of oppressive stories of aging. The stories Alison told beyond her family photographs and into the past, present, and future lives of each family member helped me to travel to her world in loving ways. Sometimes her stories were about her children when they were small, and at other times she told stories about upcoming events including special birthdays, Christmas celebrations, educational achievements,

grandchildren building their own homes, pending marriages, and the possibility of further great-grandchildren. During these conversations I found understanding regarding the presence of the photographs which appeared at first glance to be outdated and in need of replacement. These older pictures were not images stuck in time; rather, their presence brought memories from the past into the present and forward into the possible future.

Once again, I was reminded of my tendency to perceive some things in the “worlds” of older adults arrogantly. If I did not stop and inquire into the photographs in Alison’s living room I may never have found meaning and understanding of their importance to her in composing future stories. With these thoughts, I now wonder if Grandma kept her older photographs on display for similar reasons. The telling of past stories may also illuminate understandings of present stories of growing older and the recognition we are all interdependent. Travelling to another’s world may provide nursing with the opportunity to understand and embrace diversity and to become more knowledgeable (Mol, 1998). I wonder if my travels to the margins in loving ways will encourage others to develop and implement nursing care that emancipates rather than controls.

Finally, as I return to the words of Nelson (1995) and hooks (1990), listening to multiple voices inside me and attending to stories can offer alternate understandings of the experiences of growing older in relation to place. According to Clapton (2003), these stories are co-composed, not within

judgmental, hierarchical relationships; rather, relationships that are accepting and share life-enriching experiences.

Therefore,

[stories] can provide an enriched and more inclusive ethical platform from which to engage in critical discussions. Ethical reflection, then, must necessarily shift from sites of abstract theorizing about orthodoxical determinations of humanity, to forms of narrative ethics The use of narrative [inquiry] recognizes and legitimizes ‘inside voices’ as valuable sources of knowledge in ethical reflection and deliberation. The questions of *who we are* and *who we aspire to be* are located in the narratives of our lived experiences, and our capacity to relate positively to those who differ from us with respect, acceptance, grace, mutuality and trust. (Kittay as cited in Clapton, 2003, p. 545)

Through “world”-travelling and with a loving eye, Lugones (1987) reminds me I may begin to know older adults when I consult “something other than [my] own will and interests and fears and imagination” (p. 8), and through this consultation I awaken to how my assumptions and pre-conceived ideas about growing older and place influence my relationships and interactions with older adults (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). Lugones’ words remind me of my initial perceptions of Pauline the first day I arrived at her place. I arrogantly perceived her as frail and dependent because she lived in an assisted living complex. These

perceptions were triggered by the stories of independence and aging in place which I had lived alongside Grandma.

Prior to the inquiry, I was unaware of the contradictory stories I was living by in my nursing practice. However, as Pauline shared her stories of maintaining her independence and finding new opportunities to participate within her community, I realized without knowing Grandma's understandings of what "independent" and "assisted living" meant to her, we had missed potentials for living (Gergen, 2004) and telling different stories about growing older in relation to place. In consideration of the current "busyness" within healthcare, I wonder: How will nurses set aside time for older adults to share their stories and begin to shift nursing practice away from arrogant perceptions? How will nurses integrate narrative care as core care into their practice and see people not as aged, a disease, or a diagnosis, but as a storied life (Allen, 2004; Lugones, 1987)?

Shifting Stories

A Letter To Grandma

Hello Grandma,

My life has certainly been very busy lately. Spring has finally arrived here and you can feel the pace of life increasing, as everybody gets ready for summer. I still find it strange how we all live indoors for the winter and with the first hint of warmth and sunshine people are out in their gardens, walking their dogs, and

riding their bikes. It is so different to Australia where people are out and about all year round. In the winter here, I'm lucky to see one person walk by, but come the warmer weather the view from my front window is alive with activity. I haven't bought a seat for my front verandah yet but I think I will this year. I often think about the times we sat out on your front verandah and watched the people go by. I wonder if it was the memories of your front verandah that attracted me to my new home. I can certainly see you sitting out there reading your book in the afternoon sunshine.

