ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: THE MAKING OF A PRISON TEACHER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL JOURNEY THROUGH LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CORRECTIONAL EDUCATORS

Edit Árvay Sayko, Doctor of Philosophy, 2005

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Despite powerful evidence that educational attainment by incarcerated learners significantly lower the rate of recidivism, correctional educators do not enjoy high professional status and prestige. Prison teachers are forgotten professionals, whose mission and praxis are shrouded in the same public misunderstanding, mis-information and prejudice, that surround all aspects of the criminal justice system.

In this work I embark on a quest to bring into proximity concealed meanings found in the lived experiences of prison teachers. The stories and reflections of five colleagues, woven together with the researcher's personal experiences during two decades of teaching in prison, reveal powerful images. The guiding force of this work is driven by the question: What is it like to be a prison teacher? Sieved through the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology, viewed through the lenses of philosophy, literature, and art, these images reveal significant themes that bring to life the world of prison teachers. The research illuminates this phenomenon through the pervasive

struggle between opposing forces of punishment and rehabilitation. Themes of personal corporeal discomfort, the confusing spiderweb of time-perception, dwelling in an hostile environment, ambiguity regarding prison teachers' professional identities, open up the phenomenon and remove the shroud to un-conceal meanings in a prison teacher's life. Perhaps the most significant theme emerging from this research is the prison teachers' overarching commitment to their captive students, through their *disponibilitè*, and caring presence.

The research offers answers that illuminate the phenomenon with a small but significant light. This light nurtures the hope that these answers will help illuminate public opinion, correct mis-information, eradicate prejudice and generate wide-spread, robust support for correctional education, whose mission is one of the highest to which humans can aspire (Gehring, 2002, p. 89).

THE MAKING OF A PRISON TEACHER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL JOURNEY THROUGH LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CORRECTIONAL EDUCATORS

By
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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Professor William Stuart

DEDICATION

To János and Edit, my Parents,
who gave me dreams and wings and the ultimate gift of letting me go,
and whose unconditional love still provides the safety net
for all my dauntless flights.

To Árpád, my Husband,
whose loving support, encouragement and patient understanding
made my endless school years possible, and the
last thirty-six years a splendid adventure.

To Árpád Balage, my Son,
the Sun on the firmament of my life, who accepted my benign neglect
with grace and good humor, and made sure
we had dinner on the table.

One Love

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> We don't know all the reasons that propel us on a spiritual journey, but somehow our life compels us to go. Something in us knows that we are not just here to toil at our work. A thousand gates open to the spirit. (Kornfield, 2001, p. 5)

There were so many teachers, mentors, family members, friends, students, and colleagues, whose collective good wishes for a successful journey kept those gates open in front of me and filled my sails with good wind.

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and for her delicious stuffed shells. There were times when I would have quit this endeavor, if not for her invaluable assistance.

Thank you, my Hungarian "sisters," Éva, Hajna, Zsuzsi and Eszter for letting me come to you for encouragements and replenishment. I could always count on you to help me recharge my tired batteries. Köszönöm!

I would also like to thank the following individuals and publishers for their permission to use their copyrighted material:

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POETIC PROLOGUE
Ithaka

As you set out for Ithaka
hope your road is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
angry Poseidon - don't be afraid of them:
you never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
wild Poseidon - you won't encounter them
unless you bring them in your soul,
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

Hope your road is a long one.
May there be many summer mornings when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you enter harbors you're seeing for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,
mother-of-pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfume of every kind -
as many sensual perfumes as you can,
and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to learn and go on learning from their scholars.

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you're destined for.
But don't hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you're old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.

Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her, you wouldn't have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.

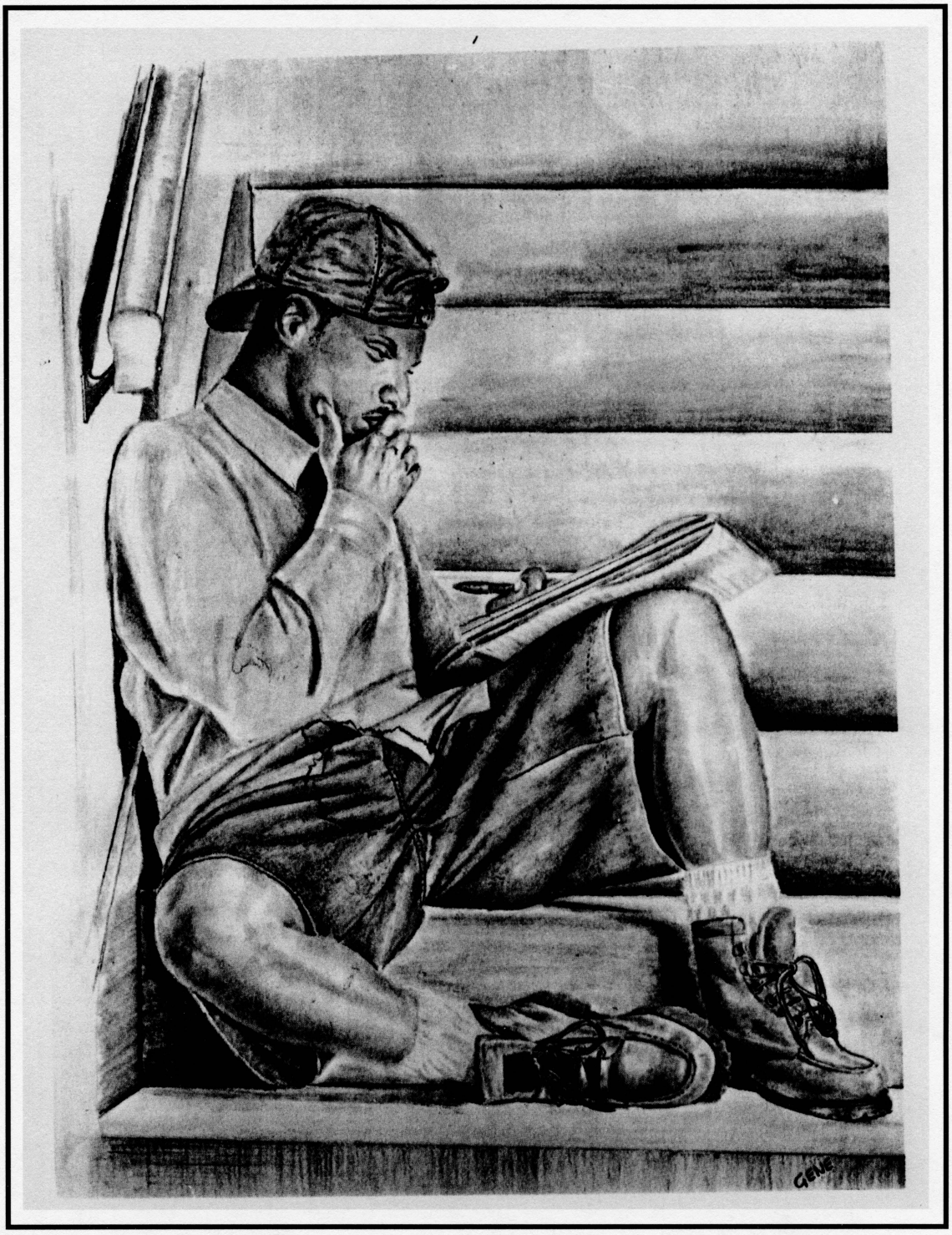
(C.P. Cavafy, 1975, p. 35)

Prelude in the Key of Hope:
Trees in the Cracks of the Sidewalk

Have you ever seen a dreary city block, where the sun beats down on stalled cars and boarded-up shop-windows? The littlest breeze conjures up a tornado of trash. Cigarette butts pile up around the bus stop like little dunes. There is an unhealthy stench of stale beer and exhaust, stray cats and unkempt children. You keep on walking determinedly, avoiding eye contact with the shady characters that huddle around the liquor store. You can't wait to pass the block, and you carry your discomfort like an umbrella.

And then, in the crack of the broken sidewalk, you notice a little tree. It found nourishment deep down below the trash, and it is hanging in there with a delicate might. It might be mimosa. It might be early summer, and its flowers tremble, being[1] kissed by the sun. You smile and regain your peace. After all, you have found the beauty of the place. I hope, this paper will reflect the beauty of the human spirit that I had the privilege to encounter, as I carefully navigated the cracks in the hostile sidewalks of prison for nearly twenty years.

The illustrations offered here are little trees growing in the cracks of the broken sidewalks. Their odd beauty captures what is good and beautiful in this place. They transmit a message of hope. I deeply appreciate the generosity of my student artists, Edwards, Genfi and Ward, for sharing their talents with us.


GENE

CHAPTER I:

TURNING TO THE PHENOMENON: OPENING TO VISTAS

> If our morality is to be more than a conformity to internalized rules and principles, if it is to include and rest on an understanding of the point of these rules and principles, and certainly if it is to involve *being* a certain kind of person and not merely *doing* certain kinds of things, then we must somehow attain and develop an ability to be aware of others as persons, as important to themselves as we are to ourselves, and to have a lively and sympathetic representation in imagination of their interest of the effects of our actions on their lives. (Frankena, 1963, p. 69)

We rode the hotel elevator together, the thirty-something couple with their little girl, in their dripping swimsuits, and I, in my professional outfit. They came for a last summer weekend at the ocean, where I had just arrived for a conference. I asked the little girl if she would like the balloon I picked up at the registration desk. She grinned and tried to read the big red letters around the red striped apple printed on the balloon: "Cee, Eee, Ay." Her parents asked me what CEA stood for? When I answered that CEA, or Correctional Education Association, is a professional organization for educators who teach in prisons, they exchanged a nervous glance, as if they had just met an escaped prisoner instead of a prison teacher.

I have been a prison teacher since 1986; I am used to similar reactions of people learning of my profession. Sometimes they amuse me; more often they make me feel defensive of my profession, compelled to explain the exciting,

harsh, important world of correctional educators, where *doing* what we do, so often defines *being* what we are. Public ignorance and mis-information about correctional education jeopardizes invaluable educational programs in prison. Scholarly studies support common sense observation, that education is the best course to fight crime. I feel a need and a responsibility to explain this to a wider public. The desire to explain gave birth to this dissertation.

I have traveled a circuitous road before discovering my calling, and arriving at the profession of correctional education. However, my journey is not all that different from those of my colleagues; as children, none of us dreamed of becoming a prison teacher. Those of us who became prison teachers, found a world of unique challenges and singular rewards. Teaching convicted adults places a "last chance" responsibility on the teacher -- a last chance, to remedy past omissions. It also offers rewards of being truly influential in improving individual lives, even society -- when all factors work in favor of our students.

For the past nineteen years, I often have reflected on the purpose and meaning of my life, as prison teacher. I can recall clearly the morning of my turning from artist to teacher. It is harder to uncover the subtle process of transition from educator to correctional educator to prison teacher. In this dissertation I have attempted to re-trace my footsteps and share some of my fellow travelers' journeys in the hope of discovering **what it is like to be a prison teacher.**

Winter on Top of the Mountain:
Beginning My Journey as a Prison Teacher

As you set out for Ithaka
hope your road is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.

The hills are bare, winter-hills. I like this smoke-soft, purple-grey, quiet landscape. Skeletal trees etch lacy arabesques into pewter skies. Bare, yet not barren, the whole world is a soft nest, lined with the finest silky down, a warm and pulsating womb, where a smiling spring is gestating. In a week, in a day, in an hour, unannounced, it will begin to be born. Vivacious flutes and soaring violins will overtake the patient oboes as the season opens her pale face toward the sun. The faintest veil of greens and yellows and pinks will dress the hillside as flocks of starlings rise, like a deep sigh, from land freshly ploughed. The sun rises over South Mountain with a crescendo. We have survived another dangerous winter!

The violent zigzag of the roof, on the main administration building of the prison, pierces the sooty fabric of the early winter morning. It is seven o'clock, January second -- the first workday of the new year, the first workday in my new job. Momentarily stranded between two sets of 20 feet high gates, my thoughts are in fast-forward. What will this day bring? What will this year bring? The second gate slides open, and on the short walk to the building I meet four men; their hands are cuffed together before them. The shackles on their

feet make them take funny small steps, like walking on ice. One of the men is smoking, dipping his head to meet his restrained hand with the cigarette. They are escorted by two guards. I try not to stare.

Now, I am standing in a small holding area in the administration building. Walls and doors made of ten feet high heavy metal rods, known by the unlikely name “grills,”create demarcation lines without blocking the sight-line of officers in a glass cubicle, the control center. Grills open and close with mechanical clutter; heavy rings of keys are signed out from the glass cage. Several sets of handcuffs, chains, billy clubs and guns decorate the wall racks behind the guard -- warning or reassurance, depending on the beholder. Finally, after a long walk across the compound, accompanied by a nasty wind and loud comments from the open windows of the dining hall, I reach my classroom building. The halls are filling with men coming to school. There is an atmosphere of camaraderie. Friendly "Good mornings" are rising with the steam of black coffee. Much notice is taken of my presence by the inmates gathering by their classroom's door. Cordial greetings and respectful questions stop me here and there. Murmured comments trail after my steps. My room is at the very end of a side corridor. It is very cold and perfectly bare except for a small table and two chairs.

The setting is a poignant metaphor for this first day in my new self as a correctional teacher; in a building buzzing with life, my room is empty and cold.

My "new self" is similarly an empty vessel, eager to receive the experiences and the people I came to serve. My new self is but an empty room in the house of my old self -- a house buzzing with life from all the experiences and people collected throughout a lifetime. The room is cold, for it needs the living breath of people, bringing their own lives, experiences and expectations to warm it. The glumness of the room awakens some questions that until now I kept quiet under the warm blanket of my enthusiasm. What am I doing here, in prison? What is teaching in prison going to be like? I know I am a good teacher, but will I be a good teacher *in prison?* Will I need to be a *different* teacher in prison?

My self-chosen mission is to fill this empty room, to empty myself into it, to bring it to life, to turn these ugly, grey, cinder-block walls presently exhaling icy air into an inviting enclosure, a safe and pleasant haven of learning and growing. I bring the warmth in my heart of group hugs from kindergarten, teary-eyed "Good-byes" from my third graders, sincere good wishes from the cool gang in grade seven -- fuel to sustain me throughout this journey.

The Road Less Traveled

I did not choose education; education chose me. As a child I admired my teachers, yet I was never inspired to follow in their footsteps. I do not remember if I ever formed an image or an opinion about the teaching profession. However, I remember distinctly, how annoying I found well-meaning friends and relatives who suggested that I become a teacher. This was still a time when

boys became doctors and girls became nurses, boys became principals and girls became teachers. Those choices were not for me. Driven by creative urges and aspirations, I had dedicated my life to art. That was to be the road of my life's journey. My dream was fostered by early successes as a young artist and by a family of talented kin.

As every "normal" teenager, I wrote poetry -- most of it bad -- but enough to become enamored by the flexibility and power of language. I soon realized that one can play with words until they come together to create a pictorial image, just as well as one can brush, smear, scrape, and otherwise manipulate paint to achieve strongly poetic visual fiction. I must have been around thirteen or fourteen at the time, right at the cusp of deciding on my future by the choice of high-school I was to attend. I used to conjure up images of myself as some pre-Raphaelite poetess-artiste with flowing hair and flowing robes commuting with the Muses under the silvery light of the Moon. This emerging self-concept -- in total opposition to the one of chemical engineer (my father's choice), nurse (my mother's choice), or teacher (my homeroom teacher's choice) -- gave rise to additional bad poetry. In a 1962 poem, *"Ars Poetica,"* I asked, "Who am I? Am I a poet, painting like the Masters? Am I a painter, with a golden tongue? When I paint I feel rhyming words to cluster, while writing verse I need my brush to paint." I was pleased to discover real

questions obscured by the awkward poetry. I understood how this once-myself young person embarked on the quest to learn

about herself -- how she reflected in her poetry on the universal questions of "Who am I?" and "Why am I?"

Re-reading my ancient *"Journal of Poetry and Other Nonsense"* was an interesting side-track this afternoon. It preserved the essence of the young girl -- naive and innocent as we all were at that time -- who discovered talents and ambitions in herself, along with a desire to "do good" with those gifts. Among teary-eyed, breaking-up poems I met almost forgotten old acquaintances: declarations of "manifest destiny," expressions of a desire to become a great artist, even a grandiose confession of wanting "to give birth to World Peace." The saving grace of all this adolescent pining was the underlying "tongue-in-cheek" tone that smoothed sharp edges and calmed youthful zeal. Nevertheless, looking back from a distance of over thirty years, I recognized in my old writing an emerging new person, trying to peel back some layers of anonymity, to open up, to show her Being to the Universe.

A Fork in the Road

In 1970 my life's journey took a great turn Westward. As a new bride, I followed my husband to the United States. I still wanted to become an artist and here, in the "Land of Opportunity," it certainly seemed a reachable aspiration. First however, unbeknownst to me, the process of making me an educator had

begun: I became a mother. Raising my son was my first teaching experience, although I could call it my first true learning experience as well, but that shall be written at a different time. Later, my years as a scoutmaster started to call forth whatever latent pedagogical gifts I might have had. Although scouting is considered more of a recreational activity, in the American-Hungarian community it also serves as a school for language, history and cultural heritage. Scouting requires a wide range of skills from map reading to first aid, as well as values education, in order to develop a healthy mind in a healthy body. As a leader I was teaching language, traditional arts and crafts, orienteering, camping skills, cooking skills, prayer and songs, fire rescue, Morse code, ethics, personal hygiene, leadership, tying knots, and dozens of other skills as they came up in the course of our program. I enjoyed every moment of it; I wanted to share everything I knew.

I delighted in my scouts' progress and their enjoyment of things newly learned. Yet, I never recognized the teacher in myself, and when parents and friends complimented me on my skills of pedagogy, I usually was surprised more than pleased. Writing these words, I recall how strong my enjoyment was, indeed! Every new skill, every new word, every new song learned by my scouts made me prouder of them and richer in myself. I often have recalled the feelings of wanting to distribute, to share with them everything I knew. Later, I often have wondered whether these feelings were the first harbingers of my

calling to teach? Were those colleagues who decided early on a career in education likewise pulled? Did they experience a similar desire to share?

Much later in my adventurous journey, after I finally discovered my calling, it was this sharing, distributing and spreading the wealth of knowledge that gave me the most satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment: I was actually touching the future! Only in retrospect and upon reflection, did my eyes finally open to see that the seeds were planted in my early childhood and had already sent roots into my heart. Those early seeds started to blossom after awakening to my true calling: "being called to care."

The Roots Grow in the Heart

After years of studying art, I became a graphic designer, making a living as an art director on the fringes of fine art. One auspicious morning, I found myself at a fork in the road; I awoke with a strong desire, almost an order, to become a teacher. If I ever had an epiphany, this moment must have been it. The idea hit me with such a force that right away I went to my Alma Mater, the University of Maryland, and immediately enrolled in classes in the College of Education. Eighteen months later I was a teacher. Two years later I received my first professional teaching assignment. I started a new journey on a road less traveled by me -- yet, immediately I knew I was on my way to my dwelling place. I was coming home.

Making this life-altering change was easy; making up a reasonable explanation for it still is not. Why did I make a U-turn in mid-career in a field I liked? What gave me the urge to enter a profession in which I never had an interest? This was not an arbitrary or accidental decision. Questions followed more questions, as sometimes I contemplated the possibility that this decision was not made by me; it was made for me. An explanation of "divine intervention" is hard to support even by those of us who believe in it. I knew in my heart that it was the right decision, that I have entered my life-work. However, before I could start on the process of meaning making, I had to understand what happened and why. I started my quest for understanding by reflecting upon my life, searching for events and experiences that perhaps predisposed or guided me to a career in education.

My father, a self-taught water colorist of remarkable talent, and my mother, who surrounded us with art and music, were unconditionally supportive and encouraging. They secretly must have wished a more practical career for me, their first-born, yet they only made gentle suggestions and never questioned my career choice. Of course, I had not discovered back then the intricately intertwined, mutually nurturing nature of art and education.

Before her marriage my mother was a kindergarten teacher in Northern Hungary, a territory that became part of Czechoslovakia after World War II. She did not teach anymore in Budapest after the war. I always enjoyed listening

to her stories of teaching in a small village where she was the sole caretaker of all the children, as the village practically emptied for urgent work in the fields in the summertime. My father, with his love and insight of literature would have made a wonderful teacher. He instilled in me a love and deep respect for our mother tongue and literature. Keeping our language pure of foreign influence and cultivating its rich beauty was seen as a sacred duty, an invisible resistance against political forces. Unfortunately, circumstances directed him toward a different career. Both my parents were giving and sharing people, taking up challenges and risks for the benefit of others.

From my parents I learned an invaluable lesson in social responsibility. Their *noblesse oblige* did not refer to blue blood origin. For us, *noblesse oblige* meant that to be a person of value and honor we are obligated to care for and share with others. When food was rationed, we shared our milk with some poor old people from mother's home town. When freedom was severely rationed, my father conjured up sunny islands of freedom for large groups of people by taking them back to nature on hiking and camping trips. Innocent activities, yet in the political climate of Hungary in the 1950's, they could have had severe repercussions.

In the dark post-war world, my parents created a safe and loving haven by teaching us, children, the power of faith, honesty, and the satisfaction gained from caring for others. They embodied the idea of *disponibilitè*, of being

available, disposable to others. In Noddings' (1984) terms, they possessed " the disposability... the readiness to bestow and spend oneself, and make oneself available;" they "recognize[d] that [they] had a self to invest, to give" (p. 19). I admired them for it, and now I realize that I also must have assimilated these traits into my personal philosophy. I have inherited their sense of responsibility and care for others. I carry this gift as a talisman, and try to use it often, as I now know that even a small investment of *disponibilitè* generates rich rewards. Sometimes I am embarrassed by the zeal as, unbidden and un-asked, I tend to "jump to the rescue," to be practical, useful, to "fix" things and situations like a volunteer Superwoman, or more poetically phrased by Morris (1868/2005, p. 3):

> Dreamer of dreams born out of my due time,
> Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?

In graduate school, I learned to view my tendency to "act on the spot" with new appreciation as a valuable gift, an ability to recognize, what van Manen (1991b) calls, the *pedagogical moment.* This discovery validated my self-as-pedagogue. What I previously considered an embarrassing, Batman-like "jumping to the rescue," van Manen elevated to professional behavior as "the immediate acting on the spot, in the ongoing flux of pedagogical moments" (p. 107). His book, *The Tact of Teaching* (1991b), since has become a mirror and a compass in my pedagogical journey. As a mirror, it reflects many of my actions and practices that seemingly flow naturally from within my Self, as I am "actively living through pedagogical experiences" (p. 41). As a compass, van

Manen's ideas orient "toward understanding the pedagogical significance of events and situations" and "the pedagogical goodness of one's past actions" (p. 41). Reading *The Tact of Teaching* filled me with a sense of confidence. As I found many of my own ideas and practices of pedagogy formally presented and verbalized in a scholarly manner on its pages, I could not help but think "I must be doing something right!"

This newly learned confidence fills me with the same sensation I feel when, hiking in back country**,** I read the compass, check my position against the map and realize with a sigh of relief that I am exactly where I should be. Establishing a secure point on the many co-ordinates of the map enables me to search deeper into the meaning of the journey**.** Realizing that I am at the right compass-point on the pedagogical atlas, points my questioning towards the smaller world of correctional pedagogy. My quest is to find the key to prison teaching. How much more tact does one need to grasp pedagogical moments behind bars? Is the inner drive to "set the crooked straight"one of the essential qualities of prison teachers? Do successful prison teachers possess an abundant amount of *disponibilitè?* **What makes a prison teacher?**

Brothers, Keepers

Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
angry Poseidon - don't be afraid of them:
you never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high

Four years of teaching in a small private school left me very happy in my conviction that I had made the right choice, I had found my niche as a teacher. These four years also left me very exhausted as I needed to continue working as a graphic designer to "support my teaching habit" -- as I used to say -- because of the meager budget of the parish. I loved my work with the children and I felt I had touched just the tip of the proverbial iceberg of possibilities in art education. Alas, the demands of two jobs, a family, and my commitment to the scouts took a heavy toll, and I was getting increasingly concerned that I would not be able to fulfill all my responsibilities. Thus, when an irresistible challenge came my way, I regretfully said good-bye to St. Mary's Elementary, took up my rod and my staff, and continued my journey toward new vistas. An unexpected twist in my path led me to the other side of the Mountain.

The Other Side of the Mountain

South Mountain is a physical barrier between the Central and Western Regions of the State where I live and teach; even the weather changes beyond it. Throughout the years, South Mountain became much more for me: a challenge in ice and snow, a sigh of relief to be on its West side. A milestone harking the end of my long journey -- only seven more miles -- nothing could harm me now. It signals the last ten minutes of solitude before facing the demands of the workday. South Mountain became an icon, a symbol, a mental

barrier between the hemispheres of my life. South Mountain became my Rubicon.

There are three prisons on the West side of South Mountain. The biggest one, with the shark-tooth roof and the largest school, is the goal of my daily pilgrimage, the site of my daily challenge. After the first few months of teaching there, it became evident that my mastery of content, my teaching skills along with my pedagogical tact and my *disponibilitè* were going to be severely tested in my new school. This was not St. Mary's Elementary!

Like so many of my colleagues, I was not armed to enter the arena of correctional education, or rather, my arm and armor were of the wrong kind. Naturally, I was well prepared academically, and having entered the profession at a more mature age, I had the confidence that only many years of various experiences can earn. I believe I have inherited a pre-disposition to be pragmatic on the one hand (my mother's gift, my practical nature) and to be creative and free to improvise on the other (a gift from my artist father). As a teacher I have always considered myself both pragmatic in building my curriculum, and creative in delivering it. I have arrived at a personal philosophy of education that placed the twin goals of mastery of the subject area and critical thinking at the highest level in the hierarchy of learning.

Teaching in prison opened my eyes to the possibility of many different hierarchies. Having been introduced to a student body with unique educational

needs provoked me to question what the highest level of the hierarchy of learning is? Should we even assume that there is a universally applicable hierarchy? Certainly the educational needs of a thirty year old, illiterate armed robber will be different from those of a highly trained computer engineer incarcerated for fraud. Whose hierarchy shall be considered? Is critical thinking really at a higher level than literacy? As a prison teacher, how does one balance personal philosophy versus reality experienced each day?

Even as a novice teacher, perhaps in defense of the low-status nature of my specialty, art education, I set out to be very pragmatic. I still question why a creative subject cannot be equally informative and substantially on par with the "really important" segments of the curriculum, yet retain the abundant freedom of artistic expression. In elementary school I intended to raise the importance of art education to the level of the three basic "R"s, while providing my young students with new ways to experience the world, and different modes of response to these experiences. Cooperating with other teachers, every effort was made to integrate art into the total curriculum. I have included reading, writing, even geometry and geography into my art lessons. Creativity soared; I felt the three "R"s benefitted and the art class began to gain respect. When students chose to spend their holidays with me, working on murals in the quiet of the closed school or roaming the National Gallery of Art, I began to realize that my plan worked; they were taking art seriously; their appreciation was

growing. I *knew* I was teaching art as a major subject when parents started complaining about the high demands I put on my primary students. After all, who has ever heard of testing and written homework in art class?

When facing an adult student population in prison, I was confident that, again, a content-oriented approach was the proper method to apply. It took a long time -- full of frustrating set-backs -- to realize that, although adults, the majority of my students might not be well prepared and ready for academic work. Their previous schooling was usually *not* a positive experience; academic success *did not* visit them often, and -- most unfortunate of all -- their basic skills were practically non-existent. It shocked and saddened me to realize how many of these men could not read any better than on a third grade level, yet they usually denied it and refused remedial help. They had developed remarkable survival skills to camouflage this embarrassing shortcoming. Their fumbling awkwardness with pencil, paper and books, their furtive looks at rulers and compasses, their frequent poverty of language skills bore evidence of much deeper needs. Many of the inmate students were also lacking in essential areas of personal development, such as a capacity to think for one's self, responsibility for one's own behavior, respect and responsibility for others, decision-making skills, etc. These deficiencies needed to be remedied just as much as the basic academic skills.

So many needs, like potholes in a road, were waiting to be filled so the ride (their ride) might be smoother -- not only more pleasant, but less painful with fewer jolts and bumps. Sometimes I felt overwhelmed by so many needs, not easily satisfied by merely teaching a trade, however useful that might be. I often wondered, did my colleagues face the same dilemma? How did they deal with it? Where did they place the emphasis in their curriculum? How did they decide on the hierarchy of student needs? Which pothole did they think was the most important to be filled first?

The harsh realities of the multiple needs of my students made it necessary to re-shuffle my teaching priorities. After a journey of many years I arrived at a balance between competencies required by the State and academic remediation, life skills training and the much needed, but practically undefinable, collection of small services and ministrations I filed under "counseling," sorely needed by my students. This, of course, was a slow and almost invisible process: a road traveled one step at a time; a demonstration stopped when you notice that they read the rulers wrong; a complaint taken care of by showing the proper use of scissors; an unplanned lecture in personal hygiene; a rap-session on self-respect. The results of this slow metamorphosis only became visible when a professor required a teaching portfolio for final evaluations. In preparation for developing my portfolio, I filled out a questionnaire that was aimed at establishing one's teaching priorities. To my

surprise, my answers were all different from what I had expected. From the platform of my real-life position as prison teacher I have placed the highest premium on basic skills, vocational skills, life skills, and "employment readiness," a term that encompasses everything from having a workable resume, through functional literacy, to the awareness of having a clean shirt and a sharp pencil ready for job interviews.

All prison teachers are faced with this dilemma. The more important question is how we evaluate the necessary shift in our philosophy of education. Do we see the re-ordering of priorities as a step down on the professional ladder? Do we consider teaching to the mundane, yet vital needs, a sign of abandoning ideals of professional standards?

Like the shifting sand of the beach, my curriculum shifted and changed, driven by the relentless breeze of student needs. Like a swimmer in the ocean, I also was pulled constantly by the undercurrents of these needs. I had to re-evaluate my pragmatic paradigm, and allow it to be shaped into a need-based, remedial kind. I was pulled away from content, toward remedial work, even counseling. When did I realize that perhaps I had to teach less higher level thinking skills and more higher level soap-and-water skills? When did I know that if I were to prepare my students for re-entering society as productive, responsible individuals, I could not declare one skill less important than the

other? When did I recognize the changes in my Self-as-teacher? In the ebb and flow of time, when did I become a prison teacher?

I have come a long way, indeed, from valuing academic skills and higher level thinking above all. The realization made me pause; did I abandon some of the heavy luggage of standards and expectations by the wayside to make my steps lighter, my journey easier? Was I losing those hard-earned skills I proudly wore as a badge of my profession? A scary notion crept into my consciousness: as I was becoming more of a prison teacher, was I slowly becoming a "lesser" teacher? The need to check these notions against the thinking of other prison teachers surfaced. Was my perception of becoming de-skilled a warning, or was it a mirage projected by fatigue on the screen of my imagination? I wanted to find out whether the possibility of becoming de-skilled was a real danger, or a worst-case scenario conjured up by my over-zealous attempt at looking under every stone. Were there other teachers who fought the same phantoms?

For an ethnographic interview on prison culture I conducted long conversations with a colleague in 1995. The theme of losing skills and professional knowledge kept re-surfacing throughout the interview.

> I think we lose a lot of our skills...
> I don't think that this type of setting
> allows itself to lecture, which I really enjoy.
> Or even group discussions... Basically this
> is more... mmm... *managing* the classroom
> than it is *teaching* in a classroom.

> I'm not sure, that I could go from here back
> into a public school situation and do... the
> job that I think I could have done ten years ago...
> (Interview 11/10/95)

One explanation for the fear of becoming de-skilled is offered by the same teacher in terms of the system and the setting: "I don't feel that I'm held as accountable here, as I would be as a public school teacher; therefore, I think we have a certain laxness, that... is not... out there on the street. It's a different headset."

Prison changes people. The razor-wire fences and guard towers do not discriminate; they spread their transforming power over everyone they enclose. We have to face the possibility of succumbing to the corruption inherent in our work-environment. Conversations with colleagues often circle around this problem, boiling and bubbling like witches brew, in the hot cauldron of our conscience. Only brutally honest self-evaluation will bring forth a truthful answer to the question, "Am I still a teacher, or did I allow my professional ethics to corrode; am I teaching or did I settle in, just counting my bits?"

Scenic Overview

May there be many summer mornings when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you enter harbors you're seeing for the first time;

The gently rolling pasture land will not be here much longer. The city encroaches on the green meadows and every spring more houses come up with

the crocuses. But this is still a beautiful country, especially in the chill of the early summer morning, when the rising sun lifts puffy fog-blankets from the ponds, and the first sentries of the Blue Ridge Mountains are really blue in the shimmering light of dawn. By this hour I have driven over 55 miles; it would feel good to stretch, maybe have a sip of coffee, but there are miles to go before I can do that. If there are rare moments to spare, I indulge myself and skip off the highway for a short treat. I stop at the natural platform on the side of the hill, and with pleasure and joy breathe in the beauty of the countryside. The county seat, spread out in the valley, stretches and yawns like a lazy cat in the morning. The blue hills recede like an oriental painting, carrying the mind into the distance. From my vantage point I can see the road sneaking up behind me, and also running before me, enticingly twisting and snaking up to the mountain's peak -- past and future encapsulated in a frozen moment.

Writing my journey mirrors my daily travels. The road behind me, captured in the language of phenomenology, covers quite a distance, but there are still miles and miles to go before peaceful rest is earned. It is time for a stretch, maybe for that sip of coffee, time for reflection from a point where past and future are both visible. This scenic overview is also the place to sit and contemplate how to continue the journey: What course to take on the road to discovery? Which chart to read and which compass to choose for a guide? Which star to follow?

Form Follows Function: Arriving at the Question Through Art

Each journey is best told in a style befitting its nature. Form follows function. Sherezade's stories are told differently from those of the Brothers Grimm. For one trained in the arts, this concept becomes a ground rule, a kind of mantra, "Form follows function." At a closer look, the idea seems eminently applicable to many areas of life. A simple work-day requires a different *form* of living it than a milestone event; the *form* of a wedding day will be fundamentally different from the *form* of a day at the beach.

It is necessary to understand that *form* is not limited to mean the visible, outside shell. *Form* contains all the tangible elements of the phenomenon, which in turn are the vessels for the actual being of it. *Form* allows us to perceive not only that which is concrete, visually available (the ontic), but the contents, the essential nature (the ontological) is also conveyed or communicated through the *form.* Thus follows, that a harmonious agreement between form and function, between the phenomenon and its manifestations, is of utmost importance in order to convey appropriate signals that allow us to learn something about the meaning of the phenomenon.

Artists are always aware and sensitive to the mutual dependency of form and function as a fundamental rule of good design. As an artist, I feel similarly compelled to select the *form* (or methodology) of my research to follow its *function,* which is the seeking of answers to the kinds of questions I set out to

study. In other words, my research questions, as well as my being, direct my selection of research design that most closely will provide the kind of data, that in turn, will lead to insights and understandings.

Twists and turns in the path of my life oriented my interest toward the lifeworld and lived experiences of prison teachers. In this chapter I reviewed the brief history of my turning to this phenomenon. As I traced my footsteps and re-visited stopovers on my journey, I was compelled to reflect on the meaning of my life as a prison teacher. This reflection gave me the words to tell the story of my journey and, like an echo, the telling bounced back and evoked more reflection. Telling and reflection combined in a fruitful union that evoked and defined the question that guides my quest: **What is it like to be a prison teacher?** A simple question, yet it is not easy to answer. Seeking answers from the wrong source could fool the inquirer; numbers and statistics would reveal nothing of the essential nature of being in prison teaching.

Phenomenology: The Path to Illumination

A light, emanating from a most unexpected source, threw further illumination on my path into the deep woods of research. Robert Allerton, a self-professed career criminal and amateur philosopher, offers the following thoughts on researchers who study the question, "What makes criminals?"

> ...how do they ever think they're going to find out what makes criminals tick if they go on looking at criminals just as specimens to experiment on?

> You know, you can learn a lot about butterflies by catching one, sticking it on a board with a pin, and looking at it through a microscope. You can study its wing-structure, its anatomy, how it breeds, how it flies, its whole mechanism -- but you're still nowhere near knowing what it's like to *be* a butterfly, are you? (Allerton, as cited in Petersen & Truzzi, 1972, pp. 32-33)

The poetic metaphor of this professional robber defines the crucial importance of phenomenological research with eloquent clarity. Indeed, phenomenology is the mode of inquiry that allows us the closest possible understanding of what it is like being a butterfly. If there is no magic wand to give us gossamer wings and weightless flight, we can immerse ourselves into the lived experiences of butterflies through rich phenomenological description and gain not only empirical knowledge, but an almost sensual understanding by virtual experience. A rich phenomenological description elicits a phenomenological nod from the reader, who will gain a deep, nearly experiential understanding of the phenomenon.

Hermeneutic phenomenology created its own terminology -- "gave language to what [researchers are] doing" (Hultgren, 1991, p. 29) -- that allows human science researchers an alternative approach to language use in order "to convince us that what they say is a result of their having actually penetrated (or, if they prefer, been penetrated by) another form of life" (Geertz, 1988, p. 4). The alternative approach to language use in phenomenological writing, particularly with its frequent hyphenation and verbal nouns, might "offend the

stylist" (Noddings, 1984) but it brings the phenomenon in proximity by illuminating deeper layers of concealed meaning. Phenomenological writing "always comes back to language -- where being is connected to saying it" (Hultgren, 1991, p. 29). Some more general issues, concerning the language of hermeneutic phenomenology, are discussed in more detail in Chapter III.

When the question is: "What is it like to be in prison teaching?" -- the function of this question demands the form (of inquiry) that will lead us into the depths of the phenomenon to shed light on its unique nature. This form is *phenomenological inquiry.* As van Manen (1990) explains, "Phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world" (p. 9). When I entered the harbor of *phenomenological inquiry,* although seeing it for the first time, I knew I came home. The following excerpts from a reaction paper I wrote several years ago, after being first introduced to phenomenology, still convey the pleasure and joy of discovery:

> I certainly felt like so many times before, at the beginning of a hike on an unknown trail. A map and a compass, my knowledge of nature and my faith to guide me and lead me to shelter at the end of the trail. The exhilaration of discovery and the deeper understanding of the territory was also similar to feelings experienced by the mountain hiker, who happens upon new vistas and reflects on the never-ending beauty of nature, thus gaining deeper and deeper understanding of her own place in the

> order of things.
> Hermeneutic phenomenology was my unknown trail in this case, and van Manen opened my eyes to new vistas and especially new ways of looking at old ones. The concept of allowing the subject of the research to be the researcher is one of the "new eyes" I have discovered. Although the same notion has been taking hold in the back of my mind, it was a great affirmation to read: "Instead of being solely the recipient of instruction, the child also serves as its source. Phenomenological pedagogical investigation is therefore not only for the children, but also by the children."
>
> A great sense of comfort was found in those words, as it always is, when one reads one's own thoughts expressed by authority. A confirmation, like an accurate reading of the compass, that "Yes! We are on the right trail." A short trip to van Manen territory can only give an introduction to it. I will have to retrace my steps until, like a well-known trail, every rise in the terrain, every boulder, every tree is familiar, becomes my own. (Reaction Paper, Fall 1992)

This revelation helped my long-repressed desire for learning and intellectual development to overcome my intimidation by quantitative research. Albeit too late in my life, I entered academe at the right moment for an alternative method of inquiry; human science research has gained acceptance in the scientific community. Being introduced to interpretive methods of research was a moment of revelation and a joyous homecoming. Deep down I always felt hopeful that there had to be something beyond empirical science. Although I did not yet understand the fine points of the method, my overall reaction was like meeting a long-lost relative, whom I have never seen before, yet whose life

history is so intimately entwined with mine, that a connection forms immediately upon meeting each other.

A child visiting F.A.O. Swartz in New York City for the first time, would not be so happily disoriented as I was upon my first entering the compelling world of hermeneutic phenomenology. For the longest time I kept my nose pressed against the window from the outside, before gathering enough courage to step inside. Then I spent some time in awe before I dared to touch the enchanted merchandize. Typical of the gifts of phenomenology, that after the first tentative gestures of “getting to know you,” the hesitant newcomer is invited into the circle, given the comfort of having been welcomed and accepted. Then, one never wants to leave, for this is too much like coming home, like stepping into the warm glow of the hearth.

My invitation to enter the circle came through van Manen (1990), who speaks to the artist in me:

> Phenomenological inquiry is not unlike an artistic endeavor, a creative attempt to somehow capture a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative, powerful and sensitive. (p. 39)

"Yes" -- I nodded enthusiastically and started to set up shop in his corner. It is a comfortable place especially because, along with factual knowledge and scholarly interest, personal experiences, biases, even feelings are welcome and recruited into service. Phenomenology, just like teaching, is capable of "creating

a context of comfort within anxiety" (Hultgren, 1991, p. 46). It is exactly the personal, the emotional, the creative self that makes phenomenological inquiry deep and meaningful, by filtering information through our lived experiences.

Like so many of my colleagues, I entered correctional education by chance, by fate. I was ill-prepared; nay, I was not prepared at all. Making mistake after painful mistake on my way to understanding the special needs and demands of this neglected segment of the education industry, my understanding of the role of the prison teacher went through a metamorphosis. Nineteen years of being a prison teacher altered my philosophy of education from what it was or what it would be were I teaching elsewhere. My discipline is Graphic Arts, but I see myself as a holistic educator; a teacher, often a counselor, confidante, sometimes a substitute mother, always a friend.

In a cold and empty room nineteen years ago I started doing certain kinds of things with the quiet confidence that I can make small changes for the better; “After all, deep down we are meliorists first” (Miles & Huberman, 1990, p. 352). Through many winters and summers I have changed and grown and learned with and from my students. I have reflected on my experiences during my time behind the wall. I often have pondered the meaning of the life of the prison teacher. Sometimes I have invited my students to share my reflections. Oftentimes they invited themselves, entered my reflective pondering, offered

criticism and insights, and made meaning-making easier. Generally, my students were objective and realistic.

