

**AN ACCIDENT, TIME OUT, AND A CURRICULUM REVIVAL: RENEWED VISIONS
OF LIVING AND LEARNING USING NARRATIVES OF EXPERIENCE, POETIC
INQUIRY, AND ART-BASED RESEARCH**

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ABSTRACT

This narrative inquiry self-study focuses on my experience of sustaining a severe head injury and making my way back to a 'new normal' life over a 2 to 3-year period. As is the case in self-study research, it is a personal tale that contributes one person's experience to the body of work on sustaining and recovering from a head injury and how the effects of head injury are perceived and felt personally and professionally over time. I use Connelly and Clandinin's (1994) definition of curriculum as being comprised of all of life's experience and their narrative framework for placing experience across time to ground my study. In my text, I share stories of situations and events that offer insights into sustaining a head injury and living through periods of recovery where I spent many months at home unable to fully process or engage in the life going on around me. I describe my gradual return to family, friends, research, and teaching after a 20-month absence when, even then, I had trouble coping with the effects of my head injury. Along with the stories of experience that form part of my text, I also include poems and visual art pieces that extend the story into the emotional realm I inhabited during this time. These works were completed both prior to and during this time period. I use these methods, as they are central to my work as a narrative and poetic inquirer and an art-based researcher. By focusing my study on this particular time in my life, I hope to bring clarity to my own understanding of the extent of changes sustaining a head injury has had on my life and those of my family. At the same time, I believe my study offers an example of one person's experience of head injury to others who seek to comprehend the effects of head injury beyond statistical accounts and summations. I believe this study will be of use to professionals who teach, support, counsel, and help rehabilitate those who live with an acquired head injury.

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Throughout this process of creating and writing this dissertation, I have gone through some difficult times personally and educationally. Reflecting back on my journey I was and am very fortunate to have been surrounded by such an amazing group of advisors which formed, what I would call, the dream committee.

I would like to thank Dr. David Booth for being there to question my thoughts of what kind of researcher I would like to become. Through his ongoing questioning throughout my defence, I was able to better articulate how I wanted to move forward with this research and as a researcher. Thank-you David for guiding me to become a better learner, researcher, and educator.

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DEDICATION

I simply dedicate this work to my family.

Job and Mac, you helped me through this work and more importantly through my recovery. Your constant caring and presence kept me focused on returning back to a father that you would be proud of. One that can play mini-sticks and read bed time stories to you. Thank-You for being the best boys ever.

Missy, you have always been there when I needed you. You have unconditionally supported me through this concussion recovery and in the writing of this dissertation. During the darkest times of recovery our family stayed strong only because of the love and support you radiant, which surrounds and completes our home. You are truly our WONDERWOMAN!

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Living. Digital photo. Adams, J. (2015).

PROLOGUE

Evolve

*Turning back time
could have made
life easier -*

*No struggles
no pain
no heartache.*

*Turning back time
could have made
our family life more
peaceful -*

*No yelling
no egg shells
no darkness.*

*Turning back time
could have made
my head less concussed -*

*No burning
no dizziness
no pressure.*

*Turning back time
could have made
me less aware -*

*No change
no growth
no evolving.*

A PREAMBLE TO MY STUDY

Looking back over the past number of years, I reflect on the beginning of my Ph.D. experience. It was July 2012, and I was at the starting line of another long run in my academic life. I was about to embrace Nipissing University's Ph.D. program as a member of the first cohort. I remember being excited but also nervous and asking myself what I was getting into. Entering a doctoral program had always been one of my life goals. I think this goal was unofficially set when I graduated from high school. I did not know what the future might hold, but my wheels were turning and this future idea was set into motion.

My educational path really began at the end of my high school years with one small comment that my dad made when I told him that I had applied for a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree instead of one in Human Kinetics, which was my initial plan. My dad asked me, "What are you going to do with an Arts degree?" and my reply was, I am not sure. In the present, I can proudly say that I completed my M.Ed. thesis in 2010 using what I learned engaging in my Fine Arts degree.

Now, as I write this Ph.D. dissertation, I am looking back at how life has changed for me since acquiring a severe head injury in 2015, and how my pathway has been altered. I remember at the beginning of the program walking into my residence as I began the first summer of my residency. At that time, I was continually asking myself, "Am I actually doing this degree?" I remember meeting my fellow first-year cohort and thinking, I can do this. There was a lot of change going on in my life then, but the most difficult one was leaving my family for the month of July that year.

During that first week of class, Dr. Shields shared the idea of "embracing the change" that doctoral study would bring us. Carmen, who supervised my Master's thesis, has always instilled

this thought in me, and now she was placing this idea on the table for everyone else to digest. Some of my classmates embraced the idea that we would grow and change over the years of doctoral studies and others questioned it. I have had the privilege of working with Carmen since 2003 when I began my Master's degree, and I have grown to embrace this perspective – I have learned that we live in a sometimes subtle, continual state of change across our life span. Reminding myself of this remembrance now and embracing it, I begin to write my self-study research.

I began this first section in the summer of 2016, and I thought I would have graduated already, but I have not. My original goal was to be the first person to walk across the stage receiving a Ph.D. degree from Nipissing University ever in the history of the school. Since my last name is Adams, I knew I would have a good chance of being the first one in an alphabetical list. I also admit that, in my bold-headed cockiness, I was trying to scout out last names during that first class to see if anyone's last name would be placed before me in the alphabetical lineup.

But in the present, I am just thankful for receiving an extension from Nipissing to complete my degree. My initial goal of being the first in line has passed, as some of my classmates have already walked the path across the stage and received their degrees. I am proud of them and celebrate their achievements. I am also thankful for the friendships that have grown out of those years and look forward to continuing them in the future.

Looking at where I am now, Carmen's words ring so true. I am not the same person that I was when I started this journey, and I have had to embrace the change. I connect her words with Dewey (1938) who writes, "everything depends upon the quality of the experience which is had" (p. 27). Through every experience that I have had, it is the quality of those experiences that have continued to change and mould my learning, including this recent change that sustaining a severe head injury has brought to my life.

My parents have always encouraged me to do my best, to compete at my best, and to be happy. I am fortunate to have married my best friend, who is the most supportive person I could have ever wished for, and I have become a father to two amazing boys who always challenge me to be the best that I can be. Despite not being the first to walk across that stage, I always return to that simple conversation with my dad that started it all. Each step of my education journey seems harder than the last, but as I jump, walk, or crawl over every hurdle, I begin to understand how important each step is in this continual process of lifelong learning. Through focusing my Ph.D. research on my years of experience with severe head injury, I embrace my changes and use them to revive and renew my vision of living and learning as I move forward professionally and personally in my life.

Beginning to Find Myself Again

A life story gives us the benefit of seeing how one person experiences and understands life over time. In telling our life story, we gain new insights into dilemmas, human struggles, and human triumphs, while also gaining a greater appreciation for how values and beliefs are acquired, shaped and held onto. (Atkinson, 1995, p. 4)

When I first read Atkinson's (1995) words at the beginning of my graduate journey I attached myself to them. I believed that I knew enough about my story to be able to speak fluently about the importance of the human story. I thought that because I was a reflective person, I could best make sense of my experience using story, poetry, and visual art because these forms of research are so important to my own learning and teaching. I know that looking at the power of my individual story enables me as the viewer/researcher to have a brief glimpse – a moment in time – to witness exactly what Atkinson speaks about. I know that allowing myself to reflect on past situations and events assists me in the process of present-day understanding. And

through that process I continue to try to comprehend my new story and the power my lived experience has over my learning and day-to-day living.

Since 2016, I have begun this dissertation multiple times, and I have left it multiple times. I have quite often begun to write words, and then I leave them alone for weeks or what now is months at a time. I do this because my idea, which produced those words, has vanished, and I have forgotten the direction I was traveling. I know it is my idea that I continue to search for. My thoughts swirl around different and numerous possibilities, but then, like everything of late, the thoughts vanish into the fog. I know that my idea is what I need to build the story, build the momentum, move me forward, but nevertheless, I am left searching in a dark room. I often feel I am a dried seed hoping and anxiously waiting for the rain.

Organizing The Text That Follows: Narratives, Poetry, and Art

Utilizing Connelly and Clandinin's (1988; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 2000) definition of curriculum as being comprised of all of life's experiences, and their framework for storying life's experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 2000), the chapters that follow contain narratives of my head injury experience. They also include poetic and visual art representations of the feelings I experienced and the insights I gained living through my head injury. I include the poetic and visual art pieces because they are my tools for sharing my inner self – they tell the story differently than text alone could tell. In my research, the poems and art I use provoke continuous insights which as researcher, I depend on to both deepen and strengthen my thinking around my research questions and my actual text.

I use mixed media because that is my usual practice in my own work and with those I teach. My original art training in my undergraduate years was as a print maker, and I have

gradually extended my practice to include painting and drawing, photography, and mixing various mediums on paper, canvas, and wood.

I often sketch in a notebook I carry with me, combining written ideas with images. I have carried on that practice through my years of head injury as I gradually improved health-wise. I build on the ideas I capture and extend them in my art – sometimes I work spontaneously writing poetry and painting in the moment. Sometimes, if I am part of a specific exhibition or writing poetry for a specific journal issue, I work according to what is required. In my study, I have chosen some artwork that I completed prior to my head injury and also pieces that I completed particularly for the study to represent how I was feeling at various points along the way. The poems were written as an extension of my narratives of events and situations that I found myself experiencing as a person with a head injury. I feel that I am able to add depth of feeling and insights for myself using poetry as a medium for expression.

Throughout the text, I offer a brief reflection on my intention for including the art pieces on the page that follows the pieces. I place that information on a separate page understanding that viewers/readers interpret images and text according to their own experience.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PHENOMENON OF MY STUDY: SUSTAINING A HEAD INJURY

In this chapter I describe the focus of my research and the personal and social justification for engaging in my topic. My rationale for sharing my story of sustaining and recovering from a serious head injury is that, much as others have done (Dryden, 2017; Sacks, 1996; Taylor, 2008), connecting with the lived experience of individuals living with differing long-term diagnoses can bring both personal information and hope to others. I know that engaging with one individual's story has the power to change or add to the perceptions we hold about injury and illness and I feel that by sharing my story I can not only help myself heal, but can also inform others how such an experience can alter life personally, in community and with family.

Describing My Research Focus

Looking back at the past years of my story, I believe now is the time to nurture my words and, with that, let my ideas grow. Currently, I am sitting at my dining room table, feeling well. Today is hot, sunny, and humid, and my trip to the Royal Victoria Hospital in Barrie, Ontario, following a debilitating concussion received while playing hockey, seems like a very long time ago.

The central focus of my research journey is the story of how February 8th 2015 – the day I sustained the concussion – has changed my life and the lives of my family. That one specific day put a stop to the life that we as a family had grown accustomed to. That day has shaped and moulded us into something entirely different than we were in the past. There has been no space to sit and enjoy a nice dinner or admire the view; the concussion provided a one-way ticket down in a crazy free-fall. Over the course of the last several years, I have been working my way out of

an overhanging cloudy haze that sits on top of and within my head. Through time and patience, I have had to reflect upon and recover my ideas that have been misplaced or forgotten.

A Simple Walk

It was Feb. 10th, 2015, a couple of days after my head hit the ice. I knew after the first day something was wrong. Things were not at all as clear as they should be or used to be. Something was not firing quite right in my head; everyday thoughts and movements had to be figured out and planned out seconds or minutes before I was able to follow through with them. The muffins that I would normally bake for the boys before school usually take about 10 minutes to make and then bake. Now what was a simple task before was taking me 50 to 60 minutes just to find and combine the ingredients. This was not normal. I fumbled my way through the first day, finding my speech deteriorating as the minutes passed. What I thought was going to be a simple day at home became a continuous, frustrating mess.

When my wife arrived home, my stuttering words were a mixed-up pile of disconnected thoughts. All I was trying to do was discuss her day at school. I figured that maybe I just needed to go for a walk. The fresh air would be good; I had been inside all day. A simple walk would clear my head and make things better. As we made our way up the street to the mailbox, she commented on how slowly I was moving. I proceeded to use the excuse of just enjoying the beautiful winter day.

The fresh air was feeling good, but it was not clearing my head. The walking was actually making things worse. The constant state of movement along with walking on the uneven ground of the snow-covered road was making me feel nauseated. The overwhelming feeling of dizziness had started to settle in as we made our way home. All I could think about was getting back into bed, and I still had 500 meters to get there. How was this going to work?

In the following poem, I offer an example of how a simple routine of family life morphed into the chaos I experienced following my head injury.

Waking Up: That First Monday Morning

Muffins anyone?

What is wrong with the kitchen?

*The kitchen looks different, everything is
moving in slow motion.*

Why is everything squeaking and creaking around the house?

*Everything is so loud -
the rooms are so bright.*

Wait...

*the lights are off
the sun is so bright.*

Wait...

*the sun is not up yet
why does everything seem so intense?*

Why can I not find the flour?

Who moved the flour?

All I am trying to do is make muffins.

Where is the baking powder?

The boys need to eat breakfast.

Now where are the damned eggs?

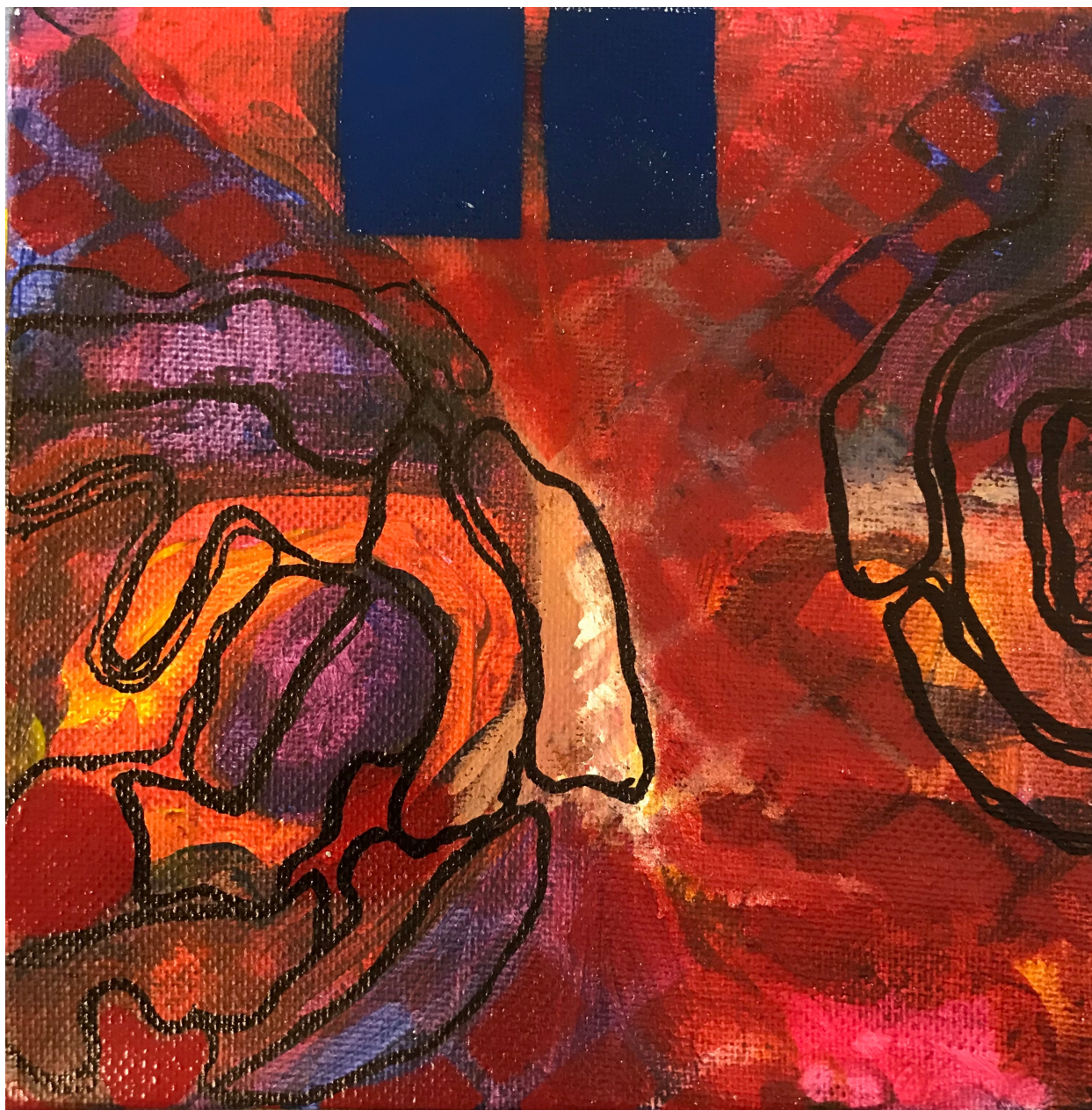
Someone must have moved everything.

Chocolate chips, I forgot the bloody chips -

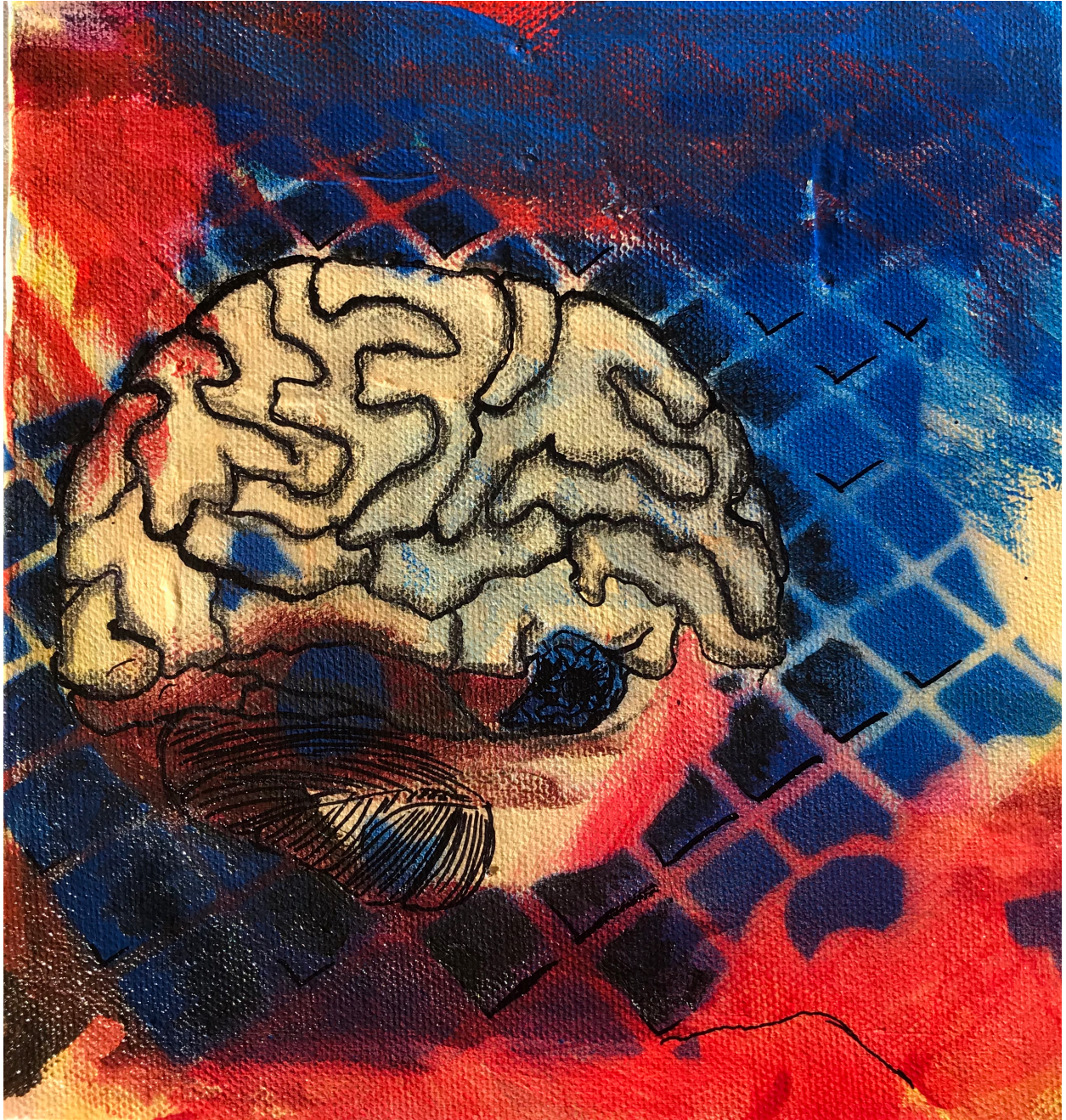
What is wrong this morning?

Something is wrong!

The following two images depict my struggle that morning with trying to complete my usual tasks on school-day mornings.



Thinking about muffins. Acrylic paint, spray paint, marker, pencil on paper. Adams, J. (2017).



Where's the flour? Acrylic paint, spray paint, marker, pencil on paper. Adams, J. (2017).

Describing These Images and My Process

*The two pieces of artwork entitled **Where's the flour?** and **Thinking about muffins** were produced as a reflection on the morning after I acquired my concussion. I made it common practice to bake muffins for my wife and two sons a couple of times in a week before they left for work and school. That morning was different than any other morning. That morning I realized I was not able to find any ingredients or even have a concrete thought to start the process of creating my recipe that morning.*

I used a number of different mediums in these paintings: acrylic paint, spray paint, marker, and pencil on paper. I have used all of these materials before but never together. As in that morning of uncertainty, I was unsure what the outcome of these works would look like.

During the process of working on these pieces I began to draw what I was thinking about as I reflected back on that morning when I first noticed I could not function in my normal way. I thought about simple ways I might use to complete these pieces. I thought about using stencils, which enabled me to layer different images on top of one another. My thinking was that by placing a cut out image on the top of the piece I had already created, I could represent the chaotic layers that I was experiencing visually as falling beneath one another as I tried to function on that first, frightening morning.

Continuing My Research Focus and Research Questions

Through my self-study research, I expand on Cole and Knowles's (2008) notion that becoming a teacher or educator is rooted in the personal. Not only is becoming a teacher deeply entrenched in the personal, but for me so is being an artist, a poet, a husband, and a father. Through these past years, my life and slow recovery has been an entirely personal experience. According to Mezirow (1990), to understand and create meaning I must make sense of an experience. I am not sure that I am able to make sense of this particular experience. I am not sure that, even as I sit here typing for the first time in several months, I know what my family and I have gone through in my slow recovery.

