

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: LISTENING TO ADOLESCENT
HEARTSONGS: PHENOMENOLOGICAL
POSSIBILITIES IN TEACHING WRITING

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Doctor of Philosophy, 2007

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This hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, is called by the question: **What is the lived experience of high school students who share something they have written from the heart?** The metaphor of the human heart opens my understanding of the experiences of thirty-two students who write and share their writings in sophomore English class. My understanding of this experience deepens during after-school conversations with twelve of those students. Text, offering words for hermeneutic pondering, was compiled from conversations, journals, student writings and sharing activities. All voices were taped and transcribed to provide a visual remembrance of these lived experiences.

The methodology underpinning this human science inquiry, is identified by Max van Manen (2003) as one that “involves description, interpretation, and self-reflective or critical analysis” (p. 4). Through my students’ heartfelt words, I see them write their way to self-discovery. The importance of “lived space” (van Manen, 2002,

p. 102) is brought forward, and lets me understand that students need to feel at “home” in school if they are to be successful. As we create a sacred space together, my students and I experience safety and freedom. In this space we find our “i-entities” and hear our heartsongs. When sharing those songs, students announce their fears of failure, death and the swift passage of time; their memories; their longing for communication and disappointment in not connecting. We dwell together in the unique, sacredness of each other, opening a listening space where relationality “allows us to transcend ourselves” (p. 105). It is here that we celebrate more similarities than differences.

The valued end of any class should include a place where students feel comfortable with themselves and others. Curriculum should be relevant to each student, providing an opportunity for self discovery and acceptance. Writing of a personal nature must be included across the curriculum so students learn to value themselves, fellow human beings, and the universe.

LISTENING TO ADOLESCENT HEARTSONGS:
PHENOMENOLOGICAL POSSIBILITIES IN TEACHING WRITING

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2007

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2007

DEDICATION

Mary and Blaine McKenzie
whose combined hearts made mine possible

Ray
who holds my heart and believes in me

Maureen
who has filled my heart with joy and wonder
since I first felt her presence beneath my own heart

Pat, Mike, and Larry
whose brotherly love and support was and is a part of who I am

My Students
who share their hearts and keep me real

Francine
in whose heart I see the Divine

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the Heart that holds me fast and makes it possible for me to *be*.

Thanks, more than I know how to say, to Francine for never giving up on me and for being, not just an inspirational teacher, but a remarkably caring, human being. The hours of time you spent reading and responding to my work in such a positive, caring manner has given me wings for flight in many areas. Thank you.

I am indebted to my dissertation committee: Dr. Hultgren, Dr. Slater, Dr. Selden, Dr. Bass and Dr. Wharton. Thanks for being willing to take on the task of guiding me in this process. Thank you for opening your minds and hearts to my study. Your intellectual guidance and suggestions are much appreciated. A special thank you to Dr. Selden who was willing to step in at the last minute and complete my committee. Thanks, also, to Dr. Saracho who offered support and direction for the first three chapters.

I thank the Maryland Writing Project for opening my eyes and heart to the miraculous place writing holds in the classroom and beyond. I also am grateful to Barbara and Linda W, who were my coordinators at the MWP. You both showed me how to practice what we, as teachers of writing, preach. You responded to my heart with your hearts and started me on an incredible path of self discovery.

Thanks to the Hermes Circle whose members both inspired me and cheered me on. Debbie, Kathy, Judith and Staley, thanks for “re-circling” with me and for listening, helping and encouraging every inch of the way. Thanks for the dinners, the books, the e-mails and the “wine and whines.” I have always been grateful for your friendship and just knowing you all were there for me.

Barbara and Maggie, thanks for writing and “beaching” with me, and for trekking all the way up to my house once a month for a whole year after my accident just so we could stay in touch and I wouldn’t give up. Thanks for being willing to read my work and for pointing me in the right direction. You kept me writing even though, at times, you rarely saw anything productive. Thanks for helping to mend my wings. I am forever grateful to you both.

Barbara, Audrey and Ann, my middle school pals, always willing to help in anyway you could, whether it meant praying, listening to me read, lending me a computer, or proofreading a bibliography, I owe more to you three than my heart knows how to say.

To Pat and Jane, early buddies on this journey, thanks for remaining my friends over all of this time. Comps would never have been the same without you. When I went to “the Phenomenological side,” you both still listened and said, “May the force be with you.” Thanks.

When my heart was broken from leaving my old school, Terri and Lorraine, you let me be friends with you. Thanks for opening your hearts to me. Thanks for reading and re-reading my proposal, for offering to teach my classes, to grade my papers, to fill my glass, and to cook my food. Who could ask for any better friends?

Thanks to Ray, who has probably driven to the University of Maryland more often than I have. You have the greatest heart I know, and I am glad you share it with me.

To all of my students, past and present, I thank you for sustaining my heart and my belief in what I do. Thanks in particular to the class of 2004 who opened their hearts and helped me give voice to this phenomenological study. Thanks, especially, to the twelve conversants who came diligently after school, because they believed in me and thought that we, together, might make a difference.

Thanks to Mattie Stepanek, God rest his soul and sustain his heartsongs. He helped me hear the heartsongs of my students and serves as an inspiration to us all.

Thanks to Sierra Keys, a student who presently shares heartsongs with me, for painting the incredible picture of the heart dripping ink that honors the cover of this binder and will have a place in my heart and on my wall forever.

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CHAPTER ONE:

TURNING TO THE PHENOMENON OF CONNECTING THROUGH PERSONAL WRITING

Alone in a crowded circle,
I know everyone, I know no one,
They fill the hole inside me,
But not forever, not for long. (Ben)

My emotions are like the ocean waves and
I, a rock too far in. (Aleah)

It doesn't matter that I can't find the sweater that she gave me for Christmas
last year. It doesn't matter that the neck of it was unraveling on the right side.
It doesn't matter that the girl I loved more than anything had a nervous
breakdown and is gone from my life forever. (Philip)

I am a winner, until I lose.
I am different, until I want to fit in. (Shanece)

I don't want to conform to other people's ideals, but I find myself doing it. I've
learned to stand up straight, to watch my weight, to put on makeup, to buy the
latest fashion trends; everything but how to just be me. (Marsha)

These excerpts are samples of writing from my tenth grade students--parts of
personal pieces--some poems, some narratives--all exhibiting emotions that throb
through their adolescent veins. These sharings of self leave them vulnerable, hearts on
their pages. Ben, a boisterous, seemingly self-assured "grinner," saunters into my
room on a regular basis. He provides entertainment for us daily with his witty
remarks. Here, however, he says he feels as though he "knows no one" and longs to
fill "a hole inside." As I read his words, I wonder if his classmates ever see this
introspective side of him. Will he volunteer to share this with the rest of the class
when we read? I wonder why he has chosen to express his loneliness in a poem
turned in to me, and I wonder if he is anticipating any particular reaction from me.

Does he care about my reaction one way or the other? Perhaps my thoughts about him are not as threatening as his peers' thoughts.

Aleah and Philip write that they long for feelings to drain out or wash over them as they beg for emotional release. Their candor fascinates me. Both students are quiet and non-participatory in class, and I marvel that they finally have spoken up. What freedom does the blank page offer that our classroom space does not? What is it like for them to finally "put themselves out there"? In what way will they experience the reactions their papers inspire?

Shanece and Marsha pose the age-old problem of "fitting in" and "being me." From their desks in my room, both of these girls seem accepted and self-confident. As I look at the personal thoughts each of these students exposes here, I fall into the rhythm of their words. I think about what it means to have personal writing be a part of my classroom. I ask myself why, for thirteen years, I have required "personal choice" pieces of writing from my students. Why every year when I sift out ideas and lessons to throw away, is this the one that I preserve? I wonder what the essence of these writing experiences is for my students. I ask if the sharing of themselves this way is as valuable for my students as it is for me. I question in what manner their sharing is actually valuable for me. Looking at my high school students' papers, I want to know what moves some of these students, who are so quiet and private about themselves in class, to pour their hearts out on paper. I wonder about their desire to connect--to connect with themselves, their classmates and me. As I consider the various ways writing presents opportunities for connection, I turn to the phenomenon of connecting through personal writing.

I think back five years ago to when I was still teaching seventh grade. My classroom was somewhat different then. We had fun with writing; students, eager to share their written words, read aloud at least once a quarter. It amused me sometimes that, even when they had relatively nothing to say, their hands waved enthusiastically to be the first to share what they had written. Twelve-year-olds did not need to be prodded to share. They needed, however, to be led to dig deeper, to explore beyond what they did on vacations; needed to be allowed to cry on paper when grandparents died or to explore the pangs of self-discovery and heartbreak as puberty engulfed them. I reveled in watching my young charges evolve. These were years of discovery for us. For the first time, their bodies, brains and hearts tried to work in synergy, and I tried to figure out how to harness all their energy to enrich our classroom. Writing provided a tool to help them transition through some of their pubescent nightmares. I strove for a sense of family with my little team of students, and as we grew together and shared our growth, writing served as the glue that bonded us together. We went from writing anything just to hear ourselves speak out loud, to writing pieces of which we really were proud. Because we grew together as writers, we seldom hesitated to share what we had written.

You can imagine my surprise, then, when my first tenth grade class refused to share anything on our first writing day. What happens between twelve and fifteen to create this situation? When I presented the dilemma to my high school colleagues for advice, I was told not to require personal writing because there was no time for such "touchy-feely nonsense" in the high school curriculum. I was not sure, at first, what that would mean to my daily planning. I had always incorporated writing as a way of

getting to know my students, a way of establishing a positive classroom climate, one where students feel comfortable enough to succeed. Following the first dimension in Marzano's *Dimensions of Learning* (1992), I had tried to build a space for success within our academic setting through personal writing. Marzano (1992) says, "Effective teachers take into account the attitudes and perceptions of the learner and then shape lessons to foster positive attitudes and perceptions" (p. 5). For me, personal writing is an effective way to "take into account the attitudes and perceptions of the learner."

Despite my previous pedagogical assumptions, for the first quarter of my high school teaching career, I did as I was told. I replaced my Snoopy and Garfield posters with Shakespeare and Whitman, and for writing, concentrated solely on analyses, expositions, and term papers. Another colleague told me not to use personal journals with my students because "these kids get way too personal, and you can end up with a good lawsuit on your hands," so I discontinued journals as well. By the end of the first quarter I truly felt "there was no joy in [high school]-ville; mighty [Hartshorn] had struck out." With no personal writing from my adolescent charges, I felt something was missing in my classroom. I discovered that I cannot teach effectively without requiring personal pieces as part of my repertoire. Why is this so important to my teaching? I question the value that student personal writing and sharing has for me as a teacher, and I wonder what my students experience when writing and sharing themselves with me and their classmates.

The Heart of the Matter

With all these "wonderings" in mind, I am called to listen to what the adolescent "heart wants to tell," and I ask, "What is the lived experience of students writing personal choice pieces in a public school setting?" As I question, I realize that the phenomenon of connecting through personal writing, like a fine, old tree, has many layers. As I examine my pedagogy, I ask what is at the center of this phenomenon. What constitutes the concentric circles that surround its core, expanding its girth?

According to *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology* (Barnhart, 1988, p. 220) core is a noun borrowed from the Old French *cuer*, *coeur*. Originally, it referred to the heart of a fruit or vegetable. As early as the 1300s, the Latin *cor* also is noted to mean heart. Skeat's *Concise Dictionary of English Etymology* (1993, p. 198) traces the word heart back to Sanskrit where *hrid* or *hridaya* means "that which quivers" and to the Greek *κραδᾶειν* which means "to quiver or throb." Perhaps at the core of the phenomenon of connecting through writing is a throbbing heart, one whose quivering voice creates the circles that make it whole. Perhaps at the center of personal writing, as some have suggested, is a desire to know who we are and to connect ourselves with others.

As I consider how students struggle to connect on a daily basis, and note that many are frustrated to the point of explosion when they are unable to make a connection, I ask myself how I might use the tool of writing personal pieces to help them connect. As I think of my students, I note that Barnhart's dictionary carries the definition of core into the realm of modern day by noting that, since 1949, the word

"core is used to indicate a part of a nuclear reactor containing fissionable material" (p. 220). My students sometimes seem like little bombs destined to explode. Contents under pressure, their heartbeats quicken, and they seem programmed to detonate. In what manner might writing be used as a de-fuser for my adolescent "reactors"? Is it possible that writing can calm their pressures, lead them to a place of less anxiety, permit them to connect with one another? If so, what conditions must be present for students to share their voices and for their voices to be heard?

Connecting with the Universal Beat

How important is connecting for any of us? Is our longing to connect with each other a sign that we have a greater need to be part of things in general?

Campbell interprets Schopenhauer's ideas about dreams that suggest a large universal symphony:

Just as your dreams are composed by an aspect of yourself of which your consciousness is unaware, so, too, your whole life is composed by the will within you. And just as people whom you will have met apparently by mere chance became leading agents in the structuring of your life, so too, will you have served unknowingly as an agent, giving meaning to the lives of others. The whole thing gears together like one big symphony, with everything unconsciously structuring everything else. . . . it is as though our lives were the features of the one great dream of a single dreamer in which all the dream characters dream, too; so that everything links to everything else, moved by the one will to life which is the universal will in nature. (Campbell, 1988, p. 284)

In what way do our classrooms play a part in this symphony, this great dream? How might we help our students connect with themselves, their classmates, us, and a universal composition, a single dream?

Jung (1958) claims that everyone has the ability to recognize a cosmic connection by virtue of what he calls the "collective unconscious." We need only be

aware of our authentic existence to feel this underlying connection. In what manner might writing help my students find a self who instinctively feels part of a bigger picture? Attentive listeners may have a chance to hear what O'Donohue (1999) refers to as an "eternal echo" that sings to us all. Perhaps my students, as Jung suggests (1958), not only need to recognize the importance of the individual self, but must come to know that they are a part of something larger than themselves. Like Joseph Campbell's (1949/1968) mythmakers and all of humankind, my students demonstrate Jung's ideas of a universal archetype. Just as Campbell explains the similarities in the mythologies of the world as a result of each culture's attentiveness to the collective unconscious, my students may recognize their place in the universal symphony by valuing their individual heartsongs.

Maintaining the Web

In the late 1850s when the last of the Indian Wars was drawing to a close, Chief Seattle, a respected leader of the Northwest Nations, presented the idea of our place in a universal connection in this way:

This we know: All things are connected like the blood that unites us.
We did not weave the web of life,
We are merely a strand in it.
Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.
(Seattle, as cited in Jeffers, 1850/1992, n. p.)

As part of a life's web, how might we help each other see the universal connections? I think of my classroom as a web with each of us contributing to its network. We are in a position to connect with one another on a daily basis, but the fragile filaments that join us to each other and the web are difficult to spin. We fear rejection, a cutting off

that will cause a hemorrhage of lifeblood; therefore, we expose life strands cautiously.

Van Manen (2003) says human beings in a larger existential sense "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" (p. 105). In what way do we have a responsibility to nourish such communal experiences in our classrooms? Palmer (1998) suggests that "Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves" (p. 11). What kind of writing works best to foster the weaving that connects children to themselves, to others, to their world? Perhaps through personal writing we may strengthen the universal web. Perhaps the web of blood that surges through our bodies and throbs in our hearts provides a song to help unite us in that larger web.

Conversing with the Dead

Abraham Lincoln, in a lecture before the Springfield Library Association, refers to writing as a supreme tool for connecting when he says,

Writing, the art of communicating thoughts to the mind through the eye, is the great invention of the world . . . enabling us to converse with the dead, the absent, and the unborn, at all distances of time and space. (Lincoln, as cited in Freedman, 1987, p. 135)

The power of writing as a tool for communication and connection is exquisitely expressed in these lines by Lincoln. When I read his message, I think about the power words can have; not only may we express our thoughts or read another's, but we actually might connect with persons living and dead by hearing what they have

written, by sharing their thoughts. Anne Tyler (2001) expresses the simple beauty of this kind of connection in a recent novel. In *Back When We Were Grownups* the main character admits that she "used to get crushes, almost, on people like, Mahatma Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln" (Tyler, p. 139). The speaker admits that she studied the lives of these famous people, read their writings and fell in love with them. I feel the same way when reading great writers, including my students. How exciting to know that by opening a book or reading a paper and delving into another person's words, we may actually get to know her/him. People touch us, and we connect with them. We may, like Lincoln says, even connect with "the dead, the absent, and the unborn over all distances of time and space." We each have an opportunity to share ourselves in this marvelous way. We may not all become famous enough to have our words preserved for generations like Shakespeare, Seattle, or Lincoln, but we may be able to communicate at least who we are and what "we are about" to those around us in the here and now.

Overall there is "an interconnectedness of things and events, a universal communion is the fundamental characteristic of reality. . . ." (Southard, 2001, n.p.). This universal communion transcends generations. According to Redfield (1993), seeing the significance of our interconnectedness may even be an important part of the evolutionary process. In *The Celestine Prophecy*, Redfield presents a picture of evolutionary development that ultimately culminates positively through the power of human connection. The final insights of a manuscript giving a blueprint for the successful, conclusive stages of human evolution, show people so totally interconnected that they evolve to a post-human level.

When we give, we receive in return because of the way energy interacts in the universe. Remember, when we project energy into someone else, this creates a void in ourselves which, if we are connected, fills up again. . . Once we begin to give constantly, we will always have more coming in than we could possibly give away. (Redfield, 1993, pp. 225-226)

Redfield sees our connecting as an integral part of evolutionary development. As humankind seeks perfection, the only way to achieve it--to cross "the barrier between this life and the other world from which we came and to which we go after death" (p. 241) -- is through interconnectedness.

A look at what happens in society when people find no connection can be seen in the "Ophelia" publications. When adolescent girls write about a search for self in *Ophelia Speaks* (Shandler, 1999), the author points out that a revival of Ophelia can be accomplished only by hearing "the collective voice and actions of Ophelias everywhere" (p. xiii). Originally, the book *Reviving Ophelia* (Pipher, 1995) told about girls trapped in the Ophelia Syndrome--teenagers caught "only in fulfilling the expectations of others" (Shandler, 1999, p. xii). These two texts reveal what disconnection is doing to our children. Discovering that we are not alone in the world may give some of us the courage to speak from personal experience as it does the hundreds of girls who wrote, hoping for revival through their printed words.

Sharing the Beat

Connecting with one another is not always easy. When one's thoughts are written down, the sharing of those thoughts may join people across time and space, as Lincoln says, but only if someone hears our words.

You want other people to read it. You want to know what they think. We are social animals, and we are trying to communicate with others of our species, and up to now, you have been alone in a hole getting your work done. You have no idea whether it sings to anyone but you. (Lamott, 1994, pp. 151-152)

Sharing our writing in an educational setting makes us and our students reach for connections both within and without the classroom. Once we find a way to connect in one setting, it seems to strengthen our willingness to seek connections elsewhere. I think back to when I first felt connection through my own written words: the summer of 1994. I had written a short piece about some of my inner thoughts and feelings and was asked to share this with a group of peers. I was petrified, but once my piece was aired, and my colleagues admitted that they "knew where I was coming from," I felt encouraged to look for more ways to make connections with my classmates. In what way may student writing serve as a vehicle for connection? When students write, if they write from the heart, they reveal themselves. When they share, put their hearts on paper, someone is bound to see who they are. At first, perhaps, the one most surprised at the revelation in the writing is the author of the words her/himself. Eventually, however, the written page is shared.

Sometimes the writer reads aloud and listeners hear the message on the paper, thereby connecting to the person speaking. Sometimes the teacher is the only one reading the person's work. Sometimes the teacher is not open to thoughts on the paper, and rejects the person in a flurry of red ink, finding only fault with the words. In this case there is **dis-connection**. Sometimes the teacher provides positive, constructive feedback on ideas and does not pick the writer's words apart. In these instances, a student senses that the teacher desires a true connection, that the teacher values the student's ideas.

What is it like for students if their "heart-felt pieces" are not well received by the reader after they struggle to put them down? Let me take you to my own home

several years ago, to a time when I first began to turn to the phenomenon of connecting when writing from the heart.

The school bus stops, and my nine-year-old daughter runs up the outside steps to our townhouse. Her red hair tangles in the swiftness of the early spring breeze as she slams the front door and throws a crumple of papers on the dining room table.

"She wrote all over them," she howls as she ascends the stairs to her room. I pick up the packet of poetry she has been eager to have returned by her teacher and follow the trail of small footprints on the stairs. For her, it is not a time for reason or sympathy. She feels sabotaged by her fourth grade teacher's red pen. Our conversation reveals that my daughter is not upset by her grade, but she is crushed that her teacher vandalized her work. She feels that Mrs. Jones did not respect her page, violated her in a sense. She claims she will never share "anything good" with "that woman ever again."

I try to defend her teacher's intentions, but all is to no avail. It is not until eleventh grade that she ever shares creative writing with anyone again. (Hartshorn, 2001)

As I recall this scene, I wonder if all of us, my students included, suffer from red pen syndrome. I wonder what happens to my students between seventh and tenth grade that makes them unwilling to spill blood for connection. Is it "peer fear" that holds them back? Is it teacher judgment or lack thereof that contributes to their hesitation? What part does "respect" for another person's written ideas play in classroom climate?

I think back to my own high school days. One particular episode comes to mind. In our senior year, my peers and I had a Problems of Democracy class that was less than inspiring. The worst part of the whole course was that every night we had to write five pages of answers to questions at the end of each chapter. One of the girls in my class announced to the rest of us that she spent very little time on this mindless exercise. She said that she just copied "any old thing" she felt like copying quickly, but in good penmanship. She told us she was convinced that Sister Bernadette did not

read the papers at all. We did not believe her. She bet us that she could write her own name five times within the body of the pages on the next day's assignment and still get an A. We dared her. She proved her point when her A outranked the papers of many girls who had actually done the assignment conscientiously. I have never forgotten this lesson. As a prospective teacher, I vowed to read everything that I assigned to my students. From that day forward, my classmates and I questioned how our work would be received or if it would be read at all. After Carol's experiment, few of us ever put much thought into completing those questions for Sister Bernadette again. If no one is going to read the paper a person writes, what does this reader-absence do to the prospective writer? Perhaps rejection of even insignificant writing communicates a rejection of the writer's self as well.

Frank McCourt (2000), in a lecture at Towson University, evoked a sympathetic murmur from his audience as he described finding bags of wonderful, heartfelt, ungraded compositions in the closet of his first classroom in New York City. He wondered how the previous teacher's total disregard for these "feelings on paper" had affected the previous writers in that room. The empathetic sounds of McCourt's listeners indicated that his experience was universally understood. When students write and are ignored, what happens to them? Are they so interested in making a connection that they never stop trying to connect? Do they become less and less willing to give it their all as time goes on? If trust in the listening ear is erased by the red pen syndrome or "no pen" syndrome, how may that trust be rekindled? In what manner do my responses influence my students' willingness to share? And how do I convince those who have been disappointed by listeners in the past that I have a

listening ear? Then, finally, I wonder how I might invite my students to provide open hearts and ears for their own writing and the writing of their peers.

When I asked my daughter what finally had caused her to share creative pieces again, I suspected that she simply was more mature and not as bothered by rejection. She said, "It was the way Mrs. Bell [her eleventh grade writing teacher] always acted like what I wrote was worth reading. She said I was good. It made me write more." This made me think about my own classroom. Students' willingness to write does seem to have something to do with the way their words are received. Once trust in the listener has diminished, it takes time to repair the trust.

"I can't believe you actually care what I think. Most teachers don't. I'm going to like keeping this journal." These words come from a student in response to comments made by me in his personal journal. I think about the part teacher-response plays in fostering an atmosphere where writing and connecting can be experienced. Another student writes, "You don't have to write about what I said, a simple check or a 'good' will be fine." Her statement makes me wonder what causes one student to enjoy sharing ideas and another to seek seclusion. How do the wide variety of students' conceptions and pre-conceptions about response to their writings affect the pieces my students submit? Is there a difference between what they will share with me and what they will share with their classmates? How might I create a way of "being" with my students that brings forth a more productive writing environment? If I listen openly to my students, and invite them to discover themselves and their ideas, will they respond openly? By sharing my own writing, exposing myself and my ideas, do I pave the way for them, showing that we have common discomfort with self-

discovery? In a trusting environment, students may feel comfortable enough to be who they are. In sharing ideas and feelings, they connect with one another and me.

Students sometimes tell us what they need. Every summer students who attend the Student Writers' Workshop at Towson University come together with teachers in the Summer Teachers' Institute for at least one day. In a group discussion, teachers ask students about their experiences as writers. The question about "teacher feedback" always comes up. Year after year, I hear the same kind of response that I heard from my own daughter so long ago: "I can't stand it when they write on my stuff." I wonder how my students feel about the comments I make on their papers. I wonder, too, if responses to my students' writings over the years may have influenced their willingness to write.

When we put our hearts on paper, they are open, and when a listener fails to appreciate the beat of our words, s/he rejects the self we try to share. Once a student has written something s/he feels is important, the reader or listener needs to value the individual's words, regardless of the language flaws. I once heard that "The essence of language is communication, not stylistic excellence." That becomes particularly true if we are interested in connecting with one another in the classroom. Think about the times when you, as a kid, came running up to someone with an exciting bit of information to share, only to have your enthusiasm foiled by an eager grammarian. You: "Hey, Mom, me and John . . ." Mom: "John and I!" If you were like some, you might not even finish the statement. If like others, a drop in tone would indicate a realization that your words were not good enough for the listener. Enthusiasm daunted, you knew that *how* not *what* you spoke was significant. As an English

teacher, how might I preserve my students' enthusiasm for the *what* they need to say as they learn that grammatical competence is also important?

Heart to Heart

Writing has the power to foster relationships. Van Manen (2003) tells us that "Relationality is the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them" (p. 104). Developing a positive interpersonal space with high school students takes effort. Without that development, however, the "lived relation we [try to] maintain" may suffer. In order to connect with students on a personal level, teachers must be willing to see adolescents as people, not papers. Teachers must be willing to look at students for who they are, not just how well they say something.

Perhaps we teachers also must be willing to share ourselves, to let students see what is in our hearts. If we expect them to be open, perhaps we must be willing to open up as well. Palmer (1998) and Tompkins (1996) both call for teachers to be more authentic in their dealings with students. Writing can be a tool for sharing the authentic self. What is the lived experience of those who put their hearts on paper, of those who bare their souls? What happens when students and teachers connect through sharing their writing?

"Teachers of writing must be writers themselves" (see National Writing Project Assumptions, Appendix H). They must know what it is like to "put themselves out there" for examination. They must know what it is like to hear and share one's heartsongs and what it is like to wait to feel a connection. Teachers must connect with their students and their curricula in real ways (van Manen, 2003). They

must be willing to discover themselves and share who they are (Palmer, 1998). And, they must be willing to develop an authentic relationship with their students by sharing themselves. In what manner might I, as a high school English teacher, develop an authentic atmosphere that fosters connections, student-to-teacher and student-to-student? What is the lived experience of adolescents who write? How might they be led to make connections?

What is the nature of relationality in our classrooms, rooms where students and teachers are chunked off into groups: the preps, the goths, the punks, the jocks, the brains, the geeks, the loners and the teachers? All search for some small connection; each exhibits her/his right to be unique just in case no connection will be made. Underneath all the clothes and the attitudes, are we not essentially separate? Perhaps these lyrics demonstrate a dilemma that haunts each of us:

Alone
All alone I didn't like the feeling
All alone I sat and cried.
All alone I had to find some meaning
In the center of the pain I felt inside.
All alone I came into this world
All alone I will someday die
Solid stone is just sand and water, baby
Sand and water and a million years gone by.
(Chapman, 1997, track 4)

Beth Neilsen Chapman croons these words on the CD titled *Sand and Water* (1997). Chapman created this album to cope with the death of her husband, and the letters from fans indicate that her singing about her feelings has helped them heal from similar wounds. Through her words we hear a yearning for connection, and realize that there has been a cry for relationality across the ages. The "heart is a lonely hunter" in Carson McCullers' (1940/1967) words, and we all yearn to be connected.

Do students find it important to make a connection? My students not only suffer the isolation of adolescence, but our school system compounds that isolation by forcing them into unfriendly, unreal spaces. We move them from class to class, forcing them from one place to another, throwing them in with one group of strangers after another. Casey (1993) reminds us that "The more [we] find [ourselves] to be isolated . . . , the more [we] will tend to find [our] surroundings desolate" (p. 197). We will suffer an alienation from the place and space where we normally reside. In his book, *Getting Back into Place* (1993), Casey describes Navaho tribes whose members lose their individual identities because they no longer have a place of residence. One who "loses his place of residence loses his personal identity and his connection to the Great Self which provides a collective identity to an entire people" (p. 197). Our students, like the Navahos, experience a sense of **dis-connection** from their place as we pack them into buildings that are 123 percent over capacity and section them off into clumps of strangers each time we reschedule them. In what way do we as teachers help students feel **re-connected**, help them to re-establish their personal identities? In what manner can we help them share who they are with the groups they encounter in these places of alienation?

Most writers hope to connect with their audiences. Dillard (1990), in talking about her writing life says, "People love pretty much the same things best. A writer looking for subjects inquires not after what he loves best, but after what he alone loves at all" (p. 67). Discovering that, he will make a connection because as human beings we share similar loves. Students seem frightened that they are the only ones who think or value a certain thing. After a journal sharing, Nancy writes,

I think being asked to share is a good thing because it allows you to share your inner thoughts at a time when others are less likely to judge you. Because if they wrote honestly then their writings would be similar, and they may find that they feel the same way you do.

Sharing offers an opportunity for students to recognize a sameness between us that Dillard refers to above.

Natalie Goldberg (1986) looks at a different aspect of writing when she says that, in order to get to the real meat of what is inside of us, we "have to go for the jugular" (p. 8), bleed on the paper. In order for students to discover a genuine connection, they must be willing to open that vein, put the real self out there to be heard. They must be willing to reveal what they love best.

When I first moved from middle to high school, I tried to maintain a professional conversation with my former teammates. We began an inter-school-journal via our county courier. At the end of each day we would journal about the day's experience and send our journals to one another for commentary. As I began to explore the idea that my students needed to write from the heart, I thought about using the heart as my metaphor for this research. My friend Bill, who teaches science on my former middle school team, responds about heart felt connecting in this way:

Did you know that if two heart-muscle cells are removed from a live person and are kept alive in a laboratory culture dish, they will continue to contract (beat)? And IF and when they accidentally touch each other, they start beating in unison. True story. People are that way, too, but you have to 'touch them.' (Carpenter, Personal Journal, 1999)

What kind of atmosphere do our classrooms need to provide in order for our students to "touch each other" in a heartfelt sense? What part do teachers play in that atmosphere? What is the lived experience of students who try to connect through their writing? What is it like for them to write from the heart, knowing that someone will

see them bleed? Perhaps Bentzley puts it best in this poem where she reveals her experience of trying to write something to share aloud in a creative writing group:

Frustration
The white page stares up at me
daring me to break the silence
and fill the empty void.
The right words escape me.
Crisp, clean lines taunt me
My mind...
desperate to make a connection.
To strike out on my own
and reveal my naked truths.
To tell my story
On plain white paper.
(Bentzley, 2001, p. 14)

Is this what it is like for my students, too? Do "blank pages" and "crisp lines taunt" them? Do they struggle to "make a connection" and reveal their "naked truths"? As I read Bentzley's words, I wonder what creates this discomfort. What part does peer critique play when writers, including my students, put their hearts into their writing?

Hearing the Beat

Where does it all begin? Who are the listeners? Is the writer the first who must listen attentively? Listen to what some writers say. We all "have dreams and fantasies which haunt and delight [us]," but it is not always easy "to discover the universe inside [us]" (Ballenger & Lane, 1996, Introduction). "The writer is often fearful in the face of the mysterious, unknowable working of the creative process" (Ayres, 2000, p. 2). "When [we] sit down and write with an open heart, [we] often wind up sharing what [we] did not even know [we] had to say" (Klauser, 1995, p. 3). We sometimes marvel at self-discovery. Once we take our heart's dictation, we then consider whether to share ourselves with others. We look for acceptance through audience. If

our words fall upon deaf ears, critical ears, understanding ears, sympathetic ears, empathetic ears or receptive ears, do those ears direct the cadence of our songs?

Tuning In

We must listen our way into that place where we ourselves belong. With this, reflection leads us through the question as to whether we still belong anywhere at all. Even to merely anticipate where we could belong it is necessary to experience ourselves. (Heidegger, 1981/1998, pp.16-17)

What part does a listening ear play in "experienc[ing] ourselves," and in the lived experience of students sharing something they have written from the heart? Are the writers the first listeners, the ones who need to be able to "listen [their] way into that place where" they belong? Student writers must hear their hearts' songs first. "Writing is the art of a listening heart" (Cameron, 1998, p. 28). If we are to be writers, then we must first be listeners. What part does the listener play in a writing experience? "To be a writer, you must become a tourist and explore the country of your own life" (Newman, 1993, p. 2). Our own lived experiences are recorded in our hearts and long to be sung for others to hear. Sometimes my students are afraid to hear their own hearts or to have others hear about their experiences. One of my students expresses his feelings after sharing a piece of writing:

You know, I was afraid to read it out loud. I was afraid to find out what people really thought about it. I mean, not everybody thinks like me, ya know. I guess you heard my voice cracking. Sorry about that. But nearly everyone came up to me at lunch and said how much they liked what I read. I know now, I can really share my good stuff. (Kris)

"By filling a blank page with words, I get to know myself and what I keep locked away in the recesses of my heart and mind" (Newman, 1993, p. 5). Writing lets us explore our inner selves, expose ourselves on paper. "Writing is about diving into the unknown and if you let it, will lead you to new places deep inside yourself"

(Newman, 1993, p. 4). Sometimes adolescents are skeptical about revealing themselves to others, because they are puzzled at self-discovery. Linda states how it is for her to share pieces of her writing with her classmates:

I find it interesting how incredibly vulnerable I feel whenever I read. It is amusing to me because I love to write, and I love to act. I am surprised at my discomfort. I watch these people as they read, some confident, some not. I assess their pieces, and I take a piece of them away from their words, their voices, and I figure them out like a puzzle. My greatest fear in reading my work is that someone will take a piece of me and figure me out without my realizing it. (Linda)

Students who really share themselves on paper feel vulnerable. Like Linda, they leave themselves wide open for peer interpretation and acceptance or rejection. None of us is completely comfortable knowing that someone really can figure us out. Perhaps that is why writing brings with it a certain vulnerability, a certain openness to pain. Vulnerable means "capable of being wounded" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 1213). When we put ourselves out there for others to see, we invite the possibility of heartache. When our true person is revealed in our words, we worry about acceptance. We worry if we have anything meaningful to say.

Listening to Heartsongs

Mattie Stepanek, a remarkable eleven-year-old poet, in his book, *Journey Through Heartsongs*, tells us that we all have something meaningful to say. We just have to listen carefully to our hearts in order to know what that is. Stepanek says everyone has a heartsong.

All people have a special song
Inside their hearts
Everyone in the whole wide world
Has a special Heartsong . . .
Words in their minds that
come together and slip out

Into the air or onto paper as a gift
To someone else, or even themselves . . .
Our ears are for listening,
But so are our hearts. (Stepanek, 2001, pp. 3, 5, 10)

When things are important to us, we listen with our hearts. When we hear what our hearts want to sing and put those thoughts on paper for "someone else, or even [ourselves]" to share, what happens to us? As I read Mattie's words, I think about the power of sharing our hearts' songs on the written page. I think about what it means for the adolescents in my classroom to hear their own heartsongs and share them with others. With all of the static that clutters our daily lives, I wonder how easy it is to hear what "[our] hearts want to tell" as Slone (1979) names it. When students write, if they write from the heart, they reveal themselves. When they share, put their hearts on paper, someone is bound to see who they are. At first, perhaps the one most surprised at the revelation in the writing is the author of the words. What does it require of a teacher to foster an atmosphere where students are not only willing to hear their heartsongs but are willing to tell them out loud? Over the years I have tried a myriad of techniques aimed at nourishing openness in my writing classroom. Sometimes students share journals. Sometimes they share papers. Anonymity is always an option. Watching the evolution of their writing, as well as their willingness to share, makes me want to dig deeper into this phenomenon.

When I ask my students to turn in a piece of "personal choice" writing: poetry, essay or narrative (I never specify genre), I wonder if their experiences at getting ideas on paper resemble my own experience a few years ago. I struggled, then, to write a personal narrative for a summer class. In the spring of 1994, the following scene plays out in my study as I try to write.

I arrange myself at the computer, coffee cup in my peripheral vision to the left of the mouse. I adjust the light, discouraging the glare from my eyes. Back arched, I slide my rear uncomfortably into the base of the pole-straight chair. Shoulders rigid, I... Wait. I relax my shoulders, and reach for my lens cleaning solution. I clean my glasses for the fourth time. Finally, hands poised, fingers stretching toward the lettered keys, I am ready to write my paper. No, not my paper, "a piece," as the instructor had termed it, a "personal piece," a piece that is now due tomorrow. I have tried to write this "piece" every weekend for the past three. Today is different. Today I shall succeed. I flex my fingers, clear my throat, take a sip of my coffee, and sit up straighter in my chair. "Grandma's smile set her apart from everyone else her age," I write. No. Delete. "When I was a kid..." Delete. I sip my coffee. It is not as hot as I had hoped. I go downstairs and let the microwave perform its magic on my cup. I ascend the stairs and compose myself again. Four hours later, when I really want to go to bed, I realize I have been writing nothing and deleting it all evening. My "piece" is still unwritten. My fingers, mouth, legs, and microwave have had a really good workout, but my mind keeps de-tracking my thoughts. I play teacher with myself:

"Do you have a topic that you know? Do you want to write about this topic?"

"I **have** a topic I know really well-- my grandmother," I answer myself back.

I grab a piece of paper as though my unnecessary roughness with the page will make thoughts magically appear. I "brainstorm" a list of things I want to say about my grandmother. I hate everything I write. Try again. "Show, don't tell," I caution myself. "Get some imagery working!... I hate this. . . ." "OK, here goes."

"My grandma's contagious laugh....," I type the words, trying to hear and see her in my mind. In the computer monitor I see a screen door, that spring slams shut and hear my grandma's voice, "Be sure to pull that door shut tight, girlie. Mind, we don't want snakes comin' in ta the house." It was an Irish thing, I guess, this unfounded fear of snakes with St. Patrick nowhere in sight except in the form of a stone statue by the church up the hill. Instead of my mind taking me into the kitchen, through that screen door, it allows the wooden slats to slap the house, the swinging zinc-hook pendulum etching a white half circle into the darker wood of the frame.

Small brown tee-strap shoes shield my white socks from the gravel alleyway that channels me to elementary school. There, I see, not the warm, inviting countenance of my grandma, but in place of her smile, a giant shaking finger, a chastising instrument dressed in the black and white of a nun's habit. I squint my eyes several times trying to bring back the image of my grandmother, but Sister Pointer's disapproval becomes more vivid. My pulse races. Face flushes. Fists clench. I wax angry and want to punch the Pointer right out of its habit. This image monopolizes my computer monitor. The fearful face of this finger eradicates my grandmother's smile. Memories of my elementary school days haunt my mind and overpower my perspective. Why

are these hateful visions holding my happier thoughts of childhood hostage? Head in hands, I try to shake myself free of this trance. I need to write this paper! What manipulates my mind, moves it to a face and place I do not want to see? What calls me to the second grade classroom at St. Patrick's Grammar School? At this moment, I discover that my heart has a tale of its own. While I love my grandmother dearly and long to capture her essence on paper, my heart clamors to sing a different song, and I write my first piece of personal narrative as dictated by my heart.

If I had this much trouble trying to find out what my heart wanted to say, I wonder if my students have a similar problem figuring out what is in their hearts. I think about what is needed to facilitate such a bloodletting by my students. Wooldridge says, she "just catch [es her] heart and mind's dictation and takes notes" (1996, p. xii). It is not that easy for me. I wonder how it is for my students. How might I help them hear the thoughts that course, like blood, through their hearts and veins so they might take those notes? I am reminded that sometimes the one thing that is needed is permission to say what one feels. I think, like Cameron says, we all have "the right to write," and we need to "give ourselves permission to just hang out on the page" (1998, p. 3). However, some of us have trouble just hearing our heartsongs, at first. Conditions may not be present to make my students comfortable enough to just hang out on the page. Looking back, I see that the accepting ears of my own peers gave me permission to write, as well as my willingness to let my heart dictate something meaningful to me.

Adjusting the Tourniquet

A few months ago I gave blood at our school. It was not a new experience for me, but taking my blood was a new experience for the young woman who was working with the Red Cross. My "bloodletting" was going very slowly, and I wondered what was wrong when I heard a veteran nurse say to the intern, "Oh,

honey, you forgot to tighten the cuff. The blood won't come out as quickly if you don't tighten the cuff." Within minutes, the novice adjusted the blood pressure band at the top of my arm, and my blood rushed to fill the bag at my side.

Writing is a lot like bloodletting. One must be comfortable and trusting; the atmosphere must be supportive and tools must be ready. Most importantly, however, one must be willing to let what is down inside flow freely. In order to achieve flow, one must listen. It takes a little concentration for us finally to hear our heartsongs. Once we have collected them, we need to let them flow through our veins onto the page. I wonder, then, what conditions have to be right in order for the literary "blood letting" in our room to be optimal? Perhaps part of it is as simple as presenting an opportunity for the veins to be opened, giving permission to write, being willing to accept the type of blood that will be given. Perhaps the first step is as simple as a call for donors. We need to call for students' words; we need to let them know that we want to hear them. We need to encourage them to write from the heart, to be willing to endure some discomfort in order to free their ideas. What serves as the pressure cuff for verbal bloodletting? What must be loosened to allow words to flow more easily? Perhaps providing a comfortable space is enough. Yet, how might we insure that comfort? How do we find willing donors in a school writing situation?

I am reminded of a note I received from the parent of one of my middle school students several years ago. One day during the 1995-1996 school year as I collected materials from my office mailbox, a note and an assignment from one of my students led the stack of items. The note read:

Dear Mrs. Hartshorn,

I just wanted to thank you for making it possible for Sean to write this. It is the first time he has ever written about or even talked about the incident to this extent. I didn't know what he did for his creative writing assignment until it was completed. Today was the court hearing. That was the stimulus; I'm sure. It's been on his mind. He had a bad night last night. I notice that the spelling is not all correct; I didn't proofread it before he painstakingly hand wrote it as neatly as he could. Please return it to him as soon as possible. I need to keep it with my records as his recounting of the experiences of that day.

Sincerely,
Mrs. F

Accompanying this note was a personal narrative from Mrs. F's son, Sean. As I read her words and his, my eyes filled with tears to see Sean's two pages, penned dysgraphically. The author of the piece, one of my little seventh grade boys, had been injured and had needed to teach himself how to write with his left hand. The memories of what happened the day of his injury came rushing back to my mind and heart as I read the title of his paper: "A Terrible Horrible No Good Very Bad Day." I remember the scene vividly:

Where to start? What to remember? Week so hectic everything is a blur. Sifting... Start with Sean and Friday last. I am in my classroom ready to dismiss students for lunch. Kids come running to my door saying Sean F has been thrown through a window near our room. They are crying and want someone to be with them. They do not want to go back toward the lockers alone. We go together. I say,

"Stay with me; we will go up to lunch and find out what is going on."

When we get to the lockers where we normally line up, the students in front of me are sent ahead by the Inclusion Aide. Over to my left, Mike, the custodian, is mopping puddles of blood from the floor. I send the kids in the opposite direction to the lunchroom, walking behind them, but wanting to stay on the first floor to avoid the unfolding situation on the upper level.

