

Chapter 4

Making sense of my past

“Where, or when or what is a beginning?” (Said, 1975. p. 29)



Marian Roberts age 2 years – Liverpool 1956

In this chapter I will present a collection of narratives from my past and then my reflection on those narratives. The focus here is on my “lived experience.” (Van Manen. 1997, 2002.) It is my intention to understand how my everyday lived experience has shaped who I am and how I relate to the world. “...*the world is given to us and actively constituted by us: reflecting on it phenomenologically, we may be presented with possibilities of individual and collective self-understanding and thoughtful praxis.*” (Van Manen, 1997. preface.) I have also paid attention to the past in my inquiry in order to ask myself and to gain clarity as to how the life I have experienced so far, the challenges, the sorrow, the excitement and the joy, have made a contribution and continue to make a

contribution to the way I live my life now and the values that I hold. In this way I have been engaged in a process described by Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) of joining history with biography, ***“When the issue confronted by the self is shown to have relationship to and bearing on the context and ethos of a time, then self-study moves to research.”*** (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15.) Although this may be perceived as a nostalgic process I am in agreement with Mitchell and Weber (1999) that nostalgia can be placed in the context of looking ahead and imagining particular scenarios for the future, in my case imagining scenarios that have the potential to transform our practice.

“We posit that a pedagogy of reinvention through memory has a political agenda that involves a deliberate remembering – one which unconsciously ‘uncovers’ memory – and which implies a relationship to schooling that is anything but nostalgic in the usual sentimental sense. Here we refer to the particular humiliation and pain that individuals might have experienced, and also how these experiences are linked to inequalities based on class, race, sex or religion.”(Mitchell and Weber, 1999, p. 225.)

It is by paying attention to these moments of humiliation and pain but also moments of joy in my own inquiry that I have been able to identify the roots of my ontological commitment to a passion for compassion and from this understanding demonstrate how this has now become a living, inclusional and responsive epistemological standard by which my work may be judged.

The purpose of this is to identify and to begin to understand how certain events in my past have, I believe, contributed to both who I am now and the way in which I practice. The stories I have decided to include here are what I will refer to as significant events. This is because I feel they are moments that have made a contribution to the development of my learning

and that have also had a significant affect on how my life and the values I try to live my life by have been formed.

To start at the beginning first of all means identifying a point in time where I began, began to be me, began the development of my self, to develop my identity. I do not intend at this point to present a theory of self but rather to further a growing understanding of my ontological self. By this I mean developing an understanding on my being in the world. Developing an understanding of my own ontology was a very important part of my inquiry into my practice. It has also been recognised as an important part of self-study research.

“The consideration of ontology, of one's being in and toward the world, should be a central feature of any discussion of the value of self-study research.” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004. p. 319).

As this part of my inquiry began I asked myself in what way have my experiences as a child contributed to the way I embrace learning / knowledge as an adult? Are there significant or critical events from my life that have defined the way in which I now choose to live my life, the values I have and the way in which I relate to others? This is particularly important to my understanding of my ontological commitment to a passion for compassion. In attempting to address these questions I have reflected on the development of my learning and my own search for knowledge

When I reflect on significant or critical moments what I recall is an emotional image. This emotional image is either one of great elation or of despair and humiliation.

Starting School – *Excitement and Humiliation*

I have been reliably informed that I was both a bright and intelligent child with parents who were passionate about the education of their children. I was the second child of four, with a brother three years older than me, a sister six years younger than me and a brother eleven years my junior. My father, a very kind and gentle man, had himself been unable to take up an offer of a place in higher education (he was planning to undertake teacher training) in order to support his parents and siblings financially by going to work. He was then called up to serve in the 2nd world war. He was serving in Monte Cassino where his battalion were ***“missing, presumed dead”***. This experience profoundly affected him; the way he lived his life and the values he held, it was also an experience that he was never able to talk about.

Although he managed to provide well for his wife and 4 children he felt unchallenged intellectually, a feeling that stayed with him until his premature death at the age of 54 in 1977.

My parents decided that our local primary school was not going to stimulate me in the way they thought I needed and so I was enrolled in a catholic convent preparatory school in Liverpool City centre, a short bus ride away from my home. I was more than ready for school and very excited, particularly about my school uniform, which included a brown overcoat with a secret pocket. I felt like Jane Bond - expert in international espionage, with my very own top-secret pocket! I remember the first bus journey to school very clearly and also the feeling of power that having a secret, even if it was only a secret pocket, gave me. I was torn between shouting this secret all over the bus or simply enjoying the power that this unshared knowledge gave me. The nuns who taught at the school also wore brown, but when I try to remember them I can only picture them from their waists down to the ground. Around their waists they wore a leather belt and from one side of their belts hung a long

crucifix and from the other side a large bunch of keys, which jangled loudly as they approached. What I can never see, or remember seeing, are their faces.

I do however remember one day very clearly indeed. We had just returned from morning break and having been too busy playing with my new friends, I had forgotten to go to the toilet. I asked sister if I could be excused, she reminded me that I had had my opportunity to go to the toilet. As a punishment she lifted me onto the top of a very high bookcase where I had to sit until the next break. Here I was asked to reflect on my sins, much to the amusement of the other children in the class. My face still burns at the memory of sitting on view, desperate to go to the toilet and unable to get down myself.

My time at the Demonstration School, however, was very short-lived as a serious illness resulted in a lengthy stay in Alder Hey Children's Hospital.

This story embraces both extremes of my emotional memory. Firstly, the sheer excitement and exuberance of a 4 year old wanting to learn and ready to take on the whole world. The other extreme, which is probably familiar to many, is that feeling of utter powerlessness and the humiliation of a public punishment for a crime you don't fully understand. Of course I was not in a situation where I could challenge what was happening to me. I have experienced that feeling at other times in my life both as a child and as an adult. It is a totally crushing feeling as your emotions rise internally and are crushed against the external power that forces them back inside. This power is one that I recognise as being hierarchical and authoritarian and a consequence of what Alan Rayner refers to as impositional knowledge. (Alan Rayner. 2003). This conflicts with my need to embrace others in a more inclusional way, a way that I believe is much more creative allowing each partner in that relationship to contribute. It was here that I began to develop my understanding of the needs of the other and the importance of listening to the voice of the other. This was the

beginning of the development of my value of loving both self and other as I experienced a lack of compassion.

Alder Hey - *rheumatic (dramatic!) fever*

On the 12th October 1960, I was wrapped in a large red blanket and bundled into an ambulance. A small crowd of concerned neighbours had gathered around the door and they clucked and tutted as I was carried past them. Although I now know that I was seriously ill I can still recall feelings of great importance and I was still able to enjoy being the centre of attention. This feeling was very short lived and vanished when my mother told me she had to go home and I would be staying in the children's ward, where I remained for 3 months. I was 6 years old.

Throughout my entire stay in hospital I spoke only to my visitors and refused to talk to anyone associated with the Hospital. The next morning I was told by a very excited nurse that my mother would be unable to visit me for a little while as we had a new baby to look after, my sister, born on the 13th October. As a consequence I have always been reminded of my stay in Alder Hey when celebrating her birthday. This event however was to have a profound effect on my 6 year old imagination, it all made sense now, I had had a baby, of course, you had to go to hospital to have a baby, but where was she, this baby of mine?