When I try to understand the events that took place that night while playing hockey, I am not even sure if anybody knew what happened. I remember standing in front of the opposition's net; the puck was in the corner, and my teammate was battling for the puck. The puck was then passed out in my direction and then I was flat on my back, staring up into the lights. It all happened very fast, but the burn that came into the back of my head, although it only took a few seconds, felt like an eternity. I remember slowly pulling myself from the ice and skating directly to the bench.

Ember

Lying staring up

taking time to study the rafters,

to study my opponent's mask and helmet.

Deep in the back of my head

the burning ember

slowly emitting the heat.

*The warm fuzz turns,
the gentle heat turns,
the glowing ember burns brighter -
a small flame.*

*The heat turns,
the burn remains
but why?*

As I continue to pursue my Ph.D. research, two positive things emerge with clarity that warrant my attention. First is the unconditional love and support I have received from my wife, our two boys, and friends and family through this time of change and upheaval. Second, through this time of recovery I have been able to spend time alone reflecting on my place and my identity as a father, a husband, a son, and a brother, along with my professional self as a narrative and poetic inquirer, and an artist-researcher.

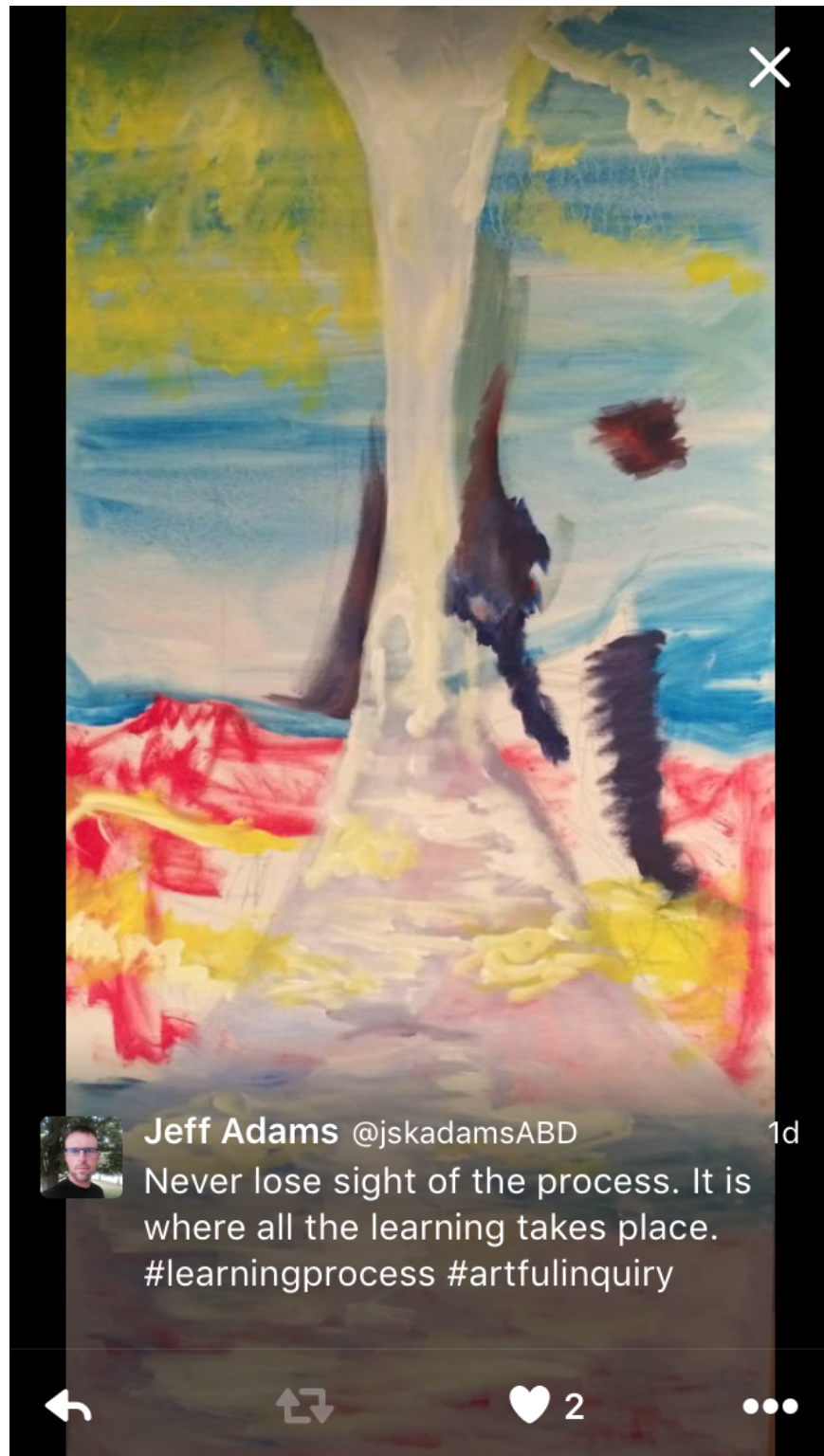
Questions arise for me that I want to address in my study; they are as follows:

1. During this period of my life, how has my perception of the roles I live been affected?
2. What can I learn about suffering a head injury and experiencing a revival of what I thought I knew about living in a family, about being a narrative and poetic inquirer, about art-based research?
3. What will I be able to say about the power of visual art and poetry to aid in transforming experience?
4. What will my renewed curricular insights entail at the end of my research that can help take me forward with hope and tenacity for my own growth and that of others I engage with personally and professionally?

Ultimately, my aim is to share my own experience and add to the growing awareness about the long-term fallout from receiving a head injury and living with the ongoing consequences.

I recognize through small moments of quiet reflection that I am able to discern events and situations that provide a starting place for sharing personal and professional stories about my head injury that offer direction into my search for renewed curricular understanding. I view this Ph.D. research now as a moment in time and a gift – a time when I am able to reflect on the power of my own narrative shared through stories of experience, poetry, and visual art that hold the seeds of new possibility for me in the present and future.

As the following art rendition details, it is important for me to remember that as in all learning, this head injury experience can be understood as a life event from which I can draw new understanding about myself. This doctoral journey provides me with the opportunity to engage in the process of continuous study (Pinar, 2015) as I incorporate new threads of meaning into my life story.



Twitter Entry. Digital screen shot. Adams, J. (2015).

Justification for My Study: Finding My Way

A Personal Perspective

Perhaps it goes without saying as I am engaged in self-study research, but my research begins and ends with me. I look inward as I consider the past, what I have enacted as a person and professional, and outward to what I will become, as I create a pathway towards a better understanding of my personal and professional praxis through the experience of severe head injury. I have been creating art and using art as a basis for my educative experience (Dewey, 1938) since I was a young boy. I use the term “educative” as I think of the continuity of art-making experiences I have engaged in across time that have informed me in positive ways in different roles in my life. As a boy, I mainly stuck to drawing, but as I grew older I started to move towards painting and printmaking. As the years have flown by, I have used art as my main method of learning, release from work, from family, from students, from stress, and from love. I look to art-making as my guide through failures and successes. I am a scholar, a researcher, a poet, and an artist; I am a teacher, husband and father, but am I critically reflective within all of these roles? In this present moment, I am not sure I have been.

In 2010, I graduated with a Master of Education degree, using my visual art and poetry to complete a narrative inquiry art-based thesis. My plan after graduating was to pursue a Ph.D. and continue on with my studies, and as of Feb. 7th, 2015 I was doing just that: continuing on. Once again I looked towards using story, poetry, and art as methods in my research, and I was thinking about how I could extend my Master’s research into the area of sustainable education. I was travelling to different curriculum conferences speaking about my research and having poems accepted for publication. Then, life as I knew it stopped. I had to stop my Ph.D. research and my teaching. Family life has been severely altered. Life is now different, it is not the same, and

things have changed. When I read the title of my dissertation and read the words *renewed and revival*, I try to remember what my initial direction was for this thesis journey. As hard as I try to remember, former thoughts are no longer there; my ideas have faded along with my memories, and only small crumbs are left.

However, in the present I have a renewed outlook on what this Ph.D. research means to me. It is no longer about how poetry and art can be used to formulate research and create new perspectives. I pursue this research now with the focus on recovery, perseverance, and reviving my inner self. I want and need to renew my beliefs about what curriculum means to me using my recent experience. Through combining stories of experience, poetic inquiry, artwork, and reflection, my intention is to engage in a revival of my curricular perspectives, to ask my research questions as I seek a sustainable future for myself in all the roles that encompass my life. With story, poetry, and artwork as my primary tools, moving forward, I hope to build a renewed vision for living and learning that creates a connection to my emotions (Eisner, 2008), which can help me realize the importance of my inner landscape in my quest for self-knowledge. As Pinar (1994) writes, this work is about the importance of acknowledging my “internal experience” (p. 16), which he sees as an essential ingredient of curriculum theorizing. This “moving inside the carriage” (p. 16) of my own experience is much like Palmer (2004) describes when he asks, “Whatever became of me?” as he explores what he calls “our backstage [or inner] life” (p. 40). I am now renewing my ideas about what sustainable curriculum might look like and feel like in my present and future.

Due to a slow recovery from my concussion, I was given one gift in the healing process. I was given time. Through this whole experience, time has moved at various and differing rates, sometimes fast, but mostly very slowly. I have had time to recognize that renewing my vision of

curriculum cannot happen for me on my own. During recovery, I was unable to learn on my own. I went from being a full-time Ph.D. student striving for excellence, to reading grade one level readers. I have had time to reflect on my self-knowledge and discover that the only way to obtain a sustainable level of personal and professional knowledge is to interact with and rely on others. This has been a very big lesson for me.

During my recovery I have learned a lot about myself: who I was and am now evolving into. I know I am not the same person I was before February 8th, 2015, and I do not think I will ever return to being that person. I find that my thoughts are evolving on a day-to-day basis, which fuels my ideas for my own curricular development. Gouzouasis, Irwing, Miles and Gordon (2013) write, “becoming pedagogical is a phrase we use to connote a state of embodied living inquiry whereby the learner [individual] is committed to learning ... with an emphasis placed upon creative flow” (p. 8). This is the path that I find my research is taking me as I work to renew my own curricular understanding.

Pondering the Path Ahead

Having a plan does not

always work. It is the

journey -

The pursuit of an idea

The process of failure

Being buried within the process of failure

Getting through the

Darkness,

Seeing the light

*Being within the
light.*

A Social/Historical Perspective

My house currently is dead silent; my family has all gone to bed and all I am hearing is the ticking of the clock and the deep breathing of my two dogs sleeping. I have been sitting here listening to the same noise now for an hour. I have tried to start typing, and there is nothing there. I am at a loss for words and thoughts, so I will start to type and see what becomes of that. This strategy to stop thinking too much is what I tell my high school and university students to do when they experience a creative block. I am not sure that what I am experiencing is a creative block or just a mental lapse, but right now I am stonewalled. Being at a loss for thoughts has been reoccurring since my concussion began. Nochi's phrase (1998), the "loss of self" hits very close to home – the ongoing idea of trying to find myself again, find the person I used to be. There is a paradox in engaging in writing my self-study, when the narrative that I knew so well is no longer the same. My narrative has changed, my friendships have changed, my vision of living and learning has changed. I could not foresee the loss of friends, close people thinking that my concussion could not have been that bad have simply drifted away. Luckily, new friends have drifted in, people that truly care about the wellbeing of others – new friends that have assisted my family in our recovery from this concussion.

On the 20-month anniversary of receiving the concussion, I returned to full-time work. Settling back into work has been difficult, and rekindling friendships has been trying; returning after a long absence is never easy. As Weinheimer (2012) writes, thinking a concussion is the invisible injury that does not cause physical symptoms does not account for the fact that it also messes up your brain. A concussion plays with your emotions, your frustration levels, your

cognitive abilities, and your simple well being. When my symptoms persisted beyond the 6 - week mark, I realized that, as noted by Leddy, Baker, Haider, Hinds, and Willer (2017), this accident could be life altering.

I have had to continually change medications to try to rectify different issues within my body. I reflect on students I have taught in the past who have had to take medication to survive the day. I always could tell if a student had taken his/her medication or not; sometimes it was body language or mood, but there was always something that would act as the tell-tale sign. I now look at my new narrative where taking medication is an everyday occurrence. I keep asking myself, is this my new normal? Will this medication remain a staple of my life?

As I read articles about brain injury and the posttraumatic effects that it has on individuals, I am still at a loss. Thurman, Alverson, Dunn, Guerrero, & Snizek (1999) speak to the 1.5 million Americans that sustain a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and how 80,000 to 90,000 of them experience long-term disability. Jorge and Robinson (2003) write: “mood and anxiety disorders appear to be frequent psychiatric complications among patients with TBI” (p. 317). I could bury myself in statistics revolving around concussions and TBIs, which comprise much of the literature on head injury, but I am trying not to. I will say a person could get very overwhelmed by all the negative statistics revolving around brain injuries. I still find myself questioning the events that happened prior to the moment of impact, but that is something that is not changeable. That moment is something that will be stuck in my mind forever. I am at a loss for words when I read Perlesz, Kinsella, and Crowe’s (2000) work about the children and spouse of the head-injured person and how they are negatively affected. I reflect on my recovery and how important my family has been as an integral part of that process and how my behaviour has affected each of them.

I reflect upon how patient my family has been with all my behavioural changes. I feel I am coming back to my preconcussion self, displaying characteristics that invite connection as I have always done through a cheerful and upbeat disposition, but just last night, as has been reported by others with head injury, I fell right back into the moody person I was when this all started. Moving forward, I believe the trick is going to be symptom management. The burning headache still comes and goes, along with the dizziness, the weird smells, and the depression and anxiety. It is a continual ebb and flow, and the management of it is key. Flaskerud (2015) writes about the long-lasting symptoms of the individuals in her study who have suffered a TBI. One thing that I have been told and that I have noticed, as others also report, is my intense use of profanity since my recovery began. Linking my use of language to the addition of my impatient moods with people that annoy me, I am finding a lot of other similarities with those discussed in Flaskerud's article, such as a loss of smell which is replaced by a metallic or musty or a burned out kind of smell. Now, I wonder, how long will these symptoms last?

Finding the New Normal Is Normal

I offer one example of my new normal in the following poem.

i accept

smells are changing

i can not put my finger on it but,

my bed smells different

my pillow smells different.

i can not put my finger on it

but that smell will not go away

it follows me downstairs

it follows me upstairs
the smell will not leave me alone
my food smells like my pillow
the smell is indescribable
if a smell had temperature
it would be a warm gentle embrace
But one that you know is wrong -
The gentle embrace that leaves you feeling
Violated.
but
i start to accept the smell
not because i want to
but because it will not
leave me alone
my clothes now smell like my pillow
maybe it is because I spend so much time
in bed, 20 hours
seems to becoming
my new norm
washing my pillow does not seem to work
the smell will not leave
the smell is in my sheets
on my clothes

on my dogs

in my shower

in the car

this smell will NOT leave me alone.

The smell is turning into

this person that will not leave me alone -

please leave!

But

If you have to stay

my pillow is fine

i accept you being here

i know that for right now

this is what it has to be like.

i accept that you have been ignited

from that small piece of ember that began to burn on

that cold sheet of ice.

i accept that you feel the need to wrap your warm arms around me

i accept that you feel the need to be around me

wherever i go.

You need to be a part of my life -

i lay in bed trying to figure out

where you actually came from

what do you actually smell like?

*if i had to describe you i am not sure that I can
i have no idea what you smell like
i just know that you have to travel and move through my life
with me right now and that you are everywhere.*

*i accept you for what you are
you are just a symptom
nothing more
nothing less
you are just one more thing on the list of many.*

*i accept you but i do not fold to you
you can live on my sheets
on my food
on my dog
in my house
but*

*If you have to be here
please stay away from my wife
she does not
need to smell this.*

*i accept you being in my car
on my clothes
on my furniture
but please*

i ask you one thing
please stay away from our boys.
i am trying to live with you, but please do not
take the boy's smell -
that is one thing I need;
it keeps me thinking of where I need to be.
i accept you
but
i don't like
you.

On January 17th, 2017, I was on my morning commute to school and I was feeling somewhat like my normal self. I was listening to *Metro Morning* on CBC radio, and Matt Galloway was interviewing Margaret Harvey who, in 2012, was run over by a garbage truck. Ms. Harvey (*Metro Morning*) spoke to her life-threatening injuries and how she coped and stayed positive throughout her long journey of recovery. In that conversation, I heard a woman who confidently spoke about how difficult her recovery was, but how she managed through it. Ms. Harvey spoke to the idea that this person that she had recovered into could now just be her new normal.

My experience of returning to work and to professional relationships that were on pause has been tricky. Nochi's (1998) thoughts about people and recovery run parallel to my experience when he writes, "They experienced loss of self in their interactions with the physical and social environments, as well as in their interpretations of their past and future" (p. 871).

Through all this time and recovery, I still feel I am at a loss as to what I have actually done and where my time has gone.

In the past, when looking for meaning, I always began by reflecting back through my lived experience. I deconstructed an event to find what was memorable. As to the experience of my severe head injury, while I try to pull the segments apart, I find that there are so many layers and pieces to each layer of the story that I struggle to make meaning. However, I continue to sift through all the bits and pieces as I attempt to move forward and make use of what I have learned.

Conclusion

As I end this Chapter, I reflect on the questions I have posed to guide my study and the rationale and focus for my research. I believe I have set the stage for Chapter Two, where I describe the methodology and methods, theory and literature, and my own positioning to share my storied data. I feel I have conveyed a sense of how severe concussion put my life on hold for almost two years and how difficult the ups and downs of recovery have been for my family and myself.

In the painting that ends this chapter, I begin to wake up slowly after these many months of what I can only describe as feeling *Numb*.



Numb. Acrylic on paper. Adams, J. (2016).

Describing This Image and My Process

*I have used this image of **Numb** many times on my social media accounts, as I believe that it best describes the feelings I have had emotionally and physically through my recovery process. I believe the image conveys my uncertain outlook on the world and what it holds for me. When I look at this image, I remember feeling removed from my external environment - my house, the people around me, and any feelings towards any and all of it. While medications assisted me in getting through the day, they left me withdrawn and disengaged from my place in life. As I remember creating **Numb**, I was thinking of the empty shell I had become.*

*In this painting I used many layers to slowly build up the colour and depth within the painting. Through this process, I was able to create the feeling of absence that I was searching for. **Numb** is painted on a smaller sized surface to keep the work tight and compact, as this represents my connection directly to the symptoms I felt throughout my recovery.*

CHAPTER TWO: CONSTRUCTING A PERSONAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I explain the methodologies I have chosen to complete my study and the methods I use to share my data. I weave literature on narrative inquiry, poetic inquiry, self-study, and art-based research into my own experience as a narrative scholar, a poet, and a visual artist.

I also share theoretical literature that I use to ground my study as well as my own positioning, based in personal experience. I have chosen to combine narrative methodology with poetic inquiry and art-based research in my self-study dissertation in order to focus on my own experience at a particular time in my life. To me, these methodologies stand together offering me the strength of each one as I focus on my research and try to delineate my storied experience with severe head injury and my path to uncovering a renewed vision of curriculum.

Throughout my study I use the term *curriculum* as Connelly and Clandinin first described in 1988:

Curriculum is often taken to mean a course of study. When we set our imaginations free from the narrow notion that a course of study is a series of textbooks or specific outline of topics to be covered and objectives to be attained, broader and more meaningful notions emerge. A curriculum can become one's life course of action. It can mean the paths we have followed and the paths we intend to follow. [In] this broad sense, curriculum [can be seen] as a person's life experience. (p. 1)

Methodology and Methods Section

Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Since the focus of my dissertation is on the story of my sustaining a severe brain injury, my years spent in recovery, and moving forward in my life today, I turn first to narrative inquiry as my primary methodology for this study. While I am aware of other qualitative methodological

traditions such as life history, case study, or autoethnography that I might have utilized, I chose narrative inquiry because I am writing a particular segment of my own lived experience. I am not writing life history research (Cole & Knowles, 2000; Creswell, 1998; Tierney, 2000); I did not want to focus on medical reports and descriptions from counsellors, which I felt I would have had to include if I had studied myself as a case of an individual with head injury (Stake, 2000, 2005; Yin, 2009), and I am not writing a culture story (Glesne, 2011; Hayler, 2011, Jones, 2005). Hayler (2011) notes the anthropological roots of ethnography as being the study of culture, while Bochner (2000) describes autoethnography being comprised of the self, (auto) culture, (ethno) and writing (graphy). In Creswell's (1998) terms, I "turned the story" (p. 219) of my research to address the point of my study and the questions I posed in Chapter One that I hope to gain insight into in my work. The point of my study is to delve into my lived experience of sustaining my head injury and its aftermath in the roles I live every day. I am aware that along with sharing my story, as researcher I have a social responsibility to offer insights from my own experience that can help provide scholars and practitioners with information about my topic. I believe that sharing the significance of my own story may help others who work in educational or other social science settings to add to their knowledge of what it means to sustain a severe head injury. I think a personal account can bring depth to the more statistical and therefore more removed information that is readily available in the literature about head injury and its aftermath. Clandinin (2013) clarifies the research work of narrative inquirers such as myself thus:

Narrative inquirers study experience. Our argument for the development and use of narrative inquiry is inspired by a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives: People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story is a portal through

which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. (p. 13)

My study follows Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) description of narrative research as writing narrative is in finding ways to understand and portray the complexity of the ongoing stories being told and retold in the inquiry. We are, as researchers and teachers, still telling in our practices our ongoing life stories as they are lived, told, relived and retold. We restory earlier experiences as we reflect on later experiences, so the stories and their meaning shift and change over time (p.9).

Through this process I believe that I am able to grow personally and socially. Looking at personal and social growth is precisely what I hope to gain through the process of completing this thesis. Following Dewey (1938), Connelly and Clandinin (1988), Clandinin and Connelly (1995, 2000) describe narrative methodology as focusing on stories of experience that can offer insight across time and situation in our lives. For me, this time and situation take place over a three-year period when my life changed due to sustaining a head injury.

