

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

**ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600**

UMI[®]

“IF I TELL YOU A STORY, WILL YOU PROMISE TO HEAR IT?”

**A Journey Towards Understanding One’s Personal Story in the Context of Their
Family Story Through a Self-Revelatory Performance Process**

Angela Colangelo

A Research Paper

In

The Department

Of

The Creative Arts Therapies

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

September 2002

© Angela Colangelo, 2002



**National Library
of Canada**

**Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services**

**395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada**

**Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada**

**Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques**

**395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada**

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-74864-2

Canada

ABSTRACT

“IF I TELL YOU A STORY, WILL YOU PROMISE TO HEAR IT?”

A Journey Towards Understanding One’s Personal Story in the Context of Their Family Story Through a Self-Revelatory Performance Process

Angela Colangelo

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

The purpose of this study was to explore how the use of the rehearsal process and Self-Revelatory performance could help achieve a deeper understanding of the author’s personal story in the context of her larger family story. Through the rehearsal process, various childhood and adulthood themes spontaneously emerged and were explored using play, enactment and other drama therapy tools. The culmination of this process was a Self-Revelatory Performance, after which interaction and sharing amongst audience members as well as further reading and settling of themes, theories and thoughts provided the author with personal insights and understanding.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my immense gratitude to three groups of people.

My colleagues and audience:

To every one of you, thank you for being my container, my safety and for helping me find the courage I needed to explore deeply. A special thank you goes to Leslie Bronstein, my director. And another goes to my therapist. You know who you are.

My Siblings:

Thank you to my siblings Charlie and Anthony Colangelo, and my sister-in-law Carolyn Colangelo, for being so willing to be there to watch and listen, even when their story was so very different. To my sister Tina Virgilio, I am grateful for discovering a real friendship and real understanding through this process.

My Advisor:

For his support, flexibility and understanding and for simply letting it be mine, I am grateful to Dr. Stephen Snow. Thank you for allowing me to discover the beauty of the process.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this paper to my parents Immacolata and Felice Colangelo for the changes they have endured in their lifetime. They have always felt that they were the “sandwiched” generation, having lived through one culture steeped in a tradition that spanned hundreds and thousands of years, and, then, having to make room for a very new and different culture in Canada. In addition, they had to cope with a strong-minded, willful child who had her own answers to life and was going to show them just the way they should do it; a child they could only try to control in the context of their fears in a new country. For wanting as much to be a part of my story as I was a part of theirs, and for giving me strength, courage and beauty, I thank you and I love you both dearly.

*I saw the angel in the marble and
I just chiseled til I set him free.*

(Michelangelo, cited in Bradshaw, 1996, p. 250)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: SELF-REVELATORY PERFORMANCE AND FAMILY THEORY AND RATIONALES	3
Why a Performance?	7
The Audience	9
The Performance Space	10
The Technical Aspects	11
The Director	13
Rehearsal (Creative Process) and Therapy	13
CHAPTER 2: THE PROCESS	15
Rehearsals (Creative Process)	15
Transition to Performance	21
Performance	24
Post-Performance	28
<u>Audience Response</u>	<u>30</u>
<u>Director Response</u>	<u>30</u>
<u>Aftermath with Family</u>	<u>31</u>
<u>Sibling Response</u>	<u>33</u>
CHAPTER 3: DISCUSSION OF THEORY, PROCESS AND FINDINGS.....	36
Comparison with Other Self-Revelatory Performances .	36
<u>Rehearsals</u>	<u>37</u>
<u>Transition to Performance</u>	<u>38</u>
<u>Performance</u>	<u>38</u>
<u>Post-Performance</u>	<u>39</u>
Discussion - New Insights Regarding my Personal Story in the Context of the “Family Story”	40
CONCLUSION	53
REFERENCES	55

INTRODUCTION

The primary research question I am intending to answer is how can the process of Self-Revelatory Performance help to clarify and/or give context to one's personal story within the greater family story? This paper represents the documentation of that process, more than three months after the performance, and an attempt at answering the above question.

Using an heuristically informed approach, the participant, with the assistance of a director, explored pertinent stories and themes in her life during the rehearsal or creative process using various drama therapy techniques. The themes and stories were taken from past and current interpersonal experiences, memories, and family stories. Personal documentation of this process occurred through journaling and drawings. Journal entries are used extensively in the description of the process. The creative process was also documented with photographs taken by the director and the performance was video-taped. The first part of this research paper describes emergent events and themes as well as the participant's emotional states and thoughts in the various stages of the process. In the latter part of the document, new insights derived from the creative process are discussed.

Drama therapy *has* been used to explore family issues with individual clients but doing so using performance is rare and I am unaware of any literature specifically related to this topic. However, the use of performance for the purpose of looking at various family-related issues has been undertaken by a small group of drama therapy students. The research that is being undertaken here is unique in that the Self-Revelatory Performance process is used to revisit and tell one's childhood story, look at patterns and

themes and make sense of them in the context of the family and to then make connections to current life experiences.

In addition to serving personal objectives, this work also satisfies artistic, research and professional goals which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 1.

The limitation of the research lies in that fact that it is heuristically informed and has limited generalizability. The meaning and synthesis of the work is completed by the participant who is also the researcher and thereby limited to one individual's perspective of her own work. Also, the participant may not be able to gain clarity on all aspects of the work; a certain amount of ambiguity will be likely. It is intended, however, to contribute to the growing body of research in the field of drama therapy and to provide a framework which may be used to conduct further work with the researcher's future clients.

Chapter 1 is a brief introduction to the pertinent drama therapy and family therapy literature as well as the rationales for using Self-Revelatory Performance as the research method.

Chapter 2 describes the entire rehearsal, performance and post-performance process as it unfolded and was being experienced by the participant, including excerpts from journal entries that were critical in capturing the process.

Chapter 3 includes a comparison of other Self-Revelatory Performance processes as well as a discussion of the insights achieved by the participant, as a result of the experience, and supported by relevant literature.

The conclusion summarizes the main insights gained by the participant and the overall results of the research.

CHAPTER 1 SELF-REVELATORY PERFORMANCE AND FAMILY THEORY AND RATIONALES

“The discovery of our life stories, and the communication of these stories via performance – in which personal, social, or cultural truths are revealed – propel us toward wholeness.” (Emunah, 1994, p. 252)

In her work with groups and Self-Revelatory Performance, Emunah (1994) explores the relationship between process (the therapy) and product (the performance) and between life and art, referred to by one of her group members as “turning pain into art” (p. 253).

What is my relationship to pain? I am a healthy, intelligent, adequately well-adjusted 40-year-old female. I have, for the most part, benefited from the opportunities available to me as a Canadian. I enjoy the status that comes with being the first-born in an Italian immigrant family. I have a strong connection with my Italian ancestry that comes partly from being born in Monteleone di Puglia, Italy, a small town in the “spur of the boot” where my ancestors were born and had lived for hundreds and perhaps thousands of years. My parents are still alive and together, and we continue to weave a vibrant and strong family fabric. However, there was always something in my experience that was different from others in my family and, certainly, the manner in which I dealt with these experiences was somehow different. Generally, I did not accept things as they were. There were cultural values, rules and roles, methods of communication, life priorities and goals which I found highly limited and, thereby, limiting. I was living in a constraining environment, pinned down by my parents’ fear of being in a metropolitan city such as Toronto; not speaking the language; being concerned about what others thought; vehemently fighting to maintain their heritage; raising four

children on one salary; and raising a first-born who was worrisome to them because she was female, difficult to control and wanted too much freedom.

My experience in this family milieu shaped who I am but, for some reason, I was not entirely sure I understood who that was. I was struck by the words of Nathaniel Branden, a psychologist and marriage, family and child counselor:

In repressing significant memories, evaluations, feelings, frustrations, longings and needs, a person denies himself access to crucial data; in attempting to think about his life and his problems he is sentenced to struggle in the dark – because key items of information are missing. (Branden, 1971, p. 14)

In recent years, I have found my way back to a life that more closely fits who I am but I am left with a strong need to look back in an attempt to uncover some of that “crucial data” and missing information in an effort to better understand what had happened to me. I am not altogether certain why I have this need. Amidst the family cohesiveness and personal success, there were strong feelings of pain: the pain of struggle, of oppression, of confusion, of feeling lost, of sadness and anger, of unmet needs and of not understanding and not being understood. I suppose that I have reached a point where I am willing and able to look at that pain.

For many years, I felt my experiences were solely a result of my personality and biological makeup. When my mother was angry with me she would say, “You are exactly like your father.” Since my adolescence, my parents and siblings told me that I was a “difficult” person. I had heard my grandfather referred to in this way. I suppose I internalized that and accepted it as an explanation for my pain and I accepted that I must have somehow brought the pain on to myself. However, as soon as I began to live a more authentic life, after quitting my corporate position and moving to the province of British Columbia, away from my parents home in Ontario, I began to discover aspects of myself

that lead me to question this. For the first time in my life, I was seeing myself differently. I was seeing myself through the eyes of new friends and new experiences and I wasn't so bad or so difficult. In fact, my strengths were being recognized and appreciated. As my awareness and insight expanded, I realized that there were many factors involved in and reasons for my particular experience within my family.

Uri Bronfenbrenner, an American psychologist, devised a model of human development that specifically looks at context. His "Ecology of Human Development model" (1979) states that a child, or adult, is affected directly or indirectly by her environment and it will determine what she will observe and learn. This theory proposes that the environment is comprised of four systems: the microsystem (home and school life settings, social activities); the mesosystem (the relationship between microsystem settings); the exosystem (settings that the child does not participate in but is affected by such as parent's work, social activities); and the macrosystem (economic conditions, social climate, government policies).

The context which I am particularly interested in is the microsystem and the mesosystem; in particular, the family system. It was my contention that some microsystems and mesosystems result in positive effects on the child and therefore would enhance a child's development and others result in negative effects, leading to compromised development. A study conducted by Horowitz (1987), comparing the "biological" predisposition and environmental influences amongst adopted children, showed that how a child perceives these influences and deals with them will depend on personality, resilience, biological factors, and environmental influences (Horowitz,

1987). The most interesting and applicable finding for this research is that resilient children are capable of doing well in poor environments (Horowitz, 1987).

Inevitably, family theory becomes important in this context. The theories that I found mostly useful and applicable for the purpose of answering the research question include the following: an individual's response or behaviour is determined by the interaction of one's biological and psychological makeup and aspects of the family environment (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Sharp, 1978; Miller, 1984; Schutzenberger, 1998); the projection of rejected aspects of oneself (the adult) onto the child (Bowen, 1978; Miller, 1984); ideologies and behaviour are transmitted from generation to generation (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Sharp, 1978; Bowen, 1978; Miller, 1984; Schutzenberger, 1998).

