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The possibilities of public literacy spaces: homeless veterans (and other adults) draft nonfiction and selves inside a community writing workshop

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THE POSSIBILITIES OF PUBLIC LITERACY SPACES:
HOMELESS VETERANS (AND OTHER ADULTS) DRAFT NONFICTION
AND SELVES INSIDE A COMMUNITY WRITING WORKSHOP

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy
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Thesis Supervisor: Professor Bonnie S. Sunstein

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Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee for
the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
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To William, Bella Rose, Aurora, my parents,
and the men and women of the Community Stories Writing Workshop
who have trusted me with their drafts.

No writer emerges from childhood into a pristine environment, free from other people's biases about writers. All of us bump up against a number of preconceptions about what constitutes good writing, and what social functions writing fulfills, or ought to fulfill. All of us develop our own ideas about what we're writing in relation to these preconceptions. Whether we attempt to live up to them, rebel against them, or find others using them to judge us, they affect our lives as writers.

Margaret Atwood
Negotiating With the Dead: A Writer on Writing. 2002.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

Deficits dominate our culture's narratives of homelessness, associating poverty with lower literacy and skewing social policies about access and equity in schools, jobs, healthcare, and community (Bomer, 2008; Miller, 2011; Miller, 2014; Moore, 2013). Scant, if any, literature exists about literacy and identity in homeless adults, in ways that they might enroll in college and/or seek long-term careers. Yet if one of our roles as educators is to advocate for justice and disrupt social apathy, then we ought to consider more studies identifying literacy strengths (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Bomer, 2008; Janks, 2010; Miller, 2011, 2014; Moore, 2013) of marginalized groups. In particular, studies examining literacy spaces where homeless adults come together to partake in the writing culture of their town can inform, if not disrupt, what literacies we privilege, and whose. What can we learn about writing and writers, reading and readers when we broaden the boundaries of access to the community? When we appropriate Bakhtin's notion of dialogic tools inside a co-constructed learning space?

This dissertation is based on my four-year and ongoing ethnographic observation of, and participation in, the literate lives of 75 men and women in the Community Stories Writing Workshop (CSWW) at a homeless shelter house (SH), a writing group I founded in fall 2010 and for which I am the facilitator. I focus on ways in which members negotiate, through composition, the layers of deficits ascribed to them as youths in school and as adults in transience (Gee, 2012, 2013; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Holland & Lachicotte, 2007) within the physical and mental, social and personal spaces of the CSWW. Implicitly this overarching pursuit assumes that the CSWW is indeed a kind of third space co-constructed by its members, and as such, throughout my

dissertation, I illustrate the various cultural practices and literacies or knowledge funds (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013; Moje, et al., 2004) that members exchange with one another (and potentially integrate) inside the CSWW. I look at how members position themselves inside this space, as well as how my dual roles as facilitator and researcher affect the practices of the group. I consider, too, the various group dynamics inside the CSWW and ways in which they function as audience for the writers. At the root, the questions I ask in this study include: How might the act and process of telling, writing, revising, and sharing nonfiction narratives inside the CSWW afford adults in homeless circumstances the physical and mental, the social and personal spaces to exercise what they know and to construct who they are as literate beings? What identities and literacies do members perform in their stories (e.g., drafts of narratives) and off the page, or *outside* of their stories relative to audience? How does audience—inside the CSWW and CSWW-sponsored spaces—support and disrupt these self-discoveries and/or enactments for CSWW members—as writers, readers, and literate beings? As my ongoing quest, I wonder how these identities might correlate with those of the narrator's in drafts (Klaus, 2010) and the transformative implications of writing.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

As a literacy educator, I am especially concerned about how cultural narratives of deficits work to immobilize homeless adults and families, leaving them without membership to the community and to education and resources that could facilitate socio-economic mobility. If our role as educators is to advocate for justice and disrupt social apathy, we must consider literacy strengths of marginalized adults. Studies examining spaces where homeless adults come together to partake in the writing culture of their town can inform, if not disrupt, what literacies we privilege, and whose. What can we learn about writing and writers, reading and readers when we broaden the boundaries of access to the community?

This dissertation is based on my four-year and ongoing ethnographic study about the Community Stories Writing Workshop at local homeless shelter, a writing group I founded in fall 2010 and for which I am the facilitator. In this space, writing is transitional, a tool for crossing environments from the streets to classroom, from marginalization to membership. Here, homeless adults with diverse literacies gather for 90 minutes weekly to compose narratives. They consider multiple, sometimes competing, perspectives on what constitutes "literary" writing and they negotiate what it means to be published writers in a town known for its literary culture. They examine their own traumatic pasts and relationships, uncovering moments of strength. Importantly, they challenge standard pedagogy (grades/test-scores), contribute cultural knowledge, and disrupt deficits associated with homelessness. Ours is a collaboration to exchange and democratize knowledge of the home, school, and community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

PREFACE

Flexing Mussels

When we first came to the United States in 1979, my mother and I lived with my aunts and cousins in Section 8 housing. Our apartment was located only a few blocks away from the public library, though I never set foot in it except for maybe once, and it wasn't for books. My cousin Tracy had told me that aside from lending out books, the library also accepted old baby dolls in exchange for brand new Barbies. "But only if you cut off your doll's hair," she said, "because the librarian only wants bald ones." Even at five, it didn't seem to make much sense, but since my mother didn't allow me to have dolls with breasts, I easily took the bait. America, I thought, was the most awesome country in the world.

The next week, I went up to the check-out desk and handed the librarian my stubby-headed doll. "Yes? What do you want?" the woman asked. When I nudged the doll closer toward her without saying a word (because my spoken English was limited at the time), she leaned over the counter, looked straight into my eyes and said, "Look, kid. I don't know what kind of game you're playing but this isn't funny. You need to leave." I rarely visited the public library thereafter.

My unlucky fate with libraries and librarians would follow me through grade school. In fourth grade, I belonged to a weekly reading group called Mrs. April's Journal Club. It was for students whom, Mrs. April, the school librarian, thought could benefit from reading more books. I was selected to the club, I think, because I checked out only

picture-books every week. As an eight-year-old, I didn't enjoy reading and I never voluntarily read anything. A Vietnamese immigrant, my mother always said to focus on math instead of English. Speak like Connie Chung but know the language of Einstein she'd say. During my short-lived stint in kindergarten years prior, I was the only kid who could do multiplication and division (and was advanced to 1st grade), though a math prodigy I never was. Looking back, I sometimes wish I had spent more time reading books, if for any reason, I wouldn't have been so lost every Wednesday when our group discussed the assigned readings.

By week three, I had started to skim through the stories and hoped that Mrs. April wouldn't call on me, and most times, she didn't. My cousin who was also in the club and exercised similar reading behaviors, on the other hand, was not so lucky. She, in fact, was kicked out of the club within the month's end because not only had she neglected to read the week's assigned short stories, she also lied about having done so. It had something to do with sea mussels, or in my cousin's case, "muscles." I was sitting right next to her when Mrs. April opened the meeting with, "Tracy, why don't you tell us about the mussels in the story. What exactly are mussels?" When my cousin flexed her biceps and said, "It's the little hill-bumps on your arm," Mrs. April pursed her lips and nodded her head knowingly. "That's what I thought," she said. "Clearly you hadn't read the story. Perhaps you shouldn't be in the club at all." In the midst of surrounding gasps, my cousin picked herself up from the plastic orange chair and sped-walked toward the double-door entrance. At that moment, I didn't know whether to pity her or envy her.

Memories of getting kicked out (or potentially getting kicked out) of the library seem to have been regular occurrences in my childhood. I can laugh at them now because

I am no longer at the mercy of librarians. But at the time, the idea of seeking a book to read for pleasure, for exploration and discovery, was not only foreign but scary. Where friends reminisce about a childhood filled with reading enjoyment and a love for language, I recall authoritative figures, punitive consequences, and a lot of tedious, hard work.

In elementary school reading involved reciting words on flipcharts without tripping over pronunciation. I focused a lot on phonetics, on the correctness of sound, which, in many ways, served me well insofar as grades went. On the outside, I appeared to have mastered fluency as an English speaker; in fact, I graduated from ESL class within two months of kindergarten (*that's* how good I was at sounding American). But on the inside, I dreaded every single thing about language arts, especially when we had quiet reading time.

Every day from 2:00 to 2:30 in the afternoon, right after recess, everyone at Bailey's Elementary School was expected to have a book in hand. It was a very presumptuous period of the day, I think, and I remember resenting it deeply, if not also feeling immense shame for not being smarter, like the Sarahs and the Johns at the school. These were the kids whose parents clearly read to them multi-syllabic text since birth, if not even while they were still in the womb, whereupon, I am quite certain the parents also played Mozart and Beethoven in the background. But for the kids like me, the ones whose reading speed depended on how fast their mouths could move (and later, whose advanced vocabulary consisted of SAT words inserted awkwardly, if not, needlessly into simple sentences about daily routines), quiet reading time was a time of struggle. Where Sarah and John ploughed through two books during those thirty minutes, I was decoding

the first half of last week's library check-out. The whole act of reading seemed brutally

uneconomical and defeating, and I suppose after a while, you can say I just gave up.

What good, after all, was it to consume a bunch of small words that I already knew only

to occasionally arrive at a word that I didn't, and then, at which point, I am supposed to

stop my flow, highlight the term, look it up in the dictionary, and attempt to reapply it

back into the sentence just so that I could see it within the appropriate context, and

potentially (though most unlikely), use it in conversation? Of course my lack of

motivation may have also been driven by possible laziness, because I am quite confident

there are many non-native English speakers who consumed books as children, who

became walking dictionaries by their own right, and who even scored a perfect 800 on the

SAT verbal, if not, close to it. They exist. I know they do. I just wasn't one of them.

Firing the English Canon

At home I read mainly for function—to do homework assignments or to translate letters

from school for my mother. Later, when my handwriting stabilized, I read so that I knew

where to sign her name on permission slips for fieldtrips. Secretly, I wished I could be a

writer.

The truth is other than Don Freeman's *Corduroy*, I don't think I was interested in

any of the books the librarian recommended. Most seemed anti-climactic and focused on

characters who learned little from their actions: *Blueberries for Sal, Eloise, The Giving

Tree* to name a few. I found them unworthy of time spent. In fact, until graduate school I

never actually finished a single book. I am neither proud of this fact, nor am I ashamed

of it. It was just something I did (or didn't do). Certainly, it was not without consequences. During an icebreaker many years ago, the director of the Nonfiction Writing Program at Iowa asked all the first-years to introduce ourselves by naming a writer whom we thought best reflected our work. New and eager to impress almost everyone cited authors I had never even heard of, though by the affirming nods in the room I suspected then, and know now, that these were names reserved for that specialized bookshelf marked "Essays" at Prairie Lights, the independent book store in town. Outside of the required readings in elementary school language arts, high school English, and a few summer courses in college, I knew nothing about nonfiction as a genre; I don't think I even cared. As far as I was concerned, good writing was good writing. If I liked the piece, then I read it. But since I rarely liked anything I picked up at the library (and by rarely, I mean almost never) I also never bothered to remember authors—most just seemed to try too hard on the page, always decorating something already beautiful with their ugly, fluffy words. And so, when the time came for me to share my nonfiction role model, I confessed that I didn't have any. "I don't really read," I said. "In fact, I'm not sure how I even got into this program." Some of my cohort laughed, because they thought I was joking; others rolled their eyes because they knew I wasn't.

I watched a lot of television as a child. Television was how I learned to hear English, speak English, read English, and yes, compose in English. Listening to JJ from *Good Times* say "DY-NO-MI-TE" had always caught my attention over reading William Faulkner's five-million-word sentences or Virginia Woolf's (or worse, James Joyce's) impenetrable stream of consciousness (no offense to anyone who may love these folks). I've just never developed the ear or heart for that kind of high-brow fancy literature stuff.

Those kinds of ears have to be bred—engineered—into you, I think. Otherwise, it's just

all white noise, the kind that, no matter how hard you listen, just buzzes. Of course, in

the world of writers, like when you're sitting with a new cohort in the Nonfiction Writing

Program at Iowa, telling all the aspiring artists that you don't like books is like telling

them they're going to become *bestsellers*; they take that stuff very critically.

It is hard for writers, especially first-year MFA students, to hear their peer confess

about a bookless history. Particularly for the ones with the scowl on their faces, my

pedigree must've seemed very unworthy of admission into the program. Being well-

cultured, well-read, and well-spoken is about, well, books and not just any books, but

books of the English Canon, books that, personally, I have never enjoyed reading, but

that I have often felt pressured to love because it was, and is, expected of me as a writer.

All writers read, at least the good ones do, don't they?

On Facebook my friends, most of whom are English-literature folks or wannabe

writers, sometimes post images of selected book titles as profile photos, or *shelfies*. It's

their way of bragging without bragging, even though there is little difference between

what their bookshelves say about them and those glamour shots they take at the mall

photo studio. I have been tempted to post my own bookcase-selfies, too. Mine would

feature works like *Star Wars – Darth Maul: Shadow Hunter* and *Vampire Hunter D,*

Volume 3: Demon Deathchase, and *DC Comics Ultimate Character Guide*—all of which,

unsurprisingly, have been, in one form or another, adapted into television shows or

blockbusters (and yes, I have experienced both text and film renditions). Of course, I

also love Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*, John McPhee's *Irons in the Fire*, Tim

O'Brien's *Going after Cacciato*, and Rick Bragg's *All Over but the Shoutin'*. Theirs are

the voices conversing inside my head—always. I crave their language and reread their sentences again and again until I feel goose bumps. I just don't talk about them. Sharing this information with others feels like a trespass; some spaces, I just can't enter.

I Don't Speak Ching Chong

In education, there is this thing we call modeling, or to be fancier, Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, or ZPD for short, which posits that children learn to do things on their own by first following adults' example. If this is true, and I think it is, then I should say that where reading (and writing) is concerned, I did not grow up witnessing any such activity in the home. Outside of television, flipcharts, and watching Sarah and John devour language in school, no adult in my family ever picked up a book. My family was not illiterate or anything—not by any sense of the word. In fact, as a child my mother used to consume the Vietnamese classics almost by the hour. But between a day-shift at Singer, Inc., a nightshift at 7-11, and a weekend shift at the *Haircuttery*, reading became a luxury that she could no longer enjoy, not in America anyway. But she also didn't mind the loss, either, I don't think. For her, coming to this country was never about gaining access to a literate life; it was about gaining access to employment, no matter how low the wages. As far as she was concerned, the more jobs she was able to juggle in a week, the closer she seemed to be living the dream.

Even if I had witnessed avid reading behavior, however, I don't know that I would have picked up the habit, myself. The books my mother preferred were all written in Vietnamese, a language I tried so hard to forget. Earlier, I mentioned that much of my

childhood reading experience focused on phonetics and enunciations of all the syllables in English words. True, a lot of this was motivated by my desire to avoid ESL class, but the other part was also to avoid speaking with a heavy foreign accent. Vietnamese, the language my mother expected me to speak at home, is very tonal. Once your tongue becomes accustomed to certain curls and rolls of the Vietnamese language, your ability to speak English and "sound American" is also altered. Even as an adult, I still find myself purposely enunciating words, excusing the exaggerated syllables as intended clear speech. And most times, I get away with it. People seem to believe I am local, or at least they are too polite to dispute it. Even so, sometimes, like at the groceries or at school or at some random place, someone from somewhere will remark at my "perfect" English. "Where are you from?" they ask. When I say, "Maryland," they pretend they didn't hear me and press for my "real" origins. "No really. Where are you really from? You speak English so well." This, they insist. Then, depending on my mood, either I smile politely and repeat, "Maryland" or I smirk (not so politely) and say, "Thank you, so do you."

During a guest presentation for a human relations class many years ago, I shared this story with a room of chuckling undergraduates. Afterward one student posed, "Don't you think the person who asked you this question was just curious? He probably didn't mean anything by it." It was a question that I had anticipated from experience, but one that had always caught me off guard anyway. It suggests my unwarranted oversensitivity, hostility even. And yet, rarely would anyone question an Anglo- or Euro-American of his or her origins as a result of speaking perfect English; it is a standard; it is expected.

As an Asian American I am prescribed a perpetual foreignness, regardless of how accurate my English speaking skills may sound. That I do not fit the prototype of an American, i.e., a Caucasian, also means that I will also not be seen as one, at least not without initial pause—how ever so subtle. The same thing goes with being accepted as a literate writer—or reader or teacher or researcher for that matter. Access to these identities is not simply about a person acquiring certain skills or performing certain roles. That is only part of it. The other part has nothing to do with competence.

I remember the summer before I started the MFA program, one of my professors said, "If you don't believe you're a writer, then nobody else will." This, he said, right after I told him I didn't think I deserved to be in the program. Somewhere deep in the pit of my heart, I had hoped that he would have said something like, "No, no. Of course you deserve to be in this program. You're such a talented writer." But he didn't. "For the next three years," he continued, "you'll get to write, read, and live like a writer. Thereafter, you may choose to continue those practices, or you may go off and pretend to be someone else." His words stunned me. And he was right. We are each our own validators. If we don't see ourselves as writers, then no one else will either. But my professor, the individualist that he was, also presumed privilege. In a world vacant of other social influences, each and every one of us certainly has the power to control how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us. Except that, we do not live in a vacuum. Any validation for my work, or identity as a writer or an English speaker or an American, could never come from only teachers or peers, nor could it come from me alone. Validation, as with identity, the kind that writers seek, the kind that we all seek, takes a village.

By Happenstance

Aside from random affirming moments by teachers in grade school, I never considered myself a writer and whenever I had the choice to do something other than the traditional writing assignment, I always opted for that. You might even say I feared writing more than I hated reading; although, admittedly, I also secretly loved it more than I supposedly read books. Until the 11th grade, all my grades in composition were between the B and B- range, and when they were higher, it was only because I knew how to fake it. For example when my English teacher, Mrs. Cox, said to write an advertisement for either a paperclip or a cardboard box or a water bottle, I selected to write a commercial about water and performed it to the *Gilligan's Island* show-tune: "I've been drinking water now for six or seven years, and I find it better than gulping down beer. W-A-T-E-R really spells the name when your tongue is dried and looks real lame. Water is first, good for your thirst…." Later, in French class, when Madame Blitz said to present a book report on *Les Miserables*, I wrote a song about Eponine's heartbreak over Marius's love for Cosette and sung it to the musical theme-tune of *Cats*—in French. "J'aime un garcon qui s'appelle, il s'appelle Marius…." Both earned me A's.

Most of my stronger drafts happen whenever I give up, whenever I am most overwhelmed, hopeless, and anxious. The first time I realized this to be true was right before I applied to the writing program at Iowa. Once was in Dr. Smith's (not his real name) classical and biblical literature class and the other was in Dr. de Saint Victor's personal writing class. Dr. Smith, I remember, hated my midterm interpretive literature paper, faulting me profusely in a page-long critique for the incorrect use of the word

"supersede." And so for my final project, I opted for the "creative" alternative to the traditional term paper: to interpret the classical works by rewriting a biblical story as a Greek tragedy. If Dr. Smith was going to hate my literary interpretations (as he had the whole semester), I should at least go down writing in a form most interesting to me and appropriate for my reading of the stories. But as it turned out, not only did Dr. Smith give the paper an A+, he called me aside after class and spoke to me for the first time in the whole semester. "I had never experienced a biblical story in tragedy form quite like this before," he said. "You made me laugh because it was so clever and then you made me cry because it was so tragic and then you made me talk to the words, because it was so present." Relieved, I resolved that I was way more comfortable interpreting stories by way of narrative than I was writing them in strict, rhetorical form.

That summer, I enrolled in a personal writing class at the university. Dr. de Saint Victor was an old-school Shakespearean scholar, and for whatever reason, I assumed all sorts of mean, English teacher stereotypes about her. It could be that she was from Berkeley, wore Birkenstock sandals with socks, and spoke with a contemplative nasal sound. Or it could be that I was just terrified of English professors in general, especially those with three-word names. And yet were it not for Dr. de Saint Victor, I would not have applied to the Nonfiction Writing Program at Iowa. It was she who taught me the power of a strong writing voice and the value of organic composition. It was she, who said that I could write.

I always tell people that I didn't become a writer until I was a graduate student in the Nonfiction Writing Program at Iowa. Sometimes I imagine my experience during those three years as my *Cliff Notes*, or crash course, to the writing identity. From peers

and maybe four other professors, I learned how to vary sentence constructions, select words, control imagery, and experiment with narrative form. Those years were the best of times and they were the most brutal of times. Like many of my classmates, I cried a whole lot the first semester, usually right after my draft had undergone "workshop." Friends can be ruthless, especially if they are writers—professors, too, though their cruelties are often hidden behind the guise of supportive rhetoric. It is never what they say on the surface that you should mind, but what they say in between the lines. "Your essay would make a wonderful and funny children's book," for instance, might mean one of two things: that your essay *really would* make a wonderful children's book, or that your essay is terribly unsophisticated. Neither of such interpretations flatters your aspirations as a literary artist. Of course, if you have a six-year-old like my daughter who fancies herself a reader of Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons*, and says things like, "I love how his opening line achieves so much in one breath," and claims the writing "exquisite," then maybe the statement would not be a jab in the throat, after all. And let me just say here before I go on, that I am not mocking children's literature by any means. There are just as many brilliant literary pieces as there are not so brilliant ones—just like in adult literature. And to be fair, what we each determine as "good" writing will vary, as it should. Otherwise we would all be forced to read Kafka (which is often the case).

Claiming that I did not become a writer until old age may seem like an exaggeration, and maybe it is. Teachers and literacy researchers would say that clearly I had learned to write somewhere, somehow and I probably wrote quite well before those three years in the writing program. Of course, these folks have never seen my early drafts. Full of clichés and forced language, my constructions were atrocious, worse than

they are now. I say all of this and yet I know very well that the issue shouldn't be about what I wrote or how I wrote before I got into the program; evaluating the quality of writing and a person's identity based on the product seems to contradict the understanding of writing (and literacy acquisition) as process. More important and worthy of query, perhaps, are where and how I had picked up language and learned to listen for rhythm in spoken word, for instance. Graduate school may be where I figured how to translate words and sounds onto the page—how to produce them in visible form—but it was hardly the moment when my composing skills suddenly appeared. Those moments happened *way* before the words hit the page, and certainly *way* before the final product—before oral composition, before written drafts. Those are moments we call, "history," history that seemingly may have nothing to do with the actual final product, but in fact, have *everything* to do with it.

From my history I can assert four things. I am a writer. I am a teacher. I am a literacy researcher. And for the purposes of this dissertation, I am also the founder and facilitator of the Community Stories Writing Workshop (CSWW) at a local shelter house (SH). Since fall 2010 I have had the privilege of reading, writing, and revising drafts with 75 U.S. military veterans and adults who have come through the emergency housing facility and who have voluntarily participated in the writing group. I, like the members in the group, experienced a myriad of literacy practices in childhood, many of which people do not normally expect of writers. My literacy came from the home, from planting red hot-chili peppers and Thai basil leaves on public property—that small plot of land right outside the apartment window—or watercress on that creek bed right off of US Route 29. Mine came from the sea, from that one half moonless night of floating on five-gallon

plastic jugs in the middle of the Pacific, of peddling hard—front and back—toward a boat that never seemed to stop rocking. Mine came from a life outside of the institution, untouched by books or ink.

Dear Readers…

I do not know who the readers of my scholarship might be, nor do I wish to define with certainty where I see myself in the literacy studies community. And perhaps that is a good thing. While it can be useful to identify my readers, it can also be extremely limiting, exclusive even. The question restricts me to boundaries where I see none. Is this scholarship for writing teachers, for writers, for researchers, or is it for scholars and professionals from other fields, like psycho-therapists, social workers, and community organizers? Truthfully I don't know how to answer the question without overlap. Too much of what we do in academia is specialized, I think, confined to disciplinary boundaries. It is as if we imagine a world that exists strictly in categories. It is as if we imagine a world that does not exist at all.

Still yet, the question of readership (and thus membership) is supposed to help me focus so as to strengthen my work. The number one rule of western composition, always, is to know your audience, and since I am a product of western rhetoric (by way of my mentors) I shall attempt to imagine my readers. I shall imagine them by their disciplines. But I shall acknowledge, too, that no person enacts one identity at all given times. At the root, my readers are thinkers and learners. They are discoverers and innovators. And they are intellectual visionaries, unconfined to disciplinary borders.

xxiv

I see my work with the writers in the CSWW as fruitful partnerships founded on deep trust. Although research demands the capability of replication, my primary goal for this dissertation is not to show others how to conduct similar studies; that may happen or it may not happen at all. Simply my goal is to tell stories, of the men and women with whom I've worked—many of them veterans. In so doing, I share my process, how I conceived of the CSWW and why. I share my initial assumptions—some of them shamefully ugly—and ways in which I have revised them. Most importantly, I share my observation of, and participation in, the literate lives of some of the most unassuming writers this town has to offer. I portray each writer's rich, diverse cultural knowledge, to show that sometimes Carmella is a painter, Lucy is a poet, Clark is a woodcarver, Dale is a folklorist. At other times, they are firefighters, postmasters, dishwashers, paramedics. But at all times, they are somebody's friends, children, parents, spouses, relatives. They are you and me and us.

And so, would my study interest writers, teachers, and researchers who work with diverse community members—young and old, from inside and outside of school? Would it appeal to those who study writing and revision—of narrative drafts and of self and identity? Would it concern those who advocate for social change and justice? I don't know, but I certainly hope so.

In the spirit of my own understanding of identity, writing, and literacy, my dissertation is a cross-disciplinary study grounded in literary, composition, performance, sociocultural, and psychological perspectives, aimed toward social justice, educational equity, and expansive literacy. I approach my work with veterans and community members at the homeless shelter as a writer, a writing teacher, a community service-

learner, and researcher, sharing what I thought I knew about the literacy practices of community writers, and what I eventually learned during the past four years in the Community Stories Writing Workshop. To this end, I write for other writers, for those with a deep love and respect for story, the arduous process of meaning making on the page, and a story's power to make the heart beat just a bit faster. I ask that we think about what makes good narratives good, to reflect on our own composing processes and know that ours is but one of many variations.

I write for teachers of the language arts—in writing and reading—for those who understand process and teach a diverse group of writers—traditional and nontraditional students whose literacies come from inside and outside the academy. As with my mentor in teaching and her mentors and her mentors' mentors, I insist that we cannot authentically understand our students as writers based solely on what we see in visible form. If we are to facilitate their writing skills, if we are to help identify and nurture their strengths, then we must also seek to know their history and who they are as literate beings. I cannot begin to think of all the writers, young and old, with whom I've met who have been dismissed as writers because of a "less than perfect" final product. If we are to embrace writing as process, then we must also extend composition to include moments even before oral/talk and written drafts and consider the writer's literacy history from in and outside of school.

I write for literacy researchers—through the ethnographic lens—to look at how our work in and outside of the academy might translate to praxis. I ask that we adopt an expansive notion of literacy to include knowledge beyond the conventions of reading and writing. My scholarship is a direct extension of my personal experience with, and value

for, literacy practices outside of schools, from working with homeless veterans and persons in a community writing workshop at a local shelter (to veterans receiving mental health services at the Veterans Affairs to "underprepared" minority student athletes in a yearlong academic seminar to stakeholders in advanced composition/nonfiction writing to business students in foundations of business class).

I write for community service learners, for those who advocate for reciprocity in public engagement, but who acknowledge the complexity of shifting power structures and sponsorships. Boundaries of access to literacy space and identities are situated as they are unstable and at times, even prohibitive. Although members come to the CSWW with diverse literacy strengths and are prolific storytellers, for example, most do not regard themselves as writers, in part, because such label remains exclusive to schools and publishing records.

Above all, I write for community members at large. I invite us to think about the possibilities of writing, how it functions in our lives within and beyond school walls, how it can uncover memories we never knew we had, how it gives us second, third, fourth— tenth—chances to reflect on who we are, how we have lived and how we wish to live. Finally I ask us to think of how social justice and social advocacy affords partnerships between the university, local businesses, and town, and importantly, how we might collaborate to create space for voices of marginalized groups and promote diversity of thought in education and in our community

INTRODUCTION

…Two, Almost Full Sleeves

I have two, almost full sleeves. On my upper right arm, there is a giant flying pig among giant roses, a symbol for my daughter, Bella Rose, who was born in the year of the golden pig. A miracle, she is, because she is a golden pig and not any other, less precious pig. Her kind comes by only every 60 years. On the lower right arm, there is the Virgin Mary, also big. In her palm, rests the sun. So small is the beam of light in her divine hand. It is for my sister, Aurora. The aurora borealis would have been unideal in ink, and too quickly dated, potentially looking like a painting from the '80s, the kind sold out of some dude's van, those vans with curtains on the windows and paintings of sunsets on the side panel. On the upper left arm is a piece inspired by Rumi's poetry: "No one knows what makes the soul wake up so happy. Maybe a dawn breeze has blown the veil from the face of god." It is of a blessed soul absorbing the morning breeze. It is of god in woman form. I had once simply called it god, but when the words poured out, it felt blasphemous. On the lower left, two old-school revolvers cross over a rose, also old-school: protect what you love, or "guns and roses." Will had suggested the tattoo while we were driving on Route 66 to California. It is meant to reflect my youth, the one where I pretended to be a metal head, but marveled over the cliché popular stuff: Def Leppard (only the later years), Guns N' Roses (only the top hits), Poison (only for their hair and makeup). Finally, at the lower wrist, another much, smaller rose followed by script: "Bella." It doesn't get any more obvious than that.

In summers when people see my naked arms, they stare, they wonder, and sometimes, they snarl. But rarely, if ever, do they question or condemn. They wish only (and quietly) that I had made better choices.

In the following pages, I introduce my study in three parts. First I provide the context for my study and offer a brief conversation about privilege and assumptions. Second, I critique the world as it is and the consequences of social inequality and apathy. Third, and finally, I imagine the world as it could and should be and propose the purposes of my study.

…the They and the We, the Them and the Us
(or a brief introduction of privilege and assumptions)

When Michael walks into May's Café, he is greeted by turning heads and suspecting eyes. It could be the Oakley sunglasses he sports on this rainy day, or the thin ponytail hanging low on the back of his neck (every day). Or, it could be something else, something just as obvious but perhaps less innocuous: faded ink lines, once black but now appearing a navy blue, stretching from shoulder to jawline. "Prison tattoos," they are called, because of their black-gray (or navy blue) monotone. But for Michael, who's never been to prison, these are just markings from a past life when he was riding motorcycles in Monterey, California. "Getting tattoos was just something I did when I was young, 'cause I thought they was cool," he says. "But I ain't young no more and I don't got no motorcycle either. Guess some stuff still sticks with you no matter what. People starin' all the time. Always makes me wonder what they see."

2

Not too long ago, Michael wrote an essay called "Seven Minutes" in which he reflected on his experience riding the university campus shuttle. He writes:

> I was running late for work the other morning, so I decided to catch the UI Cambus for the very first time, thinking that, it would be faster to make it to the transfer onto the city bus downtown. I boarded the bus and sat in the front side seats with my back against the window. As the bus started to move, I suddenly noticed the weight of all eyes on me. I was wearing my sunglasses, so I could see the passengers and their stares without them knowing that I was also looking at them, at their long gazes—up and down, back and forth. Funny, just something as simple as tinted lenses can distance us so far apart. Anyway, I began to fidget in my seat, my heart racing to where I could see the left side of my shirt moving up and down—thumping. Why me? I thought. I mean, sure, I was old enough to be all these college kids' father, and sure, I didn't look like I was heading to class at this late of an age in life. But their stares felt heavier than the years that divided us. (*Seven Minutes*, 2012)

As a former homeless man in his late 50s, Michael is especially aware of other people's assumptions about him, but he is also extremely good humored about it, tender and forgiving. At the end of the essay, he jokingly speculates about the looks he received during those seven minutes: "…as I looked on, I finally realized why I got all those stares. Why, I was the only one on board who didn't have a Blackberry phone in one hand, and an I-Pod in the other!"

Last fall, Michael read this particular essay at the premiere screening of "Challenge Your Assumptions," a documentary about the services of a local shelter for homeless individuals and families. As the founder and the facilitator of the Community Stories Writing Workshop (CSWW) at this shelter house (SH) since fall 2010, I was asked by the organization's endowment committee to facilitate the public reading portion of the event. Immediately I knew I wanted to invite Michael because of his raw

3

earnestness and impeccably timed humor. And I was right. By the end of his reading, the Englert Theatre, packed with some of the community's most affluent and influential, vibrated in loud applause. Until that evening, few knew of Michael or his story. Few cared. That evening, he was a star.

Today he and I are meeting to review a draft he wishes to submit for this year's public reading at Prairie Lights, the independent bookstore in town. Before we start, he hands me a brochure from his employer, Goodwill, featuring him as a local writer in the Community Stories Writing Workshop. "I have a surprise for you," he says. "I gave you some publicity." He looks away into the crowd as he handed me the trifold pamphlet; proud. "It's hard to believe, ain't it? Someone like me gets to be a writer that people know about. Not too bad, huh?"

I first met Michael four years ago when he came to the writing group. His case manager at the shelter had suggested that he join. "I want to keep a journal about my life so that one day, maybe my daughter will know a little bit about her old man," he told us at the first meeting. In those days, the workshop was brand new and without a permanent home; the group then, small, conducted the sessions at the downtown "church center." The shelter was in transition at the time, on its way to move to the new facility, a bigger and nicer building on the other side of town, the side where, as some locals say, the "low-income" homes reside and Kmart and Big Lot stores line up along the highway. Michael was one of two first workshop members. He, she, and the three facilitators (i.e., myself and two classmates (and good friends) whom I invited to help kick-start this program at the shelter with me: Meg and Matt) met in the church's lunchroom for the first session, the same room where free meals are served daily at noon to anyone who wants to eat—no

4

questions asked. Ours was an awkward meeting, as most first meetings can be at times.
The room was big and dark, and some of us sat with distance—one or two seats in
between each person. As facilitators (and researchers), Meg, Matt, and I seemed unsure
of our roles—who we were to incoming members and who we were to each other. This
was most apparent when Michael posed his question, one that seemed so obvious and yet
so unexpected. "Why the homeless shelter?" he asked. I remember a long pause ensued
as the three of us looked at each other almost dumbfounded. Then, clearing our throats,
we each took turns crafting our answers—one by one, tripping, tumbling, dancing, in
circles.

I cannot speak for Meg or Matt, but I struggled to articulate my thoughts that
afternoon. I was cautious not to offend Michael and the other new member; yet by the
time I finished my little speech, I think I may have anyway. What I recall are keywords
stuttering out of my mouth: Iowa, nonfiction, MFA, community, literacy, intentions.
Somehow everything I said felt wrong—privileged, distant, disconnected. In retrospect I
should have just been upfront—called it how it was. But then again what would "upfront"
have really meant? I hadn't even articulated my intentions to myself prior to Michael's
question. I hadn't even thought about it—because I didn't think I'd have to.

For as long as I've known him, Michael has always prided himself as a productive
member of the community, someone who has been employed by Goodwill and living
independently for the past several years. He is a person of character, and he never forgets
another's kindness. When given the chance to help the shelter's mission, he eagerly
volunteers his time. "They have done me right, again and again. Without them, I would
be out on the streets. Dead. Maybe," he often says of the shelter staff. As a writer he is

5

charismatic, and he has participated in more public reading events than any member of the writing group. In those moments, he is a celebrated writer in a town known for its literariness.

Still yet, in other moments, in more moments than not, Michael is perceived as the odd-man-out at the local café, or a potentially dangerous deviant on a university campus shuttle. So inconsistent, so unstable are his designations in the community—some of them more ephemeral than others.

In the last four years I have had the privilege of writing alongside 75 community writers like Michael. And often I have pondered: men and women of far less talent than Michael (and other CSWW members)—especially those graduate students in the writing arts, myself included—easily declare their/our identities as writers in this town, simply by stating that they/we are, indeed, writers. Then, they/we engage in contemplative laptop typing (or notebook writing) at local cafés (at May's, perhaps). They/We ruminate about stories that never seem to have any valid points and worse, they/we write about them. Whether they/we have actually engaged in a rigorous writing process or published work in a literary journal or read stories publicly at Prairie Lights (or anywhere for that matter), their/our choice to be writers is more readily accepted, and importantly, more readily available—by way of frequency: of occurrences, of duration, of fortification; and by way of space: of physical, of mental, of social. Their choice—*our* choice—is rarely questioned, and if it is, it is rarely with consequence.

…in the World As It Is

(or the issues at stake)

I am a graduate of the prestigious Nonfiction Writing Program at the University of Iowa and a doctoral candidate in the Language, Literacy, and Culture Program, also at Iowa. I make no pretenses about these academic opportunities, and I understand that because of them, I am also given the benefit of the doubt, excused for having tattoos, jiving to "gangster" rap, speaking in slang, all the while facilitating the writing group from a place of credibility—through the eyes of the university, the community, the SH, and CSWW members. Where pervasive cultural discourses about literacy and education work in my favor, they immobilize others, like those with whom I work and write in the workshop at SH, those men and women like Michael (and Clark and Dale and Danny and Rudy and Carmella and more than 69 others). Veterans. Non-veterans. Adults. Writers. The dialogue about meritocracy, so simplistic and dismissive, justifies division between those who have and those who have not, often vilifying the latter, leaving them without membership to the community, and importantly, to education and resources that could facilitate literacy identities and socio-economic mobility.

In the world "as it is," deficits continue to dominate our culture's narratives of homelessness, associating poverty with lower literacy and skewing social policies about access and equity in schools, jobs, health care, and community (Bomer, 2008; Finley & Diversi, 2010; Miller, 2011; Miller, 2014; Moore, 2013; Rose, 2013). Few cultural narratives, if any, consider ways in which persons in low income, working poor, and/or homeless circumstances might participate in the community and in schools from a place of knowledge, strengths, and aspiration (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 2012; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013; Janks, 2010; Rose, 2012; Rose, 2013). Google the word

7

"homelessness" and there, in the upper corner, is the man holding a cardboard sign that reads, "Need food." Next to him is the woman with uncombed hair pushing a shopping cart full of miscellanies. And at the center: that faceless person covered in layers of newspapers, crouching—sleeping—in the alley. Certainly these images exist and they reflect a truth, but only part of that truth, and usually a very binary truth at that. There are many others—unseen, overlooked. Like Carmella, a painter, a mother. Like Clark, a woodcarver, a fireman. Like Dale, a ballad singer, a Marine. Like Danny, a "dungeon master," a soldier. Like Rudy, an athlete-swimmer, a sailor. They are also editors, architects, musicians. They are paramedics, photographers, nutritionists. Indeed what it means to be homeless is vast and diverse, as are the wealth of knowledge and talents among those living in such circumstance.

Nevertheless, especially in education, the urgency to uncover the breadth of literacies and identities of homeless veterans and homeless adults remains low in priority—about their desires to enroll in college, to seek long-term careers, or simply, to engage as members of the community (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Bomer, 2008; Finley & Diversi, 2010; Janks, 2010; Janks, 2013; Miller, 2011; Miller, 2014; Moore, 2013; Rose, 2012; Rose, 2013). Part of the reason for the overlook, I think, is that, there is little or no perceived immediate consequence for not knowing. At a recent American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference presentation on homeless and "highly mobile" students, for instance, the discussant posed a blunt question to the panelists. "From a neo-liberal standpoint," she said, "why should I care to invest money and time into this one-percent group of students or care if they go or don't go to college?" And yet, how less suspicious and interrogative are we about the other "one-percent" in this country?

8

But if money is what gets taxpayers' attention, then what of the exponential costs of perpetual homelessness, unemployment, health services, and incarcerations as consequences of social marginalization? According to Secretary of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Shaun Donovan, it costs taxpayers as much as $40,000 per year for one person to be homeless (*The Daily Show*, March 5, 2012). Hospital and medical treatments, incarcerations, and emergency shelters contribute to this high expense (HUD press release No. 13-173, Brian Sullivan, November 21, 2013). Furthermore the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) reports that persons in homeless situations are more likely to visit the emergency room for longer periods of time than persons with permanent housing, costing on average about $2,414 per hospitalization per day. Physical health aside, hospitalization as a result of mental health issues is also significantly higher among homeless persons. Citing from a study of a hospital in Hawaii, the NAEH reports that the "excess cost for treating these homeless individuals was $3.5 million or about $2,000 per person" just in psychiatric treatment alone. Additionally, homeless persons make up a high number of arrests and jail stay, often for offenses associated with lack of permanent housing such as loitering, begging, sleeping in public spaces and cars. The NAEH notes, "According to a University of Texas two-year survey of homeless individuals, each person cost the taxpayers $14,480 per year, primarily for overnight jail." The dollar amount jumps to $20,000 per bed per year at a state or federal prison (NAEH data). Consequently, permanent housing and community reengagement programs (e.g., mental health, employment, and educational services) are, in fact, more economically effective and have longer-term benefits for the community.

So let me return to the discussant's question at AERA: "From a neo-liberal standpoint, why should I care to invest money and time into this one-percent group of students or care if they go or don't go to college?" In fact, while we're at it, why should anyone of us care?

Strictly monetarily speaking, democratizing education reaps economic benefits, meaning that the more college-educated people there are, the more productive is our economy and community (Rose, 2012). (This does not mean that everyone can and should attend college. But it does mean that if and when we can, we should facilitate opportunities for people to realize their full capacities.) Expense-wise, what we invest in education, in this case of youths, will always cost less than what we will spend later. As Frederick Douglas reminds us "It is easier to build strong children than repair broken men." Spending money on the front end of anything almost always is a long-term cost saver. In either case there's a cost to us all; it's just a matter of how expenses get apportioned socially.

Moreover, while educating persons who are living in poverty and homeless circumstances is cost-intensive relative to educating persons from other social strata, the educational costs relative to the other things we spend money on is almost a nonentity. To put simply, the absolute social cost of education right now is extremely low compared to entitlements, defense, health care, etc. We might even say that we could quadruple our social expenditures on education and it still wouldn't be a significant component of social spending. If defense contracts, for instance, received the same scrutiny as teacher collective bargaining agreements, the efficiency gains as an absolute figure would be significantly higher.

I find it peculiar (if not stupid) to suggest that social programs intended for persons living in poverty are cost-intensive. Isn't that the whole point? The truth is someone who is living in abject poverty and/or homelessness will not have the same social networks that say, I or you or anyone in the middle class have; those kinds of networks are very expensive to replicate. Money and social workers are a poor substitute for what a middle-class person's family, peers, and other networks provide for them. So let's not pretend that these are viable substitutions for middle class privilege and that what we offer in social services will somehow make up for what we ignore at the forefront. We cannot dismiss the currency of social networks and the privileges they afford middle class persons any more than we can pretend that meritocracy is not a myth. Some people can, and will, commit to less work and retire early, while others will work a whole lifetime and live in perpetual poverty.

There are people whom I know, who consider themselves "fiscally conservative, but socially liberal." Quite frankly I don't even know what that means—if that is even possible. A bombastic oxymoron, if I've ever heard one. How is it possible to advocate for homeless persons, for example, and at once refuse to fund programs and resources that facilitate opportunities for them? Rose (2012) has it right when he says, "America loves the underdog, the come-from-behind winner, the tale of personal redemption, the rags-to-riches story" (17). But we also don't want to know how these phenomena happen. Take for instance: conservatives and neoliberals "support the idea of second-chance educational and training programs, but many would insist that the programs trim their costs and slash the financial aid it enables students to attend them. These policy makers also resist the kinds of services that many students need to continue their

11

education: health and child care, rehabilitation programs, housing. So they support the idea of a second chance while undercutting most of what makes second chance possible. Equal opportunity is something every conservative affirms is the core of American value. Yet in no realistic term of the word does anything like equal opportunity exist toward the bottom of the income ladder" (21). In fact for neoliberals, "…the gap between the rich and poor is, in itself, not a sign of any basic malfunction or injustice, for there are always income disparities in capitalism. For government to draw on the money some citizens have earned to assist those who are less fortunate is to interfere with market principles, dampen the raw energy of capitalism, and foster dependency" (17). Reactionists these people are, and wishful-thinkers, too. Isn't that the whole foundation of neo-liberals—to believe that if we all leave the market alone, that the economy corrects itself?

Of course, this argument here is all based on the assumption that the devotion of resources to educating the one-percent has to make fiscal sense. As an educator—as a *human being*—I find such arguments repulsive, incongruent with democratic values and the pursuit of a fuller, more complete, human existence (Freire, 2007). By in large, no person living in perpetual poverty and/or homelessness is doing so by choice. That is a middle-class assumption, I think—to insist that everything is driven by choice because we are privy to multiple options ourselves. We easily blame the individual, to hold her responsible for her circumstances, those of which, again, we assume stem from her poor decisions. Yet in the past four years I've worked with men and women in the CSWW, I have yet to meet anyone who actively chose to be poor and/or homeless. A person's homelessness is hardly, if ever, a simple matter of economics untouched by other deeply rooted trauma and struggles.

The unfortunate truth is that we are less about a democratic nation as we are an economic one. We do not have a firm understanding of the poor (Rose, 2013) because we don't care to. Particularly when it comes to adult education, we support programs that promise outcomes. Education for the poor must fix deficits, not build on their individual strengths. Of the conversation on adult education, Rose (2013) writes, "There is no discussion of the kinds of intellectual growth and reflection" that are offered to more "traditional" students at four-year colleges. The curriculum focuses primarily on functional and economical purposes rather than those that spark "emotion, aesthetic response, reassessments of one's ability and identity" (76). In fact, the general rhetoric around homelessness and poverty remains apathetic at best. Specifically within the academy, any mention of such marginalized groups is usually abstract, sometimes downright inaccurate, particularly when concerning those who are adult or "nontraditional" students. For example, recruitment of prospective college students targets the recent, high school graduate (Seftor & Turner, 2002), not the "nontraditional," let alone, homeless student. That the designation "nontraditional students" exists at all is equally problematic, speaking to how unamenable, if not disconnected, we can be in the academy, especially given changes in the college freshmen demographics over the past three decades (Rose, 2012; Seftor & Turner, 2002). Rose (2012) reports, "…postsecondary students in the United States are not coming to college out of high school, they are not attending full-time, and they are absolutely not eighteen or nineteen" (8). Moreover, "the number of single parents among undergraduates has nearly doubled in the last twenty years, and since 1970 the percentage of undergraduates over forty years

has more than doubled" (9). Given these demographic shifts, terms like "traditional" and "nontraditional" seem rather unreliable anymore.

Despite increasing numbers of older-age adult college students, efforts to understand their learning processes (and of those who are living "outside the community boundaries" remain marginal (Rose, 2004; Rose, 2012). As it exists, conversations about pedagogy and literacy privilege K-12 academic spaces (i.e., elementary school and high school), and although teaching and learning do not stop after secondary education, teacher preparation at the college level is at a bare minimum, if not, nonexistent. In fact, teaching in postsecondary contexts is treated neither as craft nor discipline, but assumed as a tool that anyone can pick up with a few crash courses and a handful of *Spark* notes. Yet if one's literacy acquisition continuously evolves and happens in multiple contexts, which it does, then mustn't we value acts of learning (and teaching approaches) beyond the arbitrary public school age to include postsecondary contexts, such as in college, in home, in community (Barton, & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 2012; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013; Rose, 2012; Rose, 2013), in *figured worlds* (Holland, et al.,1998)?

…in the World As It Could and Should Be
(or the study)

CSWW as a Third Space

As a nonfiction writer, writing teacher, literacy researcher, and community member, I seek to advocate for change, disrupt social apathy, and organize toward a world "as it

14

could and should be." Particularly per the diverse contexts of literacy studies, I see my dissertation as a space in which I explore critical questions about privilege and sponsorships (Brandt, 2001; Gee, 2012), and in the cases of homeless veterans and homeless adults, about transiency and permanence as they pertain to self and home, community and institutional, and physical and mental—spaces. Close examination of community writing workshops where homeless persons come together to partake in the writing culture of their town, for instance, can inform, if not change, what we as educators assume about writing and writers, reading and readers, and what literacies we privilege (and whose) particularly when we broaden the boundaries of access beyond school walls, when we appropriate Bakhtin's notion of dialogic tools inside a collaborative, co-constructed learning space (Bruffee, 2003; Elbow, 1998; Gutierrez, 2008; Gutierrez, K.D., Baquedano-Lopez, P., Tejeda, C., & Rivera, A., 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Leander & Sheehy, 2011; Lefebvre, 1991; Moje, et al., 2004; Soja, 1996).

This dissertation, currently titled **"**Co-constructing toward a Third Space: Homeless Adults Draft Nonfiction and Revise Selves into the Identity of a Literary Town," stems from my four-year and ongoing ethnographic observation of (and participation in) the literate lives, practices, and identities of adults in situations of homelessness. The study focuses on the "Community Stories Writing Workshop" at a shelter house. In this space, writing is transitional, a tool for crossing environments (Barton, & Hamilton, 1998; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013; Heath, 1983; Hull & Schultz, 2002) from the streets to classroom, from marginalization to membership. Here, homeless adults with diverse literacies at varying levels gather for ninety minutes weekly to talk, write, revise, analyze, experiment, and share narratives (Bakhtin, 1981; Bruffee,

1993, 2003; Emig, 1977; Moje, et al., 2004; Perl 1979; Perl, 2004; Perl, & Schwartz, 2006). They consider multiple, and sometimes competing, perspectives (Moje, et al., 2004; Pratt, 1991) on what constitutes "literary" writing—from published authors, from peers, and from themselves—and "rearticulate" (Bhabha, 1994; Moje, et al., 2004; Soja, 1996) what it means to be published writers in a town known for its literary culture (Gee, 2012, 2013; Holland, et al., 1998; Holland & Lachicotte, 2007; Peacock & Holland, 1993). They examine their own traumatic pasts, childhood memories, relationships with family and community, uncovering moments of strength and success through literary art and aesthetics (Greene, 1978; Gornick, 2001; Peacock & Holland, 1993; Perl, 2004, 2006; MacCurdy, 2007). And finally (and importantly), for themselves and for me, they challenge standard pedagogy (e.g., grades, scores, curriculum), contribute diverse cultural knowledge, and disrupt common deficits associated with homelessness.

Over the past several years, I have come to view the CSWW as a kind of writing home for community members, and more prevalently, for homeless veterans and other homeless adults. The workshop, itself, seems to be moving toward what Moje, et al. (2004) define as a "third space," a hybrid space where a myriad of contexts (e.g., the binary constructions of first (physical) and second (social) spaces such as in-school vs. outside of school, academic discourse vs. everyday vernacular) come together, not in competing, but integrated forms (Bhabha, 1994; Gutiérrez, et al., 1999; Moje, et al., 2004; Soja, 1996). Such a space is constructed from merging knowledge drawn from "the 'first space' of people's home, community, and peer networks with the 'second space' of the Discourses they encounter in more formalized institutions such as work, school, or church" (Moje, et al., 2004; p. 41). This particular conceptualization of third

space adopts a hybrid perspective, combining three important, and to some degree, very different views of third space. Where Soja and Bhabha question binaries of knowledge, for example, Gutiérrez, et al. (1999) sees third space as a bridge, a point of connection, between binaries (Moje, et al., 2004). Moje, et al. (2004) further explain their perspective on third space:

> Building bridges is a necessary part of what makes third space because it helps learners see connections, as well as contradictions, between the ways they know the world and the ways others know the world. Although this seems to reestablish binaries, it does not necessarily do so. Building bridges simply connects people from one kind of knowledge or Discourse to other kinds. Unlike the bridge perspective, however, a third space focused on cultural, social, and epistemological change, something we do not claim to have perfected but something we are trying to work toward, is one in which everyday resources are integrated with disciplinary learning to construct new texts and new literacy practices, ones that merge the different aspects of knowledge and ways of knowing offered in a variety of different spaces (44).

