"wild mother dancing": Maternal Narrative in Contemporary Writing by Women in Canada and Quebec

By

DIANA RUTH BRANDT

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

PH.D. in ARTS

Department of English
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

(c) December 1992

National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file *Votre référence*

Our file *Notre référence*

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-81767-4

Canada

Name _____

Dissertation Abstracts International is arranged by broad, general subject categories. Please select the one subject which most nearly describes the content of your dissertation. Enter the corresponding four-digit code in the spaces provided.

Literature – Canadian (English)
SUBJECT TERM

0352.
SUBJECT CODE

U·M·I

Subject Categories

THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS
Architecture 0729
Art History 0377
Cinema 0900
Dance 0378
Fine Arts 0357
Information Science 0723
Journalism 0391
Library Science 0399
Mass Communications 0708
Music 0413
Speech Communication 0459
Theater 0465

EDUCATION
General 0515
Administration 0514
Adult and Continuing 0516
Agricultural 0517
Art 0273
Bilingual and Multicultural 0282
Business 0688
Community College 0275
Curriculum and Instruction 0727
Early Childhood 0518
Elementary 0524
Finance 0277
Guidance and Counseling 0519
Health 0680
Higher 0745
History of 0520
Home Economics 0278
Industrial 0521
Language and Literature 0279
Mathematics 0280
Music 0522
Philosophy of 0998
Physical 0523
Psychology 0525
Reading 0535
Religious 0527
Sciences 0714
Secondary 0533
Social Sciences 0534
Sociology of 0340
Special 0529
Teacher Training 0530
Technology 0710
Tests and Measurements 0288
Vocational 0747

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS
Language
- General 0679
- Ancient 0289
- Linguistics 0290
- Modern 0291

Literature
- General 0401
- Classical 0294
- Comparative 0295
- Medieval 0297
- Modern 0298
- African 0316
- American 0591
- Asian 0305
- Canadian (English) 0352
- Canadian (French) 0355
- English 0593
- Germanic 0311
- Latin American 0312
- Middle Eastern 0315
- Romance 0313
- Slavic and East European 0314

PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION AND THEOLOGY
Philosophy 0422
Religion
- General 0318
- Biblical Studies 0321
- Clergy 0319
- History of 0320
- Philosophy of 0322

Theology 0469

SOCIAL SCIENCES
American Studies 0323
Anthropology
- Archaeology 0324
- Cultural 0326
- Physical 0327

Business Administration
- General 0310
- Accounting 0272
- Banking 0770
- Management 0454
- Marketing 0338

Canadian Studies 0385
Economics
- General 0501
- Agricultural 0503
- Commerce-Business 0505
- Finance 0508
- History 0509
- Labor 0510
- Theory 0511

Folklore 0358
Geography 0366
Gerontology 0351
History
- General 0578
- Ancient 0579
- Medieval 0581
- Modern 0582
- Black 0328
- African 0331
- Asia, Australia and Oceania 0332
- Canadian 0334
- European 0335
- Latin American 0336
- Middle Eastern 0333
- United States 0337

History of Science 0585
Law 0398
Political Science
- General 0615
- International Law and Relations 0616
- Public Administration 0617

Recreation 0814
Social Work 0452
Sociology
- General 0626
- Criminology and Penology 0627
- Demography 0938
- Ethnic and Racial Studies 0631
- Individual and Family Studies 0628
- Industrial and Labor Relations 0629
- Public and Social Welfare 0630
- Social Structure and Development 0700
- Theory and Methods 0344

Transportation 0709
Urban and Regional Planning 0999
Women's Studies 0453

THE SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING

BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES
Agriculture
- General 0473
- Agronomy 0285
- Animal Culture and Nutrition 0475
- Animal Pathology 0476
- Food Science and Technology 0359
- Forestry and Wildlife 0478
- Plant Culture 0479
- Plant Pathology 0480
- Plant Physiology 0817
- Range Management 0777
- Wood Technology 0746

Biology
- General 0306
- Anatomy 0287
- Biostatistics 0308
- Botany 0309
- Cell 0379
- Ecology 0329
- Entomology 0353
- Genetics 0369
- Limnology 0793
- Microbiology 0410
- Molecular 0307
- Neuroscience 0317
- Oceanography 0416
- Physiology 0433
- Radiation 0821
- Veterinary Science 0778
- Zoology 0472

Biophysics
- General 0786
- Medical 0760

EARTH SCIENCES
Biogeochemistry 0425
Geochemistry 0996
Geodesy 0370
Geology 0372
Geophysics 0373
Hydrology 0388
Mineralogy 0411
Paleobotany 0345
Paleoecology 0426
Paleontology 0418
Paleozoology 0985
Palynology 0427
Physical Geography 0368
Physical Oceanography 0415

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES
Environmental Sciences 0768
Health Sciences
- General 0566
- Audiology 0300
- Chemotherapy 0992
- Dentistry 0567
- Education 0350
- Hospital Management 0769
- Human Development 0758
- Immunology 0982
- Medicine and Surgery 0564
- Mental Health 0347
- Nursing 0569
- Nutrition 0570
- Obstetrics and Gynecology 0380
- Occupational Health and Therapy 0354
- Ophthalmology 0381
- Pathology 0571
- Pharmacology 0419
- Pharmacy 0572
- Physical Therapy 0382
- Public Health 0573
- Radiology 0574
- Recreation 0575
- Speech Pathology 0460
- Toxicology 0383

Home Economics 0386

PHYSICAL SCIENCES
Pure Sciences
Chemistry
- General 0485
- Agricultural 0749
- Analytical 0486
- Biochemistry 0487
- Inorganic 0488
- Nuclear 0738
- Organic 0490
- Pharmaceutical 0491
- Physical 0494
- Polymer 0495
- Radiation 0754

Mathematics 0405
Physics
- General 0605
- Acoustics 0986
- Astronomy and Astrophysics 0606
- Atmospheric Science 0608
- Atomic 0748
- Electronics and Electricity 0607
- Elementary Particles and High Energy 0798
- Fluid and Plasma 0759
- Molecular 0609
- Nuclear 0610
- Optics 0752
- Radiation 0756
- Solid State 0611

Statistics 0463

Applied Sciences
Applied Mechanics 0346
Computer Science 0984
Engineering
- General 0537
- Aerospace 0538
- Agricultural 0539
- Automotive 0540
- Biomedical 0541
- Chemical 0542
- Civil 0543
- Electronics and Electrical 0544
- Heat and Thermodynamics 0348
- Hydraulic 0545
- Industrial 0546
- Marine 0547
- Materials Science 0794
- Mechanical 0548
- Metallurgy 0743
- Mining 0551
- Nuclear 0552
- Packaging 0549
- Petroleum 0765
- Sanitary and Municipal 0554
- System Science 0790

Geotechnology 0428
Operations Research 0796
Plastics Technology 0795
Textile Technology 0994

PSYCHOLOGY
General 0621
Behavioral 0384
Clinical 0622
Developmental 0620
Experimental 0623
Industrial 0624
Personality 0625
Physiological 0989
Psychobiology 0349
Psychometrics 0632
Social 0451

"WILD MOTHER DANCING":

MATERNAL NARRATIVE IN CONTEMPORARY WRITING

BY WOMEN IN CANADA AND QUEBEC

BY

DIANA RUTH BRANDT

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

(c) 1993

Permission has been granted to the LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA to lend or sell copies of this Thesis, to the NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA to microfilm this Thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film, and UNIVERSITY MICROFILM to publish an abstract of this Thesis.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the Thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

Abstract

"wild mother dancing": Maternal Narrative in Contemporary Writing by Women in Canada and Quebec

The mother has been so largely absent in Western narrative, not because she is unnarratable, but because her subjectivity has been violently, and repeatedly, suppressed. Writing the mother story, or mother stories, therefore involves confronting this "murder of the mother" as Luce Irigaray calls it, in Western social history and literature, as a political act. It also means re-inventing our reading strategies, most of which are invested in the tradition which denied the mother subjectivity. While deconstructive and reader response theories offer many tools for re-reading the tradition against the grain, and therefore begin to make room for the construction of new subjectivities in language, it is really in contemporary feminist theory and fiction-writing, most of it published in the last decade, that the maternal subject has begun to be articulated in a way that is useful for rewriting and identifying the place of the mother in narrative. It is also in contemporary feminist writing, perhaps because of its largely antithetical investment in Western thought, that the possibility of cross-cultural dialogue has flowered, especially around the question of the maternal.

Mary O'Brien's concept of *reproductive consciousness* provides a useful frame for looking at women's role in the reproductive process: unlike men's fundamental alienation from the reproductive process from the moment of ejaculation onwards, women experience genetic continuity through the labour of childbirth, a moment in which nature and culture, conscious and unconscious, self and other, past and future are actively mediated. Maternal consciousness thus contradicts the binary categories of traditional Western thought, and offers a model for re-imagining the

world on less divisive terms. Women writing on the margins of Western discourse, against a variety of cultural backgrounds, are producing some of the most interesting examples of maternal narrative in our time. Canadian and Québecoise writers Margaret Laurence, Daphne Marlatt, Jovette Marchessault, Joy Kogawa and Sky Lee each employ revolutionary strategies to re-member the mother, and bring her back into narrative. Katherine Martens' *Mennonite Childbirth Stories* provide a dramatic and moving sequence of oral texts, which explode the traditional public silence of Mennonite women around the intimate and life-challenging experience of childbirth.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to David Arnason, Evelyn Hinz, Marianne Hirsch, Robert Kroetsch, Daphne Marlatt, Maggie Redekop, Judy Weil, David Williams, Janice Williamson, each of whom influenced my thinking about maternal narrative, and offered valuable insights and criticisms. Thank you to Brenda Austin-Smith for pointing out the thesis potential in this topic.

Thank you to Rose Barg, Pamela Banting, Helen Buss, Bruce Butterfield, Pauline Butling, Brenda Carr, Val Clemens, Joe Connor, Dennis Cooley, Charlene Diehl-Jones, Susan Rudy Dorscht, Robert Finnegan, Heidi Harms, Marianne Hirsch, Daphne Marlatt, Kathy Martens, Val Paape, Carolyn Peters, Paul Peters, Clarence Redekop, Maggie Redekop, Carol Rose, Neal Rose, Hildi Tiessen, Paul Tiessen, Erica Walker, Betsy Warland, Janice Williamson, and my colleagues at the University of Winnipeg, especially Neil Besner, Per Brask, Murray Evans, Pauline Greenhill, Patty Hawkins, Catherine Hunter, Don Jewison, Judith Kearns, Anaheid Melekian, Uma Parameswaran and Deborah Schnitzer, for personal and professional encouragement and support; and to Joan Turner for "symbolic mothering" throughout this project.

A special thank you to David Arnason who helped me tame an unruly argument into manageable proportions, and who nudged me gently toward completion. A special thank you also to Heidi Harms, for translating and transcribing Kathy Martens' Mennonite Childbirth Stories, for helping me typeset the final manuscript, and for many good laughs in the process.

And finally, thank you to my daughters Lisa and Ali, who have taught me how to be a mother, and have waited a long time for this story to be told.

"wild mother dancing": Maternal Narrative in Contemporary Writing by Women in Canada and Quebec

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Prologue in the First Person 1

The Absent Mother, An Introduction 8

Chapter One. The Absent Mother's (Amazing) Comeback: Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* and *The Diviners* 18

Chapter Two. Re-membering with Mothertongue: Daphne Marlatt's Search for the Absent Mother in Language 48

Chapter Three. These Our Grand-mothers: Jovette Marchessault's Cosmic Vision in *Like a Child of the Earth, Mother of the Grass,* and *White Pebbles in the Dark Forests* 86

Chapter Four. Silent Mothers/Noisy Daughters: Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* 128

Chapter Five. "Everyone has their own story to tell": Katherine Martens' Mennonite Childbirth Stories 156

Some Concluding Thoughts 186

Appendix 193

Letters of Permission 344

Notes 347

References Cited 351

Prologue in the First Person

In 1976, I gave birth to my first child, Lisa. I had just completed an M.A. in English literature at the University of Toronto, in Renaissance and Romantic literature, under the heady influence of Northrop Frye's "literary symbolism." It was like falling into a vacuum, narratively speaking. I realized suddenly, with a shock, that none of the texts I had read so carefully, none of the literary skills I had acquired so diligently as a student of literature, had anything remotely to do with the experience of becoming a mother. Frye's wonderful archetypal vision had given me a framework in which to make sense of the bewildering array of stories that make up the body we call literature, but it was useless for coming to terms with maternal experience. Someone asked Frye about gender in class once (it was a timid question in the 1970s), and Frye replied that gender was metaphorical in literature, that we are all female, for example, in relation to God, Biblically speaking, and all male in relation to nature, as the heroes of history. This made perfect sense in class, looking at literature as a self-contained body of work, full of interlocking, shifting, sliding metaphors and symbols. It was incomprehensible in my house, where the reality of my maternal body and

transformed subjectivity were insisting their unmetaphorical otherness unpolitely into my consciousness.

Where, in the rich canon of Western literature, were the mother stories? I asked myself. Where, indeed, were the mothers, symbolic or otherwise, whom I might have turned to in that moment of loneliness and desperation? Everywhere I looked, in literary theory or developmental psychology, the maternal was imaged either as archetype, "earthly vessel" (usually with a double meaning, dark and unpredictable as well as nurturing), or as shadowy companion of a child with infinite needs, a caretaker without needs of her own, who was somehow expected to be limitless in her giving, without professional or social support, and without narrative models other than the Virgin Mary and her few cheerful imitators who made it into the margins of English literature before 1900.[1] I was beginning to find contemporary fictions written by women with mothers in them, *Lives of Girls and Women* by Alice Munro, *The Stone Angel* by Margaret Laurence, but they were not being theorized about at that time, nor were these stories primarily about the experience of being a mother, at least the way I read them then. It was a vacuum that drove me to re-establish connection with my own mother and her unofficial, unprofessional oral tradition, the collection of "old wives' tales" which had sustained the women in my Mennonite culture, in the difficult, heroic experience of childbirth, a tradition of secret, whispered women's stories passed on from mothers to daughters through the centuries. There was a huge gap, however, between this tradition, with its circuitous labyrinths around the question

of the repressed maternal subject, spoken in the completely experiential language of my mothertongue, Plautdietsch, and the conceptual framework I had acquired through university education, a gap which I could not bridge.

In 1985-86, I took a course in the Victorian novel with Robert O'Kell, as part of my Ph.D. course requirements at the University of Manitoba. Suddenly, I was reading dozens of novels with the "family" as a major preoccupation, and children galore, but - where were the mothers? How come they always died in opening chapter? Most of these novels had young heroines in them who got married at the very end. What would happen, I asked myself, if the story kept on going after that? If she gave birth to children and became a mother? Would the story be about that or would she die or otherwise disappear from the text, or be sent off to the margins? At the same time I was experiencing how difficult it was to perform two demanding professions, motherhood, with two young children to look after, and full-time graduate studies, with minimal financial or other support for either, and a constant tug for attention between them. I became aware of how huge an absence the mother has been in the Western tradition, in narrative and social institutions, and yet how absolutely essential motherwork is to the continuance of society, how important and challenging an activity it is, despite its invisibility in terms of recognition and reward. I began to ask everyone I encountered, why do mothers always die in Victorian novels? Why is the mother always absent in Western narratives, even when the story centers around children and families? These

are some of the answers I was given within the academy: because the mother did often die in childbirth in the nineteenth century; because novels are about transformation and adolescence is much more interesting that way, plot-wise, than motherhood; because the maternal, à la Neumann, Freud, Lacan, Jung, is unspeakable, unrepresentable, unconscious, associated with death, double-handed; because in order to tell the mother story, in order to make a place for it, you must effectively challenge the master narrative of Western history, i.e. there isn't room for the mother as subject in the Western conception of narrative as it now stands.

I knew, from my own experience of being a mother, that these answers weren't enough: if mothers did die in such huge numbers during childbirth in the nineteenth century, why weren't the novels about that? Dangerous, heroic events in which large numbers of men risking and losing their lives, such as wars, were written about extensively in fiction, why not childbirth? Having had the benefit of both experiences, I could not concur that adolescence was more interesting or challenging than motherhood, in fact, I couldn't think of a single experience (except perhaps being born) which involved as much, amazing, transformation as becoming a mother. I also couldn't accept the metaphorical association of the mother with unconsciousness or death; this was not an archetype that made the least bit of sense from the point of view of maternal subjectivity. The "womb," in my experience, had absolutely nothing to do with "tomb"; being a mother required so much intentional, active consciousness every

minute of the day and night, that the old metaphors no longer seemed valid, in fact, they began to appear somewhat malicious in intent. As for the place of maternal subjectivity in Western narrative, I could readily see that there wasn't one, or rather, that the place of the maternal was an impossible, contradictory one - and yet, there I was, and there they were, all the other mothers, women with children that I knew, and whether or not we organized a revolution, our very survival past the ordeal of childbirth, our very being alive and wanting to speak about it, not only to each other but publicly, challenged the old framework to its roots.

Meanwhile, I began to write poetry, circling around the question of the absent mother. This was a different way of exploring absence/presence in language from constructing an argument, and it allowed me to negotiate the loaded, emotional territory around the absence/silence of the mother without blowing apart the conceptual frame. Through the writing of three consecutive volumes, *questions i asked my mother* (1987), *Agnes in the sky* (1990), and *mother, not mother* (1992), I began to formulate the argument of this thesis, that the mother has been so largely absent in Western narrative, not because she is unnarratable, but because her subjectivity has been violently, and repeatedly, suppressed. (These poetic texts perform the role of unspoken intertext here.) Writing the mother story, or mother stories, therefore involves confronting this "murder of the mother" as Luce Irigaray calls it, in Western social history and literature, as a political act (Irigaray 1981, cited in Hirsch 1989,

28).[2] It also means re-inventing our reading strategies, most of which are after all invested in the tradition which denied the mother subjectivity. While deconstructive and reader response theories offer many tools for re-reading the tradition against the grain, so to speak, and therefore begin to make room for the construction of new subjectivities in language, it is really in contemporary feminist theory and fiction-writing, most of it published in the last decade, that the maternal subject has begun to be articulated in a way that's useful for rewriting and identifying the place of the mother in narrative. It is also in contemporary feminist writing, perhaps because of its largely antithetical investment in Western thought, that the possibility of cross-cultural dialogue has flowered, especially around the question of the maternal.

One of my difficulties in writing criticism is that it puts me in conflict with the erratic and unpredictable way I experience language as a poet (not to mention the equally erratic and unpredictable way I experience language as a mother of by now teenage daughters). I have agonized over this dilemma for several years now, and come to an uneasy compromise between them: in order to write good poetry, you have to become a keen observer of the world around/inside you, as well as an accurate and critical reader of other people's texts; in becoming a good critical reader, you inevitably construct your own fictions around/beside them, shaped by your bodily experience, whether you call them that or not. As for narrative, I haven't been able to get past the notion, shared by at least one other poet-critic, Robert Kroetsch, who

once said that everything is narrative, you can't get away from it no matter how hard you try, even the getting away, becomes, in the end another story (Kroetsch, in Neumann and Wilson 1982, 104, 182).

The Absent Mother, An Introduction

When Athena, sprung full-grown and motherless from the head of Zeus, descends from Olympus to pronounce the fate of Orestes, who has murdered his mother Clytemnestra to avenge the death of Agamemnon his father, the goddess predictably upholds the right of father and son over that of mother and daughter. "No mother gave me birth," she declares forthrightly, "I honour the male, in all things but marriage. Yes, with all my heart I am my Father's child" (Aeschylus, *Oresteia* 264). Apollo, who appears out of nowhere as Zeus's emissary to help influence the all-male jury of assembled Athenians, seconds her vote with the following bit of biological wisdom:

> The woman you call the mother of the child
> is not the parent, just a nurse to the seed,
> the new-sown seed that grows and swells inside her.
> The man is the source of life - the one who mounts.
> She, like a stranger for a stranger, keeps
> the shoot alive unless god hurts the roots.
> I give you proof that all I say is true.
> The father can father forth without a mother.

Here she stands, our living witness. Look -

[he points to Athena.]

(Aeschylus 260)

One might point here in turn to the tautological character of classical Greek male thought, symptomatic perhaps of its general misconception of the processes of reproduction and their relationship to social function. One might, further, theorize about the motives of a group of men in defining "justice" and "society" and "democracy" as the suppression of the mother's right to express herself in words and actions, and to defend her interests, including the safety of her children - notions which influence our conception of society even today.

Mary O'Brien, in *The Politics of Reproduction*, argues that men's fundamental alienation from the reproductive process, from the moment of ejaculation during copulation onwards, has influenced Western male thinkers to promote philosophical and institutional structures around the concept of alienation as a primary existential human reality (O'Brien 1981, ch. 1). For women, on the other hand, observes O'Brien, there is no experience of alienation in the reproductive process. There is neither anxiety of origin - unlike every anxious father, the mother does not have to worry for a moment about whether the child she bears is her own - nor is there a sense of distance between herself as conscious, intentional human identity, and as natural, instinctual reproductive body, since these two parts of herself are actively mediated through the unconscious/conscious,

instinctual/intentional labour of childbearing. The moment of childbirth, O'Brien argues convincingly, is a crucial moment in the making of human history, since it is the moment when our continuity as a species, from one generation to the next, and as a successful partnership between nature and culture, is most clearly affirmed, through the basic fact of women's reproductive experience. In Western society, says O'Brien, we acknowledge this moment as culturally productive by calling it "labour," and yet, we negate its social importance by refusing to reward it as work, and by rendering the mother passive, inert and often unconscious during the birth process, so that it appears the (well salaried) doctor is delivering the child - often with invasive medical procedures - rather than she. Throughout written history, O'Brien claims, Western institutions and cultural practices have worked to suppress maternal narrative, which might have articulated women's effective protest against these alienating conventions. Throughout this same history, women have been oppressed materially and socially *vis à vis* their reproductive capacity, with varying degrees of violence. (Mary Daly gives a graphic and well-documented historical account of patriarchal violence toward women around the globe, in *Gyn/Ecology*, a history which she terms "The Sado-Ritual Syndrome: The Re-Enactment of Goddess Murder," 1978, 107.) "'Between the conception and the creation,'" remarks O'Brien somewhat wryly, "'Falls the shadow.' Male-stream thought has not analysed its shadows, perhaps, with sufficient rigour" (O'Brien 30).

Western literature, following O'Brien, can be read as the repetition and re-enactment of the violent founding moment of Greek society, which the Oresteia celebrates as a vindication of matricide in the name of the son-and-Father. As Luce Irigaray explains in another context: "When Freud describes and theorizes,...in *Totem and Taboo*, the murder of the father as the foundation of the primitive horde, he forgets a more archaic murder, that of the woman-mother, necessitated by the establishment of a certain order in the city" (Irigaray 1981, 15; trans. and cited by Marianne Hirsch 1989, 28). Louky Bersianik agrees: "The story of Agamemnon is exemplary, and if society were not so patriarchal, it is this story and not that of Oedipus which would have seized Freud's imagination" (Bersianik 1988, 46). Looked at from the other side, we might read the Western literary tradition as ongoing lament for the missing, silenced, absent mother and her mediating, nurturing presence, in social institutions and discourse, and in story. We might think of the Western artistic project from its inception, and including its alliance with Christianity, as an expression of guilt at this murder, and as a series of strategies to explain her absence, if not to bring her back. Julia Kristeva describes the social power of the image of the Virgin Mary in medieval Europe, as a "mooring point for the humanization of the West, and in particular for the humanization of love" (Kristeva 1985, 141). Additionally, during a time when women were being disenfranchised, it provided an image of female power which appeared to be outside the father's law, and thus offered comfort as a kind of "cunning double of the

explicit phallic power" (Kristeva 141). On the other hand, as Kristeva points out and countless women could attest, the Virgin Mary, by virtue of her uniqueness and perfection, served materially to humiliate and oppress women, who were forever found wanting in her shadow.