I wrote and passed my citizenship exam last Friday. I now know more about Canada than most Canadians. I'm not sure what it means to me to become Canadian as I always thought I would return home when I grew older. Now I'm not so sure where the place I call home resides. Do you remember when I nursed in Moree a few years ago? At the time, there were a couple of older male patients who knew you when you lived out at the farm. Even though they knew you and my mother, they were not convinced I was Australian. They said I spoke with an accent, therefore I couldn't be Australian. After explaining to them I had been living

in Canada for several years, they were willing to accept me as a local; however, I began to wonder who I was in this small place so close to the home where I grew up. I continue to think about my conversations with those men and wonder how many more moves I will make before I name the “place” where I want to continue to grow older.

As I think about this, I am more than convinced it will not be anywhere where the snow lays on the ground for 6 months of the year. I have no idea how older adults navigate the icy pavements, snowdrifts, and freezing temperatures during the long winters here. I am now beginning to understand why many move into senior complexes like the one Pauline lives in or even intergenerational buildings like Sue's, because if they didn't they might become isolated and forgotten. Maybe that's how you felt on those rainy days when you didn't get to sit out on your verandah and watch and be watched by others. I know homes for older adults never appealed to you, but maybe they have a purpose in a climate such as here.

Did I tell you about the Project I was involved in earlier this year? I think you would have found it very interesting, though it seems very similar to the service you have at home. The Project, which has been funded over a period of 2 years, offers individuals in-home respite care, personal care, nursing care, home maintenance, and housekeeping services. Clients also have access to a Nurse Practitioner, Pharmacist, and Occupational Therapist. Dependent on client needs, additional services may also be negotiated between the client and the Project's team members.

Initially, I thought the Project was about keeping people in their homes for as long as possible. But now I wonder if the purpose for the provision of services is to provide people with a choice and also time for making decisions about where they will continue to grow older. Maybe we need to pay closer attention to the labels we put on homes for older adults because they do not have to become endpoints for living; rather, they may be beginnings for new possibilities. I can still hear Pauline telling me there really is never a right time to talk about moving; however, if you are going to move it is best to do so while you can still enjoy the activities

offered in your new place. Once again I find myself wondering if you and I could have explored the possibilities of you moving into the hostel just down the road.

Well, I guess I had best get back to writing my dissertation. I am so close to the end now; I wonder what my life will look like after my PhD.? Who am I becoming from this experience? So many things have changed since I began this journey that some days the person looking back at me from the mirror puzzles me. I think I just need more time and possibly a quiet place to continue to weave all I have learned into the person and nurse I want to become. On that note I will say goodbye for now and I love you lots.

Many warm hugs,

Roslyn

While attending with Pauline's, Alison's, and Sue's stories of experience in relation to place, I began to hear many other stories from people who became familiar with my inquiry. Together with participants' stories and those I had lived alongside Grandma, their stories caused me to pause many times and consider the social significance of my inquiry. As I reflect on the stories I have heard, I

wonder what growing older in relation to place will look like as I continue to grow older. Where will my generation live and who will take care of us? Will tomorrow's society embrace its older generations and their knowledge and wisdom?

As I consider these questions, I remember Michelle's story of caring for her parents who are over 80 years old. Her father has Parkinson's Dementia and her mother struggles with ongoing pulmonary disease. Prior to their most recent medical crisis, they were managing in their own home but required intensive support from Michelle. This support included answering telephone calls in the dead of night because either her father had fallen or there was a noise outside; taking either or both parents to emergency; making and attending medical appointments, which included specialists, geriatric assessments, and psychiatrists; and finding contractors to attend to repairs, snow removal, and yard work at her parents' home. At the same time Michelle was also working part-time and caring for her family.

At some point, when the crises became too numerous, her parents were admitted to hospital. Even though Michelle and her parents had engaged in conversations concerning finding alternate accommodation in which to continue to grow older, her parents had decided to continue living in their own home. Unfortunately, with the culmination of events her parents were suddenly moved into an assisted living complex. Initially, I felt an overwhelming relief for Michelle because finally someone else would be responsible for her parents' day-

to-day care and she could return to the status of daughter rather than caregiver, and being a wife and mother for her family. However, this was not to become Michelle's reality.

Initially, Michelle's father moved into a one-bedroom apartment while his wife remained in hospital. Most nights he phoned Michelle with concerns about his medications, constipation, care, and loneliness. On several occasions, he insisted Michelle come to take his blood pressure and manage his medications. Michelle's father did not want to contact the facility staff in relation to these concerns.