Afraid. Enough blood to puddle! Sean so small.

Stomachs retching, we ascend the stairs with weighted feet, wet eyes, and racing hearts. I instruct my kids to go ahead into lunch. They are sobbing.

No one lines up. They look at me with eyes that pull me toward their tables, begging for this not to be real, wanting me to say that someone exaggerated and that it didn't happen. An ambulance comes. The sobbing turns to wailing and lunch bags remain unopened. I wander back to the office and see the boy who is responsible for causing this mayhem. He is sitting on a bench with his head in his hands awaiting the principal. I just look at his size and start to cry.

This is the longest lunch period of my life. No one talks. No one eats. No one comes with official news.

Hours later we find out that Sean is going to be all right. He has been transferred to the 'hand unit' at Union Memorial Hospital. There has been extensive damage. An artery, ligaments and nerves are involved. We will have to wait and see. (Hartshorn, Teaching Journal, November, 16, 1995)

Months had passed since the day Sean had been injured. The piece of writing his mother turned in to me told his account of what happened the day a boy twice his size threw him through the plate glass window at school.

. . . I was angry because I had never met that person, and he wanted to beat me up for no reason. My heart skipped a beat when I saw Sam and his friends turn the corner. My legs began to shake. Sam ran up to me and pushed me really hard. He was yelling words, but I was too astonished to comprehend. Then he pushed me again. This time into the lockers. I wasn't thinking of the future when I was scrambling words in my mind to tell him to stop. He pushed me again, and I heard a shatter. My shoulder blade hit the window. I looked up and saw glass. Then I looked down and saw blood. I saw the inside of my arm. Everything became a blur. . . . Death was running over and over in my mind. Tears in my eyes, I ran past the office, and into the Health Suite. (Sean, 1996, excerpt personal essay)

As I look back over Sean's mother's note, she is thanking me for giving him an opportunity to write the essay. I think: "I didn't do anything to make it possible for him to write this paper; I just gave the assignment." I wonder what did make Sean finally pour his heart out on the page? Did a writing requirement in my classroom really play any part in that decision? If so, what part? Was it simply requiring a piece of personal writing from my students each quarter that gave Sean permission to write about the incident? Did the fact that he would be expected to share the piece he turned in with his classmates have anything to do with his finally clearing his chest? What

exactly was Sean's experience of writing this paper? Did some personal drive, like the muses of old, make his pen move across the page? Why was he willing to share something so personal and painful? If he had a need to write, why had he not just written in a journal and kept it to himself? Why had he chosen to share his pain on a paper that would be read by someone else? Why did he not just turn in something less heart-wrenching, less personal?

It could not have been easy for Sean physically to put his ideas on the page. Why did he go to all of the trouble to share this experience? Did he write this piece to complete an assignment for me, to persuade the judge, or to impress his classmates? Would he have written the paper if I had not given an assignment? Did he write the piece first, and then decide it was the piece he would share, or did he write it with the intention of sharing? What kind of response was he expecting from me and our team of students? Did he care what we thought about what he had written? Did he want us to care? Was he hoping for a reaction? Sean took his narrative to court, and the judge's reading of it helped him win his case. Sean's story was tragic and his writing therapeutic. Is that why we write personal pieces? The "bloodletting" feels good? Sometimes young writers need permission to bleed on paper, need to know they can let go and that they will be heard. How important is it to create a dimension like this within the classroom setting?

Feeling with the Beat

Since our county's curriculum does not require students to write personal pieces, why do I include it as a part of my classroom? This question takes me back to the summer of 1994 when I attended the Summer Teachers' Institute with the

Maryland Writing Project (MWP). This was a time when I learned the value of writing personal pieces myself. One of the premises of the MWP is that the teachers of writing must also write. By being given "required" permission to do this, I learned a lot about myself as a person, as a teacher, as a writer and as a sharer of heartsongs. That summer I participated in a writing/sharing experience that created community, an experience that I knew I wanted to recreate in my own classroom. When I returned to school in the fall, I knew why James Gray, founder of the Writing Project said that the early teachers participating in the project "rate[d] their own experience with writing as the most important part of the summer institute" (Gray, 2000, p. 84). I knew that a sense of community came from connecting through personal pieces of writing. I was determined to recreate that bonding experience in my classroom. And I knew that writing was the tool I would use to accomplish my task. My students were willing sharers and made it easy to connect with a community beat.

The phenomenon of what it means to share personal writing became even more intriguing to me when I moved to the high school level. The first quarter of teaching tenth grade, I did not require a "piece of personal writing." Since I had 162 students to start that year, the paper load was already overwhelming. However, I missed the personal student pieces that I had grown so comfortable with at the middle school level. I missed reading the papers; I felt disconnected from my students. I missed being able "to fall in love with my students quickly," as Calkins (1991, p. 11) says teachers must if they want "positive performance" (p. 11). I realized that a certain sense of connectedness occurs when sharing personal papers. Not only was I

disconnected from my high schoolers, but they were very disconnected from one another as well. I wondered how we might start to be together as writers and sharers of ideas. I wondered if we could create a community at this level of learning. I realized then, as I do now, that the pedagogical connection to this phenomenon may present itself in grand proportions at the high school level.

By second quarter, I assigned a piece due at the quarter's end. My assignment was a standing one: no specific length, no particular genre, no designated subject, just write a piece of personal choice. Papers were graded on sincerity of effort and quality of ideas. Grammar and punctuation took a back seat. The only requirement was that the paper be executed neatly and show evidence of sincere effort. Periodically, throughout the quarter I gave suggestions for topics, assigned poetry exercises, and had students think about extending stories, confronting political or social issues, or expressing personal feelings. Once I collected the first set of papers, I planned at least twenty minutes for sharing out loud during the next class. It had always been a good idea at the middle school level. Eager, waving hands abounded with twelve-year-olds. Such was not the case with sophomores; no one would share. Since I run a non-threatening classroom, I had no intention of "forcing" the students to read what they had written. I was perplexed. I collected the papers, expecting to be disappointed in their quality because no one volunteered to read. However, that evening, reading the papers to myself, I noticed that my students had written some amazing pieces. Some were personal experience essays, some were poems, and some were fantasy and science fiction pieces. Some talked about being abandoned by parents, suffering the death of loved ones, seeing friends killed by drunk drivers, falling in and out of love,

mourning victims of suicide, and being angry with themselves, their parents and the world. Their writing worked magic on me. I did "fall in love with them." I found it hard to believe that the authors of such incredible pieces acted like their arms were glued to the chairs when I asked for sharing. Why were they so intimidated? We were not strangers; we had been together for a quarter already. What happened between seventh grade and tenth grade that made them so hesitant?

My Personal Bloodletting

As I try to make some sense about my students' unwillingness to participate, my mind takes me back to my own first "sharing" experience:

"Nervous, dreadfully nervous..." Edgar Allan Poe has nothing on me this humid morning in June, 1994, as I try to compose myself for an afternoon writing group. I am not plotting a murder, but what I am about to do suggests a slow suicide.

I skip lunch, scoot off to a hallway where fewer people recognize me. Conversation is the last thing I want. Solitude . . . I need silence and solitude. As soon as a door presents itself, I duck into a ladies' room. In the large stall at the end of the tomb-sized space, I pace back and forth, reading and re-reading the paper I have written. In less than an hour I will be sharing that piece out loud with four total strangers. These strangers are other teachers, my peers for a new summer class. I do not know when I have been this nervous in any graduate class. In fact I don't know when I have been this nervous giving a presentation to peers. I chastise myself for feeling this way. I try the "you'll be just fine" speech that I have not only heard but given. It doesn't allay my fears. I clear my throat, concentrate on the text in front of me, imagining the inflection I will use when **bringing my words to life**. I feel nauseous. It is hard to tell if it stems from skipping today's meals or from the waves of discontent that ebb and flow in my torso. (Hartshorn, Personal Journal, September 1994)

I did not know it at the time, but it was this "dreadfully nervous experience" that set me on a path toward phenomenological inquiry. The discomfort of sharing a piece of personal writing aloud left me with many questions about myself and others who have a similar experience. This moment and the moments that followed prodded me

to observe myself as a writer and made me look at what it is like to share something one has written. The experience encouraged me to examine myself as a teacher of writing, incited me to inquire about the significance of audience when sharing writing, and called for me to consider the lived experience of my students in writing/sharing situations.

The discomfort of that afternoon in 1994 was the beginning of my realization that there are different kinds of writing and that the experience one has when sharing the written word varies from person to person and from piece to piece. This experience was the first to spark a curiosity in me about the vulnerability of those who share their written thoughts, a desire to investigate the relationality of those who are in a sharing place together. It is because of this initial moment that I began to turn to the phenomenon of sharing something one has written from the heart.

Teachers of writing must also write: Teachers must experience what they are asking of their students when they have students write; the process of writing can be understood best by engaging in that process first hand.

(see National Writing Project Assumptions, Appendix H)

The above quotation is one of the nine assumptions of the National Writing Project. The Writing Project insists that, for writing teachers to be credible teachers of writing, they must write themselves. Not only must writing teachers write, but also they must participate in all aspects of the writing process, including publication. Sharing aloud is a required part of the publication process for the Writing Project. During the summer of 1994, I participated in a summer institute with this organization in hopes of becoming a teacher consultant. By this time, I had been teaching English at the middle school level for nearly fifteen years. I had required

many written papers from my students during that period; many of them were shared aloud. Over the years, I came up with many required assignments that proved to be successful. I discarded many that were less productive. Eventually, I became successful at designing lessons that produced good writing, but I never asked myself what the kids experienced in writing those assignments, or what it was like for my students to share those papers out loud with their peers. In fact, I never even wondered what it was like for students to turn those pieces in to me for commentary. And finally, I never thought about what it was like for the students to have the papers returned. I just knew the lessons worked and continued to expect good products. It was not until the summer of 1994 when I was asked to write pieces for sharing that I began to question my students' experiences in writing and sharing in my classroom. My discomfort made me curious about my students' discomfort. I had become fairly relaxed about turning term papers in to teachers by this point in my career, but writing something personal and sharing it out loud in a group was a whole new experience for me, and an incredibly disconcerting one. However, it was an experience that ultimately changed my life.

Looking back on my retreat to the bathroom to agonize over the piece I was to share, I wonder what stood behind my fear. First of all, there was the big question: Was the paper good enough to share with a group of fellow teachers? Is this how my students feel when they are asked to share their writing? Knowing that I had to share made me extremely self-conscious about writing the piece before I began. After finally writing it, why did I care how others reacted to it? As I read it, I was happy

with the product. In fact, I liked the way it turned out. Why, then, was I hesitant to share? I wrote this poem as a snapshot of my first "fear of sharing."

I sit rigid
inhaling the tension in the room.
Notebook guarding my heart,
sweaty palms and whitened knuckles
unclench the page
that holds my voice.
"Remember to breathe," I think.
Exhaling,
raspy sounds begin to announce
what is on the pages of my soul.
(Summer, 1994)

While sitting there, clenching my writing, hardly able to breathe, I had prayed that time would run out before my piece was heard. But then suddenly it was my turn, and I heard myself reading the following piece:

Red Bird's Blood

What if someone discovers me? What if I'm found out? Expelled? Exiled from the land of the intelligent? That is my greatest fear, my worst insecurity. It has been forty-one years since I first set foot in elementary school where the tenor of my educational career was set by my inability to fly with the bluebirds. In 1952 it was quite a shock to go from a home where my mother proclaimed the wonders of her five-year-old daughter to anyone who would listen and to suddenly find myself in a land where bluebirds were kings; yellow birds were princes; and red birds, like myself, were the dumbest of the land. I wanted desperately, then, as I do now, to be a bluebird. I thought my feathers just as fair and had a grand desire to soar as high, but, alas, there never seemed to be a way to achieve the altitude once the flight had begun. Rejection puts an indelible mark upon the soul. It never goes away.

Today, as an educator, examining policies that separate my students and group them according to ability, the nausea and negative memories of all the failures I have met over forty-one school years haunt me and overshadow any successes I have had, any degrees I have obtained, and as I still fear banishment to the land of the dumb, I have to ask: Who were these people who tagged my soul? --who soaked my self-esteem in red bird's blood? Who are they now? After four decades of research that cries for change, how dare there still be one educator, one principal, one school, one supervisor, or one board of education promoting ability tracking and grouping for students? Who dares preserve *the legacy of the red bird's tortured flight*? (Hartshorn, 1994)

With my head still glued to the paper in front of me, I realized I had stopped reading. It was over. The circle was silent except for the beating of my heart. I was afraid to raise my head until someone finally spoke. I remember being surprised that people were shaking their heads, smiling, and saying that they had in some way connected with my narrative. Eventually, I was able to announce that my writing group gave me the courage to say out loud what was on this paper and festering in my heart for decades. The sharing of this piece was the beginning of my connecting. I connected with myself, with my writing group, with the Writing Project, and with writing.

Lamott (1994) talks about the power that writing groups can have: "Helping each other has made their hearts get bigger," she says as she talks about her students' writing group; "A big heart is both a clunky and a delicate thing. It doesn't protect itself, and it doesn't hide. It stands out, like a baby's fontanel, where you can see the soul pulse through" (pp. 159-160). While sharing my own feelings with my group put me in a very vulnerable position, the whole experience gave me a confidence that made me reach for an even greater connection. I, like my students, was afraid to open up. Once our hearts are exposed, we are afraid of being hurt. We are vulnerable.

According to the Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology vulnerable is probably related to *vellere* which means to pull or tear, and cognate with the Greek *oule* (from earlier *wolna* or *wolsa*), meaning "a wound scarred over" (p. 1213). As we become sharers of our heartsongs, we fear being "scarred," or of having no one listen. We are like astronauts in those old science fiction movies--afraid that when we throw our lifelines out into space there will be nothing there with which to connect.

"Putting your heart on paper is about so much more than writing; it is about living a life that is connected with others" (Klauser, 1995, p. 5). It is about self-discovery and openness. It is about being able to extend oneself for connection and knowing someone will be there to hear what our hearts want to tell. It is about feeling comfortable enough to spill blood for the forming of relationships and trusting enough to take another's words to heart. Connecting through writing from the heart is a phenomenon that leads me to ask: **What is the lived experience of connecting through personal writing in a public high school setting?**

Phenomenological Flow

It is my personal bloodletting, as well as my students' attempts to give themselves over to the page and their eventual willingness to share, that leads me to this unfolding. I turn to the phenomenological possibilities of listening to adolescent heartsongs. I am led to explore this question of connecting through personal writing from a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective.

Scientific research defines control groups and measures human behavior. How could one ever weigh the contents of the human heart, or count how many pints of literary blood each individual student gives through a heart-felt idea? The ancient Egyptians weighed the hearts of the pharaohs to see if they were worthy enough to be admitted into the afterworld. The heart was weighed against a feather and counted worthy if the scales balanced (Godwin, 2001), a risky proposition at best. This hermeneutic phenomenological investigation will neither measure, count nor weigh. That is not the nature of human science investigation.

"Phenomenology is the study of lived or existential meanings" (van Manen, 2003, p. 11). Throughout this study, I reflect, re-vision, re-tell, and interpret the life world of students who write personal pieces, who sing their heartsongs in a public school setting. Phenomenological research is also a search for what it means to be human (van Manen, 2003). This study searches and re-searches for what it means to be human when connecting through writing for tenth grade students.

As a hermeneutic phenomenological researcher I examine the life world of my students as they write and question what it is like "to be" in this writing place. A phenomenological researcher attends to what one might otherwise consider "trivial." By questioning and opening up the phenomenon, writing "makes us thoughtfully aware of the consequential in the inconsequential, the significant in the taken for granted" (van Manen, 2003, p. 8). In the grand scheme of things, a student's ability to connect through personal writing might seem insignificant, and may be taken for granted. It is not provided for in our high school curriculum, and many educators, including myself, may have ignored its significance over the years. However, the importance of such a connection reveals itself within the layers of this phenomenon.

Remembering the Flow

"Phenomenological reflection is not introspective but retrospective" (van Manen, 2003, p. 10). It calls for us to reflect on an experience that is already past. It asks us to "uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience" (van Manen, 2003, p. 10). For me, as a language arts educator, it involves reflecting on the lived experience of my students in a particular

pedagogical situation. This phenomenological study questions, opens up, and makes meaning of **the lived experience of my students when sharing personal writing.**

My turning to this phenomenon begins by re-viewing the lived experiences of my students at the middle school level, examining my own experience as an adult student with the Maryland Writing Project (MWP), and as a teacher, extending the question to the lived experience of my high school students.

At the Core of the Study

I have been an educator for twenty-two years; seventeen of those years were spent at the middle school level, five in high school. Each year has provided much for me to think about in my quest to improve my craft. It is within that quest that I was drawn to this interest. My students, their heartsongs and their search for willing ears, have led me to this place in my pedagogical examination. Because I want to know what is at the core, the heart, the essence of my students' lived experience and my part in that experience, I turn to hermeneutic phenomenology for the methodology of my research.

"Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (van Manen, 2003, p. 9). I want to know what writing is like for my students. I want to see how and why they are led to put their hearts to a written page. I want to have a deeper understanding about what influences their willingness to explore themselves and share that self with others.

Phenomenology asks, "What is this kind of experience like?" (van Manen, 2003, p. 9). Ultimately, it is my intent to understand what the lived experience of sharing themselves through personal writing is like for my students. To reach this

understanding I use van Manen's (2003) methodological structure of the following six research components:

- turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- maintaining a strong oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and
- balancing the research context by considering parts of the whole. (pp. 30-31)

With van Manen's plan in mind, in Chapter One I have turned to the essence of sharing personal writings in the high school life world, examining aspects that surround this phenomenon for my students and myself as writer, teacher, and researcher. In Chapter Two I explore this phenomenon more deeply as I draw upon other writing etymologies and lived experience accounts. Chapter Three provides the philosophic work and methodological grounding for the study. Chapter Four reveals the themes derived from this existential investigation of writing and sharing from the heart, and Chapter Five attends to the insights gained for teachers of writing.

Phenomenology is a type of research, says van Manen (2003) where the researcher "write[s] to measure the depth of things as well as to come to a sense of [her or his] own depth" (p. 238). It is through this research methodology, then, that I strive to hear my own heartsongs both within and without my classroom practice.

Through examining my students' descriptive tellings of how this phenomenon shows itself in their lives, I look for pedagogical insights to teaching writing in my classroom. Perhaps, the writing here, like that on my students' papers, will connect with a universal message.

CHAPTER TWO:

HEARTFELT CONCERN: EXPLORING THE PHENOMENON

My blood is alive with many voices
telling me I am made of longing. (Rilke, 1997 trans., p. 77)

There is a divine restlessness in the human heart. Though our bodies maintain an outer stability and consistency, the heart is an eternal nomad. No circle of belonging can ever contain all the longings of the human heart. (O'Donohue, 1999, p. xxvi)

Perhaps the longings of the human heart that Rilke and O'Donohue refer to here are what have long given the heart a metaphorical existence as well as a physical one. Back as far as time records, humankind has attributed special powers to the heart. In ancient cultures this fist-sized muscle was thought to have some connection to the gods. As early as the Greeks, Mesopotamians and Babylonians, people spoke of the heart as "harboring intelligence" (Harris, on line). Even today, we refer to the heart in a more-than-physical sense. We are said to have heavy hearts when we are sad, to be hard-hearted when unfeeling, to speak in a heartfelt manner when sincere, to become heartsick when adversely affected and to wear our hearts on our sleeves when we let others view our feelings (Godwin, 2001). We hold things in our hearts that are special and learn important information by heart. To the present day, heart means more than an organ that pumps lifeblood to our bodies. Generally, we define heart "in its ancient sense, as a place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self" (Palmer, 1998, p. 11). It is not unusual to hear someone say that a person speaks or writes from her/his heart.

I begin, then, to open up **the phenomenon of my students' connecting through personal writing** by exploring the metaphorical heart. It is the magic of this

heart and its message that illuminates my study, enables me to listen for adolescent heartsongs and guides my examination of students sharing themselves through their own heartfelt words. For those who are brave enough to put themselves on paper, writing decodes the message of the heart. Many believe that writing, like the heart, has a magic power; its ability to interpret and communicate for our inner spirits seems divine (Webster, 2001).

Intermittently, in this chapter I cite and interpret comments written anonymously by my high school sophomores. Some of my former and present English pupils express their feelings as writers and sharers of writing, allowing us to get a glimpse of their experiences, as I continue to explore my phenomenon. I identify their insights, using pseudonyms, as I attempt to uncover various layers of this phenomenon. Additionally, I delve deeper into the mystery of connecting through personal writing by exploring some etymological tracings, relating to the ideologies of professional writers, and analyzing pieces of literature. To elucidate this study further, I relate some current research in the teaching of writing to phenomenological possibilities found through listening to adolescent heartsongs.

The Life Within

The following excerpt from *The Prophet* (Gibran, 1923/1968) illustrates how the heart and self are connected:

Your hearts know in silence the secrets
of the days and the nights.
But your ears thirst for the sound of
your heart's knowledge.
You would know in words that which
you have always known in thought.
You would touch with your fingers the
naked body of your dreams. (Gibran 1923/1968, p. 54)

In this passage, Almustafa, the chosen, reveals that true self-knowledge lies within each individual. He points out that truth dwells within our hearts and emphasizes that our "ears thirst" for that knowledge. We long to be able to put into words that which is known to us in thought. By learning to listen to "the silence of the heart," we have the ability to "touch" our dreams. Like Almustafa, my students search for self-knowledge. Although they may not even be aware of the search or its importance, I think about how writing, the act of transcribing thoughts to paper, might serve as a tool for their self-discovery. In the following reflections, my tenth grade students comment on what they learned in their initial journal writings:

I've never done writing for fun, but I seem to be good at it and sometimes even like it. I can really jot down a lot of thoughts that my mind covers up. (Neely)

I feel like I get to explore my creativity and use this time to get to know my thoughts. (Kendel)

Writing, when it is allowed to flow, takes us to our inner thoughts. It provides a medium for us consciously to experience what Heidegger (1975) means when he says, "We never come to thoughts. They come to us" (p. 6). Writing gives us a chance to view the miracle of thought, to know first-hand that thoughts do come to us and lead us; they are not something we force.

Writing in Flow

"When you sit down to write with an open heart, you often wind up sharing what you did not even know you had to say" (Klauser, 1995, p. 3). Many professional writers refer to letting one's thoughts show themselves on paper as the first and most essential step to any writing. Goldberg (1986) calls it "writing down the bones" (p. 4),

"the essential, awake speech of [all writers'] minds" (p. 8). She says one needs only to "keep [one's] hand moving" (p. 8) to achieve the desired result. Ayres (2000) claims one must merely "write the wave" to have "ideas, feelings, images, and scenes tumble out in a breathtaking, inspired flow . . ." (p. 1). Automatic writing, brainstorming, free association, word association, free writing and cluster writing are other terms used to define the same process (Metzger, 1992; Newman, 1993; Rico, 2000; Worsham, 2001). This process of letting our thoughts come to us and be recorded on the page is akin to what Perry (1999) calls "Writing in flow . . . When you lose yourself in your writing" (pp. 15, 26) or, more appropriately, find yourself by losing yourself. It is what writers strive for and what sometimes happens for students in my classroom.

When students preface a piece they decide to share by saying, "I don't know why I wrote about this," or "I don't know where this came from," they admit to having let the writing come to them. As they giggle and read their newly written, uncensored words, the rest of the class and I are attentive to their thoughts. The connection provided by this sharing activity reveals our discovered pleasure in writing together and helps to set a positive class tone. Aaron, one of my students, tells of his early feeling in our classroom:

Sharing in the journals is very enjoyable for me and gives me a chance to tell my thoughts and feelings to the entire class through a relaxed medium.

To set the tone for each class session, we begin with a word association or use a phrase or quote for inspiration. I call out the words, and we all write, letting the chosen word or phrase lead us. Sometimes we get a list of words, but often our words

turn into phrases and then sentences. Lisa comments on her experience with the process in this way:

I like when we start with a word and write about wherever our minds lead. It gives me so many topics and brings up so many interesting things. It's also kind of funny to see what things trigger in my mind. . .

Lisa and the rest of us "ride the wave of our thoughts" (Ayers, 2000, p. 1) through our journal writings. Because the ride frequently takes us to what we can only term as strange places, it should be exciting to share and discover together. At first, however, no one volunteers to share, and I wonder what might help my students get comfortable enough to share these rides. Perhaps if they see where my writing has led me and if they realize that my writing is not perfect, they may be less intimidated to share their own.

I write on an overhead sheet, and I go with my flow, the same way I have directed them. My penmanship gets very wild, my i's are not dotted, my t's are not crossed, and spelling mistakes and forgotten capital letters abound. Sometimes I find a little sense within the lines; sometimes I do not. When I share, I display my own free form so students will be able to see my imperfections. I have to remind myself that my purpose is to cultivate free writing, for without the journey inside, heartfelt writing will not occur. As students comment on my errors, some think it cool for an English teacher to be human, while others are frightened at the prospect of being allowed to be imperfect. Encouraging them to keep writing, I persevere, realizing that we will never be able to spill any blood on paper if we do not loosen up, and I call for comments asking about their experiences. While most students comment that they

like having permission to be free and easy with their writing, some protest that they cannot write without a prescribed topic or without organizing ideas first:

I like responding to stories or quotations, but I hate this word play stuff [word association/free writing]. I just can't write that way. (Janiese)

Others claim that, despite alleviation of restrictions, they have difficulty freeing themselves:

I enjoy the writing we do in class, but it is sometimes hard for me to get going. I like to do more than one entry because I can get thinking by then. (Debbie)

In a more defeated tone, Peter admits, "Most of the time my mind is just blank."

What is it that makes some students enjoy free writing and has others admitting the opposite? Why do some students find it easy to ride a wave of words while others cannot even get on the board?

In the vein of others who support journal writing (Anson, 2003; Bartscher, et al., 2001; Bloom, 2000; Eastman, 1997; Grennan, 1989; Holt, 1994; Keaton, 1996; Leggo, 1993; McAlpine, 1992; Perham, 1992; Perl, 1994; Peyton, 2000; Tompkins, 2002; Worsham, 2001; and Zak, 1993), I encourage my students to give their writing some time. Eventually, a few brave souls volunteer to share. The result of their action is a real icebreaker. One of my students sums it up beautifully with this comment:

I enjoy sharing and also hearing the responses it evokes in people listening. Also, [I enjoy] seeing the ripple effect of the people willing to share after just one person begins to share. (Janet)

The sharing begins, and since none of us has an expected or perfect piece, we take comfort in our common ground; and with a mutual honesty, the foundation for community begins. As I sense a communal spirit emerging from our sharing times, I

wonder how far the flow will take us as a class. What are my students' experiences as we continue to explore our thoughts through journals and word play? Do they sense the opportunity for connecting as I do? What is their reaction to being nudged to look for their hearts' knowledge, to be open to self-discovery? As a teacher of composition, I wonder how I might play a part in my students' discoveries.

We know how fresh and original is each man, even the slowest and dullest. If we come at him right, talk him along, and give him his head, and at last say, What do you want: (Or if the man is very old, What did you want?) every man will speak his dream. And when a man talks from his heart, in his moment of truth, he speaks poetry. (Bradbury, 1992, p. 36)

As Bradbury says, if "we come at him right, talk him along" he will speak "from his heart." Who we are is in our hearts. Understanding this, I want to come at my students right, talk them along, give them their heads so that they might touch with fingers their dreams and speak them from their hearts. However, receiving the message of one's own heart is an individual thing. Being open to the sound is not always an easy task. I wonder how even the reluctant searchers and sharers might learn that "Writing [gives] you who you are" (Goldberg, 1986, p. 17)? It is difficult enough for anyone to examine the self, but teenagers seem particularly vulnerable when searching the heart because self and peer approval are so important to them.

Fear of Losing Self

My own students express their fears about sharing themselves through personal writing in the following statements:

I don't want people to be critical of what I think about. (John)

I don't want to be made fun of. (Sally)

I believe most of the class feels like I do, "What are my friends going to think of me?" (David)

Perhaps they fear losing who they are once their writing is exposed to their peers. At a time when self-discovery is paramount, having that found-self not measure up to peer expectations may be as deadly as silencing their hearts. It is not at all unusual for students to guard themselves, keep their hearts out of Danger. What might make them willing to risk the journey?

Fear of Facing Self

Perhaps my young writers fear facing themselves most of all, dredging up memories that identify them as who they really are. Heidegger (1977, 1993) writes:

What keeps us in our essential being holds us only so long,
however, as we for our part keep holding on to what holds us.
And we keep holding on to it by not letting it out of our memory.
Memory is the gathering of thought. (p. 369)

As my students begin to gather thoughts, it is sometimes hard for them to embrace their memories. We all have "hunger of memory" (Rodriguez, 1983, n.p.), yet honoring that hunger is often a difficult task. Rilke (1975/1993) notes that our memories are important to us:

[but]not the memories themselves. Not till they have turned to blood within us, to glance and gesture, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves--not till then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a verse arises in their midst and goes forth from them. (p. 94)

In order for my students' verses to come forward, they must tap into the flow of memory within, regardless of the discomfort of such a revelation. Sometimes fear of self is what impedes the flow from heart to pen.

Slowing the Flow

For me, free writing is difficult. I was taught to edit as I write. I remember having to write all papers in ink and not cross out for fear of points being taken off for a sloppy product. Today, I cannot imagine writing anything without editing many times, but I do find myself still wanting to be perfect as I write rather than waiting to edit after the flow. After reading research that talks about the left brain, right brain conflict (Klauser, 1995), I still have a terrible time just letting myself "hang out on the page" (p. 5) as Cameron (1998) puts it; my left brain is always trying to bring order to my right brain. The right brain is connected to the heart, but the left brain blocks my arteries, preventing blood flow. This metaphorical stroke leaves my pen speechless.

My students have behaved the same way. At the beginning of each year it is difficult for many simply to write without fear of what they will produce. One young man criticized our journal writing exercises this way:

I hate this. I just can't let myself write just anything. I have to be organized. (Larry)

While the physical act of writing may slow some students down, the flow for most of them seems to be impeded by the left side of their brains restricting free writing. They seem to want their papers to be perfect the first time they write them. They have labored so much over correcting their product in-vitro that few thoughts of substance are ever delivered to the page. When my students are asked to turn in a rough copy and a good copy, they generally copy the pencil one, unedited, in ink. Even with peer editing suggestions, for them there truly is no difference between a rough and a good copy except the writing tool, so it is no wonder that I have heard them say, "Awe, ya' mean we have ta' write it over again?" Editing as one writes is so painstaking that for

some it stops flow completely, blocks the words coming from the heart. For others it may be what makes some students write as little as possible before announcing that they are finished without ever having started. Is it too uncomfortable to fight to write?

If students constantly curtail their hearts' words with intellectual admonishings about paragraph structure, spelling, grammar and penmanship, how will they hear what they wanted to say in the first place? How can they fully be present to themselves if they are constricted by perfectionism?

You cannot be fully you if you are worrying about what you write as you write it. You are editing yourself, and sometimes when you edit yourself self-consciously, you take out the you. You are expressing only a portion of your self. (Klauser, 1995, p. 58)

If the inability to write in flow impedes the desire to write at all, perhaps knowing that one has something important to say will make writing worth the struggle. How, in the process of writing that has been so defined by past training and experiences, may students re-discover that writing can be a powerful tool, not just a chore?

Flowing to Heart

Go inside, for that is where your home is. The home within your heart is where your Essence awaits you. (Jones, 1995, pp. 64-65)

The human heart has long been equated with life itself. The first real sign that a child has been conceived is the sound of the fetus' heartbeat, and the last recognizable sign that a person is still living comes amidst beats and flat-line. From deep within each torso, the sound of physical life announces its presence. In like manner, our inner voice sounds from the depths of our thinking, feeling hearts, and

the songs of self must be heard in order for us really to live. "It matters that the world knows/ We each have a song in our heart/ That can inspire us . . ." (Stepanek, 2002, p. 25). In what way might writing serve as the stethoscope through which to channel the rhythm of the songs in our hearts? At first the scope might be tuned in for deep listening, that which the individual must have to acquire self-knowledge. Writing frequently leads us to depths not previously explored:

You write it all, discovering it at the end of the line of words . . . The line of words fingers your heart. It invades arteries, and enters the heart on a flood of breath; it presses the moving rims of thick valves; it palpates the dark muscle strong as horses, feeling for something, it knows not what. (Dillard, 2003, pp. 7, 20)

What do my students experience when they let their writing take them into their hearts? Do they, as Stepanek (2002) suggests, "Let the feeling move your heart/ Let the heart bring words to your mind, / Let the mind create a poem from your hand" (p. 3)? If writing penetrates the innermost recesses of the heart, and words defibrillate the muscle, charging it with life anew, does it cause a shock to the system? As words search the recesses of the valves, do they, as some writers suggest, even cause a physical quickening of the heart's beat (Perry, 1999)? The invasion that Dillard describes above actually makes it sound as if the writer's heart is under attack. Is real writing like that for my students? Is this what makes flow impossible for some? Perhaps pain and discomfort are so close to the surface for some teenagers that they block any flow before it starts. If so, what might ease the pain, make the act seem less life threatening?

Pain, it would appear, is necessary. Discomfort seems to bring illumination. (1975) says, "Pain gives of its healing power where we least expect it" (p. 7). Is it

possible, then, that real writing comes with pain as well as healing power? That without pain there would be no self-discovery, no real value to the writing? Possibly it is the heart that serves as an instrument through which our thoughts come to us, and it is not possible to hear those thoughts without the pain of words that tear through the arteries, pressing and palpating--revealing self.

Writing Through Pain

The moment I took up the pen, I began to be afraid.
(Dostoevsky, as cited in Brennan, 1999, p. 144)

Even Fyodor Dostoevsky, the prolific Russian author, acknowledges a fear of writing in the statement above. From where does the fear of writing come? Is it the insecurity of not being accepted or appreciated once we have made our selves known that produces fear? Is it a fear of self-discovery, of hearing what is in our own hearts? Could we be afraid of who we are? Perhaps we fear that, with our hearts exposed, someone will overtake us, usurp our spirit, our identity.

When the words stick in your throat,
know that writing is a way to give voice
to your pain. (Klauser, 1995, p. 69)

Writing gives us a channel through which our words may flow. However, their passage may not come without pain. Real writing--writing from the heart--is often painful. It is painful to give one's heart voice.

In an interview about her writing experiences, Esmeralda Santiago (2000, audio tape) reveals that above the door to her study is a painting of a "pen penetrating a book and dripping, not with ink, but blood." On being questioned about the meaning of this display, Santiago describes what writing is like for her:

I really feel as if I am giving my life blood onto the pages of a book, as if I am not only exposing myself in the most intimate way, which is my soul and my emotions, but also giving voice to things that I wouldn't even speak out loud, but I feel comfortable writing them. This image has a lot to do with pain. I can't imagine writing not being a painful process for anyone who tries it, because in addition to having to be open and honest and giving of yourself, you face yourself each time that you sit down to write. And unless you are an incredibly well adjusted person, that is a painful process. (Santiago, 2000, audio tape)

As Santiago states, facing oneself is not easy, and writing forces one to do just that.

One of my students expresses his feelings about it this way, "I'm shy. It's kinda hard to let people know about me. I only tell people stuff that they ask." Sometimes we are afraid that what other people will see in us is unusual. Or as Santiago says, it may be painful to see ourselves and know that others will see us as we really are.

The Audible Heart

The heart signals life for all animals. Even early fairy tales equate life with the heart. When the wicked queen in *Snow White* (Disney, 1939/1999; Grimm, 1884/2002, on line) orders the girl's murder, she requests that the heart of the victim be brought to her by the huntsman as a sign that Snow White is dead. Not able to kill the child, the huntsman tricks the queen by returning with an animal's heart (Disney, 1939/1999, n.p.; Grimm, 1884/2002, n.p.). The queen, realizing that she has been tricked, puts a spell on Snow White, silencing the audible beat of her heart until a handsome prince saves her, causing her heart to be heard once again (Disney, 1939/1999; Grimm, 1884/2002). In one version of the story, it is the tender kindness and kiss of a handsome prince that brings Snow White to a conscious state (Disney, 1939/1999). In Grimm's version, Snow White's heart begins beating again when a

chunk of apple, lodged in her throat, is ejected as servants carrying her to the prince trip over a tree trunk (Grimm, 1884/2002).

Frequently students are physically present in my classroom just as Snow White's body remains visibly present in her glass coffin. Young and vibrant looking, my young writers initially remain silent when it comes to expressing themselves. They seem to care about nothing, wish to share nothing, claim they have nothing to say. They act as if someone has wrenched their spiritual hearts from their chests as the queen had originally commanded the huntsman to do for Snow White. If not void of hearts, their apathy leaves me wondering who or what has cast a spell on them, causing their hearts to be silenced.

"What if you can't think of anything to write?" they ask.

As my young charges remain unconscious to the sound of self, what magic will serve as permission for them to re-claim their lives? Who or what will perform the metaphorical Heimlich maneuver needed to dislodge the impediment from their throats to let them speak? Maybe in the reality of the classroom it takes more than a teacher's request to have students come to life. Perhaps the poison used to lull their hearts to sleep will need a stronger antidote than mere permission can provide. As a teacher, I ask that students share themselves every day, but a great deal more is needed before they comply. Perhaps jointly, my students and I provide one another a communal Heimlich that frees the throat of that which blocks the flow of words. The power gained from our trusting one another dislodges a fear that silences our speech. How might we create such a powerful trust within a high school setting? What will be

needed to work the magic necessary for my students to experience a community of writers and sharers?

Making Meaning with Marks

There is energy to the hand, an energy of blood, of truth, of knowledge that is deeper than skin. Blood is the body's ink. We write our lives in it. (Cameron, 1996, p. 14)

The verb to write comes from the Old English *writan*, meaning "to score, outline, draw the figure of" and from Old Saxon *writan*, meaning "to tear, scratch, or write" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 1247). This definition describes one aspect of the act of writing: the etching, the marking, the tearing of thoughts into a solid, visible form. The act of etching makes thoughts visible to others and suggests a desire for permanence.

How far back does it go, this desire one has to write, to make oneself known, to preserve one's thoughts? Archaeologists continually hope to unearth ancient texts. Cries go up when discoveries such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Rosetta Stone are made. Examination of caves, monuments, pottery and papyrus give us a glimpse into what the ancients thought valuable enough to cut into stone or inscribe on paper. Pictures telling stories on cave walls give way to words that told tales more completely. With the deciphering of ancient writing, we see more than marks; we get a quick look at the people responsible for the inscriptions.

In a more personal sense, soon after children learn to walk, they are ready to make marks. Children draw pictures and scribble lines enthusiastically. The drive to do this is so powerful that in the absence of proper utensils, children will write in lipstick, soap, nail polish and shoe polish. If paper is unavailable, walls, couches,

sidewalks and floors serve as slates for expression. This desire for written messages to be seen does not stop with toddlers; it continues as we mature. Like the ancients, children begin making their marks with drawings and change as time goes on to the written symbols of their cultural language codes.

In our schools, the bathroom stalls, locker doors, desks, notebook covers, and textbook edges make statements universally understood. What is it that drives many of us to mark permanently things for others to view? We want to be known, and despite the romantic connotation, we want our notes to be more lasting than love letters in the sand. Most of us have a desire to make meaning with marks despite the crudeness of our lettering, the types of writing utensils or the slates available.

Simon and Garfunkel (1968/2001, track 1) remind us that "The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls and tenement halls." Even today, graffiti speaks to us from the sides of buildings in our cities, screaming messages that many are unwilling to hear. What causes a person to seek the permanence of words in this manner? Years ago, as a novice teacher, I found an old poetry book on the back of a bookshelf that I was cleaning. It was a story poem book with the words HELP ME! penned in large, red letters on the edges of its pages. The inscription sent chills up my spine as I wondered what had caused the student to carve those words into the paper's surface. Of all of the words one might inscribe on school property, why these? I keep that book on my desk to this day in hopes that its haunting message will help me find a more receptive place for my students to sound such an alarm.

Permanent Marks

Communicating what is in one's heart can frequently be desperate, sometimes even magnified to hate, anger, jealousy, or desire. As I think back over the recent tragedies at Columbine and other schools where students claiming alienation from the general population used weapons to sound their dissatisfaction, making infamous marks on our society, I wonder if writing could have disarmed their fears of disconnection. Looking out over my own classroom, seeing students searching for acceptance, I question if writing might help defuse fires that sometimes lead to destructive behavior. Recently, one of my girls who chooses to wear all black and isolate herself within the class shared this about writing:

I like having a chance to share what we write. I like people knowing more about me because [my] wearing all black usually throws them off. I like listening to what everyone else writes, too. I like having a little insight into their minds. A lot of people have really surprised me. Some people that I thought would be really horrible writers because, I guess I prejudged them, I actually found to be good. I look forward to writing in my journal, sharing my work, and listening to others. (Kate)

From all outward appearances, Kate is one who has chosen to remove herself from the general school population by deliberately wearing clothes that make that statement today. However, her words about sharing through writing indicate that her heart does not choose to be an isolate. Getting past the wall of black clothes is like a test of worth, a quest for admission to her heartsong. She wants people to know who she really is, and is happy to discover that some other students are pleasingly different from the way she envisioned them.

We all want someone to know who we are, to know we were here. Whether the spirit of communication is negative or positive, we want to make marks from our

hearts. When we pass by a tree with a heart containing the names of two lovers, we smile and wonder who they are and when they were here. We may even think about what happened to them, wondering if their relationship lasted as long as the heart-filled message they left. Perhaps we smile because their message reminds us of the immortality of love, the ability of human spirits to connect. Perhaps the same carving makes us marvel at the potential permanence of marking.

I wonder what permanent marks are important to my students. Do they ever think about the immortality of their written words? More than a few are into permanently marking their own bodies with tattooed messages or designs. Perhaps what they have imprinted on the small of their backs or the sides of their arms is a preview of what lies inside, an invitation to have someone inquire about what is in their hearts. Do they care how others view the marks they have chosen to make? Do they want to be seen as rebellious or insightful? Maybe they do not care how they are viewed as long as they are noticed. Maybe they feel just as invisible as Santiago did when her inability to speak the language meant that people acted like they never even saw her. For whom are these bold markings intended? What does this trend literally to mix messages with flesh, blood and ink say about the desperation of our youth? How badly do they need to be heard?

The Power of Positive Marks

There are some marks that present positive ideas. Sometimes even graffiti has a positive way of reaching out to people. During World War II a doodle-like message started appearing all over Europe: “Kilroy was here.” While Kilroy was an actual person, the number of people responsible for leaving the messages is unknown.

However, the mark became a morale booster for troops, signifying that "one Super GI" had been in a certain place before them and remained after they were gone (Tillery, 2003, on-line, n. p.). Even if one's intent is not to make a statement with graffiti, it does deliver a message, and sometimes those messages are taken to heart.

Some people can be identified by the marks they choose to attach to their cars. Between bumper stickers and vanity plates, it is sometimes possible to know much about a person's beliefs and values with only a few cleverly combined marks. We may laugh at the message on the car in front of us if the message is amusing or grimace if the values of the person in front of us are different from our own. Regardless of our reaction, a few words have the power to get just that--a reaction out of us. The power of words is phenomenal. I wonder if my students ever realize the power their own written words can have.