While the Victorian novel allowed women to explore a certain degree of narrative self-determination, in keeping with the individualistic expectations and new economic possibilities of industrialism, the conventions of the romance plot and the actual constraints placed upon women in Victorian society, as several feminist critics have observed, made it impossible for them to negotiate the distance between daughterhood and motherhood successfully. Rachel Blau DuPlessis points out a general contradiction in nineteenth century fiction between the plot and its female characters, where ""the female hero/heroine seems always to exceed the bounds that the plot delineates" (DuPlessis 1985, 7). In order to imagine a heroine with enough freedom to circumscribe her own developmental course, Marianne Hirsch explains, the author is forced to depict her as motherless; male orphan figures are often similarly cast adrift, set free by their lack of parenting. However, while love and marriage in the case of male heroes by and large signifies successful re-entry into the social structures which will give them prestige and power (with their long history of displaced but still powerful fathers), for women the outcome signifies the death of her individuality: whether or not she survives the very real hazards of childbirth, her interests from the moment of marriage on are subsumed in

the interests of her husband and/or children (DuPlessis 6-7; Rich 1979, 91; Hirsch 44-45). Further, her own lack of mothering, Hirsch explains, "rob[s] the heroine of important role models for her development, of the matriarchal power which could facilitate her own growth into womanhood" (Hirsch 44). As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, "what all these characters and their authors really fear they have forgotten is precisely that aspect of their lives which has been kept from them by patriarchal poetics: their matrilineal heritage of literary strength, their 'female power' which...is important to them *because of* (not in spite of) their mothers" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 59).

Pauline Butling writes that "the Freudian meta-narrative which has dominated twentieth century thought is perhaps even more damaging to women for its direct attack on the mother [than the Christian ideal of passivity and serenity]. Not only is the mother rendered powerless in the patriarchal order by her lack of a penis, but she is also an object to be attacked, displaced, and overcome by the child in the process of ego formation" (unpublished paper 13). Gail Scott, speculating on the difficulty of narrating the maternal at the end of the twentieth century, observes that "the mother's presence in language has been reduced to utilitarian function (the mother is not a person). Making it difficult for the little girl to break the symbiotic hold of the relationship enough to see the woman in the mother. So the mother always seems partly in the shadow. Maybe that's why she ends up...as a semi-Gothic character, a figure of *excess*, of *hope*,

but also of terrible absence" (Scott 1989, 128). Contemporary woman writers, however, particularly in Canada and Quebec, have begun writing mother stories in large numbers, despite these theoretical and social difficulties, and in defiance of the constraints of the Western narrative tradition with its long history of enforced maternal absence.

How do you tell a new (or old forbidden) story? How should we read these new (and remembered) mother stories, wrested as they are, not without anguish and sometimes rage, from the silent heart of Western discourse and its unruly, uncolonized margins? What happens if you begin to read stories from the point of view of the mother instead of the child-and-father? Are we still condemned, as Peter Brooks insists we are, tautologically, "to the reading of erroneous plots, granted insight only insofar as we can gain disillusion from them....condemned to repetition, rereading, in the knowledge that what we discover will always be that there was nothing to be discovered"? (Brooks 1980, 525) Or can we begin to recognize, as Marianne Hirsch envisions at the end of her pioneering study, *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, a new, politicized model of narrative, not based on separation and maternal absence, triangulation and death, but rather on the intimate interactions of the mother with the world around her, and with her child? "Can we conceive of development," Hirsch asks, "as other than a process of separation from a neutral, either nurturing or hostile, but ultimately self-effacing 'holding' background'? I would suggest," she continues, "that if we start our study of the subject with *mothers* rather than with *children*, a different conception of

subjectivity might emerge. Although it might be difficult to define, we might try to envision a culturally variable, mutually affirming form of interconnection between one body and another, one person and another, existing as social, legal, and psychological subjects" (Hirsch 197).

Such a narrative context would allow also for the development of what Mary O'Brien calls for in *The Politics of Reproduction*: an intentional, politicized awareness of our gender differences in relation to childbirth, an act of recognition and acceptance by each gender of its respective role in the reproductive process, which she terms *reproductive consciousness*. Such awareness, argues O'Brien, is crucial to solving the global crisis in overpopulation and over-industrialization, since it is men's unacknowledged alienation from the reproductive process and male anxiety over paternity that has occasioned their centuries-long subordination of women and children and over nature in the first place. Reproductive consciousness, then, would mean responsible parenting (literally and figuratively) by both sexes, which could lead to a partnership in caretaking wholly unlike the history of domination and submission which has characterized gender relations under patriarchy. Such a revolution in *reproductive consciousness,* envisions O'Brien, could bring about the maturation of subjectivity in Western narrative and in society at last. (O'Brien 1989, ch. 6; see also O'Brien 1981).

The following chapters represent my attempt at reading contemporary Canadian women's fiction from the point of view of

maternal narrative.[3] Since mother stories by definition challenge some of the basic assumptions of Western thought, including major tenets of contemporary literary theory, these essays necessarily invoke an array of theoretical questions. I have resisted, for the most part, the temptation to get side-tracked into discussing these issues for their own sake, and address them only to the extent they are relevant to the text at hand. It is not surprising, perhaps, that some of the most interesting examples of maternal narrative are being written by women who, in one way or another, have escaped colonization, and thus write on the very margins of Western discourse. It is these women's stories that interest me most in the present context, with their different sense of tradition and female identity. The women whose narratives I have chosen to read here write from a sense of otherness to the Western tradition, either through lesbian experience, recent immigration to the West, the cultural memory of a radically different indigenous heritage, or the experience of growing up in a separatist, religious, oral community. This sense of otherness exists in creative tension and dialogue with mainstream discourse in their writing, a narrative space I find extremely creative and exciting. I begin, then, with prairie writer Margaret Laurence, who was really the pioneer in fashioning a place for maternal narrative in Canada, out of the "wilderness," as she might have said. I continue with Malaysian-born West Coast writer Daphne Marlatt, Aboriginal-Quebecoise writer Jovette Marchessault, Asian-Canadian writers Joy Kogawa and Sky Lee (living in Toronto and Vancouver, respectively), and

end with a look at new, unpublished transcriptions of oral Mennonite childbirth stories, recently collected by Winnipeg writer Katherine Martens.

Chapter One.

The Absent Mother's (Amazing) Comeback: Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* and *The Diviners*.

Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* (1964) opens on the classic site of the mother's body in Western culture: the cemetery. Above her grave stands the "stone angel," bought, Hagar Shipley tells us, by her father "in pride to mark her bones and proclaim his dynasty, as he fancied, forever and a day." Laurence describes this angel as sightless, heartless, and culturally inappropriate - imitation Renaissance Italian sculpture imported at great expense to wild Canadian prairie soil. "I was too young then to know her purpose," says Hagar, remembering her childhood, but she knows it now: " I think now she must have been carved in that distant sun by stone masons who were the cynical descendants of Bernini, gouging out her like by the score, gauging with admirable accuracy the needs of fledgling pharaohs in an uncouth land" (*The Stone Angel* 3).

Most critics have skipped over this passage in their discussion of the stone angel's significance in the novel, preferring to focus on Hagar's character, her personal shortcomings, her stony heart, her spiritual blindness, the way

she herself comes to resemble, in the absence of a real, living mother, the stone angel in the graveyard, particularly in her dealings with men, her own brothers, father, husband, sons. But what if we were to take this statement seriously? What if we were to see the stone angel first and foremost as patriarchal icon, "gouged" violently out of stone and carried across the sea to serve the dynastic purposes of an authoritarian, entrepreneurial, colonizing patriarch, who "didn't much mind" the death of his wife, as he tells Hagar, in exchange for this intelligent, headstrong daughter to educate, bully, and show off?

What exactly are the needs of fledgling pharaohs in an uncouth land, that can be met by imitation Bernini statues in cemeteries? How are we to read the stone angel as patriarchal text? Surely, we say, it is there to mark the mother's absence - but what a curious marker it is, that carries so very little reference to the dead mother herself, and seems rather to spell out triumph, a celebration of the father's social position in the community, than grieving for a lost love. To what extent is the patriarchal signifier, stone-hearted, blind, and giving the illusion of spiritual grandeur and permanence, *created out of,* and *dependent upon* maternal absence? This is one of the problematic questions Laurence's text asks us to consider, at the outset. And more importantly, in narrative terms, where does that leave the daughter who is forced to negotiate the demands of a possessive, exacting father with her own unfulfilled, crying maternal need, and has only an imported, archaic, "gouged out" stone angel as image and role model?

Lynda E. Boose, in an article entitled "The Father's House and the Daughter in It," discusses the problematic kinship structures that govern the relationship of fathers and daughters in patriarchal culture:

> In the anthropological narration of family, the father is the figure who controls the exogamous exchange of women. The woman most practically available to be exchanged is clearly not the mother, who sexually belongs to the father, nor the sister, who comes under the bestowal rights of her own father. The exchangeable figure is the daughter. [If it is true] that the origins of culture are synonymous with the evolution of kinships, then culture has essentially been built upon the relationship it has seemed least eager to discuss - that between father and daughter. (Boose 1989, 22)

Boose, drawing on Edmund Leach's theory of "complementary filiation," goes on to describe the peculiar "illegitimacy" of the daughter, who unlike the son, essentially lacks parentage and is "destined to seek legitimation and name outside its boundaries":

> When her patronymic identity as daughter is exchanged for one that marks her as wife, she is still the alien until she has once again changed her sign to 'mother of new members of the lineage' - which by implication means mother to a son. (Boose 22)

Boose's analysis goes far to explain the traditional narrative absence of the mother, in anthropological terms, since she is mainly useful to provide heirs and therefore expendable (and problematic) after childbirth. It also sheds light on the contradictory and impossible position occupied by the daughter (not to mention the other family members!) in the patriarchal script, as sexual object "owned" by the father and at the same time forbidden to him - a contradiction acted out, Boose suggests, by the ritual of "father bestowal," whereby the daughter is "given away" to another male of the father's choice, so that the daughter's marriage is defined within a pattern of obedience to him, instead of symbolizing his abandonment and betrayal. There is an underlying, paternal anxiety running through this narrative script. The father's repressed sense of guilt over his desire to possess the daughter often erupts in "irrational" anger at his loss of her: anger that is very likely acted out as hostility *towards* her developing sexuality, a confusing message for daughters who have been previously favoured by their fathers, but a familiar one to daughters even today (Meisner 1990).

Second, Boose observes, there is a widespread paternal suspicion that the daughters, so valued as the vessels of familial sexual energy, may wish to follow their own, willful desire, instead of conforming to their fathers' wishes (Boose 55). The "objects" of exchange threaten at every moment to turn into their own subjects! This paternal anxiety is visited upon the daughters in the form of harsh and unexpected judgments: Boose cites the

example of Eve, who commits the double crime of attempting to appropriate the Father's power for herself, and then - outrageously - sharing it with her lover. She is punished for this - extremely - by expulsion from the father's garden into permanent exile and the "selflessness" of motherhood. We might think of countless other narratives which replay this primal scene, from Cordelia and Lear to contemporary examples such as Catherine and Em in Sharon Pollock's recent play, *Doc*. The speaker in Ecclesiastes gives rare and eloquent voice to the paternal dilemma over daughters in patriarchy - we might read it subversively as a tribute to the exuberance and independent spirit of the daughters, and as a reminder of how consistently and completely this spirit has been broken down in wives and mothers and unmarried women:

> Unknown to her, a daughter keeps her father awake,
> the worry she gives him drives away his sleep:
> .....
> Your daughter is headstrong? Keep a sharp look-out
> that she does not make you the laughing stock of
> your enemies,
> the talk of the town, the object of common gossip,
> and put you to public shame.
>
> (Ecc. 42:9-11, quoted in Boose, 70.)

Part of the terrible expectation placed upon the "obedient" daughter who is motherless by definition in the patriarchal script since she is given identity by her father, is that she will "mother" her father even though she is dependent on him, and lacks mothering herself. Naida D. Hyde has identified the phenomenon of daughters having to nurture and parent their mothers and/or fathers instead of the other way around as a form of "covert incest," often leading to deep depression in the daughters as they reach middle age (Hyde 1986). Nancy Chodorow, similarly, links the inadequate relationship between daughters and mothers in Western culture to the oppression of motherhood as a social institution, so that daughters end up having to make up for the "lack" in their own mothers, to themselves, their siblings, lovers and especially fathers, an expectation which reinforces and reproduces the dynamic of oppression in the daughters' lives (Chodorow 1978). This is clearly the pattern of filial relations in *Oedipus at Colonus, King Lear, Emma, Little Dorrit,* and the second half of *To the Lighthouse*, a pattern Lily Briscoe heroically and somewhat quizzically resists toward the end of the latter. But as Mary O'Brien reminds us in *The Politics of Reproduction*, paternity itself is a slippery and tenuous concept, based on a principle of masculine historical continuity which barely masks men's alienation from the reproductive process, and which in spite of the solidity and longevity of patriarchal institutions is unable to compensate for aging men's mortality (O'Brien 1986, ch.1). What happens if the daughter's story continues past the moment of her

"expulsion" from the family or sacrificial re-inscription within it, past the father's death? What if the story continues past the moment of her obedience and/or rebellion, past the moment of her sexual awakening into adulthood and/or maternity, past the imaginary limits imposed by patriarchy: what forbidden territory, what new uncharted wilderness does that take us to?

The Stone Angel confronts us radically with this open-ended narrative question. Hagar, the disinherited slave-woman, sent into exile for threatening the patriarchal script with her subjectivity, her illegitimate, unruly, female desire: a perfect model on which to construct a wild, new daughter's text, on into motherhood and beyond, though few critics have recognized it as such. Most have preferred to read the novel with its rich allusiveness to older texts as a confirmation of traditional, patriarchal narrative structures (Djwa 1972, Kertzer 1974, Swayze 1988). Jungian critics who interpret Hagar's story as a quest for feminine identity have been more willing to recognize Laurence's narrative challenge to the patriarchal script. According to this reading, Hagar is rescued from her identity of exile from the father's house through a process of psychological maturation or "individuation," by which she comes to recognize herself in female-identified images of the Great Mother, instead of the male-identified patriarchal Father (Maeser 1980, Buss 1985, Williams 1988). In recuperating pre-patriarchal metaphors of the maternal as universal, psychological archetypes of female identity, e.g. the Great Mother as Ground of Being, as Absolute (Maeser 151-2), the "womb-tomb identification" (Buss 1985, 14),

death as the metaphorical equivalent of the Mother as well as Nature (Williams 97), archetypal criticism risks repeating the absence of the mother as human, historically located, speaking subject. We are left the impression that maternal absence in Western narrative is primarily an individual, moral and psychological problem, as opposed to a socially inscribed, politically oppressed institution with specific, historically violent underpinnings. Further, the continued metaphorical association of the maternal function with death reiterates the patriarchal signification of the mother as stone angel, i.e., as dead (absent) body and idealized (present) spirit. David Williams, for example, implies that Hagar recognizes herself as mother, "becomes" the mother, through anticipating and confronting her own mortality, which makes it possible to affirm her connection with her own dead mother, an identification she has understandably repressed most of her life (Williams 97).

On the other hand, both Williams and Buss recognize the revisionary nature of Laurence's narrative, *vis à vis* patriarchy. "Mothers," writes Williams, "are supposed to die. Or at least be exiled. And if they live?....Rewrite the story" (Williams 89). What we see in *The Stone Angel*, argues Helen Buss, is "a movement away from a patriarchal world-view that emphasizes cause-effect moral behavior based on logical rules and notions of rewards and punishment, towards a maternal world-view in which one responds to the needs of the present moment through a freeing of the positive values of emotion and instinct" (Buss 1985). Seen from the vantage point of a daughter exiting

patriarchy, *The Stone Angel* becomes a revolutionary story of a woman who refuses weakness, selflessness and death in motherhood, to fashion her own self-identified story. The "wilderness" which Hagar flees to and in which she makes her home is thus not the barren wasteland of moralistic Christian mythology nor a metaphor for the Jungian unconscious, but the uncharted new territory of the pioneer: full of exuberance, and hardship, and negotiated as all new territories are, with difficulty, using intuition and invention and trial and error. Hagar's "problem," accordingly, is not an attitudinal but a structural one, how to live with dignity as a (motherless) daughter in/outside the patriarchal plot, and further, how to *survive* it, past the disinheritance and expulsion from the father's house and wishes: how to become a wife and mother and still stay alive. How, finally, to come to terms with the immense bitterness accumulated over a lifetime of unremitting social and material oppression.[4]

Hagar's much quoted "pride", generally understood as a moral flaw, becomes rather a sign of her moral strength, and a refuge - not indeed from "the taint of the dead mother" as Williams suggests (Williams 85), but from the deadliness of the patriarchal signifier toward daughters-who-become-mothers. The fact that Hagar can recognize the limitations of her pride in old age is, similarly, a sign of her moral courage, adaptability and insight. Constance Rooke has coined the term "Vollendungsroman" to identify a new narrative type, the novel of old age. Such novels generally involve what Robert N. Butler calls the "life review," in

which the protagonist looks back over her life "in a climate of radical revision," under the pressure of impending death (quoted in Rooke 1988, 36). Typically, the life review leads to a recognition of past failures and losses and some attempt to ameliorate them in the present, through active grieving, and occasionally, through surrogate encounters which enable the aging person to say things that were left unsaid to loved ones who have since died (as happens with Murray Lees at Shadow Point). Not all aging persons are brave or strong enough to participate in an honest life review. Rooke reminds us how much strength and stubbornness Hagar demonstrates in this final act, not of repentance but of recognition and letting go, both of her pride and the fear that it protected (Rooke 39). Her revision therefore does not recuperate the patriarchal script: her maternal gestures at the end of the novel do not imply her capitulation to the stone angel as signifier and destiny at last, but rather, show continued defiance against maternal absence, and one more celebratory act in a life which insists on the possibility of maternal subjectivity and presence, right through old age and into the moment of death.

Think of how many of the binary categories of Western thought, which Hélène Cixous has equated with the othering and silencing of women (Cixous 1981, 90), are undermined, brought together, and transformed here:

weakness	strength
nature	culture

object	subject
body	mind, spirit
rebellion	acceptance
wilderness	home

Critics have spent much energy deciding which side of the binary code Laurence's loyalties lie and interpreting the narrative accordingly, so that we have really a double set of readings of the novel now, one side insisting that Word and meaning win out, the other that "nature" and instinct prevail. Hagar Shipley's maternal narrative moves past them brilliantly, dialogically, in what Kristeva calls "the graph of a motion through which our culture forsakes itself in order to go beyond itself" (Kristeva 1983, 89).

To give just one example of how Laurence subverts traditional narrative structure around the question of female subjectivity and transforms it to make room for, among other things, maternal narrative, I shall look in some detail at the Egyptian motif running through the novel. It is typical of Laurence's method to choose names, images, events which sustain a multitude of echoes and meanings, including contradictory ones, to create what Kristeva calls "ambivalence" in writing: a disturbance of fixed meanings to open up new possibilities in language. Most obvious among the various Egyptian nuances that color Hagar's story is the Biblical allusion to Hagar, favoured and then exiled Egyptian handmaid to Abraham, father of patriarchs in the Old Testament. As the disinherited,. "illegitimate" daughter of the self-made pharaoh, Jason Currie, and later as the abused wife of

Bram Shipley, his alter ego, Hagar's life initially resembles her namesake's. (Hagar, we might say, is attracted to Bram because of his "Dionysian" energy which promises a kind of liberation from the stern, "Apollonian" outlook of her father; but as the novel shows, Dionysian energy without female liberation leaves women not much better off than before, Jason and Bram being finally two sides of the same coin.) Unlike the Bible, Laurence's novel does *not*, as many readers have suggested, consign her irrevocably to a lifetime of non-identity and marginalization, "mother of peripheral wanderers [and] outcasts like herself" (Maeser 154-5). This Hagar, unlike the Old Testament one, assumes center stage. She insists on speaking, she takes us with her, into exile, into the wilderness, where against great odds she makes her home, bears children and raises them, and comes to know herself, finally, as a self-fulfilled, joyful, furious woman. This motherless daughter may be sent away, disinherited, worked to the bone, but she *does not die*. Neither marriage nor motherhood nor housekeeperhood can make her disappear. Not even the immanent prospect of natural death at age ninety can make this renegade Christian say, "Our Father." Until the very last breath of her body and the last word in the book, and through deep loss and hardship, Hagar Shipley, daughter-wife-mother-independent wage earner holds her head up, proud even when broken, her own person to the end: "Bless me or not, Lord, just as You please, for I'll not beg" (*The Stone Angel* 307).

Another related Egyptian echo can be found in the reference to Meg Merrilies, the homeless, wandering gipsy of Keats' poem,

which the ninety-year-old Hagar recalls during her attempted escape from a nursing home in an abandoned fish cannery at Shadow Point. These lines, Hagar muses, "give me courage, more than if I'd recited the Twenty-third Psalm, but why this should be so, I cannot tell" (*The Stone Angel* 93). Joan Coldwell discusses the significance of Keats' ballad in the novel, citing a series of incidents in which Hagar chooses to follow "the gipsy side of her nature" rather than the stern Presbyterian side: playing in the cemetery among wildflowers as a child; marrying Bram," the dark, laughing, carefree lover of horses;" feeling at home on the prairie landscape at the Shipley farm despite its social isolation; finding herself at peace finally in the woods at Shadow Point (Coldwell 1980). The feisty, adventurous, spirited young woman who insists on making her own, independent life on the ramshackle Shipley homestead rather than be "owned" by her well-to-do father, is well represented by the wild, Amazonian Meg Merrilies, gipsies standing for a kind of free-spirited valorized homelessness. Coldwell, further, suggests a narrative connection between Meg Merrilies, the homeless evicted Highlanders of Scotland, and North American Indians in Laurence's writing, a connection found also in Scott's *Guy Mannering*.