Each of us has a psychological heritage that is no less real than our biological one. This inheritance includes a shadow legacy that is transmitted to us and absorbed by us in the psychic soup of our family environment. Here we are exposed to our parents' and siblings' values, temperaments, habits, and behaviour. Often, the problems our parents have failed to work out in their own lives come home to us in the form of dysfunctional coping patterns. (Zweig & Abrams, 1991, p. 47)

It is beneficial to briefly note the specific contributions of each of the above-mentioned individuals. Boszormenyi-Nagy's (1973) key contribution is the notion of loyalty and justice, and the reciprocal affects these have on the individual and their family. Miller (1984) writes about how "poisonous pedagogy" (violence in child-rearing practices) is not for a child's "own good", but acts as a way to satisfy a parent's own fears, repressed feelings and needs to punish and obtain revenge for injustices that they suffered as children. Bowen (1978) is well-known for his discovery that unresolved emotional attachments with one's family-of-origin cause a disruption in other

relationships later in life. He coined such phrases as “triangulation”, “multigenerational transmission process”, and “differentiation of self”. Schutzenberger, a transgenerational psychotherapist, has observed in her practice for many years that events and traumas experienced by our ancestors are passed down to us. “We can see, perceive or sense these complex links, although generally we do not speak about them: we experience them as part of the realm of the *unspeakable*, the *unthinkable*, the *unvoiced* or the *secret*” (Schutzenberger, 1998, p. 3).

Throughout this paper I will highlight my process by referencing the relevant drama therapy and family therapy literature, culminating in a detailed discussion in chapter 3.

RATIONALE

Why a Performance?

The Self-Revelatory Performance process satisfied many concurrent objectives of the research.

Self-Revelatory Performance is distinguished from autobiographical theatre in that in addition to being based on one’s real life, it presents issues whose exposure demands a high level of risk-taking, partly because they are current issues, rather than past issues which have already been resolved. (Emunah, 1994, p. 224)

During the creative process or rehearsal period with my director, the use of various drama therapy techniques as well as discussion allowed me to explore past and current issues that arose naturally, one leading into the other. This allowed me to note the themes that emerged.

The performance provided me with the distance needed to tell my story of pain. “the overriding principle behind arts therapies ... is that the arts have always existed to communicate those things which otherwise cannot be expressed” (Jennings, 1992, p. 1).

Performance fits who I am, how I like to work and my need for expression. Self-Revelatory Performance was going to allow me to be very close to and have control in every aspect of the research, “...and engage in the simultaneous modes of intuitive and rational thought” (Landy, 1986, p. 256). A purely theoretical research paper or case study would not satisfy all the needs of the particular research inquiry.

Self-Revelatory Performance also satisfied my artistic goals. I came to the field of drama therapy as a performing artist and had experienced, firsthand, its inherent therapeutic benefit. “Experiential research is often the preferred method for artists. It functions to uncover the creative process of making art” (Landy, 1986, p.246). I would be able to conduct research on a topic of my choice in a way that would allow me to make use of my skills as an artist.

“The creation of a performance is a direct method of research” (Landy, 1986, p. 256). The Self-Revelatory Performance process satisfied the research requirements in a way that appealed to me. It combined the heuristic approach to research that had immediately captivated my attention, as I learned about Moustakas’ (1996) inquiry into loneliness by directly experiencing it, with a performance process which allowed me to explore my material dramatically and with total presence and immersion in my feelings and thoughts; to sit fully inside my own story.

Finally, this approach to drama therapy also satisfied my professional goals. My personal and professional journey has led me to the field of family work. The Self-

Revelatory Performance process has helped me to explore and address my own family issues and will enable me to better assist families by having a greater awareness of my own transference issues within the therapeutic relationship. Johnson (1999) explains a similar experience in his life which moved him to treat families. Interestingly, however, the creative arts therapies have not had a significant impact on family therapy (Johnson, 1999). This process has provided me with a unique framework for exploring family issues with future clients, both individual and family.

The Audience

The role of the audience was of paramount importance. I needed to know my audience members and I needed them to be a supportive and holding container for my story. Therefore, I selected who I wanted to witness my story by extending personal invitations. This consisted of fellow student Drama Therapists and selected teaching staff, representing the individuals I trusted most and who knew me quite well. My audience consisted of eighteen individuals.

My siblings were also invited to be part of the audience but I viewed their role somewhat differently. As representatives of my family, I needed them in particular to hear and understand my story. Although I know my family loves me, I have often felt misunderstood, judged, disappointed and seen through a narrow lens. Due to the fact that we have rarely been able to openly communicate true and intense feelings both of love and of pain, the performance was a more “acceptable” and safe way to communicate my version of the family story and to show related feelings and emotions. I chose not to invite my parents because I felt that it would be too much for them to witness; I was concerned about and was protecting them from feelings of guilt, shame and self-blame.

The Performance Space

I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged. (Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 9)

From the beginning, I wanted as little “external” influence on the process as possible. I needed flexibility in the length of time and frequency of use of the rehearsal and performance space, considering that I had opted for a very organic and unstructured process and that Leslie, my director, was a mother of four children who also required flexibility in scheduling. Therefore, when she suggested the possibility of doing the performance in my home, I instinctively knew it was the right choice for this process.

I was excited by the idea of a supportive and holding circle in a more sacred space, which my living space came to be in the second year of my graduate work, as my roommate, Kristin, and I worked through many personal and professional issues. Aesthetically, a public stage would not support the intimate nature of my process in the same way as my own living space. Artistically, a performance in my living space supported the idea of telling *my* story, in *my* space, a safe space.

This choice was also a unique one in view of other Self-Revelatory Performances. Emunah refers to drama therapy students who do environmental pieces where the audience “is taken to a specific site that related symbolically to the content of the scene or evokes a particular mood ...” (Emunah, 1994, p. 226). Previous drama therapy students have done their performances in spaces that evoked feelings appropriate for their work. Konigsberg (1996) performed in an outdoor space that invoked the energy of the period from which the archetypal character she had explored came and where the audience moved to different locations with the actor. Pasle-Green (1996) performed at the alter of

the All Saint's Episcopal Church in the Haight Ashbury district of San Francisco due her spiritual life. She also used the space to underscore the theme of family by taking her audience on an imaginary tour of her parent's home. Voorberg (1997) also performed in a church which was significant to her exploration of her relationship with her father who was very involved with the church during her childhood. Polhemus (1992) and Rubin (1996) chose conventional theatre spaces and they both referred to the aesthetic distance which performance provides. Polhemus (1992) felt that performance "removes someone from the emotional system. It creates a distance between the self and others" (p. 19).

The Technical Aspects

The focus of the performance was the actor and her story. I did not want the performance to be hindered by technical difficulties nor did I want to spend much time going through the acrobatics required to bring the performance to technical readiness. Because of her desire to "focus on movement, story, and feeling, rather than becoming distracted by scenery" (p. 31), Rubin (1996) chose to perform on a stark stage with only a chair and a shopping bag filled with newspapers. Polhemus (1996), however, chose to present her work with all the conventional theatrical accoutrements including theatre lighting, programmes, flyers, props, costumes and curtains which she experienced as a "huge hassle" (p. 9). Although Polhemus does not provide a rationale for use of these, Emunah emphasizes the importance for the Self-Revelatory Performance to be "successful in theatrical terms" (p. 290), with aesthetics, such as lighting and a performance space, playing a primary role in creating a "heightened sense of theatricality" (p. 225). She views the aesthetic and therapeutic components as being intertwined (p. 292). Emunah is not so concerned with supporting the standards of

traditional theatre but only holds to the opinion “that works of art should be communicative, evocative, and engaging” (p. 290) and can be accomplished through aesthetic.

I used various means to create a “heightened sense of theatricality” (Emunah, 1994). The performance was done in the living room, a 10x10 foot space, with my audience sitting primarily in the three rows of chairs in the dining room, which was 9x10 feet. The two spaces were separated by an archway that served much like a proscenium. For lighting, I used two clip-on lamps, with 60-watt bulbs, each secured on opposite sides of the archway and positioned for maximum lighting of the stage for dramatic effect.

I used two musical pieces, one to open the performance and the other to close it, which were controlled by the actor on stage and naturally incorporated into each scene. The set consisted of a raised platform upstage centre, three chairs in the corners of the room and a pile of books. Props emerged without planning, taking shape as we went along and as I brought in pieces that seemed important that day. A teddy bear which I used very nonchalantly in my rehearsal process to enhance the role of the *eight-year-old-girl* became an important symbol of my inner child. Its physicality and how it was handled on stage became magnified and therefore had a powerful presence on stage. The only specific reference to props was made by Voorberg (1996) who found that a black velvet robe used as a prop took on the significance of a transitional object and assisted her in enhancing character and role. For simplicity, I chose to have no costume changes as well as no programmes or flyers.

Emunah (1994) states that the final performance may be improvisational rather than scripted. The other student Self-Revelatory Performances involved the use of a

script. Polhemus (1992) wrote her script after the rehearsal process as a way of solidifying her process and for the purpose of sound and lighting cues. However, I did not work with a script. Ultimately, the story I was to tell was so familiar to me and ingrained in my body and mind that I did not feel that I needed a script.

The Director

The most important requirement for the director was to provide me with a safe and holding container in which I could openly explore sensitive material. Secondly, the director needed to be able to work very organically and have the ability to move from one place to another, honouring the process above all. Thirdly, this person needed to have an artistic sensibility. My director, Leslie, fulfilled all of these requirements in addition to having worked successfully with me in as a co-actor in our own performance and as drama therapy students in the Concordia programme.

In other Self-Revelatory Performances, the role of the director was played out in a range of different ways. Pasle-Green (1996) participated in numerous workshops and worked individually with various drama therapists, spiritual practitioners, etc. Similarly, Voorberg (1997) used sessions in Authentic Movement and psychodrama to support her process. There were others that worked without a director (Konigsberg, 1996) and one performer who brought in three individuals to assist her in the week before her performance (Rubin, 1996).

Rehearsal (Creative Process) and Therapy

Safety and support during the process was, of course, very important. One day a week, I arranged for morning rehearsals with Leslie followed by personal processing and an afternoon session with my personal drama therapist. Rehearsals almost always began

with a discussion of what was happening for me, emotionally, and what issues were at the surface and required exploration. These discussions became very important to me as Leslie acted more like a witness as well as “assistant meaning-maker”; that is, with her help I could make sense of some of the themes that were coming up. She randomly used techniques such as improvised role-playing, visualization, psychodramatic techniques such as empty chair, role reversal and future projection as the situation required. The rehearsal process was the “battleground” where I grappled with many of the issues.