Doing It Write

In school, we send mixed messages about the power and purpose of writing. While being discouraged from producing personal graffiti and writing of their own choice, students are encouraged to learn and use the alphabet responsibly in definite ways. Although some teachers encourage them to discover writing as fun, there are still some who have them write sentences for punishment. After filling papers full of what they will not do, how can students be expected to experience writing as a pleasurable act? If students are made to copy information over and over again to promote memorization, will they remember that writing is also a vehicle to transport their thoughts to others?

When we first go to school, most of us cannot wait to learn cursive script. I remember the wonder and trepidation with which I heard this joyful announcement by my daughter when she was in first grade: "Oh, mom, I have to hurry. We're going to learn cursive today!" I was excited for her because I remembered my initial thrill at wanting to write. At the same time, I stared at a blood bruise that is still trapped below the skin on my right ring finger. It is the spot where a ruler pinned my hand against a desk with the announcement that there was a right and a wrong way to hold a pencil, silencing the flow of my script and erasing the smile from my face. My permanent scar serves as a reminder that there are those who insist on one correct way without allowing for discovery. When does writing first become a chore rather than a delight? I had hoped that my daughter would be given a chance to experiment with lettering, that she would be allowed to enjoy her learning experience. I wonder if my own students have had positive or negative first writing experiences and how those experiences have contributed, if at all, to their general feelings about writing. Possibly, something as technical as learning how to hold a pencil or make letters acceptably does have some bearing on one's decision to enjoy writing.

Anita Shreve (2001), in a recent novel, tells how pleasure in the physical act of making letters led her writer-heroine to a love of writing:

It was pure self-indulgence, the writing. She could still remember (an antidote to the chagrin?) the exquisite pleasure, the texture, so early on, of her first penciled letters on their stout lines, the practiced slant of the blue-inked cursive on her first copy book (the lavish F for Frugality, the elegant E of Envy). She collected them now, old copybooks, small repositories of beautiful handwriting. It was art, found art, of that she was convinced. She had framed some of the individual pages, had lined walls of her study at home with the prints. She supposed the copybooks (mere schoolwork of anonymous women, long dead) were virtually worthless--she had hardly ever paid more

than five or ten dollars for one in a second-hand bookstore--but they pleased her nevertheless. She was convinced that for her the writing was all about the act of writing itself . . . (pp. 7-8)

This character, like many of my friends and some of my students, developed a positive feeling for writing because she liked the physical act. Although I practiced on the same blue lines described above and learned to like creating cursive on my own, it was not until I worked on my Masters' Degree that I felt confident enough to begin to like writing. It was the encouragement of an incredible professor who changed my feelings about it. However, I wonder if my dislike went all the way back to second grade. I have needed much encouragement to let the writer in me emerge. Yet, much like Shreve's character, my daughter learned to love cursive and writing, and she always has been quite confident and prolific in working with words. These thoughts invite me to wonder if a propensity for writing is rooted in a positive experience during the initial, physical act of learning to make marks.

Many of my students cannot read cursive writing, nor can they write in cursive. I know this because they have requested that I print on the overhead and board. Thinking the fault was mine for having illegible penmanship, I promised to be more careful with my script. Some of them admitted that it was not my script but the fact that they could neither read nor write cursive that caused the problem. This was a shock to me the first time I heard it, and the idea that many of my students lack the ability to write in flowing script makes me wonder what impact, if any, that has in a writing class. Students who print rather than write seem to dislike writing even more than students who are good at script. Printing is a rather laborious act. It does not flow, joining one letter together with another, like cursive. Perhaps printing puts a

certain distance between the writer and her/his heart in the same way that Cameron (1998, p. 58) says computer generated writing does.

When I get students in tenth grade, I certainly cannot change the way they have learned to mark the page, but maybe with a little practice we can loosen up enough to let them be a little freer about the process. It may be possible that a dislike for the physical act of writing spawns negative feelings for the entire writing process. The following comments indicate that the physical act of writing does play a part in the attitude of some of my students.

I like sharing my ideas. I just wish we didn't have to write, wish we could type or say them orally. (Kurt)

I sometimes like putting my thoughts and feelings down on paper. Although it gets tedious and makes my hand hurt. (Andrew)

With this in mind, I wonder if writing experiences for students who resist the physical act of scripting are affected by their motor application. How might I foster an atmosphere where students concentrate on what they have to say rather than their penmanship and the pain of moving a pencil? I keep in mind that, when the message is important enough, some kind of marks will make a point on some kind of surface be it walls, skin or paper.

At a Loss for Words

La Crayon

I don't like a bold point
Or the melted words it leaves behind,
One which merely massages
The surface of a sheet,
Apologizing for the smear-filled leaden loops
And dots it writes.

I don't like a mediocre medium
One that can't make up its mind,
One which, doubting its importance,
Blends swollen characters noncommittally
With those of lighter hue.

I like a fine point,
One that breaks the surface of the page,
Etching in my thoughts,
One which sends the paper screaming in submission,
Chiseling my ideas into time. (Hartshorn, 1999)

What will make my students want to dominate a page with ideas of their own? Some may have perfect script, and some may print. Some may need to type while others may need to dictate. However, if the desire to communicate is great enough, there will be a way to make the mark. I am reminded here of the determination of a character called "Precious Auntie" in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (Tan, 2001):

She had no voice, just gasps and wheezes, the snorts of ragged wind. She told me things with grimaces and groans, Dancing eyebrows and darting eyes. She wrote about the world on my carry-around chalkboard. She also made pictures with her blackened hands. Hand-talk, face-talk, and chalk-talk were the languages I grew up with, soundless and strong. (p. 2)

Precious Auntie's mouth, tongue and throat had been deformed by fire when she was young. However, she communicated with chalk, sand, face and hand. She was never at a loss for words. When the need to communicate is strong enough, people will use whatever means necessary to reach an audience. There can be no doubt that students today have passionate things to reveal. The national news constantly reminds us that vulnerable young people, in search of connection, frequently fall prey to criminals who stalk Internet chat rooms. If no one listens at home and no one listens at school, strangers in computer chat rooms may provide an all too willing ear for students.

The Undiscovered Self

What happens to us if we never are able to communicate our passion? What becomes of a heart whose beat is never heard, of a self who is never discovered? "The object of self-knowledge is an individual--a relative exception and an irregular phenomenon. Hence, it is not the universal and the regular that characterize the individual but rather the unique" (Jung, 1958, p. 17). As I think about this, I wonder about our ability to express that uniqueness, and I hear the echo of Langston Hughes who once asked:

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, 1974, pp. 67-68)

Dreams and heartsongs have a lot in common. If students do not get a chance to explore their hearts, to find out who they are, to express their hopes, dreams and needs, do they harden, rot, or explode? "Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we don't remember who we are or why we're here" (Kidd, 2002, p. 107). Will my students find a receptive audience and be able to share their stories before their ideas die?

An Ear for Writing

Students pass notes or notebooks so secret words will be shared with a select, willing audience. At the same time students frequently protest assigned writing during class. As an observer, I wonder if it is possible to combine the meaningfulness of personal notes with classroom writing. Is audience or medium the clue? Computers provide a new, exciting avenue for writing, but they still do not solve the problem of students writing one way for class and another way for communication.

A recent trip to our school computer lab to give students time to revise papers demonstrated yet another way students have found to exchange notes. While the students were supposed to be editing papers important to our curriculum requirements, a tech teacher a few corridors away discovered that several of my students were sending instant messages to students in his class. Sending these messages was obviously a priority for the students. However, the tech teacher deemed sending them inappropriate. I was amused at the occurrence, realizing that the students had discovered a new, unconventional way to communicate with fellow classmates. The term inappropriate also made me smile. Students were not using what would normally be deemed "inappropriate" language; they simply were having fun with words, and if truth be known, the future writing demands of many of my students will be more like instant messages than term papers. As I pondered the irony of the whole situation, I made a note to find a way to include instant messaging as a learning tool in the near future. What is it that makes students prefer one type of writing over another? Is it the age-old idea of getting away with something that one is not supposed to do? Is it that the students' hearts are not in what they are doing in

their regular writing, or does it have something to do with having an audience who listens and responds to one's words? What if students are never given an opportunity to put their hearts in their writing? Opening oneself up through writing calls for someone to receive the ideas written. When students pass notes or send messages to select peers, they are nearly assured a receptive ear. What if students never feel like anyone is listening? Sharing with a group outside of one's normal circle of friends takes courage. Our words tend to ricochet pointedly if they fall on deaf ears.

To Take Heart

It takes courage to write when it does come from the heart. The word courage comes from the Old French *corage* and, as far back as the 1300s, implies an "ordinary sense of bravery . . . [and] all senses of the word stem from the notion that the heart is the center of feeling, thought, and character" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 227). "To write is, above all else, to construct a self" (Metzger, 1992, p. 8), and that requires an extraordinary sense of bravery on the part of the writer. One must take heart in order to look inside one's self for answers, or, more appropriately, for questions. "Who we are is revealed, ultimately by the questions we ask, rather than by the answers we find" (Metzger, 1992, p. 14). Having more questions than answers can be unsettling. Being willing to verbalize questions that reveal who we are and what we value is a heart-wrenching, self-performed operation. Without delving inside, however, we cannot begin to explore the inner self. We cannot hear our heart's voice without exposing who we are. Like Metzger (1992), we know that "Something wants to be said. We don't know what it is or what shape it desires. [It is] an inchoate feeling. A pressure around the heart, perhaps, asking it to open" (Metzger, p. 9). Most of us are afraid to

open up, to dissect ourselves on paper. Thus, it is not unusual that some students, just like adults, are unwilling to "go for the jugular" (Goldberg, 1986, p. 8).

Some students admit to having nothing to say, to having blank minds, or they are unable to think. One student even says that if she is not in the right mood, writing gets on her nerves. I cannot help but wonder if these inhibitions about writing are not simply an unwillingness to dig deeply enough to explore the heart? One student connects her fear of sharing with her fear of going into her self in the writing:

The things I have been writing are complicated and some things no one knows about. They are very personal to me, and when I write in the journal, it makes me feel like I'm confiding in someone, but there is no way the secrets could ever be shared. However, I do like hearing people share, but I think some people aren't going as deep into their life and opinions and thoughts as I am, so I feel like they don't really want to write. They are just doing it because they have to. (Sonja)

When my students are being apprehensive about writing from the heart, perhaps it is a fear of possible sharing that prevents their willingness to venture inward. Some students admit, once they find out that I will not force them to share, that they "would not be as willing to write freely if [they] knew [they] had to share." One student even says she "loves being introspective but knows that [she] will never be willing to read the stuff in the class."

Even teacher/writers have expressed a similar fear about writing. Bass (1999), in her dissertation about teaching the process of revision to a college composition class, expresses her insecurities about writing: " . . . The earth itself is a study in the tensions that make us human. This element embodies my own life both as a writer and a teacher of writing, the tensions I feel between holding back and letting go, of the desire to write and the fear that accompanies putting my thoughts on paper" (p.

50). Perhaps no one who writes is without the tension "between holding back and letting go." Why are we so afraid to expose ourselves? We say we know we are not perfect, yet we are afraid to reveal our imperfections--the very attributes that make us individuals, the little idiosyncrasies that make us special, make us lovable. Maybe we fear that, once exposed, we will not be lovable, will not make a connection.

Writing exposes us as imperfect. It lets us see ourselves as limited and in search of more. Perhaps that is why Raymond says, "I guess I fear being wrong or too strange or something like that." Paul indicates that, "Not many other people like the things I do, so I'm always afraid I'll embarrass myself." Cassidy sums it up like this:

Being asked to write personal stuff is interesting because all kinds of thoughts run through your head like, 'Will the students like what I wrote? Will I sound stupid? What if the teacher does not like it?' As a listener, I think that you are anxious to hear what other people think, but you also wonder, 'Man, that was good. Mine is not that good, why can't I write like that?' Even with all these thoughts, being your own person is important.

A nurturing environment is required to keep us from holding back, to let us open up, to "be our own persons" by putting our hearts on our sleeves without fear of destruction. Perhaps we must each see our space as safe before we are willing to open up.

The Write Place

Creating a classroom space that feels safe to the writer is not easy. Writing experts tell us to set up a specific place for writing in the classroom and show the students that writing is a priority (Applebee, 2000; Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1986; Fletcher, 2001; Frank, 1979). Supplies such as thesauruses, dictionaries and paper should be readily available. Some even suggest that we provide many different kinds

of writing utensils such as fancy paper and untraditional colored pens. After the initial physical set up, however, much is still needed to create a comfort zone.

Several of my students claim that they will write if they are not forced to share. While that seems counterproductive to our being able to connect through sharing, that does seem to be where we have to start. Each person must feel free enough to discover her/his own heartsongs. Once we see that our ideas really are not that far afield, we may eventually be willing to share. What is a comfortable sharing space like for high school students? What makes a writing space that encourages, one where poetry is completed, then celebrated and then shared like Stepanek (2001) recommends?

When I start teaching each year, I develop a writing station, display posters on the writing process and have lots of creative materials ready for student use. To be honest, however, I usually dust them off and put them away unused at the end of each school year. High school students will not be lured by sparkle-pens and seashore paper. A writing/sharing comfort zone has nothing to do with attractively equipped stations. What my students seem to need is real writing time and a non-threatening space in which to share what they have written.

A Non-Threatening Space

I am not sure how it evolved, but my students and I sit in as close to a circle as we can during sharing time. In this format we can all see one another, and no one is the center of attention all of the time. We all share the spotlight. We are able to listen more intently, and we can be heard more clearly when we speak. Much is required beyond the physical set up of the room, however, to create a comfort zone.

Setting up an inviting writing place does not mean students will write, at least not high school students. When I first started teaching at the high school level, I tried to create an appropriate atmosphere. I expected that, like the teachers with whom I had shared my work, my students would read their pieces simply because I requested it. After taking time to form a large circle that first day, I am embarrassed to say, all we got was practice moving chairs and making noise. Somehow I confused my own experience with what my students were about to go through. I had failed to consider what this activity would be like for them. In my haste to create a community of learners, I had put my students in harm's way. Palmer (1998) says that we all have an "intense fear of connectedness" (p. 58) as well as "an equally intense desire" (p. 58) for it. When I asked my young writers to put their hearts on paper and then expose them to a class of virtual strangers, I failed to recognize their fear. When no one volunteered, I thought I could cajole them into participating by sharing a piece of my own writing. The fear in my classroom was contagious. I, too, was frightened. I wondered if the students would think I was showing off or think that I was trying to be cool by doing what I had asked them to do. I found myself as apprehensive about sharing with them as I had been about sharing with my own writing peers. I did not trust my own students' reactions because they did not know me:

It is terrifying to reveal yourself to your pupils by trying to practice what you've been preaching, but once a teacher engages in the writing process with his [her] students he [she] will never be the same again. (Murray, 1982, p. 117)

Murray is correct; my initial fears and failures at creating a space to share changed my whole approach to dealing with writing. One cannot expect magic to begin by

setting up workstations, conducting mini lessons or putting chairs in a circle. At once I knew that I needed to look at what this experience is like for my students.

Creating an accepting space where adolescent writers feel comfortable enough to share takes time to develop. It was no real surprise, then, to have my own students voice fear and discomfort when they were asked to share. A chorus of refusals sparked an entire symphony of negative tones. When I asked for reasons for the mass dissent and called for criticism on paper, students confirmed my fears:

I think that something needs to be done to get the class to feel more like a close-knit community or at least good acquaintances so we feel less nervous to expose ourselves. (Kris)

Here, Kris expresses a desire to get to know the class like a community so he will feel less threatened. What makes students feel ready to face their fear, as Judy puts it?

I don't like opening myself up to people when I am not ready. It definitely is a good thing to face your fear, but it's hard at the same time.

Murray (1982) says, "Once the student has found an audience, he will catch fire. He will be motivated to write once the basic satisfaction of communication has been given to him" (p. 119). However, the absence of audience was not an issue for us. While some of my students went out on a limb to have me as an audience, they refused to value one another as listeners. Trust had not yet been established, and trust cannot be hurried.

Levoy (1997) tells a story about how Nikos Kazantzakis, the author of *Zorba the Greek*, once tried to speed up the process of metamorphosis by breathing on a butterfly that had partially emerged from a cocoon. The creature came forth deformed, its wings stuck to its body because "it needed the sun's patient warmth" (p. 42) to nurture it, not Kazantzakis' breath. He realized from that experience, like I did

from mine, that certain things cannot be forced. Most things must ripen of their own accord. Looking back, I can see that my early desire to have a ready atmosphere for sharing was premature. I was anxious to see my students' words take wing, never realizing the patience and warm nurturing needed to spawn a healthy classroom climate cannot be rushed. I did not consider what this experience was like for my students; I thought only about what I wanted it to be.

I have recently noticed that a comfort zone does not come for all students at the same time. Some need a lot more patient encouragement than others. The chrysalis of our classroom takes time to nourish us as writers who are willing to come out of our communal cocoon, ready to share our whole selves. A community comfort zone takes a little longer to foster in high school. While most students enter my room at a similar chronological age, the embryonic development of each as writer and listener is different. While some students are nearly ready to spread their writing-sharing wings in the fall, many are just beginning to be whole enough to fly in the spring. Sadly, some need more than a year of warmth and nourishment to find a voice.

Heart Light

The nourishment we provide to the heart of the other must come from our hearts. Some students do not eagerly emote warmth, do not unconditionally accept others. What kind of in-class magic will be needed to enlighten hearts like these?

Sharing sucks. No one cares what Scott or Wendy or anyone else thinks. What I write is my own business, and I hope there is never an issue where I am forced to share something I have written. (Justin)

My ideas are mine. I really don't give a rat's ass what the other people in this class have to say. (Mica)

In noticing the tone of these two students, I wonder what causes students to take such a negative stance at such an early age, but I wonder more how their negativity will impact the freedom of the other students in the room. Will my students who are afraid of being rejected feel comfortable enough to let go in the midst of these cold attitudes? Students bring with them who they are and affect the present with their *being*. In what manner might the lived experience of students be affected by the attitudes of their classmates? Will I know when to nurture, when to nudge and when to let lie? With warmth and patience, will even dark hearts evolve to a lighter place? Heard (1995) says, "Finding home is crucial to the act of writing" (p. 2). I wonder how long it will take to make this classroom a home.

Other teachers have observed their students evolve into a community of learners. Hultgren (1995) presents student reactions to the sharing of autobiographical pieces on the first night of a graduate class as she looks at an "experience of teaching and learning together" (p. 371). In her reflection, one student articulates that "There is a sense of 'coming home' in this class" (p. 374). Another states that "Openness and acceptance permeated the room, fueling the courage to speak, to reveal" (p. 375). I know what these students mean because I, too, have participated in a sharing of self in one of Hultgren's classes. However, my reaction was a little less comfortable than the students quoted above. I was a bit more hesitant, like another of Hultgren's writers who could not "believe what [was] being asked of me" (p. 375) on the first night of class. I, too, as yet another states, "was trying to listen. I want[ed] to stop worrying about what I wrote" (p. 375). While Hultgren admits that "The community [of her classroom] was not created without some tension" (p. 375) and "recognition for

attunement in listening" (p. 376), her classes accept an "invitation to be and let be" (p. 376). Students feel at home in an environment that Hultgren lets be. She follows Aoki's (1991) suggestion "of letting things come to be on their own" (p. 375). It is with that same patience that I need to work within the tensions of my own classroom with the hope that even my skeptical students will have more desire to connect as the class evolves.

Unchained Hearts

The complex nature of creating a sharing space makes me think about *The Secret Life of Bees* (Kidd, 2003). A young girl, Lily, recognizes who she is and breaks from the haunting chains of her past. It is not until she is able to open her heart to others and face herself that she is able to experience love. An important symbol in this book is that of The Black Madonna, a statue in which Mary's heart is exposed and bound in chains, a sacred symbol of the pain and sorrow that each of the women in the novel offers up through the Madonna. Unlike the others, Lily has kept her own heart chained, unable to love, unable to thrive, unable to find a real life. Once she trusts enough to tell her whole story, she begins to live. Lily is nurtured into self-discovery and opens her heart because of the sweet acceptance of those around her.

Some of my students' hearts are frequently chained up like Lily's. Their problems may not be as tragic as hers, but they are every bit as hesitant to face themselves. Once students let themselves go and look into their hearts honestly, they find writing and reading a release.

Reading a piece out loud to a group of people is a relief. You can finally share what is bottled up inside. (Jonathan)

As some of my students prepare to unchain their hearts, I realize how important trust and acceptance is within a writing community. In order for students to tell their stories, they must trust that those around them will be accepting of their stories.

As I puzzle over creating a sharing space in my room, I am encouraged by remembering that in January of last year one of my students asked me to share anonymously a piece of her writing with her peers. In fact, she asked if I would share it with all of my sophomore classes because she had friends in each. This young lady's father was dying of cancer, and she wrote a paper in September detailing what the experience was like for her. In her writing she said that one of the worst things about her situation was that her friends "didn't get it." She said that every time they would ask how her father was doing, she would say not well, and they would tell her that they were sure he would be better soon. She wrote,

He is not getting better. He is dying, and nothing in my life is ever going to be the same again. And I really need my friends to understand what I mean when I tell them that he is never getting better. (Jocelyn)

While Jocelyn was not ready to share this in September, she felt the need and the acceptance to be able to share it in January. Without experiencing acceptance, students may never know that "When we discover what we have said we discover who we are. In finding your voice you discover your identity" (Murray, 1982, p. 7).

Songs of the Self

Each time I write, each time the authentic words break through, I am changed. The older order that I was collapses and dies. I do not know what words will appear on the page. I follow language. I follow the sound of the words, and I am surprised and transformed by what I record. (Griffin, as cited in Albert, 1996, p. 4)

Perhaps writing transforms all of us. Sometimes we are afraid of this transformation because our writing has taken us to painful or private places that we are hesitant to revisit. Julia Cameron (1998) says that when we enter our hearts we not only find peace and joy but passion and heartache:

We store memories in our bodies. We store passion and heartache. We store joy, moments of transcendent peace. If we are to access these, if we are to move into them and through them, we must enter our bodies to do so. . . . Entering our bodies, we enter our hearts. (p. 58)

Newman (1993) agrees that we need to go inside ourselves but admits that we are bound to be frightened by the prospect:

It is human nature to fear the unknown, and the unknown is exactly what a blank page represents to me. By filling a blank page with words, I get to know myself and what I keep locked away in the recesses of my heart and mind. (p. 5)

These kinds of secrets are hard to release. To van Manen (2003), "Writing shows that we can now see something and at the same time it shows the limits or boundaries of our sightedness" (p. 30). It is uncomfortable for all writers, not just high school students, to enter their hearts, fill the blank page with words, and recognize the boundaries of their sightedness all at the same time. In a high school setting, however, students frequently are hesitant to listen and even more hesitant to share:

I feel so incredibly nervous when I read a piece out loud. (Judy)

When I read a piece I am terrified that no one will like it. I am afraid that it may give the wrong message or that people will see things the wrong way. (Jesse)

While some students say it is hard to read because they are incredibly nervous, others feel differently:

I like to share my pieces. It doesn't bother me at all--ever! (Les)

When I read any piece out loud, I feel a sense of great pride because it allows me to relate to myself while relating to others. (Ashley)

Writing from the heart can sometimes help students see what has been true of them all along--they have songs to sing, know tales to tell, are individuals to be. However, they all seem to come to this realization in their own good time. They cannot be rushed. Sometimes, though, students are not given an opportunity to explore the songs of the self.

Recently Diane Scharper, a professor of writing at Towson University, edited a book of her own students' writings entitled *Songs of Myself: Episodes from the Edge of Adulthood* (1998). This book contains a powerful collection of thirty-eight student memoirs. "These thirty-eight memoirs are history, and literature, and poetry. Above all, they are the human heart. In one sense, they answer the question 'Who am I?'" (p. xvii). In her introduction to the students' pieces, Scharper explains how she "added a paper that combines critical writing with creative writing: the memoir" (pp. xvii-xviii) to required writing in a course called Writing for a Liberal Education (p. xvii). The pieces included in this anthology reveal the hearts and minds of Scharper's students. Many of these college freshmen are "excellent writers, but do not realize how accomplished they are. Perhaps these students were too immature to work at writing in high school. Perhaps they had never been asked to write anything that caught their imagination" (p. xix). Whatever the reason may be that students feel they have nothing worth saying, Scharper believes "We teachers owe students an opportunity to see what real writing is" (Scharper, 1999, p. xix). We must encourage them to find their own voices because, "Writers say that 'voice' lies at the heart of good writing"

(p. xix). Scharper's students write about family, illness, pregnancy, growing up too fast, and death. Because they are tales told from the heart, they are gripping and a perfect example of what listening to the songs of oneself can reveal. Scharper's students learned to honor and believe in themselves through their writing just as Walt Whitman (1871/2002) sang a song for himself years ago:

I believe in you my soul . . .
Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat,
Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture,
not even the best,
Only the lull I like, the hum of your valve'd voice.

Like Whitman, we all need to listen carefully to hear the hum from within.

Finding a Pulse

How was it that you could not hear the messages that were being sent to you each day, through the beating of your own heart? (Jones, 1995, p. 61)

It seems ironic that we need to talk about knowing who we are or being able to hear the message of our own heart. Should this not be second nature to us?

Discovering the self is sometimes so difficult that it seems to be hidden under layers that muffle its sound. The search for self reminds me of being able to identify one's pulse after exercise. A few years ago aerobic exercise was all the rage. In order to maintain a healthy heart, one was encouraged to raise one's cardiovascular rate to a certain level. As a participant in a class designed to do just that, I was to stop at certain intervals and take my pulse. For those who are skilled at hearing their own pulses, this may be a simple activity. For me, however, it was not easy. I am embarrassed to say that I could not find my pulse. I was told that with practice I would eventually be able to hear and count the beats of my heart when they were at

their peak from activities. This took concentration, though. I had to shut out all outside distractions and make sure my fingers pressed just the right spot on my neck in order to be successful. I became excited to calculate my own blood flow. I was quite intrigued to be able to tune into something that I thought only experts knew how to do. It had never dawned on me that a regular person, such as myself, could take her own pulse.

Finding the pulse of our heartsongs can be just as difficult. Self-discovery is sometimes painful, and pressing ourselves hard enough to hear heartfelt words is easier said than done at times. When I ask my students to listen for their hearts' messages, they are frequently distracted by their surroundings. Because of everyday disruptions, real, concentrated listening is imperative. When students reach inside for ideas, only listening superficially, they come up with writing that is contrived and superficial. Some are so set on finishing quickly that they fail to tune in deeply enough to hear their true feelings. They have so little practice getting in touch with their deeper, inner thoughts that they may as well be trying to find their heartbeats for the first time. Perhaps there is too much going on around them all of the time: music, television, telephone conversations, e-mail and computer games. With all of this noise pollution who stops to listen to an internal messenger?

Metzger, in her book *Writing for Your Life* (1992) describes how the "white noise" in her head interferes with her writing. Once she cleared her head of the noise, she discovered another language in the process-- "a language neither distracted nor beclouded; a language that was mine because it took me directly into, not away from, myself. This is the language of creativity--a language through which the self is

carefully reconstructed out of pieces of itself" (p. 5). Many professional writers talk about both the difficulty and necessity of putting the inner self on paper. Klauser (1995) says the "beauty of heart writing is that anyone can do it. You don't need to be a writer. You just need to be a human being. You don't need to be eloquent or poetic or have a way with words. You don't need to do, just to be . . . Be you" (p. 50).

Students, who give themselves a chance to hear what is in their hearts are frequently surprised at how that affects their writing. Toward the end of the year, when we have become comfortable with one another and our journal writings have led us to actual pieces of personal writing, students are sometimes surprised at their experiences in connecting through writing:

I never realized how many good and diverse writers there are in this class. I never thought that writing would be so emotional, either. There were about three times when someone had finished reading their writing, and I looked over at Sheila and we were both ready to cry. I am surprised how much creative writing helps us show other people what we are really like. (Bethany)

It was interesting hearing people's voices in such an open way. I learned more about people than I knew before. It was like meeting another side or color to the person. Last night I was thinking about my best friend and how many 'colors' or different sides she has. Hearing people read their personal choice writings is like seeing another side of them. I could tell that almost all of the pieces came from the writer's heart. (Charlotte)

"Waiting to Exhale"

Perhaps in our busy world, we do not always take time to listen. Too many things pull at us. There is little time to relax or concentrate. We rush from one event to another, taking minimal time to think, frequently finding ourselves, as McMillan (1992) says in her title, "waiting to exhale." High school students are not immune to the speed with which our world turns. They are on such tight schedules with classes, homework, jobs, sports, and family obligations that they want assignments to be cut

and dried, the kind that can be answered quickly, so they can complete them and be finished. Maybe being part of the technological age has something to do with their impatience.

Metzger describes a 1938 manifesto written by Diego Rivera, Leon Trotsky, and Andre Breton in which they "agreed that creativity was innate in every human being and that societies were to be held responsible for crushing the creative instinct" (1992, p. 16). Newman (1993) says, "Every woman [person] has important stories to tell and the ability to tell them. There are no exceptions" (p. 1). However, Virginia Woolf (1931/2002) relates how she had to "kill the angel in the house," the Victorian prude who echoed in her head that women can neither think nor speak for themselves. Cixious (1991) tells how she was tormented by her need to write while being stifled by the same anti-feminine fear. Giovanni (1994) says racial discrimination kept her from writing at first. Ayn Rand (1962) speaks through a character who cannot write because he feels he has nothing to say that will please the critics of his day. Do my students have some fear from the cultural norms of today that keep them from airing their beliefs on paper? If not, and Newman is correct, what is it that "crush[es] the creative instinct" in my students and keeps them from realizing that they have "stories to tell"? Why do I hear: "What do you mean you are not going to give us a topic?" Or "How long does this have to be?" Or "What does 'personal choice' mean, like creative or what?" Is there some voice in the back of my young writers' minds that chides them into feeling unacceptable? What preconceived notions might block them from voicing their thoughts? Acknowledging that we have the right to sound our voices simply may require practice at putting our thoughts on paper. Without the visual

support of seeing our ideas in print, we may be unable to hear what we need to say. It may take a fine-tuned ear to hear the heart's song.

The Ear in Heart

Hear your own heartbeat.
Put your ear to your own heart
and listen. (Jones, 1995, p. 60)

Hearts beat; hearts race; hearts murmur and, sometimes, hearts sing. If we listen very carefully, we can hear those songs. Mattie Stepanek (2001) talks about heartsongs in his poem of the same title. He calls what is deep inside of us our heartsongs, insisting that everyone has one. In order to hear them, we must believe and listen so we can hear. As I set up my classroom each year, I wonder how our writing atmosphere might help students re-acquaint themselves with what is deep within their hearts.

As students enter my room each fall, they are new "sophomores," a word unkindly defined by the Greeks as "wise fools" (Mish, 1993, p. 1121). Perhaps as they struggle at the crossroads between adulthood and childhood, they are exactly that. They are young enough and physically awkward enough to act and look foolish, yet they are old enough to feel the stirring profundities of adults. Some come bursting with knowledge from previous years, anticipating new discoveries. Other students come sauntering into the room, slouching into desks, convinced they know everything. They listen to little but their peers and the radio. For many it has been quite a while since someone has asked them to listen to themselves, since anyone wanted to hear what they had to say. Writing may provide all types of students a tool for self-discovery, a place to write down their heartsongs. Most of them, in one way

or another, are already up to what they consider to be "matters of consequence" (de Saint Exupery, 1943/1971, p. 5). Like the grown-ups in *The Little Prince*, they are all business: some prepare for college in two years; others already work many hours after school, rejecting academics. They, like all adults noted by the prince, have no time to relax, be creative, see [or hear] the important things. They are too busy being responsible to just be. As Stepanek reminds adults to listen for their heartsongs, I search for ways to help my adolescents hear theirs.

Everyone is born with a Heartsong.
But as we grow up
Sometimes we forget about it.
Because we don't listen to it enough.
(Stepanek, 2001, p. 22)

It seems that listening to heartsongs after a certain age is like opening a wound; it results in pain and bloodletting. People tend to muffle the sounds of their hearts or to drown them out with what the world considers more important sounds. Some of my students bury themselves in their books, blast their eardrums with loud music, or hypnotize themselves with television. Yet every day I watch them struggle for ways to connect. What happens to those who do not connect, those left alone at cafeteria tables, those turned down for sports teams and clubs? Perhaps to survive, they have to be able to connect with themselves, to hear what their hearts have to say. How can we, my students and I, learn like all writers, to "listen to [ourselves]? Trust what [we] hear"? (Goldberg, 1996, introduction), and be willing to tell our tales aloud?

The Self as Listener

Listening requires an inner silence.
(Levin, 1989, p. 88)

Sometimes we cannot hear our inner voices. Maybe things happen that make us feel we are insignificant, that we have nothing worthwhile to say. Being attentive to our inner selves and being willing to listen and expose that self may be difficult, but if we are never really alive because our hearts are not heard, what happens to us? What enables us to hear our own hearts? What keeps us from giving birth to our own beings? Perhaps we have convinced ourselves that we have no time to listen, or we refuse to listen because we are afraid of our findings. Maybe something inside of us prevents us from realizing we even have a heart that needs to be heard. I wonder if each of us not only has the responsibility but the need to find out who we are, to listen to our hearts, to identify our heartsongs. If we fail to do this, perhaps we become cold-hearted, hard-hearted, or like the Grinch who stole Christmas, with a "heart[s] two sizes too small" (Geisel, T. 1958/1985, n. p.). Perhaps hearts atrophy if we are deaf to the tones of their messages.

Sometimes we have trouble hearing ourselves. Frequently, with hands over our ears to shut out sound, we say, "I can't hear myself think." The sounds from inside often compete with what is going on around us. Some of us try to take time to listen to what is within; others need to be helped to hear. Like the tin man in *The Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1914/1973), we do not always recognize that we even have a heart. Some of us do not believe we have anything to say. Having too little faith in our selves, we do not listen carefully enough to hear our heart's desire. For the tin man, the search for his heart leads him down the yellow brick road. It is not until the very end of his journey that the Great Oz gives him a silk heart, so he can believe in himself. It is evident to all, however, that he has had a heart all along. Through much of the book,

despite his search, the tin man empathizes with other characters in a heartfelt way. In fact, at one point, he starts to cry and has to be reminded that he will rust if he continues. He is unaware of his heart until he sees the Wizard implant it in his chest. It is through the other characters in the story that he is able to discover who he really is.

We sometimes need the help of sympathetic listeners to recognize the messages within us. The journey to this revelation is often long. It is this kind of self-examination that my students are encouraged to reveal through their personal writing. As they listen to their hearts, they eventually reveal themselves both inwardly and on paper. Sometimes it takes the encouragement of others to convince them they have something to say.

In the recent film *The Muse*, the main character is a writer who thinks he can no longer write. He has nothing to say. A friend convinces him to hire a muse for inspiration. His muse comes to stay at his house. She does nothing but tell him that he can write and that he should just sit down and do it. At first, he ignores her because he, like the audience, can see that she is doing nothing to help him. The most she manages to do is make him emotional about having hired her for nothing. Eventually, without the muse doing anything except living the life of luxury at the writer's expense and telling him he can write, we see him begin to write again. He first writes just to rid the muse from his life, and then realizes that he is, in fact, writing because of her. He is self-inspired but needed a little push to start his pen moving again. Sometimes all of us need a muse or a wizard to remind us to believe in ourselves.

Trusting What We Hear

As soon as we have the thing before our eyes, and in our hearts an ear for the word, thinking prospers. (Heidegger, 1977/1993, p. 343)

Trusting what we hear means trusting who we are, accepting ourselves as authentic beings. "Authenticity is not something which can be conjured up. . . . Authenticity is not something which one can produce wittingly" (Lingus, 1999, lecture). It is what one is, in essence. To hear ourselves, we need only be attentive to who we are. We do not need comment from anybody else to be. No one else needs to tell us that we are, or that who we are is acceptable. However, many of us let things get in the way of being able to accept ourselves for who we are. We seek the approval of others and let criticism interfere with the knowledge we have as self. The ability to value one's own worth is known as self-esteem. As I ponder how the ability to hear oneself affects me and my students in a writing situation, self-esteem problems come to mind. I sometimes think I am a redbird because I was deemed a redbird years ago and made to feel inferior. Deep down inside, I know that I am not a redbird, but I constantly need affirmation from others. It is also deep down inside where I believe I am a red bird. Perhaps once our self-esteem has been attacked, we need others to help uncover our worth. I frequently doubt that what I am doing is correct and equate my doing with my being. Many of my students seem to question themselves as well. They hesitate saying what they think or feel because they fear rejection. This fear acts like static that makes it difficult for them to hear what is in their hearts. I wonder in what ways high school students might learn to listen to themselves and trust what they hear.

Teacher as Listener

Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great ones make you feel that you, too, can become great. (Twain, as cited in McGuire & Abitz, 2001, p. 75)

Sometimes students are encouraged by the simplest communication. What we say to others has the power to make them feel important or give them self-doubt. In *The Secret Life of Bees* (Kidd, 2003), a child who has no self confidence tells about how one teacher changes her life simply by saying that she is smart enough to be anything she wants. She says that before this teacher's comments, she always hated when anyone asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up. She never had an answer until the teacher told her she "could be a professor or a writer of actual books" (p. 16). Sometimes we fail to realize the impact our words have on our students, especially when they wait for a response to something they have written. My own students have told me that few teachers ever read their papers, or if they do read them, they do not comment on the actual message of their text. These students wrote the following in response to my comments on their first journal entries:

Although this sounds unusual, I feel that you are one of my first teachers to completely read our work even though you do not have to. The comments make it seem like you enjoy reading my work and that is a nice feeling.
(Clara)

It's nice to finally have someone listen in on my internal conversations and give feedback, assuring me that I am making some sense. (Sam)

If a teacher is a nurturing critic, the student may be encouraged by comments.

However, fixing all mechanical mistakes and making the paper look like a battlefield tends to retard student progress. In a study entitled, "When Less is More," Zak (1993) suggests that students' writing actually improves more from writing and sharing aloud

than from any kind of written teacher responses. I personally never had a teacher whose comments helped me improve my writing until I pursued my Masters' Degree. At that time, my professor's paper grading was what I would term positive and balanced. In one of the side margins of the paper, he wrote smiley faces, checks and responses about my thinking. In the opposite margin of the paper, he asked challenging questions, to force me to dig deeper. His method of communicating was empowering. Thinking about his method of critique, I realize that his encouragement made me want to be a better student and writer. Because of his supportive comments, I looked at his suggestions as a way to improve rather than a negative criticism. Prior to that time, papers were either void of marks save the grade at the top or were so covered by red ink that I did not know where to begin. Shaughnessy (1977) says that teachers of writing must find a way to help students experience success even if in some small way. If students feel defeated by the number of their errors marked, they cannot be expected to care about improving. "Some writers, inhibited by their fear of error, produce but a few lines an hour or keep trying to begin, crossing out one try after another until the sentence is hopelessly tangled" (Shaughnessy, 1977, p. 7).

When grading papers, many English teachers seem to be out to "break the students," to make them realize they cannot write because they do not know the rules. Most students, regardless of age, tuck those criticisms in their hearts along with the ideas they long to air.

I am reminded here of a haunting part of a book called *Up the Down Staircase* (Kaufman, 1965). Miss Barrett, a young teacher, gains the trust of most of her high school students through journal writing and answering notes from a suggestion box.

One of her emotional, female students reveals that she has a crush on one of the male teachers at the school. In her journal the young lady writes a love note to this teacher. Eventually, she gains the courage to copy that letter and puts it in Mr. Barringer's mailbox. The letter reads:

Dear Mr. Barringer,

Last Sunday I took the subway to your stop having looked it up on your Time Card. I hope you don't mind the presumption I walked back and forth across the street from your house . . . back and forth and I thought I saw you and my heart was throbbing with this love I bear for you . .

I feel so deeply the Beauty and Truth of the poetry you read in class . . . I alone. . . especially such lines like "She has a lovely face, the Lady of Shalot "

I think of you all the time. at night, darkling, I pray to be worthy of you and all that you stand for I believe we understand each other and no one else And if ever you need me to die for you I will gladly do so. . .

I hope you don't think me presumptuous but I have to speak out the truth the only truth. . . .

Sincerely yours,
Alice Blake (p. 232)

Mr. Barringer circles all spelling and punctuation errors, underlines the clichés, red pens other corrections in the side margins, and writes Alice the following note:

Alice--

Thank you for your note. Watch spelling and punctuation; you tend to use a series of dots to avoid it. Watch repetitions and clichés.

You might look up the spelling of the Lady in Tennyson's "Idylls of the King"--PB. (p. 232)

When Alice tries to commit suicide, PB. does not understand how he should have responded differently to the letter. He, like most of us, could learn much from the chipmunk in Randall Jarrell's *The Bat-Poet* (1964/1998). In this tale a bat decides that he is going to stay up in the daytime to see what is going on. As he observes his surroundings, he begins to write poetry. The first poem he writes is about the

mockingbird because he loves the beautiful sound of the mockingbird's voice and the cadence of his song. Once his poem is written, the bat tells it to the mocking bird. With a narcissistic bow, the mockingbird tells the bat that he likes it but notes that the rhyme scheme is "two feet short" (p. 14).

The bat said blankly: "Two feet short?"

"It's two feet short," said the mocking bird a little impatiently. "The next to the last line's iambic pentameter, and the last line's iambic trimeter." (p. 14)

As the mockingbird continues to elaborate on the rules of poetic scansion, the bat becomes discouraged. The mockingbird tells him to write some more and come back when he gets it right. Discouraged by the response, the bat-poet writes a different poem and tries the new one out on a chipmunk. The chipmunk listens intently; when the poem is over, the chipmunk gives a big shiver and says, "It's terrible, just terrible! Is there really something like that [an owl] at night?" With this reaction, the bat poet asks if he may write more poems for the chipmunk because "It's a pleasure to say a poem to--to such a responsive audience" (Jarrell, 1964/1998, pp. 17-18).

A response-ive audience--is that not what every writer needs? An audience that listens to what one really has to say and acknowledges one's message. The word response originally comes from the Old French *repons* and the Latin *responsum* and was first used to represent that which was sung by a congregation in reply to a priest's message. The suffix *ive*, means to "respond readily to some influence, easily moved" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 918). To move a listener is every writer's dream. The bat-poet knew it, and my students know it in tenth grade. When we spend time expressing ourselves, we long to be heard. Just as the bat-poet is unwilling to make more poems for the mocking bird because of the bird's critical, unfeeling response, my students

come to me in various stages of *response fear*. If I ask students to write and share, they have two audiences to worry about: me and their peers. Looking at it from this perspective, teachers have quite a *response-ability* when commenting on student work. When a student's work is returned with a simple letter grade or check and no comment, what is a student to think? If a paper is returned with red pen bleeding all over the grammatical and spelling errors but has no mention of the thoughts it contains, how will the student view the response? How much of my students' willingness to write is colored by past teacher responses and mine in the present?

Peer response is also of grave importance when asking students to share writings. Students, like the bat-poet, need to know that a sympathetic ear will listen to their pieces. When they have been brave enough to expose details about themselves and their beliefs that others may not know, they need the assurance that those listening will be open and willing to be moved by their ideas.

Building Trust

Building trust in the classroom evolves over time. We start the year out by writing journal responses. As I respond to students' journals, I discover that they are interested in speaking their minds. I also learn that the significance of their writing increases when I respond in a nonjudgmental manner. I am surprised at how many students write so candidly about personal situations. There are few who are willing to take the initial step to share out loud in class, however. Those who read start to reduce the fear factor in our room. Little by little, more students decide to be heard. Fear has been holding them back. "Fear is everywhere--in our culture, in our institutions, in our students, in ourselves--and it cuts us off from everything" says Palmer (1998, p.