The political link between Laurence's interest in the plight of disinherited peoples and maternal narrative is often overlooked by readers. Margaret Clarke's recent review of Laurence's memoir, *Dance on the Earth*, bears quoting in this regard:

> Because of its simple diction we might miss the fact that [the memoir] is also an important theoretical discourse on women's writing....Laurence writes a text which does not ask you to play with the body of the mother, to dismember it, through your skilled deconstructive acts with language; she writes a text which asks you to re-member the mother, to become the body of the mother, through taking on the ethics that Laurence proposes as the ethics of maternity....It reaches out the hand of a dying woman, its language places that hand across yours, and it (hand/text) does not go away when the book is closed. (Clarke 1990, 72-3)

It is no wonder, given the rigidity of Hagar's Presbyterian upbringing and the ruthlessness of her disinheritance and exile, that Hagar should find comfort in Keats' ballad. But in linking the gipsy motif with such noted and privileged figures as Abraham (Bram) and King Lear (whose confrontation with himself and the universe on the heath is clearly being echoed in the Shadow Point scene), Laurence refuses to invest in the idea of women's otherness despite their marginalization; she insists on a revisioning of the available narrative terms. In the world of *The Stone Angel*, Laurence shows us, the margin is the center, the wilderness is home, and perhaps most radically and surprisingly, the wanderer and the mother are the same. Against the archetypal, Freudian plot in which the mother's death signals the beginning of the story and her reappearance its end, and against

the American version of it in which the protagonist must leave home and mother in order to have a life, Laurence posits a narrative centered *in the mother's body* as memory and as text.[5] In Laurence's vision, unlike traditional Western culture's, the mother is not represented by the patriarchal signifier which proclaims her absence, but by her own furious desire and her own speaking. And it makes her, as Marvin says, "a holy terror."

"I, the Egyptian": the fact that Hagar Shipley can identify herself as exiled slave-girl, wandering gipsy and pharaoh's daughter all at once attests of course to her (and Laurence's) imaginative agility. It also points to a deep knowledge of the contradictory nature of subjectivity in this text. "Subjectivity" is a questionable and much debated notion in contemporary critical theory. I suggest that Laurence subscribes both to Kristeva's notion of the dialogical "subject-in-process," and to the feminist "I," which Paul Smith describes as a subject which acknowledges its own contradictions and at the same time is an active political agent (Smith 1987, 151). The contradictory meanings of the Egyptian metaphor also underline the impossibility of the daughter's position in the patriarchal plot, as both illegitimate and "chosen": wandering indeed being the only way out of this *cul-de-sac*. And where does the wandering lead? To a recognition of herself finally as a being full of grief and the capacity to rejoice: the daughter giving birth to herself, giving birthright to herself, as a self-legitimized woman. "The greatest tragedy that can occur between mother and daughter," writes Marianne Hirsch, "is when they cease being able to speak and to

listen to one another. But what if they inhabit the same body, what if they are the same person, speaking with two voices?" (Hirsch 1989, 199). This moment of recognition is where maternal narrative, constructed out of the disinherited, motherless, patriarchal daughter's plot, ends, and begins.

But notice how closely this daughter-mother's text skirts the traditional paradigm after all: the Mummy coming to terms with her immanent death recognizing herself also as mummy (*The Stone Angel*, 111). Nevertheless, in this text the narrative depends on the mother's presence rather than her absence; the narrative ends before she does. The prospect of her imminent death, furthermore, is not the tragic death of a young mother in childbirth, but rather the natural death of old age. Like birth-giving, death has both a natural and cultural meaning; unlike death by violence or accident or ordeal, with its punitive and sacrificial overtones, "natural" death is an event which is universal and inevitable. There is no structure of privilege in it, no reference to gender or class. It is an event which can be anticipated, and which must be finally accepted as a healthy, normal part of the aging process. The metaphorical association of death with the mother in Western culture has served to mask the universality and naturalness of death by old age, and has tended to reinforce the idea of sacrifice and punishment, "unnatural" death, as the cornerstone of human community. At the same time, it has served to hide the material effect of Western male-dominated, violent social practices, such as war and medicine.

Adrienne Rich describes the dramatic increase of maternal death during childbirth in Europe during the seventeenth century, after the invention of obstetric practice by men, following several centuries of witchhunts, during which millions of women were put to death for natural healing practices (Daly 1978, Read 1990). Until the end of the nineteenth century, death during childbirth became the norm for women. In the French province of Lombardy, writes Rich, no single woman survived childbirth in one year:

> the specter of death, larger than ever before in the history of maternity, darkened the spirit in which any woman came to term. Anxiety depression, the sense of being a sacrifical victim, all familiar components of female experience, became more than ever the invisible attendants at pregnancy and labor. (Rich, 1986, 152-3)

Yet for centuries, writes Rich, "the disease was regarded as a mysterious epidemic, part of the curse of Eve" (Rich 1986, 152). It was only after a man contracted puerperal fever - the actual cause of the epidemic, which was being passed on as bacterial infection from one body to another by unwashed doctors' hands - that this tragedy came to be recognized as a disease that could be avoided. (The doctor, incidentally, who made the discovery, Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis, was professionally discredited by his colleagues, forced to leave his post, and eventually committed to an insane asylum. Twenty years later his claims were recognized

and the disinfection of doctors' hands during childbirth became accepted practice, Rich 1986, 155.) On another front, as Nancy Huston points out, the metaphor of childbirth has been widely used in Western culture to naturalize and justify the practice of war: "How many times have we read that a nation which never makes war becomes 'sterile,' and that blood must be shed in order for it to recover its 'fertility'? How many revolutions have been compared to 'labor pains,' violent convulsions preceding the 'birth' of a new society?" (Huston 1985, 168)

By emphasizing the moral implications of Hagar's journey toward death, Laurence undermines the metaphor of the mother as a figure of death even as she evokes it. Hagar's recognition of herself as Mummy and mummy gets played out in elaborate formal terms in the fish cannery scene, where she simultaneously recognizes her mortality, her connectedness to other human beings and her own inadequacies as a mother. The presence of scales here suggests a judgment ceremony, underlining the moral choice involved in this rite of passage.

Mothering is both natural and cultural, it is something that happens to you (sometimes by choice, sometimes not); it is also an intentional, chosen act, insofar as it involves successfully birthing and nurturing another human being. In Western culture, with its single maternal icon of the Virgin Mary whose perfection is unattainable by ordinary women, maternal failure is inevitable. The Freudian developmental paradigm has tended to reinforce this idea by its exclusive emphasis on the needs of the child, as passive reactor to drives or environmental pressures. "The

fantasy of the perfect mother," write Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto, "has led to the cultural oppression of women in the interest of a child whose needs are also fantasied....creating a totalistic, extreme, yet fragmented view of mothering and the mother-child relation in which both mother and child are paradoxically victim yet omnipotent" (Chodorow and Contratto 1982, 71). Chodorow and Contratto argue for alternative theories of child development and motherhood which "recognize collaboration and compromise as well as conflict," and which stress "relational capacities and experiences instead of insatiable, insistent drives [which cannot be met]" (Chodorow and Contratto 71). Hagar's acknowledgment of maternal limitation, of failure, is therefore paradoxically the key to her acceptance of the maternal role - not indeed as self-sacrifice, but as collaborative and conflictual interaction of adult and child, which is finally reciprocal, an experience of mutual love between mother and child. Hagar's bewilderment at recognizing Marvin's love, despite her failures toward him as mother, is an important part of this process of acceptance. Laurence's point in juxtaposing Hagar's recognition of herself as mother with the recognition of her own mortality, I would argue, is not to reinforce the metaphorical association of the mother with death in the sacrificial sense, but to point out the similarity between birth-giving and natural death, as similar events in the life process, rites of passage which are inevitable but require our spiritual acceptance and understanding in order to be done well. Hagar's speaking the mother word, "there, there," at the end of the

novel suggests acceptance of death, through an act of self-nurturing which contrasts sharply with her previous gestures of unresolved grief and despair.

The mother becoming angel: for Laurence this does not mean learning saintliness, in the Christian-Victorian sense of selfless martyrdom, but rather learning how to live and die joyously, in spite of mistakes made; the integration of flesh and spirit. The dying mother, in Laurence's vision, does not disappear; death is not an ultimate ending, but another image of being born, into another element, the mummy transformed as Mummy as newborn child, gasping "unfamiliar air" (*The Stone Angel* 307). "Can angels faint?" Hagar asks, anticipating her own amazement at such a transformation. The gypsy rebel child-woman pioneer, the disinherited angry daughter-mother, courageously inventing her own story against the patriarchal script, insisting on selfhood even into the moment of death: the stone angel revisited as maternal icon, standing crookedly on the ground, with lipstick on, proclaiming female desire - not for a dynasty, but for her own children, her own story, her own feet on the earth, dancing: this is the real, re-membered meaning of the deconstructed patriarchal signifier in Laurence's vision.

If *The Stone Angel* is a celebration of the possibility of maternal consciousness in a world which has been dominated by patriarchy, *The Diviners* (1974) is a warning about its limitations. The novel opens with Morag, writer and mother, "river watching," worrying about the future of the river and the environment, and the safety of her own daughter: "In bygone days,

Morag had once believed that nothing could be worse than killing a person. Now she perceived river-slaying as something worse. No wonder the kids felt themselves to be children of the apocalypse" (*The Diviners* 4). Her most immediate worry is Pique, her eighteen-year-old daughter, who has recently run away from home. In many ways, the novel is testimony to the "terrible vulnerability of parents" (*The Diviners* 297) in the modern world, where patriarchy no longer offers even the illusion of grandeur and permanence, where women carry as great a burden of reproductive labour as ever but without the support of the traditional family system, so that children are growing up in many ways less parented than before; where the environment is gravely threatened by pollution and the imminence of nuclear war, and it has become hard, if not impossible, to envision a healthy future for them at all. As Morag muses, of Pique:

> *My world in those days was a residual bad dream, with some goodness and some chance of climbing out. Hers is an accomplished nightmare, with nowhere to go, and the only peace is in the eye of the hurricane. My God. My God.* (*The Diviners* 87, Laurence's italics)

Much of the novel concerns the problem of mothering. None of the mothers portrayed have supportive husbands; few feel themselves to be adequate nurturers (Morag's college friend Ella Gerson's mother being the notable exception). Morag finds herself juggling the demands of career, child, and personal life in a

precarious, anxiety-ridden balancing act which sounds all too familiar to contemporary women.[6] Abortion is a recurring topic: Morag's first novel, *Spear of Innocence*, involves an abortion; other people in the novel who undergo abortions include Fan Brady, Eva Winkler, and the unidentified mother of the fetus found by Christie Logan, the Manawaka garbage collector. Each of these young women is portrayed as a victim, of the family, of male violence. Morag's own close brush with abortion involves her somewhat desperate, ill-advised one night stand with the volatile and dangerous Chas, after which she vows: *"I'll never again have sex with a man whose child I couldn't bear to bear....*It is not morality," she adds, "Just practicality of spirit and flesh" (The Diviners 270). The abortion motif underscores the vulnerability of women and the tragic implications of their reproductive capacity under difficult or abusive circumstances. Laurence suggests that "innocence, " the traditional equivalent of "purity" in women, is in fact a recipe for tragedy and abuse. The novel demonstrates the need for intentionality and responsibility in the area of sexuality. Desire may be an innate and unavoidable human drive; but acting on it requires the intense development of "reproductive consciousness" in both women and men. Pique's anguished cry to her mother, "Why did you have me?" adds a disturbing echo to this theme, implying that the motive for reproduction (for both fathers and mothers) can no longer be taken for granted in the over-populated, over-industrialized modern world.

Sexual desire and maternal consciousness, while related, therefore exist in tension to one another in Laurence's novel. Mary O'Brien argues in *The Politics of Reproduction* that the separation of the moment of sexuality from the reproductive process in general has been an assumed right for men throughout Western history. For women, on the other hand, this separation as political right is only beginning to take place, with the advent of birth control and the contemporary feminist movement. This separation, which is being energetically fought by fundamentalists and other groups on the Right, observes O'Brien, is in fact inevitable, given the current population crisis, since women *can no longer* see themselves, or be seen, as merely reproductive vessels (O'Brien 1986, 191). Ironically, the absolute identification of sexuality in women with motherhood in the Western tradition has been accompanied by extreme (male) anxiety over this identification. For Freud, the discovery of the mother's sexuality represents a traumatic moment in the child's development. The economic oppression of women, including their confinement in narrow domestic circumstances, is another expression of this anxiety. In fact, the identification has served to erase the subjective reality of both maternity and female sexuality, the Virgin Mother of Christianity serving as perfect icon to exhibit their absence in Western narrative. Laurence is thus engaged in a dual thrust: on the one hand, insisting that sexuality and maternal consciousness are separable and distinguishable from one another; on the other, reminding us that sexuality and maternity are not merely instinctual moments of

pleasure and gratification, but acts with far-reaching consequences, and with a deep inherent connection to each other. Female subjectivity, as possibility and ethical responsibility, is of course necessary to both.

Deconstructing the icon of the Virgin Mary is one of the narrative tactics Laurence employs to explore this new imaginative terrain. Upon seeing the face of Botticelli's "Venus Rising from the Waves" at a Junior League exhibit in Manawaka, young Morag thinks: "this would be how an angel or the Mother of Christ would have looked if ever such had existed....Like a queen in the old old poems, like Cuchulain's young queen, the woman beloved by all men" (*The Diviners* 126), thus making no distinction between the sexual and the maternal as icons. Later, admitting her sexual jealousy of Pique and her young lover to 74-year-old Royland, Morag feels embarrassed, "wishing it were possible to teleport herself out of the situation, literally, in the flesh. The ascension of the far-from-virgin. Mars or heaven her destination" (The Diviners 237), this time acknowledging the contradiction between sexuality and the maternal in herself.

Another, related preoccupation in *The Diviners* is the indeterminacy of language and therefore the impossibility of arriving at any fixed truth. "How could you say?" the young Morag asks after seeing Botticelli's Venus, "How can there be words for that face, for what lies behind those eyes? There have to be words. Maybe there are not. This thought is obscurely frightening. Like knowing that God does not actually see the little sparrow fall" (*The Diviners* 127). As the novel opens, the

middle-aged Morag overlooking the river criticizes the words she's used to describe it: "Naturally, the river wasn't wrinkled or creased at all - wrong words, implying something unfluid like skin, something unenduring, prey to age" (*The Diviners* 4). The differing versions of ancestral tales, Morag's stories of Piper Gunn told to her by Christie and Jules' stories of Rider Tonnerre from his father Lazarus, also serve to underline the subjectivity in story-telling, and the impossibility of arriving at a definitive version of cultural history. "What is a true story?" asks Morag in response, "Is there any such thing?" (*The Diviners* 117)

It is important to note that for Laurence this recognition of the undecidability of language, the unavoidable slippage in it - the preoccupation of every intellectual discipline at the moment - does not lead, as it does many other writers and thinkers of our time, to a position of scepticism or idealism. Hans Hauge discusses the metafictional aspect of *The Diviners*, the way it "puts into question the mimetic assumptions that lie behind her previous novels," together with Northrop Frye's assertion that Canadian writers of the last decade are describing a world which is "post-Canadian, [and in which] sensibility is no longer dependent on a specific environment or even on sense experience" (Hauge 122). He concludes that *The Diviners* is accordingly "much less grounded than Laurence's other novels and stories [and] hence the impossibility of an 'environmentalist' reading" (Hauge 125). I would argue precisely the opposite: that Laurence's recognition of the unreliability of language and the relativity of human fictions in *The Diviners* is directly connected to the deep sense of

environmental awareness, indeed anxiety, running through the novel. For Laurence, caring about the environment is another aspect of reproductive consciousness: one of the urgent questions running through the novel is, can we provide a future for our children, and if not, why are we having them? The loss of belief in language as conveyor of the Absolute, in Laurence's vision, becomes an imperative to become *more grounded* in "sense experience," to locate ourselves as precisely and humbly as we can in place and story, as Morag and Pique are trying to do: to feel the earth specifically beneath our feet, so that we can become responsible earth-keepers, as we must in our threatened world.

You can see this process at work at every turn. Morag's preoccupation with words and the impossibility of finding the right ones to describe the river accurately lead her to contemplate not the abyss of language but the way human activity has put all rivers in jeopardy now: "Left to itself, the river would probably go on like this, flowing deep, for another million or so years. That would not be allowed to happen." (*The Diviners* 4). Similarly, Morag's literary critique of Pique's melodramatic parting note ("If Gord phones, tell him I've drowned and gone floating down the river, crowned with algae and dead minnows, like Ophelia") as "slightly derivative," does not deflect from her recognition of the real warning in it. Despite her flat assertion, "Now please do not get all uptight, Ma. I can look after myself," Pique shares with most contemporary adolescents a deep despair about the state of the world and the possibility of a future, and Morag consequently shares with most mothers (and active

fathers) a deep anxiety about their children's continued well-being. After leaving Brooke to make her own life in Vancouver as a writer and soon-to-be-mother, Morag, suddenly aware of the tremendous responsibility she has taken on, reflects: "She no longer feels certain of anything. There is no fixed centre. Except, of course, that there *is* a fixed centre, and furthermore it is rapidly expanding inside her own flesh" (*The Diviners* 243). Indeterminacy, in other words, does not lead in Laurence's vision to the now familiar postmodernist celebration of the arbitrariness of language as though it were an end in itself, but rather, amazingly, to maternal and (more generally) reproductive consciousness, materially, in the flesh.

Dawne McCance describes Kristeva's idea of the "dialogical subject-in-process" as a theoretical insistence on "'the *singularity* of each person, and, even more the *multiplicity* of every person's identifications, 'the "relativity" of his or her identity/meaning in language'" (McCance 1990, 35). Any person thus aware of "the fact that his or her order is divisive, and potentially violent," explains McCance, will in Kristeva's terms "emphasize 'the *responsibility* which all...face of putting...fluidity into play against the threats of death which are unavoidable whenever an inside and an outside, a self and an other, one group and another, are constituted'" (Kristeva 1981, cited in McCance 35). It seems to me this is the way in which Laurence's sense of the loss of a "fixed centre" operates in *The Diviners*, rather than leading her to a position of scepticism and silence, as Haug implies.

Maternal consciousness, while thus representing an important and indeed imperative mode of perception, is not idealized by Laurence, nor is it a privileged position. The act of mothering is presented as a tremendously difficult one, filled with responsibility. The discrepancy between people's momentary desire for children and the ongoing reality of childbearing and childrearing is shocking. "Was it only for that reason, after all, " Morag asks herself, "she had wanted to get pregnant, so her leaving of Brooke would be irrevocable? ....How many people had she betrayed? Has she even betrayed the child itself? This thought paralyzes her." (*The Diviners* 243) Laurence holds men equally responsible for their share of parenting, fathering, despite their frequent absence from the family, physically and spiritually, in this culture. Lazarus' haunting cry over his lost, dead children, "They're mine, them, there" reverberates through the novel; Pique's quest for self-identity is very much tied up with her need for fathering.

I say *fathering*, rather than *a father*, because it is important to distinguish between the kind of conscious, ongoing, and vulnerable parenting Laurence insists on in this novel and the reified parent positions we've inherited in the Western cultural tradition. (Of nine definitions for the noun "father," the O.E.D. lists one that denotes active parenting, and then it is accompanied by the requirement of "reverence and obedience" in the children: By contrast, three out of four definitions for "mother" refer to the activity of mothering, OED 730, n. 4; 1360) It is significant that the fathers we do see in this novel are

extremely vulnerable men: Lazarus Tonnerre, Jules, Gus Winkler, Christie Logan - against such "respectable" and powerful figures as Brooke Skelton, who can't bear to father children at all. In Prin and Christie Logan, Morag's adoptive parents, we see grotesque parodies of traditionally idealized adolescent figures - princess and hero, or as young Morag imagines them, "Big Fat Woman" and "Skinny Man" (*The Diviners* 36). Despite their faults and their hideous helplessness (which perhaps has to do at least partly with their respective lack of parental models), they are presented as loving and beloved parents after all. "You were a good father to me," Morag tells Christie on his deathbed and means it, though she has spent half her lifetime running away from him. Laurence's point is perhaps that it's the *activity* of parenting that's important, quite apart from the problematic parent images we've inherited in Western culture.

After Prin's funeral in the Manawaka church where they've sung Prin's favourite hymn, "Jerusalem the Golden," Morag recognizes several things: one, that she too has been living under the illusion of the Cinderella myth: "Those halls of Sion. The Prince is ever in them. What had Morag expected, those years ago, marrying Brooke? Those selfsame halls?" (*The Diviners* 207) and two, that she's frightened of herself: *"I do not know the sound of my own voice. Not yet, anyhow"* (*The Diviners* 210). She has her own need, her own darkness, her own story to create, and can no longer affort to be chained to a distorted image of herself. Christie's response to Prin's death on the other hand is, "'If I'd had it up to me...I would have buried her my own self...In the Nuisance

Grounds'" (*The Diviners* 208). This is his way of recognizing the tragedy of her life: Prin's adding up to little more than the "dead half-bald baby birds fallen from nests in the spring of the year" and blank "sheet of white paper upon which nothing will ever now be written," which her head and face resemble as she lies dying (*The Diviners* 204). But in the terms of Christie's world, it is also a statement of love and the possibility of redemption, the garbage dump being after all where he is most at home.

If there is to be a future for the Piques of this world, Laurence's novel clearly tells us, we will have to learn to practice reproductive consciousness, both individually and collectively, on a global scale. This means learning to value what we've been accustomed to hiding from ourselves and throwing away in modern industrialized societies: both garbage and parts of ourselves, unmentionable obsessions and behavior, unsightly men and women, mothers, children, people of other races. Christie's vision, "by their goddamn fucking garbage shall ye christly well know them" (*The Diviners* 204), provides a prophetic gloss on not only Manawaka but on the entire planet. Much of Pique's quest involves reconnecting with the landscape and stories of her native ancestors, whose traditions represent one alternative to the wastefulness of white culture. Where her quest ends, in this novel, is with the song, "The valley and the mountain hold my name" (*The Diviners* 382), a renewed connection of landscape and language which stands, with *The Diviners*, as a protest and a lament against the contemporary practice of alienation between them.

Chapter Two.

Re-membering with Mothertongue: Daphne Marlatt's search for the absent mother in language

The search for the absent mother is a preoccupation in Marlatt's writing, from at least *Zocalo* onwards. I wish to look at the narrative implications of this quest in *How Hug a Stone* (1983) and *Ana Historic: A Novel* (1988), texts in which maternal absence becomes a central focus. Since both of these narratives play out images and motifs relating to previous writing, however, I shall refer briefly to several earlier texts here. As Barbara Godard points out, all of Marlatt's long poems function as loose quest narratives (Godard 1985, 489). Each employs the metaphor of journey to explore the interconnection between self, place, and language; each problematizes these concepts through the relentless questioning of the processes of perception and the production of meaning. The idea of "quest" thus continually turns on itself in Marlatt's writing, in the opening up of new narrative ground, a kind of "spiralling," going back and forth, while moving into new space. The "spiral" or "spirale" has been identified by feminist theorists as an appropriate narrative model for contemporary feminist writing: in contrast to traditional linear

and circular narrative structures with their inherent sense of closure, of completion and ending, the spiral offers the possibility of repetition without sameness, the celebration of difference along with return. In the words of Nicole Brossard, the spiral charts a journey from "[w]omen's invisibility to [n]ew perspectives: new configurations of woman-as-being-in-the-world of what's real, of reality, and of fiction" (Brossard 1988, 199, 116-7; cited in Williamson 1991, 180).