To story and restory experience requires the researcher to move into the past to retrieve stories that hold meaning and then to reconstruct them in present-day. In order to move into my past and backward in time, I engage in the "recovery of meaning" (Clandinin, 1991) process used by narrative researchers to remember specific events and situations. The second part of this meaning-making process is the "reconstruction of meaning," which enables past experience to be brought forward in time to the present and future where it can be seen and understood in new ways. Stories remembered provide the fuel for reconstruction of my experience, which I depict in poetic writings and my artwork as well as in the stories that comprise the data in this study. Polkinghorne (1988) comments, "narrative is a scheme by means of which human beings give

meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions” (p. 11). By creating poetry and art that revolve around my head injury narratives, I create and give meaning to my own experience of temporality and personal actions during my time of recovery. Mishler (1995) speaks to the construction of personal narratives as central in the creation of one’s self-identity, while Leggo (2008a) says that being able to write in creative ways allows each of us to view the multiple processes of the shaping and reshaping of our identities. Writing, in turn, assists in the self-reflective methods of art-based inquiry that I am utilizing in this research.

Choosing a Framework: Narrative Inquiry

To frame my research study, I use the four directions of narrative inquiry described by Clandinin and Connelly (1994, 2000), who write:

Methods for the study of personal experience are focused in four directions: inward and outward, backward and forward. By *inward* we mean the internal conditions of feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions. By *outward* we mean existential conditions, that is, the environment, or what E. M. Bruner (1986) calls reality. By *backward and forward* we are referring to temporality, past, present and future. To experience an experience is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way. (p. 417)

Framing my study in this way provides me with a way of retelling and reliving my head injury experience within myself, and also outside of myself to the effects of my head injury on my family and social sphere. This framework also provides consistency with the definition of curriculum I am using throughout my study. As I move in these four directions, I can consider and reconsider the questions I posed in Chapter One that support me in focusing my study and that likely point to other instances of inquiry as I compose my research text. As a narrative

scholar over the last number of years, I have discovered that it is impossible to share even the simplest of stories without moving in these four directions.

Self-Study: Looking Within

A number of educators have written about self-study as a means of focusing on personal experience as a way of understanding our thinking, actions, and perspectives as individuals and professionals (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Clandinin & Connelly, 2004; Feldman, 2003; Pinar, 1994). It makes sense to me that my life experience guides my thinking and actions – I know my epistemology and ontology are rooted there. I turn to self-study to elucidate my head injury experience so that I am able to incorporate it in my personal story with the clarity I need going forward. As Connelly and Clandinin (1988) write,

The past shapes the future through the medium of a situation, and the future shapes the past through the stories we tell to account for and explain our situation. Where we have been and where we are going interact to make meaning of the situations in which we find ourselves” (p. 9).

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) state that “self-study points to a simple truth, that to study a practice is simultaneously to study self: a study of self-in-relation to other” (p. 14). They include the words of Mooney, who describes research as a “personal venture” which is of value not only for its social benefits but also for “its direct contribution to one’s self-realization” (p. 13). Self-realization is central to the work of Shields and Patton (2004), who write of self-study research: “We work to re-cover, re-imagine and reconstruct the images [of ourselves] we hold in order to awaken to the Selves we are and can become” (p. 971). I believe that a renewed sense of self can contribute a new wholeness to my curriculum revival that will impact the stories I hold of myself as a researcher, teacher, poet, artist, and family member. As Clandinin (1991) write, “One learns

about education [in all its forms] from thinking about life and one learns about life by thinking about education” (p. 261).

All of these authors echo Dewey’s belief in the centrality of experience in education. In my thesis work, I am thinking about all of these perspectives, which I share and want to honour in my personal and professional capacities. I agree with Leggo (2008b), who declares:

Writing about personal experiences is not only egoism, solipsism, unseemly confession, boring prattling, and salacious revelation. We need to write personally because we live personally, and our personal living is always braided with other ways of living – professional, academic, administrative, artistic, social, and political (p.5).

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) offer guidelines that provide me with support as a self-study researcher in terms of thinking about how I share my head injury narrative. Among them is that “autobiographical self-studies should ring true and enable connection” with others (p. 16). Another is that “self-studies should promote insight and interpretation” (p. 16). One additional one is that “the autobiographical self-study researcher has an ineluctable obligation to seek to improve the learning situation not only for the self but for the other” (p. 17). I keep these guidelines in mind as I construct my research, believing that they are important for developing a study that displays my learning for myself and for those I can share my research with later on through dialogue, articles, and presentations. My own personal guideline is to remember that I move more slowly following my head injury and I become tired more easily. My self-study must include a heightened self-awareness that my routine needs to include rest and time to rejuvenate so that I am able to fully engage in the narrative process noted above.

Methods

To construct and share my research, I use the narrative method of writing stories of

my experience with head injury; I also use reflections on interactions with significant others. I always keep a notebook with me that I can add thoughts to in written form or for drawing ideas as they come to me. I use these small books as a data source and to aid with memory in my study.

In terms of artful methods, I use poems I have written but not yet published, printmaking, painting, and drawings that I have completed to form and extend my research text. I have been exhibiting and selling my art work in gallery exhibitions for a number of years and, in my study, I include work I completed prior to my head injury, during my time of isolation at home following my injury, and my most recent paintings as appropriate.

Another method

Slowing down to a crawl

Crawling around

Around I go

Going to bed to sleep again.

Again, I wake -

Waking is difficult

Difficult to comprehend my new

Routine.

Poetic Inquiry

I never imagined myself writing poetry, especially when in high school I barely passed any English class I had ever taken. Words were never easy for me to find, and still they are difficult to find, and if I do locate some words I am never sure how to put them down. It was not

until my Master of Education degree that I began to string words together and create what I thought could be a vehicle to hold some deeper meaning for my research.

When I first came across some poetic writing that I found in a journal, it was completely by mistake. I was not even sure that I understood what I was reading. Initially, I thought that if I could write some poems it might extend my study to the required page count. Yes, sadly I admit that, but again I am coming from a background that did not include writing as one of my favourite pastimes.

As I continued writing down words my thoughts started collecting and connecting to one another. I then realized, as more and more words came to the page, that I was getting down to the raw essence of what I wanted to write. My research and artistic process was evolving right before my eyes. Prendergast (2006) states, “poetry, [has a] unique ability to capture and present aspects of the past (in memory), present (in experience), and future (in hope/fear)” (p. 369). I find that the use of poetic writing assists me in unraveling my inner thoughts around past events. Through poetry I can dig deep into the core of an event, and I am able to pull out my inner feelings.

As I engage in poetic inquiry, I am witnessing that my work can go just about anywhere. Poetic inquiry, for me, can be the beginning or ending, a side dish, or the main course of research. I use poetic writing in my research as a staple which allows me to connect with my artistic creations and research on a very personal level. I understand Octavio Paz (1990) who speaks about poetry with love: “Poetry is in love with the instant and seeks to relive it in poem” (p. 17). Poetry allows me to dissect certain emotions around past-lived experiences, reexamine them, and help build new understandings for self-knowledge. M. Richardson (1998) writes of being present within the moment. I have learned that poetry can address specific moments in

time and bring a sense of clarity to those moments. By incorporating poetic language and inquiry in my research, I have been able to become part of the moments I remember through small, written fragments of poetry. As I piece these fragments together, narratives of my lived experiences begin to unfold, which helps build the foundation for my theories, my actions, and my research as a whole.

Sullivan (2005) encourages entry into the realm of imagination to challenge the impossible, plausible, and the probable. Guiney Yallop (2010a) writes that imagination is important when connecting to remembered experiences. He uses his imagination as he looks back at life events and uses them in the symbolic retelling of those events. Like Guiney Yallop, I use imagination in the process of writing poetry and in my artistic process as I create visual art pieces. For me, this creative artistic output, whether it is painting, printmaking, or the poetic use of language, all follows this similar creative process. Comparable to Guiney Yallop's work, I too create connections to remembered experiences through my art-making processes. During my creative process, my imagination takes liberties with remembered experiences, choosing specific stories remembered over others and naming what they represent. I am aware that every time I put pencil to paper or brush to canvas and every time I create a story to share I make myself vulnerable, which I think allows me to grasp a deeper understanding of past events in present day. As Leggo (2008a) writes, for me, poetic inquiry "invites researchers to experiment with language, to create, to know, to engage creatively and imaginatively with experience" (p. 168).

At times, as Wiebe (2008) describes, I find that my poetic writing comes from moments of compulsive spontaneity. I produce art and write poetry in the moment at hand. I move in and through that moment without fear or apprehension. I know that stories of experience can teach me many things as I reexamine and reconstruct new meaning from them. Like Wiebe I too, find

that the essence of inquiry can happen in unforeseen moments. It is also during moments of reflection that I find myself examining my own artistic process and research process, both of which I see as very loose and organic. Through this continual evolving fluidity, my artistic process and new educational perspectives take shape.

At a loss for Words: Poetically Praxis

Thoughts

more thoughts

living with

living by

looking at your

past.

Re-examine your

past

inside inwardly

outside outwardly,

outside upside

down.

Passage of Time

The whisper of each step

Crash of each wave

Continuous pattern of each brick

Avoiding each avoided glance

The cool stench of the turn around -

Why do I have so much to read?

The beauty of each warm sunset

echoes with emptiness.

Fast Cars

Motor Scooters

A life removed

Railways and boxcars, but

no one to ride with.

I think I'll keep

Walking.

Art-Based Research

I use the term “art-based” as McNiff (2008) does in his writing on art and healing: “Art-based research can be defined as... the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience” (p. 29). Looking at McNiff’s work (1989), I believe that by using “my own art as a primary mode of inquiry” I am able to connect directly to my lived experience. Like McNiff (2004) I believe that art-based research is grounded within the realm of artistic process and art-making that can help in a healing journey. I use art-based research as a guiding force, helping me form new ground within my artistic process as I heal from my head injury. Generally, I use art-making and the artistic process

as a tool to reflect upon and inquire into my personal experiences, but I turn to McNiff (1992) in this work because of the therapeutic focus he brings to research using art. McNiff (2008) notes:

The focus of my research shifted away from experimenting with human subjects and toward the more direct examination of the artistic process. I want to emphasize how even though these artistic expressions may come from within me, I nevertheless attempt to study the art objects and the process of making them with as much objectivity as possible. (p. 31)

McNiff (2008) refers to his art-based therapeutic research as a systematic use of the artistic process aimed at wellness. Schwind (2014) speaks about how reconstructing our past, present, and future ideas around our illness can give illness a voice and give it a space for dialogue to occur. Through my writing and art-based research I look to add to the dialogue that surrounds concussions from the inside, as a person who has suffered through it. Frank (2002) writes:

To seize the opportunities offered by illness,
We must live illness actively;
We must think about it and talk about it,
and some, like me, must write about it. (p. 3)

As Frank describes, I too, choose to write and create work around my head injury in order to digest my experience. As an artist, I am drawn to art-based research over other methods because of its focus on uncertainty and “absence of pre-arranged methods” (McNiff, 2011). I believe that art-based methods provide an outlet for my thoughts and ideas about healing and wellness. As I move in and out of my artistic process I am thinking about how my images can represent an inner sense of my self through loss and healing and how I can create a narrative for the viewer to follow (McNiff, 1998).

Artistic Expression

Is it so foreign to people?

When do we lose our

talents,

our creativity?

When do we gain the

over-whelming ability to

be oppressed?

Oppressed by our

obligations of fitting in

meeting the Status Quo....

To be normal....

Creativity and a sense

of possibility is a gift

given to us as infants.

Is it our parents, our friends,

But maybe it is the system

that steals this gift

the ever growing, all absorbing

machine of

Education.

Out

Looking out to another new beginning

My thoughts are here and there

Scattered through a littered pile of wasted ideas

or forgotten ones.

I am looking out towards the ending

or the beginning -

I cannot tell which way I am headed now.

Is it the end

Or just the ending

As I look towards the final day?

I look for a way out.

Other Artistic Methodologies

In 2009 I was given a book that I call my bible for art-based research. My supervisor, Dr. Carmen Shields, gave the *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research* (Knowles & Cole, 2008) to me, and it was truly a blessing. Within the pages of this book, I was able to find many research possibilities that could be done through the arts. During that time in my life, this book provided an eye-opening experience. I was awakened to a new sense of what research was and can be when the arts are involved.

As I continue to locate myself as a narrative inquiry self-study researcher and artist, I am always questioning where my work might fit in the broader sense of the emerging social science research world where the inclusion of various art forms is becoming more common. Cole and Knowles (2008) write that arts-informed research is defined as “a mode and form of qualitative

research in the social sciences that is influenced by, but not based in, the arts broadly conceived” (p. 59). They speak about arts-informed research as a stand-alone methodology, or as a methodology to further research that combines art pieces with other methods available to qualitative researchers as they create new meaning.

Findlay (2008) sees arts-based research as a form of inquiry that takes place in the hyphen between art and social science. Irwin and Springgay (2008) speak to arts-based research as an informing arts practice, while Springgay, Irwin, and Kind (2008) describe A/r/tography as being located at the small spaces between the artist, researcher, and teacher.

Like Leavy (2009) I believe that artistic methodologies can facilitate research goals that are not possible via traditional methods. When creating my art pieces for this research, I turn to Sandra Weber (2008) and agree with her list of 10 reasons why using images is important within the social dynamics of research. She notes the following:

1. Images can be used to capture the effable, the to-put-into-words.
2. Images can make us pay attention to things in new ways.
3. Images are likely to be memorable.
4. Images can be used to communicate more holistically, incorporating multiple layers, and evoking stories or questions.
5. Images can enhance empathic understanding and generalizability.
6. Through metaphor and symbol, artistic images can carry theory elegantly and eloquently.
7. Images encourage embodied knowledge.
8. Images can be more accessible than most forms of academic discourse.
9. Images can facilitate reflexivity in research design.

10. Images provoke action of social justice.

Weber believes that visual art carries weight within social science research. As researcher, I believe that including poetry and visual art allows me to extend my thoughts and ideas and deepen my stories of experience by reaching into an emotional space that I cannot convey in stories alone. I know that an image can offer an interpretation of experience that can surprise or shock me, move me, or offer me new insight. I believe that bringing such possibilities to research can serve to enlarge the scope of sharing knowledge and experience in personal, social, and cultural ways.

Creating Through Art: A Brief Personal History

I have always enjoyed creating different forms of artwork, experimenting with various forms and subject matter. Barone and Eisner (2012) qualify arts-based research as the continuous coming back to perceived phenomena and scrutinizing the world, leading to a reexperiencing of the past. Like them, I am looking into the past to reexperience it with a newly evolved lens. I look back into the past at the art pieces that I have made and question what I was doing at the time. I began university in 1995 and I never thought that I would be continuing my studies now in 2018. As I tell my students, postsecondary education is not difficult if you are learning about something that you are truly passionate about. Learning through the arts is what has kept my passion for learning alive all this time. Looking back at when I started my undergraduate degree in visual arts I see now that I was researching all the time, but no one told me that was what I was doing and I never knew it. All my work was comprised of different forms of art. All that time, and I never knew I could conduct research through my artistic creations.

I am not sure when art became a part of me. It could have been in my grade 13 year when I had a memorable art teacher. I was only fortunate enough to have her for one year, but within

that one year I was opened to the possibility of continuing within the arts. She was able to guide me through the inner workings of how to process ideas and change them into pieces of art.

My artistic career could have begun even before that. Maybe it was when I was a child making and creating things with Nanny. Nanny (Leola Almond) was my grandmother on my mother's side of the family. Nanny was a typical farmer's wife, but also had a flare for creating things. Whether it was oil painting or acid etching and engraving on the back step of the summer kitchen, Nanny was always thinking of making something, as the painting that follows displays.



Untitled. Oil on board. Private Collection. Almond, L. (date unknown).

As part of my Master's thesis I wrote a poem about Nanny. *The Woodshed* (2010) was one of the first poems I had ever written. I was not sure exactly what I was doing, but by writing

these words I was able to remember Nanny, and the process assisted me in reconnecting how important these memories are in my artistic upbringing. Including it again here, I am able to reflect on how important Nanny was to me in life and is in memory. I believe that Nanny's creative influence nurtured my art-based belief system as a young boy, though I had no idea what life might be like viewed through an artistic lens.

THE WOODSHED

soaking corn husks

stale air

tasteless tofu dinner

gray carpet

the back steps

barn cats

tubes of oil paint

dried apple heads

hair rollers

canvas boards

old eclectic frames

rose a day keeps the love alive

failing heart

metal etching

landscapes and owls

summer kitchen

river clay

heavy scissors

tea biscuits

poor eye sight

afternoon naps

brain tumour

heavy brushes

avon hand lotion

NANNY

Reflecting back on my journey through art-making I see that I have always been at a loss to see how it actually fit in my life and learning. Until I began my Master of Education degree, I had always been unsure of where my art was going. I was unsure why I was creating art or where making art might take me. I made art for the sake of making art. I wonder now what I thought I was actually making and why.

Now that I am able to look back on my long recovery, I am able to reconnect with thoughts that I had prior to this time. I am using visual art as a method of reflection on my recovery, which assists me in reconciling what actually happened. Art-based research takes different forms of art and translates them into formal research information. For example, in the following painting, my aim is to represent the overwhelming burning feeling that I have experienced through this time of injury and slow recovery. *The burn* is a constant and difficult reminder of the horror of the concussion I suffered and the long days I spent unable to work.



The burn. Acrylic on paper. Adams, J. (2016).

Describing this image and my process

In 2016 I began to create a series of small works, roughly around 10 inches square, on paper. I began painting them because at the time that is the medium I had on hand. The small surface worked well for me because I was able to move around easily with smaller pieces of paper and I could complete these pieces quickly as the feeling or idea was still in my mind. In these small pieces I tried to capture a moment in time focusing on different symptoms that I had been dealing with.

*For the most part, these paintings, like the one entitled **The burn**, were created using acrylic paint and some paper cutouts from newsprint or magazine articles. The images that I took from the articles did not have any real connection to my main idea; I simply wanted a certain colour or shape that I could use in my work.*

Trying to think

What does it feel like?

What does it feel like?

How are you feeling?

Are you OK today?

Do you need to go to bed?

Why do you have it so dark in here?

How is everyone doing?

Do you need any help?

It feels like my head is burning -

on fire -

That the only thing I have to douse the fires with is a jerry can of gas.

It feels like my brain is a wet tea-towel and someone is twisting,

twisting, and wringing the towel for every drop of moisture.

Every drop

not one little drop

left.

I am feeling TERRIBLE!

NO, I AM NOT OK

if I was ok then I would be at work

like every other normal human being.

Yes

Yes, going to bed would be good

BUT

I just spent the last 20 hours in bed

I need to walk around.

Leave me alone.

It actually is not dark in here

so

please

leave

the

lights off.

If I said that everyone is doing well I would be lying.

We are not doing fine,

I am treating everyone like crap and

my moods swing back and forth faster

than a kid on a swing,

Mainly because I have NO

Patience

No

Initiative

NO

Filter

And I am angry.

The Fear of Inquiry

*The story is strong
voices coming through
the empty pathway
breaking the silence -
empowering the quiet.
Stories echoing tragedy
but celebrating resilience.
Why is it important to
smile
in the face of
sorrow?
Trust your words
Trust yourself
and please don't walk -
run!*

A Brief Word on Reflection and Connection

According to Robert Fulford (1999), “by imitating our own life experiences, narrative gives us a way to absorb past events on an emotional as well as an intellectual level” (p. 38). Looking back at my experiences, I am able to place myself within my journey as a narrative inquirer, poet, and art-based researcher. Through the different artistic representational pieces I create, I construct a poetic and visual experience that forms my lifelong praxis journey. My rationale is much like Guiney Yallop’s (2010a) for his use of poetic research:

My research is about learning, about how I am learning about myself, about how my audiences may learn about themselves, and about how we might all learn about and from each other, as well as with and through each other. (p. 2)

Guiney Yallop speaks through his quest to make connections to our own identity, our communities, and the people that we may connect with in those communities. By making connections to my identity, my community, and the people within that community I am able to reconnect with events that have occurred within my artistic life, my educational life, and my everyday family life. By reconnecting to my artistic self I am able, like Hachiya (2009), to make connections between the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic dimensions of my life.

Through the images that I continue to create, I engage in a process of self-reflection. As I continue to recover from my head injury and move into a new space in my life, I continue to build a self-knowledge that is slowly disclosed to me as my creative process continues to produce more and more self-revealing images. Dewey (2009) notes that “such reflection upon experience gives rise to a distinction of what we experience (the experienced) and the experiencing – the how” (p. 130). Through the deconstruction of my lived experience, during my accident and recovery, and through the reconstruction of my lived experience via my “new normal” lens, I can redefine what I have gone through. Through this new normal lens, I am also able to try to understand how my recovery may have affected my personal and professional relationships.

do better

as we now live in

darkness

I am trying to

do better.

As you now live on

egg shells

I am trying to

do better.

As the two of you wonder

where your dad has gone

I am trying to

do better.

As we wonder

how long this will take

I am trying to

do better.

Theory/Literature That Informs My Study

I have developed my research on the foundation of postmodern, constructivist, and aesthetic theories. I situate my research within these theoretical frameworks as well as the artistic theories noted above. In addition, as a narrative inquirer, I also highlight my own positioning for my study in this section, focusing on three storied moments that help me place my thinking about my head injury experience in my life. By including this section as many narrative researchers do, I indicate my reliance on my own experiential background as a source of importance along with the perspectives of other scholars and researchers.

Since the purpose of my research is to focus on the phenomenon of my own lived experience as a means of continuing to build self-knowledge as an integral step in my curricular

development, I believe that through the two-step process of *recovery of meaning* and the *reconstruction of meaning* process (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) I will be better equipped to gain new knowledge of my present-day, post-head-injury self. Through ongoing reflections of past events, new interpretations of those events can begin to form. Through the examinations of new interpretations, future pathways can become more evident and possible. Through story, poetry, and artistic representation, I can place my head injury experiences outside myself to objectively reflect on them, deconstruct them, and reconstruct them to find meaning, which I can use going forward as I negotiate my way into the future.

Thinking About the Postmodern

I recognize that given fairly recent educational research history, a study such as I am engaged in would not have been possible prior to the advent of the postmodern era, where constructing narratives of experience has opened a door for many researchers whose voices were not heard in times gone by. According to Hargreaves (1994), the postmodern theoretical perspective is premised on the notion that there is “no knowable social reality [that] exists beyond the signs of language, image and discourse” (p. 39), which is now comprised of voices from many distinct and different cultures and communities. In our present day, meaning-making is understood to be an individual endeavour, and sharing personal experience through self-study is understood to be educative (Dewey, 1938). Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1995) refer to postmodernism as “an epistemic and cultural break with modernism...and to a new cultural landscape” (p. 451). Adding to this view, Slattery (1995a) describes locating meaning as part of the postmodern challenge of bringing the “past and the future into the existential present” (p. 616). He notes (1995b) that “the history of curriculum development in the postmodern era must be recounted and understood from [an] autobiographical perspective” (p. 50) to hold

meaning, rather than by providing a series of set perspectives, activities, and goals such as was the case in the modern age. Slattery writes that while art and culture were moving into the postmodern era in the 1960s, it was not until the 1980s that the education community began to embrace the postmodern. It seems to me that although postmodern theory abounds, too often in educational practice we are still in a time of transition. I feel fortunate to be a poet and artist and bring those roles to my curricular agenda in my own research so that I can include “the integration of eclectic, ironic, and kaleidoscopic experiences that affirm the uniqueness of individual creativity” and “prioritize the dramatic, the artistic...the intuitive dimensions in the learning process” (p. 209).