Afterwards, I would process our sessions by journaling and drawing or painting. With my therapist I further explored the issues that emerged during rehearsal through movement and embodiment, art and other means. These sessions were valuable in that the therapist was able to offer a completely different manner in which to explore the same themes and to delve further into these. It offered me the opportunity to gain some distance from my personal process with Leslie and to reflect on this with the assistance of a creative arts therapist. It gave me another opportunity to see myself through interactions with another individual. It was a day that allowed me to focus deeply on myself and the process for at least five hours.

The process of the other students’ work will be detailed in chapter 3.

CHAPTER 2 THE PROCESS

Rehearsals (Creative Process)

In describing my Self-Revelatory Performance process, it is my intention to take the reader through the various stages in chronological order as I experienced them: the rehearsal or creative process, the transition to performance, the performance itself and the post-performance. I will begin with a description of the significant sessions with my director, highlighting the themes explored. Journal entries and descriptions of personal therapy sessions will be used to support these themes.

My intention for the rehearsal process was to explore themes and issues organically, spontaneously and playfully in an unstructured, non product-oriented manner. I did not want to anticipate any aspect of the final performance.

During a discussion in the first meeting with Leslie, my director, I explored intense negative feelings I had experienced during a personal interaction and eventually made a very strong emotional connection between my expectations, disappointment and feelings of “being dropped.” At that moment, images from two often-repeated family stories presented themselves. One was of being “dropped” into the fireplace as a child and the other was of the amount of time I must have spent alone in my crib with my dog Nino at my side, crying if he ventured off. I allowed myself to cry freely. I sketched images from those stories. Underneath the sadness were feelings of rage and vulnerability. This marked the beginning of my process and was to inform the themes that would be played out again and again. As I reflect back, I remember that I dismissed Leslie’s suggestion of abandonment.

In the next session, I was feeling particularly agitated by past family difficulties. Leslie guided me into an enactment of my adolescence which ultimately led to a tirade towards my parents in which I told them that I was fed up living my life the way they wanted me to and that I would not do so any longer; I refused to meet their needs of who I should be. Afterwards, I found myself sketching a triangle with each of our roles labeled on it and made the stunning realization for the first time that we had been and may still be “triangled”, a Bowenian term which I will discuss further in chapter 3. In order to gain a better understanding of what had happened prior to my adolescence, Leslie guided me back to an earlier time in my life. I closed my eyes as she asked me to visualize my childhood home and the spaces I remembered. I then took on the role of myself as an *eight-year-old girl* and spoke about my family and other events as I remembered them at that time, with Leslie asking questions occasionally. When I de-rolled, my immediate reaction was one of surprise and great love for this vulnerable *little girl*. Later, I wrote:

I love my little *girl*. She is so endearing. She was so observant but so lost. No mirror for herself, but lots of rules and she knew how to follow them, boy. She was good at it. Under-nourished, under-stimulated. A flower in the desert. She didn't have any anger, hate, rage. Not yet. (personal journal, January 22, 2002)

It was this little *eight-year-old-girl* who would, later, open the performance and tell her story.

Over a number of sessions, I explored intensely negative reactions toward a number of individuals. “I dislike their mask, their duality, their non-authenticity, their weakness” (personal journal, February 8, 2002). In one particular session, Leslie guided me through the use of role play and role reversal, a psychodramatic technique, in which I spoke to an individual whose constant display of what I considered “weakness” irked me. In role reversing, I discovered the sad little girl within me and I became gentler and more

compassionate. When Leslie asked me why, I said “Because it’s my child and I love her, in all her weakness” (personal journal, February 8, 2002).

On the same day, during my personal therapy session, while telling my therapist about the little *girl*, I found myself saying: at times, I feel that I carry rage for all the voiceless women in my past for whom it was impossible to express any true feelings; it hurts when I am called a bitch; I have chosen men in my life who appear “safe” but who can never give me what I need. I was aware of most of these feelings but I didn’t really know why I felt that way or whether they were connected. Due to the fact that I have had numerous unfulfilled relationships in my life, and that I was struggling with a five-year relationship with my partner, Jeremy, at the time, I expected that this theme would present itself for exploration at some point.

In a subsequent session, I told Leslie about a strange thing that had occurred the night before as I was drawing at my desk:

I felt a “movement” or shadow. I thought one of the cats had come in (although the door was closed). I turned to look in that direction and there I see my phone cord swinging gently. I continue to look and wait for it to stop and I think if it doesn’t stop I could justify it by saying it was a draft or the heat coming out of the rad. But the swinging stopped. I froze ... What am I so afraid of? Ghosts. Someone who wants to talk to me. Tell me about my shadow. Teach me something. I don’t know if I want it like that. I can’t deal with it. Why am I so closed to the idea? My mother’s stories about spirits that visited her and her mom scared me. (personal journal, January 30, 2002)

This incident prompted Leslie to do a visualization exercise with me during which I explored my fear of the dark, in a regressed state. I was to envision being in a tent in the dark during a camping trip. When she asked me if I could see anyone there with me, I was puzzled to find that I could not see anyone in the dark. I found myself repeatedly saying “I’m afraid, so they won’t come. They know I’m afraid” (personal journal,

February 12th 2002). I began to cry. My immediate reaction was that it had something to do with intimate relationships in my life. During this visualization, I remember wanting desperately for Leslie to push me further to open my eyes. Ultimately I did not do so. She attempted to explore a connection to my paternal grandmother but it did not feel right, although in my journal that day, I wrote: "What unfinished business is there in my family that is being played out in me in this generation?" (personal journal, February 12, 2002). I am not sure why I asked this question. Perhaps I was searching for the source of this fear.

The following week in my personal therapy session, we explored further the theme of romantic relationships. I spoke of a *little girl* as I explained to my therapist why I had such a special relationship with Jeremy. She asked me to tell the story as this *little girl*. I told the story of an *eight-year-old-girl* and a 13-year-old boy. Ironically, Jeremy is eleven years younger than I am.

They [the children] talk well together. The adults talk well together. Then, it's really beautiful and magical. But when either child has to talk to the adult, forget it ... My *little girl*, when she's not happy, she rages, she hurts and judges and insults. She can be so mean. She wants to say "You're not taking care of me." "You're not seeing me." "You're not letting me be who I am." "I don't care what you think." "Help me to grow up. Show me." She's *hungry*, not for food though. She's proud. She wants to play but she's shy to ask. She's cute. She's got beautiful hair, a big smile. Sometimes she likes to wear dresses, other times pants, but not jeans. She's not allowed. She always wears shoes when her parents are around. She's in awe of this 13-year-old boy. She thinks he's so beautiful: a beautiful heart, a beautiful face. She loves his music. She loves how he can write and then put them together. It's so beautiful and she loves him. She tells him sometimes. She hopes that he can see that she loves him. He hears her. He hears her words. He feels the same for her. And it's so amazing. He's ok with her being mad. He sees that she needs to be. And she's so beautiful. She can see all his wonder even if he seems to have lost the stuff in his wagon. I don't appreciate people telling me I'm crazy for what I'm doing with Jeremy. How can they even think to comment. Can't they see that my heart is full? (personal journal, February 5, 2002)

I had read a provocative piece of writing a few months earlier by Michael Ventura, a novelist with a Jungian slant, that had struck a cord in me and through which I was now seeing the archetypal flavour of my story with Jeremy. I decided it needed to be recited in my performance during the *woman-in-waiting* scene.

My experience of relationship is two people more or less compulsively playing musical chairs with each other's selected inner archetypes ... I am your lost father and you are my doting daughter. I am your worshiper and you are my goddess. I am your god and you are my priestess. I am your client and you are my analyst. I am your intensity and you are my ground... Animus, anima, bopping on a seesaw. These hold up well enough while the archetypal pairings behave. But when the little boy inside him is looking for the mommy inside her and finds instead on this particular night a sharp-toothed analyst dissecting his guts. When the little girl playacting a goddess to please the daddy who's really a lecherous worshiper and ... little girls can't come. Or if a woman is attracted to a macho-man who is secretly looking to be mothered: when a man's sexual self is in the service of an interior little boy it's not surprising that he can't get it up or comes too quick. Or they're really not *there* at all, they're masturbating, really, men in their little-boy psyches for whom the real woman is just a stand-in;... On the other hand, teachers fuck pupils with excitement, analysts fuck clients with abandon, and people seeing each other, in bed, as gods and goddesses light up the sky - but the psyche is a multiple and shifting entity, and none of these compatible pairings hold stable for long. The archetypal mismatches soon begin, and then it's a disaster of confrontations that can take years not even to sort out... but simply to exhaust itself and fail. And then the cycle starts all over again with someone else. (Ventura, 1985, p. 20-21)

Two powerful images emerged and were explored further in sketches and in discussion with Leslie and my personal drama therapist. One image was that of a thick barrier separating me and my siblings from our parents, extended family and ancestors.

A vision emerged of me bracing my legs against a thick wall that is supported by all the people in my family history, and is pushing closer towards me, wanting to encroach on my life. I place myself and my siblings on the other side where I am ... The barrier has been created by a move to Canada, my personality and education, and also by the force of the push by my ancestors. I place my sister ½ on my side, ½ over the barrier, but not spilling over on the other side. Anthony is placed where I am but he's represented by a double circle – thicker skinned? Charlie is the furthest away. This is a very strong image and seems to apply only

when I'm feeling "pushed". Because, on the other had, I'm also quite comfortable at times on the other side with my parents, aunts and uncles, cousins but I can do so only if I'm feeling strong and loving and only if I have "protection" in certain circumstances such as ear plugs (the most useful), a blindfold and a gag (the least useful it seems because I can't shut up).
(personal journal, February 20, 2002)

In my personal therapy session, I embodied each of these four positions and explored them further.

The other image was a long, difficult, unlit road on which I was traveling with no guidance, no mentors. However, it was new, had room for new rules for traveling and it instilled a sense of freedom and growth.

"Where did you get that sense of freedom?" Leslie asked. For one, when you've been suffocated, stifled, not supported or not supported in the right way, when roles have been forced upon you, when you've been pushed, you want freedom! And you probably bounce over to "too much" freedom before you find an equilibrium. Secondly, it probably has something else to do with personality and living in a society that values freedom, no matter how costly or how unforbidden it was in mine.
(personal journal, February 22, 2002)

Through this process, my advisor, Dr. Stephen Snow, requested to observe our work. Although I felt amenable to this and cognitively I understood the reason for it, as the date drew near, I was panic-stricken and emotional. I felt my work was going to be open for inspection, critiqued, changed by another individual and my desire to have it be my own, uncensored and untouched, would vanish. My director was working in service of me, my process and my objectives. What was this person in a position of authority going to do with my story? I felt very vulnerable and resistant. It was evident to me that I was projecting the lack of freedom and judgment I experienced in my family onto Stephen.