Marlatt's repeated use of the journey motif to explore the problematic construction of self and place in language thus constitutes, in itself, a spiralling toward "new configurations" of subjectivity, in an ongoing "life" narrative which has become increasingly feminist in orientation. At the same time, the writing of female subjectivity, not as fixed entity, but as embodied, gendered being-in-process becomes more and more identified, in Marlatt's writing, with recuperating the lost narrative of the mother. Here is, for example, how she describes her writing project in a brief essay published in 1986:

> in a writing that has to concentrate first on language, questioning the formulated, the already-said every step of the way, form comes second, not as an easy mold to fall into a current to drift along with, but a struggle that is one with the struggle to subvert the rational/lawful language of the Father as patriarch & reinstate or recreate the imaginary/sensory language of the Mother

as matrix of being-in-relation. ("writing in order to be" 1986, 67)

Marlatt's emphasis on the maternal as a model for female subjectivity, and as an alternative to the name and law of the father as the operative function of language, revises not only male-centered models of subjectivity and representation, but also, much of contemporary feminist theory. As Marianne Hirsch points out, the predominant metaphor for female relationships in the feminist movement, until recently, has been "sisterhood," a model whose effect is "to isolate feminist discourse within one generation and banish feminists who are mothers to the 'mother-closet'" (Hirsch 1989, 164). The model of sisterhood, unfortunately, argues Hirsch, encourages women to continue to see themselves as daughters, rather than mature women, a position which is reinforced by the pervasive metaphor of daughterhood in the academy (Hirsch 164-5). It is only very recently that feminist theorists have begun to affirm the maternal as a model for female subjectivity. In North America, this shift began probably with the appearance of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976); in Europe with the work of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva.

Hirsch identifies four areas of avoidance and discomfort with the maternal which, she argues, account for the ongoing ambivalence toward the maternal in feminist thought: (1) "the perception that motherhood remains a patriarchal construction," i.e. buying into the idea of the mother as a unified subject and

ignoring her multiple and divided subjectivity within patriarchy; (2) discomfort with the "vulnerabilities and dependencies of maternity" which are tied up with the vulnerability/power of the maternal body; (3) fear of the body and, especially, the connection of maternity with sexuality; and (4) ongoing ambivalence toward power, authority and particularly, anger in feminist discourse (Hirsch 165-66). Adrienne Rich calls these kinds of anxiety about the maternal in women "matrophobia," a dynamic she describes as "a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage" (Rich 1986, 236). Many contemporary feminist critics echo a similar ambivalence toward the mother in their responses to female narratives. Mary Jacobus, for example, in a recent article on Virginia Woolf and Freud, despite her claim for "an alternative feminist reading" of *To the Lighthouse*, re-inscribes the Victorian idea that the mother must die in order for the daughter to have a story:

> If Lily's line at the end of the novel is the emblem of minimal but fixed difference which secures her self-inscription, the price Lily pays for finishing her picture is the casting out of the mother, her beloved Mrs. Ramsay. Or Mrs. Ramsay dies suddenly so that the 'third stroke' may be appropriated not only for Lily's art, but for Woolf's writing. (Jacobus 1988, 109)

An even more alarming view of the maternal as "archaic and all-encompassing," a monstrous, threatening space whose bondage must be confronted and escaped by the daughter, is evident in Claire Kahane's recent study of Gothic fiction, "The Gothic Mirror" (Kahane 1985). Kahane conflates the body of the absent mother in such narratives as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Jane Eyre* with the imprisoning space of the castle, in which the daughter-heroine is forced to undergo a series of tortures before escaping in to the safety of marriage. Quoting Leslie Fiedler, Kahane describes the dungeon underneath the castle as metaphor of the maternal body, symbolically identified as both womb and imprisoning tomb. In Fiedler's words, "Beneath the crumbling shell of paternal authority, lies the maternal blackness, imagined by the gothic writer as a prison, a torture chamber" (Fiedler 1966, quoted in Kahane 336).

I find Fiedler and Kahane's interpretation extremely upsetting for a variety of reasons. First, it ignores human agency in the perpetration of violence: both writers overlook the fact that it is the prison-keeper who inflicts torture upon his prisoners, not the space itself. Further, it ignores the critical role of gender in the history of power relations: the fact that it is *female* heroines being tortured by *male* torturers is completely overlooked in this reading of Gothic convention. Thirdly, by identifying the castle space as both maternal and deadly, Kahane's reading denies the mother's subjectivity and upholds her absence as a necessary feature in the heroine's development. This argument completely overlooks the daughter's need for maternal parenting, and ensures

in advance that she too will disappear from the narrative at the point of maturity and motherhood. It also negates the life-giving, generative function of the human womb - which in reality has nothing whatsoever to do with death! An alternative reading, I propose, would show how the daughter's development is arrested by her mother's absence; how the mother's disappearance signals the daughter's entry into the unprotected world of male aggression, and that it is only in confronting her own terror and lack of mothering that the heroine is able to escape from male violence into the relative safety of romance. (The castle space as image of "maternal blackness," in this reading, becomes an imaginative projection of the male aggressors, since it is surely their own fear of death, their humanness and vulnerability, these men are attempting to suppress through their violent misogyny.)

The story of mother and daughter - what Rich calls the "great unwritten story" of Western culture - once we begin to imagine it, listen for it, is first and foremost a tragic one. In denying women and particularly mothers social power, in silencing the older maternal voice which would protest this loss of place and power, and privileging instead the voices of younger women who exist in a daughterly relation to patriarchy, Western culture has inscribed alienation in the mother-daughter relationship. There is very little acknowledged space in Western social narrative, in which they might talk with one another, where daughters might learn from and struggle against their mothers and mothers might nurture, protect and struggle with their daughters. There are few models of what Italian feminists

at the Milan Women's Bookstore call "symbolic motherhood," a social contract legitimizing "women's full social agency and accountablity [sic] to other women" (Knutson 1988, 7). Instead, there is a proliferation of stories about daughters who must escape the suffocating influence of their mothers, to enter a male-defined symbolic space which will eventually silence them as well.

Marlatt's interest in recuperating the maternal in language must be seen against this background of absence and violence toward the maternal feminine, in both social and literary practices. In many ways Marlatt's work is consonant with Margaret Laurence's: "how hug a stone" deliberately echoes Laurence's "stone angel" in the Manawaka cemetery; Ana Historic/ Annie/Ana Richards/Annie Torrent, like Hagar Shipley and Morag Gunn, begins to fashion the mother story out of a daughter's sense of loss and outrage and mourning. In each case, this process leads to a sense of renewal in the text, and the replacement of mothering for the orphaned daughter in other relationships, particularly relationships with other women. This latter sense of community among women is much more prominent in Marlatt's work than in Laurence's, largely due to the influence of the feminist movement in recent decades. Marlatt's writing is also much more self-conscious in terms of genre and the linguistic process in general than is Laurence's; we can see here the influence of the Black Mountain poets, postmodernism as well as feminist theory on her work. I am arguing for the existence of an ongoing, continually evolving narrative in Marlatt's writing,

around the question of female subjectivity, particularly as it relates to the maternal. While in the earlier texts, the mother figures mainly as absence, or fragmented, indefinite memory, as longing, she gradually becomes more explicit in Marlatt's writing, as lost subject mourned by her orphaned daughter, and increasingly also, as speaker-narrator, and finally, as a characteristic feature of language itself. I shall trace this development here briefly by way of introduction to *How Hug a Stone* and *Ana Historic*.

Zocalo (1977) describes a journey by a woman narrator accompanied by her male lover, to Mexico, to visit among other places the ancient Aztec ruins of Yucatan. The maternal enters the narrative enigmatically, circumspectly, as metaphor, and wishful idea, pointed to in dreams and bits of old legend. At the Pyramid of the Magician, for example, the narrator encounters the following story:

> It begins with a dwarf whose mother was a witch & hatched him out of an egg (so far back in time it can't even be told with any probity). She sent him off to challenge the king & the king said build a palace overnight or I'll kill you. His mother helped of course with magic....So the dwarf got to be king of Uxmal & she went off to live with a serpent in a waterhole. (*Zocalo* 56)

The legend stays with the narrator as she climbs the pyramid and walks through caves. Intrigued, she looks for traces of maternal magic in the ruins around her, in their shapes and names, but the only trace she finds is the "oval stone body of his giant, its contour surely female" (*Zocalo* 58). Struck by the "disparity between act & legend, the slow historical process of this palace built stage by stage by men toiling in the light of day - & the legend of its creation overnight by a woman, out of a spell" (*Zocalo* 58), the narrator continues her musing about maternal presence in the Mexican landscape despite lack of concrete evidence:

> And continuing her descent, wonders, *under* the name? dry land, no water anywhere, but caves, caves. Somehow the witch persists, chaotic mother, though all the images are male. (*Zocalo* 59)

As Barbara Godard observes, the maternal remains "an elusive sign" in this text, "apprehended by the reader's senses rather than by logic 'under the name,' on the near side of language" (Godard, " 'Body I': Daphne Marlatt's Feminist Poetics" 1985, 491).

"In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" (1979) is a long poem describing Marlatt's journey to Malaysia, the home of her childhood, accompanied by her father and sister after her mother's death. Here the absent mother assumes a more tangible, close-up presence as the dead woman grieved by her family. Seen in glimpses of childhood memory, bits of anecdotes, held in the

landscape of the narrator's childhood, the mother begins to assume the shape of memory itself, *"mer-mer-os"* ("In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" 55). Trying to find connections with this lost mother, the narrator remembers a second mother figure, Amah, her childhood nurse, whom she had forgotten. Barbara Godard describes the effect of this doubled image in the text as follows:

> Between these two mothers, mind and body split. The mem sahib "had the words, & the words could not command their lives, only their hands" (p. 82), and has gone into the "black river" of death: Amah had the body, nourished and played with the children in a separate kingdom, in a world of revolt against the word: "two mothers, two but one mother & the other someone we have claim to"...(p. 80) (Godard 491).

Another effect of this doubling is a separation between the mother as titular head of the household and mother as caretaker, nurturer, a differentiation which can only happen in privileged households with servants, in the case of adoption, or as several feminist theorists have argued, if parenting is shared between both parents, or by a community of caretakers (Ruddick 1980, Dinnerstein 1977). Lynda E. Boose's observation that the mother is expendable in the patriarchal family after she has given birth to an heir (Boose 1989), of course depends on a similar differentiation. (I observe that in the modern middle class male-dominated family, the mother continues to play an important role,

largely because of her servant function. The importance of large families to pioneering patriarchs on the prairies, similarly had more to do with providing cheap servant labour for farming than with ensuring genetic continuity for the parents. On the other hand, the move toward shared parenting in contemporary families, particularly in single parent or blended families, signals a significant change in the maternal function and therefore the social role of women.)

In juxtaposing the images of "Amah," the nurse, with the mother, "Mem sahib," Marlatt further highlights the treacherous duplicity of the maternal role in a male-dominated colonial hierarchy: as head of the house, the wife has power over the servants and children; however, with neither access to the range of social options available to men, nor the consolation of direct, physical contact with the children, she is left deeply alienated, personally irrelevant, alone:

> what the Mem says goes (sometimes). what the Mem says exists as a separate entity in the house, to be listened to & walked around, with suitable contrition if asked (giggling in the back rooms) but separate, separate from the way life moves on ("In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" 80).

The mother in this text is pictured as profoundly absent in the subjective sense, even though she carries a name linked with power. To the daughter, she appears to be predominantly a figure

of loss and alienation, buried by the words surrounding and embalming her: mem sahib, mah mee, mummy, mah jong, *mata*, *mata hari* ("In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" 58).

"In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" ends with a moving lament to the mother, expressing the narrator's outrage at this tragic outcome:

> "life's cheat,"
> deprived of any truth, as you, long in tooth & nameless,
> recede from imagination: one cloud of thought, one word
> of no earthly use, 'mother' -
>
> you knew the dark,
> conspiracy, how they keep power in their hands, unnamed
> (you forgot, we give ourselves up to). you taught me fear
> but not how to fight. you, misspelled, gave yourself to
> the dark of some other light, leaving me here with the
> words, with fear, love, & a need to keep speaking
>
> ("In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" 95)

The speaker's grief and "need to keep speaking" suggest the possibility of rewriting the story, of reinscribing the mother in the narrative, beyond and against her prescribed absence. This question takes us into Marlatt's subsequent texts, and their attempts to create narrative space for the maternal, in a variety of ways. This new narrative is foreshadowed here, by the

speaker's preliminary act of calling up a new "word . seed . season" out of the old order, which has been irrevocably broken by her anger ("In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" 83). The image of renewal is of "garden paths, seed beds, tiny trunks all split open at last," ending with the invocation: "there mother-daughter, i call you up through the spring....whole, it [word, seed, season] comes back, it fills always where you were" ("In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" 83).

There is a strong echo of the Demeter/Kore myth in this closing passage, but with the added twist that here it is the orphaned daughter who calls the mother (also a daughter) back to life. Not a lot has been written about the peculiar situation of contemporary feminist women, whose increased sense of opportunity and professional accomplishment situates them in a maternal relationship to their own mothers. Sociologist Naida D. Hyde suggests that mothers who demand mothering from their daughters violate their daughters' personal boundaries and set up a dynamic of "covert incest" between them: "For the daughter to become her mother's caretaker," writes Hyde, "is clearly role reversal and parentification of the child. It is a betrayal by the mother of the child's trust in her mother to love her and take care of her" (Hyde 1986, 79). The effect on the daughter, explains Hyde, is that she is "unable [thereafter] to protect herself from others' neediness and invasion of her" (Hyde 80). Hyde's solution is to promote recognition and therapeutic revision of this dynamic in families. She does not address the fact, however, that in the wake of contemporary feminism (which has impacted

primarily on younger women), almost all daughters find themselves in a position of power *vis à vis* their own mothers. (This was so also before the current wave of feminism, due to the privileging of daughters in the patriarchal family at their mothers' expense, as outlined in Chapter 1. In this regard, feminism has not gotten very far in revising the social script for women, and won't until it succeeds in addressing the oppression of motherhood, as both institution and experience.)

What is a daughter to do in this situation? "One might, in this instance," writes Gail Scott, "displace the memory category of mothers (so often negative, restricted, unaccomplished professionally) to...literary mothers" (Scott 1989, 20). Or, Scott suggests, we might proceed by remembering, "discovering the images behind the images, until we hear the tinkling laughter of Queen Titania (dim reflection of a murdered goddess) - who prefers an ass to her king" (Scott 20). In this sense, every feminist daughter must accept, in her adulthood, the task of calling back, remembering, and taking care of her absent, silenced, dispossessed, lost mother(s). She cannot do so unless she receives nurturing, mothering, herself somewhere. Otherwise she merely repeats the old pattern. In Marlatt's version, the cycle begins to be broken with the daughter's grief and anger at her mother's absence; thereafter, her texts engage increasingly with the task of recreating the mother as subject of her own story, as presence.[7]

What Matters, a collection of poems and journal entries written from 1968-70, but published in 1980, pre-dates "In the

Month of Hungry Ghosts" in terms of the writing, but post-dates it as publication. I shall therefore situate it as text in the uneasy position of both before and after, in this chronological account of Marlatt's preoccupation with the mother story. Narratively speaking, *What Matters* documents the author's experience of giving birth to a son, Kit, and thus entry into the subjectivity of motherhood, moving away from the traditional romance/marriage plot into independent, self-defined female identity. The text is preoccupied also with the possibilities and effects of language, a commentary on the writing process while in the midst of it. Passages such as the following abound:

> the writing is basically trying to tell the way it is - part recording what's there & part voicing a state of mind (each does dwell inside his/her head, sees out from there) essentially circular
>
> but feel need in "telling a story" to work towards some "climax", which means imposing a 'plot-line' no matter how minimal?
>
> the "plot-line" is the drift, which circles back on itself while still moving towards some recognition - this rather than a plotted crescendo of conflict & resolution.
>
> (*What Matters* 71)

At the same time there is a growing sense of the need to create a semantic/narrative space in which to voice the newly found experience of mothering. One of the first references to the mother associates her with darkness:

> Kelly said I'm drawn to those men who deal with 'the outer processes of intellect' & fear the 'vulvary darks of the mind.' this probably so - a fear I share with Al? of the mother, of being suffocated in the dark?
> (*What Matters* 72)

This passage is followed almost immediately by an image of the birth process, in which the maternal is identified again as "the dark & the unknown, that which we are born out of." Most striking here is Marlatt's minute attention to the birthing itself, without any mention whatsoever of the mother as human subject, actively and consciously mediating the birth with her labour. The "mother" is imagined as wholly body, unconscious, threatening, chaotic, though at the same time intentional, fecund:

> infant at mercy of the uterine
> muscle which expels
> it & the hard walls of the birth canal which, threatening
> to close in, yet pass
> it thru the ring of the cervix, out. the uterus, the
> placenta, decide when to thrust it out - & yet, coming
> forth into the light the child suddenly is, appears to us -

an other, recognized as itself, making its own appearance into the world.

(*What Matters* 72)

The association of "mother" with darkness is clearly disturbing to Marlatt, an image she comes back to several times. "Mother is inarticulate dark? / Smothering?" She asks herself in one entry and answers, "No. Get water walk to the kitchen...."
(*What Matters* 83)

Later in the text, Marlatt gives us a detailed account of the actual birth-giving of her son (I take this to be autobiography), and suddenly, the mother pushes her way into forceful view. It is not possible to go through this experience (unless one is completely anesthetized, as women generally were, a generation ago), without assuming active maternal identity. A woman body, fully present, conscious, pushing, blowing, interacting with hospital staff and protocol, protesting against the use of epidural anesthesia but submitting to it anyway, feeling the helplessness of being strapped onto a birthing table surround by hospital staff, and finally, giving her last push before the amazing appearance of dark hair, and a baby's body, a boy, crying, "snuggled in a blanket on my stomach...small & perfectly HERE" (*What Matters* 101) - in this sequence the maternal moves out of the dark into active, conscious daylight.

This passage is followed by a series of entries detailing the duties of caring for a young child, carrying holding, feeding,

changing diapers, etc. Some of these passages seem a bit tedious, but what they do is carefully and precisely detail the formidable activity of mothering, not as unconscious force but as conscious, intentional social practice. Sara Ruddick observes that mothering, like any other professional discipline, involves "establishing criteria for failures and successes...setting priorities [and] identifying the virtues and liabilities the criteria presume" (Ruddick 1980, 77). While traditional literature depicts the mother as either absent or entirely available to meet the demands of the child, Ruddick points out that maternal subjectivity implies both the presence and limitation of the mother's availability to the child, since she must constantly engage with the environment, and make professional choices and judgments in mediating her child's needs with the world around her. By separating the activity of mothering from the mother as symbolic figure, Ruddick is able to isolate maternal subjectivity as historical fact. This is similar to what Marlatt achieves in *What Matters*, except that Marlatt does so with a wealth of image and detail which enable the reader to experience the sensuous reality of mothering imaginatively. (I wish to add here that *What Matters* was the first literary text I encountered, several years after the birth of my own children, describing the act of birthgiving in any detail. The impact and sheer pleasure of finding one's experience mirrored in writing for the first time, after complete silence, is indescribable. Marlatt's writing has been ground-breaking in this way for many women. As Brenda Carr claims, Marlatt's writing "opens the horizons of possibility"

for women, to imagine and reclaim their territorialized space, Carr 1990, 121).

Despite her declaration of the mother as subject, however, Marlatt continues to be fascinated with the maternal as archetype in her journal entries. Here is a subsequent passage flirting with the Neumann-Jungian image of the mother as vessel, as "eternal feminine":

> mother - death as much as life - source of mother fear - natural realization of a taking for every giving - double-handed mother. (*What Matters* 117)

One might ask how it is possible to endure the arduous activity of mothering if one associates it with "death as much as life." Marlatt herself follows this image with an extended passage on her new sense of fear, that this newborn son might die, her sense of helplessness as a mother in protecting this small life. Clearly, it is necessary to move beyond the archetype of mother as womb/tomb in order to delineate the place of the mother as active, intentional, vulnerable subject. This is a question which takes us directly to the narrative concerns of *How Hug a Stone*.

How Hug a Stone (1983) is a poetic sequence of short lyrical-documentary prose passages (you see how Marlatt defies definition by genre), describing a trip by the author-narrative with her son Kit to England, to visit her lost dead mother's relatives in the hope of finding traces of her: "perhaps i will come to understand my mother," she says in the Introduction.

Unlike Marlatt's previous quest narratives which are organized around the question of writing itself and function if anything as anti-narrative in that sense, *How Hug a Stone* proceeds by reclaiming the possibility/necessity of narrative and generic continuity, here associated also with family and genetic continuity: "without narrative," she writes, "how can we see where we've been? or, unable to leave it altogether, what we come from?" (*How Hug a Stone* 19) There is a significant shift here away from Marlatt's previous conception of quest as losing oneself in strange terrain, getting lost in order to discover oneself as receiver/maker of that process (with its attendant loneliness), to a more tangible sense of being able to find oneself in relation to the other, whether it be language, landscape or history. Subjectivity no longer depends on a simple throwing off of the past, as for example in this passage, near the end of *What Matters:*

> there is only the one immediate, personal salvation, of the psyche, your own, without help since help is maternal/paternal & that is the very caul that must be thrown off. to be born: to MATTER... (*What Matters* 127)

In *How Hug a Stone*, there is a break with postmodernism and its insistence on the present moment, its emphasis on radical discontinuity with the past, to a new, revisionary sense of historicity, of looking back and seeing the past with fresh eyes, to paraphrase Adrienne Rich in her classic essay, "When We Dead

Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (Rich 1971). The purpose for this turning to the past, in Rich's version, is not to resurrect tradition or reassert old conceptions of identity and relationship: precisely, as Rich says, "not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us" (Rich 1971, 1046). In Marlatt's case, similarly, there is the felt need to go back to the place of the lost mother's childhood, to scrutinize location and landscape, remaining relatives and family stories, in order to come to terms with the mother's continuing absence. The shift in emphasis from "In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" to *How Hug a Stone* is striking and instructive: by focussing on the place, the location of the lost mother's childhood, the daughter positions herself maternally in relation to it, as adult woman remembering, calling back forgotten child - much as the narrator promised to do at the end of the former piece, "there mother-daughter, i call you up through the spring ("In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" 83). At the same time, by recognizing the procession of generations in the making up of genetic identity, and linking it with the way historical events continue to be inscribed linguistically in words and speech patterns, Marlatt undercuts the notion of fixed individual identity, making both "mother' and "daughter" moments in an ongoing story of continuity and discontinuity.

Accompanied by her son Kit, furthermore, the narrator is forced to recognize her own daily relation to him as "mother": caretaker, companion, go-between with the previous generation. The maternal thus moves from archetype to historical reality, from "double-handed," larger-than-life, reified symbol of the

Great Mother to active, intentional, human being-in-flux. One of the sub-themes in this text is Kit's allergic response to the English landscape and the narrator-mother's inability to prevent or undo it. Her sense of maternal helplessness is played out in two different ways, first, as the difficulty of being a mother, of mothering, if she hasn't been adequately mothered herself: "i say the mother-things to him but what do i say to the child in me? who mothers me?" (*How Hug a Stone* 71). Second, there is a recognition of the maternal as part of a larger process of generation, of life itself. As a woman, the speaker can thus call on every living thing, on the life process itself, to sustain her in the impossible task of nurturing her child, of participating in the ongoing, intergenerational struggle to be alive: "the, all-powerful tickle,/gulp, wriggle gulping in the whole world hugged in ecstatic/limit, breath's. nothing still" (*How Hug a Stone* 74).