Doll (1993) writes that the postmodern posits “an intellectual vision predicated not on positivistic certainty but on pragmatic doubt...which comes from any decision based not on metanarrative themes but on human experience and local history.... It accepts the indeterminacy inherent in complexity and multiple perspectives” (p. 61). Writing particularly about the value of narrative in the postmodern, Doll says that “a good story induces, encourages, [and] challenges the reader to interpret, to enter into dialogue with the text” (p. 169). In my research text I want to bring my narrative of head injury to life for readers who may know little about such an injury. I know from my own experience that one story shared can sometimes open a door for new thinking and understanding.

Greene (1978), writing about the importance of remaining “wide-awake” to the importance of our own reflection on our postmodern culture, says, “as conscious beings, [we] constitute the world we inhabit through the interpretations we adopt or make for ourselves. To take the word for granted as predefined or objectively *there* is to be uncritical, submissive, and submerged” (p. 17).

In my terms, adopting a postmodern curricular perspective aligns with my understanding of narrative as a research method, which opens a door to including personal story as a unique and valid way of representing experience that counts as knowledge. That knowledge can be shared and contribute to the ongoing meaning making that comprises social reality. Sharing my head injury experience, although unique to me, can contribute to others' interpretations of what it means to sustain and live with an acquired head injury.

Thinking About Constructivism

Ultanir (2012) writes that constructivism refers to “a learning or meaning making theory that offers an explanation of the nature of knowledge and how human beings learn...understanding is based on a learners' previous experience and background knowledge” (p. 195). In my work, a constructivist approach provides a way for “meaning-making in progress” (Ultanir, 2012, p.196) to occur as I reconstruct the experience of sustaining a head injury with its lasting effects. I “actively and self-consciously” (Splitter, 2009, p. 139) bring my experience and understanding forward in time in a process of creating new meaning from this experience that I can share with others by describing ways of being that have influenced my ways of knowing about severe concussion.

Through self-reflection, I believe that I am strengthening my ability to continue to recover from living through a severe head injury. Lambert (1995) emphasizes that Dewey, Piaget, and Bruner all focus on the learner as the constructor of her or his own knowledge, which supports the creation of a deeper learning experience. I know I am deepening my own learning experience by utilizing a constructivist lens in my research.

Since my beginnings in graduate research, I have been opened to the thoughts and ideas of many educational theorists. Coming from the world of art making, I was a person who had

always drawn on ideas from my personal experience. Now, reading Dewey (1938), I look to all the artwork that I have created as a connection to my learning through my educational experience. As I continue to build upon my body of artwork and research, I am making more connections to a constructivist stance in education. Learning now has evolved into not just learning in a formal class or institution, but as Connelly and Clandinin (1988) note and I have embraced, our curriculum comes from all of life's experiences.

Ultanir (2012) writes that, "constructivist theorists believe that knowledge is a reflection of a representation, a portrait, or an objective world" (p. 197). Working through my recovery, I have begun to construct my art with the notion of my portrait in mind, which I highlight in various forms in this study. I believe Ultanir is correct because when I think of my head injury narrative, I understand that the portraits I include reflect my understanding of moments I have experienced in my head injury story. I do believe that my abstract portraits and poetry are able to tell the story of my concussion experience and give the viewer/reader the deepest moments to recognize what my recovery has been like.

In the present, I live in a state of reflection and self-analysis. Dewey (1938) writes that human experience may be categorized as educative or mis-educative. I look at all my experiences as educative, even though at times I do not want to believe that my mis-educative narratives will ever teach me anything. Through these reflections of life events I can discern as Dewey directs, 'particular' information and dissect it for meaning. This process allows me to take my original understanding of an event and reconstruct it to find new meaning. This view is consistent with Piaget's (1955, 1972) description of cognitive constructivism which focuses on the idea of individual learners creating their own knowledge based in their own experiences. An example of this would be that as I reflect upon the ongoing symptoms that still on occasion

plague my everyday life, I remember what it was like to move in and through the symptoms on a daily basis. Then I reflect upon how those same symptoms began to alter and change my home and family life. Dewey states, “every experience should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality... this is the very meaning of growth, continuity, reconstruction of experience” (p. 47).

Thinking About Aesthetics

Greene (1988 b) writes that “aesthetic experiences...involve us as existing beings in pursuit of meanings” (p. 293). Powerfully she suggests that “if the uniqueness of the artistic-aesthetic can be reaffirmed...we may make possible a pluralism of visions, a multiplicity of realities” (p. 295). Ten years earlier, Greene (1978) noted: “[Aesthetic experiences] must be lived within the contexts of our own self-understanding, within the context of what we have constituted as our world” (p. 180). For me, aesthetics provides a way of knowing the world as my artistic and poetic self. Throughout my absence from family life and work, when I tried to think about or represent my severe concussion, it was always through poetry or some form of visual art; these two mediums are my main ways of processing and understanding experience.

According to Dictionary.com (2019), aesthetics is defined as,

the branch of philosophy dealing with such notions as the beautiful, the ugly, the sublime, the comic, etc., as applicable to the fine arts, with a view to establishing the meaning and validity of critical judgments concerning works of art, and the principles underlying or justifying such judgments.

Slattery (1995) expands on this view: “Postmodern curriculum prioritizes the dramatic, the artistic, the non-rational, and the intuitive dimensions of the human person in the learning process...postmodern education encourages aesthetic reflections from the heart of educational

inquiry” (p. 209). Clive Bell (1924, 1958/1994) of Charleston fame describes all systems of aesthetics as beginning with a personal experience attached to a particular emotion, while Lyotard (1984/1994) writes that “a postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text that he writes, the work he produces are not principles to govern pre-established rules” (p. 564).

Embedded in a constructivist position, Slattery (1995) writes, “Aesthetics, the fine arts, and qualitative inquiry are integral to the creation of landscapes of learning and synthetical moments of self-understanding” (p. 205). In the following painting, I look to recognize what my continuous symptoms are and then try to continually learn from those symptoms, so I may move forward.



Symptoms. Acrylic, mixed media on paper. Adams, J. (2017).

Describing this image and my process

*As the eyes in **Symptoms** are not quite in focus I view this as a self-portrait. Like many of the images that are found within this research that have facial features, I create them with my own image as the source. Looking at the eyes and their different qualities I view them much as I did my own vision during my time of recovery. My vision was drastically affected by my head injury. The outward images and information that my eyes were seeing and relaying back to my brain were comprised of multiple different images that my brain had to then recalibrate so that the information could be processed, catalogued, and then stored. This process was exhausting for me, which led to other symptoms that I had to filter through my experience.*

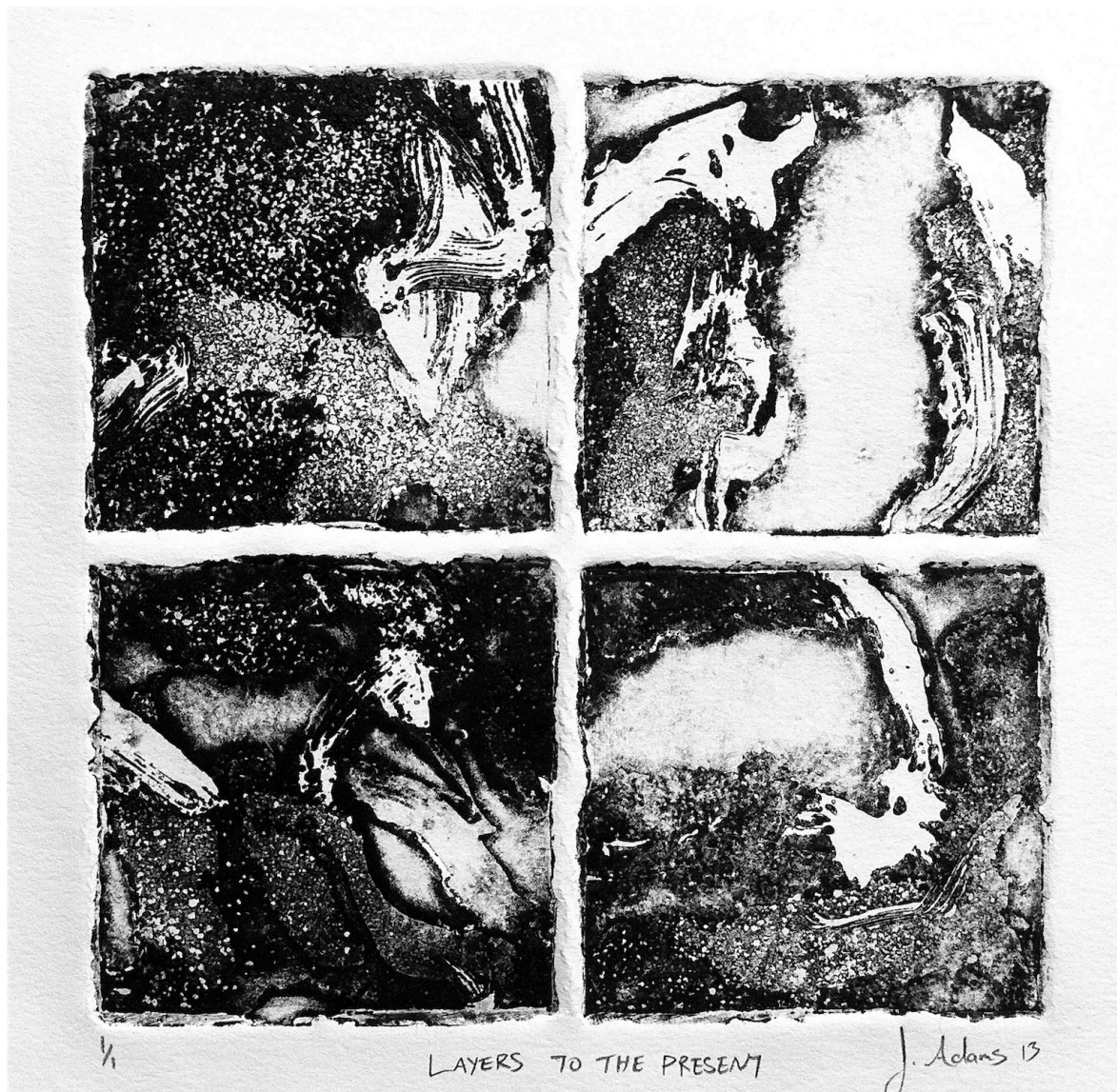
Making My Place

In this final section of Chapter Two, I offer three stories or moments of my lived experience that, in addition to the theoretical literature touched on above, provide my own positioning for my study. I begin within moments of time that began before my concussion occurred. During those 3 years prior, I was moving along, writing and creating. The goal was to graduate on time with my classmates. Creating artwork, writing poems, and writing proposals for symposiums and conferences was what I expected of myself. At the time, I believed that the artwork I was creating was important to my cause and was building a strong foundation for my research.

The second moment is a collection of art and poems that I created during the height of my recovery. I would scrawl down bits and pieces of ideas as they would formulate in my brain and then disappear. I believe that these are vital pieces within my research. They allow me to look back and de-construct my moments of clearer thinking. These pieces remind me of how the fog that I was continually in did lift, although for only brief moments, so I could see bits of imaginative thought. Looking back, I was too full of pride, thinking that I would still be able to continue through my research and everything would be OK. I did not ask for an extension from the university, which in hindsight would have taken undue pressure from my shoulders. As time slowly passed, I tried to force myself to create ideas so that I could move forward with my research.

The third moment in time is postconcussion and how I have chosen to move forward. I try to embrace my injury as a starting point and come to terms with what has happened over the last several years of my life.

Layers: Before



Layers to the Present [Intaglio print]. Adams, J. (2013).

Describing this image and my process

As an artist evolving into a printmaker through my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree I became very interested in the process of creating different forms of art. In the intaglio printing process the artist uses acid to eat or burn an image into a metal plate. This act intrigued me.

*In **Layers to the Present** I travelled back to my printmaking days of undergraduate study and what drew me to this process: the simple process of layering marks for the acid to eat into. Although this piece was done prior to acquiring a concussion, I look at this piece as a reminder of always needing to move forward - always progressing, always evolving through every experience.*

I

I begin with myself

Traveling inward to the places I know -

it is time to re-connect

to re-think and re-construct

my meaning.

I travel across my landscape

Looking for my origins

finding stories from untold times,

elders who have influenced

my time here.

I look outward to see what my landscape will consist of -

Cultivating mother nature's beauty

her stories

trees blowing as the wind passes

on the stories.

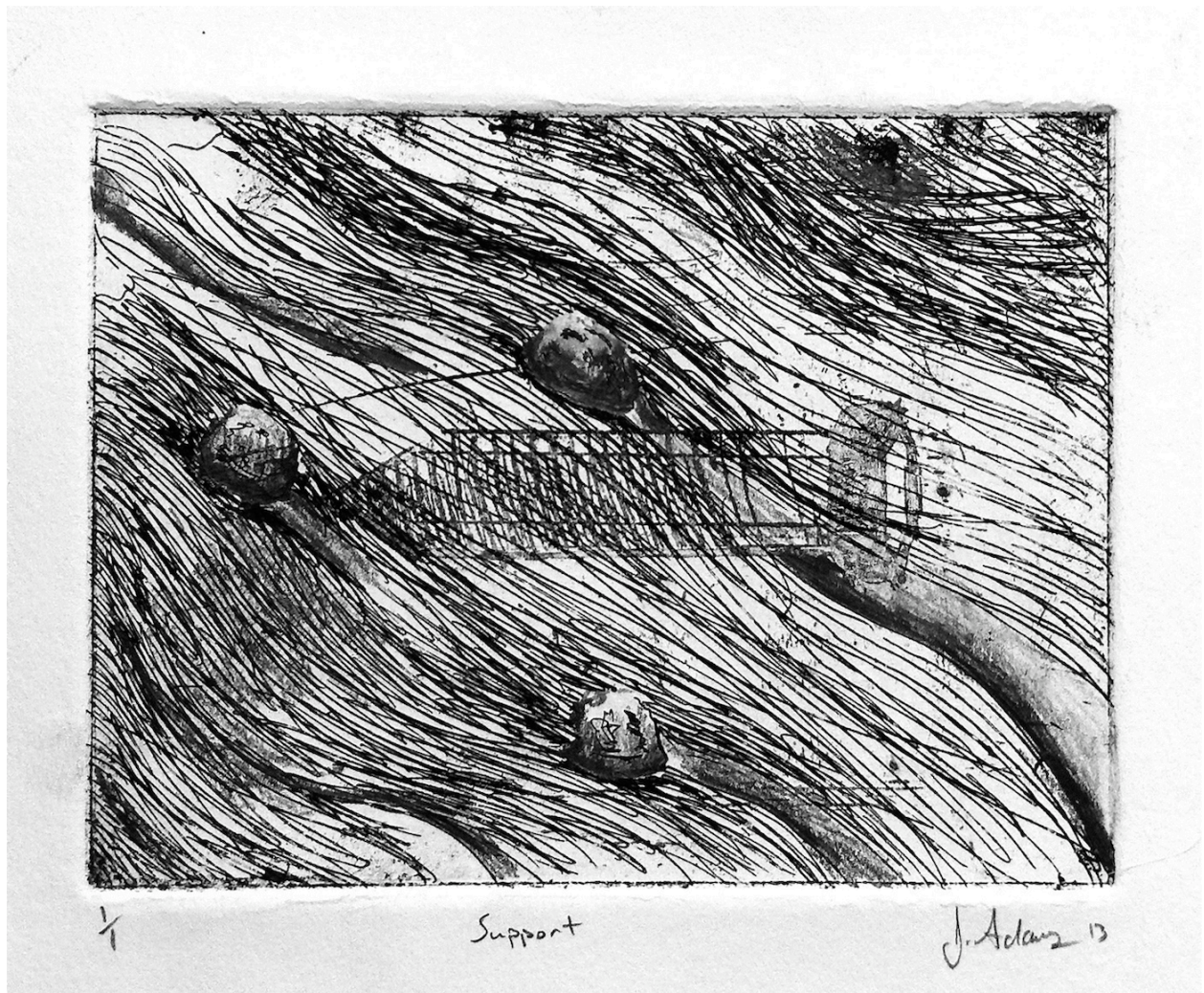
I cultivate my mind, my body, my soul

finding the truth that I am in search of

my true being

the one that lives and loves you -

it is my authentic self.



Support. Intaglio print with graphite on paper. Adams, J. (2013).

My Thinking About This Image and My Process

Support is an image completed through the intaglio printing process. This image was the first image that I made where I began to add small amounts of pencil into the work. I made this decision so that I could add three tiny rocks into the image. These three tiny rocks represent my wife and my two boys. In my life before, during, and after my concussion I know I could not do all the things I do without having the continuous support that these three individuals give me every day. The wavy lines represent the ongoing current of everyday life.

I hope that for others a moment is created for contemplating who the rocks represent in their lives and how the ever-flowing current is always trying to push us past the small, intimate moments we are fortunate to experience with those special others.

Quietly Listening

The words float around my head

I pick at them.

They are apples ripening

weighing down the branch

each one getting heavier.

The words flow unevenly

they change with speed and weight

evolving from a flower blossom

they grow in delightfulness

each one bursting with flavour.

Ideas found inside

the seeds are nourishment;

the words speak

new understandings are found -

connotations are created.

I need to not speak.

My mind is catching up

listening to the words

they stream through like

waves breaking.

My thoughts crashing around me
gulls picking away at new treasures
left helplessly on the sand.

Gathering the remnants is so very important
it is there in the jetsam that new meanings
are understood.

Looking through files on my computer, I found one filled with images that I had saved the night before my concussion happened. Although the prints were made earlier, I find it interesting that I was working on collecting my artwork and getting everything in order the night before my injury.

As I look at the images within the file, I am reminded about what I was thinking, things such as family and the multiple layers a life has within it. In the moments of reflection upon first opening the file, I remember how supportive my family has been in my education and life. I began creating work based on the idea of supporting one another, focusing on how much I need my family in order to be who I am. As I read Mantas and Mieztis's (2014) work, I connect with their thoughts of finding art in the in-between spaces. I look towards art to assist me in finding my way – I have not been able to find direction otherwise. Art is what is helping direct my recovery, reflect on what happened and how concussion has taken control of my life. I am continually looking at the individual I was preconcussion and the crazy pace I was running at. I had an image in my head that I was trying to keep up with, but in the end, in my body and soul, I knew I could not keep the pace I was living. My physical energy was becoming depleted and, try

though I might to ignore my exhaustion and accompanying inability to cover my usual ground of teaching, lecturing, painting, parenting, and partnering, I sensed that something had to give.

Layers: During

Date

Dates and times,

The never-ending rush of being in the now

Keeping up with the Joneses

How about just keeping up with me,

Myself

The never-ending struggle to do

The right thing

Wanting the best

Trying for the best

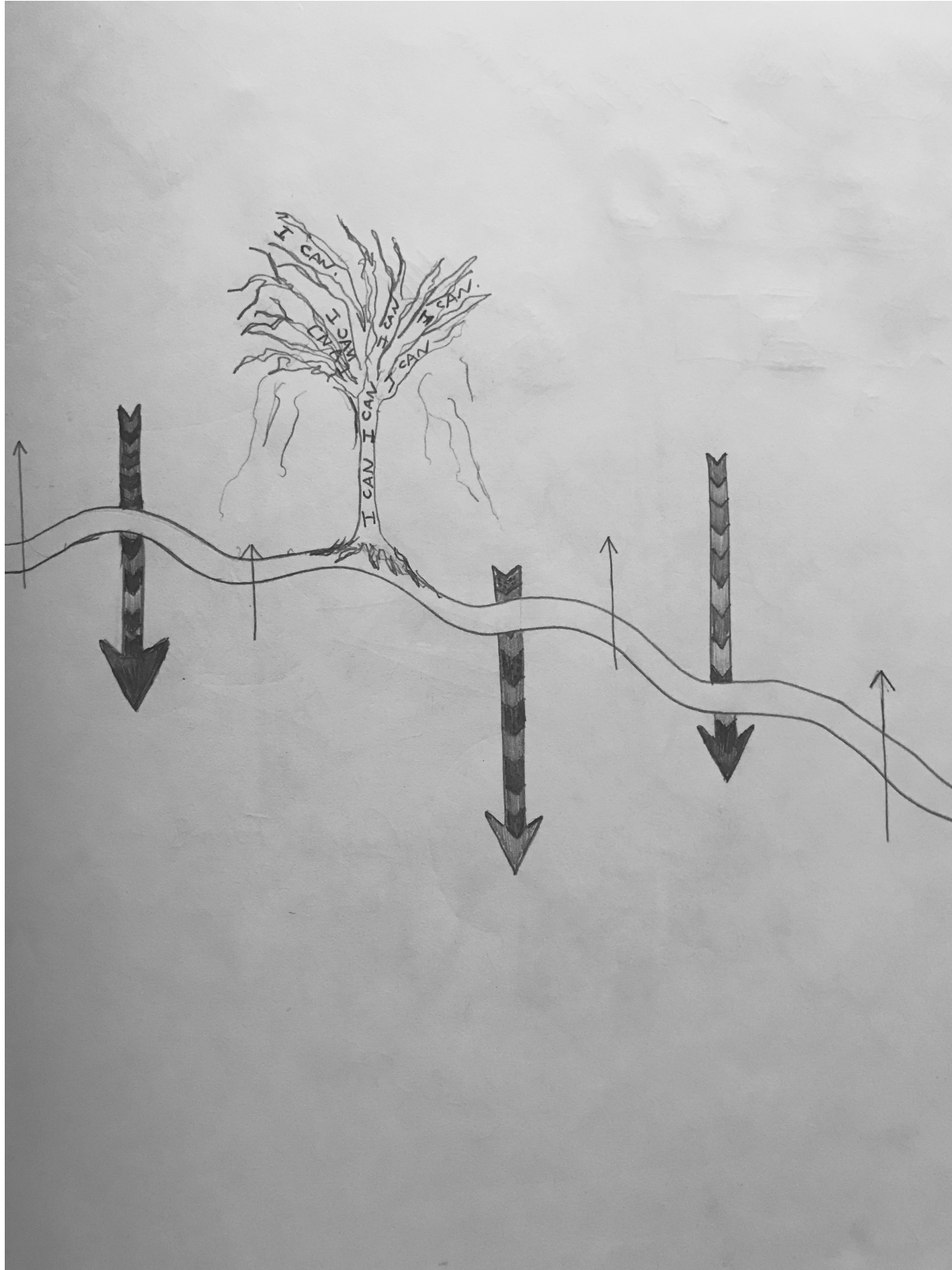
In the end just being is

sometimes the best thing.