> Us, as prisoners really need to get on the
> education foundation because, first of all,
> we got a strike against us...
> once we go back to society, if any of us
> are planning to stay in society, we have to
> deal with that strike already against us.
> (Inmate, age 38, in group discussion)

> ...this is a stepping stone for something
> bigger and brighter. Like I said, incarceration
> is a cornerstone of education for those who
> want it... if you want something out of it,
> you put something into it. Surely you are
> not going to go out and have a subliminal
> reaction again of picking up a gun...
> (Inmate, age 24, in group discussion)

> I will be leaving here very soon. I have
> been learning the basics... I have a instructor
> who cares about what we learn in this shop.
> (No going around giving her a bad name.)
> She makes sure you get good quality teaching
> and refuses to hear "I can't." She's doing her
> job like, McGuff, help that bite out of crime.
> I feel the success rate in shop will surpass
> the rest. Her work speaks for itself and I'm
> one of the many voices of her work. I'm
> proud to be taught by her.

> I end this story by saying, it would have
> never been written if she hadn't subjested
> [sic] it. I thank her for all she has taught
> me, even things that has nothing to do with shop.
> (Inmate, age 43, in autobiographical narrative)

After nineteen years, I can definitely see changes, small and not so small, hopefully all for the better. I see changes in myself; I started out *doing* certain

kinds of things and it took turning from winter to summer several times to change into *being* a certain kind of person.

My interest turned to the phenomenon of the prison teacher. I came to understand that being a prison teacher means having to un-conceal "the hidden wholeness," so we make true and authentic "choices between being and doing" (Palmer, 1990, p. 29). Burning questions propel my inquiry: What kind of person must a prison teacher be? What is involved in being, in *living* this experience? What "certain kinds of things" are we *doing*? **What is the lived experience of a prison teacher?**

The prison teacher's work is difficult, challenging, fascinating. Most prison teachers, including me, discover this special area of education quite by accident. Some hastily leave -- and there are certainly ample reasons to do so. Some of us stay -- yet few could articulate the reasons that make us continue the life of the prison teacher. As the miles grew behind me, I became more and more interested in the lifeworld of correctional teachers. Fortunately, I have found friends with similar interests among my colleagues. They willingly shared their experiences and their thoughts, and accepted the invitation to join my search for answers. (And whenever the answers remain hidden, I ask Gertrude to please, help formulate the questions.[1])

[1] This obscure reference to an anecdote about Gertrude Stein paraphrases her famous deathbed utterance "Never mind the answers, what is the question?"

Some of the questions emerge with the regularity and insistence of the first crocuses that come forth disregarding ice and snow and demand an answer with quiet force. How does one really become a *correctional* teacher? Can one prepare for a career in correctional education? If not in prison, where? How? Why do we put up with the hardship, the frustration, the inherent danger? What are the rewards, the signs of success; what makes one say "It's worth it." What is our professional image? Or self-image? Are we "special kinds of people," or are we merely "doing special kinds of things?"

These questions made me decide to devote my dissertation research to the study of the lifeworld of the prison teacher. These are also the kinds of questions that cannot be answered by means of quantitative research. They beg for a different "form," a different mode of inquiry, one that sheds light on the hidden folds and crevices of human existence that numbers could not reach. It seems a natural, logical choice to approach this human-ness with the tools offered by phenomenological research; after all, I set out on this journey not simply to gather information but to gain understanding.

Here, I offer a retrospective journey through my lived experiences and the lived experiences of other prison educators to explore our world behind double coils of razor wire. Holding up the lantern of hermeneutic phenomenology, our path shall be well lit.

Setting Out for My Ithaka

As a traveler setting out on a long journey, I have tried to clear a path in my mind to the foci of the reasons for my journey. Working my way through this first chapter I re-traced my footsteps of an earlier, longer journey: my road to correctional education. Questions arose along the way, like plants and flowers at a roadside; milestones and guideposts, marking distances covered and pointing to new directions at the same time. Writing "Turning to the Phenomenon," brought into focus the reasons and guiding questions of my inquiry.

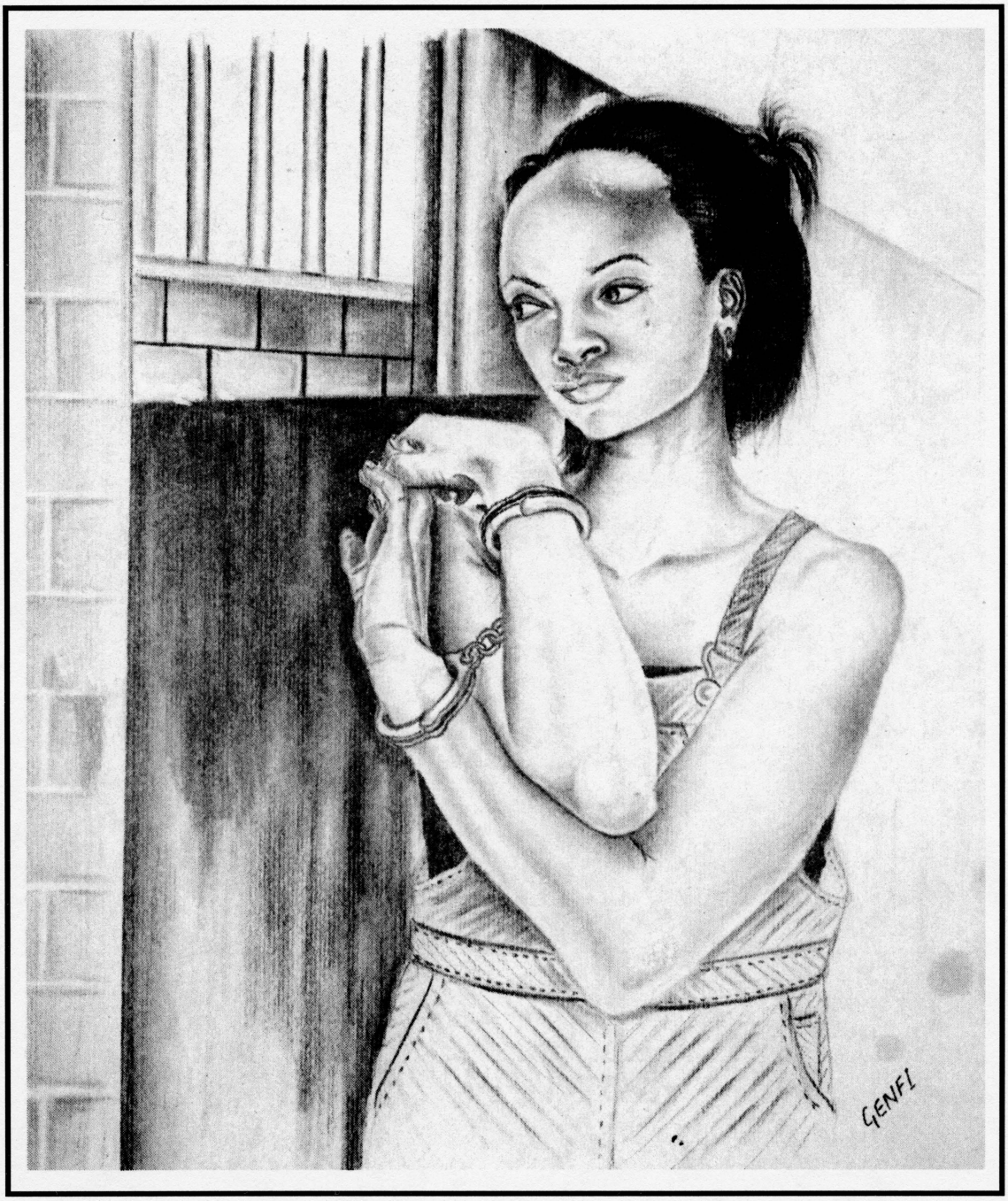
In the next chapter I explore the territory I am going to visit. Correctional education is very much *Terra Incognita* for the casual tourist. What do we know about this foreign land? What do we think about it? What do its inhabitants reveal to the visitor? A preliminary understanding of the phenomenon shall be gained from accounts of previous investigations, representations in art and fiction, and related narratives.

The third chapter introduces the methods and philosophical underpinnings that guide my journey into the lifeworld of prison teachers. The "ways and means" of data collecting also are discussed in the third chapter. I walk many different paths of learning in this chapter, as I retrace the journey that led me to phenomenology. I illuminate the unique nature of

phenomenological inquiry, and share the joy of being able to craft my research through the artful use of language.

The goal of phenomenological research is to study the *meaning of lived experiences.* Therefore, collecting data means collecting accounts of personal, lived experiences regarding the particular phenomenon being investigated. In this dissertation the experiences of prison teachers were collected as taped conversations and written narratives. In chapter four themes are uncovered and thematic statements are isolated, as I reflect on the rich text of conversations and personal narratives.

The final chapter revisits the question that is the driving force of this inquiry: What is it like to be a prison teacher? The phenomenological description of the lifeworld of prison teachers illuminates this neglected segment of the education industry, as recommendations are made to make life better for those who “teach behind bars.”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CHAPTER II:

ENTERING THE PHENOMENON

may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,
mother-of-pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfume of every kind -
as many sensual perfumes as you can

Around six o'clock every morning, on my way to work, I drive over the ridge of South Mountain. Descending on the Western side, there is a clearing in the thin woods between opposing rivers of the highway. I glance far left through this opening to catch a fleeting sight of my destination. In the wintertime it is dark at this time of the day and the diamond lights make the prison compound float like a brilliant island in the indigo sky. "How beautiful" -- I think -- "How absurdly, beautiful."

“Somehow prisons do not belong to social reality” says Galtung (as cited in Jepson, 1989, p. 30); they float on reality, like some island. Both a visitor and an inhabitant, I explore our Island in this chapter. Stopping at the trading posts of other prison teachers, fellow islanders, I collect pearls of their wisdom, corals of their experiences, amber and ebony of their stories. Like an anthropologist, I look at artifacts preserved in language, rites of passage, secrets and magic, as many sensual images as I can, in order to discover as a phenomenologist the concealed meaning of the lived experiences of my fellow islanders.

The First Station: Introduction

I was graciously granted permission to use an essay by a fellow teacher, who just recently joined our ranks behind bars. The powerful description of her first day in prison brought back, vividly, memories faded by the floodwater of time, thus allowing a chance to look at the familiar with fresh, new eyes.

> I was anxious and apprehensive during the short drive to my new job. I had been wondering what it was going to be like teaching criminals in an all male prison, when the country road offered me a clear view of the enclosed community. Stretched out from across the field were large symmetrically shaped buildings glowing from the high lights.
>
> The impression of structured perfection was marred only by the wire fence hanging between the end-posts of the high towers. Again, I considered whether I was humane enough to work with men that our Justice system had decided needed to be locked up and removed from the presence of others; would I be able to teach and help these prisoners as I had so many other students?
>
> As I locked my car doors, I glanced at the fence topped with circling jagged wire. Surely, I thought, one twenty-foot fence was enough to keep anyone inside, but there were two chain-linked fences spaced fifteen feet apart. I noticed on my walk to the front entrance that the nearest fence had sharp razor wire not only across the top, but also in the middle and along the bottom. Inside the entrance corridor I walked through an airport-type metal-detector and two additional doors that could be locked and secured. I waited meekly for the officer sitting behind the glass partition to trigger open the two, towering chain-link gates separating me from the front lobby.

> Slowly, I heard the electric motors whining as they drew apart to allow me to pass; they closed behind me with a loud 'clang.' As part of the check-in process, another corrections officer stationed in the lobby directed me to complete the sign-in ledger. After I had written my name, department, and time-of-arrival on the correct line, he assigned me a badge, the number of which he recorded in the ledger. The officer was very careful to explain to me that I needed this badge to get out of the institution and that in case of 'disturbance' my name in the ledger would make sure that I was accounted for.
>
> In spite of this grim reminder of danger, I must admit that I was more excited and expectant than worried. I waited patiently with other non-uniformed employees who were talking and kidding among themselves in front of a wall. The wall was composed entirely of a grill, that, instead of having traditional vertical bars, consisted of a more enclosing pattern of iron rectangles. I was surprised to see how relaxed everyone moved onward to the next grill after I heard the first grill slam closed behind me. Again, I heard the slamming of a grill behind me, but I was already hurrying through the last door to the open compound.
>
> At first glance, I felt like I was on a small college campus. Six identical two-story brick dormitories lined the large expanse of grass. Extra-wide asphalt walkways led to all buildings. On the walk to the Education Building I noticed that there were no trees, no large bushes, and no benches; after coming through all the doors, gates, and grills I was just happy to be outside and in the open. (Brown, 1995, p. 1)

The physical reality of prison, its "permanent fixtures" (Rapoport,1990), does not discriminate between its involuntary inhabitants and those who are there by choice. Counselors, psychologists, administrators, doctors, nurses,

officers, teachers are inevitably effected by those twenty-foot walls crowned with razor wire. In this we share much more with our students than we have ever expected, or realized. Mitford (1973, p. 27) in a classic reference describes prison as

> A life of planned, unrelieved inactivity and boredom... no overt brutality but plenty of random, largely unintentional cruelty... a pervasive sense of helplessness and frustration engulfing not only the inmates but their keepers, themselves prisoners trapped in the variate complex of paradoxes that is the prison world.

Indeed, it is a rude awakening to be faced finally with the realization that we teachers also are locked in, also are inmates of a weird and unhappy microcosm.

> I do not believe that the public understands the nature of this work, nor the unremitting pressures which bear down on those who have to spend twenty-four hours per day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, working and indeed living in a prison. There are for example, enormous emotional pressures and tensions involved. (as cited in Jepson, 1983, p. 41)

Mr. Dunbar, an ex-governor (warden) of a British prison, wrote those words referring to probation officers. They are just as valid and applicable to the pressures and tensions present in prison teachers' lives today. Work schedules of “twenty-four hours per day, seven days a week, 365 days a year” should not, of course, be taken literally. This dramatic exaggeration is used to express the extremely exposed, stressful position of prison staff.

Exploring Hidden Paths Through Dialogue

In an effort to create meaning of our shared experiences and to provide relief by reflection, at the beginning of the 1995/96 school year a colleague and I started a dialogue journal, discussing our work in corrections. This project started with a very general idea of allowing ourselves to "talk out" the daily buildup of pressure. Since then journal entries and our end-of-day “wind-down” conversations illuminate much of my investigation, especially regarding the macro-politics of the Education Department. My first entry, dated August 11, 1995 defines our intent:

> The goal of this joint venture is to make record of our lives, to "tell our stories." According to some thinkers, (Cooper, 1991; Tappan & Brown, 1991) our very *life* becomes real and valid *only* upon telling it. If you think about the fleeting nature of time, the elusive “present,” event and memories of events building in layers ... making the presence of the present moment instantly a thing of the past -- so easy to see the need for telling.

My reading of Heidegger's (1962) *Being and Time* certainly influenced my journal writing, although the need to record the details and events of this rich culture was always on some future agenda. For an average person, leading an average life, suddenly being immersed in a prison culture is a confusing, disorienting experience that has to be interpreted and explained. We need to make sense and meaning in order to find our own place and meaning in this alternative reality.

The first discovery made by my journal partner was the need for self-protection. Double layers of bureaucracy create a mine-field of rules and restrictions upon the normal and reasonable system of security precautions. In our system educational programs are administered by an autonomous Education Department within the prison. Underlying a veneer of co-operation in a mutual interest, there is mutual resentment. Certainly,

> The spokespeople for corrections have been nearly unanimous in their support of correctional education. However, the contrast between these abstractions and the actual conditions confronting us every day drives us to the brink of despair. Correctional education is impeded by the teacher's status as an outsider in the coercive setting. Anti-education constraints contribute to the correctional education professional turnover rate. We are intimidated by the institutional anti-education bias. (Gehring, 2002, p. 90)

Teachers seem to be especially vulnerable because correctional staff tend to resent what they perceive as extra work caused by the Education Department. The dichotomy between the mission of the Department of Corrections and that of the Department of Education makes life in this forced equilibrium a daily risk of inadvertently failing to recognize some regulation. Because in prison, one lives the life of a fish in an aquarium, any little failure is exposed immediately, scrutinized and punished. Thus, I clearly understand my writing-partner's cautious approach:

> I will write the truth about my experience in working in corrections, but I will not write all the truth. I am always concerned now that one slip of the tongue or

> one inappropriate action will be blown out of proportion and then I will be in trouble. Therefore I shall still be careful, but honest. (Journal, August, 1995)

Similar concerns resonate in the suggestion that "correctional educators should be selected for their ability to stand up to prison staff, who resent the educational opportunities offered to inmates" (Banks, as cited in Gehring, 1993, p. 72).

Four Correctional Teachers Illuminate Their Life Worlds

The teaching profession -- even in prison -- has been a feminine realm. Perhaps not by accident; perhaps it is our feminine inheritance to possess in abundance the quality of "...disposability *disponibilité* the readiness to bestow and spend oneself and make oneself available" (Marcel, as cited in Noddings, 1984, p. 19). Therefore, it is with female colleagues that I most often engage in reflective conversations. These spontaneous sessions are illuminating and therapeutic, as we try to comb the tangled yarn of our prison-teacher-lives into a smooth skein of meaning and significance.

The following is a collage of many meaning-making conversations and musings that I used in an earlier writing (Sayko, 1994). In an attempt to convey the unstructured and introspective nature of these conversations, my writing took a similarly loose, unstructured form -- adopting an almost free verse-like quality. Re-reading these pages made me realize how hermeneutic phenomenological writing invites one to enter the phenomenon. Because the

person of the speaker is of no particular importance, individuals are not identified. Direct quotes flow in and out of interpretive sentences to create text that -- like a stream of consciousness -- speaks to the reader intimately and with great authenticity.

We are sitting, taking a breather from classes this afternoon, because of the heat, or cold, or electrical shut down, any one of the variety of causes of disruption, our students tucked away in their berths. We are four women, hands permanently cupped around coffee mugs, minds tuned to our vocation, souls ready to be restored in a long-needed cleansing rain of friendly, professional talk. We are ready for a discourse that "enables us to make our lives conversationally available: debatable, accountable, evaluable" (van Manen, 1990, p. 19).

We have about sixty years of prison experience among us and a lifetime worth of caring. Yes, we are disposable. Noddings (1984) could have referred to us when she said "One who is disposable recognizes that she has a self to invest, to give" (p. 19). We are sitting with our coffees and memories and "one-caring" selves, exchanging war-stories, sharing our space with the lingering presence of long-departed students. We give voice to and receive voice from each other, through each other. Our stories echo each other; we are sisters -- like in a Chekhov drama. My story becomes yours, as we try to entangle the multi-knotted yarn of our lives in prison.

> These are all experiences that could be yours, or mine, not because we have all lived through them but because we are human and nothing human is alien to us. (van Manen, 2002, p. ii)

Like a tunnel of mirrors, bouncing images back and forth -- we find that we are looking at ourselves by looking at each other's hearts.

> The insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience.
> (van Manen, 1990, p. 77)

From several conversations around the coffee pot slowly emerges a "structure of meaning." Like talented jugglers, we keep many hats in the air, ready to grab and wear the one that most befits the need of the moment. Whether we are crowned with a mother'' bonnet, or a chef's toque, the top hat of a teacher, or the nurse's cap, our motivational force is a deep-seated commitment to make ourselves available, to answer the relentless stream of demands, to be giving, to be *disposable.*

> To take to give is all, return what is hungrily given.
> Puffing the pounds of manna up through the dew to heaven,
> The lovely gift of the gab bangs back on a blind shaft.
> (Thomas, 1971, p. 104)

The meta-theme of disposability, of *disponibilité,* encloses several aspects in the life world of prison teachers, in a forceful, unifying embrace. We speak the same language; we talk in one voice. It shall, therefore, be one voice,

a Sister Voice that tells our story in an effort to validate, to gain ownership of our shared lived experiences as prison teachers.

Mothers and Other Strangers

> "Dialogue"
>
> Tell me about your day.
> Which part you wanna hear?
> The part about the blood,
> or the sweat, or the tears?
> I want to hear it all, because
> I want to tell it all.
> (Sayko, 1995)

The merciless summer enclosed the country in a crystal bell of suffocating heat, hardly any green left for the eyes to rest upon. The mountains sunk into the same blueness in seamless union with the sky. Walking around the compound in the eerie quiet of high noon, short shadows like dark puppies circle teasingly around my ankles. The browning grass rattles under my steps made heavy by the heat-monkey sitting on my sweaty back. The air parts before me in a curtain of almost visible ripples. Relentless steamy days lock down around us with the weight of iron grills. Tempers rise, tension builds, nerves crack. Words are exchanged, fists hardened, knives pulled. We are waiting for the first fat, merciful drops of rain to break the weather. Summer is a dangerous place in prison.

I can not believe they were outside, playing ball in this weather! Even the guards complained, but only those that fainted were allowed to go inside. We

“tsk, tsk” and shake our heads, not that we should be surprised. All this fits into a day behind bars -- even in 105 degrees Fahrenheit -- even in thunder and lightening -- even when thunder strikes. What a way to die in prison!

I just tell them to drink water until it starts to spray out of their pores. I tell them to stay in the shade, but there is no shade on Bare Mountain. I tell them “Don't lift weights, don’t run, don’t play ball.” They tell me “Oh, you are like a mother to us.” Yea, that’s right, a mother -- a mother they did not know, or do not have anymore, or do not see often enough, or a mother who does not want to see them.

From hotels and airplanes I collect those little soaps; when nobody looks I take all the plastic spoons and forks from McDonald’s. These new One Dollar stores are a blessing with their dozen-bag plastic combs, quart size lotions, cheap candy -- small kindnesses, secretly slipped from hand to hand. I tell them “Comb your hair, wash your face, brush your teeth, change your underwear. *Wear* your underwear!” We burst out laughing. That’s right, wear your underwear! Wash your hair, clean your clothes, eat your vegetables.

He is someone's blond boy. Like my own golden child, he turned twenty-one today. Clean shirt, freshly combed hair, ear trained on the telephone. “Will the next ring announce my visitors?” As I walk by I place my card, with its candy-bar lining, on his drawing board. My wishes are sincere for a much happier twenty-second. He lingers behind when the lunch bell rings; baby fat

still makes puffy pillows of his rosy cheeks. Trying valiantly to act like a crusty convict, his arms stop short of an embrace, “I want to thank you...”

My arms echo the ache for a motherly hug. Against the rules “to allow or initiate physical contact even by mutual consent...” I spread my arms. What the hell -- he turned adult today. So little I can do -- a card, a 45-cent candy, an illegal hug -- *taktgefühl.* I hope I am *being* more than *doing* in this “immediate, situational, contingent, improvisational” microcosm of ours (van Manen, 1991b, p. 123).

Handcuffed by Frustration

Frustration sets in like the autumn rain, leaden, cold, unending. Prison handcuffs and shackles everyone. Rules and rules and rules erect twenty-foot fences around you. As we sit around, emptying coffee mugs and hearts, a theme of frustration demands to be let to the surface, and stories of woe are recited to the chorus of knowingly nodding heads. The cold, the rats, the roaches -- communicable diseases we are exposed to, and diseases of the mind and heart also are contagious. No, no, you cannot. No money for books, for paper, for a chair to sit on. Winters pass without heat; two rickety fans fight to fend off 100 degree summers. Empty first-aid boxes, hearts empty of empathy are more intimidating than twenty-foot fences. So little one can do, and even that is regulated until it shrinks to minuscule proportions. Winter frosts of small indignities erode away the spirit.

We frequently are saddened by frustration over the lost capacity of minds blown away on drugs, shipwrecked self-esteem, lost confidence, aborted ambitions. At least frustration coming from the students carries the wind of challenge and the promise of hope: challenge to test the teacher, hope for remediation. Frustration, borne of the often mis-guided priorities of an indifferent administration, is a twenty-foot wall, crowned with double coils of the razor-wire of ignorance.

Your well has been emptied many times by the frustration over giving and giving of yourself, to bestow and spend yourself until you are left like an autumn tree, bereft of fruit -- an empty vessel, because there is nothing to replenish you. You are stranded, isolated, losing touch with other aspects of your life because husbands and lovers and children will not --cannot -- understand your need to answer your calling. You are parched because husbands and lovers and children will not -- cannot -- understand your thirst for the nourishment only they can provide when your well goes dry. They get angry instead. They get scared and frustrated because you are not there exclusively for them. “You treat those criminals better than us.” They get angry; they run away.

So often we are angered by the frustration of not having a voice in the creation of the processes that ultimately we are responsible for, over not being able to effect, to meliorate, to improve, even where it could, *should* be the natural thing to do. In prison there are guards and counselors and psychologists,

group leaders, nurses, coaches, chaplains, but it is the correctional teacher who spends the most time, has the most intimate personal contact with inmates. We see them every day, in some classes six hours a day, for twenty weeks. We learn a lot about a person during such regular, sustained contact. We get to know them. It would stand to reason that our insights would be used, our experiences called upon, when life-altering decisions are made on our students' behalf. Parole Boards frequently turn the thumb up or down, based on a few notes and records in the inmate's base-file, without interviewing, sometimes even without ever seeing the inmate. Teachers' input is not only uninvited, it is usually most firmly discouraged --sometimes most rudely refused.

The frustration of being prevented from doing what one could do -- what, in essence, one is paid to do -- plays a cruel trick of robbing the prison teacher of self-esteem and professional pride. Oh well, we are already robbed of a professional title, being classified as *instructional personnel, teacher provisional-unclassified.* Sticks and stones...?

Dreams Deferred

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore -
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over -
Like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
Like a heavy load.

> Or does it explode?
> (Hughes, 1970, pp. 156-157)

Dreams deferred sometimes become dreams projected. A massive crowd of over three thousand men will generate sexual tension. Some will spin a web of fantasy around females appearing in their midst. Teacher-mother-counselor-friend thus becomes the romantic personification of an ideal.

> My friend, I would like to expound upon some of the wonderful and lovely qualities you passessed. [sic] The qualities I wish to speak of first of all are your internal ones, for therein lays the real and true you, for true beauty and love comes from within and all true relationships are established and maintained from within. My friend, I respect and appreciate the diligence, elegance, and benevolence of your precious soul. I respect and appreciate your sweet tender loving heart, and in my eyes and mind, you are the personification of how all women were created to be. You are a true "Queen" without doubt, and for the first time in my life, I have witness a phenomenal [*sic*], for you are in all actuality an extraordinary woman. (From student's letter)

Letters might mysteriously appear on one's desk, letters that will never be answered, for this is a dangerous and unfair game.

> My friend please don't misunderstand what I am about to say, I only wish to let you know how beautiful you are, for I must confess you are a very attractive, gorgeous and fasinated [sic] lady, and one of the most beautiful women I ever had the pleasure to know. (From student's letter)

If one takes the attitude of the other, the need to feel love and the need to express love can be understood. Taking a realistic and responsible second look,

one that is tempered by professional standards, the subject of such unrequited emotions must realize that she is but a screen against which dreams are projected.

Prison punishes by isolation. Being separated from family, friends, and the usual acutrements of everyday life, every little thing from the “outside” carries powerful images and emotion evoking properties. All new workers have a turn at being the center of some inmates’ fantasies -- at least, for a while, until the novelty wears off. Teachers are especially vulnerable, because they spend the longest sustained time with the prisoners. Becoming the center of such attention places the new, inexperienced teacher into a mine-field that she has to navigate without a map.

Cat-calls and wolf-whistles are easy enough to ignore. But what do you do when the roses arrive, setting the whole institution abuzz with malicious rumors? What do you do when put on the defensive for crimes not even conceived? Being on the far side of fifty years and two-hundred pounds, the thought of becoming the subject of admiration never entered my mind. I feel shielded from the possibility. I just keep on walking; this is not even an annoyance. I cannot help that I still blush every time. I would rather walk by the back of the building, where there are only trash bins and rats to dodge. I do not have to listen to their rude remarks; I just yell back at them to shut up.

You have to let your “mother-icon” override your “female-icon.” You have to underplay the feminine side of your persona. You have to act in a gender-neutral way and never-never indulge in your own fantasies. I dress casually, bordering on sloppy. I try to be friendly but business-like; I show that I care about them in a motherly way. Still, some students will comment and tell me things they think I am glad to hear. Sometimes it takes rudeness to reset the balance. Yet, taking the attitude of the other, one has to remember that this is but an attempt to confirm the self, a clumsy try at regaining some of the lost dignity and confidence.

Sometimes dreams deferred do explode. [1]He was saying good-bye to everyone in the building. We all thought he got paroled. Then he came into my room, sat down across my desk and calmly cut his wrist with razor blades carefully smuggled through the metal-detector. His note said to tell his mother how he went out in a blaze of fireworks because he could not contain his love anymore.

> If I said anything that have made you feel the
> least uncomfortable then please accept my apology
> and I thank you for your time, trust, and consideration.
> Smile. (From student's letter)

Those Who Can, Teach

In the winter season of my prison experience, I was perhaps teaching more, dutifully grinding out facts and figures and information on this or that,

proudly thinking I was giving away my store. Look at all this knowledge; now you can read, you can write, add, multiply, type, run a machine.

Bud, fifty-four-year-old, kept complaining about the dull scissors. I did not notice; they worked fine earlier. “Let me see.” I walked over where he was cutting up old sheets for machine-cleaning rags. I watched him for a few minutes wrestling oddly with the scissors. Oh! “Here, try it this way.” Recalling gestures last used in Kindergarten, I placed the large orange eyes of the scissors in the proper position on his thumb and forefinger. As the first snip cut straight into the fabric, a triumphant smile melted over his face: “Aha! This is how you do it!”

Not all of us are familiar with van Manen's (1991b) *Tact of Teaching*, yet in our praxis we are all his students: understanding, sensitive, listening, observing. Praxis, simply stated, is a combination of reflection and action, or thoughtful action (van Manen, 1990). It is the essence of engaged pedagogy, as we apply theory to our actions and let our actions inform the theory. Our pedagogical personae are borne of the nature of pedagogy, endowed with love, hope and responsibility for students whose path turned awry, perhaps because no one made a pedagogical investment in their early lives. Our practice is “facilitated by trustful sympathy” (van Manen, 1991b, p. 96). How else could one teach, in the same class, a fourteen year old boy and a man of 89 the miracle

of reading? How else could one truly share the profound joy of a murderer, who is celebrating what might be the first victory of his life: his freshly earned GED?

Our students are not like others. Under the grimy crust, self-built or layered on by a mis-knowing society, they are more vulnerable than a babe, who is held tight by his mother. Who is there to hold these people tight? Although they are built on the same human frame with all of us, that is a "...microcosm that could, with proper education, reflect the beauty and order of the universe" (Plato, as cited in Grudin, 1990, p. 150) -- who is there to see their beauty and order? As prison teachers, we choose to "lock in" with our students in the belief that the "teacher is a mediator between the order that is implicit in the cosmos and an order that is implicit in the individual" (Grudin, 1990, p. 150).

Cracking the Mirror

The role of education in the process of rehabilitation is long understood and well documented. A body of scholarly work (Bazos & Hausman, 2004; Berglowe, 2004; Chappel, 2004; Jenkins & Mumford, 1990; Jenkins, Steurer & Pendry, 1995; Nuttal, Hoolmen, & Staley, 2003; Spangenberg, 2004; Steurer, Smith, & Tracey, 2001) confirms and re-confirms that confinement within an institution does not deter crime. Education is one of the very few programs which has an effect on recidivism. Still, the public-at-large does not favor prison programs of any kind, including education.

This resentment -- born of ignorance or lack of information -- is not a new phenomenon. Prison guards in England were complaining about (educational) opportunities for inmates, that were not available for them or their children, as far back as the 1890's (Jepson, 1989). The general misunderstanding turns into a serious threat when it takes the form of political power. As elected officials act upon prevailing public opinion, the legislature can annihilate entire (prison) programs because of their lack of popularity, as the examples show later in this chapter.

To appreciate the lived experiences of prison teachers fully, it is important to recognize one of the harshest conflicts with which they have to deal. The discrepancy between the proven value of education in corrections, and the negative political/societal forces that work against it, places a brick wall in the prison teacher's path, that has to be broken down on a daily basis. In order to open a window to the lifeworld of prison teachers, some recent studies on the correlation between educational attainment and recidivism are instructive.

Jenkins and Mumford (1990) presented *a paper, Where Are My Students Now?* to the International Correctional Education Association Conference in Vancouver, BC. They reported a direct, positive correlation between educational attainment and post-release success in finding and keeping employment. They also showed that the level of completed educational programs is in positive correlation with the level of job related success. In 1995

Jenkins, Steurer and Pendry shared the results of their follow-up study of 169 inmate releasees, who completed correctional education programs. Their findings demonstrate clearly the benefits of correctional education. Case Closing Reports filed by parole agents indicate that in the State of Maryland for FY 1992, fourteen percent of the entire population of released offenders committed a new offense. In comparison, the study group of ex-offenders, who benefitted from educational programs, showed a remarkably low seven percent of new offenses. (Jenkins, et. Al., 1995)

The Three State Recidivism Study by Steurer, Smith, and Tracey (2001) analyzed the largest ex-offender population (3200 inmates) to date in the states of Maryland, Minnesota and Ohio. Their results support earlier research and demonstrate a statistically significant positive correlation between educational attainment and declining rate of recidivism. Bazos and Hausman (2004) convert the positive results of correctional education into monetary value by comparing the annual cost of crime prevented by education to the annual cost of crime prevented by incarceration. Their analyses show a staggering two to one ratio. Simply stated, "Correctional education is almost twice as cost-effective [than incarceration] as a crime control policy" (p. 2).

Despite all the empirical evidence, correctional education is still the social pariah and the stepchild of the contemporary education system. Unfortunately this attitude is reflected in the low esteem and inferior status

society assigns to prison teachers. Even a close friend, discussing the need for more and better educated prison teachers, blurts out: “Yes, but why would a good teacher want to work there?” I do not take this remark as a personal affront. I understand her unchecked expression as simply a reflection of prevailing public opinion.

As a small, yet painful example of this mind-set, I need only to recall the language from the memos and bulletins that correctional teachers received in connection with the 1996 downsizing. We were *eliminated*, not fired; we were *terminated*, not laid off; our lives were not disrupted, we were simply *impacted.* We were assured that “this determination... in no way reflects upon your job performance” (State Superintendent’s 2/5/1996 letter). The Director of Correctional Education stated: “There is no relationship between any individual factors (length of services, quality of service, etc.) and the process used to identify those impacted” (Bulletin -- 96-18 1/22/96). Some of us “impacted” were serving for twenty-eight years, yet a few years shy of retirement age. Some had children still in high school. Some of us would have preferred an unsatisfactory rating, or at least inadequate length of service to be the reason for our elimination. But to be terminated by our PIN, or personal identification numbers, was an affront to our personhood. In the sickly quiet of those first devastating days the only sound was made by our shattering self-esteem.

> The hardship of dealing with low self esteem has the inherent dangers of grinding into our heart, nestling in

> our consciousness, infecting our self-image. Our low status on the societal totem pole creates a two-faced monster, as it reflects on our self-esteem. Like images between two mirrors facing each other, they feed off each other, throwing the same pictures back and forth *ad infinitum.* Until one mirror cracks there is no way to escape the prison of this *perpetuum mobile.* (Journal entry, September, 1995)

Being placed in a low -- thus unimportant -- status touches the security of livelihood of the prison teacher. In efforts to deal with budget crises, it became a bi-annual ritual in the State of Maryland to cut out unpopular programs from education and social services. Despite its low-cost high-return nature, correctional education is unfortunately a favorite target.

How do we counter-act political forces that threaten our livelihood? How can we crack the mirror and maintain self-esteem and professional stature from the lowest rung of the ladder? How do prison teachers keep lit the torch of dedication, when there are so many ill-winds blowing against it?

The Last Clear Chance Doctrine

> One of the definitions of *correction* given in Webster's Dictionary is that of "setting it right according to truth, rectitude, justice" (p. 410). Applying this understanding to *correctional education* suggests a form of educational content and method which would liberate us to stand in consonance or harmony with that which is true, right, and just. (Zollman, 1993, p. 92)

On my darkest winter days I often feel abandoned in my role as a prison teacher. In one of the richest, most powerful countries of the world, education in

general is still not a full-fledged member of the family of concerns. Like a step-child at the family's gathering for holiday dinner, it gets the chipped china at the low end of the table. Then there she is, scrubbing pots by the kitchen stove, picking at leftover morsels: correctional education. Marsh pictures prison teachers as "forgotten professionals," a sorry predicament, for which he blames "...the lack of knowledge by teacher training institutions regarding correctional education" (as cited in DeGraw, 1987, p. 18). Nearly twenty years later, Gehring and Puffer (2005) present the same conditions,

> Almost no correctional educators were professionally prepared to work in correctional education. Neither do they have access to the literature of the field of correctional education. (p. 23)

The dual demands placed on prison teachers by the education and corrections administration further impede the development of a robust professional identity. "The professional growth and development of teachers fade under the demands and priorities of the correctional bureaucracy," opines Zaro (2000, p. 191).

While several aspects of the world of corrections have received the attention of researchers, there is little professional interest in correctional teachers. DeGraw's (1987) study of prison teachers explores teaching conditions in adult institutions in search of the question: "How contented are these educators with their present environment?" (p. 19). In his study DeGraw collected data from a randomly selected population of correctional teachers regarding their level of education, major field, years of experience, etc. To his

credit, DeGraw also turned toward the less tangible aspects of correctional teachers' lives.

If plans to stay or to leave a job are, indeed, a fair measure of contentment as DeGraw suggests, his study paints a rather grim picture of the life of correctional teachers. A total of 59.5 percent had considered leaving their present positions; 47.7 percent had taken serious steps in that direction (actively seeking or inquiring about another job). In fact, only 32.9 percent expected to be in the same position in five years. Twenty percent on the other hand planned to be out of the correctional environment altogether (DeGraw, 1987, p. 19). Unfortunately DeGraw neglected to ask the more pertinent "why" questions that should have followed his discovery of such a high percentage of teachers confessing their discontent. Instead of exploring deep-seated causes of why these prison teachers were "expressing intentions to leave the field," he merely glosses over the real issue by offering the reasons to be "possibly because of burnout or job dissatisfaction, or both" (p. 1). DeGraw's speculative answer is supported by Gehring (2002), who acknowledges that "Inadequate compensation, poor working conditions, and limited opportunities for professional development" may be held responsible for the high frequency of teacher burnout (p. 89).

Were the teachers responding to DeGraw's inquiry "*being* certain kinds of people" or were they merely "*doing* certain kinds of things," thus denying

themselves the truly life-sustaining moments of satisfaction that lay locked up behind bars? For despite the disparity in respect, pay, length of the working year, quality of working conditions between prison teachers and public school teachers, there are many veterans among us with twenty-plus years of service -- twenty-plus years of faith. Twenty years "on stage, as educators" -- is Steve Jones' (1993) description of their work -- and still acting with the excitement and wonder of opening night.

Will I last twenty years? Will I see the relentless turning of time from winter to summer from within or from without? Most of all as long as I shall last, will I be able to provide true, liberating education, "one that includes not only factual knowledge, but teaches us the processes of exploring alternatives, applying our concept of the desirable, and making a final free decision" (Clifton, as cited in Zollman, 1993, p. 93). Will I be able to prepare my students "to meet the challenge of the times?" As their teacher-counselor-mother-friend will I turn the winter of my *doing* into the summer of my *being* with them and for them? Will they learn from me that "To meet the challenge of the times, we must know what we are doing, why we are doing it, and actively direct changes which are central to us" (Zollman, 1993, p. 93).

As prison teachers is our only responsibility just to teach? While a formidable task in itself -- considering the previous educational mis-

conditioning of our particular student population -- in prison, especially in prison, “just teaching” is not adequate.

> Education that remains merely on the surface of human life, that fails to go to the heart of being, will inevitably fail in being correctional or, in other words, formative, reformative, and transformative. (Zollman, 1993, p. 93)

Zollman’s words recall my experience visiting prisons in British Columbia where I observed prison schools that, under the visionary leadership of Stephen Duguid,

> Created an effective learning culture in which adult education in prison could find an effective operational context -- effective because it allows prisoner-students to put into practice values and ideas that percolate through the community, and because it converts the Prison Education Program part of the prison experience into an around-the-clock educational experience for some prisoners. (Duguid, 2000, p. 252)

Through his philosophy of democratic, participatory school administration Duguid, like earlier Zollman, urges us prison teachers to

> strive to establish civil and ethical relations between teachers, counselors and volunteers on the one hand and prisoners on the other that kick starts the process of individual development that can lead to transformation. (p. 254)

We, prison teachers have to prepare our students to be able to break out of the confines of their previous life worlds, to be able to “break the spell and

circle of routines built up by modern culture and begin the transition into a different stream of experience" (Gablik, as cited in Zollman, 1993, p. 93).

The magic wand to break the spell, by consensus, is *education,* in our case, *correctional* education. Both words are endowed with powers to open the treasure-trove of our intellectual Sesame. The dictionary un-conceals the many-layered meanings of this potent expression. The word "correctional," is born of the Latin *correctus* and Middle English *correcten,* "to make or set right, to amend, to lead straight, rebuke or punish" (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 2004, p. 326). Time did not alter its meaning, we still "correct" to set things right, to amend mistakes and to punish. Our word "educate" also originates from the mixed parentage of the Old English *educaten* and two Latin words, *educare,* "to bring up, rear or train" and *educere,* "to lead, draw, or bring". Their original meaning, "to bring up, rear or train," evolved to mean "to develop mentally and morally, especially by instruction" (p. 453).