Marlatt does not abandon her interest in language; as in the previous texts, the narrative proceeds by a careful listening to the precise elements of perception and signification; here there is an opening out beyond the speaker's personal experience, into the surrounding world. Maps, bits of conversation in several dialects, old stories, remembered Indo-European roots of words, all dot the figurative landscape of this text. It is as though history suddenly floods the consciousness of the narrative, fragmenting and layering it, while at the same time endowing it with a sense of continuity, connectedness, what Mary O'Brien calls female "reproductive consciousness."[8] Here is a characteristic passage:

i see my ghostly child in him, not gone & not quite him, as she in me, mother, grandmother, grand, full grown we stand in, not for. (*How Hug a Stone* 49)

This observation is followed by the thought that "earth takes back what is given, *ghos-ti*, hostly & hostile at one" (*How Hug a Stone* 49). A separation occurs here between the mother as human, one figure in a long line of genetically connected, human beings, and the earth as matrix, as the ground on which we stand, by which we exist, female and male, in our separate, mortal incarnations.

That this is not history in the traditional sense of male-centered, male-controlled events Marlatt is reconstructing here, but rather, a revisionary history, in the feminine, in which the mother (as human body, mind, memory, feeling, absence, presence) takes her rightful place beside the daughter, is emphasized in passages like this one: "the news confirm/my landlady's view of history, this plot we're in..." and goes on to ask, "what if history is simply the shell we exude for a place to lie in? *all wrapped up.* break out before it buries us. stories can kill" (*How Hug a Stone* 51). In a later passage she elaborates further on the limits of the "old story":

a script that continues to write our parts in the passion we find ourselves enacting, old wrongs, old sacrifices. & the endless struggle to redeem them, or them in ourselves, our "selves" our inheritance of

words." (*How Hug a Stone* 73)

Narrative, in other words, according to Marlatt, must be released from its allegiance to the sacrificial, killing script of Western culture, with its "enraged mother at the heart of it: lost" (*How Hug a Stone* 15), and become, rather, subjectivity-in-process, "a strategy for survival" (*How Hug a Stone* 75). Such a release will bring us in to the present moment, not in the alienated, cut-off sense of the postmodern (having lost both father and mother), but in the re-connected sense of recognizing oneself (nurtured, parented), in the larger flux of life: "the enfolded present waits for us to have done with hiding-&-seeking terrors, territories, our obsession with the end of things" (*How Hug a Stone* 75).

The most striking and powerful pieces in *How Hug a Stone* are those which begin to image the lost, suppressed maternal feminine in Western culture, as recoverable reality. In "long after The Brown Day of Bride," the absent mother is pictured, for example, beyond the immediate memory of the speaker's own dead mother, as historical figure, as collective memory, inaccurately sung but nevertheless kept alive in the stories of "Mary Gypsy, Mary of/Egypt, Miriam, Marianne suppressed, become/Mary of the/Blue Veil, Sea Lamb sifting sand & dust, dust & bone..." (*How Hug a Stone* 72). The deliberate echo from H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* and *Trilogy* here suggests the possibility of constructing an alternative literary genealogy of women's writing (similar perhaps to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's idea in collecting the *Norton Anthology of Women's Literature).*

Marlatt pushes the image of the bride-mother in this piece past the known "stories about her, versions of history that are versions of her" (*How Hug a Stone* 73) to the following observation:

> though she comes in many guises she is not a person, she is what we come through to & what we come out of, ground & source. the space after the colon, the pause (between the words) of all possible relation. (*How Hug a Stone* 73)

That is to say, there is no definitive Person or Idea behind the image of the bride-mother, no originating Mother presiding over history, imprinting her image on a series of secondary maternal figures: "she" is analogous neither to the Christian God nor the Platonic Ideal. If you trace her back to source, what you find is rather the *possibility* of "all relation" which the bride-mother represents in her imaginative and reproductive capacity, her potentiality as life spirit.

In the next piece, "Avebury *awi-spek,* winged from buried (egg", Marlatt turns to the earth itself as source and ground of being, with its "fields of (waves of) renewed green, cloud, light" (*How Hug a Stone* 74). The circle of ancient stones at Avebury become, in the narrator's delighted eyes, "writing in monumental stones. open....to sky (-change)" (*How Hug a Stone* 75). "*she lives,*" explains the narrator, reading this ancient text, "stands for nothing but this longstanding matter in the grass, settled hunks

of mother crust, early Tertiary, bearing the rootholes of palms" (*How Hug a Stone* 75). What is at the "centre" is "earth, only earth": there is no source of being to be discovered but the process itself, sustaining us with its "old slow pulse," its longstanding "*stei*-ing power." "how hug a stone" here acquires the moving resonance of grieving for the lost human mother, buried under stone, while simultaneously embracing the life process, its strength and continuity, written so movingly in the Avebury stones - the process which both gave the mother her power and outlasted her.

The image of the absent mother who returns in the guise of a goddess or mythical dream woman (thus bridging the distance between human mother, earthly ground of being, and universal life spirit), is most powerfully presented in the last piece, "feeding the pigeons," where the narrator describes a profound, personal encounter with this "she," standing at the edge of the sea with her son Kit, who has recovered from his illness and wants to go home. Here is the passage in full:

> & i can do nothing but stand in my sandals & jeans
> unveiled, beat out the words, dance out names at the
> heart of where we are lost, hers first of all, wild mother
> dancing upon the waves, wide-wandering dove beat
> against, & the dance beats with you, claims of the dead
> in our world (the fear that binds). i am learning how the
> small ones live, ruffled neck feathers ripple snakelike
> movement of the neck last vestige of dinosaurs: then

lift, this quick wing flap, heart at breast strike up a wild beating, blood for the climb, glide, rest, on air current, free we want to be where live things are.
(*How Hug a Stone* 79)

This passage is remarkable, both for its lyricism and its extraordinary visionary quality. The "wild mother dancing" powerfully suggests the generative quality of the cosmos, and the depth of the narrator's grief and desire for her own lost mother. This imaginative and mythical encounter at the edge of the sea enables the narrator finally to end her quest, to lay aside her sense of maternal loss and turn to mother her own son, at last. Together, they envision flying home to Vancouver, "where live things are," in an airplane - like birds, with their trace of dinosaur in them, fully connected to their genetic heritage, past and future, fully alive.

Several (male) critics have commented negatively on this passage, suggesting that Marlatt's text lapses into "essentialism" at this point. Frank Davey, for example, reads the ending of *How Hug a Stone* as follows:

> the text thus places, against the categorizing and collecting masculine, an essential feminine inside which the narrator can "stand in my sandals & jeans unveiled"...[L]ike the narrative of God the Father that supports patriarchy, this counter-narrative of a primal feminine is a metaphysical one which locates the human

> outside of social action in an archetypal predetermination (Davey 1989, 45).

Dennis Cooley, similarly, finds in Marlatt's writing a search for "origins, beginnings, sources - always for realities that are prior to language" (Cooley 1989, 72). "Everywhere," he concludes, "Marlatt seeks the essential self, unadulterated by the wrong structures of knowing. Her dream is Edenic. She dreams of return, imagines she will be restored" (*How Hug a Stone* 78). I find it ironic that at precisely the point where Marlatt begins to distinguish in her ongoing life narrative, between the chaotic "double handed mother" which has haunted the Western imagination as archetype, and the more specifically differentiated, historically situated human mother and the image of the "wild mother dancing" beside her, mythical embodiment of the earth's generative life spirit, that Davey and Cooley should designate her writing "essentialist." If anything, it seems to me Marlatt's image of the mother is finally becoming historically nameable, visible, present (in a manner quite unlike the archetype of the "doubleheaded mother") in a narrative which both recognizes the long tragic history of maternal absence in the Western tradition, and the life-giving spirit of the environment.[9]

In "musing with mothertongue," Marlatt's ground-breaking, lyrical essay on the poetics of language (1984), she develops the idea of language itself as matrix, as maternal body, "a living body we enter at birth, [which] sustains and contains us" (*Touch to My Tongue* 45). As such, language does not displace or replace

anything, and therefore is not, as in the post-Saussurean paradigm, characterized primarily by lack, but rather by presence, experienced first of all as sound, then as association, and finally, as dream, imagination, and memory. Cooley's suggestion that Marlatt longs for "realities that are prior to language" does not hold, unless it is the maternal body which surrounds us before birth that he is referring to! Marlatt echoes a traditional association between "the act of composition" and the "act of birthing" here (*Touch to My Tongue* 49), but unlike the traditional metaphor, speech and artistic creation here are not seen as alternatives to or displacements of the physical act of birthgiving, but continuous with it. The body, that is to say, is not erased in speech and writing but articulated by it. In direct contrast to the male-centered and anti-maternal linguistic paradigm of, say, Roland Barthes, for whom "every narrative (every unveiling of the truth) is a staging of the (absent, hidden, or hypostatized) father" (Barthes 1975, 10), and the writer "someone who plays with his mother's body....in order to glorify it, to embellish it, or in order to dismember it" (Barthes 37), in the imaginative space created by Marlatt, the maternal body, the maternal impulse to bring forth to create, and the writer's impulse to speak, to make sounds, to give birth to the subjective and thus to be born by it, these things are continuous with one another, and exist interdependently.

This conception of language as mothered, mothering, as truly mothertongue, has far-reaching implications which extend into Marlatt's subsequent writing. If it is possible to image the

mother as presence rather than absence, as speaking subject rather than mute object, container, vessel, then it is possible to write the mother story as a story of relationships between existing women, and not just as the orphaned daughter's lament. In the highly erotic lesbian love poems which make up the main text of *Touch to My Tongue*, Marlatt plays with the image of Persephone's return to Demeter from underground as a metaphor for the lovers' separation through geography and circumstances and return to one another (cf. Williamson 1992, 182). A question we might ask here is, if it is important for women to learn to differentiate themselves from their own mothers, how is it that the Demeter-Kore myth provides a useful paradigm for women's erotic relationships with one another? The answer is perhaps that in order for women to write themselves into being, to reclaim their lost, territorialized space as women, it is necessary for them to collaborate, to give birth to each other. As Brenda Carr puts it: "If the days of the Lone Ranger are over, it seems that women cannot enter the realm of the symbolic, the realm of cultural and social agency, in solo. [It is in] collaborative action where the culture negatives...are re-versed, in the solidarity of 'she-and-she-who-is-singing'" (Carr 121) *Touch to My Tongue* celebrates this collaborative process literally, in its dialogue with Cheryl Sourkes' photocollages (in the same text), and Betsy Warland's companion text, *Open is Broken* (1984). It also works to undo the hierarchical relations inscribed in the traditional heterosexual romance plot (where the wife continues to act in a daughterly relation to her husband,

financially dependent and therefore answerable to him), by reversing the roles of daughter and mother in the women's erotic encounter. As Janice Williamson comments, "Daughter becomes Demeter, and mother, Persephone, as the fixed identities of the two lovers slide" (Williamson 183). It would be interesting to look further at the relational complexities set up by this conflation of narratives; Williamson's article provides an excellent introduction to the politics of the lesbian erotic in this regard. Let me just say here that this sense of collaborative identity-making is a dramatic revision of Marlatt's previous emphasis on the individual psyche's responsibility to create itself, against the pull of parental, particularly maternal, influences.

Ana Historic: A Novel (1988) celebrates maternal absence/presence in a variety of ways, continuing the concerns set forth in *How Hug a Stone.* The novel begins, again, with the recognition of maternal absence, but in this case, the narrator daughter, Annie, voices her lament in an extended monologue addressed directly to the missing mother, Ina. The mother thus takes her place in the text as listener, as ghost, in the present, as well as in memory. The fear of ghosts, monsters, bears, is played out as a series of remembered childhood fantasies and games: "Who's There? she was whispering. knock knock. in the dark" (*Ana Historic* 9). But as the narrator acknowledges, it is not the mother who is monstrous in this narrative, but rather her enforced absence from public discourse, from self-definition:

> there *is* a monster, there is something monstrous here, but it's not you....all the housewives absent, their curlerheads, their still mops on their knees in the aftermath of storm....bathrobe sleeping beauties gone in a trice, a trance, embalmed, waiting for a kiss to wake them when their kids, their men would finally come home...suspended out of the swift race of the world. (*Ana Historic* 24)

"the monstrous lie of it:" she adds, "the lure of absence. self-effacing" (*Ana Historic* 24). Who was it, the novel asks, that enforced this absence, who promoted this monstrous lie, this seductive script of maternal self-effacement, so violently and forcefully that it was accepted and passed on by an entire society's women? So completely that the narrator herself is drawn to it: "how peaceful i thought, how i longed for it. a woman's place. safe. suspended out of the swift race of the world" (*Ana Historic* 24)? This passage is followed immediately by a description of men's activities, active, physical, domineering, in a logging episode taken from the archive documents, their "mastery. the bold line of it" contrasting sharply to the somnambulance of the women. Who else but the masters, the dominators of history, men, whose actions of violence and conquest have been celebrated publicly, written down, repeated, over and over: "history is the real story the city fathers tell of the only important events in the world. a tale of their exploits hacked out against a silent backdrop of trees" (*Ana Historic* 28)?

Against this official documented history, *Ana Historic* posits a second history, secretive, unspoken, full of gaps and silences, obliquely pointing to the reality of women's lives behind the walls of domesticity, "holes in the story," Annie calls them (*Ana Historic* 26). In many ways this becomes the project of the novel: to strategize ways of recovering, re-inventing this lost history for women, so that it can be seen fully, experienced, heard.

The plot of *Ana Historic* revolves around Annie's work as a historical researcher (she is also the mother of two children), into the life of a Mrs. Richards, a nineteenth century British-born pioneer woman referred to obliquely in the public records of the Vancouver Archives. Fascinated by the question of what the life of this unnamed, unmarried career woman in a chauvinist pioneer village would have been like, Annie begins to imagine and re-invent her personal life, all the while carrying on an imagined dialogue with her dead mother: "these are not facts but skeletal bones of a suppressed body the story is," Anna tells her, "there *is* a story here, Ina, i keep trying to get to" *(Ana Historic* 29). We discover there is a journal, written by Mrs. Richards' daughter, imagining her mother's girlhood (an analogue of this novel), considered to be "private" and therefore not factual and historical by the archive professionals! (*Ana Historic* 30) Over the course of the novel, Marlatt reclaims and develops this idea of the "ahistoric," the "ana-historic" as the appropriate narrative space for women's fictional stories: because we cannot remember women's lives from the historical record kept about us, we are free to invent them. As Annie says of the factual/fictional Mrs.

Richards, "we cannot see her and so she is free to look out at the world with her own eyes, free to create her vision of it" (*Ana Historic* 30).

The act of imaginatively recreating Mrs. Richards' personal life (whom she names "Ana," thus introducing a complicated play of words with Annie, Ina and the concept of the ana-historic), becomes for the narrator a model for remembering and reconstructing the story of her own missing mother. Gradually she builds a portrait for us of Ina, another British-born immigrant, nervously out of place in Canada, timidly trying to live up to male expectations by suppressing her own needs and desires in the service of husband and children. As the narrator gains greater understanding of her mother, her rage at being abandoned shifts from Ina to the social structure that kept her bound and eventually drove her to despair and (it is implied) suicide. Annie's monologue addressed to Ina, the missing mother, turns into a sporadic and often painful dialogue with her. The mother's voice, recovered enough to speak back to her, makes it possible for Annie to remember also other, more pleasurable parts of her life:

> now i'm remembering. not dis- but re-membering. putting things back together again, the things that have been split off, set aside. what did it mean to leave behind that body aroused by the feel of hot wind, ecstatic with the smell of sage, so excited i could barely contain myself as we left pines and high-blue eagle sky....

(*Ana Historic* 51)

Reaching back into her childhood, to recover the sense of independent sensual pleasure, not dependent on male approval, Annie remembers also how it was replaced during adolescence, covered over, with feminine propriety, "pride on the outside, and on the inside - shame," she recalls (*Ana Historic* 61).

The lament for the missing mother in this text thus becomes a lament also for the shamed, silenced feminine body, a betrayal perpetuated throughout written, male-dominated history, and reinforced in Annie's own experience at every turn, by her mother's instructions, her father's expectations, the boy's taunts at school: "'cunt,' 'slit,' 'boob' ('you boob, you dumb broad')" (*Ana Historic* 62). In claiming imaginative reconstruction as a viable tool for (re)writing women's histories, *Ana Historic* moves beyond lament and protest and through what Annie calls "a monstrous leap of the imagination" (*Ana Historic* 135) becomes an affirmation of the independent reality of women's lives, in community with one another, instead of marginally situated in relation to men.

Marlatt gives two dramatic and moving examples of such womanly encounters toward the end of the novel. The first is a description of the fictional Jeannie Alexander's nineteenth century birthgiving, attended by women friends, including the re-invented, re-imagined Ana Richards. The account of the birthgiving is interspersed ironically with the description of a Dominion Day boat race, taken from the public archive records -

an event considered more noteworthy to the fathers of "history" in this village than the birth of the first pioneer child (*Ana Historic* 126). The image, the sight of the birthgiving body, becomes a metaphor in Ana's mind for the "mouth speaking flesh," and touching it, she imagines being born from "that place....with no known name" to "the country she has come into, the country of her body" (*Ana Historic* 127), and wishes, instead of coming to it late, as a stranger, an immigrant, she could have been "there from the first. indigene. *ingenuus* (born in), native, natural, free(born) - at home from the beginning" (*Ana Historic* 127). As in "musing with mothertongue," the maternal body becomes synonymous here, in the woman's speaking voice, with the body of language itself, birthing us into being.

The second event, following immediately after, begins with Annie in animated conversation with a woman friend, Zoe, over cappucino, who is saying that "the real history of women...is unwritten because it runs through our bodies: we give birth to each other" (*Ana Historic* 132). Through the course of her talk, the two women become romantically interested in one another. Following this episode, we see Annie wildly reconstructing the narratives of Ina and Ana, her mother and alter ego, in her mind, rewriting their unhappy endings, imagining for them the terrifyingly happy ending she is also trying to construct for herself, a fiction which turns finally into a lesbian, erotic encounter with Zoe. "we give place," write Marlatt, commenting on this narrative outcome, "giving words, giving birth, to each other - she and me. you." (*Ana Historic* 153)

Lola Lemire Tostevin, in her reading of the novel, criticizes the ending as "unexpectedly conventional in its utopian vision" (Tostevin 1989, 38). Many women, comments Tostevin, will find "solutions to complex social problems limited if confined to the sexual sphere....Is the displacement of 'phallocentrism' by 'vulvalogocenticism [sic]," she asks, " sufficient" - or does difference based on gender and sexuality merely reproduce the revolutionary potential of feminism within patriarchal terms? (Tostevin 38) Tostevin's criticism strikes me as reductive, given the complexity of Marlatt's agenda in *Ana Historic*. By creating a narrative space for those women's experiences which were omitted or distorted in the traditional patriarchal script - including the experience of adolescent female desire and its suppression, maternal desperation passed down from one generation to the next, the amazing, powerful experience of birthgiving, and the solidarity of women acting in community - Marlatt has written a story which very naturally also contains the possibility of women's erotic encounter with one another. Marlatt's ending, far from being "prescriptive," celebrates what Adrienne Rich has called the "lesbian continuum," which includes such various and vital encounters between women as, to paraphrase Rich, a woman suckling her child, two women sharing a laboratory, and a woman dying at ninety, touched and handled by women (Rich 1990, 302-3). Marlatt's novel, I would argue, far from reinvesting in traditional, binary definitions of gender, opens out onto the rich variety of (historically suppressed) differences between and among women, where the maternal and

the sexual assume their place as part of women's experience and not the symbolic whole.

Chapter 3.

These Our Grand-mothers: Jovette Marchessault's *Like a Child of the Earth, Mother of the Grass,* and *White Pebbles in the Dark Forest*

Jovette Marchessault's recently translated novel trilogy, *Like a Child of the Earth, Mother of the Grass,* and *White Pebbles in the Dark Forests*, reads like fireworks, one colourful explosion of narrative expectation after another. "My origin is celestial and I was born in Montreal during the thirties," declares the narrator in the opening sentence, thus announcing a double narrative structure which informs the work as a whole, one strand of which is visionary, extra-terrestrial, and shamanic, and the other, realistic in the conventional sense. This double structure allows Marchessault to explore an alternative vision which is not tied to Western cultural practice, but rather, draws on her Aboriginal ancestry and her own psychic experience, which in turn radically politicizes the "realistic" story being told. Maxine Hong Kingston uses a similar technique in *The Woman Warrior* to describe her experience of growing up as the daughter of Chinese-American immigrants in California: I see here an effective model for women to explore, re-imagine and reclaim the female heritage

that was lost to them through colonization and immigration, and at the same time to critique current social and narrative practices which re-iterate that process.

Lorna Irvine, in *Sub/Version*, describes women's writing as typically double, split between the requirements of public, male-centered discourse and female desire (Irvine 1986, 3-19). This doubleness, argues Irvine, echoing Lacan, implies a split within the self, an unavoidable and likely irrevocable duplicity in the female speaking subject. I wish to argue, rather, along with Julia Kristeva and Alice Miller, that female desire, and the female imaginary, when taken seriously as the existential, and cultural, ground of women's experience, becomes a site of healing, both for the split female subject and for the structures that support it. (Kristeva 1980; Miller 1990. The same can of course be said for the male subject, who is also frequently alienated from symbolic structures, as Miller demonstrates.) Such healing often does not occur without great internal conflict, leading to separation and/or transformation; sometimes it can lead to death. Kristeva talks about the borderline of psychosis which must be risked and negotiated in order for the suffering subject to reclaim her experience from the "void" of the unnameable (Kristeva 1980, x). Carol P. Christ describes suicide as one of the possible tragic results if personal awakening in women is not accompanied by adequate social support (Christ 1980, 27-40). Marchessault's preoccupation with the healing not only of the speaking subject but of the planet as a whole means that the entire universe must be called upon to witness the spectacle of

ongoing violence which perpetuates the splitting of consciousness and experience, and to participate in its reuniting through recognition and protest.

While most contemporary writers of Western-European ancestry have scrupulously avoided the question of "origins" in writing because of its Christian-metaphysical implications, Marchessault leaps without hesitation into this cosmic terrain. At the end of the first volume, *Like a Child of the Earth,* the narrator, Jeanne (we find out her name in the third volume), exhorts us to break through our customary amnesia and recollect our magical, celestial origins:

> Women, do not be stunned. Men, do not be stunned. Instead, take your throat between your two hands and force yourself to spit up a river of sleeping pills. Make connections! Interweave yourselves! Commit yourselves to memory in the time of your childhood, in the time of your permanent emotion. Tear yourselves down to the weft of your being and rally all of your memories. Memories in your cells memories in your head, memories in your heart, in your soul, and in the infinitely mercurial memories of your spirit. (*Like a Child of the Earth* 166)

She then takes us on a journey to "remember" her own blissful pre-existence among the stars, and subsequent "fall," through the ear and mouth of the great She-Wolf in the sky, "descending

straight down like a spit from the sun," (*Like a Child of the Earth* 176) into human birth as a girl child.