When my dad came to visit me that evening he explained that she was my sister, not my daughter. This for me was even more sinister, the reality dawned, they had replaced me. I was probably going to be left here forever!

My time as a patient in Alder Hey was my first introduction to the NHS. Unusually for the time the consultant paediatrician looking after me was a woman, in fact the entire environment was female. The ward was staffed with a variety of nurses, all female of course and there were also the others, the play leaders who wanted me to play, which was a little difficult

when you were not allowed to sit up and a large cage over my legs meant I couldn't see anything. The person who impressed me most however, was the ward sister, sister ruled with a rod of iron. I decided that that was for me, I wanted to be sister. I wanted to change places with her, I wanted to be the one with the power.

In what way did this period affect and/or change my approach to learning? I believe it had a profound affect on my confidence and the way in which I present myself to the outside world. I had felt special and excited starting school for the first time and although I quickly realised that school was very different to what I had expected I was not anxious about going there. My treatment in hospital involved large doses of steroids and I had left there looking and feeling like the Incredible Hulk. I had doubled in size and I can clearly remember my mother's distress as she tried to squeeze me into my clothes that were now several sizes too small. I felt so awful for her, I was letting her down, I was a nuisance, she was ashamed of the way I looked. In some way this feeling of not quite being what people expected, not to be a nuisance, not quite able to make the grade – despite so many achievements, stays with me. I also believe that this is where I began to develop my passion for compassion. Suffering from a serious illness as a small child introduced me to the vulnerability of both myself and of other people. I can remember very clearly that the toddler in the cot next to me was visited by no-one for the three months he was beside me. I shared his fear of the dark and listened to him cry out for comfort – but nobody ever came. I know that his physical needs were met but what I was also acutely aware of was that his fear and his loneliness were left for him to cope with himself. I believe that this experience awoke in me at a very early age a desire to try to make things better. I clung on to this hope that however difficult things may feel that we always have the potential to change the situation.

Eventually I returned to school, but not back to the Demonstration school as it was agreed that I would not manage the journey, so at 6 years of age I attended our local Primary school. My stay in hospital and time off recovering had meant plenty of time for reading, which was my favourite pastime. This made it quite difficult for the infant school to manage me and I spent a lot of time with the Head Teacher in her office reading and talking about what I had read. I think that this period in my learning set a definite pattern in the way I approached learning. I could argue that this was a very student centred and self-directed approach and that I was benefiting from this. This was the first time, in an educational context, that I experienced a relationship that although still based on power, was different; this difference was experienced by me as incredibly empowering. Unfortunately our secondary school system, particularly at this time, was not able to provide the same individual approach.

Woolton Hall – *insignificant in grey*

**Grey lady walking the halls after dark searching for a
happier time.**

**Grey girls walk and talk and search for knowledge and a
future for themselves.**

Some are greyer than others.

Some are overwhelmed by their grey matter.

**I melt into the greyness but manage to sustain the red I hide
within.**

You light the blue touch paper and I run.

(Naidoo. 2002)

And indeed I did run, I ran as far away as I possibly could. The secondary school I attended was reputedly the best in Liverpool. I had excelled in the 11 plus and was able to choose the school I had dreamt of attending. Woolton Hall was a very traditional girl's convent and some of the pupils were still fee paying. In our first assembly Sister Anne told us how we were "*the crème de la crème*" and that "*the world is your oyster.*" The reality was of course that I didn't feel that confident and those who were fee paying looked down on us scholarship girls. Despite this there were many opportunities to be had in this environment for those with the confidence to seize them.

Reflecting on this environment is quite interesting particularly in relation to secondary education today and the different levels of achievement from boys and girls. I cannot ever remember being prepared for a female occupation. The nuns never indicated that some career paths were better for boys, we could do whatever we wanted, well some could!

For me I had made my mind up at 6, I was going to be a ward sister. This however was not good enough for my parents, particularly my father. He felt it was an underachievement and didn't want me to feel as he had done, under-stretched. He was of the opinion that I should and could do medicine instead, as nursing, in his opinion, was a second rate profession, that I would be no more than a servant to the doctors.

In my heart though there was another voice, one that wouldn't go away, but I couldn't listen to this voice yet, so I ran, briefly, to France.

I spent several months working as a nursing assistant in an old people's home in Reims in Northern France.

“Ma Maison” Time to reflect

I had been doing some voluntary work in Liverpool in an old people’s home and thought I knew the ropes but was totally unprepared for my time at ***“Ma Maison”***. I think the name of the home is very appropriate, my house, and very much the philosophy behind the day-to-day running of the home. It was run by nuns, but they took a behind the scenes role. They were there to provide nursing care to the very ill and they ran the kitchen but the rest was very much the responsibility of the residents, their families and anyone else like me who had the privilege to be there. Ma Maison was the complete opposite to the very often sterile environments we provide for our elderly infirm. Life at Ma Maison was pretty good, being on the outskirts of Reims meant it was very close to the champagne producers who were very generous and every evening meal included wine, with champagne for Sundays. The residents were also able to keep pets; one gentleman even had a pet monkey!



Resident of “Ma Maison” with his pet monkey and Susan a school friend who had come from the UK to visit me. 1972

The home also had an orchard and a small farm where the residents worked if they wanted to and were able to. There was a great community

spirit about the place and even those who were suffering from quite advanced Alzheimer's disease were able to contribute to the day-to-day activities, with a lot of help from each other. What they all had though was a sense of purpose and achievement even if the most you contribute was a big lap from your wheel chair in which to catch the fruit that was shaken from the trees.

Jean was in his late 80's when I met him at Ma Maison. Despite his years he was still a very fit man and was very proud of his strength. Jean had been a farmer for all of his working life, but when his "**Heart**" died he did not have the will to continue with the farm and he had eventually sold up and come to live at the home. Jean's "**Heart**" was his wife, his childhood sweetheart who he had known all his life and they had married in their teens. Jean took care of the pigs at Ma Maison with love and care. Jean's only regret was that despite his 80 odd years he had never seen the sea and it was his greatest wish to visit the coast before he died. I had the great privilege to accompany Jean and several other residents on a trip to the coast. I can honestly say that sharing Jean's first sight of the sea with him was one of the most moving experiences I have known.

Working at the home in France allowed me the space I needed to make decisions about what I wanted to do. On reflection this environment was very different to the one I would experience as a student nurse. In this environment respect and dignity were almost taken for granted. The well-being and happiness of the residents were as important as their medical conditions. Their opinions and ideas were always sought and acted upon in a way that recognised their life experience and wisdom of age. My decision to return to England and take up my place as a student nurse had been influenced by this attitude and my expectations were founded on this experience. The image created for me here is one of elation and empowerment I returned home excited at the prospects ahead of me,

secure in the knowledge that I was embarking on a career that would enable me to make a difference. I knew I had the potential to be an excellent nurse and I also had a passionate commitment to working with people.

Learning to nurse



Florence Nightingale in 1856

I began my nursing career on the 1st January 1973. At that time the selection process for nursing was very competitive and I felt very privileged to have been accepted by my first choice, the Liverpool Royal Infirmary. My dad and younger brother escorted me to the door of the nurse's residence; they were not allowed to come inside.