56). It destroys our connectedness. We must all "move beyond the fear . . . by reclaiming the connectedness that takes away fear" (Palmer, 1998, p. 56). Madden (2001) tells of a National Writing Project Director in Arizona who encourages Native American students to "uncover their lived experiences through the process of journal writing" (p. 160). The students write, rewrite and share their experiences with others. The sharing, as well as the writing, provides healing and change for the students. Through conversations between the Native American writers and the director, Madden identifies trust as the essential component to the project's success. This same kind of trust is needed by my students to create a community of listeners within our room, listeners whose openness will dispel fear and connect us as a community.

Students can be so critical of one another. They judge each other because of money, clothing, hairstyle, work ethic, and numerous other things. A foundation of trust must be established before people are willing to be open. The task of nurturing a supportive atmosphere falls to both the teacher and the student-writer. The willingness of the teacher to be a participant as well as a receiver is important. Teachers must share who they are, put themselves out there, be trusting enough of the students that they are willing to return our trust. If we want students to write from the heart, we must lead by example.

Much of what we write has been in our minds and hearts for a lifetime. But as teachers, we must provide ways for children to call up these experiences. (Swain, 1994, p. 87)

In my classroom practice I continually am trying to decide how to make a "write place." The two things that seem to be needed are trust and openness.

Listening is one way we show regard for the other person. "The art of skillful hearing . . . is our response-ability . . ." (Levin, 1989, p. 2). A classroom where listening is valued is one where students become comfortable enough to speak, willing to be themselves. "It is predominantly in speaking that man's [or woman's] being-in-the-world takes place" (Heidegger, 1924/1996, p. 8E). Therefore, an atmosphere where a person is encouraged to speak is one that allows her/him to exist out of isolation. When students are filled with self-doubt, they frequently feel isolated, dis-connected from the world. Listening is an empowering gift. It helps speakers develop confidence, makes them realize their self worth and causes them to discover their own voices.

I am reminded here of a scene in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (Tan, 2001) that illustrates the importance of being heard and the connection of voice to identity. A Chinese girl, who is born outside of marriage, is adopted by her mother's sister in order to save face in the family. The girl's real mother is known to her as Precious Auntie. When the young girl is a teenager and about to marry into the family that was responsible for her real father's death, Precious Auntie writes her a letter revealing the truth. The girl never reads the letter and fails to acknowledge her mother. Precious Auntie's broken heart fuels her suicide as dreams of ending her isolation and having her real voice heard are dashed forever. "Voice stands in contrast to its opposite, silence. It is a metaphor for how people describe their identity, self-worth, and feelings of isolation from or connection to others . . ." (Kreisberg, 1992, p. 116). Because no one listens to Precious Auntie, she feels that she has no identity.

I wonder if my students feel as insignificant as Precious Auntie when they remain silent, if they feel no connection. There are several stories where the protagonist considers herself / himself nearly invisible because s/he does not speak. Esmeraldo Santiago (NCTE Conference, 2001) tells that, as a Latino girl who could not speak the language in school, she felt invisible. Richard Rodriguez (1983) says that he lost not only his voice but his home when he was forbidden to use his native language. Maya Angelou equates her self-worth with speech in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970/1993). As a young girl, she is raped and withdraws into silence for many years. She thinks if she does not speak, she does not exist. If she does not exist, she need not feel the pain of what has happened to her.

Another recent teenage novel, *Speak* (Anderson, 2003), proposes a similar scenario. A high school student who is raped at a party is silent until she realizes her self worth and finally speaks. What happens if we remain silent and never share ourselves? Do we exist? Perhaps we even fail to *be* if we do not communicate who we are. The gift of language is one given to humankind alone. If we choose not to use it, how does that choice affect our existence? Do we have an obligation to communicate who we are? Do we have an obligation to help one another open our hearts?

Mirror, Mirror: Seeing Self in the Text of Others

When stars first appeared in the sky, they were lonely, never
touching, or becoming touched by what lay beyond their isolation.
They had deep eyes with which to examine the sinew of
The universe and secret ears with which to hear the struggling whispers
of plants emerging from the earth below. After a while,
when the stars were looking within themselves for meaning,

They noticed a field of yellow flowers swaying in the wind of a
distant mountaintop. These flowers were patient and unresisting,
some so small that the stars couldn't see them very well,
But they knew these living things to be mirrors of their own vast beauty.
Thus stars married flowers in loving affirmation
Of one another, expecting nothing more than recognition
of their unimportant differences. (Wood, 1996, p. 23)

This Pueblo inspired poem eloquently depicts how we mirror one another's beauty. What is so naturally affirming for the flowers and the stars is not as easily achieved in human beings. We, like the stars, are frequently lonely and isolated, never touching or becoming touched by those beyond our personal space, and an introspective search for self tends to leave us wanting and inadequate. My student-writers are definitely illustrative of this enigma. As they search for self, they look to one another and to me for affirmation. They feel isolated amidst a class of peers, as a school of 1,600, a modern world. Perhaps through shared writing they, like the stars, can develop deep eyes and secret ears that will enable them to see their beauty mirrored in one another. Perhaps the realization of the importance of that connection will permit them, too, to recognize, without care, their unimportant differences. As students share from personal pieces they have written, mutual reflections come more clearly into focus.

This kind of shared admiration and necessary connection is illustrated further in the story of Narcissus as told in the prologue to *The Alchemist* (Coelho, 1998). In this version of the Greek myth, after Narcissus dies and becomes a flower on the bank of a lake for admiring his own beauty, the lake begins to cry and turns her waters from fresh to salty. When the goddesses tell her they know she is weeping because she will miss Narcissus' beauty, the lake replies that she weeps because "each time he

knelt beside my banks, I could see, in the depths of his eyes, my own beauty reflected" (Prologue, n. p.). Narcissus and the lake needed one another just as the stars and flowers and "people who need people" (Merrill, 1964). Some of my students feel a connection with one another and some do not. Many admit to feeling isolated, but not all are willing to admit that they need any one but themselves.

The origin of the word pupil has a derivation that is very interesting in light of the previous discussion. The word pupil comes from the Latin *pupilla* which means "a little doll" (Funk, 1978, p. 240). Funk relates two tales to elucidate the original source of the word. The first is that "pupils sitting in a classroom look like little dolls" (p. 240). The second addresses the origin of pupil when it means the part of the eye. "When we look another person in the eye, we often see a minute image of oneself reflected there" (p. 240). This leads me to think that, just as my students may appear as little dolls in front of me in my room, if we truly connect, they see their images reflected in my eyes and in the eyes of their classmates, and I see myself in them.

Sharing Ourselves

If the essence of language is communication and the essence of being is who we are, perhaps language is the tool we have to join the two. Heidegger (1975) shares von Humboldt's ideas when he writes this about language:

Man [sic] is said to have language by nature. It is held that man, in distinction from plant and animal, is the living being capable of speech. This statement does not mean only that, along with other faculties, man also possesses the faculty of speech. It means to say that only speech enables man to be the living being he is as man. It is as one who speaks that man is--man. (p. 189)

Noting this, sharing our heartsongs through personal writing provides a grand opportunity for us to be the persons we were meant to be. And, it is most assuredly an

obligation for students and teachers alike to become the kind of listeners who seek and encourage this self-discovery. Sharing ourselves by revealing our heartsongs lets us connect with one another and should be part of every high school curriculum. While many researchers in the past have been concerned with measuring students' mechanical writing success (Emig, 1983; Hillocks, 1986), some recognize that students need to be vested more personally in their work (Dyson & Freedman, 1991; Freedman, 1994; Reigstad, 1994). The written product, however, is not nearly as important as giving our students an opportunity to discover themselves (Grace, 1993; Malinowski, 2003; Martin, 1992; Sperling, 1993) and connect with one another.

As I carry out my study I continue to listen attentively, trying to harmonize with the songs in my tenth graders' hearts, looking for connections that writing may offer as we share ourselves with one another in the classroom. Through class observations, student conversations, critiques of one another's writings, class activities and our daily journal entries, I illuminate what the lived experience of students in our writing setting is actually like. The next chapter provides the philosophical foundation and methodology for this hermeneutic phenomenological study.

CHAPTER THREE:

PHILOSOPHIC CONNECTIONS AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

Phenomenological research . . .always begins in the lifeworld. [It is] the study of lived experience, . . . the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness, . . . the study of essences. Phenomenological research is a search for what it means to be human. (van Manen, 2003, pp. 9, 10, 11, 12)

Just as the sound of blood, the essence of life that pulses through our veins, is not readily audible, the essence of my phenomenon, **connecting when sharing something written from the heart**, may not be easy to discern. It takes a particularly sensitive ear, an invisible stethoscope of sorts, to uncover what makes up this lived experience--a scope attuned to *being* in its many aspects. Hermeneutic phenomenological research is, "fundamentally a writing activity" (van Manen, 2003, p. 7), and provides a way to hear the pulse of my phenomenon and interpret what is illuminated there. While phenomenology shows the essence of my phenomenon, hermeneutics provides a way to uncover hidden meanings, both being rooted in philosophy (van Manen, 2003).

As I search for the essence of the lived experience of my tenth grade students when they share personal writing, I am informed by my own experiences, my students' words and our *being-together* in this phenomenon. The beliefs of several philosophers help me explore the essence of my study more deeply. I am led to this methodology in order to see my students beyond a "factual" sense--to see them not only as they are but in their "potentiality," as Heidegger (1953/1996, p. 136) calls it.

"Human science. . . studies 'persons,' or beings that have 'consciousness' and that 'act purposefully' in and on the world. . . ." (van Manen, 2003, p. 4). In this type of research one deals with the unique. As I listen attentively to the lived experiences of my tenth grade students, each situation is unlike any other that has gone before it or will come after it. Yet, we are together. It is what it is, and we are who we are. And ultimately, the phenomenon is revealed as such because we are in this experience together at this time. "The individual case does not serve only to confirm a law from which practical predictions can be made. Its ideal is rather to understand the phenomenon itself in its uniqueness . . ." (Gadamer, 1960/1999, pp. 4-5). As I am present with my students in writing, sharing and connecting, the uniqueness of our being together in this phenomenon shows itself as we are together in our classroom.

Since "the methodological meaning of phenomenological description is interpretation" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 33), hermeneutic writing guides me to uncover the lived experience of my students as they share something they have written from their hearts. This chapter provides the philosophic and methodological grounding for my study and describes what I will do to carry it out in the context of my teaching, as students experience personal writing and sharing in our classroom.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Hermeneutics involves the study of the methodological principles of interpretation. (Pinar et al., 2000, p. 432)

The methodological meaning of phenomenological description is interpretation . . . Phenomenology of Da-sein is *hermeneutics* in the original signification to the word, which designates the work of interpretation. (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 33)

The hermeneutic aspect of this methodology takes its meaning from Greek mythology and the messenger god, Hermes. The figure of Hermes, Mercury to the Romans, is quite recognizable even today; his caricature, complete with winged hat and sandals relays tidings from one mortal to another via flowers. In the days of the Greeks, however, Hermes did not "say it with flowers" like the FTD florists' messenger of today; he served as interpreter between Zeus (Jupiter) and mortals. Mythological research indicates that this god's duties were reflective of the derivation of his name.

The name Hermes is probably derived from the Greek word for 'stone-heap' . . . Representations of Hermes in classical times usually took the form of a square-cut ithyphallic block of stone surmounted with the god's head; this art type was called a "herm" because, although occasionally extended to other gods, it was originally a distinctive characteristic of the cult of Hermes. (Brown, 2003, p. 32)

These stones, "marking a point of communication between strangers" (Brown, 1947/2003, p. 32), were placed anywhere that strangers came in contact with one another: "at the entrance of a house . . . at crossroads . . . in a forest or on some hilltop" (Brown, 2003, p. 32). Thus, the "herm" marked the spot where people met to present ideas that may have been misunderstood or misinterpreted, and thus required interpretation.

Today's hermeneuticist, like Hermes and the "herm," also serves as a messenger. Where the ancient interpreter "labors to interpret other texts, often ancient, sometimes sacred, for our understanding in the present" (Pinar et al., 2000, p. 423), the modern investigator makes meaning of a variety of present day phenomena. The interpretive nature of hermeneutics in phenomenological research is just as important today as it was in the days of the ancients. As phenomenological inquirers,

we stand at the crossroads of our research findings and interpret the experiences of our everyday lives. We, as researchers, write our way to understanding. In a sense, the hermeneuticist becomes, like the *herm* of old, a "border guard," interpreting at the "crossroads" of phenomena. As investigative writers, we serve as "stone heaps" between text and discernment.

Hermeneutics: Being a Writer

Writing is a border town between experience, imagination, and understanding. Borders are wild and unstable places. . . . Borders are a big subject in writing because living means constantly crossing them between the physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological realms. This is where two or more places meet, where one ends, another begins, but both exist at the same time. (Goldberg, 1996, p. 93)

Writers, then, frequently serve as interpreters. Whether being desirous of seeing what shows itself in a phenomenon or being in search of understanding self or self's place in the universe, writers employ a hermeneutic methodology. Like Hermes, the writer tries to promote "communication between strangers" (Brown, 1947/2003, p. 32). Hermeneutics "is an exposition which brings tidings because it can listen to a message. Such exposition becomes an interpretation" (Heidegger, 1959/1982, p. 29). In the case of this investigation, the "tidings" (research) that my "exposition" (interpretation) brings reflect the messages (heartsongs) of my students. Just as the *herms* of old marked borders and fostered communication, I, as a hermeneuticist, listen and interpret so the messages of my students are understood. From another stance, as my high schoolers become writers and sharers, they frequently become interpreters themselves. Guarding the borders of their hearts, writing serves as a meeting point for them to reveal their imaginations and heartsongs to one another.

Hermeneutics: Going in Circles

I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.
(Rilke, in Barrows & Macy, 1996, p. 48)

"Hermeneutic circle" is a term used to refer to the circular thinking that is part of every hermeneutic interpretation. This term describes the thought process that one engages in when being present in the observational circle.

All human understanding, by virtue of its occurring in time, is hermeneutically circular. Because as sentient creatures we are located always at some point in space during some moment in time, information becomes available to us only serially. We notice things in succession as one item after another attracts our attention. . . . Understanding occurs when we recognize the significance of the various items that we notice. . . . Understanding, then, is an essentially integrative activity. (Bontekoe, 1996, p. 2)

As temporal beings, we cannot always see everything at the same moment, nor do we see how things affect one another instantaneously. Our existence is not static; therefore, our interpretations of what we observe are not static either.

The phenomenon that shows itself in our classroom changes over time, enfolding and unfolding itself in various lights. At first it sparks my interest and makes me take note of it, inspiring questions, broadening its beam. The heart beats faster with anticipation and interest. Then, the phenomenon reveals aspects of its essence that have been affected by experiences past and are being affected by experiences present. By questioning my own experiences, writing and sharing personal pieces of writing, I am led to question my students' experiences. Knowing that my own experiences are tinted with episodes in my past, I begin to ask what experiences might have led my students to this place in time. I question how their experiences affect their sharing of personal writing here and now. Then, my mind

draws my curiosity to the present time, and I begin to notice that "now" plays an important part in my students' willingness to share what they have written. Once again, my own experiences lead me to ask questions to help me see my students' lifeworld more clearly. Like a shadowy spirit, the amorphous form of this phenomenon changes shape as it pulls me to question and interpret. Thinking in the hermeneutic circle permits me to wonder, think, conceptualize and re-conceptualize. The circle provides a place to view and re-view relatedness backward and forward to my phenomenon; it does not, however, imply circular reasoning. Heidegger addresses the idea of circular reasoning in the following way,

This guiding look at being grows out of the average understanding of being in which we are always already involved . . . A circle of reasoning cannot possibly lie in the formulation of the question of the meaning of being, because in answering this question it is not a matter of grounding by deduction but rather of laying bare and exhibiting the found. (Heidegger (1953/1996, p. 6)

Just as Heidegger talks of "exhibiting the found," hermeneutic research shows what is, and "One must always do hermeneutics from within a hermeneutic circle" (Dreyfus, 1997, p. 4). By being a part of the circle, we begin to understand how things combine to make meaning. For me, the meaning making continually alters itself. Any preconceptions I might have, which Heidegger (1953/1996) refers to as "*fore-structure*," contribute to my refocusing of the phenomenon:

In every understanding of world, existence is also understood, and vice versa. Furthermore, every interpretation operates within the *fore-structure* which we characterized. Every interpretation which is to contribute some understanding must already have understood what is to be interpreted. This fact has always already been noticed, if only in the realm of derivative ways of understanding and interpretation . . . (p. 142)

Heidegger means we must be present to all aspects of our phenomenon as we recognize what our own *fore structures* are. This is especially true in a classroom situation, where teachers continually examine and re-examine their practice and guide their own pedagogical changes. I cannot assume, for example, that all of my students will want to use classroom writing as a tool for self-discovery simply because I know that some have done so, but I can use my previous experience to inform my present one. By the same token, it cannot be assumed that all students will find a way to connect or even be willing to share within a high school classroom setting. Whatever has gone before may inform my thoughts, but in no way guarantees duplication. The whole experience is fluid, yet loosely guided. For skeptics of the circular nature of this kind of thinking, Heidegger (1953/1996) says that if we tend to think that the hermeneutic circle presents a "vicious circle," then we are showing that we do not "understand understanding from the ground up" (p. 143). All understanding really is designed in exactly the same way, and in phenomenology, "we as the message-bearer[s] must come from the message. But [we] must also have gone toward it" (Heidegger, 1959/1982, p. 51). This means that the hermeneuticist must always interpret from inside the circle.

As the phenomenon whirls and lives around us, we not only observe it but are a part of its life and motion. Heidegger describes our position by saying that we must, in fact, "leap" into the circle.

The hermeneutic circle represents schematically this integrative aspect of human understanding. . . . What distinguishes the hermeneutic circle from the vicious circle is that the amount of information contained within the former is being constantly augmented. And this new information . . . makes possible the progressive development of new insights. (Bontekoe, 1996, p. 3)

While we live in our phenomenon, it continually shows itself differently because the circle provides a place to view and re-view, while constantly augmenting and developing new **in**-sights.

Showing and Telling

What exactly is phenomenology?

Phenomena must be interpreted in light of the overriding cohesive whole. . . . in any process of understanding the parts must be understood in relation to the whole, just as the whole can be understood in relation to its parts. (Muller-Vollmer, 1997, p. 16)

"The Greek expression, *phainomenon*, from which the term 'phenomenon' derives, comes from the verb *phainesthai*, meaning, 'to show itself.' Thus this *phainomenon* means what shows itself, the self-showing, the manifest" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 25). Phenomenology is derived from *phainomenon*, and *logos*, meaning "speech . . . that which is being talked about" (p. 28). Heidegger describes the method of phenomenology like this:

With this term the treatise dictates for itself neither a 'standpoint' nor a 'direction,' because phenomenology is neither of these and can never be as long as it understands itself. The expression 'phenomenology' signifies primarily a *concept of method*. It does not characterize the 'what ' of the objects of philosophical research in terms of their content but the 'how ' of such research.

The word phenomenon, as used in phenomenology, "is understood from the very beginning as the self-showing in itself" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 27). "What already shows itself in appearances prior to and always accompanying what we commonly understand as phenomena, though unthematically, can be brought thematically to self-showing. What thus shows itself in itself are the phenomena of phenomenology" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, pp. 27-28). Through phenomenology, we actually interpret

that which shows itself through lived experience. We uncover what is concealed, viewing aspects of the phenomenon through an interpretive thematizing process, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a Research Methodology

"From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (van Manen, 2003, p. 5). As mentioned in Chapter One, the methodological structure for this type of research involves an interplay among these activities:

- 1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interest us and commits us to the world;
- 2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- 3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- 4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- 5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
- 6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (van Manen, 2003, pp. 30-31)

Turning to a Heartfelt Interest

As soon as we have the thing before
Our eyes, and in our hearts an ear
for the word, thinking prospers. (Heidegger, 1975, p. 5)

In Chapter One of this study I turn the ear in my heart to the phenomenon of **the lived experience of my students sharing something they have written from their hearts**. I give myself over to this "quest, a true task, a deep questioning of something that restores an original sense of what it means to be a thinker, a researcher, a theorist" (van Manen, 2003, p. 31). Like those who research in a similar

vein, I hope to make sense of this "aspect of human existence" (p. 31)--my students' lived experience.

Questioning is at the heart of phenomenological research. "To do phenomenological research is *to question* something phenomenologically and also to be addressed by the question of what something is 'really' like" (van Manen, 2003, p. 42). What is it really like for my tenth-graders to be in a writing-sharing situation in my room? As we question we must, as Gadamer (1960/1999) says, remain open to all possibilities. This means that one question will open up other questions, and at no time do we presuppose the answer to any questions. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the "questioning is more a passion than an action. A question presses itself on us; we can no longer avoid it and persist in an accustomed opinion" (Gadamer, 1960/1999, p. 366). This study gives me an opportunity to delve into my questions and let them take me to unexpected places. Gadamer explains that, following the Greek tradition, the importance of questioning lies in the fact that one does not know the answers. "All questioning and desire to know presuppose a knowledge that one does not know; so much so, indeed, that a particular lack of knowledge leads to a particular question" (Gadamer, 1960/1999, pp. 365-366). For me, questioning begins with my turning in Chapter One and guides me throughout this study.

Gadamer (1960/1999) says that there is a certain art in hermeneutic questioning--it avoids the pressure of opinion and enables us to conduct what he refers to as "dialectic" questioning. "The art of questioning is the art of questioning ever further--i.e. the art of thinking. It is called dialectic because it is the art of conducting a real dialogue" (p. 367). It is with questions, then, that I begin to open up

my phenomenon. I follow Rilke's suggestion to "be patient toward all that is unsolved in [my] heart and try to love the *questions themselves* like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue . . . [And] Live the questions now" (Rilke, 1934/1993, p. 35).

Investigating as We Live

Personal experience is the starting point of phenomenological research, and no one knows our own experience better than we who live it do. Phenomenological descriptions use "the 'I' form and the 'we' form . . . to enhance the evocative value of a truth experience . . . [and] to show that the author recognizes that one's own experiences are the possible experiences of others" (van Manen, 2003, pp. 57-58) and vice versa. Therefore, my students and I recount our experiences as we live them. Because sharing something written from the heart does not begin and end with that specific act, we also explore the richness of the scaffolding surrounding this phenomenon. Chapter Two brings this lifeworld into clearer focus by using the metaphorical images, tracing the etymological origins of words and pondering idiomatic phrases. Continued exploration of this lifeworld occurs as I engage my students in this study.

"Lived experience descriptions are data [oral or written reflections, conversational interviews, observations and audio or videotapes], or material on which to work" (van Manen, 2003, p. 55). To that end, this study draws from oral and written musings and observations from the life world of my student-writers and me. Besides the lived experience descriptions, this study also turns to literature for enlightenment. By looking at the struggles of literary characters, we are "given the

chance of living through an experience that provides us with an opportunity of gaining insight into certain aspects of the human condition" (van Manen, 2003, p. 70). Autobiographical and biographical accounts of published writers and the work of researchers also provide a type of shared experience with this phenomenon.

Reflecting Thematically

As I began in Chapter Two, I continue in Chapter Four, to uncover essential themes that show themselves through conversation and student writing.

Phenomenological themes are not objects or generalizations; metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes. Themes are the stars that make up the universes of meaning we live through. By the light of these themes we can navigate and explore such universes. Themes have phenomenological power when they allow us to proceed with phenomenological descriptions. (van Manen, 2003, p. 90)

Woven into the six components of this research methodology are philosophical ideas that enable us to dig more deeply, or in my case, to listen more acutely to the sounds of my students' lived experiences. Van Manen (2003) identifies four "lifeworld existentials" to guide our interpretation: "Lived space" (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived relation (relationality or communality)" (p. 101).

"*Lived space* is the existential theme that refers to the world or landscape in which human beings move and find themselves at home" (van Manen, 2003, p. 102). For my students and me, the classroom, our writing spaces and, if Georgia Heard (1995) is correct, the act of writing itself may be places where we feel at home. "Finding home is crucial to the act of writing" (Heard, 1995, p. 2). According to Casey (1993) "Place serves as the condition of all existing things" (p. 15). It is not

just a location or situation in which we find our selves, but "place belongs to the very concept of existence" (p. 15). The place we occupy is extremely important to the way we are. "Entire cultures can become profoundly averse to the places they inhabit, feeling atopic and displaced . . ." (Casey, 1993, p. 34). Merleau-Ponty (1962/1998) reminds us, as did Heidegger before him, that we are not in any place alone. For my students, their place in space and feelings of being 'in place' invite many questions about their lived experience as writers, sharers and listeners, and the place from which their writing comes.

The existential of "*lived body*" refers to the phenomenological fact that we are always bodily in the world" (van Manen, 2003, p. 103). Our physical bodies both reveal and conceal where we are in the present, and the "body memory . . . has its own way of remembering" things to the point where we can be "in the situation itself again feeling it through our body" (Casey, 2000, p. 147). This corporeality impacts our sharing as we find our bodies together in the classroom and experience the space and the stress of the moment. Body also plays a physical part in the act of scripting pieces by hand or computer. It is the body's experiences that we re-collect when writing anything from memory.

"*Lived time* is subjective time as opposed to clock time" (van Manen, 2003, p. 104). A person's past, present and future affect a person's time.

Time is . . . not a real process, not an actual succession that I am content to record. It arises from my relation to things. . . . Past and future exist only too unmistakably in the world, they exist in the present, and what being itself lacks in order to be of the temporal order, is the not-being of elsewhere, formerly and tomorrow. (Merleau-Ponty, 1998, p. 412)

This definition of time refers to when we are in time. Included in this are our historicity and our potentiality, which I explain in the Philosophy of Being section of this chapter. Basically, where we are from and where we are headed combine with where we are to make who we are in time.

"*Lived other* is the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them" (van Manen, 2003, p. 104). Regardless of the degree of association we have with others, we do not exist in a vacuum. This aspect of existence is of major importance as my students both shy away from and yearn for communal connections.

Simply put, looking at where we are, how we are, when we are, and with whom we are, we see who we are in our lived experience. Any examination of this lived experience is incomplete without invoking the philosophy of Martin Heidegger to the lifeworld existentials. Heidegger will be discussed more fully later in this chapter.

The Art of Writing and Rewriting

All written works have a profound community in that language is what makes the contents meaningful. In this light, when texts are understood by, say, a historian, that is not so very different from their being experienced as art. (Gadamer, 1960/1999, p. 153)

Hermeneutic phenomenological writing is an art just as all writing is an art. Language provides the artful rendering of our ideas in textual form.

Nothing is so purely the trace of the mind as writing, but nothing is so dependent on the understanding mind either. In deciphering and interpreting it, a miracle takes place: the transformation of something alien and dead into total contemporaneity and familiarity. (Gadamer, 1960/1999, p. 163)

All spoken words of my students have been transcribed to written text to enable the thematizing process. From those words, I "decipher and interpret" in hopes of completing the type of transformation alluded to above.

A phenomenologist must have a sensitive ear turned to the subtleties of language. While working with metaphor, anecdote, and narrative, one must be mindful that "What is spoken is never, and in no language, what is said" (Heidegger, 1975, p. 11). This careful listening means having an ear attuned to the "silences" that coexist with all languages. Van Manen cautions that there are different types of silences: a literal silence--the absence of words; an epistemological silence--"when we know more than we can tell"; and an ontological silence--where we meet "our fundamental predicament of always returning to silence" (van Manen, 2003, pp. 113-115). As I examine and re-examine the texts of my students' language samples, I tune into what they are not saying as well as what they do say.

Staying the Course: Maintaining a Pedagogic Orientation

"To be oriented to an object means that we are animated by the object in a full and human sense" (van Manen, 2003, p. 33). I turn to the phenomenological question: **What is the lived experience of my students sharing something written from the heart?** Then, I must remain focused on that question despite narrative meanderings and the conversational, questioning, interpretive style of hermeneutic phenomenology. I must keep my heart tuned to the heartsongs of my students, listening for their lived experience.

Discourse cheers us to companionable reflection. Such reflection neither parades polemical opinions nor does it tolerate complaisant agreement. The sail

of thinking keeps trimmed hard to the
wind of the matter. (Heidegger, 1975, p. 6)

The wind of the matter in this study involves staying the focus on the pedagogic orientation of how we should be and act with high schoolers.

Balancing the Context

"It is easy to get so buried in writing that one no longer knows where to go or what to do next and how to get out of the hole that one has dug" (van Manen, 2003, p. 33). In order to keep this from happening, one must step back frequently and listen carefully to make sure that each small voice contributes to the collective voice of the whole.

Van Manen (2003) suggests five ways of approaching this phenomenological writing without getting "buried." First, working **thematically**, I might strive to make sense of lived experience by being insightfully open to what may be hidden within the experience. Second, my writing might be organized **analytically**, where examining conversations and reconstructing events into "life stories" or "anecdotes" might help to illustrate the themes of my phenomenon. Third, working **exemplificatively**, I might use various examples to illuminate the essential nature of the phenomenon. Fourth, using other phenomenological authors **exegetically**, I might shed light on the lived experience by relating to their works. Finally, I might write my way to meaning by blending the phenomenological description with the four **existentials** mentioned previously. One or all of these suggestions may influence me as I construct meaning from conversation.

As I continue to write my way to understanding, the philosophical ideas of Martin Heidegger enable the exploration of the dimensions of being in an intense

manner. Heidegger's notion of being and the many aspects that contribute to it will shine a different light on "lived experience."

The Philosophy of Being

Beings "thrown" into a sea of experience, we are polished and etched by the waves of time, the sands of trial. Tossed and turned, we struggle to discover who we are. "The task Heidegger has set for *Da-sein* ['the being which I myself am' (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 108)] is to understand itself" (Johnson, 2000, p. 24). But how do we accomplish this? How can we understand the 'Who of Da-sein'? And since, in the words of Heidegger, "This determination indicates . . . that the I is always this being, and not others" (p. 108), the ability to recognize the importance of my-self and the other-self is of major significance. Valuing each individual is tantamount to being as we explore the potentialities of that being and embrace our historicity. As Heidegger dissects the meaning of being, it is necessary to look at his concept of being in all of its facets in order to see how the various aspects of being may help uncover that which waits to be seen in my study. As a teacher, writer and teacher-of-writers, therefore, I ask how might the search for self, individually and collectively, be part of my classroom practice? In this section, I look at how the question of being, in all of its facets, might illuminate my study. To that end, I turn primarily to the discussions of Martin Hedigger.

What Is "Is"?

Heidegger points out that the real metaphysical question centers around being and *What is 'Is'?* "We stand in an understanding of the 'is' without being able to determine conceptually what the 'is' means" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 4).

I am
You are
He, she or it is

We are
You (collective) are
They are (Warriner et al., 1977, pp. 146-147)

Difficulty with the application of "is" as a part of the general conjugation of the verb "to be" parallels the difficulty Heidegger admits in comprehending what *is* means in a metaphysical sense. The difficulty of the word "is" creeps into our everyday language and into our English classroom on a regular basis. Students have as troublesome a time coming to grips with the grammatical constructions involving the verb "to be" as they do figuring out who "they are." By technical definition, "linking" or "state of being" verbs are those that show a connection between a condition or description and a person or thing (a being). Sentences containing them express simply that something "is" one way or another. They are hard to define. In fact, the official definition for exactly what linking verbs do is expressed in grammar books by telling what they do not do. They do not show action. They simply demonstrate existence. But what does it mean to demonstrate existence? It is no wonder that students have trouble with the concept grammatically, as well as metaphysically; people have been struggling for centuries to express exactly what it means, "to be."

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Shakespeare, Act III, Scene I) vocalizes one way of looking at the question by suggesting that he might not "be" or "suffer" if he permits himself **not** to be--to stop living. For him "To be or not to be" is the question. He implies, and many of us are inclined to agree, that "being" is bound by bodily

existence. Heidegger says being is much more involved than that. We not only are, we are what we can possibly be.

Being is Possibility

I dwell in possibility--
(Dickinson, 1993, p.113)

We all dwell in possibility. For Martin Heidegger, "being" is more than just the temporal space that we occupy by our presence. Over and above everything else, the important thing is that we are, that we exist and that we question what that means. Heidegger (1953/1996) points out that, in the days of the Greeks, we questioned what it meant to be, but for centuries now, we have lost sight of that question. "It is fitting that we should raise anew the question of the meaning of being" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. xix).

For Heidegger the question of being is ontological, tied to existence. He maintains that we are thrown into a cultural situation and are affected by all the history that precedes and accompanies it. He terms this "our thrown-ness" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 127). Because there is Being with a capital B (not a noun), we **are** there. It is this ontological existence that Heidegger terms *da-sein* (being there). Heidegger says, however, that *da-sein* must be considered in all of its aspects. As creatures we are who we are, in time, in Being, but we are not in isolation. We must see ourselves as "being-in-the-world," and "being-with-others" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, pp. 59-103). Into our picture of being we must also figure time, our own authenticity, and care for being. For Heidegger being is a verb instead of a noun. In fact, Being (the whole of existing) and being (the temporal existing of the individual in all of its aspects) are both action verbs. All being is possibility.

Heidegger's ontological view of existence underpins the nature of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. Therefore, I begin to look at Heidegger's notion of being, and I consider its relation to my phenomenon. How **are** my students and I in relation to this complicated notion of being, and how might questioning it affect us in our classroom?

Being and Nothing

The world is a joint effort. We might say it is like a giant puzzle and each one of us is a very important unique part of it. (Eadie, 1995, pp.183-184)

While Heidegger does not believe that the world revolves around individuals, he does point out that there is a great deal of difference between being and nothing. The overriding significance is that we are at all. Equally as significant is that we realize it. If, as Eadie suggests in the previous quote, we look at Being as a giant jigsaw puzzle, the presence of each piece is significant. In a larger sense, the tremendous importance of each individual being in Being can be seen if one can imagine one's self not having been at all. Director Frank Capra beautifully illustrates this idea in the classic film, *It's a Wonderful Life*. In this story, the main character, George Bailey, jumps from a bridge as he wishes he had never been born. The thought that his life is a useless mess fuels George's suicide attempt. His efforts seem thwarted as an angel-in-training pulls him to safety. Instead of returning him to his present life, however, the would-be-angel takes him to his town to show him what it would be like if he had never been born. George has a chance to see that his life matters. Without his intervention, the town druggist would have misread a medicine bottle and poisoned someone. Without George, his younger brother would have drowned in an ice skating accident. Eventually, the point becomes clear to George

that his life, like each of ours, is extremely significant. Heidegger's idea of being emphasizes being over nothing. I wonder if my students truly realize their unique significance in the universe, our town, our school, and our classroom?

These days so many of us give lip service to the importance of the individual, but one does not have to look twice to see that an appreciation for each human being's personal worth is lacking in our schools. While we have laws that demand that the individual needs of students be met and a Federal Administration promising that "No child be left behind," we herd our students into overcrowded classrooms, provide curricula designed to teach to standardized tests and are beginning to march lock-step toward a national curriculum. With these conditions looming over our school systems, it is easy to see how the importance of the individual student might get lost in the shuffle of everyday school life. How will my students be able to recognize and appreciate their own individual importance in a place that advocates cookie-cutter students, cookie-cutter teachers and cookie-cutter learning? How might what happens in a classroom help students realize the importance of their individual lives? How might they appreciate their individual worth in the world without first realizing that they have something to offer?

Being-in-the-World

All our heart's courage is the
echoing response to the
first call of Being which
gathers our thinking into the
play of the world. (Heidegger, 1975, p. 9)

Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world starts with a recognition that we are part of something larger than ourselves. Even though appreciation of the self is

crucial, Heidegger's idea of being-in-the-world illuminates being from several facets.

First, Heidegger talks of *Da-sein* as being thrown into a time, culture, family--a whole existence:

Its [*Da-sein's*] character is determined by *thrownness* as a fact of the being that it is, and so determined, it has always already been delivered over to existence, and remains so constantly. But the facticity of *Da-sein* is essentially distinguished from the factuality of something objectively present. Existing *Da-sein* does not encounter itself as something objectively present within the world. But neither is thrownness attached to *Da-sein* as an inaccessible quality that is of no importance to its existence. As *thrown*, *Da-sein* has been **thrown into existence**. It exists as a being that has to be as it is and can be. (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 255)

We must see ourselves as an important part of the bigger picture. We must treat the place of our thrownness with respect. We are part of everything else. If we do not value our thrownness, we fail to value ourselves as part of that concept. How important where we are, is! How important this aspect of Heidegger's message is for my students! How might aspects of their thrownness--in the classroom, our school, this era--affect them and their experiences in writing, sharing and connecting? As part of our thrownness, we are with others, and this aspect of being adds an even deeper dimension to being in my classroom. What does it mean to be-with-others?

Being-with-Others

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee. (Donne, 1611/ 1985, p. 243)

For John Donne, *Meditation XVII* expresses in the 15th century part of what Heidegger rephrases in the 20th century. Every being shares in the existence of every

other being. Heidegger talks of our being-with others as part of our thrownness.

However, he cautions:

"The others" does not mean everybody else but me--those from whom the I distinguishes itself. They are, rather, those from whom one mostly does *not* distinguish oneself, those among whom one is, too.

. . . On the basis of the *like-with* being-in-the-world, the world is always already the one that I share with the others. The world of *Da-sein* is a *with-world*. Being-in is *being-with* others. (Heidegger, 1953/1996, pp. 111-112)

As students are "thrown" into my writing classroom and into our high school, they are very much a part of one another's being. Closely related to the idea of being-with-the-other is Heidegger's notion of care. "Being-in-the-world is essentially care, being-together-with things at hand could be taken . . . as concern. Being-together-with is taking care of things, because as a mode of being-in it is determined by its fundamental structure, care" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 180). Heidegger is saying that by our very disposition to that and those around us, and by our recognition of our place as being-in-the-world and with-others, we acknowledge the importance of our thrownness in all of its aspects--we care. These notions bring much to bear when thinking about our place with those around us.

I wonder to what extent this complicated aspect of Heidegger's thought can be realized while being in my classroom. There may be no aspect of being that is more visible to my students than being-with. In the midst of trying to discover who they are, my students look to others for definition. Within my classroom I see students attuned to being-with, the longing-to-be-with, the fearing-to be-with as well as a realizing that we-are-with. It is this aspect of being-in-the-world that has great significance in the life world of our classroom.

Being a Prophet

He who thinks greatly must
err greatly. (Heidegger, 1975, p. 9)

These lines from *The Thinker as Poet*, are prophetic for Heidegger. Despite the fact that Heidegger is judged by some as "one of the greatest, if not the greatest, twentieth-century philosopher" (Johnson, 2000, p. 1), he is extremely controversial. His association with the National Socialist Party and Nazism during World War II (Safranski, 1998) causes many to say that he did, in fact, "err greatly."

Since my initial introduction to Heidegger's ideas a few years ago, I have been fascinated by his thinking and the methodology that he brings to research. His philosophy of being is positive and uplifting. He champions the importance of questioning being, speaks of how we are all part of a greater whole and how we need, therefore, to respect ourselves and all people and things around us. It is hard to imagine someone with Heidegger's philosophical beliefs as a member of the Nazi Party. It seems to me, though, that Heidegger's life bears out his philosophy of being.

Martin Heidegger was "thrown" into Germany in an era when national improvement became a mantra. Both family and religious experiences eventually influenced his philosophic and academic development. A gifted capacity for questioning and learning led to lecturing successes and popularity for him, but he became frustrated at being continually overlooked for academic appointments. Fear of rejection, loss of position and maybe even loss of life eventually may have eroded his sense of authenticity. As he became enthralled with the "they" who influenced his "being-in-the-world," he lost sight of "care" for those with whom he ultimately existed; and unfortunately, he lost himself. He made poor choices, expanded the

"potentiality of his being" in what seems to be inauthentic, non-caring ways. What happened was something that he feared early on:

He [Heidegger] was always captivated by the tension between his real inspiration and the covering over of that by his own tendency to adjust to the public. The inseparability of authenticity and inauthenticity, the sliding into ruination as the tendency of everyday existence, that was the early Heidegger's concern. (Gadamer, in Misgeld & Nicholson, 1992, pp. 66-67)

Perhaps it should have been the later Heidegger's concern as well.

Why would Martin Heidegger support the National Socialist Party when its actions seem diametrically opposed to his philosophy of being? At the juncture of his life when the war raged, Heidegger finally had attained a position of prestige, a final accolade for years of hard work. What would happen to a professor who spoke against the new regime? Heidegger viewed the initial changes in German culture as a good thing, changes that would heal an ailing nation. Once the errors of Nazi extremism became clear, perhaps either fear or pride kept Heidegger from speaking up.

Many of us have a hard a time being authentic in certain situations ourselves. We do not choose to ignore an atrocity as great as the execution of 6,000,000 fellow beings, but we often lose sight of, or ignore, aspects and responsibilities surrounding our own existence. Ironically, Heidegger even warned that it is easy to get caught in the "they" of everyday life and forget the bigger picture. Think, for example, about teachers who do not agree with rules and policies adopted by their school systems. School systems pay their salaries, salaries that are vital to survival for some. When rules are made and policies adopted that do not seem to be in the best interest of the students, we feel powerless to change them. Fearing political repercussion, we do not

always speak out against those decisions. If we do speak up and our pleas are ignored, we have no choice but to follow a mandate with which we may disagree if we want to keep our jobs. When this happens to me, if I know I am being inauthentic, my being suffers for my lack of choice.

On a grander scale, we might consider the times when our own country goes to war. Some wars, like Vietnam, have been very unpopular. People who refused to participate in the draft of that war, despite freedom of speech, lost their citizenship in this country. Right now, many do not agree with the War on Terror. Disagreeing with any government at a time of war is never a very secure position to take, even in this country, where we have freedom of speech.

What must it have been like for Heidegger? Did he just fear losing a job he had worked for all of his life? Did his pride prevent him from retracting his support once he realized what was going on? While Heidegger's motives remain unclear, it is definite that, for some reason, he failed to live according to his own beliefs. He was unable to remove himself from the paralysis of his political situation enough to exist in "care" with "others" in his own "thrownness." He "erred greatly." Even though his ability to lead us into the ontological realm leaves most of us feeling that we are much closer to the divine when guided by his thinking, he was not God. The fact that he was a flawed individual does not make all of his thinking flawed; it just makes him human. Like any of us who are not true to ourselves, he suffered. His legacy will be forever tainted by his tragic flaw. Even Gadamer, one of Heidegger's most ardent admirers eventually "gave him up" (Gadamer, in Misgeld & Nicholson, 1992, p. 10). Heidegger met and continues to meet with rejection because of his mistakes.

In the final analysis, what people seem to hold against him the most is that he never made a statement to condemn Nazi behavior. Perhaps it was his pride, his hubris that kept Heidegger from speaking up to clear himself. His peers called for Heidegger to make an announcement that would at least confirm or deny his position in the whole mess, but he did not. We can only wonder why such a great thinker would not see and admit the error of his ways. Gadamer (in Misgeld & Nicholson, 1992) says:

The truth is that as a little boy Heidegger was all too much admired and adored at home. He never learned how to lose. A person who, in the first three years of life as a child, never learns how to lose will never learn that his whole life long. (pp. 11-12).

Despite the controversy over Heidegger's politics, many of his methods and ideas help to illuminate my study. I will remember this dark side as my students and I confront the reality of our existence in a less than perfect world.