In the end just being is

sometimes the hardest thing

out there.



I can. Pencil drawing on paper. Adams, J. (2015).

Describing this image and my process

I Can is a simple pencil sketch that illustrates the continual small steps that I was trying to make forward when every day I seemed to have more setbacks then gains. The tree is to simply represent growth, although it is drawn to look weak and struggling.

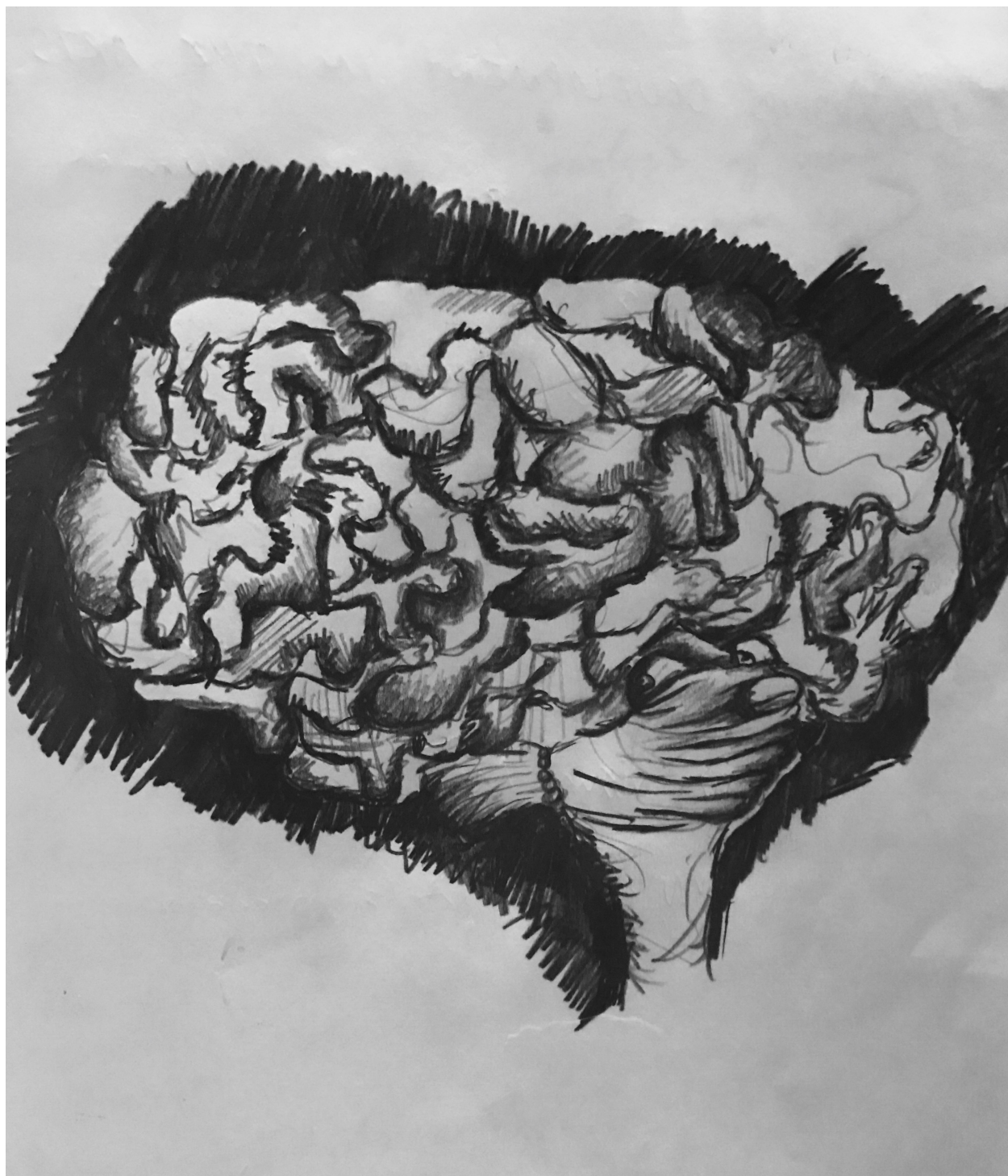
Ride

That is a big hill. I will not ride down that one. That looks like a fast hill

Have you ever seen a flat hill?

Now dad that would be the fastest.

It would be the fastest because it is flat.



My Inside Person. Pencil drawing on paper. Adams, J. (2015).

Describing this image and my process

*My **Inside Person** is linked to the saying about having a monkey on your back. No matter what I do I always feel like I have a monkey on my back. It is a creature or being of some sort that is continually lurking waiting, for a trigger to be set so that any one of my symptoms can return.*

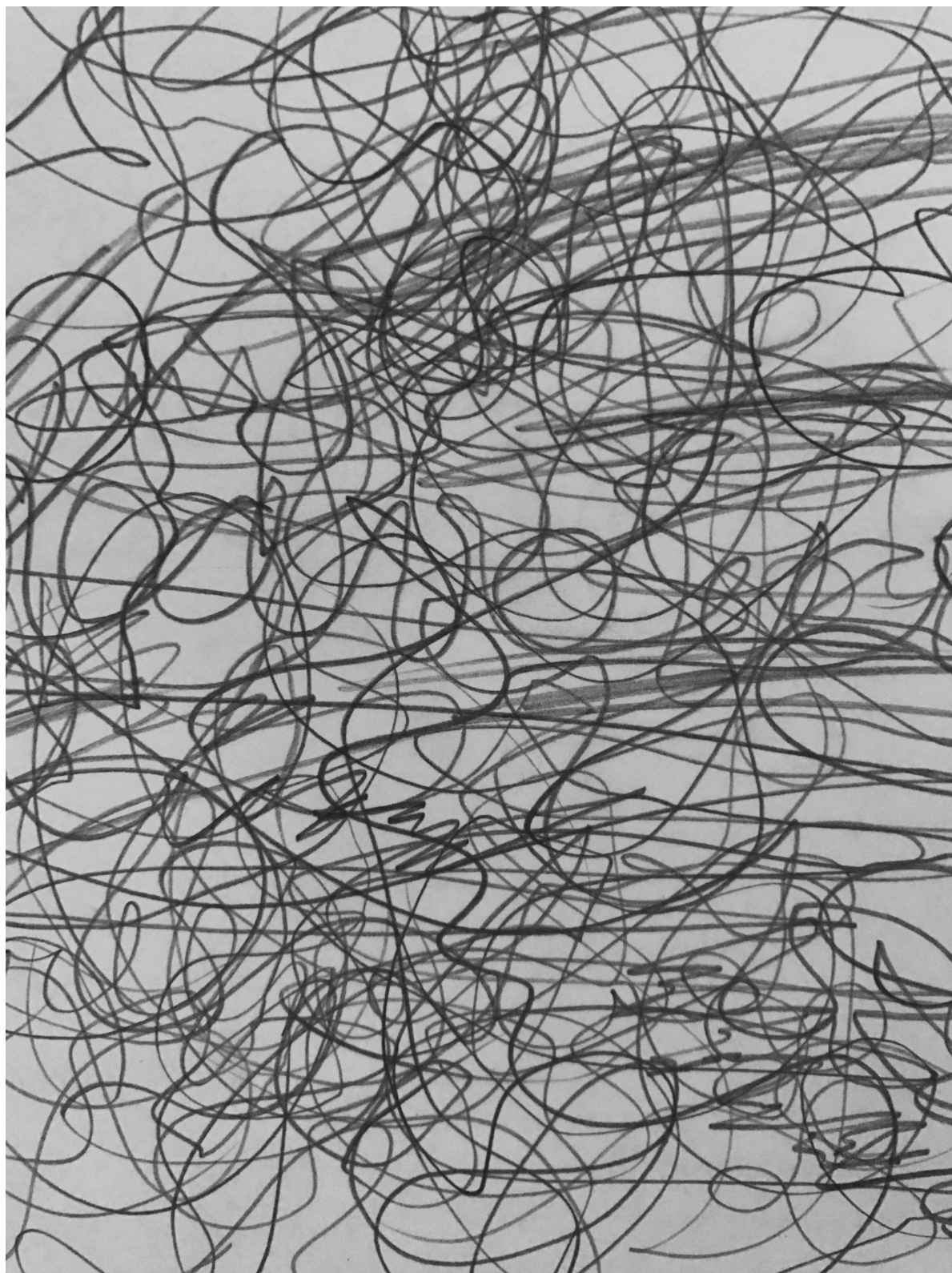
Knowing

I remember when this all started, Feb 8th - time. Talk about skating over to Doug

I believe everything happens for a reason

Elbows. Face. Head.

I think she knows...



My thoughts. Pencil drawing on paper. Adams, J. (2015).

Describing this image and my process

I look to this image as a representation of what my headspace was looking like as I tried to organize my day and my thoughts. Each day was like trying to unravel a knotted-up ball of yarn.

Chocolate

So the story goes....

I remember when I was a kid waking up every Sunday morning

anxious butterflies

in my stomach -

did the Easter bunny visit my house last night.

Did he leave any chocolate or candy

for me?

Layers: After: Being “normal”

Fear

It is the fear of showing
my true self

It is the fear of realizing that I am not the same person
as yesterday

It is the fear of discovering that life
has changed

It is the fear of discovering that the thoughts and memories
may not be there anymore.

It is the fear of beginning this journey once more
trying not to screw things up.

I never thought that recovering from a concussion would be so difficult. As I sit and type these words, I feel all right and I hope I should – it has been more than two years, but surprisingly, I do not believe that I have fully recovered. Nochi (1998) investigates three common themes that occur with individuals that have suffered a traumatic brain injury (TBI).

1. A clear loss of self-knowledge,
2. A loss of self by comparison,
3. A loss of self in the eyes of others.

In the images that follow, the white spaces represent these three points, as I perceived them following my head injury. They are the emptiness that I could not fill as I struggled to comprehend my new reality.



Physio #1. Monoprint. Adams, J. (2016).



Physio #2. Monoprint. Adams, J. (2016).



Physio #3. Monoprint. Adams, J. (2016).



Physio #4. Monoprint. Adams, J. (2016).

Describing these images and my process

*The previous four pieces of artwork are all monoprints, which are a single run-through of an inked plate rolled through a press. Although monoprints are a type of printmaking, the results are only one-offs. I enjoy creating monoprints because I feel they are more reactionary in the way I apply the material to the plexiglass plate. These four images are all based on the ongoing treatments I had to attend throughout my recovery. The blank white spaces are there to offer a break from what is going on within the image. These blank spaces are representative of the breaks that I needed to take as I was continually going to my physiotherapy appointments. In **Physio #1** the text is there to show the words that I was asked to recognize as I was completing some of the neurological testing to see how my memory and reaction times were improving.*

150

I never knew how many appointments I went to.

I still have people ask

When I tell them, they don't believe -

It really could not have been that

Bad.

Friends giving up and throwing in the

towel -

I still ask myself

who does that?

It was through the ongoing appointments

that the dizziness continued to plague my mind

Through the rolling and the jumping,

the twisting and turning

I sat listening to the continual ticking of the metronome

I waited for the bomb to explode in my head

The slow igniting of the burn in my temples that would last for days.

Much like a bad hangover

I was shot for hours and days after.

It was the ongoing push to see
just how far I could go
wanting to see
waiting to see
praying to see
if I could make it
just a little
further.

Conclusion

As I complete this chapter, I believe I have described the methodologies and methods that I use in my study and offered perspectives from other academics who, like me, find that their research is committed to the inclusion of story, poetry, and art. I have also situated my self briefly in the postmodern, constructivist, and aesthetic literature that grounds my study and offered my own positioning too, based in my own experience.

CHAPTER THREE: LOOKING BACK: HOME ALONE THROUGH THE BURNING FOG

In this chapter, using my narrative framework, I take the *inward* journey *backward* in time as I reflect upon the many weeks of recovery that I spent home alone while my family went about their days. I focus on three seminal stories of experience from that time of extended sleep, restlessness, confusion, and fear. I use art pieces and poetry to share a sense of my own life and life with family. Engaging in this remembrance, I have discovered the fear I still hold of my injury, which has deeply rooted itself within me.

A Word On My Approach to References in Chapters Three and Four

The references in this chapter are in this section; they apply to this chapter and the following one, which is also comprised of my stories of experience – chapter four. I include them now because I want my stories of experience to stand alone in my text. But recognizing I am not the only academic who has written about suffering a life-changing injury, I offer the thoughts and perspectives of several scholars who have written about difficult times in their own lives through the experience of physical or mental injury. When I read their work, I am left with a sense that each story or account stands as testimony to each person's unique experience. I can easily relate to each of their stories. I aspire to do the same as they have done in their work : contribute my stories to the small but revealing personal narratives on the effects of illness or injury with long-term effects, which in my case is head injury.

While I am cojoined to these writers through trying to express the experience of illness and injury, the fear and loneliness I express are my own, just as their difficulties are unique to each of them. Like these scholars and writers, I am sharing my experience of serious, long-term injury and, like them, my narrative has been changed and I cannot return to who I was prior to

my injury. But speaking and sharing these stories can add to the understanding of others, and it can also help wounded individuals like me to heal.

Palmer (2004) notes,

Because our stories make us vulnerable to being fixed, exploited, dismissed, or ignored, we have learned to tell them guardedly or not at all. Neighbours, coworkers, and even family members can live side by side for years without learning much about each other's lives. As a result, we lose something of great value (p. 123).

This passage is insightful for me as I have not yet shared my writing with family or friends – like other authors, I can't be fixed, and I don't want to be ignored. I want my story to be understood, and so I share it in the form of this thesis to add to the so far slim body of work that is comprised of others' stories of head injury experience.

Palmer (2000) describes his clinical depression saying, "Midway in my life's journey...I found myself in the dark woods of clinical depression a total eclipse of light and hope" (p. 56). He continues, "Depression is the ultimate state of disconnection – it deprives one of the relatedness that is the lifeline of every living being" (p. 61). Others such as Laurel Richardson focus on physical injury. In her book *After the Fall* (2013), she writes:

One way to change consciousness is to listen to those who speak from embodiment – not about the *theory* of the body, which is so popular in the academy, but a *speaking*, if you will, from the body, what some have called the "*embodied experience*." For those in *physically challenged* bodies, *marginality* is not just a concept in postmodern criticism; it is a place their bodies occupy (p. 262).

Challenged bodies can take many forms. While Richardson writes of sustaining a life-changing fall and the offshoots of breaking bones in an aging body, Guiney Yallop (2010b)

describes his experience of living with prostate cancer in 25 poems in his book, *Notes to My Prostate*.

Oakley (2007), in her book, *Fracture*, says, “Fracture is my attempt to make sense of what happened to me and my right arm...[it is] my own field trip: a sociological account of a personal journey into the land of bodily damage” (p. 148). She writes that this account is important because “the body is how we know the world” and “through text, we reclaim the body; we have some hope of owning and integrating the experience of damage” (p. 153).

Bailey (2010), who, like these authors, experienced a serious illness with effects that have changed her life, begins her story thus:

At the age of thirty-four, on a brief trip to Europe, I was felled by a mysterious viral or bacterial pathogen, resulting in severe neurological symptoms. I had thought I was indestructible. But I wasn't. If anything did go wrong, I figured modern medicine would fix me. But it didn't. (p. 4).

Once again, a written account of her journey offers insight into a life changed by disability in her book, *The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating*.

Interestingly, many of these writers include thoughts on well-meaning visitors that express feelings I write about in a story in Chapter Four. Bailey comments: “I eagerly awaited visitors, but the anticipation and the extra energy of greetings caused a numbing exhaustion. As the first stories unfolded, my spirit held onto the conversation as it could – but my body sank beneath waves of weakness” (p. 38). Palmer (2000) explains his reaction thus:

I do not like to speak ungratefully of my visitors. They all meant well...but despite their good intentions, most of them acted like Job's comforters – the friends who came to Job in his misery and offered sympathy that led him deeper into despair (p. 61).

I understand these words and feelings completely.

Like Palmer (2004), I know that “the story of my journey is no more or less important than anyone else’s. It is simply the best source of data I have on a subject where generalizations often fail but truth may be found in the details” (p. 19). With this perspective, I begin to share my stories.

Starting With a Story

My earliest childhood memory is of being read to or told a story. The act of storytelling is something that has been happening as long as humans have been able to communicate. Storytelling can be done through spoken or written word, music, or artwork. Through these different methods of storytelling, one thing is a constant: the passing on of information through the sharing of an event or experience that has taken place in the past.

Story 1: *From An Overextending Lifestyle to Being Alone with Zero Visibility*

Prior to my head injury, I would run on about 5–6 hours of sleep every night. I also know that a healthy number of hours of sleep according to others would be around 7–8 hours a night. My preconcussion routine was pretty chaotic, and by saying that I do not mean out-of-control chaotic; rather, I am speaking about the sheer number of things that I did in a week. I was teaching visual art full-time at a local high school, teaching studio art part-time at a local university, being a full-time PhD student, a coach for three different athletic teams for my two boys, and trying to be the best husband and father I could be. In order to get any work done for my two teaching jobs or my PhD, I would be working from 10pm–12:30am, sometimes after 1am, and then get up at 5:45am to start the process all over again. Looking back at this routine now, I can see that it was self-destructive, but I could really not see any other way to proceed.

Although all of these obligations were always on my mind and in my home-life, a very loving wife and our two boys always surrounded me.

On Feb. 08, 2015 those 5 hours in bed became my only 5 hours being up. Looking back on the first few weeks of my recovery now, I see that was when I initially started having thoughts and feelings of fear. I believe that the fear was generated by not knowing – Would I ever be getting better? How bad was this concussion? Why can I not clear my head to think straight?

I was never a person to stay in bed for countless hours and here I was not being able to get out of bed. When I did get out of bed I had a constant gravitational pull back to bed. An overwhelming feeling of “it would just be easier” continued to sweep over me. If I just got back into bed I would not have to think of anything, see anything, smell anything, or focus on anything. I could just lie there and be numb to my outside world: numb to my thoughts, my worries, and try to be numb to the fear of having this injury.

An overwhelming feeling of fear was continual, day after day and night after night. The idea of sleeping all the time and not seeing any light, of having no energy, was always frustrating. Although I was in bed trying to sleep, I was not having restful sleep. Rather, it was long but restless sleep, which made me even more confused about what exactly was going on in my head. If I was sleeping for all those hours but not really sleeping, how was I going to get any real rest to recover?

In those initial weeks, along with fear, loneliness set in often. Before my concussion, there was always something to get started on, something to continue doing, or something to finish. Now there was nothing except a burning, twisting pressure that was relentlessly taking each second away from me each day during each moment I was able to be awake. When I realized that this overwhelming feeling of pressure, burning, and confusion was not going away,

I began to question how I was ever going to get better. I had no indicators or vision that I was going to be able to resolve this on my own. I was at home day after day wrestling with my own uneasiness and the fear that seemed to be evolving into a mass of fog with no visible outcome. As in the drawing that follows, BED with its surrounding fog was not a quiet place, but rather a dark place of fear, where I could see no way forward.



BED. Acrylic paint, marker, pencil, pencil crayon on paper. Adams, J. (2017).

Describing this image and my process

*In **BED** my aim was to create an image that was dark and gloomy, which is how I felt spending 19 to 20 hours in bed during that first month or so. I found myself very exhausted all of the time and weighted down with the pressure in my head. The gray, organic shapes that are layered on top of the bed create the idea of the foggy brain I was living with. I believe that trying to make my way through the fog was slowing my processing speed down immensely. Once again I have used mixed media because I enjoy the multiple effects I can use to express my ideas when there is an abundance of materials being used.*

In the present, fear is something I still deal with on a daily basis. Whether it is through the fear of symptoms returning more regularly than they already do, or if it is just the fear of not knowing what to do next. Some people may call this anxiety, but I call it fear.

Not knowing up from down

The day seems to be like any other

Waking up without a clue -

my plans were set the day before

plans of writing and relaxing

plans of getting things caught up -

laundry,

garbage,

school work,

life.

But

that is not what happened.

Confusion

misdirection

loss of things

misplacement of self,

Back in BED.

It Creeps In

As the fear creeps in

I begin to feel the
dark cloud casting its ever
growing shadow over me.

As the fear creeps in
I become cold and void
of anything that reminds me
of my old self.

As the fear creeps in
I try to listen for the small
voice in the back of my head
calling to me.

As the fear creeps in
I worry that my fear of what was
is noticeable to everyone
around me.

As the fear creeps in I wonder -
will my words be clear
my thoughts be lucid
my emotions be raw

and my feelings be true?

It is when this fear creeps back in
I begin to lose sight of my goals
and of my purpose.

The poem ***It creeps in*** speaks to the thoughts that I continue to have today of having that dark cloud of fear creep its way back into my life. I still feel it lurking in the background of my everyday occurrences. When I first wake up, I lie in bed wondering if today will be one of those days. I believe that I continue to try to keep myself busy to keep the negative thoughts at bay that so easily cloud my mind. My mind seems to be something like changing weather – the fog along with different pressure systems seems to roll in and out as I move through my day.