It was 6 weeks before I had any real patient contact. The first 6 weeks were spent in the classroom environment where we began to cover the basics of nursing care. We were taught to give oranges injections and to take each other's blood pressure. The day we were allocated our first wards had a very ceremonial feel to it. My first ward was Clarence Ward, a 40 bedded male medical ward. The words of my clinical tutor will stay with me forever ***“Marian, if you can get through your time on Clarence ward you can cope with anything!”***

So why was Clarence ward so challenging? A forty-bedded ward is just too large. In those days there were no little bays or private areas it was just a long ward with 20 beds on either side, and a long dining table down the middle. The patients who were up and about had their meals at the long table. In between meal times the long table also held the ward book. The ward book was very important, it contained all our instructions for that day, and it was the main form of communication between the ward sister and the nursing staff. The day itself was manic, every patient had to be bathed and every bed made before lunchtime. There was also a very definite pecking order and a first year student nurse was the lowest of the low. My illusion of myself as the caring nurse mopping a fevered brow, and giving comfort to those in pain was shattered.

I can recall one specific incident, a very young man, a scientist from the university we were part of had been admitted following an accident with a toxic substance. He was very distressed because he had just been told by the Doctor that his condition would probably deteriorate, he had sustained damage to his liver and kidneys and this could result in massive organ failure, he was devastated. I was 18, I was inexperienced, and I wasn't sure what to do. He grabbed my hand and asked me to stay with him, I sat beside him and held his hand I can still see the fear in his eyes. I heard a noise behind me, the symbol of power, the dangling keys. ***“No work to do***

nurse! I'm surprised you've got time to sit down chatting to patients, get on with something now!" It was sister.

This was a very different environment from what I had experienced in France and from what I was expecting. Why was that? and what effect did it have on me at the beginning of what I wanted to be a long and successful career? I was overwhelmed again with a sense of powerlessness. I was part of a system that had been designed to maintain and protect a hierarchy of which I was at the bottom, except for perhaps the patients who seemed to have the lowest status. We were part of a system that disempowered the people it was there to support. Patients were dehumanised unlike the way in which “Ma Maison” had placed the patients at the centre, their needs were paramount. Here we were dealing with medical needs and ignoring individual human needs. What effect did this have on me? To a certain extent I could recognise the problem but as I was disabled by the system because of my place in the hierarchy, I was unable to do anything about it. I still felt motivated but knew that until I was in a more senior position I would be unable to change anything. It did however sow the seed of a passion that would grow and develop throughout my working life, a passion that directs me every day to find a way of working within the health service that fosters an environment where we value and respect each other and that that respect and value extends and embraces the people who we care for. A passion for compassion.

I can now see that it was with these experiences that my values of inclusional relationships, responsive practice, trust, love and respect for self and for others and living life creatively, were being formed. I can also see myself as a ***“living contradiction”*** (Whitehead, 1989) in that I was in the position of not being able to live my values fully in my practice.

In DVD chapter 3, *“I am because we are”*, the third character in the story, June, experiences similar contradictions in being unable to live her values fully in the work place. She expresses this to the audience when she says *“If we can know that it is the people who are important, then everything else will fall into place.”* (June, “I am because we are”.) June carries with her in this statement a hope for humanity and a hope for the future.

My training continued for 2 years at the Royal and in my third year I decided to transfer to Addenbrookes hospital in Cambridge and took my final exams there. I also gained some experience as a staff nurse but finally gave up working as a nurse in the NHS in 1977 and decided to try my hand in the private sector.

Princess Grace “How the other half live”

The advert in the Nursing Times screamed out at me, *“Are you ready for a challenge?”* American Medical International was opening a brand new hospital in the centre of London. They were looking for a small group of nurses to be employed before the opening of the hospital to help with the final planning and the kitting out of the hospital. This was just the opportunity I was looking for; this hospital was to have the best equipment and the best technology. It was to be one of the first hospitals to include bypass surgery, which meant that they had to bring over their own bypass technicians from America. It was very exciting to be able to be part of something like this from the beginning. Learning to use the technology in the hospital was our first major challenge. The hospital had been fitted with the very latest in communication technology. Each patient had their

own very luxurious en-suite room, which was great for them but a logistical nightmare for the nursing staff as you could only see one patient at a time. In order to deal with this and to make sure that the patients felt that they had direct access to a qualified nurse at all times each room was fitted with a communication panel. This was made up of a series of lights in different colours. When you entered a room you pressed the coloured light appropriate to your grade. In a master control room a panel would show where each member of staff was in relation to each patient. The rooms were also fitted with a two-way cupboard that you could access from within the room and from outside. If you were a patient who required something, perhaps some pain relief, you would call the switchboard and tell them what you required; the operator would see who was the nearest member of staff and talk to them via an intercom. The member of staff would put whatever was requested into the cupboard from the corridor, enter the room and remove the requested item from the cupboard, but from inside the room, as if by magic. The owners of the hospital felt that this made you look more professional as it was very sloppy entering a room carrying medicine or equipment.

When we first opened and patients were at last being admitted I was faced with a huge contradiction. I felt that I was working in a very privileged environment but I found it more and more difficult to deal with this privilege. I was sharing a flat with a nursing friend who was working at Great Ormond Street Hospital. There were many evenings were she would return from work in a very distressed state because of the lack of resources available to the children she was caring for. She was having to face, on a daily basis, the outcome of these shortages and the impact it was having on the children she was caring for. It was very common for there not to be enough kidney dialysis machines available, for example. I was experiencing the opposite, people who were privileged enough to be able to queue jump and pay for treatment. This was an environment that kept profit at the fore front of its business.

I was then faced with a very sudden and catastrophic event, my father died suddenly when I was on holiday in Cornwall. His death, in his early 50's could probably have been prevented if he had had access to the kind of technology available to my patients who could pay for it.



A family day out shortly before my father's death.

At this point I knew I had to distance my self from healthcare for a while. My experiences had left me feeling too damaged; I was too involved and not strong enough to take up a fight. I needed to take time out to consider where to go next. This was not an easy decision to make and for a short time I made an attempt to deal with life on the ward but I knew that I was not able to give. All my energy was being directed into self-preservation, it was time to go.

Digging for victory “Where there’s muck there’s brass!”

When things were getting on top of my father he would take his frustration out on the garden. He would dig and weed and plant until all was well again with the world. In this way I think we are very similar, taking out our frustrations in a physical activity. I am much better at ironing when I am angry, but it isn't a futile activity, as I work physically I find I am able to solve problems and imagine solutions. This happens because as I am engaged in the physicality of what ever task I have chosen I am also having an internal dialogue, a conversation with myself. Within these conversations with myself I can explore a variety of creative possibilities.

Following my decision to leave nursing I had undertaken a course in speed writing and speed typing so that I could earn a living while looking at my options. An opportunity arose for me to join an archaeological dig in Canterbury, not something I had ever considered before but the thought of spending the summer out doors in such a beautiful part of the country and engaging in a physical activity was too tempting to resist.

The days on the dig were long and arduous but the sense of belonging to a team was quite overwhelming. We excavated a very deep pit under the car park of the Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury. There were plans to build a new theatre and this was an opportunity to look for more of Canterbury's Roman past before the building work commenced. What I found most fascinating was how our history is revealed in layers beneath the ground and when a pit is excavated those layers are exposed like a giant history sandwich. We unearthed so many pieces of roman jewellery and coins and pottery it was easy to become complacent about the significance of what we were finding.