Following the discharge of her father and mother from hospital, Michelle moved them into a two-bedroom apartment and began the process of packing-up her parents' home and listing it for sale. Over the next several months Michelle's parents were readmitted to hospital on several occasions and she continued to be engaged in assisting her parents to meet their healthcare and personal needs on a daily basis. Unfortunately, Michelle's experiences with assisted living for her parents are not atypical in today's society. Recently, news headlines report the deteriorating care of older adults in supported living, particularly in relation to personal care in long-term care settings, making it necessary for families to continue providing daily care and support for their relatives even when in care (Smith, 2010).

Pauline also shared stories about the deterioration of the complex in which she lives. In particular, her concerns related to the environment within her

apartment exacerbating her asthma and triggering her allergies. She described the carpets as old and dirty, her window leaked and water seeped into the walls during heavy rains, and the heating and cooling system needed to be replaced. In the dining room Pauline described the meals as being inadequate and of poor quality. I find these occurrences disturbing because they continue to support society's perception of older adults as burdensome and in a state of decline, and I wonder how these perceptions can be interrupted. While pondering, I heard Grandma singing "the old grey mare she ain't what she used to be" (unknown, n.d.) during a phone conversation.

FN (The Old Grey Mare)

Grandma and I were singing this song again during a phone conversation and I now find myself reflecting on the song's words. Were they supposed to come together to create a negative image or were they an invitation for us to consider the natural progression of growing older? Throughout my life, I continually have the opportunity to grow from my experiences; therefore, can I expect to be what I used to be? As I remember Grandma singing, I now have a new appreciation for the verse and realize we needed to change our understanding of the old grey mare. Grandma wasn't what she used to be; she wasn't as active, as mobile, or as

engaged with society as she previously had been during her younger years. But all her experiences came together to create the person she was, someone I cherished for who she was in the moment rather than for whom she was in the past.

A new song was shared during our phone conversation which Grandma had added to her repertoire: "I'm so sorry for myself, so sorry for myself, I've even lost my appetite, I can't even sleep a wink at night, I'm so sorry for myself" (unknown, n.d.). Grandma said this song just 'popped' into her head during our conversation and it fit her current situation perfectly. I began to see Grandma differently and to understand how she was feeling right at that moment.

At some point during our conversation Grandma said, "worry is a waste of time as it doesn't get you anywhere." I am not sure how her words connected to our conversation of feeling old and sorry for herself. Possibly, these words weren't meant for immediate conversation, rather as information for future contemplation. As I struggled to form connections between her chosen songs and our conversation, I remember wondering how I

could explore these vast topics on the telephone with her. She missed large portions of our conversation and yet, with the distance between us, we were forced to rely on technology to communicate. Just as we were hanging up the telephone, Grandma remembered Madge's recent birthday and she said, "She turned 96 you know. That scares me." We never had the opportunity to explore this final comment as the line was disconnected.

I continue to wonder, who was sitting with Grandma and listening deeply with her stories of her past and present life? It is now 2 years since Grandma died and on several occasions I have heard my mother sing "The old grey mare she ain't what she used to be." Maybe now is the time to explore and appreciate I can never be who I once was as I am constantly growing and changing with each experience I seek to understand. At these times I also find myself smiling as I realize Grandma and her wisdom continue to live in the stories I tell.

My conversations with Pauline, Alison, and Sue have further emphasized the importance of inviting intergenerational conversations to challenge a western culture's notion of growing older as an "unavoidable breakdown and

obsolescence” (Schachter-Shalomi & Miller, 1995, p. 21). Similarly, these conversations remind me of the importance of older adults’ presence within communities. Because I never met the participants’ grandchildren, I wonder what their perceptions are of their grandmothers and growing older? More recently, I read an article on condominium living in Canada (McMahon, 2014) which further emphasizes the importance for intergenerational conversations because

developers are churning out condos filled with one-bedroom units, which attract precisely the two demographics least accustomed to communal living: first-time buyers moving out of their parents’ basements and Baby Boomers downsizing from larger homes . . . the two groups end up living side by side in the same building. (para. 13)

For Sue this was exactly the type of living arrangement she was looking for. She did not want “to be in an over 55 place ‘cause I wanted young people around me . . . but I won’t say screaming babies exactly.” During our conversations, Sue reminded me of the importance of paying attention to not what you say, but rather to how you say it; and not what you do, but how you do it.