Gloria Orenstein describes Marchessault's birth narrative, here (and in the later, more overtly lesbian "Chronique lesbienne du moyen-age quebecois"), as a feminist-lesbian revisioning of the classic hero myth, in which a male child is imagined to have divine or noble origins, who is abandoned at birth, raised in exile by humble people, and eventually called to his heroic destiny as the leader of his people through certain events. In Marchessault's version, says Orenstein, "For the first time in its long history from Sappho to Adrienne Rich, from Renee Vivien to Rita Mae Brown, an extraterrestrial heroine makes her appearance in lesbian literature, heralding the advent of a new myth of origins for woman-identified women" (Orenstein 1987, 1988-9). The moment of her "sacred fall" (*Like a Child of the Earth* 173) also re-enacts the traditional Christian-classical story of the hero's fall from heaven, with these significant differences: this fall is not precipitated by pride, or hubris, as in the case of Lucifer and Icarus, but rather, the heroine's parent stars rejecting her, "pushing" her into generation. "That is what it is all about," laments the narrator, remembering her life prior to earthly conception:

> - it is about rejection. On earth we speak of birth, but the word birth is a word which we have borrowed from the void, from the super-void....They were going to reject me. They were going to turn me away once again. They

were going to double-lock the door and throw me out into the generation of fathers... (*Like a Child of the Earth* 167)

The fall is thus in itself, quite apart from the intentions of the heroine, a begetting, a birthing, a letting go, and not a separate, contrary moment from creation, as in the Christian/classical view. For Marchessault, the separation that occurs in the moment of conception and birth, and the ongoing separation into individuality - albeit traumatic and filled with "rejection" for the child - are simply part of the reproductive process, and deeply connected physical reality of the cosmos, which is envisioned here as a kind of primal maternal body.

What is striking here on the theme of "origins," is both the physicality of the universe, and its personal, feminine aspect. The stars are not an abstract metaphor for disembodied spirits in a male-defined heaven, nor are they alienated blobs of gravitational matter floating around in empty space. "The Milky Way," for Marchessault, is a physical place, best described in personal, experiential terms, with fields to walk in, and sunsets to paint. It is, furthermore, deeply resonant with the image of a woman, the "Grandmother." "I heard the music of an ancient dance issuing from the void," the narrator tells us, remembering the moment just before her fall, "or, more precisely, coming from the womb of the Grandmother. Her over-flesh, over-earth, over-sea womb was coming toward us, breaking its moorings" (*Like a Child of the Earth* 166). It is difficult, I think, for readers steeped in Western thought to appreciate the implications of this vision, and the

radical challenge it offers to non-Native, dualistic thinking: there isn't a fall into conception, there isn't a fall away from Idea, or Word, or Spirit, into the body, there isn't a fall from father sky to mother earth. There is rather a passage, a birth-giving, from one state of physical/spiritual being into another, through the celestial body of the She Wolf, her ear canal, her mouth, helped along with a swat from the paws of the presiding Great She-Bear of the sky. Our biggest mistake, according to Marchessault, is forgetting our physical/spiritual connections to the cosmos, and its formidable reproductive, regenerative power: "It was an absolutely new beginning," exclaims the narrator at the end of *Like a Child of the Earth*, "and you will never make me believe that everything is motivated by the unconscious or the subconscious. I say that the whole source of motivation is metaphysical, that it falls in a direct line from the Great Spirit and from the Great She-Bear's breasts, with every kind of admirable sign, miracle, and mutation, and it is this unique source which impregnates us" (*Like a Child of the Earth* 175).

Mary Crow Dog, in her recent autobiography, *Lakota Woman*, offers the following explanation of the North American Native visionary practice, and describes what happened in a Ghost Dance, a ceremony which was banned by the American government in the nineteenth century, and revived on the Sioux reservation in 1974:

> Dreams and visions are very important to us, maybe more important than any other aspect of Indian religion. I have met Indians from South and Central America, from

> Mexico and from the Arctic Circle. They all pray for visions, they are all 'crying for a dream,' as the Sioux call it. Some get their visions from fasting for four days and nights in a vision pit on a lonely hilltop. Others get their visions fasting and suffering during the long days of the Sun Dance, gazing at the blinding light in the sky. The Ghost Dancers went around and around in a circle, chanting until they fell down in a swoon, leaving their own bodies, leaving the earth, wandering along the Milky Way and among the stars. When they woke up they related what they had seen. Some found "star flesh" in their clenched fists, and moon rocks, so it is said." (*Crow Dog* 1991, 98-99)

The mythic visionary nature of the universe, in other words, is experienced by its practitioners, through dreams and rituals, as literally, physically, demonstrably real. Crow Dog describes how the missionary superintendent at Pine Ridge Sioux Indian reserve, tried to discredit Native medicine men during the 1940s, by "exposing" their rituals. The leading medicine man, Horn Chips, was asked to perform a yuwipi (magic) ceremony for a group of white observers, who supervised the preparations. "To the disappointment of the watching missionaries," relates Crow Dog, "the mystery sparks appeared out of nowhere and the gourds flew around the superintendent's head. The result was that many Christian Indians went back to the old Lakota religion" (Crow Dog 211). Within the North American Native mythic paradigm, then,

the Western dichotomy between science and the imagination does not make any sense. Magical events are observable and performable, and therefore "scientifically" true. But in order for them to occur in the first place, there has to be imagination and belief on the part of the participants. There do not appear to be any inherent limits to the kinds of imaginative/experiential connections that can be made between individuals and the universe through visionary practice; the only limits there are seem to stem from lack of intention and focus in the believers themselves.

Nuclear physicist Fred Alan Wolf, author of *Taking the Quantum Leap* (1981) and *The Eagle's Quest* (1991) argues that the newest insights of nuclear quantum physics correlate to a remarkable degree with ancient shamanic teachings. Heisenberg's famous uncertainty principle, which announced that it is impossible to determine the location and the momentum of a particle simultaneously, shattered Western belief in the material certainty of the world we live in. Determinism and causality, the cornerstones of Western science, no longer hold in the quantum universe. According to the new quantum physics, explains Wolf, electrons do not actually have mass and therefore do not occupy identifiable space. They are rather tendencies, concepts, ideas, probabilities:

> We can't even specify at any moment what the condition of reality is because of the uncertainty principle; instead we have probable possibilities. These possible particles

> represent a cloud of possibilities in which the actual particle is somehow enfolded but is not actually present as an object would be, like an ash tray or cup....Quantum physics tells us there isn't really any such thing as a particle, only possible particles." (Wolf, cited in Leviton 1992, 52)

The virtuality of matter throws the focus back on the observer, and particularly the observer's intent. Our intent influences the materialization of electrons out of their virtual state of infinite probability. It is therefore our belief that makes reality appear in a given manifestation. "The observer effect," argues Wolf, "is probably the most important thing we've ever discovered in terms of relating magic to physical reality. If you take quantum mechanics as it's presently understood, that's magic. You have a cloud of possibilities that suddenly manifest into one actuality (Wolf, cited in Leviton 53).

Wolf argues further, that in order to become more focused in our intent, more consciously "cocreative" with the universe, we must integrate its feminine aspect into our nature. "I learned that the magic in me was in my feminine spirit, in my reawakened feminine core," he explains. "You have to understand both elements of the mythic reality of yourself, the male and female, in order to portray either of those realities in your life" (Wolf, cited in Leviton 55). This statement can be interpreted in the Jungian sense, as a need for psychic integration of opposites within the self, but the implications for constructing a

contemporary cosmology which will accurately reflect human experience are equally radical and profound. (Wolf, incidentally, and perhaps not surprisingly, has turned to shamanism in recent years as a more profound and satisfying imaginative paradigm of how the universe works than the one offered by quantum physics, Leviton 55).

Feminist poet Libby Scheier, in her newest collection, *SKY*, expresses a similar concern for recovering the feminine aspect of the universe. Her poems represent a powerful revisioning of the alienated cosmos of Western science, in connection with her personal healing process (she was raped as a young girl). In order to be whole, Scheier's poems suggest, we must reclaim the "lost" parts of ourselves from outer space, from the abstract, empty space we imagine "out there," which is really a projection of our own split off, alienated selves. Through personal healing, we can begin to experience the universe in its nurturing aspect, as a feminine, maternal, caring body. Here is her image of "sky," as a kind of grand, celestial womb:

be that as it may
sky's been kind to us, a mother muse

blue, pervasive, like sound through silence

.....

we are inside sky,
like we were inside mother,
can we remember how limitless we felt?"

(Scheier 1990, 19)

Marchessault's interest in "origins" clearly stems from this same interest in envisioning a holistic and woman-affirming cosmology. "Two questions torment us - the question of origins and beginning and the question of the final outcome. Everything else is just padding and a way of passing time" (*Like a Child of the Earth* 121). This statement, if we are to take Marchessault's vision seriously, must be read as a political protest against our modernist sense of alienation from the past, the universe, and our human power as imaginative, creative, (re)generative beings, and not as a lapse into essentialism or escape from historicity.[10] Out of this alienation, suggests Marchessault, arises our contemporary inability to imagine the future. We might think of Margaret Laurence's famous dictum at the end of *The Diviners*: *"Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence,"* as a similar reminder to become reconnected to the (re)generative process which carries us through history (Laurence 1974, 370). As Gloria Orenstein explains, referring to Marchessault's fictions:

All the potential for evolution and mutation is stored in the human memory of our cells....Both the invisible

> energies of plants and minerals as well as the invisible genetic material of all women who have lived in past ages and in all incarnations constitute the inherited living matter of our psycho-cellular beings, the *prima materia* of imagination and creation (Orenstein 187).

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Marchessault's imaginative vision is the place of animals and plants in it. While many contemporary feminist writers have begun to express their concern for the environment in a variety of ways, including the revival of goddess imagery, protesting against images of violence toward women and the body, and revisioning metaphors of earth and landscape, it is really Aboriginal writers, drawing on the shamanic tradition, who have most successfully articulated reverence for the plant and animal worlds. In traditional Aboriginal terms, animals and plants do not hold an inferior position to humans in the universal structure of creation. On the contrary, animals, birds, plants, fish all hold special, sacred knowledge which can help human beings, and which, if anything, demonstrates their greater connectedness to the Great Universal Spirit. Mary Crow Dog talks about the meaning of animals to the Aboriginal imagination in her autobiography. Here is her description of (her husband) Leonard Crow Dog's stay in prison:

> Leonard told me he communicated with birds outside his window or in the yard. They seemed to him to be spirit messengers and they cheered him up. Once a crow

> perched on his windowsill and that made him feel good. He thought it was a Crow Dog spirit come to visit him. Another time it was a yellowhammer which to him represented the Peyote Church [peyote is the hallucinogenic herb used in ritual ceremonies]. During a parole hearing he saw two eagles through the window circling in the clouds and he took this for a good sign. He always felt the presence of the spirits, even when he was in the hole. "Tunkashila is watching over me," he told me one time. "I have a hot line to the Great Spirit. I got a built-in amplifier for talking to Tunkashila." (Crow Dog 235)

The identity of plants and animals, that is to say, is not recognizable in discrete, abstractly defined, objective categories, as in Western science, but rather, must be understood mythically. Every living being is connected to every other living being through the universal life spirit. Each reflects the reality of every other being back to them. There is no "metaphysical" realm outside or beyond the physical. Animal and god, body and spirit, are inextricably and organically linked through the life process, and capable of infinite permutation. Separating the divine from the bestial, and the eternal from the temporal the way we have done in Western metaphysics is an act of violence which leads to sickness and death in individual creatures and in the universal organism. In order to understand "difference" in the

physical world we must also be able to recognize its intricate interconnectedness.[11]

Doug Nepinak, a Winnipeg Cree poet, expresses a reverence for the natural environment and its creatures, similar to Crow Dog and Marchessault's, in a recent poem entitled "Earth." In his vision, the animal and mineral worlds possess both consciousness and feeling:

there is nothing
symbolic about
the fruit, tree,
earth, sky,
mountain, plain,
day, night.....

the rock lives
and inhales
rays of sunlight.
exhales. prepares
for the moon.
the rhythm is
for no-one.
everything has
the patience of rock.

(Nepinak 1991,51)

Humans, in other words, are generally too caught up with categorization and intellectual control. Nepinak's poem ends, as much Aboriginal writing does, with a protest against domineering human activity and the wish to merge more fully with the universal consciousness of nature (recognized here as impossible, however, given the possibilities and limitations of human consciousness and activity):

all is one.
time is dead.

i would talk
without names
if i could.

Marchessault's vision of a sacred cosmos in which animals and plants preside along with rocks and stars is mythical in a way which is foreign to Western thinking. However, contemporary Western concern over the threatened environment has brought us to a vision of the planet as a vastly interconnected and interdependent ecosystem, which is not unlike her vision in certain ways. In her book *The Chalice and the Blade*, Riane Eisler criticizes the "dominator" model which has characterized social thinking throughout Western history, including modern science, and offers a more egalitarian, interdependent model which she calls the "partnership" mode. The latter, she argues, is a much more accurate way of describing effective evolutionary

development than "survival of the fittest," and offers us a way of thinking about future as open-ended and life-affirming, as opposed to the dead-end approach which is currently operative in much of the world (Eisler 1988). The general trend of the new science, she explains, which includes "chaos" theory and feminist scholarship as well as quantum physics, is to develop more egalitarian, empathic, integrative, caring approaches to research and knowledge, no longer "directed toward the domination of nature or of humanity as part of nature" (Hillary Rose 1983, cited in Eisler 191). The kinds of relationships we foster between men and women, Eisler argues further, are crucial to the success of the partnership model, since it is the oppression of women and their connection to the reproductive process that lies at the core of the dominator mode (Eisler 202-3).

Marchessault's narrative of celestial origin, with its grand figures of the "Great She Bear" in the sky, and the great cosmic "Grandmother" behind her, suggests a revival of the Aboriginal shamanic vision, in dialogue with feminism and the "new science." Her images offer a critique of Western cultural practice, and challenge it in mythic and revisionary terms. Marchessault's novels passionately protest the objectification of the natural world and the degradation of the woman's body. The awakening of consciousness, Marchessault's fictions declare, involves recovering a magical connection to the universe through memory and imagination. Such a connection presupposes a basic reverence for the mother: as matrix, as generative, intelligent, nurturing body, as independent woman, as totem animal, as universal

consciousness. Like other feminist writers, Marchessault laments the absence/oppression/murder/silencing of the maternal body and maternal subject in Western culture - a violent suppression imposed on Aboriginal cultures in the last few centuries, as it was violently imposed on pagan Europe before that (cf. Donna Read's film, *The Goddess Remembered*, 1989 , for a moving portrait of that mostly forgotten time in Europe).

Because her memory of a former culture in which the mother was honoured and celebrated is relatively recent, Marchessault is able to reclaim the mother story with less irony than most non-Aboriginal writers. On the other hand, her sense of literary production as a mode of bringing the mother back into social discourse is deeply informed by the irony of participating in Western narrative structures, with their misogynist, colonizing history. Here is a passage from *White Pebbles in the Dark Forest*, which describes the narrator's difficulty in holding on to this dynamic double edge:

> Sometimes I tell myself that it is pointless to try to tell this story. I do not have enough strength for this work. And anyway, does literature have the right to get involved with miracles? Literature, with its critical violence and its need for rational, historical proofs, which it loves to heap up and stir till it makes you sick to your stomach. Writing is like waving a sword in the air, like having a fit of hysterics in the belly of a carp. But all the same...if only once literature could think

> beyond its permitted limits....After all, literature is Mother, a vital energy which pours itself out into the world. Oh Mother Literature, I implore you, I beg you on bended knees to protect your little girl on these sterile plains which extend from book to book, these steppes which are increasingly dangerous to cross. (*White Pebbles in the Dark Forest* 9)

I'm trying to imagine what the Western literary tradition might have been like if, thinking beyond its "permitted limits," we had allowed maternal energy to be its informing Muse, as Marchessault does here, instead of accepting the mother's expulsion from history and trying to write our tragic narratives around her absence!

I turn now to a more detailed look at the novels in terms of Western "realist" narrative conventions they evoke and challenge. *Like a Child of the Earth* (1988), the first of the novels, which marked Marchessault's literary debut in Canada, is structured as a journey quest, depicting the narrator's travels around "Native North America" in the "belly of a dog," a Greyhound bus, with her friend Francine. As we follow them from one dirty bus depot to another, the narrator shares her dreams and observations of the landscape with us. Her purpose, she tells us, is to acquaint herself with the Native North American geography, in order to "appropriate" and "annex" it imaginatively for herself and for Aboriginal people, in defiance of Christopher Columbus and several hundred years of European colonization. The narrator's

odyssey takes us through a series of geographical and mythical landscapes, ranging from Montreal to New York to rural New Mexico. Along the way we encounter the ghosts of a variety of characters who have had an impact on the North American cultural imagination, from Jack Kerouac to Columbus to King Kong. We also catch a glimpse of Atlantis, which, Marchessault claims, is the sunken continental bridge that once linked Africa with the Americas, and our only existing explanation for "the analogies, echoes, and extensions between the fauna and the flora of the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands, Cape Verge, the Antilles, and Central America" (*Like a Child of the Earth* 37). Marchessault's reclaiming of the imaginary island as geological fact makes it possible for her to bridge opposing cultures and continents. It also allows her to ground her sense of the imaginary as another version of the real in the landscape itself. She is thus able to avoid the pitfalls of writing from the point of view of cultural otherness, while turning the colonializing project back on itself.

The quest ends with her vision/memory of celestial origins, as described above, and the experience of sliding into human birth. The journey motif thus circles around geographically and in time; there is not a linear narrative line from "away" to "home," as in Homer's *Odyssey*, or from "home" to "away," as in *Moby Dick* and *Huckleberry Finn*. Rather, by the end of the novel, the entire North American continent and the universe itself come to be recognized imaginatively as home by the narrator. The body of the mother is, analogously, imaged not as the cataclysmic

beginning and end of the story, the traumatic womb/tomb of the self, but rather as universal, generative matrix which makes possible the birth and growth of individual human (and therefore universal) consciousness.

Mother of the Grass (1989), Marchessault's second novel, depicts the narrator's childhood, growing up in a "Catholic tribe," her extended family, on the banks of a river on the outskirts of Montreal, and subsequent move with them to the "Land of Permanent Sacrifice," in a poverty stricken area of the inner city. The narrative focus shifts, significantly, away from the cosmic and global terrain of the first novel, with its endless journeying possibilities, to the more limited, socially defined arena of the family. There is a corresponding shift in style away from the exclamatory mysticism of the first novel to a kind of mythic realism. Here are two passages, taken from the opening chapters of the two novels, to illustrate this shift:

> When I am thirty, I can, if I stick out my tongue and take a thousand precautions, a thousand baby steps, while fluttering my wings, suck from the breasts of the Great She-Bear, she who lives in the white land of the tree-eater. When I have satisfied my thirst, I cover the ashes of my face, now the colour of cornstraw, and return into myself. But if, standing on the edge of horror and cold, I feel I am threatened, I make the sign of the cross and strike the flint and steel to light the little suns which I

> hide in my armpits and so warm and soothe myself again. (*Like a Child of the Earth* 7)

> In those days, we lived beside the river. We were my grandmother, my mother, my father, and my grandmother's second husband. We lived as a tribe, in a great congregation of nerve cells and blood cells. And we lived with eyes in the back of our heads to catch sight of the prophets of calamity with their volcanic eruptions of rumour. Black clouds, grey novenas, and violet scapulars. This tribe of Catholics, head over heels in the holy water font! Bad news spurting everywhere, distributed free by the waves, by everyone, by the newspapers. (*Mother of the Grass* 7)

The point is not, I think, that Marchessault abandons her shamanic vision in favour of realism, but rather, that having established its magical possibilities in narrative terms, the shamanic becomes a frame for what follows, a point of view from which to critique Western narrative conventions, including their investment in in the colonized, industrialized, Christianized family. A vivid and central character in *Mother of the Grass* is the narrator's grandmother, a tragic-heroic maternal figure, who exerts great imaginative influence on her granddaughter. Her stature clearly derives from the cosmic Grandmothers in *Like a Child of the Earth*, and her strength represents an important challenge to the Western tradition with its maternal absences. As a "character,"

she is certainly the most influential figure in Marchessault's trilogy. Because she embodies so much of what Marchessault might envision as a model maternal subject, I shall describe her in some detail.

The Grandmother is depicted, through her granddaughter's eyes, as an artist of great skill and imagination. Her piano music, recalls the narrator, was "at one with the Earth, with its underground springs, its caverns, its earthworms, its thunder lizards, with germination, that vegetal and mineral epiphany ripening in the bomb of a volcano or the palm of an ice floe. Grandmother's music was full to the brim" (*Mother of the Grass* 14). The Grandmother is a powerful story-teller, mixing Catholic superstition with personal fantasy and shamanic lore, and animating the narrator's childhood imagination with vivid, life-affirming images. "No matter what or whom she spoke about," remembers the narrator, "her speech sparked an immediate pleasure throughout my entire body. Her stories were almost always about flesh and blood creatures, and it didn't matter if the flesh and blood was vegetable, mineral, or animal. What she knew and understood about each and every thing was a recognition which was life-giving, which injected vitality. Listening to her was for me to listen to the collective voice of every living thing" (*Mother of the Grass* 18). Later we see her painting glorious, magical pictures of hens. The maternal, in Marchessault's view, is not divorced from the powers of the creative imagination or in competition with it, as in the Western European tradition, but at

one with it. Mother and artist are literally the same thing, both participating joyfully in the (re)productive spirit of the universe.

The Grandmother is equally at home playing games with the children and speaking her mind about politics. "You should have seen her leap on the ice with both feet together, " exclaims the narrator, remembering her skating on the river, "with a spring in her arms and legs....Dizzying pirouettes! Jumping like a frog when her skate caught a rough patch in the ice. Gliding through the air with the wind in her face. Snowploughing to a stop" (*Mother of the Grass* 20). During the war, her second husband and the narrator's father are employed at the munitions factory. They talk very little, afraid to think about the death they manufacture daily with their hands, afraid to think of the war ending and their jobs along with it. The Grandmother, on the other hand, the narrator tells us, "brought her rage out of the cupboard....she banged her fists on the table and got up to spit on the stove, restraining herself so that she didn't break everything in the kitchen. Grandmother had no desire to temporize or compromise with the war. That slaughter was her living nightmare" (*Mother of the Grass* 23). The men look at her sceptically, calling her crazy for wanting to "change the world." The narrator child, however, understands and identifies with her revolutionary spirit, which is the other side of her playfulness. She recognizes the way both are part of the life-giving, creative force which make her the (Grand)mother in the first place.