Hultgren (1991) could have been defining *correctional teaching* with this wonderful sentence: "Teaching is creating a context of comfort within anxiety" (p. 46). We create comfort by leading straight, by showing road-signs to different modes of living, without being paralyzed by the anxiety inherent in a life riddled with crime. The objectives of modern correctional education are eloquently articulated by MacCormick, the First Assistant Director of the US Federal Bureau of Prison in charge of educational programs, in a 1931 speech:

> The prison will be a place where it is possible, if one wishes, to make up for lost advantages or to add knowledge and skill which has already been acquired. Its educational philosophy will be to consider prisoners not only as criminals in need of reform, but also as adults in need of education. Its aim will be to extend to prisoners as individuals, every type of educational opportunity that experience or sound reasoning shows may be of benefit or of interest to them, in the hope that they may thereby be fitted to live more competently, more honestly, more satisfyingly, and more cooperatively as members of society. (Yearbook of Correctional Education, 1989, pp. 16-17)

As the term "education" has two Latin roots, the mission of the correctional teacher also feeds from the twin springs of *educ**a**re*/educate, to raise the inmate students' human potential, to lead them to a stage where they can live more competently, more honestly. The mission also is nourished by *educ**e**re*/educate, to lead out of the poverty and depravity created by under-education. The correctional teacher should not be left alone with this mission. Just as crime is a common problem touching all members of society, corrections should be a common concern, a shared responsibility, akin to the *Last Clear Chance Doctrine* in law, meaning the last chance to avoid an accident or injury. "The theory is that while the plaintiff was negligent, his/her actions did not cause the accident because the defendant could have reasonably averted the accident" (Law.com Dictionary, 2005). When a criminal finally ends up in prison, we have a last chance to correct, to set things right -- and we are responsible collectively.

We correct, we lead straight on a straight path, we straighten. We *educare*/educate, as we lead, *into* the realm of knowledge, into the possession of the protective arm and armor of self-esteem. Also, we *educere*/educate, show the way, lead *out of* the powerless poverty of ignorance. We correct, or rather we offer to show ways, straight paths to self-correction by offering true, liberating education that is "not only factual knowledge but teaches us the processes of exploring alternatives... and making a final free decision" (Clifton, as cited in Zollman, 1993, p. 93). This is an ambitious undertaking that can be braved with the encouragement offered by Gibran (1970, p. 13):

> Be not contented with little;
> he who brings to the springs of life
> an empty jar will return with two full ones.

Having spent over nineteen years teaching behind bars, I recognize changes in my mind and in my soul. During this time my philosophy of teaching changed, and my praxis metamorphosised from pedagogy to andragogy. Recognizing these changes turned my interest toward the lifeworld of prison teachers, a neglected minority at the peripheries of the profession. I am pulled to search for meanings concealed by the mundane dust of everyday, until I reach the “hidden wholeness,” the essence of what it is like to be a prison teacher because,

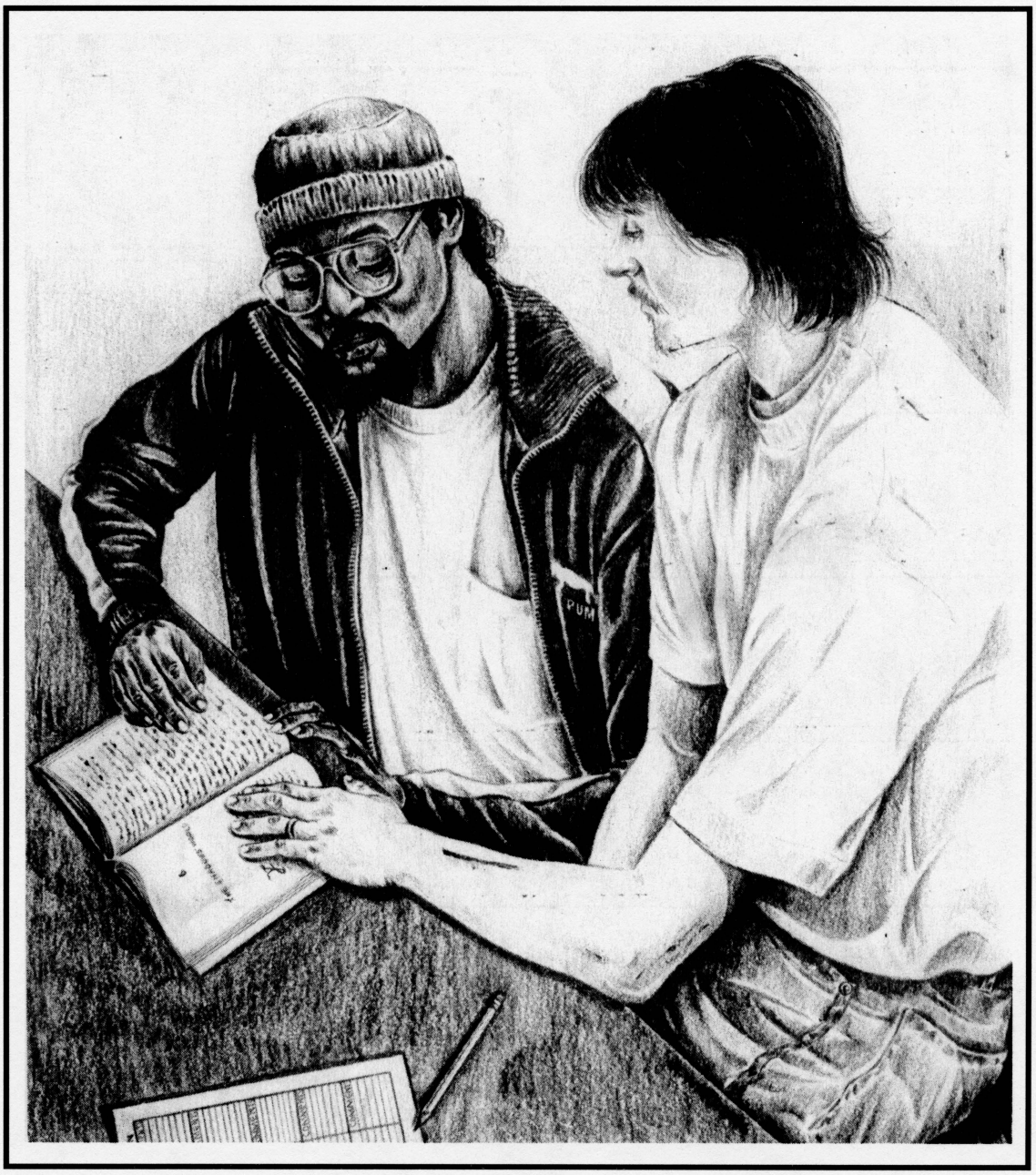
> Until we know the hidden wholeness we will live in a
> world of dualisms, of forced but false choices between
> being and doing that result in action that is mere

> frenzy or in contemplation that is mere escape.
> (Palmer, 1991, p. 29)

What is it like to be a part of this culture as a teacher in prison? What makes a teacher a *correctional* teacher? Is there a turning point when a school teacher becomes a prison teacher? What forces are at work pulling people into a permanent commitment to this field? Are prison teachers fools, or dreamers of impossible dreams? Are they merely *doing* special kinds of things or are they truly *being* special kinds of persons?

Entering Beyond the Mirror

Exploring *Terra Incognita* of correctional education offers the visitor a preliminary understanding of the phenomenon. Looking through the album of snapshots and sketches, presented in this chapter, previously concealed areas -- worthy of investigation -- were discovered. Re-reading and re-telling stories offered the opportunity to delve into the rich spring of narratives of prison teaching that serve to open my phenomenon. In the next chapter I explicate the philosophical foundations of my questioning and the methodology employed in my research and analysis.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CHAPTER III:

METHODOLOGY:
LEARNING MY WAY TO MEANING

and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to learn and go on learning from their scholars.

"My returning to the way of feelings and consciousness allowed me to retrieve my past, pull on the present, and call to the future -- transcending all limitations to illuminate the life world" (White-Hood 1989, p. 8). These words echo in my mind as I embark on this chapter. Earlier, I explained what winds turned my sails toward the phenomenon of prison teaching. In Chapter II, I shared insights and pre-understandings gathered on my voyage through experiences, reflections and narratives, that opened up the phenomenon, shed light on some of the hidden meanings of encounters. Now, it is time to study the methods and philosophical guidelines -- my maps and charts -- that keep me on course. To reach my goal, to illuminate the life world of prison teachers, I have to examine what I bring to the journey. This might arouse the suspicion of the scientific community, in whose judgment,

> Subjectivity... is often used to signify a form of pollution in social and scientific inquiry. To be "subjective" is to be "biased", allowing one's values to enter into and prejudice the outcome of one's research. (Rowan & Apple, 1990, p. 38)

As if engaged in dialogue, van Manen answers Apple and Rowan with this question:

> How does one put out of play everything one knows about an experience that one has selected for study? If we simply try to forget what we already "know", we may find that the presuppositions persistently creep back into our reflections. It is better to make explicit our understanding, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, not in order to forget them again, but rather to hold them deliberately at bay and even turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shadows or concealing character. (van Manen, 1990, p. 47)

Do we have to worry that whatever our inquiry turns up will be "drawn through the tight sieve of [our] preconceptions, so that only what [we] had already believed remained?" (Auchincloss, 1962, p. 259). This is not the intent of human science research. In the above quote van Manen prudently calls our attention to the need to be circumspect, to be able to stand up to the scrutiny with which human science research should be examined. Interpretive methodology is not exempt from the obligation to be valid and authentic. It should have the benefit of having been vetted by such scrutiny, as any other research methodology, in order to demonstrate its soundness in meeting the criterion of goodness.

“Criterion of goodness” is a much needed alternative to empirical positivistic assessment techniques that are unsuitable to evaluate qualitative research for which we are still “seeking legitimacy” (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, p. 448). Legitimacy is assured when the quality of work is judged by assumptions born of the methodology and resonate with the spirit of the work.

Works of interpretive inquiry satisfy the criterion of goodness, when they are founded in epistemology and theory, and when the research methodology is aligned with appropriate methods of data collection. The voice of the research must be reflective and mindful of the participants through interpretation and meaning making. Meeting the criterion for goodness means that "The method of data collection and the art of its analysis and interpretation must be clear, offering new understandings of the phenomenon leading to recommendations for practical actions"(Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, p. 459).

Learning to Be One With My Research

Allowing the overt presence of the researcher's biases leads to one of the most satisfying aspects of phenomenological inquiry: the invitation for the self to be present, even as a central character, in the investigation.

> Interpretive inquiry seeks to establish a communicative relationship with persons encountered, and it is not seen as a form of inquiry separate from ourselves. (Hultgren, 1991, p. 19)

Interpretive inquiry depends on encounter, on dialogue and on shared reflections. A collective activity is clearly implied here; excluding the self of the researcher in the traditional manner of scholarly writing not only creates an artificiality in language, but also seriously effects the validity of the research. The open acknowledgment of the self is celebrated by Wolcott (1990), who says that

> I opt for subjectivity as a strength of qualitative approaches rather than attempt to establish a detached

> objectivity that I am not sure I want or needed. I have always put myself squarely into the setting. (p. 131)

This freedom to "put myself squarely" into the midst of the investigation gives me encouragement to engage in the research in the interpretive mode with confidence in having found the right niche. Finally, I am in the company of scholars who, like Wolcott (1990), are not intimidated to thumb their noses at the “competition:”

> Qualitative research has brought researchers self-consciously back into the research setting. That has been healthy for all, including *those quantitative types who wanted us to believe that they were not part of their own investigations.* [emphasis added] (p.131)

The trite expression “to stop and smell the roses” was not thought to be the stuff of scientific investigation, until hermeneutic phenomenology made it a vital part of its methodology, when it asks the human science researcher to look at the world reflectively and accept its offers of rich, sensory experiences.

> By thus returning the taken-for-granted realm of subjective experience, not to explain it but simply to pay attention to its rhythms and textures, not to capture or control it but simply to become familiar with its diverse modes of appearance -- and ultimately to give voice to its enigmatic and even shifting patterns -- phenomenology would articulate the ground of the other sciences. (Abram, 1997, p. 35)

What a luxurious indulgence it gives us by requiring a regular practice of reflection! Indeed smell the roses! Reflection is not just a nice exercise; rather, it is meant to be the key to gain insight and understanding. Reflection, says van

Manen (1990), is a way to reach the essence of the phenomenon. The "process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience" will indeed lead us to the discovery of "structures of meaning, that are generally human" (van Manen, 1990, p. 15).

Learning the Craft of Language

> In the beginning was the word,
> and the Word was with God,
> and God was the Word.
> (St. John Ch.1-1,
> Riverside New Testament, 1923, p. 151)

Reflections on my first tentative steps on the path of phenomenology lead me to the morning of sweet awakening to the method, and to the high noon of understanding why I feel such affinity with this mode of inquiry. Of all the facets of interpretive inquiry, the one that mirrors my soul most clearly is expressed by van Manen (1990), "To do human science research is to be involved in the crafting of the text" (p. 78). Van Manen's call to get myself involved "in the crafting of the text," calls upon my craftswoman-self, upon my storehouse of knowing the practical nature of creation, that I store in my mind and heart and in the small muscles of my craftswoman's hand. This calls to me the loudest. To be "engaged in the activity of textual labor" brings forth a real, palpable, sensuous pleasure of playing with the material of my creation -- be it clay, paint, marble, or words. "A person interested in human science research needs to learn textually how others reflect and write and address the topic of

their interest," (van Manen (2002, p. ii) places me comfortably in my own home environment. The music of his word, "textually" resonates with "texture," a visual tool of the artist, that helps create rich three-dimensionality with line, tone and color, similar to a writer re-creating lived experience with the help of language. Setting out from the secure home-base of my own environment, it is a wondrous journey to discover, understand, and learn the practicum of conducting phenomenological research with and through the artful use of language. For, "Lived experience is soaked through with language" says van Manen (1990, p. 38); he even goes as far as stating that "Human experience *is only possible because we have language"* [emphasis added] (p. 38).

Writing, the "scripted words" have a powerful transforming effect on the writer. By the simple act of committing the elusive thought to the permanence of ink on paper, or electronic signals on a plastic disk, we are receiving a sense of permanence in life as well. "The literate self cannot help but feel its own transcendence and timelessness relative to the fleeting world of corporeal experience" (Abram, 1997, p. 112). What a powerful and empowering gift!

Language -- the word, God-Word -- brought us, human beings, about. "It is language that first brings man about, brings him into existence" (Heidegger, 1959/1971, p. 192). We came into existence by the power of our capacity for language. The unique capacity of speech differentiates humans from other

living beings, not as only one of our many attributes, rather as the one attribute that enables us to be living as the living beings we are, as humans.

The deep-seated wisdom of Heidegger's philosophy, after years of working with narratives, has deepened my understanding and appreciation of the power and importance of the narrative. Just as in Heidegger's book, *On the Way to Language* (1971), I have gained new insights and fuller understanding of the fundamental requirements of phenomenological writing: to think clearly and deeply, to peel back the layers that conceal the "truth-thing," and to write accurately and poetically.

It is surprising to find how much time Heidegger devotes to the discussion of an area that one would have thought was understood. My true understanding came with the realization that he elaborated on the subject in order to emphasize its importance. I am referring to Heidegger's discourse on the value and shortcomings of dictionaries that (certainly) translate and transmit the meaning of words, "yet are incapable of elaborating on what words, when spoken thoughtfully" (p.175), really say. While etymology is not expected to drive our thinking, it is the tool that makes it possible for words to be vested with essential content for thought. What seems as a tedious technical process -- tracing the etymology of words -- is understood from the writing of Heidegger as an integral part of the process of discovery. Despite its seeming technical nature, etymology has been shown to be a willing, fluid material under the pen

of the poet and the phenomenologist. This fluidity brings to mind the proverbial seventeen different terms for snow in the lifeworld of the Aleut or the relative poverty of specific words, leading to a creative abundance of color descriptions, in Native American languages.

What kinds of human experiences make such linguistic variations possible? Language, like water or air, is taken for granted until one is faced with a shortage of it. For a non-native speaker, the richness of the English language is something elusive, to be aimed for and grasped. Thus, being called to explore ideas via exploring language is an experience laden with pitfalls, as well as unexpected pleasure. I love to immerse my soul in the refreshing spring of words and "engage in primal incantation or poetizing which harkens back to the silence from which the words emanate" (van Manen, 1990, p. 13). Van Manen paints a romantic image in my mind, of deep, mossy forests, echoing the incantation of magic chants, enticing the friendly beasts of words to wake up and slowly, shyly appear at the mouth of their deep, silent caves. A rite of primal beauty evokes the power that will allow us to "discover what lies at the ontological core of our being. So that in the words, or perhaps better, in spite of the words, we find 'memories' that paradoxically we never thought of or felt before" (van Manen, 1990, p. 13). Treading our steps further down the path, into the misty depths of the forest, we might reach the "deep truth... (that) lies just beyond the words, on the other side of language" (p. 112).

I became enchanted by the power and freedom that phenomenological inquiry allows, by the invitation extended to me to enter another's life, by the creative expression that is not only allowed but expressly required -- and willingly given. I am enchanted by the experience of employing my essential-artist-self in the service of scholarly pursuits, by *creating research.* I am grateful for phenomenology, that,

> not unlike poetry, is a poetizing project. Phenomenology speaks to us in a voice of incantative, evocative speaking, a primal telling, wherein we aim to involve the voice in an *original singing of the world.* [emphasis added] (van Manen, 1990, p. 13)

Humans act as masters of language, yet language still remains master (Heidegger, 1971). However, in this power struggle, it is still humans, who -- when "looking thoughtfully about" -- invoke language in order to define its character. Humans turn to language -- or to God, who is the Word -- and name their world. In naming, one bids into presence the once uncalled. In this sense, every human is like Adam, who, upon awakening, was charged with naming the World. (And here, I recall Umberto Eco's unforgettable lecture in 1999, at the College Park campus of the University of Maryland, where he posed the question: "In what language did God speak to Adam?")

Like Adam, we are constantly naming, bidding, calling into presence the once uncalled, to bear upon our process to learn the world, and in it ourselves. We tame the world, as Saint-Exupery's (1971) Little Prince tamed the fox.

More accurately, like the fox, we allow ourselves to be tamed by that, which we intend to tame in a mutual quest toward the discovery of the thingly character of things. Albeit, our attempts to bring the concealed thingly character into proximity shall be frustrated, as long as we insist, out of ignorance, to assign as the thingly character those characteristics that are perceived by the senses (Heidegger, 1971).

Learning to Un-conceal

During the past several years, much of my scholarly effort has been spent on a quest to discover and bring into proximity the concealed meanings of prison teaching. Through discussions with colleagues and writing journals and term papers, I tried to find a way to separate the intertwined double coil of our *doing* the job of prison teachers, from our essential *being* prison teachers.

Discussions with colleagues usually focus on the practical side of our lifeworld, the prison school. What constitutes our *doing* (of prison teaching) receives most of our attention by virtue of the imminence of problems to be solved, that are embedded in the daily routine. Only during more deliberate discourse, can we approach the more concealed and elusive meaning of *being* a prison teacher.

Through journaling and dialogue we try patiently to peel back the many layers of concealment. We analyze the "thing" from many different aspects, through many different lenses in hopes of gleaning glorious moments of

discovery. Heidegger (1971) guides us on our journey to discovery, as he offers the example of the jug. Like a child playing with a ball, Heidegger takes the "jug-thing," throws it up, looks at it in flight, twirls it around in order to look at it from different angles, catches it and repeats the process. We are accompanying and witnessing this journey in and out, around and around the shape, the material, the function, and the making of the simple wine jug. Finally, we arrive at the essential thing-ness of the jug-thing, which is the "nothing" contained within its sides and bottom. This void, that will be filled and emptied in turn, defines the jug-thing, whose jug-ness is manifested in the *gift of the outpouring.*

The ultimate destiny of my journey is -- after traveling through our lived experiences -- to arrive at the essential core, to find the *outpouring gift of being a prison teacher.* In Webster's New World College Dictionary (2004) *teaching* is defined "to impart knowledge" (p. 1468). This definition implies the "gift of outpouring," because for teachers to be successful, they need to be outgoing/outpouring, able to impart knowledge freely and selflessly, and at the same time, receive the teaching that is given back to them.

Learning Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Aesthetic inquiry, once freed from its bondage of limitations, reaches its full potential, grows into blooming beauty in phenomenological research. While aesthetic inquiry merely borrows the techniques of art criticism,

phenomenology employs aesthetic principles as a value-base, an underlying philosophy for a more sophisticated approach to human science research. From its philosophical foundations, phenomenology develops into a form of interpretive inquiry "which focuses on human perceptions, *particularly on the aesthetic qualities of human experience"* [emphasis added] (Willis, 1991 p. 173).

The artistic components of phenomenology are not simply techniques; they are building blocks of a method that is capable of investigating lifeworld phenomena in all their complexity. As Willis (1991, p. 173) defines it, phenomenology "is that form of interpretive inquiry that comes closest to artistic inquiry."

> Phenomenology is the science that studies the truth. It stands back from our rational involvement with things and marvels at the fact that there is disclosure, that things do appear, that the world can be understood, and that in our lifetime we serve as datives for the manifestation of things. (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 185)

Indeed, when we stand back from our "rational involvements," like an artist steps back from the easel to be able to study the inter-related parts of the whole composition, we may marvel with heightened awareness at the world. Phenomenology gives us deeper understanding of the essential truths of our lifeworld as long as we are able to suspend "judgments and senses as intermediaries between the mind and things" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 99).

The most definitive characteristic of phenomenology is how it focuses the investigator's light-beam on the experience itself. “Attention falls on the perception itself and the immediate feelings it evokes” (Willis,1991, p. 173). In this respect phenomenological inquiry is perhaps the best suited method to investigate the uniquely human capacity “for fully experiencing (our) own experiences” (Willis, 1991, p. 174). It is designed to deal with the primary human consciousness in individual lives. The researcher is invited to enter the life of another, to take the attitude of the other, and to report on the experience as *he or she* has experienced it.

Consciously, “experiencing the experience” requires a great emotional investment on the part of the observer/experiencer because, next to empirical, naturalistic gathering of evidence about the lifeworld of others, the inquirer is called upon to “intuitively scan,” (Willis, 1991) re-visit, re-examine his/her own lifeworld -- a challenging emotional journey. Writing good phenomenological descriptions also requires a high degree of mastery of the language.

> Since phenomenological inquiry is at heart an *artistic process,* its only successful practitioners ... have been artists, writers, storytellers, or other people who have perceived something real, or true, or valuable about their own or others' lifeworlds and who have exemplified their perceptions well in a creative medium. (Willis, 1991, p. 178)

Willis (1991) offers some practical guidelines to help organize the phenomenological inquiry, that he summarizes as having three components: 1) “intuitive scanning of the inquirer's own primary consciousness,”

2) “empirical scanning of evidence of the primary consciousness of others,” and 3) “use of some means or medium -- such as meditation, painting, poetry, discursive prose -- to render *metaphorically* [emphasis added] what the inquirer has perceived about lifeworld perceptions” (p. 175).

> Whether or not this understanding of what is at the heart of phenomenological inquiry is even actually accepted or articulated by the inquirer, it is what the phenomenological inquirer most shares with the artist. Both strive to communicate what is primary within the experience of individual human beings through the best possible examples, examples which appeal directly to what is primary. (Willis, 1991, p. 176)

Phenomenology -- like qualitative research methodology in general -- still has its opponents, whose main objection is the method’s perceived lack of generalizability. However, we have to accept the fact that the true value of phenomenology lies in its singular concentration on the unique that “provide[s] us with powerful imitations to similarly experience the primary experience of others and so change the course of our own lifeworlds” (Willis, 1991, p. 176). We have to celebrate this method for what it allows us to have, that no other methods can provide. As Willis (1991) advises, “Give up the expectation of finding universal structures in primary human experience. Commonalities, themes, or patterns - yes, structures or essences -- no” (p. 184).

> Unlike the mathematics-based sciences,
> phenomenology would seek not to explain the world,

> but to describe as closely as possible the way the world makes itself evident to awareness, the way things first arise in our direct, sensorial experience. (Abram, 1997, p. 35)

The hermeneutic circle is a wreath woven from the branches of phenomenology: language and attention to detail tell the story of the whole, to which hermeneutic's own branch of creative interpretation has been added. Following the notion of the hermeneutic circle as a guiding force of inquiry, the researcher is free to develop a tailor made method, that is uniquely suited to the experience under scrutiny. As Smith (1991) says, referring to Gadamer, "It is not possible, in genuine inquiry, to establish correct method independently of what it is one is inquiring into. This is because *what* is being investigated itself holds part of the answer concerning *how* it should be investigated" (p. 198). In practical terms, Smith (1991) offers four guidelines to be followed in the course of the hermeneutic endeavor:

> 1) a deep *attentiveness to language*, which should include the tracing of etymologies of terminology. Because in this mode of inquiry the writing process itself constitutes the research, there is concern for exceptional creativity in the use of language (p. 199);
>
> 2) a sense of *interpretability* of life itself - a notion that suggests an inclusive and creative process toward meaning-making, a conscious effort to study, deconstruct, then re-construct life-text (p. 199);
>
> 3) overall *interest* in human meaning -- the inquirer is constantly engaged in the practice of interpretation and in constant search for deeper understanding of what it is that is being investigated (p. 200);
>
> 4) perhaps the most unique aspect of hermeneutics is the call for *creating meaning*, not simply reporting on it, and the desire to provoke new ways

> of seeing and thinking within a deep sense of tradition, that will bring about new forms of engagement and dialogue about the world we face together. (p. 201)

Phenomenology invites reflection and interpretation as an alternate road to knowledge. The creative meaning-making process, inherent in the methodology, is imbued with "profound pedagogical purpose" (p. 203). Hermeneutic Phenomenology compels the inquirer to gaze at the world with the artist's eyes and speak the poet's language of truth.

Learning from Max van Manen

"Hermeneutic phenomenological research is a search for the fullness of living, for the ways a woman possibly can experience the world as a woman, for what it is to be a woman. The same is true, of course, for men. In phenomenological research description carries a moral force" (van Manen, 1990, p. 12). In artistic endeavors form follows function; consequently, hermeneutic phenomenological research follows my search for the "fullness of living" in the lived experiences of correctional teachers. As discussed earlier, this mode of inquiry is the most appropriate form to apply to human science research when the internal structures of meaning (of a phenomenon) are being investigated.

Van Manen (1990, 1997), Willis (1991) and Smith (1991), offer conceptual guidelines to the methodological structure of human science research. The common thread in these structures is their deep attentiveness to

language and an intuitive approach to de-construction. Each structure places the researcher squarely in the center of the research, and each encourages a search for overall human meaning. For my guide in this research I have elected Max van Manen, who offers the most comprehensive and organized framework, explicated in the following linked research activities.

Turning to the phenomenon. The process of turning to the phenomenon to be investigated establishes not only the nature of the lived experience, but also discloses the researchers' assumptions and pre-understandings of it. As we discover the roots of our interest (in the phenomenon) we begin to formulate phenomenological questions that will drive our investigation. "A phenomenological question must not only be made clear, understood, but also 'lived' by the researcher" (van Manen, 1990, p. 44). "The researcher/writer must 'pull' the reader into the question in such a way that the reader cannot help but wonder about the nature of the phenomenon" (p. 44).

In Chapter I, I re-visited my long and meandering road to the phenomenon of correctional education. My guiding question became clearer, more defined, and multi-dimensional, as I progressed through the "Turning" phase of the study. The phenomenological question, What is it like to be a prison teacher, became a banner-head above a multi-level plan to investigate the rich layers of its meaning.

Investigating the experience as we live it. As we orient ourselves to the phenomenon and open it up for examination, it is important to remember that we should be giving a factual account, a deep and rich description without attempting to assign meaning or causal explanations. At this stage, we collect different interpretations related to the phenomenon, such as representations of it in art and literature, experiential descriptions, journals, anecdotes, interviews, biographical accounts, etc. Tracing the etymology of terminology and idiomatic phrases relevant to the phenomenon also is included as an integral part of this data collection.

In Chapter II, an invitation to "Enter the Phenomenon" is extended. The world of prison education is visited via snapshots, sketches, impressions, collected stories and shared dialogues. Some of the many roles teachers play in prison are reflected in the words of inmate-students. A brief account of socio-political factors also has been included, as they are important agents in the lifeworld of correctional teachers.

Hermeneutic phenomenological reflection. Reflecting on essential themes does not concern itself as much with factual accuracy, as with the special significance of the experience. Phenomenology distinguishes the appearance and the essence of our lived experiences. Through reflection we approach the concealed, bring to nearness the obscure, and uncover thematic aspects.

In the course of previous inquiries into the lived experiences of correctional teachers, thematic aspects started to emerge from the mounds of narratives I have collected. Like hikers on a mountain, shrouded in fog, themes emerged then disappeared, to re-appear again when the sunshine became stronger. One of the most persistent themes is the teacher's position in the prison environment, the constant need to be attentive to the rules and regulations governing our lives. As Barbara wrote in our dialogue journal, "I am always concerned now that one slip of the tongue or one inappropriate action will be blown out of proportion and then I will be in trouble." Her fears imply the sense of discomfort created by the fish-bowl life one lives in prison.

Another theme demanding attention was the question of professionalism. There were truly candid moments when we haltingly articulated deep-seated fears of giving in to the system, giving up our standards, allowing our professional measures to slowly sink lower and lower. Karen confesses, "I think we lose a lot of our skills. . . I'm not sure, that I could go from here back to a public school situation and do. . . the job that I think I could have done ten years ago." Later, many of our conversations circled around the painful question of professionalism and professional ethics. A related theme to examine is the self-concept of the correctional teacher. As an un-avoidable influence on our self-concept, I would also examine our students' perceptions of prison teachers. It is reasonable to expect that, through the process of phenomenological writing,

many other themes will be discovered and un-concealed from the rich text collected as the raw material of this dissertation.

Hermeneutic phenomenological writing. Writing becomes research. Getting engaged in the textual labor of writing of one's research becomes the essential activity of the inquiry. This is critical, as language is used both as the tool and the substance of the research. Language serves as the microscope *and* the slides examined under its lenses. As much as I write the text, the text writes my research. There were moments during writing this text when I shared an almost mystical experience with Lee (1991) as the "spirit gave life to ideas that emerged at the keyboard, literary through my fingertips" (p.124).

Phenomenological text should be powerful, poetic and evocative to "bring the phenomenon that we study into experiential nearness" (van Manen, 1997, p. 61). Through the cycle of writing, reading, reflecting, and re-writing, the researcher/author should "orient the reader reflectively to the region of lived experiences where the phenomenon dwells in recognizable form" (van Manen, 2002, p. 238). However, it is not enough to introduce the phenomenon; the text should draw the reader into a trance of vicariously experiencing it through the magic of language. "The reader must become possessed by the allusive power of the text -- taken, touched, overcome by the addressive effect of its reflective engagement with lived experiences" (van Manen, 2002, p. 238).

Languaging the phenomenon. When I grew up, careful use and respect for my native language was instilled in me by my parents and teachers. Later on, I understood the political motivation in this effort: saving the purity of our language was one of the few patriotic acts that were available for us to practice without repercussion. Eventually English became my second language, which made me fascinated by my facility to use a language other than my native tongue. To work with words, layering carefully chosen expressions is much like the work of the artist painting layers of transparent glaze, to achieve the exact colors with which to create the most accurate picture painted in words. Thus, writing became an artistic expression, and its material -- words -- objects to be respected and honored for their power and their magic. I am in awe of what Gadamer (1998) calls "the maieutic productivity.... the art of using words as a midwife" (p. 368).

As a novice in phenomenology, I used to find it difficult to accept the unusual ways words were used as *terminus technicus* of the method. The frequent use of hyphenation and verbal nouns, or assigning slightly different (perhaps deeper than conventional) meaning to words seemed contrived and uncomfortable. My respect for the purity of language made me reluctant to allow for its changing nature. At one memorable time, when I protested during class discussion, what I considered to be the distortioning (dis-tortion-ing) of our most important material, I added for emphasis "Max [van Manen] would

never do this." This minor outburst turned into comic relief a short time later, when the class watched a video in which van Manen explained, among some aspects of phenomenology, the need to create technical terms that provide the researcher with precise, accurate language tools. When someone in his audience voiced a protest similar to mine, he said: "We are simply *languaging* the phenomenon."

I found the same concept echoed in Noddings (1984),

> We must realize, also, that one writing on philosophical/educational problems may be handicapped and even rejected in the attempt to bring a new voice to an old domain, particularly when entrance to that domain is gained by uttering the appropriate passwords. Whatever language is chosen, it must not be used as a cloak for sloppy thinking. (p.2)

As a personal contribution to languaging the phenomenon, I have opted to use "prison teacher" instead of "correctional educator" which is the favored term in the United States. Although the two terms are almost interchangeable, "prison teacher" offers a richer emotional connection to our lived experiences. I find it more expressive of the phenomenological description of our lifeworld as teachers behind bars. In Chapter V, I use the two terms individually to make further distinction between different attitudes toward teaching/educating the confined learner.

Here, it seems helpful to provide a brief introduction, via an arbitrary selection of a few typical examples, in the language of phenomenology, so the

reader is able to follow the intent of the writer. Verbal nouns are used not simply to imply an activity (e.g. journaling) but to disclose a mode of being-in-the-world, where deliberately observing and keeping records of experiences are an essential part of living the experience. These verb forms reference the *lifeworld* of the one experiencing/living the phenomenon. Similarly, in our context the term *knowing* does not represent encyclopedical knowledge. It describes the way one possesses understanding, as in *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, et al., 1986, p. 15) where the authors describe "epistemological *perspectives* from which women know and view the world."

It could be argued that we all live our experiences, but most of the time, we let the experience happen, let it wash over us -- a landscape observed from a speeding car. *Lived experience* in a phenomenological sense implies our full participation in and simultaneous observation of the experience. "In all animals, experiencing consists of the three interrelated processes of perceiving, thinking and acting. Only humans appear to have the capacity for fully experiencing their own experiences" (Willis,1991, p.174).

To clarify further the meaning of the terms *lived experiences* and *lifeworld*, I again cite van Manen (1984), a fine craftsman in the language of phenomenology: "Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience. To say the same thing differently: phenomenology is the study of lifeworld --

the world as we immediately experience it rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or theorize about it" (p. 2).

Hyphenated forms might, says Noddings (1984), "offend the stylist, they represent in this case an attempt to achieve both economy and rigor" (p. 4). Phenomenologists employ the hyphenated form to illuminate connections between mundane events whose deep meaning is concealed for the casual observer. The simple word "living" is transformed into a multi-layered phenomenon when analyzed, observed and interpreted as "being-in-the-world." Palmer (1990) offers, "Rather than speak of contemplation and action, we might speak of contemplation-and-action, letting the hyphens suggest what our language obscures: that the one cannot exist without the other" (p. 15). The term *un-conceal* is not simply a fanciful substitute for the word reveal, which does not imply quite the same quality of discovery. The form un-conceal projects an image of peeling back layers of meaning, like eating an artichoke, savoring it leaf by leaf, until we reach the soft, delicious essence in the center. The expression un-conceal gives colorful description of our enjoyment in the process as well as the discovery.

Van Manen's "languaging the phenomenon" means more than simply creating technical terms for phenomenological writing. It is a creative process by which a whole new world-view or way-of-experienc-ing is made accessible.

The essence or nature of an experience has been

> adequately described in language when the description reawakens or shows us the lived meaning or significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner. (van Manen, 1984, p. 3)

Maintaining a strong oriented pedagogical relation. This kind of relation to the phenomenon requires the researcher to keep in focus the lifeworld of educational praxis without alienating it with abstract theorizing. I interpret this research activity as a need to act on my understanding, involving a "clarification or guiding principle which turns any kind of social situation or relation... into a pedagogic one" (van Manen, 1990, p. 155). In order not to "settle for superficialities or falsities" (van Manen, 1990, p. 33) I accept insights revealed from my research, if they hold promise for application to practical pedagogical action.

Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. "One needs to constantly measure the overall design of the study/text against the significance that the parts must play in the total textual structure" (van Manen, 1990, p. 33). A delicate balance must be maintained throughout the research so as not to meander in the wilderness of words and ideas, following the invitation of intriguing concepts hidden in dark caves, or running after the enticing phrases that dance like butterflies. Van Manen (2002) also warns of the "danger that we [become] merely enchanted by the superficial haunt of shallow sentimentality or catchy formulation" (p. 238).

In my investigation I follow the guiding framework of these distinct, but intertwined components, as I engage in the "task of phenomenological research and writing: *to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience"* (van Manen, 1990, p. 41).

Learning the Art of Storytelling

In the introduction to this section I recall the haunting words of Carlos Fuentes that I read in a magazine a long time ago: "Every storyteller is a son of Scheherazade, hurrying to tell his story, so that death can be postponed one more time." These words find validation in Willis (1991): "Since phenomenological inquiry is at heart an artistic process, its only successful practitioners have been artists, writers, storytellers" (p. 178).

If language "brought man [sic] about," as Heidegger states, it must be assumed that language will also assure humanity's survival. As "man thoughtfully looked about" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 189) his first tool and companion was language. Language speaks, and language most purely spoken presents us with deep truth. Concealed meanings have to be sought in the spoken. Therefore, when we aspire to learn deep truth and uncover concealed meanings, we gather language that contains these treasures. We collect data in the form of stories, narratives, dialogues, journals -- as many sensual stories as we can.

Phenomenological data collection is never a solitary experience. The researcher relies on personal experience with the phenomenon, and the narratives of others, gathered from interviews, journals, diaries, art and literature, biography, and many other sources. The common element in all these sources of text is *language, the building material of narrative.* Hermeneutic phenomenological writing -- the essential process of phenomenological research -- uses language as its raw material, a medium through which understanding is received. The writing process itself is an organic part of the research through the reflection needed for writing, the search for etymologies or key idioms, and the careful, poetic use of language.

Each of us carries around an accumulation of stories. “The story of my life” -- we sigh as we put down this baggage for a momentary rest. Each of us also carries a secret desire to tell our story, because it is unique and it is important. The telling of our story is a life-affirming process. We “create ourselves” by telling our story; we give voice or gain voice, according to Witherell and Noddings (1991). By necessity of review and reflection, before commencing the narration, we also learn ourselves. At least, we learn of or about ourselves aspects that were tucked away, concealed, forgotten, or not-yet-understood. Perhaps we should consider narrative the essential representation of lived experience, the permanent residue, distilled through reflection, evaluation and (finally) understanding of self: the unperishable legacy of life.

Through our stories, we learn who we are as we examine our lived experiences from a somewhat detached perspective, looking at them with the eyes of a storyteller; looking for the essential elements, the definitive events. Stories define our lives or maybe we define our lives by the kind of stories we tell about them. At any rate, as we discover -- or receive -- our voice from or through our stories, we go through a process of deep and fundamental discovery: we "learn ourselves" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

By telling our stories, we "learn who we are and what we need" (Cooper, 1991, p. 99); therefore, we approach the goal of our educational endeavor as a journey, a quest to learn who we are. Stories help to meet and examine the self in search of finding meaning in the lived experience. Telling stories forces this task of examination and evaluation on the storytellers themselves, as they create/recreate meaning by selecting some details for inclusion, while discarding others. The process, modulated by the tellers's value system and an innate desire to achieve the ideal self, is perhaps the crucial, most important benefit of story telling: like the "Son of Scheherazade" who forges himself and perpetuates his life by telling it. Our narrative accords weight and importance to all of our life experiences from the mundane to the momentous.

Stories give us a key to our own life, but they are also perhaps the only pathway that allows us to enter another's life, as "It is the storyteller's lyrical magic that insinuates itself into the separate lives of the various readers" (Coles,

1989, p. 155). By design or by accident we continually enter and exit another's life, but when we are invited in by the narrative, we come as honored guests. "People bring us their stories in the hope that we understand and interpret them correctly" (Coles, 1989, p. 7). Although his setting -- psychotherapy in a mental institution -- was one where storytelling is a basic necessity in the healing process, Cole's observation is expandable and applicable to all situations where stories are shared. We each bring our own, unique (and to us uniquely important) stories, expecting to be understood and respected.

Through our stories we open up to others in the hope of receiving understanding, respect and mutual trust in return. "I give you my truth but if you don't give me your truth in return, there is no truth between us," (Merton, 1993, p. 178). This invitation into the life of another is an honor. It also places a burden on the conscience: now I am responsible for the story, for the life revealed in the story. The relationship between storyteller and story receiver has been altered forever. Once we enter the life of another, we leave indelible footprints -- we must know how to tread gently.

The "call of stories" is a relentless pull, like the mystical powers of the Moon. To be invited into the life of another on the ticket of a narrative cannot be refused.

> Narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable

> to structures of meaning that are generally human.
> (White, as cited in Tappan & Brown, 1989, p. 174)

Learning the Ways and Means

My initial plans for this study were built upon previous activities within the institution where I previously taught. I gathered text in different areas and levels of intimacy and intensity. As these areas connect and interact with each other, they provide me with intimate close-ups as well as wide-angle views of the prison-world landscape. With their help I am enabled to find traces of the universal in the most intimate personal conversations, and also to animate the broad background with heart-and-soul individual stories.

At the most intimate and intense level of data gathering I made use of recordings of the continuing daily reflective discussions that a colleague and I were engaged in for several years prior to this study. These conversations started as informal, end-of-the-day chit-chats, as we were walking out of the institution. The beneficial effects of these ad hoc winding down sessions soon became apparent when we found ourselves standing by the car, talking on and on, come rain or shine. Eventually we stayed in the school building, enjoying the quietude of the empty classroom, broken only by the faint staccato of pigeons dancing on top of the skylight. With the commencement of my study, we engaged in four hour-long tape recorded conversations from March through October, 1999, and we continued having follow-up meetings as my work progressed.

Regular dialogue and shared reflection made bad days bearable and good days so much better. The mundane realities of prison life -- the fights, the stealing, red-tape, the tyranny of petty authority -- erode the spirit. The physical reality of the surroundings is depressing, even when we do not see the double coils of razor wire. We cannot quite shield ourselves from the human tragedy contained inside the walls, where the potential for violence covers everything like a fine dust of volcanic ash. Our spontaneous daily meetings became truly therapeutic, like a cleansing, refreshing shower. Through our discussions of daily issues related to curriculum, discipline, or questions of pedagogy, we articulated our teaching philosophy, created meaning and wove a network of support. As Noddings (1984) suggests, we were collecting a "reservoir of sustenance" (p. 124), as we were engaged in a dialogue that "allows the negotiation of meaning, through which the self in relation to other selves and to one's cultural communities is constituted" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 7).