In part, it had to do with the very vulnerable characters (mostly children) that I had discovered and feeling protective of them. Now they would be witnessed.

They weren't ready. They hadn't yet figured out what was happening for themselves and the prospect of having someone else watch them, see it and figure it out was too much for them. It was important that they get some insight about themselves first....It also raises for me issues of being seen, being seen unfinished, not knowing, not very ready at all, not prepared, raw. The words/images that come to mind: half-baked, not right, incomplete, open, hurt, judged, not free, interrupted, influenced, controlled infringed, 'do it like this', 'this is better', 'this is what you should do', 'my idea is ...' No! That's about you, not me. I want to do it my way, find my own way, make mistakes, fail. It has to be mine. Not yours. Give it back. Take your hands off it. Let go. Give me space, freedom. I'm doing it right. Right for me. It has to be right for me! (personal journal, March 8, 2002)

Transition to Performance

Another shadow moment: this week's rehearsal with Leslie. I became agitated, unsure, angry, annoyed about what I was doing with my performance. I'm really just scared and wanting guidance and reassurance. Leslie was right. I was trying to ask for this of her and she wasn't quite doing it for me and I got even more insecure. I felt like she failed to keep me focused, on topic, thinking about what I needed to do. But part of the agitation was frustration with myself and the process. It's that time in the process where things shift and I question them. When I'm fearful, I show it outwardly, aggressively. I don't keep it in. Because if I did, it would kill me. (personal journal, April 6, 2002)

The transition to the performance was difficult and ungraceful. I wrote out lists of characters and situations and events that I had explored and could not come to any decision about which needed to be included. I was lost. What were my stories and what were the family stories and which did I want to communicate? What did I want this performance to be? My level of expectation for this performance was so high that I began to feel that I could not rise to the occasion. I drew diagrams that depicted the themes in different ways. It was overwhelming. Ten days before my performance, new themes emerged; themes of being lost and a need to re-parent myself. I remembered new incidents that affected me as a child. I experienced frustration and disappointment in being told by my mother that my recollection of certain family stories was incorrect. I

created a life map hoping to obtain clues for what I should do. Again, I felt lost and I experienced a familiar feeling of not being able to clearly see myself, as in a dream. Leslie and I had reached an impasse. She wanted to continue to explore organically. I was falling into my “goal-oriented, linear, controlling” self as the deadline for delivering a product (the performance) drew near.

I decided that I needed to work alone for a while. In a matter of a few days, I had a chronological list of scenes and characters chosen from the repertoire of images, characters, and events that we had uncovered during rehearsal as well as others, which had been awakened by the process and, I felt, needed to be presented. This comprised a large part of my performance, the content of which ultimately did not change a great deal.

One week before the performance, as I continued to struggle with the rest of the scenes and characters, the intensity of the process was further heightened by other emotions and events going on in my life, including the painful realization that my relationship with Jeremy was coming to an end.

Woke up feeling ok but got progressively more morose, sad, sensitive, vulnerable... I talked about my guilt at not inviting my parents to my self-revelatory performance and worrying about how they were feeling about not being invited. Then I spoke with Leslie and she seemed to be upset. It turned out she was a bit annoyed with me that I was still at Tamar's and she wanted to work earlier than she had told me and she's feeling the pressure of putting on the performance on Saturday and feeling that since I had gotten a good review on the first half of the show, I had relaxed and wasn't moving forward to the other half. Through all this, the sadness and anger I'm feeling about today being exactly 14 days since Jeremy has called me set in. I was feeling very lonely... I was feeling exposed and taking in too much of people's emotions around me. Feeling unsupported ... Leslie and I talked. I realized I really needed her to help me hold all this and in the meantime she was angry and annoyed with me. We walked through parts of the rest of the performance. I can't be in performance mode all week. I'm too exposed. It's not like acting another character. Acting another character just means that you have to find the connection between the character and yourself – where the two meet. In self-rev you're it! There

is not 'meeting place'. It's a direct line to me... I'm ripe and I'm ready and it doesn't take very much to get me there. Like a woman who knows her own orgasms well enough to know how to get herself there quickly.
(personal journal, April 22, 2002)

One of Emunah's clients speaks about a similar feeling regarding her little girl character:

"... I didn't feel I was being funny or acting. I felt I just became the girl. And afterwards I panicked, because I was still the girl" (Emunah, 1994, p. 258).

After working on the remainder of the performance and fine-tuning the characters, Leslie attempted to communicate to me that there was a very important element missing from the performance, which I was avoiding. In fact, she had been trying to uncover this missing part in the existing characters and scenes but was having some difficulty due to my resistance. This discussion was witnessed by my advisor who was observing the rehearsal that day. He concurred with Leslie's observations. I did not agree with her and attempted to rationalize that it had simply not surfaced in the explored material. I tried to argue that the performance was more about my childhood and not about current issues. Stephen was very gentle and unobtrusive and observed the rehearsal and this interaction with the utmost of respect. After a while, I felt relief and somehow more open to what they were attempting to communicate to me. After Stephen left, Leslie asked me to retrieve my personal journals over the last few years. Entry after entry in my relationship with Jeremy, the same pattern emerged: endless waiting for a response to a call or an email finally followed by contact full of promise and emotion and love and forgiveness followed by more painful waiting. It was obvious that Leslie was right.

Still nothing from Jeremy. Part of me is hurt and feeling abandoned... I can't rehearse my life... It's just present, always. The need for audience response, involvement. Seeing myself through their eyes. Re-traumatization. Is that happening here? Is that why I can't rehearse? What is it about this impasse? Not wanting to explore

the hunger for relationship, not wanting to take it further. I'm resilient. I won't die. I don't accept aloneness. But I've lived it. I have been alone. I have been with lovers and been totally alone. Why do I accept that? Why am I so willing to have that?
(personal journal, April 25, 2002)

As a result of this, the *woman-in-waiting* scene emerged two days before performance!

Leslie was not satisfied with the amount of work done on this scene but accepted it due to my discomfort with it and the lack of time available before performance.

...It's shameful. I hate it. It emerged from reading journal entries since last April. It's unbelievable ... how much waiting I've done for Jeremy. It's utterly embarrassing. That he could feed me a morsel and that would keep me going for so long, over and over again. In a way, it's the most difficult piece in the performance. (personal journal, April 26, 2002)

Performance

The following is a list of scenes and characters that made up my performance.

1. Entrance and introduction to the life of the *eight-year-old girl*
2. *16-year-old adolescent* reminiscing about her early childhood and the elopement of her parents
3. Images of abuse, *little girl/adolescent*
4. Emergence of the *animal* in response to events in the previous scene
5. Emergence of the *woman-in-waiting*
6. Emergence of the *hungry woman*, "*Jacunda*" the Maneater
7. The *judging/impatient woman* makes an appearance
8. *teller/holder of family stories* pays homage to the ancestors and their stories

I am feeling ok. I'm not nervous. I feel I am honouring me and my experience. I have an audience of my choosing, supportive, loving. This is an offering to my ancestors, my culture, and marks the start of a new existence for my family. I offer this up to them. It is my gift. Please accept it. This performance marks the beginning for me of a number of things: 1. relationships – experienced much differently than

before. 2. goodbye to Jeremy. 3. a beginning of the second half of my life as vital and meaningful as the first half was painful and soul-searching. 4. the start of my life work. 5. laying to rest my pain and regrets and lostness. (personal journal, April 26, 2002)

As I sat in my bedroom, reflecting on my performance and making last minute changes and additions, I could hear my audience members arriving and my thoughts were racing. These are the people who love me and no matter what they see of me, still manage to love and respect me. This was important. I summon Leslie to come in. I want to talk to her about some a few last minute ideas I have. She smiles like a supportive mom to her child and reassures me that all will be well. I could hear Kristin mingling with the others. She had returned from Calgary, perhaps a little earlier than she had planned, so that she could be present for my performance. This meant a lot to me. I could hear Suzanne and her infectious laugh and unmistakable accent; one of my biggest supporters. I could hear Stephen. Oh my, Stephen was in my apartment rubbing elbows with everyone. But where are my brothers and sister-in-law to be? I didn't hear them. Five minutes to go. I hear Bonnie and my brothers. How awkward for them. I hope they are doing fine. Earlier they joked about being watched and judged. What an absolutely strange situation, really. All my dear friends from Montreal, my most trusted teachers and part of my family, in my apartment. I am reminded of how sacred this space has been over the past year. It's time. It is unbelievably quite. I move to the hallway, taking with me my bear Leggy, given to me with lots of love by Kristin and Cynthia. I give my director the queue. I'm on ...

When I reached the stage area and turned around, I was immediately taken aback at first by eighteen people sitting in my living space and also warmed and filled up with love by the fact that they were all eager and excited to be there and supportive of my

efforts. I wanted to show my appreciation and I did so, in character, as I made contact with each one.

At the end of the first scene, as the *eight-year-old girl* finished playing hopscotch, she sat facing her audience and sang the lyrics of the song that was playing: “I want to show you, I want to show you my heart.” A wave of emotion came over me as well as the feeling of opening up my skin to let my audience in to my heart and my life. I wanted to say to my trusted audience “please tread carefully, be gentle as you receive and hold my story.”

Doing the third scene proved to be much more difficult, now, with my siblings in the audience. It was important for me to tell this part of the *little girl*’s story but I was also conscious of how my siblings were receiving it.

The *animal* was as terrified as it was terrifying. In an effort to protect, the *animal* turned her desire to cry into a ferociousness capable of maiming. She really didn’t want to harm; only to send a strong message that she would protect her young at any cost. I felt ashamed to show this part of me and feeling ungrateful in directing this rage to my trusting audience. When I retreated to the raised area on the stage wrapped around the teddy bear, it took a long time for me to make the transition to the next scene. I was feeling very present in my mind and body and my thoughts were: “you need to stay here, it’s not time to transition, take your time, your audience will be right there with you, breathe, let the *animal* drain from your body, breathe.”