The Context for My Study

This hermeneutic phenomenological study listens for the heartsongs of the thirty-two students who were enrolled in my tenth grade English class for fifth period during the spring semester of 2004. This class is one of five that I teach at a high school in Maryland. Our school is situated in the middle of a small town that has recently experienced a growth spurt. Of the “1636 students enrolled at our institution, 90% are White, non Hispanic, 4% are Black, non Hispanic, 3% are Asian Pacific Islanders, 2% are Hispanic and 1 % American Indian/Alaskan Native. Five percent of our total school population is eligible for free or reduced lunch” (Harford County Public Schools). Permission has been granted by Harford County Schools to conduct this research in my classroom (See Appendix A). I selected this class because the

types of writing submitted by these students varied in genre, and the group was one where boys and girls were most equally represented, with 14 girls and 18 boys.

This class and I engaged in building a learning community together from August 2003, when that academic year began, until June 2004, when we dismissed for summer break. Our school operates on a yearly schedule rather than by semester. The year is, however, divided into two semesters of two quarters each. There are approximately ten weeks allotted to each quarter. We have a five period day, with a rotating seven period schedule. Everyday, during the fourth hour of the day, a different class meets for one and one half hours, thirty minutes before lunch, and one hour after. It was during this long period of the day, that I introduced journal writing and suggested activities aimed at helping students engage in what I called “personal writing.” During each ten-week period, I asked students to turn in a piece of writing. The topic, genre and length was up to the students. The only requirement was that they take the assignment seriously and write something meaningful, something from the heart. (See Appendix E) After I collected the papers and commented on them myself, we had a “read around day.” Students were invited to share these pieces aloud after each submission. This sharing was done in a large circle, but students were not forced to read. Because I had noticed a reluctance on the part of my tenth graders to share writings in class, I adopted a system where students were encouraged to share their own pieces, and students, who were hesitant, let me read their pieces anonymously. After each sharing, the rest of the class wrote comments for the authors on small pieces of paper that were eventually given to those writers. If I shared for a student, comments were written first and then I asked if the author wanted to be

recognized. Sometimes students raised hands to be identified, sometimes not. Comment sheets were submitted to me, and I looked through them see what types of remarks were being made. Student comments guided me insightfully as we continued this activity. I also could have withdrawn any inappropriate notes before giving the comment sheets to the persons who shared their papers. It was never necessary for me to withhold anyone's slip. Students were always eager to get their comment sheets. For the first two quarters of the year, all comments were given on paper only. Starting with the third sharing, I asked students for oral comments in addition to written ones. Everyone put thoughts on paper first, and then, I called for vocal response. Throughout the year, in the class sessions where personal writing was featured, I look for **the lived experience of students connecting when sharing something they have written from the heart.**

The Participants

Thirty-two students participated in journal writing/sharing sessions during the long periods of the 2003-2004 school year. The entire class also participated during the sessions where we shared our personal writings. These classes were audio taped. I invited all thirty-three members of this class to engage in both individual and group conversations about their lived experiences of writing and sharing in our classroom. I asked for volunteers to converse with me after class hours, stating that I would draw ten names from the volunteers. Twelve volunteered, so I accepted all twelve. We conversed after the regular school day. In total six boys and six girls participated in the after school sessions. I met with each student individually, one time, for thirty minutes. Students then came in groups of two or three for the other conversations.

Those meetings lasted for an hour each. I met with each student three times, once in a one on one session, and twice each met with me and one or two other students. All conversations took place in my classroom, and all were taped and transcribed.

To initiate the study, students were given a letter to explain the study and invited to participate, signing a consent form (see Appendix B). Since the students were not eighteen, a letter also was sent to parents explaining the study, and asking them to sign the consent form (see Appendix C). Consent forms were collected from students at the next class session and conversation times were scheduled for those who volunteered to participate individually. An additional consent form was collected from parents of these young adults (see Appendix D). All students chose to participate during normal class hours, and no parent refused to let her or his child participate. Involvement in the above described sessions, or refusal to do so, in no way affected any student's grade for any quarter.

The entire class periodically communicated their experiences through journal responses. The journal responses were sometimes shared in class and were open to comment from the group. At other times, only I responded to journals. When students shared their quarter pieces, comments were written anonymously by everyone in the class. These notes were submitted to me for review and then given to the students who shared aloud. Students were asked to comment about each piece of writing shared. At the end of each sharing session, students also anonymously reflected on the process as a whole, completing sheets provided for them. (See Appendix F) All student writing, sharing, and commenting was part of the lived experience of my students.

Looking at Lived Experience

In a large read-around-circle, students were invited to share pieces of personal writing that they turned in at the end of each quarter (see syllabus and handouts in Appendix E). The authors of the pieces who were willing to have the class hear their pieces either shared their own writings or had me read them anonymously to the group. Listeners in the room responded anonymously, on paper, for each piece shared. Starting third quarter, some students also commented orally after the written responses were completed. These sessions were audio-taped. The written responses were collected and presented to the authors. After the first listening session, students also were asked to turn in a written appraisal of what the experience was like for them. Those who were listeners shared what was like to hear the pieces of their peers. Those who only listened and did not share, explained why they did not share and what it was like to listen to their classmates. Those who shared described the experience of sharing and told why they chose to do so. Overall, students also responded to the fact that some people shared their own pieces and some were shared anonymously by me (see response sheet in Appendix F).

The following textual sources were examined to uncover the lived experiences of tenth graders in my classroom as we shared pieces we had written:

- Written biweekly journal responses to ideas posed by reading assignments, inspirational quotations written on the board, word play and other activities to inspire "free-writes," or whatever is on the student's mind (see Appendix G);
- Written personal pieces shared at the end of quarter three and quarter four;

- Tape-recorded and transcribed class sessions during shared writings;
- Anonymous responses after sharing personal pieces (see Appendix F);
- One tape-recorded and transcribed hermeneutic conversation with each of the twelve students;
- Two tape recorded and transcribed group conversations with groups of two or three of the twelve students;
- Personal contributions from my own response journal;

In my particular school situation, we had a rotating schedule. My fifth period class did not always meet at the same time every day, and some days did not meet at all. Every time I met this class during the fourth hour of the day, we had what is termed "long hour." On these days, we had class for thirty minutes, went to lunch, and resumed class for a full hour after lunch. During "long hour," which occurs every eight days, we responded in journals, and I called for sharing during those sessions. These sharings were taped as well as the more formal sessions when students shared complete personal pieces. Formal sharings occurred on two different days, at the end of each quarter. During those sharings, I listened to what the students wrote as a reaction to our process and noted what they wrote in response to individual peer pieces. As we sat in a circle and listened to one another share, students' body language helped me "to listen" as Gadamer (in Misgeld & Nicholson, 1992) says we must, "even to the silent voice of the audience" (p. 66).

When I met with students for personal conversations, I was interested in hearing them respond to questions like the following:

- What is it like to have a teacher respond to what you have written in your journal?
- What is it like to listen to your classmates share something written from their journals?
- What is it like to share a formal piece of personal writing?
- What is it like to have a choice to share anonymously?
- What is it like to critique your classmates when they have shared or had the teacher share their writing?
- What is it like to read what your classmates have written about your work?
- What is it like to sit in the circle and watch your classmates respond to your writing?
- What is it like to be the listener when someone else is sharing a piece they have written?

Tapes of these sessions and others were transcribed and served as text for the thematizing activities of Chapter Four. Throughout these sessions, I was alert to changes in the sense of class community. I watched to see if more students eventually felt comfortable enough to share their own pieces. I watched to see if any particular response or reading served as catalyst for any other. In watching and listening for the lived experiences of my students, I looked for a comfort level and enthusiasm for participation. These sessions illuminated my study and helped identify the pedagogical significance of what was visible through the lived experience of my high school students.

Join me now as the words of my students linger on their tongues and invite us to open the ear in our hearts while thoughtful conversations gently uncover the lived experience of those whose essence enlightens Room 127 during sharing times.

CHAPTER FOUR:

UNCOVERING THE SELF IN THE DEEP HEART'S CORE

Today, I come to the table of phenomenological inquiry; it is set with the tapes and transcriptions of my students' conversations, volumes of philosophical words and gifts from supportive friends and family. I come with a taste for hermeneutic interpretation and arrange myself amidst the glow of candles and the purr of cats--the cats, my constant confidants, the candles, illuminating hearts that decorate the sides of the containers that hold their flames. A glow, bringing the decorative hearts to light, re-kindles thoughts about my classroom, my student conversations, and my inquiry: **What is the lived experience of my students as they discover themselves when they share something they have written from the heart?** As I re-attune myself to my students' words through earphones that connect with sounds that seem to emanate from each "deep heart's core" (Yeats, in Rosenthal, 1996, p. 13), I cannot help but notice how similar this equipment is to a stethoscope which magnifies the sound of human life, no matter how muted or erratic. As I adjust the volume of my recorder, I listen my way to voices that illuminate my research question, embracing, like Whitman (in Moon, 2002) once did, "the varied carols I hear" (p. 12).

It has been said that to teach is to learn anew and, as I settle into my writing space and invite the lived experience of my students to enlighten me, I recognize that each quest for identity of my students re-kindles thoughts of that same longing in me. As I play the tapes of classroom conversations, young adult voices massage my mind. We are together in this place, searching, learning, re-calling, and becoming in this

space. I am led to re-view my own search for identity, and I see on the horizon the holy grail of self-discovery perpetually beckoning each of us, continually luring one and all to keep searching and re-calling, constantly prompting us to expand our search. Questing and re-requesting is a necessary part of discovering who we are. We evolve and change; just as we see ourselves, we lose ourselves. Change is constant and we become with time, continually adding to the one we think we know, developing, improving.

On the waves of a seventy's sound, my memory transports me back to a time when music first made me take to heart, lines that bid me "[learn] who you are, my little star" (Moody Blues, 1972), and I am reminded how complicated and painful it is to be a young adult, in search of self for the first time. Lindberg's words (1955/2005) magnify the importance of being willing or able to make that discovery as she points out, "When one is a stranger to oneself then one is estranged to others, too. If one is out of touch with oneself, then one cannot touch others" (p. 38). Her words not only intensify the notion that self-discovery is important, but she also suggests that the elusive nature of self-awareness persists through every age. Students generally are in search of self, and high school students may be inching their way into that discovery, hoping to have the answer once and for all. However, just like generations who have gone before them, my students begin to see that becoming is continual, always needing re-appraisal.

What makes something as elemental as "knowing oneself" such an elusive treasure? What part does being able to get in touch with oneself play in the development of who we are? The perpetual quest that keeps us asking, re-requesting

from all around us who we are, manifests itself as much in my classroom as anywhere my students find themselves. When students really put themselves on paper, they get the first glimpse at what others will see. Some will not look at who they are; they refuse to put the real "them" on paper. Some share the knowledge they uncover with one or two other people; sometimes I am lucky enough to be one of those people. Some are ready to share themselves with the whole class, waiting for reaction, hoping for connection, hoping to see if they are "OK" in the eyes of peers who view themselves as "OK" (Harris, 1967). Others are confident enough to say, as one student does, "I share my writing because I want this class to know who I am."

My own struggle for self-discovery drifts and mingles with those of student searchers from 2004, and I tune in to conversations that pump life-blood through our classroom, stretching its walls, shaping its space. Words spill from lips to ears, hoping for connection, longing to touch. Thirty-two students and I inflate the chambers of this room. All of us join together in this inquiry, and twelve of the thirty-two students offer to converse with me about writing/sharing experiences. It is these thirty-two voices, in general, and the twelve, in particular, who quest and re-quest with me on this phenomenological journey. As I adjust the earphones of my tape recorder, I sit alert amidst the sounds of students and wait, as Heidegger (1953/1996) suggests, to ponder words that will present themselves in this audible text. I let these texts speak to me, transfuse me, as I take the art of listening into the realm of hermeneutic interpretation.

"I-dentity": Making Our Hearts Known

To know anything, one must discover its core, its essence, that which makes it what it is. The idea sounds simple, almost so self evident that it is not worth mentioning. At times like this I recognize the simplest ideas are often the most complex. If I am able to know my essence, perhaps comprehending its power, a power each individual has, it is not initially evident. Dwelling for a moment on visions of Paul Williams (1987/1999), I close my eyes and imagine essence as he guides with these words.

Picture a burning log, like in a fireplace, a hearth.

Now see it as if it were floating in the air a few feet in front of you, and notice that there are two elements here: the log, and the fire that clings to it.

Now move this image of a burning object into your body, so that you can feel it like a warm, comforting glow inside your chest.

This burning log is real, and it exists inside you.

The inexhaustible log is called your essence; and the fire, the flame, is your life. (p. 3)

To say that who we are changes over time is one thing, but, in order to recognize that change, we need to know what is being added or subtracted. We need to be able to recognize the presence of this "log"--our essence, and we need to be willing to share the warmth of our "flame." As we quest for "I-dentity," look for essence, how do we uncover the I who makes an impression in our name? How do we know who we are?

To all deep thinking minds, the inquiry about the "I" and its nature has an irresistible fascination.

Call it by any name, God, Self, the Heart or the Seat of Consciousness, it is all the same. The point to be grasped is this, the *Heart* means the very core of one's being, the Center,

without which there is nothing whatever. (Maharshi, as cited in *Parabola*, 2001, p. 80)

One cannot seek information about the “I” without searching the heart, and one cannot look into the heart without realizing its connection to the “I.” This message from *The Spiritual Teachings* of Ramana Maharshi says that it is an intuitive part of human nature to realize that the heart makes us who we are. Maharshi writes that if we think about it, we can see that even a schoolboy knows this. If the boy says, “It is I that did the sum correctly,” or “Shall I run and get the book for you?” he points to his chest right at his heart, not at his head (2001, p. 82). This is an intuitive identification, according to Maharshi. Each of us knows that who we are is inside of us, at the heart of things. While we may intuitively know this, we also may realize that we are vulnerable to our surroundings. Do we really know who we are “intuitively” as Maharshi claims? Or do we need to uncover more than our intuition hints at to see who we really are? Maybe discovering who we are can only be done by exposing our hearts to others. Perhaps, without realizing it, my students intuitively seek to understand what Heidegger calls the possibilities of existence for *Dasein* (Heidegger, 1953/1996). We all want “to be accepted” or “to connect” or “to relate” according to most of my students. Perhaps recognizing our own actions as “relating” or realizing that what we have done is “acceptable,” or listening to what others have done in hopes of a connection is a way for *Dasein* to uncover itself as a “Being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, p. 10).

Exposing the core of our existence may be risky business. What if those around us do not accept us, do not agree with us, or try to change us? Perhaps this is why it is so difficult for us to let others see who we are. In fact, instinctual self-

preservation may be what tells us to keep our I-identity hidden within our heart's core.

The word identity itself, when considered and traced over centuries, carries with it an aura of the same protective notion: Identity evolved in two ways; at first, *identite'*, from Middle French, means oneness. It was taken from the Latin *identitatem*, meaning "sameness, . . . extracted from the adverb *identidem* over and over again," suggesting oneness or repeating something in exactly the same way, being identical. Yet by "1644, the verb to identify, while meaning to regard as the same," also means "to recognize as being a particular person or thing" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 505). While each of us shares similarities with one another as human beings, we each maintain unique, unreplicable characteristics, implying oneness.

Levinas (2000) says we verify the existence of a face to face recognition of the exquisite, unique being that the other is, while Heidegger (1969) says we learn to know ourselves by our individuality through difference. Our identity may be more readily discerned by coming face to face with one another, but there is certainly more to see about who we are by identifying how we are unique at our cores. Allowing others to see how we are different, however, is a risky place to be, especially for a teenager. One needs only to look at how students create school uniforms for themselves in order to see that they don't want to be as different as they claim. Students separate themselves from parental ties by choosing their own wardrobes, but they align themselves with people who share some common thread, by dressing like a certain type. Within any classroom, there are several uniformed groups, ready to be recognized on the outside. To see a person's true difference, however, we need to look deeper, to value difference as well as sameness. Listening to what lies under the

clothing, hair-dos, tattoos, make-up, or lack thereof, gives us an opportunity to identify the oneness in the unique sense.

Dreamer (2003) says she, like many of us, sometimes ignores the call within her. Maybe it takes a certain maturity to hear the call. It may even take a certain maturity to want to listen. How do we learn who we are if we do not hear the call? Perhaps some people are too far away from hearing their own inner voices, their own heartsongs, to find them alone. Possibly the tone of another's song can direct us to hear our own. Perhaps, in shades of Freud (1960), who sees our identities as developing through a battle between pleasure and reality, we need to separate our "i-entities" from our "id-entities." As my students begin to search for who they really are, they realize that their hearts are tangled tightly in desires and their ideal Ego or "i-identity" is hard to separate from emotional chains.

Remembering: Learning "Id" by Heart

Learning who we are is a complicated process. Everything is cyclical. Once we almost have a grasp on who we are, and think we know what makes us who we are, we fall prey to memories of who we once were or hopes of who we want to be, and we lose sight of the big picture. Perhaps Freud's (1960) notion that the Id, or "the pleasure principle" (p. 19), competes with the Ego or "the reality principle" (p. 19), while our Super Ego or "Ego Ideal" (p. 22) is developing, has something to do with the complexity of this process. We need to re-member, re-collect, pieces from the past while realizing that we are constantly changing. As we evolve, we carry *Id* in our hearts. No matter how mature and *Ego Ideal* we become, *Id* is there. Our becoming is a steady adding on to who we already are. The notion of this continuous becoming

suggests a scene in the short story "Eleven" (Cisneros, 1992, pp. 6-9). Rachel, who is having her eleventh birthday is the narrator.

What they don't understand about birthdays and what they never tell you is that when you're eleven, you're also ten, and nine, and eight, and seven, and six, and five, and four, and three, and two, and one, and when you wake up on your eleventh birthday you expect to feel eleven, but you don't. You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today. And you don't feel eleven at all. You feel like you're still ten. . . . Because the way you grow old is kind of like an onion or like the rings inside a tree trunk or like my little wooden dolls that fit one inside the other, each year inside the next one. That's how being eleven years old is. (Cisneros, 1992, pp. 16-17)

We all start out by satisfying the childlike, emotional parts of our personalities. How we develop from there is difficult and rarely discussed. Some students in my class have never taken a conscious look at themselves before, or if they have, are very private about what they have found, thinking they are peculiar. Some may fear that they are too immature. Some are convinced they know it all, are more mature than their peers and have nothing to learn from anyone else their age.

As I listen to my students' voices, I hear that they are in various stages of self-exposure. Some still are searching to find who lies within, and know that releasing themselves requires a delicate, but necessary, operation. Some already have made an initial cut, revealing themselves but feeling vulnerable; they are afraid that others will not like them. Some claim they do not care what people think, but they are guarding their hearts just the same. Others are confident that they are acceptable and long to build their own strength on transfusions from others. They do not yet realize that their "vulnerability is [their] most attractive quality, [that while] all people give off light, vulnerable people also let light in" (Williams, 1987, p. 112). With me, all examine writing as the tool of choice for such delicate operations, and as Rilke (1934/1993)

before me advises another young writer, I hope for all to "Go into [themselves]. Search for the reason that bids [them] write" (p. 18) and come out sharing.

At the Circle's Core, Twelve Conversants

As we begin to look at the lived experience of those who volunteer to share pieces they have written from the heart, let me introduce the twelve conversants (pseudonyms) who enrich this study and this class with their brave hearts and willing voices. (All participants are White, except Donald, who is of Asian Heritage.)

Donald is quiet and composes songs about love. He brings his guitar and literally fills the classroom with his heartsongs. Donald says his "songs are usually about someone [he is] thinking about." He says he "need[s] to write them," that "sharing them helps [him] move on, and knowing that [he has] an opportunity to share makes [him] want them to be a better quality." Donald says he might get upset if people criticize his pieces, but not enough to make him "regroove." Donald's presence in our class on a regular basis is not noticeable. He is quiet, respectful, attentive, pleasant, and responsive if called upon to contribute. Donald's willingness to sing songs to his own accompaniment allows all of us to get a different glimpse of him. As he croons over his strings, the class is immersed in a song from his heart which is now audible and melodic. Donald's demeanor demonstrates a soft, silent confidence. The eyes of the class are glued to his, which on normal days are cast down. He writes on his own.

Warren writes science fiction. He has written ten chapters, the first seven and the last three of what he hopes eventually will be a published book. Warren is a class leader in every sense of the word: articulate, confident, humorous, and engaging. He

frequently leads discussions and volunteers responses. A devoted writer, Warren has "already designed the plot outline" for his book. He knows what he wants to write. He says it does not just evolve for him. He plans it. "I love this writing assignment," he says. "It gives me a chance to see what everyone else thinks about my stuff." And the class generally is in awe of his dedication and talent. Warren admits that there is much of him in his story despite its genre. He invites criticism from all. Warren writes on his own.

Charles writes about his family and real life fiction. He is a quiet class participant. Reserved, he only responds when called upon. Charles's writings are emotional, and he admits that he uses writing as an opportunity "to get out my emotions." He confesses that he tends to be "one who look[s] at the darker side of things. I guess I am very pessimistic by nature. My stories are about a very dark scene. It lets me feel more comfortable about the way things really are, helps me look on the brighter side of things." While Charles is tentative about sharing his writing, he likes "the positive feelings that sharing carries with it. [He hopes he] will catch the writing bug like Warren, but [he has not written] for personal pleasure before."

Judy is tall, lithe and exudes good humor on a daily basis. She tries her hand at poetry, and the caustic, somber tone of her words takes us by surprise. Her style is conversational free verse, and her writing insists that someone hear her. Although she eventually identifies herself as the author, Judy asks me to share her first poem. The remaining three, she shares herself. Her own voice, high-pitched and quivering, accuses someone of harboring disingenuous feelings for her and the redness of her serious face seems so out of character for her. The annoyance she suffers in shallow,

peer relationships seems to resonate with classmates who may have felt mute and invisible themselves. I note how normally she expertly conceals her dissonant tune.

Erica is timid and quiet. She blushes at the sound of her own name, but her eyes and smile always seem connected. From a chair in the center of the room, her nods identify the degree of connection my words make with at least one person. She writes thoughtful, intense pieces of poetry and prose. The thought of sharing makes her catatonic. I am the only one who has been privy to her ideas in this group, and I see that the ruddy color of her face reflects the grandness of her heart.

Nina has soft eyes and a discerning smile. She is selective about her in-class responses, hand up occasionally, neither too quickly, to prove she is there, nor to save me from a failed discussion, but rather when she has something original or unique to add to the conversation. She writes about relationships, some successful, some failed, some peer, some family, all poetry. Nina never shares but always asks me to share for her. She is a thinker, a feeler and an evaluator. She says she sometimes writes to clear her head.

Phil, truly "dwells in possibility" (Dickinson, in Johnson, 1960, p. 327). He is open to anything. When we were reviewing prepositions, he volunteered to come in and teach all of my classes the "preposition song" he learned in middle school. His voice is as deep as his thoughts and he offers a helping hand to anyone willing to take hold. Every time we write, Phil chooses a different genre and topic. He is eager to receive feedback, implying that his openness goes deeper than his ear. Phil tells me that he uses this writing assignment "to explore."

Sheila, quiet but confident, likes to write for expression. She says sometimes

she does not know what she is going to write about until she writes it, but she appreciates the opportunity to express herself. In class, she frequently saves a failed discussion, rushes to the rescue, rewording what the class may have misunderstood in my phrasing. Sheila frequently pops in to see me after school. We talk and laugh together about nothing in particular. She is interested in everything so college choices are not going to be easy for her. Sheila writes about longing and dreams she hopes will come true.

Terry has gentle eyes and a soft voice. In class, he is cautious and reserved about responses. He writes about family and teenage angst. He tells me that he has volunteered to participate in this research because he feels like this might be something important he can do. Terry feels that he does not contribute enough in class and wants to make a difference, and this opportunity to speak up within a smaller group appeals to him. He comes to these conversations with Peter, who offers him support. Terry has never shared, but hopes to have enough courage to speak up by the end of the year. He does, in fact, read his final piece, which is well received by his peers. Terry writes "to clear his mind on personal issues."

Peter is new to our school this year. He is intelligent, reserved and looking forward to making friends. He says, "It's hard to start into a high school in tenth grade because people are not too quick to include you, and high school should be about hanging out with friends." Peter likes our writing days because it has made it easier for him to find some people who think a little like he does. Peter thinks "more students should have a chance to write like this [personal choice pieces]," so he is "anxious to participate in these conversations about our writing activity." He writes

about "important issues that are on [his] mind, whatever may be troubling [him] at the moment." Peter writes in a journal at home and uses it to get topics for the pieces he submits.

Andrea is sensitive and congenial, but her frailty gives her a delicate edge. She glides into the room, anxious to participate and ready to be a friend. She smiles nonchalantly and prepares her supplies for class. I always have a fear of her getting knocked around; she brings out the mother in me. Andrea writes about family, friends, and hopes for the future. She usually lets me share what she writes, but she never claims the pieces. She is "too self-conscious to let people know what [she] wrote," but she "likes to hear other people share what they have written because [she] can relate to so many of them." Andrea does not write like this outside of this assignment.

Dana is quite the philosopher, taking most of her ideas from works we have read in class. She writes in various genres and shares her own pieces aloud. Her ideas seem quite sophisticated for some class members; many consider her intellectually superior, but all listen attentively when she speaks. Dana loves writing in class and at home. Very little ruffles her and she reminds me, when I become upset about one of our participant's response to a piece of writing, "Well, when you really think about it, Mrs. Hartshorn, it still comes under the umbrella of emotion."

In addition to the twelve students who stay after to converse with me, heartsongs, offered by other classmates, will be scattered throughout this text. We all dwell beneath, what Dana has so appropriately named "the umbrella of emotion."

Sharing Under the "Umbrella of Emotion"

Although there are 33 of us in this group, we manage to squeeze our desks and chairs into a circle large enough to nearly break through the walls. The magic of a continuous circle, with no beginning and no end, with no head and no tail, smiles on our experience and coaxes a lived curriculum from our hearts as we prepare to share pieces of personal writing for the first time.

To share, originally from the Old English, *scaer*, meaning "to cut or shear" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 993), "to divide and parcel out in shares" (Costello, 1994, p. 1253), may be a word I use too liberally in my classroom. As students write papers to share, perhaps an echo from a more primitive time cautions them to beware, warns them that they will be dividing themselves up among their peers. Perhaps the image of Mike TV, a little boy from the old *Willie Wonka* movie, who is changed into TV particles and sent to viewers via a TV set, floats into their minds. Once Mike puts himself out there for others to view, he is unable to return to his original place. Perhaps sharing themselves word by word brings back memories of Mike for my students, suggesting that once little particles of them are out there, they will not be retrievable. Putting themselves on paper and then sharing aloud who they are means dividing themselves up among their peers. When we think about dividing things up and portioning them out, we seldom imagine that, by some miracle of fate, what we gave will still be ours. In days when one's "share" meant something desired, deserved, even demanded, there probably was never a time when the item being divided was rejected. But my students worry about rejection by the one receiving the share.

As I ponder the derivation of share, I cannot help but wonder at my naïveté

and presumption at calling for something so invasive of my students' beings. In hopes of vindicating myself as a teacher, I consult the response sheets (Appendix F) that students fill out for me after our activity. I read over what my students say about how they feel about sharing what they have written. I note that by June, twenty-eight of the thirty-two say they are "nervous," or "uncomfortable," "embarrassed," "anxious" or "scared" when sharing. Re-viewing these comments, I realize something I have never recognized before: my students have overlooked different degrees of discomfort in order to share their hearts in our room. Just knowing that they choose to share themselves despite the uneasiness and anxiety of the process, sends a chill up my spine as the gravely, pain-ridden voice of Janice Joplin singing "take another little piece of my heart, now" accompanies my thoughts. I marvel at how, despite the fact that we fear "being torn apart" as Jason says, we share ourselves anyway. I see that sharing, when **you** are, in fact, the object being parceled out, suggests potential, emotional pain. My eyes are then drawn to responses where students say, "I love the sharing"; "I love seeing what people think"; "I love getting feedback from the class."

What is this draw we have to be united to one another, to make a connection? Maybe we are like plants and trees that are being grafted. When I was a little girl, I used to trail my daddy as he pruned and manicured our apple orchard. I watched as he grafted one tree to another. The operation was delicate; he cut a tree base and a tree limb at angles and, as the sap of the two different trees bled one into the other, he wrapped the wound in swaddling bandage while I handed pieces of cloth to seal the union. The whole process was very intriguing. Even more intriguing than the process was the product of these mergers. From the sturdy root system of one tree, two

different fruits would grow, often two totally different flavors and colors. While each branch maintained its individuality, a strong base gave life to one less sturdy. What a lovely lesson in sharing. I see in my students a similar life giving potential. As one person is brave enough to share a piece of writing, the strength of that one breathes courage into another. The second takes sustenance from the first while maintaining a unique identity of her/his own. Each is rooted in the stronger base of a classroom community that allows them to flourish and bloom, sharing the fruit of their minds and hearts. When hearts are open and rub together, perhaps it makes it possible for stronger beings to emerge. If conditions in the classroom are right, previously hesitant readers will thrive and be happy to have grown, and the more confident writers will welcome their role in that survival.

Thrown together into this group on a daily basis, we grapple with a myriad of problems and celebrate remarkable feats of courage and valor, but then classrooms are always like this, microcosms of the larger drama. One day at the beach the beauty of the minds we blend together comes home to me as I write in my journal:

I'm at the beach today. I gather with A.A. Milne, Billy Collins, Martin Heidegger, Frank McCourt, and Ray [my husband]. I relate differently to each of these gentlemen. Each, inspires me, in a way. As I lean back in my beach chair, I wonder whom I should consult first. Each nods to the words of e.e. cummings (1954), as he reminds me, "It's always ourselves we find at the sea" (p. 6). Each lies on the blanket, some are eager to draw me into conversation, some wait for me to engage them. As I start to entertain each one's thoughts, Ray sits quietly, illuminated by the sun, listening to his friends on the radio, allowing me time to listen, and mentally converse with the voices from the books and tapes that surround me on this beautiful July day. The realization that I am capable of relating, connecting, and being energized by so many different types, moods, intellects, and personalities, gives me hope for a connection of individual voices within my own classroom. We all long for someone with whom to connect. Some voices make us smile; some make us think; some bring out the child in us; some sail in on memories from the past; some seem to be coming from the same place that we are; some stretch our

minds with words, others with imagination. Of those gathered here today, all look for a tiny corner of my heart as I take their ideas home from the sea. I realize that one of my goals in teaching is not too different: I hope that my students will find space in their hearts for many voices no matter how "varied the carols" (Whitman, in Moon, 2002, p.12) they sing. (Personal Journal, July 2005)

"Writing seems to put us out there," Dana says. She has discovered what Santiago (2000) tells us about writing.

I can't imagine writing not being a painful process for anyone who tries it, because in addition to having to be open and honest and giving of yourself, you face yourself each time that you sit down to write and unless you are an incredibly well adjusted person, that is a painful process. It is a constant questioning of your own self and your opinions and who you are. (audio tape)

"Putting themselves out there" may be the reason many students seem to find it much more difficult to share what they write. Writing itself already makes us vulnerable, but having someone see or hear vulnerability, makes us own it, makes it real. Some people do not want to take the risk of exposing themselves to others. Some will share with no one but me, while some will not even let me see who they are. Others, like Warren, seem perfectly comfortable with who they are and share all of the time.

Warren says he shares "because I just want to show people that this is who I am." He adds about one piece he shares, "I sensed the real professionalism of my piece of writing; it just ended perfectly. I got the sense that the class felt that, too." In Warren's case, what he perceives as the class's acceptance of his "professionalism" confirms his interpretation of who he is. Do we depend on one another to act as tuning forks to listen for our own heartsongs? Do we gather the sound that forms our interpretation from within and from others? Perhaps this is what Heidegger (1953/1996) had in mind when he writes of *Dasein* being able to interpret itself.

Listening: the Give and Take of Words

At our first sharing session, I try to set the tone for listening by asking the students what they think it means to listen.

John: It means you hear something, what someone says.

Cliff: Yeah, it means you *really* hear what someone says.

MA: What do you mean *really* hear?

Cliff: Well, ya don't just sit there, *you really hear it*.

MA: Can we tell that you *really hear it*? Do you do anything differently?

John: Well, Cliff means you think about what someone says.

Cliff: Yeah, and you sometimes shake your head or make a comment to the speaker.

MA: Do you have to agree with what the person says?

Judy: No, but you should let them speak their minds.

MA: Then, you think there should be room for different ideas?

Cliff: Yes, but sometimes that's hard because people in this class can get pretty excited with themselves.

MA: Do you think we can all try to really listen to one another?

Voices: Yeah, sure.

MA: Well, then let's get ready to listen. Before we start, I want you to take out a sheet of paper.

John: Aw! I thought we were reading our stuff!

MA: We are, but wouldn't you like to see what the people in the class think about your writing?

John: Yeah, I guess.

MA: I'd like you to just write a few comments for each of the people who share.

Christine: What kind of comments do you want? Like if they use the wrong verbs or stuff?

MA: That's a very good question. What do *you* think you should listen for?

Kristin: Well, I want to enjoy what people read, not look for mistakes.

MA: I hope that all of us will listen for positive reasons. We will practice first.

Beth: You did say we didn't have to share, right?

MA: Yes, I said you may share; you may decide not to share at all, or you may let me share for you, anonymously. Once the piece has been shared, each of us will write a few comments on the paper you have prepared. I will give the comments to the people whose pieces we have heard. Right now, let's fold our papers in four to get ready.

Cliff: Hot dog fold or hamburger fold?

John: Must be both if it's four. She said four.

We all laugh with this reference to elementary school paper folding techniques, and I am reminded that fifteen is not as far from seven as some people would like to think.

Once the papers are folded into quadrants, I tell the students we will practice with a reading from Randall Jarrell's, *Bat Poet* (1964/1998). I say, "Just sit back and listen. I would like you to try to put yourself in the place of the bat in this story as I read."

A shuffling of feet and bottoms takes place as nearly everyone in the circle seems to snuggle in, maybe even pretending that the seats are plush rather than rock hard. Some have their eyes closed, and little tiny smiles creep across many lips making little ripples around the room.

As you recall from Chapter Two, in Jarrell's tale, a little brown bat pours his heart out, and a mocking bird criticizes his style. He then looks for a more receptive

ear and says his poem for a chipmunk. I stop reading right before the chipmunk offers a response to the bat.

MA: I would like you to write some comments for the bat in the first square on your response sheet.

Leone: Do we have to read these out loud?

MA: No, but I will collect them.

Phil: Do we put our names on them?

MA: Not unless you want to.

And so it begins, another year of laying down the support circle; another time for letting go, attuning to, being-with and pulsing forth, through the sinews of this room; another day of creating safe space for listening to songs pulled from deep within each student's heart.

The verb "to listen" has a varied etymological history. Before the 1200s, it meant "to lean or incline to one side." A little later, still a verb, it meant "to please, desire." Eventually, it becomes "to lust" or "longing." Originally developed "from the Old English *hlysten*, hear, hearken" it is the opposite of "listless," meaning "indifferent or languid" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 505). Overall, the term means to direct one's attention toward the words of another. How important is it for any of us to hear what is said? To respond to someone when spoken to? If I pass another person and say, "Good morning," only to be ignored completely, am I as invisible as I feel? How might the fact that I feel invisible alter my existence? When people choose to ignore us, what does it say about who we are? If our words fall on deaf ears, what does that say about us? Who *are* we? Like Robert Burns (in Williams, pp. 241-243) suggests, do we perceive ourselves "as others see us" (p. 392), or must we be heard and not just

seen? As I remember Santiago (2000), speaking about the pain of feeling invisible in a class where she could not speak the language. I wonder if a similar pain occurs when others simply choose not to hear us speak even though our language is the same. How much does another's willingness to listen call us into being?

People start talking to us when we are just moments old, recognizing who we are by directing words to us. At first, we pay no attention; we do not even seem to be able to participate in the type of listening that Levin (1989) identifies as "primordial, pre-personal attunement" (p. 50). Eventually, though, provided that we have the necessary auditory organs, and we are not preoccupied with colic pangs or some more serious malady, we realize that we *are* because someone calls us into attunement. How, if at all, might our i-identity be determined by these connections? When we discover that we are capable of making sounds to which others respond, in what way does our ability to illicit response with sound affect us? How do we identify who we are, and what part do speaking and listening play in that identification?

In Pursuit of Identity: Who Am I?

Conscience manifests itself as the call of care: the caller is *Dasein*, which, in its thrownness is anxious about its potentiality-for-Being. The one to whom the appeal is made is this very same *Dasein*, summoned to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. *Dasein* is in danger of falling into the "they," and it is summoned out of this falling by the appeal. (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 277)

The potentiality-for Being, which Heidegger leads us to think about here, is part of every human being. It is the desire for fulfillment of this potentiality that causes us to want to be more than we are, the call of conscience. It is the call that Dreamer (2003, n.p.) says, "sometimes comes as a soft-bellied whisper," and

"sometimes . . . holds an edge of urgency." It is the call to one's essence, one's heart. It is the call that some of my students are just beginning to hear. To many, its entreaty seems nearly as threatening as the Sirens' songs of old. It is hard for these young adults to know which voices are a threat and which will help them be who they are meant to be. In this day of vocal pollution, how might they hear what their inner voices know as truth? How might they hear "the one who talks to the deep ear in [their] chest [s]?" (Rumi, in Barks, 2001, p. 90). My students feel the pull of *Dasein's* call most vehemently. They struggle to hear what the voice of conscience whispers to the deep ear in their chests. Who we are is both miracle and mystery, and both reveal the unknown.

I don't even know who I am. (Stacie)

I need some time to just find me. (Judy)

Why won't they just let me be me? (Joshua)

The above responses from student journals are witness to some of the angst students voice as they recognize they are in search of identity. Heidegger (1953/1996) tells us that conscience calls us to be true to ourselves but warns that frequently we get lost in the "they" (p. 117). We get so caught up in what others want us to be that we forget who we are. "To thine ownself be true," a well known line from *Hamlet* (I. iii. 78), is memorized and cited by many of my students, but digested by few. Some tenth graders have a hard time being true to themselves. They "fall into the they," but they also feel the "call to conscience" of which Heidegger speaks. Like all of us, they feel the need to "know who they are," find themselves, or be themselves. When I first struggled with this issue as a young adult, the whisper of an old song opened my

eyes as well as my heart's ear: "Wake up in the morning to yourself/ Open your eyes and start to be you" (Moody Blues, 1972).

Before one can share what the heart says, one must be able to hear the voice and the message one's own heart wants to make known. Being able to hear the sounds from within may not be readily discernible. Perhaps they come as the soft "echoes of the spirit" for which Stepanek (2001, p. 62) urges us to listen. Maybe they seem more spiritual and eternal like the echoes O'Donohue (1999) suggests are pulling our heart strings toward home.

Iamb, Iamb, I am, I am: Each Heart Announces, *I am*

It is a quiet, sleepy Saturday morning, and I lie awake next to Ray thinking I must get up and start writing. Sleeping soundly, he does not notice that I rest my head for five last minutes on his chest. "Iamb, iamb, iamb, iamb," his heart announces its presence to my eardrum. I am content to linger here, my auricle being massaged by the soft-hard, soft-hard cadence of his essence. I smile thinking how his eyebrows would rise in disbelief if he knew that I had his heart and Shakespeare on my mind at this time of the morning. I remember reading that the "iamb" (soft, hard) sound which makes up the five feet of most Shakespearean lines, "has a rhythm that reflects the beating of the human heart" (Fletcher, 2002, p. 37). As I lie here lingering in the syllabic flow of some favorite Shakespearean phrases, Ray's heartbeat serves as a metronome for their music in my mind, and gradually my own blood joins in the miraculous measure. Slowly, my mind opens to the sound of my students' words struggling to join in. Words drummed by my students announce "I am" in various scansions, the sound of each heartsong searching for a cadence that can be heard.

Perhaps the beat of the heart tells us exactly how to make ourselves heard --" soft, hard, soft, hard, repeat."

I Am Who I Am

"I am who I am and that's all that I am," says Popeye the Sailor Man.

Apparently, Popeye is not the only one to ever announce his presence in such a way.

In *How Do We Know Who We Are*, Ludwig (1997) tells us of one who shared the same simple idea: "Standing before a mirror, Friedrich Nietzsche apocryphally asked the deranged image staring back at him--'Who are you?'--and then repeated over and over again, 'I am who I am'" (p. 5). Some students, like Warren, are sure of themselves. "I know who I am, and I want them [the class] to see who that is."

Warren explains that he realizes that his writing is some part autobiography. He senses that in "creating story, we create and re-create ourselves" (Albert, 1996, p. ix). He knows that he is in the characters he writes about in his Science Fiction. Perhaps all writers are in their characters. Conroy admits:

I have drawn long and often from the memory book of my youth . . . I have used my books as instruments to force my way into the world. It was with surprise and wonder that I discovered that the same elements, dangerous chemistry that moves through the volcanoes of the earth also moved through me. Through words, I learned that life and art can be raised to a fever pitch, to sacramental levels, that ecstasy itself is within easy reach for all of us, but the secret is in knowing it is there and when to reach for it. . . . A novel is my fingerprint, my identity card . . . (Conroy, 1998, p. 59)

Like Conroy, Warren's work is his "identity card." While he is always anxious to see what others say about him on his response sheets and in oral responses, little dissuades him from what he sets for himself as a writing task. "Kelil," the protagonist in Warren's adventure, is described, by him, like this:

Chainmail armor clinking together, Kelil's nervous energy seemed to manifest itself in the bolts of lightning crackling around the portal. Now facing the portal, however, Kelil closed his eyes and forced that energy down, molding it into pure power like he had done with so many blades back home in his smithy. And for the one moment before the minotaur stomped through the portal, absolute tranquillity reigned; the calm air soothed Kelil's soul more than a faerie's whisper upon the gentle rainfall. *I will not fail them-- Any of them.* (Warren)

Warren's determination to be successful parallels that of his protagonist. At one point during the course of the year, Warren and Alan, another science fiction writer in the class, entered a contest. Alan won. This rejection simply makes Warren more determined. He is able to be truly happy for Alan while he plods on toward finishing his first novel. "It is in my blood," Warren says. "It is who I am. I love it. I don't do it for an award." Like Kelil, he will not fail.

Dana, the thinker- philosopher of our little group, "loves the questions themselves," (Rilke, 1934/1962, p. 35) and challenges us all to live the questions with her as she poetically renders thoughts inspired by a play we read in class.

The Fine Line Between Love,
Insanity and Death

It seems to me
that there is a very fine line
between Love, Insanity, and Death.
What is Love?
Passion, adoration, amore`
Complete and total submersion
into the depths of devotion
some might say
Now, why does one swim
willingly into those waters,
that great ocean of love?
There is so much opportunity
for pain
broken hearts
death
One must be insane

to wish for all that sorrow
So what is insanity?
to be mad, crazy,
a blurring of the line between
reality
and fantasy
In love, one's rational side
will inevitably die
In insanity, rational thinking
is already dead. (Dana)

Dana exudes an intellectual confidence that permits her to appreciate difficult questions. Many marvel at her inquisitiveness and praise her depth of perception; others consider her "too smart for [them]." She receives few comments from the class that are worthy of her willingness to share. While many of her class comment sheets say, "Good job," which my conversants confirm means **nothing**, some are honest and say, "I don't have the slightest idea what you are talking about." Whereas some students might be offended by such non-participatory comments, Dana has confidence in herself and her own words. She loves and lives the questions her mind is capable of asking and continues to seek despite peer dis-connection. "I wanted to put it out there," she says, "I loved writing about it and thinking about it and thought maybe someone else would, too." When I asked her how she felt about the fact that some said they had no idea what she was talking about, she said, "At least they were listening. I guess, they just can't go there yet."