We tended to congregate in the theatre café and bar at lunchtime and at the end of the day so long as we weren't too dirty! I had also become involved in a local amateur production of A Winter's Tale, I had joined the

company a little late to be included in the casting, so was helping out with props and costumes until they realised there was a very important character missing, there was an opportunity for me after all. They needed me to play the bear; Shakespeare's most famous exit line was mine. (*Exit, pursued by a bear*) and I was the bear! We were well known to the theatre staff and when a job came up in the publicity department they asked me if I would like to apply. At my interview I was asked if I was harbouring any secret ambition to become an actor, because they would not be interested in employing anyone who really was looking for a back door into the acting profession. I looked at him straight in the eyes, holding his gaze, my exterior calm and convincing, while at the same time, throughout my whole body, I was experiencing what I can only describe as electric shock treatment. My brain was screaming Yes! Yes! Yes! that is exactly what I want to do, what I have to do, while my mouth was calmly telling him no, no, I have no secret desire to be an actor!

On reflection the emotional memory that I have here is one of warmth and sunshine. This was for me a very significant time and I was fortunate enough to have been able to take time out at this point in order to think about my future. It was also a very healing time for me and also for my family, learning to live on a daily basis without the love and influence of our father. My younger brother was only 11 when he died, a very difficult age for any boy. He was trying to deal with growing up and he was at an age where for boys it is becoming more difficult to show emotion. My younger sister was approaching O levels, a very stressful time academically in any young person's life. My mother who was only in her late 40's was trying to adjust to a life of bringing up her children alone at the same time as trying to deal with her own loss. I can see now that some of the decisions I made at this point in my life were directly linked to wanting things to be better. One of these decisions was to rush into what was to become an unsuccessful marriage, but for both of us it was the right

thing to do at the time. I can see now though that I was probably using this to give me a strong basis from which to make some very difficult decisions about my future. Although it was impossible for us to sustain our marriage beyond its first year it was not a destructive time but a safe platform from which we leapt together, but landed separately.

The seed of recognition that was sowed when attending for interview at the Marlowe Theatre bloomed into a beautiful flower. The recognition that I wanted to pursue a career in the Theatre was of course only the start of a lengthy process. I had many different reactions from my family, friends and colleagues to what they perceived was a very sudden and out of the blue decision to throw away everything and apply to theatre school to train as an actor. Those reactions ranged from shock, horror and derision to amazing levels of understanding and support. There was also no guarantee that I would even make the first hurdle of getting through the audition process which was highly competitive. Once I had made the decision I knew that for me there would be no going back, I had to give it a go. In many ways it was indeed a quantum leap into a life of uncertainty. Also at the time I had no knowledge whatsoever of theatre-in-education or theatre for development. What I did have though at some intuitive level was the knowledge that theatre could be used as a vehicle for change. I can remember expressing a desire to be the ‘community actor’ in the same way that a community can have a ‘community midwife’. At the time I had no idea that this could well be a possibility.

Don't put you daughter on the stage – *Finding the right course.*

The process of attending auditions was frightening beyond belief. I really had no idea what to expect at all. The process for each drama college was also quite different, some sent you extracts from plays that they selected for you to prepare while others asked you to select 2 contrasting pieces

yourself. Some colleges included improvisation and movement or singing and others just wanted your prepared pieces. I had very little experience of performing, in fact at my first audition when they talked us through the audition process I can remember wondering what improvisation actually entailed – but of course I kept that to myself. Waiting together with all the other hopefuls I felt like a fish out of water. The other auditionees appeared to have a selection of outfits – leotards, ballet shoes; - I had none of these things. What I did have however was a passion and as soon as I stepped out into the performance space my insecurities disappeared and something else took over. That something comes from deep within from a space, at the time; I had little experience of except in my imagination. I found that feelings and emotions I found difficult to express or communicate externally as myself were accessible if I was taking on the role of another character. I felt alive, I felt in charge, but not controlling, and I loved it. There was one college, Rose Bruford College who had set up their audition day in a very different way. The course at Rose Bruford College had originally been designed for teacher training. The old course focused on the use of drama in schools but was essentially a course for teachers. This changed over the years and of course has since changed but at the time there were 3 different courses available. The first of these was for technical training and was aimed at people who were more interested in the production side of theatre. It included stage management, costume design, set design and construction. The second course was very traditional theatre training and the third, which caught my interest, was called Community Theatre Arts. The CTA course as it was known, stood out from the crowd. What it promised was the development of conscious devising actors. This course looked very different to the others, it provided students with the same level of professional training but also offered the opportunity to research, devise and tour original pieces of theatre. This was the course I applied for and the audition day also proved to be very different from the others I had attended. To begin with it was

for the whole day and the interview panel also included students in their second year of study who worked with us and were available to answer any questions about life as a Bruford student. All the other auditions I had attended had been pretty stressful but this day I really enjoyed and it was with a great sense of excitement tinged with regret that the day had ended.

There was then a very long wait, made even longer by my impatience, until offers from Colleges began to appear. I was very fortunate and was offered places at 6 of the 7 theatre schools I had applied to. One of the offers came from Bruford's and for me there was no choice and I accepted my place on the CTA course commencing my study in the autumn of 1979. The next 3 years changed forever the path that my life would take. These three years were for me extremely challenging but the skills I was able to develop there have been transferred into my life at every level.

Rose Bruford College – *finding me by being someone else!*

Although we studied all of the dominant theatre methodologies on the community theatre arts course, particular emphasis was placed on the works of Constantin Stanislavski, Jerzy Grotowsky, Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal. The methodology that has influenced much of my practice is that of Augusto Boal. The now very famous work ***“Theatre of the Oppressed”*** was first published in this country in 1979 which coincided with the beginning of my actor education. In theatre of the oppressed Boal shows us that ***“all theatre is necessarily political”***. This claim is made by him because theatre reflects life and life is always political. He also claims in the forward of the book that ***“...the theatre can also be a weapon for liberation.”*** (Boal, 1979). Boal developed a kind of theatre that allows a dialogue to take place between the actor and the audience. In the traditional theatre the theatre is delivered to the audience and the

audience receive the theatre, the relationship is one way. Boal uses the work of Paulo Freire who talks about the *“transitivity”* of teaching, (Freire, 1970). What Freire was describing is also a one-way street, the one-way street of imparting of knowledge from the teacher to the pupil. His argument is that the process of education should not be a one-way process. Education should always be in the form of a dialogue and teachers should recognise that they are engaged in a two way learning process, the pupil learns from the teacher and the teacher learns from the pupil. Boal in his subsequent work, *“Legislative Theatre”* quotes from an Argentinean teacher *“I taught a peasant how to write the word “plough”: and he taught me how to use it.”* (Boal, 1998, p19). Freire calls this kind of pedagogical relationship a dialectical pedagogy. This differs because those in the role of student / learner bring their experiences into the relationship and are encouraged to use their experience to solve their own problems. This encourages them to take a more active role in their lives outside the classroom and perhaps to also bring about change.