Moje's, et al. (2004) synthesis closely reflects what I see happening in the CSWW. And although I like the idea of rejecting binaries of knowledge altogether, I am wary of its presumptions, those that underestimate, if not ignore, the ever pervasive power of dominant discourse. This is not to say we cannot imagine or at least attempt toward one. In successful moments, writers like Rudy, for example, share their histories with herding and ranching, swimming and wrestling. Lucy speaks of her roles, as daughter, mother, veteran, and woman. Community members see themselves as literate beings—as writers, readers, learners, teachers.

As a literacy space, the CSWW is especially complex because it is, at times, an assumed second space, and it is, at most times, an attempt toward a third space (more successfully in some moments than others). When members first arrive to the workshop, for example, most of them see it as a type of class taught by someone (me) from the

17

University. They say things like, "I haven't taken a writing class for a while." "Am I late for class?" "Are you the teacher?" In these instances, the CSWW appears to be a second space where power and authority of knowledge reside primarily in the facilitator. Yet as members engage in workshop practices, they also find themselves co-constructing that space (e.g., determining the group's activities for the session, negotiating what good writing is) and bringing in their diverse sets of knowledge. In those instances, the CSWW is a first space, combined with a second space, and in attempt toward a third space. Here, I stress the point that it is an *attempt* toward a third space because binaries of knowledge inside the workshop continuously persist (as perceived by CSWW members—myself included). Furthermore, I don't know that it is ever possible to achieve a space of pure, "equal" integration because that would assume the absence of power structures and tension. Even if such a space could exist where Discourses (Gee, 2012, 2013) and diverse knowledge fully integrate, it would only be momentary and contextual; it would be unstable.

Similarly, I cannot underestimate within-group tensions during the process by which new meaning is negotiated, i.e., that moment before integration, which might be more reflective of a kind of "contact zone" (Pratt, 1991) where varying perspectives "meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (34). In the case of the CSWW, for example, the meaning of words and language that members use outside of the workshop often merge with those in the workshop, and becomes something of new meaning. For example, where writers used to call their work, "stories," they learn to call them drafts or narratives. They see "story" as something beyond a first draft, a piece of writing that has narrative arc and quest

18

(Gornick, 2001). Similarly, the word "writer" holds different meanings in the workshop. When writers first come, most deny the label, writer. "I am no writer," they say. "I'm what you call a storyteller." Overtime writers become more comfortable with the term—overtime and over experience participating in the workshop and workshop related events (Lave, & Wenger, 1991).

Often, the process by which these texts achieve new meaning involves tension, and ongoing renegotiations among members. Thus, within-group resistance happens continuously, and the group is not necessarily fully integrated at all times. Additionally, the level of resistance and renegotiations also depends on the context. Members of the CSWW, for example, will occasionally question my perspectives on the readings we do in workshop sessions (as well as with other members' views, especially when they echo academic rhetoric). Danny, for example, has a dislike for what he deems as "disconnected endings" in essays, i.e., endings that are seemingly unrelated to the rest of the story. Even when I offer my perspective, Danny resists, noting, "I know what you're telling me but where I come from, it still does not make sense. The author is trying too hard, I think. And I read a lot!" Sometimes, Dale and Clark may chime in, sometimes in support of my perspective, sometimes in support of other members' such as Danny's. Nevertheless, the level of resistance lessens when CSWW members are outside the workshop setting, for instance, during public reading events. In these instances, the stakes are different for the members; their common goal to seek and attain community acceptance invites a more unified stance. At the Writing My Way Back Home Conference for veterans, for example, Lucy introduced herself to the group as such: "Hi. I'm Lucy. I'm here because my facilitator from the Community Stories Writing

19

Workshop told me to come to this. I write quite a bit, mainly poetry. My facilitator always tells me I should revise more, so here I am. That's why I'm here. To work on that." Here, Lucy invokes the workshop and even mentions practices that she's picked up from the workshop.

In any case, the point I want to make here is that the integration of knowledge is associated with goals and stakes, and the process of bridging knowledge and contexts, or the bridge itself, oftentimes resembles a contact zone. I contend that the contact zone is indeed a part of the process toward third space. That is, where Pratt suggests that the contact zone is a destination, a space of being, I see it as a necessary part of the movement toward a third space.

As a participant-observer of the CSWW, I have long wondered how the workshop provides members, as individuals and as a community of peers, that third space to unpack their literacies, to make sense of their past and present circumstances, and to find home for their stories and for themselves through composition. More specifically, I wondered about the process of writing and revising (creative) nonfiction (Hesse, 2009; Klaus, 2010; Perl 1979; Perl, 2004; Perl, & Schwartz, 2006), how drafts of essays and narratives could illustrate, or even function as, a kind of third space. So much happens to writers, after all, to how they perceive themselves while composing stories with self, with others, and within the spaces they occupy. What identities (other than the prescribed "homeless person of deficit") emerge and evolve in oral and written drafts can often translate into identities *off the page*, or in what Holland, et al., (1998) refers to as, *the figured worlds*. Especially for writers who are homeless, access to such spaces are not always available, and because of this, the possibilities in which writers might see and express themselves

20

(Greene, 1978) and how they might contribute to the community are also limited, sometimes just to the page. And yet these pages are where it all begins, where writing becomes recognized, privileged, and importantly, circulated through print publications and public reading events at reputable literary venues. In moments like these, as evident in this study, those places typically referred to as "second spaces" can become third spaces, too, if not only momentarily.

Research Goals

For this dissertation, my intentions are to focus on ways in which homeless veterans and homeless adults negotiate, through composition, the layers of deficits ascribed to them as adults in transience (and as youths in school) (Gee, 2012; Gee, 2013; Holland, et al., 1998; Holland & Lachicotte, 2007) within the physical and mental, social and personal spaces of the CSWW. Implicitly this overarching pursuit assumes that the CSWW is indeed a kind of third space (or at least, moving toward one) co-constructed by its members, and as such, throughout my dissertation, and particularly in the "Pre-Profile," I illustrate the various cultural practices and literacies or knowledge funds (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013; Moje, et al., 2004) that members exchange with one another (and potentially integrate) inside the CSWW. Then in Profiles One, Two, and Three I look at how members position themselves inside this space, as well as how my dual roles as facilitator and researcher affect the practices of the group. I consider, too, the various group dynamics inside the CSWW and ways in which they function as audience for the writers. In Profile Four I examine one writer's composing process, and the importance of

21

talk in making sense of trauma narratives. Finally, in the "Post-Profile" I illustrate one writer's arc, or experience in the CSWW.

Questions that I explore in this study include: How might the act and process of telling, writing, revising, and sharing nonfiction narratives inside the CSWW afford adults in homeless circumstances the physical and mental, the social and personal spaces to exercise what they know and to construct who they are as literate beings? What identities and literacies do members perform in their stories (e.g., drafts of narratives) and off the page, or *outside* of their stories relative to audience? Note that, in personal nonfiction, the writer takes on a kind of persona (character traits) that she enacts through her narrator (Gornick, 2001; Hesse, 2009; Klaus, 2010). As such, within the space of narratives, what I am examining is the narrator's personas (identities) and her various ways strengths and knowledge. Second, just as it is important to uncover what literacies and identities CSWW members tell and perform in their stories (via their narrators in drafts of narratives), it is also important to examine what literacies and identities they share and enact *outside* of their stories relative to audience (e.g., via oral-accounts during conversations in workshop, one-on-one conferences, and public readings). How does audience—inside the CSWW and CSWW-sponsored spaces—support and disrupt these self-discoveries and/or enactments for CSWW members—as writers, readers, and literate beings? As my ongoing quest, I wonder how these identities might correlate with those of the narrator's in drafts. In other words, is there a connection between the identities that writers perform in their stories (as narrators), and those they enact outside of their stories (as the writer of the story and as members of the CSWW)—do these enactments

22

influence each other and help writers revise their senses of selves? At the root, this ongoing question explores the various transformative implications of writing stories.

As suggested, in the context of the writing workshop at the SH, community is transient and can consist of new and returning SH clients and community members at any given session. For one hour and thirty minutes each week, these attending members serve as the audience for anyone who wishes to share drafts. Group dynamic and rapport within the 90-minute session, thus, can determine how members participate in the workshop community and how they negotiate their identities and composition process. Members often re-position themselves (tailor their voices and narrator personas (Elbow, 2007; Sperling, Appleman, & et al. 2011)) each and every time they write or rewrite a piece to accommodate their shifting readership. Others may select to write only for a small group such as the facilitator and a few regular attendees. What might these various instances, then, suggest to us about "narrative truth" and consistencies in the composing process, or about peer group collaborative writing in a homeless shelter—in any space where community is constantly being revised, for that matter?

On a grander scale, exploring these questions and various contexts allows me to think about rituals and practices that writers enact during the telling and drafting process as social acts (Bruffee, 2003; Elbow, 1998; Murray, 2012; Newkirk, 2009; Oakeshott, 1962). Social contexts in relation to the audience—and the writer's relationship to the audience—can inform what stories writers tell, and how they see themselves while telling them. To this end, stories may have multiple truths or meanings (Frank, 2010; Gornick, 2001; Klaus, 2010; MacCurdy, 2007) those that which are determined by context and audience (Gornick, 2001; Klaus, 2010; Wortham, 2001). Pedagogically, this stresses the

importance of allowing for multiple truths to exist in students' writing, even in nonfiction—*especially* in nonfiction (Hesse, 2009; Gornick, 2001; Klaus, 2010; Perl 1979; Perl, 2004; Perl, & Schwartz, 2006). Inconsistencies in drafts can, in fact, be opportunities for in-depth exploration. Indeed writing is a tool for discovery and learning, just as it is a very interactive, social and collaborative act (Bruffee, 2003; Elbow, 1998; Murray, 2012; Newkirk, 2009; Oakeshott, 1962). My research inquiries, thus, have implications about what it means to create a supportive community and peer group collaboration for writers in discovering (and validating) meaning in stories and self (Bruffee, 2003; Elbow, 1998; Murray, 2012; Newkirk, 1997; Newkirk, 2009; Oakeshott, 1962). Asking these questions also inform what teaching practices and group dynamics work well with writers who do not necessarily see themselves as writers, and what writing prompts, activities, and/or conversations inspire revision. Furthermore, the questions offer, if not expand, our perspectives about spatiality and literacy (Gutierrez, 2008; Gutierrez, K.D., Baquedano-Lopez, P., Tejeda, C., & Rivera, A., 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Leander & Sheehy, 2011; Lefebvre, 1991; Moje, et al., 2004, Soja, 1996), and in particular, about access to literacy spaces where homeless veterans and homeless adults might enact their identities as literate beings (Janks, 2010; Janks, 2013; Street, 2012). Why might it be important to perceive drafts as yet another third space? As I have repeatedly noted, the past four years have clarified for me that being currently, or formerly, homeless also means that opportunities to the literate and/or literary identity is limited, as well as the duration of time and frequency in which one gets to enact that identity. Not only is identity unstable and ever shifting (Gee, 2012; Gee, 2013; Holland, et al., 1998; Holland & Lachicotte, 2007), but the shifts and frequency of those shifts—

24

the longevity of identities—also varies (and in these cases, per socio-cultural and -economic class and per race). At the core of my work, I contend that in the world "as it is," availability to literacy space and identity are ever transient for persons in situations of homelessness. Yet in the world "as it could and should be," community members come together to co-construct a "third space," a teaching and learning space (inside the CSWW and by way of drafts), where we negotiate the boundaries of literacy identities; confront the systems that create, and at times, inhibit access to these identities; and importantly, reorient ourselves toward a more inclusive existence (Janks, 2010; Janks, 2013; Moje, et al., 2004).

LITERATURE REVIEW

…Ching-a-ling-choy

In fifth grade I was casted in the school play as a China doll. Dressed in an orange Japanese kimono and a bun held together by chopsticks, I was to come to life toward the end of the middle act. I was to clasp my palms in prayer pose, tiptoe to the front of the stage, tilt my head to the side, and greet the audience with, "Ching-a-ling-choy!" During rehearsal a few weeks prior, I had suggested saying something in actual Chinese like, "Ni hao, ma?" but my teacher feared that it would not sound believable or funny enough. "No one will know what that means," she said. "No one will care."

In the following pages, I offer my review of literature about persons living in situations of homelessness. I begin with an overview of studies conducted by scholars outside of education, as that is where most of the research seems to be. Next I highlight studies done within education which focuses on deficits and on homeless youths and mothers. Currently scant, if any, literature exists in education about homeless adults' literacy practices and identities, particularly those examining strengths.

…an Overview of Literature about Homelessness
(from scholars outside of education)

My literature review suggests a general lack of interest among educators when it comes to such topics as homeless adult literacy practices. This disinterest may be due, in part, to

26

a lack of understanding of homelessness (and of people living in these circumstances). It may also be because of the perceived difficulty in conducting research on adults in transience, potentially resulting in unstable data. Whatever the reasons, scant scholarship exists on adults' knowledge funds and practices (Rose, 2004), and even more negligible are those that address literacy strengths of men and women who are homeless, suggesting the low priority placed on this group in education research. Indeed my literature search has led me mainly to articles about one of two things: social policies and health-related matters. Studies aimed at "fixing" or "preventing" homelessness as a social problem are of abundance, like Koegel's, et al. (1995) "Childhood Risk Factors for Homelessness among Homeless Adults" which considers the connections between homelessness and early experiences with poverty, lack of housing, and family problems; and Hamilton's, et al. (2011) "'Homelessness and Trauma Go Hand-in-Hand': Pathways to Homelessness among Women Veterans" which seeks to identify exactly what the title suggested— predictors of homelessness for women veterans. Although research that connects experiences of childhood trauma with an increased likelihood of adult transiency can stress the importance of holistic approaches in healthcare services and preventive actions, as recommended in Hamilton, et al. (2011), the study also attempts to "sever the pathways to homelessness" (Hamilton, et al., 2011, p. S208) which, while noble, connotes a rather narrow perspective on homelessness (Miller, 2014). Perhaps even more importantly is what the study and those like it suggest about our culture's demand for immediacy and outcomes, or in this case, our tendency to liken homelessness to a disease that demands a cure, even where there may be none.

In fact, in 2009 President Obama and former Veterans Affairs Secretary Shinseki even vowed to eradicate homelessness among veterans by 2015—an ambitious goal, you might say. Without doubt, many people who are homeless have mental illnesses and issues with substance addiction, but homelessness in and of itself is a situation of being that can be chronic, cyclical, and generational; in other words, for some it can recur—always. And although Hamilton, et al., (2011) consider the possibilities of recurrence (hence their recommendation on increased resources for ongoing support of women veterans) they also suggest flagging individuals as potential "victims" of homelessness, which presumes the person's vulnerability, if not also stigmatizes him or her, with deficits at the forefront. In this way, healthcare providers and social service workers may be encouraged to detect faults, not strengths in those whom they serve.

Consider another study based on secondary analyses of a dataset, "Low Literacy and Mental Illness in a Nationally Represented Sample" (Sentell, &Shunway, 2003). Certainly lower literacy rates can be associated with mental illness and poverty, as noted in the study, but over-privileging datasets like the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) also implies that the researchers are settling for a very incomplete depiction of literacy, one based on number count. Closer examination of the survey, for example, would find literacy narrowly defined as the ability to read and write. Furthermore, what exactly constituted as "reading" and "writing" may be even narrower. Vocabulary? Pronunciation? Fluency? Speed? Grammar? Spelling? As an education researcher and the facilitator of the CSWW, I find such a limited perspective of literacy unsettlingly incomplete. Based on my experience with CSWW members in the past four years alone, I can attest that just about every member has been diagnosed with some kind of mental

28

illness and just about all of them are literate, both functionally and expansively. In fact, I don't know if I have met more people with more knowledge than the 75 men and women with whom I have worked. I am not dismissing the fact that there are, indeed, adults—regardless of mental health and housing situations—who could benefit from basic literacy skill training. I know they exist. However, my concern here is that if research is to be conducted about adult literacy, then it ought to be more complete to examine the broader scope of this word, "literacy" (Gee, 2012). What benefits, after all, can come of partial findings other than skewed policies (and faulty core curricula)?

In more general terms, as a parent it frightens me to think about how narrowly defined literacy is in our culture. In kindergarten, for example, my daughter was tested for the number of words she could read out loud to a third-party tester (i.e., someone she did not know). Being the shy child that she was, she did not speak up much during this activity, and therefore, scored low on the reading test. Yet other than her shyness, the score did not reflect her ability to make inferences, or even simpler, it did not consider her cognitive wonderings like say, when she read about chimpanzees and upon discovering (after her research) that one percent of their diet was meat, she asked, "What I want to know is, one percent of what? One percent per serving? One percent per day? One percent per month?" Gee (2012) calls the focus on decoding instruction, "the fourth grade slump," wherein students learn to read rather than read to learn. That is, they may perform well on tests, but they may also struggle to read to learn content (e.g., math and science) (Gee, 2012). Similarly, a writing test that quantified the number of words she wrote per sentence—correctly—did not account for her economy of language and tendency to call certain phrasings, "redundant." In writing, we just refer to excessive use

of words as wordiness. I am digressing here, but the shortcomings of a narrowly defined

literacy remain and it is a point on which I will elaborate in my methodology.

For now, let me return to the literature on homeless adult research. As suggested,

most of these studies typically come from disciplines outside of education, such as social

policy and health-related fields, and often focuses on preventive measures, deficits, and

generalizability. While such research may have their purposes per their respective

disciplines, and certainly, need is common among persons experiencing homelessness,

the articles reflect two important observations where it concerns my own work: 1) the

power of societal demands for quick-fix outcomes rather than inform our understanding

of real-life human beings and their diverse circumstances (Miller, 2014; Rose, 2012); and

2) the low priority placed on homeless adults in education research.

…Literature about Literacy Practices and Identities of Homeless Persons
(from education)

More Studies about Deficits

Most disappointing in my literature review, I think, is the fact that even the far and few

research articles about education and literacy of homeless persons tend to assume

deficiencies, particularly earlier reports like the U.S. Department of Education's

executive summary in 1990, *Education for Homeless Adults: The First Year*. In the

discussion about "basic educational services" for homeless persons, the summary also

highlights barriers to success, such as participants' "low self-esteem and lack of

30

commitment among students," and "continued substance abuse by program participants" (p. 14). The report's implications of individual fault and poor choices, and its narrow focus on functional literacy suggest that literacy programs for homeless adults should help secure employment rather than, for example, promote a more "democratic world" (Janks, 2010; Janks, 2013; Rose, 2012; Rose, 2013; Street, 2012). In this way, homelessness is viewed primarily as an economic issue instead of the very complex human experience that it is. Likewise, literacy is minimized to a set of skills (i.e., a product) that, once attained, can solve personal and social problems.

Interestingly, a couple years later, Norris, & Kennington (1992) published "Developing Literacy Programs for Homeless Adults: Professional Practices in Adult Education and Human Resource Development" in which they invited literacy program administrators, volunteers, and teachers to adopt leaner-centered approaches and subscribe to a more expansive literacy transcending reading and writing skillsets to include life experiences as valuable forms of knowledge. Similarly, in a later study of eight Scottish education organizations, Crowther, et al. (2010) offer critical lenses to examine ways in which 47 adults' (some of whom are homeless) lived experiences serve as resources for learning. Crowther, et al. (2010) assert that literacy practices can influence, to use their word, "vulnerable" adults to change their outlook on learning, and therefore, potentially help adults transition to their aspired futures. Both of these studies consider a broader, more inclusive understanding of knowledge and emphasize adult learners' strengths—progress away from deficit discourses. At the same time, the researchers continue to subscribe to descriptions like "at risk," "vulnerable," and "fragile" which seem oxymoronic when they are supposedly discussing peoples'

31

strengths. Critical discourse analysis aside, the studies are also about literacy programs whose missions focus on "practical outcomes" and literacy benchmarks. Among the eight organizations in Crowther's, et al. (2010) study, for example, are basic skills and numeracy classes. Indeed more often than not, adult literacy programs, particularly for homeless and "at risk" men and women, exist primarily to facilitate economic mobility. As such, the emphases tend to be on skill building as well as ostensible results (usually for funding purposes)—in the meanwhile, four-year college liberal arts and humanities programs exist to encourage cultural and intellectual pursuits of the young, middle and upper classes without the same criteria. The divide between adult literacy programs and four-year colleges cannot be any more apparent.

To be clear, I recognize the necessity for basic skills preparation just as I see the economic benefits (e.g., employment) of education. However, as Rose (2012) suggests, education "is about more than a paycheck" (28) and can (and should) also reap personal, civic, and social welfares (more on this point later). He writes, "…our philosophy of education…has to include intellectual, social, civic, moral, and aesthetic motives as well" (185). Hence, if we are to democratize education, to make knowledge accessible for all, then minimizing literacy to basic skill sets for some groups while broadening it for others is hypocritical at best (Rose, 2012). Moreover, as long as we continue to rely on economic demands to determine what literacies we value, we also cannot trust in static curriculum focused only on basic skills (Brandt, 2001). In this way Norris, & Kennington's (1992) and Crowther's, et al. (2010) studies are important because they call attention to recognizing adults' strengths, and to adopting a more expansive literacy perspective when working with adults. But perhaps more importantly, for me these two

studies beg questions about the purposes of adult learning. As it exists, where literacy might include a plethora of knowledge, practices, and values for people with privilege, the opposite seems to be true for those living in poverty and homeless circumstances. And so here I ask: what kind of curriculum should a literacy program for homeless adults entail? Or more bluntly, what exactly do homeless adults *deserve* to learn?

I remember when the local newspaper published a story about the Community Stories Writing Workshop at the shelter house, many community members commented online about the workshop's functional literacy component. Many praised the CSWW as a valuable program "as long as" it assisted clients with employment-related tasks such as writing resumes, cover letters, and job applications. Similarly, when we first proposed to run the writing workshop at the shelter, the program coordinator asked if we would be offering these very services to clients. The idea of a storytelling group alone just did not seem necessary for SH clients. This is partly because so much of our social and educational policies toward homeless persons are based on economic discourse and threat (Rose, 2012). As Rose (2012) puts it, according to the writers in the *Economists*, "…the real danger to the American economy is chronic, ingrained joblessness that is related to our social and economic structure…." (18). For these reasons, much of our adult education programs are economically motivated, meaning, they focus on employment and the belief of meritocracy and upward mobility without much consideration of social, racial, and class inequality. Such a paradox, if not simplistic, is this notion of equality. I don't have to go far to see the fallacies in meritocracy; none of us do. More to the point of literacy programs, however, is that because of this economic argument, we tend to see little value outside of basic and functional literacy skill training. Adults who are

33

homeless, thus, have no place or time to engage in exploratory and creative practices. What good, after all, could composing nonfiction narratives and essays gain—in a town celebrated for its literary writing culture, no less? (I should also mention that in the last four years, only two of 75 CSWW members have requested assistance with their job applications. The shelter staff does an extraordinary job providing this service. As such, members have joined voluntarily for various reasons, such as to connect themselves with writing, with literature, and with the community. I will elaborate later.)

Indeed, the socio-economic class and privilege divide is embarrassingly obvious where it concerns homeless adult education. Double standards aside, narratives of charity are particularly salient in the academy where perceptions of homelessness significantly contrast the actual lived experiences of people living in these circumstances (Finley, & Diversi, 2010; MacGillivray, et al., 2010; Miller, 2014). Widening this gap is the fact that past and current research continue to insinuate "lack in the poor" and "the savior and the needy" dichotomy of the middle and poorer classes. Studies like Murphy, & Tobin (2011), for example, reference homeless youths as "victims," their study written in language reflective of "savior sentimentalists," i.e., teachers as the superheroes to save the helpless public. Similarly Ruby Payne's (2005) self-published and widely popular, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, advocates for education that helps socio-economically poorer students conform to middle class standards—as a response to the "social problem" that is poverty (and those *living* in these circumstances) (Bomer, et al., 2008). In privileging middle class values, Payne also fails to identify actual needs of students whom schools and teachers serve. Her framework, at best, is based on nothing other than her opinions (Bomer, et al. (2008).

34

Only recently have a handful of literacy research sought to challenge prevailing characterizations of persons experiencing poverty and/or homelessness. Bomer, et al., (2008), in particular, warn against Ruby Payne's "deficit thinking" and ask teachers to consider a more robust and critical lens when working with students who are poor. The researchers call for a more ethical education system where all students are taught about social class and poverty and the importance of recognizing diverse knowledge funds. Similarly, Tierney, & Hallett (2009) stress the value of recruiting homeless youths' perspectives in order to create policies and resources that would, in fact, reflect their diverse needs. To this end Miller's (2011) review of literature on homeless youths further illustrates the varying conditions of homelessness and how they affect students' experiences in school, policies on students' rights and opportunities, and students' support networks. Accordingly, students in situations of transience have higher likelihood of mobility and isolation than students in more residentially stable environments; Miller (2011) therefore recommends adopting a more inclusive, network perspective among the people and institutions when creating policies and support services for homeless students. Other related studies examine students' geographic dispersion (Miller, & Bourgeois, 2013), students' risk and resilience (Masten, 2012), and education researchers' roles in social justice work and homeless advocacy (Miller, 2014).

Additionally, in a research summary sanctioned by the National Center for Homeless Education, Moore (2013) offers an overview of literature on homeless children and their families. She recommends strategies to work effectively with homeless and

"highly mobile" youths, stressing specifically the importance of identifying literacy strengths in students who are otherwise deemed "at risk." Moore's (2013) suggestions stem from studies like Miller, & Schreiber (2012) and Israel, & Jozefowicz-Simbeni (2009) who report that minimal effort has been done to uncover homeless students' abilities. Moore also notes Kim's (2013) research which asks teachers to reevaluate their presumptions of deficits when working with students from families and communities different from that of their (i.e., the teachers') own.

Overall, it seems that most researchers who are interested in the literacy practices of homeless persons concentrate their attention on the lives of children (and implicitly, of their families), but not necessarily on individual adult men and women. Rare are studies like MacGillivray, et al. (2010) and Jacobs (2014) who consider the literate lives of adults—in their cases, namely parents. MacGillivray, et al. (2010), for example, discuss the literate lives of mothers and children in homeless shelters, the literacy sponsorships of libraries, churches, and schools, and the (sometimes contrasting) influences of different institutions on the literacy practices of families in crisis. Certainly issues of sponsorship are crucial in facilitating, legitimizing, and valuing literacy practices, and this cannot be truer for persons who live on the margins. Similarly, Jacobs (2014) examines the literacy values and aspirations of mothers at a homeless and transitional shelter, offering "counternarratives" that disputes individual fault, poor personal choices, and deficit assumptions that pervasively characterize persons living in homeless situations. Both studies ask critical questions about privilege and access to education resources as well as identity. They offer narratives of strengths and success that have important implications for how schools and community might engage with students and families in crisis. And

36

they focus on similar goals among the women: to secure opportunities for their children by way of prioritizing school.

Without doubt, formal education can be a powerful resource for children, or any persons living in poverty and homelessness, for that matter. For children and their parents, alike, it can afford them access to the middle class, to more diverse forms of literacy, and importantly, to the opportunities to practice these diverse forms of knowledge. In fact Rose (2012) would suggest that we support adult educational efforts (and thus economic mobility) if we are to ensure brighter futures for children. "Parental income has greater effect on children's success in America than in other developed countries," Rose (2012) writes. "A report from the Pell Institute, for example, shows an astonishing 47 percent gap in the attainment of bachelor's degrees between young people at the top half versus bottom half of our country's income distribution….low-income children live in a different economic world" (Rose, 2012; p. 21). Supporting parents' (i.e., adults') educational pursuits, thus, has generational benefits.

In an ethnographic study of homeless mothers, Rivera (2003) makes similar assertions. Accordingly, women who engage in "popular education" classes (e.g., workshops on motherhood and parenting, social inequality) are more likely to experience an increase in self-esteem and involvement in their children's education. They are also more motivated to advocate for others in similar life circumstances. Popular education, as Rivera (2003) notes, "is a methodology of teaching and learning through dialogue that directly links curriculum content to people's lived experience and that inspires political action" (p. 32). It invites women to address important issues related to their homelessness and other relevant circumstances, including personal, educational and civic

matters, all of which extend functional and numeracy literacy skills. What I appreciate about Rivera (2003) is her emphasis on the importance of an expansive adult education program, noting that "By limiting access to adult literacy education through 'work-first' welfare reform policies, social inequalities are produced and reproduced" (48). Indeed, not only do such policies perpetuate inequality, Freire (2007) would insist that they are, in fact, grounded on an ideology of inequality. Particularly with respect to many literacy programs for (homeless) adults, the notion of education as liberation cannot be anymore paradoxical.

Adding to this point, in his essay "Inner Life of the Poor" Rose (2013) reminds us that "…the invisibility of the poor is ultimately a sociological and political phenomenon….The label 'the poor' itself becomes a categorical term freighted with deficiency" (73). For this reason, we need more second chance programs, such those initiated by "Cultural projects…in churches and community centers, women's shelters, prison arts programs…literacy centers, adult schools, many community colleges" (73). Rose (2013) asserts that "These institutions are among the few places in mainstream society where poor people can become more publicly visible and display their advantage multiple dimensions of their lives" (73).

This brings me back to the conversation in the introduction about the neo-liberals' cost-benefit argument. To recall, the discussant asked the panelists (i.e., researchers who study and advocate for highly mobile youths) the following: "From a neo-liberal standpoint, why should I care to invest money and time into this one-percent group of students or care if they go or don't go to college?" In many ways this is an unanswerable question, I think, or at the least, it is a question that can yield no possible satisfactory

answers—not for the neo-liberals, anyway. At the fundamental level, someone who perceives formal education as a societal investment is also someone who subscribes to the banking concept of education, wherein the goal is not for equality or social justice; rather, the goal is to nurture the systems of power in place (Freire, 2007), i.e., the "teacher," or the entity representing institutions of power, feeds knowledge to the "student," or subjects in order to sustain the status quo. In this sense, education of homeless persons is worth the investment only if it maintains their place on the margins, or more to Freire's language, within the social structure that dehumanizes them (the oppressed) while privileging the people in power (the oppressors). For the neo-liberals, thus, no true benefit could come of corrupting the current situation. No benefit could come of investing time or money (or research) on homeless persons.

To be fair, however, neo-liberals cannot bear sole blame for this dearth investment. Regardless of political and economic viewpoints, with the exception of the few studies I have mentioned above, my literature review confirms a general lack of interest and scholarship on homeless adults' literate lives; in particular, their ways of knowing, practices, and strengths and their desires to participate as active and productive community members. Again, part of this is due to our minimal understanding of homelessness, and our insistence that education for anyone who is poor should focus on economic and functional purposes. Especially with regard to discussions about adult education, "There is no talk of literature or the arts, of political science and sociology, of world culture—nothing beyond the technical" (Rose, 2013; p. 76).

As an educator who is committed to equality and second chances, I am both disheartened by this shortage in the literature as I am determined. Where there is

sparseness, I see possibilities for important studies that explore both the functional and economical, and the ethical and moral purposes of education for homeless men and women. I see a need for scholarship that asks questions about privilege, access, and equity as they pertain to literacy space and identity of the CSWW members, for example; that observes the ways in which the men and women in the workshop share their knowledge in collaborative venues as they work to reengage with the community (Bruffee, 2003; Newkirk, 2009; Oakeshott, 1962); that recognizes drafts composed orally and in writing during collaborative efforts among members (Bruffee, 2003; Elbow, 1998; Murray, 2012; Newkirk, 2009; Oakeshott, 1962); that considers issues of forged community and audience groups; and that examines members' revision of drafts and identities on and off the page. "What we lack in the reports" and research literature is "the blending of statistical table with the portrait of a life" (Rose, 2012, p. 53). As an educator who is committed to equality and second chances, I understand that democratizing education reaps rippling benefits—that children *can*, and *do*, profit from their parents' literacies—and that we can all participate, in big and small ways, to ensure a more inclusive, democratic world and move toward a fuller humanity (Freire, 2007).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We are all, all the time, theoreticians, and we ought, when things matter, be good ones.

<div align="right">(Gee, 2012; p. 20).</div>

…to be Publicly Engaged

Will, who's been serving the local shelter house for over ten years, does not see himself as an advocate for the homeless. "That role is best suited for Crissy," he says, referencing the director of the shelter. For as long as we've been together, I have never known Will to speak of his work beyond the scope of mental health services, and still yet, a part of me has always assumed that it's because he has to say that, because he feels compelled to put up some sort of scholarly front as a faculty, psychologist, and researcher. But now, now I don't know, because here we are on this long car ride, just him and me, talking about the homeless shelter where we volunteer weekly, and he still speaks with theory and objectivity. He tells me about the importance of reciprocity, sustainability, and identifying needed services, citing all the principles of public engagement. It is as if he had just read the public engagement textbook, it is as if he had just written one himself, and I should be proud.

"My priority has always been to first, identify what services, if any, the shelter wanted and needed, and then, if and only if (and when possible) think about research—in that order," he says.

As a side thought, I wonder whether his heart ever makes its way to his thinking, whether he might ever consider a more intimate response, something with feeling, something with hints of both ethics and morals, something beyond, "I've learned that I am constantly negotiating a balance between compassion, personal responsibility, and systematic accountability." Because here's the thing: I think that sometimes, sometimes it's not merely about negotiating balance; sometimes, it's about embracing the tension that is sentiments and ethics and morals and justice—because most times, they are related.

Gee (2012) says that to theorize is to be ideological as it is to be moral. He also says that when we theorize, we ought to think about whether it is rooted in our desire for power and control, or whether it is to understand and build toward a better world, a better us. Frankly I cannot say with certainty whether my work does, indeed, make a better world or a better us. That seems a bit grandiose, I think. What I can say, though, and say it confidently is this: my work uncovers the wealth of knowledge from my community. My work carves out space for voices that are unheard. My work witnesses moments when men like Clark pick up the pen for the first time since the 10th grade and composes inside a storage unit in the middle of the night; when Rudy calls himself a writer and teacher rather than a "bridge troll" and conducts writing workshops at support group meetings; when Michael shares his published stories, not just with the community at a bookstore or at a documentary premiere showing, but with his daughter whom he rarely sees. My work is a step, and it is a *small* step at that, toward what is moral, what is ethical, what is just (Gee, 2012; Freire, 2007; Rose, 2012; Rose, 2013).

42

I frame my scholarly, pedagogical, and personal goals around ideas of social justice and literacy strengths (Gee, 2012; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013; Rose, 2004, 2012). Just as writing is a learning tool (Emig, 1971; Shaugnessy, 1977; Walshe, 1987) so, too, is writing a human right—to (re)discover, to exercise, and to convey knowledge and enact identity. In this light, knowledge and identity are part of our literacy, and "literacy," in turn, encompasses our senses of selves as well as our ways of knowing, practices, and learning to include (and value) knowledge beyond reading and writing (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013; Gee, 2012; Rose, 2004; Rose, 2013). Literacy is thus expansive, and we, as knowledge bearers, are transporters of "old" knowledge, as we are makers of new ones (Bakhtin, 1981; Rogers, 2011; Street, 2012).

In the following pages, I offer the theoretical framework for my study. I divide this section into three parts. Part one looks at concepts of expansive literacy. Part two examines social and collaborative literacy spaces, practices, and communities. Part three considers the process of composing world and self. For this latter part, I consider theories around oral and written composition.

…an Expansive Literacy

As the facilitator of the CSWW, I recognize the wealth of knowledge among CSWW members and deem it meaningful and legitimate—no matter how diverse it may be from standardized paradigms on which dominant discourse is based (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013; Hull and Schultz, 2002; Rose, 2004; Rose,

43

2008). All members have relevant literacies to contribute to our learning; all members are experts about something worth knowing (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013). Literacy is the inclusion of many kinds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013). Literacy is also, as Rose (2004) asserts in *The Mind at Work*, the ability to practice and put to action intelligence, which is both "variable and dynamic" (xxii) and thus, "creativity, emotion, aesthetic response, and the use of the body…must be considered as aspects of intelligent behavior" (Rose, 2004; p. xxii). Literacy is how we practice our talents, express our sentiments, perceive art, and connect mind and body. What we do with our hands reflects what we think in our mind; our body is our knowledge and intellect at work, and no one illustrates this point better than Rose (2008) in his article, "Intelligence, Knowledge, and the Hand/Brain Divide." Yet how we judge intelligence and the value we place on certain "types" of knowledge are often related to the line of work we and others do. We rank, for instance, doctors and scientists at the top of this hierarchy because we give more weight to skills that require "advanced level education," associating them with "analytical and cognitive" knowledge. In similar vein we deem people in blue collar work/manual labor as less intelligent because we do not perceive vocational skills as valid school knowledge (Rose, 2008). After all how many of us, when growing up, heard that we ought to be doctors, lawyers, and engineers? What about a welder, a carpenter, and a plumber?

Barton, & Hamilton, (1998) illuminate the divide between the literacies we privilege and the ones we don't. They write, "Socially powerful institutions, such as education, tend to support dominant literacy practices. These dominant practices can be seen as part of whole discourse formations, institutionalized configurations of power and

knowledge which are embodied in social relationships. Other vernacular literacies which exist in people's everyday lives are less visible and less supported. This means that literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others" (12). Yet, it isn't just social institutions and power relationships alone that dictate what literacies we value, but the economy. The economy, after all, is what drives power, determining what literacies we "need," and thus, what we ought to supply, or support (Brandt, 2001). Consequently the qualities with which we associate literacy and intelligence have less to do with a person's funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013) and talent abilities than it does, perhaps, with sponsorship (Brandt, 2001). That is, the literacies we value are the literacies we endorse—in schools, in the market place. And again these endorsements, as Karl Marx tells us, depend on what happens in our economy. Gee (2012) explains Marx's ideology more clearly:

> …our knowledge, beliefs, and behavior reflected, and were shaped most importantly by, the economic relationships (relationships of production and consumption) that existed in our societies. In a society where power, wealth, and status are quite unequally distributed, Marx claimed that the social and political ideas of those groups with the most power, status, and wealth 'are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships. What this means is that what people in power believe is simply an expression or reflection of their desire, whether conscious or not, to retain and enhance their power' (7).

We could easily say, then, that because Gee believes in the moral aspects of theorizing (as do I), sponsorship of literacy based on the economy (that of which is motivated by the desire to retain power) is thus immoral. After a while, these fluctuating concepts of literacy become almost meaningless.

45

Brandt (2001) explains best just how biased and unstable our definitions of literacy can be, asserting that the "dynamics of economic competition create the context in which literate resources are pursued, expended, enjoyed, and rewarded" (36). What we qualify as valuable knowledge, therefore, wavers according to what the market demands, meaning our notion of literacy is indeed unreliable. Brandt (2001) writes, "Literacy learning is conditioned by economic changes and the implications they bring to regions and communities in which" we live (42). Economic changes can "devalue once-accepted standards of literacy achievement but, more seriously, destabilize the social and cultural trade routes over which families and communities once learned to preserve and pass on literate know-how" (42). Thus, for example, as the economy becomes more technologically oriented, then knowledge funds about trees and wood, cows and sheep, may likely become less valuable, sometimes obsolete. I am thinking here about CSWW members with whom I've worked and how Brandt's assertions illuminate for me the importance of affording literacy opportunities in places like a homeless shelter, places that are not commonly associated with reading, and in the case of the CSWW, *writing*. The stakes are highest for people like Jimmy who started logging since age nine, and Rudy who herded cattle since age ten. These are trade literacies that they acquired in childhood; they are what inform their reading and writing practices; they are what shape how they see themselves (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013). After all, as González, Moll, & Amanti (2013) remind us, "The jobs that people work often provide them with a varied and extensive wealth of information" (12). A person's labor history, thus, can reveal what they know and where they learned what they know. Particularly for my study where many of the CSWW have spent their lives in the labor and workforce,

46

recognizing these kinds of experiences as valuable sources of knowledge is not only important but necessary to their explorations and discoveries of literacy practices, identities, and possibilities (e.g., employment, community membership).

Indeed to understand informal and/or common knowledge is to understand literacy in whole, not just in parts. Yet the disconnection between what knowledge is privileged in school and what is learned at home cannot be any wider. Seeking to bridge this gap between school instruction and students' lives, González, Moll, & Amanti, (2013) ask educators to validate home-acquired and home-practiced literacies in the classroom, to assume that students come to school *already knowing*, and to acknowledge that their life experiences are important sources of knowledge. To this end, I imagine that the CSWW is a kind of response to this call. As noted, the workshop often functions as a space where various domains of literacies come together, and importantly, it is a space that celebrates and validates what members know, what they practice, who they are, and who they aspire to become. González, Moll, & Amanti's (2013) assertions of an expanded literacy help me recognize these moments as well as validate workshop members' multiple and diverse ways of knowing.

In essence the CSWW is in constant movement toward a kind of third space where innumerable contexts integrate and co-exist (Bhabha, 1994; Moje, et al., 2004; Soja, 1996). Theoretically, this third space consists of knowledge born of multiple sources and contexts, those acquired from the first space, i.e., informal groups and gatherings such as in the home, community, and peers, and those from second space, i.e., formal institutions like work, school, or church (Moje, et al., 2004). And theoretically, these knowledge funds merge to form new knowledge, those derived from first (e.g.,

from everyday life) and second (e.g., from school) spaces. But moving toward such a space is not a process without tension. As suggested in Heath's (1983) study, the disconnection between school-based literacy and home-based literacy is quite vast. Bridging the two contexts, although could be ideal theoretically, can in fact be contentious in practice.

In the case of the CSWW, the struggle to bridge first and second spaces can be witnessed via within-group tensions where various forms of literacy practices, identities, and their sources come together—sometimes in conflict, sometimes in synchronicity, but at all times, in (re)negotiation. As a writing group, members look to each other to actively contribute, exchange, support, and at times, even challenge ideas (Bruffee, 2003; Elbow,1998; Newkirk, 2009). Collaboration of any kind, after all, be it collaborative learning, collaborative community, or collaborative anything for that matter, does not (nor should it) erase tension and constant (re)negotiations. In fact, it is through tension and (re)negotiation of others' utterances that new meanings evolve and that learning occurs (Bakhtin, 1981; Oakeshott, 1962); dialogic learning is rarely a peaceful process. Clashes of ideas are necessary, particularly inside collaborative learning spaces like the CSWW where members come with varying literacies and knowledge funds. In such context, no movement toward a kind of third space, a space that acknowledges and values all forms of knowing from first and second spaces, can actually happen, not even in theory, I don't think, without some sort of simulation of a "contact zone" (Bizzell, 2003; Cushman and Emmons, 2002)—a "thinking" space where ideas come together, pushing and pulling. Through the contact zone are bridges built.

48

…the Social and Collaborative

(or literacy spaces, practices, and communities)

Initially the CSWW was meant to serve as a space for community members to enact

literacy practices and identities, and in so doing, participate in the literary culture of the

town. That was it. I don't know that I thought much else beyond that. (How could I

have?) An idealist, I was, and maybe I still am, though these days, I also try to see the

grey areas and consider for example, moments of successes when the CSWW serves to

facilitate writers' discoveries—of practices, of self—as well as moments of tension, when

the CSWW impedes such possibilities. Because here's the thing: over the years, the

CSWW has taken a life of its own, evolving into something more than just a place where

I and other members came to write and read together. The CSWW has become a

"community of knowledgeable peers" (p. 423, Bruffee, 2003) where we, as the members,

create and determine what is valuable knowledge (e.g., what makes good writing

"good"), participate in literate roles—as writers, as teachers, as knowledge bearers—and

validate each other's literacies and ways of knowing. Knowledge is, thus, conceived as a

social artifact inside this space, "something we generate and maintain in company with

and in dependency upon each other" (p. 426, Bruffee, 2003). And this knowledge, as

Bruffee (2003) clarifies, is neither static nor stable because, again, it is dependent on who

the peers are in the community at any given time. In the case of the CSWW, a writing

workshop inside a homeless (and transient) shelter, the beliefs and values to which we

subscribe tend to fluctuate frequently with the ever-shifting membership. Such

occurrence was particularly evident and noticeable in the earlier years of the writing

49

group, in part, because although we maintained some long-term attending members, we also had not established a cohort of returning, or "regular" members (e.g., former SH clients who live independently in the community and who return weekly to the SH to participate in the writing group).

To this end Bruffee's (2003) discussion about collaborative learning helps me think about how certain CSWW cohorts come together as a community of writers, how we exchange ideas in conversations about composition, about experiences, about knowledge, about practices—how we, as a group, internalize these conversations as thought, and how we write about them, our writing (i.e., drafts) serving as the social and external "artifact" of our internalized thoughts (Bruffee, 2003). From perusing members' drafts and observing workshop conversations, for instance, I have noticed that many writers talk about how their participation in the workshop has influenced the way they see themselves as literate beings (e.g., as leaders, teachers, writers, artists) and the way they enact their literacies (e.g., their approaches to writing and revising drafts).

Once reserved and hesitant about commenting on readings, for example, members like Carmella, Dale, and Clark have, over time, become some of the most active workshoppers. Dale, in particular, often leads our discussions where in the past, he used to keep quietly to himself; while Carmella and Clark almost always present alternative perspectives on essays that are reminiscent of previous workshop dialogue. The three of them are also the most likely to welcome new members into the group and encourage them to share drafts. In essence Carmella, Dale, and Clark have come to form a community of knowledgeable peers, a group that validates each other's practices and identities; the CSWW has become a literacy space that provides for them the

50

opportunities (and legitimacy) to exercise "expert" and leadership roles (Lave, & Wenger, 1991). To this end the writing group, itself, is both a social product and process (Leander, & Sheehy, 2004), meaning that it is as much a kind of outcome as it is an ongoing one—always shifting and changing itself and the members who enact the activities inside its space. And because such "change necessarily involves power" (p. 2), the CSWW is also a space of power renegotiation—over matters of practice, membership, and identity. Again, members, for example, continuously assess what literacies and identities hold more currency per given time, context, and audience. In such a space, the social act of learning comes first, by reading literary text—nonfiction mostly (Gornick, 2001; Hesse, 2009; Klaus, 2010; Perl 1979; Perl, 2004; Perl, & Schwartz, 2006), but sometimes fiction, poetry, and mixed forms—and then by discussing ways in which they might serve as models for writers' own work.

Second, members like Carmella and Clark and Nancy and many others use this space to experiment with various essay forms. Just like with any kind of learning, they compose so that they may see their ideas in print—to learn in the process of seeing and hearing—and to revise them as necessary (Didion, 1976; Emig, 1971; Fletcher, 1993; Murray, 1980; Murray, 2012; Shaugnessy, 1977; Walshe, 1987). Indeed, writers must not only write regularly but also experiment willingly, breaking literary and other compositional conventions when necessary (D'Agata and Fingal, 2012) and navigating through unfamiliar forms in order to know which ones fit best with what they have to say and how they wish to say it (D'Agata and Fingal, 2012; Hesse, 2009; Miller and Paola, 2003). What writers think they know, thus, also gets reshaped in this process of composing in different forms—from poetry to narrative, or vice versa, from narrative to

poetry form—and their drafts become yet, another kind of third space where they negotiate various knowledge funds and identities.

…the Process of Composing World and Self

Access to space is crucial in developing thought and senses of selves. Particularly with identity, Moje (2004) contends that space matters in "how people represent themselves" (36). She tells us that people have "access to different material, textual, discursive, and human resources in different spaces" (36). Although Moje (2004) does not consider the written draft in her chapter called, "Powerful Spaces," where she examines how youths construct their identities in seven difference spaces (i.e., national, city, community, neighborhood, home, suburban, and virtual spaces), I think the leap I am making here is not too far fetch, especially if we're looking at the draft as a space of access to indefinite possibilities of identities and *figured worlds* and identities (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). According to Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain (1998) figured worlds are socially and culturally constructed realms "of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (52). Furthermore, "Figured worlds could be called figurative, narrativized, or dramatized worlds. 'Figurative,'…means transferred in sense from literal or plain to abstract or hypothetical; representing or represented by a figure. The production and reproduction of figured worlds involves both abstraction of significant regularities from everyday life into expectations about how particular types of events unfold and interpretation of the everyday according to these distillations of past

52

experiences. A figured world is formed and re-formed in relation to the everyday activities and events that ordain happenings within it" (53). This is why, for example, reading and writing stories in the CSWW can influence members' identity. More to the point I'm making here is the idea that when writers write, they compose a kind of figured world for themselves on the page. The page, or draft, thus serves as a space where they may ponder about, and construct, infinite possibilities of the self and the world in which that self exists.

Oral Composition

Yet, although narrative writing is the primary means of inquiry inside the CSWW, oftentimes, members (especially first-time attendees) do not necessarily compose on the page initially. Instead, they engage in oral composition, or storytelling by way of talk (Bauman, 1986; Ong, 1980). Jimmy, for instance, composes almost primarily through talk as did Clark during the first six months he arrived at the workshop. This should be of no surprise, of course, since oral literacy has been around much longer than written literacy (Lord, 2000)—historically speaking, but also through one's upbringing. Certainly, as children many if not most of us have heard family members tell stories, none of which was read, but told by heart from memory. Oral literacy precedes written literacy, and because it does, most people also find it less intimidating, if not superior to writing. In Chapter 6: Writing and Oral tradition, of *The Singer of Tales*, for example, Lord (2000) writes: "We assume without thinking that written style is always superior to oral style….Actually this is an error in simple observation of experience, perpetuated by

scholars who have shunned experience for the theatrical. A superior written style is the development of generations. When a tradition or an individual goes from oral to written, he or it, goes from an adult, mature style of one kind to a faltering and embryonic style of another sort" (134). The written form is, but, young and underdeveloped according to Lord (2000), and because it is, it is also less natural and effective than talk. Adding to his assertions about the strengths of orality, Lord (2000) notes that same story can be retold and re-performed (and heard/experienced/transformed) over and over again without ever having any written version of it. More importantly, this same story can be retold differently based on each teller's unique voice (Elbow, 2007). Indeed the oral tradition prides itself on the fact that no one performance is exactly like another—not even the words. This is because word accuracy isn't the point of orality, in this case, poems; more relevant is the act of composing in and during the performance itself—the beauty resides in the eloquence of delivery. What I find especially interesting is Lord's allusion to the enactment of the self in oral composition, particularly how oral composition celebrates a performer's voice and thus, her identity through such performance. Here, I am thinking of CSWW members like Carmella, for example, who has an extraordinary oral delivery about her. When telling stories, other members have said that her voice echoes Maya Angelou's: sonorous, well-paced, and distinct. These are precious moments in a writer's composition process because they allow her and others to actually *hear* how she sounds—or at least how one of her many narrator selves sound.