I realize that there is something to be said for having a place to express oneself even if others do not get the message. Sometimes it is all right for the message to be a question. In class, the day Dana shares this poem, Mark says, "You amaze me. I don't get it, but I want to. Will you read it again?" Sometimes questions inspire questions, and inspiration and questions from classmates can be an awesome

addition to any classroom. While there are some who refuse to "attune" themselves to the type of listening and hearing (Levin, 1989) required to understand Dana's thinking, there are enough who question her with sincere interest, to confirm for her the fact that thinking and questioning matter. Dana's confidence in herself is reinforced by those who want to really hear her song.

"The act of writing, though often tedious, can still provide extraordinary pleasure," says James Slater (1998, p. 34). Few students in my class are as driven as Warren and Dana. The moments spent sharing in our classroom give them a place to be heard. Warren does not seem to need a reason to write. "It is in [his] blood." It is a pleasure for him to write and to share with all of us. Dana loves to think and wants to take us with her.

I Am Remembering: Re-calling Pieces of the Past

In *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rilke (1934/1962) reminds Mr. Kappus that "Childhood [is a] precious kingly possession, a treasure-house of memories" (p. 20).

Perhaps over all there is a great motherhood, as common longing. The beauty of the virgin, a being that (as you [Mr. Kappus] so beautifully say) "has not yet achieved anything," is motherhood that begins to sense itself and to prepare, anxious and yearning and the mother's beauty is ministering motherhood, and in the old woman there is a great remembering. (Rilke, 1934/1962, p. 38)

As Rilke likens life to the stages of a "great motherhood," I see these stages in the heartsongs of my students and their peer reactions to them, and I realize that those stages recur again and again for all of us across a lifetime. Many of my students' personal writings deal with memories from childhood, and they participate in "a great remembering." Students tell about family trips, family celebrations, and family problems. Kelly writes:

I remember the way his hair felt in my hands, how I giggled and bounced atop his broad shoulders, while he secured my knees with callused palms. I was Princess of Pace Street in those days. I cannot remember when, exactly, the good times stopped, but I could not help playing those shoulder-rides over again and again in my mind when my mother, my step-father and I were informed that Daddy was dead. (Personal Writing)

Kelly shares this piece with me, only. She tells me she “cried enough while writing it.” She does not want to expose this side of herself to the class.

From experience and previously shared writings, the class knows Kelly as the field hockey player who sends chills up an opposing goalie’s neck during heated games. Kelly probably never read what Cameron writes about memory, but the above excerpt from Kelly's piece about her dad beautifully illustrates this passage:

We store memories in our bodies. We store passion and heartache. We store joy and moments of transcendent peace. If we are to address these, if we are to move into them and through them, we must enter our bodies to do so. When we encounter an emotional shock, the trauma of a lost beloved, the grief of separation, our bodies count the cost. Our minds may go numb, adroit at denial, but our bodies hold fast to the truth. Entering our bodies, we enter our hearts. (Cameron, 1998, p. 58)

It is this very “body memory” (p. 146) which Casey (2000) also talks about that pushes a rewind button in Kelly’s heart. Over and over she actually feels her father’s hands on her knees, realizing again and again that his touch is gone forever. As she has the courage to write, her body counts the cost, and though her mind may go numb, she is able to move into and through this moment of heartache.

As I notice Kelly’s somber demeanor across from me in our circle, Cameron's words resonate with me and illuminate all of the faces that sit in this space. I think how different we are, how altered we become over time, how we are all beings thrown into a sea of experience, polished and etched by the waves of time, the sands of trial. Each of us is tossed like a pebble on the beach and honed by conflict over

time, *becoming* through the moments that shape and change us.

Matt exposes his change of heart for all of us to see. He uses flashback to show us how he has been tossed and shaped by the moments that make him the boy who can appreciate today.

It was a huge event. I don't know how much time was spent-- wait... Let me start at the beginning.

I began life in Washington D.C. and lived in a big gray house until I was eight. Up until age five, everything was normal. I had a mom, dad, and three triplet siblings. But around age three or four something went wrong. My mom got sick. Soon she was being rushed to all these hospitals, and all I knew was that I started seeing more of our short, Spanish nanny from Nicaragua than my mom, and I didn't understand why. Every once in a while I'd visit Mom, or she would come home to visit and rest. She had shaved her long, beautiful curly hair so that now she had a buzz cut. She still had her natural beauty but her face was pale, ragged, and tired. Even when she was home, she was sleeping. On October 8th my mom died of a brain tumor. It was two days before my siblings' birthday and several days after my own. My world went reeling. Slowly, the meaning of death set in. I realized that I would never see my mom again.

My dad took us to church for support, and one day about a year after my mom's death, my dad met someone. . . .

Matt goes on to describe a courtship and the beautiful wedding of which he and his siblings were a part. He tells that his new mom was "radiant! beautiful! as she came down the aisle." He ends his account with:

Everyone applauded as they kissed, and I gave my dad a thumbs-up sign. Now I could call her mom, and I hugged her. It felt good to say mom again. Since then, we moved to Maryland and have been making memories together as a complete family ever since. (Matt)

When death takes a loved one from us, we heal in different ways. Matt moves on, making new memories, opening his heart to another, changing amidst challenge but surfacing to love again. Classmates are quick to congratulate him, several saying they are sorry for his loss but happy for his gain. While loss is painful, finding a way to restore our hope puts us in a positive place. For Matt that place is a new home with

love and a new mom to hug. Casey (1993) tells us that home is:

A place in which you can move about with ease and familiarity. To be taken in you don't have to have proved yourself in any particular way, or have gained merit in the world at large. . . You just need to be a member of a household whose journeys have taken you elsewhere, to other places than to home-place to which you now return. Here you are received as a person who belongs to this place, a home-person who calls for being welcomed back. (p. 300)

Matt returns to a place he calls home in a different state at a different time, to a place that receives him as a person who belongs to this place, with these people. Matt's happiness is evident in his words and his demeanor as he shares his piece with us. It is impossible not to be happy for him and share his feeling of being at home with his new situation.

For everyone, the journey home is not as positive as it is for Matt. Jason has no new "home" and looks for a "home-place" while sharing. I mark that even the coolest heart sometimes seems to melt during sharing situations. Jason, a loner who antagonizes others more than he should, lets us see a little of why his heart has hardened:

My childhood was
Like most southern children's
Cat fishin' on the river
Chasing lightin' bugs in the moon light
Then I'd go home and hide under the covers
Of my Big Red Race Car Bed,
Shivering in fear cuz the two monsters
Were at it again.
Their roars, so loud, it shakes the house.
So loud, I cover my ears
Cuz if I don't
They'll explode with the reality
That I'm not like, most southern children
That I see fishin' down at the river
And chasin' fireflies
Then it stops...

The neighbor's lights go out
And I fall asleep on a wet pillow. (Jason)

I can just picture the big red car bed with little Jason in it. I have seen those beds. When my husband and I started our family, I remember decorating a little boy's room in my mind, using one of those beds. "If I have a little boy," I thought, "we will buy one of those race car beds." How special it should make a child feel to have such an awesome space of his own, such a comfortable place. Parents who choose such an item surely expect happiness and goodness to accompany the gift. Creating a nurturing, loving space is more demanding of individuals than their ability to make a purchase, however. One cannot separate place from the people that make it what it is. The pathos in Jason's poem reveals so vividly part of what makes him who he is. As Casey (2000) tells us, "It is an inescapable fact about human existence that we are made of our memories: *we are what we remember ourselves to be*. We cannot dissociate the remembering of our personal past from our present self-identity" (p. 290). Jason is so embroiled in this memory of the past that unconsciously, I imagine, he switches his writing from past to present verb tense in this memory poem, perpetuating the pain of childhood.

Sutherland (in Friedman & Moon, 1997), who walks the Zen path, talks of a certain healing which accompanies remembering. The healing comes because of "a kind of ripening. It's learning to suffer in an authentic way so that [one] can begin to stop suffering" (p. 8). Jason is still healing as his heart is still suffering on its way to ripeness. Frequently we have tears, and back patting during our class sharing sessions. Suffering softens our bodies with red faces, real tears and an invitation for personal contact. Writing gives us freedom to remember, helps us broaden our

knowledge of who we are, and possibly enables us to stop suffering. Rilke's words (in Barrows & Macy, 1996) lead me to a place not unlike those my students re-enter as they search for who they are.

I would describe myself
like a landscape I've studied
at length, in detail;
like a word I'm coming to understand
like a pitcher I pour from at mealtime;
like my mother's face;
like a ship that carried me
when the waters raged. (p. 33)

For Jason, the road to recovering trust and finding self is long and challenging, just like the one on which he maneuvered the little race car bed that was unable to turn into a ship when the waters of his childhood raged beneath 'lightnin' bugs" and "moonlight." Jason still treads the waters of uncertainty, trusting few along his journey, still searching for a safe place.

I Am Afraid to Forget

Sometimes writing makes us remember images we are trying to forget, images that pick us apart, clawing and chewing at our hearts. Alicia writes, "I can't forget the way my mother looked in the black lacquered casket. Her 'not-smile' haunts me." The disturbing image traced by Alicia's words, awakens my memory, and my tears widen splotches where Alicia's grieving has caused the ink to smear the page. I, too, still try to forget my own mother's voice-silenced lips, sewn shut and smeared with the wrong color lipstick. My heart, recharged with wanting to forget, makes me wonder what place wanting to forget plays in our becoming. Is this what psychologists call repression? Thoughts that come like plagues, gnawing at us from the inside out can sometimes be put to rest on paper. How different will we be if we have little or much

to forget? How important is it that we all recognize the need to play out this part of our becoming?

According to the Pueblo people, forgetting is a ritual which prepares the ground for seeds of change.

The ritual of forgetting took so long boys
While waiting for those old lines of place
To disappear. The new village was the same
As the old village, except its edges were less rounded
With sorrow, and along its walls slid the shadows
Of regret in which they saw old familiar pieces of themselves.
The ritual of forgetting was the means by which
The Ancestors prepared the ground for seeds of change,
While remembering the tears required to grow them.
(Wood, 1996, p. 55)

As the poem suggests, our trying to forget furrows the heart, preparing it for seeds of change, and only our tears can promote that growth. I wonder what part writing plays to encourage those important tears? My own mother died in 1990, but it was not until 1994 when I started writing and sharing with my classmates at the Maryland Writing Project, that I re-collected those images and cried the tears necessary for growth from my seeds of pain. I was forty years old when the pain of losing a parent set me on the pathway of forgetting, stagnating my growth. The seeds of pain and the tears needed to make them grow, allowing us to reap harvest and push out from the underbrush, know no age. Each year, I am shocked at the number of my students who are already participating in the ritual of forgetting.

Perhaps what some students are trying to forget is the loss of childhood, a loss which has been thrust upon them prematurely. Donald writes:

I come from

I come from a big house to a small

from a mom and a dad to just a mom
I come from eating my favorite dinner to no dinner at all
from working 20 hours a week to 38
from having fun all of the time to having no fun at all
I come from a life with no responsibility to having them all
from loving my life to hating my life
from hating my home to living with friends

Having been nurtured, even after leaving home, by a family who supported me, my heart shook in disbelief as I absorbed Donald's words. He shared his piece aloud, and amidst student notes that said, "good job," and "well done" were these:

Gee, Don, I know exactly where you're coming from. My dad left us, and my Mom moved us here. That wouldn't be so bad, but this is the sixth time we have moved in three years. I have no idea what will happen from here. I hate it. too. (Kaitlyn)

Yo! Life's a bitch! My mom had to go to rehab center. I only get to see her once a month, if she's clean. Meals suck at my house, and most of the time Dad forgets I need money for lunch. It's a bitch, man! (George)

Kaitlyn and George are not usually friends with Donald, but through his writing, they have made a connection. Perhaps they will smile at him in the lunch line today.

Kaitlyn writes about her father for the next sharing day, and George writes poems for his mother. Perhaps by re-membering, they all will nurture their seeds through change just as re-membering ourselves calls forth a change in who we are.

I Am Letting the Writing Take Me There

Andrea says, "Most of the time I don't even know what I am going to write about until I start. I let the writing take me there." Dillard (2003) confirms that many writers experience a similar journey. "[O]riginal work fashions a form the true shape of which it discovers only as it proceeds . . ." (p. 16). Other professional writers also announce that writing has the ability to lead us to what we need to say. Perry (1999) has written an entire book about this process, calling it, *Writing in Flow*. Metzger

(1992) terms the procedure, "automatic writing" (p. 25), and Elbow (1998) emphasizes the importance of "free writing" by announcing that it is "an invitation to stop writing and instead to be written" (p. 209). Andrea has discovered what many have noted before her. In class we use this technique to inspire journal pieces. Calling out a word or phrase, we write and let our hearts lead the way. "Just go with it," I say, and ink fills our pages. Sometimes we find writing topics. Sometimes we don't. Students always are surprised to see what is really on their minds and in their bodies. Writing can lead us into places of laughter, places of fear, places of pain, even places we have never been before, even to what Yeats calls, "the rag and bone shop of the heart" (in Rosenthal, 1996, p. 213). My students find value in the search.

Charles: When you do not restrict writing, do not throw out guideline after guideline, you will get what, to use an old cliché, might be called "writing from the heart." It is so liberating to know that we can just write. It [the writing] shows me what I want to say. I usually get a couple more pages than I'm expecting.

Judy: With this kind of writing, you kind of learn a little about yourself because normally if you aren't a writer you don't know what you like to write about. This helps you find out, so maybe the next time you have an assignment, you can gear it toward what you enjoy doing.

Charles: Yeah, with some assignments you are so worried about getting the right number of pages or backing up some point that you don't have a chance to find out what you really think.

These students experience a little of what Mailer confirms to be true of himself and his life long friend, Jean Malaquais, "The only time I know the truth is when it reveals itself at the point of my pen" (Mailer, 1998, pp. 3-4). Without our realizing it, writing sometimes leads the pen through the labyrinth of the heart. After many false starts and sometimes pain, we emerge safely in a comfortable space, knowing what we think and feel. "Writing *is* Flow" (Whalstrom, 2006, p. 31). These

words head the second chapter of *The Tao of Writing*, and Whalstom goes on to equate the power of writing with the force that water exhibits on stone as he quotes verse 78 of *Tao Te Ching*:

Nothing on earth is more gentle and yielding than water, yet nothing is stronger. When it confronts a wall of stone, gentleness overcomes hardness; the power of water prevails. (Whalstom, 2006, p. 31)

Perhaps the age-old wisdom of these lines may help us visualize how writing can wear away even the hardest shell to expose the being within. Sometimes we need to chisel our way into a place where we can hear our heartsongs so we can realize, like Mattie Stepanick (2001), that

Our life is an echo
Of our spirit today.
Of our essence
As it is.
Caught between
Our yesterday
And our tomorrow.
It is the resounding
Reality of who we are.
As a result of
Where we have been.
And where we will be.
For eternity. (p. 60)

The essence of my students sometimes seems caught between yesterday and tomorrow. The reality of who they are is sealed up tightly, reminding me of today's cereal boxes: Their covers are shiny and appealing. Their pointed edges and tightly sealed lids protect the essence within. If one manages to get through the outer coverings, the essence of the contents is guarded by a nearly non-penetrable bag, suggesting that a more sophisticated instrument be used to get to that which is so

securely protected inside. Some students use writing as a tool to gain access to what is inside.

Levin (1985) tells us:

We must simply give out thoughts to the body. We must take our thinking down into the body. We must learn to think with the body. For once we should listen in silence to our bodily felt experience. Thinking needs to learn by feeling, by just being with our bodily being. (p. 61)

When Charles talks about being so preoccupied with the number of pages required in some writing assignments that "you don't have a chance to find out what you really think," he is admitting that in most of his papers, he is not really represented. He has not allowed his body to feel; therefore, he has neither listened to the silence within nor has he discovered his thoughts. My first impulse is to ask, "What kind of a paper can this be?" Then, I stop and remind myself about my own reason for choosing this type of dissertation. I, like Charles, sometimes forget to listen to the silence. I wanted my thinking to be informed by feeling, like Levin says, but there are times when I feel I barely have time to breathe, let alone feel. Like Charles, however, I can see the value of being totally vested in my writing as well as my life. Neither living nor writing is any good without being.

I Am Anxious

Anxiety is different from fear, says Heidegger (1977/1993). When we fear, we know of what we are afraid. Anxiety is when one feels "ill at ease" (p. 101). I cannot help but notice that the Heideggarian translators use the same words some of my students do when asked how reading their writing in class makes them feel: "ill at ease," "uncomfortable" and "afraid." Yet, they do not know what they fear.

I am drawn at this point to note the parenthetical, italicized German

translation included on this page in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*. "Ill at ease" translates from the German, "*es ist einem unheimlich*" (p. 101). I smile as I think of the "heimlich maneuver," the first aid procedure for choking. I have seen two people successfully administer this technique in real life situations. Both times, I prayed that if I ever needed to save someone from choking, I would be strong enough and knowledgeable enough to administer such a helping hand. I am drawn now to the irony hidden in the German form of feeling "ill at ease." I wonder if the anxiety my students feel when sharing what they have written feels like they are choking on their words. It is certainly not the first time food consumption has been metaphorically connected with words. Idiomatic phrases like: "She's going to have to eat her words!" or "You may choke on those words," and "That might be a little hard to swallow" seem to imply that many of us have trouble getting words out.

Dry mouthed, Erica swallows hard, gulps in air and asks if she may get her water bottle before sharing a piece about visiting "her" house. With this poem she mourns the loss of a childhood and a place "they" once called home.

Down
Those wooden steps
Once hung at least a hundred pictures,
Pictures of the four of us, young and old,
Even pets.
Now-new pictures. Not of us. Replacements.
Turn right--
The family room.
Once green carpet, the newest in the house,
Computer desk, an outdated computer,
Big screen TV, surround sound,
Old sofa, and warm fireplace.
Now- the same room, only half the size.
The other half? For another replacement.
My brother's room-- Once and Still--
Full of Christmas lights, computer, huge closet,

Random electronics, music blasting,
And clothes everywhere.
The downstairs bathroom--
Once so "lived in" no one would use it
Smudged mirrors, mold ridden shower,
Just a quick convenience.
Now--shiny, dark blue tiles,
Cleaned better than new, a nautical theme.
The back of the basement--Once and Still--
Unfinished-- a laundry room
With clothes stacked high above the washer,
A work bench with endless tools,
And a desk with the family calendar.
Out back--
The deck once bare
But burdened with rotting table and chairs.
Now--stained wood, working lights,
Iron table and chairs, flower boxes,
An umbrella, table and new hot tub.
This once was my house.
This once was where I laughed and grew.
Now this is a house full of replacements.
This is a house where memories have faded
And a lie is being lived. (Erica)

It is hard to grow up all at once, when adulthood smacks you in the face while you are busy playing and acting your age. "Not even the loss of love nor a summer without flowers creates a grief as deep as the theft of children's laughter" (Wood, 1997, p. 57). To mourn the loss of one's innocence will require many tears. Nothing prepares one for this.

Too many of my students respond that Erica's poem is one with which they can "empathize," that her loss is one they've "felt," that her tears ones they have "cried," and her "resentment" one they "share." This whole experience is one that must be difficult to swallow. Perhaps peer understanding and "spitting" it out will help the discomfort of the situation to heal. I cannot know this heartache, but it is part of what makes me want to make my room a home for all who enter there. If the

comfort level is high enough perhaps there will be less anxiety, fewer words needing to be dislodged from writers' throats.

I Am Speechless

Many of my students think they don't have any thing to say. They are sure that everything about them is ordinary and unimportant to the rest of the class. McCourt (with Farrington, 1997) tells his students, who are convinced that their lives are "pretty dull," that "nothing is significant until [they] make it significant" (p. 21). The problem is students have been asked to write about topics which do not belong to them for so long that they do not recognize a significant moment in their lives as a writing topic. They have spent so many papers deleting the pronoun I, that some are afraid that "personal writing" in our room is asking for something they do not have the ability to give.

"What do you mean we can write about **anything**?" (Keith)

"How long does it have to be if you say it can be **any** length?" (Sue)

"Don't share mine 'cause it's **really** bad. I didn't know what you wanted." (Ed)

"It can just be about us, right?" (Kate)

If students do not think that writings about their lives are important enough to submit for this assignment, what do they think about themselves? The classroom can provide a place to sound out the importance of their lives and an audience who will be receptive to what matters to them. If young adults write about ordinary things, perhaps they will discover that it is all right to be ordinary and will, like McCourt suggests, look for the significance in their ordinariness.

Simic (as cited in Fletcher, 2002, p. 20) says, "Poems are other people's

snapshots in which we see our own lives." It seems to me that all genre offer the same type of "snapshot." If we never make personal connections with writing, why would we ever read anything? Connecting with one another through these kinds of classroom sharings, provides students with more than a heart to heart connection in this classroom; it furnishes a blueprint for one of the most important reasons to read the words of any writer. If students see purpose in their own words, might they not look more closely for the significance in masters like Shakespeare, Ibsen and Woolf?

My students want to mesmerize an audience, to call forth the laughter, the gasp, the tear, or at least, in my room, the filled comment sheet. Perhaps they are too young to realize that real life has the ability to mesmerize.

Some students do not want to dig deeply enough into their lived experience to recognize the significance. One hundred percent of the class is not going to be attuned to one hundred percent of the papers presented. Usually, however, someone will connect with us if we put ourselves out there to be seen.

I Am Concerned About Relating

Sometimes in order to gather the strength necessary to sustain our light on the outside we need, as Osho (2001) suggests, to "go in" (p. 43) so we have something to offer when we try to relate. "Unless you are centered, unless you know who you are, you cannot really relate" (Osho, 2001, p. 46). Discovering our essence, writing about who we are, exposing ourselves to those around us, becoming vulnerable to the "slings and arrows" (*Hamlet* III, i, 56) of our peers is not a process with which everyone is comfortable.

When Dana says, "I only share when I think I have written something that the

class will be able to relate to," perhaps she has examined herself and feels that there are only parts of who she is with whom her classmates will connect. Peter says, "I never share because I know no one can relate to my stuff. I'm weird." He is quiet and seems to be a loner. He may be saying that nobody relates to him. At this point in his life, he may just worry about being different. If he opens up and gets rejected, his suspicions are confirmed. On the other hand, perhaps both of these students are reserving a piece of themselves, a piece they do not want to share because they know others will reject who they are, and they do not need the class to confirm them as acceptable. By now, some students may know there are some to whom they do not want to relate.

Interestingly enough, the word *relate* seems to embody a number of its definitions in the context of sharing in our classroom. "Relate means to tell or narrate" (Soukhanov, 1992, p. 1523) which is the first step in our sharing process; students are narrators. Looking a little more deeply into what my students say about their indecisiveness before sharing, however, I hear that they are actually concerned with "relating" in its second context; they look for a "natural association" or hope to "establish or demonstrate a connection" (Soukhanov, 1992, p. 1523) or not. Perhaps students do not want to be completely open to each other. Van Manen & Levering (1996) explain how it is impossible for one person to be completely open to another:

No two people can ever be completely open to each other. It is in the nature of human relations that the other is ultimately experienced as mystery, as an existential secret that can never be completely revealed or unraveled. (p. 11)

Because one is an "existential secret" from others, part of the attraction we have for one another is a desire to unravel "the mystery of the other." When my students

share, not only are they unable to reveal who they are because of a "communicative secrecy [which causes] certain things [to be] kept inside or [to be] kept interpretively inarticulable or inaccessible" (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 12) but, there is also a certain mystery about each of them that cannot be exposed. Perhaps one person is drawn toward the other because of difference, not because of similarity. When students are moved or intrigued by one another's writing, those who have the most unique experiences or use the most unusual words may be the ones who are most memorable. When Cliff and Dave criticize the "sappy poems," Dave says:

I don't mind if you people want to write about love. But do they all have to be the same. "Oh, my, he broke my heart!" or "Oh, my, somebody left me!" Couldn't you be a little different? We've heard all that stuff before. (Dave)

The pieces that make the class sit up and take notice are those that reveal pieces of the unknown. From one another we learn how one person coped with a terrible situation. Perhaps this is why most of the memorable pieces in our sharing situation are dark. Atwood (2003) published an entire book where the topic is about the darkness of and journeys through the "inner labyrinth." She writes:

Obstruction, obscurity, emptiness, disorientation, twilight, blackout, often combined with a struggle or path or journey--an inability to see one's way forward, but a feeling that there was a way forward, and that the act of going forward would eventually bring about the conditions for vision--these were the common elements in many descriptions of the process of writing. I was reminded of something a medical student said to me about the interior of the human body, forty years ago: "It's dark in there."

Possibly, then, writing has to do with darkness, and a desire or perhaps a compulsion to enter it, and, with luck, to illuminate it, and to bring something back out into the light. (pp. xxiii-xxiv)

There is no question that my students have picked up on this chord of truth. It is good to empathize, but it is even more important to learn from others. If what one writes about is a typical experience, some do not want to listen. On the other hand, if a

person experiences a trauma for the first time, like in the "love" arena, s/he may not realize that others are going to be bored with that sentiment.

I Am Antsy During Sharing

As we talk about the way it feels to share, physical discomfort is the first memory my conversants have. Nina, who chooses to have me share her writing, says:

I am surprised, since I am not reading, that I feel really antsy when you read my stuff. I have never shared myself and probably never will. I try to look inconspicuous so the class won't know the piece is mine, but mainly I watch to see how my words are being received. I can do that much better when you read my piece. I can see if I'm in sync.

The pieces I share for Nina are not about death or heartache, just about everyday teenage life, but she "watches" her classmates as they listen to what she has put on the page. She wants to know if what she has written is meaningful enough to get their attention and bring a response to their faces. I cannot help but wonder from where this need to know we are "in sync" with others originates. Atwood (2003) relates that getting up and reading her own words creates "such an exposed position, such possibilities for making an idiot of yourself --this make me sick" (p. 24). She goes on to say that she has had "ten years of behind-the-scenes throwing-up to look forward to" (p. 24) since her first experience sharing.

Are we just sounding out ideas when we share, looking for confirmation that we are thinking in the right direction? Why do we feel such discomfort in showing who we are? Perhaps we fail to trust ourselves. The mistrust may not be a lack of faith but a realization that from mistakes we grow, and previous experience has taught us that learning from mistakes sometimes is accompanied by pain. Perhaps sharing ideas out loud, in a personal writing, or otherwise, gives us a chance to hope for

vicarious answers to the unknown in personal relationships or experiences. When we put ourselves on paper, we uncover ourselves, realizing that all that stands between our hearts and the other is a thin veil of words. We know we must be alert, lest our hearts come under fire. Nina feels the discomfort of guarding her heart as she physically squirms in her seat while I offer her words to our circle of listeners. Nina knows, as Delpit (1995) cautions us, "One of the most difficult tasks we face as human beings is trying to communicate across our individual differences, trying to make sure that what we say to someone is interpreted the way we intend" (p. 135).

When Warren reads, he clears his throat, pushes up his glasses and begins seriously and deliberately. While he reads, he runs the palms of his hands down the surface of his pants from thigh to knee and back, smoothing the fabric of his jeans with increasingly rapid motions. The silly, immature smile that normally characterizes his face and accompanies the twinkle in his eye is gone, replaced by quick attempts to raise the corners of his mouth occasionally while reading. His eyes are engaged with his page. His intonation takes us to where he wants us to be, but he never looks up, ever careful to deliver exactly what he has rendered to the page.

During our conversation about his sharing, Charles says:

I was uncomfortable last time [I shared] because I really liked my piece, and I was worried about how everybody would react to it. So first, I was really nervous, but as I read more, I got more into it, and knew the class was with me.

Here, Charles ends up feeling positive about the way the class received his writing. In fact, his reaction is much like Warren's. Each "senses" or "knows" that the class is "with him," and each feels a certain pride that what he wrote proclaims something positive about him and his audience: Warren "got the sense" that the "class felt" his

“professionalism;” Charles “got more into it” and “knew the class was with” him.

Warren looks forward to the sharing process while Charles “was worried about how everybody would react.”

I Am Worried About How I Will Be Received

As I hear Charles announce that, in the end, he is happy about the way his writing is *received* by the class, I think about the connotation of being received. I think of the soft blue receiving blanket I bought for my friend's baby and wonder why we use that term in connection with a blanket. I also think of two lines where I was recently received: one at a wedding, the other at a funeral service. "Receive," combining the Latin prefix *re* with *cipere* means to take back, hold or seize. Before the early 1300s it meant "to take" something that was "offered or sent" (Barnhart, 1988, p. 894). According to the American Heritage Dictionary, the word is later associated with "the French, meaning accept" (Costello, 1994, pp. 688-689). When we say that something is receivable, it is "suitable of being received or accepted" (Costello, 1994, pp. 688-689). However, when it is "cognate with the Greek *kaptein*," it is associated with something held captive and means to "gulp down" and from the Low German, it means to "happen swallow" (Costello, 1994, p. 143).

There are so many ways Charles might look at having his words received. Perhaps he views his piece as a living object, something over which he has labored and to which he has given birth, something he hopes will be kindly and gently received. On the other hand, as in a receiving-line at a formal event, possibly he only hopes to have folks shake his hand, nod their heads, smile, and admit that he is "suitable" for acceptance and welcome. On yet another level, by chance Charles has

said something he feels the group will need to "swallow," and he hopes he has captivated their attention and prays his ideas will be well received. For one reason or another, Charles is worried about how he will be accepted.

I Am Looking for Acceptance

So, what happens if the class or the audience reacts negatively to a person's writing? Do we judge ourselves too much on how others see us? I know that I am a doubter. I have doubted myself for as long as I can remember. I used to think it was just intellectual things that made me question my abilities because I was a "redbird" in first grade, but when I look more closely at it, a doubter is who I am. For me, it seems that the moment I feel competent, that feeling backfires and becomes my tragic flaw. Like Charles, I worry about how I will measure up. Unlike Warren, I frequently lack the self-confidence to "put myself out there" without fear of reprisal. Perhaps, like some of my students, I get too "lost in the they" when the "call of conscience" asks us to face who we are (Heidegger, 1953/1997, p. 269). What makes it possible for us to face who we are? We need to recognize, as does Bradbury (1992) that we "should not turn away from what [we] are--the material within [us] makes [us] individual, and therefore, indispensable to others" (p. 45).

I Am Drowning in the Speed of Time

One of Stepanek's (2005) heart songs reveals how he considers time a hurdle. He feels that he is "treading time" and that he will eventually "leave that hurdle in [his] dust"(p. 101). Like, Stepanek, my students talk about time, but they already feel confronted by its speed. Michele's piece reads as breathlessly as her view of time's passage.

Too fast
Slow down
The speed of my life--
Racing
Flying
Give me a minute
To catch my breath.
I thought I was fast--
Not fast enough.
In my race against time,
I fall over my feet.

I wake up.
The day ends.
The lights go out.
Is it 6:00 already?
Seasons come
And then they're gone.
The months fall,
Autumn leaves, turning
Like calendar pages,
My days--
Winter snowflakes:
Merciless sun.
Spring, my new hope:
Suffocated, tangles of weeds.
Running.
I start running away,
Away from my problems
A brave face
Shattered
Cold reality
But I'm getting tired,
Exhausted
From running.
Somebody,
Help me stand up to my fears.

Seconds racing
Minutes dropping,
Hours flying
Stop the clock!
Take it.
Throw it.
Smash it.
Rage

I want control!
On the wall,
Sadistic,
Leering face.
Moving hands,
Turning, turning,
STOP!
What happened to carefree?
What happened to my time?
--Michele

At the end of her poetic rendering of the swift passage of time, Michele explains:

I wrote this because I thought about how fast time is passing, and how it only seems to get faster each year, and it is scary. I want to be able to step back and appreciate everything, but I can't. Our lives rush on, and I am afraid I will miss something important. Later when I look back, I don't want missed opportunities or regrets. I wish time would slow down so we could all see the big picture. Isn't it ironic how, as children, all we want to do is grow up faster?

Michele brings forward the thoughts of her generation and others before her. She needs to "take time for livin" (Addrisi, 1968). Like those who "kicked sand from our feet" back in the 60s, Michele and many students need to "make the moments last."

Today, too many, including those of us who have not sustained the message over time, spend too many days rushing, not being. We wait for the weekend, put things on hold until vacation, squander our time, ourselves by not being connected with the here and now. Heidegger (1975) indicates that we cannot qualify time as just the present because "We understand the present as the now as distinct from the no longer now or the past and the not-yet-now of the future. But the present speaks at the same time of presence" (p. 11), connecting Being and time. As Michele gets caught up in feeling that time flies, she loses sight of now and of herself in this now.

While they are being and becoming, my students concentrate most on what they will be, trying to see time, only mildly aware that they must be to become. With

pressure from all angles, Michele and others write about the quick passage of time. Perhaps the frustration they are experiencing is actually a realization of exactly what Heidegger is saying without their being consciously aware of it. In the midst of looking toward the future, they do not want to miss today, do not want to consciously pass by experiences that are making them who they will be. There never seems to be enough time to do both.

Dana thinks of life and time as a conveyor belt, and manages to see that the now and future are connected and that she has a choice in who she will become over time.

You see the road in front of you
And you see where you came from
all you want
is just to go back
to the land of color tv
but, oh, no,
this road is a conveyor belt
with no emergency shut-off.
It pulls you relentlessly
into the land of black and white
into Kansas.
Yeah, I definitely think I want to go back.
I don't belong in black and white.
No, I think I'll step off this conveyor belt.
I'll make my own road. (Dana)

Dana laments the loss of childhood simplicity. She wants to linger longer in a place of beauty and dreams. Many students do not want to grow up. Stephanie says,

I don't think I really want to grow up. Like in Peter Pan, I want to just stay young and do whatever I want. Being an adult seems hard, very hard. So many decisions that leave life changing effects. I wonder how you know which things to choose. It's all coming too fast, my license and soon I'll be graduating and then what? I wonder when I get older if I will have time to sit and think like I am now. I hope so. Thinking to me is so great, even though my thinking never comes out very profound. That's why I enjoy these journals because it make me write this stuff down so when I am older I can remember

the past. What a wonderful idea. I think from now on, I am not going to take any day for granted. I don't want life to go by too fast. (Stephanie)

Too many student papers are written about the swift passage of time, the panic at completing tasks, the pressures of growing up. I wonder what is the rush? They are driven to get the highest test grades, the best SAT scores, to take the most difficult level of classes, the most academically challenging schedules, while competing in a rigorous sport. Casey (2000) says, "We experience states of corporeal existence, e. g., health or illness, ecstasy or sluggishness; but it is only when we notice discrepancies between such states that we begin to infer the passage of time" (p. 234). My students are just turning sixteen. Why should they already be so fixated on the passage of time? Decisions about career and what they will do with the rest of their lives are made at sixteen.

I Am Getting It Off My Chest

Some students carry heavy feelings from the cradle. Lauren apologizes to the class for sharing a piece she wrote about her father, saying she just had to get it off her chest. With a quivering voice, erratic breathing and flushed cheeks, Lauren is a picture of someone whose heart is weighted down with rejection. She reads quickly and deliberately, never taking her eyes from the shaking page in front of her:

Webster's Dictionary defines father as a founder. One interpretation of a founder is one who fails completely. [I'm not sure where this statement comes from.] This concept couldn't be more correct in my case. I was never meant to be on this earth. I guess you could say I was an accident. The funny thing is I can live with that. I have a mother who cares for my well being. On the other hand, I have a father who feels I am an obligation. Nothing more than a "thing" he accidentally helped bring into this world. Something he must send a check to every other week but never calls or speaks to. Shouldn't a father be more than this? Care for his child? Must a child be made to feel forlorn and neglected because of her father's mistakes and unwillingness to care?

I look at the world today and rarely do I see a picture perfect family. Have we all been reduced to feign a perfect existence? Day in and day out we lie or "pretend" that we have people who care about us. When in fact we have no idea how most people really feel toward us.

I can't remember the last time "I love you" actually meant something in my life. Those three little words have never left my father's mouth. I realize there are many kids who have worse fathers than I do. Some children are abused, both mentally and physically. Others are ignored. There are a select few who can honestly say that they are content with their parents. I unfortunately belong to the group whose fathers consider them an obligation. . . (Lauren)

When Lauren finishes, Nina puts her arm around her and holds her while her breathing returns to normal. Every pen in the classroom fills the comment sheets in front of them. Most express sorrow for her experience, admitting they sometimes forget how lucky they are. A few have similar fathers to get off their chests:

I can sorta sympathize because I never met my father. He left before I was even born. (CeeCee)

You're lucky. I hate my father. I am so glad my mother moved away from where he lives. He has a girlfriend a year older than me and lets my brother do drugs. I won't even take his money. (Melissa)

Getting things off her chest may not solve Lauren's problems, but it might be somewhat therapeutic for her to have written about it, shared it out loud, and received support from her classmates. Perhaps the feeling that she has when she "needs to get it off her chest" is *literally* oppressive and similar to what Metzger (1992) tells us happens at the beginning of writing:

The beginning. Something wants to be said. We don't know what it is or what shape it desires. An inchoate feeling. A pressure around the heart, perhaps, asking it to open. We pick up a pen or sit down at the computer. (p. 9)

In our class the day Lauren reads, the pressure being released by her words, seems to bind us together as she gains strength from the exhalation of hostility. "Writing . . . when it is pursued freely, is generally therapeutic, is in the interest of the self, even if

it disturbs us and arouses fear or despair" (Metzger, 1992, p. 21). Perhaps writing is just the kind of thing that can enable us to move on.

I Am Puttin' Myself out There and Movin' On

Donald shares his writing with our class every time. "Ya gotta put yourself out there when ya write this stuff," he says. He sings soft love songs, accompanying himself on his guitar. Here is an excerpt of his final piece.

Fly

I've always wanted to
Tell you how I feel,
But I've been too afraid.
Would it be cheesy if I
Sang to you in the moonlight
Would it be redundant if I said,
I missed you,
I miss you

Chorus:
If I could fly . . . to you
Then I'd jump off the roof
And sail through the sky,
Only to fall when I see you
If I could die a thousand times,
I would . . . for you.
If I cry when you're gone,
Then you'd have the ocean

When I ask how he came up with these songs, he says: "I sing about what is on my mind and in my heart. It is usually about a person I feel special about."

Donald's feelings get hurt during one of our class sessions when two of his classmates make fun of "sappy love poems." Even though the comments made were not directed specifically toward him, Donald feels included in "the slam." When I ask him why he was willing to share despite that controversy, he says:

It upset me at first because I always write what Cliff would call 'sappy love poems,' I guess, but I know I have to put it out there and just move on. I know when I write that's what I am doing. I give it everything I've got, and then move on.

As the one who calls for hearts to be opened in this room, I find it difficult to hear words from some students that make other students uncomfortable, especially in high school where would-be-lovers are only beginning to explore the possibilities of really connecting. Recognizing that we are capable of having feelings for someone other than a family member makes us take a closer look at who we are. For some students, discovering that they have a capacity and need for love is an uncomfortable place to be. Some have had bad experiences at home and their desires to connect may be accompanied with doubts that it is possible. Others may have had only great experiences at home and are unprepared for rejection. Hearing about someone's love experience, may identify a similar elation or struggle in a listener. The realization that we may put ourselves out there and not have feelings returned by others, or even understood by others, for that matter, is daunting. Unrequited--this is a new word for many of my students, both in definition and experience. Why? Are we different? Unusual? Undesirable? These questions may help my students dig deeper as they search for their own identities. Is there more to connecting than an attraction? Rilke (in Mood 1975/1993) is no stranger to this enigma. Through his words, we might be enticed to see the value of being willing to open to another.

All companionship can consist only in the strengthening of two neighboring solitudes, whereas everything that one is wont to call giving oneself is by nature harmful to companionship: for when a person abandons himself, he is no longer anything, and when two people both give themselves up in order to come close to each other, there is no longer any ground beneath them and their being together is a continual falling. (p. 28)

Falling means "to drop oneself to a lower or less erect position" (Soukhnov, 1992, p. 657). When linked with love--the nature of the falling occurs because a person abandons herself or himself for the beloved. What has been a firm ground on which to stand, one's unique identity, is discarded in lieu of new ground, that of the other. This is an unfamiliar place to stand, shaky at best, and if the lover "abandons" her/himself, what does s/he have left? How can s/he do anything but fall if the ground is gone? Is it any wonder that some high school students write pain-ridden love poems? They have put themselves in precarious positions, and while they are sighing and complaining about the other not accepting them, they are really angry with themselves for being duped. No one likes to fail or fall.

Love is at first not anything that means merging, giving over, and uniting with another (for what would a union be of something unclarified and unfinished, still subordinate--?); it is a high inducement to the individual to ripen, to become something in himself, to become world, to become world for himself for another's sake; it is a great exacting claim upon him, something that chooses him out and calls him to vast things. (Rilke, in Moon, 1975/1993, p. 31)

Becoming the best person one can be to complement the best other--real relationships are made of these. Looking at Rilke's reasoning, I can't help but remember a line in *As Good as It Gets* (Andrus & Brooks, 1997) where Jack Nicholson tells the waitress he loves that she "makes [him] want to be a better man." A mature love such as this is not always the first type of love that young people encounter.

Love is hard and a lot more difficult than physical attraction alludes. Some student pieces about love seem very juvenile and silly because they grasp at the surface and sound trite. That is all they know.

For one human being to love another: that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks, the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other

work is but preparation. For this reason young people, who are beginners in everything, cannot yet know love: they have to learn it. (Rilke, in Mood, 1975/1993, p. 31)

Because we are sharing from the heart and some students are angry and hurt after giving themselves away and being rejected, others get very uncomfortable. Some may be uncomfortable because they have been in the same predicament. Some may be uncomfortable because they have never been in such a place and would never share if they were. Luke says, "I can't figure out what these people think. Do they think if they read it [a love poem addressed to a former lover], the person who hurt them will get the message, and it will all get fixed?" He does not see that there may be benefit if the hurt is put out so the heart can heal. Perhaps he knows from experience that one heals oneself. If one foolishly abandons oneself while trying to be loved, which Rilke's warns against, perhaps finding ourselves again is even more difficult than we first realized. Rather than honing our individual being as we develop, we must retrieve and repair what we have thrown away before trying to build anew. This "most important of tasks" is not for the fainthearted.

When I taught middle school, I attended a conference by Nancie Atwell at Columbia University. The conference centered around *In the Middle* (1987/1998), a book Atwell published about using the reading and writing workshop approach in the English classroom. At that conference, Atwell said some people worry that students in middle school read too much horror. R.L. Stine was really popular at the time. Atwell said those fears were unfounded, stating that the only emotion middle schoolers are not afraid of is fear. They are afraid of love, anger, sadness, even happiness. Having spent seventeen years teaching "in the middle," I agree completely

and see now that a similar kind of reasoning applies at the high school level.

I have long noted that giggling is a great cover for nervousness. Students laugh and giggle when they cannot express the appropriate emotion. A certain emotional sophistication accompanies maturity. In our high school classroom, many students are still afraid of love. Rather than share a piece about how much he loves his family, which he turned in to me during the first collection, Cliff reads a satirical piece about what his friend Dave, calls sappy pieces. Cliff actually writes a fake piece about love and says, "Psyche!" at the end. At first there is laughter, a strange stifled laughter, and then a controversy rages. He does not read the piece himself but has me read it. Because he has shared it with others at lunch, everyone knows it is his piece. He grins and relaxes until, Maddie who has never raised her hand all year, says,

Maddie: How dare you ruin our personal writing time by making fun of people?!"