Augusto Boal has introduced the work of Paulo Freire into his theatre. Boal describes the development of theatre from the Aristotelian period to the present day. He describes Aristotle’s coercive system of tragedy as a *“Powerful system of intimidation.”* (Boal, 1979, p.46). In Aristotle’s coercive system of tragedy the audience is introduced to a hero figure, the hero is likable, despite their flaws and the audience develop an empathy with this character. The audience feels alongside the hero, they share their feelings of happiness and good will. At this point in a tragedy something always happens to the hero and the audience feel fear on behalf of the character. The tragic hero then has to see the error of their ways, so as not to alienate the audience because they also see their own errors. There must always be a tragic end to the theatre in order to ensure catharsis. Boal argues that this means that the audience does not have to think for itself or act for itself and instead instils a fear of change. *“Aristotle*

formulated a very powerful purgative system, the objective of which is to eliminate all that is not commonly accepted, including the revolution, before it takes place”, (Boal, 1979. p.47).

The theatre of Bertolt Brecht differs enormously in that it concerns itself with developing an understanding from the audience that the world is changeable. Brecht's theatre is taken from social life from what he calls the *“street scene”* (Brecht, 1964). The street scene is given as an example of how what has become to be known as ‘epic’ theatre is developed. Epic theatre is the name given to a type of theatre that describes situations in very clear and precise ways. The events being described are told to the audience by a demonstrator and also includes the use of film projection to underpin a meaning. Brecht is also concerned with empathy or the arousing of emotion but unlike Aristotle not in an impassive way. In Brecht's work the emphasis is placed on understanding the cause of the emotion, which will hopefully lead to an opportunity for transformation. Brecht was also a Marxist and his political stance also informed his theatre.

“..a Marxist artist....must promote the movement toward national liberation and toward the liberation of the classes oppressed by capital. Hegel and Aristotle see theatre as a purging of the spectator's “antiestablishment” characteristics; Brecht clarifies concepts, reveals truths, exposes contradictions, and proposes transformations.” (Boal, 1979. p105).

In Brecht's epic theatre the audience had to think and to judge for itself and this was achieved by them being distanced emotionally from the characters demonstrating the action. The theatre of Augusto Boal takes this one step further by involving the audience directly in the action of the theatre in the role of what he calls “spectator”.



Rehearsing a devised play about the demise of the steel industry

What effect did all this new knowledge about the theatre and acting and the many other things I was experiencing in a very non-linear way have on me? When I reflect on this period I create an image in my mind of intensity but in a very joyous way. I was finding me, my “I”, my identity, as I was preparing myself to take on the role of other characters.

It is with mixed emotions I am at this moment in time observing my oldest son, Philip, going through a very similar process. Philip is an incredibly bright young man and at just 19 he has managed to maintain his passion for knowledge, very often despite rather than because of our education system. I can recall his first day at school he wandered out of the classroom with a puzzled expression on his face. I asked him if he had enjoyed school, he replied “mm it was OK” I shouted “see you tomorrow” to one of the other mums who I knew. “Mummy, why are we coming to school tomorrow, I went to school today, why do I have to go again?” At that moment his new teacher came out of the classroom and I suggested that he say thank you to her for today. He walked gravely over to his teacher and put out his small hand in an offer to shake hers. “Thank you”

he said “Oh that’s my pleasure, see you in the morning” she replied. And then to my astonishment he said “Oh no I won’t be coming back tomorrow, I didn’t learn anything today, so I don’t think I’ll be back again.” The look on her face in the following moments as I bundled my son out of the door is a look I have seen on a few of his subsequent teacher’s faces as they struggle to answer him. I can divide his teachers into two distinct camps, there have been no grey areas, they have either loved him and found his questioning of the world stimulating and even labelled him as a ‘genius’ or they have really taken a dislike to him and thought him troublesome. He has been very successful academically and has a place to study medicine in October 2003, something that he has wanted to do for as long as I can remember. At the moment he is having a gap year and travelling across the Southern hemisphere. Before he left he had the opportunity to work with Shaun and myself developing a piece of theatre in education for children in year 7. His engagement with the work of Boal has had a profound effect on him, so much so that he is now going to give up his place to do medicine and study theatre instead. People are finding it quite hard to understand this transition but I understand it completely. There is, of course, a part of me that is wanting to say “no stick with medicine it’s much safer,” but I can’t because I can share his awakening at a deeply personal level and I know he has to continue being true to himself. ¹

Each half term at Bruford’s led to a performance of one sort or another. The first half of the term was usually a smaller version of a larger event at the end of the term. Throughout the term the classes were geared towards developing whatever skills you needed for the production. In my first term we were of course thrown straight in at the deep end. We were given

¹ Philip did in fact take up his place to study medicine and is now at the end of his second year. Although he feels committed to medicine he is finding the way he is being taught rather disappointing and often unstimulating. There appears to be a lack of opportunity for critical thinking which for students like him results in frustration.

a series of stories that had been written by a group of Asian women who were working in a laundry in London. Our task at the end of a 4-week period was to devise a piece of theatre that truthfully communicated the issues we had identified from their stories. We all had to develop and perform authentic, believable characters that could interact with each other and tell their stories. This was an enormous challenge, as firstly not one of us was Asian and secondly we were not all women. We did actually meet the challenge and were able to present our stories to the rest of the college and it was passable as a short piece of theatre. What was more important was the level of learning we had been engaged in. In order to communicate on behalf of another we had to understand what they would want us to communicate. We spent time in a sweatshop, we worked alongside these women, several had been living and working in London for many years but still spoke very little English. We learnt about their culture and the role of women within that culture. We discovered what made them laugh and what made them angry and I experienced racism and the effect it had on its victims for the first time in my life. I was also developing a relationship with one of the students in his third year, Shaun, Shaun is now my husband. His help throughout this project was very important, his questioning and challenges made me delve deeper into my value system than I had ever been able to do before. His experience of Asian culture and his own experience of racism forced me to look at my own racism, which of course I naively denied. Shaun's father is Indian and was born and brought up in South Africa and moved to Glasgow over 50 years ago. His mother was the white daughter of an Irish family and theirs was the first mixed race family in the neighbourhood. So Shaun's experience of racism is his lived experience. I found it very painful to discover that the white, postcolonial society that I had been brought up within was deeply racist and that until I confronted those values within myself and recognised my own contradictions I would not rise above it. I can remember having an argument with another student Paulette, who was

one of my closest friends. She was talking about when she enters a room people see her firstly as black and then as a woman but when I enter a room I am seen firstly as a woman. I replied, again naively, that I didn't see her blackness, I just saw her, Paulette, my friend, who I love, it wasn't important to me what colour my friends were. I could never have been prepared for her anger and the disappointment she felt towards me. What I had said to her denied who she was, it denied her identity, denied that she was a black woman living in a white racist society and my denial of this fact to her was even more racist, what a lot I had to learn! Now when I remember these moments I can see how lucky I was to be in an environment where we were having to confront issues like this head on, trying to resolve them within ourselves in order to create a theatre that would engage others in a similar process. I was also able to begin to live my values in my practice more fully by being engaged in a process of relating to others in a more inclusional, responsive, trusting and loving way.

As part of this process, I have also been influenced by the post colonial writing of a Paulus Murray, (Murray, 2004). His writing has encouraged me to pay attention to the post colonial nature of inclusionality (Rayner, 2004) and responsiveness in my work and to myself as the wife of a mixed race husband and as the mother of my mixed race children. Paulus also alerted me to his passion and spirit in Ubuntu, which speaks of the fact that a person is a person because of other people. I believe that in communicating my inquiry I am able to demonstrate how I have tried to fully embrace this in my practice by striving to move my ontological commitment to a passion for compassion to a living, inclusional and responsive epistemological standard of judgement. I am often amazed at how little attention we pay to issues such as compassion and respect in what we term the caring professions and beyond in society as a whole. Tackling issues of stigma and discrimination is at the forefront of what I

do within mental health services where these behaviours are often experienced by the people who use our services. This is also recognised by Gaita in the following writing.