The Grandmother is also a healer. In the spring she collects herbs, which grow plentifully in the fields and ditches of

Montreal. "In the heavens," the narrator tells us, "the Mother of the Grass was creating her flora, weaving without haste all kinds of herbs....The Mother of the Grass was giving birth to her daughters of vegetation, her daughters venerated in the Spring sky" (*Mother of the Grass* 24). The "Mother of the Grass," we find out elsewhere, is a mythical reference to the moon (*Mother of the Grass* 154). She is also what Western readers would identify as Primavera, goddess of spring and Demeter, goddess of harvest. In fact, it is interesting that while the goddess figures in the Greek myths are differentiated by function and location, all are conflated in Native mythology in the figure of the "Mother." This is one answer to the fragmentation of the feminine psyche in Western culture.[12]

Marchessault follows her mythic depiction of spring with a list of the healing herbs collected by the Grandmother and their uses. It is a wild catalogue of names, creating a sense of visionary splendour, in epic fashion. Unlike the lists of names we're accustomed to in the Western tradition, these herbs do not have official names, imposed on them institutionally, nor even folk names passed on through popular usage. Rather, they are referred to by their healing properties, available to anyone who recognizes them and is willing to go out and pick them in common fields and ditches:

> [The Mother of the Grass] was giving birth to herbs which aid the birthing of complete babies or of fetuses. To affectional herbs, for every affection, respiratory,

> cardiac, and intestinal as well as the other kinds. To herbs for pain, pains all over, articular pain, pains of anger, pains of patience, pains in the pit of the stomach and in the heights of the heart. And to herbs for predicaments, for the bending of rules. To herbs for children, for chilblains, for convulsions, for seizures. To herbs all golden from the light which is organized within them. [And so on.] (*Mother of the Grass* 25)

That is to say, the "language" by which plants are named is the language of the body's response to them. It is a language which cannot be spoken in words alone, and therefore cannot be transmitted in books, but only by intimate interaction with the herbs themselves, a "hands on" knowledge passed on personally, from mother to daughter.

We might compare Marchessault's catalogue with Morag Gunn's list of common weed names in *The Diviners*: "Curly Pondwood/ Silver Hairgrass/Old Witch Grass/Prostrate Pigweed/ Nightflying Catchfly/Queen-of-the-Meadow....Povertyweed/Staggerwort/ Devil's Paintbrush" (*The Diviners* 333). Morag and her friend Tom exchange "glances of glee and mutual appreciation" over the list, which Morag has found in an unnamed "weed and wildflower" book. Though Laurence does not elaborate, we assume Morag's amusement derives from the unexpected, rich imaginative landscape inscribed in the names. Set next to Marchessault's catalogue, we can see how deeply Laurence's list is embedded in the particular cultural history of medieval Europe, with its

heritage of witches and faeries and devils, filtered through the Christian dual categories of good and evil. "With us, knowing the weeds isn't essential to survival," reflects Morag, "at least not any more and not yet," pointing to the possibility (and perhaps necessity) of reviving the lost art of healing through herbs, which was violently eradicated in Europe during the witch hunts which marked the beginning of modern, male-dominated "science" (Daly 1978, Read 1990). For Marchessault, on the other hand, the knowledge of weeds as useful to human survival is as recent as the memory of the Grandmother, treating the ills and woes of the many men and women who come through her kitchen, begging for treatment.

Everywhere in the text, Marchessault inserts mythical references to the Mother. The grandchildren, who accompany the Grandmother in her search for herbs, discover caves in the forest which they explore with curiosity and trepidation. "Upon entering the cave," writes Marchessault, "we altered our identities along the way, like a crystal which becomes a diamond. Who were we? Who were we really? Were we emeralds in their rocky wombs or explorers or gold prospectors cast out from the hard, sharp matter of a great American city? Or were we children of the earth in search of a universal Mother, a mother hidden in these subterranean galleries, a mother long since forgotten because her black, acid, gleaming eyes were like those of insects or of fish with beautiful spotted bellies and fins sharpened and polished by the wear and tear and beating of the water of the deeps?" (*Mother of the Grass* 49) Unlike Neumann's Great Mother, whose function

is mainly that of birth-giving, of "vessel," centered around adult (male) interests, Marchessault's "universal Mother" evokes awe on her own behalf, and demands the ego's surrender to childlike imaginative wonder, wherein identities are not fixed but capable of magical transformation.

Phyllis Webb, in a recent interview, has observed that "the big paradigm shift in our culture right now is the feminist shift, the shift into the realization of the feminine point of view, experience and theory....The other, of course," she adds, "is the environmental shift, where we, in order to survive, must change our vision from centering on the human-centered to the animal- and environment-centered view of the world. That is what Olson in fact posited in "Projective Verse," that "our egos must shrink" (Webb/Kamboureli 1991-92, 28). It is interesting to note that in Marchessault's vision, this shrinking and letting go does not involve self-flagellation and renunciation, as in the Christian and Buddhist traditions, but rather, the recovery of imaginative playfulness and a sense of wonder.

Song Four, entitled "The Cart Before The Horse," describes the forced emigration of the narrator's family, including the Grandmother and her second husband, due to post-war unemployment, to Montreal's poverty-stricken inner city. This is the Land of Permanent Sacrifice, scathingly depicted by the narrator, who endures young adolescence here, as a sea of the violence and despair. The fathers in this working class and welfare neighbourhood are listless and unmotivated, for the most part, except when eating and drinking or beating their children.

The mothers, on the other hand, are active and exhausted, worked to the bone, "rubbing, scrubbing, cleaning, washing, drying, hanging up the clothes on the line to the telephone pole, scrubbing again, tidying, wrinkling their noses because they smelt piss or shit, pulling back the sheets, peeling potatoes," and on and on (*Mother of the Grass* 79), in an endless litany of unacknowledged domestic tasks. Marchessault's celebration of the Mother and her (re)creative power clearly has its dark underside: the recognition that "motherhood" as practised in the Western nuclear family is deeply oppressive to women.

Divinity is present in the Land of Permanent Sacrifice, not as the resplendent "Mother of the Grass," pouring out her blossoms on the world, but rather, a stern, reproachful God the Father: "a kind of Jack the Ripper," says Marchessault, "who waved his dagger and brandished his whip. The God of back alleys, the God of prisons, hangings, the God of the Mounted Police" (*Mother of the Grass* 78). The mothers, in contrast to the Grandmother with her artistic and healing powers, rub and scrub and entertain murderous thoughts of their too many children:

> I love my children and the Good Lord. I have another one on the way. I'm going to bring it on, throw it down the toilet or bury it in the garbage can. Or maybe it would be better to let it be born and then strangle it if it's a girl. I could strangle her with my bare hands and look her straight in the face. Maybe that's the only way to point her in another direction, toward something else.

> Sometimes, when I look at the kids, I'd love to push them back into my body and cross them off the supreme voter's list. (*Mother of the Grass* 79)

Song Four is a kind of scream, a cry of despair, for all the mothers who have experienced the oppressive aspects of "motherhood," as practised in Western culture under the shadow of the Father. It is also a scream of outrage for the daughters, who are stripped of adequate role models and turn against the passivity of their mothers:

> The silent monologue of the mommies in their kitchens, their kennels. Mama, mommies, why didn't you speak up more? Why, I am asking you. I will go on asking you forever. Miserable mucky mama! Miserable mucky mama, you should have screamed out loud. Damn you, mama, you accomplice! Damned sticky, drowned, walled-up, flattened-out mama, why? Why, I ask you! You were afraid. You were always afraid. You were always afraid of someone or something, it didn't matter what. You were always afraid of words, afraid of the big penis in words.... (*Mother of the Grass* 83)

Song Four culminates in a dramatic, desperate act by the granddaughter. Pushed beyond endurance by the awfulness of life in the Land of Permanent Sacrifice, she impulsively turns on the gas in the middle of the night, and goes back to bed. Her act of

murdering the family is intercepted, however, as we find out in Song Five, by the Grandmother, with her keen sense of smell. Both the Grandmother and mother are shocked, horrified, though the Grandmother in her wisdom knows enough not to argue with the girl or remonstrate, nor to report the incident to the men. The mother takes her to Catholic confession the next morning, but there is no repentance in her:

> No! I said it all by myself, my lips unsealed - no. No! No! I was not sorry. There was not a single ounce of regret in my body, nothing but crystal, black salt, and diamond chips crystallized in the unifying light of revolt. It boiled in my head and my path divided. I could not ask for pardon or bow my back as far as that. No! No! No! (*Mother of the Grass* 101)

It is at home, later, in bed with her mother and grandmother, that she finds absolution through crying:

> My mother was crying tear after tear; then my grandmother, then me. The three of us in one bed, absolving ourselves of all guilt, curing ourselves of my gesture of death. I love you, my mothers. I love you to death. I love you to life....I love you, my mothers (*Mother of the Grass* 102)

Gloria Orenstein comments on this passage as follows:

> It is her unusual use of the plural in this line 'I love you my mothers' that illuminates the original interpretation of the meaning of mothers in Jovette Marchessault's work. This concept of the plurality of mothers refers to her entire biological matrilineage as well as to all her spiritual, natural, and mythic mothers. For the mothers of her rebirth are manifold. In *[Mother of the Grass]* they are at once the ancient mammals of the Neolithic caves, the protective angels of her childhood, Plant Mother, the Indian-Magus Keteri Tekakwita who performs miracles, her mother, grandmother, neighbour Belle Beatrice, and all the mother forces of the universe - the sun, the moon, the plants, the earth, and the river (Orenstein 187-88).

The child-narrator finds absolution and healing, not through repentance for her rebellious, angry act, but through commiseration with the mothers. There is no expulsion of the feminine/maternal subject in order to stabilize the society of the fathers. Rather, there is the possibility of community among women through their shared grief and love.

While the murderous impulse of the child is not condoned by the narrator, the anger and frustration it represents, the sense of outrage in daughters against the continual sacrifice required of their mothers, is fully acknowledged, made present, in the text. So is the murderous impulse toward the children in the mothers themselves. Unlike the maternal impulse in the Western narrative tradition, which is assumed to be infinite and

continually giving, continually self-sacrificial, the mother in Marchessault's novels, despite a two hundred year brush with Catholicism, is allowed her own interests, and is dignified by a sense of choice and limitation. In "The Angel Makers," written after *Mother of the Grass*, Marchessault portrays the mother as an illegal abortionist. After the operation, the mother and the woman she has assisted, whisper together that they are not killers:

> They have merely slowed the panicky course of the hypnotized toward the most negative level of life....they have halted succession, lunacy, family, waste, and gangrene. ("The Angel Makers" 87)

Of course, Marchessault knows as we all do that this view is not currently a socially acceptable one. Her description of the angel-makers is followed by a list of derogatory names, by which these women, outlaws, may be named:

> The angel makers, witches, hysterical women, the bad fucks, old cows, bitches in heat, wild cats, old mares, birds of ill omen, non-virgins, whores, lesbians, unnatural mothers, loose women, crazy ladies, chattering magpies, cock-teasers, the depressed and the sluts, like those two there, have already been burnt, and they will be hanged on top of that. ("The Angel Makers" 87)

It is an outburst expressing rage and fear and self-doubt all at one. Nevertheless, the narrator exclaims, emphatically, "My mother exists and that fact makes me ecstatic" ("The Angel Makers" 85). It is an assertion that most daughters of Western culture have yet to make, as affirmation and celebration.

Grandmothers, in traditional Aboriginal terms, were deemed more powerful than mothers; they were less preoccupied with the daily responsibilities of child-rearing, and their age signified seniority in wisdom and experience. In portraying the family intergenerationally, Marchessault is able to give us a sense of the traditional power of the grandmothers, without glossing over the oppression of the mothers in the modern family. A similar portrait of the grandmother, as artist and Creator, can be found in Gabrielle Roy's *The Road Past Altamont*. Like Marchessault, Roy is deeply moved by the magic of landscape, earth and lake and sky, and sees the grandmother's power as connected with it. Roy's portrait does not draw on the Aboriginal tradition, but is rather steeped in French Canadian prairie Catholicism. It seems that those communities which were able to preserve a sense of the extended family against the ravages of industrialization, have access to a greater range of maternal figures than those who didn't. This kind of intergenerational mothering (in order to become an adult woman you need to be mothered, both literally and symbolically, by a range of women) is something the feminist community is only now beginning to understand and practise.[13]

This Grandmother, despite her flamboyant air, is not without her own tragic history. She buried nine babies from her first

marriage, the narrator tells us, living on the trapline with her husband, and carrying their bones around with her in a little bag, before she gave birth to the narrator's father, her only living child. Her power is not the power of privilege but of experience and perseverance. Together with the narrator's family, the Grandmother and her second husband form an extended family group which makes it possible for the women to provide emotional and practical support to one another, and to offer a kind of intergenerational knowledge to the granddaughter which is sorely lacking in Western family narratives. This knowledge includes a recognition of the limits of the purely reproductive function of women and the importance of related activities, such as artistic self-expression and healing, which sustain the reproductive process and the women who are the keepers of it.

Interestingly, the narrator chooses not to replicate the oppression of motherhood by marrying or having children herself. In this sense, I think Marchessault agrees with Nicole Brossard's assertion in *These Our Mothers*, that the only way to end patriarchy is for women to stop bearing children, to get out of the family, "kill the womb," and create independent lives with and for one another. For Brossard, the feminist community she envisions is primarily a lesbian/ sisterly one: "It is while caressing the body of another woman over its entire living surface that she kills the mother, that the identical woman is born" (Brossard 1983, 23). In Marchessault's vision, at least in this novel, the mother continues to play a dominant role. Brossard's text eventually takes us away from the playground where the mothers

are gathered with their young children to the image of women in revolution: "I want to see in fact the form of women organizing in the trajectory of the species" (Brossard 101). *Mother of the Grass* ends similarly with the narrator's artistic awakening, but her imagined universe is still maternally centered. Here is the closing passage in the novel:

> And then, I told myself, perhaps one day I shall be able to create something, to testify to hope and life. Perhaps, I will even write a few lines about a grandmother, myself, Earth, the Mother of the Grass, and about a she-whale who will never mount to the surface anymore.
> (*Mother of the Grass* 173)

The difference here perhaps is not so much ideological as cultural: for Brossard, writing out of and against Western European textual consciousness, the mother is inextricably bound up in the patriarchal net, she is "symbolic mother" whether she chooses to be or not, "the body of the mother as extended fiction" (Brossard 23). Marchessault on the other hand has access to a different symbolic system, oral rather than textual, in which the "semiotic" is not divorced from and submerged under the "symbolic", to use Kristeva's terms.[14] In the Aboriginal signifying system, the "(grand)mother" represents social power *as a woman*: partly because of her reproductive role and partly because she transcends it. Even though the family portrayed in this novel is caught increasingly in the patriarchal system, there

is enough access to an alternative cultural vision to politicize the requisite symbolic positions, if not explode them.

(Song Six, on the other hand, gives a vivid and horrendous picture of the narrator working in a nineteenth century Dickens style garment factory. The question here is how long Aboriginal cultural groups can hold out against the pressures of industrialism: perhaps it is only a matter of time before the family tribe is irrevocably fragmented by the industrial machine, before the memory of the Grandmother is subsumed in the Western narrative of the nuclear family and its absent/powerless mother? Marchessault's answer for now is "No! No!" The daughter refuses to get caught in the seductive net of the industrial hierarchy, refuses the place offered to her in the factory, refuses to fall in love with a male supervisor and thus reproduce the oppression of the Western nuclear family. She quits her job instead to become an artist and self-creator instead, drawing inspiration and strength from her now aging Grandmother.)

White Pebbles in the Dark Forests (1990), Marchessault's experimental third novel, published ten years after the second, provides an apocalyptic and prophetic gloss on the trilogy, much in the way that Doris Lessing's *The Four Gated City* did in the *Children of Violence* series. Doris Cowan, reviewing this novel for *Books in Canada*, calls it a "strange book," perhaps not entirely successful, although "maybe it's just that her new, dramatic forms of expression take some getting used to" (Cowan 1991, 42). Most of the novel is constructed as dialogue, between Jeanne the narrator and the community of women she lives with in the

Appalachian mountains, whom she calls alternatively the "red cicadas" and the "old guard." This dialogic structure is sometimes difficult to follow, but allows Marchessault to explore conflicting narratives in different voices, and to discuss polemical issues without targetting individual characters. An important figure in the novel is Noria, Jeanne's lover, who arrives in a little airplane, the Spad, with her two dogs, Rimouski-Belle and Only-One-Eye. Later we find out she has rescued them from death in scientific experiments. Much of the novel is a protest against the destructive uses of modern science: the torture of animals in the name of research, and the adaptation of space technology to military ends. "What seemed, at the beginning, to be an extraordinary adventure marked by the spirit of romance," observes the narrator, referring to the beginning of aviation at the turn of the century, " was transformed, with demented speed, into a gigantic enterprise of death" (*White Pebbles in the Dark Forests* 53). Why, asks the narrator, why does this seem to happen, so quickly, with almost everything? One reason the late twentieth century spirit is so sick, so destructive, suggests Marchessault, is because of the extent of animal torture in our time: six billion dogs tortured to the point of death since 1945, estimates Marchessault rather extravagantly, 18 million turtles dead with electrodes buried in their brains, six billion monkeys, rabbits, cats, mice, and calves tortured and killed, all in the name of scientific knowledge: "A billion mutilated phantoms whose shrieks of hatred for the human race haunt the Atmosphere of the Age!" (*White Pebbles in the Dark Forests* 88)

Marchessault constructs an alternative genealogy of the universe to the current scientific one, which derives to a large extent from the Judeo-Christian one, with its mind-body split and attitude of (male) domination over nature. In Marchessault's vision, it is animals who are "the Mothers of humanity." In what she calls the Third Age, the narrator explains, "the animal reign of the Mothers began, very gently, to imagine us, the human beings, as a possible ideal" (White Pebbles in the Dark Forests 29). The First and Second Ages, before that, she tells us, engendered the mineral and vegetable worlds out of the slow, beautiful process which she calls "the innovation of form." The Fourth Age, suggests Noria, "will in its turn begin to invent the future. It dreams of utopias! It delights in adoration and destruction, in cruelty and pity. In its own time, it imagines a possible ideal." In the Fifth Age, responds Jeanne, "it will be our turn to be Ancestors. Who knows what this new age will remember of us as it tells its tales and stories to its children..." (*White Pebbles in the Dark Forests* 29)

Paula Gunn Allen, describing the ancient Keres gynocratic society at Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico, explains the importance of the question "Who is your mother?" in Keres discourse:

> Among the Keres, "context" and "matrix" are equivalent terms, and both refer to approximately the same thing as knowing your derivation and place. Failure to know your mother, that is, your position and its attendant traditions, history, and place in the scheme of things, is

> failure to remember your significance, your reality, your right relationship to earth and society. It is the same as being lost - isolated, abandoned, self-estranged, and alienated from your own life. (Allen 209-210)

The figure of the Woman, Mother, Grandmother was recognized in traditional Aboriginal societies not only as powerful social figure, but as creatrix, the source of being in the universe. In some tribes she was referred to as Spider Woman, the being who "weaves us together in a fabric of interconnection" (Allen 11). Because she represents the life-giving spirit of the universe itself, she is deeply connected to the animal, vegetable and mineral worlds, as well as to the stars. Marchessault's genealogy of creation translates the traditional Aboriginal myth into modern "scientific" discourse, in order to critique and challenge the way we behave toward the natural world in Westernized, industrialized countries. Her metaphor, "animals are the Mother of humanity," inverts both patriarchy and humanism, and challenges us to cultivate reverence toward animals and plants, since we are in fact dependent on them for our being.

And, if there is to be a Fifth Age for us to be ancestors to, Marchessault grimly reminds us (as do Laurence and Lessing), there is urgent need for political action and reform, particularly in the uses of industry and technology, otherwise we will destroy the natural environment, our matrix, our Mother altogether. Reflecting on her task as a writer, the narrator declares at the beginning of the novel:

> I have just recalled that my part, a part which I have by heart but which I had forgotten in the depths of my childhood, my part, I say, is to save the world. As is yours! I am convinced that each and every one of us knows this part...even if we try to distract ourselves away from it....Our role is to save this world, so old, beautiful, so cruel, and so tender. (*White Pebbles in the Dark Forests* 8)

According to Marchessault, it would seem we have already embarked on the Fourth Age, the age of utopias, when human actions get divided clearly into "adoration and destruction....cruelty and pity." The polemical nature of current world events and philosophies tends to corroborate her view. Phyllis Webb's notion of a universal "paradigm shift" also supports this notion. The task of the reader, for Marchessault, is therefore a deeply active and political one.

The women on the Appalachian trail attempt to nurse the dogs, brought to them by Noria from experimental labs across the country, back to health. Sometimes they survive, often they must be put to death by injection. "Someday," imagines the narrator, "perhaps tomorrow, the return will occur. That precious old ancestor will return who, long, long ago, imagined us in a luminous perspective, like a possible ideal" (*White Pebbles in the Dark Forests* 89). In the meantime, the women must continue to talk, and exert pressure on society to change its views. I wish to

emphasize here that Marchessault is not advocating a simple return to pre-industrial, pre-technological society (even if such a thing were possible). Her novel is in many ways a celebration of technology, and particularly women's role in it. Third Song contains a list of the names of women who participated in the invention of aviation, including Maryse Bastie, Adrienne Bolland, Helene Boucher, Jacqueline Auriol and Danielle Decure in France, Jean Batten in New Zealand, Hanna Retitsche in Germany, Jacqueline Cochran, Ruth Nichols and Amelia Earhart in the United States, May Heath, Amy Johnson, Mary Bailey in England, Moulon Embete in Ethiopia, and Joan Bonnisteel in Canada (*White Pebbles in the Dark Forests* 64). Noria's mother is portrayed as an adventurous, courageous aviatrix, whose exploits celebrate the new relationship to the sky. After her death, she appears to Noria, caught in her Spad in a dangerous snowstorm over the Appalachian mountains, as a spirit, and saves her life by pointing her in the only safe direction. Marchessault's point is that technology, as a manifestation of the human creative spirit, is a wonderful thing. What makes it destructive is the attitude of contempt for women and animals which is endemic to scientific and government institutions, and promotes their oppression.

Part of Marchessault's interrogation of the world, which includes an honest scrutiny of her own actions, is reserved for the Fathers. Every time she asks herself about them, says the narrator, "I am up against a wall, and I hear so much weeping. And I hear the sound of all those things that have been worn away by those tears. And I hear that violent theft which was

committed so long ago. The years, the centuries, the mounting mass of misery...." (*White Pebbles in the Dark Forests* 9). In this novel the Fathers are represented by the figure of Noria's father, dubbed the Lion of Bangor, who was a cancer research specialist with typical dreams of conquest and ownership toward women and toward the body. The novel ends with a moving portrait of this man, who has come to the mountains to nurse his dying daughter. Instead of trying to save her life with drugs and surgery, he very gently assists her toward death with healing colors. He also tells the narrator Jeanne the painful story of how he came to be transformed, from a competitive, jealous male to the compassionate, gentle father he is now, through great suffering and the recognition of his own misdeeds. He also tells her the horrendous story of Noria's childhood after her mother's death in an aviation accident, including an extended stay in a camp operated by the Ku Klux Klan. After his personal awakening, the Lion of Bangor tells us, he devoted his life to finding and restoring his lost daughter: to becoming a Father in practice and not just in name.

A final shocking image in the book is the Lion of Bangor's revelation that Noria had a child, who was tortured and killed in "Pavlovian" experiments, which he says were "much in vogue in the 1940s," and were practiced extensively on human children as well as animals. The horror of this image overwhelms the end of the novel, and emphasizes as perhaps nothing else could, Marchessault's warning to us, that unless we revolutionize the way we behave in the modern world, our children are doomed.