Sometime during the inquiry I asked my daughter to share her personal understanding of what growing older means (Andrews, 2009) and what she has learned from older adults who share her world. She told stories of playing guitar at the palliative care unit with her adopted grandmother here in Canada; travelling with her grandparents in their caravan during her summer vacations in Australia;

playing cards with the grandmas and grandpas living in a nursing home; and watching groups of older adults visiting over coffee at Tim Horton's. It wasn't until she shared a poem she wrote to her Great-Grandma that I began to understand what she had learned.

Generations

I sit here thinking now how lucky I have been
for I am one of four generations

I go each odd year to spend some time with my mami and my pa
when I am there I get a privilege some people don't
for I get to see and be with my great grandma

great grandmas are different
great grandmas are one who want to do nothing more
than to see you or be by you

you might think it is a pain like I once did
when they just sit there and don't acknowledge you
because they are just content to be there with you
to know that you are near

but since I now know this
and the years have been catching up on her
I have accepted it to be a privilege

I have someone to go to when in need on both sides of the world
a phone call can mean everything
so embrace your generations because they're there for you
and ask your questions now
for once they've gone
those questions will never be answered
and you will be left with sorrow and regret

as I look into your lined face
I hope the people who knew you got to ask their questions
you might not have answered them
knowing that they would find it in themselves
and as others before me they will have seen
the wisdom and kindness I saw in your eyes

that you have passed on to them and others through them

and as you lie there as silent as dawn
 waiting for what the new day brings
 some people may think that the river has run dry
 but those special to you know that the river still flows
 with an abundance of life
 created with our memories of you

so let's all raise our faces to the Heavens
 and lets keep our faces held high
 as a new dawn is coming
 bringing with it new life

Cybell Alekss Compton Arlsanian

March 2011

Updated May 19, 2011³⁰

The stories Alison and Sue shared about sitting in places where they could observe and be observed reinforces the meanings for sustaining places in which people might sit and watch others and participate in their worlds (Rowles, 1987). Through these observations, individuals may begin to seek meaning and understanding of how they might fit into the world, “while still being me, when I am old” (Andrews, 2009, p. 75). It is here I wonder about inquiring into the experiences of older adults of watching and being watched by others and their social integration into communities. I wonder how communal notions of place are shaped by these experiences and how understanding these experiences might respond to Peace et al.’s (2005) call for inquiring into how “policies on

³⁰ Cybell added the last three stanzas to this poem after Grandma passed away.

regeneration and development recognize how older people locate themselves within community life” (p. 203).

Through understanding our self in relation to growing older comes the possibility of stimulating a conscious rather than unconscious and uncomfortable response to growing older. I wonder if this thinking will give individuals the opportunity to explore the current dichotomy between decline and successful aging. As Hammond, Teucher, Duggleby, and Thomas (2012) remind me, these trajectories do not “do justice to the more complicated and amorphous lives of individuals” (p. 151), because growing older does not have boundaries. Rather, it is a “process of living” (Andrews, 2009, p. 80) creative and deeply fulfilling lives by engaging in the process of reading and restorying our lives (Kenyon, 2011). It is through this process we might become the person we want to be by retelling and reliving stories from our past differently and composing new stories for our futures (Andrews, 2009; Bateson, 2010; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Schachter-Shalomi & Miller, 1995).

As I wonder how I can nurture these conversations and also encourage imagination and playfulness in our understandings of what it might mean to grow older, I returned to Greene’s (1995) work in relation to seeing big and seeing small. Greene suggests to “see things or people small, one chooses to see from a detached point of view, to watch behaviors from the perspective of a system, to be concerned with trends and tendencies rather than the intentionality and concreteness of everyday life” (p. 10). To see older adults as small possibly

makes them transparent. In their transparency, societies may “look through or past aging people, failing to recognize their individual identities” (Sorrell, 2007, p. 19) as “they simply [live] under the shadow of the narratives [of decline] which are culturally available” (Andrews, 2009, p. 78).

As I bumped up against cultural narratives of decline, Pauline, Alison, and Sue invited me into their places. My understandings gained from their sharing encouraged me to be wakeful to seeing them big. To see people big, Greene (1995) encourages me

[to] resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularity instead. [I] must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening. (p. 10)

As our relationships deepened, spaces opened up for conversations about growing older rather than aging, and understanding the experience from a perspective of cultural relevancy and social diversity (Hazan, 1994). What I describe here is what Greene (1995) describes as a type of “utopian thinking: thinking that refuses mere compliance, that looks down roads not yet taken to the shapes of a more fulfilling social order, to more vibrant ways of being in the world” (p. 5). To shift this understanding into the social milieu, Green suggests this

kind of reshaping imagination may be released through many sorts of dialogue: dialogue among the young who come from different cultures and different modes of life, dialogue among people who have come together to

solve problems that seem worth solving to all of them, dialogue among people undertaking shared tasks, protesting injustices, avoiding or overcoming dependencies or illnesses. (p. 3)