"Treat me as a human being, fully as your equal, without condescension - that demand (or plea), whether it is made by women to men or by blacks to white, is a demand or a plea for justice. Not, however, for justice conceived as equal access to goods and opportunities. It is for justice conceived as equality of respect. Only when one's humanity is fully visible will one be treated as someone who can intelligently press claims to equal access to goods and opportunities. Victims of racial or other forms of radical denigration, who are quite literally treated as less than fully human, would be - if they were to do it. The struggle for social justice, I argue, is the struggle to make our institutions reveal rather than obscure, and then enhance rather than diminish, the full humanity of our fellow citizens.

To speak, as I do, of fully acknowledging another's humanity will, I know, sound like rhetoric to many people who would prefer to speak of recognising someone fully as a person, or even as a rational agent, at least when, in philosophical mode, they try to make perspicuous what really is the bearer of moral status. My endorsements of Weil's remark - that love sees what is invisible - will sound even worse to them. In this preface I can only plead that I mean both and soberly. Later I argue that improbable though it may seem at first, placing the weight that I do on our humanity and on love rather than on, say, the obligated acknowledgement of rights, is more hardheaded than the longing to make secure to reason what reason cannot secure, all the while whistling in the dark." (Gaita, 2002. pp. 20-21).

We were also learning how to perform – believably – but what does that actually mean and what did it entail. In order to communicate something to an audience you have to fully understand what it is you are communicating. If you are working from a script it is impossible to extract the meaning simply from looking at the words that are written down. You have to find the meaning, find what it is that the character is really trying to say, what they are feeling and then communicate it in a way that you know the audience is going to believe you. The development of a character happens on many different levels. There is the physical level, how do they differ physically from yourself? Are they heavier or lighter than you? How does this affect the way they move? How does their physical self affect the way they speak? How does the way they speak differ from the way I speak? Faster, slower, higher, lower? How do they relate to the other people in the scene? What motivates them? Where are the power relationships? How does the way we relate physically in the space affect our relationship? In order to answer these questions about a character I am building I have to be able to answer them about myself. I cannot make a journey to another place until I know where that journey begins. Who am I? How do I move? How do I speak? What do I feel? How do I relate to other people? What are my values? These are areas I had never even considered before; I thought if I said the lines beautifully then everything else would just happen around me.

Of course throughout the three years I studied theatre there were many highs and lows. There were times when things went very well but there were also many difficult times. Much of the work in the early terms was geared towards breaking down barriers, particularly physical barriers. I found this work particularly challenging. I learnt very early on that I was uncomfortable when anyone came into my personal space. I was uncomfortable with my own body. I had a tendency to become very tense physically if another person came too close. I had not known these things

about myself; in our society we don't get too close to each other. We are more reserved physically than in other cultures so I was not unusual. Over the three years I learnt many games and exercises that helped me deal with my physical insecurity. I became more aware of my body and voice. I was also beginning to allow myself to love me through developing loving relationships with others.

Boal divides the actors development into exercises and games with exercises aimed at ***“all physical muscular movement (respiratory, motor, vocal) which helps the doer to a better knowledge or recognition of his or her body, its muscles, its nerves, its relationship to other bodies, to gravity, objects, space, dimensions, volumes, distances, weights, speed, the interrelationship of these different forces, and so on. The goal of the exercises is a better awareness of the body and its mechanisms, its atrophies and hypertrophies, its capacities for recuperation, restructuring, reharmonisation. Each exercise is a ‘physical reflection’ on oneself. A monologue. An introversion.”*** (Boal, 1992, p.60).

Games differ from exercises in that they are usually concerned with the body's expression with others. The way in which we use our bodies to communicate, as Boal says, games ***“deal with the expressivity of the body as emitter and receiver of messages. The games are a dialogue, they require an interlocutor. They are extroversion.”*** (Boal, 1992, p.60).

Actors will use games and exercise together throughout their professional lives. They also play a vital role in developing all of our senses particularly those of touch, sight and sound. Our busy lives give us very little time to be aware of these senses but actors have to develop these in order be freer and more receptive when working creatively.

The other area of an actor's work, which has to be developed, is concerned with group dynamic. If, for instance, I have to fall backwards off a

platform and have to be caught by a fellow actor I can only do that if I trust them. Actors work very hard on their relationships with each other in order to build trust. Actors also have to learn how to give and receive constructive criticism. We have to learn how to be truthful and objective both in the giving and receiving of criticism. All of these skills can be learnt by anyone and I have subsequently used all of these techniques with teams I have been working with in the health service.

The course at Bruford's was unique in another area. It had been introduced to us as being student centred and also used a spiral learning curriculum. What did that mean to us in practice? We were taught how to write and use a reflective diary throughout the three years, which we had to start on day one. This diary was used at the end of each segment of the course as a means of identifying what you had learned, what you didn't learn and where you needed to go to next. This demanded a rigour of analysis and reflection that I have attempted to keep throughout my working and learning life. It also demanded a commitment from the staff most of whom were incredibly hard working. There was also a policy to employ directors from the profession on a project basis to direct productions. This enabled the college to keep in touch with the outside profession on a practical basis. It was quite often difficult for guest directors to maintain the same level of rigour in terms of analysis and this was not the usual practice within the profession. This did not put the college off employing from within the profession as it was seen to be a very practical way of preparing actors for the reality of working in the profession in the real world, as a practitioner.

Discovering the educational power of theatre.

Until I went to Bruford's I had never heard of theatre-in education (T.I.E.) in any shape or form, but I was very fortunate studying in London to have

access to several of the leaders in this field. My first experience of T.I.E. was watching a performance of *“Ways of Change”* from the Cockpit T.I.E. team. The programme from the team was delivered in 2 parts each part taking a half day and the 2 parts were separated by about 3 weeks. This particular programme marked a fundamental shift in the relationship between T.I.E. and schools. This shift was from a one off theatrical experience that could be delivered to as many groups of children in schools as was possible, to the development alongside a group of teachers that can be used as an integral part of the school curriculum. This meant that the theatre would have to be judged not just on its merits as a piece of theatre but also on precise and particular educational aims.

The theatre was set in the seventeenth century English revolution to examine *“How and why change takes place”*, (SCYPT Journal, 1980). In part one the actor/teachers use a combination of narration and improvisation to understand the different perspectives from different class groups by establishing different class identities. I was given the role of a peasant and when the suggestion was made that we should storm the Palace, I was ready to go and knew exactly what was at stake and what I was fighting for. It is important to acknowledge that I was in my 20's and up until this moment was unaware until then that England had had a revolution.

The second part of the programme is a very rich piece of theatre that uses imagery to examine the way individual characters experience change, from revolutionary change to personal change. The purpose of this is to provoke an emotional response from the audience, which makes direct links with their own experience and hopefully helps them to deal with change. When the theatre programme comes to an end the teachers use this stimulus across a whole range of lessons, History, English as well as Social Studies and Drama. The teachers were also provided with a

teacher's pack, which contained a wide variety of helpful material, which included excerpts from the theatre, photographs and suggestions for lesson plans. I was very excited by this whole experience; I couldn't believe how much I had learnt from this and even now how clear some of the images from the theatre are. I wanted to learn more about T.I.E how I could become involved and also how this kind of educational theatre could be used with older audiences in local communities.