To facilitate oral composition in the CSWW, I often invite members to reflect on the things they carry with them from day to day. Inspired by Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, the "things" that members take with them when outside the home can

54

sometimes be used as a composing artifact, something upon which writers might reflect and then talk about (i.e., compose orally). Cultural artifacts can reveal *to* and *about* the carriers what they know, what they value, what they practice, and how and who they perceive themselves to be. The "things" that members hold onto when they come to the workshop may include cultural/material artifacts and other tangible items such as woodcarvings, photographs, plastic bags, back braces, eye patches, as well as typical writing tools like notebooks, pens, iPads, etc. The idea behind these exercises is for me to encourage writers to reflect on the items, tell stories about them, and then, *potentially write* about them. I stress the words, "potentially write" because I do not necessarily value writing over orality. I also do not push members to write in the workshop. How they participate in the group is entirely up to them; that is, nothing is mandatory.

Written Composition

At the same time, as a writer and writing teacher, I also recognize the power of writing—what benefits it reaps for individuals, myself included. Even Ong (1980), who values orality acknowledges the transformative influence of writing. He writes:

> Oral cultures indeed produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic and human worth, which are no longer even possible once writing has taken possession of the psyche. Nevertheless, without writing, human consciousness cannot achieve its fuller potentials, cannot produce other beautiful and powerful creations. In this sense, orality needs to produce and is destined to produce writing. Literacy, as will be seen, is absolutely necessary for the development not only of science but also history, philosophy, explicative understanding of literature and of any art, and indeed for the explanation of language (including oral speech) itself. There is hardly an oral culture or a predominantly oral culture left in the world today that this is not somehow aware of the vast complex of powers forever inaccessible without literacy.

This awareness is agony for persons rooted in primarily orality, who want literacy passionately but who also know very well that moving into the exciting world of literacy means leaving behind much that is exciting and deeply loved in the earlier oral world (14-15).

Ong's (1980) assertion is a rather bittersweet sentiment, one reflective of the tension that exists inside the CSWW: to tell or to write. It seems there is always a struggle between the oral and writing forms of expressions. And yet, too, there is something quite poetic and beautiful about this movement from orality to written composition. For writing, as many writers and writing researchers attest, affords discovery and awareness—of self and of truths.

In his book, *The Performance of the Self*, for example, Newkirk (1997) references Murray (1980, 2012) and posits that a self does, indeed, emerge through the process of writing. This self, I assume, surfaces upon the process of writing and discovery, *with and for* audience (Ong, 2003). After all, writing with and for audience often requires that the writer creates a writing persona and voice (Elbow, 2007; Sperling, Appleman, & et al. 2011) for that audience (Ong, 2003). Writing, as Ong (1980) states, comes from the world of oral exchange and because it does, our written words often derive from voiced exchanges heard off the page. According to Ong (1980; Ong, 2003), then, a word's meaning is manifested and realized through orality, suggesting (or at least makes room for us to think) that the voice on the page comes from dialogue we hear spoken— utterances upon utterances. My mind immediately jumps to Bakhtin who says, "The speaker is not the biblical Adam, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed objects. Speakers must use words already used by others because all words have been….all words 'echo' with the 'voices' of others, and as interpreters, we try to understand the speaker's position with respect to the others who characteristically speak this way" (cited in

56

Wortham, 2001, 21-22). We are always responding to other utterances, which means that our voice (oral and written), though unique in sound, is not, in fact, that unique. This is mostly true, I think, although I also contend that uniqueness exists to some degree, particularly in the performance and delivery (Lord, 2000). In other words, while a person's style of delivery comprises of many previous and current utterances, the way and the combination in which she tailors them is where the distinctiveness comes from (Lord, 2000)—and even more, these combinations are endless as they are determined per situation/performance.

Britton, Elbow, Murray, Sommers and their contemporaries contend that all kinds of writing can mature and develop from expressive composition. Of such writing, Britton (1975) notes in *The Development of Writing Abilities*, the language is "free to move easily from participant role in spectator and vice versa; mutual exploration, the pursuit of 'togetherness,' may proceed equally by the pleasurable reconstruction of past experiences—a traffic in values or by the exchange of opinions about the world and information with autobiographical relevance, and the borderline between the two modes will be a shadowy one" (82). Through writing, the writer "draws on the whole store of his experience, and his whole social being, so that in the act of writing he imposes his own individuality" (47). Here, Britton acknowledges social and cultural influences, but also suggests that the self can also be individualized through the composing process. To be clear, I do not valorize the individual as much as I acknowledge each writer's potential to craft utterances in her own voice—that of which may consist of a multitude of other utterances. Hence, while voice is the writer's signature on the page, voice is also a cultural projection, layered with others' utterances. Recently, Sperling and Appleman

57

(2011) attempted to define voice as "…a language performance—always social, mediated by experience, and culturally embedded" (81). I suspect this definition is motivated by practical means. Defining it as a "language performance," for instance, offers opportunities for teaching implications; it leaves room for teachers and writers to think of voice as a language feature that is culturally and socially influenced. I recognize, too, that identity is implied in Sperling and Appleman's definition, although it remains rather hidden at best.

To this end, I see the writing voice as a literary feature of identity (Gornick, 2001), particularly when concerning personal essays and narratives. Voice is the performance of the self in writing that is relative to the intended audience (Gornick, 2001; Ong, 2003). It is thus, varied and ever fluctuating per context, and these fluctuations of voice—of the writer's self on the page—can be seen in written drafts. Through revision, for instance, writers create and recreate various versions of themselves, i.e., personas, as they deem appropriate per their intended audience (Ong, 2003), which, in many cases, may also shift as well, depending on the context. Thus, writing to discover requires commitment to multiple drafts, or as many writers will insist, writing is predominantly revision (Ballenger, 2008; Emig, 1971; Fletcher, 1993; Murray, 1980; Murray, 2012; Perl, 1979; Shaughnessy, 1977; Sommers, 1982). Importantly, as writers construct themselves in stories, they also can potentially become that self (Wortham, 2001). Wortham writes, "…in telling the story, the narrator adopts a certain interactional position, and in acting like that kind of person, becomes more like that kind of person, at least in certain contexts" (9). For this reason, nonfiction essays, particularly personal narratives, work especially well for purposes of self-discovery. The fact that these

narratives generally reflect some reality for the writers also helps them connect to their situations outside of their drafts.

Gornick (2001), Wortham (2001), and Frank (2010) lend perspectives on how composing and revising narratives can inform a person's self-construction, i.e., identity on the page, as well as create multiple truths. Gornick's emphasis on the narrator's motivation for writing a particular narrative, for example, and the narrator's pursuit toward arriving at a "story" helps me understand the emotional energy behind the composing process. Moreover, that the truth in one draft may evolve in subsequent rendition also has implications about the narrator's values and believes, and what she perceives as meaningful per context (i.e., a narrator's values are multi-layered and may fluctuate per context). Gornick also considers the role of audience in her discussion of the narrator's persona (which is reflected in the writing voice). That is, the narrator persona is but one aspect of the writer, or at the least, it is one performance of a self that the narrator takes on as a way to engage with her audience (Gornick, 2001; Hesse, 2009; Klaus, 2010; Ong, 2003). In fact, nonfiction writing, in particular relies heavily on this persona (Gornick, 2001; Hesse, 2009; Klaus, 2010; Ong, 2003). How reliable and likeable she is will determine whether readers will connect and stay on the page with her. Although Gornick's perspectives inform my understanding of the writer's identity on the page (through her narrator persona), her discussion does not account for the writer-self who exists outside of the narrative; she doesn't care to, in fact, because when discussing story construction, that isn't as important. In the world of writing workshops, every draft is evaluated on its literary narrative merits.

Like Gornick, Wortham's (2001) discussions also focus on how the self is constructed in narratives, referencing the self as it relates to the stories told, i.e., as the narrator and the narrated-self. The assumption here is that, the narrator is an identity that the writer takes on to convey her story; this narrator may be telling stories about her current situation or her past and past narrated-self. In this way Wortham's (2001) concepts allow me more flexibility to explore CSWW writers' writings and drafts—how they represent themselves as narrators in the story, how their narrators tell the story about their narrated past and present, and how their narrators interact with the audience (readers) while telling these stories, thus, eventually having implications of the self outside of the narrative, though still as the "narrator" of the story.

Without a doubt there is a fine line between what happens in a person's autobiographical narrative and what happens to her off the page. Composing stories can incite the writer's emotions, and thus lead her to reflect on matters she may otherwise overlook, on and off the page (Frank, 2010). That is, whatever happens on the page, may not necessarily always stay on the page. According to Frank (2010), "Stories create imaginations of how the past might have gone differently and the future is open to any possibility. The capacity of stories is to arouse people's imaginations concerning how their lives might have been different, and the possibilities that still lie open to them" (42). How often, for example, have writers like Rudy reflected on alternative outcomes for their lives, reimagining themselves as someone who has survived trauma rather than as someone who had fallen victim to abuse? Constructing personal essays and/or narratives, thus, enables writers to think about and potentially create possible truths. As Frank (2010) tells us, "Stories become true as they are told" (41). Yet, he reminds us, too, that

"Stories tell the truth, but stories tell the truth by twisting it" (88). What he means by this is that stories, like memories, are relative to context and time. As he explains it, "Stories reassemble bits and pieces—character types and motivation, forms of action, symbols, tropes—recycle them in the present storytelling, and then turn them loose for future use, which now has added resonance. In storytelling, perception and memory are always filtered through narrative resources, shifting and expanding those resources" (90). Adding to this complexity and relativity is the presence of audience. In other words, "Any storytelling is tailored to fit the expected response of the listener(s), including the listener's apparent needs and purposes, sense of humor, likes and dislikes, and readiness to approve or disdain" (90). Consequently, our memories and thus senses of truth, like our identities (Holland, et al., 1998; Gee, 2012; Wortham, 2001), are relative to whatever situation we happen to be in and whomever we happen to be with, at the moment of recalling them.

Indeed we are always (re)constructing stories around our lives and because we are, we can also exist in written forms, as well as in the "narrativized" (Holland, et al., 1998) world off the page. In this sense, the world, itself, is our draft. According to Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain (1998) the notion of "'Narrativized' and 'dramatized' convey the idea that many of the elements of the world relate to one another in the form of a story or drama, a 'standard plot' against which narratives of unusual events are told" (53). This is why CSWW members' narrative drafts may also inform what happens to them in the world outside of the draft. Holland, et al., (1998) liken our identities to "the imaginings of self in worlds of action, as social products" (5). They assert, "Identity is the concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world

61

with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations….Identities are a key means through which people care about and care for what is going on around them. They are important bases from which people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways of being" (5). To this end, we might even say that all writing is autobiographical—all writing is a projection of a self in a figured world that of which is on the page and that of which is off the page. Holland, et al., (1998) explain the connections of these figured worlds. Of a figured world, they write:

> It is a landscape of objectified (materially and perceptibly expressed) meanings, joint activities, and structures of privilege and influence—all partly contingent upon and partly independent of other figured worlds, the interconnections among figured worlds, and the larger societal and trans-societal forces. Figured worlds in their conceptual dimensions supply the contexts of meaning for actions, cultural productions, performances, disputes, for the understandings that people come to make of themselves, and for the capabilities that people develop to direct their own behavior in these worlds. Materially, figured worlds are manifest in people's activities and practices….Figured worlds provide the contexts of meaning and action in which social positions and social relationships are named and conducted. They also provide the loci in which people fashion senses of self—that is, develop identities (60).

Thus, in the context that I am speaking, the figured world of the draft is partly dependent on, and connected to, other figured worlds outside of the draft. What writers compose in their stories, for instance, is, in part, reflective of what is happening to them in the world outside of their narratives. Similarly, how they see themselves in their stories often mirrors how they see themselves in workshop, i.e., as writers, and vice versa. If they perceive themselves positively, then their narrators on the draft will likely also project that positive self-perception. Key to this notion of figured worlds and identity, too, is the idea that repetition can solidify identity. That is, the more CSWW members are able to uncover their many identities and enact them repeatedly (in this case through the

composition process), the more they are able to thicken these identities for themselves. As Holland, et al., (1998) explains, "The identities we gain within figured worlds are…socially historical developments, grown through continued participation in the positions defined by the social organizations of those worlds' activity" (41). What they mean here is that part of a person's identity—how firmly she sees herself in that identity—is often linked to how long she has been given that identity and thus experienced it.   Men and women who have experienced chronic homelessness and who been stigmatized by the community as persons of deficits, for instance, are likely to continue to see themselves in marginalized identities because their history of homelessness perpetuates their marginalization. By the same token, if and when such individuals are given the space to repeatedly enact other senses of selves, then they will also likely adopt other notions of selves.

As an educator who seeks to understand and build toward a better world, a better us, I am committed to creating these opportunities, those for which homeless men and women may create a new history, a new space, a new figured world and a new identity— for themselves and for the community. As it stands the alternative is neither democratic nor just, neither ethical nor moral. As Rose (2013) asserts, we have such a "pinched understanding of the inner lives of poor people," and to this, I add, of persons who are homeless. "The intersection of a reductive, technocratic orientation with the aura of deficiency that surrounds the poor not only dehumanizes our public institutions but makes them less effective. To have a prayer of achieving a society that realizes the potential of all its citizens, we will need institutions that affirm full humanity, the wide sweep of desire and ability of the people walking through the door" (76).

METHODS

…the Ride Up North

On the drive home from Virginia, we would take Route 66, drive through Constitution Avenue, cut across Chinatown, and connect back to 495 North toward Maryland. We made this trek, my parents and I, every Friday night from aunt's apartment in Falls Church to my parents' in Hyattsville. From kindergarten until the fifth grade, the 75-minute drive plus all of Saturday and a few hours on Sunday were the only times I saw my mother and father. "Hyattsville is where all the Black people go to school," my mother used to say, explaining why I had to pack my bags and head back to my aunt's at weekend's end. "For safety," she would add.

And so from Sunday afternoon till Friday night, I'd be waiting for the maroon '77 Chevrolet Nova to pull up along the curb outside Knollwood Apartments. As soon as it came into sight, I'd sprint across the patched lawn between me and the car, looking left and right all the while hoping—praying, begging—that Sunshine, the neighbor's racist Collie, wouldn't chase after me; he was always roaming the complex those days. Unleashed. Hungry. "Gook, gook!" his growls echoed every time he darted toward me and my cousins on the playground. That his owners used to mock us whenever we played hide-and-go-seek and counted, "5-10-15-20" in Vietnamese also didn't help. "The fuck language is the chink speaking?" they would say, their voices trailing in the air as we ran by.

64

Yes, from Sunday afternoon till Friday night, I'd be waiting for the maroon '77 Chevrolet Nova to pull up along the curb outside Knollwood Apartments. I'd be waiting for my trip back to my parents, for the long ride up north, for us to pass the Vietnam Memorial where vets in their pin-filled caps walked outside the wall of names. I'd be waiting to hold in my breath for that stretch of the ride, the same way I would not breathe whenever we drove pass cemeteries. I'd be waiting to avoid eye contact, watching and witnessing vets strolling by in wheelchairs. I'd be waiting to imagine that someday, I would feel the engraved letters on the marble, read them like Braille, and whisper that I was sorry.

On Friday nights, on the drive home from Virginia, we would take Route 66, drive through Constitution Avenue, cut across Chinatown, and connect back to 495 North toward Maryland. On Friday nights I'd be holding in my breath until we passed it all, until I knew I was no longer guilty.

This section is about how I came to work among veterans and other community writers, or more precisely, how I have gone about doing so, and why. In the following pages, I explain my methodology for this study, and importantly, the methods by which I enact these beliefs as writer, teacher, and researcher. I introduce my participants and how they have informed me of adult literacy strengths. I discuss my research design, the ways in which I have come to know understand who these men and women are as writers and literate beings. I share my various data and collection process.

…the Who

(or who are they? who am I? who are we?)

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Every Tuesday, and sometimes Wednesday or Thursday but mainly Tuesday, I arrive at the local shelter house, carrying one bag on each shoulder, for a total of two—a messenger bag with my laptop and other researcher's note-taking tools and a tote bag with things for the group: empty folders, extra pens, paper, and the week's reading, usually a work of nonfiction, and sometimes, though rarely, a work of fiction.   It is a routine I have had for the past four years and one that has certainly evolved over time, but for the most part, the purpose of my weekly visit to the shelter remains: to run the Community Stories Writing Workshop, or what I have been calling, the "CSWW."

Since fall 2010 I have had the privilege of working with, and learning from, 75 men and women (i.e., 47 men and 26 women in their 20s to 60s) who maintain identities as veterans, firefighters, loggers, woodcarvers, editors, photographers, college students, manufacturing plant workers, ministers, artists, event promoters, musicians, dishwashers, architects, and daycare providers. Many, if not most of them, have children and/or grandchildren of public school or of young adult ages. Family, mental health, and/or economic circumstances are among the most common reasons for why they come to SH, although a handful of members (about five of the 75) are from the community at large and have never resided at the shelter house. For the most part, members say that they learned of the CSWW from flyers on public bulletins, campus and other presentations, feature stories in the local newspaper, and/or word-of-mouth (i.e., peers, case managers, shelter house staff, or other specialized group facilitators at the shelter house).   Of the sources, word-of-mouth from peers is the most influential in membership recruitment,

which could explain the increase in veteran members in recent years. (Besides receiving support and sponsorships from the shelter and Veterans Affairs, veterans are a particularly close-knit group at the shelter, which I will discuss.)

An overview of the CSWW in the last four years suggests that the group appears racially and ethnically diverse, consisting of Caucasians, African Americans, Caribbean, Native American, Jewish, Latino, and Asian. However, per workshop, the group is generally more homogenous than not, with the majority of members identified as Caucasians. Part of this, I think, is just demographics and geography of the state and city; our workshop is situated in a Midwestern suburban-rural town where the state population is predominantly Caucasian. The other part, and I am still pondering about this, has more to do with one's personal choice in selecting group membership. Without doubt, there are distinct racial and ethnic cohorts at the shelter, mainly among Caucasians, African Americans, and other racial and ethnic minorities; and then there are also within group cohorts. As such, CSWW membership recruitment often correlates with whatever the current demographics of CSWW may be at a given time. That is, if the majority of members attending the workshop are Caucasian, then the majority of incoming members will also likely be Caucasian. Related to this point, I imagine that race and ethnicity also affect how a person might see herself as a literate being, in this case, as a writer. In other words, a Caucasian homeless person may have very different access to a literacy identity than an African American homeless person. Again, these are just speculations based on my general observations right now. Without researching this hypothesis, I have nothing to base it on otherwise. Certainly I will elaborate on this in my data section where I discuss the various cultural groups and practices at the shelter. In any case, regardless of

racial and ethnic designations, many members share similar socio-economic experiences, recalling childhoods and early adult life in working poor and/or working class families, while some report middle to upper middle class backgrounds. To this end, it might be interesting to look into the various cohorts at the shelter and examine factors for this blatant separation among clients.

The Selected Ten Participants of the Study

For the purposes of my dissertation, I focused primarily on three of the 75 CSWW members (i.e., Michael, Rudy, and Clark). These men voluntarily joined the writing group between 2010 to 2012, signed informed consent forms, and maintained workshop membership for about two years. I select them because they exemplify the kind of rich literacy history, identities, knowledge, values, and practices that I have witnessed inside the CSWW. Their stories and practices inside the workshop dispute assumed deficits of homeless individuals. The three of them have also engaged in the long and rigorous composition process wherein their drafts underwent multiple stages of revision. Both their drafts and their sense of identity have shifted noticeably during the course of the workshop (e.g., from homeless men to writers and peer mentors). To this end the three participants' drafts represent some of the most noticeable and transformative kind of writing that I have seen in the past four years, and importantly, they exemplify the benefits of process-focused, literary writing. Finally, the selected individuals have all continued to participate in the workshop in some capacity after their residencies at the shelter expired, suggesting that for them, the CSWW has become a kind of permanence,

or literacy home. Their longer-term participation in the CSWW, in many ways, have shaped the group's culture as well as afforded me more consistent observations.

In addition to Michael, Rudy, and Clark, there are many other members who will appear throughout my dissertation as I discuss workshop cohorts and membership. Specifically these other members represent various "cohorts" of the CSWW throughout the past four years and shed light on ways in which the writing group community can facilitate as well as impede members' workshop experiences. I mention them as necessary to further illuminate the CSWW community, while, again, my focus maintains on Michael, Rudy, and Clark. . The majority of them have participated in the workshop for at least three months to two years, and a few of them continue to attend the writing group at the shelter each week. All participants have signed informed consent forms.

Michael, Rudy, and Clark are in their fifties, while the rest of the participants' age range is between the thirties to sixties. They describe their ethnicities and races as follows: Caucasian, Caribbean natives, and African Americans. The majority of them grew up in working class and working-poor households, and a few came from middle-class and upper-middle-class households. The majority are parents to school-age children and young adults.

In my discussion of these men and women, I may refer to them collectively as study participants, CSWW members, writers, and/or adults. Frequently, I may also address them as veterans and non-veterans, not for comparison purposes, but to acknowledge that each writer has a clear, shifting identity within the cultures of the shelter house and their larger community. Furthermore, the distinctions allow me to discuss literacy sponsorships (Brandt, 2001) that enable more veterans to participate in

the CSWW for a longer period of time than other non-veteran members. That is, as part of a collaboration between the shelter house and the Veteran Affairs (VA), veterans may reside at the shelter facility for up to two years rather than the standard 45 days (formerly 90 days) designated to non-veteran residents. Veterans are also more likely to return to the shelter after their two-year residence for administrative (visits with case workers), group counseling services, and/or other purposes such as social visits with old friends. The shelter also offers veterans access to computers and the Internet via job labs at least twice a week, thus serving as a consistent sponsor of their writing practices. Veterans are more likely to have private time and space to compose than other non-veteran members. Moreover along with their veteran status are some common experiences and identities that they all share with other veterans. In fact, upon their first arrival at the workshop, most, if not all, identify themselves as "a veteran." This particular designation, after all, has afforded them participation in the shelter house-VA joint housing program. As veterans, they also exhibit insider cultural knowledge and expectations that other non-veterans don't always have, e.g., laughing at the same jokes, sharing the same jargons, recalling similar boot camp experiences. Moreover, the veterans' participation in the writing workshop is often affected by their responsibilities to the VA. For example, sometimes they cannot attend the sessions because they have appointments at the VA.

At the same time, CSWW veteran members also share similarities with CSWW non-veteran members, namely their understanding of homelessness, early childhood trauma, mental illnesses, substance addiction, and other related hardships. Regardless of their veteran statuses, at the root, they, along with the other three participants, represent everyday men and women with extraordinary lives and literacy gifts. Again, they possess

70

some of the richest and most diverse literacy practices that I have witnessed in the CSWW in the past four years. Because of dominant narratives of "need" framing homelessness, however, these strengths, as I have suggested earlier, are rarely recognized in education and social policies and/or settings. It is not uncommon, for instance, for participants to recall early writing memories shaped by assumed academic shortfalls (i.e., red-ink markings), both symptomatic of deficit assumptions of people who are poor, as well as a non-dialogic curriculum that privileged correctness over ideas, product over process (Murray, 1980; Murray, 2012; Newkirk, 1997; Newkirk, 2009). Many of the study participants also talk about socio-economic family circumstances that necessitated prioritizing work over formal education. What is important to understand, here, is that these priorities are not synonymous with a person's literacy and ability, which I think, gets conflated more than not. We tend to assume that, if a person doesn't attend school, then she must be unintelligent or lazy. We don't always think about the circumstances that may have necessitated someone to reprioritize responsibilities; we don't care. Yet people who are living in poverty and/or homeless situations experience a very different reality than people in the middle classes (Rose, 2013). In more ways than one, their access to literacy practices and identities are limited, and the way in which they acquire them usually occurs in communities outside of school walls. To this end, I select these participants for the study because of their perseverance, courage, and willingness to participate in the sponsored writing group at the shelter, in public readings at the local bookstore, in publishing their stories in the CSWW journal, and in the wider community of their town—in spite of the layers of deficits ascribed to them as youths in school and as veterans and adults in transience. I select them because they are among the most

71

diligent and persistent writers. They work hard to revise their drafts—from anecdotes to narrative, from situation to story. They are, by practice, by craft, by right, *writers.*

<p align="center">*Researcher as Participant Observer*</p>

When I first conceived of the Community Stories Writing Workshop, I did not know that I would be writing with as many veterans as have been for four years. In fact I did not think much about the community writers whom I would meet—who they might be, what they did in the past, how they came to SH. Similarly until the first session when, as I mentioned, Michael asked, "Why shelter house," I had not considered who I would be to the members either. In this way and in others, I suppose I went about the workshop and my research rather naively, unaware of my role and privilege as well as my relationship and connections with the men and women at the shelter.

I should pause for a minute here and clarify that, when I say "my connections" with CSWW members, I am not implying that I am "in the know." I do not have any delusions about what it is like to be homeless. Other than living in low-income housing in Knollwood Apartments and later in Vista Gardens, a shared experience by many Vietnamese refugees in Fall Church, Virginia in the '80s, I consider my childhood, especially from the fifth grade and on, quite a privileged one. Even if our home stood sparse of furniture, where the only place to sit was on a spring-less mattress and ripped vinyl seats from a dining set my parents bought at a garage sale years prior, from the outside looking in, we had bought ourselves a house in suburbia, in Montgomery County, Maryland no less, one of the richest counties in the country. Ours was a house that my

friends (mainly gangsters back then) often called "the castle of forbidden love" because of its sharp castle-like roof peaks and scaled sidings, right in the middle of a cul-de-sac. Ours was a piece of that American pie, though not the one you would imagine from fancy French bakeries or even at the Village Inn, but from the Vietnamese bakery in Little Saigon, the one that, from the outside looks like an apple pie, but tastes like red beans and tapioca pearls in coconut milk. Not better or worse. Just different. And still pie.

Even more so these days, my life as a doctoral candidate in language, literacy, and culture (and all the privileges and power that come with it) cannot be any farther from the lives of the men and women with whom I write every Tuesday and whom I call my friends. Except for part of the 90 minutes each week when we co-construct a literacy space (and I am an insider), I am very much an outsider to their world. This, I am aware.

Nevertheless, the universe has brought me back full-circle, you might say, and connected me with people I otherwise would have never thought to connect with. Once a child who shied away from Vietnam-era veterans, I am now an adult who reads, writes, and revises with many of them weekly at a homeless shelter. It is a very unexpected, but also natural and beautiful thing. I realize I talk a great deal here about veterans, as if I do not share the similar sentiments with the other participants. Of course this is not true. I know how hard I have worked to connect with everyone in the group, and veteran or not, the rapport I have with each of the CSWW members is precious, and it does not come easily or quickly. Trust takes time and patience; patience and time bring trust. In the purest sense, as in, absent of social and economic networks, privileges, and consequences, we share many commonalities as writers, and because we do, we are also a very close-knit group. Every session, we come together and we converse about our

73

week's experiences—good and bad ones. We exchange our opinions about the readings—both in supporting and thought-provoking ways. We engage in writing and revision practices—of old and new, of oral and written drafts.   These are very intimate engagements. They are moments when we reveal our imperfections as well as our strengths, when we enact who we are as human beings to each other, to the community, and to ourselves.

This is not to say that ours is a seamless relationship absent of constant (re)negotiations; far from it. As the workshop facilitator, a writer, and a researcher, I am also a teacher, a peer, and a spectator. I am always shifting roles between insider and outsider, participant and observer. I am always considering who I am to workshop members, and who I am to the project. This self-awareness is a crucial necessity for my research; it is what contributes to, what we call in nonfiction, the reliability of the narrator (Gornick, 2001; Hesse, 2009; Klaus, 2010). It is this awareness of my roles in the study that informs me of biases—in my participation, in my observations, and in my interpretations of my observations. It is this awareness of my roles in the study that allows me to convey a truth about literacy, about adults, about homelessness, about all three lumped into one. And like any good research (and any good writing for that matter), this is a truth that is unstable and relative. This is a truth that begins with me, the writer, but one that I hope does not end with me—because this is a truth that is very worth knowing and it is always evolving.

To this end and appropriately, I ground my study on ethnographic epistemology and methods (Behar, 2003; Geertz, 2002; Sunstein, & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). The reflexive nature of this research approach reminds me to always acknowledge who I am

as researcher, facilitator, and member of the workshop—how these roles lend both insider and outsider perspectives and shape my relationship with other participants. As the CSWW facilitator, for example, I am the person who plans for each week's workshop and provides the group with reading materials (usually works of literary nonfiction), writing invitations based on readings, and written responses to members' drafts. I am the one who facilitates conversations about the readings and ask members to share their initial responses to the story as well as their thoughts on the author's writing choices. During these discussions, which could take anywhere between 20 to 30 minutes depending on group members' interests, I try to create opportunities for members to enact identities as writing teachers and peer-mentors to one another. After, I hand out a list of writing prompts framed around the reading, including an open-topic prompt for members who wish to work on another existing draft; for example, sometimes, members have their own writing projects, and therefore, may use this time for that purpose. Then, for members who have requested my feedback, I compose written responses in the form of a letter, citing strengths of the piece as well as questions related to narrative structure and craft. Because I serve primarily as the workshop facilitator, I am also a different kind of participant in the study. That is, my roles and responsibilities are often moving between peer and teacher, and with each shift, my perspective of the study and my relationship with the participants also change.

And just as I am a participant, I am also an observer. I take fieldnotes during every session, and occasionally I ask members for permission to audio-record our workshop conversations. I also write in my teaching journal after each session, reflecting on my observations and practices. What I have discovered through these tasks is that my

75

responsibilities as a researcher are often in conflict with my responsibilities as a group member. Jotting down fieldnotes, for example, can interrupt my full engagement in discussions about readings. In such moments, my role as a researcher becomes secondary to my participation in the group. Likewise, there are times when being a researcher takes precedence such as when members are responding to the writing prompts. During these writing periods, I am vigorously taking notes about group interactions and not necessarily engaging in the same narrative exercise as other members. In both roles, as the workshop facilitator and as a researcher, I am constantly negotiating between my participation and my observations. Ethnographic methods stress the importance of acknowledging these things about myself in the research process—because no researcher can genuinely detach herself from the culture of her study.

…the Where, the When, and the How
(or in the context of a 90-minute culture)

The CSWW is situated in a town designated as a UNESCO City of Literature. Known for its literary culture, this Midwestern locale is also home to a self-proclaimed "writing university" which houses several internationally acclaimed writing workshops and programs. For this reason and many others, writers from across the country and abroad come to this place to tell, write, and revise drafts. They come to learn and exchange what they know and who they are as writers. They come to participate in community. Yet, despite being a utopia for writers, the town can also be exclusive in who it permits

access—to its culture, to its identity. Particularly for persons living in homeless circumstances, membership is almost nonexistent—until fall 2010.

Since inception, the CSWW has served as a space for community members to enact their various forms of knowledge and composition practices—by way of oral storytelling, graphic depictions (e.g., wood-carving, painting), and/or free-writing drafts. Every Tuesday, members (including myself) gather inside one of two meeting rooms at a homeless shelter and participate in collaborative and social reading and writing exchanges (Ballenger, 2008; Elbow, 1998; Elbow, 2007; Emig, 1991; Gornick, 2001; Hesse, 2009; Murray, 2012; Newkirk, 2009; Shaughnessy, 1977). At least for these 90 minutes, the CSWW is a space that defies boundaries of access to the literary culture and identity of this town.

In the following sections, I describe the workshop's culture, its structure, its philosophy, and its reading and writing rituals.

The Structure and Philosophy of the CSWW: An Overview

Originally, the CSWW was modeled after the writing workshops in the Iowa Nonfiction Writing Program and the Iowa Writers Workshop, but over time, I have modified it significantly to accommodate the literacy practices and strengths of members. Structurally, the CSWW has both reading and writing components. On the one hand, it reflects a "forms of nonfiction workshop," which is devoted to reading and critiquing nonfiction essays. On the other hand, it operates similarly to a typical nonfiction writing workshop (with modifications), in that it focuses on drafts and group feedback to drafts.

77

In both instances, I work intentionally to facilitate a member/student-centered teaching and learning environment, a space where all members including myself, the facilitator, share the power of instruction. For instance, I may refrain from dictating what I believe is "good writing" and instead, invite perspectives from as many group members as possible. I may also articulate strengths in every member's perspective, validating them as possibilities. Similarly, I may invite all members to participate in conversation during a writing workshop, including the person whose draft is being discussed. This practice, in particular, differs from the typical nonfiction workshop grounded on "New Criticism" perspectives (Ransom, 1979), which discourages the writer of the draft from speaking up during workshop. The purpose is to ensure an "objective" encounter between the reader and text; otherwise, her participation in the discussion could potentially skew the workshop into a personal engagement, one where readers respond to the writer of the draft rather than the text and importantly, to her ability as a writer.

Although I see value in the New Criticism method and, in fact, have benefitted from this model during the MFA years, I do not deem it appropriate for the CSWW. Epistemologically speaking, if the purpose of the CSWW is to recognize and build on literacy strengths, then silencing the writer during a discussion (and often a critique) of her personal writing would be hypocritical and counter-productive, at best. Furthermore, on a theoretical level, I contend that the process of meaning making should involve a healthy, though not necessarily equal, exchange between writer, reader, and text. Rosenblatt (1995) tells us that readers do not necessarily think about what the author intended for the text anyway, but instead reformulate the meaning "as it exists rather than what the reader thinks the author is trying to do" (cited in Tompkins, 1980, p. 143). Thus

in this way literary work (as is with other texts) is only as good as what meaning the reader makes of it.

Yet negating the power of the writer in meaning construction seems rather extreme and dismissive, I think, if not blindly partial. In fact, in "Epistemological assumptions in the study of response," Bleich (1980) cautions us against straying too far from the experience to which the text actually refers, i.e., it's good to respond with our personal experiential lens but we must also remain within reason, within what the text actually means. Bleich's (1980) perspective acknowledges the author's presence and the intended meaning of words.

Although I remain that once a piece of writing leaves the hands of the author, the author has little power to determine how readers interpret it, I contend that a responsible reader must also be an ethical one, someone who is always aware of the context of the written word. In a literary workshop of community writers, in particular, it is crucial to respond to the text as readers, to respond to the text as writers, to respond to the text within its context, and to respond to the text with the author's input in conversation. The writer of the draft, after all, is the one who will decide whether she will revise the piece.

The Weekly Reading Practices of the CSWW

Although writing is the main focus of the CSWW, reading is a crucial activity that informs one's composition process. In fact, many members engage in reading practices more frequently than they do writing. The reason here, and again, I will discuss them in more detail in the data section, is that not every member is ready to write or wants to

write "on the spot" during workshop time. Similarly, time limitations and other priorities outside of the CSWW (e.g., work and family) prevent members from composing. For these members, in particular, their writing and reading practices are contained within the 90 minutes of the group meeting, and then within this timeframe, they are more likely to participate in the reading portion of the workshop than the writing, because reading is, in some ways, a more social and communal exercise (at least in the context of the CSWW), and thus may be less demanding personally. Members like Carmella, Dale, and Clark, for instance, tend to see the writing workshop as a time to relax and converse with one another (be it about reading someone else's writing). For them, the CSWW functions as a community before it is anything else, and reading and writing are just some of the activities that the group does together.

Each week, my first order of business is always to identify a reading material for the group. These may be personal narratives, short reflections, or any other kind of nonfiction essays and poetry/lyrics from literary and popular journals/magazines (*The New Yorker, The Iowa Review, The Missouri Review, Garden and Gun, Southern Living, etc.*), anthologies (T*he Best American Essays, The Lost Origins of the Essay*, *The Norton Sampler, etc.*) and books (*Ava's Man, Me Talk Pretty One Day, The Life of Pi, Refresh Refresh*, etc.). They may also be excerpts from graphic novels, and sometimes, they are works of fiction. Regardless of form and genre, the selected reading will usually reflect the group's interest at the time. For example, recently members have been talking about material culture and the personal sentiments that people attach to objects. Thus, we read "I'll Eat What He's Wearing" by David Sedaris, "A Giant Step" by Louis Henry Gates, and "Buckeye" by Scott Russell Sanders. All of these essays explore why people keep

80

certain things around, including rotted foods, an orthopedic pair of shoes, and a pair of buckeyes. They also generate lively conversations in the workshop, inviting members to reflect on their personal responses as well as the writing techniques and styles that the authors used to convey their quest in the essay.   My goal, here, is to expose members to a range of literary writing and story-telling forms that could potentially serve as models for their own work.

Almost always, we read the essays together as a group, and afterward, I invite discussions on the reading material. As suggested, these conversations typically start with the reader's personal responses to the text and eventually migrate to issues of literary craft. Most of this has to do with my prompting questions such as, "What are your thoughts on this piece?" or "What were the most significant moments of the essay?" These kinds of questions help members ease into the discussion without the feeling of a formal literary writing classroom. Because the questions focus on personal opinion, there are no threats of answering incorrectly; they are also more inclusive, open to any and everyone's input. During these exchanges, my role is to facilitate and entertain perspectives. Some of my comments might be, "I can see why you say that and I wonder if others might have had similar reactions to the story" or "I like what you just said because it seems that here, you're responding to the story's…." or "That's an interesting take and I wonder if you could elaborate on that for just a bit more." These kinds of inquiries allow me to engage in the discussion, express interest, build on members' comments, and encourage additional perspectives. Often, they elicit innocuous responses from members, but sometimes, they also invite, potentially, very charged, philosophical, political, and religious debates among members. In such instances, my job as the

81

facilitator is to make space for these exchanges but to also mediate and ensure a productive and constructive workshop.

To this end and appropriately, I ease the conversation toward a kind of rhetorical critique and pose what, I consider, are hybrid questions, those that touch on personal reactions to the text as well as writing techniques. I may ask, for example, "What was it about the story, what the author wrote and how she wrote it, for instance, that made you think about that?" or "Who do you think was her intended audience and do you think she thought her writing would have generated this kind of discussion?" Often, I may also ask about crafting choices like, "What parts of the essay worked well for you and why?" or "What parts didn't work so well and why?" or "What was it about the writing in this section that appealed or didn't appeal to you?" Thereafter, I follow with questions more clearly related to style, language, word choices, sentence construction, narrative arcs and turning points, movement of ideas, the narrator's quest, the narrator's reliability, language and narrative tension, and so on (Gornick, 2001; MacCurdy, 2007). "Why do you think the author chose this particular voice or tone?" "What do you think the author wanted you to come away with and how did she go about getting you there based on what she provided in the text?" "What might be some useful writing techniques that you might want to try in their own drafts?" "If you were to engage in a writing workshop with the author of this piece, what might you suggest to him or her for revision?" All of these questions focus on craft. They ask members to approach their reading from the perspective of the writer, i.e., to get into the writer's mind and consider crafting choices.

Although my efforts to transition from personal reactions to literary craft critiques are intentional and systematical, they, by no means, dictate the direction of the

conversation. Most times, there is a natural back and forth movement between the personal and the literary critiques. But sometimes, depending on the interest in the group, the discussion may focus solely on one or the other—how readers might relate to the story, or how the writer has crafted the piece. As the facilitator, my role is to support members' responses and at times, pose contrarian views for consideration. To the latter point, my purpose is not to dictate or create consensus; rather, it is, again, to offer varying viewpoints on readings and invite members to consider possibilities outside their usual understanding and sentiments about a particular topic.

The Weekly Writing Practices of the CSWW

After our conversation about the published work, I invite members to compose their own stories. I do this by handing out a writing invitation that consists of two to four free-writing prompts related to the reading. For these handouts, I try to craft them in a way that reflects members' personal interests and lived-circumstances, and I do so with a personal tone and voice. This is especially important because the prompts, serve as a bridge between me and the group members. These writing invitations offer me the chance and space to connect with the men and women in the group in personal and intimate ways.

Consider the following invitation as an example. After reading Tony Early's "Nighthawk," in one of the workshops, I presented members with this:

> When I see him, I say always that I love eating alone. I say it more than once, three times at least—out of guilt, out of ignorance, out of the need to fix things, maybe. The truth is I never know how to respond when my father says he prefers ordering out to dining in at a restaurant, even at

83

Hardee's or McDonald's. Anxious of other people's glances, he often commutes two hours to a small Vietnamese restaurant in Hartford, CT for carry-out pho. "I don't like feeling people's gazes when the see me eating by myself," he says. Only when my sister and I visit him, which isn't often, does he sit down for the beef noodle soup. In those moments, he seems content and smiles widely, even when toothless. "Look at my girls. Listen to them slurp that soup," he will say, and I, not knowing what to say, will look down and force a slight smile instead. I will inevitably, too, remember how, when my parents first divorced and still lived under the same roof, I'd often have to eat twice every night—first with my mom and then with my dad. They were both very competitive for our affection and time, but mine mostly because Aurora was still a toddler. My mom usually made Vietnamese food for us, all the dishes my father loved, but did not know how to make. She would label the containers and track the portions with an erasable marker. "Make sure old man doesn't get any of this," she would say. "It is at 1/3 of the Tupperware right now."

We no longer live under the same roof, and while I am relieved that we have all parted ways, I remember still how my father cried for days before packing up his Corolla with bags after bags of Hefty cinch sacks. "We will never eat together again," he said as he turned the key.

Eating is as much about taste as it is about experience, those that which have nothing to do with the buds on our tongues. Certainly foods can, in fact, taste differently depending on the company we keep and the context in which we experience them. It is as Earley says in the essay, "…sometimes what makes a fried-bologna-and-onion sandwich so delicious has nothing to do with the bologna or the onion." Sure, Earley might be talking about specific spices and ingredients, but he's also referring to the experience of eating, the people with whom we share our meals, the way the meal was prepared and by whom, and so on. For this week, I invite you to think about the following:

1. What are some of your favorite dishes—how does it smell, taste, feel, sound (yes, sound), look—and what stories and experiences are connected to eating them? Have you ever had a time when they tasted differently? In what context did this happen? Who were you with or not with at the time? What memories and people do you attach to these dishes?

2. Alternatively you might think about early memories of sharing meals with family. What were those like? Were you the one preparing them or eating them? Did you enjoy them as activities, or was eating just a matter of "something you had to do to survive"? What do you miss about these moments? What don't you miss? What relationships were forged from the meals you shared? What role does food play in your relationships with loved ones?

3. If none of these prompts inspire your writing, then please spend this time writing about anything that interests you including any drafts you've been working on.

Most of my writing invitations are intentionally written with a personal anecdote and tone like this one. Because some of these prompts may implicitly ask members to share very private (and perhaps even painful) information about themselves, I see it as a necessary and ethical point to also model my own willingness to disclose personal history. Again, part of this is a matter of reciprocity and building rapport and trust with members; and part of it also is to create a safe space for creative expression as well as to encourage a healthy and meaningful composing process for members. These efforts are in similar vein to Dutro's (2008) approach to working with students who have experienced trauma. Dutro (2008) contends "that to be effective witnesses for the testimonies of our students, we need, in turn, to allow them to be our witnesses – even when it is hard, even when it feels too risky" (424). In a subsequent article, Dutro (2011) also calls teachers to not only share their own responses to trauma, but to invite aspects of students' "lived lives" (e.g., traumatic experiences) into the curriculum. Although Dutro's essays focus on pedagogy and teacher-student relationships (rather than facilitation of a community writing workshop for adults), the ideas of reciprocity and trauma are similar. To be expected, the majority of CSWW members has endured and/or continued to live through some kind of traumatic life-changing event(s) in addition to their current homeless circumstances. Among its many functions, the CSWW is, thus, a literacy space that invites, as it does validate emotional responses and disclosure among members. Indeed the workshop offers adults a social experience with writing that did not and does not always exist—in schools, in community, or in home.

More often than not, almost every workshop member engages in composition practices upon receiving the writing invitation. For 20 to 30 minutes, the pens move and members are either responding to one of the topics from the list, or they are working on previous drafts and/or their own projects, composing in any case. For the few individuals who prefer to not write "on the spot," they usually spend the time as they wish, such as reading a book quietly, going out for a cigarette break, or concocting clever captions for the weekly cartoon caption contest from *The New Yorker* (which I provide).

Soon after everybody finishes the free-writing exercise, I invite volunteers to read their draft out loud, be it the piece they had just composed during the 20 to 30 minutes in the workshop, or one that they worked on during the week, outside if the workshop meeting. Most people in the group take this opportunity to share their stories to an audience and get feedback, while newer members who have not yet settled into the group may sometimes refrain from offering their drafts. More often than not, however, just about everyone volunteers to either tell her story or read her written piece to the group. Established CSWW members are especially encouraging to the incoming members, sometimes purposely volunteering to read first as a way to model and normalize the activity for the new comers. Additionally when and if a newer member shares her work, the rest of the group usually makes a point to flourish the writer with praises, commenting on what they especially appreciate about the draft. This level of peer support is quite common in the CSWW. Similar to conversations about the week's reading, group responses to a member's writing tend to focus on strengths and ways in which they could relate to the writer's story.

As the facilitator of the group, I also participate, citing places that worked in the draft as well as posing questions about certain details that the writer of the draft may have skimmed over. As the conversation moves toward craft, I am careful to keep the focus on what is working rather than what is lacking. In other words, my questions are always posed with a positive spin, and I position myself as a reader who wishes to learn more about the piece. For example, I may say, "As a reader, I am especially drawn to the part of the story where _____ and I wonder if you might elaborate more on _____ because that is where it gets really interesting and I'm immediately hooked." Such comment and those like it are meant to to facilitate thought, writing, and revision processes, and not to criticize work (Elbow, 1998; Newkirk, 2009; Sommers, 1982; Wilson, 2006). My aim is to provide constructive nurture and motivate revision in the same way that Nancy Sommers (1982) reminds us in "Responding to Students Writing, "…we comment on student writing because we believe that it is necessary for us to offer assistance to student writers when they are in the process of composing a text, rather than after the text has been completed. Comments create the motive for doing something different in the next draft; thoughtful comments create the motive for revising" (149). As a writer and writing teacher, I also understand that reading drafts is an intimate act between reader and writer that is made possible only by trust, and I respect the diverse processes among writers. To this end, nothing in the CSWW is mandatory, meaning, my goal is always to inspire revision, not to require or expect it. Besides, for a few members, the process of revision may not happen for months after their initial participation in the group; in some cases, they may never occur at all. It is all up to each member and what she wants to take away from in the group.

87

For members who wish to further develop their drafts, my role as the facilitator is to help them think beyond the short anecdotes and reportage that are often true of first composition attempts and move the piece toward a "story" with emotional truth and meaning. That is, given the workshop's emphases on literary writing and craft, I make a point to stress on the narrator's emotional journey. I encourage every workshop member to think of herself as literary nonfiction writer, and to craft narratives that transcend what Gornick (2001) calls, the "situation," or series of events, and arrive at a "story" evident of the narrator's personal quest, stake, and motivation. To facilitate these practices for CSWW writers, I invite writers with further-developed written drafts to volunteer their piece for "workshop," meaning the writer would engage in 1) a few writing workshop sessions with the group, and 2) an unlimited and as needed number of one-on-one writing conferences with me, the facilitator.

For writing workshop sessions with the group, the writer of the draft may request that I make copies of her piece to pass out to all members at the beginning of the meeting. After everyone gets a copy of the draft, the writer communicates her goals for the piece, and the group members review the story, keeping these points in mind. Once every member has finished reading the piece, the workshop discussion begins.

In typical workshop practices, I ask members to pose questions to the "narrator" of the draft rather than to the "writer." In other words, the writer is perceived as yet, another being, someone with a more complex identity than perhaps the narrator (and her persona on the page) who is telling the story to an intended reader (Gibson, 1980). This

88

distancing enables members and the writer of the draft to discuss issues of craft freely, and in some ways, independently of any personal biases they may harbor about the writer outside of the written draft. As indicated, throughout this workshop, the writer may contribute to the discussion at any time. In fact, her input during the discussion keeps the focus on her intentions for the narrative, ensuring her agency over her own writing.

To facilitate discussion, I model for members how to read as writers and to frame their inquiries with literary questions centered on technical choices and motivation. Some questions are as follows: "What do you think the narrator really wants to say and how does the text support it?" "What is the narrator's quest?" "What is the big question this story wants to answer?" These queries serve as points of entry for workshop members, including the writer of the draft, to navigate and identify other, unvisited narrative layers, and potentially, discover emerging themes such as personal strengths and knowledge. They ask the writer to think about her reasons for telling the story, those of which go beyond simply recalling the memories. The initial response from writers is typically, "I don't know why I wrote about this. It's just a story that came to mind." The follow-up to this comment, then, might be, "Why did this story come to mind?" "What was its significance for the narrator?" "What and where is the emotional charge that drives this story?" (See Figure 1; Liu, 2013.)

Again, during these workshop sessions, the conversation frames around the draft and the narrator as the persona telling the story so as to create space and distance (Gornick, 2001). Furthermore by discussing narratives through literary perspectives and a modified writing workshop model, members engage in a unique form of community than what may be the norm for them outside the workshop, e.g., shelter house.
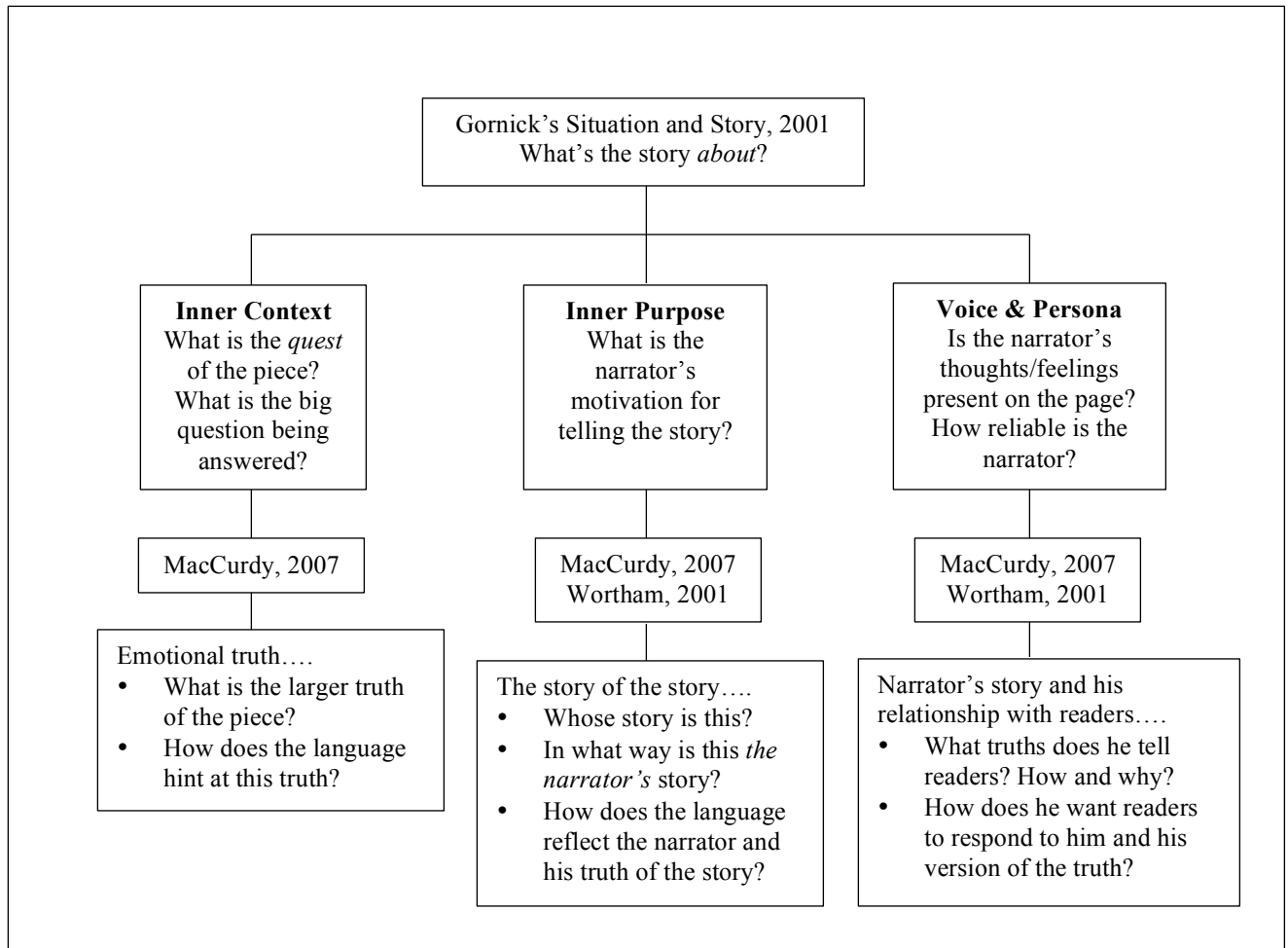
Figure 1. Crafting Questions for the Situation and the Story

In the context of the workshop, members do not necessarily relate to one another as veterans and non-veterans (as they may have upon first arrival), for example, or as men and women in transience, but as peers and as writers concerned with the literary. They, particularly the longer-attending members, also adopt for themselves workshop terminology, and incorporate them into everyday conversations about writing. Clark, for instance, often talks about his interactions with other community writers (both from CSWW and other groups) during the week, and in these conversations, he uses terms like "narrator" and "revision" and "stake." During the workshop, the group may occasionally

90

cover some technical and mechanical matters (Culler, 1980), citing what they understood of the text and what they did not (Flower, 1979) in order to facilitate the writing from what Flower (1979) calls writer-based prose to reader-based prose.