From our conversations I have gleaned assumptions and pre-understandings about the phenomenon I am investigating. The transcripts of our tape-recorded discussions provide rich text that allows a deep phenomenological description and interpretation. Naturally a system of selective organizing is needed, as

> Qualitative data are normally relatively messy, unorganized data. It demands techniques of observation that allow the investigator to sort and "winnow" the data, searching out patterns of

> association and assumptions. This process is hard to mechanize. It is necessary to listen not only with the tidiest and most precise of one's cognitive abilities, but also with the whole of one's experience and imagination... The investigator must use his or her experience and imagination to find (or fashion) a match for the pattern evidenced by the data.
> The diverse aspects of the self become a bundle of templates to be held up against the data until parallels emerge. (McCracken, 1988, p. 19)

In the above excerpt McCracken capsulizes what very well might be considered the most important activity in human science research: *thematic analysis*, a process of examining our collected narrative until themes emerge giving structure and order to our data. Themes, the elements or motifs of different modalities of creative work, are not alien to phenomenology, which is also a creative endeavor. Van Manen (1990) calls themes "fasteners, foci, threads around which the phenomenological description is facilitated" (p. 91), and offers three approaches to un-conceal themes buried in the text.

Using the *wholistic, or sententious approach* the text is considered in its entirety and an overall meaning is derived by selecting *sententious phrases*. Aiming to derive a fundamental meanings, the results might be nebulous, overly general, or idiosyncratic.

The *selective highlighting approach* requires that the researcher listen to the tape-recorded conversations or read the transcript repeatedly, highlighting expressions that offer significant insights to the phenomenon. Selectively marking, then grouping revealing phrases in themes allows a balance between

overall statements and observations in minute detail. This approach promotes balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

Practicing the *detailed or line-by-line approach*, the researcher needs to examine every single line or sentence of the text in its singularity for what it might reveal about the phenomenon. Care must be taken to avoid fragmentation of meaning found in the text. I used the selective highlighting approach for isolating thematic statements regarding my phenomenon.

Preparing to set sail. I requested and received permission to visit four institutions from the Education Liaison at the Division of Correction, as well as the Field Director of the Division of Correctional Education. The Field Director added the stipulation that I refrain from conducting interviews at the same prison where I work (see Appendix A).

Before the pre-arranged visits, all faculty members in my region received a letter, explaining the nature and goals of my research, and soliciting their participation. A Participant Consent Form was also included (see Appendix B). Eleven colleagues volunteered to participate. Following McCracken's (1988) advice, I selected five teachers as my conversants, basing my selection on length of service, and giving preference to the most senior faculty members. The final selection, of four women and one man, reflects the demographics of gender distribution of the profession. The five participants and I represent a diverse group with one African, one African-American, one Hungarian-

American, one third generation Croatian-American and two White American members. In accordance with standard ethics protocol, the names of the participants and the institutions were kept confidential by using pseudonyms and generalized descriptions of their respective institutions. However, in order to present real, flesh-and-blood human beings, I attempted to maintain the individuality of each participant through rich description and by allowing their personal voices to tell their stories.

All aboard. I asked the participants to write a short narrative, entitled "What does it mean to be a prison teacher?" and forward it to me before our visit and personal conversations. This was to serve a dual purpose. First of all, the teacher would have some private time to reflect on his or her thoughts and feelings about what it means to be a prison teacher. At the same time, it would provide some insights and pre-understandings that would guide my conversation with the teachers. To my disappointment, my fellow teachers did not agree to do this written work.

My conversation partners represent four different prison schools in the state where I work. One of these schools is located in the largest medium security male institution, where I used to teach. I had the longest and most fruitful conversations with one female colleague at this site. We also tried to re-start the dialogue journal that we began initially in our prior conversations, but regretfully abandoned that plan when our lives hit the stormy weather of too

many commitments and too little time. We always kept the idea of the journal alive, with the clear understanding that it would be continued when we would sail on calmer seas. The journal already had provided rich text and served as part of the framework of pre-understandings and assumptions about the phenomenon.

At a maximum security male institution I had initial conversations with two male teachers. Shortly after our first conversation, however, one male participant opted out of the project and was replaced by a female teacher from a medium security male prison. At the fourth institution, also a medium security level housing female inmates, I had conversations with two female faculty members. Beginning in March, 1999, I visited a total of six classrooms or vocational shops, and spent from one to two hours in conversation with the participants. I tape-recorded these formal conversations in the teachers' own classrooms at their respective institutions. After an initial warm-up period, when information was solicited about the participants' education and teaching experience both in and out of prison, I posed questions more specifically directed to their prison experiences. I was always mindful to formulate open-ended questions, and to avoid leading remarks or responses, as I gently guided the conversation to maintain a strong orientation to the phenomenon.

Initially I asked each participant the same questions: How did you decide to teach in prison? What were the motivating factors in your decision? How did

you prepare for this job? What did your family and friends think about it? When this area was exhausted, I stirred the conversation toward the prison experience asking, What was it like to enter the institution for the first time? Can you recall some events that stand out in your memory? What is it like for you to teach criminals? Usually we discussed their lived experiences as prison teachers for about two hours, or until the conversational flow started to ebb and we started to re-visit previously discussed subjects. This forum for having their voices heard did encourage my fellow prison teachers to express and share their experiences. However, a certain degree of guardedness was clearly evident -- not a big surprise considering the environment

After these tape-recorded conversations were transcribed for a preliminary analysis and interpretation, I had a second meeting with each participant. This time I invited them for lunch or coffee after work, or to spend an afternoon at my house, to eliminate the intimidating shadow of the prison. The more relaxed settings promoted an opening up to the phenomenon, as we helped each other uncover defining characteristics of the life world of prison teachers. During these sessions my conversation partners became my true research partners, fellow travelers on my journey. Although the formal conversations were completed by October, 1999, working in relative proximity with my participants, and meeting at various work related events, informal conversations continued. These impromptu meetings brought forth choice

nuggets of reflection and insight from the participants, regarding meaning in the everyday events in the life of prison teachers.

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you're destined for.

Starting in earnest on my quest for the meaning of the lived experiences of prison teachers, I followed the guiding light of van Manen's (1990) framework for *Researching Lived Experiences.* I have *turned* to the phenomenon and started "to live" the question that, as a magic key, opens up the phenomenon. I further explored the phenomenon, investigating its different interpretations and representations. Re-visiting earlier lived experiences and reflecting on experiential accounts helped to *orient* the reader and me as the researcher to the lifeworld of prison teachers. Through *phenomenological reflection* I started to un-conceal themes -- a research activity, that is carried throughout the entire study.

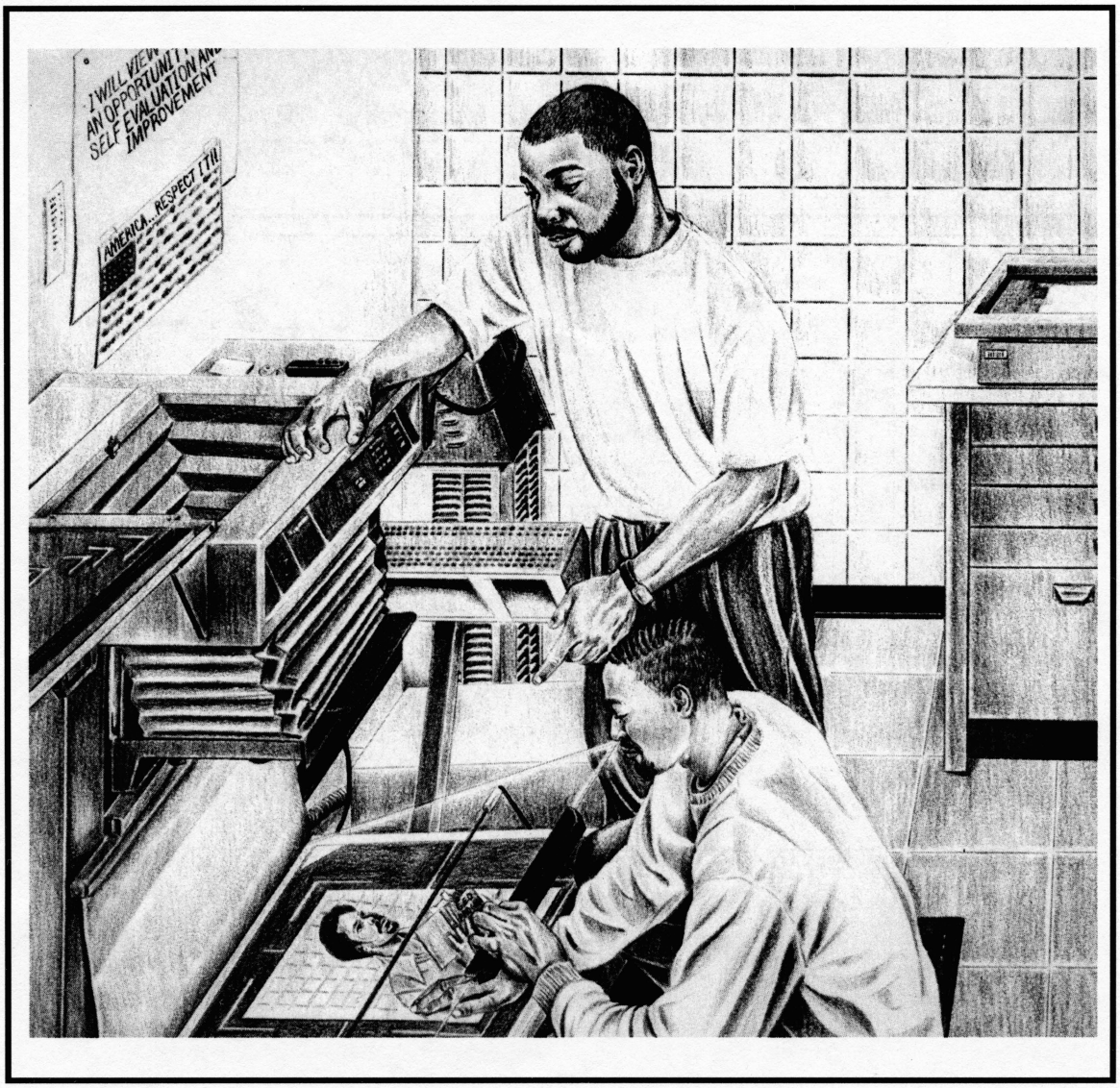
I truly savored what is perhaps the hardest, yet the most enjoyable aspect of this inquiry: the *hermeneutic phenomenological writing.* Through this artistic experience the researcher is immersed in the incredible power of language, giving a poetic account of the endeavor. We need a poetic account, because, as Heidegger, (1975) says "The voice of truth must be poetic, because poetry is the language of truth" (p. x).

A *strong oriented pedagogical relation* to the phenomenon was maintained. This discipline ensured that we "keep Ithaka always in [our] mind." Finally, the artist stepped into the action, and ensured that one of the most important design principles, *balance*, has been properly maintained. Considering the dynamic relationship between parts and whole, I have sought to *balance the research context,* reaching the primary goal of this study, where I

> found the permanent in the fleeting, the commensurable in the incommensurable, the conceptual in the unique, the *measurable in the poetic.* [emphasis added] (van Manen, 1982, p. 46)

Abram (1997) describes the significance of the Socratic method in the development of literacy by the need to formulate specific, new questions in the interlocutor's own words, instead of relying on the habitual phrases and formulas that were necessary to pass on knowledge through the teaching stories of the oral tradition. On the cusp of becoming a phenomenological writer, I experience a similar need to exchange my habitual phrases for the evocative language of phenomenology that allows both writer and reader "to touch something in order to be touched by it" (van Manen, 2002, p. 245).

As I turn to Chapter IV to reveal the themes that were discovered in this quest, I hope to be able to "instill a reverberation [in the readers] that temporarily shatters habitual ways of seeing and feeling, leaving [them] open to a world all alive, awake and aware" (Abram, 1997, p. 19).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CHAPTER IV:

JOURNEY TO THE FAR COUNTRY OF CORRECTION: HERE, THERE WILL BE LIONS

> When a man [sic] journeys into a far country, he must be prepared to forget many of the things he has learned, and to acquire such customs as are inherent with existence in the new land; he must abandon the old ideals and the old gods, and oftentimes he must reverse the very codes by which his conduct has hitherto been shaped.
> (Jack London, 1900, p. 38)

Ancient cartographers drew maps, leaving blank areas for territory known to exist, but yet unexplored - *Terra Incognita.* Sometimes their fear of the unknown was expressed by populating these blank worlds with the most fantastical beasts of their imagination. On the margins of charts from Columbus' time we can see ten feet tall, one-eyed humans, animals with three heads, wings and hoof, incredible plant life, and oftentimes the warning: "Here there will be lions."

When I set out for my Ithaka, I did not have a clear expectation of what sort of place *my Ithaka* would be. I was excited by the adventures, experiences, surprises and discoveries promised by the journey. The physical reality of my destination, however, was as undefined as the *Terra Incognita* of ancient maps, where curious "lion" labels simultaneously warned and invited the adventurer. "Here, there will be lions" flashed in the back of my mind the first time I passed the prison's forbidding iron gates crowned with double coils of razor wire: a warning, but definitely an invitation, as the adventures began.

On the Way to Ithaka

We were sailing on the ebb and flow of conversation. Words were the wind in our sail. In the course of our conversations my fellow travelers and I, like Merleau-Ponty (1973), discovered what it was that we wished to say. We spoke not in search of answers, but rather of an unfolding of understanding, a discovery of multiple layers of meaning.

> "Approaching the Core"
>
> Like artichoke eaters,
> picking one tender leaf at a time,
> grating it through our teeth,
> learning its delicate flavors,
> sucking its delicious flesh.
> Approaching the core, layer-by-layer
> one succulent leaf at a time,
> and with a hopeful last gulp
> understanding the essence
> of all the artichokes on Earth.
> (Sayko, 2004)

I allow myself a moment of quiet satisfaction upon realizing how our conversations invited my partners and me to ponder, question, and analyze our being-as-prison teachers. The notion of "being versus doing" surfaced with growing frequency. We were probing our world, the lifeworld of prison teachers, through thick descriptions of the mundane details of our daily lives. Occasionally we engaged, as van Manen (1990, p. 13) says we must, "in a primal incantation or poetizing which harkens back to the silence from which words emanate," in order to "discover what lies at the ontological core of our

being. So that in the words or in spite of the words...” we can uncover the truth of our being. We were in pursuit of *dasein* (*Da + Sein*), our “there-being” or being-in-the-world as prison teachers (Heidegger, 1927/1962).

We followed the path laid out by Heidegger (1927/ 1962):

> The most primordial phenomenon of truth is first shown by the existential-ontological foundations of uncovering. [H]ence only with Dasein’s disclosedness is the most primordial phenomenon of truth attained...
> Disclosedness is constituted by state-of-mind, understanding, and discourse, and pertains equiprimordially to the world, to Being-in, and to the Self. (p. 263)

As the trail unfolds new landscapes before the traveler, our discourse and understanding unfolded the meaning of our phenomenological question, What is it like to be a prison teacher?

Companions, Luggage

Traveling alone allows time and provides solitude for contemplation. Eventually, however, the traveler will have collected so many impressions, memories and questions, that the presence of fellow travelers will be welcome. The journey becomes more enjoyable, and experiences gain a richer and deeper meaning when shared with congenial companions. Sharing the journey also provides the gift of mutual discovery, as meaning-making is made easier and more productive in company than in solitude. And when we approach those uncharted territories where “there will be lions,” the presence of companions

strengthens the heart and steels the determination to forge ahead. Meet my companions (named by pseudonyms) who shared in this journey, and in essence, became my fellow investigators into the question, What is it like to be a prison teacher?

Emma gives a first impression of a stereotypical middle class White suburban woman of that certain age. Always neatly dressed in the professional "uniform" of well-coordinated outfits, neatly coifed hair, smiling, friendly -- she presents the perfect picture of a serene, business-like professional woman.

If I were the captain of my ship, with my earliest teacher companion as my First Mate, I would think of Emma, as the only original Sea-Woman First Class. It is very rare to meet anyone who planned to become a prison teacher. Little girls do not play prison-teacher with their dolls; little boys might play cops-and-robbers without thinking of a career in corrections at all. Emma, however, had her sea-bag rolled up with a heavy load that oriented her interest toward prison. As a young girl, she had the unfortunate experience with this underside of society when, following a family tragedy, her father had been incarcerated.

At the beginning of our conversations Emma talked of the hardship of her rare visits to see her father in prison: the reluctance of her grandmother to take her, the difficult logistics of traveling to the prison, and most of all the

emotional toll these rare and sad visits took on the little girl. Remarkably, out of these tragic circumstances she developed a desire to help "those people." As she puts it: "I wanted to help my father. I didn't know how, or what I could have done for him, but I wanted to help. If (as a child) there was nothing I could do for my father, I knew later on, that I wanted to help others."

Traveling a meandering road in her life, Emma never entirely abandoned her dreams of helping the incarcerated. When the chance presented itself she eagerly accepted the challenge to follow up on the desire of that young girl, and seven years ago started a new career in prison education. While other prison educators find their mission in their jobs, many other teachers express that often after a long journey they find a job that allows them to fulfill their mission. As Emma says:

> I see the children from my elementary [teaching] years and I wonder. You know... You could almost pinpoint the ones that are going to wind up in the institutions. And you want to do what you can to stop it at that level. I went into teaching because it seemed like something I could do. And the school system there [where I lived] needed help, and... I wanted to change the world... I still do.

"I want to change the world"-- what a beautiful sentiment to hear from a woman in her fifties! This simple sentence, filled with courage and faith, reverberating with promise and determination, reflects the nature of prison teachers. This sentence, in its simplicity, proclaims a vision that brings to mind

a beautiful and intriguing line by William Blake (1802/2004, p. 3): “Now I a fourfold vision see,” a line I often recite to myself.

Peter’s journey started in Africa. He was a high ranking government official, before civil war ravaged his homeland and forced him and his family to flee. Starting a new life, in his forties in the United States, meant that he had to start on the low rung of the professional ladder. So, Peter became, again, a teacher. Finding employment about seven years ago in correctional education, he secured his family’s livelihood, but also developed a special interest in the field of correctional education. Becoming an “accidental tourist,” borrowing from the book by Ann Tyler (2002), in the land of prison education oriented him toward new ways to help his people. Recognizing the dismal prison conditions, he started planning the development of a correctional education system in his country. Carrying luggage heavy with obligation to his homeland, this kind and intense man told me, he was “...just a visitor here, only until peace is restored and it will be possible to return home, and start rebuilding.”

Of all my conversation partners Peter was the most openly philosophical. His personal mission, his plans to return to his native country and develop a modern system of prison education, made him a student of correctional education in the United States. As a prison teacher, like many of us “reflective practitioners,” he is a participant observer. Only by being both participants and

observers are we able to reach across the cultural divides and start on the road of mutual understanding (Bateson, 1994).

Peter questions: “What is it that we are doing, that is correctional?” “What makes us correctional?” “How is it that we do the same [as other teachers], yet it is not the same?” Such questions stand behind the phenomenological question I ask: What is it like to be a prison teacher? However, his questions generate from a pragmatic need to understand and codify the nature and praxis of teaching in prison that he can pack away in his suitcase and take home, unpack and start using for the benefit of his own people and country.

Catherine, is a tall, forty-ish woman who taught with me at my previous institution. I remember many mornings when her soprano voice echoed in the gloomy hallway, and I envied her pleasant disposition that inspired her to sing, as she puttered around the classroom in preparation for the students to arrive. Starting a second career in correctional education at that time, Catherine was beginning to feel “at home.”

Four years later, at the start of our conversation, Catherine tells me in her matter-of-fact style, “Sometimes a job is just that, a job, income, benefits.” I am a little puzzled at her detachment, because I have seen Catherine teach. Walking around the classroom, she would bend down at the desk of each student with

apparent pedagogical availability. Like a gardener tending delicate flowers, her manners always suggest personal involvement and care.

Catherine's career ascended from administrative helper to vocational instructor, to school principal by following step-by-step the Agency's blueprint for career advancement. She took the required courses, earned the appropriate credits and passed the necessary examinations. As the opportunity presented itself, Catherine was ready, willing and able to take it. She is a hard worker, and an extremely well organized individual. She also is driven by a vision to succeed.

Alesis, in her mid-thirties, is the youngest of my conversation partners. She is African-American, a contemporary reincarnation of Cleopatra with her almond eyes, high-cheekbones and thick crown of braids.

U.S. Army Captain Alesis, a military intelligence electronic warfare officer, dedicated herself to be an example for young soldiers. She recognized a need for positive role models, especially for the growing number of young African-American females in the army. Keenly aware of the gaps in public education that allow so many of our young ones to fail, get lost and forgotten, Alesis packed a very full trunk with her dedication to serve the disenfranchised. Whether as a captain in charge of young soldiers who needed help, or as a GED teacher of adjudicated juveniles at the Job Corps, Alesis provided training, and also served as career counselor, social worker, and a selfless source of moral

support and encouragement. For the last five years she carries the same ideals and dedication to her prison job, teaching inmates to reach for their highest potentials.

Barbara is a Croatian woman in her mid-fifties, whose family left the Old Country two generations ago. My first, and most lasting companion sought me out at a conference where, as a loner, I found it hard to initiate contact with the other participants. Barbara, however, is a most gregarious "people person" who greeted me with such genuine warmth and interest that for a moment I thought, "I must know this woman from somewhere." The conversation began to flow easily, and it has never stopped.

Barbara carried the insights and understanding of the educational neglect of a marginal (student) population. Before joining the ranks of prison teachers, she worked with special education students who were "left behind," who were under-served by the teaching industry, and whose path, as a result, frequently ended in juvenile justice institutions or prison. Barbara's personal quest is prevention through early intervention.

As we became closer and more intimate friends, our conversations turned from a casual, end-of-day winding-down into a mutual quest. For what were we searching? It is hard to tell; there was no specific goal, and there were no guiding questions at the beginning. Like accidental archaeologists, sensing deep

layers of artifacts buried under our feet, we were digging and sifting through the day's sediment.

Conversations with Barbara: The Incubator of My Research

The layout of the institution where Barbara and I worked at the time, made it logistically sensible that I go to her room after our working day was over. Barbara's room also had a luxury: a window to the compound. The symbolic value of this opening-to-the-world only became apparent when I started analyzing the rich text of our conversations. I will return to this issue later. At the time, our tired minds and spirits were lulled by the rhythm of the silent background music; the constant ebb and flow of seemingly identical human figures played to our conversations, punctuated by the faint staccato of pigeons dancing on the skylight.

Having traveled far in time and space, I recognize that my interest in the life world of prison teachers began a long, long time ago. My understanding of phenomenology, my possession of research skills -- some of the "fine things" I have gathered on my way to Ithaka -- opened a window, and suddenly I realize that my investigation into this phenomenon started with those conversations. I see the embracing arcs of the hermeneutic circle reaching all the way back to those long-ago afternoons, incubators of inquiry, where questions first started to emerge in my mind: What are prison teachers doing or, more importantly, being? What is this prison-teaching life?

Core, *Coer*

It was an obvious choice, a natural outgrowth of our conversations to invite Barbara to join my investigation of these questions. Being the curious and open-minded adventurer herself, she picked up her luggage and joined the journey. The dialogue with Barbara did not end with the formal tape-recorded conversations that serve as the backbone of this research. Although our careers placed us on different tracks, we are able to continue our dialogue. This phenomenological partnership forms the core, the innermost circle of a widening array of concentric circles, drawn by conversations of various intensity with other prison teachers.

"Core," from the Latin *cor*, or the French *coer*, means innermost circle, *core*, *coer*, heart. This etymological connection is fitting for Barbara, who after sharing much of the long road of adventure and discovery, became my true research partner, part of the core; this core, this heart, illuminates the story I wish to tell.

Navigating the Lifeworld of Prison

Ithaca gave you the marvelous journey

Like Odysseus, my companions and I have sailed to strange and beautiful and frightening places that became our dwelling. We discovered hidden meanings in our prison environment, and realized how we were influenced and shaped by it. We survived meeting with "Laistrygonians and Cyclops, angry

Poseidon," and the experience clarified our position on the hierarchy of the prison industry. Like Dante (1320/2001), we have visited the seven circles of hell, and it has taught us lessons of caring and compassion, and a way of being-with in non-judgmental acceptance. Like the Little Prince (Saint-Exupery, 1946/1971), we have made friends with unlikely strangers, tamed cunning beasts, and gladly became responsible for those we have tamed.

With our increasingly unfolding understanding we are able to recognize the emergence of a pattern. The overarching theme of the lived experiences of prison teachers appears to be a force of dichotomy that -- as we will uncover from our discourse -- presents itself in all aspects of our life world. Arriving in our language with little change from the Greek *dichotomia* (cut in two), "dichotomy" describes "a division or a process of dividing into especially mutually exclusive or contradictory groups" (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 2004, p. 400). This is a fitting term to illuminate the opposing tensions of the lifeworld of prison, pregnant with the negative connotations it evokes. Yet, taming the contradictions and the mutually exclusive agenda, we can glean knowledge and understanding because, as Gadamer (1998) reminds us, "Knowledge always means, precisely, considering opposites" (p. 365).

Like sailors for millennia, navigating with the help of the cardinal points in the sky, we are guided by the four existentials set before us by van Manen (1990), as we recall our journey. The intertwining elements of our lifeworld,

spatiality, temporality, corporeality and relationality, give us the structure on which our story is built. In order to preserve conceptual unity, even at the cost of creating a long Chapter IV, I opted for maintaining an unbroken organizational path around the four existentials. The illustration on page 155 serves as a visual resting place and signals the beginning of discourse on relationality, the most significant theme emerging from my conversations.

The Space We Occupy: The Lived Environment of Prison

There are always birds. In the Western Region, amid the fields of corn and soy beans, there are wild turkeys, who sometimes land on the sill of windows so high in the wall that they only can offer a rectangle of the ever-changing sky. There are the pigeons, constant companions to our afternoon conversations, dancing on the skylight of Barbara's room. Close to the shore sea gulls, graceful funny clowns, provide entertainment. In the prison complex, surrounded by wetlands, hundreds of beautiful wild Canadian geese share are our space.

What an ironic co-existence! The birds, symbols of freedom within the perimeters of prison, at times create a surreal impression of being displaced, an *Alice in Wonderland* moment. The contrast between being surrounded by grim reminders of danger and the carefree frolicking of these beautiful visitors elicit questions: Are we within, or without? If we are not free to fly like birds, how

are we free? Are we free at all? And thus, we are faced with the inescapable duality of prison existence: in and out, free and captive, in control, or being controlled.

The prison teacher's ambiguous position, our presence within and without the topography of the prison world, exhibits the *tensional arc* that, in turn, informs our communication with the students. As explained by Casey (1993):

> We feel the tension between here and there much more acutely in certain situations than in others, often most acutely in interpersonal settings. For instance, we become aware of our failure to understand another person "from her point of view," which is to say, from the standpoint of her own somatocentric here. (p. 55)

Building Meaning

I now examine the daily living conditions of the prison teacher. I call to mind Barbara's description of her first day of entering the prison. How clearly her mind photographed the surroundings and her immediate reactions to it: "[T]he the fence topped with circling jagged wire. Surely, I thought, one twenty-foot fence was enough to keep anyone inside, but there were two chain-linked fences spaced fifteen feet apart. I noticed... that the nearest fence had sharp razor wire not only across the top, but also in the middle and along the bottom."

> It appears that people react to environments in terms of the meaning the environments have for them. One

> might say that environmental evaluation then, is more a matter of overall affective response than of a detailed analysis of specific aspects, it is more a matter of latent than manifest function, and it is largely affected by images and ideals. (Rapoport, 1990, p. 13)

Applying Rapoport's thesis on how we react to our environment, we can un-conceal meaning in the experiences of prison teachers, and other prison personnel. What meaning do we derive from the constant presence of the double wire fence, the background noise of tinkling keys, the humming of electric motors operating cell doors? *We Are All Doing Time* reads the title of a collection of essays, poems and short stories, all talking about lived experiences in prison (Lozoff, 1994). We are all doing time together. We are all on the inside, contained by these grim reminders of danger.

> Reflecting on the environment that contains us, the mind wonders over the 20 foot razor wire-crowned fence, but the spirit is trapped inside. Not to say that it is a constant occupant of conscientious thought, but it is an undeniable constant of our daily lives -- a part of every moment of every day that defines our existence. (Journal, November, 2003)

Heidegger (1971), van Manen (1990) and Rapoport (1990) each recognize and address the importance of the relationship between humans and their environment. One of the cardinal points on van Manen's compass, the lived environment, directs the researcher to "Inquire into the nature of the lived

space that renders that particular experience its quality of meaning" (1990, p. 103).

Heidegger (1971) invites us to contemplate a 360 degree intellectual landscape when he posits his multi-layered notion of our place in our environment:

> Man's relation to locations, and through locations to spaces, inheres in his dwelling. The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, strictly thought and spoken. (p. 157)

Reflecting on the nature of prison buildings as lived spaces, questions arise: What is our relation to these forbidding buildings? How do they belong to our dwelling? How do we, as prison teachers belong to these buildings? How do we dwell here?

> The power of a place such as a mere room possesses determines not only *where* I am in a limited sense of cartographic location but *how* I am together with others (i.e. how I commingle and communicate with them) and even *who* we shall become together. (Casey, 1993, p. 23)

Studying the sociocultural meaning of the built environment, Rapoport (1990) concludes that "People typically act in accordance with their reading of environmental cues" (p. 57). Our lived space in prison offers a wide array of cues. On the way to work, we are greeted by guard towers in the distance. Although some newer prisons are built on a more friendly scale, their function is unmistakably announced by twenty-feet perimeter fences crowned by coils of

razor-wire. Some of the older penitentiaries are towering grey stone buildings; their forbidding presence sends shivers down the spine. Blake (1794/1992) captures the iconic image of prison, and the kind of dwelling experienced by those within, with his romantic theatricality:

> And their sun does never shine,
> And their fields are bleak and bare.
> And their ways are fill'd with thorns:
> It is eternal winter here. (p. 34)

Enter the Big House -- Surrender Control

The entrance rituals contain more cues with the metal detector, the control area with a collection of chains, handcuffs and guns in plain site. Warning? Deterrent? Protection? First, we go through sets of automatic gates. Then, our bags are searched and we are patted down, just like the inmates. We are in the viewing area of closed circuit television cameras. Several sets of heavy metal doors are opened by an invisible hand and clank shut behind us. Werner (1990) accurately points out how the entrance ritual prepares us for our status in the prison hierarchy:

> The ritualized entrance to the prison by you as an employee sets forth the role that you will occupy. The twin feelings of isolation and loss of control will serve directly or indirectly to shape everything you as a corrections educator will attempt to think about your occupation. (p. 85)

Now, we are on the compound, where we can sense, but not see, hundreds of pairs of curious eyes following our movement from behind narrow

slits of cell windows. There might be a group of people shuffling their way to the dining hall, in order to prolong the feel of fresh air on their faces. There might be an inmate in the bright orange segregation jump suit, hands cuffed behind the back, led by guards, a sight one cannot ever get used to without shuddering. The fences enclose all of us; the towers are guarding us as well. There are smells and sounds announcing another day in the life of the prison teacher.

Environmental cues such as the above are gathered in the first fifteen minutes of the typical work day in prison. How do we read these? How do we act "in accordance" with these cues? "I always walk very deliberately, straight to the school building," says Emma. "I feel an urge to show, with my body and movements that I don't belong here. I'm not an inmate, I mean.Yet, you don't want to project discomfort or fear." Her statement reminds me of another colleague, whose every mincing step announced his unease when he had to move around the compound. What cues has this man gathered, that wrapped him in an invisible cloak of fear?

Could his discomfort be caused by the absence of Hestia, the Greek goddess of the hearth and home, from the *place-world* of prison (Casey, 1993)? Most modern prisons are built on a rectilinear grid whose side-by-side individual cubicles do not extend the invitation for ingathering of a curvilinear space organized around a hearth. With their forbidding linearity, repeatedly

emphasized in the vertical bars, towers, and high fences, prisons are hearthless and heartless places; in the terminology of the famous French architect, Le Corbusier, they are "machines to live in."

Rapoport (1990) states that "People react to environments in terms of the meaning the environments have for them" (p. 13). According to him, the meaning of this built environment is generated through personalization, through taking possession. The notions of "personalization" and "possession" suggest a need for identification with, almost an embracing of the particular environment. How can that be possible while being surrounded by cues of restriction and control?

Rapoport (1990) could have been articulating the mission of prisons -- to strip the incarcerated individual of freedom, choice and control -- when he concludes that being controlled by a dense environment leads to feelings of lacking control, choice or freedom. Although this mission is not aimed at the staff, neither is full immunity guaranteed from its effects for those of us who are "imprisoned" by choice. Not surprisingly, all those feelings -- lack of control, lack of choice, limited freedom, isolation -- are evident in our conversations.

Key control. Dave Marsters, Correctional Education Association's "1990 Teacher of the Year" writes:

> Keys. Keys are one of "our most important products." Everything which can be equipped with a lock has a lock -- even the fire extinguishers. "Want a pencil? It's over here in that locked drawer." Lose a

> key? You're fired. Lose a pair of scissors or a screwdriver? Close the entire wing and search until the tool is recovered. Not recovered? Guess what could happen. (Marsters, 1991, p. 165)

Working in prison places the same environmental controls on the staff as on the inmates. Counselors, teachers, health workers -- we are all behind bars, in the most literal sense. There are few doors that may be left unlocked. The constant need to lock-in, lock-out as we negotiate the paths of daily routine does not provide the comfort of being in control. We always feel the pull of the weight of our key rings on a lariat around our neck, or wearing holes in our pocket -- an additional grim reminder of danger.

Obviously, it is a serious matter to misplace keys in prison. Guards are put on three day suspensions just for dropping their keys. Emma shares this story:

> My key ring had been lost once, after I had signed it back to key control. The sergeant called me around midnight, when they discovered the keys missing. I knew I signed it back when I left, and there were witnesses. Nevertheless, I got out of bed and searched my clothes, my pocketbook, even my car. I was so scared of repercussions, even though I did follow regulations. Still, I was afraid of being fired. Now, I am so used to checking for my keys, I keep patting my pockets wherever I am and get a jolt of panic, if I can't feel them.

Carrying a key ring might create the illusion of being in control, but it is more of an objectification of the lack of control for many of us prison dwellers. The obvious, necessary and justifiable need for the tightly controlled

environment of a correctional institution is understood and accepted as a fact of prison life. However, the ensuing feelings of being controlled by that same restrictive environment also are indisputable.

Control repossessed. Peter obsesses over the cleanliness and orderliness of his classroom, and complains how messy the room was left when different groups used it. “I can’t understand why teachers won’t keep better order. I think it’s disrespectful, but I can’t tell them... make them do it...” Shaking his head, he walks over and straightens an unruly chair, then sits back with the satisfaction that now he has regained control over his microcosm.

Alesis has considerable control over her environment; she has three windows in her room. Although the windows are covered with heavy grills, she can look out at the main thoroughfare of the compound. She says:

> I need to be able to see people, movement... keep a check on things. Not that it makes any difference, really, but I like to know when the Chief or the Warden is out on the compound. Somehow it makes me (feel) more secure, more in charge, that I know what’s going on out there.

The students can look out, past the guard towers and the fences. They can look at the birds cavorting under the sky. Certainly, the students must follow the flight of these carefree travelers, vicariously enjoying the illusion of freedom. They feed them; the gulls catch bits of food in aerial acrobatics. The geese toddle under the chow hall windows for their rations. The pigeons grow fat on

the leftovers. The inmates sometimes make pets, friends of them, even die for them -- for possessing a small symbol of freedom.

To relieve the numbing feeling of isolation permeating the grey space of my vocational shop, I turn to my memories of travels and to my artist's colors and brushes. I design, and with the help of my students, paint a mural of a sunny landscape in Italy. The picture of the terrace of a villa, surrounded by a lush landscape of olive trees and brilliant bougainvillaea, gives the illusion that we could walk down the marble steps to the harbor of the small village below. With that picture, we have achieved a semblance of control over our environment; we can escape the cinder block building, if only in our minds.

Prison Environment: the Strangest Landscape

> So it appears that lived space is a category for inquiring into the ways we experience the affairs of our own day to day existence; in addition it helps us uncover more fundamental meaning dimensions of lived life. (van Manen, 1990, p. 103)

My classroom is located in a huge, warehouse-like space. There are no windows to open, no skylights to invite in the sun. We work under the cold gaze of fluorescent tubes. My door opens to a hallway in the belly of the building. With no direct connection to the outside I have no control over my environment. I usually am informed of the weather only by the rain dripping from a ventilation duct, or by my students returning from their break. And only when

surprised by ankle-deep snow on my way to the parking lot, do I realize that I missed the magic of softly falling snow.

The building holds me captive; I need to go through three locked doors before I breathe fresh air and see the sky. Subconsciously I am always aware of being surrounded by steel and concrete, living my days in the middle of prison, within a metaphor for prison. This lived space gives me the gift of uncovering, almost understanding a fundamental dimension of a particular lived life: that of the inmate's.

"(We) know that the space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel... In general, we may say that we become the space we are in" (van Manen, 1990, p.102). Catherine's words resonate with van Manen's, but her idea of "becoming the space" has a dark undertone as she expresses it:

> I can't think of any other place as out of touch with my every day life, as the prison. It is unreal. And the scary part is, how even prison became a part of my life. Or I became a part of prison. You know, like part of the furniture... prison part.

Double walls of isolation. Prisons are isolated from society; it is their mission, their *raison d'etre*. The teaching profession shares this much with prison, as classroom teachers, in general, are isolated in their own domain. Consider the space we as prison teachers dwell in, surrounded by double walls of isolation. Paup (1995) writes:

> There is the physical and psychological isolation from other education professionals and institutions.

> As a corrections teacher you may work far from any city library, resources, or college campus. This separation may have the secondary effects of making this work environment a sort of prison for you as well. (p. 6)

If we, as van Manen (1990) says, indeed become the space we are in, we are in great danger of becoming isolated as well as isolating. Throughout our dialogue journal, Barbara complains about the discouragement and depression brought upon her by the isolation inherent in this culture. After an incident to which she was merely a witness, her isolation became more pronounced and hurtful:

> No one had said a word to me. I stay in my room now. I no longer want to work in this environment. ...the insanity surrounding this job is too much for me to handle. I am no longer willing to teach in isolation.

Eventually she left, and correctional education lost a great teacher. Filtering our inquiry through the particular physical boundaries of prison buildings un-concealed a fundamentally unhappy dimension of correctional teaching: this environment seems to deepen our isolation. Are the characteristics of our lived space to be blamed for her loss, or the actions of those of us who allowed this space to encoil our minds with the razor wire of fear and suspicion?

May streams begin. As we take up residence in our lived space, occupy our lived environment, shape it, and let it shape us, we dwell. Although dwelling can not be reduced to a mere physical edifice constructed for occupation, our dwelling-as-prison-teachers is informed by the hostile attributes

of that built environment. “Dwelling is the manner in which mortals are on the earth... and includes a belonging to men’s [sic] being with one another” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 149). We need to pose more questions: How are we, prison teachers, on the earth? Do we recompense our dwelling by being with one another in a good way?

> This morning
> when the chill that rises up from the ground
> is warmed,
> the snow is melted
> where the small deer have slept.
> See how the bodies leave their mark.
> The snow reveals their paths on the hillsides
> the white overcrossing pathways into the
> upper meadows
> where water comes forth and streams begin.
> With a new snow the unseen becomes seen.
> Rivers begin this way.
> (Hogan, 2004, p. 4)

Native American legend has it that water springs up from the forest floor where the deer danced. Are we, like the deer, able to cause springs to burst forth? Are we watering the parched forest floor of our students’ intellect as a consequence of our being-with them? Will our bodies, our dwelling leave a mark, a testimony that we have been here in a good way?

If, as Catherine says, there is no “other place as out of touch with everyday life as the prison -- it is unreal” there is also no other time as unreal as time spent in prison. Here, the inter-relatedness of place and time might be

more obvious or more pronounced, but certainly, it is not limited to the prison-world, as we see in Casey (1993):

> The cultural dimension of place -- along with affiliated historical, social, and political aspects and avatars -- adds something ... we had not yet encountered in our reflections on the logic and experience of place. This dimension contributes to the felt density of a particular place, the sense that it has something lasting in it. To be lasting, however, is to be in time. (p. 33)

Sour Sweet Music: Temporality in Prison

> How sour sweet music is
> When time is broke, and no proportion kept!
> So is it in the music of men's lives.
> And here have I the daintiness of ear
> To check time broke in a disordered string;
> (Shakespeare, 1972, *Richard II*, act 5, scene 5)

As everything else, time also becomes a different reality in prison. We share space and time with our students, but the differences in how we experience lived space and lived time contribute greatly to the dichotomy of life in prison. "Every day is a minor eternity of 86,000 seconds" (Grudin, 1982, p.7). A "minor eternity" could mean limitless possibilities for one, or could be a black hole of a fruitless twenty-four hours for the Other.

Cool People's Time

Teachers move at a lively tempo on a tight grid of time, defined by lesson plans, curriculum objectives, school bells, testing schedules, records of attendance, and so on. Prison teachers need to negotiate the day on a similar

grid, submerged in “cool people’s time.” Sociologist John Horton coined the term to refer to the “sporadically unemployed young Black street corner population” (as cited in Levine, 1997, p. 11), a fitting description of the majority of our inmate population. “Time for the cool person is ‘dead’ when resources are low -- such as when money is tight, or when he is in jail” (Horton, as cited in Levine, 1997, p. 11). People living on “dead time” resist the expectations placed upon them by a system that is running on “real” time. They close up, enter a state of mental hibernation, a kind of suspended animation of mind and body, “maintaining,” they say from under half-closed eyelids. Their time is “broke,” and the “sweet music” of their lives has soured. The prison teacher needs “the daintiness of ear to check time broke in a disordered string.” It is our chance, even our obligation to re-tune those strings and to restore the order of time if only for the 55 minutes of the lesson.

Irrelevance

Time becomes a Dali watch, melting, undefined, irrelevant. Like those surreal watches in Dali’s painting, *The Persistence of Memory*, prison time does not measure out sixty minutes to each hour. Sixty minutes, an hour, a day -- their urgency succumbs to the verdict that was given in years, decades, or even a lifetime. From here on, “Time is understood as a succession, as a ‘flowing stream’ of nows, as the ‘course of time’” (Heidegger, 1926/1962, p. 474).