Story 2: Ten Minutes Before Bed

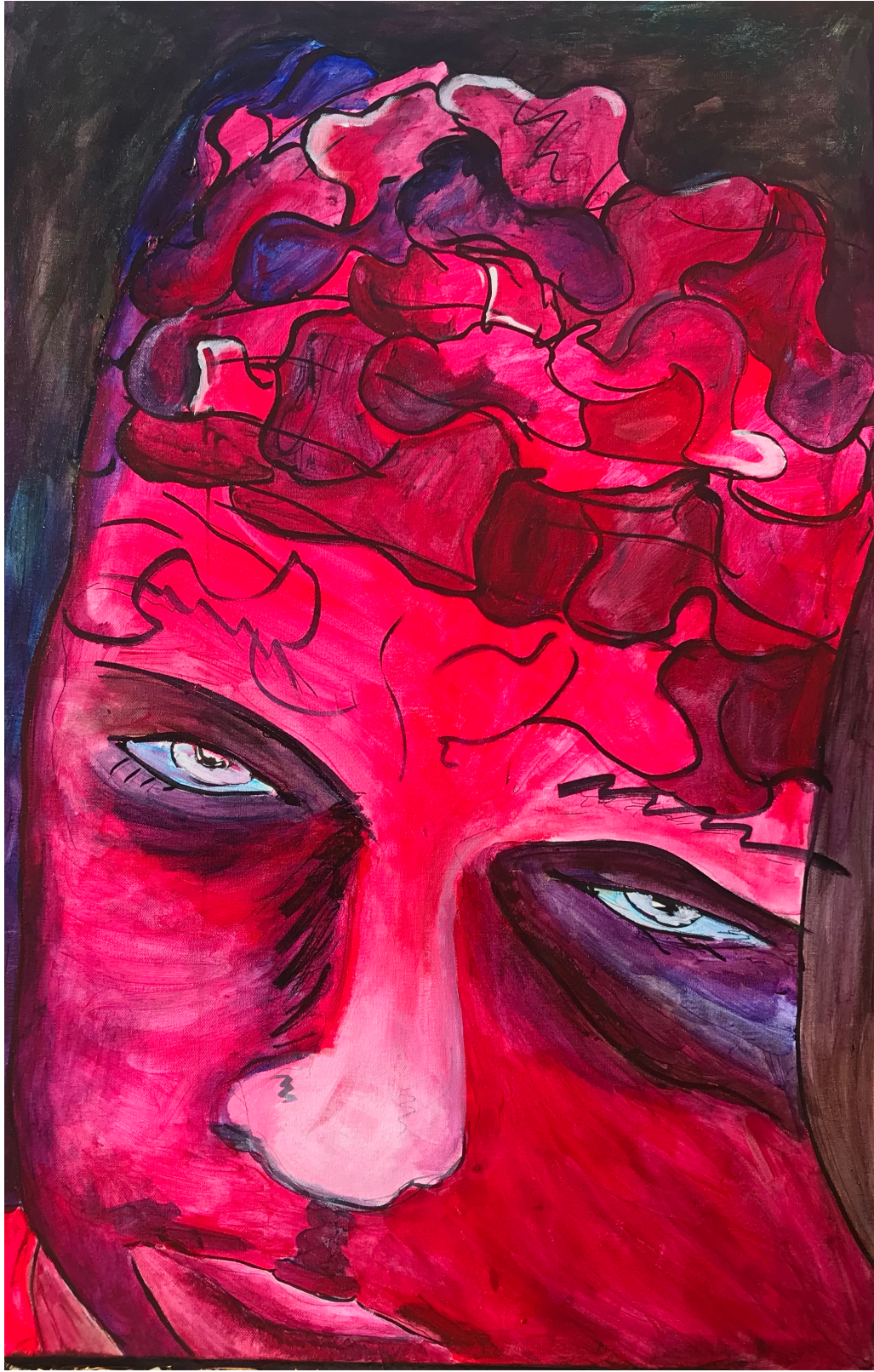
Something that my wife and I started from the moment our first son was born was to take 10 minutes to read to him before he went to bed. As our second son came into the world, we continued this practice with the two of them before bedtime. The act of reading a story to our two young boys gave us some quiet family time that we both cherished. It may have been the third or fourth night after I received my concussion that I realized that this time together had been dramatically altered. I was not spending the same time reading to our boys as I had done a few nights before.

It was “Geronimo Stilton” that really set things in motion. I am still not sure if that motion was forward or backwards, but for me it was a wakeup call to the severity of my concussion. Up until that point, only being a few days in, I noticed the few symptoms that were really starting to be causing me grief: walking on uneven ground, stuttering, bright lights, and

loud noises. But it was reading “Geronimo” when I really began to realize that something was wrong. Just a few short days before, I was writing academic ideas and papers for my Ph.D. I was reading academic articles, gathering research so I could start constructing my proposal. Now, as I was trying to continue the simple act of reading to my boys before they went to sleep, I found myself lying beside my oldest son with one of his favourite books, “Geronimo Stilton,” a mouse detective/editor of a newspaper who has a nose for solving the most mysterious cases. I had read many of these stories before because they were a staple in our library, but that night was different. The words just did not flow as they usually did. I began to stutter and stumble through the words as I read the first page. Feelings of frustration and anger started to fill within me as I tried to push through, but by the third page the burning, twisting, and turning within my head ignited with no sign of simmering down in sight.

That night I stopped at 2.5 pages, and every night after that for a long while I stopped at 2.5 pages. As each night passed and I lay with my son, the fear of not knowing would creep in. When would the words stop acting like gas that seemed to ignite the relentless burning?

I have depicted the feelings I experienced in this story in the paintings that follow.



Burning Fog #3. Acrylic paint on canvas. Adams, J. (2017).



Burning Fog #4. Acrylic paint on canvas. Adams, J. (2017).

Describing these images and my process

Burning Fog #3 and #4 are a pair of paintings in a series of works that I painted in 2017 that are completed from photographic images that I took of myself in the early days of my head injury to illustrate my outward look and my inward feelings. I used deep blues and purples to add depth to both pieces and a vibrant red tone for the skin to represent the burning feeling that surrounded this entire time of recovery. As I look at these two images, I am not sure that I am completely happy with them. Today, I feel somewhat frustrated with these two pieces of work. I include them, however, because I do feel they depict an accurate representation of the way I looked at that time in the original photographs.

Burning: about burning and suffering

The talk burning is never really going to leave me alone

it is a constant reminder of what was and still is - what can it be?

It is the burning frustration of life in recovery – recovering,
but not fully recovering.

It is the burning frustration that fills my day
that fills my night -

it is there in the morning

and as I read Geronimo Stilton.

It is in my family

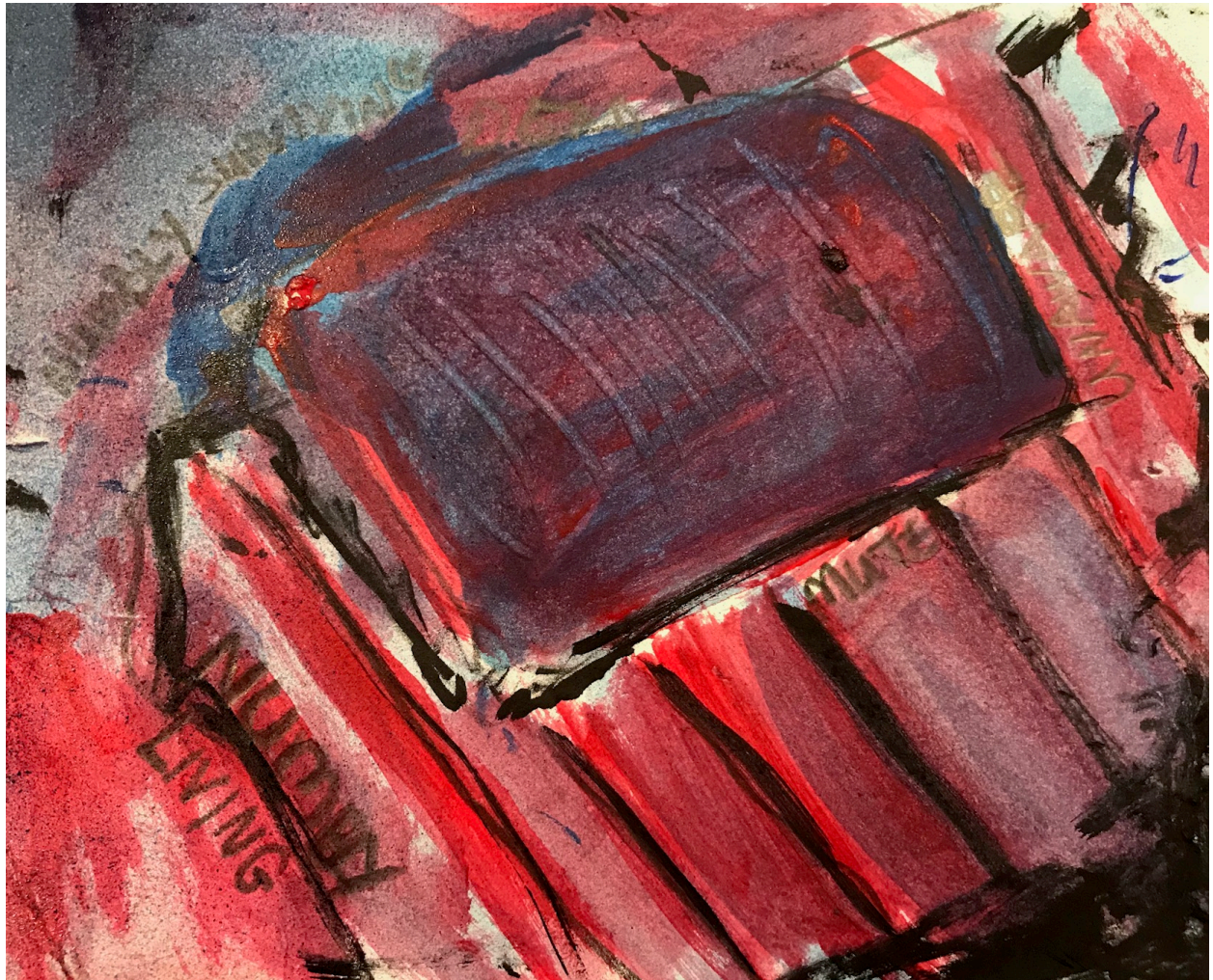
in my home

in me.

I am left feeling *numb*, which the following images display.



numb. Acrylic paint, spray paint, marker, pencil on paper. Adams, J. (2017).



Lying *numbly*. Acrylic paint, spray paint, marker, pencil on paper. Adams, J. (2017).

Describing these images and my process

I often relate the burning fog that occurs in my head to a dishcloth having boiling water wrung out of it. It is the constant twisting and tightening of the boiling dishrag that seems to never leave me alone – it is always there – the source of my numbness. During my recovery, it was there every day, all day; now it comes and goes depending on certain external events, stimulus, or stresses. It is something that I am not sure that I can rid myself of. It has become a part of me.

Today though, by blocking out the external stimulus in my world, I am able to focus on still moments I find within my head. Within these moments I try to clear the clutter of unprocessed thoughts and ideas that I have not been able to filter during the day. The issue that arises with this process is that I have to numb myself to everything around me so my mind does not take in any unnecessary information.

a single moment

It is a moment
a moment in time when I realize
that what I have become
is what I most feared
fearful of what I have
become

In time, it is the struggle
the beating down,
the relentless pounding
from the shadows that
continue to ever consume

It is through the burning down
that I will begin to
fuel my wanting
my desire
to be at
home
again.

Grey

Finding my place
in the dark room
resting thoughts
resting my mind
clearing the fog
and
extinguishing the flames
on my

couch.

Story 3: Reconciling Through Repetition: Remembrance and Reconciliation

I am extremely lucky, or I should say fortunate. I have a great wife, two great sons, great parents, great in-laws, and great friends, so when my concussion happened we had an extremely strong support network. My family members overextended themselves to make sure that we did

not need anything. From time to time people would drop in to see how I was, but I think more so to see how the entire family was doing. I cannot explain or express enough how thankful I am for our support network taking care of us and looking after us.

I am extremely lucky, or I should say fortunate. I have a great wife, two great sons, a great family, great parents, great in-laws, and great friends and as someone who is recovering from a severe concussion, I was glad to see people come visit and offer assistance. Many days passed where I felt very alone with no relief in sight. It was good for the boys and my wife to have people around that were able to offer distraction, friendship, a listening ear, and a nonjudgmental stance on our friendship, because my wife and I shut down our family life just to try to make it through each day. We became an island. We turned our focus inward and tried to figure out how we were going to manage. In doing so, we found those who truly cared for our wellbeing, and who were there to help us out. We gained new friends and lost old friends in the journey through recovery. It was through the loss of friendships that I felt truly betrayed and abandoned. A concussion is like an invisible injury because to the outside world, I appeared to be perfectly normal, but inside my mind was in a constant state of turmoil. Besides the ongoing symptoms of the concussion, the loss of what we thought was friendship was a cut that still runs deep within our thoughts, but we must move on.

I am extremely lucky, or I should say fortunate. I have a great wife, two great sons, a great family, great parents, great in-laws, and great friends, so when they came to visit I was really happy to see them. It was nice to hear of the outside world and what was going on, whether it was about school or the kids' sports programs. These conversations helped pass the time and let me think of something other than sitting at home by myself. I specifically remember one day when a new friend came out to the house just to say hi and talk for a few minutes.

Looking back, it was those simple breaks that really helped me out. Another time, when our sump pump piping froze, a friend dropped everything to fix the problem. I sat inside as he was cutting a hole in our deck with a chainsaw, so he could get access to the frozen pipe. When my wife called another friend to take me to the hospital the day after my injury, that friend sat with me for five hours in the emergency department, taking away from his own family time for us. When our boys were invited to their friend's house for a visit to just get out of the house – that really helped out.

I am extremely lucky, or I should say fortunate. I have a great wife, two great sons, a great family, great parents, great in-laws, and great friends, so when anyone came to help or visit I put my best self forward, and this is what hurt the most. Now as I look inward, I can see what was really happening as I was trying to recover. My wife and boys were walking on egg shells, living nothing short of a nightmare. When people came to visit I wanted to make sure that they did not see me for the hurt and broken person that I was. At times, I was struggling with the fear of not getting better, self-doubt would come and go, and depression and anxiety would feed on my lack of wellbeing. All these emotions and feelings would ball themselves up into one big knot that was something people outside of my house could not see. For me, all these feelings were a sign of weakness, and I did not want anyone to see how much I was actually struggling to get through one day. I would consciously try to be a part of the conversation that was happening when people came over. The only problem was that if there was more than one person talking in a group I could not follow what was going on. I remember sitting in conversations trying to focus on what one person was saying all the while the body movements of another person in the room was sucking all of my energy by giving my brain some other stimulus to be distracted by. This symptom only got worse as more people joined the conversation and started to speak over each

other. As this situation continued, I tried so desperately just to stay afloat within a sea of dialogue.

As people left they would always tell me the same things: “Well, you’re looking better” or “I hope you’re feeling better,” but really I was not feeling better. What I was thinking was that by your coming over here I wouldn’t be feeling any better for days. For the next few hours or even days after a big visit or outing, the fallout from the concussion really hit home. It was in these times that all of my symptoms would be heightened, driving me into an area of no return. I was extremely short tempered, rude, disrespectful, and mean. If it was not the TV being too loud the boys would be making too much noise and I would lose my mind on my family for being so loud or just for being there. As I look backward now into the past, I try to reconcile this behaviour, and this state of mind that I was experiencing on a daily basis. I am not sure what damage I have done with this behaviour but I know it is an area of my life that has put a deep scar on my family’s life.

I am extremely lucky, or I should say fortunate. I have a great wife, two great sons, a great family, great parents, great in-laws, and great friends, so when I look back at my recovery and see how far I have come, I think of them. It is through their constant support even still today that lets me live my “new normal” life.

Uncontrollable

It is the moment of pent-up rage
that slowly seeps
into my head.

This is part of the new normal
which I do not need.

I try to control this menacing
feeling that sweeps over my head.
I am not sure if this is something that
I am able to do -
Physically capable of doing
Mentally ready to do
Feeling like I know what to do.
It is this feeling that nothing is going my way.

Being under the weight

It is the constant feel of darkness that surrounds my thoughts
the weight of each day is almost unbearable
looking for a small way out
a glimmer of hope to tie myself to so I do not fall back -
an anchor to cling to.
The dark weight that bares itself each time I try to move forward
pushes its overwhelming weight down throughout my head
It is the darkness that drapes itself over my everyday.
Feeling pulled down
my frustration is my undoing
the calm tiny footsteps moving around me
trying to please
trying to figure out what has happened

tiny footsteps trying to be loved
each one being crushed by my ongoing
short fuse that is endlessly burning
too quick to be extinguished.

Noise and Silence

Gluing egg shells together
with a short-fused stick of dynamite. The
hold will be everlasting.

Whispering does not help
my searing brain. It only ignites the rage that is
ongoing and fuels my
wanting to rid myself of
the burning.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on three narratives that are representative of my months at home following my head injury. I have focused on situations that shed light on some of my personal struggles through the early days of trying to reconcile how my life had become consumed by confusion and fear. In the next chapter, I look *forward* and *outward* toward living my new normal life as a narrative inquirer, poet, artist, father, and husband.

CHAPTER FOUR: STEPPING INTO THE WORLD AGAIN: MAKING A SLOW RETURN TO LIVING LIFE IN NEW WAYS

In this chapter, in narrative terms, I shift direction *outward* into the social realm as I slowly rejoin my family in my roles of father and husband, and I begin to move temporally in a *forward* direction where I study and teach again after many months spent in my own darkness. Much like the previous chapter, I offer three stories, substantiated with poetry and art pieces that express my return to family and work, but with a “new normal” lens.

Story 4: *Time*

After weeks of sitting in the darkness and trying to find my way out of the burning fog I began seeing a group of doctors and therapists who specialize in concussion treatment and recovery. Through my time with this team I was able to make some headway and was given the reinforcement that things were going to get better. I took their advice to heart – it was the first positive information my family and I had received in weeks. Initially, when I began these appointments I found out how poor my condition was. My eyes were not working together as a pair. This circumstance meant that the information that was being brought to my brain was not in sync, and so my mind was working hard to decipher the information before it could be processed. Because my vision was affecting the information coming into my brain, my vestibular system was not working properly, which led to ongoing dizziness. These are but a few symptoms that reared their ugly heads on a daily and hourly basis. During all this time trying to figure out what would work and what would not work for me, I slowly found my symptom triggers and tried to live life within those triggers. I got caught once in a while setting them all off at once. For the most part though, I was slowly able to manoeuvre within what my body would allow me to do with setting off only one trigger at a time. In doing so, I was moving forward within my recovery

plan, but it was at a ridiculously slow pace. Usually it was after dinner that I would get hit hard with symptom overload, and I was at a point weeks after this slow recovery began that I did not care.

About an hour after dinner, my boys always asked if I was feeling well enough to play ministicks in the basement with them. This small question cut deep into my mind, my being, and I would try to go downstairs to join in the game. I longed for “normal” family time. I longed to join them. Preconcussion, during these times we would laugh, scream, and yell as we acted as our favourite player from our favourite team. We always won the Stanley Cup, and our fans went wild for us after every game.

As the game began I always thought that I would be able to play a simple ministick game with the boys. But two or three minutes into the first game I knew that all of my triggers were firing because of the loud noise, the echoing of the basement, the excitement of the game, and of course the speed of the ball. I was not able to play. I continued to try and track the little yellow ball, but it was just moving too fast. I was amazed at how I could not keep up, and moving my head around just threw me into a greater bubble of dizziness. I tried to play without letting them see that on the inside I was internally crumbling because everything was so overwhelming. I knew that by playing this simple game I would digress from my forward pathway of recovery, but it was worth the burning pain and pressure to be back in the basement winning the Stanley Cup with my boys for those few minutes.

little smiles

It is the little smiles

that peek around the corner

that I long for.

It is the time we spend

together when time

is slowly slipping by.

Short moments

full of excitement

as we hoist the cup

over our heads.

Scorching burns in my mind

as triggers fire.

I look to your little smiles

to pull me

through.

Fire Away

It is the time

I will never get back

burning in my mind

like the hot coals in the middle

of a winter's fire.

It is the time

that I will never get back

twirling in my mind

like the winds turning and twisting
through a hot and humid summer's day.

It is the time
that I will never get back
squeezing in my mind
like a lemon being pressed
of all its juices.

It is the time
that I will never get back
choking in my mind
like being smothered
under an ocean of water.

It is the time that I truly miss.
I will not be able to get those days back -
I will not be able to take back the
comments or the behaviours that have already been committed.

I will continue to
reach out from underneath
this weighted blanket that will smother me

no longer.

Insights Into Home

Home is a haven
full of support
love and healing.

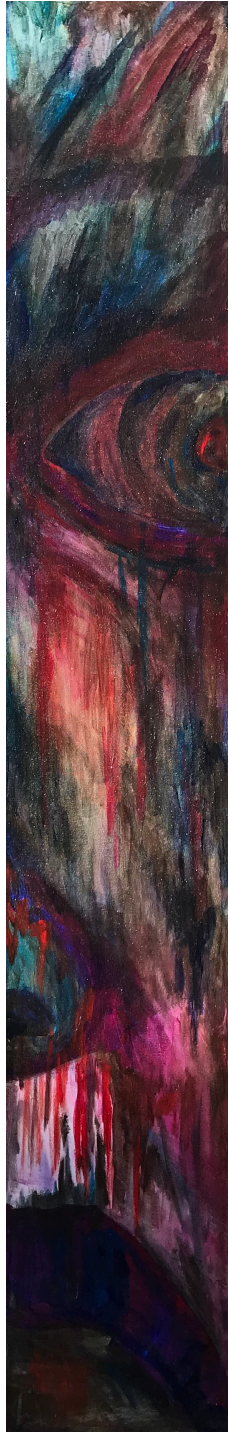
Home is a place of darkness,
yelling and frustration
high expectations - and
low tolerance.

Home is filled with
unconditional acceptance
warm embraces and
solace.

Home is a nightmare
filled with sadness
and despair.

Home is not home
anymore.

In *Insights Into Home*, two different places are represented. The first is my physical home where the boys and my wife continually support me through my recovery. The second place is an internal idea of home within my mind, which is filled with frustration and anger. It is a place I try to avoid, but because it is within my own being, I struggle to crawl from under its smothering weight.



Smothered. Acrylic paint on canvas. Adams, J. (2017).

Reflecting on this image and my process

Smothered is a painting that I created over the entire period of time that I have been coping with the symptoms of my concussion. The title is directly linked to the idea of being smothered by a continual barrage of symptoms that relentlessly are beating at my inner self. The canvas is 74.5" x 12" and is created using these dimensions purposefully. The narrowness of the canvas represents the narrow window of clarity that I had before another symptom would arise. I looked forward to these narrow windows because they offered me hope.

Story 5: A Crowded Head

Crowded head, crowded thoughts, crowded mind, crowded halls. Just after one year of being off teaching full time, I had made enough progress to return to my teaching position at the high school. It was about 150 medical appointments later that my team of doctors and therapists believed that I was able and ready to make that big step back into the work world.