In addition to craft-related issues, CSWW members also spend a significant amount of time just affirming the writer's work. As noted, because many of these stories are very personal, it is especially important for the writer of the draft to hear about what works really well in the piece of writing. Indeed just as constructive, literary responses to the writing enable the writer to develop her story, positive feedback empowers her to own and enact strengths as well as legitimize her choices (Fletcher, 1993; MacCurdy, 2007). To encourage such comments, I prompt reader response queries similar to the way I do for less-developed pieces (e.g., after a member reads out loud her first draft composed during the workshop's 20 to 30 minute writing session). I might ask, "As a peer reader of this draft, what do you respond to most and why," and "In what ways might you find common ground with this story?" The questions invite readers to share their personal take on the content and how they might react or relate to it based on their own experiences (i.e., consider ways in which their lives and identities influence their reading) (Holland, 1980). My goal for such formulations is to direct attention to the writer's successes—how her story can be relatable and understood—and not necessarily to the readers' "tastes." As such, I am also careful to avoid posing, for example, "What do you like best" because the inverse of that would be, "What do you like least or not like at all?" As with conversations about the less-developed drafts (composed "on the spot" during workshop), I ask instead, "What do you think works really well in this draft?" Regardless, it is almost always inevitable that some members of the group will respond

91

with, "I like this part." In such instance, I redirect by asking the person to offer why she responded positively to the story. At this point, members who are accustomed to workshop goals will also follow and assist in the redirection.

Feedback Letters, One-on-one Conferencing, and the Drafting Process

My role as the workshop facilitator means that a large part of what I do is just that, facilitation. As indicated, I plan for and I mediate group workshop sessions. In this capacity, my interactions with writers are public, social, and collaborative (Bruffee, 2003; Elbow, 1998; Murray, 2012; Newkirk, 2009). In other capacities, when I work with members individually, for instance, my relationship with them is personal though still social and collaborative (Bruffee, 2003; Newkirk, 2009). For these one-on-one exchanges, my job is to support the writer's revision process. I do this in two primary ways: feedback letters and one-on-one conferences. For example, after each session, a group member may choose to turn in her draft to me for a written feedback letter the following week. These correspondences allow me to discuss the piece of writing as a reader who is informed in literary nonfiction. In other words, I comment from the perspective of a reader, but one who also sees potential for narrative development. To this end, I am acting as a peer but also as the workshop facilitator offering literary perspectives. In these letters, I always open with at least three strengths and/or places of interest. I identify what I believe to be the energy of the piece. Then I ask about the content and other clarification questions. These are usually limited between one to two questions. Revision is a process after all, and it is crucial that I do not hinder the writer's

motivation to revise. Finally, I recall other writers' techniques, those from the essays we've read in workshop, and ask the writer to consider these techniques for her own draft. Typically I mention essays that I know she appreciates and those that focus on similar subjects. Importantly, these essays are meant only as writing samples; as always, it is up to the writer of the draft whether she wants to incorporate these ideas and techniques into her own writing.

Following the feedback letters, the writer will meet with me to discuss her piece. Our conversations cover similar issues brought up in the feedback letter, however, the one-on-one format is much more interactive. During this conference, we review the draft's content, identify strengths, and consider possibilities for revision or perhaps jumping off points from which the writer could grow another, related story. Sometimes writers set out to compose a particular story, but end up writing yet, another one that is more charged and immediate. One-on-one conferences affords the writer (and me) to talk through the draft and discover (Gee, 2012) the key, charged moment—the actual reason and motivation of the piece, the story that the writer was meant to write, the one she may have wanted to write but didn't realize it. This is why during these conversations, we also discuss other possible forms with which the writer might experiment in the revision, e.g., sometimes a piece is best conveyed as a poem or graphic art rather than a traditional narrative. Whatever the case, the talk centers on the writer of the draft and what she wants to do with the story.

Typically these one-on-one conferences occur before the group workshop sessions and range anywhere between half an hour to one full hour. Depending on room availability, she and I may sit at one of the tables in the commons area of the shelter or at

a desk in one of the smaller offices.   Wherever we situate ourselves, I make a point for us to sit side by side, or adjacent to one another at the table or desk. This sitting arrangement makes for a casual conversation. Our dynamic is more of equal footing, in some ways, because the power structure of the group where I serve as the facilitator moves to the background and my participation becomes closer to peer-like. Not only does this kind of setup and shift in roles encourage the member to talk about her work as a writer from a place of knowing, it also allows me to engage in a more personable exchange with her.

For most members, the revision process spans anywhere between a few months (or three to four drafts) to one to two years (or ten or more drafts). In general it is up to the writer of the draft to decide when the story is done, when she has arrived at a *story*, one with personal significance, emotional truth, and narrative arc. To help her with this process, the writer will often times recruit the advice of peers. Workshop members' collective responses, thus, can impact a writer's final draft (Gornick, 2001; MacCurdy, 2007; Wortham, 2001). I will discuss this further in the data section.

The Importance of Public Readings, Anthologies, and other Publications

In more ways than not, I see the CSWW as a space of agency where men and women who are often marginalized because of their situations of homelessness can exercise what they know and who they are as literate beings. Through a yearlong, rigorous drafting process inside the CSWW, workshop members have the option to participate in a public reading at a local independent bookstore and publish their work in the CSWW's literary

journal, *Of the Folk*, sold at cost to the community audience. This process requires writers to commit to a long and often tedious process of writing and rewriting. First, writers identify a nonfiction draft that they would like to further develop into a "story" with literary qualities such as narrative arc, quest, and truth. Second, they submit the draft for group workshop and one-on-one conferences with me. Third, they revise their draft, focusing on content, structural and grammatical issues. Fourth, they submit their latest rendition for group workshop and one-on-one conferences with me again, and will likely undergo additional revisions.

Particularly key in this process is the back and for exchanges between the writer and me as the facilitator and "editor" of the journal, which could last anywhere between a couple of months to a year—sometimes longer. During these one-on-one sessions, I work side by side with the writer and ask key questions about the narrative. I make suggestions about narrative structure, and content inclusions and/or omissions, but I am also careful to stress the writer's ownership over her story. At the same time, because these stories will eventually be shared at a public reading and in print form via the journal, I also encourage writers to revise their stories for literary merits. Here, my roles as the facilitator, editor, and writer all come into play, which admittedly, can impact my relationship with the writers. These exchanges shift the power dynamics more significantly and noticeably than in other interactions. Although I am always mindful in how I craft my suggestions (i.e., I try to make sure that they come across as suggestions and not as requirements), members seem to perceive a kind of authority behind what I say that, perhaps they usually don't in other situations. I will discuss this in greater detail in the profiles. Part of this, I think, is because of the different stakes involved—for the

95

writer and for me. For the writers, publishing their stories by way of print and at a public reading event means getting the chance to reengage with the community from a place of strength. This is made possible if their work reads authentically, but also "professionally" and "writerly." The fact that this is the first time for many of men and women to share their work publicly (and in a town such as this, known for its writing culture) certainly adds to the stakes involved. How will the community receive their stories? Will people appreciate them as much as their peers in the workshop?

For me, the stakes are similar in that I think about all these issues related to how they writers will come across in the community. Nothing is more important to me as the group facilitator than to ensure a positive experience for the participants. Anything less of this could potentially damage writers' confidences. Additionally, I also think about my collaboration with the bookstore. Here, adding to the stakes is the fact that not only does the bookstore provide the space for the reading—a very reputable literary space, in fact—it also funds the publication of the anthology and donates 10 percent of the reading day's sales to the shelter. To nurture this collaboration, I work hard to ensure the success of these events as well as the sales of the anthology. This means that I facilitate advertisements and publicity for this reading. It means that I also handle all editorial tasks, from content management to design and layout. I have, in recent years, recruited the help of friends and colleagues for copyediting purposes and graphic designs, but for the most part, the task of publishing the journal and organizing the reading is on me. Similarly, I have asked the shelter and bookstore for help advertising these events as well, most of which occur at the annual fundraiser gala and via emails to donors and press releases to the local newspapers.

My choice of location for the public reading is intentional. The fact that the CSWW is located in a town known for its literary culture, all the more stresses the importance of where and how writers share their stories. The bookstore that sponsors our event and publication is considered a writing cultural icon. Writers from all over the country and world, come to this place to read their work, and because they do, I recognized the importance to make this space accessible to community writers as well. What could be more validating for writers than to read at such a place of literary stature? Importantly, what could be more powerful for the community than to witness the redefined boundaries of access within their own town?

…the What and the How

(or methods of data collection)

Thick Descriptive Notes and Other Data Sources

One of the most challenging aspects of my work in the CSWW has been navigating between who I am as workshop facilitator and researcher, participant and observer, insider and outsider. Right before I arrive at the shelter house, I always remind myself to be cognizant of these multiple roles. How will I handle my note-taking today? Will I be able to audio-record part of the session? How much will I participate in or observe the discussion? Will today's reading offend anyone? If so, how will I facilitate through the discussion? And what about group dynamics? There are some members who want more attention than others. How will I attend enough to each writer and at the same time, not

leave the rest out? These were anxieties I would have especially in the earlier days of the workshop, although over the years I have gotten more natural at negotiating my roles. Still yet, there are times, like when new members join, when awkwardness still ensues.

I would like to believe that my priority has always been on storytelling and composition, and to that end, that I have always run the CSWW as a literacy space for community members. It is for that very purpose, after all, that I started the writing workshop. Nevertheless the CSWW is also a research site, and as observer, I am responsible for gathering data about people whom I consider are my peers and cultural teachers. Specifically I take fieldnotes, conduct and transcribe interviews with participants, reflect in a researcher's journal, and collect various artifacts from the workshop (e.g., members' drafts, writing prompts, written correspondences) (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Geertz, 2002; Heath, & Street, 2008). In this data-gathering process, I admit that I sometimes wonder about my priorities. To what degree am I simply feeding my own research interest? And importantly, how do my actions as a researcher hinder members' experiences in the workshop?

Indeed the balancing act between observer and participant is a hard one, especially when the task of taking notes requires my full commitment and concentration. "Thick descriptive" (Geertz, 2002), in particular, is a key component of ethnographic fieldworking. It is a kind of note-taking method that asks me, as the researcher, to pay close attention to, and record detailed observations of, the various cultural practices and literacies, or in this case, knowledge funds (Moje, et al., 2004) of members within the context of the community writing workshop. The goal is to illuminate for outsiders (e.g., my readers) the meaningfulness and relevance of these moments, and as such, part of

98

taking descriptive fieldnotes is to *see past* what is obvious, or what Sunstein, & Chiseri-Strater (2012) refer to as to "look at your fish" over a repeated period of time. What do members typically do at the beginning, middle, and end of a workshop? How does the group interact with one another when say, Carmella tells them about Grandma Red who carried a butcher's knife inside her bra?

To report and reflect on weekly workshop sessions as well as my one-on-one conversations with members, I rely on the double-entry note format, wherein on the left column, I record what I observe and on the right column, I respond to these descriptions. This format allows me to document cultural practices of the group, and at the same time, to make sense of them with respect to my own biases and multiple roles—am I responding as an observer here or am I responding as a participant? In general, my notes focus on such occurrences as what members say to each other and to me; what drafts members share or choose to read to me and/or the group and how they do it (orally or written or visual art); and how members respond to the readings that I provide each week—what they say, why they say it, when they say it, and to whom do they direct their comments. During these exchanges, I pay close attention to how I and other CSWW members might support and at times, challenge each member as writers. Additionally, I always make a point to observe the material items that workshop members carry with them on a day to day basis. As indicated in my theoretical framework, artifacts in, and of themselves, carry stories and significance. They help illuminate the various kinds of knowledge, value systems, and practices that members bring into the workshop each week. For example, how does Clark's knowledge about the various kinds of wood and Iowa landscapes inform his readings of Rick Bragg's essays on coon dogs and Southern

country life? What has playing dungeons and dragons taught Danny about character and plot development? When Jimmy arrives each week, what tools and artifacts does he bring to share with the group? In what ways do Dale's love of Greek mythology and Homer show up in his writing?

Besides fieldnotes, I write regularly in my researcher's journal, reflecting on workshop activities and how they might build on and/or bring out members' literacy strengths. I think about my "session plans" and writing invitations (prompts). And similar to the double-entry notes, I use this space to think about my dual roles as a researcher and facilitator; for example, how they might affect my relationship with members. Certainly there have been times when members like Clark have questioned our relationship and boundaries, e.g., why I cannot give him a ride home or why I cannot meet him outside of the shelter facility. "Aren't we friends?" he asked. Yet due to policies at the shelter, the nature of our relationship, and other liability issues, I am prohibited from engaging socially with CSWW members outside the facility. This is just one example of our complicated dynamic and why I am constantly revisiting priorities between the CSWW as a community literacy space, the CSWW within the context of my collaboration and affiliation with the homeless shelter, and the CSWW as a research site. (I will discuss this issue in greater detail later in the data section.)

In addition to thick descriptive fieldnotes and reflexive researcher's journal entries, ethnographic methods also inform me what kinds of artifacts I might gather. Since fall 2010 (to present), I have been collecting the following: 1) members' written and orally composed drafts, including their notes for revision and writing processes, 2) members' literacy autobiographies and reflections on self as writers, 3) copies of my

feedback letters to members' drafts, 4) any artifacts that members give me by choice (e.g., buckeyes, DVDs, comics, crossword puzzles, captions to cartoon contests, pens, books, wood carvings, etc.), and 5) where appropriate, audio and/or video recordings of various members telling their stories during workshop, public readings, and interviews.

Generally, for the interviews, I meet with a member separately, and ask her to reflect open-endedly on her composing process, i.e., what she was hoping to achieve in the drafts, what she may have been thinking about while writing—her writing choices, feelings, wishes, and so on—and who she imagined were her audiences. For these interviews, I make a point to have copies of the writer's drafts with me that she may reflect more clearly on her process. After, I transcribe the interviews so that I may later review and analyze the transcription. Typically, these interviews take place soon after (within a week or so) the member completes her writing so that her goals and processes are still fresh in mind. I also conduct interviews a few months after the completion of a story, publication of the story, and/or reading of the story in order to determine any fluctuations in their reflections overtime.

Without a doubt, the past four years have generated for me an insane amount of data, be it from fieldnotes, researcher's journal entries, workshop and writers' artifacts, or interviews. At the same time, due to the transient circumstances of many CSWW members, a good amount of my data is also uneven. Members have come and they have left, and many have returned—to the shelter and to the CSWW. Thus, among the many challenges of my data-collection process are data management, categorization/organization, interpretation, and presentation. Fortunately, there has been a large enough number of long-term, regular, and/or returning members (whom I have

introduced in the participant section) that allows me to triangulate my findings and offer solid case studies, or what I prefer to call profiles. In the following section, I discuss how I interpret my observations, and how I hope to present what I have learned.

…the How
(or methods of data presentation)

A Recap of Research Goals

To recap, this is a four-year and ongoing (fall 2010 to present) ethnographic study of the Community Stories Writing Workshop, or CSWW, where I am the facilitator and researcher, participant and observer, insider and outsider. This is a study about the literate lives and identities of men and women of the CSWW—what they know, what they value, what they enact, what they share within the co-constructed literacy space of the writing workshop as well as in the wider community. And this is a study about how audience (and community) influences what writers tell, write, revise, and enact. I consider how the workshop participants negotiate the layers of deficits ascribed to them as youths in school and as adults in transience (Gee, 2012, 2013; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Holland & Lachicotte, 2007) within the physical and mental, social and personal spaces of the CSWW.

The context of my study implicitly requires that I call attention to the various cultural practices and literacies or knowledge funds (Moje, et al., 2004) that members exchange with one another (and potentially integrate) inside the CSWW. By illustrating

102

the literacy strengths and identities of the men and women in the workshop, I am, thus, challenging dominant assumptions of deficits about people living in homeless circumstances. Doing so also allows me to set up the premise to narrow in on how might the process participating in the CSWW afford adults in homeless circumstances the physical and mental, the social and personal spaces to exercise what they know and to construct who they are as literate beings? First, how might writing literary nonfiction serve as, yet, another kind of third space where writers explore their multiple literacy funds, negotiate them, and in so doing, discover other layers of knowledge and identities for themselves? How does the page serve as yet another space for writers to engage with one another? What identities and literacies do members perform in their stories (e.g., drafts of narratives)? How might these identities and literacies evolve, if at all, as writers consider audience while composing themselves into the identity of their literary town?

Second, what literacies and identities do members share and enact *outside* of their stories relative to audience (via written reflections on self as writer, reader, and literate being, and via oral-accounts during conversations in workshop, one-on-one conferences, interviews). In what ways, might these identities and the character traits of these identities reflect those of the narrator's stories? Or do they at all? How does audience— inside the CSWW and CSWW-sponsored spaces—support these self-discoveries and/or enactments for CSWW members—as writers, readers, and literate beings?

Four Profiles: The First Workshop, the Researcher's Workshop,
the Writers' Workshop, and A Writer's Composing Process

Over the past four years I have accumulated a massive amount of data, and I have contemplated throughout my research and writing process about how to best present my observations within the confines of a dissertation. After multiple in-depth conversations with my advisor and committee members—together and separately—I am resolved to explore my research queries in four main profiles bookended with a "pre-profile" and a "post-profile."

The pre-profile introduces my data and offers an overview of the culture, literacies, identities and practices inside the CSWW. Specifically I describe the wealth of literacies among selected participants in the study—their knowledge funds and identities, and their participation in the group as literate beings. Because of the collaborative nature of the workshop and my study's emphasis on audience, no "one" profile can stand alone, without also examining the other members who "orbit" around the person's process. Thus this pre-profile allows me to set up the context to discuss the four profiles in my study. Furthermore in depicting selected members as "vignettes" in this overview profile, I am able to account for the uneven data I have on participants due to the transient nature of SH residents, and thus ever-shifting membership in the CSWW. Even though each of my selected participants has maintained at least a three-month workshop membership, the frequency and dates of their attendance still vary.

Profiles One, Two, and Three illustrate the various kinds of "workshops" inside the CSWW. Profile One examines the first workshop and the questions that arose about my roles and goals for the CSWW. It also introduces the powerful presence and impact of workshop members in shaping this space. Profile Two, called "The Researcher's Workshop," illustrates my initial assumptions about the CSWW and role as the

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researcher—how these aspects affected the cultural practices of the group. Importantly, I discuss the power of group members' influence in redirecting me toward my roles as the facilitator and member of the CSWW. Appropriately, Profile Three is called "The Writers' Workshop" and looks at ways in which the members and I, together construct this space for ourselves and with each other. I illustrate the various shapes of audience groups inside and outside of this space. In Profile Four, I examine one writer's drafts and how oral composition facilitated his writing. At the root, in both Profiles Three and Four, my objectives are to study how participation in the CSWW, i.e., through the process of telling, writing, and rewriting narratives and group interactions, afford adults in homeless circumstances the physical and mental, the social and personal spaces to exercise what they know and to construct who they are as literate beings. I reflect on ways in which the process of composition (both via oral delivery and the written draft) can serve as a kind of home, or third space, for writers who are without "space." Again, what kinds of stories (and literacies) do the writers share in their stories? How do they negotiate the layers of knowledge, values and beliefs in their drafts, those that which may complement or sometimes conflict with what they know? How do the writers (as authors of the draft) position themselves with respect to their audience in these contexts? And how do their considerations of their audiences in these contexts affect their composition process? Just as it is important to understand how writing can afford space for writers to enact their literacies and selves on the page, it is just as important to see if and when these discoveries on the page might translate to the world outside the page. That is, in writing and revising about themselves and their strengths on the page, do the writers also then begin to recognize and enact these discoveries about themselves, off the page?

In the Post-Profile I zoom in on one writer's arc, or experience in the workshop. My intentions are to suggest a portrait of a writer who benefitted from sponsorship and participating in the workshop. This particular writer, in many ways, represents many others who have engaged in the CSWW, those with rich literacies, commitment to writing, and desire to engage with the wider community from a place of strength.

Stylistically, I write the profiles as nonfiction essays, similar to the way I do in the prologue. I choose this form because it reflects the kind of writing that CSWW members compose. To this end, I construct all four profiles inside one main narrative strand; that is, while each profile stands alone as its own essay about assumptions, the researcher, and the writers, each of the four also comes together to create a larger essay about negotiating space. At the conclusion of each profile, I offer additional reflections that I may have missed in the profile. In this space, I may also include some citations as necessary. Between the profiles, I offer excerpts called, "Why I Write," written in the words of CSWW writers themselves. Doing so allows me to share what writers do when they are in the CSWW, why they come to the group at all, and why they stay.

<div align="center">

…the How and the Why

(or methods of data analysis)

</div>

I ground this study on ethnographic methodology and I approach my data analysis from the perspectives of participant and observer, and insider and outsider to the CSWW (Behar, 2003; Geertz, 2002; Sunstein, & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). I use my thick descriptive notes, my researcher's journal, workshop artifacts, and other data to construct

106

the four profiles. These tools and approach allow me to write the profiles as ethnographic essays, a kind of nonfiction form that I deem appropriate for this study.   In fact, because I am writing about a culture and the members inside such a culture, the narrative voice is not only fitting, it is also necessary as it allows me to acknowledge my own role in, and sentiments of, the group. I mention my writing choices here, again, because data collection, data analysis, and data writing are all interrelated. One informs the other, and neither can stand without considering the other two. In short, I collect, analyze, and write about the CSWW through ethnographic and nonfiction lenses.

I rely on my thick descriptive fieldnotes about my observations within the CSWW as well as outside the CSWW such as the public reading event, my researcher's reflections, and my conversations and interviews with participants. I code for recurring themes about members' personal values and beliefs, their various ways of knowing, and how they came to learn, adopt, and made sense of them—from where and from whom. I consider when they enact these values, beliefs, and knowledge—during the narrative composing process, workshop activities, and other social engagements with me and/or with peers. What do these moments of engagement with other members in the workshop look like? How do these beliefs, values, and literacies influence members' participation inside the workshop?

To further illuminate the things members value, practice, and know, I observe the things they carry with them into the workshop from week to week. I look for consistencies and changes in these items and consider reasons for why members value the items. What are the cultural implications of these items in the context of the workshop and beyond? How do the members use these items—in their storytelling composition

process, in their responses to peers? Are there commonalities among members in what they carry with them into the group? In addition to physical artifacts, I also pay close attention to vernacular and other common language use by members. What are some words that members use a lot in their conversations? Dale, for example, has a tendency to invoke "Our Blessed Father" in his responses to readings, thus revealing his very Christian and religious side. Most times, this side of him dictates his reaction to violence on the page, for example, or to other varying perspectives (e.g., those that which he may deem as "pagan"). Dale, at times, will leave the workshop room until a writer finishes reading a violent story. And then of course, how do other members react when he makes such invocations? Does Danny, for example, wince?

Discussion inside and outside of workshop sessions, one-on-one conferences, and other social formats also tell me a lot about members' literacy. In the CSWW, talk, after all, is how we communicate (besides writing) and so much history and details are revealed and disclosed in these engagements (Gee, 2012). Yet, just as it is important to pay attention to what members say, it is equally relevant to note what they don't say and when and with whom. Depending on who attends the workshop per week and members' relationships with each other outside the workshop, the CSWW can either be a space of collaborative exchanges among members (Bruffee, 2003; Elbow, 1998; Newkirk, 2009; Oakeshott, 1962), or it can be a rather exclusive and disconnected one. In these instances, I make note of my own role in supporting and/or unintentionally impeding group cohesiveness inside the CSWW.

In short, ethnographic methods enable me to describe the workshop culture, the literacies strengths and identities of members, the moments when they function as a

community of knowledgeable peers and the moments when they don't do so as successfully. Next, I reconstruct these moments in the profiles, which again, are written as narratives where I weave participants' comments into scenes. Throughout the narratives, i.e., profile, I reflect on my own perspectives and positioning as both participant and observer and what my participation in the writing group means to me as well as how it affects other members' participation.

In conjunction with the ethnographic lens, for parts of profiles three and four, I also employ literary analysis (Gornick, 2001) and narrative inquiry (Frank, 2010; Wortham, 2001) to examine some members' composition processes. What motivates them to write, and importantly, to revise? What is the connection between a writer's motivation to write and his sense of self as a writer and/or literate being? To this end, how does a writer's motivation and sense writer identity influence how he makes meaning of the stories he tells—one that goes beyond circumstantial events to that of emotional truth? That is, are writers more likely to write and revise if they believe that what they have to say is worth reading, worth discovering, worth revisiting? What truths do they wish to elicit and how does such truth become especially meaningful? At the root, I seek to understand which practices work well in creating meaning for writers in the CSWW, and how the workshop provides this space for adults living in situations of homelessness. How do drafts, in particular, serve as a third space where a writer's multiple sources of identity and literacy come together?

More specifically Gornick's (2001) literary notions of the "situation" and the "story" focus on the narrator's emotional quest and motivation for writing the story, and thus enables me to explore issues of narrative truths and narrator personas and voice (i.e.,

character traits of narrator, her beliefs and attitudes toward things and people, etc.). The fact that the CSWW culture emphasizes literary nonfiction writing makes Gornick's concepts particularly relevant in my data analysis, and in this way, her work helps me frame my overall examination of CSWW writers' stories—for matters of identity via narrator's persona and voice, and for matters of knowledge funds via narrator's discoveries through drafting.

For this part of my analysis, I consider the following: 1) the narrator's persona (e.g., how does this persona influence the telling of this story, how does this personal affect readers' reactions to the story), 2) narrator's voice (e.g., similar to persona, how does the narrator speak on the page, what are her attitudes, beliefs, values, etc. toward matters, etc.), 3) the literary form (e.g., essay, narrative, poem, graphic depictions, or fiction) and the structure of that form (e.g., narrative structure), 4) the narrator's quest (or the big questions the narrator seeks to answer) as explicitly conveyed by the narrator, and 5) the implied narrator's quest (or the big questions the narrator seeks to answer) as suggested in the narrative but not explicitly stated by the narrator. For this latter observation, I identify places where the narrator seems most emotionally charged (i.e., where is the energy of the draft) as well as the frequency and recurrence of these emotional sentiments throughout the drafts. Although these are places in the story where the narrator ought to explore in depth, they are sometimes left unattended throughout multiple drafts—particularly earlier ones. Sometimes, too, they may recur throughout one draft without explicit awareness from the narrator at all. That is, they are repeatedly present in the narrative but the narrator is unaware of their significance or why they recur. This could be because the narrator is unprepared to address this particular truth. Or, it

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could be because the narrator is unaware of this truth. Regardless these "emotionally energized" places in the drafts have important implications about the narrator's journey toward an emotional truth. They lend me perspective on what writers in the CSWW may be doing or thinking during their composing process. The movement from first to "final," or most recent draft, often requires narrators to elaborate in various places, and in so doing, they also reveal histories (e.g., sources of knowledge), including those of which have shaped their understanding of the world and how they see themselves in that world.

In addition to the literary attributes of writers' drafts and narrator personas, I also consider the narrative inquiry lenses of Frank (2010) to further explore how narrators negotiate various "truths" in their stories, and Wortham (2001) to examine the narrator's construction of the self. According to Frank (2010), stories can reveal many truths, and each truth that is revealed is influenced by the narrator's response to her audience. In other words, "The core truth of the story is not correspondence but performance" (41). Moreover, the "performativity of stories is crucial to what is particular about their claim to truth" (40). This is not to say that these truths are unreliable; rather, such relativity to the audience suggests the power of stories to create many truths, every one of which are valid per audience and offer different possibilities for the narrator. In a similar way, Frank's (2010) emphasis on the performance of stories also implies the power of *audience* in the construction of truths. This is particularly pertinent in the case of the CSWW where members may compose their stories with and for various audiences in mind (Gornick, 2001; Ong, 2003; Wortham, 2001); they write and revise with and for themselves, with and for me (the facilitator), with and for workshop members, and for the wider community. Are there any shifts among the audience groups? What truths does

the narrator focus on during her composing process when she knows she will be sharing the draft with only me, with peers, and/or with the wider community? Likewise, what truths does the narrator stress when she reads her draft out loud to various audiences? For example, while reading the piece out loud, does she cry or joke about a particular scene in the story—as a way to stress the effect of that moment in the narrative?

Furthermore Frank (2010) posits that, "stories' capacity to report truths that have been enacted elsewhere is always morphing into their more distinct capacity to enact truths. These truths are not copies of an original. They are enactments in which something original comes to be, as if for the first time, in the full significance that the story gives it" (40). By this logic, there are many versions of "original truth," or perhaps, more accurately, the idea of original just does not exist. Truths in stories are dialogical and dialectical (Bakhtin, 1981; Frank, 2010); they build on other iterations and they continuously transform into their "authentic," "original" form. Here, what I especially appreciate is the flexibility for possibilities, wherein, for example, drafts of "different" stories might potentially be drafts of the same story, or to put it another way, drafts of "different" stories can contribute to the construction of a truth (i.e., the same truth that other drafts of other stories are also pursuing). In the context of my study, CSWW members often compose a variety of short excerpts (taken from various writing invitations). At a glance, these drafts appear to be separate stories, because each of them was composed from different prompts. However, closer perusal frequently suggests noticeable overlaps in narrative meaning and pursuit. That is, in composing drafts of different stories (and thus, exploring different truths), writers sometimes uncover, yet, another more significant truth.

112

For this part of my data analysis, I gather writer's collection of drafts composed from various prompts. These may include first and/or most recent drafts of the same narrative as well as first drafts of separate narratives. From the collection, I identify for recurring and overlapping narrative meaning, or theme. I compare the drafts with the most similarities using some of Frank's (2010) tools for interpreting narratives and truths, such as: 1) interpret the story into images, 2) interpret the story from the perspective of a previously marginal character, 3) mark which details might have been expected but are left out, 4) address differences between the storyteller and the analyst (me), 5) take some pauses in the interpretation of these drafts, and 6) recognize the strengths of the story and the storyteller (e.g., write a letter telling the narrator what you took away from the story—similar to my feedback letters to CSWW members).

Where Frank's (2010) method of narrative analysis illuminate the multiple truths in CSWW members' narrative drafts with respect to audience, Wortham's (2001) approach inform how CSWW members' narrators position themselves in drafts throughout the composition process—from first to "final" draft. How do these narrators represent themselves in stories, and how do they act like that representation depicted in stories—*on and off* the page (i.e., as far as how their narrators interact with readers in relation to their stories). Wortham (2001) offers me the socio-cultural perspective to Gornick's questions about narrator's persona, and importantly, to my exploration of identity performance in drafts, in the same way that Frank (2010) provides me with similar lenses to understand Gornick's questions about the narrator's emotional truth.

As noted, Wortham (2001) asserts that autobiographical narratives can play a big role in self-construction, i.e., identities. Accordingly the process of self-construction has

113

two components: one representational and one interactional (Wortham, 2001). Writers not only create and represent themselves as a certain narrator (a kind of person/self/character) in their stories, their narrators also behave like that representation as they interact with their audiences (readers). For example, Lucy (the writer) often paints her narrator as a mythical being who can transcend all hardships, and who sees only the good in others and in life. This narrator that she (the writer) portrays on the page makes up what Wortham (2001) calls, the representational component in narrative self-construction. But to portray this image, Lucy's narrator must also look, act, and speak like a goddess in the story. That is, her narrator must also interrelate with others (i.e., the audience) while telling the story. Wortham (2001) calls this part of the self-construction, interactional positioning, which has to do with how the narrator acts as a certain type of person as she tells the story, as well as how she relates to others (i.e., her audience) while telling the personal narrative. Thus, through representational and interactional positioning, Lucy creates for herself a certain type of narrator on the page and acts like this narrator on and off the page when relating with her audience. I analyze Rudy's and Clark's drafts for these occurrences.

To help me examine a CSWW member's process of self-construction, and importantly to understand the interactional functions in this process, I consider the context of the story in which the narrator speaks (and thus shares knowledge and performs identity). I gather first and final drafts and compare how the narrator positions herself on the page in each draft. Does she position herself as a victim or a survivor, for instance, and in what context in the story? Similarly, I take note of contexts off the page such as in workshop sessions, one-on-one conferences, and public reading events. How

114

does the narrator position herself when reading to different audiences? Wortham (2001) refers to this as the "mediated" approach, which suggests that certain aspects of the context can become relevant in the interactional positioning for the speakers and hearers. To determine what these certain aspects may be, I look for contextual cues in the drafts, and in whatever physical setting outside of the draft. A contextualization cue is "some aspect of an utterance that indicates how its context should be construed. Hearers first attend to cues in utterances, on the basis of which they next select aspects of the context as relevant, and they then apply rules to determine what positioning is going on" (36).

Just as it is important to take note of the context in which the narrator speaks in drafts and outside of the drafts, I also look at ways in which subsequent interactions under subsequent contexts might solidify and validate the narrator's positioning. Wortham's (2001) emergent approach asks that I consider whether the narrator's positioning persist and/or gets validated in later contexts by her peers. After all, a narrator's interactional positioning solidifies through repeated enactments and when peers cohere to it. Wortham (2001) writes, "…an utterance's interactional functions depend on how subsequent utterances cohere with it….Cues in an utterance establish its interactional positioning only as subsequent utterances indicate that those cues have been taken in a certain way" (41). Consequently, how a narrator positions herself depends on others' collaboration. Similar to Frank's assertions about the audience's power over constructing narrative truths, Wortham (2001) believes that "…other participants' responses to an utterance can change the interactional positioning accomplished by an earlier utterance" (41). That is, the audience has power over how a narrator juxtaposes herself relative to her audience. For example, a writer like Carmella may position herself

115

as a strong woman narrator in the context of the CSWW, and she is validated as such within this context by her peers and me each week. However, this strong woman narrator may not necessarily translate into other contexts outside the CSWW, at least not without the validation of the audience in these places. They may not know her narrator to be such and therefore, how she positions herself in her storytelling act may be different, e.g., she may not be as assertive. To use another example, CSWW members often receive praise at public reading events. The audience appreciates their stories and views them as community writers. In such context, CSWW members stand at the podium and position themselves as the experts of their narratives. They tell their stories to attentive ears. However, after the event, they may change their positioning—until the next time they read. Each repeated opportunities within the same contexts validates their interactional positioning. Similarly, without the support of the context (i.e., a public reading event that focuses on community writers) and the audience to go with this context, this positioning cannot sustain itself.

Wortham's mediated and emergent approaches also have implications about the dialogic qualities of narratives. Mediation, for example, gives me room to infer meaning in what narrators may be trying to tell in their drafts. This is especially important because first drafts do not always cohere. Sometimes, particularly in earlier renditions of stories, writers will only list events without any indication of contexts for the events. Why some events make it on the list or why they follow one another may not be so obvious or clear. As such, exploring the contextual cues in these drafts could help clarify some of these reasons and help the writer compose toward a more "complete" and meaningful story. Like mediation, Wortham's (2001) notion of emergence lends

perspective on the dialogic qualities of narrative analysis as well, such as how narrator's stories might get incorporated into ongoing conversation and how the audience influences the shape of these stories even after the story has been composed. What this means, then, is that the point, or meaning, of narratives are instable; new meanings may emerge as a result of subsequent conversations from workshop sessions, one-on-one conferences with me, as well as public reading events. Even though Clark has published his stories in the CSWW journal, for example, he often revisits it during workshop discussions and changes the point of the story. I discuss this in more detail when I share his profile.

Examining the Writer's Narrative Drafts: How They All Connect

Methods from Gornick, Frank, and Wortham help me understand CSWW members' process of composing self and narratives in drafts. Conceptually, I see the correlations as such (see Figure 2):

Figure 2. How They Connect

Examining the CSWW as a Third Space: Literacies and Identities Outside of Narratives

As suggested, the process of telling, writing, and rewriting nonfiction narratives can afford homeless adults the physical and the mental, the social and the personal spaces to exercise what they know and to construct who they are as literate beings. Just as it is important to uncover what literacies and identities CSWW members tell and perform in their stories (via drafts of narratives), it is also important to examine what literacies and identities they share and enact *outside* of their stories (via written and oral-accounts—conversations in workshop, one-on-one conferences, interviews—of reflections on self as writer, reader, and literate being) relative to audience. The assumption I am making here is that, in addition to enacting a certain self in their stories (as narrators), CSWW members also enact a certain self outside of their stories (e.g., as the writer of the story and as members of the CSWW). These identities and the character traits of these identities may often mirror those of the narrator's, but not always and not necessarily as obvious. How does audience—inside the workshop and among the town community—influence these self-discoveries and/or enactments for CSWW members—as writers, readers, and literate beings?

For this part, I return to ethnographic methods to inform me of writers' cultural values, practices and identities inside the CSWW. I review my thick descriptive fieldnotes, researcher's reflections, and conversations and interviews with participants and examine for recurring themes about their senses of selves as literate beings and for any shifts that may have occurred over time. In conjunction with what they convey orally during workshop conversations, one-on-one conferences, and interviews, I also examine their artifacts; more specifically, in this case, I study their reflections on self as writer, reader, and literate beings. I examine the language and the context variables, i.e., "…the

118

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actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects" (Gee, 2005; p. 21) with and by which members express their identities in these reflections and conversations. I inquire about their literacy sources, i.e., where the writers acquire these identities, practices, and values? At home? From school? From the CSWW? Identifying the sources helps me understand how the CSWW serves as that third space where first and second Discourses (Gee, 2012) come together. As well this allows me to more thoroughly understand how CSWW members' participation in the workshop and their composing practices might affect their perception of self and literacy—over time and over repeated writing rituals, for example.

DATA

…a Pre-Profile:

Introducing the Cast of Writers
(or tracing the narrative arc)

We bathed inside the cement building, the one with the aluminum, rippled rooftop—light turquoise faded to green. Our water came from the well outside. Sometimes one of the camp residents would be there to help, his sleeves rolled up to his elbow, his pants to his knees. Taiwanese evenings, when my mother took me for the daily washing, were always cooler than the day, and inside the concrete walls where no sun ever hit, it was cold like a meat warehouse. Parents lined their children along the interior perimeter with soap in hand and a basin of water by the side. We were to bathe together each evening, our nakedness indifferent to each other's stares. "You are only four, anyway. What do you have to hide?" my mother would say when my arms crossed to cover the mid-section and lower half. She didn't know that it wasn't my bareness I wanted to conceal. Worse than the scrawny frame and potbelly was that big dark circle protruding next to my navel. For years, my mother would tell me, "That big mole is the gods' gift to you"—a promise that I would always have food inside my body. But gods or gifts or food mattered not. I was four, almost five, and inside a bathhouse among other refugee children. I wanted only unmarked bare skin.

Years later, I would eventually replace the mole with four stitches, and though my skin would still protrude in that spot like an embossed print, it would no longer be black.

When Rudy first arrived at the Community Stories Writing Workshop (CSWW) in late fall 2010, he introduced himself, not as a writer or as a U.S. Navy veteran, but as a "bridge troll." Pointing around the room where the writing group was held at the time, I remember his very teacher-like voice educating me about the outdoors. "You see all these white walls around here?" he said. "These are nice—nothing like it is out there. Where I lived, there ain't no heater, no air conditioning. It's just the air and you. In fact, if it weren't for ["Mike"] at the VA, I probably would have stayed out there in the outdoors. [Mike] was looking for homeless veterans like me at the time and pulling us out of the streets."

At 56 years of age, Rudy had been living under the "B" street bridge for the past five years along with other veterans and non-veterans who were without permanent housing. Except for the absence of sturdy walls and the conventions of store-bought furnishings, the community under the street was not too unlike others. Boundaries around and between living spaces were clear, defined by camping tents, clotheslines, drawers made from cardboard boxes, and other pieces of furniture—those found as secondhand pieces, and those built from whatever materials were available. John, another member of the CSWW, once told me that while in transience, he would carry aluminum foil with him to create utensils. "When you're out there, you have to carry light," he said. "I used aluminum foil for everything: dishware, cups, spoons, you name it. All the things you can do with aluminum foil—people just don't know about them, because they don't have to."

John was right. In open-space communities like the one Rudy lived in, the things that many of us overlook—that we waste away—can be, and are, often recycled and repurposed. I was rather taken, in fact, by the breadth of knowledge that the members of this community possessed, about using things as newspapers for insulation and storage units as dwelling—completely furnished with beds, tables, chairs, and so on. It is a kind of knowing, I think, that many of us just don't have, that we ignore, maybe. And yet, it is a kind of knowing that is also very necessary, driven by the basic need to survive, to live—what could be more important? It is a kind of knowing that is learned from experiences, those that have exposed them to the larger world beyond social conventions, that taught them skills about things long forgotten, or at the least, that are frequently overlooked and undervalued. Knowledge—literacy—as Brandt (2001) reminds us, has a lifespan.

Rudy, for example, knows a great deal about ranching and cattle herding—the old fashioned way with the horseback riding, the leather chaps, the cowboy hats—the works. As a child, he grew up poor, and often had to skip school in order to earn wages for the family. Rudy also knows a lot about medicine and tending to injuries from his years serving as an EMT in the U.S. Navy and thereafter. "You don't know this, but I was pre-Med at the time," he said. Vocational and practical skills aside, Rudy was also a student athlete. In fact, he almost competed for the U.S. Olympic Swim Team. "I was a champion in wrestling, but I was even better as a swimmer. Boy, could I swim!" he said, his eyes glistened with pride. Indeed Rudy is a wealth of talent and knowledge. Rudy is a man of knowing. Rudy is a teacher.

But his skills, his ways of knowing, aren't always recognized or privileged—because of supply, because of demand, and because of whom he is assumed to be: a homeless middle-aged man drowned in deficits.

And to be truthful, when I first facilitated the writing group at the shelter house, I don't think I really understood the value of everyday knowledge in the way that I do now. Had I not sat down with Rudy (and 74 others) each week and worked with him to compose narratives, I wouldn't have known or thought much about these literacies at all. These four years in the workshop, they have been the learning years—for me, for writers, for the community.

Since the beginning days of the CSWW, I have heard a wide range of opinions and comments about my work at the shelter house—some supportive, some hateful, and most, if not all, presumptuous. Supporters speak of the workshop with hints of savior complexes toward people who are poor, while critics shun my supposed enablement of unproductivity and system abuse. In both cases the rhetoric around homelessness and poverty ignores prejudicial and systemic inequalities and assumes individual deficits. Yet in all the time I have spent with men and women in the CSWW, I have still to meet anyone who actively chooses to reside at the shelter and/or "abuse" the few assistive programs available to his or her family. Given more options, for example, U.S. Navy veteran, Milton, said he would rather "weather the Midwestern winters than to depend on anyone. I'm just waiting for my pension to come through and then I'm going back into the woods. You won't find me unless you walk deep into the northeastern part of the state—in the midst of trees." For Milton, personal freedom is paramount. "I've put years

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of my life as a fireman in the Navy. Now, I just want to be left alone—me and a P.O. Box. Out there, it's just me and the trees."

Another veteran, Dale, insisted on fulltime employment despite the fact that he qualified for disability and a decent pension after two tours in the U.S. Marine Corps. "I want to find a job so that I could get my own place," he said. "As long as I am physically able, I refuse to not work." Every day, regardless of season, Dale sported a hard-plastic vest over his dress shirts—a back brace for extra support. "I just can't do heavy labor, but I can offer my editing skills and such," he said. Prior to becoming homeless, Dale worked at ACT and although an editor he was not, he proudly declared himself as a "word guru." Indeed in workshops he was the one to whom we all went for vocabulary suggestions. He was also the one who taught us Greek.

Then this past summer he got a job with the U.S. Postal Service as postmaster and the sole mail deliverer for a small town about two hours away from the shelter. But a couple of months into the training, he voluntarily withdrew from the position, stating: "I realized that I could not multitask, as would be required of me as postmaster and the only mail deliverer. I would be getting a paycheck without having earned it properly." And so it was. Dale quit for fear of falling short on his duties.

In this way he, like Milton, like Rudy, like the 72 other CSWW members aspire to the same things we all do: to earn an honest living, to participate in community, to lead an independent life. Indeed by in large, few, if any, person living in perpetual poverty and/or homelessness is doing so out of sloth or by choice. That is a middle-class assumption, I think, to insist on the abundance of options. Blaming the individual— holding him responsible for his circumstances, those of which assumingly stem from

124

poor decisions—requires little thought and even lesser effort. A person's homelessness is hardly, if ever, a simple matter of economics untouched by other deeply rooted trauma and struggles. Moreover, homelessness is not synonymous with illiteracy, as is often assumed. In fact, nowhere have I witnessed more ways of knowing than at the shelter, nowhere have I learned more about the community than inside the CSWW. From Dale to Milton to Rudy, I've discovered the world of cattle ranchers, farmers, loggers, Greek classics, athletics, firefighting. From Alvin—photography and bilingualism. From John—architecture and music. From Melvin—graphics and tattoo artistry. Together and individually, these men and women embody knowledge and strengths. They are veterans and adults who experienced homelessness—yes—but more importantly, they are veterans and adults who challenge dominant narratives of deficits ascribed to them—through their readings, through their writings, through their participation in the CSWW.

Indeed I have had the privilege of witnessing the literacies and the writing processes of writers like Clark, a U.S. Army veteran and a woodcarver, who only recently discovered writing at the age of 57. Prior to the CSWW, Clark had "not picked up the pen since the 10th grade." He recalled mostly red ink marks by teachers who were more concerned with correctness than content. "I just didn't like writing, or school for that matter," he said, "which is probably why I graduated 451 out of 452 students in my high school." He chuckled at the thought and added, "What I really want to know, though, is, who's this one kid that I beat out." Always good humored about things, Clark is, in fact, a natural storyteller with a keen awareness of his audience. His cadence carries with it an earnestness and honesty that is only his, both off and on the page. These days, especially in the middle of the night or mid-morning, he will wake up and compose stories inside

his black and white composition notebook. "Isn't that what writers do?" he asked. "Writers write, and I'm a writer." But of course, you wouldn't know that by his high school grades.

In fact there isn't much you could learn about a person's ways of knowing or capabilities from grades or test scores or designated skill levels. Makes you wonder why we privilege these numbers as "tells-all" to begin with. Take U.S. Army veteran, Danny, for example. I know him as an avid reader of literature, a fan of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and Wyss's *The Swiss Robinson Crusoe*. But in elementary school, Danny said, "It wasn't always this way. I was born dyslexic so reading used to be a challenge. When I started the first grade, I could barely maintain the lowest reading level of the class. But then I remember the moment when it all clicked and I could read. I was reading Sunday funnies and the first word that I figured out all by myself was 'handsome.' After that, I went from reading four books that previous summer to 63 books the following." Hearing about Danny's literacy history makes me think of three things: 1) he loved reading, 2) because he did, he read at home, and 3) that moment where "it all clicked" for him, well, that didn't happen because he was in the lowest reading level in class. It happened in spite of it. Certainly the man is extraordinarily literate (in more ways than one), not to mention the fact that he also has a very interactive imagination as can be seen in his writing.

As a writer, Danny composes very dialogue-intensive fantasies. The exchanges between his characters are beautifully economical, illustrating scene, characterization, relationships, and tension. What is particularly interesting to me as a teacher and literacy researcher is that, although the stories are fictitious, they reveal a very personal side of

126

him that many people do not know. For one, he used to be a Dungeons Master, which means that he created plotlines and characters for live-Dungeons and Dragons role-play and re-enactments. Moreover these stories are a way for him to respond to the violence he has witnessed in the community—to the good, the bad, the ugly, to all of it. "People are just so unkind and violent to one another," he said. "My characters are no different. They do things to each other that sometimes make me gasp." Now, by no means am I a psychologist but I can certainly connect the dots between what Danny, the narrator writes on the page, and what Danny, the writer and person, tells me off the page. It doesn't take extra theory to make that leap, to understand that writing serves as a kind of meaning-making process for him.

In fact writers in the CSWW have shared very traumatic memories with the group, those of which they've had to peel off one layer at a time, one draft at a time. Early writings by Rudy, for example, used to be packed with clichés and stock phrases. He spoke in metaphors and generalizations, describing himself, for instance, as a butterfly inside a cocoon and his life as a river flowing past trees. In one of his drafts, he writes:

> From a young man, the flowing river covering ground, and a caterpillar with a lot of legs and metamorphosing into a young new beauty or senior old man in the glorious parts of his own destiny of death and not wanting to be missed.

Full of borrowed imagery, Rudy summarized his life rather than narrated it. He also strived for poetry, though what he achieved was a first draft loaded with naturistic allegories. It took Rudy two years of rigorous and tedious revision to uncover the many other layers, those that told of a rich history of ranch life and multiple athletic

achievements, those that he described in his own words, with his own voice. Two years, this took him. In a later draft, Rudy writes:

> I grew up [a few] miles south of Canada and west of North Dakota. [My hometown] sat on flatlands and it snowed eight months of the year with only a small window of time for spring, summer, and fall. The population consisted of [a couple hundred] people; more than half were relatives—mothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents. This was the 1950s and early 1960s.

And this:

> In summer 1976, I was 22 and coming back home from the United States Army. Mom picked me up from the airport, and cried the whole ride home. It seemed she was always crying those days; she cried the day I went into the service and she cried the day I returned. I told her, "Make up your mind. Are you sad that I had left or are you happy that I'm back?"