> What then, is time? If no one asks me, I know.
> If I wish to explain it, I know not.

(St. Augustine, as cited in Levine, 1997, p. 24)

The vortex of "dead time" pulls on us; time becomes meaningless and it is not always possible to claim our meaningful ways against it. We shrug; we sigh. What does it matter? What does it matter for 19 year old Yahya, with a 45 year sentence for armed robbery? What does it matter for Donald, who is seventy years old, has been in prison for the last thirty-six years, and knows he will die behind bars? What does it matter to me, as I desperately try to convince Donald that he should complete English 101 in the post-secondary program, that it will be time well spent, a rewarding experience?

Our professional obligation dictates that we maintain a "regular" school schedule, follow the curriculum, reach our goals, produce X number of graduates each term. Our day-to-day reality informs us that many students enroll for the "good days" they earn for being in school that will diminish their sentence. Many others come to school for the comfort of air-conditioning. Most of our students are ill-prepared, un-motivated, frustrated, and have a million pressing concerns that have nothing to do with school. Questions arise from these opposing forces: Are we wasting time here? Do they even deserve our time? Are we spending these irreplaceable hours for the best purpose we can?

Alesis talks about times of perfect synchronicity, when things go hummingly well:

> I like to absorb those moments, when everyone
> 'gets it.' You can almost see the gears in their head,

> turning, cranking out answers. Some guys holler
> or laugh, 'I see! I got it!' It's great!

Students are energized and engaged; the air reverberates from intellectual challenges and exchange of ideas. The class is enveloped in a peaceful aura of Zen, allowing us to be liberated from time, as it now appears to stand still. Moments like this fill our reserves with the confident answer, "Yes, *we are* spending these irreplaceable hours for the best purpose we can."

An Embarrassment of Riches

"[T]ime is not the achievement of an isolated and lone subject, but... it is the very relationship of the subject with the Other" (Levinas, 1987, p. 39). Levinas directs our thoughts on time toward our being-with-others, our *Dasein*, our *Mitdasein.* Time creates a very unbalanced relationship between a prison teacher and an incarcerated student. Alesis expresses a familiar complaint: "They assume, they have plenty of time but they really do not, because they are here for six weeks before [GED] testing. But the students do not see six weeks, they look at ten years, or thirty years and a period of six weeks becomes abstract for them. Yet, when I take off a few days, they act like I take away their time, and believe me, I am being punished for it."

Going out for lunch, attending a conference, planning a trip, or simply going home at the end of the day -- the time is all ours, a personal possession to use at will, a true luxury our students do not have. This discrepancy -- its reasons notwithstanding --places a shadow on our relationship. Barbara talks

eloquently about her discomfort when confronted by the opposing realities of "their time" and ours:

> Friday afternoon, before a long holiday weekend.
> I cannot wait to get out of here, to start my three days
> of solitude. They linger. My students are not happily
> looking forward to the long break. They dread three
> days in their cell, locked in, unable to use the exercise
> yard, the library; they would rather be in school.
> At the bell they wish me a pleasant weekend and
> happy holidays. What can I wish back?

At times our being-with turns uncomfortable, almost embarrassing, especially when we are turning toward periods of personal freedom, however short or long they might be.

Horizons in a Temporal Landscape

It is my New Year's ritual to write a year-long plan and a ten-year plan. These letters are sealed with the date written on the envelope, to be opened in a year or in ten years. This is my way of harnessing time and conjuring up a future I desire. This exercise positions the temporality of my Being-in-the-world on the grid of time. I can better accept having been thrown into Being-towards-death (Heidegger, 1926/1962) because I have designated my authentic future.

In January I ask my students to write their own plans, design their own futures. They react with scepticism, questioning the relevance and the usefulness of the exercise. I speak to them of the subliminal magic of the written word: "When you write down your dreams and your plans, they stay with you

and inspire you to act upon them. You write out your life, you gain control of the elusive time, and ultimately you will be in charge of the outcome."

> Life, like any other exciting story, is bound to have painful and scary parts, boring and depressing parts, but it's a brilliant story, and it's up to us how it will turn out at the end. (Lozoff, 1985, p. 5)

Eventually the remarks and snickers stop and a deep, thoughtful hush descends upon the classroom. I can sense that the men have become involved with the project, giving it serious consideration. I see brows wrinkled in concentration, un-seeing eyes searching the future, hands hesitating over the paper. I feel questions, wishes and prayers being released in small sighs, as the men, sitting near each other yet isolated, cloaked in their own dreams, chart their future. Time accelerates for them -- a year, ten years into the future, as they now create "some sort of awaiting...[that] disclosed the horizon and the range from which something can be expected. Expecting is formed upon awaiting, and is a mode of that future which temporalizes itself authentically as anticipation" (Heidegger, 1926/1962, p. 387).

Measured, public time is of little concern for our students who are placed in limbo, a space that lacks "some sort of awaiting" (Heidegger, 1926/196). Lived time has no significance in limbo, as it is "a place or condition of confinement, neglect, or oblivion" to which unwanted things or persons are relegated (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 2004, p. 832); therefore, expectation and anticipation shrivel up and die, unable to bring forth a future.

As teachers we chase the “unforgiving minute” (Kipling, 1936) on orbits different from those traveled by our students.

“The temporal dimensions of past, present, and future constitute the horizons of a person’s temporal landscape” (van Manen, 1990, p. 104). In the temporal landscape of prison, where the past is to be buried and the present is just to be lived through, the future stands as the most real dimension and the most significant element for which an inmate reaches. Therefore, we need to synchronize, adjust course and cross each other’s paths in order to direct the present toward an anticipated future by filling our time purposefully, as Kipling (1936, p. 66) advises:

> If you can fill the unforgiving minute
> With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run --
> Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it,
> And -- which is more -- you’ll be a Man, my son!

Living in a Fishbowl: Dimensions of Corporeality in Prison

Take off your hat, spread your arms, stand still, while the guard’s hands travel down your side, your arms, pat your back, your front, the length of your legs, your pockets. She tries to be nonchalant, smooth, professional. Some guards seem to take a little pleasure in causing this necessary discomfort. Some do their job with uncalled-for gusto. One female guard takes her “patting” really seriously; eventually she is removed from the post. You try not to shrug, not let your skin crawl back on itself, not scream in your moment of humiliation.

"Pat down" is understood as a necessary security measure, albeit of questionable efficiency. It is a regular security procedure every time one enters the prison compound; refusal would result in being banned from the institution. Intellectually it is accepted, yet on a primary level, the corpus protests this brutal invasion that declares us guilty and for a moment places us in the position of the inmate.

Someone Else's Gaze

Corporeality, simply said, means that we live in our body and we interact with others in their bodily reality. This obvious fact opens up to multiple layers of meaning, when examined through the lens of phenomenology, as "We both reveal something about ourselves and always conceal something at the same time -- not necessarily consciously or deliberately, but rather in spite of ourselves" (van Manen, 1990, p. 103). In the surrealistic landscape of prison, our corporeal presence takes on a unique quality, where we consciously need to employ our capacity to "experience [our] own body as the power of adopting certain forms of behavior and a certain world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2004, p. 412).

Van Manen (1990) says, "When the body is the object of someone else's gaze, it may lose its naturalness or else it may happen that it grows enhanced in its modality of being" (p. 104). Barbara used to say, "We live in a fishbowl" and, indeed, there is no escape from the gaze of dozens of invisible eyes

following each move we make. Guards watch us from strategic points on the compound, through binoculars from the towers. Inmates watch us from the cells, from the dining hall, from the exercise yard, from everywhere -- we are visitors from the outside world -- diversion, entertainment. Being aware of "someone else's gaze" evokes a heightened awareness of bodily presence in everyone:

> My awareness of my body is a profoundly social thing, arising out of experiences of the corporeality of other people and of their gaze directed back upon me. Am I fat or thin, beautiful or ugly, clumsy or agile? My self-understanding always involves the seeing of what others see in me. (Leder, 1990, p. 92)

I tease Alesis that she must be quoting from *The Absent Body* (Leder, 1990), when I hear her speaking of "always being conscious" of her body:

> Are my clothes too tight, revealing too much? Do I shake and wiggle when I walk? Does my jacket cover my derriere? Did I leave anything on the chair? Are my feet pedicured? Will they see any bunions?

I find shrouded in Alesis' seemingly superficial questions an urgent desire to discover herself, and an innate understanding that it is best achieved through the corporeal images one creates in someone else's gaze, because "through other eyes we are for ourselves fully visible" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/2002, p. 143).

The Quaker Ladies' Advice

Being the object of so much interest, the focus of so much attention might not be an entirely unpleasant experience, especially for a novice prison teacher,

or other prison worker, whose inexperience with the culture could make her vulnerable. Common sense and the unwritten rules of professional decorum, as well as the rules of the institution, dictate that flattered as one might feel, it is never admitted, discussed or acted upon. Inadvertently, we conspire to uphold the taboo, even at the cost of leaving troubling thoughts and questions unresolved. The dichotomy of prison surfaces again as we walk gingerly between the right of being flattered and the safety of being invisible, or between the desire for privacy and the unavoidable necessity of placing ourselves on public display.

Years ago Josephine (not her real name), my occasional car pool partner, surprised me by admitting secretly to enjoying the attention. A very young woman with a brand new diploma and a brand new husband, she accepted with a smile the home-made greeting cards, the bad love poems, the pieces of candy left on her desk, the superficial questions of the "guys" swarming around just to engage her in conversation. Josephine confessed she was confused because, as she said:

> I don't know how to deal with all these men. I hate to feel this way, but I find it somehow exciting to be surrounded by them, even though sometimes I feel scared. They're always watching. I am more careful, how I move, how I dress. They always make comments and compliment me on every little thing. I know I should not feel this way... but I, I feel kind of 'turned on.'

I was glad she had a husband to go home to, and relieved when she found a different job and left the institution. Yet, I understand Josephine perfectly

because walking on the prison compound, passing groups of men, I hear their wolf-whistles, compliments or suggestive remarks and although I ignore them I experience a surge of power and smugly think, “I am here, at arm’s length and you cannot touch me. I am untouchable, taboo.”

At a conference a few years ago I picked up a small pamphlet with the unwieldy title, *What We Wish We Had Been Told When First Going into Prisons: Advice from Some Quaker Women Volunteers Who Are Old Hands, to New Volunteers, Quakers and Others* (No author, publisher or date of publication). In a refreshingly honest and surprisingly candid language the Quaker women volunteers warned:

> Expect to feel an unfamiliar, very heady and very addictive “super star” feeling, especially at first. It may arise from sexuality in a deprived environment. Expect to be sexually turned on some time early in your prison work. Almost nobody escapes this experience, from beautiful and innocent young girls to happily married (or widowed) matrons of a certain age. (Quaker, pp. 1-2)

I wish I had the Quaker women’s advice back then, to give to Josephine and to all the Josephines to read and commit to memory before they first went into prison.

In *The Absent Body*, Leder (1990) discusses how being an object of constant observation can invoke more affective consequences, like anxiety. His description reminds me of Reba (not her real name), a young teacher of above average height and weight, and a slight limp. As the newest staff member in the

prison, she received the usual uninvited attention. On the long walk from the main gates to our classrooms, she was the object of constant teasing, cat calls and vulgar remarks. Reba could not handle this very well, and by the time she reached her classroom, she was regularly reduced to tears and nervous fits and eventually quit her job.

> This affective disturbance not only gives rise to bodily self-consciousness but may originally have been the result of it. In this case, my anxiety was first stimulated by the hundreds of pairs of eyes focused upon me. My self-awareness in the face of this Gaze led to nervousness and consequently bodily symptoms. (Leder, 1990, p. 85)

There is certainly enough anecdotal evidence of frequent headaches, chronic fatigue, hypertension to support Leder's suggestion of causality between the "Gaze" and bodily symptoms. I know; I find it exhausting to be constantly "on." There are days when I feel like I am playing the lead in an eight hour drama without intermission. But can I blame my frequent headaches on the laser-pointer of my students' relentless gaze? After all, the mirror of their gaze, that allows me to feel my body, is reflected in my parallel mirror as we bounce our images back and forth *ad infinitum,* thus my body announces "its aspect for the other" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/2000, p. 245). Earlier he explicates:

> I am given to myself merely as a certain hold upon the world; now, it is precisely my body which perceives the body of another, and discovers in that other body a miraculous prolongation of my intentions, a familiar way of dealing with the world. (1945/2004, p. 412)

Walking in the Landscape of Corporeality

It is by no means an oversight, or willful negligence toward the "first sex" (as Simone de Bouvoir might have said) that I choose to focus on the theme of corporeality from the feminine perspective. The general feminization of the teaching profession did not bypass schools in correctional institutions where, similarly to public schools, there are more women than men faculty members. Four of my five research partners are women, and while two of them now work in a women's prison, we all started our correctional careers in male institutions. I believe corporeality carries a heavier burden for women than for men in prison. Although male colleagues have shared experiences of unpleasant encounters with aggressive female inmates, the blatant truth is that there is a greater potential for women to experience harm, both in spirit and in the flesh.

Self-consciousness becomes our constant companion. We walk across the compound, with eyes fixed ahead and ears closed to the calls and remarks sent our way, hoping that we will not slip, or lose control of our bodies in a spectacular fall, my personal fear. "I hope my skirt hangs properly and the sun isn't behind me," says Emma. We laugh, talking about how we shop for clothes that are not too tight, too short, too soft, too lacy, sheer, low cut, high slit, or made of spandex or denim.

In a misguided effort to defuse the potential for sartorial mistakes, some schools adopt a kind of uniform for teachers and staff. They dress in a "unisex"

attire of polo shirts and khaki trousers. Prisons, like other organizations, “Are sexualized in asymmetrical ways; although men’s sexuality is largely invisible, females take pains to act asexual in an attempt to avoid being seen as sexy” (Tracy, 2004, p. 513). Thus, a trivial matter of the professional wardrobe becomes a different kind of constant reminder of danger. At a meeting, I mention my concern that any uniform would symbolically identify us with the “uniformed staff” of correctional officers. I say, “Blending in, might not send the most positive message toward our students.” My colleagues, especially the women, vehemently defend their choice. Tina says, “That’s exactly what I want, to blend in. I don’t want them to look at me,” expressing what Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) calls, “our natural attitude [that] is not to experience our own feelings or to adhere to our own pleasures, but to live in accordance with the emotional categories of the environment” (p. 442). Instead of being proudly celebrated, the reality of prison requires the body, especially the female body in a male institution, to be shrouded, its femininity obscured, rendered invisible. Thus we have our ownership of our body and our autonomy limited by “the lessening of *tolerance* allowed by the bodily and institutional data of our lives” (Merleau-Ponty, as cited in Diprose, 2002, p. 72).

Whose Life is It?

When, following an institutional announcement, we show up to receive a series of Hepatitis B shots, teachers are turned away. We are denied

immunization against this prevalent and dangerous disease, “because teachers are not at high risk to contact it,” we are told. In a typical prison school day, a teacher can see as many as 120 students and spend six hours with inmates. As a matter of fact, prison teachers spend more “face time” with offenders than counselors, officers, or any other prison staff. Yet, we are denied protective measures available for everyone else in the prison, including office workers, who never need to be in personal contact with an inmate. My body rings the panic bell, urging me to flee for my health, while my mind is flooded with rage at being placed, without protection, in the path of spreading risk. My emotions reverberate with questions: Am I not worth the price of a shot? Are we teachers valued so little? I believe this was the defining moment that started me on the way to become an advocate for prison teachers. After some angry telephone calls and letters to “higher powers,” the prison administration comes to the decision that prison teachers, after all, are at high risk and we receive the Hepatitis B immunization.

Corporeality in prison can be understood as a simple, basic concern of health and physical survival. The general health of the prison population is very poor. HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, tuberculosis, and a number of other health conditions are present in a greater concentration than in the general population. Privacy laws protect the identity of infected students, but there is no law protecting the health of the teacher. We are told to “exercise universal

precautions" -- in other words treat the students as if they all had active tuberculosis or full blown AIDS.

But as a committed teacher, how can I withhold my corporeal presence from my students? How can I not lean over them when I explain long division for the tenth time? How can I not switch seats when I have to clear up a mistake they made on the computer? How can I not allow books, papers, markers, tools being passed back-and-forth, hand-to-hand a million times a day? How can I build trust, show my responsibility, demonstrate my being-with, if I run to wash my hands after every single encounter?

My friend Alesis, regularly presents us with little bottles of hand-sanitizer. Not candy, not chocolates, not other fancy treats, the symbolic gesture of her loving concern comes in the form of health care supply, and we need all the help. Goldstein and Cohen of *The Washington Post* write:

> Tuberculosis has sneaked up again, reappearing with alarming frequency across the United States. The government began writing rules to protect 5 million people whose jobs put them in special danger. Hospitals and homeless shelters, *prisons* [my emphasis] and drug treatment centers - all would be required to test their employees for TB, hand out breathing masks and quarantine those with the disease. (2004, August 15, p. A1)

This was the good news, and the rules, first conceived before 2004, were predicted to save 25,000 infections and about 135 deaths a year. The article continues:

> Then, on the last day of 2003, in an action so obscure it was not mentioned in any major newspaper in the country, the administration canceled the rules. (The Washington Post, 2004, August 15, p. A 14)

Here we are, five million people, prison teachers included, vulnerable to a preventible disease, losing protection by government decree. The fact that we are not singled out this time does not ease my anxiety. I still feel that the corpo-reality of prison feeds my body to Laistrygonians and Cyclops.

Quiet As It's Kept...

From Toni Morrison's (1994) *The Bluest Eye*, this heading is a fitting introduction to some reflections on prison life that are buried under collective silence, just like the problems, fears and mysteries Morrison's characters refuse to deal with in the open social arena. It takes courageous determination to peel back the layers of denial and uncover, at least partially, some of the more troublesome and embarrassing secrets of our lived experiences. In reality, there are very, very few teachers in correction, who engage in improper conduct on their own volition. We conduct ourselves professionally like "a female guide who must step out of her body, casting off any suggestion of sensuality or privilege" (Davis, 2003, p. 36).

Nevertheless, the subject is troublesome. As teachers, we are in closer physical, mental and perhaps emotional proximity to the inmate students than any other prison staff, and that renders us vulnerable to be suspected and oftentimes accused of wrongdoing. It also is incredibly embarrassing and scary

to be innocent, yet to be kept under the magnifying glass of suspicion. Barbara finds the perfect expression to describe the emotion: “I’ve been slimed!”

Paup (1995) with unusual candor relates the following incident:

> The combination of being a female teacher in an environment where men are in confinement, results in uncomfortable interactions at times. Recently, while working at a Clallam Bay Correction Center (CBCC), a maximum security prison, I was propositioned for a sexual relationship by an inmate. Despite my initial reaction, I responded with what I hoped was sincerity and firmness, ‘I am a teacher here. There can be no personal relationships between me and a student here.’ It was my way of saying ‘not interested,’ through an appeal to this man’s knowledge of correction rules (i.e. this is not allowed here, instead of ‘I am not interested in you!’). Fortunately, he backed off quickly. With an agreement from me to keep this just to myself, he left. (p. 56)

Paup mishandled the situation by not reporting the offending inmate to the proper authorities. Despite her intention of being sincere and firm, she sent the wrong message by protecting the inmate. By agreeing to keep it just to herself, she inadvertently creates a shared secret, an unsavory bond between herself and the man, who could have concluded that she was interested after all, and continued manipulating and harassing her. The only proper way to deal with propositions, or any other offending behavior, is to protest immediately and loudly, and to follow institutional rules of reporting the infraction. Thereby, we teachers establish the “untouchable” nature of our person and dis-invite any

further attempt for intimacy from the inmates, and the same time declare our innocence in an effort to preempt suspicion and accusation.

Unmentionables. Paup's experience is not at all unique or unusual, and especially when a prominent person falls into the glare of the searchlight of accusation, stories are carried around, words come tumbling out in excited whispers -- the rumor mill turns on full power. However, after lingering for a while as gossip, the sensational event fades away, buried in silence.

Typically, my conversation partners take a long and circuitous route around this issue. Catherine allows: "Sometimes I felt uncomfortable being in the classroom with all these men. It's... dangerous... You need an edge." Emma smiles an incredulous little smile, like she has never noticed any "such thing," before reluctantly admitting to moments of discomfort, even in the women's institution. She says she is "disturbed" by the sight of female "couples" and resents having to "police the classroom" for proper behavior. Emma expresses the concern of other female teachers in the women's institution, who are thinking of their own safety, when seeing an inmate getting pregnant in prison. Their discomfort reverberates in Barbara's words, "A correctional officer comes into my room and turns off the light when I am alone. That scares me."

Barbara has the courage to take the shortcut, walk into the heart of the matter, and openly address the complex nature of female teachers inadvertently becoming the love, or rather the lust, interests of incarcerated men. We recall

the horror one of our colleagues had to go through, when a student tried to commit suicide because she did not acknowledge his professions of unrequited love. The drama, created by this young man by cutting himself and spraying the classroom with blood, was indicative of his mental state, not any illicit relationship.Yet the teacher was “considered guilty” by both prison and education hierarchy, and had a difficult time restoring her stature and regaining her equilibrium.

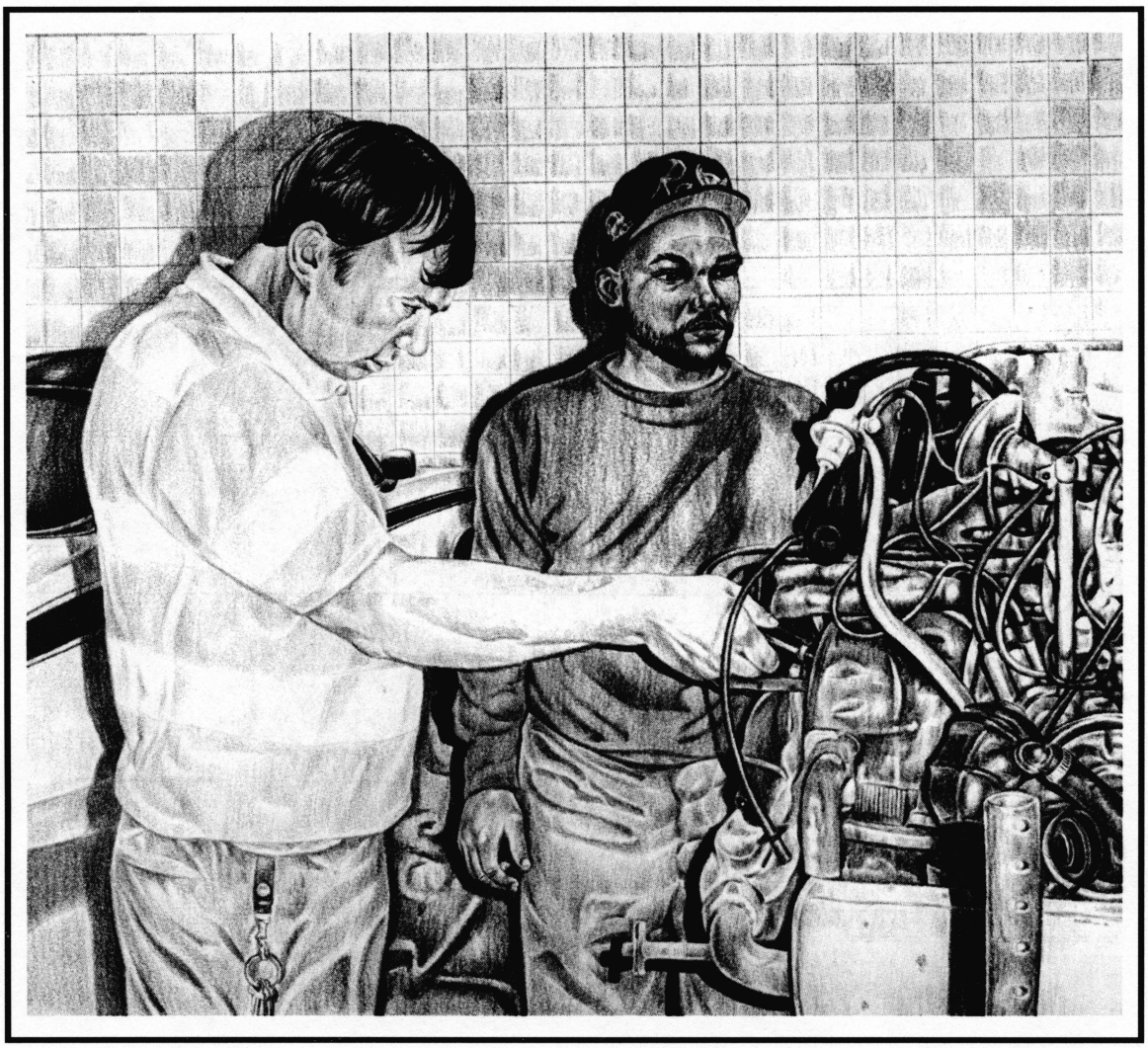
Another inmate’s overdose was rumored to be the result of being similarly refused by the object of his infatuation. This teacher agreed to talk about the event, only with the assurance that even her pseudonym would not be used:

> I remember looking for Malik that morning because he used to bring down the newspapers. I was told that he died of an overdose the night before. I couldn’t believe it! I was in shock. I had to hide in the bathroom and cry. You know... my clerk, a young man. I was very upset. I was questioned later, but I didn’t know anything except what went on in school. There was nothing suspicious about him. You can imagine how it blew my mind when they [investigating officers] told me that they thought, I could’ve been responsible. I could’ve been his lover, I could’ve supplied his drugs. Me? My God! I couldn’t believe what they were saying. I never felt so violated.

Correction rules strictly and explicitly forbid any relationship of a sexual nature between inmates and staff members. However, stories of intimate encounters crop up with such frequency that it is hard to ignore the possibility

of some of them being true. Many inmates are indiscreet gossips who like to brag about their dubious “conquests,” especially among female officers. Although I tell them that I am not interested and do not even believe their stories, I am disturbed, because I know some of them are telling the truth.

Indeed, some of these stories are true, like the famous incident a few years ago of an inmate’s affair with the institutional psychologist, who later aided his escape. I also carry an image deeply buried in my mind of a glimpse of a colleague, embraced in a passionate kiss with an inmate. Questions arise -- along with congratulations -- when a staff member marries a newly released ex-inmate: When, and how did their relationship reach the point of such serious commitment? Or, was there any “foul play” involved? Remember Josephine? What could have happened to young Josephine, if she allowed her body to act upon its forbidden desires? And more disturbingly, Could this happen to me? But these questions will never be answered, because they will never be asked. They will remain unmentionable. The clinically neutral technical term, corporeality, is spread in front of the traveler like a veritable archipelago of emotions, concerns, suspicions, secrets, shrouded in a lingering fog of questions un-uttered.



Phases of the Moon:
The Dichotomy of Lived Relationships in Prison

The definition of the word *dichotomy* as "the phase of the moon or of other planets in which half of its apparently flat surface seems to be illuminated" (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 2004, p. 400), shadows the relationality experienced in prison with the faint silver glow of the moon. This definition applies to all the relationships created, maintained, cherished or feared in prison. Like our Moon, they are ebony and silver, light and dark, positive and negative -- occasionally all at the same time.

It is easy to lose direction on a starless night. When the dark side of the moon obscures our path, the world can become a strange and frightening place. The traveler shivers, remembering the old warning, "Here, there will be lions." Indeed, as we navigate our relationships, we often meet lions; like Odysseus, we meet the mythical Laistrygonians and Cyclops. At such times it is hard to remember the other side of the moon, the one that illuminates our path. Then, the moon emerges from the shadows -- we encounter positive experiences -- and our Being-with-one-another becomes, in the words of Rumi,

> Daylight, full of small dancing particles
> and the one great turning, our souls
> are dancing with you, without feet, they dance.
> (1984, p. 11)

We, as prison teachers, track on an ambiguous path that meanders in and out of

darkness and light, following the dichotomy of our community as our lifeworld turns.

Lived Dichotomy

To reconcile the image of "common criminal," "convict" or "inmate" with the same person, who is our "student" -- this is the most formidable challenge a prison teacher has to deal with every single day. As teachers we are trained to assume and expect the best of our students, but in the prison culture students are presented to us as a "special form of humanity" and "cunning malingerers" (Mitford, 1973, p. 101). This theme, like a double-exposed photograph, hovers over and plays tricks on the prison teacher's conscience.

Catherine speaks for all of us saying, "From the beginning of my tenure in prison, I found it difficult to keep focusing on my students as criminals -- as I was reminded over and over." Reducing people under their authority to a six-digit number might serve the agenda of the Department of Correction. After all, prisons are essentially warehouses, whose inventory consists of the incarcerated population. However, this extreme objectification is fundamentally opposite of both the practice and spirit of pedagogy, that directs us to consider each student in the fullness of his or her individuality. Teachers in prison schools are constantly sitting on the horn of the dilemma, whether to accept the correctional system's one-dimensional perception of their students as convicts and deny their

identity, or to separate these students from their crime and afford them the same individual attention as all students deserve.

Barbara's toughest problem to work through, "is to only know them, and I only want to know them, as my students, like those in high-school, maybe a little older: some good, some not so good, some interested, some not, most of them polite, respectful, normal." Like many of us, Barbara searches for a path that leads her to an island of normalcy that she creates in her prison classroom. With pedagogical tact (van Manen, 1991) we offer this safe haven to our students, but we need it just as much to be on solid ground that is not shaken by quakes of convict- versus-student dichotomy.

> "The Dichotomy is Daunting"
>
> I look at Yayah, big sad eyes of a deer,
> yet he is full of mischief.
> Writes beautiful prose, but could not spell
> correctly if his life depended on it.
> Always boasting, "big boy," "the man," "the best."
> Now, sitting in my office, I can hardly
> hear his words: "Mother died... next of kin...
> I have to sign papers, so she can be buried..."
> Yayah, turned nineteen in April,
> is sentenced for twenty-four years.
> (Sayko, 2004)

It is compelling to see only one side of the positive/negative image of these individuals, yet it is equally erroneous to accept only one singular aspect of this duality. Ignoring the dark reality of their criminal activities easily can subject a naive teacher or staff member to manipulation that can lead to serious

consequences. However, disregarding the person to focus only on what is represented by a commitment number, creates a single vision that strips the teacher of caring and tact, and the capacity of individually being-with each student -- attributes that make effective (correctional) education possible.

Of all my conversation partners Peter, the only male, expresses the most professional distance, saying, “I never look up my students’[criminal] records. If I find out why they are locked up, it does not influence my feelings and attitude towards them. But you still have to remember who they are.” Although I share his attitude of not being influenced by his students’ crimes, I marvel at his apparent ease of reconciling this dilemma without the difficulty shared by the rest of us in conversation. I wonder, is his ability to navigate the path, that is so problematic for my female participants, gender related? Or, might the different ethos of the maximum security institution, where he works with an older, more violent population serving life sentences, be responsible for Peter’s way of relating to his students?

When I hear Emma saying, “The biggest surprise in prison for me, was to discover how very *alike* we are,” I recall my early impressions as a prison teacher. Being informed about prison and prisoners by popular media like most of us, I was in turn surprised, confused and delighted to recognize that although prison is a different world, it is inhabited by people much like the rest of us. In the words of Austin MacCormick, assistant director of the United States Bureau

of Prisons in the 1930s and founder of the Correctional Education Association, "The prisoner... does not differ as greatly as is popularly supposed from the general run of humanity" (1931, p. 16).

How do we navigate the turbulent waters of dichotomy inherent in a prison school's student body? To be effective educators, we need to be oriented toward each student on a personal level, yet the prison culture advocates a rigid demarcation line between "us" and "them," with the inherent danger of reducing the educator into mere instructor. Where do we locate the proper social-psychological space of "nearness and farness" between ourselves and our students (Wright, 2004)? How do we nourish a classroom community that is respectfully engaged and assures good learning without running afoul of institutional regulations and common sense practices of necessary caution?

Transactions in the Relational Landscape

Pinton (1982) attempts to create a profile of the prison teacher. Although he appears to have conducted his participant observations in prison schools that did not employ female teachers, his description is accurate:

> He is an educator and he does perform the roles of teacher, father, brother, friend, guide, model, counselor to his students, who are socially isolated individuals, with all the needs a human being may have in conditions of separation, rejection and suspicion. (p. 9)

Through conversations, personal experiences and observations I have collected ample evidence to support Pintor's definition; whether by choice or by the

nature of our vocation, we do perform the roles of teacher, mother, sister, friend, guide, model and counselor.

In addition to mastery of the content and excellence in pedagogy, teaching in any setting requires the talent of an actor, the skills of a magician, and genuine interest in the development of one's students. Prison teachers need to possess the best skills, and cannot underplay the importance of building relationships with their students. In the isolated arena of prison, the need for practical help in changing not only the life of the mind but also that of the heart, and the universal human need for compassion, place heavy demands on the teacher. We might ask with Berman (1998) "How can a teacher endure situations in which their reactions and actions desperately matter?" (p. 174).

A safe haven. Educators, by definition, are willing to invest themselves in their students. This is even more essential in prison, where the inmate is defined as object and the atmosphere is permeated by a theme of potential crises. In the relational landscape of prison schools prison teachers are called upon to create an oasis (Wright, 2004).

> I tell my ladies, when you walk in here, we have a different atmosphere. This is a business class... I realize their vulnerable position, but I want them to know that here, they don't need to feel vulnerable. (Emma)

Emma creates a safe haven for her students by inviting them to step into a different atmosphere, "This is a business class." With this sentence, she also

establishes the rules and expectations for her program. These young women are enabled subliminally to assimilate proper attitudes, work ethics, and appropriate business manners and appearance, in addition to the skills contained in the curriculum. For a few hours every day, Emma's students leave prison behind and practice living in the "real world" of business letters, spread-sheets, and the multitude of details of office work, where their relationship to the instructor also takes a more business like, collegial sheen.

Most prison teachers make a concerted effort to keep a clear demarcation line between education and custody, between *prison teachers* and correctional *officers*. It is very important to me to convey the message to my students that, although I am bound to respect the prison's rules and regulations, I represent their side; I am in their service. I build my relationships with them on the basis of being their advocate, with a mission to meliorate not to penalize. Barbara speaks for most of us:

> As a teacher I find it essential to establish my person, my mission, my goals and my relationship with my students as distant from custody.

Our students tune very sensitive antennae toward prison personnel. They depend on an accurate perception of the attitudes and allegiances of people who can influence the quality of their daily existence, and might direct the enfolding of their future. Even in the safe haven of prison school, new teachers undergo a period of covert observation by the students who gauge their [the teachers']

personality and decide whether a friend or a foe. Peter speaks about feeling as being "on trial," and observing a positive change in his students' relationships toward him only after showing his "true colors" by supporting a student in some incident:

> It took a while for my class to relax around me. They were observing my reactions and my interactions, especially with the officers. I felt as if I was on trial. Then, an incident happened and I had to stand up for one of the students, and that seems to have been a turning point. After that I was "O.K." *Then the real learning began.* [My emphasis]

Indeed, the real learning will only begin after we have gained their trust and accepted the need to "perform the roles of teacher, father, brother, friend, guide, model, counselor" (Pinton, 1982, p. 9). Catherine says, "We are raising these kids. So, we are mothers too." Alesis says:

> It is being like a big sister, or parent to some of these kids, because there's more than just teaching the course objectives. You know, you're basically giving... a lot of... even here... giving advice.

There is a growing demand on teachers to wear many hats. It is expected that teachers act *in situ parentis,* substitute for the collective neglect of society, and in some cases administer the most basic socialization and care in addition to their obligation to teach the curriculum. Prison teachers face similar demands and expectations with the additional obstacles of teaching adults, who are, for the most part, educationally "handicapped" and whose priorities are often in a different order.

Beware of lions. As we journey around the lifeworld of prison schools, the companions agree that we occupy a peculiar position, placed on the axis of tension between prisoners and prison guards. As educators, we harken to a magnetic pull towards our primary obligations, our students, an orientation that makes us suspect in the eyes of the (be)holders. Common sense dictates caution and adherence to the rules and regulations and vigilance in maintaining the safety and security of the prison. To be perceived by the students as belonging to the "other side" might weaken their trust in the teachers' loyalty, thus weaken their belief in the value of education. Indeed, the prison teacher is called upon to perform a high-wire act between his or her dual obligations. Paup (1995) offers her perception of the attributes of an "ideal" corrections teacher:

> For teachers to do their jobs in prison, they should first be cautious of inmate and staff behavior at all times. Second, they should consider whether or not their demeanor could be interpreted as sexual, weak (and therefore not in control), ambiguous (and therefore a potential "sucker"), or subversive in regards to corrections policy. (p. 17)
> (R)ules for how we should teach are scarce, and it is only when we are "caught going too far," that we are warned, reprimanded or punished. (p. 51)

In a single paragraph Paup tip-toes around several land mines that could be tripped by an unsuspecting teacher. It could be a casual remark or a friendly gesture, misinterpreted as inappropriate sexual conduct. It could be inexperience perceived as lack of control, or it could be the starry-eyed optimism of new teachers trusting unquestioningly. The landscape of the far country of prison is

strewn with land mines and no accurate map is provided. The map has many white areas where “there will be lions,” but we only learn about them when we are “caught going too far.”

In brief orientation sessions all newcomers officially are admonished to be cautious in their interactions with inmates. Through informal enculturation we learn, and teach each other, to be equally cautious of staff, especially those in uniform, whose agenda is not in harmony with those of us in education. These are unexpected dark islands in our relational landscape where, like Odysseus, we meet our Laistrygonians.

Meeting Laistrygonians and Cyclops, Angry Poseidon

Barbara confronted a wall of thinly disguised hostility, when a casual conversation with officers about her students created unexpected unpleasant reverberations around her. She was labeled suspicious [by some officers] and, for a period of time, was scrutinized by prison administration for violating written or unwritten rules of conduct. This is not a happy time for her to remember: “I felt weird,”confesses Barbara; “they [corrections officers] acted like there was something wrong with me, because I said I really liked my students. I care for every one of them. Did you know that it goes on your record if you show any interest in the welfare of your students?”

Barbara’s story illustrates the fundamentally different relationship between teachers and inmate students, versus officers and inmates. What we see

as pedagogical tact, the caring attitude of the educator, or simply providing the extra individual attention required by some students; the officers perceive as fraternization, “coddling,” or improper relationships, and it goes on our record. The subliminal message is to treat our students, like the majority of officers, as if they were the hateful refuse of society. Otherwise we are being accused, in the very crude language of prison, “You like them, you must be f...ing them.”

If we, like Barbara, verbalize our care and dedication to our students we are considered suspect of having “something wrong” with us. This subliminal attack on our professional self-esteem and personal integrity is confusing, humiliating and frightening -- weird, in Barbara’s words. It is confusing, because in essence we are being penalized for doing a good job as teachers, and it is humiliating because we are thus judged by personnel who have no authority, and certainly are not qualified, to evaluate our skills. It is also frightening, because it can lead to being considered a security risk, scrutinized for contraband, followed by the search light of suspicion -- in essence being judged “guilty” and having to face the enormous task of proving ourselves innocent.

> Your job hangs by a thin thread if you do not know the rules... When you are under investigation, whether you did anything or not, you will feel like an inmate. You have no say... This is harsh reality. This means you can be locked out of an institution without knowing why until after the fact.
> (Geraci, 2002, p. vii)

The security system of the prison keeps a tab on everyone for “indicators” of being a security risk such as providing any kind of help or assistance, advocating for inmates, showing interest in an individual student, carrying contraband in or out of prison.

Contraband. This is another broad minefield with its vague definitions and undefined boundaries. For better understanding of the scope and hidden traps in the subject of contraband, I include a sample from “Institutional Directive 50-57-1,” a publication that conveys the applicable rules and regulations to correctional employees. The obvious and sensible list of firearms, ammunition, lethal weapons, alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, drug and drug paraphernalia, escape paraphernalia, is appended by radios, Bic Crystal Ball pens, lunches, vitamins and flowers. Authorized items include a flashlight, plastic cup, watch, ring, comb, vending machine items (no more than two) and 20 oz. of beverage in a sealed, unbreakable container. Wardens have a relatively wide berth of authority in establishing the policy of their institutions. Some might allow a little more flexibility, like bringing in lunch, but the list above offers a fair illustration of the nitty-gritty of daily life in prison.

I call the area of contraband a trap because it is very easy to make a mistake and carry the wrong kind of pen or, as happened to Peter once, have 20 inches of string in your bag. Under different circumstances Peter’s story could be funny; however, behind bars humor usually is not welcome:

> At the metal detector, the officer pulled this piece of string out of my book bag. I had no idea how it got in there, and was not concerned when the officer kept it. I thought nothing of it until, around ten o'clock, I was called to the Duty Lieutenant's office, and he asked me to write a Matter of Record, to explain the reason for bringing in the string. I had to laugh. The "evidence" was sitting on his desk, all two feet of it. I picked it up, it sticky and smelling faintly of pine. Then I remembered! We were bringing home the Christmas tree that was tied up with string. This piece must have slipped off, and I somehow picked it up, maybe with some papers, and it found its way into my bag. I had to laugh. Nevertheless, I was lectured on the potential dangers of this piece of twine falling into the wrong hands. I also received a written reprimand.

In prison, the simplest daily routine takes enormous proportions because everything is permeated by the weirdness of the place, and rules change unannounced. I am repeatedly reminded of Galtung's (1961) remark that prisons do not belong to social reality. "The weird thing about being in prison is not the inmates" says Barbara:

> It is the DOC [prison] staff that gives me the creeps. I move with confidence among my students. I feel safe, even though I am surrounded by rapists, murderers, child molesters, thugs, whatever... Then, an officer comes into my room and turns off the light when I am alone. That scares me. He makes suggestive double-talk. That scares me. You never know what they dare do next. The fact, that in prison I am scared of the guards, not the inmates -- that's weird.

One of the most troubling aspects of working in prison as a non-uniformed staff, is the animosity received from members of the custodial staff.