I was excited and extremely nervous. I had not been back in the school at all since I left so abruptly. I was not really sure what to expect when I first walked into the building. It felt like I was supposed to be there, and it felt good to be back in the building. As a start, walking around getting familiar with the building again, I began to run into colleagues who were shocked to see that I was back and asked all the usual questions: “How are you feeling?” or “Wow, you’re back, are you back full-time?” It was nice to have people concerned about my wellbeing, but the questions got really old very quickly. I was just tired of being asked how I was feeling. If I were to answer everyone honestly, I would be telling them that I felt the same as I had been feeling for the past year. I did not choose that reply because likely they did not have any reference point to know what a head injury feels like.

When I went back to work the symptoms were all still there, the burning, the twisting and turning, the pressure, and the ongoing headache. I just thought that one year off work was long enough and I could go back and push through. Looking back now, I believe the only thing that was not with me that entire time was the dizziness.

Even though my first day back was a professional development day when no students were in the building, it was still very tiring. I found out very quickly, as I did playing minisicks in the basement, what my triggers were going to be as I walked quietly around the empty school. As I walked into different rooms I was exposed to different things – smells, lights, and visual

stimulus such as items found in cupboards or on bookshelves. With the simple overstimulating of my brain that first day, I was pretty sure that once students arrived back in the building it would be a lot different.

In came the students...

It was just as I remembered as the students came rustling back into the school. I had several students stop by my classroom just to pop their heads in to say hello. One problem that I encountered was just trying to remember who each one was. They had no problem remembering me, but there were a few that I had no idea who they were.

As the days continued I stayed in my room most of the time, much like I continue to do now. At the start, it was a survival tool because the chaos of the students changing classrooms, the noise of the lockers, and the overall commotion of the whole ordeal was too much for me. Even though it was a brief 5-minute transition, it echoed within my head long into the next period. During the lunch hour, I ventured out into the hallways when the noise quieted down, but there were still students roaming around. I did this on a daily basis just to get out of my classroom and try to become acclimatized to my daily environment. Before long I changed my lunchtime routine to include walking across to the local grocery store to buy a lunch. This gentle walk across the street was great for clearing my head so that I could start the afternoon calmly and in a focused way.

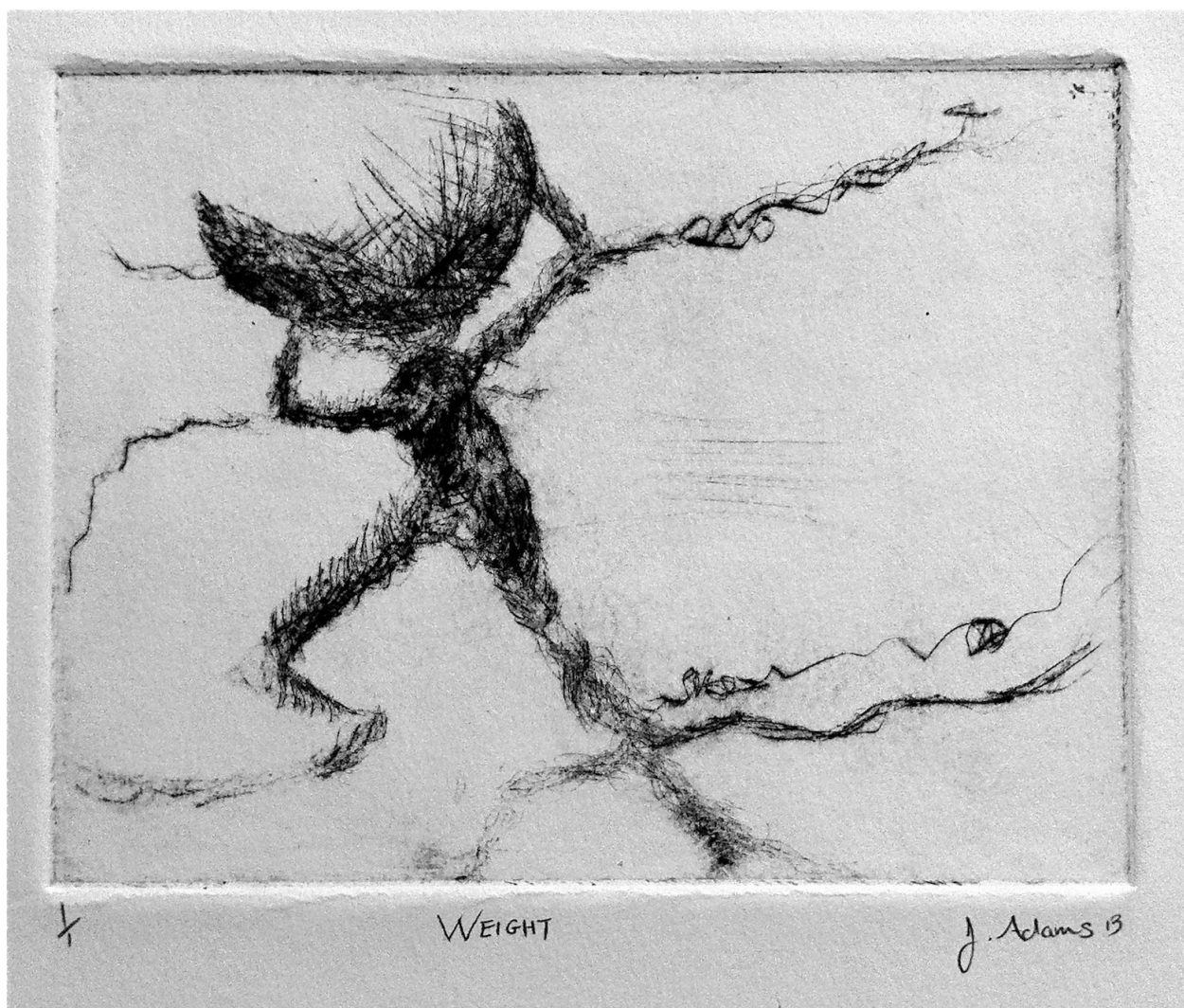
At 2:30 the final bell of the day would ring, and every day I would be so thankful when that happened. By the end, my mind was completely on fire and I could not get out of the building fast enough. The positive thing I found in being back at work, was just that. I was back at work and for me at this time, once again I had purpose for my day. The general community could see that I was back working and that gave me a small sense of accomplishment. The

negative in my return was that I felt that I was slowly regressing backwards and I was not focusing on my recovery. I felt that since I was back at work, I was recovered, which could not have been further from the truth.

It was 3 months after I started working that I found myself back in my doctor's office, uncontrollably crying, not really knowing which end of my mind was up or down. The only way I could describe my thought process during this time was extremely dark and lonely. Even though I was back at work and trying to participate in all the things that I did prior to my concussion, I was slowly falling apart from the inside out.

In the weeks leading up to that point I felt the burning fog of symptoms and paranoia slowly seeping back into my life. I was afraid that I would not be able to make it through each day. The symptoms that did return were not entirely the same as right after my concussion, but rather were a mixture of new ones and old ones. Once again, my head was crowded with ongoing confusion, headaches, and my anxiety was moving towards a point where I was not able to control it. Explaining this crowded weight of symptoms that filled my head to my doctor resulted in my leaving work for 3 months so that I could refocus on my recovery. On one level, I truly felt that I was recovered, but on another, it was obvious that I was not there.

Through the following months I refocused my energies to try to rid myself of the heavy weight that was slowly dismantling my overall wellbeing.



Weight. Intaglio Print. Adams, J. (2013).

Describing this image and my process

*Although this print was created 2 years prior to my concussion, I feel it is the perfect depiction of what was happening internally as I tried to return to a professional life. **Weight** was initially created in response to beginning my Ph.D. I felt that through the pressure of course work, presenting at conferences, trying to get published, and keeping up with my everyday roles I had a huge weight that I had to carry over the next 4 years. This image was one that spoke so well to my situation at the time and now carries forward into my recovery. The Weight is becoming a permanent fixture within my everyday life and within my “new normal” world.*

Rocking Stools

Trying to find papers -
the fear of being found out
the fear of being noticed,
questioned,
stared at,
interrogated,
stared at,
questioned,
noticed,
that I am
not recovered.

Story 6: *Finding My Way Back*

Over the course of the past 3 years I have had many ups and downs throughout my recovery from concussion. I still have symptomatic relapses when I get overtired, when my heart rate goes too high, or in the odd game of ministicks when the boys really start to put the pressure on me to squeak out a win. It has been over the last year that I have really had to live with symptom management, even though I am 3 years out from the initial injury. I am amazed at the lasting ripples that I still feel, and it is in those moments that I need to step away for a moment of silence. Finding the opportunity to take these few moments has been difficult and has really been possible only because of my wife.

I still remember the first morning after my injury when she came downstairs as she was getting ready for work. She noticed right away that I was not myself. I am not sure still today if it

was the way I looked, or that I was working in the kitchen with the lights dimmed or if it was just the way I was talking, but she knew. I was fumbling in the cupboard trying to find the flour to make muffins for the boys. I remember how confused I was in the kitchen that morning. I remember thinking that something was wrong but I didn't really know what and I wondered if she really did know that I was not OK.

Reflecting on those first few weeks now, I cannot imagine what was going through her head every day as our life went from ticking along to crashing down around us. Throughout the following few weeks and months our roles completely changed as she shouldered the workload in the house. In addition, for the first 2 months of my recovery, she filtered everything that came into our house. This action was not because we were hiding my injury, but because I could not handle the commotion of events and situations that were going on outside our house. It was enough for me to try to concentrate on being a husband and father while trying to get better. I soon realized that my wife and the boys were what I needed to focus my limited energy on. I have to thank my wife for reading my signs and looking after what we as a family needed.

As time passed, as a family we began to start moving beyond the boundaries of our home. One evening we decided to make a trip to Target to do some shopping. It was one of the first trips to a store that I had made in a long time. Previously, Target was one of our favourite stores to just wander around in. We planned to go about twenty minutes before closing, thinking that there would be fewer people in the store and the commotion would be less. We were right about the fewer people, but what we did not anticipate was all of the visual busyness of the items on the shelves that I could not process. I had found another trigger that set me off, and my wife was able to read my signs and remove me from this situation.

As time moved on and my recovery progressed, we started to visit friends during special occasions. She made sure there would be only a few people, knowing that I would not be able to keep up with the conversation otherwise. As these evenings began, I remember I was feeling really good, mostly because we made sure that I did not do anything too strenuous for the days prior. We knew that I would not be able to go out if I was struggling with my symptoms from other stressors. As the night progressed, so did my symptoms, and my wife would see me declining throughout the night. She would tell my friends just to watch me over the evening to see if they noticed when I was finished. After they began watching my behaviour, they soon picked up the signs. At the beginning of the evening I would be active in the conversations, then I would start to regress back into a fogged-over glaze. Through my wife's watchful gaze, I was able to manage a night out and return home without too much symptom overload.

Even after 3 years have now passed since my injury, I still have my wife's watchful eye looking out for my wellbeing. She continues to put herself behind the boys and me every single day. In doing so, I believe she is instilling the act of selflessness for our boys to witness and learn. It is only recently that she has started doing things for herself again. This concussion has rocked our family in more ways than anyone could imagine. I am just thankful that she was there to look after and coordinate my recovery. I do not believe I would be in the shape that I am in now if it was not for her continual care and unconditional support. She is always looking out for us.

In the two images that follow, I return in visual form to the morning when I struggled to make muffins for the boys. In *measuring things up*, three white spaces are visible within the image. They are a purposeful reminder of times when I felt bombarded by different auditory and visual stimuli and needed to take breaks to cope. In connection to my recovery, similar to the

white lines in several of the images in Chapter Two, these white spaces also represent emptiness – my need to give myself time and space in order to move forward as husband and father in my new existence.



Measuring things up. Acrylic paint, spray paint, marker, pencil on paper. Adams, J. (2017).



Remembering - lost in the cupboard. Acrylic paint, spray paint, marker, pencil on paper. Adams, J. (2017).

Describing these images and my process

Measuring things up and *Remembering: lost in the cupboard* were 2 paintings that I created to take me back to that first initial morning. I found myself looking for things but being lost in the process of trying to find anything. Both of these paintings have the reappearing image of a brain along with some open areas of solid colour. The brain image is my continual and now ongoing connection to my concussion along with every weather change, bump on the head, road hockey game with my kids, which all have some differing effects on me now. The large areas of colour are to remind me of the small bits of time I had of clarity.

Moving Away

As I move away from
what I know
it is unbearable to see
you move forward.

I do not want to be the
anchor that hinders
that movement
forward -

I have become the slow pull
of heavy iron that weighs
on the soul.

Moving away from what we
know is not
what I had planned -
it is the unfortunate
circumstance of living.

Moving away
is
not
what I
want.

Your Help Wandering Through the Fog

As I stumble through
the fog, I continue
to look for a way out.

I continue to reach
out.

It is you that I see
in the haze of the
fog.

You are the beacon of
support that I
search for.
It is you
who continually supports
me in spite of all of my
set backs.

Conclusion

As I end this chapter looking back on my *outward* movement back into my family space and workspace, I also look to the future. I know I must continue looking forward to ways of shaping and improving my mental wellbeing. I believe that through continuing to take the backward, forward, inward, outward journey that narrative inquiry provides, I can sustain my continuing recovery and be able to move forward in my new normal life.

CHAPTER FIVE: BRINGING THE EXPERIENCE OF HEAD INJURY FORWARD IN MY LIFE NOW: MOVING INTO THE FUTURE WITH A RENEWED VISION OF LIVING AND LEARNING

My narrative inquiry self-study research has taken me back in time in a search for meaning held in my head injury experience. Focusing my study on this topic has been important for me to move forward in all the roles of my life with a renewed commitment to living and learning after these years of illness, turmoil, and uncertainty. To delineate what I have learned in this final chapter, I highlight aspects of my research text and, returning to my narrative definition of curriculum, I draw from it what I have learned living through my head injury experience. I include my reflections on the significance of my study – the therapeutic nature of my methodology and methods, the value of story, poetry, and art in healing, and my newfound understanding of self-compassion in my life.

Highlighting Aspects of My Research Text

Looking back to the beginning of my research text, I think about words, terms, and questions that have guided my study. First, I return to the words that comprise the title of my study. A revival can be thought of as a restoration of what existed in the past or a renewal of past attitudes or perspectives. Either way, a revival is a return, a coming back, it is being revived from a period of detachment. That is the way I think of returning now to living my life. Through engaging in this research, I have a renewed sense of my self, which I lost during my months alone with severe head injury, a revival of my self as an individual capable of living, learning, and sharing what I have learned with spirit and joy.

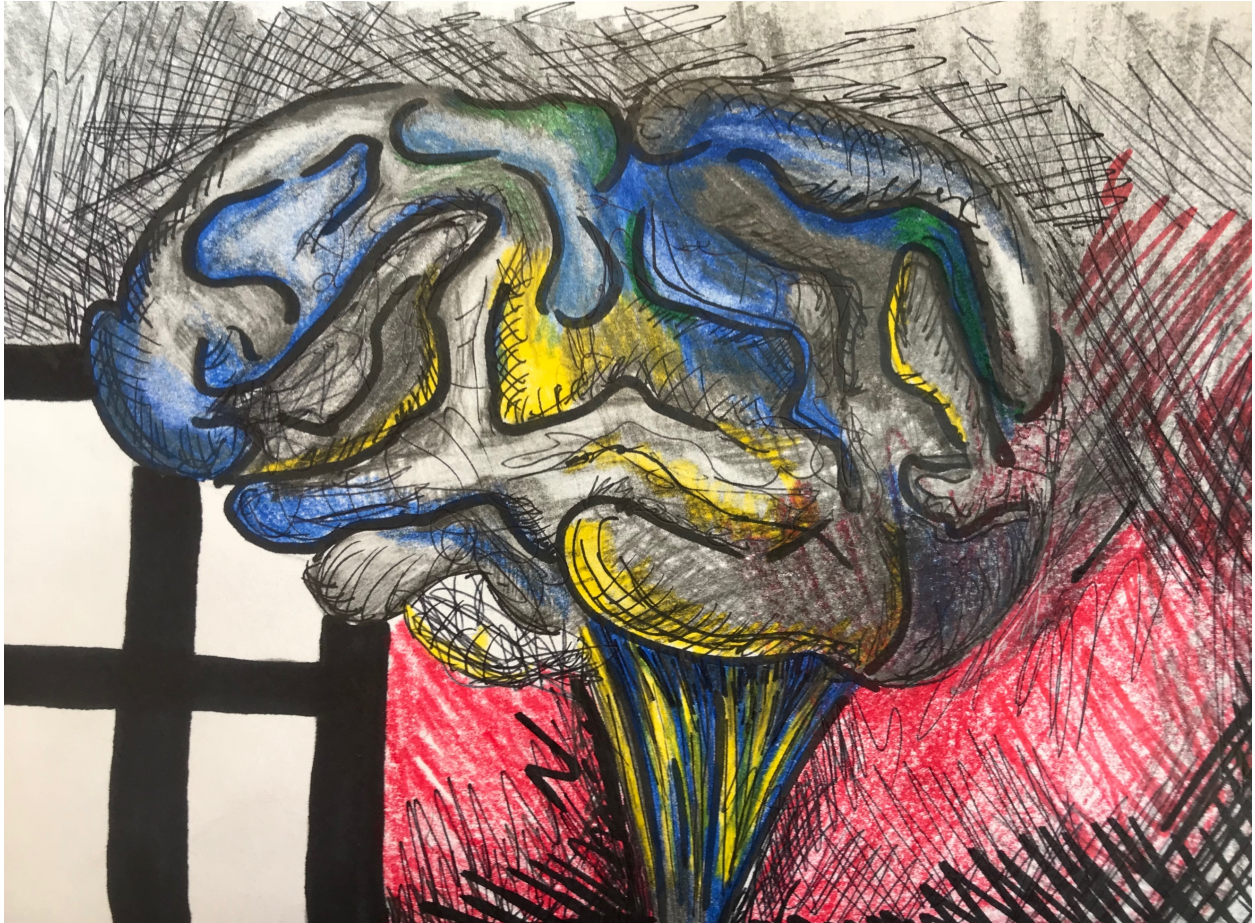
I think about the research questions I posed in Chapter One that have guided my inquiry as I consider them now, at the end of my study:

- 1) During this period of my life, how has my perception of the roles I live been affected?
- 2) What can I learn about suffering a head injury and experiencing a revival of what I thought I knew about living in a family, about being a narrative and poetic inquirer, about art-based research?
- 3) What will I be able to say about the power of visual art and poetry to aid in transforming experience?
- 4) What will my renewed curricular insights entail at the end of my research that can help take me forward with hope and tenacity for my own growth and that of others I engage with personally and professionally?

I embed this chapter with my thinking about these questions now. I also think about the term “new normal” that I used in Chapter One as I look to the future in this final chapter.

I also return to my version of curriculum as noted in Chapter Two, which is that curriculum is comprised of all of life’s experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). To live this definition requires remembrance of past situations and events, attitudes, and emotions, sometimes regrets and small jubilant moments that have occurred across time. However, remembrance is only a first step. The next is to reconstruct stories of experience in the present, using the new knowledge that has been amassed through living across the intervening years. It is then that new meaning can be uncovered that can be applied to life in the present and future. This pathway has been my focus in Chapters Three and Four where stories of remembered situations and events from both early and later days living with severe head injury have been my primary data source expressed in narratives, poetry, and visual art representations.

I hold all these features of my work in my mind as I name new perspectives that I have learned during the 3 years of writing focused on my severe head injury experience. The image that follows expresses my return to a present where, in my thinking now, my renewed vision of curriculum holds a future for me that looks much brighter than it did just a year ago.



Finding the doorway to new curricular ingredients. Marker, pencil on paper. Adams, J. (2017).

Describing this image and my process

*In **Finding the doorway to new curricular ingredients** I look at my personal growth through these past 3 years. I have had to scrutinize my way of life and future direction. The multiple lines that make up the image represent the constant movement of my thoughts as I continue to grow and evolve my perspectives of traumatic brain injury and my rehabilitation.*

Using A Poem to Expand On New Insights and Transform My Own Understanding

In the summer of 2012, in my first doctoral residency, I stumbled upon an article that, over the years since has helped me think about the significance of my inquiry for myself and for others I can share my work with in the future. I use some of Leggo's points here as I delineate insights I have gained from engaging in my study. In this article entitled "What is a poem good for?" Leggo (2011) writes, "Poetry is an act of transformation and an art of transformation because poetry is always minding and mining the possibilities of language and discourse for translating the stories we live by" (p. 142). While I wholeheartedly agree with Leggo's words, I think of this quote in new and broader ways than I have previously. I feel his perspective is also applicable to my paintings and images as well as the stories and poems that comprise my dissertation. Engaging in all the processes involved in my study has been transformative for me – in "mining and minding possibilities" in my head injury tale over time, I have found renewal and affirmation in my ability to persist through difficult times in what matters most to me – my family and my ongoing curricular inquiry and learning.

Continuing to think about Leggo's, (2011) article, I believe that through utilizing stories, poems, and visual art pieces to express my experience of severe concussion I have found, "a way of recording and interrogating memories and emotions and hopes, especially with close attention to the autobiographical" (p. 151). I have been surprised at the depth of emotion that I have been able to write in the stories and poems in my study, as usually I am a very private person who has trouble sharing at this level. Writing about my experience, I believe "I have [written] poetry [and added art pieces] as a creative way to lay down words in shapes, designs, and structures that encourage me to know the cosmos in chaos and the chaos in cosmos" (p. 156). This description comes very close to representing my world throughout my head injury experience.

Leggo, (2011) also notes, “I also write poetry as a way of calling out to others” (p. 152). I hope that I have portrayed the experience of head injury with enough clarity to “call out,” offering my insights to others into the terrors of suddenly not being able to function as expected and to experience the uncertainty of what the future holds in the short and long term. Leggo’s words resonate for me when he writes, “I regard each poem as a center that provides a location for speculation and locution, an aesthetic and imaginative stance (even an instance) for circling, spiralling, [through an experience]” (p. 157). Spiralling through this severe concussion experience, my stories, poetry, and art pieces have provided a location for me to comprehend my experience and speculate on what might follow – without an aesthetic and imaginative stance, I am uncertain that I would be where I am in my recovery. My way of knowing is bound up in understanding the world aesthetically through the construction and reconstruction of experience (Clandinin, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988).