Without a doubt, the differences between Rudy's early drafts and his later drafts are vast and wide. Writing, for Rudy, reaped benefits and self-discovery—from seeing himself as a child victim of abuse to realizing his strengths and successes as a survivor, from calling himself a bridge troll to seeing himself as a teacher and mentor. After a couple years at the shelter, Rudy moved back home to his adopted family in a different state. He called me recently to say that he has been sober for over two years, and describes his new home as a town with a church—not bar—in every corner. "I go to my AA meeting regularly and then I run my own writing workshop for whoever wants to join," he said. I have no doubt that he is very good at it, too.

Of course, not everyone experiences positive discoveries in the workshop. Sometimes the trauma is so deeply buried in their memories and self-perceptions that they cannot get past their first drafts. For these writers, the temporariness of their stay at the shelter (and thus access to the CSWW) can be especially hindering. Melvin, for

example, started to compose about his service in Vietnam but then stopped abruptly in mid-composition. "Talking about this is going to get me in trouble," he said. Others, like Jimmy, preferred to compose around it.

More specifically Jimmy told stories about the various vocations he's had. "I've been farming my whole life, but I logged even earlier," he said. "I was logging in 1959. I was 10. Now I'm giving away my age. I built my first barn with logs and only pegs in 1962 and I tore down a 100-year-old barn in 1964. That means that barn was built during the Civil War." He also shared with me his knowledge of tools (e.g., two-man saw) and building cabins and barns without nails or heavy machinery, noting that such kind of construction is a lost craft. "People just don't make things like that anymore," Jimmy said. "It takes too long and everything is rush, rush, nowadays." At one point he also mentioned his three-year tour in Vietnam. "I was a Buck Sergeant in the U.S. Army," he said. "It was a rank I earned for being a hard worker. The Army loved us boys from [Midwestern state] because they know we're used to waking up early at 4:30 a.m. to tend to the farm animals and such. I've been working my whole life, so when I got to Vietnam, it was not different." Jimmy described the country as a "hot and stinky" place because of the "heat, humidity and swamplands. Then around the DMZ, there'd be these thick forests that were so thick and dark, you're literally stepping from day into night within steps." But after these descriptions of Vietnam, he switched to other topics such as farming, working on the railroad, and building telephone poles—his eyes wet. He didn't say why but it was obvious. Months later, Jimmy brought up the war again and said, "That's a tough one, you know. That kind of stuff is reserved for me, my therapist at the VA, and my lawyer."

Indeed the CSWW is a space of narrative explorations and discoveries as it is a space of difficult navigation. Revisiting traumatic moments can be a challenge in itself, let alone the fact that for men like Jimmy and Melvin who were homeless, there's also a time limitation on how long they could spend exploring these moments on the page. One minute they could be residing at the shelter and composing in the CSWW, another minute, they could be elsewhere—sometimes by choice, sometimes by circumstance, sometimes "just because." In this way we—the writers and I—are always working to balance between the clock and the meaning-making process. It isn't always easy, and sometimes, it simply does not work out. Sometimes, writers leave mid-process and I wonder whether they will ever get the chance to revisit drafts with others.

Nevertheless in successful moments, the CSWW is a space that affords community members a time and place to compose, to work through their past, make sense of their present, and construct their days beyond. It is a space where they participate in, and where they contribute to, the literary identity of the town. Here, a proud U.S. Marine like Alvin explores the connections between what he knows, i.e., photography, and what he seeks to develop and nurture, i.e., writing. "With a camera, I capture an image of a beautiful woman walking by the library," he said. "With a pen and paper, I do the same but in words." Here, a U.S. Air Force veteran, Lucy, experiments with literary forms—testing, moving, composing between poetry and narrative inside a small notebook that she made from purple duct tape. "In this one, I use to draft and take notes and think," she said of her handicraft. Here, community members enact their literacies; here, they uncover possibilities.

In the following four profiles, I offer you a glimpse into this space, and importantly, into the literate lives of men and women who are seemingly ordinary people but who have certainly led extraordinary lives. Most of the individuals whom I mentioned above (and others who follow) will show up in the profiles as vignettes (i.e., less detailed profiles) of writers orbiting around various spaces and "communities of audience" inside the workshop. This is necessary, I think, because in order for you to truly understand and appreciate the literacy practices and identities inside this place, you must also know who navigates inside of it—how they do it, when, and why. In Profile One about the first session held inside a church's lunchroom, for example, I introduce Michael and Angie, and explore ways in which they (Michael, in particular) co-constructed the literacy space of the workshop, all the while calling to question the roles of facilitators and that of their own in the group. Every now and then, I interrupt the main narration with a personal thought written in italics. Though seemingly tangential, these italicized moments are there to illustrate my responses (or immediate "analysis") to observations and to progress the narrative toward the "reflection," or analysis section where I further consider the significance of the first workshop. Indeed this exchange with Michael brought up issues such as negotiating space, roles, and function inside the CSWW, things that I had not anticipated. To this end the uncertainties of my dynamic with Michael and Angie were reflections of my naivety and unpreparedness for what was to come of this engagement.

Profile Two called, "The Researcher's Workshop," is a natural follow-up to the first. In this portrayal, I continue to explore, though perhaps in greater depth, my goals as the researcher and facilitator of the CSWW, and specifically, how they dictated the

practices of the group in the early days, usually in conflict rather than as complements. Doing so allows me to examine ways that my presence and efforts in these roles affected members' experiences in the workshop as well as my lessons learned. As I tell this part of the story, I uncover moments when members like Michael, Alvin, Jimmy, and many others shape what would become the prevailing culture of the CSWW. Furthermore although I initially prioritized my research objectives, workshop members eventually steered me toward engagement, community, and reciprocity. Similar to the first profile, I offer my responses (or "immediate" analysis) to the observations throughout the narrative. And like the first profile, I also conclude with a reflection section where I discuss my initial assumptions about the CSWW and consider what it means to balance my roles as the facilitator of the workshop and as the researcher in the study. In what ways did I support, and in what ways did I impede, the CSWW's movement toward a kind of third space? I recall the tenets of public engagement and how I've come to understand reciprocity through my work with community writers. The come-away piece for me, I think, is that there is no such thing as an equal "balance" between my roles and purposes, as one priority will always take precedence over another. The more I embraced reciprocity, for instance, the less rigid I became about prioritizing "consistent" data collection and considered instead, the impact that this workshop has had on group members. I also learned to be more flexible with workshop practices, and importantly, to trust that the CSWW in, and of, itself was a literacy culture in the making—by *all* participants. Thus, what had started as "The Researcher's Workshop," evolved into "The Facilitator-as-Member Workshop," or more precisely, "The Writers' Workshop."

132

Appropriately, Profile Three is called, "The Writers' Workshop" and focuses on the CSWW as a literacy space for the people, by the people, of the people. I consider such issues as why writers come to the CSWW and importantly why many of them stay. I examine group dynamics to discuss the various configurations of audience inside the workshop, including times when members both disrupt and support each other's experience and composing process. In these instances, I explore the ways in which the CSWW may reflect more closely to a "contact zone." What do these moments suggest about ownership of the workshop culture, about my role as the facilitator, about members as writers and literate beings? Certainly members have stepped into the role of facilitator from time to time and taken over the group's activities and conversations, too. They have shared with each other their multiple literacies, they have *talked* about their experiences, and they have composed about them.

In Profile Four, "A Writer's Composing Process," I consider one writer's (i.e., Rudy, whom you've met) appropriation of talk in his writing. How did Rudy bridge orality with the written form and produce an extraordinary personal essay about a life of hardship and perseverance? How has the process of telling, writing, and rewriting nonfiction narratives in the CSWW afforded him the physical and mental, the social and personal spaces to exercise what he knows and to construct who he is as a literate being?

At the core of my reflection sections for Profile Three and Profile Four, I examine the ways in which third space can exist physically and within community, as well as emotionally and within the self through drafts. In Three, I discuss how "shared" the workshop can be at times—among group members and me—and how the CSWW functions as both a physical and emotional space, or "home," for us all. Certainly not

only do members own the workshop, they also work hard to maintain it—to protect it. Then, in Four, I focus on the importance of employing multiple forms of composition inside the workshop, such as talk and how it can help facilitate discovery of narrative truths and quest for one writer as he navigated through layers of past traumas.

To conclude the main four profiles, I offer a "cameo," or post-profile of one writer's experience in the workshop. Clark, whom you have met earlier, and whom you will meet throughout the profiles, represents one of the most successful writers in the group. His journey in the past two and a half years underscores the transformative power writing as well as the importance of supporting multiple sponsorships, including the CSWW, and an expansive literacy perspective.

Overall my goal is to construct the profiles as standalones, each with its own narrative emphases and quests. At the same time, I hope that when read together, the four profiles create one bigger narrative about movement, or rather, about the "quest" toward an integrated space of diverse knowledge and possibilities. As breaks between profiles, I offer quotations called, "Why I Write," as conveyed by CSWW writers. These excerpts provide glimpses into why writers come to the CSWW in their own words.

Finally, writing and research, the kind that I do, cannot be detached of feeling or "story" (Behar, 2003; Newkirk, 2014). I don't know how to write about Clark as a woodcarver, for example, and not also see him as a father who regrets his absences, who now yearns for his daughter and savors every second spent with her, even if it is only for fives minutes at a coffee shop. I don't know how to write about Nancy as a poet without recalling her struggles with mental illness and the lobotomy almost forced onto her because of it. I don't know how to write about Carmella without knowing that she

134

paints—in oil and watercolor—or that she often dines alone, waiting—wishing—for her son and his family to join her. I don't know how to write any of this, to speak to their strengths, to bring them to life on the page, without feeling with, and for, them.

Why I Write

I was a month or so into being a full-time resident at the old Shelter House in October 2010. My STAR case manager at the time, whom I had known during my first stay at the shelter in 2004, asked me if I'd be willing to join a writing workshop that was barely starting up. The goal was for me to learn a few new things and write a journal for my daughter whom I had been away from since she was six years old. I really didn't like the idea at first, as I figured it was some school thing. The idea of using the last of my burnt up brain cells trying to learn "writing" didn't interest me. I dropped out of high school a few months shy of my 15th birthday because I thought I had better things to do in life, so why in the hell would I want to do some education crap now at the age 53?

After grinding my teeth and biting my tongue a bit, I finally told my case manager, "Yeah, sure. I'll go check it out." I mean, I couldn't exactly tell her no as the STAR Program and Shelter House had been putting up with me off and on for the last eight to nine years now, helping me get my life back on track—which wasn't all that great then or easy, believe me.

Later, I showed up to this "writing workshop".… As I strolled into the room, there was one other Shelter House resident and three other people whom I assumed were teaching the class. I had to laugh to myself, thinking, "Wow, this is quite a turnout. Don't these people got better things to do on a weeknight than sit here with a couple of homeless folks? Did they get into trouble with the law and gotta do community service?"

After a few minutes, I asked in a harsh, intimidating manner: "Why the homeless shelter?!" I was just curious to see and hear their responses (which at the time was like, "huh?"). Rossina finally cleared her throat and then mumbled something about writing and stories and *drafts*. I'm sure she and the rest of them didn't expect that question right from the get-go. I kind of glanced down underneath the table to see if their pants were still dry all the while trying to keep a straight face.

Prior to joining the group, I had never considered myself as any type of writer, so when I was asked to write during workshop class, I would just basically write about whatever...and would bring something and read it out loud for the group to hear. Then Rossina contacted me and asked me to read two of my stories at the Shelter House's first public reading at Prairie Lights in spring 2011. I didn't want to do it at first, but the more I thought about it, the more guilt and shame came about. After all, Shelter House and the STAR Program had helped me in so many ways to get my life back together again. I just couldn't turn my back on them.

That very first Prairie Lights reading made a pretty big impact on my life as far as in what I wrote and what I would write and read again in the second Prairie Lights reading and even at the Englert Theatre (which, by the way, was just too cool in and of itself).…for me to be able to express myself in what I write, that part is owed to them and the Community Stories Writing Workshop. As for the journal that I was supposed to start, that never happened. I stopped school in the early '70s because I didn't want to do no homework then, so I sure ain't going to start now (although I suppose my writings in these past couple collections, *Of the Folk*, might count as the first pages).

(Michael, 2013)

…Profile One:

The First Workshop at the Church Center

(or negotiating space and each other)

I call this profile "The First Workshop" because it represents the "first" of everything for me in this project—first anticipations, first uncertainties, first assumptions, first reflections. In this space I begin to reflect on public engagement, or more precisely, consider the differences between understanding the theoretical foundations of community-based research and programs and implementing them. Issues that arise include building trust with group members like Michael and Angie, figuring out our roles with and to each other, and co-constructing the workshop space.

1. At the Church Center

By the time we arrived at the front door, Michael and Angie were already there, waiting. Matt, Meg, and I had wanted to get the church center earlier than four o'clock but I had a local conference that afternoon and didn't come back soon enough. At the front lawn of the brick building, I noticed a White male in his 50's (whom I would later learn was Michael) walking away from entrance, almost as if stepping aside for us—or perhaps, rethinking his decision to participate in the workshop. He gave us no eye contact, and I was unsure whether he was even there for the workshop. Luckily Angie stood nearby, and when I saw her, I felt a bit more at ease—happy, that she had come.

137

"Oh hey, there you are," she said and smiled. I've always loved that smile of hers. We had met at the co-op a year ago, and every time I knew she was working the register, hers was the line I would always choose. Angie was the one who advised me to always buy meat at the co-op "because you just don't know where the other places get their goods," she said. She also warned me that the raw organic dog bones were not to be mistaken for soup bones. "They look the same, but they are handled differently," she said. Just this fall semester, she enrolled in my Elements of Writing class at the community college, and learned about the writing workshop during one of our discussions. "I heard you said you were doing a workshop at the shelter?" Angie asked after class. "I am staying there right now and I would very much like to join if I can." Thrilled, I told her about our first meeting, uncertain whether she would actually come.

The five of us entered the glass door and into the building. We made our way down the stairs to the lunchroom. Because I knew we were "late," because I felt we shouldn't have been, my hands trembled as I searched for the key. "Why doesn't this door have a key hole?" I asked.

The hallway where we stood was especially dark. In fact, the only light came from the stairway and the men's restroom, and as I stood there contemplating on the absence of a keyhole, Angie and Matt and Meg and Michael felt the walls for a switch.

"I don't think that's the room," Angie finally said. She and Matt pointed to the door behind me on the far left side.   (Sometimes when I am nervous, I lose my bearings. I don't concentrate. I ask too many questions. I say the wrong things. I unlock the wrong door.)

138

Weeks prior Meg, Matt, and I had visited the church center during the free lunch hour, so in some ways, the lunchroom in which we met for the first workshop did not seem as foreign. Though it was a lot quieter and emptier, the humidity was still there, and the room, like the cafeterias at schools, was furnished with three aisles of tables. At the front center of the room was a stage, and at the front left side of that was an old, wooden piano. From the back of the room, at the immediate left side of the entrance, a large bulletin board hung—on it, were announcements for community events.

We opted for the upper far right side, by the piano. It was around the same area where Matt, Meg, and I had eaten our afternoon meal when we visited the place. I don't know if the three of us were intentional about our seating choice, but the spot, at least for me, felt right, seemingly committing us all to the room, to the workshop, to each other.

1. Digression

When I moved to LA, one of my first missions was to turn blonde. I needed to find a good hairstylist, one who knew how to not turn my Asian hair into orange, but platinum. This was during the pre-Yelp days, requiring me to do old-school research. My first effort was to scope out Melrose Avenue (this was back when it was still cool to walk down this strip). When I spotted what looked like a trendy salon, I rushed to the door. Yet no sooner had I walked in, did it occur to me that the place specialized in African American hair. And still, another yet, I was already inside—committed.

At the counter, I asked the woman if I could make an appointment. She glanced at me, chuckled a bit, and then did the kindest thing that anyone could have done for me at that moment. She referred me to another salon.

2. At the Church Center

We spread out our seating so as to avoid any hierarchy and/or exclusivity. Matt and Meg sat across from me with a few stools between them. We had anticipated, or maybe we had hoped, that Michael and Angie would sit somewhere in between us. But as it were, Michael took a seat to my left (one seat in between us) and Angie took a seat to Meg's right (also one seat in between them). Matt then quickly got up and walked to the other end next to Michael (again, one seat apart).

Our "seating chart," the "intended" seating chart, was challenged—shifted and dictated by Michael's and Angie's choices. They did not know us, at least Michael didn't know any of us, and it was evident that he and Angie were going to distance themselves physically on this first day of workshop. And quite frankly, why wouldn't they? It's the same way when I go to the DMV or when I enter any public places, for that matter. If there are empty seats, I space myself out.

2. Digression

It doesn't matter who you are—man or woman, old or young—the elbows swing and fly injudiciously. No one, and I do mean, no one stands in the way of Vietnamese folk when

it comes to *che,* or red-bean tapioca pudding mixed with coconut milk—at least not at this storefront in Little Saigon. The line stretches for blocks at a time with patrons who are overly eager, if not physically, impatient to get their hands on a cup of that dessert.

Of course, looking from afar, you just wouldn't know that. You wouldn't know because you would assume things about this place like I did, things like rules and politeness and etiquette, for example. You would assume them because you wouldn't know not to. You wouldn't know that, here, old ladies could throw punches way better than Bruce Lee ever could. You wouldn't know, either, to mind your own business and just hope that you make it to the front of the line at some point. In fact the first time I waited for my turn, I made the mistake of telling an elderly woman that she was cutting in line. "Excuse me, the line starts there," I said, and then pointed to the long, tangled braid of people behind us. Not only did she give me shade, she shoulder-butt me right before landing her elbow into my solar-plex. So you know, when I say "man or woman, old or young," I mean that here, Confucius (and whatever else he may have said about respect) just does not exist, or if he does, he's standing in line with the rest of everybody else—fists and elbows flying.

3. At the Church Center

Michael and Angie sat quietly at first, as Meg and I made small talk (mainly with each other), although I cannot remember the specifics of our exchanges. At one point, I considered if our familiarity with one another was excluding the two of them, and I repeatedly uttered, "I'm sorry," before every sentence.

141

I cannot speak for Meg or Matt, but my self-consciousness was especially heightened that day. Ivan Illich's *To Hell with Good Intentions* was all over my psyche and I worried constantly of coming across as 1) that jerk with a savior complex, 2) that jerk who stereotyped the homeless, or 3) that jerk in combination, savior complexes, stereotypes—*everything*. In some ways I felt inferior to Michael and Angie, and at the same time, I worried that Michael and Angie would feel inferior to me—*to us*.   Part of my discomfort and awkwardness, too, was that I knew I was, indeed, an outsider to Angie's and Michael's world, and by that logic, they were outsiders to mine. They knew it. I knew it.

We opened our session with an introduction—our name, our background, our reasons for being at the workshop. I tripped over my greeting when Michael asked, what seemed like a simple enough question, "Why the homeless shelter?" Ill-prepared I danced around my reasons, careful to choose the right wording. It took me for a bit of a spin, and thereafter, I found my attention shifting to Michael who, for most of the session, appeared reserved and distant, and yet at times, very opened all at once.

From his introduction we learned that he became aware of our workshop from his caseworker at the shelter. He had an 11-year-old daughter to whom he wanted to give his journal, a journal that he would write while participating in this workshop. This journal, he said, would be about his life's experiences, about lessons learned, about moments of regrets as well as triumphs. We learned, too, that his daughter was living with her mother in a different state.

Throughout our initial exchanges, Michael kept insisting that he would need to know us better before he would divulge more details of his life. Yet with each

142

disclaimer, he also shared more stories—intimate ones—about past drug abuse, depression, and street life. In fact, Michael has been in and out of homelessness since his mid-30s. It was "…a challenge to survive," he said. "I think I thrive on it sometimes." Chronic homelessness. I don't think I knew that there was such a thing.

3. Digression

When Will told me about the new shelter house facility and the opportunities for specialized educational programs, I immediately called my advisor and told her that I would start a writing workshop, a pedagogically grounded literary space for community writers. That week, I knocked on another one of my professor's office door and told her I was enrolling in her adult literacy seminar that fall. It would help me think through my goals for the writing group. After, I gloated to friends about the idea. In my elation, I asked two of them to join me on this venture. Until that point, I had never talked about collaborating with either one of them on anything. I knew very little about their work style, their philosophies, and their goals. I knew only that I liked them.

4. At the Church Center

Though Michael carried with him a cynicism about the world, his sentiments were almost always tempered with humor—however so subtly—and he made sure that we saw that lighter side of him during this first workshop. On his political views, he noted, "I am not on the right side or on the left side. I'm what you call the middle finger side. It's my

message to the system." Comments like these received laughter among the group—ice breakers, they were, throughout our first meeting. It was Michael's way to connect with everybody, but also his way to evaluate us. As he spoke, he often looked around at each person, watching for our reactions, carefully gauging. "He's a quiet one, over there," he said at one point, and then nudged his head toward Matt. Again, we all burst into laughter, and Michael, though selective with his smiles, seemed pleased that we did.

Indeed there were many moments during the ninety minutes when Michael paused and gestured to others in the group, moments when he conveyed that he was listening, that he could empathize, that he could be supportive—as a peer and even, as a facilitator. I remember one instance, in particular, when I confessed to the group that I had never finished a novel in my life. "I would read it half way," I said, "and then asked someone in class to tell me what happened." Unlike Matt, Meg, and Angie who sort of laughed it off, Michael acknowledged it. "That was just your way of survival, and whatever. We all do it—how ever we can, whatever it takes," he said. I thanked him for the validation. In my mind, I wondered, too, if he was talking about himself.

By the end of our first workshop, Michael asked us if we had read the newspaper recently. "Did you guys hear about that homeless guy whose body was discovered in an alley? See, nobody really cares who you are. In the end, you're just a chalk outline," he said. Without further words, Michael lifted himself out of the seat and motioned away from the table.

"Will we see you next week?" I asked.

He hesitated at first with his, "I'm not sure if I trust you yet" response. Then he smiled and said, "Yes, I suppose I'll give it a try."

144

Reflection

Weeks after the first workshop, I drove by the newly open shelter house facility to pick

up paperwork. By the front window, at the far right corner of the building, I saw Michael

sitting, staring blankly out at the parking lot. I wondered what he was thinking. Was it

about his daughter? His trauma? His depression? His homelessness? I wondered and yet I

realized, too, that there was no way for me to know, because these kinds of questions

would not be answered, not anytime soon, and I would not ask them.

The temptation is always there, of course, to wonder about a person's private life,

particularly if he or she is someone with whom you work. It is even more pronounced if

he or she is homeless—the how, the when, the why—even though there may be no

justifiable answers. I have never asked any of the 75 participants this question directly,

though I would be dishonest to say that I never wondered. After all, it is the big elephant

in the room whenever a new member walks in. How did he or she get here?

In the early days of the workshop people would often ask me why I chose to start

a writing workshop at a homeless shelter. The scholarly answers were easiest to offer: to

advocate for social justice, challenge assumptions of deficits about homeless persons,

expand the boundaries of literacy practices and identities, build on what it means "to

know," and connect the university to the wider community. Similarly the personal

answers were just as easy to recall. "The workshop itself represents the beliefs and

values I hold as a writer, as a teacher, as a researcher, as a community member."

"Because I feel especially connected to the men and women and families who experience

homelessness." "Because I can appreciate what it means to seek some kind of permanence, and home."

But these responses—scholarly and personal—have also been revised, recrafted, and fine-tuned over the years. They do not represent the fuller, or maybe even darker, side to why I started the workshop. The truth is I chose to facilitate a writing group at a *homeless shelter* because I "wanted to know" more about writers who were homeless, and I *assumed* that they would tell me what I wanted to know, or worse, I *expected* that they would. And just when I cannot sound anymore crass, there was (and is) also that "do-gooder" in me (Illich, 1968, 2010). (Is it not part of the human condition to want to do good?) Although it is a side that I have learned to critique, a side that many of us have, I think, I chose to start a writing workshop at a homeless shelter because I assumed that such a place *would* and *could* benefit from what I had to offer.

I should pause and clarify that my assertions here are not intended as some sort of self-loathing confession or get-rid-of-the-guilt cleanse. These sentiments are very real and present to me at all times and I struggle with them always—that tension between what I know and what I feel, especially in "the early stages of this work." (I will recall iterations of this clause many times throughout my dissertation because eventually things—priorities and goals—will shift for me over time.) Furthermore I wish to stress that I do not advocate for no action, no exploration, no interest in the community. Being overly self-critical can be dangerously paralyzing, if not selfish. And in fact what has always frustrated me about people's (e.g., graduate students, my fellow peers) take on Illich's *To Hell with Good Intentions*, for instance, is their binary response to condemn any kind of outreach efforts at all without further complicating the matter. If anything,

146

the essay serves to remind each of us to self-reflect, to be mindful of our roles, our privileges, and importantly, of our presumptions when we enter a culture other than our own. To believe otherwise is neither thoughtful nor helpful. After all there is something called "negotiating a fine balance" between personal motivations and service. At some point, we have to just be okay with that. Of course, the journey to get to that "some point" can be especially complicated and contentious, and in Profile Two, I reflect on the early days of the workshop when I struggled to identify such balance.

That said, what motivates me to come back week after week to the workshop has evolved significantly over the years. My work and commitment would not have survived and the workshop would not have lasted this long, if they hadn't. On the one hand, there is nothing wrong with *wanting* to know, to understand, to foster collaboration and acceptance. On the other hand I must also embrace the fact that I won't learn of the answers—because sometimes, I simply "can't know" as was the case with Michael. This tension is necessary for my work as the workshop facilitator, member, and researcher (Fitgerald, et al., 2012). It is a tension with which I writhe each and every day as I renegotiate why I am at the shelter house, what I want to learn, and with and for whom.

Indeed I cannot begin to articulate what I learned from Michael just on this workshop day (and what I would come to understand in the next four years). Michael called my attention to the importance, and sometimes, the challenge of building trust with writers in the group (Behar, 2003; Geertz, 2002; Sunstein, & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). He, himself, for example, was unsure of the group at first and whether he should even attend the writing workshop. In fact, he almost walked away when we arrived. This was because he hadn't decided if he liked or trusted us, yet. And frankly, why would or should he?

147

As a writing teacher—at the university and the community college—I have never assumed that students would immediately like or respect or trust me. Those things come with time and consistency. But as a writing teacher, I also have the benefit of students' doubt—to some degree. There is a certain power and privilege that comes with that role endorsed by the academic institution that did not necessarily carry over into the church center's lunchroom that day at our first workshop. Trust would come with time, patience, consistency, and importantly, "connection" because without it, without rapport, none of these things would matter (Sunstein, & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). (I will write more on this point later.)

From Michael I also learned that writers will come. Writers will participate. Writers will react. Writers will assess. And writers will lead (Elbow, 1998; Lave, & Wenger, 1991). These observations are evident in at least four instances during our workshop, from Michael's and Angie's seating choices to Michael's inquiries and comments. First, as you may recall, Michael and Angie sat at different spots than in the places that we had planned per our "seating chart." Neither of them chose the chairs between or near Matt and Meg, and instead, sat with at least one seat between them and whoever else the other person. In fact their decisions to space themselves out as such, actually caused *Matt*, one of the facilitators, to switch *his* seat. These choices bear both symbolic and literal significance, suggesting the organic and unpredictable dynamics of the group; that is, workshop participants will always have a say in how they interpret the space, regardless of facilitators' plans or intentions. Even though we may prepare for each session (or in this case, seating arrangements), for instance, there is no way for us to

148

predict how the rest of the group will make sense of these plans. In fact workshop members can often dictate how these sessions are run.

Consider, for instance, that moment when Michael questioned our intentions for starting the CSWW. "Why the homeless?" he asked during our meet-and-greet round robin. Not only did his inquiry incite uneasiness among the three of us facilitators, it also directed our conversation and how we, as a group, would spend our time and engage with each other in this space (Gee, 2013). In this instance, Michael highlighted our outsider-ness rather than his own; by placing himself as the asker (Wortham, 2001), he was posing as the gatekeeper of the homeless community. He was not entering into our community as we—Matt, Meg, and I—were entering into his.

Third, Michael continued to steer our conversation when he described his political party as the "middle-finger." Indeed this statement was both humorous as it was meant to convey his own sentiments about people in positions of power (Gee, 2013). As he looked around the room and watched for our reactions to his comments, Michael was as much the observer, or the one *researching* us, as we were of him. Similarly, in this moment he also served as a peer and as a facilitator of the group. When I shared my reading history, for example, he justified my inability to finish a book as a survival tactic, thus taking the role of the validator.

Indeed the exchange with Michael in the first workshop illuminated for me the two-sidedness of our dynamics. I learned that we, the facilitators, will always be sharing our roles and responsibilities with workshop participants like him and Angie (Bruffee, 2003; Elbow, 1998). And gogether, we will define what the group stood for (Bruffee, 2003). (Is that not what a third space is, or at least the movement toward such a space?)

149

At the same time, as facilitators, we will also be in the position to "mediate" the context for members like Michael and Angie to access these roles (Gee, 2013; Wortham, 2001). For example, when I chose to disclose my personal reading history with the group, I also created opportunities for Michael to respond and connect with me. Granted, I did not know whether he (or Angie) would respond in the way that he did; however, I anticipated that my disclosure would at least invite a lively discussion about our childhood literacies.

In many ways, the first workshop with Michael and Angie foreshadows the observations that I would come to notice and the tensions with which I would negotiate as I enter this community of adult writers who join the group by choice, at a time when there may be other urgencies such as securing employment and housing. Naturally for the writers who select to participate, they will come because they prioritize writing, storytelling, community. They will come because they value them. They will come because they recognize that creative expression is not a luxury but an essential to what makes us complete, and human.

And equally important, from Michael, though perhaps from Angie even more so, I learned something about my own participation in the group—my anxieties, worries, fears; my assumptions; and my mistakes. For one, we—*I*—may have focused too much attention on Michael and not enough on Angie. Although Angie was relatively quiet in the same way that she was in my writing class, I wonder about my efforts that day—how much did I really try to motivate her to talk?

To be fair, Meg and I tried engaging Angie in conversation, and she, in fact, offered a few sentences here and there. When we talked about our writing exercise, for instance, Angie commented about the wastefulness of political campaigns. "I wrote about

150

the election," she said. "I don't like all the campaign things that people pass out. It's so wasteful. All that money spent on notepads with their names on it." Excited to hear her speak, Meg added, "Yes. And the pens. Those usually only have two runs," and then I asked, "What inspired you to think about waste?" But the conversation did not go further thereafter. Angie smiled shyly, shrugged her shoulders, and said, "It was just something to write about, I guess." And then she was done.

Or maybe she wasn't, and I just thought she was? Maybe, I didn't remark about her (Geertz, 2002; Sunstein, & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). Maybe, that as a writer, I was interested in the more animated members like Michael—someone I imagined I could write about. Maybe I was thinking too much about this workshop as a research project, and not enough as a facilitator. Maybe. Or maybe, I am way off, here. Maybe we gave Angie attention but she was genuinely more interested in what Michael had to say. Or maybe she would have talked if Michael had not. Maybe.

Whatever the case, my notes suggest that I have nothing on her after she commented about campaign waste (Geertz, 2002). This doesn't mean that she did not participate. This also does not mean that Angie was less important or less interesting than Michael. This just means that I stopped taking notes on her, thus calling attention to my biases as the researcher of the CSWW and how they dictate the "findings" I discuss (not to mention, the culture of the workshop itself) as well as the construction of the CSWW, or rather, its movement, toward a third space.

In the early days, specifically, the writing group did not seem very close to any kind of a third space at all because I had not figured out, or fully *understood*, my goals and roles. In fact for the next year or so I would continue to struggle between who I was

151

as the researcher and who I was as the facilitator of the writing group—from making sense of my priorities and goals to negotiating my anxieties about connecting with writers who are homeless. I would wonder often whether group members liked the writing workshop enough to come back. I would reflect always on my own facilitation. Did my efforts to engage with members like Angie, for example, shut off Michael's momentum, a person who seemed especially guarded? I would question every now and again, why I cared to keep *everyone* talking.

I remember the first time I taught a nonfiction writing workshop at the university, I used to attend to the more talkative students, or maybe more accurately, I used to rely on them to alleviate my own fear. The more they talked, the less I had to—make mistakes, offend them, reveal my nerves. Most of this was due to nerves and lack of confidence. It was my way to deflect away from potential silences in the room.

At this first workshop session, my anxieties circled around the uncertainty of my own role, of Meg's, of Matt's inside the writing group. What exactly did it mean to call ourselves facilitators? Who were we to the workshop, to the writers, and to each other (Gee, 2013; Wortham, 2001)?

Why I Write

I write because I can't always take pictures. Sometimes people will ask, "Are you a writer?" The answer is "No." I write, or better yet, I blurt. I am a blurter. Yes, I know that's not a real word. But, you get my point. Recently, I have come to relive my memories and observations by describing them on paper, as opposed to what I used to do in photography. Like photography, writing has different areas. When you take photos, black and white means "drama," abstracts are fiction, sports represent adventure, an improvised street photography is a short story, an odd photo is a poem, and a nude picture is a romance novel. Just as the photographer has lenses, cameras, tripods, light meters, the writer has a typewriter, laptop, i-Pad, paper, pen, and so on. Both forms are art with rules that I, for one, do not often follow—I don't know many artists who do. We have a general idea of guidelines, but rules are meant to be broken. So there. That is why I write—or blurt. It's an attempt of my hands to keep up with my head. Writing is way harder than photography wherein, I can blink and I have it. Goodbye. CLICK!

("Aba Nico, Sal Chichon," 2013)

153

…Profile Two:

The Researcher's Workshop

(or space and negotiating goals)

I intentionally call this profile "The Researcher's Workshop" because it highlights the initial assumptions I made as insider-*Outsider*, participant-*Observer* (Geertz, 2002; Sunstein, & Chiseri-Strater, 2012) of the workshop during the first year. These assumptions dictated much of the culture inside this writing space—how researchers-facilitators and members positioned our *selves* in relation to each other, and importantly, how the CSWW would progress toward a kind of third space. As a self-reflection (Behar, 2003; Sunstein, & Chiseri-Strater, 2012), this profile is about my process as a researcher and as a facilitator—my struggles to negotiate goals, my unpreparedness to collaborate with colleagues, my efforts to relate with group members, and my witness to writers' co-construction of culture and space. In short, this profile illuminates the ways in which the writing group shifted over time, and in particular, my role in these shifts, one that began primarily as a researcher and evolved to a participating facilitator.

1. Digression

The formaldehyde had pickled the organs down to rubber. I wasn't sure why Allison still crunched her nose. Or why Lucy giggled without pause. Or why John and Peter locked hands. But I knew that we each had a scalpel in our hands, and that I had to be careful not to swing mine around, that I had to watch for anyone else who might.

154

"Look inside and label what you see," Mr. McCombe said, "with these." He held up a pin and thread and then pointed down at the frog nailed to the cardboard. For weeks, he had prepared us for the dissection: find the heart, label it; find the liver, label it; find the lungs, label them. Our task seemed simple enough. What else was there?

—Not his eyes, the stillness of his stare.

—Not his spots, the staining of his skin.

—Not his arms, the defeat of his pose.

For the next hour, as the class poked and marveled at each anatomical discovery, I worked as quickly as I could. I did not pause to think or feel or know. I labeled only as many parts as visible, moving rhythmically from flesh to cardboard.

Mapping.

Learning.

Forgetting.

1. Inside the Blue Room and onward to the Shelter

For the second workshop, we met in the Blue Room on the second floor (first floor off the split foyer) of the church center. Although we did not know the formal name of it, the three of us designated it as the "Blue Room" because of the dull blue carpeting. Half the size of the lunch commons in the basement, though still quite big, it had two main double-door entrances that opened up to a living-room space with sofas and a coffee table at the center. To the far right wall was the fireplace, and to the far left of that same wall was an old black piano shaped like a horizontal harp. Windows stretched across the

155

center wall, the longest one in the rectangular room. During the day, the place was lit by natural lighting, but by four o'clock in the afternoon and in fall time, it required the illumination of ceiling lamps. To the far left side was a kitchen equipped with a range, counter, and refrigerator. Small square-shaped tables lined up against the walls, half against the center wall, and half against the wall between the two entrances. Random pots of plants sat throughout the room, some behind the tables.

Although it was not the nicest space in the building, it was much brighter, less isolating, and much friendlier than the cafeteria. At the least it felt more like a living room and we imagined we would conduct all future sessions here until the construction of the new shelter facility was complete. Our contacts at the shelter had said it could be any week now, but none of us, I don't think, were anxious to change locations yet again.

On this particular meeting, only Michael attended. Angie did not make it. In fact, she was absent from my writing class all week, which was very unusual for her. I wondered if it had to do with our last workshop, if I had somehow upset her. But a week later, Angie returned to the workshop and the writing class and explained that she was in the process of moving out of the state. Disappointed, my heart sunk as she spoke. It felt too soon and I wished that I had been more attentive while she was local. Hers would be the first of many departures that I'd witness during the next four years. Most times I could roll with it, reminding myself that such was the nature of working with writers in transience. But sometimes I would struggle with the loss, no matter how inevitable their departure.

At the start, the four of us each sat a few seats apart once again (and some in separate corners) of the living room, so that we were either facing each other or we were

adjacent to one another. Despite the distance, this time around felt like we were old friends meeting for coffee. I also brought pastries from a local bakery, but only Matt and Meg ate the petit fours. Michael did not care for the sweets. Compared to the first meeting, Michael spoke even more frequently on this day. He made eye contact, too—a positive connection. I wondered whether his newfound comfort level was due to the living-room space, to the presence of sweets, or to the fact that it was our second meeting.

"I wrote something during the week," he told us. He pulled out a wrinkled, folded piece of paper from his pocket. "I can read it to you if you want, or whatever. It's just about my morning at the current shelter. I mean, I also talked about how I almost lost my keys."

And so it went. We listened to Michael read through the draft, which was about less than a paragraph long. He spoke in a very monotonous tone, and his words overlapped one another. Midway through his reading, I felt inclined to get out of my chair and sit on the floor by the coffee table. Somehow I thought that by closing the distance between us, I could better understand what he was saying, I could better add gaps between words. It's like when people assume I don't know English and then they start speaking slower and louder. Why do they do that?

When Michael finished reading, he looked up and said, "I know it ain't much and all and whatever, but it's a start." A disclaimer. Funny how all writers do that when they are unfamiliar with the crowd, when they are uncertain of their writing.

2. Digression

157

The first time my draft was up for workshop, Maria told me to "crank it down a few notches. You're trying too hard to be Sedaris," she said. "Your work is more like Amy Tan's, but like even more 'best seller.'" That's considered an insult when you're in an MFA writing workshop where everyone aspires for Graywolf Press and the likes. It was never her smugness that offended me, though, as it was the hand gestures she'd make while her mouth moved. Maria's right hand would motion toward my seat from across the room, then as if grabbing onto a volume button, she'd turn the invisible knob clockwise, one small rotation at a time, clenching her teeth all the while so ever unapologetically.

2. *Inside the Blue Room and onward to the Shelter*

Michael's first draft was brief and offered us little to go by. Still we looked for strengths, or what I often call, *possibilities*, places that seemed emotionally charged and where the narrator could explore further. In Michael's, it was when the narrator expressed desperation from his perceived lack of choice. He writes: "…when I reached for my watch pocket for my key to the locker, it couldn't be found….So I had no choice but to get a pair of box cutters and cut the lock." The story ended shortly thereafter in which he found his key. What was interesting, of course, wasn't the fact that the narrator found his keys, but that he felt compelled to take matters into his own hands rather than request assistance from a shelter house staff. And so for the next hour, we stretched the conversation for as long as we could, taking turns asking him about his decision to use a box cutter. Certainly part of our questioning stemmed from genuine interest. But the part

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of it, I think, was motivated by something else. Perhaps we were afraid he'd feel insecure about his writing if we did not comment enough. We, after all, knew what it was like to sit through a silent workshop. Or perhaps we were hoping he would reveal more about himself in the prolonged discussion; perhaps we were hoping we could invite subsequent drafts. Looking in, I imagine the workshop must've appeared as a successful exchange because everyone was talking and engaging, and moments of pause seemed purposeful. But somewhere in the back of my mind, I couldn't help recognize that there we were, the *three* of us as facilitators (and researchers) with Michael, asking him questions—examining him, one sentence at a time.

3. Digression

I ran into a former classmate, "Lisa," at the bakery this morning. I was delighted to see her because I had always wanted for us to be friends. Years earlier, she and I had clashed on something I had stupidly said about writing stories: "Just because you think you have a story, it doesn't mean you should write about it." It was an asshole thing to say, a statement stemmed from my own arrogance and perhaps self-loathe, having just graduated from the Nonfiction Writing Program and thinking that the world was full of wannabes—myself included. (I was ready to throw in the towel on my own writing.) And so when we ran into each other at the bakery, part me wanted Lisa to know that my perspectives had evolved and that I had since revised them. But sometimes, you know, people remember only the last worst thing you said.

159

Soon after our polite greeting, Lisa remarked at my "project" at the homeless shelter. "How is that coming along, anyway?" she said. When I told her that it was going well, she just nodded, but not necessarily in agreement. It was more like a "waiting for my turn to speak," patronizing nod, the kind with an upside down smile. (You know the kind.) I was unsure how to react because even though her disapproval was apparent, she was nodding. Worse than the emotional limbo I was in, though, was what she said following her up and down head motions. "You do realize that you are exploiting these men and women in the workshop, don't you?" she asked.

Caught off guard, yet again, I found myself unintentionally bobbing my own head. I didn't want to sound thoughtless, or worse, superior. "Well, yes. I can see what you mean," I stuttered. "But the writers come back every week. Most have been with me for over a year or two, now. They enjoy sharing stories and thinking about nonfiction writing. I don't know if they would say I'm exploiting them by any means."

I hated that I wasn't more eloquent, more confident in my response. It seemed the only thing my tentativeness achieved was a persistent rebuttal.

"Yes, but you're using their stories, aren't you?" Lisa said. Her voice slowed down until she was pausing between words. "You're. Running. A. Workshop. And. You're. Making. Them. Write. Intimately. About. Their. Lives. And. Then. You're. Telling. These. Stories. In. Your. Research. THAT'S. Exploitation." Lisa clasped her hands together and placed both elbows on the table. Leaning in, she spoke at normal speed again. "They just don't think of it that way because capital 'D' discourse tells them that they should be grateful to you, that they are somehow benefiting from you," she said.

160

By this point, my head nodded nonstop and obediently. What else could I have said? "Nuh-ahh," "No way," "You wish"? The truth was, Lisa beat me up pretty badly that day, and not only didn't I fight back, I also bent over and said, "Please kick here."

3. Inside the Blue Room and onward to the Shelter

By the third workshop, our session and thereafter, were held primarily in the new shelter's "training room," a windowless rectangular space furnished with six desks (two occupants per desk) that faced a projector screen. It reminded me of an oversized walk-in closet, the kind of place where companies send you to watch sexual harassment and diversity training videos or fill out 401K forms. Even so, compared to the lunchroom and the Blue Room, this new location was at least more accessible for shelter house clients, which meant that we could potentially host more members.

To create a friendlier, more collaborative writing environment, Matt, Meg, and I would move the desks together into a semi-conference table before each session. We also wanted to avoid designations such as "the front of the room" or "the head of the table," so we'd spread out our seating like we did at the church center, with Matt at one corner, Meg at the other, and me sitting several seats between them.

In general this seating arrangement worked out well except for the fact that we sat inside the training room at the shelter, a much smaller space where all our actions and choices became much more magnified to each other, and most importantly, to ourselves. For Matt, Meg, and I, this translated into silent resistances about our goals for the workshop. Although the three of us agreed on the larger themes of civic democracy,

161

teaching and learning collaboration, and research, we didn't necessarily see eye-to-eye on implementation and priorities. We rarely discussed how each of us ranked these goals either; certainly they did not all hold equal significance. We also rarely talked about our personal commitments to the workshop—how much, and how often, we could contribute to the operations of running it.

For me, the workshop was a very personal project, one rooted in my own history of learning from the home, of discovering writing later in life. Although I did not (and do not) know what it's like to be homeless, I understood that, for many of the men and women at the shelter, their literacies, similar to mine, came from life experiences rather than books. I also knew they practiced the kinds of literacy that weren't always valued, particularly in schools and the community. I suppose you might say, I felt a certain connection to clients at the shelter house, and because I did, I also fit myself into the community with ease. This is not to say Matt and Meg did not, as I do not claim to know their personal responses to the place. I acknowledge only that, because I, myself, felt a connection with the shelter and its clients, I also assumed a kind of knowledge about the community—how ever unwarranted and flawed—that led me to take charge of the project in the direction that I thought was most fitting. During our collaboration, for instance, I had a habit of over-functioning for the three of us. I assumed the role of preparing for each week's sessions. I selected readings, crafted and suggested writing prompts, set research goals and responsibilities, and overlooked data collection. Part of this was because I wanted to do these tasks. They were aspects of the work that I had anticipated on doing, that I had imagined would be necessary to run the writing group. The other part was because of my presumptions—I assumed that no one else would, or

could, fulfill these tasks otherwise. At times, it seemed the three of us had very different life priorities and our working styles were mismatched. In retrospect I realize that, perhaps, we may have gone into our collaboration rather naively. We, or at least *I*, assumed too much—about the workshop, about the members, about each other, about myself.

I should pause here, and declare that the three of us, Matt, Meg, and I, are very good friends and by no means do I regret our coming together. As colleagues, I confide in Meg, for instance, in ways that I do not with any other, and I trust her intentions fully. We do not always approach our scholarship similarly, but we advise each other very honestly and critically. Matt has also been a wonderful friend and colleague to me. During the time we worked together, he helped me craft writing prompts, scan drafts for data, and make copies of weekly readings. Furthermore he has always been very supportive of the CSWW, and like Meg, he has never missed any of the writers' public readings. And so, when I disclose this part of my experience, I want to emphasize that I do so with the benefit of hindsight, and with the intentions of reflecting on the lessons learned—the challenges of collaborating with good friends, the importance of clear communication, and the ongoing negotiations of expectations.

The truth is, collaboration is hard. Collaboration is process. Collaboration is planning. Collaboration is flexibility. And above all, collaboration is transparency. To this key point, I may have worried too much about stepping on my friends' toes, or worse, about being misconstrued by them. As a consequence, I found myself speaking vaguely and politely about matters that I should have articulated more clearly. Certainly in the short term, this made for peaceful interactions among us three, but in the long term,

it fostered misunderstandings and sometimes even hurt feelings. In hindsight, and from a bird's eye view, I recognize that my uncertainty of space—physical, mental, relational— inside the lunchroom and the Blue Room reflected my own discomfort and doubt of our collaboration. What I had imagined was going to be a seamless collaborative effort among three friends was, in fact, full of uncertainties and tensions. This, we may have all known, I think. We may have all known it for six whole months. And still yet, we ploughed on anyway until we knew we could no longer *just know*.

Indeed months after settling into the shelter's facility, many things changed for us. Matt got a lectureship at the university and devoted his schedule to the new job. Meg proposed a family art and story hour at the shelter, and began work on her dissertation. By end of May 2011, I ran the CSWW as the sole facilitator.

Meanwhile the number of writers joining the group multiplied from two initial members to forty in late fall 2011, with over fifty-percent of that forty coming in, and after, summer 2011. Part of the reason for the rapid growth during this period, I think, was because the shelter had just opened and therefore received a lot of publicity in local and nearby-town newspapers. As facilitators of the CSWW, even Matt, Meg and I had our fifteen minutes in the local paper's annual "Heart and Soul" spread earlier that spring, along with other community advocates. It was the papers' way to acknowledge "good community service," though admittedly I did not feel comfortable with that kind of attention. Nevertheless the publicity helped the CSWW welcome new writers from across town(s) for the next year.

Once the shelter house moved to the new and larger facility, it also opened more possibilities for university-community collaboration. From fall 2010 to fall 2011, I made

concerted efforts to visit other "specialized" programs at the shelter such as the empowerment group, the mindfulness group, and the group therapy sessions run by university faculty (i.e., psychologists) and students (i.e., counseling psychology doctoral students in advanced practicum). My goals were twofold: 1) to learn more about shelter house clients and 2) to invite their participation in the CSWW. On these visits, I would pitch the CSWW as a continuation of these other programs. "I'm here to observe your group," I'd say. "The Community Stories Writing Workshop could be a nice follow-up to your conversations here. In the workshop, we write, we read, we share stories with each other. As a community of writers, we work together to draft narratives. We ask each other to consider who our audience is, as well as how we might craft our stories with respect to this audience. Writing," I'd tell them, "is a kind of therapeutic and social engagement, too. Writing is a lifelong practice."

At the same time I would also articulate some kind of "practical" function to writing. I would say something like, "If you choose, you could use this space to refine your writing and reading skills." Particularly during the first six months of the workshop, many people in the community did not necessarily understand the value of a "storytelling" or "story writing" group. Public support was often tagged by comments like, "This is nice, as long as the workshop also helps people with job applications and resumes," thus implying the rush to get shelter house clients employed—as if the economy is the only reason why anyone would ever become homeless. The implication there, too, is that homelessness can be "fixed" and that programs are only as good and valuable as their solution to the immediate "social problem."

165

Let me pause again and clarify a few points. First, I am not suggesting that finding home and employment is unimportant. Of course it's crucial. However, programs for people who are poor, or *homeless*, often assume a deficit model of literacy. In other words, if you are poor, then you have to *earn* your right to tell stories, to be creative, to enact a wider range of literacy. If you are of the middle class or otherwise of a more affluent socio-economic class, however, that prerequisite does not apply—it doesn't even exist. It is the same way in schools. We say, for example, that students must learn the basics first before they are *allowed* to be creative, to ask questions, to experiment without consequences. At most universities, nonfiction writing courses are categorized as "advanced" composition courses reserved for students who have proven their grammatical competency, even though grammar is not synonymous with writing.

This brings me to my second point. Writing is not just a tool or a set of skills. It is not simply a means to an end. Writing, in every sense of the word, is a craft, a discipline, a process. Yet most people—inside and outside the academy—do not understand this. For this reason, especially in the cases of programs intended for people who are poor and homeless, writing often becomes part of a quick-fix solution. In other words, if we can teach students—or people—to write "well" (i.e., correctly) then we can help them succeed at school, at work, at *life.*

Finally, to my third and last point: by all means, I am not pretending that shelter house clients did not (or do not) need functional literacy or that they did not (or do not) welcome support. Certainly there were individuals (especially those who had not yet attended the CSWWW) who wanted to know how their participation in the CSWW could benefit their current circumstances. Thus, the word "help" as in, how the CSWW could

help seemed to resonate especially well among some clients, and although I cringed at the use of this word, I understood its relevance in my invitation to them on my visits. I expected, too, that it would take time to convey to the community the value of writing as a human right, one that transcended conventional "practical outcomes."