The transition felt particularly poignant for me as the *animal* disappeared and a beautiful and self-assured woman emerged. The only problem was that this woman had an unsavoury ability to wait for certain things in her life for a long time. The waiting that

occurred at the beginning of this scene felt familiar and comfortable. There was a quality in the waiting, of doing absolutely nothing on stage, of simply being. I wasn't waiting at all. Was I? I did not feel anxious about keeping my audience waiting despite the fact that I sensed their discomfort. The feeling of being grounded shifted to anxiety as the scene progressed and as I layered on my face makeup with growing desperation in each stage of waiting. Feelings of shame and judgment crept in. To my great surprise, this scene elicited laughter amongst audience members. In the moment, I felt relieved and it must also have been a release for them after the discomfort of watching me do nothing. Yes, it was rather humorous, wasn't it? I did not feel mocked or foolish. It was very funny. I had to resist the urge to laugh. Waiting and reading and underlining important parts of Hendrix's book Getting The Love You Want was funny!

How was I now going to move to *Jacunda, the Maneater*. This piece had grown out of a very private, sexually charged moment of need for a person I hardly knew. I was baring it for all to see. Should I still do it? I hadn't been able to learn the lines or deliver the monologue without them. My director's words stayed with me: there's something you are avoiding. Suzanne was sitting front row centre. Yes, I would do this piece and direct it to her. It should be easy, really, because we have a special connection. Here goes ... I was uncomfortable and self-conscious through this entire piece. I felt that I did not do justice to my very raw and real feelings of "skin hunger". It felt shameful and somewhat embarrassing to express my voracious need for closeness and the need to tear into someone's skin and to burrow inside of them for comfort. But there it was, out in the open. I wanted it to end as soon as possible but it seemed to last forever.

At the end of the performance, when I revisited each place on stage where my characters had been, I experienced a huge flood of emotion and, then, tenderness. It was like revisiting my entire life; sitting inside of it rather than watching it. I let the tears and emotions run freely. I let my audience support and follow me through that journey. I felt they were right there with me. I left each place only after feeling satisfied that I had really experienced and honoured what was there and, as I did, I bid that place and that energy farewell. The music etched this feeling a little deeper into my mind. It was not until three months after the performance that I listened to the lyrics. Despite not being able to decipher all the words, it is eerie to me now how many of the artist's thoughts echoed the themes in my own process.

Beside the heart ... searching for the answer ... make for sleep and peace
of mind ... taste the sour words ... test of devotion, something you need ...
out of time, they told her why, not to ask those questions and their cry ...
a fatal start ... never take the blame ... boy you swore to catch me as I run ...
savour him with guilt in my eyes ... memory ... because if you really tried
to see the place ... all the things that one can deserve is enough to wonder
why you punish your girls ... facing you now ... better than facing nothing
at all. (Sarah Slean, "Sarah Slean" CD, 2001)

I have been heard. I am done. It is over. A flood of new emotion: love ... for my audience, my director and for my life. Thank you. I am in tears. My brother Anthony leaves his seat to come to the stage. He gives me a hug and tells me how great it was. The audience watches.

Post-Performance

I asked my audience members to take turns approaching the stage and standing in a place on the stage where a particular character or event or text had had a strong effect on them. I asked them to say anything that struck them, if they desired. I told them it was my turn to watch them as I took my place in the audience. In a ritualized manner,

each one of them very beautifully and respectfully weaved themselves into my story. It was like an exchange of the most wonderful gifts between friends. I felt the intensity of true connection to the human spirit and feelings of validation.

I became starkly aware of my sibling's tears and emotions, especially those of my brother, Charlie. This had been very difficult for them. I hoped that I had not inflicted them with undue pain. My interaction with them after the performance was somewhat distant. I had planned to have an intimate discussion in my apartment about what they had observed. However, Anthony's allergies prevented him from remaining in the apartment and he, Carolyn, and Charlie decided to leave to have dinner. It had been suggested by my therapist, a few days before the performance, that we conduct a debriefing session after the performance. In the span of thirty minutes I had to decide with whom I was going to spend the evening. I had difficulty with this decision. In deciding to be a part of the debriefing session at home, I struggled with feelings of guilt for not choosing to be with my siblings. In the end, my decision was based on my need for support, sharing and reflection on the performance that I suspected I would not get from my siblings over dinner.

Four individuals remained at the end of the evening to participate in a one-and-a-half hour session of sharing thoughts and feelings. This group was comprised of my director, my therapist, and two close friends. "*Self-Revelatory Performance* is best followed by a simple ritual bringing the group [actors] together in celebration of its work and validation of the intensity and intimacy that have been experienced" (Emunah, 1994, p. 226). In the serenity of the space in which I did my performance, with a few candles lit, we sat in an intimate circle and I relished in all that was shared and celebrated

about me. I was elated and exhausted. I left my set as it was and I slept in the performance space on the futon which had functioned as a set piece. I had a strong desire to “be” with my work, my pictures, drawings, family, ancestors and the incredible energy that filled the space that night. I felt anxious as I wondered if any spirits would attempt to make themselves known through the night and but I wanted to be there anyway.

Audience Response

A number of people were surprised by my vulnerability and the change in my normally high-spirited energy and strong physical presence. People were also struck by the powerful silences in the performance. Some people indicated strong reactions to the *animal* and to *Jacunda*. The images, body postures and facial expressions of these characters had stayed with them for days. One individual stated that the performance had “furthered everyone’s story”. This is supported by Emunah’s thoughts that this process is “reminiscent of Grotowski’s *holy theatre*, in which the actors’ exposure of their ‘innermost core’ invites the audience on a similar journey of psychological and spiritual examination” (Emunah, 1994, p. 290).

Director Response

In a sharing session a few weeks later Leslie provided me with detailed feedback, beginning with her thoughts that “It was alive the moment you walked into the room” (personal conversation, May 14, 2002). She said I went farther into my childhood experience than she had seen me go and that she did not feel at all worried for me in that moment. Leslie *did* feel concern about how I would navigate the transitions from one scene or character to another. In the end, she was proud of the flow and, in particular, the transition from *animal* to *woman-in-waiting*: “you really stayed with it ... being soothed

and comforted... I needed and wanted to watch it settle... very dynamic” (personal conversation, May 14, 2002). She, too, had noticed that the animal was more hurt than ferocious and acknowledged my still existent feelings of hurt. She said that the waiting was uncomfortable as the information was coming very slowly but, nonetheless, the scene accomplished was it was intended to. About the characters, she said “the characters were always a reflection of you – never over the top, staying very true. They were showing layers of who you are – never a caricature. The characters evolved through the performance” (personal conversation, May 14, 2002). Some questions she was left with: “What would have happened if the family stories were placed first? What if someone else played you? Would you show your parents? What would you want from your own children?” (personal conversation, May 14, 2002).

Aftermath with Family

The morning after my performance, I traveled to Toronto with my siblings. I attempted on numerous occasions to broach the subject of the performance. I was met with very brief, unemotional responses and attempts to change the subject. It was evident that there was going to be no discussion at *this* time.

My mom asked about the performance and I gave as little detail as possible being careful to avoid the important “bits,” afraid that it would make her feel badly.

My fortieth birthday celebration was “slapped” together in a couple of days. It consisted of a two-hour dinner with my immediate family during which I felt completely “uncelebrated.” I was extremely emotional and felt depressed and very much like the *little girl* in my performance all over again. Life imitates art. I felt very angry with my mother and my sister. I suppressed all of these emotions so that I would not upset

everyone, until I released them in private with my brother, Anthony, and my sister, Tina, comforting me. My family had disappointed me once again.

What a strange time in my life. It's such a huge transition. School ends. Where to settle and find work? Jeremy is so over. Kristin is leaving for Calgary May 11th, much earlier than anticipated. My performance done. Being with my parents. Not fitting in to anyone's life, not my parents, not my sister's, not Anthony's, not Charlie's. I'm on my own, totally. It does however give me the opportunity to really be selfish and reinvest my life, reinvent how I want to live. It's scary. I feel alone. I feel somewhat unsupported. I feel that I'd like to share it with someone... I've been very cranky. I've felt that my family has not considered the importance of my birthday... I'm on the edge all the time. (personal journal, May 1, 2002)

As usual, my friends came through for me and honoured my fortieth birthday by throwing a surprise party upon my return to Montreal.

On the day of my actual birthday, I felt disappointed again when my parent's neighbour called to wish me happy birthday instead of my parents. I spoke with her and, then, to her mother before the phone was passed to my parents. I felt the familiar hurt feelings. I tried ever so gently to enquire about why they did not make the call, suppressing my real feelings. Their response was typical and exemplified the nature of our current relationship. My mother was practical and unemotional. My father response was avoidant but charming.

... Then I talked to my mom. She tried to sound all cheery for me and I appreciate that but I did ask her why she hadn't called. They'd been walking and ended up at Commara's [the neighbour] house and since it's her house it was appropriate for her to make the call! That pissed me off. When dad got on the line, he was sweet and when I commented on his being the last, he said he was being a gentleman. Hard to get pissed at that approach. But I did take the opportunity to say that he should (there's that word) be first. In our family, it is highly unnatural to be so direct and say "I would have liked you to be first." I tried to be ok with all this but I was denying my feelings about why they hang back so much... I cannot help how I feel. I guess that little *girl* is a lot more hurt than I thought. Then afterwards when she subsides and the adult returns, I feel I've given them an unnecessarily hard time. And I understand more that my parents are shy, reserved, unable to communicate emotion. I'm still struggling with

this... And yes, I understand them but I don't accept (that is my child, that part that hurts, does not accept) their behaviour and limitations.
(personal journal, May 15, 2002)

The intensity of emotion that I was feeling at this time was part of the post-performance depression that Emunah speaks about and was referred to by others who had embarked on this process. Emunah (1994) states that the performance process results in an altered self-image which is threatened once the performance ends and can lead to social withdrawal or acting-out behaviour when one realizes that the performance, no matter how potent, has not changed one's family, financial, or other situation. In going home immediately after the performance, I did not get the support and structure needed in the post-performance period to help integrate the new self-image, and to gain the closure and celebration that is required at this stage which Emunah (1994) accomplishes through an intensive series of sessions that parallel the intensity of the pre-performance stage.

Sibling Response

Anthony responded to a series of questions I had provided and these were further discussed in a phone conversation on August 26. Overall, he felt it had been a positive experience. What stood out most for him in the performance were my subtle glances at the photos on the wall and the emotions of courage, strength and pride. He connected most with the child who wanted to play and noted the vulnerability and impressionable mind of a child. The performance resulted in a realization and better understanding of my experience and my "inner self" (personal communication, July 16, 2002). He felt he had put pieces of a puzzle together about my life and how he fit into that. He also learned that he was more "open-minded, appreciative, emotionally in touch" (personal communication, July 16, 2002) than he had been in the past. The performance reassured

the strength of our bond as siblings. Prior to the performance, Anthony was fearful of being judged by the other audience members who knew about some of my family experiences. During the performance, he felt the absence of the other family members. He also expressed his desire not to relive the experience of the performance as it would require “restaging” our life.