But interrupting Greene's (1995) suggested dialogues between generations are stories about older adults moving places and potentially decreasing their visibility within communities. These stories include moving "off-shore"³¹ to Thailand and the Philippines, the increasing popularity of recreational and amenity moves, migration moves, and the choice to age-in-place (Litwak & Longino, 1987; Wiseman, 1980). Listening to Pauline's, Alison's, and Sue's stories about moving, it has become evident that moving for many older adults may not be characterized by significant distance, such as across borders or across the globe. Rather, they may move across the hall or across town or undertake a more strategic move across borders to return to their place of birth or childhood or reunite with family members (Lee, 1966).

When considering moving, I also attended with stories told by older adults who continue to maintain a more nomadic lifestyle and others who were constantly perplexed about whether they should stay or move. Overarching all the reasons for moving are the powerful influence of affordability, the impact of declining incomes, increasing costs of living, and the reality that older adults now have the potential to outlive their financial resources (Katz, 2005). In response to

³¹ Moving older adults "off-shore" has been branded "gerontological colonialism" by the German press. It is an attempt by families to find "quality care at an affordable rate" (Gray, 2014, para. 2).

these factors, Löfqvist et al. (2013) suggests “to improve our knowledge base and to support societal planning for very old people, we need to develop understandings of the complexity of the topic ‘where to grow old’ and of the dynamics underlying a person’s decision to relocate” (p. 920).

Through the inquiry, I have awoken to the multiplicity of stories in relation to moving and the necessity for nurses to become engaged in a strategic approach towards healthcare management and service provision within communities to ensure service developments are sustainable and congruent with the needs of older adults. As Rowland (2009) suggests, active engagement in policy review and development will be crucial in addressing the influence of functional and structural changes within societies, as by 2050 or even earlier, older adults will represent between “a quarter and a third of many national populations” (p. 37).

Reconsidering Place

G'day Grandma,

Can you believe it? It has been 3 years since I visited your place. I still remember you sitting in your front room reading your book or playing checkers with me. During my last visit I took many photographs in an attempt to retain all memories of the things you had gathered together to name your place “home.” I wonder if the framed pastel drawing of the blue birds on your dining room wall

served a similar purpose for you. My mother told me they had once hung on the walls of her childhood home. Were they reminders of a time when you lived on the farm and belonged to a small rural community? Maybe they reminded you of a time when you were married and your children were small.

As I think about your “things,” I wonder what you might have chosen to take with you had you decided to move. Pauline, Alison, and Sue shared what they needed to take with them into their new places to remain connected with the person they had been in other places. Sue described her elephant collection as a connection to India, the place she came to call home. Maybe your shell collection was a reminder of the seaside where you lived as a child and fell in love with the man who was to become your husband. Alison brought with her the bedroom suite she had bought with her first teaching money and its presence reminded me of the small black footstool I kept from your home because it held many memories of me sitting on it at your feet and learning about life.

Now your home is empty and I know I will never walk through your front door again. However, memories of you live within me

and the presence of your belongings which I brought with me have entered a place I am beginning to call home. I now realize sharing our stories gives me the opportunity to travel deeper into my understandings, particularly in relation to the places in which they were composed and the person I was in those places. You know Grandma, some of the stories I tell are beginning to change because Pauline, Alison, Sue, and this new place I call home invite me to see new possibilities within the stories I lived alongside you.

On that note Grandma, it is time for me to say goodbye again. I sure have enjoyed writing these letters to you throughout my dissertation. They have given me an opportunity to explore some things we never had a chance to talk about and also to keep you close to an inquiry which was supposed to be about you. In many ways my letters to you invited me to travel backwards and

forwards between the places we shared and the place within me to seek meaning and understanding of what it might mean to grow older in relation to place. They also call me to attend to my ethical responsibility to care for our stories and to give them away when they are needed (Lopez, 1990).