Interestingly enough, however, despite my pitch on practical outcomes, only a couple of shelter house clients actually sought assistance for resume and job applications purposes in the past four years. Most people learned about the writing group through word of mouth (from other attending members and from their caseworkers at the shelter), and joined because they were interested in writing and storytelling—or as one of the veterans said, "The kind of writing that matters." A lot of this, I think, had to do with one simple fact: people knew what they liked, what they valued. They just didn't feel like they should articulate it; they didn't feel like it would matter even if they did.

4. Digression

Every semester, I introduce my writing class with two questions. First I ask students to define what constitutes "good" writing, to which, many tentatively qualify those "sentences without grammatical errors." Then I rephrase my question and ask them to define good reading material, and most identify language that expresses clear ideas and sentiments. I remember in one of these classes, a student said, "I like reading this author's writing because she can describe things really well, like I know exactly how she feels and I can relate to it." At this point, more hands went up and another student added, "A good writer is someone who can make you see and feel the same thing," thus

suggesting the qualities of specificity (i.e., show/don't tell), universality, and ultimately, substance. Like their classmates, both students who raised their hands seemed to prioritize concrete and idea-focused content and perhaps even stylistic choices when assessing writing. Compare these qualities with their initial responses, which reflected a mechanics- and grammar-based paradigm, and it appears that these students may have been subscribing to two different models of writing—one in the position of self as a writer and one in the position of self as a reader.

Without a doubt, the discrepancies between what students generally forefront as good, effective writing, and what they consider as good reading suggest that complex social and cultural ecologies may be involved in their writing identity and performances. Under their "good writing" model, for instance, many of them tend to view themselves as "weak writers" because of low scores on composition tests and/or previous writing assignments due to grammar and mechanical issues. But under their reading model, a flourish of hands almost always goes up, and students recall all kinds of writing: poetry, fiction, fantasy, nonfiction, graphics and comics. They talk about projects they have on the side: "I'm working on a book," some of them will say. For these students, writing is actually enjoyable and sometimes, even necessary. It's just unfortunately, enough, they don't see it that way when they enter a <u>writing</u> classroom.

4. Inside the Blue Room and onward to the Shelter

Today the majority of CSWW participants are veterans, making up at least seventy-five to eighty-five percent of the membership. They are either current shelter house clients,

former shelter clients, or from the community at large, the university (i.e., undergraduate veterans), or the Veterans Affairs. Non-veteran members make up twenty-five percent or less of workshop participation. The influx of veterans is owed, in part, to the Veterans Affairs and Shelter House partnership. The program extends veterans' stay for up to two years, during which time they may seek employment and permanent housing, receive medical care, and in some cases, for those who are of age, start the paper process for pension and social security. This also means that veterans have more flexibilities and thus, opportunities, to learn about the CSWW and to participate in the group. In comparison, non-veteran shelter house clients are eligible to stay at the facility for up to 90 days, and at present, only 45 days. No doubt, the urgency to find work and home has always been prevalent, but the newly set tenure for non-veterans seems to have created an even quicker turnover, requiring clients to focus on their immediate needs, rather than, for example, address the longer-term, if not, more in-depth reasons that may have led to their transience. For this reason, most non-veteran members are either former shelter house clients or non-shelter house clients who have learned about the CSWW, again, through word of mouth.

Just as workshop demographics have changed over the years, so too have the goals and practices. As I hinted, in earlier times I was especially driven by research. In fact, sometimes *that* dominated much of the practices inside the group, which ironically, also contradicted my perceived connections to members and their expansive ways of knowing. That is, as a researcher—the rigid kind that I was back then, anyway—meant that I maintained a more obvious position of power and any regard for reciprocity was at a bare minimum, or perhaps just didn't exist. For example, I used to follow a weekly

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session plan modeled closely after the writing workshops in the Nonfiction Writing Program. Though pedagogically grounded, these session plans also served research purposes. They offered me a structure to follow, one that ensured consistent practices inside the workshop, and thus, produced consistent *data types*.

Also at the forefront of my efforts was the pursuit to attain consent from group members. While this was, indeed, an ethical decision, it was also motivated by my desire to do research. I knew that without members' permission, I would not be able to write about them. Thus, I used to ask newly arrived members—how ever so prematurely—at the end of their first or second sessions if they would be willing to take part in the study. Of course, I'd assure them that it was voluntary, and that their experience in the workshop would not be affected one way or another, meaning that I would not treat them any differently. (In retrospect, I realize how unrealistic that must've sounded, how ever truthful and sincere I intended for it to be; the idea of "equal anything" is all but too naïve to claim.) Luckily, however, the majority of writers whom I asked, agreed to participate in the study. In fact over the past four years, only two members have declined. One noted that he did not mind if I wrote about him but that he would prefer to not officially sign any documents due to his distrust of "the system." The other person said she didn't want anyone to know she was homeless, regardless of pseudonym.

In general, my success in attaining consent (especially after the first six months) was largely due to one simple fact: I redirected my focus from research to facilitation. The truth is (and I don't know if it happened concurrently or in tandem) I learned to be more mindful and thoughtful about the process, about my positioning. I waited longer, sometimes for weeks, if not months, before mentioning my research to "new" members.

This was less of a strategic gesture as it was one driven by my conscience and commonsense. After all I had always found it awkward to ask newcomers to sign the forms, and I never liked doing it. It always felt so disingenuous, as if I had an ulterior motive for running the workshop, and I suppose, depending on how you look at it, I did. But as time went by and my relationship with writers developed, I became more invested in the week-to-week engagements we shared. I noticed things that I once overlooked, things about each writer that made him or her the survivor that he or she was and is. I was inspired by, and grateful for, the opportunities to witness how writing with audience and community had impacted their lives. Thus, in this way, the CSWW became a space of very real emotional consequences for me. The act of reading, writing, and revising drafts with others was, indeed, a very intimate affair, and I felt it.

In retrospect, I realize that I may not have fully understood my intentions for establishing the CSWW when I started. On the one hand I was motivated by teaching and civic democracy. I wanted to facilitate writing opportunities in the community and expand access to literacy identities. I wanted to challenge assumptions of deficits about homeless persons, and explore strengths and possibilities. I felt personally connected to the writers. On the other hand I was also motivated by research and scholarship. I wanted to know what kinds of stories people told, and why. I wanted to examine drafts and trace each writer's meaning-making process. I wanted to identify the various ways in which writing reaped benefits and liberated the mind and body. What I didn't want, or maybe what I didn't and couldn't anticipate was how my goals and intentions would translate into practice, and importantly, how conflicted I would feel about them. Prior to stepping through that door—into the lunchroom, into the Blue Room, and later, into the training

171

room at the shelter—I had not planned on feeling so strongly about my relationship with the writers, about the workshop, about my role inside this space. I had not planned on juggling between my study and my facilitation, or realizing that they were very two different things. And really, how could I have foreseen the vast disconnection between research goals, service goals, and writers' goals? Or more to the point, how could I have possibly known what that tension felt like?

5. Digression

There are weeks when I do not take notes.

Like when Carmella says the security guard kicked her out of the mall, banning her from it, because she "complained too much" about a store clerk's discrimination, and all I want to do is focus on her letter to the Human Rights Commission (and tell my father that I understand why he hates to dine alone in public).

Like when Mary hands me an old paperback book about Helen Keller because she had just bought it with her last dollar and all I want is to discuss Keller's Three Days to See with her (and replay what my father had once said, "We can never experience the same thing twice").

Like when Dale shows me Corporeal Grizzle, a stuffed teddy bear that sits at the front passenger seat of his car, the one his ex-wife had decorated in U.S. Marines dressed blues, and all I want is to snap a picture of them together, print it in photo stock, and frame it, so that I may remember how he covered the car's windshield with a metallic

172

silver screen on that one sunny day (and how my own father seals his apartment windows with duct tape and cotton).

There are weeks when I do not take notes, at all—when all I am is witness.

5. Inside the Blue Room and onward to the Shelter

People often ask me what it is like to work with homeless veterans and adults. They sometimes marvel at the stories that the writers share with the community at public reading events and inside a literary journal. They say things like, "How did you *get* them to tell their stories?" They offer, "I don't know what you did with their drafts and their writing, but whatever it is, it worked." They ask, "What is your rapport like with them? How did you build it?" Often, I do not say much other than to respond to the immediate questions at face value—because really, how do you answer these questions? I do not have an elevator-pitch response to any of these queries—to what writers choose to write, how they produce the kind of work they do, or why or how they came to let me read their drafts. I know only that each of these questions have separate answers, though sometimes they also overlap. I know, too, that I cannot sum up my relationship with the writers, for each connection is unique and takes time—persistency—to build. And trust.

And still, what exactly do these big, blanket words like "time" and "trust" actually mean? Shall I illustrate time and trust through a series of members' testimonies? Like:

—when signing the consent form, Dale said, "Because I know you and I know you mean well, I will sign. If I can help you somehow write your dissertation, then this is my small token."

173

—or when, Nancy just beat me to the punch altogether and said, "I heard you were doing a research study of this group. I want to help you. Give me the forms and I will sign them."

—or when Alvin conveyed similar sentiments as Dale and Nancy, and said, "If I can do anything to help you as much as you have helped me, then I will do it." Shall I explain that not only do each of these testimonies by Alvin, Dale, and Nancy express their willingness to participate in my research, but also their desires to give back, to return their friendship?

The other day, in the middle of recalling significant moments of his life, Jimmy said, "I want you to know I don't trust easily. I watch people, scan them. I wait to see if their real selves will be different from what they perform. That goes for you, too. I wanted to see if I could trust you. That's the only reason why we're here now, why I am telling you my story." Clark, Rudy, Lucy, Carmella, they've all said similar things over the years—about waiting, watching, trusting—Dale, Nancy, and Alvin, too.

But again, that's only part of it—the waiting, the watching, the trusting. The truth is writers will write when they are ready, when they *want* to. They will write when they are inspired. They will write when I, too, write with them, when I offer writing prompts like these:

> In "Stillness," Bragg talks about those rare quiet moments in our lives, the ones that allow us to appreciate the world around us. I, too, love it when it is quiet in the home—in afternoons when Bella Rose is at school and the only sound is that of my fingers hitting the keyboard. My sister, when she is around, always stares at me when I type too fast. It distracts her—the noise—and she yearns for stillness.
>
> My favorite quietness, though, happens in the late hour of the night. I hear Will's snoring in bed next to me
> —and Bella's Rose's in the room across from me
> —and Spartacus's in the crate downstairs from me.

I hear, too, the sound of the house, its creaks from expanding wood and cheap aluminum. Sometimes, if I am lucky, I hear the wind talking to the trees, the leaves screaming back with immediacy. That kind of stillness at night can be frightening, too, which is why I think I prefer it. The fear takes me to the world outside my comfort, and I wonder about things I must've missed during the day.

I love Rick Bragg. I love everything he has to say about everything. I think we all know that by now. But he, like I, seem to reminisce about our stillness with a kind of luxury that others may not have, those who do not have the privilege of experiencing soundlessness. For example, people who live in cities, I imagine, they hear traffic, honking horns, curse words, sirens. People who occupy in communal spaces hear the sound of complaints and moans, jokes and laughter, children (sometimes not theirs) crying through the owl's song.

And then, people who are truly living in stillness and alone, for them, the sound of silence is a reminder of their losses

　　　—his wife gone to the white man with thick brown hair

　　　—his daughters, toward dreams that do not include him

　　　—his work, to a retirement without purpose or relevance.

I imagine that such people would not glorify the silence.

I invite you now to think about your moments of stillness. When do they occur and what runs through your mind? Do you like them or do you not prefer them and why? Do you think about a past and/or your childhood? Do you think about your life outside the stillness? What does stillness and silence bring you?

If this prompt does not interest you, then I invite you to think about another point that Bragg makes in this essay: the value of slowing down and noticing the world around you. Do you have time for that these days? Why or why not? At what point in our life, do you think, does the world begin to move too fast and our minds and innocence along with it?? Finally, if this second prompt does not work for you, then I invite you to please write about anything that comes to mind and intrigues your heart.

Instead of these:

Can you think of a moment when you struggled? Maybe it was today, last week, last year, or long ago. How would you tell the story of that moment? When does the story begin? How does it end? What is the most powerful moment between beginning and end? Why was it such a struggle?

Writers will write when I offer aspects of my personal life and vulnerabilities with them,

when I see myself more as a writer in the group than as the facilitator and researcher.

Writers will write when I embrace the importance of building intimacy with readers,

when I refuse to offer writing prompts that I do not and cannot respond to myself. Writers will write when I acknowledge that my efforts have pedagogical implications, but that I do not necessarily do them for those reasons, that I do them instead as an exchange between one writer to another. Writers will write when they are ready, when they wish to trust. Writers will write because they have always wanted to.

From day one, members like Michael have taken command of the writing space that is the CSWW, as well as their relationship with me, the facilitator. They have asked me to share drafts, not just to read my writing but also to *evaluate* it. They have requested that I hold an annual writers retreat at the public library, for such was a neutral space where members and I connected as peers, where Alvin and other writers led discussions, where they voted on what we, as a group would read and write, and even arranged with the shelter house for reimbursement on our pizza lunch that day. In these ways and others, CSWW participants have always taken part in shaping the workshop. They—*we*—have always co-constructed its culture as well as our roles inside of it. They—*we*—have always shared this space.

…Profile Two:

Reflection

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching defines public engagement as follows:

> …the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity (p. 5-6; Fitzgerald, et al., 2012 citing Driscoll, 2008, p. 39)

176

Premised on "…the understanding that not all knowledge and expertise reside in the academy, and that both expertise and great learning opportunities in teaching and scholarship also reside in non-academic settings" (Fitzgerald, et al., 2012, p. 4), a publicly engaged partnership should be grounded in scholarship, meaning that it should be built on evidence-based practices. The relationship should—*must*—be reciprocal wherein both the university and the community partner(s) benefit mutually from the collaboration; both partners engage in the planning and implementation of activities; both partners commit to sustaining the program; both partners assess the impact. At the core, any kind of public engagement must be true to the ideas of civic democracy—promoting it, speaking it, enacting it.

I admit, when I first started the Community Stories Writing Workshop I did not see it as a public engagement. I don't think I understood what that meant; I don't think I cared. It is no secret, after all, that when I approached the homeless shelter about facilitating the CSWW, I did not carefully consider the needs of the clients with whom I would work. Primarily I wanted to run a writing group because I, myself, had come from the Nonfiction Writing Program at Iowa. I expected that everyone would welcome a storytelling group. Who didn't love telling stories, and even better, writing about them? Indeed I assumed very liberally about the community into which I entered.

But four years (almost five, come this fall) is a long time and a lot can happen to even someone like me, someone full of assumptions, expectations, and set goals—and a lot *has* happened. Time has afforded me many opportunities to reflect on what it means to bear witness to members' drafts and discoveries. It has taught me to revise who I am as a writer, a workshop facilitator (and teacher), and importantly, a publicly engaged

177

scholar. It has called my attention to the fact that, although I am not the first or only person who has founded and facilitated a writing workshop at a homeless shelter, I am among the few who have been fortunate enough to sustain such a collaboration in a town known for its literary culture. Through this kind of sustainability I have learned to recognize the assumptions I made at the start of this endeavor, the tensions I experienced when I shifted goals from researcher to facilitator, and the flexibility I came to embrace when I enter the workshop each week.

In the following analysis section, I reflect on my come-away moments for each of the following accounts: 1) the second workshop in the Blue Room, 2) the sessions inside the training room at the shelter, and 3) my experiences during that first year as the sole facilitator. I relate my thoughts to the tenets of public engagement, how I neglected to see my work through such lens in the beginning, but also how I came to realize that what I'd been doing all along (and still do) with writers inside the CSWW at the shelter house is, in fact, *public engagement.*

Negotiating Goals inside the Blue Room

As you may have seen in this profile and in the first, group members have always co-constructed this space and in this way, the CSWW is a culture in perpetual movement (Heath, & Street, 2008; Street, 2012; Sunstein, & Chiseri-Strater, 2012) and construction toward a third space. The first time this became unquestionably clear to me was at our second session. I found myself, along with Matt and Meg as facilitators, negotiating what

178

it meant to share this space, or more accurately, what it meant to let go of our control and enable a give-take, mutual exchange with Michael.

To recall, when we arrived at the Blue Room, Matt, Meg, and I opted for the couches in the "living-room" area, and we even brought in donated sweets from the local bakery. Our intention was to acquaint ourselves with workshop members, or in this case, with Michael. We wanted to engage with him more casually and more closely as peers. And certainly from the outside view, we probably looked like friends sitting in a living room, indulging in sweets, and all the while talking about writing. Ours was a casual engagement among friends rather than student-teacher conferences.

Yet as Michael shared his draft with us, I quickly realized that we had to reposition ourselves to play other roles on top of being "friends" (Behar, 2003; Sunstein, & Chiseri-Strater, 2012; Wortham, 2001): first, we were writing peers supporting his work; second, we were facilitators identifying strengths in his writing; and third, we were researchers observing our exchanges. In most cases, the notions of friends and peers are almost synonymous. However, what I am referring to here in the context of our workshop is a bit different. That is, when we conversed without evaluation, when we laughed without intentions, then Michael, Matt, Meg, and I were friends. When we conversed with evaluative praises, however, then we were writing peers, meaning that we also engaged with each other as writers. Being friends and writing peers are not necessarily the same things, after all, because as peer writers, we also assessed and provided feedback to Michael, albeit only positive ones (Newkirk, 2009).

Similarly as facilitators of the group, we carried the responsibility of identifying strengths in the draft, and thus, we also asked appropriate questions to invite exploration

179

and revision (Murray, 1980; Newkirk, 2009). While these actions may mirror those of writing peers, as facilitators we had "teaching" goals as well as a certain level of authority and credibility that writing peers would not necessarily have had with Michael (at least not at this point). Therefore when Michael was reading his draft to us, it was likely that, in his mind, he was reading to a peer audience and facilitators at once.

Finally as researchers, the three of us were also collecting data. This role required us to distance ourselves as insiders of the group, and observe the whole exchange from an outsider's point of view (Sunstein, & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). Yet interestingly (and I don't know if we did this intentionally or not) we did not position ourselves openly as researchers—not to Michael, not even to each other (Wortham, 2001). With the exception of a few instances of note-taking, we devoted most of our attention and time to Michael and his draft. Part of this, I think, was because we knew vigorous note-taking would have interrupted the culture that we were trying to create within the CSWW. We wanted the workshop to function as a space of exploration with, and for, self and audience. What we studied, thus, would be the construction of that community—in progress—and our attention had to, in many ways, focus on its creation (Sunstein, & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). The other part of why we seemed to subvert our researcher's roles may have also stemmed out of guilt. In between the pastries and the living-room couches, we were also researchers and because we were, we carried a level of fault for our voyeurism. What could be more exploitive, after all, than to examine homeless writers inside a community writing workshop, or worse, *one* writer inside a workshop run by *three* observers (Gee, 2013; Behar, 2003)?

180

Of course as a researcher, I also recognize the benefits reaped from studying such a literacy space. In fact, my commitment to the workshop (and thus the sustainability of it) may not have lasted for as long as it has without the *learning* opportunities that came with it. True, my relationship with the writers is the strongest motivation of all, but that did not come to me until I started facilitating the workshop on my own. In the early days, before I developed relationships with the writers, it was my need to write and observe and learn and critique, it was my need to serve and to *learn* from serving that kept me going.

And so what I want to emphasize here, then, is the contradictions of my motivations and roles as a facilitator and researcher and my constant juggling between participation and observation (Sunstein, & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). Furthermore I acknowledge, too, the fact that I intentionally chose to facilitate a writing workshop at a *homeless shelter* and with that choice comes a kind of cynicism that just doesn't, or *wouldn't*, exist for many other of community-based programs and research studies. After all, context matters. What I offer, where I offer it, how I offer it, why I offer it, and for whom I offer it—*matters*. As it should. Questions of exploitations and stakes are, therefore, fair game, and I must always be aware of them. The truth is the kind of research that I do, the kind of research that my study entails, demands this level of awareness and reflexivity. And so, in order to do this research and to do it well, I must embrace the tensions of constant renegotiations.

That said, even though as the facilitator and researcher, I have a significant hand in constructing the culture, group members like Michael certainly have their influence on how the workshop functions, as well as what role they want to enact inside this space. My account of this second workshop, for example, suggests that Michael clearly positioned

181

himself intentionally as an independent community member, a peer, and a writer (Gee, 2013; Holland, et al., 1998; Wortham, 2001). He was the one who chose to attend the session. He was the one who chose to share his writing with us. Even in his draft, he chose to situate his narrator as a self-determined, fix-it-yourself person (Wortham, 2001). In his short-paragraph narrative, for instance, he portrayed his narrator as a trouble-shooter who also has a sense of humor about life's mishaps. He is the type of narrator who rolls with the flow. These self-depictions were all of his choosing (Frank, 2010). They were what *he wanted* for us to see (Gornick, 2001; Frank, 2010; Wortham, 2001).

Implicitly, Michael also revealed a much more vulnerable side of himself—be it as the narrator or as the writer off the page. In particular, it seems he was not the kind of person who would trust easily in others, hence, his narrator did not seek help from the shelter's staff to open the lock (Gornick, 2001). Similarly as a person who had experienced chronic homelessness (Gee, 2013), Michael has always had to survive and figure things out by himself. It is plausible, then, that his statement in the draft, "I had no choice," suggests his lack of options—not just per the immediate context of his story but per the wider circumstances in his life as well. Choice, for Michael, has always been limited on and off the page.

Discourse analysis of Michael's draft aside, the workshop exchange revealed our own uncertainties as facilitators, too, about who we were and who we wanted to be at the moment—to Michael and to each other. Clearly we were still figuring out our own positioning inside this space, particularly since there were three of us and only one of him. The imbalance, even as facilitator-to-writer, was obvious, if not seemingly, patronizing. Would we workshop Michael's draft as peers—all *four* of us: him, Matt,

182

Meg, and me? Or would Matt, Meg, and I each take turns to "teach" composition, and if so, would we be the facilitator in relation to Michael (and peer to the other two) or would we be the facilitator to Michael *and* the other two of us at once?

Negotiating Goals inside the Training Room at the Shelter House

As I reflected, I went into my collaboration with Matt and Meg with a lot of assumptions about our goals and intentions for the CSWW (Bruffee, 2003). At times, the three of us seemed to share very different visions for the writing group, whether it was as publicly engaged scholars, as teachers and facilitators, or as researchers. Why were we facilitating a community writing workshop? For social justice? Writing? Teaching? Who were we to CSWW members? Writing teachers? Members? Researchers?

Especially as researchers, our expectations seemed blurredly defined, at best, our roles and ideas for the CSWW frequently colliding—clashing. As with our exchanges with Michael at the first and second workshops, from the outside we seemed in sync and in agreement. We seemed to be able to exchange our varying perspectives in a cohesive third space. Yet closer examination hinted at our differences. Our personal histories (e.g., our family, our upbringing, the various subcultures to which we belonged), for example, affected how we each positioned ourselves in the workshop with members (e.g., how I connected with the members) (Gee, 2012; Gee, 2013; Holland, et al.,1998). Specifically, because of my own early literacy background (i.e., from the home) and experience with transiency, I self-assumed an insider-ness to the CSWW (Behar, 2003) that, in many ways, ended up ostracizing Matt and Meg (Gee, 2013). While it was not my conscious

183

intention to do that, I didn't necessarily stop the process. Instead, I followed the flow, never once admitting to the distance that I created between my two colleagues and me. More urgent, was my need to bond with workshop writers—for research purposes, yes— but also, really, for very personal and emotional reasons. In truth, the more I facilitated the workshop, the more attached I became to members. Their stories reminded me of my father's, of my mother's, of my own. And because of these connections, I also shared very different relationships with members, I think, than did Matt and Meg.

In addition to personal histories, Matt, Meg, and I also had some noticeable differences of pedagogical approaches and intentions for the research. We struggled to balance social justice, teaching, and scholarship as a team (Bruffee, 2003). Thus, although the three of us agreed on similar pursuits, we disagreed on how to execute them. By the end of the first and second workshops, for example, the tension between what we wanted to do as group facilitators and what we did as literacy researchers created a rift among us. Although I did not illustrate this in the profile, there were times during workshop discussions that I would second-guess my word choices, sometimes even stunting my speech to an awkward halt. I wondered too hard, I think, whether I sounded too assuming, too leading, or too dictatorial. I could not speak as naturally and freely as I normally would have in my own writing classroom. My self-consciousness and insecurities exacerbated whenever Matt, Meg, and I shared our input afterward during our "researcher-facilitator" weekly debriefing sessions. "Let's make sure we don't turn this into a 'class.'" "Is it necessary to talk about literary writing instead of just story?" "Maybe we shouldn't talk about writing styles or techniques." Although these comments were not overtly directed at me, I felt defensive nonetheless. My defensiveness even

translated into the fieldnotes I shared with my colleagues where I constantly justified my pedagogical choices, backing them up with composition theories combined with teaching experience in the writing classroom. Similarly, as noted, in workshop sessions I often aligned myself—how ever unconsciously—with group members.

Looking back, I realize that my choices did little to assuage the tension of our collaboration. Although we parted on mutually peaceful terms, I often wish that I had been more equipped, more prepared, more knowledgeable to better collaborate with my colleagues—my *friends* (Bruffee, 2003). I wish that I had been less resistant to their perspectives and ideas, welcoming them and truly considering them as thoughtfully and as thoroughly as I know how to. I wish that I had been more confident and more secure. I wish that I had not taken everything so personally.

Negotiating Goals as the Sole Facilitator

Throughout the past four years of this workshop, many volunteers have approached the shelter and asked if they, too, could facilitate the CSWW. The common assumption, I think, is that *anyone* could teach writing, as long as he or she has the desire to try (hence programs like Teach for America). Thus unlike other "specialized" programs at the shelter, such as empowerment groups, counseling groups, healthcare groups (e.g., visits from nurses and medical staff), the Community Stories Writing Workshop has had more unsolicited volunteers than any other programs. Of course, what volunteers do not realize is that the CSWW is, in fact, a writing workshop that is pedagogically and literarily grounded; it is premised on scholarship that views writing as both craft and

discipline (Murray, 2010; Newkirk, 2009), as are teaching and facilitating a writing group of adult writers. As the facilitator of the workshop, I share my knowledge as a nonfiction writer and as an experienced writing teacher when I work with members and their drafts—one set of lenses informs the other, at all times. To this end, any volunteer who wishes to facilitate the workshop would, preferably, also have firm scholarship in writing and importantly, in teaching. At the very least, he or she *and* I would have to share the same goals, and we would have to agree to implement these goals in complementary ways. As I suggested in this profile, collaboration only works if all partners (and our goals) are in agreement (and evolve) with each other. Yet such consensus is not always possible—even when I was collaborating with close colleagues and friends, *especially* with close colleagues and friends.

Moreover, people tend to share very different ideas about what encompasses literacy and writing (Barton, & Hamilton, 1998; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013; Rose, 2012; Rose, 2013). Even in a town known for its literary culture, community writing workshops can sometimes be reduced to "practical" purposes like resume and cover letter writing, as was the case when I first proposed a storytelling and story-writing workshop at the shelter. Especially in the early days of the CSWW, I had to often negotiate between what I valued as literacy practices and what the general community valued for "homeless" persons. This is because, by and large, deficits dominate our cultural narratives about people who are poor and/or homeless (Barton, & Hamilton, 1998; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013; Miller, 2014). Particularly where literacy is concerned, even advocates for homeless persons may not recognize the *need* for a storytelling group (Rose, 2012; Rose 2013) as they may for the same group of writers under any other

circumstances and in any other contexts. No one would question, for instance, a writing workshop for veterans at the VA or at the university or at the public library. But add that adjective, "homeless," and the rules suddenly change. In general, most people do not recognize the concrete value of a storytelling and writing workshop.

Similarly volunteers who approach the shelter about facilitating the CSWW may subscribe to very different ideas of literacy and writing than I do. Where they may suggest edits as revision, for example, I invite conversations about emotional truths and narrative arcs. That said, I have, as suggested in the profile, made compromises to accommodate functional literacy requests. Particularly early on, I offered services such as resume and cover letter writing in order to show good faith and willingness to respond to my community partner's, i.e., the shelter's, assumed needs. As Fitzgerald, et al. (2012) notes, part of public engagement is to fulfill the needs of our partners. Thus, although I subscribe to an expansive literacy and an expressivist form of writing, I knew I could not overlook the perceived needs of the shelter no matter how antithetical they may have seemed to me as a writing teacher. Over time, however, the functional literacy component of the workshop dissipated as members would join the workshop primarily for storytelling purposes.

Theoretical and pedagogical differences aside (and back to my reflection about volunteers), in a space where the notion of community is as uncertain as it is, the one constant that ought to remain consistent in the workshop is the facilitator. Yet most volunteers are usually available for only short periods of time (i.e., one semester in a service-learning class). Thus, the idea of introducing a new facilitator to the workshop, while possible, is not a matter I take lightly; I cannot simply introduce someone without

knowing his or her commitment to the work, especially not when many members have been part of the group since inception (i.e., four years) (Fitzgerald, et al., 2012). Indeed the CSWW is a writing community that is very closely knit. I have committed an insane amount of time and effort to working with writers in group settings (i.e., workshops) and on individual basis (i.e., one-on-one conferences). The exchange of drafts, as I have repeatedly mentioned, is a very personal engagement and requires trust among members. CSWW writers do not automatically share their stories with just anyone. As Dale, Nancy, Carmella, and so many other members of the CSWW have articulated, they do not grant others access into their lives so easily, or without question. Trust takes time and consistency.

Of course knowing what I know now about building trust and about my relationship with writers, there are many things I regret about the choices I made in the early days of this engagement (Fitzgerald, et al., 2012). For one thing, I wish that I had been more mindful about my own focus on the research process; I wish that I had not allowed it to consume my work and goals in the CSWW. As my profile suggests, there were times when I prioritized my research goals, and because I did, I also positioned myself as an outsider to the group. By focusing on data collection, I was, in fact, distancing myself from a culture in the making. Moreover, I didn't understand how my researcher and outsider positioning would affect the culture of the workshop—what we practiced, how we practiced it, and why we practiced it. During the first six months, in particular, so much of our workshop activities were defined in session plans. My, then, lack of flexibility slowed down group members' co-construction of the workshop space and culture. Here, I say "slowed down" because members were still very actively

188

involved, I think, in creating this space for themselves and for me. However, my insistence on research goals often constrained this process, keeping members from fully participating organically in the workshop, as well as from deciding on how they wanted to use the weekly ninety minutes. In this way, not only were my various roles as the researcher, facilitator, and member of the CSWW in constant struggle with one another, they were also in a constant "contact zone" with workshop members' desires for, and *participation* in, the workshop (Pratt, 1991).

In fact, one of the most significant insights coming out of this profile about the first year (and the first profile) is perhaps also the most obvious: community members will always have a role in shaping (and changing) their culture, or in this case, their literacy space particularly if and when given the opportunity to do so. This was apparent with Michael and Angie, and it was even further underscored throughout the first year's workshops when Alvin and Dale and Nancy and Jimmy explained why they *gave me their* consent. That is, if research was going to happen—if any activities that relate to research were going to happen inside the workshop setting—then it would be because they granted me permission. Consider Dale's comment, "Because I know you and I know you mean well, I will sign. If I can help you somehow write your dissertation, then this is my small token." Or Nancy's initiative, "I heard you were doing a research study of this group. I want to help you. Give me the forms and I will sign them." Or Alvin's personal extension, "If I can do anything to help you as much as you have helped me, then I will do it." All three writers spoke declaratively and in active voice (Gee, 2013). Specifically assertions like, "I know," "I will," "I can help," "I want to help" and "Give me" show that each of the speakers communicate from a place of power and strength (Gee, 2013);

189

they are the ones *telling* me what *they* are *willing* to do *for* me. The fact that Nancy took initiative to approach me about consent was especially telling of her agency and how she saw herself as an educated and literate writer. That is, because she attended the university as an undergraduate (and withdrew due to mental health related reasons) she also felt that she could contribute to my understanding of adult literacy strengths.

Similarly Alvin often reminded me of his willingness to participate in my study, noting each time, his previous experiences with research. "I've done this before at the university," he used to say. In such instances, Alvin connected himself to the university, or "scholarly" community and positioned himself as a valuable contributor to my study about adult literacy strengths (Wortham, 2001). Furthermore he made concerted efforts to distant himself from other shelter residents, frequently sporting around a bright North Face coat and a matching North Face hat, for instance. He also carried around an iPad and sometimes he even brought in his camera and its lenses into the workshop to show us his art. In short, Alvin wanted to show that he was a person of many talents and of many ways of knowing, and granting me consent was just another way for him to express these qualities—as well as to assert his power.

Yet perhaps the most suggestive of members' power can be seen in Jimmy, who shared with me that he had been observing and evaluating me over time, and that only because I had passed his test that he was now telling me his story. To recall, Jimmy said, "I want you to know I don't trust easily. I watch people, scan them. I wait to see if their real selves will be different from what they perform. That goes for you, too. I wanted to see if I could trust you. That's the only reason why we're here now, why I am telling you my story." Like Dale, Nancy, and Alvin, Jimmy used very declarative phrases: "I want,"

190

"I watch," "I wait," "I could trust you," and "I am telling you my story." Jimmy wanted me to know that I was privileged to his trust only because *he* chose to *grant* me *his t*rust.

Overall, the writers who gave me their consents, all gave them to me from a place of power. Each of them suggested that they were the ones who allowed my note-taking during discussions. They were the ones who agreed to be studied and analyzed. They were the ones who said *we could* spend those ninety minutes doing these things. And they were, and *are*, absolutely right.

Of course what this implies, too, is my enablement of these exchanges. As one of the primary sponsors of the CSWW, I have adopted a kind of "reciprocity-based" pedagogy wherein *I* create opportunities for members to co-construct the CSWW culture, and wherein *they* allow me to learn *from* and *about* them. In this way, what I have done, then, is revise and expand my understanding of research and facilitation. Where I once assumed them as separate, I now see parallels and overlap. Indeed facilitation and research by way of public engagement can work in conjunction with one another rather than as opposing perspectives and practices. My work as a facilitator (or teacher) has thus, become congruent with my work as a researcher. Or to phrase it another way, the public engagement model has become my research and my teaching-facilitating model.

It is through this public engagement lens, that I have come to facilitate, observe, participate, and write about everyday men and women, about their strengths, successes, and contributions to our community. I have come to build on theories that expand our understanding about knowing, about learners as teachers and teachers as learners. I have come to connect the academy to the community, and the community to the academy. I

come to ask myself, and others, to think critically about what kinds of writing we privilege and whose.

Through this lens, I have come to know my work inside the workshop as facilitator and as researcher. It has been, and *is*, a process of ongoing negotiations of goals and relationships, and of acknowledging moments of parallel. It has been, and *is*, a kind of consciousness of which I must be thoughtful *always*, with which I must be comfortable *always*, until I just feel it, until I just do it. Like breathing.

Why I Write

I was entering college and my transcripts could not be found in time for an English class, so they had me write a page to see where I would place. I just wrote what seemed to be in my head and heart. It just seemed natural to do it that way. Anyway, that was my first serious writing experience. They placed me in English Composition 101.

I write now because I'm in a community writing workshop. Sometimes I am inspired. Sometimes I feel a need to get things on paper and out of my head and heart. Sometimes I feel expressive and then, I write *just because*. Sometimes I need to tell a story.

(Carmella, 2013)

. . .Profile Three:

The Writers' Workshop

(or negotiating space, audience, and identities)

This profile is called "The Writers' Workshop" because it reflects how the CSWW members and I, as the *facilitator*, co-constructed this space. I divide my analyses into two ideas: *The Supportive-Audience Workshop* and *The Inhibitive Audience Workshop: Conflicting Goals.* Together, they offer you a glimpse into our group dynamics as well as the contradictions of the workshop as both supportive and inhibitive of composition.

Digression

In this room, at this table, five, sometimes ten men and women sit. Today Dale, a word master of Greek, takes off his bifocals and rubs the skin between his eyebrows. In his discomfort, as the gore in Danny's story becomes too gory, he steps up from the chair and quietly walks out the room. Through the glass window, I see him pacing back and forth. Waiting.

Clark, a woodcarver and storyteller, sits next to me. He sighs without secret, letting it known his boredom. He tends to do this whenever someone else is sharing drafts, though I don't think it's intentional—the loudness. As Danny reads his story about vampires tearing apart half-human-half-demons, Clark takes out a composition notebook from his hard-covered leather briefcase. Half of the briefcase is fully erected in front of his face, partitioning him from everybody else across the table. He exerts another big

194

sigh, rolls off the thick rubber band that binds his notebook, and flips through the pages—one by one, the snapping sound of paper rips through Danny's words.

But Danny does not stop. He does not even look up. Both arms stretched out between his notebook, he reads on about swords piercing through ribcages. His sentences, like cursive, string to each other without break.

Carmella, whose eyes are as round and bright as marbles, on the other hand, is less forgiving. She stares straight at Clark. Her eyelids hang halfway down; her lips tightly pursed. "You. Can. Be. So. Rude," she says, enunciating each word with a pause and then scoots her chair slightly away in the opposite direction. Looking at Danny, she says, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt."

"It's true," Nancy chimes in. "You do that a lot, Clark."

Clark's right eyebrow arches into an upside down V. "What, you, too?" he says.

Danny stops and blinks a few times at me.

"I'm sorry, Danny. Please continue," I say.

"It's okay, I'm done. I can stop here for now. I'll read more next week. I know Dale must be waiting to get back into the room, anyway."

"Thank God!" Clark says. "I can't understand much of what's going on anyway. Everything is in dialogue, man."

Just now Dale steps back into the room and takes his seat. "I must apologize for my disruption," he says. "I didn't mean to be rude, Danny. It's just sometimes your stories are rather of a different nature."

"You're fine," Danny says. "Clark's not a fan either."

195

"I didn't say that I wasn't. Don't get me wrong," Clark interjects. "I just said your stories are hard to follow sometimes. But I really like your characters, though. Vicious."

"To build on Clark's comment, I wish to say your dialogue is always a pleasure and your characters are some very interesting folks," Dale adds.

Once, when he was in college, Dale found Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" to be so grotesque that he requested an alternative assignment. "It's offensive to my faith," he said. When the professor refused, Dale dropped the class, but not without writing a letter to the Chancellor expressing the teacher's infringement on his freedom of speech and religion. In return, the Chancellor granted Dale a free pass to take another course for free of charge.

"I'm sorry I didn't mean to offend anyone," Danny says. "I don't make these things up. That's what my characters want to do so I follow their lead. They sort of write themselves. I'm just the one jotting these details down. I'm the transcriber."

I nod along. "That's right. Characters want what they want," I say. "That can be a beautiful thing—when the characters take life of their own. What you're describing is when a writer gets into the moment and into her characters' minds. It's a magical thing."

"Sure, if you can understand what he's saying," Clark insists. "Danny, no offense to you, but you assume I know what's going on. You assume I should know the backstory. But I don't, man. You just think I do and then I feel like an asshole because I actually don't. Your stories are great but they can be hard to follow. That's all I'm saying."

"Yes. Writers sometimes assume that their readers already know what they, as the writers, themselves, know. That's why we workshop," I say. "Let's keep in mind, too,

that some pieces are best experienced with our eyes, so I'm certain if we had a copy of Danny's draft, we'd have a better feel of what's happening. For such a dialogue-heavy piece, I wonder if we might each read a character, so that we could see the dynamics in action, as well. Would that help you to see how others are reading your work, Danny?"

"Sure," Danny says, "I mean, if that's what you guys want to do—play out the scenes."

"Would it help you in the revision?"

"Well, I think it reads well right now. Plus it's already 'published' in this notebook." Danny lifts up the blue hardcover journal. "Once the scenes go into this, it's done, I don't know if I'll revise it. I just write for myself anyway. It doesn't matter what others think."

"Then why do you always read your stories to us?" Clark says. "Why are you even here?"

The Writers' Workshop

We don't always admit it, but we need each other. As writers, we want to be read. We want our work to reach others' ears, eyes, minds, hearts—unless, of course, we're writing for personal purposes like in the form of journal entries. Even then, we imagine some sort of audience—our future self(ves), perhaps, reading the work of the older-self narrator.

In the Community Stories Writing Workshop, we come for the time and space to write. We come for the sake of discipline. We come for the structure it provides. But

197

really, no matter our reasons, we also come to see each other—for community, friendship, camaraderie, audience. Even Danny, who claims he does not mind what others may think of his stories, admitted to me a few weeks ago, that he enjoyed sharing his drafts with the group. Of course, that was also on a week when Clark did not sigh so loudly and Dale sat in the room quietly. That was on the week when the audience was explicitly supportive, when Carmella said things like, "In my opinion, and this is again, just my opinion, you are so talented. You have such a wonderful imagination. I really admire that."

The truth is, every writer appreciates an audience—you, me, all of us. But when you're a writer without permanent housing, without permanent space—when you're a writer who's staying at a homeless shelter, like Danny and Dale and Clark and Carmella and 71 others in the workshop—the whole notion of audience can be unstable at times, just like everything else. Consequently, even though the sharing of drafts is a very intimate and necessary engagement for writers, sometimes there's just no safe space for that kind of confidence. By nature, within the CSWW, group dynamics vary from week to week and the "community," or audience, consists of whoever happens to arrive at the workshop on that particular session—it always has. Unlike the conventional writing classroom, membership fluctuates—sometimes dramatically.

In many ways the workshop reflects similarly to a community college classroom where attendance can be unpredictable and irregular; but even then, the community college class is still an "official class" with a cohort of students who attend regularly throughout the semester. At the shelter, inside the CSWW, this kind of cohort can and *might* exist, but the transient nature of the place is significantly more apparent and there

is simply no telling what groups of writers will end up sticking close to each other while others will fall apart. The fact that personalities are diverse, as are moods, further complicates what community actually means. Carmella, Alvin, Jimmy, Danny, Clark, Dale—all of them—have come in the sessions excited about each other's writing one week, for instance, and less interested the next. (Note: I say "less interested" because rarely does anyone intentionally *criticize* a writer in the CSWW, except maybe once due to a misunderstanding and miscommunication, which I will talk about later.) No doubt, stressors such as homelessness, mental and physical health, and other deeply rooted trauma can be especially defeating at times, causing low morale and annoyances among attendees.

For these reasons, some members like Michael simply prefer to work one-on-one with me instead of with the larger group. He, in particular, tends to come to the workshop only when there are few writers, or no writers present at all. Part of this is driven by circumstance. His work schedule no longer allows him the same kind of flexibility he once had when staying at the shelter. The other part of this has to do with his preference to avoid others, altogether. Rudy is the same way, having once shared with me why he stopped attending the writing group regularly. "There's a person in there that I just can't stand to be around," he said. "It's nothing against you, because I know you have to be nice to everyone, but I know that I can't be in the same space as that person, especially if I don't have to. There's a lot of negativity and I can't be around that."

Potentially the most contentious are those sessions when members like Rudy and Michael, members who hold very strong opinions about others, attend the same workshop together. Especially in the early days of the CSWW, I often worried about clashes

199

between them and specifically about how I would respond should conflicts break. There is a very fine line between a firm response and a passive one, after all, either of which could disrupt members' composing processes as well as cause resentment and a loss of membership.

On this particular occasion that I am thinking of, Michael had decided to return to the CSWW after having missed two weeks of it. The only other writer in attendance was Rudy, though that didn't matter much as both men ignored each other soon upon arrival, anyhow. It is not uncommon for writers to disregard each other's presence in the group like that, particularly if they are not friends outside of the workshop. Even though Rudy and Michael resided at the shelter, were in the same writing workshop, and had been in and out of homelessness throughout their adult lives, they were not necessarily insiders to each other's community. And even if they were insiders or friends, it wouldn't necessarily mean an automatic alliance.

When members do not acknowledge each other inside the workshop space, my role as the facilitator becomes especially pronounced. After all I am the person with whom they are most acquainted, the one whom they met when they first joined the group, and the one who's still around when they return. For Michael, Rudy, and writers like them, I serve as a kind of "regular" audience—the familiar face in the crowd, similar to that of a teacher in a classroom. They rely on me to listen to and/or read their drafts. They rely on me to comment thoughtfully and with affirmation. They rely on me, also, to be aware of their presence in the room, of their sentiments toward others in the room, and of their contribution to the group. Sometimes members may also "over-convey" their familiarity with me, thus, highlighting the outsider-ness of the others (Clark is especially

200

known for this; Rudy and Michael, too). As the workshop facilitator, then, I am always thinking about multiple things—two, three, four, ten writers' needs—simultaneously. I am always anticipating the potential for arguments to break out. And I am always hoping that I respond appropriately.

At the same time I am never actually running the workshop sessions alone. As suggested in the first and second profiles, group members direct, they decide, too, what happens in these exchanges. Following our welcome greetings on this particular day, for instance, Michael led the conversation to his writing and in so doing he also prompted Rudy's attention. In fact, even though he appeared to be addressing me, Michael was clearly talking to Rudy as well—perhaps even trying to connect with him. Every now and then his eyes shifted across the table, as if scoping out Rudy's reactions.

"I haven't come to the group meetings, but I've been writing," Michael said. He pulled out a folded piece of paper from his pant pocket, and slid it across the table toward me. "I was looking at that golden arc, you know, the one at McDonald's, and I thought about the [writing] prompt you gave us, 'write about an object you want bronzed."

"Yes, I remember that," I said. "Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s essay. I'm glad you pursued it."

Nodding his head lightly, Michael took another look around the room and then back at me. "Well," he paused. "I want to bronze the fucking cheeseburger."

A true performer, Michael has always been aware of his audience. No doubt, what he said right then and there, and *how* he said it, was *all* intentional—from the pauses to his choice of words. *He* was setting *us* up for the punchline. (He reminds me a lot of my friend Jane, actually, who will break into a momentary silence right before she responds

to someone's comments. Sometimes she'll offer a long exhale to go along with the pause, and if you're lucky, she'll rub her forehead, too, and then lean in with her fingers pointing as she speaks. It's a very animated communication style, and you either appreciate it for its performance value or you dismiss it because you have little patience for that kind of personality. Either way, it's one of those deliveries you don't forget.)

As it turns out, though, this cheeseburger, the one in Michael's story, was much more than a punchline. It was, in fact, about his then, three-year-old daughter, about her refusal to eat the cheese-covered beef sandwich, and about his poor choice of words in response. "Eat the fucking cheeseburger," was what he had said to her, and because he did, he has regretted it since. "It's one of the few exchanges we had when she was little, and I wish I hadn't been such a jerk," he said. "She was only three years old. As far as she knew, her dad just said the F word to her."

Michael's remorse was apparent on this draft; striking, too, was his rich vocabulary, vocabulary that was not always evident when he spoke. (Michael sometimes inserts a lot of fillers into his speech, repeating phrases like, "whatever and whatever" and "you know what I'm sayin'" between sentences. Sometimes he does it so often that the filler-phrase makes up as much as seventy-five percent of his speech—his oral performance.) Yet on the page, Michael's use of language was quite economical; his narrator's voice was present, strong, and vibrant. Even more significantly, this was the first story he's ever written about his daughter since joining the CSWW, and it was a most intimate story, at that, a most intimate *sharing* of stories, indeed.

And Rudy, who had been listening thoughtfully and taking down notes as Michael read his story, seemed especially moved by the father-daughter relationship and the

202

narrator's honesty. In fact, as soon as Michael ended the piece, Rudy immediately offered his insights before I could even ask for them.

"That piece right there is so rich in detail. I can tell he's used his five senses to describe the situation very honestly. It was very nice," Rudy said, and even glanced across the table at Michael. "Very specific and zoomed in. I think the narrator is very regretful."

It was a pleasant surprise, Rudy's response was, because just weeks ago when he and Michael sat in on their first workshop together, he had declined to share his draft with "others" during the small group session. "I'm not up to it today. I don't want others to use what I write against me," he said, and then darted both of his eyes toward Michael. Yet something changed between the two of them at this more recent workshop. Through writing, through talking about writing, they seemed to relate to each other differently—as peers, as *writers*.

Back then our relationship was still very new—mine, Rudy's, and Michael's—so I hadn't yet figured all my bearings inside the group, let alone predicted this outcome: that in a workshop session with just the three of us, Rudy would praise the descriptive language in the piece, invoke writerly techniques like the five senses, and position himself as a supportive peer to Michael, a person he had previously perceived as an outsider. From having worked alongside each of the men on draft revisions, I just assumed they were not likely to back down in a conflict.

Specifically I had witnessed a kind of unyieldingness from Rudy before when he and another member, Cassie, clashed over religion at a previous workshop. The group had just finished reading *A View from the Bridge* by Cherokee Paul McDonald when the

203

argument between them silenced everybody to a pause. Angry over her interpretation of the Bible, Rudy called Cassie "blasphemous," then slammed his notebooks on top of each other and walked out of the session.

As Cassie explained after, "[Rudy] interprets it one way and I interpret it another way. I don't see it the way he does and he got mad at me. My belief has always been, let's agree to disagree, but he's not okay with that." Then, referencing Jason, one of the younger veterans at the shelter and CSWW member, Cassie added, "The kid doesn't know it but he's getting brainwashed by [Rudy]. He was just so spiritually broken when he came here [to the shelter]. Then [Rudy] took him and hasn't let anyone talk to him. He's isolated him from everybody else. They don't talk to anyone anymore. After so many weeks together, you see this other side of people that aren't as pleasant. You think, what happened to him? He's been acting weird—secluded, isolated. He thinks negatively of others."

In small communal spaces such as that of a homeless shelter, interpersonal conflicts can affect friendships and morale. Quarrels among shelter clients range anywhere from breaking dorm room policies to philosophical and religious differences to accusations of theft. By the time members arrive at the workshop, many of them are simply exhausted—from the week, from each other, from themselves. Consequently a significant part of my role as the CSWW facilitator involves managing group dynamics and ensuring a safe and respectful space for everyone to speak their thoughts, and importantly, to be heard. When members talk, for instance, my response is usually to nod lightly and steadily along, not necessarily to agree, but to acknowledge what they may be saying—no matter how tangential their comments may be from the workshop discussions

204

at times. Of course, sometimes members like Cassie may also go on for a while, so when they do, I seek for natural pauses in the speech in order to redirect our conversation back to workshop-related topics, much like any teacher might in a traditional classroom. If it is appropriate, I may even ask questions like, "You seem especially committed to this issue. There are a lot of emotions tied to it. Perhaps there's another layer of truth underneath that wants to suggest itself to surface. Might this be something you'd like to explore on the page?"

Depending on who is in attendance, other members in the group may chime in to help refocus the discussion as well. Carmella and Nancy, for example, are especially supportive of their peers, and when possible, they are the ones who encourage fellow members to express their frustrations in written form. "I hope you write about this," Carmella will say, "because it seems so important to you. You have a lot of energy stored up there, and I don't know what it is, but I'm interested to know why." Similarly, Nancy will ask questions like, "If you were to write about this, I would want to know more about _[insert specific detail]_." In general, these kinds of comments work really well to redirect workshop discussions. They convey interest in what the speaker is saying, and at the same time, they gently remind him or her that the workshop is a writing space.

Yet, not everyone is always as tactful as Carmella and Nancy. In fact sometimes other members' interjections can create more tension in the group than encourage support. Rudy, for instance, has a very low tolerance for digressions, and as you may have already seen, he isn't exactly shy about articulating his sentiments. On one of these occasions when a member went off tangent, Rudy remarked, "I'm offended that we've gotten off track like this. I'm not interested in gossip here. We talk about this all the time

205

[in other support groups]. But this is a writing group and I want to stick to that task. I want to learn to be a better writer."