On July 29, 2002, Charlie responded to my email request for feedback to the performance. He began by saying that he never imagined the performance to be so intense. Although he felt he had not learned anything new about me or our relationship, he was amazed by my ability to express myself through words and actions. He expressed his pride in the part I played in breaking “the vicious cycle in our family” (email communication, July 29, 2002). He found the intensity difficult but the message powerful and clear. He elicited very strong emotions in me when he stated that he would not be half the man he is if it was not for me and that I continue to teach him a great deal. I feel immense love for Charlie in his ability to understand who I am as well as who I am in his life. I also felt the shared pain of a childhood lost. A week later, strong feelings emerged and I felt compelled to send him another email telling him of how I had experienced a rush of images and remembered past events that involved my love for him and my motherly feelings toward him. He responded by saying he felt I was the mother figure he never had and that I understand him the most. This is true.

On August 4, 2002, my sister-in-law, Carolyn, and I had a phone conversation during which she expressed how moved she was by the performance. She noticed her eldest sister’s story in mine and she spoke of her sister’s need to look back and work out the incidents in her own childhood. This was difficult for Carolyn because it is not her

story. She said that she blocked out parts of the performance as they were too difficult to observe. She had a strong impulse to support Charlie through the performance but she did not know how or felt it was not her place to do so. Although she felt close to me afterwards, she was also angry as a result of not being able to process the feelings it brought up for her, feelings that she was not ready to deal with. She also felt at the time that nothing had changed in the sibling relationships and that it was not too late to engage in a discussion as a group during my next visit.

My sister, Tina, was unable to attend my performance, which I feel is a real gap in my process. Although the reason was a valid one, her delivery and lack of ownership to the guilt she was feeling left me feeling very hurt and disappointed. Three weeks after my birthday fiasco in Toronto my sister called to tell me that she felt it was her fault, that she was sorry and that she loved me. I was grateful for this despite my discomfort with her feelings of guilt. The conversation represented the first time I had really felt heard, validated and understood by her and it has made her more aware of my how sensitive I can be, which, in the past, has been disguised as anger. Since then, we have spent many hours talking openly about our feelings and experiences. Recently, my sister sent me a lengthy email outlining her response to a discussion regarding the insights gained from the process. It was quite clear in the email that we are very different individuals and we hold very different perspectives regarding our family experience. Tina also has a way of reframing her experience that allows her to deal with things differently than me and to defend and not blame. She is insightful about some of my experiences and not about others. Ultimately, she stated: "I have noticed a huge difference in you and I am very proud of you" (email communication, August 24, 2002).

CHAPTER 3 DISCUSSION OF THEORY, PROCESS AND FINDINGS

I will begin the discussion with a comparison of other student works using Self-Revelatory Performance as a means of investigating research questions related to my own, followed by a discussion of my own insights, findings and related literature.

Comparison with Other Self-Revelatory Performances

The following is a review of the Self-Revelatory Performance process of other drama therapy students at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco whose work I introduced in chapter 1, regarding rationales. This comparison is vital for two reasons. Firstly, this body of research represents emergent and compelling work using performance as a research tool. Secondly, like mine, the research question the authors attempt to answer involves exploration of some aspect of self and family.

I will first briefly outline the question each individual intended to answer and the outcome. Polhemus (1992) used the Self-Revelatory Performance process to disentangle and “differentiate” herself from her family, based on Bowen’s (1978) work, by accepting rejected parts of herself: child, adult, creative and healer self. The performance was her voice to her family and “brought to light the unseen webs and relationships that made it impossible for me to become an adult and named them in the presence of an audience” (Polhemus, 1992, p. 2). Polhemus’ exploration of self and family most closely approximated my own.

Through the creative process, a black velvet robe that was being used as a prop became a transitional object for Voorberg (1997) that helped her to reconnect with a series of childhood losses, including loss of contact with her father and lost parts of herself, and to re-integrate them.

Konigsberg's (1996) choice of performance had arisen naturally from a forty-five minute improvisation in class. She explored archetypal characters and themes of death, madness and rage via the historical figure of Juana La Loca in order to understand the conflict between her feminine and masculine parts. During the process she discovered her painful feelings regarding an unresolved relationship with her father.

Through her process, Pasle-Green (1996), in part, came to understand the social forces that had shaped her mother by revisiting her family roots. This allowed Pasle-Green to make peace with her mother and in turn helped her to achieve full integration of self and to "plant the seeds of healing in my relationship with my own daughter" (Pasle-Green, 1996, p. 63).

Rubin (1996) explored her own journey through the use of a story about a desert fish who finds its way back home to the ocean. Rubin believed that, in acting as the narrator of her own unfinished, uncomfortable and untold childhood and family stories, and in moving backward and forward in time as she needed, her process allowed her to find meaning in these stories and to integrate them back into her self.

Rehearsals

Pasle-Green (1996) allowed her rehearsal process to emerge organically and chaotically, as I did (albeit without a director) and through immersion in creative writing, psychodrama, mask-making and ritual story-telling workshops. She worked with another actor who played her daughter and, hence, encountered additional challenges. Voorberg (1997) used sessions in Authentic Movement and psychodrama to support her process. Konigsberg (1996) primarily used theatre and movement improvisation, her own writing and poetry as well as that of others, painting, as well as dreams and "Shamanic

journeying” (p. 10). I was struck by the very structured and disciplined manner in which Rubin (1996) worked through her rehearsal process. She began each journal entry with free writing and then a non-stop, timed writing for five minutes after which she would choose a sentence or thought and write about it further or do an improvisation.

Improvisations with movement and acting consisted of warm-ups, followed by a short sequence or a movement, based on themes in her journal entries, which would then be developed into a full-blown story. The starting place for Polhemus’ (1996) creative process were ideas and images that came from “strong, unshaped feelings” (p.5), memorable moments from her internship, a musical she had seen, and a dream. When she experienced feelings of fear or anxiety due to abandonment, she would rehearse the piece and it would soothe her. As a result, she experienced the rehearsal process as very healing and felt that she didn’t need to do the actual performance to achieve the healing.

Transition to Performance

Rubin’s (1996) transition was marked by a trip to the Utah desert one month prior to the performance, where she “let go” of her stories, and a one-week blitz to the final production, enlisting the assistance of three “performance coaches” (p.31) for five days. Polhemus documented the resistance exhibited by her and others involved in her performance as well as her feelings of anxiety and her need for perfection during this part of the process. The others did not make significant reference to a transition stage.

Performance

Rubin (1996) was the only researcher who wrote extensively about her experience during the performance. She felt herself being very present and being connected with the audience. She listened to their laughter and sighs and afterwards felt whole and complete

after being fully received. This echoed my own experience. Rubin also took care to ensure her audience was comfortable. This is something I never considered. I had been very selfish in regards to my own needs in choosing my audience and never once considered their safety and comfort, other than some concern at unleashing the *animal*. On the other hand, I also did what Rubin referred to as idealizing her audience, visualizing them as strong, sensitive, caring and receptive friends. Unlike my under-distanced role-playing of self at different stages of my life, her storyteller or narrative role helped create the emotional distance and safety she needed in order to allow her to give voice to the emotionally charged roles, in particular her vulnerable child-self and her rage-filled mother.

Post-Performance

Voorberg (1997) stated that after the performance, while in Holland, she felt empty, alone and totally abandoned. However, in allowing the aloneness “a new sense of preciousness and love arose” (p. 3). Pasle-Green (1996) stated that the performance was an “ecstatic experience” (p.23) that allowed her to integrate all aspects of her cultural heritage, confirm her trust in her inner knowing and allow her soul to be fully seen. She presented her work at a conference of the Association for Women in Psychology in Portland, Oregon, the response to which confirmed the healing power of the work. Rubin (1996) enjoyed and celebrated a new relationship with her old stories and began to see her child self as a survivor rather than a victim. Her plans were to use storytelling and performance as a non-threatening means of introducing people to drama therapy using what she had learned in her own process. Polhemus (1992) touched on the many of the same themes as my own and had similar results to mine. The process helped join her

child self and adult self. It allowed her to express long suppressed feelings and have her childhood experiences witnessed in a creative way. It also helped her differentiate from her family by loosening her bonds to her family so that she could continue to grow. The performance also triggered “emotional upheaval” (p. 18) and was the beginning of a dialogue between her and each family member. The result of my performance was much less catastrophic and I believe the “fall out” will occur much later.

Some theses were very theoretical and did not elaborate very much on their process (Voorberg, 1997; Pasle-Green, 1996). Others were very focused on the process and changes that ensued as a result of doing the performance (Konigsberg, 1996; Polhemus, 1992). It was much more gratifying to read the latter which attests to my own need to find a visceral connection to others’ experience.

Discussion - New Insights Regarding my Personal Story in the Context of the “Family Story”

In illustrating the difference between Self-Revelatory Performance and autobiographical theatre Emunah says of the former that “it presents issues whose exposure demands a high level of risk-taking, partly because they are current issues, rather than past issues which have already been resolved” (Emunah, 1994, p. 224). I believe now that I was trying to unpack and make sense of past unresolved issues in an effort to find the missing data that Branden refers to in chapter 1.

The rehearsal process gave birth to the performance, with all the associated labour pains. The performance, in turn, has acted as a catalyst for an ongoing process of looking at my life and of making sense of it. At times it has been emotionally challenging simply by virtue of being immersed in the material over such a short period of time and living

with and reworking the material in the documentation phase. I certainly achieved my intention of “sitting fully in my story” and in so doing I have released strong emotions; I have achieved greater understanding and I feel a greater sense of peace, of purpose and of having been healed.

The following discussion represents insights gleaned from the Self-Revelatory Performance process. It is not about blame. It is about honouring the story of the “child within me”.

The Self-Revelatory Performance process helped me to see that there was a child in me that I had not been acknowledging for years. This child emerged repeatedly in my exploration as though screaming to be heard. I was astonished by the love that I felt for her. Through the process I discovered her vulnerability and her beauty and I was reacquainted with her pain. I felt much like Polhemus (1992) did about her child self: “I needed to be the child and to go through all the feelings that I never experienced then” (p. 8).

The process also helped to make clear the extent to which I had been affected by the pedagogical child-rearing practices of my parents and the unmet needs in my childhood. Although this had not directly arisen in the creative process, it emerged in my struggle during the transition to the performance. It was as though my psyche knew it needed to be expressed but was unprepared to explore it prior to that.