Cliff: Oh, I didn't mean it **that** way!

Maddie: How could you not mean it **that** way? You are just a jerk. If I had written one of the pieces you are so quick to criticize, I'd be devastated.

Cliff: No, really, I was just trying to be funny.

Maddie: Yeah, Cliff, we all know you are funny. Don't you have anything better to write than something to make fun of someone else.

After a few moments of Cliff's trying to redeem himself, I lead the class into a new sharing, trying to change the subject a bit. Cliff is very vocal in his support for any and all people who read during the rest of the period. I sense an uneasiness in his tone, realizing that it is much easier for him to maintain his class entertainer status than to share his true emotions with the group. I sense that he may even be afraid of

how this all will change his image.

Later on that week, when I have conversations with some of my students. I ask how they see this whole episode.

Charles: It bothered me.

MA: Why?

Charles: Well someone else wrote it [the alleged sappy paper], and if that is what they wanted to write, let 'em. You gave us all the freedom. It's none of anyone else's business who wrote it or what it was about.

MA: You didn't like the fact that they said something that seemed to be against somebody else?

Charles: They did it to get attention, as a joke, but it was really annoying.

MA: Do you think that most people in the class felt that way about it? That it was annoying?

Charles: Well, at first people kinda laughed, because it was Cliff, and he is famous for his jokes, but you could tell that the people who had written the pieces were annoyed about it. I don't suppose they liked what Cliff or Dave wrote. I mean, writing from the heart was criticized by two guys who only know how to criticize other people. They never share themselves. Never.

Donald: Oh, they shared all right! Everyone got to see who they really are. I guess there are some people just like Cliff and Dave who agreed with them but not most people. Lots of people were worried about me and came and told me not to worry about Cliff and said that they love my stuff.

Charles: But it backfired on them. Remember, Maddie let them have it. She is the one who said they had no right to change the spirit of our room and our sharing. She said they had no right to criticize others when they would never once think about sharing the real them. It took a lot of guts for her to do that.

Donald: I hated what they did at first and thought I'd never sing one of my songs again, but now I know I will continue to share. I don't care what they think.

If this had happened at the beginning of our sessions, I do not know how I would have seen it, myself. The support from the class, my conversants and about our project encourages me to realize that amidst the greatness of this background there may always be a skeptic or two. The class as a whole, however, ends on a very positive note. We are thankful for all who are "puttin [them]selves out there and movin' on."

Heart to Heart

The heart to which I refer, as mentioned in Chapter One, is not one's physical heart; although metaphorically, the physical organ opens the heart for us to examine. In writings from the East, the heart is described as the "the very core of being . . . pure consciousness . . . ultimate truth" (Maharshi, 1972/2001, pp. 80-81). It is the "seat of the soul, a place of compassion and love, an embodied awareness of the Infinite" (Denton, 2005, p. 758), and as compassionate awareness calls forth its song, it searches for the ear in yet another h-**ear**-t. The "awakened heart is not a finite condition of individual being but a coparticipative involvement in an ever-unfolding process of awakening and movement--a phenomenological shift in experience and perception at both poles of subject/object" (Denton, 2005, p. 759). It provides a malleable, infinite chalice for being-with and renders us into becoming together, "coparticipative," connected. It takes our veins and pushes them forward into the "unanimous blood" to which Dalton refers here:

I believe the world is beautiful
and that poetry, like bread, is for everyone.

And that my veins don't end in me
but in the unanimous blood

of those who struggle for life,
love,
little things,
landscape and bread,
the poetry of everyone. (Dalton, in Heard, 1999, p. xvii)

Listening to Our Own Hearts

Cameron (1998) assures us that "Writing connects the self to the Self" (p. 95).

Since the search for self is an ongoing one and we recognize that we change over time, it is imperative that we keep in touch with who we are. Atwood (2003) confirms the notion of this change when she speaks about meeting professional writers:

All writers are double, for the simple reason that you can never actually meet the author of the book you have just read. Too much time has elapsed between composition and publication, and the person who wrote the book is now a different person. (p. 37)

In one of our conversations about his experience writing, Charles says:

I like doing the writing. I tend to look at what people call "the dark side of things," I guess. It helps me to write about what is on my mind because it helps me put things into perspective.

MA: How does it do that?

Charles: I don't know. I guess it just helps me see what is real. What's on my mind is a little pessimistic, and writing about it and reading it to myself puts things in perspective for me.

MA: But, have you ever share your pieces with the class?

Charles: No, not yet. I don't want to share these things with the class because I don't want everyone to know that about me.

Some students choose not to share themselves at all. On a voyage of discovery, and unsure of the unfolding, they choose to guard the treasure that lies within their chests. For them, personal exploration is revelation enough. They are unwilling to expose their hearts for public scrutiny; they remain unable to consciously

seek connection. Most, however, share only with themselves and me. I have opened my heart to them, and they trust that I will not reject them. Sometimes students do see themselves as odd and, therefore, insignificant.

By pretending to be invisible, these students remain in the silence.

Invisible
She hides from the world
So she can't be seen
She becomes someone she's not
So people won't judge
It doesn't help
She loses herself
People talk with no voices
People look with no faces
Everything turns into
The same old places
She's trapped in her silence
And she can't escape (Kandace)

Kandace is so trapped in her silence that she writes in third person. While she is aware of the disguise she wears and aches because of her anonymity, she seems content to float in a silent space. As I dwell in Kandace's poetic confession, faces of others who hide themselves drift toward me, their eyes tranced on distant, non-worlds that seem to be beckoning them. Kandace is one who admits that she remains aloof in my classes; but, legions of them file past me and others in the halls, rendering us as invisible as they want to be. Too pretend-preoccupied to respond to greetings with even a nod or a smile, they not only maintain invisibility, but they assign it to all who attempt to recognize their presence. Like little children playing hide and seek, they must think we cannot see them if they refuse to see us. In yearning to connect with them, I must remember what Hirschfield (1997) has so eloquently expressed in this poem:

There are times
when the heart closes down,
the metal grate drawn
and padlocked,
the owner's footprints covered by snow.

Someone may come to peer through the glass,
but soon leaves.
Someone may come to clean, but turns away.
What is still inside
settles down for the darkness: clocks stop,
newspapers pass out of date.

The new silence goes unheard
under so many grindings of engines,
so many sounds of construction.

Only the three pigeons,
refusing to eat,
lower their heads and grieve. (p. 10)

Kandace's poem brings forth the notion that her heart is closing down, giving up, but the turning in of her thoughts may indicate that the padlock is not yet bolted. Perhaps a few encouraging, inquiring words will defibrillate the valves to save her plight. Amidst the grindings of our days, perhaps the trap in which she silences herself is gradually opening.

Kandace lets me read her poem anonymously. Several of the comment sheets to her say, "I know where you are coming from." One even adds, "I wish I knew who you are." Perhaps that one wishful statement will enable Kandace to open her own eyes at the next sharing to see if anyone else is visible enough to be seen. Perhaps she will begin to realize that she need not remain invisible. Maybe, like Maxine Green (in Pinar, 1998, p. 256) entreats teachers, Kandace can begin to "relish [her] sense of incompleteness" and start to live "with a conscious sense of possibility" (p. 256),

knowing that it is all right to be different. Perhaps next time she has me share, she will reveal a bit more of herself. Maybe a tiny smile or averting of her eyes will give her away to a peer-listener who will not only see, but find, her. Perhaps that one person will give her enough courage to raise her hand when I ask for the author to be recognized. Maybe the clue that someone wants to know her, is enough to set her free or at least "sense her possibility." Perhaps, a tiny nudge toward the visible will help put *being* in perspective for her, unlocking the heart she is closing down. Hopefully, the other invisible faces in our hallway will find such a nudge as well.

While Kandace hides from the world through silence, Conrad uses sarcasm as his shield and padlock. He shies away from the opinions of others by entertaining those who do not know him. Lamott (1994) admits that all she "ever wanted was to belong, to wear the hat of belonging" (p. xvi). She was teased because she was skinny, but she ". . . was funny. So the popular kids let [her] hang out with them" (p. xvi). Conrad wants to belong, and the other students love his humor, not realizing it is his cover, as it was Lamott's. Conrad knows himself well enough to know that he "speaks in riddles."

To Speak in Riddles

To speak in riddles
is to cover my fear
Sincerity opens the door
to that from which I hide.
Sincerity leaves me vulnerable
to the opinions of others.
But to be indefinite
is to be safe from the
oppressive blows of spectators.

Acceptance is victory.
But to be accepted by all,

one must defy oneself,
and lie to oneself,
a chameleon consumed.

To take a side is
to risk the win.
Yet, proper indecision
results in plastic trophies,
hollow hearts
and empty smiles.

To speak sincerely,
to talk truly,
is to murder the undecidedly guilty.
As the noose tightens,
sincerity suffocates the mind
and pushes oneself into
a sword of friendly foe.

Sarcasm is a shield,
wooden at best.
The protection one receives,
leaves one feeling almost safe,
yet much more insecure.

Acceptance is a mold
in which one is poured.
Truly, I am normal,
but I have no form.
Indecisive nature allows me,
like water,
to change my shape,

As I meet the dents
of my rusted container.
To speak sincerely
is to reveal oneself
to the bloodshot
eyes of the judges.
To lose is to win.
Unacceptance is genuine. (Conrad)

Conrad comes to understand that being accepted by others means lying to
himself--a state which causes him to self destruct or as he so aptly phrases it, "leaves

him a chameleon consumed.” Conrad actually writes his way to a choice. He, like McMillin (1998), uses words "to dig inside [his] heart to find the truth." Conrad decides to be true to himself and reject acceptance by the masses. He concludes that “acceptance is a mold” and that “indecision” only results in “plastic trophies, hollow hearts and empty smiles.” As Conrad writes to a better perspective of himself, he discovers who he is and rejects the phony connection a mask of sarcasm has offered him. For many of us, being accepted into a certain group or by a certain friend may mean giving up who we are. It may not be an easy thing for tenth graders to know the power inside them and "to grasp and give shape to [their] world" (Rilke, in Barrows & Macy, 1996, p. 47), but Conrad is beginning to sense his power. Sometimes students are looking for a mask to hold up because they do not understand that "You have to be open to mystery. If you are open to it, mystery will come" (Clifton, 1993, p. 217). For Conrad, the mystery of who he is has "grasped" him and opens a new space for him in a real place.

Tuning in to Red Flags

As I sit down to retrieve mail at my computer, I see three messages in my “in box” that have red flags in front of them. These mean, I have been told, that I am supposed to read them first because they are time sensitive. Since I have taken a break from writing to access this e-mail, I am reminded of other red flag messages I receive. Some students, like Charles, tend to look at the dark side of things, or at least they tend to write about the dark side of things. My students are not the only ones who write about such topics. Recently, one of my younger colleagues said:

I don't know how you can stand reading this dark, depressing stuff. It is bad enough that we see this junk on TV but to know that our own kids have these

problems. . . I'm not assigning this kind of question anymore. I can't take it.

This young teacher is referring to a paper one of her students wrote about his mother's being abused and how they went to a shelter. Sometimes dwelling in the "deep heart's core" does involve spending way too much time "in the rag and bone shop of the heart." Perhaps writing about bad experiences may be able to raise us up. David Peltzer (1995), author of *A Child Called It*, and other books recounting his personal story of recovery from parental abuse, makes me think that there is merit in providing a space to receive dark writings. At times the urgency for such student writings to be read comes with a red flag attached.

Matthew, who never raises his hand in class, comes up to me the day after students turned in their first "personal pieces." He says, "Mrs. Hartshorn did you get a chance to read the papers we turned in yet? I wanted to make sure mine was what you were lookin' for." I admit that I have not had a chance to read them yet, but that I will let him know how it is as soon as I can. That evening, Matthew's piece shocks me a little. It is a very dark story about a young boy who feels trapped, depressed, and worthless. Since Matt is an artist, he includes pen and ink sketches to accompany his words. They, too, are haunting, like his words. His paper frightens me, and I am glad that I have not put off reading the papers any longer. The next day, I go to Matthew's homeroom to seek him out. We talk about the paper, and he is relieved that I have actually read it. He assures me that he is fine, personally, but admits that he needs someone to talk to. The young man in Matt's story is constantly put down and emotionally abused by his father. While Matthew claims that the story is fiction, he continues to write about this young man, and he continues to come to talk with me

about the character. I eventually am able to persuade him to see one of our counselors for some guidance. Matt never volunteers to share any of his pieces with the class, but thanks me at the end of the year for letting him write them. I am not sure if Matthew is "putting himself out there and moving on" like Donald, "gaining perspective" like Charles and Conrad, or just wanting to know that he is OK like all of us. It is Matthew who initially teaches me to spot a red flag. As the first person with whom my students share, I feel a sense of responsibility and am in awe of the trust placed in me. I do not take my role lightly.

Over the years I have learned to recognize the red flags that sometimes accompany the pieces turned in. Sometimes the flag becomes visible when students, like Matt, want to know if I have read their papers right away. Sometimes the flag becomes visible because the student makes a big production over submitting the paper. This is true in Kirsten's case. All out of breath, she comes running into my room before the homeroom bell one morning. She asks, "Mrs. Hartshorn, where is the file where we can turn in our personal pieces if they are early?" I point to my folder-tower which houses IN papers. Kirsten deposits the paper and turns to me and says, "Don't share it with anyone! It is the first really personal piece I ever wrote, and I just wrote and wrote and wrote! I couldn't stop." I smile, say, "Okey, dokey" and watch as Kirsten disappears more quickly than she arrives. I sense immediately that I need to read the piece during my planning that day. Kirsten writes about her mom who was just diagnosed with breast cancer. The paper is passionately full of questions, doubts, regrets--all of the monstrous fears that eat away at you when a situation like this becomes your own. I find Kirsten later on that day. She starts

crying before I ever reach her in the hall, saying, "I just had to tell somebody."

Sometimes the flag is on the person's voice when s/he says, "Promise you'll read mine first." This is true when Janice returns from a ski trip in Colorado with her science class. When she first says, "If you have time, promise to read my piece tonight." I figure she is going to describe the magnificence of the mountains and the lodge and the fun they all had, but something in her tone sends that red flag in my direction, telling me to read her paper before preparing for the next day's class. It turns out that the exciting news about the trip has been tabled, even at her house, by her sister's news of a different kind. Two years Janice's senior, Julia has been whisked home from college that weekend after having been raped. The urgency in Janice's voice had sounded an alarm for me. Her paper pleads for answers to what she knows are unanswerable questions. The next day she says:

I just had to write it all down, every crummy detail. I can't tell anyone. My folks would kill me if they knew I told you. I needed to know someone knew I was hurting, too.

Red flag pieces usually are for me alone. They are rarely shared with the class, but I feel the heart to heart pull that tells me it is important to activate the ear in my heart.

Listening to Another's Heart

Sometimes my ear is not enough when tragedy strikes. Lisa, whose Dad is dying of cancer, writes a piece about how unbearable the experience is. She talks about what a wonderful guy her father is and how close the family unit has been and how she knows her "life is about to change forever." She asks that I share her writing with all four classes because she has friends in all of them and needs for her friends to

hear what she is saying. She writes:

The worst thing is that all of my friends try to cheer me up by saying things like, "I am sure he will get better soon," and "It will just take time; they cured my uncle and your dad will be all right." But, the truth is, my Dad is dying, and things will never be all right again. I need my friends to know that and to stop saying those things. I need them to understand what is going on and listen to me.

Lisa has been sharing her heart with her friends, but they have not really been listening. In making the request that I share her narrative with all classes, she is hoping that the ears of her peers will open more completely. Lisa is looking for the listeners' ears in our circle to "adjust down from loud life to the subtle, imaginary sounds of the written word" (Dillard, 2003, pp. 17-18). Perhaps in this instance, writing will make the meaning of the message more real for those who have tended to brush spoken words aside.

Waiting for a Question

Being able to talk with parents presents a major dilemma for many of my students. Confrontation seems to stifle communication for many. Since parents know some of the things that might harm their children, they tend to be protective, maybe overly so. Once the newspapers and television prime the parental imagination, many get carried away, suspecting that their children are strangers. If they could just talk, so many issues could be resolved. The irony of Christie's words below calls forth an empathetic ear.

You see me
Pen in hand
And wonder what I'm doing,
What thoughts are clouding my vision,
With one last glance,
You study my face and shut the door
And leave me be.

You don't know me
Even though you think you do
Did you know I bleed like every other human?
I am a stranger to you
But did I ever tell you
That I'm a complete stranger to myself?

You repeat that you know
Nothing about me.
I don't understand why
People do not ask questions,
Simple ones even.

You could find out all you wanted to know
If you would just ask me.
But, instead you choose to watch me
Not ever interrupting my own thoughts
You don't realize your quiet presence
Lingers in the air
You leave my room, but your memory stays.

You see me
Pen in hand
And wonder what it is I'm writing.
Do you ever wonder if it's about you? (Christie)

"If you would just ask me"--why can some parents talk to their kids? What happens to communication between parents and children during teenage years? I remember confrontations of my own. It seems that young adults are always testing their limits, and parents resent having to examine the lines they have drawn. My mom would say "You're just gettin' too big for you britches, young lady," and that would be have been the end of the discussion. With my own daughter, I remember telling her to watch her mouth once when she said something totally inappropriate, or she might get smacked. She resounded with a prompt, "1-800-FORACHILD," which caused me to tell her to go straight to her room and lock the door while I calmed down. In one of Erma Bombeck's (1997) books, she says that adolescence is God's way of protecting

and preparing parents for the future. She says if children stayed as cute forever as they are when they are little, we would never be able to let them go. Adolescents see things from a different perspective, however.

In her poem, Christie wants her mom to ask her questions and holds on to her presence long after she has left the room. The mom must not feel comfortable enough to ask the questions. Christie, does not, however, initiate conversation either. While we can infer from the tone of her poem that she seeks a connection, one is not yet established. What we see here is two hearts longing to reach out to one another. The essence of the desire pervades the air.

Hole in My Heart: On Death and Dying

The idea of death looms over everyday life, confirming, as Rilke (in Barrows & Macy, 1996) says, "We are the rind and the leaf. / The great death, that each of us carries inside, / is the fruit. / Everything enfolds it" (p. 133). Some feel the ripening of that fruit to be closer than others. As he battles "dysautonomic mitochondrial myopathy" (Stepanek, 2005, book jacket), Mattie Stepanek lets his heart speak for him on this subject:

One day,
yet all too soon,
My memory will
Simply be a
silhouette in time.
One day,
Now all too near,
My mortality will
Fade and be
Ashes scattered
In the winds of existence. (p. 190)

Stepanek makes the most of his days by writing and sharing his heartsongs, knowing

that he "enfolds" a disease that will take him to join his brother. Some of us never stop to think that we carry death within us unless we see it in someone else. Mattie's brother, Jamie, died when they were small, and Mattie knows he will go to join him sooner rather than later. Saying goodbye to someone we love very much, opens our hearts and eyes to the wonders of the person we are about to lose, but it introduces us to our own mortality as well. Annie embraces a dying relative with these lines:

Death's Sweet Slumber

Hands shaking
Blood running thin
My mind slipping on to a whim
I hold you close
Heart so faint
Sorry for the world you had yet to paint
Kiss your fore
Watch your eyes slowly close
Frozen slumber into a pose
Wish you could stay
Hands now falling cold
All of your stories remain untold. (Annie)

Somehow Annie's words seems bittersweet. Along with the gentleness that surrounds her last moments with her grandfather, is her sorrow in losing the person whose work and stories have been so much a part of her own life. While Annie herself has a knack for painting and story telling, she must realize that along with those gifts she shares the mortality that, at this moment, consumes her loved one's spirit. Perhaps she only realizes how much she shall miss having him around, but loss and mortality are a rude awakening when first we confront them whether we are four or forty. Perhaps the immensity of our loss is directly proportional to the deflation of our heart at the person's passing. I, too, have known this pain:

stretch marks on my heart

there are
stretch marks
on my heart
once so filled with you

fragile scars
trace
a road map to
where you've been

lacerated welts
weaken muscle
that shrinks to mend

(Hartshorn, Personal Journal)

When people pass from our midst, by death or distance, the alteration of our hearts cannot possibly go unnoticed. While the beauty of life is that we have the ability to re-inflate our hearts over time, rediscovery and acceptance do take time, and the scars of grief and loss leave us more vulnerable than before. Perhaps, once stretched, however, our hearts are more willing to refill once more. We know the joy of love as well as the sadness of loss.

Becky writes about the last visits with her grandmother. When such love is evident on the page it must affect the rhythm of the heart.

We began to visit her more often, stopping in for lunch on days we didn't have school and almost every weekend after church. She sat in a pink-covered chair with a design of criss-crossing green petals. Her face broke out in a smile every time we walked through the door, arms reaching out to us the strongest hug she could manage. We held her naturally cold fingers in our hands, grinning at her tiny giggles. Then there came the time when Gram's hands grew warm, and her smiles more vacant, however persistent they were. We visited every day, rushing into the room, calling out greetings and giving hugs and kisses. Eventually, we sat by her bedside instead of around her chair. I simply held her hand and watched her lips for her smile, as she slept. And every night, as we readied to leave, it was my turn to wrap my arms around her and whisper, "I love you." (Becky)

Whether it was the silence that propelled the pens or the tears that wet the pages, there was little doubt that most students who heard these pieces knew this place. Even short messages reached to touch these speakers. These reactions came from our response sheets:

"Maybe you can tell her stories. You are such a good writer. You probably get it from her. She'd probably like that."

"The dying process is a lot longer than I thought it was. Hope you're OK."

"At least you had a chance to be with her when she died. Be glad."

"You've got such great memories."

"I can't even imagine what it will be like when my Nana goes. She is getting older. I am sorry."

"I am so jealous. I wish I had someone to love that much."

While some students speak of being with someone who is dying, others talk about being afraid that they will forget those who have passed on. "The body retains memories of pleasures as well as of pains . . . we remember many pleasures in and through our bodies" (Casey, 2000, p. 157). Renee remembers a voice, a touch, a smell and realizes that her first hero is not immortal after all. Only her memory will continue to carry the touch of her grandfather to her heart, and Renee wonders for how long she will sustain that memory.

I was afraid I'd forget his voice, which holds so many memories. When viewing some videotapes of times before I could even remember, there he stood and spoke before me. A videotape can capture images but not a touch, or smell. So badly did I want to reach out and just hug him, feel his wet lips kiss my forehead again. I was in shock. It had not hit me yet that he was really gone. That dreadful day when I had to say goodbye to my hero, my idol, The feeling that he would be immortal was suddenly crushed forever. (Renee)

Along with the awareness that relatives are not going to live forever, we unfortunately almost always have a student-death to make our young adults realize that none of their days are infinitely granted. The shock of a fellow student passing from our midst is one that makes words hard to find and mortality even harder to understand. No one is prepared for death even when illness is the reason for the loss.

"Diseases have no eyes. They pick with a dizzy finger anyone, just anyone"

(Cisneros, 1991, p. 59). How true are these lines from *House on Mango Street*.

Accidents and catastrophes also "pick with a dizzy finger." The uncertainty of when or why death might come is a morbid reality for us all, but when it accosts my students, for most, it is the first time they have had to deal with it. In the past few years, we have had one student die of a seizure in his sleep, one who had a heart attack, one who committed suicide, and several who were killed in auto accidents.

Students who have not yet faced death, fear its arrival when parents and siblings are diagnosed with serious diseases. Kiley writes about her brother who has cancer. Arlo writes about his mom who has just had breast surgery. When we are young perhaps we do not notice how permanently some people are removed from our midst. As we grow older and *become* with others over time, we feel their absence more because of the hole they leave in our hearts. As we grow even older, we begin to recognize how we may draw beauty and strength from the openness the absence of a loved one creates in our hearts. Heart holes are not unlike the "holes in lace" that O'Donohue (1999) says "render it beautiful" (p. 42), but unlike lace, the holes in our hearts bring a beautiful pain. My students are only beginning to learn to love the shape of the holes others make in their hearts. They, like the velveteen rabbit in

Williams children story, are still searching for what it means to be "real" (Williams, 1975, p.12). They are only beginning to learn that, becoming real is forever an active burgeoning forth. In the story, the Skin Horse tries to enlighten the rabbit by explaining how one becomes real:

You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and your get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand. (Williams, 1975, p. 13)

We never stop becoming real, and like fine Irish lace, eventually our hearts will be gloriously enriched by the holes that help us become. Heidegger (1972/2002) enriches this notion when he discusses how we are with that which is no longer present:

Even that which is no longer present presences immediately in its absence--in the manner of what has been, and still concerns us. What has been does not just vanish from the previous now as does that which is merely past. Rather what has been presences, but in its own way. In what has been, presencing is extended. (p. 13)

To fully understand the nature of how those who are a part of us remain with us is nearly as cryptic as the idea of becoming real. At first loss, the heart pain is so intense that the beauty of the remaining "presence" is at first elusive. Over time, we can learn to appreciate the "presence" which remains within the holes in our hearts.

Hole in My Heart: On Saying Goodbye

Older siblings go off to school, leaving younger ones behind, changing the family unit, making freedom look inviting, creating a new loneliness, a different shaped hole in our hearts. Christie lies awake, thinking about her impending loss.

Goodbye

So maybe I can't tell what face is in front of me.
It's all blurred now.
But, yesterday I could picture your face clearly,
And your laughter echoed in my head.
Not today.
Today, I can't play the memory of you.
And it's a shame my mind plays these tricks on me.
But, I can't seem to change it.
I can't see you standing behind me.
You're fading away now.
It's not your fault.
No, it's my fault.
However, I do blame you
For moving too fast.
Every picture I attempt to take
Of you comes out blurred.
Do you know why?

I want to frame you in a 3 by 5
And hang you upon my wall.
And capture the sweet sounds
That escape from your mouth.
I want to follow you to wherever it is you go.
But, I'll never have the chance to.
Every night, I won't fall asleep
Until I hear the sound of your car.
Recognizing that noise lets me know
It's okay to sleep.
It's my silent lullaby.

It's just a matter of time
Until I hear that sound for one last time.
From then on, all things are going to change,
And the only thing I will have left
Will be blurred pictures of you.

Will it still feel like home here without you?
Your walls will be bare and white,
And time will stand still.
It's the one place I know of
That will stay untouched.
When I get enough courage
To turn your doorknob,
I think a wall of emotions will collide into me
And will swallow me whole.

What does it feel like to walk out that door
And never return?
I wish I could follow you. (Christie)

Several students are in tears when Christie finishes her piece. She hangs her head and follows suit. Silence pervades the room and the presence of her words hang in the air, echoing, perhaps, the presence of her absent brother in her life. Christie's poem brings back a whole barrage of memories for me: my own leaving for school and finding home different when I returned, transferring from one college to another and leaving new friends behind, sending my brother Pat off to boot camp and then Viet Nam. I recall what this change-pain feels like, and I realize that this is the first of many of these good-byes for Christie and my class. Having someone removed from one's life through death is devastating, but losing them through geographical distance, shares some of the same pain. Nothing will ever be the same, and it is so hard to concentrate on the beauty left inside us by those who made the holes in our heart when those wounds are still throbbing.

Some poems, like this one of Christie's draw us into a communal rhythm, marking memories and helping us to keep "movin on," and "get over it" as my students state that they need to do when writing about other topics. Perhaps knowing that we are not alone in our pain can be hopeful, like Wood (1995) who longs to see a loved one again:

I shall see you again, if the world lasts, even though
you are gone from my sight, My breath creates
new life for you, now that we are apart and
the universe lies here in the ashes of my memory. (Wood, 1995, p. 49)

My students' dreams and memories enrich me as they enlighten their peers, and I understand first hand what Flagg (in Conrad & Schulz, 2002) means when she says, "The joy about writing is that as long as you write from your heart, a thousand English degrees cannot compete with that" (p. 69). When we speak heart to heart, we truly become together.

In a reflective pondering, I consider the lived experience of the thirty three of us who inflate Room 127 at Bel Air High, and I wonder at the pedagogical significance of being together in this place.

CHAPTER FIVE:

HOLDING HEARTSONGS IN A SACRED SPACE--FINDING PEDAGOGICAL HARMONY

Remembering Heartsongs

In one of the last poems he wrote, published posthumously by his mother, Mattie Stepanek (2005), the young man to whom I am indebted for the notion of "heartsongs" says:

I will revolve seasonally
When my death comes,
And Children will remember
And share their Heartsongs,
Celebrating the gifts in the circle of life. (p. 207)

We all want to be remembered, to be held in a sacred space in the hearts of others. Perhaps this is because we all want to know that we matter to someone else, or that our heartsongs are significant enough not to be forgotten, or that someone sees the essence of who we are. I remember Mattie and his heartsongs, and I now share my heartsong with those who join me in "celebrating the gifts in the circle of life." This work is my heartsong, and "I dwell in [the] possibility" (Dickinson, in Johnson, 1890/1960, p. 327) that looms before us after listening to and remembering the heartsongs of my students. As you walk with us on this phenomenological path, I have asked you to listen, as Rumi suggests, with the "deep ear in your heart" (in Barks, 2001, p. 90) while my students and I offer our hearts in this telling way.

The voices of my current students re-sound with those who first led me to inquire about writing from the heart and the possibility of its place in my classroom. In Chapter One, I ask you to turn, with me, to the lived experience of the first high

school students who refuse to share heartfelt writings with their classmates. Puzzled by their resolve, I begin to ask what the lived experience of sharing is like for them. My pondering takes me back to my days at the Maryland Writing Project and I re-live my own reluctance to share writing with my peers. From farther off, I re-view the negative, wagging finger of a teacher in my elementary school experience and wonder in what way my students remember their earlier school days. I wonder what cultivates comfort in a teenage place, what might free my students so they will share themselves. Lingering in this contemplation, I wonder in what way my presence and our classroom atmosphere might encourage my young writers to share their hearts with their peers. At first, journals transport us to a starting place and open our sharing. Heartbeat by heartbeat, our voices begin to sound for one another, and I wonder what this lived experience is for my young men and women. “Lived experience,” according to van Manen (2003), “involves our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life: a reflexive or self-given awareness which is as awareness, unaware of itself” (p. 35). As my students and I begin this writing-sharing journey together, we share more than space, we start to *become* together in Room 127.

From a pulsing place, in Chapter Two, I draw metaphorically on the functions of the human heart to illuminate my reflections as I dwell thoughtfully in the lived experience of my students while they share their personal writings. Meditatively, I use literature to broaden the scope of such heartfelt thinking. Then, author-writers who support writing as a means of self-discovery, also shed light on what it means to open one’s heart in a high school class.

In Chapter Three, philosophical connections plunge us more deeply into this phenomenon, suggesting that there may be ontological connections in the nature of this writing. Perhaps writing helps us find ourselves, lets us linger in the past long enough to uncover who we are. Hearts opened authentically on paper connect us with others, and the universe. “Our lives are connected to one another’s and to the larger world and the universe” (Heard, 1995, p. 103). It is from this perspective that we might know:

What we do with our hearts affects the whole universe... what happens deep inside of each of us has an effect on everything outside of us. (Race, as cited in Southard, 2001, n.p.)

The voices of my students melodiously illuminate most of Chapter Four, their heartsongs awaiting an attuned ear, hoping for the connection. Written words, softly spoken, call forth thoughts, smiles, tears, and, even, criticism. Hearts in search of connection, announce the importance of a sacred space, a space where they feel free to sing and where being real is prized more heavily than wearing a mask. A sacred space is where “each one [person] is nourished and gives its all as nourishment for others” (Southard, 2001, p. 4). It is a space, once sampled, that students do not want to lose. Dana, in conversation about our sharing, says, “He [a boy who criticizes someone’s sentimental poetry] can’t take the specialness of our classroom away. We won’t let him. I love sharing and listening, and I am not the only one.” Sacred space is prized and desired as a place for growth and actualization. It is what van Manen (2003) refers to as,

Lived space or felt space. . . . We do not often reflect on it. And yet we know that the space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel. . . . We may say that we become the space we are in. [It lets us feel at home, providing] a very special space experience which has something to do with the

fundamental sense of our being. . . .Home is where we can *be* what *we are*. (p. 102)

This is the ideal home, and it is a nurturing of this space that helps our classroom feel like home; however, "Home is a place where a set of different destinies begin to articulate and define themselves" (O'Donohue, 1999, p. 31). Unfortunately, many students do not come from a nurturing place. Home, the nurturing way I remember it, and where "we can *be* what *we are*" is a nesting place, a nurturing type of place needed for my students to share what they have written from their hearts.

As I meditatively turn to my students' words, it is through "textual reflection" that I write my way to seeing how our lived experience might "contribute to [the] pedagogic thoughtfulness in this research process" (van Manen, 2003, p. 2). It is from our lived experience in a sharing, writing classroom that I offer up pedagogical insights and phenomenological recommendations for the teaching of writing that shares the hearts of high school students.

Heartsongs from Home

As Casey (1987/2000) deconstructs the concept of remembering, he says:

In remembering, there is a tenuous but consistently felt "self-presence" of the rememberer that inheres in what is remembered Body memories are not just memories of the body but instances of remembering places, events, and people with and in the lived body. In commemoration, body and place memory conspire with co-participating others in ritualized scenes of co-remembering. (pp. ix-xi)

Being the "rememberer" in this instance, "body memory" serves me well. My mother was not a very good housekeeper, or at least that is what people said. As a little kid, I never noticed it, and as an older one I did as much for her as I could. Mom worked full time, cooked all of our family's meals, canned all of the produce from a five acre

farm and took care of four children and a husband. After Mom passed away, one of my aunts told me that one time someone said something to Mom about getting a maid to keep up with things, and Mom said, "No. Whenever I go, they are not going to remember me for my cleaning. They will remember the time I spent with them and the food I cooked for them." She was so right. I lovingly remember my mother. I hear her expressive voice reading poetry to me. I see her work-swollen fingers sewing clothes for me. I taste the amazing homemade jams and breads she made and smell the kitchen during baking and canning times. Most of all, I remember her admiring blue eyes as she sent me off to school. Her eyes said I could do and be anything. We shared a sacred dwelling place, Mom and I. We grew to know one another, shared our hearts. In my thinking back, I see that we *became together* for what now seems like a very short time. Now, we co-participate in remembering. Our deep caring for one another sends me forth, desiring a meaningful connection with others. Looking back, I know where I learned that "There is nothing you could want to have/that would mean as much to you/as the experience of giving of yourself/ and being received" (Williams, 1987/1999, p. 141). It is this experience that I offer in my teaching, an experience I received from my first teacher, my mom.

Within the walls of my classroom, I want there to be a place for students to give of themselves and know that they will be received. I want them to feel at home. In my mind, because of what home was for me, I try to re-member and re-create. For some, I learn from their writing, home is not a caring, nurturing place where one is encouraged to be, a place where story can be made and told.

A plaque in the front of my classroom reads: “HOME IS WHERE YOUR STORY BEGINS.” As I re-connect with my mom’s blue eyes, I wonder what kind of eyes send my students forth. With whom and how do their stories begin? Longing to recreate a home within my room, I let my students’ words take me to the homes they know. They move me to see that not all homes are equal and not all sending forths are as positive as mine. Not all homes nourish, and not all eyes believe; yet, story begins there just the same. Student words reverberate between my experience and what they share about their homes. As they open their hearts and raise their voices to tell their stories, words transport us to other homes, to other dwellings, to different *becoming* spaces, and we begin to see why everyone’s heartsong has a different tune. While each song sounds individually, the stories and homes from which they come are just as unique. For Becky, holding her grandmother’s hand is a part of home, and as we join her, we feel her nana’s frail skin beneath our touch. Her grandmother’s giggles take us to a loving place, and we linger in her laughter, in a remembering, with Becky, for a time. Sound transports us again, as Renee worries that she will forget the sound of a voice she loves. We can almost hear that voice; most of us have at least one voice we never want to forget. Becky and Renee are nurtured and guided by several generations of caregivers who engage, appreciate, protect, and empower their hearts. Their stories begin at home, and we get a glimpse of who they are in the telling.

Jason cries himself to sleep while the two “monsters are at it again,” and the noise and his discomfort make us cringe. His story frightens us, too, because we know the love that bought the race-car bed that holds his tears is one that did not last.

We look at Jason with softer eyes today. Elizabeth takes us down steps no longer hers, where pictures of family have been erased from walls she once knew as home. We feel her loss deepen as we descend with each step she takes in her telling. Both Jason and Elizabeth hover in dissonance. Left alone to develop a sense of self-worth, they await permission to tell what is in their hearts if anybody is listening.

The homes from which my students come, are, of course, as varied as the number of students whose songs wait to be sung. The first hearts that open pass a willingness to be vulnerable along to others, and *be*-longing shows me the need for making a space to honor story, nurture hearts and value every song as important as every other. Nye (2002), in an introduction to poems written by children in the middle east, asks us to think about the importance of honoring the difference of others:

Some things will never change: Our need to know one another and to care about other people's lives. . . . It is most important to know about lives that seem, on the surface, unlike our own. (n. p.)

My students and I feel a need to know one another, and, on the surface, we imagine others' lives to be unlike our own. When we hear words from the heart of another, we are led to honor their differences and celebrate similarities that change our outlook on things.

We often hear the phrase, "I see where you're comin' from," meaning we understand who you are and part of your story, and we value you. Whether we are talking about cultural, financial, familial, intellectual, structural, or emotional differences in individuals, we all need to be understood and to be connected. Differences about the way our stories evolve affect the songs we sing in an ever

changing world. Some of us, especially teenagers in the midst of change, need reassurance that we are being heard. We need to know we matter.

A classroom environment can send out messages: that all of our students' lives matter; that every voice is worth listening to; and that students can take risks in writing poems [or other pieces] about whatever their hearts urge them to write. . . . A respectful and safe environment can ease these fears and inhibitions and help students write more honest[ly]. (Heard, 1999, p. 3)

Invited into a nurturing environment, my students sense a comfort that is usually reserved for home. Times have changed since my mom spent time with me. Some students do not have parents at home with whom they can spend time. Some students come to school after parents have gone for the day. They get themselves up, fix their own breakfasts (if they eat any), and get themselves off to school. "My parents work night shifts," John's mature voice announces. "I only see them on weekends."

Some "parents work nights, and are not home while [their children] are awake." My mind reels when a student confesses this, and I sense, even more acutely, the need for a classroom with a heart. For some students, televisions, computers, and recording devices take the place of Moms and Dads who read and listen. With so many "heartless," technological care-givers, to whom do my students talk? What if nobody listens?

Many of my students are like, Rob, who says, "I am pretty much on my own. My folks both work and put in tons of overtime." What does being alone do to my students? If we live with machines, do we become machines? How might I reach the hearts of those who dwell in this way?

Listening is so important. “In times of stress, the best thing we can do for each other is to listen with our ears and our hearts” (Rogers, 2003, p. 79). Students want to know that someone will listen to what they say. Even when parents are home, they sometimes find it difficult to communicate with their teenagers. Christy’s words send a chill over the room when she admits that she wishes her mother would “just ask” her what she is “writing.” Almost screaming for connection, she asks, “Did you ever think it might be about you?”

Jess admits she “would never let [her] mother read [her] stuff.” Not because she writes “anything bad,” she says, but because her “mother would not understand.” The inability to communicate comes forward as a theme resounding through my room. We not only need a comfortable space, a safe space, but a listening place, as well. Our class starts out infant-like as a listening place, and for many this is a stage of listening that is absent at home. In *The Listening Self*, Levin, (1989) guides us through the stages of listening as they develop in people. I wonder in what stage of listening my classroom receives the shared writing of other members. Because this room is comprised of individual members, it must evolve as a listening space in tandem with its members

We are essentially involved in developing our listening as a practice of compassion, increasing our capacity, as listeners, to be aware of, and responsive to, the interrelatedness and commonality of all sonorous beings.(p. 47)

We need people with ears and hearts of compassion who are involved in developing a place where who we *are* can sound forth and be heard. We need a sacred space, a place to call home away from home.

Heartsongs from Students

Writing is made of voices. Our single voices may seem to be lost in the bitter wind. But if we listen hard enough we can hear hundreds of other voices trying to sing like us. Like threads weaving a cloth. Like the constellation patterns we draw to connect stars. Voices who have never dared sing before. (Heard, 1995, p. xi)

Georgia Heard's words name a place where the harmony of a hundred voices weave, draw and connect within the wind. I know this place; it is like the sweet sounds that give life to my room. Heard's thoughts take me to the sounding of the final bell in June, 2004, the closing of another year, the parting of another group. There are tear-seasoned smiles and lingering hugs, quick-snapped photographs, and promises of "I'll keep in touch." True pathos tugs at our hearts; we beam because we really *were* together for a time, and we mourn for what will *be* no more. The noise subsides and the halls are bare. I sit alone in what was our space, in what was our read around circle. I want to savor the sounds that stretched the chambers of this room for just a moment longer before packing things away. I want to linger in the past for just a moment.

I re-member the desks of the previous August, as, one by one, faces fill the seats that are arranged in two large horseshoes, one within the other. A few students saunter in and ask if there is a seating chart. They do not respond to my "Good morning." Instead, they ask quick questions about books and supplies and homework. I smile, noticing how different today's leaving was from their first arrival.

A cacophony of grumblings arose about a week later when I explained that we would be writing in journals. "Hate to write" stumbles into my ear, accompanied by a kind of a *growl*. As I re-view that first day, I remember thinking that I had my work

cut out for me. Responding to journals is one of my favorite things, but it does not take me long to see why most students are resistant. From their comments, I learn that they are shocked that I ever read the things they write, let alone respond to them. Because I use a post-it note response system, and try to just talk with them in my comments, sometimes asking questions, they panic. “Do we have to answer these questions?” they ask. That question is a mistake, because I decide they should do that very thing. I can still see the strange looks as pieces of scrap paper come their way. “Now, what do you want us to do?” comes a cynical voice from the side. “Respond to my comments. Pretend we are having a conversation on paper,” I say. Raised eyebrows and all, that is where it started, our communication, our connection, our trust, our willingness to *be* together. That is how I re-member hearts on the brink of sounding in this class.

Being in Circles with a Great Song of the Sacred

I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.
I may not ever complete the last one,
but I give myself to it.

I circle around God, that primordial tower.
I have been circling for thousands of years,
and I still don't know: am I a falcon,
a storm, or a great song? (Rilke, in Barrows & Macy, 1996, p. 1)

In this poem, Rilke's words transport me to a mindful place, and I see the circles of my own life widening as I reach out to embrace my students, and then, stretch across the world, first to my colleagues and eventually to student teachers and researchers in my field. There have been times, after a recent, nearly fatal auto accident, when I have felt that I would not complete this dissertation circle; but, like

Rilke, I gave and give myself to the flow of my heart, letting myself *be* and *become* over this time. Both figuratively and literally, I feel that I have been circling for a thousand years. However, inspiration drips abundantly from the hearts of the many who circle with and before me. From a place of listening and wondering, I open my heart to speak--to share my students, my passion for heartsongs, my desire to create sacred classroom space, and my belief that success at anything starts with belief in the self.