Indeed communication styles vary greatly among CSWW members; a lot of times the tones of delivery can come across as very speaker-centric (or "speaker-based" to invoke Flower's (1979) writer-based prose), meaning that, the speaker isn't fully aware of his or her audience, and assumes the audience will accept his or her tone of articulation without consequence. In the case of Rudy and in that particular incident, it could have been that he did not realize how forceful and intimidating his comments sounded. Or likely, it could have been that he knew exactly how he sounded and he wanted to shut down the other member. Regardless of intentions, such a speaker-based communication style can silence the whole group to a halt, or just as worse, incite an altercation. (I should pause here, however, and say that physical confrontations are rare at the shelter, and they are even rarer inside the workshop, if not, nonexistent. In fact, the closest incident that resembled a "fight," didn't involve any actual contact at all—just a lot of yelling of voices, crashing of chairs, and shifting of the table, but nothing more.)

The truth is, members see the writing group as a kind of temporary refuge from their homelessness, and they especially resent it when that space is disrupted—when, for instance, conversations get sidetracked, or when attention is focused too long on one person in the group. To this end part of my job as the workshop facilitator, too, is to be aware of members' differing views on what that "refuge" entails for them, and then, to navigate through these differences in such a way that respects as many members' expectations as possible. Members like Rudy, for example, joined the CSWW for story writing (at least they believe that they joined for that purpose), and they may not

immediately see the relevance of talk as part of the whole experience, including as part of the composition process. For them, any deviation from explicit "writing talk" could trigger frustration. Thus, at all times, I have to be mindful of how the workshop time is spent. I have to make sure that the conversations do not digress so much that members feel excluded.

At the same time, there are also members like Cassie who want the chance to decompress inside the workshop space. They want to express their frustrations; they want to vent to sympathetic ears. And so for them, I try to create opportunities for digressions and invite talk; otherwise, the CSWW would have limited functions, and it would reflect too closely to a rigidly controlled classroom, the kind where members are expected to sit quietly and "stick to the task," the kind where they receive knowledge rather than participate in its construction. In fact, what I have learned over the years is that, just as the workshop is a literacy space for writing and exploration, it must also function as a social space for reflecting on past and immediate circumstances. After all, through talk, members interact; they slow down to think. Through talk, they compose.

…Profile Three:
Reflection

In this analysis section, I discuss the various shapes of audience that come together in the CSWW, and importantly, the ways in which these communities of peer audience (Bruffee, 2003) support and stunt members' composition process and identities as literate beings (i.e., writers). Through my depiction of Michael's and Rudy's exchange, for

example, I offer one moment in which members related to each other through composition. When and if these moments happen, the draft functions almost like a "clean slate," a new opportunity for members, who may or may not be friends outside the workshop, to connect differently. In workshopping Michael's drafts, for example, Rudy and Michael engaged with each other in a space where they shared common goals (Rogers, 2003). Even though both men came from different "first" spaces, they did not clash as they may normally have in different contexts such as inside the shelter house or on the streets. Instead, Rudy focused his comments on the narrator's persona, tone, intentions (Gornick, 2001), and thus, addressed Michael as a writer rather than as another stranger or client of the shelter (Gee, 2013; Holland, et al., 1998). In so doing, Rudy also positioned himself as a writer and writing teacher and peer (Gee, 2013; Holland, et al., 1998; Wortham, 2001). Undoubtedly switching contexts can affect members' relationships with each other. Although Rudy and Michael were not necessarily friends outside of the CSWW, for instance, they were still able to engage with each other inside the writing workshop. Certainly, writers often bring their conflicts into the workshop space, but sometimes the change in scenery and goals can redirect them toward a common goal.

At the same time, not all workshop sessions are as successful as the exchange between Michael and Rudy; members sometimes do not make it pass external tensions outside of the workshop in order to connect with one another *on the page*. In these cases, the context outside the page (i.e., inside and outside the shelter) can be especially dominant. In part two of my analysis, I suggest that factors such as personality clashes, interpersonal conflicts, and other stressors can inhibit collaboration and cohesiveness

among group members. In the exchange between Rudy and Cassie, for example, the group dynamic reflects more of a contact zone (Bizzell, 2003; Cushman and Emmons, 2002; Pratt, 1991) than a kind of third space (Gutierrez, K.D., Baquedano-Lopez, P., Tejeda, C., & Rivera, A., 1999; Moje, et al., 2004). Indeed even when members come together to supposedly work toward a common goal such as workshopping drafts, they may, instead, impede each other's membership and experience.

Regardless, whether members support or disrupt each other's experiences in the sessions, my role as the facilitator and the role of group members as peers are especially crucial—what we do, how we do it, and when we do it can affect members' composition processes and identities as writers. To further help structure my reflection, I discuss the group dynamics and influences in two kinds of settings—the supportive-audience workshop and the inhibitive-audience workshop. How do we, as members of a writing group, support each other as peers? Conversely what do we do (individually and as a group) to hinder each other's experiences?

The Supportive-Audience Workshop

As I have repeatedly noted, the CSWW is a space for writers to compose stories with, and for, audience (Ong, 2003). Yet who that audience is can affect writers' experiences in the workshop—it can either inspire him or her to share drafts or it can cause him or her to withdraw from the workshop altogether (Bruffee, 2003). For this discussion, I focus on how the workshop supports writers' composition and identities as literate beings. Particularly, I consider Rudy's and Michael's exchange, and how they both authenticated

209

each other's literate identities—Michael validating Rudy as a writer-peer and Rudy validating Michael as a writer. I consider, too, my own role in this exchange—such moments when I engage in the conversation and when I pull back to allow space for Rudy and Michael to acknowledge each other.

As noted, Michael is a performer; he is always aware of his audience. It is not too surprising, then, that he would come to this workshop and announce his draft about the cheeseburger in the way that he did—with pauses and a quick observation across the room. For him, in particular, the more he participated in the workshop, the less secluded he seemed to become. I suspect this is because within the contained setting of the group, he has audience—at least for 90 minutes, anyway. Writing in the workshop environment offers him entrance into a community, a space in which he can perform *with* others and *for* others. Indeed, whether he is aware of it, Michael views writing very much as a social act. During the workshop session between Rudy and him, for example, Michael's performance suggests that he was portraying himself as a writer and a longtime workshop member, someone who was very familiar with me, the facilitator, and the workshop (Wortham, 2001). Additionally, in stating, "I was looking at that golden arc, you know, the one at McDonald's, and I thought about the [writing] prompt you gave us, 'write about an object you want bronzed," Michael may have been enacting the role of the "good student," someone who followed the "teacher's assignment." Certainly he wanted me to know that, but to a larger degree, he wanted *Rudy* to know about his relationship with me. In fact, Michael wanted us both to understand that even though he had been absent from the group, he had been thinking about the assignment. Of course, this message was further confirmed by me, when I said, "Yes, I remember that. Henry Louis

Gates, Jr.'s essay. I'm glad you pursued it." As the facilitator of the group, it was my job to validate his positioning, to secure or "mediate" the context for his performance as a writer and member of the CSWW (Wortham, 2001).

At this point of the interaction, it is uncertain whether Michael had fully accepted Rudy as a peer audience. More likely, perhaps, is that he was still in the midst of auditioning, or casting Rudy for the role, figuring whether Rudy would respond accordingly as a supportive peer. Every now and then, for instance, Michael glanced around the room to observe, made his pauses, and carried on, even though he never once made eye contact. Note, although many of us may expect regular eye-contact with our peers, this kind of visual connection does not always happen between CSWW members. It could be a social cue that some of them have acquired, be it from childhood, family, friends or while living at the shelter, out on the streets, or elsewhere. Or it could be a personal choice to communicate distance and/or disinterest. In fact, when Rudy and Michael first walked into the room, neither one of them acknowledged the other. They looked only at me; and they spoke only to me. Once and again, my role as the facilitator in these instances was to deescalate any potential tensions among the members. I addressed both Rudy and Michael as casually as I could so as to temper the awkwardness in their dismissal of each other's presence. At this point, both of them had a lot of power in constructing the workshop space. Thus, in order to mediate and prevent one member's influence from overpowering the other's, I had to be very cautious of their gestures toward each other.

The truth is, just as Michael may have been assessing Rudy's role in the group, Rudy was also constructing his own participation as a peer audience. After Michael read

his story, for example, Rudy made effort to connect with his peer by looking across the table at him. Thus, although Rudy was telling me, the facilitator, what he thought about Michael's story, he was also conveying this message to Michael with his eyes. Importantly, Rudy's comments about Michael's use of the five senses were, in fact, his efforts to connect with Michael from writer to writer; he was trying to recognize his peer's skills in descriptive writing, as well as respond to the narrator on the page. By glancing at Michael across the table, commenting on his writing choices, and relating to his narrator, Rudy acknowledged Michael's identity as a writer in that moment, and in turn, he (i.e., Rudy) also enacted the role of expert, writer, and maybe even teacher.

Validation by peers is important in these workshops because when it is present, it confirms for each member his or her sense of self as a writer (Brufee, 2003; Lave, & Wenger, 1991) within the group. In turn, for the peer audience, the process of validating another member's writer identity also enables them to enact other identities for themselves, those other than the identity they came into the workshop, such as, "bridge troll," "homeless guy," "street bum" (Lave, & Wenger, 1991), e.g., Rudy gets to play the role as teacher and expert. Undeniably the influence of peers can be especially powerful; in fact, it can be even stronger than the influence of the teacher, or facilitator at times (Elbow, 1997). Just as writers want me to bear witness to their drafts and experiences, for example, they also need their peers to serve that role. After all, group relationships and dynamics are constructed by *both* the facilitator and by their peer group, and they are not necessarily with equal impact, either.

To this end, when the group dynamics are contentious or when the support is vague, it could discourage writers' composition process. More specifically, when

212

validation is not apparent, writers may become discouraged from *sharing* their stories with others. Note, I emphasize the word, "sharing," and not "writing" because I think the writing could and may likely still happen, though just not necessarily with other members in the group. This brings me to the next part of this analysis section where I discuss moments when the workshop inhibited members' experiences.

The Inhibitive Audience Workshop: Conflicting Goals

In general members join the CSWW because they want to belong, they want to be seen as literate beings—in the eyes of the community, in the eyes of the academy, and in the eyes of each other and themselves. They come for writing and storytelling purposes, to compose their stories and revise their selves. But closer examination of what these reasons mean to members and how they translate into practice reveal more variance than overlap. To this end group members do not always agree on how the weekly ninety minutes are spent.

For example, sometimes members may refer to the CSWW as a class (rather than a workshop) where I serve as the teacher (rather than the facilitator). When this happens, I redirect their references from class to "writing workshop," from teacher to "facilitator" so as to imply a much more collaborative space (Bruffee, 2003; Elbow, 1998; Newkirk, 2009). Yet even as I do this, some members may still insist on the former designations. For them, words like "class" and "teacher" connote a sense of legitimacy and discipline, that perhaps, writing workshop and facilitator do not (at least not until they, themselves, internalize their own writer-selves). Particularly for the men and women who did not

213

have positive experiences in school, the idea of attending a writing class is similar to a kind of "second chance" at education (Rose, 2012). Equally relevant, for those who completed high school and/or college, the opportunity to enroll in a writing class once more also means a chance to reconnect with their literate identities (Rose, 2013). In both cases, members join the CSWW because they, too, subscribe to dominant notions of literacy, and they want to be a part of those conventions. And really, why wouldn't they? No doubt, the ability to read critically and write effectively could well afford employment and social mobility (Janks, 2010; Janks, 2013; Rose, 2013).

Many, if not, most of the writers are homeless when they first arrive at the workshop; thus, they carry with them the stigma prescribed to them as such: a homeless person with deficits (Finley, & Diversi, 2010; Miller, 2014). But inside the CSWW, at least for ninety minutes each week, they are able to share their various ways of knowing, they are able to enact their many other selves (Gee, 2013; Holland, et al., 1998), those that do not necessarily embody the mark of the Scarlet Letter. Inside the training room where the workshop is held, Danny expresses his love of books, for example, his history as an avid reader since the age of five. Dale shares his drafts partly written in Greek, and sometimes even performs a Homeric poem. Carmella shows her oil and water paintings, and on occasion, reads her 30-page fairy tale, the story she wrote for her grandson. Indeed the CSWW as a space of second chances, is a space to which all writers should have access, but to which not all writers do. Here, writers revise for themselves and for the community what it means to be a "productive" community members, a literate being, a teacher, a giver—and not always the receiver of support.

214

Furthermore, in a town known for its writing culture, members like Cassie, for example, will mention the CSWW's affiliation with the university's writing programs. "I was so excited that the [re-known writing program] was here at the shelter and now I can be part of it," she said. Similarly, Casper, says he read about the writing group "in the newspaper from [a city three hours away], and came to be part of the group." And Rudy and Michael often assert their affiliation with the university's writing program whenever they talk to other people about their writing—Michael through a brochure featuring his success story and Rudy at community support group meetings. For them, association with the university's program further adds to their credibility as writers (Gee, 2013).

Of course, as a writing teacher and literacy researcher, I subscribe to a different form of legitimacy, one where I imagine writers validate each other's work for their strengths and possibilities (Elbow, 1998; Newkirk, 2009), rather than depend on their connections to a university's brand. I see the CSWW as a space for community writers like Casper, who says, "I was at a different shelter facility, about two hours away from this town. I heard about you guys and I came because I'm a poet. And maybe I could be a writer of narratives too." And Nancy, who notes, "I have a mental illness. Writing helps me, but I have nowhere to go, no one to write with. In this town, as much as it's a famous writing place, it's impossible to find a writing group, especially if you're someone like me." Yet, like other aspects of this work, e.g., negotiating between functional literacy and expansive literacy, I must find ways to bring together writers' various views of the workshop and those of my own. I must be part of the force that facilitates the CSWW toward third space, not the one that disrupts it, even when I may not necessarily want or wish for opposition.

Sometimes writers will invite speakers, for example, without notifying me ahead of time. Now, this is relevant only insofar as where it concerns group dynamics, because introducing a stranger who does not intend to stay as part of the workshop could certainly disrupt how the workshop runs that day. In one situation, Dale had met an author at a local book fair and invited him to speak with the writing group. In an email to me, he wrote: "Dear Ms. Liu, While attending a symposium on small presses and self-publishing…on Saturday, I was impressed enough with one of the non-fiction authors that I invited him to communicate with you and to be our guest speaker when he was able. I hope I did not exceed my bounds in doing so! His name is [name of author]. Please let me know if that's okay...." Although polite, and maybe even apologetic, Dale had certainly taken it upon himself to shape the workshop time because the reality was, he had already invited the speaker. His email served more to inform than to request permission. And so in this particular instance, I graciously accepted the guest, because really, what else could I have done? The point I wish to stress here is that members are always contributing to the construction of the workshop space and time and I don't always have control over what we do, when we do it, or with whom we do it.

Finally, just about every single writer, whether they anticipated it or not, said they came for the camaraderie and sense of community in the CSWW. Certainly members use this weekly time and space primarily for writing, but throughout the years, they've also shared personal announcements, exchanged shelter house and community news, gossiped about neighbors, and supported each other through difficult trials.

Given the variability of members' perceived purposes for the workshop, maintaining unity and collaboration within the group is not always easy. In fact, tensions

often break out and members challenge each other's goals for the space and ninety minutes. For example, when Rudy said he wasn't "interested in gossip" and wanted instead to "learn to be a better writer," he was prioritizing his own interests, meaning that no one else's mattered, at least not to him. He was also reminding me of my job to refocus the group back to writing: "…this is a writing group," he said, thus positioning himself as a person with set goals, someone who joined the group for writing purposes, and any person doing otherwise was, in fact, preventing him (and the group) from productive participation. In short, Rudy was enacting his power in the group.

While Rudy's strong will and insistence may suggest his rigidness and unwillingness to collaborate, it equally hints at what the workshop, itself, represents to him, and thus helps explain his protectiveness of it. Indeed for him, the CSWW served as one of the rare spaces and community in which he wanted to participate. Outside of this space, Rudy actually saw himself as an outsider. The first time he came to the workshop, for instance, he said, "I lived under the bridge and the ducks and squirrels were my friends. I'm what you call a bridge troll." From the start, Rudy made a point to distinguish himself from other clients at the shelter. He even declared proudly his knowledge of various subgroups of homelessness, and that he was an *insider* of a particular group that lived under the bridge.

Even inside the CSWW, Rudy did not easily accept his peer audience. Part of this, of course, had nothing to do with his resistance and/or protectiveness. The transient nature of the shelter meant frequent, and sometimes drastic, shifts in membership. As such, as new members joined and rejoined the workshop (thus changing dynamics and cohort configurations), and as relationships outside of the workshop (i.e., within the

217

shelter house) evolved, Rudy had to renegotiate his audience inside the workshop. The inconsistency in membership, or cohort, complicated his notion of community, and in many ways, of his trust. Although this was the case for everybody in the group, Rudy, in particular was among those who struggled most with the instability. To this end, there were occasions when he came across as very rigid about how the workshop time was spent. It is almost as if he did not think it was worth his effort to regroup and befriend new members. Furthermore, as suggested, the struggle to trust others may be part of what he had learned from experiencing chronic homelessness, and therefore, when entering the workshop space, he brought those values with him.

Nevertheless, it is true, too, that over time as Rudy engaged more in the CSWW he also started to ease up on his expectations. He was also more comfortable talking about writing, invoking writerly terms like "five senses" and "specificity." He talked, often, about himself as a teacher, someone who could help me run the writing group and help members through their own revision process. There seems to be some connection between his increased roles in the workshop and his flexibility. That is, as he internalized these identities as peer mentor and writer, he also placed less weight on his identity as a "bridge troll," and he grew more accepting of digressions in workshop sessions.

Rudy's interaction with Michael, is perhaps the first instance when he was, in fact, supportive of fellow group members. By this point, Rudy had already started to experience the act of writing socially within a writing group. He had begun to understand that, not only is writing a social act, but talking (via conversations and even digressions) is a necessary part of that engagement, *talking* is a function of slowing down to think, the shaping of ideas at the point of utterance (Britton, 1975; Britton, 2003; Moffett, 1988).

218

Why I Write

It is difficult for me to imagine not writing. Except for very short periods of my life, I have always written something in one form or another. Writing just came to me. I have had a difficult, traumatic life. I write to stay emotionally sane, to connect with God, and to discover who I am as a person. Often when I begin the revision process, I read back to myself what I have written. I always learn something about myself when I listen to what's on the page. There is something about the writing and revision processes that give me some insight that I cannot find any other way. Writing, for me, is an expression of the soul, a window into who I really am.

(Nancy, 2013)

A Writer's Composing Process

(or negotiating between talk and written forms)

I grew up in the Vietnamese oral tradition, meaning that my mother told stories—lots of them. My grandmother did, too, maybe even more than my mother. Many were about ghosts and the supernatural, like how the closer you get to the equator, the closer you are to the spirits, and they, to you. My favorite is the one about my past life, how I was once an immortal little boy—"a servant to the Goddess of Mercy," as my grandmother used to say proudly. "The neighborhood monk predicted your holy birth a few months before it happened, you know."

This monk was able to see things that others couldn't—he, being possessed by the divine spirits. In fact, it was he who told my grandmother that her teenage daughter (my mother) was pregnant. "Don't let her loose clothing fool you," he said. "She is carrying the soul of an immortal in her womb."

Neighbors used to seek him out for all sorts of services: counseling, astrological readings, herbal concoctions, and lottery numbers. He knew how to interpret dreams and translate them into numeric forms. "'If you see a snake in your sleep, or hints of it,' he said, 'play the number 32; dragons are 26, but only those that fly, the lying-down kind, the ones in the water are 10, though those could also be worms which are 05. Horses are 12, chickens are 28, pigs are 7, oxen are 9, and prostitutes are 21'" (Liu, 2014).

Indeed this monk had many talents, and he could do many things—he, and every single monk in my grandmothers' stories; stories that had no apparent moral lessons or

220

point to them at all, but that stuck to me, anyway, like cooked rice; stories that, after they were told, all I heard were voices ringing inside my ears, all I saw were personalities dancing before my eyes.

In this fourth profile called, "A Writer's Composing Process," I talk about the importance of orality in storytelling. More specifically I focus on one writer's drafts, i.e., Rudy's, and discuss how he incorporated talk in his composition process. Where his early written drafts were full of clichés and stock phrases, Rudy's orally-delivered renditions were rich in scene, and importantly, distinct in voice. For a period of two years, he and I worked to connect these specific moments from his oral narration to those he wrote about on the page. Through the composition process, Rudy discovered other layers of emotional truths behind his story and composed a personal essay that was eventually published in the first issue of our anthology, *Of the Folk*.

A Writer's Process

Melvin remembers handling a ball-peen hammer, but forgets whether he did so in his stepfather's garage to pound on sheets of metal, or in the midst of a monsoon to crush the skull of a man. Wilson tells me about the harsh conditions of Vietnamese jungles, but says that, just as severe, if not worse, "was being burnt by Zippo lighter fluid as a child by one of my siblings." Jimmy does not talk about the war at all, but remembers the day of his discharge, noting, "The Colonel came in…and I was smokin' a cigarette and came to attention in my boxer shorts….'" And then finally, Rudy recalls very little of the war but carries a heavy shame, nonetheless, from his childhood—he, Dale, and Clark, too.

221

Shame and trauma, these are the kinds of narratives that writers often compose inside the workshop, although they are not always the ones that writers share with others outside of this space. It can feel rather unsafe, after all, to disclose personal stories like these, particularly when the threat of ridicule and/or rejection is probable. Nevertheless there are times when writers will talk about their painful memories; they will write about them, too, and then a few of them will even resent me for bearing witness, but not for too long, usually. In these moments of exchange, I can always sense the urgency of the teller to tell, the writer to write. So I sit there. I listen. But after, sometimes in moments of quietness, I suspect that some of them will regret it, in the same way I sometimes feel after I confide too much in a friend. The sharing, the talking, the writing, and the revising of stories are intense as they are; add trauma and personal shame to the mix and that tension explodes. But such is par for the course, as people say. Anybody who works with trauma narratives knows that there is price to bearing witness to other people's hauntings. Anybody who is still doing it, knows the work is worth it.

For me, the successful moments in the workshop are those that translate into composition, when the writer is ready and willing to uncover, through drafts, the layers of truths (and shame). The results are nothing less of poignancy—inspirational, eye-opening, transformative narratives. But the road to get there is hardly, if ever, without potholes and ditches. The process requires a commitment of time to multiple drafts, and constant (and often contentious) negotiations between oral and written forms. Employing multiple composition forms such as talk, writing, and even graphics can be especially helpful when and if writers are composing about traumatic pasts like abuse and loss. This is because while the writer may be able to *talk* about their hauntings, they may not always

be able to write about them with the same level of details, voice, presence, and clarity. The process of recalling one's painful experiences can be challenging as it is, let alone the process of writing about it, too. Not only is the heart preoccupied with the emotional burden, the mind is preoccupied with expectations of language, tone, correctness that are often attached to putting thought to paper.

To this end *talk* (Bauman, 1986; Ong, 1980) becomes an incredibly important composition tool and form for writers in the CSWW as they explore through their violent pasts. It can facilitate their entry to the written form because the act of talking usually also means the presence of audience; writers see the person(s) to whom they are telling their stories, they are able to share and revise their ideas from and during the engagement—collaboratively and socially—rather than just imagine them. Because talk is a much more commonly practiced as a social exchange, there is a sense of immediacy in disclosure of details and specificity. As writers orally compose the story, for instance, their audience is also receiving it in real-time, and thus are able to ask and expect more information along the way. Of course, this is not to dismiss or devalue the act of writing, itself. In fact, without paper and pen, personal revelations and emotional discoveries would be very limited, perhaps even superficial. Nevertheless oral composition (Bauman, 1986; Ong, 1980) can facilitate that process; I have witnessed the power of orality too many times in the last four years to ignore its benefits .

Particularly for writers like Rudy, who do not easily engage in storytelling on the page and who tend to write about trauma, oral narration can be an especially useful composition method. In fact, in an article called, "'The Things They Carried': Unpacking trauma scripts inside a community writing workshop" (Liu, 2013), I focused on Rudy's

223

(and one other veteran's) orality and the ways in which talk facilitated his writing process. Again, where his written drafts consisted of stock phrases, for instance, his oral composition had rich details about a childhood spent on the ranch, about military experience as a medical evacuation technician, and about life living under a bridge.

As illustration, recall the excerpt I presented in the Pre-Profile of Rudy's first written draft about a significant moment of his life in which he took things for granted. In it, he writes:

> From a young man, the flowing river covering ground, and a caterpillar with a lot of legs and metamorphosing into a young new beauty or senior old man in the glorious parts of his own destiny of death and not wanting to be missed.

Full of clichés and/or metaphors such as "the flowing river" and "a caterpillar…metamorphosing into a young beauty" (or butterfly), the writing in this rendition lacks specificity (Liu, 2013). Aside from the thematic significance, neither details of personal accounts nor a writer's persona and voice exist in this draft. This kind of vague imagery is more typical than not in trauma narratives; in fact, it is Caruth (1996), I believe, who tells us that imagery is often mask for buried truths derived of trauma. Ironically because of their ambiguous meanings, allegorical language can be especially contrived rather than poetic when written in absence of context and other specific details.

Now, compare what I just presented to you with Rudy's oral narration to a similar prompt. He tells:

> I used to be stuck in the car, eating chips and drinking sodas while [my father] got drunk and hit on women inside the pub. That's the life we were born into, my sister and me. There was no time to be a kid.

224

Noteworthy here are his word choices during the oral storytelling composition. Where his written rendition employs stock descriptors, his orally delivered narrative provides details about a very specific moment in a narrator's childhood, the latter suggesting a much more organic composition to the former's more rigid and vague written draft. Importantly, the audience hearing this description (and/or the reader who may read it, were it written in this way) has a clearer understanding of who the narrator is through his persona and voice and what he experienced as a child through the presence of specific nouns like "car," "chips," "soda," and "pub," as well as verbs like "stuck" and "hit on." Together, these words paint for us an image of Rudy's childhood.

The differences between Rudy's two forms suggest a few things. First, trauma narratives can be challenging to write because of their emotional weight. Even if a person is ready and able to talk about it, he or she may struggle to translate it onto the page. Something happens to the writer when he or she brings thought to paper that doesn't always transpire during oral delivery. Specificity and details, for example, may turn into vague metaphors. Second, it seems that somewhere, somehow, Rudy must have learned to disconnect the language of talking from the language of writing. Somewhere, somehow, he learned that telling and writing stories are two separate acts rather than parts of one composition process.

Of course, to this latter point, Rudy is not the only writer who has disconnected orality from the written form. In the ten years I've taught basic and advanced writing, just about every other student I've had, has written "differently" from the way he or she talked, often at the expense of "voice" on the page—regardless of story type and content. Nothing frustrates me more as a writer and writing teacher than to read voiceless text. It

bores me, and it suggests the writer's lack of confidence on the page. Voiceless-ness and vague language are forms of deflections, I think. Yet why write if you are going to disclaim it?

At the same time, for writers who are recalling painful memories, disclamation may be symptomatic of un-readiness to confront their trauma, and understandably, it may well be a part of the bigger, longer-term process to discovery, to finding space and home for past hauntings. Consequently it is important to revisit with writers about their preparedness, asking them whether they want to proceed, and assuring them that they don't have to. It is as simple as asking, for example, "How are you doing right now?" and "You don't have to continue if you are not ready."

In Rudy's case, although he was ready to tell his story, he couldn't necessarily tell it on the page the same way he could tell it orally—again, with voice, persona, and specific language. Thus, the goal was to help him hear his voice in talk and to *sound* like himself on the page. The goal was to get him to incorporate the details he offered during his oral composition into his written draft. After all the beauty in a piece of writing depends largely on voice and the details—as witnessed from the *narrator's point of view*, in how he or she experiences the world through the senses. But sometimes when writers compose, they forget about that.

For a period of two years, Rudy and I met regularly in both group workshop settings and one-on-one conferences. During these interactions we talked extensively about zooming in to specifics and writing "small" by using his five senses to describe the "big" abstract ideas he wanted to convey. "Help me see, touch, smell, hear, and taste this moment with you. Write about it in the same way you just talked about it," I said. "What

are the big ideas you're trying to get at, here?" Additionally, we read works of creative nonfiction as examples of different types of prose. We—*he*—engaged in multiple drafts, composed in multiple ways (orally and in written forms) and in social and collaborative exchanges. We—*he*—uncovered details about his life bit by bit, draft by draft, and eventually bridged his literacies and knowledge into one beautiful narrative.

In the "final" draft of his essay, the one he published in the CSWW's literary journal, *Of the Folk*, the one sold at a local independent bookstore, Rudy shared a story about growing up poor, about having to prioritize work over school, and most importantly, about learning to let go. In the essay he writes:

Montana 1976…

In summer 1976, I was 22 and coming back home from the United States Army. Mom picked me up from the airport, and cried the whole ride home. It seemed she was always crying those days; she cried the day I went into the service and she cried the day I returned. I told her, "Make up your mind. Are you sad that I had left or are you happy that I'm back?"

"Stay with us for a year, son," was all she said back. I was all grown up then, but I couldn't bring myself to disappointing her. I finally just gave in and stayed with my folks for one year to the day. It wasn't that I didn't want to live with her. Sometimes there are things that happen in your life that you just want to let go—even if that means letting go of the people you love most.

Montana 1959…

I grew up twenty-six miles south of Canada and eight miles west of North Dakota. Sidney, Montana sat on flatlands and it snowed eight months of the year with only a small window of time for spring, summer, and fall. The population consisted of 175 people; more than half were relatives—mothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents.

This was the 1950s and early 1960s. Women wore shirts that had to be buttoned up to the neck, but most of the time, they wore dresses; they were not allowed to wear pants except when journeying outdoors. Young girls could wear pants but only under their dresses to school and even then, the dresses couldn't go above the knees. If they did, it was considered inappropriate, and the girls wearing them would be sent home. It was a different time back then—closed and reserved—a time for things

227

hidden, a time that demanded them. People always seemed to whisper but they never spoke, and I learned pretty fast that speaking in regular voice just wasn't allowed. I learned pretty fast, too, about shame, how you could never tattle on an adult—no matter what. Worse than getting fist-punched in the face or being touched in the wrong way by your own father was getting labeled bad names, names that came with them ugly words, ugly words that defined you and marked you.

So most times, I stayed quiet, wore my happy-face mask, and blocked out ugly memories, even if they were just from a day ago. Most times I focused on other things, things like the grease pig contest. Once a year, farmers around Sidney would donate a few piglets for local kids' grabbing. They would grease up these piglets with lard and release them into the blocked off streets downtown, and then the kids would try to catch the piglets—what, between the squirming and yelping, that is. The rule was, if you could catch it, then you could keep it and raise it for slaughter. Of course, I didn't think of the contest that way (with the slaughter and all). For me, it was just a chance to have fun. In fact, back then that's all I wanted, really. I wanted to be a kid and shoot marbles and earn me some cat's eyes or steles or stripes or solids (those tiny glass balls were like kids' money back then). I wanted to throw the ball around with the neighbor's son and pretend we were in the World Series. Granted, we'd throw so hard (thinking we were so good at baseball), that the ball would, without fail, go through someone's house window. Then naturally, as kids, we would do what all kids do: run as fast and far away as possible. One time, one of the neighbors actually caught up to us and yanked me by the ear. "Boy, see what you did? Now, how old are you?" he demanded. I remember I was so terrified, I said, "I'm four," and held up three fingers.

Getting caught by the neighbor wasn't the worst of it, though. Certainly it didn't teach me anything other than to run faster if I didn't want to get caught. The consequence of messing with other people just wasn't nearly as frightening, I don't think, as that of messing with Mother Goose, or in my case, "Mother Geese." You see, my aunt and uncle owned a geese farm, and one day, they left to work on the fields without remembering to lock the birdcages. My cousin David and me noticed the unlocked cages and decided we would keep guard of the birds and make sure they didn't get out. The task seemed easy enough. How hard, after all, was it really to keep the birds from going down the streets? Well, sure enough that afternoon, the geese got loose and headed toward the front yard. In panic, David and I decided we would "shoo" them back to the backyard and into their cages. Boy, what a mistake that was! Apparently the geese didn't like our tone. They put their heads down and started yelling at each other in bird-talk. Then without any notice, they charged at us, pecking at arms and pulling hair out of heads. Just when we thought it couldn't get worse, they began flapping their wings and suddenly grew into these big, monster birds as tall as we were. As you can imagine, we retreated pretty quickly to the house. At that point, I don't think we cared

228

whether those things ended up on the road or not. All we knew were the blood on our arms, the holes in our faces, and the patches of bald scalp on our eight-year-old selves.

Oh the memories of youth! How far and few in between those were. You see, I was the only male in our immediate family—there was Grandma, Mom, my sister, and me. As early as age five, I had to take on the role of the man of the house. There weren't too many chances to pose as a cowboy toting guns and wearing butt-less chaps, or an American Indian with feathers pinned in between my headband and war paint smeared across the face. For me, the day began at 4 o'clock in the morning on the farm, fetching eggs from the chicken coop, milking cows to make butter and heavy cream, and feeding the animals with buck bales of hay from the neighbor. I also worked the garden—I planted it, I cleaned it, and I picked it.   And while I did the chores, inside the house, the women would prepare meals. Every morning after breakfast, I would ride the range with other men and herd the livestock for winter harvest. We would gather the cattle to the stock yards and separate them by brand. The roundups always started at the end of September, which meant that going to school was secondary to going on round-ups with the men. To do this work, I had to learn to ride a horse early on. In fact, back in those days knowing how to ride a horse was an important part of being a man. And if you lived on the outskirts of town, you definitely had to know how to ride one to school. Yes ma'am, there was no such thing as a school bus. It was either a horse or ice skates to school—what, with winter being so long while spring, fall and summer being so short. Anyway, I had to learn to ride a horse for round-ups because all the cattle were in open range and there was no other way you could get them into a closed-in pasture otherwise. In all I would make $5 a week, adding to the few that Grandma and Mom made working at one of the only restaurants in Sidney.

Boy, were we poor! Of course, I never realized it. As a kid, all I knew was my sister and I had clothes, food, and a roof over our heads. Our home was a small, two-bedroom cabin. We had electricity but no running water, so we had to run pipes into the ground. How this worked was we would drive a lead pipe 10 to 15 feet into the earth until water rushed up. We'd then have to cap the end with a pump. Later, the water retrieved would be filtered for bathing and dishwashing purposes. Otherwise, we used the hand pump by the well. There was also an outhouse just about 10 feet from the door. At night, we'd take a light with us to check the outhouse for critters such as snakes and other wild animals because they would crawl in there to keep warm. Baths happened inside a round wash basin in the middle of the kitchen. Both entrances to the kitchen would be covered with curtains for privacy because we had no door on either side. When it was our day to bathe, we would just hang a blanket up to divide the kitchen from the dining room and no one was allowed in the area until each person in the family had washed. Yes, we were poor. Mom always tried to make things better, though her good intentions often backfired.

Once for Halloween, because we didn't have money for masks, Mom thought she'd dress me up as a hobo, thinking that having a costume was better than having none at all. She put me in a ripped shirt and pants, and smeared my face with black grease. I looked horrible—just like a hobo. Mom was so proud she was able to do something for me, so I didn't say anything. I just smiled and then after she left for work, I stayed home and cried. Never did go to school that day.

Mom wasn't the only one with good intentions, though. One Christmas (my sister and I couldn't have been much more than seven or eight years old) we were told that JC Penney's was going to send a person to our house and donate $5 to every kid for gift-buying. We qualified for the program because Mom was on welfare, though at the time, we didn't know it. We just thought it was a regular Christmas thing. Anyway, my sister and I sat at home that one evening at 6 o'clock just waiting for the JC Penney's guy to come and take us Christmas shopping. We waited and waited. Seven o'clock came, and no JC Penney's. Eight o'clock came, and no JC Penney's. Then nine o'clock came and still, no JC Penney's. By that point, it was bedtime. So what did we do? We curled up and we cried. We thought we must've been so bad that the JC Penney guy didn't want to come get us. Anyway the next day, not wanting Mom not to have anything for Christmas, I went to the neighborhood bargain basement, which really was just some woman selling crafts out of her house. I went in there, looked around and ran across a beautiful, blue crystal necklace (well, it was actually quite ugly as hell but as a kid, it was the most beautiful thing I thought I had ever seen and I wanted it for Mom). I kept going back and forth, knowing all the while that I didn't have money to get it. Eventually I just took it and put it in my pocket. I was so proud, too. I ran home, wrapped it up, and put it under the Christmas tree. Then Christmas came, and Mom acted all surprised when she opened it and said it was beautiful. Afterward, she asked how I was able to afford it and I lied. I told her it was from lunch money I had saved up. Mom knew, though, that we didn't get lunch money that often, but she just nodded anyway. I only saw her wear that blue thing once, on that Christmas Day, and never again.

Mom and I have always had that unspoken understanding between us and I'm not sure when that all stopped but eventually it did. As I got older, we saw fewer and fewer of each other. Mom started dating again and sometimes I would not see her for months. I became heavily involved in sports—swimming, wrestling, running—and I would place first in all them. In fact, at 13, I nearly made it into the U.S. Olympic Swimming Team—placed fifth. Had I placed fourth, I would have had the chance to represent this country. From seventh grade through high school, I was also undefeated in wrestling until I quit sports altogether. The truth was, victories were sweet but never quite enough when neither parents were there to witness it, when the cheers you heard in the crowd sounded more like a ball of mixed up noise than that of your mom's or even dad's. "You

230

did it, son!" Or, "We are so proud!" Mom's excuse was that she didn't want to see me get hurt doing sports, but really, there wasn't much I couldn't do. Seems, by then, our unspoken understanding had died out, or maybe it had never really existed at all. Maybe I had made it all up in my mind. After all, Mom had us young, my sister and me. There was only so much a young woman like her could handle—raising two kids and enduring black eyes and bloody noses from our dad, Whitey, whenever he came by. I remember once, Mom was so desperate she wanted to put us up for adoption. She wanted us to go live with rich people outside town. She tried to convince us that these people could provide for us and give us things that she couldn't. My sister was willing and ready to go, but I didn't want to leave. I figured, what's better than the home you're living in? Why would I want to live with a fake mom? Besides, I knew Mom had some kidney disease and she thought she was going to die at 22 from it. I figured if her death was going to hurt, then I wanted to be there for her. Even at five, I knew I couldn't walk away.

Montana 1977…

Two weeks after I moved out and went on my own, the news finally came to pass. It was 8:30 at night when my sister and stepdad knocked on my apartment door. This visit, so late in the evening, couldn't be good, I thought. From the anticipation, my heart fell and my guts tightened. When I opened the door, my sister said, "Mom just died." I remember feeling a few tears, but I was very numbed otherwise.

The day came when we had to bury Mom, and as usual, I was late. When she was still alive, Mom even used to tell me, "Randy, you will be late to my funeral," and well, she was right. By the time I arrived, everyone was already there, waiting for me. I remember standing over her and noticing the lifeless body dressed in a beautiful blue outfit, the hair done only like my mom could do. I stared at her, hoping—praying—she would open her eyes or say something, anything, to me. But, neither happened and my heart, full of grief, could handle no more.

When everyone filed out of the church, I stayed till they closed the casket and moved it to Mom's final resting spot. I watched as the people lowered the beautiful, skinny, brown box into the large, dark hole, one that would eventually be sealed with dirt. I bent down to the ground, scooped a handful of earth, and threw it onto the box. Afterward, I turned away, never to return.

I offer Rudy's narrative almost in its entirety because I want to show just how impressive his process really was, particularly if you consider the kind of language he constructed in early drafts. To this end and importantly, I want to illustrate what

231

employing multi-layered composition methods could reap. What you see here is a product of two years of composition from mouth to page, of telling short snapshots then writing them down then revising them then threading them into a "story." Rich content, distinct voice, intentional tone, specific language, these qualities are all present in Rudy's final version, as is the repetitious and rhythmic narrative structure that binds the story— Montana 1976, Montana 1959, Montana 1977.

It is important for me to mention that the process of blending both oral and written forms into one draft was less linear than it was recurrent, and entailed a shifting between forms throughout composition. Additionally, I should say that not everything Rudy composed orally were appropriate for the written form. At times when he orally composed about his childhood trauma, for example, the tone did not necessarily complement with that on his written draft. Specifically, in recalling memories of molestation, Rudy used words like "sperm donor" and "molested" to refer to his biologic father and the sexual abuse. Although accurate of the trauma, the temper and brashness in such blunt descriptions changed the tone and voice on his draft. It also redirected the focus of his narrative's story about "loss" and "letting go" to the vulgarity of the abuse. In other words, it emphasized the situation rather than the emotional truth or impact that it had on the narrator. That Rudy also had no desire to discuss and explore the abuse in greater detail also necessitated the tempering of this moment. Indeed in composing multiple drafts, Rudy realized that he wanted to focus on his survival, perseverance, and second chances in spite of multiple traumas, and as such, opted to hint at the abuse, not highlight it. Per his final draft, he shared his knowledge about farming, ranching, and herding. He depicted himself as a devoted son who loved his mother deeply; he was a

232

caretaker, a breadwinner, a male figure of the household—all the things that his biological father wasn't. Thus, just as the story is about survival and letting go, it can also be read as a story about who he, Rudy, is as a person.

After completing his essay, "Montana," Rudy moved to a different state to be with his adopted parents and for two years we communicated mainly through third-party, i.e., Mary, his caseworker. Recently, he and I were able to reconnect on the phone, however, and in the conversation he told me about a writing group that he had been facilitating—teaching, informing, *inspiring* people in the community about possibilities of second, third, fourth chances, about surviving traumatic pasts, about reclaiming life from a place of strength.

"I am working with this one kid; he's like in his twenties," Rudy said. "You know, he's like one of those kids that see me as a grandpa of sorts. I told him, 'I'm too old to be your father, so maybe grandpa is more like it.' Anyway I showed him that story I wrote and he loved it—asked me why I stopped. He just wanted more. I tell people here in [this town] that I've been working with a professor at the University of [State]. I don't know if you really are a professor, but to me you are, and well, they say, 'Wow. [That state] is where all the writers are. It's a really good program.' Made me so proud because I never knew. But wow, how lucky I was."

Thinking about Rudy's life now, I am reminded of why it is important to sponsor spaces like the CSWW, spaces intentionally situated inside a homeless shelter, spaces supposedly plagued with illiteracy and neediness, spaces where writing is presumed to be nonexistent. The act of writing socially (and teaching) can help keep many writers like Rudy focused on possibilities. Discoveries of strengths and successes on the page, at least

233

for him, seem to have translated into enactments of strengths into the figured world, *off* the page. It is quite common, after all, for writers to adopt and embrace the perspectives and identities of their narrators. Sometimes the line between the narrative truth and the figured world truth is so fine that the realities conflate. As seen with Rudy, writing and telling and living are all part of the same process. In moments of success like these, there is no denying the transformative power of writing—what were once words spoken from the mouth are now transcribed onto the page, and are lived out in the figured world.

Digression

I remember him. He sat alone at the far corner of the table and hung onto his backpack the way people hung onto their grocery bags—up front and against his chest. He told me he wasn't sure why he came to the workshop session, and then pushed away the sheet of paper to no one in particular. He insisted, like many members before, that he did not like to write.

He said he didn't carry anything on him, that he traveled lightly, and that the only things he had, were his stories. "But writing them down doesn't make them anymore permanent," he said. "My stories, they're under my skin, inside of me." He pointed to his forearm, pricked at his shirt collar, and for the next thirty minutes, composed about the things he carried without ever writing a single word on the page.

Yes. I remember him. He, and everyone like him, who reminds me that so much of writing grows from talk. He, like a handful of members, never picked up the pen

while in the workshop, but he, like a handful of members, had stories and shared them he did, when the mood struck right, and the words just wouldn't—couldn't—stop.

…Profile Four:

Reflection

As suggested, Rudy is a perfect example of someone who benefitted from multiple forms of composition, experimentation of written forms, and collaboration. When on the page, particularly in the early drafts, he composed almost primarily in metaphors and stock phrases. His sentence constructions were also unclear, and upon first read, some people might even say that they were incomprehensible. Yet, through reading his drafts with peers (and with me), through talking and exploring what motivated his writing, Rudy also produced a rich draft that incorporated details from his oral composition.

In this reflection section, I want to discuss some of the points that I may have overlooked in the profile about Rudy's drafting process. Mainly, I want to reflect a little more about the shifts between the generalness of his first draft to the specific descriptions of his final draft, considering for instance, the writing tools and techniques that I used with Rudy to facilitate his composition process. Second, I want to review the role of talk and audience—on the collaboration and immediacy it imposed on Rudy's construction of truth as well as his revision process. Finally I want to revisit the ways in which the "draft" could serve as a third space, an idea that I brought up in Profile Three, but now would like to zoom in further to consider how the draft could function as a kind of "home" for one's trauma.

As suggested the final rendition of Rudy's narrative has many themes such as: loss of innocence, letting go (of loved ones and of past wounds), and survival. He hints at these ideas in each of his childhood memories, starting with the moment he came back from the military (1976), then trailing back to his childhood before the military (1959), and finally back to a more recent past when he learned of his mother's passing (1977). In all these recollections, Rudy depicts his narrator's persona (Gornick, 2001) as a responsible and good son to his mother. He prioritized work over school, for instance, not because he wanted to but because it was out of necessity to help his mother. In fact, he shares quite a bit about life on the farm and his responsibilities feeding the animals and herding them at a nearby ranch. Indeed life was hard because he and his family were poor. Still yet, as a good son, Rudy's narrator desperately wanted nice things for his mother and once, even stole a necklace to give to her. Despite the hardships of their poverty, he, unlike his sister, also refused foster care or adoption—he, being a good son, wanted to stay by his mother's side.

At the same time, even though Rudy was forced to grow up before his time and take on more responsibilities than most children, he also had moments of innocence such as the memory of "Mother Geese" and the grease pig contest. Here, he shows that even though he had to work and take care of the family, he was still a child, nonetheless. The implications are twofold: 1) Rudy wants his audience or readers to see his narrator as a good son and 2) he wants to remind us, too, that he was still a child who yearned for the same things all children yearn for—fun. These two conflicting images of his narrator— the good son who took care of the family, and the innocent little boy who wanted

freedom from responsibilities—are meant to illustrate the contradictions of his childhood in full, as well as potentially invite our compassion as the readers (Gee, 2013; Wortham, 2001). These depictions show Rudy's values and his sacrifices; they suggest that in spite of being abused by his father, he survived and ploughed on, and eventually learned to let go (Gornick, 2001; Frank, 2010).

But these themes and these identities were not necessarily clear when Rudy first put thought to pen (Frank, 2010; MacCurdy, 2007). As you may have seen on a couple of occasions now, his first written draft read as so:

> From a young man, the flowing river covering ground, and a caterpillar with a lot of legs and metamorphosing into a young new beauty or senior old man in the glorious parts of his own destiny of death and not wanting to be missed.

Although absent of specificity and clear language, what this rendition offers are thematic ideas, and as a writing teacher, I saw them as opportunities or openings for further exploration (Murray, 1980; Murray, 2012; Newkirk, 2009). Take for example, words like death and destiny. While vast and vague, they already come with them thematic significance. Thus, the challenge for Rudy wasn't necessarily to work toward a narrative quest (Gornick, 2001) as it was to illustrate the specific moments of that journey. Useful, then, were questions like "Might you offer me some examples or some images that you attach to these words?" because they asked him to zoom into his own experiences and to illustrate them for his readers.

Similarly, the caterpillar (and the idea of metamorphosis) is, in fact, a metaphor for the one's life cycle, which complements his assertions about "death" and "destiny." Likewise, the river imagery is meant to convey freedom, or more precisely, a free-

237

flowing journey into "a sea of possibilities." All of these allegories suggest the narrator's life quest for freedom, and so again, thematically, he had that part down in this first draft. Yet these imageries are also very contrived, meaning that they are not specific illustrations of Rudy's life or experiences; there are no specific examples that came from his life, through his lens onto which readers could hang.

In *What a Writer Needs*, Fletcher (1993) recalls the advice of Richard Price who says that if you want to write about big abstract ideas such as loss, love, war, peace, happiness, death, destiny and so on, then you must zoom in and write "small," as in you must narrow into an image that represents that big idea. Quoting from Price, Fletcher (1993) writes, "The bigger the issue, the smaller you write…You don't write about the horrors of war. No. You write about a kid's burnt socks lying on the road" (49).

Where this concerns Rudy's first written draft, of course, is that he wrote it very widely—and vaguely. To this end, as the facilitator of the workshop, and as a writing teacher, I relied on questions that asked Rudy to zoom into the specific details, such as, "Might you draw details from your own life's experiences to illustrate what you mean by freedom?" "If you closed your eyes right now and you think about destiny, what do you see?" "If you could only rely on your sense of smell to describe the flight of a butterfly, how would you do it?"

For most writing teachers and writers, these exploratory inquiries may seem all too commonsensical, as they are just different ways to ask the writer to use examples to illustrate what he or she means. Yet the rephrasing of such questions could trigger certain memories in writers that inquiries like "Might you give me examples of what you mean," just couldn't or wouldn't do. That is, just as we tell students to zoom in and write

238

small, we must also zoom in, ourselves, and *ask small*, specific questions. (This is why if you're going to teach writing, you should also be a writer yourself and understand what it means to write as well as invite writing, (Fletcher, 1993; Murray, 2012; Newkirk, 2009)).

To help Rudy *actualize* the act of writing small, and narrow in to particular scenes, I invited him to tap into his five senses (Miller, & Paola, 2003). I asked questions like, "What do you *see* when you think of death? What do you *smell*? What do you *hear*? What do you *taste*? What do you *hear*?" Again, every writer and writing teacher knows about the five senses, but oddly enough our students don't always do. (This is because we do not teach writing through the felt senses (Perl, 2004)—among many other reasons.) For Rudy, as he tapped into his senses he also started to tell me, by way of oral narration, the various details of his childhood, many of which ended up onto the page and in his final rendition. That is, in these instances, I invited Rudy to literally close his eyes and walk me through what he saw. I asked him to literally take in a whiff of air and literally smell what he picked up through is nose. As we engaged in these activities, Rudy also narrated the scenes. It was almost as if he had undergone a kind of hypnosis in these narration trances, reliving each moment with his audience (Ong, 2003).

In general, the pattern of Rudy's drafting process was such that he would orally narrate his stories during workshop. Then after workshop, i.e., during the week, he would write them, transcribing them onto the page, but with even more elaboration each time. That is, the written form and the orally delivered version were never exact matches, as one version always had more details than the other. (Such is the nature of revision— drafts evolve and they often *grow*.) Once the stories made it onto the page, Rudy would

239

then share his written draft at the next workshop with me and with group members for feedback (Newkirk, 2009). We would do this on and off for a period of two years.