Much love and warm hugs,

Roslyn

As I reflect on this last letter I wrote to Grandma, I returned to the works of Cameron (2004) and Dixon and Durrheim (2000). According to Cameron, in attending with the need of individuals it is important to ask, "How are you?" (p. 53). Not only is it important to ask, "How are you?" but I now realize I must ask "Who are you?" and "Where do you come from?" (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000). By asking these questions, I recognize the places people have been also shape the person they are becoming because their experiences are not isolated events occurring in unknown places.

I leave the field knowing the biographical side of growing older is equally essential in understanding growing older in relation to place as is the biological side of human life (Kenyon et al., 2011). Narratives, or stories, potentially enrich our understanding of growing older through providing a more optimistic perspective that also acknowledges "the dignity, humanity, and uniqueness of the lives of older persons" (Kenyon et al., p. xiii). Furthermore, they provide an

opportunity to explore our relationship with our own bodies and to deepen our understanding of what it means to physically, emotionally, and spiritually grow older.

I leave the inquiry with more wonderings than when I entered. From living alongside Pauline's, Alison's, and Sue's stories of growing older in relation to place, including places within us, I now wonder how societal understandings of moving later in life can become about beginnings rather than endings of a life; how conversations around transitions change as we grow older, in particular choices about places and moving places; how older adults can sustain their identities within communities; about the nostalgic notion of home; about the stories never told by older adults and how their silence shapes the stories they and others live by; if the absence of older adults within communities sustains an arrogant perception of what it might mean to grow older; and I wonder if growing older could become about the person, because as human beings we are continuously growing older. With these questions comes my understanding that I will always live in the midst of place—places that sustain and challenge who I am not yet (Greene, 1995).

Returning to the Fabric of Place

Now, as I return to the narrative threads of the inquiry I realize I cannot remove any thread without paying attention to the personal, practical, and social significances which have become embedded within the fibers of the threads throughout the inquiry. To remove a warp or weft thread from the fabric may

cause the threads and their significances to become misaligned or tied insecurely producing a fabric, which “is full of loose threads . . . leav[ing] unsightly flaws.” (Kronyk, 2013, section 2, para. 1).

Seeing place within the metaphor of fabric also invites the possibility it is always becoming, because the years pass and the seasons change bringing with them new colours and new patterns. With this understanding comes the possibility the experiences of older adults in relation to place are not finite: they do not stand still. The opportunity to change the threads, colours, and patterns while weaving the fabric of place re-presents growing older to the social milieu as a time for seeing differently and imagining possibilities. The loom, and the warp and the weft threads can always be changed to bring forth telling, living, retelling, and reliving of new stories of significance (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of what it might mean to grow older in relation to place.

However, new threads may also be woven into the fabric bringing with them new stories, creating complexity within the fabric’s pattern. Bateson (1994) encourages me to attend to the old and new threads with peripheral vision, because to find meaning and understanding in the complexity of growing older in relation to place, I need to remember to be playful and creative. It is here I remember Sue’s shirt and her finding the place of India within its cotton. Today I wear a shirt Grandma and I picked out together, and I feel her wrapped around me.

Finally, my dissertation is written and I have taken many detours along the way. Sometimes I became lost in Pauline's, Alison's, and Sue's worlds as well as my own. It was during the times I was lost that I learned the most about the significance of relationships in seeking meaning and understanding of the stories we co-composed about our experiences. It wasn't always easy to attend with our stories and many times I wondered how I could write what we needed to say and still remain sensitive to the people in our worlds. During these times, Sexton (1994) reminded me, "with sensitive handling, the truth could be written in spite of the family" (p. 233). She also called me to attend with truth as being something we believe in at a particular moment, on a particular day; therefore, truth is subjective. Often this understanding helped me to accept the differences between the stories Pauline, Alison, and Sue told and the stories they did not tell.

Personally, this understanding also encouraged me to accept the differences between what my mother believes and the stories Grandma lived by. Freeman (2010) wrote,

Stories we tell are always provisional and revisable . . . even when I least expect it, a new experience or piece of information may come along that will utterly and completely transform my understanding of the past and the story I tell about it. (p. 85)

Accepting the subjective nature of truth required openness and acceptance of multiple tellings of stories, and the realization that for Pauline, Alison, Sue, and Grandma, the story they were sharing at the time was their truth at that particular moment. It was during these multiple tellings I came to deeply understand what it meant to be a narrative inquirer. I learned about listening with stories and to enter the worlds of Pauline, Alison, and Sue in loving ways and not with arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987). By being in relationship, we shared memories of events which opened up opportunities for further travels to places where we could imagine possibilities of new stories to live by.

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