Caryl Hartjes, a Catholic nun, served three months incarcerated for criminal trespass in a protest demonstration. Her observations, quoted in *The Washington Post* (Duke, 3/14/2004, pp. D1, D7), resonate with prison teachers: "Psychologically, you never feel safe. Psychologically, you can always be brought down for some perceived something on the part of the guards."

These problems have roots reaching back in history. Gehring (1993) writes about Sarah Martin, a teacher in 1832 at England's Great Yarmouth Gaol, who complained of suffering "distress at the depravity of one of the turnkeys. Yet, even he could not deprive me of respect from the prisoners. My influence with the prisoners was simply supported by what I taught of truth" (Banks, as cited in Gehring, 1993, p. 72). Banks, says Gehring, concludes that prison teachers should be selected for their ability to "stand up" to correctional staff who resent the educational opportunities available to inmates.

Hidden paradigm. In the United States, where the penal system was built upon a philosophy of rehabilitation, similar resentments still generate unhealthy undercurrents of life in prisons today that, in turn, color and shape the position and status of prison teachers. The long history of ambivalent relationships between custody and treatment personnel is fueled by "prison officers' negative conception of (inmate) education: many view prisons as places for punishment and regard education as a pretext for avoiding work" writes Jepson (1989, p. 46). Later he talks about prison officers feeling that it is

"inequitable that prisoners should have access to education while opportunities are denied to them and their children" (p. 46). No doubt, the officers' misconceptions of the reasons and benefits of inmate education are projected onto those of us who support and provide prison education.

Undeniably, there is mutual suspicion and professional jealousy. Treatment staff -- including teachers -- are generally better educated, better paid and better liked (by our students) than the guards. Female guards tend to resent non-uniformed females because civilian clothes are naturally nicer, more stylish and certainly more comfortable than their dark blue polyester uniforms.

The mission of prison guards, from the warden down to the lowest ranking officer, is to maintain security in their institution. They accept educational programs because, according to a 1994 survey of Washington State prison Superintendents, they understand that one of the primary reasons to have an education program is to "reduce idleness" and to assist in the "secure operation of the [prison] facility" (Paup, 1995, p. 42). The mission of treatment staff, psychologists, social workers, counselors and educators, is to help the inmates' torturous recovery from their complex condition of mental, physical, social and educational handicaps, and to prepare them for re-entry into society. These are mutually supportive missions; however, carrying out their daily details breeds misunderstandings, cross purposes and resentment. Heidegger

(1977) illuminates the ethos of prison: “The Being-with-one-another of those who are hired for the same affair often thrives only on mistrust” (p. 159).

Crying “wolf.” In a sensitive environment, where safety and security are very real and serious concerns, venting personal frustrations is a relatively simple matter. Anyone can cry “Wolf” and point a finger claiming a security infraction. Anyone can be implicated, accused, suspected and automatically considered guilty. To be locked out of the institution, even if only for investigation, is a serious and complicated matter that even when exonerated, leaves the individual branded. It is not only weird, it can be really scary.

Custody generally views treatment as a necessary evil. Civilian staff is considered suspect in all kinds of real or imagined infractions and mis-deeds. Shortly after I transferred to my present institution, I became the target of hostility and harassment, that nearly caused the end of my service as prison teacher.

> For months, this officer was clearly on a mission to “get me.” He contradicted me at every chance, made up rules on a whim, conducted inappropriate searches of my personal belongings, intimidated and harassed me. He entered my lab and damaged the equipment, but blamed it on my students when confronted. He extended this harassment to my students, challenging them, provoking them wherever he could. He had me written up by another officer for “standing face to face in front of an inmate, at approximately three inches apart.” Then, he started rumors of me having inappropriate physical contact with my students. Colleagues, even inmates came to tell me what they heard, offering

> sympathy, advice and warning. Complaints to the officer's superiors were met with a stone-faced, "He is just doing his job" until, in frustration, I told the Warden that if this harassment will not stop and the officer will not be removed from my area immediately and permanently, I will be forced to resign my position and seek legal remedies. I simply could not work any longer in this hostile environment. (Journal, October, 1999)

Those were nightmare times. First, I was upset and angry. As the harassment escalated, fear, like a loathsome intruder, took up residence within. I was getting scared. What if people believed him? I could have lost my job and my reputation. As a veteran prison teacher, nearing retirement, I am still shaken by the memories of being harassed, intimidated and humiliated by an officer.

What could create such hatred? Perhaps Foucalt (1995) can shed some light on the underlying issues driving the behavior of some correctional officers:

> Criticism that was often leveled at the penitentiary system in the early nineteenth century (imprisonment is not a sufficient punishment: prisoners are less hungry, less cold, less deprived in general than many poor people or even workers) suggests a postulate that was never explicitly denied: it is just that a condemned man should suffer physically more than other men. (p. 16)

Foucalt speaks of the nineteenth century, yet popular sentiment has not changed too much, and some people might interpret their limited authority as a license to ensure adequate suffering. Consider two more poignant observations by Foucalt (1995): "In modern justice and on the part of those who dispense it

there is a shame in punishing, which does not always preclude zeal," and "It is ugly to be punishable, but there is no glory in punishing" (p. 10).

The mythical Laistrygonian giants tore apart and ate the men who came with Odysseus to their island, even though they came in peace. Was it hatred or was it fear that prompted the giants to act so brutally? Was it a need to prove their unbridled authority over their territory? Our daily journey takes us to the island of corrections. We come in peace with good works to be done; we should not have to fear Laistrygonians and should not have to fight the one-eyed Cyclops. We should not have to be concerned with angry Poseidon setting traps to make our journey more perilous. We are not the enemy. Custody staff or education personnel, uniformed or not -- we are on the same mission: to restore and rehabilitate.

Suffering the proverb. For the most part, a precarious balance is maintained between staff and prison teachers, but occasionally poorly concealed feelings break to the surface with frightening force. Emma recalls feeling confused and intimidated when the Warden sternly reprimanded her for requesting for a small change in the schedule to allow recreation time for her students. "What for?" demanded the Warden. "Well, it would be good for their morale" offered Emma. "Don't concern yourself with their morale! I don't want to hear about the inmates' morale" bellowed the Warden. "Life is hell, it's more hell when you go to prison... Don't be an advocate for the inmates!" Paup

(1995) summarizes this attitude, "...this system, the prison institution perpetuates viewing the inmate as 'other,' as criminal" (p. 23).

In a similar event I was painfully shamed by the Assistant Warden [AW] for trying to prevent the transfer of a student barely three weeks before final exams in the college program. I recorded this incident in my journal:

> If I ever leave [prison teaching] it will be for the frustration, anger, disappointment, and powerlessness created by incidents like yesterday. Xavier, one of my best students was accused of some infraction. I believe that the whole incident was based on lies. A staff member created havoc by reporting this student, who now was facing transfer to another institution. My supervisor and I tried to reverse Custody's decision, and keep the student. It did not look promising. I approached the AW on the walk, to express my concern, and ask him to reconsider. I told him how disturbing it is to see a student, who does excellent work in his vocational program, as well as in the college course he is taking, (and also volunteers as tutor, and a member of the choir) being shipped out. The AW looked at me with unmistakable scorn and said, "He is an *inmate.* There are hundreds like him." When I (bravely or foolishly) asked him if the Warden was aware of the situation and approved the sanction, the AW cut me off, "Now, you are upsetting me" and turned his back, and with that I was dismissed. It felt like I was one of the "hundreds like him"- sharing their frustration and humiliation.
> (Journal entry, April, 2001)

An African proverb says, "If you want to help, come suffer with me." At that moment I was living the proverb; I was sharing the suffering of my students

and all the inmates. I was living the phenomenon; I was truly being-with the Other.

It would be unfair not to acknowledge that the majority of correctional officers did not come from the Island of Laistrygonians. Most officers are fair, professional and caring people, who share our vested interest in the inmates' welfare. They provide the procedural framework and necessary security provisions to make our daily work safe and productive. Some of them become near-friends who we are glad to see assigned in our area. Their reliability and good humor make a day behind bars a little easier to bear. As Alesis says, "When I see Tonya at the desk, I whisper to myself 'Thank you God this is going to be a good day.'" However, the incidents and problems I have discussed in this section are frequent enough to color our prison-teacher-lives in a somber hue. Barbara was right saying: "The fact, that in prison I am scared of the guards, not the inmates -- that's weird."

Weird

Weird -- the term crops up over and over again in my conversations with prison teachers. Alesis finds it weird constantly being watched:

> Your students watch you, the officers watch you; everyone walking by my door has to take a look. It is like being on display. You know, you cannot just move and act or talk without giving it a quick mental check first. You always are on the alert making sure your hair is right, your skirt hangs properly, you are not getting too close to a student, and so on. Sometimes it makes me want to jump out

of my skin.

For most of us the sinister ambiguity of being free, yet spending our days locked in a space surrounded by razor wire fences, generates a weird landscape of suspended reality. Having our briefcases and pockets searched and our bodies frisked -- legitimate reasons notwithstanding -- send a potent message of being considered a suspect, if not guilty of some un-named infraction. Is it not weird, asks Emma, how the officers love to group us together with the inmates? Although, as advocates for inmate students, many prison teachers are more willing to align themselves on the inmates' side rather than identify with correction personnel. Some correctional officers would include teachers in their good-old-boys-network thus saying, with a cynical wink of the eye, "You are one of us against them." Peter is vehemently opposed to be enmeshed in the uniformed hierarchy of prison:

> I am not a guard; I am a teacher. I am educated; I have a different agenda. I am not here to be an instrument of punishment. I care for my students, and I think it is weird to be ostracized for that.

"Weird" was not a theme I would have expected to surface from my conversations, and its persistence puzzles me. As it so often happens, reading the etymology of the word "weird" (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1993, p. 537) rewarded me with an explanation and a multi-layered, deep understanding of the curious term. Following the evolutionary twists and turns of this single word

brought to close proximity the reasons why “weird” made such frequent appearance in our conversations about prison.

The current usage of “unaccountably mysterious, uncanny, odd” is a relative new-comer from Shakespeare’s “Macbeth.” The origin of the word is found in the Old English *wyrd* and Old Saxon *wurd* meaning “to become” or rather “what is to come” (Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 2004, p. 1623). According to Webster’s New World Dictionary (1968, p. 1658), by the 14th century the word’s archaic meaning, “fate, lot, destiny,” grew to mean “controlling the destinies of men” in the English language.

Michel Foucalt (1995, p. 11) writes, “From being an art of unbearable sensations punishment has become an economy of suspended rights.” Suspending the rights of the individual, society takes control of the destiny of that person. With the ominous clank of the prison gates behind them, prisoners are stripped of almost all rights to make personal decisions. They are told when to wake up and when to go to bed, when and what to eat; they are assigned work, or left to suffer the idleness of endless days. Small liberties, telephone calls or visits, are strictly regulated and easily taken away. Treatment services -- medical, dental, psychological, educational -- are often inadequate in their scope and quality and they do not always reach the entire population who would need or desire them. Controlling all aspects of daily life “fate, lot, destiny” of the

individual, indeed constitutes “controlling the destinies” of incarcerated men and women.

Weird -- what an apt term to describe prison! How appropriate that it is the most frequently used descriptive by my conversation partners. By an ironic twist in our self-chosen career-path, we as prison teachers are not entirely immune to the consequences of “weird.” The archaic meaning, “controlling the destinies of men,” applies to our daily existence behind bars: our lives are controlled to a significant degree by the requirements of public safety and security, and to an additional degree by the personal whims of people, whose job is to ensure the safety and security of the public.

I recall a quote I used earlier from the book, *Kind and Usual Punishment* by Jessica Mitford (1973), who paints a very realistic picture of life in prison applicable to both voluntary and involuntary inhabitants:

> A life of planned, unrelieved inactivity and boredom... no overt brutality but plenty of random, largely unintentional cruelty... a pervasive sense of helplessness and frustration engulfing not only the inmates but their keepers, themselves prisoners trapped in the *weird complex of paradoxes that is the prison world* [my emphasis]. (p. 27)

While teachers rarely suffer from inactivity and boredom, the inherent cruelty of the prison environment does not leave anyone untouched: for eight hours a day we are immersed into this *olla podria,* cooked up of rough language, small acts of unnecessary meanness, theft and vicious lies, snitching, the inhumanity of

unkempt, sick, smelly, physically impaired bodies. Prisoners and prison teachers alike are trapped by the un-definable sense of brutality that hangs over the population like a shroud and reverberates with unspeakable deeds like a silent echo. We prison teachers can accept Mitford's description of being prisoners; it narrows the distance between teacher and student and invites both us and the Other to become fellow travelers.

The Presence of Others

> As we meet the other we are able to develop a conversational relation which allows us to transcend our *selves*. In a larger existential sense human beings have searched in this experience of the other, the communal, the social for a sense of purpose in life, meaningfulness, grounds for living, as in the religious experience of the absolute Other, God. (van Manen, 1990, p. 105)

Through the example of the master woodcarver, who in spiritual partnership with the right tree carves the most beautiful bell stand, Palmer (1990) teaches us, that our every action exists in partnership with an other. He invokes Chung Tzu saying, "We must know and revere the nature of the other if our action is to be fruitful" (p. 69). As prison teachers, we are also reminded here to approach with reverence our significant others, our students, regardless of our social and cultural distance.

Our lives are inextricably linked with those of others. A solitary existence does not inspire great deeds that satisfy more than just our survival needs because, "For excellence, by definition, the presence of others is always

required" (Arendt, 1958, p. 49). For further proof to the verity of this notion, we only need to consider that one of the most generously community oriented educators of our time, Maxine Greene (as cited in Ernst, et al., 1998, p. 33), adopted the same philosophy. Selflessly sharing time and food, conversation and instruction, knowing and questioning with others, Greene stands as a living definition of creating excellence in the presence of others.

Secret Keepers: Living With Horrifying Knowledge

On its heavenly path, the Moon sometimes hides behind the Earth and conceals itself in total darkness. Even as a short-lived phenomenon, an eclipse could fill one with unease in the presence of the power of the Universe. From time to time, our Being-with-one-another enters a total eclipse that not even a faint silvery light of the Moon can penetrate. From time to time we encounter Others whose lifeworld, light years away from our own, seems to be spinning in the darkness of a permanent eclipse.

Having visited that world, by invitation via the stories of its inhabitants, changes the traveler's understanding of the human condition. Growing up sheltered in the safety of middle class family values, most of us were not prepared to peek into "the darkest recesses of the mind" and few of us ever knew souls "that sin has permanently marked" (as cited in the following poem by my student, Olurupo Byrd). His poetry, thudding with heart-beat rhythm,

comes from the deepest pain of personal experience and offers a brutally realistic panorama of that “other” lifeworld.

> “God Forbid”
>
> In the darkest recesses of the mind, in the blackest part of the heart.
> The part of the soul that sin has permanently marked, and the purest form of hate parks.
> We harbor demons one and all.
> Seek out God like Saul.
> Stumble and fall.
> Wonder if he heard our call.
> Or if he cares at all.
> When we pass, will we be the last to blast, for that cash?
> Murder our brothers, torment our mothers?
> Turn young sisters into abused lovers?
> Bury bodies in covers?
> Neglect our seed for the sake of our rep?
> Exchange crack for welfare checks?
> So we can ice down our necks?
> Smoke-tint the Lex?
> Charter private jets.
> Sport the latest sweats.
> Yet so many go hungry.
> Buy our moms pearls and furs with dirty drug money.
> Its kind of funny...
> How many moms really don’t mind until their son’s blood, their son’s chalk outline.
> (Byrd, 2002, p. 11)

Despite an effort to maintain professional distance, when raw emotions are bared we prison teachers, like any dedicated pedagogue, allow ourselves to respond on a deeply personal level, and open up to our students in a one-caring relationship, “experiencing more compassion than condemnation” (Leder, 2000, p. 22).

Catherine says, after reading Deon's paper:

> Surely he made this up. He wrote about growing up on the street, on his own since he was about twelve years old, eating out of trashcans, fighting with rats for food, hiding from the police, steeling from everyone. He said he had no family. Nobody... nobody to take care of him. I could never imagine lives like his. He doesn't even know how old he really is. I wanted to hug him, to comfort him, or the little boy that he had been. *I* wanted to be comforted. This was just too much.

Inmates are assigned to institutional counselors, or case managers, but those individuals are perceived as being part of the corrections system, more like guards and gate-keepers than helping professionals. Inmates, like other socially isolated persons, generally perceive teachers as having "high professional standing," being trustworthy and reliable, "to whom they will confide more naturally than to the correctional counselors or even their legal counselor" (Pinton, 1982, p. 6). Sometimes, for a fleeting moment we allow ourselves to bask in the warmth of this trust and confidence. Truthfully, however, they fill the prison teacher's luggage with stones; what we have learned might be too much to know, and too much to share. Like Catherine, we want to be comforted, want to be rid of the burden of carrying the burden of others.

> No one will understand these stories. The tragedies, the neediness behind them... People think you are crazy because you empathize and are willing to help. They want to hear the gory details and quickly decide how terrible these guys are, and how they

> deserve whatever... I just don't talk about it.
> (Barbara)

Thus, lacking an outlet, we keep the stories to ourselves, they become our terrible secrets. So many times I have wailed silently, I don't want to hear this, I don't want to know your terrible, painful, shameful story, yet I was moved "to do" something about it. "Experiences of pain, nurture and time can be instances of mattering. To be attuned to mattering is invitational to compassionate action" (Berman, 1998, p. 173).

> "Give me a Break"
>
> I don't want to listen to your cussing and moaning
> about your kids being raised on junkfood and TV
> by your baby-mother's boyfriend.
> The one that you don't like and certainly disapprove of.
> I don't want to hear how cleverly you used to break into homes,
> and the many places you know of where people think
> they have stashed away their wedding bands and welfare checks
> and bus-money for safety.
> You think I might be amused to learn
> that it takes you a mere thirty seconds to get into a car,
> and only two fingers on the right spot on the neck
> to stop people from breathing.
> But I really, really don't want to know.
> I don't want to learn about how you take revenge
> on officers and foes who "disrespected" you,
> by throwing your feces at them through the grill.
> I don't want to hear about your dirty secrets with
> officers or guys in the shower.
> I don't want to know about it because
> everything matters, and because of that
> I would be invited to "compassionate action"
> that I cannot afford.
> There is already too much request for my compassion.
> Give me a break, forgive me, I don't want to hear
> your story, because, like in the proverb,

> I will forever carry it in my heart and it will make
> my heart heavy and sad.
> Because I care
> and it is tough to be caring.
> (Sayko, 2004)

However, as a holistic educator I could not deny my student the healing moment of facing his monsters, and telling about them. Once a story has been heard, a confidence shared, it cannot be undone and the recipient inadvertently becomes part of the story, permanently connected on some level to the storyteller. “The existence of secrecy always means that there is a certain relational dynamic between people who... share secrets with each other” (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 66).

We are All Doing Time (Lozoff, 1994) poignantly expresses the weirdness of life in prison. We *are all* doing time, indeed. No one, involved in prison culture, can be exempt from that culture. Nobody is given immunity. We all take on -- if only symbolically -- the drabness of the prison uniform. It is weird, how eventually it can all become so normal.

Normal can be frightening in prison. Or even something frightening is entirely normal in prison. Whichever way I twist that sentence it gives a glimpse of prison life. In one of our conversations Peter told me that “There are inmates who want to die, yet for many reasons cannot do it on their own, [so they] commit suicide ‘by proxy.’ They aggravate other inmates, until they make enemies so angry at them, that they will kill them.” McCall (1995) gives voice

to this inner horror: “Go on kill me. Gimme a glorious way to get out of this shit” (p. 181). This was said quite sadly but calmly, spoken by someone who has grown immune to this dark reality. Part of being a prison teacher is to be living with horrifying knowledge. With knowledge comes responsibility and *disponibilité* - obligations that cannot be easily abandoned, and at times this knowledge is a heavy burden.

There are times when I feel as though I literally am carrying a heavy satchel on my back, full of the misery of prison and unrequited knowledge of prisoners’ horrifying tales. However, I believe that with knowledge comes understanding and human growth, and an ability to dwell with the Other in a more meaningful way. Gathering all this horrifying knowledge can deeply hurt, yet it can become deeply transformational, like having faced death. As a teacher, caring and disposable, I accept the heavy burden I am asked to carry, because I hope that it will enable me to be a transforming agent, whose ministrations will harken life to flower under the feet of my students.

> For many, at the beginning of our search, it is the painful truths of life that become our sacred gateway, that open us to the great beauty of compassion. (Kornfield, 2001, p. 63)

Looking at the Medusa. The myth teaches that certain knowledge can be detrimental to the knower. As a teacher, one cannot - must not - avoid knowing all that is possible about one’s students. In prison, teachers receive knowledge that can be likened to looking at the Medusa: something inside turns

into stone. Or like Lot, it turns one into a pillar of salt, or disturbs one's spirit, because these are stories of lives of unbelievable darkness and depravity.

"Looking at These Others"

Being-with-these-Others,
my students.
Looking at them, seeing the scars
reading them like tales.
Knife cuts, bullet holes,
teeth knocked out in fights.
Deeper scars, looking out
at you from deep-well eyes
where un-speakable
deeds and memories
are buried in shallow graves.
You receive un-tellable tales
and shiver.
Go ahead, avert your gaze
the images are here to stay
forever
sketched on your memory
like paintings in a cave.
These are your stories now
your scars to carry.
(Sayko, 2004)

The listener will forever carry the story in himself or herself. Once we know them we cannot shift into reverse and "un-know." Receiving another's story we become somehow responsible for the other. We are not the strangers we were before. We are engaged in a weird, black-and-white relationship. It is a privilege and a burden; it is the raw experience of *Dasein*, as it dissolves itself into the Other. It is advisable not to learn too much about our inmate students -- advisable, but clearly, not possible for an educator.

Medusa looks back. After learning tolerance and acceptance to the highest degree, after opening up to lives of such difference, after sharing years of institutionalization with our students, there is only one simple conclusion to draw: we are so alike, we are the same.

> If you settle in... you cannot help but open to the resonance of a place and the deeper you go, the stranger the people become because they're like you and they're not. (Mayes, 2000, p. 176)

After so many years, the veneer of righteousness cracks open, and the truthful, honest human mind wraps around the possibility of becoming incarcerated. Sometimes all it takes is a carelessly drunk "last drink," or violent act in self defense, or the life or death effort to save one's child. Sometimes, need or greed may lead a person awry. Looking in the darkest corner of the mind, where the Medusa of dire possibilities looks back at us from a dark mirror, creates a tsunami of shocking realization: yes, we are all capable of committing acts that could lead to incarceration.

We circle around this subject gingerly. Emma has painful memories of having been closest to the experience through family tragedy. Peter is shocked and saddened by the discovery that, while imprisonment would bring unfathomable shame and adversity for him and his family, for many of his young African-American students it is an expected part of life, a rite of passage. Barbara and I find dark humor in the value of knowing how to prepare for prison and how to behave as an inmate. Joking about shopping for the proper

prison wardrobe (sensible shoes, no-frill underwear) is our attempt to throw but a thin veil of gallows's humor over the realization that "here, but for the love of God, go I."

The One-Caring

> Ethical caring [is] the relation in which we do meet the other morally... arising out of natural caring -- that relation in which we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination. The relation of natural caring... [is] the human condition that we, consciously or unconsciously, perceive as "good." It is that condition toward which we long and strive, and it is our longing for caring... that provides the motivation for us to be moral. (Noddings, 1984, p. 5)

The strongest leitmotif emerging from our conversations is a deep-seated obligation and desire to care. Obviously, our primary mission is to provide excellent education, yet our caring reaches way beyond the curriculum as we try "apprehending the other's reality, feeling what he feels as nearly as possible..." (Noddings, 1984, p.16). It is in caring that the potentiality of an educator's life-work is fully realized and allowed to blossom. According to Heidegger (1962), "The Being of *Dasein* is care. This entity exists fallingly as something that has been thrown" (p. 465).

Heidegger's words carry special poignancy when we consider that most prison teachers have been "thrown" or "fell into" prison. Most of us became accidental tourists in the far country of corrections. According to a 1979 survey, only 4% of prison teachers received pre-service training in

correctional education (Zaro, 2000). Gehring and Puffer (2004) write, "Almost no correctional educators were professionally prepared to work in correctional education" (p. 23). They encountered few teachers with degrees in the field of correctional education.

My conversations confirm the observation of Gehring and Puffer, we rarely meet a colleague, who planned to become a prison teacher. Even Emma, who experienced her father's incarceration and nurtured a deep-seated desire [to help], fell into prison teaching. She says, "As a young girl, I wanted to help. I wanted to do something for my father, to help those people [in prison]." Heidegger's (1962) words also resonate with the dichotomy of our lifeworld, as it moves from dark to light under the different phases of the Moon:

> In its thrownness *Dasein* has been surrendered to the changes of day and night. Day with its brightness gives the possibility of sight; night takes this away. (p. 465)

Lingering warmth. Our path is illuminated by the silver light of the Moon, when we walk in one of our many presences, as the one-caring, the person who is ready "to bestow and spend oneself and make oneself available" (Noddings, 1984, p. 19). We are weavers of cozy blankets to offer warmth and protection and a safe haven for our students, "a lingering warmth of human connection, the belief that one is not, after all, so very much alone" (Strout, 1999, p. 125). We prison teachers are resented and frequently reprimanded, for

"caring too much" for our students. On the other hand, we see the officers as generally uncaring, unconcerned with the welfare of the incarcerated. The following story, told by a colleague, illustrates this point:

> One of my students got sick with flu-like symptoms that became progressively worse. His complaints were dismissed by his housing officer, and he was not given a pass to the dispensary. I contacted prison officials to help him receive proper treatment when he developed a high fever and constant headaches, and was obviously very ill. At this point the man had to be hospitalized with what turned out to be meningitis, that he had most likely contacted when he tried to nurse an injured pigeon back to health. I went to visit him in the hospital. I was sitting with him when he died... The nurse told me, meningitis can be cured if caught in time.

The teacher is weeping by the time he reaches the end of the story, and so is the audience. Yet, we share in the comfort of knowing that once again one of us was able to be that "lingering warmth of human connection," and the man died but "not after all, so very much alone." Our double vision is tested at times, straining to see a human heart under that blue shirt with the officer's badge.

Care and double vision. Exercising what Noddings (1986) calls "the essential part of caring" (p. 16) does not mean that we abandon our double vision and forget that we are caring for people who committed crimes. We have come to understand that our caring must apply double vision that permits us to see the person concealed under the commitment number as a human being in need of genuine human care. This caring aptly is described by Levinas (1987),

as “Command[ing] me to not remain indifferent to this death, to not let the Other die alone, that is, to answer for the life of the other person” (p. 109). And herein lie the root causes of the daily struggle for the prison teacher: to live in the paradigm of care amid the paradigm of punishment. Dr. Harvey Powelson, resident psychiatrist at San Quentin in the 1950s, came to understand the “striking contrast” of different views of the prisoner in the context of medical and psychiatric treatment. However, his observations are equally applicable in the arena of educational programs:

> No matter how assiduously the guiders, carers, treaters and medics tried to carry out their mission, they found themselves frustrated at every turn by the Custody Division (guards) with its punitive approach to the prisoners. [There is] a striking contrast between the custodial and the psychiatric view of the prisoner. The custodial man regards the prisoner, at least unofficially, as a special form of humanity, and acts on the premise that each prisoner is a cunning malingerer and that each staff member who is not a guard falls easy prey to the chicanery of the criminal mind. (as cited in Mitford, 1973, p. 101)

Like Dr.Powelson, every prison teacher suffers from frustration generated by the discrepancy between custody’s and treatment staff’s regard and treatment of prisoners. Where a prison guard sees a “cunning malingerer,” without any redeeming qualities, thus, someone on a lower social order from himself or herself, a prison teacher perceives an equal and vulnerable human being, in need of different kinds of services on his or her way to redemption.

We prison teachers see people engaged in learning and call them students, and every fiber in our body is jolted in protest when we hear, “Hey, convict,” my one-time Warden’s favored way to call out to them. Mild mannered Alesis is “ready to punch his mouth,” when the Duty Lieutenant comes into her classroom, and to gain the students’ attention bellows “thugs.” We are not in denial of the dark side of their reality. We simply are guiding our students to recover their human potential and restore their self-esteem, by educating them toward the pursuit of anatomy and freedom.

Many faces of the one-caring. In the writings and conversations of nurses I often find a strong familiarity with their professional concerns, questioning and reflections. Indeed our professions share many similar attributes. We both care for people who are routinely objectified, as a disease or as a commitment number, by the professional hierarchy. We both work in settings where skills and care are equally needed, yet not equally valued. Prison teachers, like nurses have harkened to the call to care, although we understand the difficulty of its elusive nature that defies taxonomical definition.

> Caring cannot be possessed in a way that we possess a skill... Caring is something that we must continually redeem, retrieve, regain, and recapture each time we are called to be in caring encounters. (Hultgren, 1994, p. 180)

The best practitioners of both professions “continually redeem, retrieve, regain and recapture” the willingness and propensity to care, even when our best

efforts might seem to have been for naught as we lose a patient or see a student return to prison. This is why the questions Berman (1994) poses in conversation with nurses, resonate with practitioners of correctional education:

> What is the meaning of being called to care in settings where persons are seen as objects... where reciprocity is nonexistent? Where the reward system is inadequate, not valued, or unfair? ... How does one maintain authenticity when subtle cues are given that the inauthentic is valued? (p. 166)

From "sorrow" to "custody" the word "care" carries many different meanings (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 2004, p. 221). Similarly, for each of us to be disposable holds a different meaning that creates different means of discharging our self-selected pedagogical role and responsibility as the one-caring. Caring teachers develop fine skills to navigate the prison's institutionally prescribed prohibitions on relationships with inmates. Education staff "must walk the thin line between [custodial] staff and prisoners" (Duguid, as cited in Jepson, 1989, p. 48). Yet, we maintain a personal, inclusive and respectful relationship *of* "*inconspicuous familiarity*" (Heidegger 1926/1962, p. 137) with our students. The students respond by being diligent in their work. They reciprocate by offering subtle signs of care and respect. These caring relationships reward the teachers more than the "system."

> Students realize they are cared-for and they are internally motivated to do their best; they respond to care... with positive growth and change. They are motivated to learn. (Wright, 2004, p. 12)

Emma became a teacher when, she says, “I realized that I could share my knowledge with people, and sharing what I enjoy made a difference.” Noddings (1986) would say Emma “is disposable, [she] recognizes that she has a self to invest, to give” (p. 19). Emma cares deeply for her students without being sentimental about them. Instead, she creates a safe place, where mistakes are allowed but expectations are high and her “ladies” are empowered with a measure of self esteem along with the curriculum that provides highly marketable skills.

Catherine’s voice carries an unmistakable streak of resentment as she contemplates her different “hats:”

> I certainly don't remember whenever I was preparing to be a teacher that anybody told me well, you got to be a psychiatrist. You got to do this and that. And the mothering role. I am mothered out at home. I don't mother people here. I got a kid at home to mother.

Yet, in a different conversation she freely admits to “raising these kids,” as the ever-lowering age of incarcerated women places new demands on the school. Catherine is present in her acts of caring, as she reluctantly provides much needed mothering to her young students, when she sneaks in decent clothes for the women to wear to their job interviews, or when she offers herself as a role model.

Catherine is not alone experiencing bouts of reluctance. At times we all have felt overwhelmed because, as Hultgren (1994) points out, “We cannot

merely respond to the call but must assume responsibility for it -- to hold in question and question our continual ability to respond" (p. 17). There are days under those dark phases of the Moon, when the responsibility to care, although eagerly accepted, weighs so heavily in our luggage that we need to question our ability to continually respond.

Alesis radiates excitement and genuine investment in each individual student as she celebrates their small triumphs:

> I am enthralled whenever I see students that are excited about math. Their investigative skills and knowledge far exceeds their common sense. I want to be a conduit to show them how to use the gifts that they've been blessed with [sic].

As a GED teacher, she is at a pivotal point in the students' educational attainment and instrumental in the success of her school. Alesis, like most of us committed teachers, builds and cultivates her students in the Heideggerian sense for life-long achievement and growth, grounded in the belief that even if we will not witness it, growth will come for our students:

> Cultivating and caring (colere, cultura) are a kind of building. But man [sic] not only cultivates what produces growth out of itself; he also builds in the sense of *aedificare*, by erecting things that cannot come into being and subsist by growing.
> (1971, p. 217)

Heidegger, again, leads us into the un-concealing light of the sun by first evoking an image as basic as tilling the earth, and then with a poetic leap shepherding us into a transcendental building-dwelling place. Prison schools,

more than any educational arena, have a last chance responsibility to till the hungry intellectual soil of imprisoned students. First, images of c*olere* spring to mind, of seeds setting forth small roots, getting stronger, taking possession of the nurturing earth, building their own dwelling. Soul-sustaining moments for the teacher to witness as students "with what pleasure, what joy... enter harbors [they are] seeing for the first time" (Cavafy, 1975, p. 35); the heretofore elusive *abracadabra* becomes words, sentences, books. Thus, grounded in the mortal earth students, and teachers as well, can attend to *aedificare*, erecting transcendental dwelling places that leap forth toward the divine.

Barbara, who is a special education teacher, came to prison with a clear understanding of the needs of at-risk students and a one-caring attitude toward them that she developed in the public school system. She approaches her students with exceptional tact, patience and passionate care for their future:

> There's very little consideration for what possibly these young men have gone through. I teach guys as young as 14 and 15 years of age and... we are really putting in a lot of youngsters in prison and they have committed horrendous crimes but these kids can't read. They certainly can't think.
> Before I even begin to teach anything, I work with making them feel comfortable, helping them to know that they can trust and rely on me. And that, you know, is diametrically opposed to working in the DOC. Many of these men have been mocked and made fun of... they're very distrustful.

Barbara's remarks recall an unforgettable exchange I had with Keith, a difficult student that I had to "tame" first by showing him that he is important, that he belongs to my sphere of care.

> Keith kept giving me a hard time coming in late, not putting any effort into his work, being mouthy and disruptive in class -- the works. I got tired and frustrated after several days of warning to no avail and set him down in my office Thursday afternoon for a serious one-on-one conversation. Although he was a little subdued, expecting a tirade of reprimand, I guess, but being aware of the rest of the class quietly watching the outcome of the interview, tried to appear as self-assured and cocky as he could. I simply, quietly asked him, What's wrong with you Keith? His eyes grew big as he replied, No one ever pulled me up like that. Nobody. Nobody ever pulled me up and asked what's wrong with me! You really care! He sounded incredulous, and I thought, What a shame that this should be such a shocking surprise for him. (Journal entry, March, 2004)

Peter's words express the desire to care pedagogically and the imposed limitations to exercise it freely:

> Rules and regulations that have been stipulated by DOC, contradict what you will do as a teacher to be effective. You must have some social relationship, you must be able to get them on a personal level, before you can teach the individual.

Like Barbara, Peter, and Catherine, we all have run a course that was diagonally opposed to DOC practices. Why did we take that chance? What are the motivating forces to risk reprimand, or even more serious consequences? Is it

witnessing the pain and suffering of the inmate students? Is it the weight of their horrifying stories we carry?

Tracing back my journey, I recognize that the guiding power that led me to the far country of corrections is my inheritance of *noblesse oblige*, the giving gift I have received from my parents. I believe I can make a difference by teaching my students valuable skills, and by inviting them to dream and envision a life free of chaos and violence. The motivation comes from my students. For sustenance I recall the words of one long-ago student who said, "Who would've thought, me, a college man! I can't use a gun for an argument anymore." The validation comes from those who were successful in turning their lives around.

"Conscience manifests itself as the call of care: the caller is *Dasein*" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 322). Is it our conscience that causes it all to matter to us? Or is it simply because "As human beings we want to care and to be cared for. *Caring* is important in itself" (Noddings, 1984, p. 7).

Being present to care. As any young mother, I was very concerned with my son's happiness, well-being and safety. I worried that some harm might come to him. The idea that disturbed me even more was that something might happen to him when I would not be there to take care of him, to wipe his tears, bandage his scraped knee, retrieve the kite from the trees. Thirty years later I still wish I could be near him, shielding him from harm by my presence.

> Presence is
> more than flesh
> warm or cold
> and absence is
> more than loss
> or sum of
> grief, the love
> not yet told.
> (Gutteridge, 1982, p. 79)

Oddly, I experience similar feelings regarding my students. I wish to make my presence available to them, to retrieve the lost kites of their dreams and hopes, to bandage their mental and emotional scrapes and bruises, to shield them from harm that is often self-inflicted. To be present and willing to answer the call to care is a mental attitude stemming from one's personal ethics. However, it requires the actual physical presence of the one-caring, a spatial proximity to be at arm's length, that Heidegger (1926/1962) calls *ready-to-hand*. In practical terms, "What is ready-to-hand in our everyday dealings has the character of *closeness*" (p. 135).

Care: A feminine dialectic. Genuine care is not altruistic; however, it is embedded in a loving practice that is grounded in a feminine dialectic (Belenky, et al., 1986). Care is intuitive and process oriented; it is interested in the "means" more than the "ends." Care is personal and collaborative, synthesizing in a generalized performance the practical and the spiritual. The voice of care is listening, and like a good mother, it takes responsibility for others.

Again and again, my companions speak of "Mothering," even Peter, the sole male of the crew. Catherine laments, "I am mothered out at home. I don't mother people here," but her actions contradict her words. Emma cherishes "that mother attitude I took with them. And they respected me for that role." Cultivating a "mother persona" also can serve as a helpful safety shield a female teacher can hide behind, especially in a male institution. Acting from a "motherly" perspective allows the teacher to reach out beyond the institutional constraints and develop a nurturing atmosphere rooted in mutual respect, where learning finds a home.

As Emma notes, our students, regardless of their age, are very receptive to mothering ministrations. I tease them, saying they act like needy children, thinking I am their mother. They always are asking for things: "Give me a pencil, give me paper, give me a band-aid, give me your attention."

> Mrs. Sayko, why don't you bring us some donuts tomorrow?
> Why should I bring you donuts? Am I your mother?
> No, you are my *homegirl.*

"Homegirl" is a term not defined in any dictionary. Even the *Dictionary of Afro-American Slang* (1970, p. 66) only mentions home*boy*, with this meager definition: "person from one's home town (Southern)." In real usage homeboy stands for buddy, friend, protector, confidante. Homegirl, a counterpart, is a partner for homeboy. A term of endearment, colorful and rich with the mouth-watering aroma of home-cooked meals, the sound of music and laughter flying

up from the fire escape on sultry summer nights. My home, my girl, one in whom I can trust and confide. I wear your name for me with a smile in my heart. I wear it proudly as a badge of your trust and acceptance of what I am, and what I am to you -- a one-caring, certain kind of person.

Dwelling in Care

Conversationally sailing around the archipelago of spatiality, temporality, corporeality and relationality, we have brought to the surface knowledge and understanding about our lifeworlds, previously buried many fathoms deep in the ocean floor of our pre-understandings. Although these four existentials (van Manen, 1990) oriented to all cardinal directions, we insistently kept returning to the island of our lived relationality, where we dwell together with our cared-for Others. The island's strong pull should not be a surprise; the foundation of our profession is cemented on relationships and care. Perhaps those of us who possess a keen openness to relationality and a propensity to care harken to the call to enter the profession, because these two qualities were evident in every utterance throughout my conversations.

Talking about the need to smooth the turbulence created by officers, Peter says, "Each time I come in the classroom, my first concern is, who is in a bad spell? I look around to see whose head is on the desk, and I go, "Is there anything wrong with you?," Alesis confesses to a "serious wanting to have some impact on these people's lives." Catherine's concern is the particular need

of her female inmates, who tend to “Share right in the room with the class anything that happened to them personally. Mostly it’s something with their children. And they’re in tears. And you, you’ve got to talk to them and help them through this.”

And Emma realizes that, “He was just a little boy living in a grown up body, just a little child wanting someone to say, ‘You are important to me.’”

Barbara shows care in her tactful ways of reaching out to her special education students. She shares the story of a student who had serious difficulties in math:

> He said this was baby stuff and he was stupid not being able to do it. He was so ashamed and so humiliated that he would not even let me teach him. It took several weeks before he even communicated that with me and still, his anxiety level goes sky high anytime he has to do math. It took me weeks of building trust with him and letting him work in reading and language until he felt comfortable enough with me, that I was not going to harm his psyche.

Wright (2004) calls care the “Heart” of prison teaching for good reason, while admitting that, “Perhaps it is surprising and incongruous to speak of care and prisons in the same breath” (p. 191). My conversation partners’ reflections, indicating the central role of care in the lived experiences of prison teachers, are similar to Wright’s view, that “Care is a matter of dwelling in the duality of self-other, in such a way that recognizes the integrity of each party” (p. 199).

The Gift of Outpouring

> That need... that need is just an endless hole. But
> you really have to get your refilling of your pitcher.
> (Barbara)

One of Heidegger's (1971) most poetic images is a simple, clay water jug. He elevates the humble vessel into ethereal beauty by un-concealing its essence. The jug's *raison d'être* is not to have been made as a simple object to be accepted in its physical appearance as a holding vessel. The true essence of this container is the void, the emptiness its clay walls and bottom enclose, thus making it capable of receiving and holding and the gift of giving, by pouring a drink, for which it had to be made. "To pour from the jug is to give. The giving of the outpouring can be a drink" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 172).

Reflecting on the guiding question of my journey -- What is it like to be a prison teacher? -- the image of the humble clay jug began to emerge on the canvas of my thoughts. Indeed, Heidegger offers a fine and fitting metaphor for the essence of a prison teacher. Do we not enclose a void in our being, that is waiting, ready-to-hand, to receive and hold accumulated skills and knowledge for the purpose of giving? Educators, in prison and elsewhere, need to be "outpouring." Do we not freely and willingly pour out this "drink" of knowledge, even wishing that it were possible to "pour" it directly into our students' minds?

Heidegger (1971) says the potter "only shapes the clay. *No -- he shapes the void*" (p. 169). As educators, it is also our privilege and responsibility to "shape the void" as we engage and lead, *educare* or *educere* (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 2004, p. 453), our students out of the darkness of ignorance and into the light of knowledge.