Woman The Healer

*“A woman's place is set, like a tightly woven net
She's chained to her position like a dog
And if by chance or fate she should happen to escape
She's a menace to the keepers of tradition
So if you have the gift to heal but forget which way to kneel
Get ready for a man made inquisition
In the witching hour you come to your power
You feel it deep within you
It's rising, rising
And you think it's a dream 'til you hear yourself scream
Power to the witch and the woman in me.”*

(Daly, 1973, p.63.)

In my final term at Rose Bruford College, I and the rest of my year group were expected to research, devise and perform a piece of theatre that would be accepted in the professional world. We were able to work with other individuals, in effect forming a theatre company, or to work alone on a one-person production. We could use whatever form we felt to be most

appropriate and for a target audience of our own choosing. I had a lengthy session with Colin Hicks, my tutor at the time, we were reviewing my learning to date and identifying and agreeing where I needed to go next and what skills I would need in order to fulfil what ever I decided I would do. This student centred approach was at the centre of the spiral curriculum that had been introduced into the course. I can remember quite clearly as the session was drawing to a close he looked at me and held my gaze for what seemed like a very long time and then, **“Marian”** he said **“you are carrying the nursing profession on your back, you need to deal with it.”** I was a little stunned by this and demanded an explanation. **“Just think about it”** was all he would say. I did think about, I thought about it a great deal and this thinking led me to research a part of history that up until this moment in time I knew very little about. I was reading a book at the time called “Beyond God The Father, Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation,” by Mary Daly, and I was struck by the following excerpt.

“A most striking example of the selective total destruction of a large number of women was the torturing and burning of women condemned by the church as witches. The most important medieval work on the subject, the Malleus Maleficarum, written by two Dominican priests (Sprenger and Kramer) in the fifteenth century proclaims, “it is women who are chiefly addicted to evil superstitions.” This is, after all, only to be expected, for “all witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable.....(Daly, 1973. p.63).

The authors of the Malleus Maleficarum or The Witches Hammer, that Mary Daly refers to was the professional manual for witch-hunters. It asserts that among women, midwives surpass all others in wickedness. Michelet elaborates on this point **“there is reason to believe that women who were midwives and who healed were greatly feared by the Church,**

for their power threatened the supremacy of the clerics”, (Michelet, 1958, p.77). I was shocked by this information, yes of course I knew about the witch-hunts but my knowledge was quite limited. I decided to find out as much information as I could about the witch-hunts and the more I discovered the more shocked I became. The most striking thing about the research was my complete ignorance of the numbers of women who were hanged or burnt at the stake. What is it about the teaching of history in our schools that it can ignore such an important and significant part of our history, particularly the history of women? There is of course much debate amongst historians about the number of people who died in this way and the numbers range from 30,000 to several million and the majority of those killed were women. Within this number of women there appears to be a significant amount of wise women, midwives and healers. What all of these women had in common was a perceived power and that power arose out of knowledge. In the case of the wise woman she was an expert in the healing power of herbs and was a source of help within the local community. This knowledge of healing was identified as being supplied to the women by the devil and as a consequence they were classed as evil. The Malleus Maleficarum clearly outlines this fear of women who are perceived as having power and how this power if not controlled by men will be their downfall.

“If we enquire we find that nearly all the kingdoms of the world have been overthrown by women. Troy, which was a prosperous kingdom, was, for the rape of one woman, Helen, destroyed, and many thousands of Greeks slain. The kingdom of the Jews suffered much misfortune and destruction through the accursed Jezebel, and her daughter Athaliah, queen of Judah, who caused her son’s sons to be killed, that on her death she might reign herself; yet each of them were slain. The kingdom of the Romans endured much evil through Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, that worst of women. And so with others. Therefore it is no

wonder if the world now suffers through the malice of women.”

(Summers, 1971, p.46).

This clearly illustrates the feeling of the time of the witch-hunts, that women who were perceived to have power or knowledge were dangerous and not to be trusted. This originates from the belief that women are weaker than men and also much less intelligent.

“..that since they are feebler both in mind and body, it is not surprising that they should come under the spell of witchcraft”, (Summers, 1971, p.45).

Women are also perceived as being deceitful and cunning which again creates difficulties for men.

“And he means that a woman is beautiful to look upon, contaminating to the touch, and deadly to keep.....For as she is a liar by nature, so in her speech she stings while she delights us. Wherefore her voice is like the song of the sirens, who with their sweet melody entice the passers-by and kill them.” (Summers, 1971, p. 46).

Although I was researching a period of history I was finding resonance in much of what I was reading and discovering about this period. As I thought about my experience as a woman and as a nurse several centuries later, I found myself identifying with the women I was reading about. This was a significant time for me both as an actor and an educator. I had been influenced by the writing of Freire and Boal and combining this influence with my interest in this period of history I made the decision to research, devise, write and perform a piece of Theatre-in –Education. The theatre would be aimed at 14 and 15 year olds and their teachers. I wanted to work initially with young people in Liverpool, my home city. There

were several reasons for wanting to work in Liverpool at this particular time and one reason was the generosity of the Education Department in funding my place at Drama College. At the time of my application the course at Rose Bruford college, like all other drama schools was not accepted at degree level. Rose Bruford college was accepted as a degree when I was in my 3rd year of study. This meant that successful applicants had to apply to their local authority for a discretionary award and Liverpool was known to be one of the most difficult to make such awards. I was determined to persuade the authority to invest in my education. Without this award, which would pay my fees, I would be unable to take up my place. In my interview I promised that if they were to support my application I would make sure that Liverpool would benefit in some way from the skills I would no doubt develop. This project for me was the beginning of that repayment. I knew that my education at school would have benefited from a Theatre-in –Education input, but to my knowledge there was nothing like this available to schools in the city. This for me was to be the first of several inputs into my home city over the years and since this time I have been able to input into the development of Theatre-in-education in Liverpool both directly and indirectly through my involvement in the education of actors within the city.

I also wanted to engage the young people I worked with in the whole process and to develop a relationship with them. I developed a workshop to accompany the theatre and the workshop happened about 2 weeks before the theatre. Working with those involved in this way allowed them to get to know a little more about me and me to find out about them. In the workshop we explored their understanding of witches and witchcraft, they made costumes and used make-up to dress each other in whatever they decided was witch-like. The workshop then went on to explore, through the use of games, exercise and improvisation, the role that women

play in today's healthcare and later, in discussion, their understanding of the different roles played by women and men in today's society.

I learnt so much from these workshops and the first 2 or 3 workshops resulted in some changes in the theatre itself. I had an expectation or perhaps it was a hope, that the stereotypical male and female roles would have changed since I was at school. The experience of this set of workshops was that at the level of discussion there was change but at the level of behaviour, displayed through role play and improvisation, sexism was still deeply embedded into the culture of both the boys and the girls participating. In one improvisation in particular I asked for 2 volunteers, 1 to play a nurse and 1 to play doctor. The volunteers in most instances were boys for the doctor and girls for the nurse. There was usually willingness for the girls to play the role of the doctor, with encouragement, but the boys were always reluctant to undertake the role of the nurse. The interaction within the improvisation was also very interesting with the boys often commenting on their dissatisfaction with the tidiness of the ward and in the main placing the nurse in a subservient role. It was also interesting to observe that when the boys were challenged by the girls, they often resorted to personal insult as a means of defence.