I do not recollect many childhood memories until the age of eight or ten. What I inevitably recall above all else is oppression, abuse, sadness, and conflict. I was raised with the very strong beliefs, ideologies and customs of my culture which my parents clung to when they came to Canada. The negative aspects of these seemed to have

overshadowed the positive. I remember being constantly told to “sit and be quiet”, “it’s none of your business”, “don’t you dare talk back”, “you *should*...”, “I’m in control, not you.” Once, I heard “you will do as I say even if it’s wrong.” I remember trying to make sense of this as a child. Throughout my adolescence and early adulthood, I was not allowed to express my feelings, thoughts, opinions and it hurt. I remember feeling stuck. I felt that I was not allowed to leave my family but also I was not permitted to be who I was and to relay my hurt feelings. I had to grin and bear it. It was excruciating. This had made me a very angry person and, when young, I directed this anger at my siblings and, later, at my parents. When dependency needs are unmet the individual is left with inner yearnings to be loved, appreciated and approved which may be minimized or denied or covered over by feelings of anger, resentment, rejection of others (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 1973; Miller, 1984; Bradshaw, 1996). A person’s ability to perceive and *gain insight into* what is happening is blocked by “early enforcement of obedience and the suppression of feelings” (Miller, 1984, p. 74). What ensures this ongoing pattern from generation to generation is what Alice Miller (1984) calls “poisonous pedagogy”, a form of parenting that violates the rights of children and is then re-enacted when these children become parents. Maurizio Andolfi (1979), a family therapist from Italy, states that when changes occur within and outside of the family, which the family has difficulty adapting to, it disallows the continued growth amongst its members. This is a description of what happened to my family when they decided to move to Canada. I acknowledge Erikson’s (1968) thoughts that there is some “intrinsic wisdom” (p. 99) in cultural rules we are subjected to because what is good for the child really depends on what she “is supposed to become and where” (p. 99). The moment we

stepped onto Canadian soil, however, most of the rules from the “template” that my parents were working from, automatically became outdated; the “what” was now completely out of context and “where” had certainly changed forever.

Branden talks about children who learn to control or disown their feelings. This affects children psychologically, by not acknowledging or recognizing their feelings, and also physically ... “he tenses his body, he induces muscular tensions, which has the effect of partially anesthetizing him, of making him numb, so that he is no longer readily able to feel his own inner state ... so as to wipe out the knowledge that he is hurt” (Branden, 1971, p. 9). I experienced this many times, sitting at the dinner table and trying to suppress my hurt.

For years I tried to suppress the child part of who I am in order to get on with my life. Since the performance, I have had many conversations and shed many tears which has increasingly felt like a grieving process; grieving the loss of that early part of my life. I had not been able to do so until I had fully expressed the child’s story. I had not done so partly because I did not know it was what I needed and also because my adult self struggled with blaming my parents.

In a discussion with Leslie about past family experiences, I realized for the first time that I had been “triangled” with my parents and had been involved in an intricate dynamic that I was not certain I understood. I had never seen my relationship with my parents in this way before and it served to uncover some of the reasons for such divergent perceptions amongst myself and my siblings regarding family experiences.

From a young age, I remember wanting to play with my mother and wanting my father's love and approval. I tried to be a "good girl". I was a very good student and I immersed myself in my studies and enjoyed doing well. This resulted in a positive reaction from my father and I was often held up as an example for my siblings. Despite the abuse and the fear, I craved his attention and his acceptance. My father had been raised in a very authoritarian environment, where his own father did not believe in hugging his children for fear of losing his authority. He had difficulty expressing his emotions. Therefore, my mother, like all mothers before her, became the "go between," communicating pertinent messages between her husband and her children. I spent much of my time being angry; I needed their approval and I did not have the confidence to go against their wishes, so I resented them instead. This dynamic was very debilitating.

The role I had played in my parent's marriage is described in the literature in different ways. Miller (1984) speaks about the psychodynamic mechanism referred to as "projection" where negative, feared and rejected parts of the parent (including emotionalism, tears, helplessness, fear) are projected onto a defenseless object, the child, so as not to have to struggle with these in oneself and to feel good, moral, etc. Boszormenyi-Nagy and Sharp (1973) say children become the targets of the invisible loyalty their parents have to their own parents. Sulloway (1997) states that in large families firstborns often become surrogate parents and conform to parental authority. Bowen (1969) describes it as a family dynamic called "triangulation" in which the child serves as a distraction from the difficulties in the marital unit whereby the child eventually gets locked into the parental unit and it becomes almost impossible to leave. I will add to this by saying that my involvement was encouraged and necessary, due to my

helper role with my parents, and I was not allowed to disengage even when I really needed to.

Through the *animal* in my performance I expressed the rage that I have felt at not having had my needs met and for being “sucked into” a very confusing dynamic with my parents. This *animal* was different than the one that I had embodied during rehearsal, just once before. During rehearsal, the *animal*, feeling rage and having no fear, was poised to hurt. Playing her had been exhausting, physically and emotionally. However, the *animal* took on a more protective stance during the performance due to the feelings elicited by the previous scene as well as the relationship that had been emerging with the teddy bear. The first *animal* felt representative of my inner child; the second, like the protective mother.

I realized after my performance that I had explored my relationship with my father, through role play and role reversal, but I had not explored my relationship with my mother. Prior to my performance, I was the protagonist in a psychodrama in which I explored my issues with my father. The psychodramatist, Tobi Klein, told me afterwards that I should look at my relationship with my mother. Since my performance, I attended a Developmental Transformations (Johnson, 2000) workshop. During an individual session, my therapist offered that perhaps I was more like my mother than I cared to think. I had been avoiding this all along because the implications seemed too devastating. Erikson speaks it best:

These mothers love, but they love desperately and intrusively. They are themselves so *hungry* [italics added] for approval and recognition that they burden their young children with complicated complaints, especially about the fathers, almost pleading with them to justify their mothers’ existence by their existence. They are highly jealous and highly sensitive to the jealousy of others. In our context it is especially important that the mother is intensely jealous of any

sign that the child may identify primarily with the father or, worse, base his very identity on that of the father... The conclusion is inescapable that these patients [the child] in turn have, from the very beginning of their lives, deeply hurt their mothers by shying away from them because of an utter intolerance of what at first looks like extreme temperamental differences. (Erikson, 1968, p. 177)

My relationship with my mother is very familiar, like sisters I've always said. However, I believe I have recognized my mother's child self and I understand our relationship now more as two hurt children. This may help me better deal with my mom. I wonder whether I have been replaying my mother's *hunger*, as evidenced in *Jacunda*.

The virtual absence of sibling exploration in my process seems to support the extent of my over-involvement with my parents. It occurred to me that, for the first twenty-five years or so of my life, I did not really know what was happening in my siblings' lives. Sulloway (1997) states that firstborn children tend to identify closely with parents and that firstborns are significantly more affected by their conflict with their parents than laterborns. This helps to explain our differing perceptions. Miller makes reference to sibling conflict: "The child's intense anger at the parents, being strictly forbidden, is simply deflected onto other people and onto himself, but not done away with" (Miller, 1984, p. 248). Over the years, I have increasingly opened up to them and looked to my siblings for support. However, as I recall my behaviour with them and these instances of "deflection", I realize that I need to apologize as an adult, now that I have told my story from my "child self" and have been heard by my siblings. It is my hope this experience will help to draw us closer and to more easily demonstrate our love for one another. To date, it has generated some lengthy and emotional discussions and emails centered mainly around our differing perceptions about our family experience, how we coped with the difficulties and their appreciation of my story. This process has

helped me to see our differences and the need to relate from a point of respect and support for one another rather than a desire to change one another.

The Self-Revelatory Performance process clarified for me that my childhood experiences had been, in fact, affecting my relationships. It was difficult for me to acknowledge, accept and perform the *woman-in-waiting*. Issues of relationship were still too present and unresolved; at the time of performance, I had been waiting three weeks for a call from Jeremy. I was reliving life or as Emunah says of one of her client's scenes "life is being mirrored on our stage" (p. 59). Having gone through this process may have helped me to let go of my attachment to the relationship with Jeremy. It has been almost five months since we spoke; something I was unable to do for three and a half years. Stein (1973) talks about the need for parents to shed their "archetypal parent" role in order to equalize their relationship with their adult children, otherwise that relationship becomes difficult and the adult child falls into the role of either archetypal child or parent in all her relationships, making it difficult for her to experience equal and individual relationships with anyone.

The *woman-in-waiting* scene elicited laughter and discomfort from the audience members. I wondered if the discomfort was due to the expectation by an audience that there be some kind of action taking place on stage or perhaps it was due to the fact that "it almost seems like eavesdropping" (Emunah, 1994, p. 58). Perhaps I touched on universal themes of loneliness and the difficulty of relationships.

On May 19, 2002, I received very valuable feedback about my performance from Bonnie Hamden, an Art and Family Therapist/Supervisor at the Montreal Children's Hospital. She had identified a theme of under-stimulation. She felt that the "waiting"

was linked to the under-stimulation. She explained how the brain is naturally programmed to return to familiar states or replay familiar patterns. Bonnie helped me to make a connection to this pattern in my life: under-stimulation, followed by trauma (the abuse in my family), followed in turn by feelings of deprivation, of not getting enough. I realized that this pattern is often played out when I visit my family and it is definitely a pattern I recognize in my romantic relationships. Whether it is genetics or environment or the interplay of both, as suggested by Ratey and Johnson (1997) and Hamer and Copeland (1998), I have been stuck in the “brain pattern”. Boszormenyi-Nagy and Sharp look at it from the point of view of loyalty and guilt.

The more rigidly the maturing child is tied to his parents with invisible loyalty commitments, the more difficult it will be for him to replace the original loyalty with a new relational commitment. As the new commitment leads to marriage and parenthood, it is far easier to develop a deeply loyal devotion to one’s child than to one’s spouse. The inherent right and merit of a helpless infant to be cared for is probably the strongest factor to counterbalance his parent’s guilt over loosening his own life-long filial obligations. (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Sharp, 1973, p. 48)

During my last visit to Toronto, my parents conveyed the message that they no longer felt comfortable telling their children what to do. This message was meant specifically for me, according to my sister. I suppose it was their way of giving me permission to do what I needed to do in my life; a symbolic severing of the strings that held me tightly to them...for forty years!