The Gift of Receiving

A thirst-quenching drink of water, poured from a simple jug, can be a gift. However, to be given the ability to offer that drink, to be allowed an outpouring, to be invited for the role of the jug -- are gifts of a divine nature. Heidegger (1971) introduces us to the fourfold through the exploration of the "jug thing." Accepting the jug for our metaphor, we are included in the fourfold, which allows us to go to the spring and refill our pitchers with the gift of outpouring.

> In the gift of the outpouring, mortals and divinities each dwell in their different ways. Earth and sky dwell in the gift of outpouring. In the gift of outpouring earth and sky, divinities and mortals dwell *together all at once*. (Heidegger, 1971, p. 173)

In our Being-in-the-world, we "dwell together all at once" and share this lifeworld of prison with our closest "others," our students. The dwelling-sharing is not a our privilege alone; our students dwell in the gift of outpouring as well. They reciprocate our outpouring with rich offerings of thirst-quenching drinks from their own jugs. They gift us with their enthusiasm and joy upon being able

to face challenges, take risks or make better decisions powered by the self-confidence gained from education. Although we usually do not have the closure of knowing when, upon returning to society our ex-students are able to rebuild successful lives, we often have their heart-felt thanks and warm words of appreciation.

As we dwell together, our gift of outpouring is returned manyfold, as we become better persons because our students allow us to transcend our own selfish concerns, by allowing us to give. Harris (1988) learned the joy of giving and discovered the gifts received by the giver when the offering is graciously accepted, during a long solitary canoe trip down the entire length of the mighty Mississippi river. His reflections resonate with the prison teacher:

> Sometimes it takes a pretty big heart to receive, to let someone share with you. You have to put your pride and your ego aside. And you'd be surprised just how much giving you're doing while you're getting, because some people are just dying to give and have no one to give to. And when you let them, you give something in return. Like listening to me rambling on. I'm not sure how much I was giving to you, but you were giving me plenty. That's why I'm saying you should never refuse a gift. It let's the giver give. (p. 95)

Consider some of our students: adults, some of them older than the teacher, under-educated survivors, who made a living without the "three R's." Now, they are invited or required to sit in a school room like kids, like teenagers. We can have all the world to offer, but if our intentions are refused we cannot

experience the exhilaration of giving and our full jug becomes heavier and heavier. They, our students, have to put their pride and bruised egos aside and give us the gift of receiving, allow us the gift of outpouring. It is in the mutual giving and receiving that we complete the circle of Being-with-the-other, as in the simple words of St. Francis of Assisi, "For it is in the giving that we receive."

Our Students, Our Selves

Being defined by our students is not unique to prison teachers. "Teachers' knowledge and practice are nested -- teachers feel, think and act in close relationship with their students" (Wright, 2004, p. 204). Teachers' being-in-the-world, in their lifeworld of the education arena, is but one side of the coin, whose other side holds the imprint of students. As this being-in also implies being-with, according to Heidegger (1962/1926),

> Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one I share with Others. The world of Dasein is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is *Being-with*-Others. Their Being-in-themselves within-the-world is *Dasein-with* [*Mitdasein*]. (p.155)

If teachers, like members of the armed forces, were given dogtags for identification we would ask for an extra large with room enough for our entire roster of students.

How strongly we align our lives in prison with our students was evident in our conversations; we had to be guided back to the person of the teacher quite

often. Conversations circled around our "gift of outpouring," as the participants reflected on prison teaching:

> There is so much knowledge and information to be gained, and my goal is to give, empower them in a way that enriches their lives. (Emma)

> Such a sense of accomplishment to see what they can do. And they can be in control of something instead of everybody controlling their lives. (Peter)

Van Manen (1990) writes, "Through hopes and expectations we have a perspective on life to come" (p. 104). What hopes, what expectations, what promises can we give to our students? How can we, in the classroom behind bars, restore the inmates' "mood of life of youth as one of expectation and a pervasive sense of 'morningness' as when we start a promising day" (van Manen, 1990, p. 104)?

> It was the week before Christmas. From the abundance of seasonal offerings on television, I had just about overdosed on the "Nutcracker," but I could not deny myself just one more concert on PBS. I love all kinds of group singing, especially a male chorus, and this evening the men's choir of Moorhouse College sang like angels. Their well-trained, smoothly blending voices filled the room with the timeless beauty and warmth of well-known hymns and spirituals. I was watching the upturned shining faces of the hundred or so singers: proud, intelligent, self-assured, hopeful, beautiful, young African-American men. College men, in their twenties, pouring energy and talent into singing in the holidays. I started crying, "My God, my students could be like these!" My students could be these young men, singing happily, instead of wasting their lives and cussing their fate behind bars. My heart broke for

> every single one of them. My students... they could be just as proud, intelligent, self-assured and hopeful. They could turn shining faces up toward a promising future, instead of hanging their head, as if in mourning, counting their days. What have they done? What have we done to them? What can we do for them? (Journal entry, December, 1999)

I cried for my students and I cried for myself, because I felt overwhelmed by the demands of this relationship and the futility and inadequacy of our best efforts in the face of their needs. My jug seemed painfully small, as I perceived a need for gifts of outpouring the size of the oceans. I received some consolation by understanding that I was truly being-with-the-Other.

Levinas (1979) asks: "How can a being enter into relation with the other without allowing its very self to be crushed by the other?" (p. 77). In the course of teaching in prison, the self indeed, is crushed by the overwhelming needs of the Other, time and time again, in order to re-emerge in a state of being-present, oriented towards the Other. In our quest to work out the question of Being adequately, as prison teachers we are called upon to subjugate our Being, to allow our own *Dasein* to dissolve into the kind of being of the Other (Heidegger, 1962). These are the moments in our journey when we unload our own luggage and, un-encumbered with personal entanglements, follow the footsteps of the Buddha to contribute in a small measure toward the search for the end of human sorrow (Kornfield, 1996).

A Prayer for Goodness

Approaching the end of this chapter -- the end of my journey -- I am consumed by the idea of "goodness," as a true and appropriate measure of the quality of interpretive inquiry (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). One question plays a haunting xylophone in my mind, Did I meet the criteria of goodness? In my quest at meaning making did I, as Cavafy (1975, p. 35) implores, "stop at Phoenician trading stations to buy fine things, mother-of-pearl and coral (of our personal stories), amber and ebony (of our shared prison experiences), sensual perfume of every kind" (of our relationships)? Will my interpretation of the phenomenon invite the reader into the lifeworld of the prison teacher, and will the reader leave with a "phenomenological nod" of understanding what it is like to be a prison teacher? In Chapter V I explore these questions as I share my reflections and present some suggestions for consideration to "improve our practice and, ultimately our world" (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002).


SPRING
GRADUATION
1997

CHAPTER V:

LANDFALL, ITHAKA:
MUSINGS ON THE WAY HOME

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you're destined for.
But don't hurry the journey at all.
Better it lasts for years,
so you're old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.

Sailing on the changing sea of circumstances delayed my journey and caused me to heed Cavafy's (1975) advice. I did not hurry the journey. It took many years to reach my Ithaka, and I now am admittedly old, but "wealthy with all [I have] gained on the way," the "mother-of-pearl and coral, amber and ebony" of new understandings, and the "sensual perfumes" of experiences.

The journey metaphor that guided my study is etymologically affirmed by Hoad (1993, p. 248). In its current reincarnation, the word means a long voyage, befitting of thoughtful reflection required by phenomenological research. However, in the 13th century usage, "journey" was used to mean a "spell of travel," what we would call a day trip. Many prisons are established in remote areas. In the small group of my research companions and myself, three of us have quite a "spell of travel" to and from work. A 14th century dialect, used "journey" to mean a day's work (hence journeyman). We were looking at the

lifeworld of prison teachers. All the artifacts collected on our journey -- meanings un-concealed, understandings received, experiences shared and celebrated -- belong in a day's work of the prison teacher.

The Making of a Prison Teacher

When I entered the lifeworld of prison teachers my goal was to reconstruct this phenomenon, as I knew it then, from selected building blocks of first impressions, significant events and meaningful conversations with colleagues. I needed to create a backdrop of pre-understanding, against which we could project and illuminate the discoveries of our journey. This preliminary exploration of the phenomenon brought forth a series of questions, that served as our navigational guides. I closed Chapter II with the following paragraph:

> What is it like to be part of this culture of prison teachers? What makes an educator a *correctional* educator? Is there a turning point when a school teacher becomes a prison teacher? What forces are at work pulling people into a permanent commitment to this field? Are prison teachers fools, or dreamers of impossible dreams? Are they merely *doing* special kinds of things or are they truly *being* special kinds of persons?

As the conversations with my participants progressed, I began to notice the emergence of two overlapping, but distinct images of people who teach in prison. I call one "Correctional Educator" and the other "Prison Teacher." I need to emphasize that these titles represent subtle differences in style and philosophy, and by no means reflect ranking or value judgment of any sort. If

my biases position me closer to one than the other, it is for the reason that I, perhaps, recognize in myself more of the attributes of one than the other.

Correctional Educator

In the United States "Correctional Educator" is the favored title, while the European community uses "Prison Teacher." I have no reason to believe that these terms were other than an arbitrary label for the profession, and their interchangeable use supports that proposition. However, from the beginning of my involvement with the CEA (Correctional Education Association) and the EPEA (European Prison Teachers Association) I sensed a different attitude, a different philosophical stance embedded by the language.

Using "correctional" and "education" in the same sentence seems like an oxymoron, having learned from our investigation of the "uncertain role of education within the prison" attributed to "conflict between the contradictory philosophies espoused by custodial and treatment personnel" and "hostility of security staff toward education" (Bell, as cited in Gehring, 2002, p. 90). Yet, we call our prison teachers *correctional* educators, even though the title associates us with corrections and implies an unfortunate affiliation with what is wrong with prison teaching. Placing the emphasis, perhaps unintentionally, on "correctional" instead of on "education," suggests the attitude of the outsider: we are going to correct, rehabilitate, educate you -- but keeping you, the Other, at arm's length.

Correctional educators might apply for a position in prison and say: “I want to teach and I’m here and I’m not going to go anywhere else” (Catherine). They might “teach their heart out,” be the ultimate professionals, follow the curriculum, perform their duties, “do unto” their students what their speciality requires. They go home at the end of the day satisfied with a job well done.

Prison Teacher

I was experienced a different ethos in corrections and correctional education in 1990 in Vancouver, British Columbia, at the 45th International Conference of the Correctional Education Association, where I presented “Relevant Curriculum,” a program I wrote for vocational education in prison. While I was engaged in my study, I had the opportunity to attend European Prison Education Association (EPEA) conferences where I was introduced to a different paradigm of educational programs in European penal institutions. In 1997 I was invited to present a paper on inmate narratives at the EPEA Conference in Budapest, Hungary. I also participated in the 1999 EPEA Conference in Athens, Greece.

At these events I met colleagues from many European countries, as well as from Canada and Australia. We exchanged ideas and reflections on the very different lived experiences of prison teachers. In this global dialogue I learned of a different ethos of correctional education prevalent these countries. The pursuit of autonomy and freedom through education for inmates, who are least free and most dependent, has proven to be not only possible and quite

successful. As key-note addresses, presentations and lectures by prominent leaders of the correctional and educational institutions of the host countries suggested, the penal system in Europe operates by a different paradigm than the United States. It seems to be tighter, more "streamlined," more dedicated to rehabilitation. It also allows for a wide range of creativity in sentencing, especially in Western Europe, where sentencing is not limited to incarceration, and where the offender is not stripped of personal dignity.

At the 1997 EPEA Conference in Budapest, I listened with a mixture of awe and envy to Erik Såheim's presentation on the Norwegian prison island, Bastøy, where about 105 inmates live in 4-6 person "family" units in individual villas, under the guidance of seventy staff members. Their education, based on democratic principles, is not restricted to the classroom but is seen as an integrated holistic service, implanting self-sufficiency through practical trade and business. The inmates maintain businesses in forestry and livestock, farm for their own food production, build and maintain the facilities and participate in community activities in a planned progression toward returning to society. A similar model in Holland, called "normalcy," allows prisoners to "retain their citizenship, even when in prison. In Holland when citizens have trouble they are not shunned from the community and locked away, forgotten. Rather, they are helped to fix their issues and kept close as the solution is worked on. This system does not train prisoners to be tougher criminals -- it trains them to be better citizens" (Gehring, 2002, p. 92).

When a penal system is called “normalcy” it follows that teachers within that system face demands and enjoy freedoms vastly different from a system based on a punitive model. Being invited and allowed to work toward the rehabilitation of inmate students fosters the educator to become, what I call, a prison teacher. With the terms “prison education” as well as “prison teacher” I suggest an attitude that sides with the intended beneficiary, the prisoner. Peter defines “prison teacher” in comparison to a “regular teacher,”

> As that person, or that professional who understands and shows sympathy to the background of the type of student population he or she deals with, and seems to find ways in which to address their specific and unique needs. That’s a prison teacher. Uhm, someone just teaching in the prison [is] just a regular teacher. If you don’t seem to understand and you want to be just a teacher from the public school, you’re not going to be successful. There are certain ways in which you have to adjust to the prison environment.

Prison teachers might declare with Emma, “I just really believe I’ve been molded into this environment. I think my whole life has led me to this point.” They invest themselves into being-with their students, whom they teach to become life-long learners, train to obtain excellent skills, counsel to develop positive self-image and guide toward a hopeful future. They go home at the end of the day pondering, like Matthews (1998):

> An important question to me at the end of each day is, “Have I made someone’s life better today?” With no other group of people I have been able to say “I believe so,” with so much consistency, and know that I have a goal for tomorrow as well. (p. 101)

A Rose by Any Other Name... Can Still Be of a Different Color

I appropriated the terms "correctional educator" and "prison teacher" and dyed them in different colors by attributing a set of characteristics to each. I needed this arbitrary designation to be able to distinguish between teachers who are involved and those who are committed. This contrast is illustrated in the hilarious explanation of Brown (1988):

> What is the difference between involvement and commitment? Think of ham and eggs. The chicken is involved. The pig is committed. (p. 60)

At the beginning of my explorations into the lifeworld of prison education, I used the terms "correctional educator," "prison teacher," or "correctional teacher" interchangeably, as the nomenclature for education professionals, who ply their trade in prison. As our journey progressed, my companions and I began to recognize subtle, but significant differences between the attitude and philosophy of our colleagues.

Some teachers apply for a position, ("Sometimes a job is just that, a job, income, benefits," Catherine) get hired, and settle in for a life of involved, professional service in "doing certain kinds of things" for their inmate students. Some teachers follow a calling ("I think my whole life has led me to this point," Emma) and embrace the commitment to meliorate the intellectual-mental-human condition of their students. We recognized this latter group of "certain kind of persons" to be representative of what is best in correctional education. Members of this group reached their Ithaka, thus became Prison Teachers, who

are willing to treat the offenders what they are capable of being and becoming: open, loving, generous, ambitious and responsible.

Metamorphosis

"Educational transformation is as much a moral and spiritual calling as it is a professional obligation" (Brown & Moffett, 1999, p. 4). We prison teachers started our quest driven by professional obligation and, transformed by our journey, harkened to the "moral and spiritual calling" that is the bedrock of good teaching. There are no fanfares announcing the completion of the making of a prison teacher. The transformation from educator to correctional educator to prison teacher is a subtle process, much like aging in a good way. A new line in the face, a few more grey hairs, a slower step also bring patience, tolerance, understanding, wisdom -- and with luck maintain our innocence, so we still can assume that

> ...with knowledge would come desirable attitudes and dispositions. Like Plato, we believe(d) that to know good is to do it, and that the good could be known. We believe(d) that we could all be part of the solution, for the truth will set us free. We believe(d) that we could empower our students to act freely and from a critical consciousness. (Pagano, 1998, p. 256)

A turning point for many of us came with the realization, that to empower our students, to enable them to act from a critical consciousness, we need a different approach to teaching. We needed to allow ourselves to shift focus from a pragmatic curriculum limited to instruction of specific skill sets, to a holistic curriculum that answers the multitude of needs of our very special

students. To be effective prison teachers, we need to understand and tend to the "implicit agenda" of teaching, because "While the explicit agenda of true teaching is this or that particular art, its implicit agenda is the art of self-understanding, the art of humanity" (Grudin, 1990, p. 150).

Again, I found our students' needs and our ways of responding to them parallel to the concerns and practice of health professionals. We are not dwelling fully in our vocation, if we only teach the lesson, treat the wound, do the easily defined, pragmatic requirements of our duties. We cannot only treat the disease or teach the missing skill -- and neglect the entire person. The words of O'Neil (1999) describe it well:

> Over time, my nursing practice has changed from a need to do for patients to a need to understand patients. Long ago I was uncomfortable in a patient's room unless I was making a bed, giving chemotherapy, instructing on a prednisone taper schedule. Slowly I began to see other needs that all the instructing, talking and doing were not addressing: the need of patients for the human presence in the face of their suffering. (p. 75)

Like O'Neil, many of us prison teachers experience the same shift in emphasis as our understanding of the needs of our students deepens.

First Person Singular

I recall shaving off some of the minutiae of my daily lessons, to save time and energy for individual tutoring in basic arithmetic -- not included in my occupational curriculum. I remember questioning my judgment when I "went off schedule" to devote an hour to a group discussion that spontaneously grew

out of some common concern. And I fondly remember the aftermath of having calm and satisfied students, appreciating the chance to express ideas and exchange opinions in the safe haven of our classroom. My room is a sanctuary, like the galley on a ship:

> There is an old rule that in the galley every man can speak his mind with impunity, as at Hyde Park Corner in London. An officer who held anything spoken in the galley against a man the moment he steps outside would soon find himself sabotaged off the ship.
> (de Hanto, as cited in Goffman, 1959, p. 198)

Now, I schedule breaks for discussing a variety of topics, from parenting to world geography -- only in full sentences and in a parliamentary manner, please -- as an addition to the vocational skills curriculum, and a much needed addition to an unwritten life skills curriculum. I do not think I shortchange my students, or the State, when I invite some meandering. Because, as Berman (1998, p. 172) says, "Meandering is embedded in a limited freedom where life is seen not so much as a problem to be solved but rather a mystery to be lived." My inmate students' "limited freedom" opens up when they are allowed to live intellectually, experience a life of mystery and discovery. I believe I am fulfilling my moral, social and professional obligations when I open new vistas to be explored, allow individual voices to be heard, and join my students as we collectively make progress, "not through improving what has been done, but reaching toward what has yet to be done" (Gibran, 1970, p. 17).

Turning the corner. A few years ago a book created quite a stir in correctional education. Written by a news reporter and a detective-turned schoolteacher, *The Corner* is a heartbreaking account of life in West Baltimore's ghetto, the "Projects." Simon and Burns (1997) present the true story of people who struggle to survive in the main drug market of Baltimore city, known as "The Corner." Nothing before gave us a truer insight and better understanding of this urban underworld.

A few fellow teachers read the book, and we formed a discussion group to help each other through the discovery of a part of America, which for many of us is strange, like a foreign country. Horrible lives are depicted in *The Corner* with frightening accuracy and unblinking detail, that sadly, many of our students readily identified as their own. They recognized their "homies," acquaintances and friends with whom they grew up, in the few photographs and proudly pointed out their old neighborhood on the accompanying map.

Through frightening glimpses into their lifeworlds, I have gained a clearer understanding of who these people, my students, are. Searing questions bombard my conscience: Why and how would these students want to strive to achieve higher goals in life, when they grew up with "goals" and "achievement" never entering their consciousness? How could they demonstrate good work habits, polite manners, even proper hygiene, when some of them literally lived on the street? How can they aspire for happiness, when they survived on bits of questionable pleasure?

The most painful reality-shock came when I realized that by-and-large my students have accepted their meager lives, and their singular aspiration is to return to them. This discovery demanded that I re-examine my philosophy of correctional education, re-formulate my curriculum, re-think my methods and recover my belief that, as Plato suggests:

> The human frame [is] a microcosm that could, with proper education, reflect the beauty and order of the universe. Teacher is a mediator between order that is implicit in the cosmos and order that is implicit in the individual. (As cited in Grudin, 1990, p. 150)

It became clear that, as important as they are, academic or vocational skills are not enough, restoring the "beauty and order of the universe" into the damaged human frame of our students is the bigger challenge. I mark this period as my rite of passage, my becoming a prison teacher.

Kurtz and Ketcham (as cited in Berman, 1998, p. 172) introduce me to the idea of working for goals that are obtainable by my will, and others that I cannot reach by will but, I believe, I can earn through deeper, spiritual means. As a "mediator" I need to guide my students on a path that will lead them to desired outcomes they can achieve by exercising their will to work hard for them. As a teacher I also am called to open up ways for my students to reach goals of lasting, intrinsic value that will have the power to restore the order between their individual lives and the cosmos.

" Decide on the Right Side"

Oh, yes!
I want you to will yourself to learn, gain knowledge,
and skills, the employment office calls marketable,
that will enable you to pay the rent, buy food,
in other words, be a provider.
But I also want you to attain wisdom,
that will help you to contemplate your options,
to decide on the right side,
to be a daddy, a true lover, a better man.
I can teach you to read, to write,
and do your numbers exceedingly well,
but you will have to grow into understanding
on your own.
Oh, yes!
I want you to have your pleasure,
although you might remember what all those
past pleasures have gained you.
I'd rather you aim for happiness,
so when you go to bed,
your night is free of demons,
and you sleep deservedly well.
(Sayko, 2004)

Different Animals

I think a prison teacher is somebody that wants to be here because they believe in what they're doing. They're dedicated to that purpose... Uhm, I don't want to say prison teachers are different animals, but they are because this, this is a school that is not a public school. Our job is education, but it's not public education. (Catherine)

The fact that "our job is education, but it is not public education" sets us apart from other professionals in the field of education. According to Gehring and Puffer (2004):

The most intense impediment might actually be a lack of professional awareness. This lack has been called

> the correctional educator identity problem. Many correctional educators do not know they are correctional educators. Instead they think they are institutional employees, or teachers in some particular content who happen to teach in a facility. (p. 52)

"Correctional educators are frequently afflicted with a professional identity problem," writes Zaro (2000, p. 191). As firmly grounded as we might be in our lifeworld as prison teachers -- and my conversation partners did not hesitate to affirm it -- public perception still gnaws at the professional pride of the ego.

> They look at you, like [you were] some kind of freak. Certainly not a professional teacher. Even a friend of mine said, "I can't figure out why a good teacher would ever want to work there." (Alesis)

> I get the same thing. Why would you want to work there when you have all these skills and ability? In this job I feel like it's just not respected, and yet, I know that it is so needed, anything that benefits helping these students benefits our society, and yet... (Barbara)

> My own mother! She can't bring herself to say "My daughter works in prison." It has to be an "institution." It irritates me. I tell her, "Mother, I am a professional, I write articles, I give speeches at international forums, there is nothing to be embarrassed about working in a prison." But she just can't handle it. (Sayko)

> The general public out there... when you say you're teaching [in prison] "You are teaching criminals? You are not afraid to even be among these criminals?" "You are crazy!" There is somehow the notion out there that teachers who teach in correctional education maybe those are people who are not too qualified to teach in... in a "real" school. (Peter)

The negative reception prison teachers receive from the public has a corrosive effect on our self-esteem. Even more damaging is how the negative public attitude informs politics and influences political decision makers, who hold our livelihood within their power. Our job security, income, benefits are contingent on the changing tide of the political power structure.

We already work, according to the feudalistic terminology, “at the pleasure of” the State Superintendent. In a negative political climate any budget deficit can bring forth a recommendation to eliminate our programs, as many of us have experienced in past years. Even as recently as January of 2005, an entire school in my state has been closed, faculty and staff fired with no recourse. Our livelihood and professional pride are always threatened by the *Sword of Damocles* of being terminated. We are sitting in our positions like Damocles at the feast, whose fable was told by Cicero: Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse invited Damocles, his sycophant to a lavish banquet. As a punishment for his envy, a sword was hung by a hair over Damocles, who was afraid to stir and of course, his enjoyment of the banquet was spoiled by fear (Brewer, 1870/1978).

Hidden Professionals in Search of Identity

The dichotomy, that is apparent throughout our journey, surfaces again as we contemplate the building blocks of our professional identity. We are professional educators, committed to a mission, convinced that we perform an essential service for the benefit of society. Our self-esteem is bolstered and we feel validated to hear, “Correctional education is not a job, but a mission; not

only a profession, but also a vocation: to serve fellowmen" (Pinton, 1982, p. 9). Yet, we often are relegated to the lower rungs of the hierarchical ladder when people, even in the larger education arena, question with disbelief our credentials. When applying for a high school position, Alesis was told: "We only interview [applicants with] professional certificates."

> When the interviewer heard that I teach in prison, her tone changed, she got impatient and put me on the defensive by the way she asked to justify my qualifications, although she must have seen in my application that I have a master's degree, and an advanced professional [teacher] certification.
> I thought, hm... it is not easy to break out of prison, even for teachers. (Alesis)

In a society where education professionals are not given the high esteem granted to athletes and pop-culture idols, and where success frequently is measured by one's bank account, prison teachers, their hard and important work notwithstanding, are not considered to be eligible for top honors nor for substantial compensation.

> The teaching profession is notorious for its special challenges and low salaries. Even in most teacher markets, however, correctional educators' salaries are not competitive. (Gehring, 2002, p. 89)

The "slings and arrows" of negativism eventually can erode our professional pride and replace self-confidence with self-doubt. Like pebbles in the shoe, nagging questions take hold: "Is it worth it? Is my work really important? Do I really make a difference?" We question our professional identity, like the colleague from Virginia, who confronted Dr.Eggleston after

her presentation on “Surviving the Institution” at the 2001 Correctional Education Leadership Forum: “What am I then? Am I a teacher or a correctional officer?”

I believe Peter was grappling with the same need to articulate a definition of professional identity, as he insistently returned to the same questions in our conversations: “What distinguishes us from public education? What are we doing differently? What is the unique character of correctional education that can be identified that *this is* the correctional aspect?” It cannot simply be our unique location. The more we discussed Peter’s questions, the clearer it became that we collectively suffer from an identity crisis and, like him, we are

> looking forward to a time when correctional education will really be defined and given its own character, not to tell it apart from public education, but to give it some unique characteristics in terms of the environment and the student population. I don’t think that line has been drawn yet and that unique characteristics of correctional education have been defined in terms of the curriculum, the activities, the goals and methods.

Teachers need educating too.

> When people think about “correctional education,” they typically think about only the kind that is aimed at the inmates, forgetting that the teachers need educating, too; and that the line officers and DOC commissioners and sheriffs’ deputies need career-long training, too; and that the general public, which tends to be a little knee-jerk on these issues, needs enlightening too. (Lewis, 1994, p. 2)

The greatest proportion of the over 30,000 teachers currently working in American prisons, are not professionally prepared to reach the special needs of incarcerated learners and, "As a result they have to 'reinvent the wheel' whenever they encounter a classroom problem" (Gehring & Puffer, 2004, p. 23). Like my participants and myself, these teachers are "accidental tourists" in the world of prisons, who received their training and certification in traditional education programs, or as journeymen for the occupational trades. While this lack of specialized preparation does not pose an unsurmountable obstacle for becoming an effective teacher in prison, it does not promote strong personal identification as a correctional educator.

"Fifteen years ago there were seventeen correctional education programs around the nation, offering degrees at the undergraduate, graduate and doctoral levels. Today only a handful remain, and there are no doctoral programs," states the *Proposal for Doctoral Programs in Correctional Education*, a brochure developed by Dr. Gehring of the Education Department of California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) in cooperation with Dr. Bieger of Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) in 2004. Gehring and Puffer (2004) concur, "No universities grant terminal degrees, Ph.D.s or Ed.D.s, in correctional education. Despite nearly 225 years of history there have only been two definitive books on the field, and the best literature is long out of print" (p. 53).

The proposed doctoral program mentioned above certainly will fill a need, when it becomes available in the next two years. However, Drs. Bieger

and Gehring, the authors of the proposal, agree that pre-service training at the undergraduate level to prepare teachers specifically for correctional education should be considered a more urgent need. We should urge the National Board for Teacher Certification to develop criteria relevant for certification. The lack of a robust, independent identity also is hindered by the absence of a licensure category for the specialized field of correctional education in every state of the Union.

I suggest that having content specific educational requirements, combined with state or national certification, will provide the necessary quality and professional identity for prison teachers. When we have a teacher education program designed to prepare teachers for a career in correctional education, Peter's questions might be answered: -- "What distinguishes us from public education? What are we doing differently? What is the unique character of correctional education that can be identified that this is the correctional aspect?" Then, supported by an appropriate curriculum, from the platform of professional identity we can say with confidence, "Yes, I am a correctional educator, I am a prison teacher" and expect a respectful and appreciative public reception.

Meanwhile, we can step over the obstacles of daily concerns and frustrations, reach into our reservoir, dust off our bruised *Dasein* (Heidegger, 1971), and "leap forth" to be[ing]-with-others who desperately need the kind of education that is correctional and liberating.

> Everyday Being-with-one-another maintains itself between the two extremes of positive solicitude -- that which leaps in and dominates, and that which leaps forth and liberates. (Heidegger, 1977, p. 159)

Entering Burnout

In Chapter IV, I discuss in detail the ongoing conflict between the different philosophies espoused by corrections and education personnel. The roots of corrections' anti-education attitude are not new, nor are they limited to the American soil; they grow far back in geography and time. As an illustration of the absurdity of corrections' response to innovation and educational success, I offer this historical vignette from *The Journal of Correctional Education:*

> In 1840, Warden Alexander Maconochie authorized headstones on inmate graves in Norfolk Island, a British penal colony in the South Pacific. The move was calculated as part of an overall reform program to educate the convicts, and was greatly appreciated by the inmates. Also implemented were a new band, "adult schools," a small garden for every man, and rewards for inmates who read aloud to interested men in the hospital and isolation unit. The program was so successful that Maconochie was eventually fired by his supervisor, Australian Governor Gipps.
> (Barry, 2000, p.167)

Ironically, the passage of a hundred and sixty years did not quite lift the fog of resistance to change. Prison teachers still are unable to negotiate the barriers erected by custody. We are still "asked to perform our noble duties in what are some of mankind's most depressing and dehumanizing settings" (Gehring, 2002, p. 89). The institutional anti-education bias is an impediment to quality education (Gehring, 2002) and a contributing factor to teacher frustration and

disenfranchisement. The undertone of hostility that custody display toward education staff creates an atmosphere where "you learn to trust no one, but definitely trust your instincts" (Geraci, 2002, p. 46).

Burdened with loads of non-educational duties, many of us cry out like Paup (1995): "I thought I would be educating students as a top priority. Too often I find I am babysitting for D.O.C." (p. 42). Sometimes it requires heroic efforts from teachers to maintain an open and inviting sanctuary in the most antisocial environment of prison without adequate support, even from our own [education] administration. Most of my conversation partners were very guarded whenever we approached the "taboo"subject of the Department of Education. Their reluctance even to discuss, much less to criticize [the Department], did not surprise me. However, I gathered an impression from off-the-record remarks that many teachers share the frustration articulated by Barbara:

> Correctional education is very frustrating. There is so much to it, it's hard to describe. Part of me feels that it's so important that I'm willing to put up with a lot to work in correctional education. But there is little or no support from society, from D.O.C.... little or no support from the teachers and the administration.

I found robust support for our timid criticism in the essays by Gehring and Puffer (2004) stating, "Any observer who suggests that correctional education administration consistently, or even typically, functions as it is supposed to is either poorly informed or deceitful" (p. 45). In an earlier article based on a

larger scale observation, Gehring states: “Our programs are ineffectually conceived and implemented, insufficiently staffed, inadequately resourced, and infrequently monitored for educational quality” (2002, p. 90).

The teachers’ best efforts are further impeded by a correctional education system that emphasizes and rewards the industrial model of training as opposed to practicing of the art of teaching. We face with trepidation the danger of losing our enthusiasm along with our skills.

> When practice is reduced to science or technology, persons are treated as objects; their humanity is denied as they become things determined by natural forces. When applied science replaces practice, practice then degenerates into technique.
> (Hultgren, 1994, p. 23)

When we are reduced to be mere technicians instead of teachers, we have arrived at the “dark side of the Moon,” where negative forces generate alienation and where “it seems as each teacher goes quietly insane in their own particular way. This is one of the main reasons I want out” (Barbara). Indeed, the main reason we are losing excellent teachers is “... the strain. Most often they do not leave because of intense student needs -- they leave because of the unwarranted constraints generated by school and institutional administrators,” observes Dr. Thom Gehring (2002, p. 90), co-director of the Center for the Study of Correctional Education at California State University, San Bernardino.

Blow out the candle. There are prison teachers who, at the height of their career, braved those white areas on the map where there were lions. But

their lions became weak like old circus animals, tired and toothless, more scared than scary. The teachers likewise, lose their "roar," their fighting edge and do not venture into unexplored territory anymore. I have seen too many good teachers turn into toothless lions who, in the prison vernacular, "sit back *bidding their time, maintaining,* waiting for the lights [of retirement] to appear at the end of the tunnel" (Catherine).

There are prison teachers who are deeply immersed in the lifeworld that they share with their students and become so affected by them that eventually it surfaces as a personal problem:

> The characteristics of the inmates have actually changed me. I couldn't believe it but I have to fight negativism and depression too. It is continuous. Every day. Every day that I'm at work, that I interact with inmates, I have to deal with negativism, with how depressed they can be, or they've given up hope, or everything is somebody else's fault. After a while it starts to permeate into my own happy being, my goal setting, my own way of thinking about things. And it worries me. (Barbara)

It worries me to see colleagues becoming disillusioned, losing the joy of pedagogical practice when that "Aha!" moment sparkles and lights up the room. While understandable, our students' reluctance to revisit their prison experience robs us of the satisfaction of knowing that our work with them is successful in turning their lives around. Werner (1990) wisely prepares the prison teacher for this lack of closure:

> You will rarely hear from your students after they leave prison, and you will likely never know how

> much of an impact you have had on their lives. This may, over time, lead to a feeling that your efforts are disappearing down a sort of well, that you are expending effort with no measure of success. (p. 124)

I had to reach down into the depths of our conversations to discover undercurrents that pose a real hazard, especially for professionals like us, in the helping occupations. Layered against some of my readings, (Freudenberger, 1981; Gehring, 2002), parts of our dialogue revealed that in some ways we all fight the threat of burnout as we "deplete and exhaust our physical and mental resources by excessively striving to reach some unrealistic expectation imposed by ourselves or by the values of society" (Freudenberger, 1981, p. 17) or, I might add, the power of the specific system to which we belong. Freudenberger (1981) could be talking about prisons as he says, "Burnout usually occurs in difficult environments over which the participants have little control" (p. 202). My hope for all of us is to "burn brightly rather than burn out" (Schaefer, 2003, p. 306).

"Candlepower"

Blow out the candle
before it burns out (in) your heart.
Don't sit under a dark moon.
Overcome.
Sing a new song, celebrate:
you are the one-caring.
And if your pitcher feels empty,
go to the spring.
Refill, renew, recover.
And most of all
light a new candle.
(Sayko, 2004)

The professional literature (Berglas, 2001; Freudenberger, 1981; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Potter, 1998) offers a rich menu, from activity to zealotry, to prevent and combat burnout. Embedded in our conversations, two recurring thoughts suggest remedy: talk and talk some more, and indulge in the healing power of the intrinsic rewards we receive when we fulfill our obligations as prison teachers and human beings.

Heal thyself. Teachers, parents, nurses -- as caregivers we are often totally depleted. It is not only our right, but our ethical duty to refill our pitcher, to rebuild our "reservoir of sustenance. An ethic of caring strives to maintain the caring attitude. That means that the one-caring must be maintained, for she is the immediate source of caring" (Noddings, 1986, p. 105).

I recall our daily conversations with Barbara, that we laughingly dismissed as our "coffee-and-therapy sessions," but instinctively recognized as immeasurably helpful to our survival of prison life. During those discussions we cleansed ourselves from the daily grime, and more importantly, begun to define our lives, our purpose and our selves as "prison teachers." Later, after I went to "visit many Egyptian cities to learn and go on learning from their scholars" (Cavafy, 1975, p. 35) I learned that we actually were engaged in "peer consultation" -- a practice long recognized in the field of mental health.

Peer supervision/consultation (the term is used interchangeably) is defined "as a process through which counselors assist each other to become more effective and skillful helpers by using their relationships and professional

skills with each other" (Benshoff, 1992, p. 1). As a training process, peer supervision/consultation has different models and modalities, from highly structured to spontaneous interaction. It is counted among the benefits that peer consultation groups are "profoundly and positively affected by the absence of the power dynamics inherent in traditional supervision. There is no concern about being evaluated poorly" (Horowitz, as cited in Fried Ellen, 2004, p. 3).

Talking with Brunner, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), shed light on an additional area of mental health, where peer consultation is recommended, even required in some cases. Brunner says:

> You are stuck in drive, you keep going and going, and you are carrying every clients' problems in you. As a professional you have to repress your own emotions [relating to the case]. It's draining and overwhelming.
>
> You need to unload, clean out, so that you can start up again, but there has to be someone receiving all this, providing, what we call, a "holding environment."

The person receiving our problems has to be knowledgeable of and familiar with our professional lifeworlds, and allow reciprocity to be effective. "I know my peer supervision group knows what I'm talking about because they've been there," says Seig, psychiatrist (as cited in Fried Ellen, 2004, p. 4). She also expresses concern about the lack of emphasis on the mental health of [mental health] professionals, "Even though people give lip service to our mental health, there are very few ways we're taught about how to take care of ourselves. We're left to our own devices" (p. 4).Is it not ironic that a psychiatrist utters

those complaints? What can we prison teachers say about having been taught to care for ourselves?

I already have found common ground with the health care profession, as discussed in the previous chapter. This new link encourages me to contemplate the potential benefits of peer counseling in the field of correctional education. We share similar demands, stresses and vulnerability common to the helping professions. We should borrow from each other's coping mechanisms demonstrated to be effective. I see peer supervision as a useful tool of professional development because it offers feedback and advice without the specter of being evaluated by a supervisor. I also welcome peer counseling as a preventive measure against burnout by offering a safe and comfortable place to bring our frustrations, concerns and the horrifying knowledge we receive from those for whom we care.

Persevere in Joy

May there be many summer mornings when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you enter harbors you're seeing for the first time

How can we mention "joy" in the context of life in prison? Yet, there are moments that cannot be described any other way: the tearfully happy victory dance of Blade, a father of four, finally receiving his high school diploma; Max, a lifer who will never go shopping with his granddaughter, sending her money to buy a new outfit for graduation; Colorado, who at 42 finally learns to read

and now devours books with a passion; the quiet joy of the teacher, hearing the music of purposeful activity, seeing minds come alive, ideas enfold, voices found. Hartnell (2003), a long-time prison activist, teacher and veteran of many execution vigils, speaks for all of us as he captures the duality of the prison world:

> Balancing the joys of teaching in prison with the terrors of having to spend time in them has left me confused. I am sympathetic with those prison activists who refuse to set foot in prisons, yet cannot begin to convey how joyous it is to watch men who have never before been validated in ideas, writing, and speech come to life, come to power, come to self-realization through learning. (p. 122)

In our lifeworld of shadow and light, we prison teachers need to orient toward the light to find joy and satisfaction, if only in small measures, in our daily toil. But if we bring our full attention to really being-with-the-others, our students, we can gather small victories every day that can grow and blossom into the sustenance we need. Alesis talks about a small breakthrough with one of her GED students with infectious enthusiasm:

> It took three weeks; we had to go back and start with the multiplication table, but finally he “got it” and I’m sure that he will pass the GED test this time. And you know, I was thinking, this is really doing something. You know, this is, doing something worthwhile, something that matters. This has... this adds more meaning to my life.

What pleasure, what joy and what deep, life-affirming meaning in a few sentences! But as McFarlane (2002) indicates, we are a modest group of people,

not prone to ring our own bells. I had to sift through our conversations carefully to glean small utterances of pride in our success, and even those were framed in terms of our students' achievement:

> I take pride in doing what I do because I think that so many students are [doing] very well. And sometimes they say, "If I had a teacher like you when I was in public school than I wouldn't have quit school." They also give me a name, "Workaholic," because I work so hard. We do a job and we have success, you know, good success. (Peter)

> Once they get out and either go to school or get a job with the training that they've had and they don't come back. And those are the ones that you've helped and they're gone, and that's it. Uhm, you get a really good feeling that way. I like that. (Catherine)

Being a positive change agent in many people's lives offers intrinsic rewards more meaningful and valuable than any "Certificate of Appreciation." Emma says, "*It is nice* [my emphasis] to go home at the end of the day knowing you've done something that is positive," but her simple sentence is pregnant with pride and satisfaction -- her rewards and sustenance for the next day. To be able to go home carrying rewards of a well worked day like Emma, or happily reflecting, "Oh wow, a really good day" like Barbara, make it possible to re-enter the classroom with pleasure and joy, like for the first time on a summer morning.

Closure

In *The Courage to Teach,* Palmer (1998) describes the symbiotic relationship between student and teacher:

> There are great gaps between us. But no matter how wide and perilous they may be, I am committed to bridging them -- not only because you need me to help you on your way but also because I need your insight and energy to help renew my own life. (p. 49)

This brief, yet poetic paragraph gives voice to feelings that many teachers find hard to express: the acknowledgment of a mutual need. After all, what is a teacher without a student? The teacher's *Dasein* can only be lived through the student. Palmer's passionate dedication to students' needs, accompanied by his honest admission of welcome reciprocity, should be an appropriate introduction to a section knitted together from our students' words.

"I would like to thank Mrs. Sayko for giving me the courage and opportunity to take on such a project as this; without her encouragement it wouldn't have been done," writes Robert, in the Acknowledgment of the 65 page autobiography he published for his final project in my vocational training course. Such consoling words bring back the sun on many summer mornings that are clouded by students returning to prison after being released on parole or at the end of their sentence. Incredibly, they expect to pick up their prison life where they left off, but for me it is always a heartbreak, and a deep questioning of my own efforts in their behalf. We rarely learn of happy endings, lives straightened out for good, family and future regained, but what a joy it is when we do:

> Yesterday, in the supermarket, I notice this guy running toward me in the bread isle. I try to dodge him before we collide. He seems adamant to run into me. He calls

> out my name and I finally recognize Ricky, one of my students in the college program. Before I can say anything, he enfolds me in a bear hug words tumbling out of him: job, college, own apartment, looking for a car... And when he comes up for air "I just want to thank you." We talk some, but I have to run, husband, dinner... but I am grinning all the way home... even later, while chopping up onions. (Journal, October, 2004)

Mementos from students are our most cherished rewards. Emma shares with me a folder of letters and cards from her "ladies."