Of course I should clarify, here, that Rudy did not necessarily come back each time to the workshop with a new rendition, or a new draft, of the same story. In fact many writers in the workshop, including Rudy, did not necessarily respond well to the idea of revisiting the same draft for too long (Murray, 2012). Most times, they would either lose interest by the second or third version, or they would hit a roadblock and thus delay the revision. For this reason, I have never asked writers, be it in the workshop or in my classroom, to revise the same drafts continuously. Besides suggesting that revision is all voluntary, I contend that writers will almost always return to their stories by their own free will, particularly if it is a story that they find meaningful (Murray, 2012). This is especially true in the CSWW, where writers come because they want to and because they have stories to tell—stories they wish to tell. And so each week, in addition to inviting members to revisit their drafts (only if they want to), I offer "new" writing prompts for any writer who wants to craft "new" stories. In fact, I encourage writers to respond to these new prompts.

What I have found to be true, as it was in the case of Rudy, is that even though writers were responding to "new" and "different" writing prompts and they were crafting new and different memories, all of their drafts seemed to pivot around the same or similar emotional truths (Gornick, 2001), usually about their trauma pasts. For example, no matter what the prompt may be, Rudy's narrator usually explored similar themes and quests on the page, such as innocence, loss, freedom. That is, whether he's talking about the necklace he stole for his mother, or the stink of greased piglets, or the house without

240

indoor plumbing, the "story" (Gornick, 2001) he was conveying was usually about a childhood absent of money, of innocence, of freedom. Yet, with each prompt, he discovered different memories and uncovered, yet, other layers of truths (Frank, 2010). Consequently, each of the smaller pieces that Rudy crafted and revised were in fact part of a larger narrative, one that would eventually become "Montana."

Throughout this process, talk helped Rudy connect what he articulated orally and what he wrote on the page. It allowed him to craft his stories collaboratively and socially with others, rather than for him to do it alone at a table or desk elsewhere, and in the next section, I discuss this a bit more and consider how talk—and thus audience—helped Rudy make sense of his trauma, and discover possibilities of other selves.

Oral or Talk Composition

As I mentioned in this profile the act of talking through a story can help writers uncover the layers of truth (Gornick, 2001; Frank, 2010) that are otherwise hidden in writing, e.g., vague imagery. Again, because of its fluidity and social nature (i.e., back and forth conversational qualities), *talk* composition allows the storyteller to construct his or her truths, as well as revise those truths more immediately in relation to his or her audience. That is, in oral composition, the audience can ask the storyteller for clarification or deeper exploration during the conversation, and thus, prompt elaboration and potentially, facilitate other layers of discoveries along with them (the audience) (Bauman, 1986; Ong, 1980). Thus, the "truth" that is uncovered in this process is often built from audience responses and feedback (Bakhtin, 1981; Gee, 2013). The physical presence of an

241

audience, in some ways, demands a more immediate revision as well as a more collaborative one. After all, who that audience is at that moment of delivery can affect the truth and meaning of the story for the storyteller (Bruffee, 2003). Moreover the audience has the power to either support or challenge the narrator's truth. In Rudy's workshop sessions, for instance, my role as the facilitator as well as those of the workshop participants were especially crucial because our endorsement could either fortify his truth or dismiss it (Gee, 2013). Similarly the same could be claimed about his narrator's persona and his—Rudy's—sense of self as a writer. Our presence in his drafting process, particularly during his oral narration, had a significant influence on how he saw himself as a survivor of trauma and as a writer and peer mentor (Gee, 2013; Holland, et al., 1998).

What I want to stress here is the importance of audience in Rudy's process. That is, in these engagements, Rudy had to consider how his audience would respond to his stories, and then he had to decide whether he would build on our comments or dismantle them—either way, he had to respond to an audience other than himself. What this implies then is that Rudy's stories (the ones he wrote in the workshop) as well as his identities (the ones discovered and enacted in the workshop) are products of our collaboration and social exchanges (Gee, 2013), as they were products of his own revelations that came about through the writing and revision processes.

The Draft as Potential Home for Trauma Narratives

Finally let's talk a little about ways in which the "draft" could serve as a kind of third space for writers (Moje, et al., 2004). In Profile Three, I suggested that the narrative draft could, at times, function as a "common ground" for members like Rudy and Michael who did not necessarily get along outside of the context of the writing workshop. To recall, the two of them were able to connect over their common goals for Michael's draft. Pivoting around this idea, I contend that the draft itself could also be a space in which writers negotiate the meaning (and perhaps even make peace with) their trauma.

Often when writers, like Rudy, recall moments of pain, for example, they tend to speak of the incidences with trepidations and sometimes vagueness (MacCurdy, 2007). Part of this is because the violence of that trauma elicits so much emotional energy that writers struggle to articulate words or give name to their hauntings (Caruth, 1996). That is, they struggle to give it concrete form, and thus, often rely instead on metaphors (Caruth, 1996) to convey the idea of the trauma rather than illustrate it with specificity. Given these conflicting and often impairing sentiments, most writers like Rudy undergo multiple drafts—be that in writing or talking—before they are able to uncover hints of their tragic past. These "drafts" thus serve a kind of contact zone (Pratt, 1991) where they disclose, dissect, and investigate the various truths. But in successful moments, the drafts also become "home" for the "story," or emotional truths, of these violent circumstances (Gutierrez, K.D., Baquedano-Lopez, P., Tejeda, C., & Rivera, A., 1999; Gutierrez, 2008; Moje, et al., 2004). In Rudy's final draft, for instance, he acknowledges his sexual abuse, but he details other beautiful memories of his childhood, too, those that which illustrate a person who, in spite of the abuse, developed into a person of integrity, loyalty, and responsibility. All these components exist on the page, not in opposition, but

in sync so as to show a more complete portrait Gutierrez, K.D., Baquedano-Lopez, P., Tejeda, C., & Rivera, A., 1999; Moje, et al., 2004).

You may recall that Rudy once called himself a bridge-troll, meaning that he identified himself as someone who was homeless and who lived under the bridge. He was someone who lived on the margins of mainstream community. Even in his early draft, he described himself as a butterfly, as someone who lived with nature (not within community). Yet, in this story, "Montana," Rudy depicted himself as a person that was very relatable—a very caring and thoughtful son, a hard worker, a person of sacrifice, and a survivor (Gee, 2013; Holland, et al., 1998).

Similarly in the early days of the two years that I worked with Rudy, rarely did he refer to himself as a writer, other than to assert some kind of disclaimer. "I know I'm not a real writer or anything," he used to say, "but I do like to read my stories to people who need to hear them." However, over time, as he sat through one-on-one conferences with me and in large-group workshops with peers, he also started to assert his identity as a writer, playing the peer mentor to other writers in the group, as well (Bruffee, 2003; Lave, & Wenger, 1991). Indeed besides serving in the U.S. Navy as an EMT, Rudy has often imagined himself as a kind of teacher, too—a mentor to others. Whenever he could, he would try to run his own writing workshops in the community, as well (Lave, & Wenger, 1991). "When I'm at my support group, I would offer to share the drafts that I worked on with you," he said, "and the young folks, especially, would be in awe. They would say things like, 'Wow, you've lived through a lot. I love how you write and I want to write just like you, too.' So you know, I'd say to them, 'My teacher at the shelter taught me a lot of things about writing.' I say to them, 'I'm willing to meet with you

244

somewhere and workshop your draft. For starters, you just have to use your five senses if you want to describe something.'"

Rudy and I would have these conversations often whenever he attended the workshop, and almost always, he would tell me some kind of rendition to this particular story with proudness. What has always struck me in these exchanges is just how much of a writer and a teacher he has become, and still yet, where he can easily talk about himself as a teacher, he will still only hint peripherally at his writing, at how much others appreciated his words. Part of this hesitation, of course, has to do with the exclusivity of the label "writer" itself—of what it means to be one in a town like ours, a town known for its literary culture, i.e., MFA in writing, book publications, and so on (Gee, 2013; Rose, 2012). In this place, access to the "writer" designation was, and still is, prohibitive, if not downright unavailable to community members, especially to men and women like Rudy and the 74 others with whom I've worked (Gee, 2013; Rose, 2012). For many in this community, it seems to matter not, really, that Rudy engaged daily in "writerly" practices. More prevalent and more heavily weighted were, and are, evaluative assumptions about him that have nothing to do with writing at all.

Cultural narratives about "bridge trolls" and "street bums," for example, immediately presume illiteracy and lack of knowledge, and by this default, men like Rudy can neither read nor write nor do anything (Barton, & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 2012). Even Rudy, himself, continues to struggle at times to embrace literate identities, to see himself as a person of knowing—even though he knows quite a lot about a lot of things. The lack of access to opportunities, time, and space to enact his knowledge has often prevented him from broadening his membership in the community (Brandt, 2001),

245

in the same way that it has kept the community from recognizing the value and knowledge he carries with him (in this case, as a writer).

When I think of Rudy now, I think of a writer, who, like many of my students at the community college and at the university, share similar aspirations, ambivalences, and hesitations about writing: they like to write, but they fear it, too. When composing first drafts and on the page, Rudy's hand and mind tend to restrict themselves to "poetic" clichés. Yet through multiple revisions, through incorporating rich details from his orally told stories into his written drafts, Rudy can, and *has* produced an extraordinary narrative with persona and voice, quest and truth. Indeed when I think of him now, like when I reread his drafts, I see a story about a boy who forfeited school in order to earn wages for his family, but who acquired valuable knowledge from that experience, experience that he could now write about. I see the promises of multiple forms—when talking turns into writing, clichés into portraits, stories into lyrics, and tellers into writers. When I think of Rudy now, I see the process of composition.

Why I Write

In the past, putting words to paper for enjoyment was not something I desired to do or had much interest in. I viewed writing as a tedious, labor-intensive chore. English grammar and me were not very good friends—even today. I tend to throw commas everywhere. Going to a university where creativity was "strongly encouraged" at every corner, however, I couldn't help but run into writing.

I could not sing, dance, or play an instrument, so by default that left writing as a form of creative expression. I chose poetry as my attempt to be creative. Why? Because it was short and I realized that my brain worked in bullet statements. Also, it was easy to make a piece sound "big" without filling up pages with words; I called myself the "Lazy Writer." Encouraged by friends who liked what I wrote, I continued writing poetry.

I presented myself with the challenge to write one piece a week. I felt that this was doable and not stressful. It is a challenge that I have maintained for close to two years. Now, it is a part of me that I look forward to.

I chose the pen name "DHANYA," which is Sanskrit for wealth and fortune. I want that to be the experience invoked in others as they absorb and understand my thoughts. I want not just to create something for people to read, but to create a dialogue even if it is within themselves.

Through writing I have grown as an individual. I have a deeper connection to the world around me. I enjoy sharing my thoughts that reflect the deeper parts of me. I enjoy the gratification that I receive as I share my thoughts and experiences. I reflect back at the time when I did not write, and I see that was also a time when I shared very little of myself.

("DHANYA," 2013)

…a Post-Profile:

A Writer's Experience in the Workshop

(or sponsorships and possibilities)

Clark has a bundle of hiking sticks—three, four, five of them, all carved with faces of wood spirits, morel mushrooms, or hobbit houses atop—and they're what he carries with him when he isn't carrying his hard-sided, tan-leather briefcase, the one that he inherited from a former dorm-mate, Robby, and now uses to carry his mail and paperwork: medical files, writing notebooks, the title to his van, and a partly torn black and white photo of Martini, his first horse. It isn't exactly a convenient item to haul around, this *attaché* case. The thing is quite heavy, which is why, I sometimes wonder if Clark just likes carrying it in the same way he occasionally wears a messenger bag across his chest. As he says, "That's what the writers wear in this town."

I'm sure the case has practical functions, too, though. Clark alluded to it, once, saying: "Before I started all the writing, it actually served as an office for my carving work." Inside, he kept bits that went with his carving machine, a Dremel tool. It used to be that he stored the power drill—the box-like motor part of it—in his van, and sometimes, when the weather permitted, he would be right out there at the front, left corner of the shelter just carving away, his machine plugged into the building's outside outlet. These days, though, he keeps the tools in the garage outside his apartment where he does most of his work, even in winter months. On those really cold days, Clark will set up a couple space heaters around the room and sculpt away.

"I carve with a power drill—not knives," he says. "But you know, some people think it's less authentic because I do."

Every time Clark distinguishes his carving methods, I notice that he'll bring up this notion of authenticity, too. I don't know much about carving and I surely don't know what insiders of the woodcarving community value, but I suspect this distinction must matter because usually right after his disclosure, Clark will also justify his approach as if I had questioned it. "Some people think I'm cheating because I use power, but really I'm just using a different technique," he'll say. "Don't get me wrong. I respect the knife. I know how hard it is to carve that way and I don't do that.

"Most people don't care how I do it, though. They just appreciate the work. They see my sticks and they can't believe the details on the mushrooms. They think it's fake (not carved) because it looks so real."

And he's right, too. These morels are wooden replicas of the real thing. Clark also carves them onto deer antlers and sells them as charms for key chains and/or necklaces at $10 a piece. He wears one, in fact, around his neck—if he isn't already wearing one of his carved wood-spirit faces. "I like to wear them around as advertisement. People see them and they'll ask, 'Hey, that's cool. Where did you get it?' and then, that's when I'll say, 'I'm glad you asked. I made them.'"

More recently, Clark's muse is the hobbit house. "I just got this book at a woodcarving show the other week," he says. "I figure, I might as well teach myself how to do some of these cottages. The thing you have to know is how to hollow out the wood so that you could create a three-dimensional house and look inside. Some of them come

hollow, so those are ideal." He points to the pictures and tells me how he plans to proceed with the project.

Quite honestly I don't know anyone more enthusiastic about his work. In fact, if you have time and you don't stop him, Clark can go on for hours talking about woodcarving. It's one of those topics that excite him most, partly because he's very good at carving and sees himself as a craftsman, and partly because the process relaxes him. The first story he ever told me, in fact, focused on his carvings and how he came to refine his skills. In it, he tells:

Some people see this face and think it's Santa Claus, but it's not. It's a wood spirit and according to German folklore, they are protectors—guardians—of the Black Forest. They watch over the woods and protect it from fire destruction. They also represent good luck and such. I wear one on my neck, too, but usually I carve them onto walking sticks….

It used to take me a whole day to carve a face like this, but then I met Jim. Jim had this huge shop and that's all he did—make and sell walking sticks….he showed me how to do it more efficiently. The guy could carve these things in 20 to 30 minutes. I'm a little slower, although what used to take me a whole day, now only takes me about 45 minutes. Before Jim, my mushrooms also used to be all the same, just a bunch of patterns in a row. But now, they have shape and I have people asking if I attached some plastic mushroom to the stick. They just can't believe that the morels are part of the stick—it's wood. I've carved these things over a hundred times, and you know what, none of them are alike.

I'm not sure why I'm telling this story other than to say carving represents an important part of who I am and what I've worked hard for….The act gives me time to think through things. It's also soothing….I don't want to have to mass produce these things. I don't want to not care about the details. I don't want it to not be therapeutic. I guess you can say, it's really about the time and the craft. I've done it for eight years so far.

This reminds me of that story about Pablo Picasso. He was sitting at a bar one day and some guy came up and asked him if he would draw something for him on a piece of napkin—sort of like an autograph. So Picasso drew something. I don't know what it was, but anyway, when he was done he handed the napkin to the guy, and the guy was all happy. "Hey thanks! That's pretty cool," he said. Then Picasso said, "Hey wait. I want $10,000 for that."

"What? Why?" asked the guy. "It only took you 5 to 10 minutes to draw that," to which, Picasso said, "No. It took me 40 years." That's the best way I can explain it—the craft of woodcarving. It's like that.

I remember being so charmed when I first heard this story. I loved then, and I still do now, that Clark compared his process to Picasso's in this story. Indeed through our conversations in the workshop and stories like these, I have gotten to know him as a literate being, as someone who really enjoys what he does, and even better, as someone who does it rather quite well. In him, I see craftsmanship—years of it. I see someone who practices every day to perfect the patterns on those morels; someone who attends meticulously to technique, so much so that none of the wood-spirit faces look alike; someone who knows a great many things about different types of wood; he will spend days, sometimes weeks, just looking for the right one to carve because "not just any stick would do." Indeed through our conversations in the workshop and the stories he writes, I have gotten to know a lot about Clark. And in that process, I suppose I should say, too, that I have gotten to see my own oversights.

I met Clark a little over three years ago. Next to Michael, Clark is the longest standing member of the workshop. As a writer, he, like many before and after him, did not see himself as a writer when he initially came into the workshop. Instead he preferred the term, "storyteller," because somehow, someway, that term seemed to fit more right with him; it's less exclusive, maybe. He also felt more comfortable composing stories orally, reflecting on cultural artifacts, on the things he carried with him on a day-to-day, things he took with him when outside the home, things like his briefcase and woodcarvings. These objects served as points of entry into narrative composition for him, and before long, he was composing stories like "A Thing Bronzed," stories that

251

began as a reflection on woodcarving (such as seen in the above excerpt from,

"Woodspirits and Morels") and ended as a narrative about his daughter.

Here's part it. In "A Thing Bronzed" he writes:

> Every now and then when I see the stick, I think of her when she was five years old. This stick that I made for Alli, it was a little short stick, a piece of junk wood that I had found in the woods. It fit her at the time; she's 22 now and recently I finally let her have it back to take home to keep because it's something from her childhood that her and I did together. If I could, I'd like to have that stick incased inside a long, tall glass tube/dome on a wooden base, and then I'd carve a couple mushrooms down below for it and put it on there. It's a special stick but it looks like crap. It's one of the worst things I ever did as far as realistic-looking mushrooms. Hers had a perfectly shaped mushroom on top, like a hot dog and it tapered down at the end. I did the holes all in a neat pattern and spray-painted it in black and then sanded it off so that the color would stay in the holes but not in the outer surface. I then took a Sharpie or a magic marker—a yellow one—and did it over the top surface. This is what I thought mushrooms looked like. I looked at it and thought, "Wow, this is a great job." It was one of the proudest sticks I've ever made; it still is today. Back then, carving was more of a part-time kind of thing. I mean, she was 5 and she's 22 now, so that was 17 years ago. I've only started to seriously carve 8 years ago. At that time I still had a job, I still had my family. I was carving for fun.
>
> I remember the last time—a long time ago—when we were out in the woods, and she would be right on my back and so I said, "Honey I'm not gonna leave you in the woods, but you can't be this close to me because you're gonna get hit with branches as we go through the woods here." Inevitably, she wound up right on my heels and I let go one of the branches and it came back and hit her right below the eyes. It was a rose bush and one of the thorns broke off and stuck her right under the eye. We had just been there for only 5 to 10 minutes; we hadn't gotten to our spot yet, and there she was, wailing and crying, wanting to go home. She was crying—tears were running down her face—so I picked her up and told her, "Look, we just got here, and you're going to be okay." I pulled the thorn out and gave it to her, and she was so pissed, she threw it. I asked, "You gonna be alright?" and she said yes. So we kept on going.

Since this story, Clark has written many more pieces, including "School Daze,"

which is about him as a local hero, and "Spin Cycle," which is about him and his

estranged father. Clark has also started countless other drafts such as the one about Ms.

Enz, his terror of a teacher who slapped his ear for sleeping in class; an owl he made in elementary school, which I am convinced is really about his mother, but he won't say; and his first horse, Martini, which seems to be about his childhood and lack of permanence, but again, he won't say either.

Aside from the layers of meaning in his stories and the voice in which he tells them, the thing I find rather "writerly" about Clark's process, too, is the fact that he wrote most of them—particularly the early ones—in his dorm room at the shelter, inside a rented storage unit, and/or at the café-diner at HyVee, the local supermarket. On the surface these places may not seem all that important to note, but in Clark's case they suggest that he prioritized his writing, that he found time and space to compose in spite of his then, homeless situation. The fact that he wrote inside a storage unit, the dorm room, and at Hyvee also suggests his arc as a writer, because once and again, here is a person who prior to joining the writing group, had not picked up the pen since the tenth grade. Here's a person who described himself as an outcast as a boy, who did the bare minimum to get by in school, and who was ranked 451 out of 452 students as a result.

Yet, here is the same person who now compares himself to his favorite writer, Rick Bragg, and who, in fact, wrote a letter to the Pulitzer Prize author asking him to serve on my dissertation committee. Here is a person who recently talked to a community college admissions advisor about going back to school, who said, "Education should be more valued than money or friends….if you are able to do something that enhances your life then it's worth it. What it means to you is what matters, and if it influences others to want to do it, too, then that's a good thing." Here's a person who is very much a writer in every meaning of the word, a writer who has reflected on and made sense of his past, a

writer who wishes only that, "If I had cared about writing in high school and not felt like it was forced, then I'd be better at writing today."

These days, like many members before him, Clark's work schedule doesn't allow him the same kind of flexibility he once had, and because of that, he comes to the writing group less frequently than before. Besides volunteering for the shelter's laundry services, he also works at the temporary wet shelter where he helps to set up cots, distribute freeze-dried packaged foods, and monitor the front desk from dusk to dawn. For about three to four days a week, he also works at a local garage, doing clean up and whatever else the boss asks of him.

I mention these facts because there was a time when Clark was ready to retire from employment altogether and he'd justify it as a cost-benefit thing: "Why should I work if Uncle Sam takes back over half of my earned money?" he would say. "I'd end up with less than if I were collecting my pension and SS." The shelter house staff used to offer him all kinds of jobs, too, such as the receptionist position at the front desk, or the "shuttle" driver to take shelter clients to and from job interviews. But each and every time, Clark would decline, saying he'd rather volunteer and "work for free" instead—which, he did, too. Between the front desk and the shelter's laundry services, Clark committed at least 20 to 35 hours a week for work that he could have gotten paid for. In fact, anyone who knows Clark also knows he has an impeccable employment record reflective of nothing less than years of hard work and contribution—twenty-two years at a packing plant and ten years as a firefighter, just to name a couple.

And so I guess when Clark said he vowed off work about a year and a half ago, when he refused to work due to some economics algorithm, it just didn't make all that

much sense to me. For one, the cost of living far exceeds his pension and social security

benefits, and two, selling his woodcarvings for supplement income is not only

unpredictable, it's also insufficient, at least at the generously low price that he charges for

his artwork. And so, like I said, the cost-benefit analysis, the whole narrative of it all,

sounded more like stories that he just told himself (and others) to make sense of whatever

it was that was haunting his morale. Certainly Clark has endured more traumatic

experiences in his life than most of us combined. And although I don't quite know the

full story—because some things you just don't know, and you never will—I suspect that

somewhere along the way, things fell apart pretty quickly for Clark. Somewhere along

the way, he found himself inside an old abandoned apartment, shivering over a fire pit.

Somewhere along the way, he found himself cold and alone, apart from loved ones.

Sometimes a person just has to hit, what people say, "rock bottom," before he or

she begins the climb back up that hill, I suppose. For Clark, that climb began on a Sunday

afternoon at church. As he recalls:

> "There was a guest pastor and week after week, it was like she
> tailored the sermon to me. It was like she knew things about me and now
> she was preaching about it to the whole congregation. So there I was,
> sitting in the back, just bawling. Week after week, the pastor would ask
> for volunteers to come up and accept Jesus Christ, and you know, I was
> baptized as a child but it's different when you're an adult and you
> understand just what it is you're accepting by being baptized. Anyway,
> she'd ask for people to come up and week after week, there'd be eight to
> ten people just lining up to accept Jesus Christ. I'd want to go but I kept
> delaying it, saying, 'Next week, I'll go' but next week would come and I'd
> delay it again. Then Christmas service came, and I thought this time, when
> she calls for volunteers I'm going to join everyone. Sure enough, she
> asked, "Who wants to accept our Lord?" And I hurriedly went up to the
> front of the church. I looked back to see if there was anyone else who
> wanted to back me up, but no one did. So the pastor said, 'Is there anyone
> who wants to join this brother today?' and when still, no one volunteered,
> she said, 'Okay, well then I invite all of us to join him. We are all going to
> do this together.' Then the whole congregation joined me and that was

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how I got baptized as an adult. I realized at that moment, you know, that there was something bigger than all of us. So I guess that was the start of my journey back. Besides, church is only for one hour every Sunday, which is pretty painless, I think. I find it calming and eye-opening."

Since 2011, Clark has been attending the local church every week and when possible, he visits the one in a nearby town where the pastor who baptized him now preaches. "It's an African American congregation," Clark says. "I stick out because I'm White and I'm not in a lime green or purple suit. It's quit a fashion show every Sunday. Usually, I'll sit in the back and just listen. The pastor is great. She has this very powerful voice and presence about her. Her sermons hit me really well."

Clark has had many other supporters, people from various organizations like the Veterans Affairs and the shelter, people who have helped him find his own apartment, attain two different jobs, and reengage with the community. And because of them, at the end of it all, Clark's story is a successful story, and it is story like many who have come through the shelter. Yet, Clark's story, like Rudy's and Michael's, is also a rather unique and special kind of story, too, because his story has a literacy narrative attached to its arc; his participation in the Community Stories Writing Workshop, in particular, has impacted him significantly; it has facilitated his process of self-rediscovery from street to home, or at least that is what he says and that is what I would like to believe. I would like to believe that, for him, there was discovery in the personal and collaborative composition processes, in the act of writing and revising with self and with peers. I would like to believe that there was ownership in co-constructing the workshop space with peers and with me, in transforming, shifting, *evolving* from storyteller to writer, homeless veteran to community member. I would like to believe that, for Clark, there was—and still is—a reason for why he comes to the writing group every Tuesday at 2:30 p.m., why he carries

his notebooks inside that heavy briefcase of his, why he will sometimes bring, along with

his briefcase, a bundle of sticks: the spirits, the morels, and the houses.

What makes a writer a writer?

What makes a writer a writer? Is it as simple as calling yourself a writer? Or is it that someone read something you wrote and they consider you a writer? Is it the amount of content you write, or the time you put into writing that makes your words worth reading? Can it be because you knocked one out of the park with a story that made people want more of you, make them pick up anything your name is on solely because your name is on the cover?

Beats me. Most of the things I put in a story are from real life experiences. At times certain areas may be spiced up a bit. Conversations or quotes within a story may not be totally accurate because some of them happened so long ago that specific instances and details may be fuzzy. But for the most part, my stories are real and true and they're mine—if they are not, I would tell you so. So, does that make me a writer, my collection of stories? Or am I a writer because it is 3:00 a.m. and the only people out are cops, criminals, and me—my van situated in front of my storage unit all the while I'm sitting inside, using a wooded spool from Crescent Electric as a desk so I could finish my latest literary masterpiece?

Masterpiece. Why even try? What if your last piece is just that—your last piece? What if, no matter what you come up with doesn't measure up to the last best thing you ever wrote? What if the words, ideas, or thoughts can't make it from your head to your pen and onto paper? What then? Do you wallow in self-doubt wondering if this is it? Will I ever do anything again that will make others say, "Man that guy can write!" or will they say, "Oh that was okay but it didn't come close to grabbing me like the first time I read him"? We've all heard it said before: "You're only as good as the last great thing you did." What if that's true? What if you set the bar so high for yourself that you never really achieve the satisfaction you once did from the "big one"? What then? Bow out and fade away?

Truth is I don't really consider myself to be a "writer"—whatever that means. I can't write on command. I'm not a machine you can turn on and off like a switch. I'm a broken water heater. I get stuck. It may take days, even weeks, before the parts are delivered and I'm up and running again. Till then, all you get is little cold spurts. Quick splashes. And that has to be enough. In the end, I am a storyteller and when I'm telling a story I like to have the ones listening to paint a picture with places and characters coming to life in their own minds as I'm putting a scene before them. I write knowing that the pen may be my best friend or worst enemy, depending how I bring it into my world. There are many ways it can help me as there are ways for it to betray me. In the end it's really up to me as to which of those two possibilities unfold. Only time and an occasional meeting will tell. For now, let's just say I'll start off slow and see what happens.

And as far as who gets to be called a writer, who cares really? If picking up a pen and scratching something onto the page does something for you and you alone then that's all that should matter. Whether you've been trained as a writer or just hack away at it, I think it all boils down to how you feel about your writing. Write for yourself, first. Sign everything "anonymous" and see if people can figure out who it is. Try it.

(Clark, 2013)

CONCLUSION

…Public Readings and Implications

(or some things for us to think about)

Without the men and women of the Community Stories Writing Workshop, this study would not have happened, and I would not have learned as much as I have about the vastness of literacy and composition (Barton, & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 2012; Gee, 2013; Janks, 2010; Janks, 2013; Street, 2012). I would not have had the opportunity to engage with many talented writers inside this space, those whose rich literacies and knowledge have gone unnoticed by the community (Barton, & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 2012), in large part, because of their homeless circumstances.

Certainly, in addition to Michael, Rudy, and Clark whom you've met in the profiles, there are many others who have appeared in snapshots and/or vignettes throughout my dissertation like Carmella, who is a painter at heart but who also has an extraordinary gift for picking out unique aspects of a person's character and then translating them into vibrant portraits, usually of family members and people whom she's met in the community. Carmella's peers have likened her to Maya Angelou because of her sonorous reading cadence. One of such peers is Nancy, who, by her own right, is a prolific writer herself. Nancy prefers to compose poetry, though her narratives are just as poignant. As a writer who is in her thirties, Nancy reflects on a wide range of topics, including work, childhood, and mental illness. Her poem called, "Water," is an

especially piercing commentary about work and mental illness; I do not doubt that a literary journal will pick it up someday.

You might remember Lucy, too, a U.S. Air Force veteran and a mother of four. She, in particular, likes to experiment and challenge herself as a writer. She enjoys musing over those early years in the U.S. Virgin Islands, her past and current romances, and what it means to be a free spirit. In one of her pieces, Lucy wrote about "place and home" without employing any words with the letter "s" in it. Her writing is always an uplifting experience, and so is Silvia's. Silvia sees writing as cathartic and talks a great deal about her past with substance abuse. Besides Michael and Clark, she, perhaps has had the most opportunities to share her writing with the public through the local media, support groups at church and community centers, and Drug Court. Finally John, a more reserved kind of writer than Silvia, Michael, and Clark combined, but just as courageous, has a smooth and rhythmic stream of consciousness about his prose that mimics architecture and music, his areas of study in college. Like a few others in the workshop, John is also a photographer who likes to capture snapshots of landscapes and life in the community.

Indeed inside the Community Stories Writing Workshop there are many people like Carmella, Nancy, Lucy, Silvia, and John, men and women who know a whole lot about a whole lot of things (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013; Rose, 2012; Rose, 2013), very *interesting* things like painting, photography, and poetry, or carving, carpentry, and cabin-building—with pegs only. Yet outside of the workshop (and this dissertation), most of us do not hear about them. Despite their diverse ways of knowing, despite their funds of literacies, they are also assumed with deficits, their strengths veiled by the

260

stigma of homelessness (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Janks, 2010; Rose, 2012; Rose, 2013). After all Carmella's stories and many like hers are not particularly rare, they're just predominantly unheard. This is because in our world, in the world as it is, when we think of writing, rarely, if ever, do we consider Carmella or Lucy or the 73 veterans and adults who have come to a shelter house and participated in a writing group. Rarely do we consider the hundreds of others in this city, or the thousands outside of it—those who are without housing, those who are living in poverty, and yes, those who are very capable of writing about what they know—and writing them well, they are—about handling power drills at the early age of four; swimming across lakes to train for the Olympics; straightening rusted nails with a hammer for reuse; or sometimes about life's other moments—significant events like saving a couple from drowning in the reservoir, or simpler ones, like visiting Mrs. Helen every Monday to make sure she doesn't smoke around her oxygen tank. Undoubtedly these stories are important for us to hear as they are for writers to tell. They depict fuller portraits of the men and women at the shelter, illustrating their—*our*—commonalities and humanness. They enable writers to discover, for themselves, moments of success or at the least, possibilities of them.

Yet "homeless," "literary," "writing," and "writers" are words that just do not seem to go together even in—*especially* in—a UNESCO City of Literature. In theory, all community members have access to the writing culture of this town; but, in practice, what it means to write and who gets to enact this identity remain exclusive to the MFA graduate, or at the least, to the college-educated person—though never to the writer who is homeless (Rose, 2012). Even when writers in the Community Stories Writing Workshop demonstrate at public reading events that they can produce narratives with

literary qualities of arc, quest, and voice, for instance, there is often a sense of disbelief and/or surprise among the audience. Someone or other is whispering quietly to himself or herself, "Wow, I can't believe a homeless person actually wrote this story" or "That's actually pretty good for a homeless guy." Though well meaning, these comments are underhanded compliments. Not only are they *not* the inverse of the deficit rhetoric, they are, in fact, the deficit rhetoric (Diversi, & Finley, 2010; Finley, & Diversi, 2010).

Similarly I do not doubt for one minute that there are people in the audience (especially first-timers) who think they are there to hear stories about communities under the bridge and/or life in storage units. I suspect some of them may even expect to. And really, given the images of homeless men and women—un-bathed and darken by dirt, those that pervade in the media, on the Internet, in our minds—why would anyone think otherwise? Why would anyone think that he or she would hear stories about ranching and farming, about family and friends, about memorable pasts and hopeful futures? These sorts of reflections and essays aren't exactly what most of us have in mind, again, when we think of writers from a homeless shelter (Diversi, &Finley, 2010; Finley, & Diversi, 2010; MacGillivray, Ardell, & Curwen, 2010).

Of course, there is great power in writing about personal trauma and about how a person became homeless. Such stories *should* and *need* to be told when and if writers want to compose them, when and if writers could benefit from doing so. However there is also a general expectation that these are the only kinds of stories a homeless person should (and could) tell at a public reading. It is an expectation that is congruent with, I think, the ideas of homelessness and functional literacy (Rose, 2012), the kind of thought that restricts writers' access to the literary culture of their town.

262

In general public support for the Community Stories Writing Workshop, as I suggested in the profiles, is contingent on what the community expects of, and for, homeless persons. Whether that means that writing "programs" like the workshop should focus only on practical and numeracy skills, or that writers should only tell stories about their homeless situations, the rhetoric of deficits and essentialism are prevalent (Miller, 2014; Rose, 2012). As Bloome (2005) notes about access to writing practices, "As currently organized, who can write what, when, where, and how is hierarchically structured…." (302). Where it concerns homeless persons, then, writing is only valuable when it serves the community's expectations, when it verifies the public's assumptions about homelessness: a social problem to be fixed (through functional means and outcomes) and/or a fetishized experience of *other*. Both are forms of limited expectations and limited access—to education, to identity, to class (Rose, 2012; Rose, 2013). Both are forms of a tracking, or *caste*, system hidden behind good intentions.

I remember, not too long ago in an interview with a reporter, she asked me how I managed "the different levels of literacy skills" among writers inside the workshop. "I am curious," she said, "because I have met a lot of people who could barely read and write. How do you handle the range of literacy? How do you get them to *write*?"

I answered the reporter in the same way I have always answered these types of questions. "It depends what you define as literacy," I said, "or more to the point, what you qualify as writing." Of course, my response did not satisfy her—it rarely satisfies anyone. She, like most people, wanted an answer that fit within conventions, within her subscription of, in this case, literacy. "I understand that, but their spelling and grammar…" she said, "what do you do with that?"

263

To be fair, her wonderment is not unwarranted. It is common, actually, and it may even be truthful. Based on her partial definition of literacy and writing (or in her case, *grammar*), it may well be the case that some members in the workshop cannot read or write, at least not by literary standards. Then again, homelessness is a lot more diverse than what most of us realize (Miller, 2014), as are individuals' knowledge and fluencies. While there are people who could benefit from additional reading and writing skills, such as the men and women whom this reporter said she met at a homeless shelter, there are just as many, if not more, who are well-versed and well-knowledgeable, such as the 75 men and women with whom I have worked in the past four years. Admittedly not everyone among the 75 members has strong command of grammar or spelling. But as all writers and writing teachers know, writing is also not about correctness, at least not in the first, second, third, or even fourth drafts (Murray, 1980; Murray, 2012; Newkirk, 2009; Perl, 2004). Correctness belongs to mechanics and grammar—*tools* for writing, but not writing, in and of itself.

Writing is composition, which in turn, is process (Murray, 2012; Newkirk, 2009; Perl, 2004) and importantly, diverse in form. In the workshop, we compose in our heads as we do by talk and on the page (Britton, 1975; Moffett, 1988). We revise and we experiment; some stories exist best as traditional narratives; some as poems; others as collages (Miller, & Paola, 2003). We recognize that writing—composing—is not a solitary act, but a collaborative one (Bruffee, 2003; Elbow, 1998; Newkirk, 2009). Even when and if writers struggle with grammar and mechanics, their peers will chime in and contribute to the composition. In fact peer audience has just as much influence on what writers write and how they write what they write (Bruffee, 2003; Elbow, 1998; Newkirk,

264

2009). When we view writing through these expansive and collaborative lenses, the emphasis on correctness and mechanics just seems rather trivial, perhaps even arbitrary, though what human-made definition isn't?

The Contradictions of the Workshop:
My Role as the Facilitator, Our Role as the Peer Audience

When I first conceived of the Community Stories Writing Workshop, I, with the consultation and help of my colleagues, made some very strong assumptions about literacy and writing, in particular. This would be the space where we—the members and I—employed literary concepts and tools such as the narrative "I" (Hesse, 2009; Newkirk, 1997); it would be where we encouraged collaborative exchanges because reading and writing are social acts (Bruffee, 2003; Newkirk, 2009). What we did not assume—what we *rejected*—were suggestions of "alternative" literacies designed for "homeless" writers. We did not "dumb down" the writing process. We expanded it.

Since inception the Community Stories Writing Workshop has, thus, served as a statement of access and equity, an opportunity for writers—no matter who they are, where they come from—to participate in the literary culture of our town (Bloome, 2005; Rose, 2013). Just as it is important for writers to have the time and space to compose, it is equally important for them to have opportunities to share their writing with the public and enact their identities as writers (Bloome, 2005; Newkirk, 2009). To this end when preparing writers for the workshop's annual public reading, there are many factors that I have to consider. As an overarching goal, I seek to highlight writers' strengths as well as

265

to show a diverse range of stories that they tell. How that goal translates into action, of course, can be a very complicated execution.

For one, the very thing that marginalizes the men and women in this group, i.e., their homelessness, again, is the very thing the general community values about them. Yet there *must be*, a line—sometimes not so fine—between what the public wants and what the writer decides to write (Bloome, 2005). My job, in this capacity, is to help writers convey the humanness of their stories. After all participating in a public reading at a prominent bookstore can empower members of a writing workshop at a local homeless shelter, but it can also leave many feeling vulnerable, particularly if they share intimate stories about themselves, particularly, if and when, the community already harbors preconceived notions of who they are and who they *want them* to be (Bloome, 2005). The risks are, thus, not only in the act of telling personal stories and the consequences of talking about painful pasts, on top of it all, the risk is in potentially perpetuating the public's expectations of what a homeless person could and should write about. The risk is in essentializing, in fetishizing a person's homeless experiences.

Indeed these are the contradictions of the CSWW, and in particular, of my role as the facilitator in supporting and disrupting this space of personal and public accesses (Brandt, 2001; Fitzgerald, et al., 2012). I wonder often about how the workshop, through my facilitation, both enables and impedes writers' negotiations between narrative craft and personal meaningfulness (Brandt, 2001; Bloome, 2005). I think about the vulnerabilities that writers must negotiate as they prepare for the public venue and claim voice in the literary identity of their town. What exactly, after all, is shareable, or publically accessible?

266

Moreover just as I am an insider of the workshop, I am also an insider of the academic and wider communities (Behar, 2003; Sunstein, & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). Especially per these public reading events, I think always about my role—*our* role—as peer audience for CSWW writers. Currently members' access to literacy identities and practices is not only limited in the figured world *off* the page (Holland, et al., 1998; Street, 2012), it is also limited in the figured world *on* the page. That is, not only do assumptions of deficit heavily affect homeless writers' experiences in the physical community, they also dictate their experiences on the page—what stories they write and who they can be (Gee, 2013). Our role as the audience (at public readings, for example), thus, can heavily support and/or impede writers' composition process and their enactment of literate selves (Bruffee, 2003). How might we, then, reconstruct our expectations of what writers (who are homeless) would, could, or should write about to include a wider range of narratives (and literacy practices) (Bloome, 2005)? How might we participate in the world of the CSWW writers, rather than assume that *they,* the writers, would participate in ours (Fitgerald, et al., 2012)? How do we prepare ourselves to be effective audiences in their space? To bear witness to writers' strengths as well as their traumas?

This brings me to matters of sponsorship and what it means to "sponsor" literacy spaces (Brandt, 2001). As community members who attend CSWW public readings, we are actively participating in, if not, co-sponsoring literacy access for writers. Our role as the peer audience in this space (Frank, 2010; Wortham, 2001), thus, must be a thoughtful one. We can neither be righteous as creators of literacy space *for the others* (Fitzgerald, et al., 2012), nor can we be neutral (I don't think that's even possible). Sponsorship, after all, is not always a *good* deed (Brandt, 2001; Illich, 2010), and the stakes are significant

267

for writers when they agree to accept our sponsorships, or in this case, when they participate a public reading and read their stories from a published anthology that is subsequently sold as a fundraising effort for the homeless shelter.

Indeed creating opportunities for members in the workshop to write and to share their work publicly—be it of a weekly writing workshop or an annual reading at a bookstore—is a very delicate matter (Bloome, 2005). In addition to matters of sponsorships and risks, stories should only be told when writers want to tell them and when they are *ready* to tell them (Gornick, 2001)—regardless of their content. The notion of readiness is not only a tricky matter, it is also a very multi-layered one, involving both the writer's willingness to share his or her story as well as the preparedness of his or her draft. To the latter point, drafts should reflect literary qualities and the content, or *story*, should humanize the writer rather than potentially, over-exoticize experiences and/or perpetuate assumptions of deficits.

Consequently the revision process is a crucial part of the preparation for the reading (Murray, 2012). Early drafts can often reveal raw content, sometimes those that may seemingly sensationalize the writer's life accounts (as was with Rudy's early drafts). The language can reflect more closely to writer-based prose (Flower, 1979), for example, where the writer articulates the events without elaboration or thought about how the story may come across. Drafts may sometimes also over-emphasize the trauma (i.e., the situation) rather than inquire a deeper meaning or relevance of that trauma.

To this end, the movement from writer-based prose to reader-based prose, or from "situation" to "story" (Gornick, 2001) is neither a short nor easy process. Discoveries and evolutions on the page do not and cannot happen with only a few drafts. Most writers

require almost one-year of revisiting content and language, of responding to different writing prompts, of composing what are seemingly different stories but that are, in fact, intertwined and part of the same narrative thread. In this way revision is also not simply about revisiting drafts of the same story written from the same prompt. Revision, instead, requires exploring outside of the original draft through other prompts. This is because revision, like the story that is being "revised," or perhaps, more accurately, like the story that needs to be "uncovered," is less linear and chronological as it is recurring and circular, pivoting around similar emotional truths—hopping, skipping, dancing until it is ready to be seen (MacCurdy, 2007; Murray, 2012; Perl, & Schwartz, 2006).

As the facilitator, my job is to work very closely with writers throughout this process. My job is to ask them how they want to be read and by whom (Ong, 2003). My job is to propose exploratory questions like, "what is the *story* here," because while the situation on the page may center on abuse, for instance, the narrator's quest may be about survival or hope (Frank, 2010; Gornick, 2001). Hence, literary questions tend to work especially well in helping writers explore their motivation for writing the piece as well as shaping their narrative arc (Gornick, 2001; Klaus, 2010; MacCurdy, 2007). Importantly, too, is for me to remind writers of the relativity of truths in personal narratives (Frank, 2010). What was "true" at the time of the event, for instance, is not necessarily true for the narrator at present (Klaus, 2010). Questions like, "what is the emotional arc here?" and "what is the narrator's quest?" are therefore especially important in facilitating this process of discovery for writers.

Why We Do It and Why It's Worth It

269

In the *White Album*, Didion (1979, 2009) tells us, "We tell ourselves stories in order to live..." (11), and indeed in successful moments, for those who contribute to the literary anthology, *Of the Folk* and participate in these public reading events, something beautiful and transformative certainly happens: they tell their stories, and they *live*. Often overlooked because of their homeless circumstances, these men and women, at least for an hour, read in the same space as other authors (nationally and internationally known). They watch the bookstore fill up with thirty, forty, fifty others (even on a rainy day). They see their stories published inside the pages of a literary journal that of which is sold as a fundraiser for the shelter. Each of these things, separately and together, works to validate their membership in the community (Bloome, 2005). Each of these things enables them to call themselves writers, and we, their audience (Gee, 2013; Holland, et al., 1998; Wortham, 2001).

Certainly there is no denying the power of literary craft to facilitate emergent narratives and identities of strengths among persons experiencing homelessness such as Rudy and Michael and Clark and many others who have participated in the writing group. Literacy spaces like the Community Stories Writing Workshop can redefine boundaries of access (beyond school and publishing) (Bloome, 2005; Janks, 2010; Janks, 2013; Rose, 2013; Street, 2012). In a student-centered teaching and learning environment where members share the power of instruction, co-construct meaning, and participate in a yearlong drafting process (Bruffee, 2003; Elbow, 1998; Lave, &Wenger, 1991; Murray, 2012), homeless persons revise themselves into a literary town's identity through nonfiction forms. Writers also enact writing identities (Gee, 2013; Holland, et al., 1998)

outside the writing workshop by reenrolling in college, participating in self-created writing groups, and/or seeking long-term careers using writing skills (Rose, 2012; Rose, 2013). They respond to their marginalization, even resist it, in a public reading at an independent bookstore (Janks, 2010; Wortham, 2001).

For the writers, these experiences legitimize their membership in the town from a place of strength. For the general public and community, the publication and the reading challenge expectations and assumptions of deficits, inviting us all to reconsider what it means to be a writer in this town (Bloome, 2005). For scholars of various disciplines, this work illustrates cross-disciplinary relevance and applicability, and the impact of public engagement (Fitzgerald, et al., 2012). Collaborative writing has transformative benefits for persons with mental illness and dislocation as they make sense of trauma, depression, and substance addiction (Liu, 2013). It asks questions about the importance of literacy on individuals' social welfare and identity (Janks, 2010; Janks, 2013; Street, 2012). And it complicates what it means to sponsor such literacy spaces (Bloome, 2005; Brandt, 2001; Leander, & Sheehy, 2010). Finally for me, as a writer, teacher, and literacy scholar, these engagements invite partnerships between a university and a community, allowing me to create literacy spaces for veterans and adults who are, or were, in situations of homelessness (Fitzgerald, et al., 2012). From my work with the men and women in the Community Stories Writing Workshop, I see my own oversights, and importantly, I reflect on them—learning, drafting, *revising*.

EPILOGUE

In a poem by Gulick (I do not remember the title or the poet's first name), she says, "We experience everything once through childhood. The rest is memory." I have always loved the line, but I realize, too, that she is only partially right. She assumes that our childhood shapes all that we see thereafter. She does not say anything on how experiences build on and across each other, and thus, so do memories. She assumes, too, the purity of the childhood lens, that we begin with a clean slate at birth. She does not consider the history we inherit, the possibility that, perhaps, before birth, memories were already made—were already *being* made—for us.

…a Boy Named Nancy

I once knew a boy named Quan who wore the same t-shirt to school every day. It was purple and it said "Nancy" on the back in cut-out velour letters. Kids used to tease him; they'd call him Nancy or, pussy, and I'd wish he'd tell them to eat fist. But, he never did. He'd just smile and sometimes, even chuckle along as if they were all friends. Quan, I think, lived in a world where everyone loved Friday-school pizza lunches, and to fit in, he pretended that he did too, even though he was lactose intolerant. He just wanted friends because he didn't have any, I don't think, just a cousin, a boy named Dinh who liked to say "fuck your mother" between sentences. I doubt the two were that close.

In those days I had thought much about befriending Quan, especially whenever I'd see him carrying his torn, strapless backpack up against his chest on his way to

272

school. Both of his hands would hold up the bottom as if it were a grocery bag and that sight, for whatever reason, always made me want to hug him. Of course, I never felt enough urgency to come off the monkey bars to actually do it. Quan stood out in all the wrong ways, and I, being a seven-year-old—a Vietnamese seven-year-old in the early '80s—couldn't afford the rescue. We'd end up being marked as the pair of FOB kids at school anyhow. "Hey, if you don't like America, then go back and let the gooks run bamboo sticks up your fingernails while you soak in the Mekong," the kids would say and then, of course, naturally I would cry. I would cry and then, stupidly, I would tell my mother. I would tell my mother and then, regretfully, hear this: "Why upset the white people?! Be grateful we don't hear bombs blowing up at night anymore," she would say and, she would be right. In 1981, no bombs went off at night outside Knollwood apartments—only in mornings, in afternoons, in cafeterias, in classrooms:

"Fucking gook. Are you a boy or a girl?"

"Ching chong, ping pong, ding dong!"

—one right after another.

In 1981, I was seven and I spoke some English, just enough only to communicate the basics, though not enough to pronounce words without accents or construct sentences without extra verbs. Yet I knew how to look, to see fingers pointing; I knew how to listen, to hear voices echoing; I knew to hurt, to feel guilt festering. Most importantly I knew that being Vietnamese, even if I were just half, was not cool. I knew I didn't have to know English to understand shame.

School was not a safe place for children. Discourse about the war centered on guys in black pajama pants and children bombers, and on how the war was actually an

273

unfair one because the Vietnamese didn't play by the rules. I remember Mr. McGraw would follow every atrocity with: "Life ain't fair, folks. If life were fair, I'd be 6 foot 3, play for the Celtics, dump the basketball, and do underwear commercials." Without fail, everyone would stare at his plump 5'7" stature, imagine him in Fruit of Looms and laugh, and I, especially, would try to prolong the laughter for as long as possible. Jokes meant fewer stares from Gunther Williams and Harry Dicks who took every chance they could to squint their round eyes at me. "Hey, aren't you from Vietnam, too?" they'd ask.

Words like grief and terror did not (and could not) belong to me, but to classmates and teachers who spoke of family and national losses, to the Vietnam Memorial and the veterans who sported the small American flag on the back corner of their wheelchairs, to Clark Springstein and the Born in the USA lyrics pointing out "the yellow man," and later, to actors like Tom Cruise with his heavily lined forehead and emotional fist-pumping jitters in Born on the Fourth of July. No matter that the Memorial served as remembrance of bravery and sacrifice, or the flag as a symbol of liberty and freedom, or the song and movie as critiques of the war, I would assume blame anyway, and avoid all things Vietnam.

It would take many more years, as you can see, before my perception of self and community would change, before I could say with relative truth that I do not see myself dressed in black pajamas with a rifle in one arm and sharpened bamboo nail-picks in another. Although my guilt has not disappeared completely (because, really, nobody gets to start over with a spotless mind), it has, I think, mixed in with other sentiments. I think of Quan and Gunther and Harry now, only in spurts, really, when I walk with my daughter through the Star Spangle Banner exhibit at the Smithsonian American History

274

Museum, when I hear for the 109th time (because it's always on TV), Tom Hanks as "Forest Gump" say in a heavy Alabamian accent, "Nam," or when I sit at the table with a group of writers, many of whom are veterans of the Vietnam era, vigorously moving their pens in the writing workshop at the homeless shelter.

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