As for the first segment of the title of Leggo’s writing, “Living Language,” I feel I have expressed the living language of head injury using the ways I know best: through storying the experience, through writing poetry, and creating images that express my situation. These are the avenues I use to “call out” to others who may share my experience in the educational realm or in other fields of study or those who are interested in a personal account of living with a head injury. I feel my story is of significance if it offers insight or support for even one person beyond myself.

Reflections on Extending My Theoretical Learning

I have gained a new depth of understanding about my own experience through engaging in constructing and reconstructing my stories of severe head injury. While formerly I understood

constructivist theory to be premised on individuals constructing new meaning based in their own past experience (J. Bruner, 1986, 1990; Piaget, 1955), now I see the impact of constructivism on my ontological self as well as my epistemological self. My very way of being in the world has changed along with my way of knowing the world. I have had to make many accommodations in my way of living as well as assimilate new perspectives; I believe I understand my world in ways I did not before because my experience did not include being ill for many months at a time, or not being able to process simple aspects of daily life. I can say that traits such as empathy and kindness are no longer merely concepts to me because I have lived with these qualities offered to me by family and friends over this long period of illness. I see they are attributes I can offer others overtly in daily life. In Vanier's (2008) terms, I understand brokenness of body and spirit, and I am developing patience for healing in others (and myself) as I have learned how much time and energy that can take.

Connelly & Clandinin (Clandinin, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) have written extensively on Dewey's notion of "the continuity of experience" (1938) as a central component of narrative inquiry. Part of the fear and anxiety I know I have experienced has been being in a state where continuity was disrupted – where I could not make connections between the past and the present, where constructing my daily reality came to a halt, and my future was unknown. I have understood the value of the concept of "continuity of experience" in a much deeper and more personal way than I did prior to my head injury, having lived with the dissociative experience of trying to make sense of my world without continuity.

Aesthetic experience too has changed for me from a theoretical perspective to a lifeline: I know that writing, drawing, sketching, and painting the situations I found myself in have been central to my recovery. Through lived experience, I have embraced McNiff's (1992) view of art

as medicine where “creating a therapy of the imagination” has allowed me to express my perspectives, emotions, and insights into living with a head injury. Placing my experience outside myself using the methods that I have embraced in my study has provided me with a way of looking at myself with some objectivity, which I could not do prior to constructing this narrative inquiry self-study. All the swirling thoughts, fears, anger, and turmoil that I held within me have been made visible, which has set me on a path that has aided me in my recovery.

Creating art has supported me in processing my story, which in turn has enabled me to reconstruct my personal narrative using reflections on my experience. Vygotsky (1971/1994) writes, “Art is based upon the union of feeling and imagination” (p. 523). For me, reflection on past events and situations has become the glue that binds the feelings of head injury I have experienced with my imaginative renderings of that experience in poetry and art. Ultimately, by making a connection between my feelings and my imagination, I have brought a sense of wholeness to this life-changing experience, knowing with much greater clarity what it has meant in terms of change to my family as well as myself. As we go forward together I am very aware that the life we lead is fragile and I must think of love as an active rather than a passive concept.

Without a turn to the postmodern literature in education over the last number of years, I know that my study would not have taken shape as it has. Slattery (1995b) has written that a postmodern lens focuses on aesthetics, autobiography, and eclecticism, all of which play a vital role in the evolution of my work. Constructing a text such as this is a personal venture that has its place in a research milieu that no longer relies on one truth, but rather on trustworthy accounts (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Mishler, 1995) of experience that I think add an important dimension to the research on severe head injury. I recognize that my experience of head injury may be unique, or at least not the same as that of others, but as Slattery notes, since the

postmodern recognizes “persons as interdependent rather than as isolated and independent” (p. 19), I hope my account offers insight that can support others who find themselves in a position similar to my own.

Reflections on Changes in My Perspectives and Behaviour

I have an insider’s perspective now on how hard it is just to function carrying anxiety, depression, learning difficulties, and problems at home. I know that I needed the care I received from friends and family to keep going and retain any sense of myself. I recognize the value of having an attentive listening other take time to provide support. After many months of struggling to work on my dissertation and not being able to complete very much, I have come to understand the value of time in processing material and even in choosing words that express the thoughts I tried in vain to reach within myself.

During my time of recovery, I have had to learn to navigate different pathways through social settings, teaching environments, and professional conversations. By allowing myself extended time to process information, formulate a strategy and then proceed through those pathways, I have been able to return to the teaching world and my educational career.

Along with time, I have also had to give myself space when manoeuvring through different environments. To this day, my brain can still get very overwhelmed by a lot of stimulus in an environment. I am only able to take in so much visual and auditory information at a time, and when the amount gets too high, I begin to slow down mentally and physically. By giving myself space within my environment, by reducing such stimulus, I can process the information I need to relate to others in positive ways. I have a new understanding of the importance of considering both time and space as elements for learning.

I have understood that my family, friends, and students are all part of my curricular development; that they are woven into the fabric of my poetry and art just as the events and situations I have lived are also. I have understood that my emotional and spiritual self is bound up in the stories of others, most particularly my wife and two sons, who also have lived this family story with me and also have their own stories of my head injury experience. This is new knowledge that I can name now that I could not before.

Reasoning

I question the reason you came into my life

stopping me in my tracks

Making me wonder why you are here

making me wonder where you have been.

Being consumed inwardly

breathing outwardly

always looking over my shoulder

as I move and trip on forward debris.

My story

bound and intertwined

before me -

before

you.

Reflections on the Processes of My Study

The Therapeutic Nature of My Methodology: Self-Study Narrative Inquiry

Until sustaining my head injury and writing this dissertation, I had not experienced the therapeutic power held in this methodology. In spite of listening with empathy to classmates' stories of negative and debilitating experiences that were shared around our graduate table over a number of years, I did not understand the depths that self-study narrative inquiry could transcend in a journey to wellness. As I complete my dissertation, however, I can say that focusing on my own head injury experience using this methodology over the past 3 years has helped provide the therapy I needed to heal. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write, in narrative terms, "the reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story and reliving a life story" (p. 71) has provided me with a place to move forward in my "new normal" life, incorporating my head injury experience into my definition of curriculum as all of life's experience. I have learned, as Pinkola Estes (1992), a Jungian therapist, notes, that "story is a medicine which strengthens and can aright the individual" (p. 19). Through constructing and reconstructing my stories in this work, I have also learned, as Winterson (2004) says, that "the stories themselves make the meaning" (p. 134). I ask myself where I might be now in my healing process if I had not engaged in making meaning of this experience in the concrete way that story has provided. All those swirling feelings and upset and my resulting behaviour might still be ongoing if the process of storying my experience was unknown to me.

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) note that storytellers are influenced by the telling of their own stories. Active construction and telling of a story is educative: The storyteller learns through the act of storytelling. This is why the writing of a story for oneself...is an educative act. (p. 155)

I believe that through story, in Dewey's (1938) terms, I have been able to turn a mis-educative experience into an educative one that I can take forward to share in the educational community with others. Like the authors I referenced in Chapter Three, I believe the significance of sharing individual stories of illness and recovery is important for the insights they can provide for others going through their own upheaval – there is comfort and support in knowing that others have survived and even thrived following a life-changing accident or illness. In my own case, I know that I have found therapeutic value in the stories of others, while I found little to help me heal in the more quantitative studies focused on following those with long-term effects from head injury and their families.

Reflecting on My Research Methods and Their Healing Properties

Palmer (2004) writes, "Telling a story expressively, as an end in itself, can contribute powerfully to our insight, healing, and enlivenment" (p. 125). I have found that the methods I used for expressing the turmoil I experienced over the three years of head injury have had a therapeutic benefit: My poetry and art have enhanced my stories of head injury experience and brought me to a place of new insight. When I look back over the titles of some of my poems, I see that they are representative of the emotional aftermath of my head injury experience. When I reread titles like "alone with zero visibility," "not knowing up from down," "it creeps in" – I remember how frightened and alone I felt and how my healing process began as I wrote these poems. When I look back at some of the art pieces, I see images that represent my sense of disconnection and the emotional rollercoaster that I was on. My experience and slow recovery is much as Richardson (2001) describes about writing as method, which was her tool for recovery from a near fatal car accident:

Although I could not bring into speech what was happening in my head, I found that I could write about it. If I could not find the word I wanted, I could

write its first letter or leave a blank space. In writing, the pace and the issues were my own, not the maddening questioning of others. Writing allowed me to record little thoughts, to revisit them and fill in the blanks, to piece them together, thought-by-thought. Writing gave me a feeling of control over time and space, and a faith that I would recover. Writing was the method through which I constituted the world and reconstituted myself. (p. 33)

When I could not find words, I sketched my feelings and thoughts in my journals or small notebooks; my “writing as method” was often in poetic form, while my story writing came later. Like Richardson, initially these tools gave me a way to record my experience and then later to piece that experience together to help make sense of it and, like her, this process gave me hope that I would have a future back in the world one day.

Through each of the methods I used in my study I have experienced the therapeutic benefits of art as described by McNiff (2004) in his book *Art Heals*. Over the past 3 years, emotionally and spiritually, I have traveled to some very dark places in my psyche. I have never been more mentally challenged than in this period of my life. Until my head injury, I never had to deal with issues involving long-term anxiety or depression. I believe that I have developed insider knowledge of the power that art can have on healing - through story, poetry and art-making I have been able to visualize and express what I have been coping with physically and emotionally on a daily basis. I understand McNiff (1992) when he writes in *Art as Medicine*: “Whenever illness is associated with loss of soul, the arts emerge spontaneously as remedies, soul medicine” (p. 89). Writing specifically about poetic medicine, Fox (1997) notes, “poetry is like a homeopathic tincture derived from the stuff of life itself – *your experience*. Poems distil experience into essentials. Our personal experiences touch the ground we share with others” (p.

3). He captures what I have experienced in each of the methods I used in my study when he writes, “poetry provides guidance revealing what you did not know you knew before you wrote the poem” (p. 3). I think of Dryden’s (2017) recent book *Game Change: The Life and Death of Steve Montador and the Future of Hockey*, which focuses on one player’s undiagnosed head injury and death at the age of 35 from chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a progressive degenerative disease of the brain found in people with a history of repetitive brain trauma such as numerous concussions, and I wonder how that life might have been saved if avenues for self-expression had been made available for him to share his story.

Through this whole experience, I believe I have learned the real strength of using creative processes as methods in research and scholarship. For many years in my classes I have watched others create stories, poetry, and art around their own personal struggles, but this time it was me.

A Word on The Process of Using Art to Heal versus. The Practice of Art Therapy

A distinction I have found in my research is that there are those who use art as a process to help others in medical or psychological circumstances, and there are those, like myself, who as artists turn to art as a source of understanding and interpreting personal experience in daily life and in traumatic circumstances. I was drawn to Shaun McNiff as a source for methods of sharing my experience, because, like me, McNiff began his career and remains a practicing artist in his own right. He was an artist who came to the therapeutic use of art through his work. He shares his coming to art as therapy thus: “My work with untrained artists at the Danvers State Hospital [was] where I became an art therapist in March of 1970. The patients in the art studio taught me how to paint in direct and authentic ways in response to the immediate environment” (shaunmcniff.com). Like him, I came to my professional life as a print-maker and painter and became an educator with the perspective of an artist already established.

In contrast, in the psychological literature, it seems that some therapists use art among other strategies to support others who have a myriad of mental health problems. Edwards, (2004/2014), defining art therapy, writes: “Art therapy may be defined as a form of therapy in which created images and objects plays a central role in the therapeutic relationship established between the art therapist and client” (p. 2). A well-known art therapist who created *The Trauma-Informed Practices and Expressive Arts Therapy Institute*, Cathy Melchiodi (2007) writes, “Through art making as therapy you may find relief from overwhelming emotions, crises, a trauma; discover insights about yourself; achieve a sense of well-being” (p. x). It appears that the therapist helps determine the meaning of an image for the patient rather than taking an artist’s stance of drawing on personal experience to make meaning through art. Since my research is narrative and self-study based, the process of sharing my head injury using the skills I know best means that I interpret my art pieces based in my own experience without therapeutic intervention. McNiff (2004) has written that creativity cures the soul. I can say that through using the creative processes I used in this study, I have experienced their healing properties, which have touched my soul – their use has deepened my understanding of the value of my life and changed how I want to be with and share with those dear to me and with those I teach.

Reflections on Learning Self-Compassion

While there are a number of authors who write about compassion (Brown, 2010; Palmer, 1993, 2004; Vanier, 2008) the notion of offering compassion to myself is new, and I am still absorbing the concept. In the past, prior to this study, I thought of compassion as an outward emotion – one reserved for thinking about the predicaments of others. I have realized though that completing my self-study is in itself an act of self-compassion, one that has provided me with a new template for thinking about myself as a person worthy of my own consideration. Brown

(2010) writes, “Practicing courage, compassion, and connection in our daily lives is how we cultivate worthiness...we invite compassion into our lives when we act compassionately towards ourselves and others, and we feel connected when we reach out and connect” (p. 7). Formerly, reaching out to support others has been my version of compassion, without considering myself part of the equation. However, authors such as Germer (2009) have offered me a different view, writing that “self-compassion is the foundation of compassion for others” (p. 3).

Brown (2010) describes the connection between compassion and setting boundaries, saying that “if we really want to practice compassion, we have to start by setting boundaries and holding people accountable for their behaviour” (p. 17). Palmer (1993) enhances this view, writing that boundaries offer the opportunity of an open and hospitable learning space because boundaries are what keep the learning space open for new ideas and insights to occur. Connecting the writing of these two authors, I see that to provide compassion for myself I must offer myself an open and hospitable space where I set boundaries that can enhance my understanding of what it means to be accountable for my behaviours toward others and myself.

Neff (2003) has operationalized self-compassion as consisting of three main elements: kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. These components combine and mutually interact to create a self-compassionate frame of mind. Self-compassion is relevant when considering personal inadequacies, mistakes, and failures, as well as when struggling with more general life situations that cause us mental, emotional, or physical pain. I am drawn to the idea of kindness toward myself and becoming more mindful of the circumstances that life sometimes sends my way – for better or for worse. As an educator and artist, I believe I have been concerned with the human condition for many years; however, my focus was solely

outward. Now I know I must move inward to include myself in the equation as I continue to explore the concept of self-compassion and what it can mean in my life.

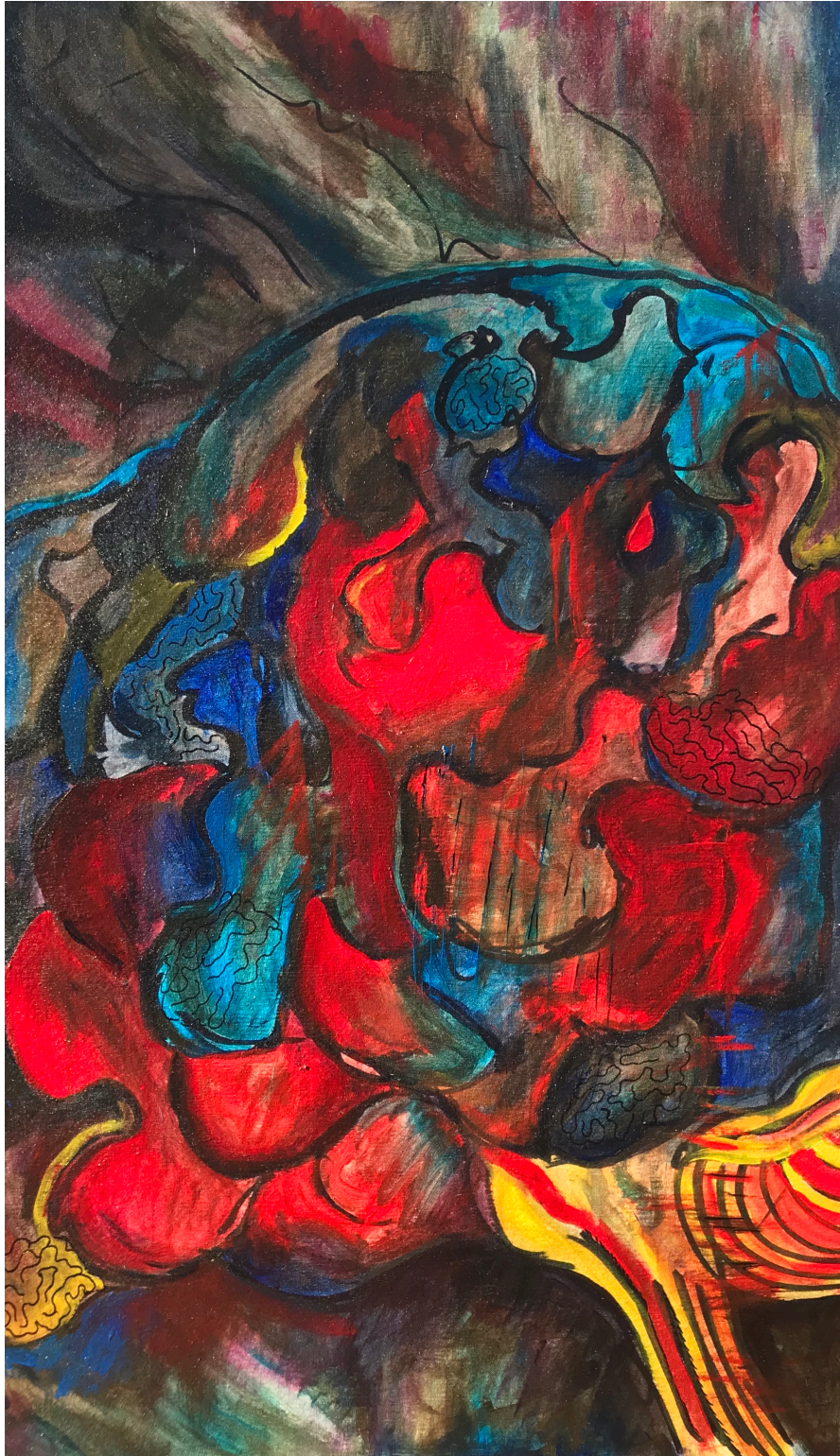
Looking Ahead to Living My Curriculum Revival

When I think of the word “revival”, I think of the concept of an awakening of faith and commitment or a renewal of commitment, similar to what individuals professed at religious revivals of the past. When I narrow this concept down to myself, I think of my own renewal of faith in life following my experience of traumatic head injury and my renewed commitment to sharing my curriculum defined as “all of life’s experience.” I think of my stories, poetry, and art and how I used them to compose my world over the past 3 years. I think of the reflection and inquiry I was engaged in during my doctoral course work and thesis process, and I think of the importance of looking outside myself for support when I needed it most; I think of my family and the value I place on my life with them now.

My revival includes a heightened understanding of the importance of the setting that I create for both others and myself. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) describe three commonplaces of narrative inquiry, which are “temporality, sociality, and place” (p. 479). I know now that for learning to occur it is important to be in a calm and organized place that offers time for coming together in an environment where quiet and focused social interaction can occur. I think in the best of learning environments, space is provided to interact with others about our ideas and choices, to share our work, but also a place to work independently on projects that hold meaning for us personally.

As I move forward in time now, my intention is to continue my research journey into postconcussion recovery experience to see how, through the use of a variety of creative avenues, I can add to the scholarly dialogue around recovery from severe head injury. I hope that by

moving in this direction I can shed light for others as well as myself on the therapeutic processes of recovery using story, poetry, and art as a basis for representing experience.



Finding the bright spot. acrylic paint, marker, pencil on canvas. Adams, J. (2017).

Describing this image and my process

*In **Finding the Bright Spot** I am continually moving forward. My paintings are getting more colourful and more vibrant. The heavy smothering blanket is slowly being removed and the colours and energy from underneath that blanket are being released.*

Last Thoughts

I think of Lyotard's (1984/1994) words when he writes, "no self is an island; each [of us] exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before" (p. 15). My "fabric of relations" connects me to my family, to my social circle, to my high school and university students, to my art and poetry. Now, it also connects me to myself. In the present, I view my ongoing concussion symptoms as threads that I weave together as I continue to create the fabric that is myself. As I paint and write my past experiences, I have become very attentive to the small things that have added to my life. Focusing on the small, seminal stories gives light to important moments within my personal narrative that may alter the creation of my fabric. Each moment holds a potential thread that can be storied and woven into the fabric of my being.

I understand with clarity now that everyone has a continual story that is being written each day, and by opening myself up to this understanding I can be accepting of experiences that impact others' lives. My intention going forward is to continue to "call out" to others by being encouraging, promoting and facilitating opportunities for others to transform their life curriculum by listening with care to their stories. I have a renewed calling to live from my spirit and my heart. I can say with confidence that now I understand the deep and abiding impact found in sharing a story of lived experience.

EPILOGUE

For David Booth

Me

Grow and grow
is what I do,
standing on shoulders
admiring the view.

Knowledge is building,
I evolve -
I search for identity,
symptoms dissolve.

I reflect back
on words I respect -
search my studio,
remain introspect.

Just a few weeks ago, on December 11th I had the most wonderful afternoon as I defended my PhD dissertation. Now I add this epilogue to bring closure to what has been a life-changing journey. I look towards the future and the possibilities that may arise. I look forward to continuing writing words and poetry to express my life curriculum as I persist in my exploration of the world - my aim is to use my words to live more effectively and productively (Leggo, 2004; Winterson, 1995), to be able to be one within my world.

Leggo (2004) writes, that a curriculum of joy “is a lived and living curriculum, always

generated by questing and questioning, by searching and re-searching. A curriculum of joy is always connected to experiences of the body, heart, imagination, and mind” (p.32). At the end of this research, I can say that I do connect everything I think and learn to my body, heart, mind and imagination. My curriculum expectations, goals and what I count as success, are forever altered.

During my defence, my External Examiner, Dr. David Booth, asked if my notion of curriculum was now more of a ‘felt’ curriculum. I believe that I do focus now on how I, and those whose lives touch mine, are feeling physically and emotionally. In doing so I feel I am able to refine my learning through my lived experiences as I create new meaning.

In the above poem I speak to the idea of standing on shoulders and admiring the view. During my research journey I have continually read and thought about the work of researchers and scholars who have come before me to assist in supporting my ideas. Now, I look to how I’ve evolved as a researcher and artist, and I look towards a new scholarly direction that will involve creating artful narrative inquiry focused on the idea of the felt curriculum. Beginning a new stage of research, I no longer have the lens of a student. Rather, I am looking through the lens of a narrative art-based poetic researcher.



Work in progress. acrylic on canvas. Adams, J. (2019).

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