> I hope all I have learned is my own accomplishment, but also is an accomplishment of my prison teachers. Their knowledge is the light in my brain. (Tawana)

On the bulletin board in Catherine's office I notice similar expressions of appreciation:

> Had it not been for the special people and their unique passion for their work, talents for educating... I would not be as grown up as I have grown to be today. I believe I am the product of my prison teachers. (Mary)

While Barbara is not a collector, she keeps an album of graduation photographs of her GED students. Alesis is paid tribute in the form of small bouquets picked from the flower beds in the prison yard at some risk.

> I have learned a great deal from my education in prison. I'd go as far as saying I've been blessed with teachers who've influenced my thinking on a level that's caused me to challenge myself and thirst for more knowledge and technical training. (Ernest)

Lord (1997), a convict-turned-college teacher also credits his teachers for awakening his pride and restoring his self-confidence:

> College instructors were the only people I came into contact with who were not part of the system. Through my interactions with them, I learned that my citizenship extended beyond the prison wall, beyond the system that confined me. Here were people who saw more in me than damaged goods and a future paycheck. I began to see myself not as a convict, but as a college student. (p. 89)

Borrowing from a Hungarian proverb, "Even the best wine needs to be touted," I suggest that even the best, most confident prison teacher needs to be confirmed, assured from time to time. Our belief that we do make a difference makes the wind fill out the sails on our little boat, but we must continue our journey even when the adversity of prison life brings about windless calm.

Whenever I feel aimlessly drifting for lack of wind or lack of focus, I read the poem "You & I" by Byrd (2000). It never fails to restore my bearings, reset my compass and generate friendly winds to keep me on the right course. This poem was borne out of a particularly painful period in the life of Byrd, who was working for me as a tutor at the time. He was nearing thirty, his much hoped-for parole was denied and the enormity of eighteen more years in prison drove him to the brink of suicide. I was worried about him, and spent many afternoons in "therapeutic listening," while my students were busy with their independent work assignments, until I sensed his burden lightening and his spirit mending. One day the following week Byrd said, "Thank you for listening" and gave me this poem, initially inspired by our conversations.

However, his powerful poetic gifts transcended the classroom and created a paean to every teacher.

> "You & I"
>
> A bunker in battle a safe haven in a storm.
> Solace for the beleaguered, the promise for the unborn.
> Compassion for the worn, the worried, the weary.
> As we teeter on the edge we cling to your words dearly.
> When we see little clearly you clarify. A beacon in the haze.
> We follow the light of your countenance through the fog into clearer days.
> You help us navigate the maze that is our existence,
> To identify the obstacles that lie in the distance.
> When we offered little resistance to the adversary you taught us to stand our ground.
> When our foes beat us down, when violence was the only sound
> Heard over the roar of our own plaintiff wails,
> You were the wind that inflated our sails,
> The canopy that protected us from the hail, the hands that held us aloft.
> When we wandered amongst the lost
> You stood with us no matter the cost.
> It was you that awoke me when I was determined to tarry.
> It was you that sustained when I had hardships to carry,
> When my heart was weighted down with grief,
> When my demons consumed my fervor in my sleep,
> When success seemed out of reach, and death seemed my only relief.
> I found in you someone who would truly care.
> I found in you someone who'd always been there.
> I found in me... you. I found that we... two... too, will make it thru.
> (Byrd, 2000, p. 35)

Homecoming

Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her, you wouldn't have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
You'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.

Yes, we did "make it thru." We triumphed over challenges and finally reached our dwelling place and made landfall in our *Ithaka.* Like Odysseus, we navigated the sea, visited many islands that beckoned with the promise of discovery. Upon embarking on their shore, we discovered as many different lands, as our lived relationships. In our conversations we tiptoed around the inhospitable land of correction, visited the island of our peers in education, and dwelt on the island of our mission where we share our days with our students. Like the fabulous drawings on ancient Greek pottery, each encounter was different, unique. And like the designs on the urns, plates and vases, each experience was created in sharp contrast of black and white.

Our quest for understanding the lifeworld of the prison teacher led us on a journey through a landscape, changing like the phases of the moon, oscillating between light and dark, silver and ebony, positive and negative. We experience the pull of these opposing forces from the moment we voluntarily surrender our freedom by stepping through the metal detector every morning, to spend the day in suspended freedom within the compound of the institution. The dichotomy is

present in our efforts to make sense of the importance of fifty-five minutes against the larger canvas of eighteen years with no parole. We are walking between light and dark, as we labor to reconcile the student with the criminal; our instinctive recoiling from the dark underside of human existence, embodied by our convict students, is balanced by our natural disposability as the one-caring to express responsibility for the Other, the cared-for. In the words of Levinas, (1987):

> Subjection to the order that ordains man[sic] -- the ego -- to answer for the other is, perhaps, the harsh name of love. Love here is no longer what this compromised word of our literature and our hypocrisies express, but the very fact of the approach of the unique one and, consequently of the absolute other. (p. 116)

We also met our Laistrygonians at a place shrouded in shadow, "where the low night path of the sun is near the sun's path by day" (Homer, 8th c.B.C./1961, p. 160). As we navigate our lifeworld in prison, it is easy to become disoriented, to go down the wrong path, to be mislead by the unnatural friendliness of lions, because, as Odysseus warns his men on the island of Kirke:

> Where dawn lies, and the West,
> and where the great Sun, light of men may go
> under the earth by night, and where he rises --
> of these things we know nothing.
> (Homer, 8th c.B.C./1961, p. 162)

Homer's solar geography in the *Odyssey* parallels the light/dark dichotomy of the far country of corrections. After going through this journey riddled with self-doubt, questioning the accuracy of my navigation, and then to be able to reach across millennia and realizing that kindred spirits in the classics have walked with me -- is a validating, powerful reassurance, a true gift.

Approaching Home Port

A tidal wave of mixed emotions and conflicting thoughts washes over the traveler; relief and thanksgiving for having arrived home safe and wealthy with the gifts of the voyage, but also a tinge of sadness and a shade of nostalgia for the journey that came to an end. We are carried by sea-legs picked up on our ship and taste the salt of the ocean for a while longer, as we re-enter the workday reality of our lives, and -- paraphrasing Kornfield (2001) -- we reluctantly say farewell to the ecstasy and start sorting the laundry.

New eyes or new mirror? At the end of out journey we realize that the person who returned is not the same as the one who departed at the outset of the journey. "The odyssey of any life surprises the sailor/seeker," we agree with Brown (1988, p.18), and begin to analyze what our Ithakas mean. The experience of the quest trained us to look around with wiser eyes, to listen with more sensitive ears, to consider with a more open mind, and to accept with a heart innocent of prejudice.

Looking in my old mirror, I see myself richer and wiser, more able than before to see the concealed and to hear the un-spoken. Sailing through many

conversational miles transformed me, and hopefully my companions also, into seekers of deeper layers of knowledge about our lifeworld and its inhabitants. We set out on a quest to find some answers to a single question, **What is it like to be a prison teacher?** We learned that even a single question, if asked with fully intended consideration, will bring forth a wealth of answers. In Chapter IV I opened our coffers to share the gifts of newly discovered knowledge and un-concealed understanding of the lived experiences of prison teachers.

Taking stock. At the end of my journey I realize that fundamentally, we all have a place to claim as our own, but the onus is on every one of us to make it habitable, even enjoyable. I rejoice, seeing my students engaged in building a habitat at the most despicable of environments, and my fellow teachers creating a safe haven in the midst of concrete blocks and razor wire. I appreciate having been invited to join those people who found their dwelling at the place where they belong, and are aware of their good fortune to be able recognize this gift.

Beauty in Imperfection

Master Persian rug weavers intentionally include a mistake in every rug they weave to honor the notion that only Allah is perfect. This is both a conscious act of reverent humility and a telling commentary on the nature of beauty (Bolland, 2002, p. 1). My appreciation for beauty in imperfection was no doubt part of the gift I have for art, and it evolved during years of my being-with people, who were manifestations of imperfection on a larger than average

scale, yet revealed unexpected human beauty. With senses newly honed on my journey, I can see beyond the surface of the visible, and perceive that,

> What is proper to the visible is to be the surface of an inexhaustible depth: this is what makes it able to be open to visions other than our own. Yet this flesh that one sees and touches is not all there is to flesh, nor this massive corporeality all there is to the body. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/2000, p. 144)

The Persian weavers' example teaches us humility in the presence of greatness. In a similar vein, Umberto Eco (1996) also urges us to approach with proper humility, in this case, the subject of our research. I detected the same notion, unsaid but clearly present, in my conversations. We were talking about our students as if we owe them a pound of our flesh -- and indeed we do. We were expressing our duty, our obligation to be present-to-care, like humble servants -- and indeed we are. What is it like to be teachers, particularly prison teachers? It is to be willingly humble before our students in order to level the playing field and meet them on equal grounds. I believe Palmer (1998) entertains similar ideas when he says, "Face to face with my students, only one resource is at my immediate command: my identity, my selfhood, my sense of 'I' who teaches -- without which I have no sense of the 'Thou' who learns" (p. 10). For some to be humble might be an imperfection, yet the humble heart will find endless beauty in imperfection.

A Disciple of Janus

At the conclusion of my journey I am looking back and looking ahead like Janus, the god of Roman mythology. The guardian of portals, and the patron god of beginning and ending, Janus is portrayed with a face in front and a face at the back of his head to illustrate his power of knowing past and future (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 2004, p. 765). Probing the question, "What is it like to be a prison teacher," un-concealed past lived experiences while at the same time directed the attention to an agenda of future-building research and development -- much of it long overdue.

Looking back. Projected against a vivid backdrop painted by anecdotes and sharply contoured by research, I see one of the major impediments prison teachers have to overcome: the almost total lack of professional preparation in the field of correctional education. I must say, there is no field of correctional education in terms of standards for specialized *correctional* teacher education. There is a movement to (re)establish correctional education programs on the graduate level, spearheaded by Drs. Gehring and Bieger of California State University, San Bernardino and Indiana University of Pennsylvania, respectively. Although the realization of these plans will be a great stride toward professionalizing correctional education, it will not solve the more urgent need to prepare teachers for the prison classroom.

Looking ahead. "Teachers immerse themselves and students in future-oriented practices. Often, prison staff see prisoners through the rear-view mirror

of their crime. Caring infuses the present with the future" (Wright, 2004, p. 202). We prison teachers are collectively responsible for infusing the present, ours as well as our students, with the future. Looking ahead to the near future the need for research and development of a curriculum in correctional education, on the undergraduate level, for teacher certification must be considered a first priority. I suggest that to achieve such undertaking on the State level successfully, it should be initiated by the Correctional Education arm of the U. S. Department of Education.

"There is really nothing more to say -- except why. But since *why* is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in *how*" (Morrison, 1970, p. iv). I beg to differ with Toni Morrison; for me the last thing left to say is *why not*? Why not now? Why not here? Why not us, or at the very least why not me? I remember a saying attributed to Rumi, that my friend sent me when I started this dissertation: "Start a huge, foolish project like Noah. It makes absolutely no difference what people think of you." If we aspire to achieve respect through professional status, I suggest we take active ownership in the development of the requirements and the establishment of proper venues to meet them. Like many other attributes, professionalism "shows itself within a context of involvements" (Heidegger, 1926/1962, p. 179).

Step up and step out. Superintendent McFarlane sent us a wake-up call in his opening address at the 2002 CEA Conference: "To overcome our lack of a distinct image to capture the public's attention, it is not enough to do a good

job and expect everyone to recognize it without any further effort on our part. We need to recognize that a sound and proactive public relations program is an absolute necessity. Correctional educators have to let people know what they are doing and that what they are doing is a great way to fight crime."

Being an artist is a calling as much as a vocation; the same attributes are shared by teachers, rendering both artist and teacher primarily practical and vocationally oriented. Looking ahead, we cannot ignore McFarlane's call for a "sound and proactive public relations program," and such agenda should speak to both the artist and the teacher in us. We need to do more scholarly research in our field, but we need to disseminate the findings of current research immediately to the widest possible audience in order to re-educate public thinking regarding prisoners and prison teachers. The *Three-State Recidivism Study* by Steurer and Jenkins (2003) convincingly supported significant positive correlation between educational attainment and recidivism, yet only a few hundred copies were printed and distributed to legislators. Bazos and Hausman (2004) converted the effects of correctional education to easily comprehensible terms of dollars and cents, effectively showing that "One million dollars spent on correctional education prevents about 600 crimes, while that same money invested in incarceration prevents 350 crimes. Correctional education is almost twice as cost-effective as a crime policy" (p. 2). Their paper, *Correctional Education as a Crime Control Program*, created an indelible impression on the State legislature and on members of key Senate committees, but unfortunately

did not reach a nation-wide audience. We need to employ our calling and continue doing relevant research in our field, and we must employ our vocation to publicize our tremendous achievements in service of the public.

Calling and vocation, the head and the heart moved mountains in the past, and we are encouraged by Gehring and Puffer (2004):

> Correctional educators might associate the rational capacity with "head" and emotional or intuitive capacity with "heart." Head can be strong, but head and heart can be stronger. (p. 56)

Fourfold Paths

> Now I a fourfold vision see
> And a fourfold vision is given to me
> Tis fourfold is my supreme delight...
> (Blake, 1802/2004, p. 3)

Lurking in our conversations, emerging, fading and resurfacing in thematizing, appearing in different disguises from different directions, images of the fourfold visit my thoughts frequently during the labor and delivery of this text. Persistent companions, they engage my attention and offer assistance. I find the fourfold structure in van Manen's four existentials: lived temporality, spatiality, corporeality and relationality. They are a great help in meaning-making from the rich text of conversations with my participants. Following a more spiritual approach, we discover teachers, or in a broader sense the teaching profession, at the end of any one of the different paths to the fourfold. Because each approach represents essential qualities of fully realized teachers, I find the fourfold path an apt metaphor for the profession.

I found a roadmap to my journey in the far country of corrections in the fourfold path of Jesus, as He directs His followers to “Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind and with all thy strength” (Mark 12:30-31). Facing a diverse group of students, teachers, whether followers of Jesus or not, need to possess a heart full of love, devotion and compassion. We have to have an intuitive soul, prepared for reflection and meditation, open to recognize mystical experiences of transformation through education in our students. The teacher’s mind is the most important tool of the trade in the intellectual quest of education. And God only knows, we need the strength, (physical, emotional, and moral) to allow us to make it through the day.

My conversations revealed four components in prison teachers (a sharp intellect, a committed soul, a caring heart, and moral and physical strength) that now I hear echoed in the Indian spiritual practice of Yoga that teaches four major disciplines that follow a twin path with the one offered by Jesus. Bhakti Yoga serves the way of the Heart; Rajah Yoga is the mystical path of the Soul. The “inside discipline” of Jhana Yoga corresponds to the intellectual work of the Mind, while Karma Yoga follows the same path as Strength. Jungian psychology offers *Four Functions of the Psyche*: Feeling, Intuition, Thinking and Sensation -- a close relative of both the fourfold path of Jesus and the four disciplines of Yoga (Carter, n.d., p. 2).

Heidegger (1971) presents a concept of the fourfold both simpler in its Earth, Sky, Mortal, Divine quartet, and more complicated, as in "the united four, earth and sky, divinities and mortals in the simple onefold of their self-united fourfold" (p. 178). He invites us to consider, and perhaps appreciate, the world as a "simple oneness" composed of the indivisible fourfold.

We can position the teacher in Heidegger's fourfold world-view also, by realizing that teaching is a practical, "earthly" profession. As we use our strength in performing our daily routine, dispensing information, discipline, care and compassion, we are dwelling in the earth and better have both feet firmly planted. We dwell in the sky when we implant dreams and aspirations, and use our mind to impart knowledge and skill. As we are being-with our students through the heart, we dwell in our mortal self. We are also granted the incredible privilege of entering the realm of the divine, because "to teach is to touch someone else's life in progress" (Yamamoto, 1969, p. I).

"Dwelling in the Fourfold"

Knowledge-sky: life-giving earth-spring.
Teaching: giving both knowledge and life.
Yet givers are also receivers, getting richer
by sharing their bounty.
In teachers' minds dwell abundant powers,
in their soul dwells the gift of outpouring.
In their gifts of knowledge and giving
dwell the earth and the star-studded sky.
In their outpouring self, divine and mortal,
they are the dwelling place of the fourfold.
(Sayko, 1997)

I found in the fourfold my personal Rosetta stone, that enabled me to translate concealed messages and obscure utterances on my way to the spiritual core of the prison teacher. In that heart of hearts I was faced again with the question that launched my quest, What is it like to be a prison teacher? I also was rewarded with the understanding, that the life of a prison teacher is a manifest fourfold, a "gift of outpouring [where] earth and sky, divinities and mortals dwell *together all at once.* These four, at one because of what they themselves are belong together" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 173).

Sailing on Different Waters

We have reached the shores of Ithaka by the time the last veil was lifted from the core of the life of prison teachers, and we had to bid farewell. We set off to our different destinations richer and wiser by the experience of our shared voyage. Where are my companions now, some years after our journey has ended? What new adventures are they facing, what waters rock their vessels? Are there going to be lions at their new destinations? Are Laystrigonians and Cyclops, angry Poseidon threatening their safe passage?

Emma dwells cheerfully and successfully in her prison classroom. She is happy and secure in her realization that, as she said, "I just really believe I've been molded into this environment. I think my whole life has led me to this point."

Catherine confesses that in time, "What I had thought about prison education, my views on it changed as I got into it more. And then I realized that

I wanted to stay." Catherine's star is still rising and recently she was promoted to lead one of the largest prison schools in the State.

Alesis seems to be on the crossroads. Her command of her subject and her formidable teaching skills could not prevent a series of painful disappointments caused by nasty undercurrents in the murky waters in the far country of corrections. I am saddened by the possibility of losing another teacher who has

> The courage to teach, [that] is the courage to keep one's heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning and living require. (Palmer, 1998, p. 11)

Peter literally sailed away, following his heart and returning to his native country. Is he, as planned, developing a modern correctional education system in his homeland? Is he back, pursuing a career in higher education? Well, the latest news coming through some meandering grapevine had Peter running for President!

Barbara, becoming tired, frustrated and disillusioned with the politics of correctional education, left prison teaching. She is now Assistant Principal of a school that serves an equally important and equally demanding cause, the special education of children with severe, multiple needs and challenges.

That leaves me, Sayko, typing these pages in deliriously happy exhaustion at the home port of my incredible journey. I feel I have a life-long

engagement with prison teaching, but I also sprouted new leafs of aspiration for a different level, where I would assume more responsibility and could be more instrumental in effecting positive change.

"Finding My Ithaka"

Treasures gathered on a voyage,
whose goal was not the destination,
but the journey, and the treasures found
and with them, wisdom.
On how many journeys have I
criss-crossed this lifeworld?
The artist's paints: dreams fulfilled
then abandoned, when different shores
called with a new song.
"An apple a day" -- a teacher's way
on a path full of wonder, discovery
and gay moments
only the innocence of children
can gift you.
Another twisty turn,
darker vistas beckon,
I'm called to serve those
who are written off like so many
hopeless souls. Lucked out, locked in,
like they don't even
deserve a slice of hope with their daily bread.
Again, a new horizon, on with the journey,
my work here is done, yet my work isn't finished.
(Sayko, 1999)

Postlude in the Key of Hope

At the beginning of my career as prison teacher, I used to feel like I was treating terminally ill patients in a hospital. I could not find hope behind bars, and meeting previous students on their way back eradicated any expectation of it. I was sorely disappointed in my thwarted desire to be a positive presence, an

agent of change, a mentor for my students. Like a lighthouse without a beacon, I was not able to provide guidance and direction. Eventually I reasoned that I was the person responsible for generating hope to fill our sails with good wind and keep both teacher and students on course. Finally, I had my equilibrium restored and my confidence in my pedagogical skills regained, and begun to realize positive changes in my classroom. Since then I often contemplate this little message from Messud (1999), that I have framed and hung in my office:

> What, after all, is reason, but a means to lead us along the paths of our own desire? We find hope where we can, and where we cannot, invent it. (p. 148)

I was able to transcend the negativity at last, and find not only hope, but joyful satisfaction in educating, guiding, training my captive audience, once I grasped the privilege of my position in their lives when Geraci (2002, p. 69) opened my eyes:

> This is what the correctional educator sees that no one else does. You get to see a fallible human being and you will care for them. You may never hear how any of your students have done once they get out of prison. Maybe, however, just maybe, you will get a thank you note saying thank you for being compassionate, kind and understanding. You may also never see that student incarcerated again, which is the best gift of all.

Throughout my conversations our students quietly took center stage. Even now, at the end, contemplating the journey in the solitude of my study with the silent music of gently falling snow turning my suburban lot into a magical forest, my thoughts return over and over to my students. What is it like

to be a prison teacher? On my best days it is like a prayer, “It is refreshing, renewing, painful, and transformational” (Linnel, 2004, p. 79). With its high drama reflecting grotesque images of the real world, with continuous action, with actors and audiences, to be a prison teacher is also like a play in the words of Molly Smith (2003):

> Sometimes it comes as a revelation. Sometimes a recollection. And sometimes a feeling even more subtle and vague, Will your life change? Who can say? But you acknowledge this much, at least: from that moment on, the play lives inside you. You can’t unthink what you thought. You can’t unfeel what you felt. And you’d have it no other way. (p. 3)

EPILOGUE

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.

If, indeed, I have become wise on the road to Ithaka, than I have an obligation to share the wisdom gathered on this marvelous journey. So come, join me now as I revisit my Ithaka and reflect on my experiences. Let us sit under the lacy shadow of an old olive tree, enjoy the gift of cool freshness of some sweet wine as we look down into the incredible blueness of the Aegean, where happy sailors embark to meet their future. Do not laugh at my nostalgic musings; half of my heart is still sailing the seven seas. Ithaka gave me the marvelous journey and evoked a desire for more.

What I have learned on this quest about the subject of my inquiry, I have presented in the previous chapters through rich phenomenological descriptions, not unlike displaying photographs taken on a family vacation. Textually sharing, making public my experiences is an act of "taking possession, an appropriation of the experience, and through the experience, of the thing" (Langan, 2002, p. 2).

Phenomenological inquiry, through its reflective-interpretive process, creates appropriation, a kind of ownership, of the "thing" being examined. Receiving (or earning) ownership implies "a coming to grips with the essence of the traditions and the situation within which they meet" (Langan, 2002, p. 7). Appropriation is the gift of authenticity and the obligation of responsibility to respond, that the researcher receives at the successful conclusion of inquiry.

Now it is time to question what are we going to do with this newly appropriated understanding? How are we going to deal with *subtilitas applicandi*, the hermeneutic problem of application, to be found in all understanding (Gadamer, 1960/1998)? For "appropriation in the service of authenticity, and authenticity as the quest for the sense of existence, give phenomenology its direction and meaning and education its mission" (Langan, 2002, p. 9). From considering hermeneutics, not only as a fusion of understanding and interpretation but as action oriented research, follows the obvious conclusion that "the task of hermeneutics [is] to adapt the text's

meaning to the concrete situation to which the text is speaking" (Gadamer, 19960/1998, p. 308).

Let us finish our wine and take a walk around the island to visit places where our specific issues dwell. And should we meet others on our way, let us visit to pay our dues by outpouring, by sharing the "rare excitement" of reflective meaning-making through experiential research.

"Let Us Stop When We Meet Others"

On our way down from the mountain,
if we meet workers of Dionysus[2],
harvesting honey-sweet grapes,
carrying their loaded bushels up to the crest of the hill,
where they dance wine-making dances since sun-up,
Let us stop and ask what is it like
to be the makers of Ithaka's nectar?
Grateful for stealing a few precious moments of rest,
they will put down their sweet burden, might even stop
their back-braking wine-making dance.
Let us look into their puzzled gaze and
invite them to think of the joys of their doing
what they can so capably do.

And if we meet shipbuilding boatrights,
Poseidon's[3] brothers and slaves,
carefully bending the fragrant, rigid wood into their will,
to shape vessels worthy of sailing the sea,
Let us stop and ask what is it like
to be creators of these floating houses that test our faith
as they brave the fathomless ocean?
They will most likely pause for a moment,

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[2] Dionysus is the Greek god of wine making and merriment (Brewer, 1978, p. 356).

[3] Poseidon, the god of the sea in Greek mythology (Webster's, 2004, p. 1123).

silence their hammers,
stop the flight of the curlicued wood-chips.
Let us look into their puzzled gaze and
invite them to think of the joys of their doing
what they can so capably do.

And if at the edge of the village,
we meet Hephaistos'[4]servant, the blacksmith,
bathed in soot and his own sweat, adorned by showers of sparks
ringing out brave songs with enormous hammers
shaping hot iron into a dutiful scythe,
Let us stop and ask what is it like
to be taming the dangerous fire,
to shape the iron at will?
He will keep bending that hot blade
until its red light fades into blue, then,
wiping his face with a red cloth,
maybe he'll ponder our question.
Let us look into his puzzled gaze and
invite him to think of the joys of his doing
what he can so capably do.
(Sayko, 2005)

Let us rest a while now, and enjoy the stark beauty of Ithaka, where sky and sea are betrothed to each other, and invisible gods animate the land. This peaceful hillside invites contemplation, and the mind turns to our recent appropriation of the essence of the lifeworld of prison teachers. In the alternate Universe of prison, we found themes corresponding to aspects of everyday life. However, like reflections in a fun-house mirror, all these images are distorted. The main themes -- spatiality, temporality and relationality -- carry extra layers of burden, when considered behind prison walls.

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[4] Hephaistos, Greek god of fire and the forge (Brewer, 1978, p. 599).

The institutional hostility of the built environment of prison evokes un-accustomed, and mostly un-intentional, hostility from the inhabitants. Whether it is a cover up of fear, or a chameleon-like adjustment to the place, prison teachers have to be mindful not to allow the hostility to settle and become a permanent part of their mindset. The precious commodity of time loses its everyday import for someone whose sweet time turned sour when the judge declared the sentence. How can a teacher expect concern for a fifty-five minute math class from a student committed for fifty-five years? Which one of us is allowed to lose perspective over the "unforgiving minute?" And why do I feel apologetic when leaving for home at the end of the day?

Relationships in prison are likewise skewed for having been colored by the hostility and fear, legitimate concern for security, and the conflicting philosophies of custody and education that are inherent in the environment. The fact that what a teacher considers a proper relationship with the to be, prison officers will consider it improper, and this creates confusion for teachers and students alike. Sooner or later the prison teacher's inventory of personal dilemmas will receive new entries: How do I relate to my students in an engaged, personal, caring and available mode without inviting custody's suspicion of "improper contact?" How would I feel if I decide to keep a rigid distancing, thereby emphasizing the other-ness of my students?

These concerns add to the weight of one of the most troubling issues in

correctional education: the unsettled status of our professional identity. The reasons and consequences were discussed in an earlier chapter. At the end of my journey, the action oriented nature of phenomenology obliges me to act upon and apply the results of my investigation to help bring forth some needed changes. Understanding our collective responsibility to disseminate accurate information about the effects and value of prison teaching, I admit that we prison teachers have neglected to utilize the tremendous power of public relations. A hermeneutic phenomenological account of the lifeworld of prison teachers such as this one might dispel public ignorance and create a better reception for these essential programs. As a prison teacher poised for accepting a larger role in the leadership of my profession, I presume it a useful agenda to engage in dialogue with policy makers responsible for, and having the authority of, decision-making that influences the future of correctional education.

Continue our walk down to the harbor. Fishermen will have arrived by the time we will get there, the fresh catch of their hard day will be roasting on open grills, sending delicious aromas to invite the visitor to dinner. The oil lamps will be lit on the tables in front of the *taverna* and gay melodies of softly chirping zithers and bazookas will float up to the slowly darkening sky. Let us sit at one of the tables, order more wine and dinner, and immerse ourselves in the peacefulness of the evening with the satisfaction of a day's work well done. The Moon rises over the mountain, spreading her silvery net over Ithaka, and

each freshly lit brilliant star heralds a new hope for tomorrow.

If there is but one souvenir to take home from Ithaka, it must be this new hope for tomorrow, packed tightly in the protective seashell of our hearts, so it will not escape and disappear, because we need hope for our every tomorrows. Tomorrow is a gift, not a promise, and in the far country of prison only hope, when renewed daily, will bring a bearable tomorrow.

We -- prison teachers and prison learners alike -- need hope for our daily sustenance. To be able to overcome the small indignities and big inequities of both physical and spiritual incarceration we need to create a vision of hope, "not blind optimism but something more substantial," according to Senator Barack Obama in his opening address to the 2005 Conference of the Council for American Studies Education (CASE) in Chicago. He challenged the audience to an aggressively proactive pedagogy of hope, that he calls "The Audacity of Hope." Obama follows in the footsteps of the great Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, who also possessed the admirable "audacity" to offer hope to the disenfranchised, the "condemned of the earth" by empowering them through literacy. Freire practiced his pedagogy of hope by situating the educational activity in the lived experiences of the (adult) participants. By drawing metaphors from familiar Christian sources, Freire was able to transcend the divide between teachers and learners. His classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), and *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving the Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1995),

his engaging reflections on the development of policy and practice, should be on the reading list of all (prison) teachers.

"Education is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness. It is imperative that we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite" (hooks, 2003, pp. xiv-xv). Bell hooks' pedagogy of hope embraces values of love, spirituality, and service that are so fundamental for learning and teaching and advocates for mutually liberating learning, where teacher and student together work in partnership. A hope-filled, engaged pedagogy makes learning "a place where paradise can be created. The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility" (hooks, 1994, p. 207).

A pedagogy of hope should become integral to teacher education and an essential part of preparing teachers for correctional education. We have to carry the message of hope and optimism behind those twenty feet high fences with their razor-wire crowns to ensure that our efforts reach the heart of being, both of the giver and the receiver of education. That is our only hope to achieve education that is truly "correctional, in other words, formative, reformative and transformative" (Zollman, 1993, p. 93). We have to carry the message of hope and optimism in our hearts to ensure that we "find hope where we can, and where we cannot, invent it" (Messud, 1999, p. 148).

APPENDIX A

PERMISSIONS

STATE OF MARYLAND
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

PARRIS N. GLENDENING
GOVERNOR

KATHLEEN KENNEDY TOWNSEND
LT. GOVERNOR

STUART O. SIMMS
SECRETARY

RICHARD A. LANHAM, SR.
COMMISSIONER

DIVISION OF CORRECTION
SUITE 310, PLAZA OFFICE CENTER
6776 REISTERSTOWN ROAD
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21215-2311
(410) 764-4100
V/TTY FOR THE DEAF: 1-800-735-2258
(MARYLAND RELAY SERVICE)

July 21, 1998

Edit Sayko
Graphics Instructor
Maryland Correctional Training Center
18800 Roxbury Road
Hagerstown, MD 21746

Dear Ms. Sayko:

I have reviewed the revised materials you submitted on your doctoral research topic, The Making of a Prison Teacher. I approve of your proceeding with the research. I apologize that I did not respond more quickly as I was on vacation for two weeks.

Sincerely,

David Jenkins
Educational Liaison

cc: Richard A. Lanham, Sr., Commissioner
Daphne Mathews, Principal, MCTC

Maryland State Department of
EDUCATION

Schools for Success

Nancy S. Grasmick
State Superintendent of Schools

200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
Phone (410) 767-0100
TTY/TDD (410) 333-6442

To: Edit Sayko, graphics instructor, MCTC
From: Carolyn Buser, field coordinator, Correctional Education Program
Date: August 19, 1998
Re: Request to do university sponsored research

I have discussed your request with John Linton and our Human Resources Branch. There is no objection in principle, however, we all feel that we need some specifics.

1.Are you requesting that participants be given work time to conduct the interviews?

2.Are you requesting that any portion of your research be conducted using your work time?

3.How will the two interviewees per site be chosen from among the volunteers?

4.Which institutions do you plan to visit, and how much time do you plan to spend at each place? (I read the descriptions of the four institutions you were planning to visit and didn't recognize three of them.) I assume you were planning to use MCTC (which, by the way, I feel to be a marginal research site for you since you have worked with that staff for a number of years) but MCTC is not the largest medium/minimum security male institution in the state. ECI is. There is no maximum security institution in a large industrial town, and there is no pre-release unit housing male and female minimum security and work release inmates who participate in an intensive job retraining and life-skills program.

5. If you plan to interview within an institution, tape recorders are considered contraband. What provisions have you made for alternate forms of transcription?

Please respond to our five questions, and provide any other details you feel may be pertinent to our understanding of the proposed data collection and specific staff involvement so that we may respond to your .request to conduct research. Good luck in your endeavors.

c John Linton
David Jenkins
Richard Pescatore
Daphne Mathews
file

MEMO

To: Dr. Carolyn Buser, field coordinator,
Correctional Education Program
From: Edit Mária Sayko, graphic arts teacher, MCTC
Date: September 3, 1998
Re: Request to do research

Re your Memo dated August 19, 1998, I would like to forward the following information:

1. Work time for participants

I am requesting 2 hours work time for participants for the duration of the interview. I have discussed this with Mr.Linton, who had no objection to this request.

2. Work time for me

I am going to use annual leave or personal leave to conduct the interviews.

3. Selecting participants

In case more than two teachers volunteer at a site, those with the most correctional education experience will be asked to be interviewed.

4. Institutions to visit

MCTC - Your note about my research being "marginal" by familiarity at this site is appreciated. However, phenomenological research is not really influenced by this factor. Also, safeguards (triangulation, etc.) are being used to ensure that the validity of information is not compromised.

ECI - I think ECI is only larger if we considered the total (numbers) of the two sides.

Maryland Penitentiary - I believe is a maximum security institution. Baltimore, with it's commercial port is a "large industrial town", especially in comparison to our other sites. As it is essential to avoid exposing information that could lead to the identification of sites and/or participants, I use more generalized labels ("industrial town," "county seat," etc.).

OSTC - I considered OSTC a pre-release unit, where skills and employment readiness training is provided to both male and female inmates. I don't think I mentioned that they are housed together, as I know it is not so.

5. Taperecorders

I have asked Security Chief Keith Raines about the use o recording equipment. Mr. Raines advised to send a memo requesting permission to use a taperecorder. The exact date, time and location should be given along with the name and position of those who are involved in the recording. It is understood, that the equipment is secured, off limits and unavailable to inmates.

I hope I have supplied satisfactory answers and explanations to all your questions and my request to conduct the interviews will be granted as soon as possible.

Thank you very much.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORMS

Dear Colleague:

My name is Edit Mária Sayko, I am a correctional educator "serving" my twelfth year in a large state prison. During this time I became very interested in the lives of correctional teachers. If you -- as almost all of us -- started your teaching career in public school, you would agree that prison teaching is very different from public school teaching. I started wondering: Does it mean that prison teachers are also different from public school teachers? What is our professional life like? What is the meaning of the lives of correctional teachers? What makes a teacher a prison teacher?

Presently I am a doctoral candidate at the College of Education, University of Maryland, USA. I am researching the experiences of correctional educators as part of my dissertation, entitled The Making of a Prison Teacher. My goal is to find answers to the above questions in a quest to uncover the hidden meaning of life experiences of prison teachers. I hope to be able to accurately describe the life of educators in prison, and to learn what makes an educator become a prison educator. I also hope that information gleaned from this research will provide valuable insights that could be applied to the pre-service (and in-service) training of future correctional educators. Eventually I would also like to share these insights with the general public in order to shed a little light on the important and valuable services we, prison teachers, provide for the benefit of society.

I would like to ask for your help with my research, by sharing some of your experiences as a prison teacher. I would like to have a conversation of 1 ½ to 2 hours, to discuss your experiences and the meanings they hold for you. I will also ask for your consent to have our conversation taped and transcribed, and quoted in parts or in its entirety in my dissertation and possibly in later publications. I assure you that your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Your identity will be protected and confidentiality maintained throughout the research process. All written and taped information collected during our interviews will be kept in strict confidence in compliance with the standard ethics protocol of social science research activities. Tapes and transcripts will be handled only by me, and will be destroyed after my research is completed. Names, locations and other identifying data will not be used.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone (301)791-7200 at work, (301)577-0383 at home, or by E-mail at saykoedit@juno.

I want you to know how much I appreciate your participation in my research project. Sharing your experiences is an extremely important and valuable resource. I hope you will find that our conversations gave you a new awareness and renewed appreciation for the importance of our shared profession and your valuable position in it.

Thank you very much,

Edit Mária Sayko, M.Ed.

Participant Consent Form

Title of Research: The Making of a Prison Teacher. A Phenomenological Journey Through Lived Experiences of Correctional Educators.

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Edit Mária Sayko at the University of Maryland, USA.

I understand that the goal of this research is to unconceal the nature of the experiences correctional educators live through while teaching in prison. I am also aware that discovering a personal meaning of these experiences is a further goal of this research.

I agree to provide information on my formal education and my teaching experiences both in and out of prison. I agree to share some of my experiences as a prison teacher, and to discuss the meaning those experiences hold for me.

I agree to have an initial conversation (of 1 to 1 ½ hours) and a follow-up session if required. I agree to have these conversations taped, transcribed and to be cited or included in parts or in their entirety in the final text of Ms. Sayko's dissertation and any future publication.

I also agree to have my writing (in its entirety or excerpted) to be included in the final text of Ms.Sayko's dissertation and any other future publication.

I understand that my name and the name and location of my Institution will be kept strictly confidential, and information that might identify me will not be used.

I understand that I will not be under any physical or emotional risk as a participant in this research. I am participating in this research voluntarily and understand that I have the liberty to conclude my participation at any time.

Faculty Advisor

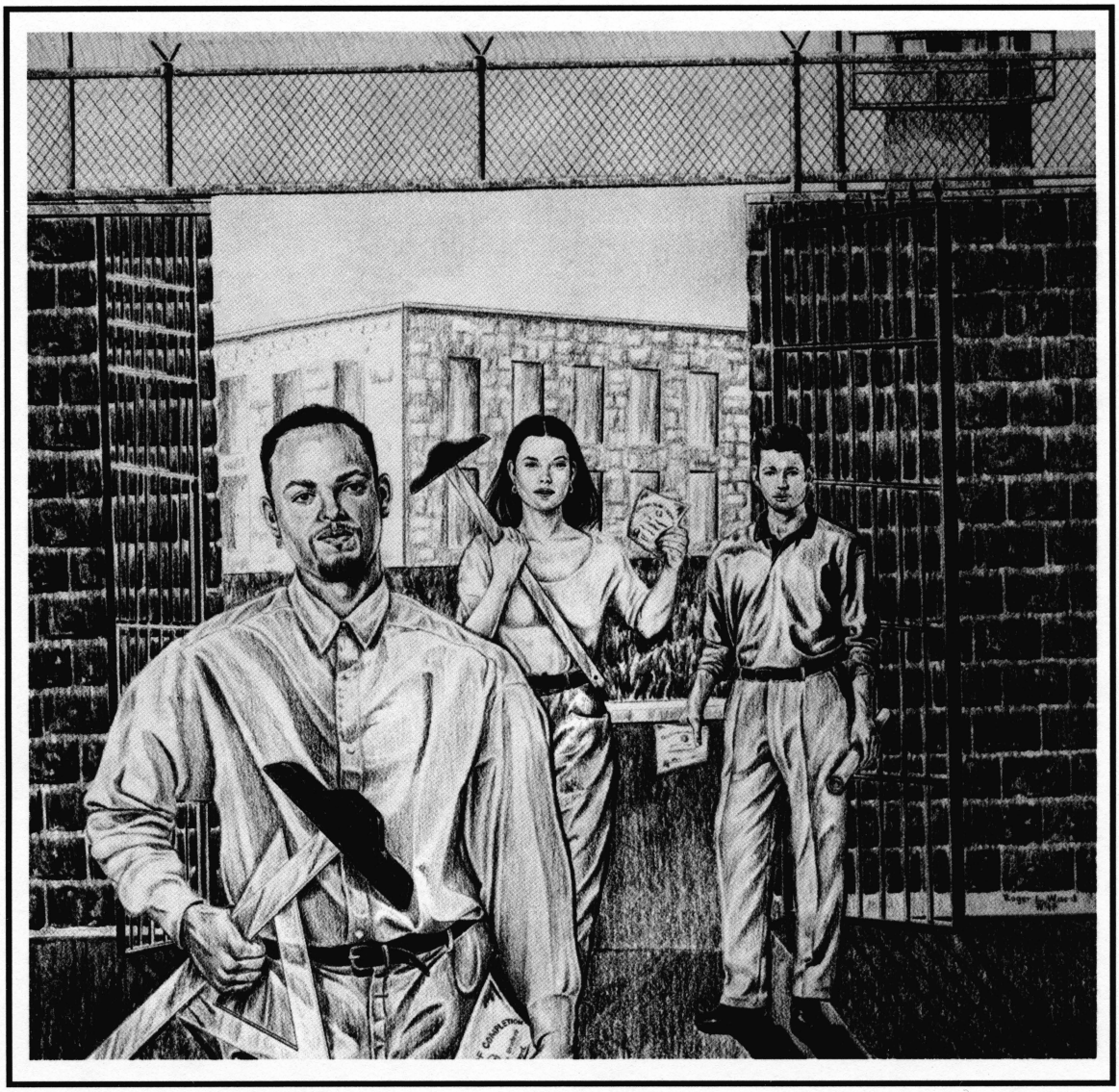
Dr. Francine Hultgren
University of Maryland
College of Education
Education Policy, Planning and Administration
Benjamin Building
College Park Phone: 301-405-4562

Researcher

Edit Mária Sayko
7411 Varnum Street
Hyattsville, MD 20784 Phone: 301-791-7200 E-mail: saykoedit@juno.com

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____



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