To Be Requires Sacred Space

"Place is security," says Tuan (1977, p. 3). "Space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other" (p. 3). Sacred space is one that provides the ideal -- the security that Tuan attributes to place and the freedom that he knows we associate with having enough space to grow. The tension that comes with growth begs for sacred space. Aoki (2005) tells us:

It is possible to regard all tensions as being negative and [as something] to be got rid of. [When, in fact,] such a regard rests on misunderstanding that comes from forgetting that to be alive is to live in tension; that, in fact, it is the tensionality that allows good thoughts and actions to arise when properly tensioned chords are struck, and that tensionless strings are not only unable to give voice to songs, but also unable to allow a song to be sung. (p. 162)

Because heartfelt songs are tangled up in tensionality, nothing less than a sacred space will allow for them to be sung, and nothing less will assure them a close listening. It is just such a place and space that is needed to *be* anywhere, but this safe space, this place of freedom, is particularly important if students are to grow in the classroom and share who they are.

I learned about safe space from my "puss-cat," Ollie, who sits with me on mornings when I have time to sit, have coffee and write in my journal. Ollie has a

special blanket next to me on the couch. I pet her a little, and the purr that vibrates beneath my fingers jump starts my pen, connecting it to the rhythm of my heart. As I write, Ollie sleeps, sleeps so soundly that I can lay my hand on her for another dose of purr, and she never opens an eye, makes a sound, or flinches. She knows me so well that she recognizes my felt-touch and is comfortable and content enough to sleep and go wherever her imagination takes her. Ollie is so soundly asleep in my presence that, in her old age, she even snores a little. I realize that her comfort level with me is unusual. Normally, cats are alert nappers, not sound sleepers. They are ever vigilant in case some threatening thing might approach. In our house that threat shows up in the person of my husband who tip-toes over to us while Ollie sleeps and puts one finger gently on her head. Immediately, she is awake and on guard because Ray frequently "rough-houses" with her. The strange thing is that one gentle finger of Ray's hand near Ollie, and she is up. I can rest my whole hand on her body and or head, and she does not flinch except to sometimes increase the drone of her purr. We offer a sacred space to one another, Ollie and I. Her purr dissolves the stress that blocks my veins. She purrs; I write. While she is curled around in a circle on her blanket, imagination running wild, my presence frees her. I write and touch; Ollie sleeps and dreams. She is the one who makes me realize that writing from the heart requires a safe space and the freedom to be in that place.

If students are to allow one another to *be*, we need just such a sacred space. Students say they need to know that others are "going to relate" to what they share. They need to know that our classroom frees them to say what they believe to be true. They want to know that they can dream a little and no one will object, or that they can

protest and someone will listen. More than anything else, they need to know that the sacred space we share is safe for them to be themselves, without fear of reprisal. They need to be able to let themselves go like Ollie and know that no one is waiting to attack them. To make our space sacred all need to trust and nurture one another. Sharing from the heart allows that to happen, but it takes time.

To Be Takes Time

There is a tension in *being*; energy is constantly used up and brought forth. *To be* is an active verb in the Heideggerian (1953/1996) sense. By *being*, we are involved in an emerging forth, an *evolvement* over time. "*Volve*," the root of both previous terms, comes from the Latin *volvere*, which is the stem for "*volva*, *vulva*, [referring to protection] covering the womb" (Soukhanov, 1992, p. 2132). Just as the covering of the womb protects and provides a fetus with a gradual emergence into a new space, *being* evolves gradually over time. The tension of finding a place in a new space is exciting but fraught with anxiety. Vulnerability heightens. To be in my classroom in that way causes its share of tension. I ask students to experience the felt meaning of one another's words. Creating a safe space to *be* is like feathering a nest or decorating a nursery; it takes time to make it comfortable and secure.

Because of previous experiences, some of my students are very hesitant to believe that they will be safe within our classroom. Writing in journals, sharing from them, and getting feedback about ideas instead of grammatical deficiencies yield the first layers of trust within our room, and present the first circle that reaches out across our class. Building trust and creating a sacred space takes time, and both are needed to awaken *who* lies inside.

To Be Awakens the Individual

In order to celebrate the individual, we must be willing to sing a song of self (Whitman, in Moon, 2002). Choices must be made; risks must be taken; essences must be recognized, appreciated, and celebrated. We must not only honor who we are but must recognize the possibilities of what we might become.

The heart of all creativity is the awakening and flowering of individuality. The mystery and magic of being an individual is to live life in response to the deep call within, the call to become who we were dreamed to be. . . . Freedom is not simply the absence of necessity; it is the poise of soul at one with life which honours and engages its creative possibility. . . . To be an individual is to stand out from the group or the system and such separation always entails vulnerability. (O'Donohue, 2004, p. 174)

Students need the freedom to look into themselves, to “hear the deep call from within,” to see who they are, and to be willing to be what they “were dreamed to be.” They must render themselves vulnerable while “stand[ing] out from the group.” It takes courage to speak up and announce who they are even when the space feels safe.

Somewhere in every heart there is a discerning voice. This voice is an inner whisper not obvious or known to others outside. It receives little attention and is not usually highlighted among a person's qualities. Yet so much depends on that small voice. The truth of its whisper marks the line between honour and egoism, kindness and chaos. (O'Donohue, 2004, p. 75)

It is this voice that whispers to my students and gives them the courage to speak out loud. It is so important that students recognize their uniqueness. It is our responsibility as teachers to help students appreciate that they are unlike anyone else who is, was, or will be. Maxine Greene (2001) maintains that this responsibility is part of authentic teaching.

We ourselves, unique persons living in a shared world, will be enlisted in the sense-making process, as we must be every time we attend a play, listen to a quartet, watch a dance, [or read a student paper]. And this is one of the things we will want to learn how to communicate to those we teach. Through the

awareness, through the wide-awakeness brought about by aesthetic education (or by authentic teaching conducted to that end), our students will in some sense be free to find their own voices, as they find their eyes and ears. They may even find themselves free for a time to possess their own lived worlds. (p. 11)

We must not only be capable of sense-making ourselves, but we must be able to help students find their own voices and use them. In trying to do this we might do well to remember what Rogers (2003) says, "It seems the songs of our children may be in keys we've never tried. The melody of each generation emerges from all that's gone before. Each one of us contributes in some unique way to the composition of life" (p. 83). Personal worth must be validated.

Even in a safe space, students worry about letting themselves be who they are. "I don't even know who I am," may mean "I am not willing to look at who I am for fear that I 'won't fit in.'" Some worry about being hurt if they "put [themselves] out there." Some wear masks on purpose, some without knowing it. Some are afraid to be seen at all. Some do not want to get involved enough "to be real." Perhaps the problem is that being and making a safe place have to happen simultaneously. Once someone tells one person that "s/he's OK," others want to know the same is true about them. Once the sharing starts, the bond begins.

To Be Involves Others

We do not live in isolation, nor should we pretend that we do. Using student writing to initiate understanding of one another makes conversation possible in the complete sense of the word. Once we are open and able to talk, we have a real possibility of *being-with* one another.

Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly

accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says. (Gadamer, 1999, p. 385)

Gadamer expresses here, the epitome of what communication needs to be like for my students. To *be-with* in an open way is to understand the other's point of view without reservation. We not only understand one another but are able to *be* in the presence of the other while calling forth an opportunity for the other to *be*. Both persons have a unique responsibility when they come to understanding in this way. Each person must be willing to be real, must not be pretending to be something they are not, and they must be willing to hear what the other person believes without trying to change that belief. The ability to carry on a conversation in this manner is a slow process within a classroom. Students need to figure out who they *are* before they can *be with* others in this way.

A true conversation, in Gadamer's sense, means being willing to delve completely into what the other says, recognizing that it is a valid point of view. By this definition, conversation is ideal communication and such an elusive treasure, that to totally embrace it calls for the conscious willingness to be open at all times. While a person needs to be an individual, s/he needs also to be able to let the other person be an individual, too.

In individualism the person, in consequence of his merely imaginary mastery of his basic situation is attacked by the ravages of the fictitious, however much he thinks or strives to think, that he is asserting himself as a person of being. In collectivism the person surrenders himself when he renounces the directness of personal decision and responsibility. In both cases the person is incapable of breaking through to the other; there is genuine relation only between genuine persons. (Buber, 1970, p. 74)

Sharing something one writes from the heart and also being willing to listen to others with an open heart calls for what Buber terms a “genuine person.” It is “genuine relation between two genuine persons” that is needed in a classroom in order to have students share heartfelt writings productively. To be present to one another in this way lets us *be*, while strengthening our sacred space. As students share and listen, give and take, community is created and individuals become stronger, valuing themselves, others, and community. Sharing who we truly are, makes this possible because we are drawn into communion with one another. Writing from the heart makes this possible.

To Be Hermeneutic is Learning to Fly

I met Julia Cameron around 1997 when I was first introduced to *The Artist's Way* (1992). It was through her inspirational guidance that I became acquainted with "Morning Pages" (p. 9) and viewed myself as a possible writer. In her workshops, Cameron asks those who are interested in finding their creativity to write three pages every morning. I have been doing this activity on Saturdays, Sundays, school holidays, and daily in the summer since I first read the suggestion and discovered its importance for me. "Morning pages are the gateway to the inner and higher self. They bring guidance and silence. They make us farseeing" (Cameron, 2005, p. 2). In recent years, my dissertation is never far from my mind no matter what I am doing, and frequently my morning pages end up rambling about it in one way or another.

Glancing back over my journals, I find this entry from morning pages last spring:

This morning I look at the *Tao of Writing* (2006) for a place to begin my pages. I notice a chapter entitled, "Writing is Discovery." My Doctoral quest has been exactly that. There are times when the pressures of pursuing this degree amidst maintaining a full time job teaching high school English and

trying to have a life seems insurmountable to me, and I have actually asked myself the question everyone else asks me, "Why are you doing this?" As I read Wahlstrom's suggestions, hoping for inspiration for this journal entry, my thoughts replay a recent conversation between two friends and me at lunch last Saturday. [The three of us started a doctoral program at the same time. We supported one another all the way through comps and beyond. One of us is already a Doctor and one of us has decided to terminate the process, having completed all but the dissertation. I am still plugging away.] As the three of us laughed, ate, and celebrated present day happenings, we eventually got around to talking about our individual stages in this process. Mary said,

"I don't know why I ever did it. I just couldn't finish. I mean what was it going to get me? A promotion? There is nothing that I want. Will it increase my money? A measly five hundred bucks a year! Will it help me with my teaching? No." Then Jenny said:

"I wish I had never done it either. The whole thing has been a total waste of time. I could have the same job and research what I need to research for my present problems on the educational job site without having gone through all of that hassle."

Then she turned to me and said, "This is sad. MaryAnn, I think you are the only one who is happy."

I said, "I guess it's because I love my topic. It is about my kids, and I love them."

Thank God I never was about doing this for the money. Thank God that I picked the topic I did. How did I get so lucky? I wanted something that I could use in my classroom. I am a teacher who loves being just that. Lots of people say what are you going to do with your degree. I say, "Teach."

"Will you get more money?"

"Not much."

But it's not about money. It's never been about money. I want to be a better teacher. My friend Donna asked me,

"How can you stand taking all of those crap courses?"

Courses, like everything in life, are what you make them. I am looking for helpful information to use, and I always find it.

Ray, frequently says, "Leave the papers. They will eat you up. Give them all A's and be done with it." I can't do that. That is not who I am. It doesn't matter how many students they [the administration] give me or what kind of attitudes they [my students] bring to my door, I want to love them and help them take something from me for the time they are thrown together with me.

Meeting Heidegger and working on this dissertation has made my life even richer than before, has strengthened my belief in what I am doing both in the long and the short run. (Personal Journal, 2006)

I look over this entry, and search for why I see this long, demanding, tedious, project as positive. With the exception of recent physical difficulties, due to my car

accident, that have put a "crimp in my style" as my mom would say, I would not have given this experience up for the world. Between the classes I have taken and the writing I have done, this journey has been a discovery for me. I have learned who I *am* and I know that I am a much better teacher for it.

"What has happened to the Redbird," I ask myself. At first I want to say, "Oh, she is turning Blue," but that is not what is happening to me in this process. Instead, I find my red-self to be OK. As I open my heart to my students, to my study, and to the philosophers, writers, and advisor who guide my hermeneutic ponderings, I see my red wings spreading, and I realize that I am in flight.

Redbirdness is part of my authenticity, and I cannot change that. Alphonse Lingis (1999) explained that to me when I first began my search. I heard him but was not totally attuned (Levin, 1989) to his words. I now realize that no one chooses to be a Redbird, and that somewhere deep down inside I should know that it is just who I am and a good thing to be. Heidegger (1953/1996) helps me recognize the reality of my "thrownness" and the beauty of what might yet *be* in me. Being dubbed a Redbird is not a condemnation but a seeing place, a place for thinking and questing before taking flight, and this hermeneutic inquiry provides an open place to sing my red heart's song.

Marianne Williamson (1992), says, "Our worst fear is not that we are inadequate, our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure" (p. 4). These words now resonate with me. Viewing myself as a Redbird, I permit myself to be what other people think I might be rather than who I am. Perpetuating the myth of redbirdness in myself, I refuse to see my possibilities.

I have a set of Osho Zen Tarot cards, and have been exasperated to see, many times, my hand play a card that has a picture of two trees, one bamboo and one oak.

The commentary for the card reads:

Who ever told you that the bamboo is more beautiful than the oak, or the oak more valuable than the bamboo? Do you think the oak wishes it had a hollow trunk like the bamboo? Does the bamboo feel jealous of the oak because it is bigger and its leaves change color in the fall? . . . There is always going to be somebody who is more beautiful, more talented, stronger, more intelligent or apparently happier than you. And conversely, there will always be those who are less than you in all those ways. The way to find out who you are is not by comparing yourself with others, but by looking to see whether you are fulfilling your own potential in the best way you know how. (Padama, 1994, p. 126)

While my friends and I laugh because I constantly uncover this card, I am finally able to "look around [and see] that everything fits together"(Padama, 1994, p. 127). Through the heartsongs of my students, I am able to see how "everybody is incomparably unique" (Padama, p. 127), including me.

It is because of my students' successful flights that I am able to take wings. On our last day, amidst goodbyes and tears, students left me notes. I saved Annie's for last because it was in a large white envelope at the bottom of the pile. Inside was a book she made for me of things she had written. The note on the first page let me see that our writing had let her find value in who she is as a person and a writer. It reads:

Dear Mrs. H,

Here are some pieces I wanted you to have. Some you will recognize from class, some you won't. I hope you like them all. I am ever grateful for the motivation you have given me through your personal writing activities. The thing that was most surprising was having my peers approach me and ask me if they could read more or hear more of my stuff! It made me realize that I have something after all. No one ever made me feel like that before. Thank you for allowing myself and others to showcase our gifts and to receive honest feedback. Truly, Annie S

Her letter takes me back to the one I received from a mom in middle school, thanking me for letting her son write about the day he was thrown through a window at school. (cited in Chapter One). Sometimes students just need time to write and a place to share in order to find who they are and take flight. As Conrad tells me that I have given him “the writing bug” and that he is going to be in the slam contest, I think back on his piece about taking off his mask and deciding to not cover his true person by being a comedian anymore (cited in Chapter Four). As my students have learned to fly, so have I. Not all of us have taken flight, but enough have that I have hopes for those who are still on the runway.

A Curriculum of Flight

We come to know something as we form ourselves around it. Therefore, we can not separate what is to be known from ourselves. (Atwell-Vasey, 1998, p. 35)

Who am I as an educator? As I linger in Atwell-Vasey's words, trying to focus on my teacher-self, I remember that Palmer (1998) puts it in a slightly different way when he says, "We teach what we are" (p.1). I think, then, of myself in the hallway at school during a change of class.

Jennie, one of my fourth period girls, is the first to greet me: "Are we sharing our personal writings today?" I say, "No, not today." She smiles and sits down and says, "When will we?" I say, "Next week." Ben bounds in the door, throwing his books on his desk and slumping into his chair. He looks at the front board where I am supposed to have the objective of the day. "Aww, no personal writings today, Mrs. H?" Jenn tells him what I said.

I smile as I remember a comment that was made to me by one of my former students recently. Ali stopped in to visit and talk about her year as a junior. She said she missed my class, especially the writing. She said she had tried to talk her new teacher into doing journal writing during our long period of the day. [At that time our students had a period that lasted an hour and a half. They came to class for thirty minutes, went to lunch, and then returned for an hour.] Ali told me her new teacher said, "Oh, no. There will be none of that time-wasting stuff in here!" And so it goes, the pervasive attitude that writing for self-discovery and pleasure is a waste of time.

While my mind is riddled with these questions and these doubts, I live in the tension between my dreams and the pressures of testing. I remain ever mindful of the difference between the "Lived Curriculum" (Aoki, 2005) and the printed, test-driven one. I know that "Testing is Not Teaching" (Graves, 2002), and I know that I teach the most important subject in the world. I touch texts that, in turn, touch minds and hearts, making way for self discovery, giving students strength to ask that their ideas be considered as important, right along with literary masters. I have learned that the real valued ends in any course are what one becomes in the process of learning the material. If I spend 180 days with a student, I hope s/he will be a better person for having been in my class.

Dreams

This isn't my dream
rigid lines
perfect rows
weed less landscapes
no space for dandelions and dragonflies,
the wish makers
no space for dancing feet
or smiling eyes

spaces filled with order
and orders

but
this dream
creeps
into my dream
like ground cover: crown vetch, bumblebee weed, kudzu
choking out
hand holding
soul stirring
heart beating
imagining
and growing

suffocating my dream,
stifling symphony
creativity
and flow
regulating
heart's place
channeling
love's space

denying
the dusty down
of dandelions and dragonwings
(Hartshorn 2000)

In this day of *No Child Left Behind*, we teachers find ourselves examining our methods more and more. There is no time for dreaming. Many systems are re-mandating certain outdated curricula, re-adopting thinking that moves every child in lock-step like a machine. We do not teach machines; we teach unique individuals who come to school to *become* and grow over time. We need to be about looking for ways to find the best in students and to trust them enough to let them forge ahead. Education is something we do to ourselves, to paraphrase a poster I once had. No one can be forced to learn. Students must want to do what we ask of them. How might teachers be trained to assist students in true flight? The answer is really the same for

everyone, teachers and students, alike. We all need time and freedom to be ourselves and to put who we are into what we do. Palmer (1998) encourages educators to recognize that to be effective they must be themselves. If they want to reach the young people in front of them, they must be *real* in the classroom. Perhaps it works in a similar vein for our students. We must let them be real, help them find a way to *become* while they are with us. We do that best by example. We must be real, too. If we are looking for a way to take every child into a successful future, boards of education, supervisors and administrators need to allow teachers to be themselves with their students. We need school systems that have hearts if we are to teach the whole child. We need teachers who are willing to teach and listen from their hearts. Instead of scoffing that journal writing wastes time or that it reveals too much about the personal lives of students, teachers need to provide space for students to express themselves in writing. Schools need to be places where teachers and students can *become* together, places where both are respected as individuals. “To become a teacher includes something that cannot be taught formally: the most personal embodiment of pedagogical thoughtfulness” (van Manen, 1991, p. 109). We must treat our students as respected human beings. If students do not respond as expected, we must look for ways to reach them still. The only way to succeed is to plant the seeds of success and nurture them.

Theory offers groundwork, so we must be familiar with the new and the old. Our knowledge of subject matter is critical; therefore, we must be skilled in our craft. Most importantly, we must remember, despite the rushed days, the pressures of standards, and the panic over achieving high scores, that we are working with human

beings instead of predictable machines. We must constantly view and re-view what works and what does not and look at for whom it works and for whom it does not. We need to provide a sacred space that trusts our teachers and students and allows time for trial and error, time to get to know themselves, and the confidence to prepare for flight. Finally, we must admit that all students may not be ready to fly at the same time.

Supervisors need to trust teachers, treat them like professionals, let them develop themselves into better educators. As teachers complete advanced degrees, they should have an opportunity to choose classes of interest to them, classes that will make them better at what they do. When I went back to school to get my Master's Degree, I took a number of classes in writing and reading, learned how to turn on my first computer, and started to look at the psychological make-up of teenagers. I knew where my teaching weaknesses were. I knew what I had been told would work with my students, did not work. I wanted to improve my teaching because I wanted my students to succeed. It was at this time that I became part of the Maryland Writing Project. With fellow teachers, I learned to value my colleagues by viewing each person's best practice. The most important thing I learned that summer was that "A teacher of writing must write" (Writing Project Assumptions, Appendix H). This does not mean writing like in making up tests for students or letters to parents, but it means writing from the heart. I learned that real writers have audiences in mind when they write. From sharing, I learned how validating it is to open oneself to an accepting group. I knew when I experienced success at this myself, that this might be the way to empower my students, and the flight inspired by my students' heartsongs

indicates that writing puts them in a good place to prepare for take off. I am not certain that all of them will pass the tests they will be required to take, but I know they have confidence in themselves and want to do well, and that is worth more than can be measured.

The National Commission on Writing has announced that, “Writing today is not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for the many” (National Commission on Writing, (2003), n. p.). This report begs for everyone to become involved in the teaching of writing, including parents “*because writing matters*” (National Writing Project & Nagin, (2003). All subject-teachers must be involved in this task, but the most important person to involve in writing is the student. If students do not see a reason for writing and have a desire to improve at it, they will not. Practice at writing makes writing better, and becoming good at one type of writing leads to wanting to be good at all types of writing. Writing from the heart fosters self discovery, and knowing who one is makes it possible to know what one thinks, and knowing what one thinks, makes it possible to communicate one’s thoughts. “Writing is the art of communication,” announces another classroom poster.

Students form ideas about themselves when they see how teachers respond to what they turn in. If a teacher does not read what students write, students stop caring about what they submit. This has not changed since I was in high school. This holds true for how classmates comment on student writing as well as how teachers respond. When I require students to comment on little slips of paper about the shared writings, I ask them to try to be positive about what engaged them when they heard the paper. I discourage negative comments or comments about grammatical problems or stylistic

inadequacies. I have questioned myself about this method many times. A friend of mine, who teaches creative writing, cautioned me that the only way to have writing improve is to receive critical feedback and to learn how to be "person enough" to accept negative criticism when it comes. I disagree. Real writing comes from the heart and when it is attacked, the writer's growth is stunted. When a person finally has all of her/his thoughts on paper, then is the time to have it scrutinized for perfection. If someone's thoughts are rejected while they are still forming, the configuration is impeded. When I had conversations with my twelve participants in this study, I asked them if they felt there was any value in the writing and sharing as we did it. I knew they enjoyed it; I wanted to see if they felt it was productive. They unanimously agreed that it was, each pointing out something a little different s/he had experienced in our classroom:

Oh, yeah, you can even see some people's styles develop. (Charles)

Like I mentioned last class, our writings are getting better and better as the year progresses. (Dana)

I am not sure that my writing is any different, but my shyness is gone. I have a different way of looking at participating. (Conrad)

For once, I feel like someone cares about what I want to do. (Warren)

I think it even helped me do better on my term paper, but I don't know how. (Phil)

How might all students be given an opportunity to take flight with us? They must have a chance to see that their "writing matters," and, because they put themselves on paper, they will know that they matter.

“New Lines of Flight”

We laugh when Peddiwell (1939/1990) in *The Saber-Tooth Curriculum* points out a curriculum that still teaches students how to kill tigers that no longer exist, but some of what we ask students to do these days seems just as obsolete.

Curriculum theory should be about developing new lines of flight—lines of flight (becomings) that allow, however, contingently, briefly, or momentarily, for us to soar vertically like a bird or slither horizontally, silently like a snake weaving our way amid the constant reconfigurations, cooptations, and movements of the ruins. (Reynolds & Webber, 2004, p. 4)

In “developing new lines of flight,” we must remember to seek a balance. We need to live the experience with our students. In order to be relevant to our students, we need to know who they are and let them be responsible for their own learning. We need not be absent; we should learn right along with them. Being trusted to learn for ourselves and with others, “amid the constant reconfigurations” in our lives provides an exhilarating “flight pattern.” Most of us first learn to spread our wings at home. Many students, today, do not experience “home” in that way. School must provide a sacred space where learning who we are is valued, and improving each individual is a goal for all.

When I first proposed this study, one of my committee members asked if personal writing works with low ability students. I said it did. It was noted, however, that I had not used a low group in my study. Just recently, Erin Grunwell published a book, that was then turned into a movie, about that very question. Grunwell’s (1999), *Freedom Writer’s Diary* shows how her classroom came alive by letting the students be who they are and respect one another. “Low ability” is a curious term. Most

students in “low ability” classes are actually “low opportunity,” and Grunwell proves that by providing her students with opportunities that change them as learners. The students in my study are not low ability, are not financially deprived, nor have they been deprived of opportunity, but they are still in great need to connect with someone. Students in all classes share this common need; we all, as human beings, share it also.

The National Writing Project advocates that all subject areas, all grade levels (including college) must write, and it maintains that all teachers must write. In order to know the power of the pen, one must use it. If the National Commission on Writing is insisting that all subject areas write, perhaps we will not only meet the needs of our students but those of the state at the same time. Perhaps the days of lived curriculum and printed curriculum are closer than we think.

Student teachers, first year teachers, and veteran educators of all ages could look for no better means to learn how to be good at what they do than to write their way to seeing themselves. They might write their way to knowing. In that knowing will be what they need to learn or improve. They will also see where they are good and let that part of them *be* while they *become* better over time. They will also know, by practicing what they preach, at least one strategy to use with students. At the heart of it all must be the song of self if each person is to succeed. The heartsong of teaching might be the sound of success.

When it comes time for publication, I will amass a committee of editors, who will offer suggestions. I am no longer afraid to admit that I am, in fact, a red bird but with help from my friends, my wings have been mended and my flight has begun. This is what I want for all of my students.

APPENDIX A

Harford County Public Schools

45 East Gordon Street
Bel Air, Maryland 21014-2988
410-838-7300
FAX 410-893-2478

Jacqueline C. Haas
Superintendent of Schools

January 16, 2004

Ms. Mary Ann Hartshorn
Bel Air High School
100 Heighe Street
Bel Air, MD 21014

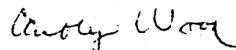
Dear Ms. Hartshorn:

My purpose in writing is to inform you that you are permitted to conduct classroom research as you requested in your letter of January 7, 2004. It is my understanding that the purpose of the research is to complete your doctoral program at the University of Maryland, and the videotape/audiotape data gathered will be used only for that purpose. I would ask that you receive approval for the research from your IRB Board at Maryland, that you receive informed consent from parents through a letter, that parents be informed that a student may decline to participate in the project at any time, and that results will be kept confidential.

I understand from Mr. Fleming that Harford County Schools' procedures to obtain parents' written permission for tapes or pictures of their children to be used outside of the classroom have been implemented and the permission information is on file.

If I can be of further assistance to you by answering questions or addressing any concerns, please feel free to contact my office. I look forward to learning about your study and findings. Best wishes for a successful project.

Sincerely,



Carolyn M. Wood, Ph.D.
Supervisor of Research & Evaluation

Cc: Mr. Kevin Fleming

APPENDIX B

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY-- CLASS PARTICIPATION

March 10, 2004

Dear Student,

I invite you to engage in a research study with me that explores your experience of sharing personal writing. I am a doctoral student in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership at the University of Maryland at College Park, MD

The purpose of this study is to understand what it is like for students to write, share, and listen to personal pieces of writing. As I seek to understand this writing and sharing process, I will record the class sessions when we share personal pieces during third and fourth quarter. I will also keep a copy of the reflections you turn in after those sessions. At some point, I will need to have three individual conversations with a few volunteers. These conversations will be conducted outside of class time and also will be recorded and transcribed. Any comments you make or reflections you write will be used anonymously. You will not be identified by name in the published findings. After the research is complete, I will share the results with you.

This study will make an important contribution to understanding this writing and sharing process. If you would like to be one of my conversants, please let me know so I can set up times for those sessions.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Hartshorn
English Department
Bel Air High School

Student Consent Form for Classroom Participation in Research

| | | | |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|-------|
| Identification of Project/Title | Listening to Adolescent Heartsongs: Phenomenological Possibilities in Teaching Writing | | |
| Statement of Age of Subject | I state that I am not yet 18 years of age, but am in good physical health, and wish to participate in a program of research being conducted by Mary Ann Hartshorn in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership at the University of Maryland, College Park. | | |
| Purpose | I understand that the purpose of this research is to study what it is like for high school students to write, share, and listen to pieces of personal writing. | | |
| Procedures | I understand that class sessions when my classmates and I may share our writing will be tape-recorded for transcription later. This recording will occur during journal sharing time, once a week, and during the sharing of personal pieces at the end of third and fourth quarters. I also understand that my written reflections about peer writings and the sharing experience, in general, may also be used. Additionally, I understand that I may volunteer to participate in three individual conversational sessions. These conversations will take place after school and last for approximately one hour. The conversations will be about my experience as a writer, sharer and listener in our classroom. | | |
| Confidentiality | I understand that my name will not be used in any public documents or oral presentations. A pseudonym will be used instead. I understand that data I provide will be grouped with data others provide for reporting and presentation purposes. | | |
| Risks | I understand there are no known risks to participating in this study. | | |
| Benefits, Freedom to Withdraw | I understand that this research is not designed to help me personally, but that the investigator hopes to learn more about sharing personal pieces of writing in order to inform educational practice. I understand that I have the right to withdraw without penalty at any time. | | |
| Name/Address and Phone of Graduate Researcher | Mary Ann Hartshorn 1800 Oxford Square Bel Air, MD 21015 mahart1947@msn.com | 410-893-1613 (h) 410-638-4600 (w) | |
| Name/Address and Phone of Faculty Advisor | Dr. Francine Hultgren Department of Education Policy & Leadership University of Maryland College Park, MD 20742 fh14@uemail.umd.edu | 301-405-4562 | |
| Name of Participant | _____ | | |
| Signature of Participant | _____ | Date | _____ |

APPENDIX C

A REQUEST FOR PARENTAL PERMISSION TO HAVE STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY CLASS PARTICIPATION

March 10, 2004

Dear Parents,

I request permission to engage in a research study with your daughter or son. I am a doctoral student in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership at the University of Maryland at College Park, MD. I have received permission to conduct this study in my classroom from Harford County Public Schools.

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand what it is like for students to write, share, and listen to personal pieces of writing. As I try to understand their experiences, I engage them in a series of written activities.

Your young adult's participation will require nothing in addition to regular class obligations. Biweekly, students in my classes write in journals, and quarterly they complete a piece of 'personal choice' writing. Students are invited to share journal pieces as well as their personal writings. No one is ever forced to share. When we share personal pieces, students sometimes elect to have their pieces shared anonymously. The class, then, has an opportunity to respond, either verbally or on paper, to the selections they hear. Students also are asked to evaluate the writing and sharing process periodically. These written responses will also be examined in a quest for some thematic connection.

For my research, the class will proceed as usual while I tape-record sharing sessions and class conversations about those sessions. These recordings will be transcribed to preserve the integrity and completeness of the experience. All transcripts and written responses will be held in the strictest confidence. Any student whose comments I use in my research will be given a pseudonym.

At some point, I will ask for a few individuals to conduct conversational interviews with me. These students will need an additional permission form in order to participate.

Each student's experiences are unique. Information obtained in this research study may provide a deeper understanding about the experience of sharing writings at the high school level. When my research is complete, a summary of results will be made available to you and the students.

If, for any reason, you do not want your child to be part of my study, please indicate so on the enclosed form. Students who do not participate will be given a similar assignment to complete on their own. If you have any questions, please contact me or my advisor at one of the following numbers. Thank you.

Mary Ann M. Hartshorn
410-638-4600
maryann.hartshorn@hcps.org

Dr. Francine Hultgren, Advisor
University of Maryland
301-405-4562

Parent Consent Form for Classroom Participation

| | | |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| Identification of Project/Title | Listening to Adolescent Heartsongs: Phenomenological Possibilities in Teaching Writing | |
| Statement of Age of Subject | I state that my young adult is in good physical health, and wishes to participate in a program of research being conducted by Mary Ann Hartshorn in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership at the University of Maryland, College Park. | |
| Purpose | I understand that the purpose of this research is to study what it is like for high school students to write, share, and listen to pieces of personal writing. | |
| Procedures | I understand that class sessions when my child and her/his classmates share their writing will be tape-recorded for transcription later. This recording will occur during journal sharing time, once a week, and during the sharing of personal pieces at the end of third and fourth quarters. I also understand that my child's written reflections about peer writings and the sharing experience, in general, may also be used. Additionally, I understand that my child may volunteer to participate in three individual conversational sessions. These conversations will take place after school and last for approximately one hour. The conversations will be about her/his experience as a writer, sharer and listener in the classroom. | |
| Confidentiality | I understand that my child's name will not be used in any public documents or oral presentations. A pseudonym will be used instead. I understand that data d will be grouped with data others provide for reporting and presentation purposes. | |
| Risks | I understand there are no known risks to participating in this study. | |
| Benefits, Freedom to Withdraw | I understand that this research is not designed to help my child personally, but that the investigator hopes to learn more about sharing personal pieces of writing in order to inform educational practice. I understand that my child may withdraw without penalty at any time. | |
| Name/Address and Phone of Graduate Researcher | Mary Ann Hartshorn 1800 Oxford Square Bel Air, MD 21015 mahart1947@msn.com | 410-893-1613 (h) 410-638-4600 (w) |
| Name/Address and Phone of Faculty Advisor | Dr. Francine Hultgren Department of Education Policy & Leadership University of Maryland College Park, MD 20742 fh14@umail.umd.edu | 301-405-4562 |

Name of Participant _____

Signature of Parent _____ **Date** _____

APPENDIX D

PARENT AND STUDENT CONSENT FOR RESEARCH STUDY-- INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION

Dear Parents,

As previously mentioned, I am conducting doctoral research as a student at the University of Maryland at College Park, MD. The nature of my study involves exploring the lived experience of students in a writing-sharing situation, in my regular classroom teaching

In addition to the information gathered in our class sessions, I need to conduct three conversational interviews with a few students. Your young adult has volunteered to be one of those participants. During these conversations, students will discuss their experiences as writers, sharers and listeners in our classroom. The conversations will be tape-recorded and transcribed just like the class sessions. All comments will be dealt with in the strictest confidence. At no time will students be identified if their comments are cited in my study.

I look forward to conversing with _____. Please consent to after school meetings on the following days: _____, _____, and _____ from 2:30 p.m. until 3:30 p.m.

Thank you for your cooperation.

APPENDIX E

ENGLISH TEN

COURSE SYLLABUS

MRS. HARTSHORN 2003-2004

In English 10 the focus is on World Literature. We shall explore short stories, poetry, novels, non-fiction and drama while examining various themes. We will be using a variety of textbooks: *Traditions in Literature*, *Coming of Age*, *Man in Literature*, *World Writers Today* and *The Language of Literature*. *Traditions* and *The Language of Literature* will be signed out for you to take home. The other books will be used in class. The themes of our units center around the universal struggles of humankind. Individuals struggle against themselves, other individuals, society, nature, and machines. While examining some of those conflicts, we shall concentrate on looking at individuals in connection with self-discovery, love, war, careers, and dreams.

Besides stories and plays in the textbooks, reading selections will be taken from the following list, depending on availability of materials:

Alas Babylon
Childhood's End
Andromeda Strain
Brave New World
A Day in the Life of Ivan Denysovitch
A Farewell to Arms
Hiroshima
Fallen Angels
Look Homeward Angel
Candide
Flowers for Algernon

All Quiet on the Western Front
A Separate Peace
Spoon River Anthology
Inherit the Wind
House on Mango Street
Julius Caesar
What the Sea Remembers
Shakespearean Drama
Utopia

Vocabulary/spelling will be studied in connection with literature read. You will be given specific directions for learning vocabulary from your outside reading. We shall also explore SAT "hotpicks."

Writing requirements for this year will include: an annotated bibliography of all books read, a character analysis in connection with *Julius Caesar*, a reader response journal in connection with outside reading, a problem/solution paper (term paper format), a cause/effect composition, collaborative poetry/prose, and a focused description.

Creative writing will be included as part of long range assignments and a personal journal will be updated weekly. One creative or personal choice piece will be due at the end of each quarter.

Grammar will be taught in connection with composition and reading. A web

site called *dailygrammar.com* could serve as an excellent reference. Our newest text, *The Language of Literature*, also provides us with a new resource for grammar.

As time permits, the Touchstones Program will serve as a tool to hone our critical thinking and discussion skills. Ideally, that program will provide a template for our literature discussions.

You will be required to read one outside book each quarter in addition to the regular assigned readings. Some of those books will be self-selected and some will be teacher selected. Each quarter you will have an opportunity to share your knowledge of that novel in a different way. Directions will be given for each quarter's requirement as the year progresses.

GRADING POLICY

Everything counts. I work on a point system.

- ✓ Anything missed because of an excused class absence must be completed and turned in immediately following the absence. (You have the number of days absent to make up work).
- ✓ Work done in class must be submitted the day it is assigned unless you need time to finish at home. If you need to finish for homework, the paper must be turned in the next day. Classwork must be made up if you are absent. Classwork may **not** be made up if you were here but off task.
- ✓ Homework must be turned in on the date it is due. No late papers will be accepted unless I have communicated with parents. For long range assignments you will have a "window of opportunity" (usually three days to a week) for submitting papers or giving presentations. After that window expires, no papers or presentations will be accepted.
- ✓ If you have an **unexcused** absence, **you may not make up the work missed or due on that day.**

HOW POINTS CONVERT TO PERCENTAGES

- ✓ Homework and written, submitted class work = 25%
- ✓ Tests and quizzes = 25%
- ✓ Writing assignments = 25%
- ✓ Class participation and presentations = 25%

I encourage you to use the grade sheet in the back of your new planner.

OBJECTIVES

Our objectives coincide with the **National, State and County Standards** for English/Language Arts.

"**National Standards** for Grade 10" ask students to:

- ✓ Examine a wide range of print and non-print information to build understanding of texts, themselves, and cultures of the world.
- ✓ Read a wide range of literature from many genres to build an understanding of the human experience.

- ✓ Apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.
- ✓ Draw on prior experience to interact with texts.
- ✓ Adjust use of spoken, written and visual language to communicate effectively with different audiences.
- ✓ Apply knowledge of language structure and conventions in written and spoken work.
- ✓ Conduct research on issues and interests. Gather, evaluate, and synthesize information.
- ✓ Use a variety of technological and informational resources.
- ✓ Develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language patterns and dialects across cultures.
- ✓ Develop competency in English by using their first language if that language is not English.
- ✓ Participate in a variety of literacy communities.
- ✓ Use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish set purposes.

"**Maryland Core Learning Goals** for Grade 10" indicate that students will demonstrate the ability to:

- ✓ Respond to a text by employing personal responses and critical literary analysis.
- ✓ Compose in a variety of modes by developing content, employing specific forms, and selecting language appropriate for a particular audience and purpose.
- ✓ Control language by applying the conventions of standard English in writing and speaking.
- ✓ Evaluate the content, organization, and language usage.

"**Harford County Standards** for Grade 10" emphasize that students will:

- ✓ Demonstrate positive attitudes toward reading and writing as valued pursuits.
- ✓ Construct multiple responses to a wide variety of literature and language experiences.
- ✓ Demonstrate recognition of and appreciation for multicultural literacy and language heritage.
- ✓ Utilize effective communication skills in various settings.
- ✓ Access, retrieve, manage, and produce information by using a variety of sources.
- ✓ Communicate effectively by making mature, conscious language choices for a variety of audiences.
- ✓ Use language to create intellectual, artistic, and practical products.

In addition to the National, State and County Standards, **I hope** my students will also be able to:

- ✓ Read and write for pleasure.
- ✓ Express themselves intelligently in professional as well as social situations.
- ✓ Access resource materials needed to remain life long learners.
- ✓ Realize the importance of their individual gifts and talents.
- ✓ Recognize a universality in all people.
- ✓ Feel confident in their literacy.

- ✓ Use language skills to promote future success.

Below list **your personal goals** for English for the 2003-2004 school year:

- ✓
- ✓
- ✓
- ✓
- ✓
- ✓

APPENDIX F

Personal Choice Writing

Keep All Year!

What do I write about?

- Choose a topic of personal interest to you.
- You may write
 - a "creative" piece
 - about something you strongly like or dislike
 - a personal memoir about someone or something in your life
 - a comedy skit or a song (performance welcome if shared)

What are the requirements?

- Type
- 12 Font (no smaller)
- Times New Roman or something equally legible
- Double Space
- Spell check and proof read
- Turn in on time
- Quality work
- Something of which you are proud
- Title your piece something besides "Personal Writing" (Sometimes better to wait until it is written and look for a good "hook")

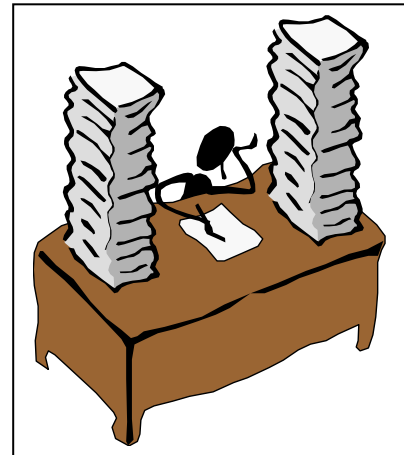
What are the options?

- Unlimited--your paper may be
 - any length
 - any genre
 - any topic

What are the restrictions?

- Do not just list things
- Do not just do a free write
- Must be school appropriate language and topic

Suggestions



- Use topics suggested by journal writing
- Write about something that reading has inspired (i.e. The complications of friendships, women's rights, feminism, belonging to groups . . .)
- Choose a topic that means something to you personally.

How Will This Be Graded?

- Quality of your work
- Seriousness of intent
- Evidence that you put some time in to it.
- Topic that indicates personal interest.
- Will not be graded for grammar and structure

This is an opportunity for you to get some writing points on a "non-structured" assignment. We will share some of these, but only if you wish. They may be shared by you or anonymously by me, for you.

Dates Due

IF YOU KNOW THAT YOU WILL BE OUT, PLEASE TURN PAPER IN BEFORE FINAL DUE DATE.

- ❑ **October 20th, 21st or 22nd.**
- ❑ On or before **December 15th.**
- ❑ **March 22nd, 23rd or 24th.**
- ❑ **May 17th or 18th.**

APPENDIX G

Response Sheet

1. With what piece of writing were you most impressed today? Why?
2. Did you share your piece of writing today? Why? or Why not?
3. How do you feel when you share a piece of your writing with the class?
4. How do you feel about listening to your classmates read their pieces?
5. What do you think about the way we do this sharing activity?
6. What benefits do you think there are in this activity?
7. What drawbacks do you see in this activity?
8. What do you think about sharing pieces anonymously?

APPENDIX H

KEEPING A JOURNAL

This year you will be asked to keep a journal in English.
This journal will serve many purposes.

- ❖ Sometimes you will be asked to reflect about pieces of literature that we read.
- ❖ At times I will pose a "Think About" question asking you to relate a piece we have read to everyday life or explore some facet of the writing.
- ❖ Sometimes you will have a chance to pose a "Think About" question of your own.
- ❖ Somedays will be "free write" days. On those days, you may respond to one of the quotes on the front board or write about whatever is on your mind.
- ❖ Once in a while we will use words or phrases to inspire our writing. During these sessions, we will write freely, letting our minds take over.
- ❖ In the back of your journal, you will need to develop a "Topic" page.
- ❖ From journal writings, I will show you how to develop a list of topics that interest you.
- ❖ I hope these topics will give you ideas for the personal choice piece that is due at the end of each quarter.
- ❖ When I have you for long hour, we will not only write but share from our journals. Sharing will be voluntary but encouraged. This activity will give us an opportunity to get to know one another a little better.
- ❖ From time to time, I will collect journals and respond to what you have written.

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