The Self-Revelatory Performance process helped me to see my resistance and how it manifests as “being difficult”. It helped me to see that it is about an extreme fear of failing, being incompetent and “not doing it right”, about showing my weakness and insecurities and the fear of being judged for that. A good example of this was in the transition to performance. In trying to make sense of this now, I see my response as a

replaying of old patterns. I did not want help from anyone. I wanted to do it myself, to have full control. It had to be perfect. Earlier, I referred to this transition as ungraceful. This is important in that I had come to regard these bouts of “dis-grace” as an opportunity for growth, which in this case I had let slip by. This idea of lack of gracefulness came to me during a particularly difficult transition in my life where I completely lost trust life and in myself. Two months later, I discovered the drama therapy programme at Concordia. I promised myself that I would trust and be graceful in times of apparent “lostness”. It is comforting to know that the period of transition in the Self-Revelatory process is an emotional time with attempts to sabotage, incite failure and repeat one’s history by staying with what is familiar (Emunah, 1994). In her work with *Beyond Analysis*, Emunah (1994) lessened the emotional intensity of this period by devising “scripts” or a prospective structure for the play “to lend tangibility...and to stimulate the group’s own ideas” (p. 281). However, the anxiety is not lessened simply by providing scripts. Emunah instinctively responded with a number of anxiety-reducing exercises before she could do any further work with the scripts. This may have been useful in helping me move through this period. Other examples of fear-based resistance: when Leslie played my father, instead of staying with it, I insisted that it was not how my father would be; the projection of the lack of freedom and judgment I experienced in my family onto Stephen in his attempts to view my rehearsals; the *woman-in-waiting*, *Jacunda*; being in the dark and not wanting to open my eyes.

Furthermore, the process showed me that my fear of judgment manifests itself as judgment of those parts of myself that I do not want to show and judgment of others, a psychological process which I have come to know as “projection”. This

was very evident in the *judging woman* in the performance. I was surprised by her rigidity and how mean she could be about others' weakness. I recognized her as the internalized critical parental voice. She also seemed sly in her attempts to enlist others, in this case the audience, in her tirade against the *woman-in-waiting*.

Through my exploration of the metaphor of the road and of the barrier/wall, I realized that I have been fighting a lonely uphill battle. I resist who I am and where I come from. Although I like my "warrior woman" and she has stood me well, I no longer want to fight. It's difficult and I'm tired. I have been fascinated with family stories of members who disconnected themselves from their Italian roots, the most poignant of which is that of my uncle Generoso, my grandfather's brother, who left Monteleone, Italy and his parents at the age of fifteen to move to New York City where he married and had seven children. In the past year or two, I have heard myself say things such as: "I think I am the result of the many missing pieces and unspoken words of my family"; "I feel the long line of women before me - they are in my pores and in my guts"; and "My paternal grandmother is the woman I feel the strongest inside of me." My interest in my ancestry and family stories may be better understood in this context:

The black sheep in a family is the designated recipient and carrier of the family shadow. According to psychoanalyst Sylvia Brinton Perera in *The Scapegoat Complex*, the scapegoat-identified adult is usually by nature especially sensitive to unconscious and emotional currents. This was the child who picked up and carried the family shadow. (Zweig and Abrams, 1991, p. 48)

Similarly, Miller (1984) states that the way children experience their family situation depends in part on their sensitivity. Boszormenyi-Nagy and Sharp (1973) would argue that I am acting out past generation's injustices. Perhaps this is the reason for my experiences in my family. However, I would like to find another way to

pay homage to my family and ancestors and to resolve the duality of living two divergent cultures.

The performance helped me to see myself. I am multi-faceted and not one-dimensional. I play many different roles and I have a very broad range of emotions, skills and abilities. I can be strong-minded, goal-oriented and courageous (*animal*, and in some ways the *judging/impatient woman*). However, I can also be creative and meandering. I have fears, including fears of baring all of who I am, but I can do so anyway (*Jacunda*). I am loveable and I have a huge capacity to love. I am vulnerable and I can be weak and emotionally-driven (*eight-year-old girl, woman-in-waiting, Jacunda*). I find myself saying “I am a paradox”, quite often, and have spent a great deal of time trying to understand why this is. I see that I need to embrace all of these parts of myself and integrate them and love who I am with all my faults. Having to be the “strong” one in my family and having to hide my hurt and other parts of myself have made me an angry person. This process has been the beginning of greater acceptance of myself and others. I entertained the idea that the performance would be my rite of passage into the next part of my life, leaving behind all the old stories and ways of understanding myself within my family. To be seen and loved and embraced by my friends and siblings as a result of the performance has been a large part of this therapeutic journey.

The Self-Revelatory Performance process confirmed the importance for me to continue to express myself through performance. Four months after my performance, I am excited at the prospect of doing another performance, albeit not necessarily entirely self-revelatory.

Intellectually, I understand that my parents are not bad people. They did the best they could and after all, they were following the rules and passing along the ideologies of child-rearing that had been practiced in their families many generations before (Bradshaw, 1996; Miller, 1984; Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 1973; Schutzenberger, 1998). I know that today they question some of their practices. I believe that, in allowing expression of my childhood pain, this process has made it possible for me to open up to the idea of forgiving my parents. Emunah's words ring true for me: "Many experience forgiveness, a deeper level of acceptance, and relief – as though freed of a heavy burden" (Emunah, 1994, p. 225). However, I also recognize the work I have to do to further this and take solace in Polhemus' ability to reframe her view of her parents: "I tried to clear away the old spirits so that I could then begin to relate to my parents as they are now" (Polhemus, 1992, p. 47).

In looking at who I am in my family, I have also accessed who I am apart from them. The Self-Revelatory process has been the culmination of a seven-year journey of "correcting" my life that has been empowering and enlightening.

CONCLUSION

Through role play, psychodramatic techniques and performance, the Self-Revelatory Performance process helped me revisit my childhood story, communicate this story through performance, helped me to discover and see more clearly the experiences in my family and illuminated how this affects my relationships, today. The choice to conduct this research through performance proved to be worthwhile in that it provided a fuller range of exploration than would have been possible with one-on-one interaction with a personal therapist and it satisfied many different objectives of the research.

Through an ongoing creative outlet for expression of emotions and sustained focus on my story, the Self-Revelatory process provided a container within which I could safely pull apart aspects of the story and discover parts of myself that were hidden, suppressed, and denied and, like a puzzle, see how the pieces fit together within a greater family story. The creative process helped to concretize my feelings and experiences and thereby allowed a kind of “self penetration” that helped me to arrive at a truthfulness about who I am that has been maintained in my personal interactions since the performance. The creation of art from the experience of pain allowed me to see my connectedness to others’ stories and gave me a sense of accomplishment, acceptance and validation.

This process gave a voice to my neglected child in order for her to tell her story of pain, oppression and sadness without fear of reprisal, being shut down or concern for who she would upset. It provided a space in which, for the first time, I was able to clearly see the dynamic between my parents and me. It has helped my siblings to better understand my motivations and way of perceiving things and vice versa. It has paved the way to a

different quality of interaction between me and my siblings, based on an increasing awareness of who we each were in our family and who we are today. In shedding light on the unmet needs of my childhood, I have been able to gain insight into how this plays out in other relationships. It has altered the way I see myself vis-à-vis romantic relationships and it has resulted in a much greater consciousness of the choices I make. The Self-Revelatory Performance process has allowed me to feel less full of rage and it has helped me take greater ownership for my feelings by expressing these more truthfully, with my family in particular. I am experiencing greater forgiveness towards darker and more negative parts of myself. I am more able to accept all aspects of who I am and view these as valid and important to my experience and growth; I am experiencing more fully who I am.

The Self-Revelatory Performance process has been a rite of passage for me. It has changed my self-image and allowed me to consciously re-invent who I am in my family. In liberating me and giving me the power to see myself as a separate entity from my family, it has empowered me to consciously decide how I want to exist within my family in a new, more authentic and more compassionate manner.

Although the Self-Revelatory Performance process cannot be said, as yet, to be generalizable, it represents a growing body of knowledge that marks the beginning of a viable method of research in the field of drama therapy.

REFERENCES

- Andolfi, M. (1979). *Family therapy: An interactional approach*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Boszormenyi-Nagy, I. & Spark, G.M. (1973). *Invisible loyalties: Reciprocity in intergenerational family therapy*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. New York: Jason Aronson.
- Bradshaw, J. (1996). *The family: A new way of creating solid self-esteem*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communication.
- Branden, N. (1971). *The disowned self*. Los Angeles: Nash Publishing.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brook, P. (1968). *The empty space*. London: MacGibbon & Kee.
- Emunah, R. (1994). *Acting for real: Dramatherapy process, technique, and performance*. Levittown, PA: Brunner/Mazel.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Hamer, D. & Copeland, P. (1998). *Living with our genes: Why they matter more than you think*. New York: Doubleday.
- Hendrix, H. (1988). *Getting the love you want: A guide for couples*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Horowitz, F.D. (1987). *Exploring developmental theories: toward a structural/behavioural model of development*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Jennings, S. (Ed). (1992). *Dramatherapy: Theory and practice 2*. London: Tavistock/Routledge.

- Johnson, D.R. (1999). *Essays on the creative arts therapies: Imaging the birth of a profession*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
- Johnson, D.R. (2000). Developmental transformations: toward the body as presence. In P. Lewis & D.R. Johnson (Eds.), *Current approaches in drama therapy* (pp. 87-110). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
- Konigsberg, M. (1996). *The queen of hearts: The use of historical-archetypal characters in self-revelatory performance*. Unpublished master's thesis, California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco.
- Landy, R. (1986). *Drama therapy: Concepts, theories, and practices* (2nd Ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
- Miller, A. (1984). *For your own good: Hidden cruelty in child-rearing and the roots of violence*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Moustakas, C. (1996). *Loneliness*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.
- Pasle-Green, J. (1996). *Healing the mother-daughter wound: Lifting the shadow of motherhood into the light for compassion and forgiveness*. Unpublished master's thesis, California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco.
- Polhemus, C. (1992). *I'll see you when I see your face – autobiographical performance: A path toward differentiation from one's family of origin*. Unpublished master's thesis, California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco.
- Ratey, J.J & Johnson, C. (1997). *Shadow syndromes: The mild forms of major mental disorders that sabotage us*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Rubin, S. (1996). *The role of storyteller in self-revelatory performance*. Unpublished

- master's thesis, California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco.
- Schutzenberger, A. (1998). *The ancestor syndrome: Transgenerational psychotherapy and the hidden links in the family tree*. London: Routledge.
- Stein, R. (1973). *Incest and human love: The betrayal of the soul in psychotherapy*. NY: Third Press.
- Sulloway, F. J. (1997). *Born to rebel: Birth order, family dynamics, and creative lives*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Ventura, M. (1985). *Shadow dancing in the U.S.A.* Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher.
- Voorberg, P. (1997). *Black velvet: Uncovering true self through the use of a transitional object*. Unpublished master's thesis, California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco.
- Zweig, C. & Abrams, J. (Eds). (1991). *Meeting the shadow: The hidden power of the dark side of human nature*. NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.