My second visit to the school was to share with them the story that I had developed from the research. It was also important for me to show them what it was like to be an actor. I wanted them to see me turn up at the school, straight off the bus, with all I needed for the theatre contained in a backpack. I had no set, no lights, and no magic tricks up my sleeve. I was just like them, a girl from Liverpool, if I could do this then so could they. I wanted to demystify the role of the actor and make that role as accessible to them as I could. In many ways this was very naive and I can remember my first visit to an inner city school in Liverpool being escorted to the classroom by a security guard. I entered the classroom only to be

confronted by these huge teenagers who towered above me and I thought to myself what on earth have I let myself into. Many of the audiences were indeed challenging and I was not very experienced but on the whole they participated in the workshop and their teacher was usually there to lend a hand. The experience of leading the workshops enabled me to gain a little more insight into the kind of story I was developing. The character in the story had to be someone who they could all relate to in some way. They had to like her and develop an empathy with her. I had to engage them emotionally but I had to ensure that this did not result in catharsis but in an understanding of the causes of her predicament. I was also conscious that I didn't want to create a victim, but I wanted her story to be told in such a way that she maintained her integrity in spite of her circumstances. The way I solved this was to involve the young people in the story. The story is about a young woman around their own age, her name is Alice. Alice is an engaging character, she is bright and energetic and someone who they immediately like. Before the story begins they help me to set up the acting area, which involved identifying the acting space, setting out where they are going to sit and scattering a selection of greenery around the floor space. We then discussed the format of the story and how they were going to be involved. In the final scene Alice is tried as a witch and hanged and they need to help me with both the trial and the hanging. This instantly engaged them in the drama and the scene was rehearsed. I had prepared cards for them with their lines on, which were taken from the *Malleus Maleficarum*. We would then spend some time developing the characters in their role play and talking about this particular period in history. When they are happy with their performance we begin the story and they meet Alice for the first time.

Within the story I also introduced the role of the narrator who could move in and out of the drama and comment on the action. Alice and her twin sister Mary are the only children of a very wealthy land owner and his

beautiful wife. They are identical in every way except for the fact that Alice is born with a clubfoot. In the 17th century where the story is set, there is a lot of superstition and Alice is rarely seen outside her parent's estate. When we first meet Alice she has escaped from her 16th birthday celebration into the forest where she finds peace. The party is also a celebration of the betrothal of her twin sister to the local magistrate. Alice talks to the audience about her love of nature and her friendship with the local wise woman, who she admires greatly for her knowledge, Alice tells the audience, "*The wise woman says that, one plant grows for every illness that ails folk, imagine that, an illness, a plant, a cure!*" She also describes how she saw the wise woman cast out the devil from a young woman in the village by reciting a spell.

*"Shake her once more devil,
Shake her once well.
Then shake her no more
'Til you shake her in hell."*

As the story unfolds we learn that Alice is forbidden to continue to meet the wise woman but of course she continues her liaisons in secret. This is further complicated when her sister marries the magistrate as he is the leader in the search for witches. There is a point in the story where we see Alice collecting branches as she tells us the story of the wise woman's capture and torture. As she tells the story she is making a traditional broom out of the branches, which symbolises her developing understanding of the importance of the role of the wise woman. We see Alice make this connection and her realisation leads to her decision to continue in her place. At the end of the monologue she sweeps the floor with this symbol of witchcraft.

“I heard their voices clearly from my hiding place.... my blood froze. There were many amongst them that I recognised from the village and there was 1 voice in particular, my sister’s husband, the magistrate. They had come to her house many times before for medicine, for herbs, she had helped them all. Now they came for another reason, to mock and to taunt and to accuse. They took her from her home and they kept her for three days without food. She was tortured and her body was shaved of all its hair. On the 4th day she was taken to the river they tied her left wrist to her right ankle and her right wrist to her left ankle and they threw her in the river. A guilty witch will rise to the surface and the innocent will sink.....she sank. But they decidedwith all their wisdom.... That here was a particularly evil and cunning woman, she almost had them fooled. And yesterday, at noon, upon that hill, she was hanged by the neck until she was dead “Ad Majorum Dei Gloriam” For the greater glory of God. Whose God? A god who demands human sacrifice? A God whose body is fed by the blood of my sisters? There is no magic! No witchcraft! Just simple skills that have been handed down through the ages... through the hands of women.....into my hands.” (Roberts, Woman the Healer, 1982).

Using the image of the broom in this way enabled me to show the contradiction between what we assume when we see the broom and the reality. In the workshop the young people always used the broom as a symbol of witchcraft. The image of the broom in the theatre is a concrete stage image but for the audience has meaning beyond its use in the theatre. That meaning carries with it the attitude of society towards witches and witchcraft. The very act of building the broom as Alice does while she talks to the audience also presents the powerful image of Alice deciding to take control of her own life and begin to transform it.

Alice's decision to leave her home and take up the place of the wise woman in her house has many ramifications for her. She is devastated by the decision of her father and her brother-in-law to forbid her any contact with her twin sister. Mary is expecting her first baby, the birth of the baby is not straightforward and after many hours of labour, in desperation their mother smuggles Alice into her sister to see if she can help. Alice brings Mary some medicine she has prepared for her and her baby son is born safely. The baby is perfect in every way apart from having the same deformity of the foot as Alice. Mary's husband is outraged and accuses Alice of witchcraft. Alice is arrested, tried and hanged by the audience.

As the drama has unfolded the young people have developed a relationship with Alice. When it comes to the trial the enthusiasm that the audience found in the rehearsal has usually gone. At this point they no longer want to hang Alice and understand that the circumstances surrounding her arrest are about ignorance and superstition and not guilt.

I had a real struggle with this scene particularly within the framework of Forum theatre. I did not know whether to involve the audience as 'spectactors' in the method of Boal and let them rewrite the scene in the way that they wanted it to end. My decision to make them continue with the trial and the hanging was so that they could experience the feeling that they had become tied up within something that was out of control. I wanted them to experience in order to understand the role of the others who had an impact on Alice's life. There would then be the potential for transformation from a position of an understanding of the motivation of all those involved rather than just a feeling of empathy for Alice.

No matter how many times I performed *Woman The Healer* I was always amazed at the level of contribution from the young people I worked with. The story was always followed by a full discussion and it was here that I

gave them the opportunity to change the story, but now from an informed position with me in the role of what Freire calls “*the problem-posing educator*”.

“The students – no longer docile listeners – are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher.” (Freire,1970. p.62).

I was now at the end of my theatre training and looking forward to being able to take the skills I had developed and use them and develop them further in the real world.

In this chapter I have reflected on stories from my past that I believe have made a significant contribution to the development of my practice. In particular my ontological commitment to having a passion for compassion can be directly linked to my early experience of hospitalisation as a child. The values that appear to be motivating my practice are also an important part of the stories contained in this chapter. Values such as love and respect for self and for others and developing an inclusional and responsive basis in my work can be seen to play an important part in who I am becoming, and how I am developing my practice.

In the following chapter I look at how my growing awareness of and engagement with complexity theory helped me to understand the importance of the creative process in my work in healthcare improvement and how in applying a synthesis of complexity and creativity I was, I believe, able to improve my practice.