Chapter Four:

Joy Kogawa, *Obasan* and Sky Lee, *Disappearing Moon Cafe*

Joy Kogawa's accomplished first novel, *Obasan* (1982), which documents the plight of Japanese Canadians during and after the Second World War, is structured, interestingly, around the absence of the mother. While the connection between Canadian and international politics and family politics is thus subtly and firmly established as a narrative fact, the story of the absent mother is complicated by its racial, cross-cultural context. The novel celebrates the cohesiveness and stability of the Japanese Canadian family with the mother at the center, and mourns its fragmentation through the disenfranchisement and dislocation of Japanese Canadians during the war. One of the bitter ironies in the novel is that the Japanese-Canadian community, unlike some immigrant groups (e.g. Chinese, Hutterite), was working hard to assimilate to mainstream Canadian culture. Most of the narrator's family is Christian. The father, a doctor with Western medical training, plays European compositions on his violin, the mother sings English folksongs. Stephen becomes a classical pianist; Naomi is a public school teacher in rural Alberta. "We are *Canadian*," the narrator insists over and over, as do other

members of the family. There was no need to intern Japanese Canadians during the war, Kogawa asserts, because there was no opposition to "Canada" in them.

Obasan served as a catalyst to the Japanese Redress movement in the 1980s, with people like Joy Kogawa and Roy Miki as spokespersons. The movement successfully defended the rights of Japanese Canadian citizens, who were wrongfully imprisoned and robbed of their homes and land, and dislocated in small groups to remote geographical areas in rural Canada during the 1940s and 50s. I mention this to underline the political implications of Kogawa's fiction: I don't think it is possible to read this story of the "absent mother" without paying attention to its geo-political ramifications. Kogawa implies that the forcible absence of the mother in Western social narrative is connected to attitudes of racism, the need to find a "scapegoat" upon which to project this culture's excesses and evils, and to attitudes of environmental and political imperialism, the need to dominate nature and other countries and racial groups, to humiliate them, bring them to their knees.

Edward Said has coined the term "Orientalism" for the West's attitude of domination toward the East, which he claims has roots in the eighteenth century and is profoundly embedded in Western social, political, and philosophical practices. According to Said, "Europe gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said 1978, 3). He describes Orientalism as "a Western style of dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the

Orient." Because of Orientalism, he says, "the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action" (Said 3). (As an aside, I note that Columbus's ambition, in "discovering" the Americas, well before the eighteenth century, was to find a cheap route to India and the "Far East." Spain's subsequent plundering of North and South American Aboriginal cultures was perhaps not so different from its intentions toward the "Orient." Certainly both Kogawa and Sky Lee make a narrative link between Native and Asian North Americans. Not only do they bear physical resemblance to one another, according to Kogawa and Lee, but they share the same heritage of anti-Asian discrimination in Canada and elsewhere.) As many feminist scholars have asserted, the attitude of domination and subordination in Western-European based cultures is continually reinforced by and indeed grounded in the hierarchical relationships between male and female, sanctioned by marriage and the patriarchal family. "Woman" is thus linked with "oriental" and "native" in the Western European (male) imagination. The oppression and silencing of the mother is therefore directly related to the oppression and silencing of non-Western cultural groups, as Kogawa eloquently shows. In *Obasan*, then, the "absent mother" metaphorically equals "lost motherland" equals silenced Japanese Canadians. (The title for the 1983 Japanese edition of *Obasan* was *Ushinawareta Sokoku*, "The Lost Motherland," Redekop 1989, 16).

Kogawa movingly depicts Japanese Canadians as victims of "scapegoating" during the Second World War. How come German Canadians weren't sent to prison camps the way the Japanese

were, she asks over and over, if Germany and Japan were equally the enemy? Why were Japanese families broken apart and relocated to remote areas in Canada after the war, if not for reasons of genocide? Although she doesn't develop this idea in the novel, I hear a terrible echo here of what was happening to the Jews in Germany. The North American, and Canadian, attitude toward political injustice seems to be, not to work at undoing it or even reversing it, but to redirect it toward someone else. Japanese Canadian concentration camps as an answer to Auschwitz. The burning of Nagasaki and Hiroshima as a solution to the Nazi holocaust. "We won!" exclaims Steven, the narrator's younger brother, as the war ends, not understanding the terrible irony for Japanese Canadians in this victory, nor how closely the punishment of Nagasaki touches his own family. Kogawa's point is surely that war is altogether a problematic solution to long-term racism, that we must learn to identify imaginatively with other people, listen to their stories, instead of isolating and punishing people by the color of their skin. Rough Lock, the legendary old man of Slocan, provides a model for cross-racial dialogue in this regard. As he says to the children playing near the river, "Never met a kid didn't like stories. Red skin, yellow skin, white skin, any skin....Don't make sense, do it, all this fuss about skin?" (*Obasan* 145)

The bombing of Nagasaki, which forms the climax of this novel, as it did of the war, shows North American Orientalism/ scapegoating escalated to proportions of unmitigated horror. In the midst of this horror, we encounter the missing mother, her

face burned off, skin charred, a survivor with a face mask, accepting and indeed insisting on her own absence and silence, to her children and to herself. What is the meaning of the silent mother in *Obasan*? In a recent interview with Magdalene Redekop, Kogawa discussed the mother's absence in the novel, and her reappearance at the end as a war victim. "The mother's absence," she explained, "is the prime analogy for the experience of divine abandonment. God is also defaced among us. Love's presence is only understood when stripped of its potency and paradoxically its power to heal us comes when we embrace its impotence" (Redekop 1989, 17). Redekop responded by pointing out the alarming absence of the mother's subjectivity as a result: "But what about the mother? She's still voiceless. You pray to the Gentle Mother but she's still powerless. There's something there that you're exploring, that whole victim mentality and the suffering mother. It's almost as if it's the silent mother that is at the heart of the bomb....And that's so painful and frightening I can't even frame a question about it" (Redekop 17).

Other critics have tried to grapple with the meaning of the mother's absence in *Obasan*, with varying results. A. Lynne Magnusson (1948) reads the novel in Lacanian terms, as a narrative depiction of the child's crisis of separation from the mother's body, which occurs at the moment of acquiring speech and entry into the symbolic order of language. According to Magnusson, Kogawa is attracted to the "consoling story of a pre-linguistic paradise" in which the child is connected to the mother without having to speak. The longing to recover the original

presence of the mother, says Magnusson, is what makes Kogawa so ambivalent about the efficacy of language in this novel. However, as Magnusson points out, the separation from the mother does not occur at the point of acquiring language in this novel, but well after the narrator has learned to speak, and read and write. In fact, there are several separations between the narrator, Naomi, and her mother, the first a psychic separation that is caused by Old Man Gower's sexual violation of the prepubescent girl, an event she does not feel able to report to her mother. Her silence therefore makes her an accomplice of the old man and his abuse. This event causes a rift between Naomi and her mother which she describes as follows:

> His hands are frightening and pleasurable. In the centre of my body is a rift.
>
> In my childhood dreams, the mountain yawns apart as the chasm spreads. My mother is on one side of the rift. I am on the other. We cannot reach each other. My legs are being sawn in half. (*Obasan* 65)

The second and permanent separation is occasioned by the mother's voyage to Japan and subsequent wounding in Nagasaki by the bomb. And, although Magnusson doesn't mention this, we might identify a third stage in the separation between Naomi and her mother, consisting of the family's conspiracy of secrecy around the mother's absence and disfigurement.

Magnusson explains the discrepancy between Kogawa's

narrative and the Lacanian model as follows:

> What we find...is a story and a counter-story, or a preferred myth of origins and unassimilated story elements that pull against it: a consoling story of a pre-linguistic paradise in tension with a supplement that threatens the consolation of the story. The violence which the Gower supplement threatens to the preferred story seems to be played out obliquely in some of Naomi's nightmares....After the long-delayed "telling" of Nagasaki, after Naomi has absorbed the hurtful betrayal of the "not telling" (232), Naomi relinquishes the original myth of a pre-linguistic paradise. This revision of the past privileges speech over silence, language - with all its inadequacy - over a delusory wordless security. (Magnusson 65-66)

I would argue, rather, that Kogawa's narrative, given the particular configurations of speech and silence in relation to the mother's presence/absence in the novel, does not really fit the Lacanian paradigm of language development. It is not, after all, the entry into language and speech that precipitates Naomi's separation from the mother as nurturing presence, nor is the meaning of silence in this novel primarily related to nostalgia for the undifferentiated pre-linguistic maternal body. As Magnusson rightly points out, it is (adult male) violence that pushes the young Naomi from the comfort of wordlessness, as an expression

of her mother's physical and spiritual closeness - a mode of communication highly valued in the Japanese family as more intimate than speech - to a sense of alienation which feels more like the withholding of speech, of being silenced. It is adult male violence, again, multiplied a billionfold in the dropping of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki, that enforces the mother's irrevocable absence from Naomi and her family, later in the novel. The person who encourages Naomi to renounce her long silence, furthermore, even though it means contradicting her cultural upbringing and opening old wounds, is not some paternal authority figure but her Aunt Emily. We might say, given these narrative particulars, that the Lacanian model of speech development as a relinquishment of pre-linguistic maternal presence and entry into the symbolic area of the Father with its inherent sense of distance between signifier and signified, is displaced in Kogawa's fiction by a complicated dialogue around the efficacy of speech and silence, both of whom can be used as modes of communication and withholding. Aggression and violence, similarly, in Kogawa's view, are more accurately the determinant of alienation in language and in people's psyches, than is the acquisition of speech *per se*. And, as many women could attest, entry into language is not condition enough to make speech possible in the context of violation and enforced maternal absence. In order for women to speak under these circumstance, Kogawa would agree, it is necessary for them to find at least one strong adult female figure, who can act as surrogate or "symbolic" mother to them, to help them break silence, as Aunt Emily does here.

The ongoing debate in the narrator's mind between the worth and usefulness of silence and speech in the novel represents, I think, also a complex dialogue between Asian and contemporary North American cultural modes. Obasan and Aunt Emily, the two aunts, are set up as opposite models of womanly nurturing for Naomi, in the absence of her mother, the one representing silence, constancy, calmness, passivity, and acceptance of fate, the other representing speech, activism, anger, memory and political resistance to injustice. Each of these modes, Kogawa shows us, have their strengths and limitations. Obasan has been a warm, consoling, motherly presence for Naomi while growing up. Her "silence" gave her the strength and capacity to endure the injustices of war, and to nurture Naomi and Steven through much hardship with a measure of equanimity. Obasan's silence is not an empty silence, but a practised silence, in which we can recognize the ancient Buddhist ideal of self-discipline and acceptance of difficult circumstances, and personal restraint. On the other hand, Obasan is unable to offer much help in the way of political resistance after the war. If there is a battle to be fought, Obasan's silence is not of much use. Aunt Emily, by contrast, is angry, articulate and actively engaged in cultural politics. She is not "maternal" in the traditional sense; it is hard for us to imagine Aunt Emily consoling her niece and nephew during internment. Yet she acts as muse to Naomi in her mid-thirties; she nags at and finally inspires her niece to break silence, to investigate the history of her people's abuse in Canada, to ask questions about her mother's absence, to speak out publicly, to

become politically active.

Kogawa's portrait of the mother as silent presence occurs predominantly in Chapter 11. Young Naomi has mistakenly put the new baby chicks into her mother hen's cage, only to see the hen angrily destroy them. The mother's response is quick, non-judgmental, and reassuring to her daughter:

> All the while that she acts, there is calm efficiency in her face and she does not speak. Her eyes are steady and matter of fact - the eyes of Japanese motherhood. They do not invade and betray. They are eyes that protect, shielding what is hidden most deeply in the heart of the child. She makes safe the small stirrings underfoot and in the shadows. Physically, the sensation is not in the region of the heart, but in the belly. This that is in the belly is honoured when it is allowed to be, without fanfare, without reproach, without words. What is there is there. (*Obasan* 59)

Later, in the house, after the chickens have been rescued, the mother and daughter have the following exchange:

> "It was not good, was it," Mother says. "Yoku nakatta ne." Three words. Good, negation of good in the past tense, agreement with statement. It is not a language that promotes hysteria. There is no blame or pity. I am not responsible. The hen is not responsible. My mother does

> not look at me when she says this...She has waited until all is calm before we talk. I tell her everything. (*Obasan* 60)

These passages constitute a critique of the Western tendency, deriving to a large extent from Christian practice, to impose judgment and blame on children's actions and feelings, an attitude which promotes feelings of shame and guilt in the child. Kogawa offers an alternative model of parenting, which allows the child privacy and respect, but also safety and nurturing. It is not a "prelinguistic" relationship, but rather, a relationship in which language is used with care, to convey calmness and loving acceptance of the other. By not naming or prodding at the child's emotional response, she is allowed to experience her feelings, in all their confusion and ambivalence, without having to reveal them, and therefore without shame.

Interestingly, Kogawa links the mother's use of language and silence with the steady, matter of fact expression of her eyes, "They do not invade and betray." There is an implicit negative comparison being made here with the Western use of language and the direct "gaze," the way both are used to confront, control and manipulate the other. Joy Asham Fedorick offers a similar critique of the Western gaze, from an Aboriginal point of view:

> Dominant culture of North America dictates the use and reliance on eye contact as a means of determining sincerity, honesty, self-confidence, etc. Yet, to the

> Swampy Cree, etiquette required that you avoid direct eye contact as much as possible, as the eyes were considered to be the "Windows of the Soul." For one to stare into your eyes was an intrusion, and to focus on another's was earnestly avoided. Negative stereotypes were not assigned to this behaviour, indeed, the person who practiced such avoidance was considered to be both respectful and humble. (Fedorick 1990, 12).

Fedorick, like Kogawa, makes a connection between the Western use of the gaze and the tendency toward colonization, to "invade and betray" non-Western cultures:

> Yes, we're interesting to look at, analyze, and speculate upon, take under advisement and pray for. All these things also fulfill a further purpose: during the scrutiny of us, one procrastinates from looking at "self"....We, due to the dominance of Western European culture in our lives, have had our own history torn from us and thrown away. We are forced to live without our history, due to the intervention of invasion. (Fedorick 10, 12)

Kogawa's point in *Obasan* is that the Western need to dominate and control other cultures is connected, profoundly, to the way personal relationships are constructed, through language, through the gaze, and through childrearing practices in the patriarchal family. It is possible to speculate here that Kristeva's

distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic functions of language, and their respective associations with the mother and father, reflect the particular split between body and mind, female and male, unconscious and conscious, of Western culture, rather than the universal function of language itself. Kogawa's description of maternal language certainly suggests an alternative model, in which the semiotic and the symbolic are carefully and respectfully in partnership with one another, rather than structurally opposed. The language of the body is brought into the realm of words, not by alienation and subjugation, but through silence, through listening and respect.

Kogawa's description of "Japanese motherhood" is followed immediately by the narrator's description of Old Man Gower sexually abusing the young Naomi. This is the one thing, the narrator tells us, she cannot tell her mother. As Magnusson suggests, this is where the split between the daughter and mother really occurs: at the point of entry into a particular kind of language, the language of colonization, of invasion and betrayal, a language which has hidden at its center the sexual abuse of children. The rest of the novel becomes a dialogue between the two kinds of language, the language of politeness and respect, which honours silence, the presence of the body, and the privacy of the other, and the language of direct action and speech, which tends toward invasion and betrayal. Kogawa's anguished insight is that though the former is more affirming, the latter unfortunately becomes necessary in order to resist betrayal, once it has occurred. The narrator's moving speech to her (found)

absent mother at the end of the novel, addresses the limitations of the Japanese mode of language and silence, in the face of racial and sexual abuse: "Gentle Mother, we were lost together in our silences. Our wordlessness was our mutual destruction" (*Obasan* 243). Kogawa's novel is really a plea, in a global sense, to confront the split between East and West, between silence and speech, between contemplation and action, body and mind, female and male, mother and father, which makes sexual and cultural domination of the "other" possible. The fact that her plea is addressed first and foremost to the daughter and mother underlines the importance of this relationship in cultural terms, and suggests a revolutionary stance toward the Western attitude of devaluing and silencing the mother, in the name of the symbolic.

Susan Griffin offers a similar plea, in slightly different terms, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside her* and *Pornography and Silence: Nature's Revenge Against Culture*. Griffin's thesis is that Western (male) thought has tried to split the world into the hostile, opposing categories, "Culture" and "Nature," in order to control and dominate "Nature," and has reinforced this dualism by metaphorically associating women with "Nature," and building social structures to dominate them. Griffin offers the insight that "we see ourselves. And we are nature. We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature. Nature weeping. Nature speaking of nature to nature." (Griffin 1978, 226)

Marilyn Russell Rose interprets Kogawa's ongoing debate in the novel between speech and silence rhetorically, as a reply to

the post-Saussurean belief in the non-referentiality of language. *Obasan*, Rose argues convincingly, "assumes that ultimately, language *can* convey actual human experience, whatever the complexity of the relationships between language and social context. Moreover, it is overtly rhetorical in its assumption that experiencing 'real' human suffering, even indirectly, as when human experience is enacted in language, will radicalize the person who comes to know it, the reader" (Rose 19488, 215-6). Naomi's problem, according to Rose, is not with words *per se*, but "with experience that is so frozen within her as the novel begins that it cannot be released into 'freeing' language - spoken language, *recorded* words, public speech" (Rose 219). Rose identifies the silence of the "victim," whether it be of sexual or other kinds of abuse, in Kogawa's terms, with the daughter's feeling of the alienation from the mother. The absence of the mother in Western narrative, that is to say, is neither accidental nor innocent. Bringing the mother (and hence also the daughter's helpless, mute self) back into the story involves an heroic act of remembering, grieving, lamenting, and ultimately, of challenging the *status quo*. In Aunt Emily's words, "You have to remember. You are your history. If you cut any of it off you're an amputee. Don't deny the past. Remember everything. If you're bitter, be bitter. Cry it out! Scream! Denial is gangrene" (*Obasan* 49-50).

What about Magdalene Redekop's "frightening" question about the silent mother at the heart of the bomb? If, as Kogawa suggests, the mother represents God, the divine presence among us, and her absence and disfigurement a sign of our lack of

recognition and caring, what does that say about the explosive power contained in the heart of the atom and its destructive potential? Is that also God? Is that also the mother? Kogawa would say yes. That is after all the energy which makes life possible, the matrix, the womb of matter. It is our human responsibility, Kogawa would argue, to honour the "impotence" of God, the silence of the earth, the mother, matter, to recognize and embrace its helplessness in the face of the human will to destruction. In this sense, it is not the mother's silence that is disturbing in the novel, but rather her family's, in the way that it distorts Naomi's perceptions while growing up and paralyzes the family's individual and collective responses to her disfigurement.

On the other hand, by equating the mother with God and matter metaphorically, Kogawa risks essentializing the mother as human figure out of the realm of subjectivity and speech, though at the same time happily undercutting the traditional Christian hierarchy of spirit over matter. This may be what is most "frightening," as Redekop says, about Kogawa's vision. Most of the time, however, Kogawa is careful to delineate the mother as human subject, particularly in her silences, which Kogawa shows us, are themselves a kind of speech. "I am thinking that for a child there is no presence without flesh," writes Naomi near the end of the novel, after discovering her mother's fate in Aunt Emily's letters. "But perhaps it is because I am no longer a child I can know your presence though you are not here. The letters tonight are skeletons. Bones only. But the earth still stirs with dormant blooms. Love flows through the roots of the trees by our

graves" (*Obasan* 243). Through language and memory, then, and even more, through the particular sensitivity of listening to silence, the absence of the mother can be undone, even after her death. By rewriting the story, by challenging the will to dominate in the Western split psyche as reflected in its power structures, Kogawa implies, God (and also the mother) can take her place among us, as presence instead of terrifying absence.

Sky Lee's first novel, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990), describes the experience of four generations of Chinese immigrants on the Canadian West Coast. Like *Obasan*, it is a novel about racism in Canada and its effect on Asian families, particularly on women. There are important structural differences between these texts, however, some of which have to do with their respective social contexts. The community Lee writes about was discriminated against economically and culturally, rather than officially through the war. Unlike the Japanese families in Kogawa's novel, who are working hard at assimilating to mainstream North American life, while at the same time maintaining their own cultural and family network, the Chinese families in Lee's novel are radically separatist. They interact with "ghosts," outsiders, non-Chinese people, only when strictly necessary. They construct large economic and cultural enclaves in North American cities, "Chinatowns," which are self-sufficient to a great extent, and run by Mafia-like clan hierarchies. It strikes me as ironic that the Japanese willingness to assimilate, to participate in Western social and economic

structures, should be seen as more imperialist and threatening to European-based North Americans than the Chinese attitude of separatism. On the other hand, it is easier to discriminate racially against a group that is seen as closed and irrevocably "other." Lee refers, obliquely, to the kind of street violence Chinese youths are subject to in Vancouver as a matter of course. Her characters also refer, frequently and matter-of-factly, to the kind of trouble they anticipate from Canadian government officials regarding immigration of Chinese relatives and import/export regulations:

> Under the strain of bigotry, they were outlaws. Chinamen didn't make the law of the land, so they would always live outside of it. In fact, it was a crime for them just to be here. The result was submerged, but always there: violence, with the same, sour odour of trapped bodies under duress. That could be why the whites complained that chinamen were unclean. Sinister, they said. But imagine their fresh-faced, thoughtless innocence beside the seething rage and bitterness in chinese faces! They grew uncomfortable in the presence of chinese, without even knowing why. (*Disappearing Moon Cafe* 221)

The whole issue of racism against Chinese people flares up in the Foon Sing murder trial incident. Foon Sing, a Chinese house boy, is convicted of murdering his white mistress. The Chinese

community, all too aware of the danger this incident puts it in, given the racial tensions of Vancouver, deals harshly and finally with the boy before he can testify in public. Lee's anger is directed in part against the European-Canadian community and its racist practices, but it is directed at least as much toward Chinese-Canadians. During the Foon Sing incident, she writes, "[The elders] were surprised to find how much alike chinamen and white people were" (*Disappearing Moon Cafe* 223). Both groups are portrayed as harsh, unforgiving, and also terrified. In another episode she describes the beginning of the Cold War (and the resulting separation between Chinese family members on different continents) as follows:

> Then, in 1949, China closed - no, slammed - its doors to the west.... I like to imagine Fong Mei as this cold war cartoon character I once saw in a magazine, with no other option than to stand in front of those bamboo curtains, banging her fists on them, with what she didn't realize was an empty suitcase at her side.
> (*Disappearing Moon Cafe* 167)

There is less of an "us and them" stance here, less a vision of unimaginable, unmitigated, and undeserved suffering among a particular people (as in Kogawa's novel), and more of a sense of mutual aggression, mutual hostility between people of different races, and also between people of one race. The novel begins with Gwei Chang's experience of travelling in northern B.C. in search

of his ancestors' bones, left to rot without ceremony beside the railroad in whose service they died, and his romantic encounter with Kelora, the young Indian woman with a Chinese father. His first response to her is, "But you're a wild injun," suggesting that racism is as endemic to Chinese thinking as it is to white North American thought. As we find out later in the novel, Gwei Chang abandons his son by Kelora, Ting An, after she dies, an act of betrayal which has grave consequences for his future progeny. Most of the tensions in this novel, in fact, have to do with family issues, the kinds of intergenerational wrongs perpetrated in families by parents, which then get passed on to the children. The family story, as Lee tells it, is (in the drunken words of Morgan, Ting An's son): "A story full of holes...no, wait! A family full of assholes....assholes plugged with little secrets!" (*Disappearing Moon Cafe* 160) The whole idea of telling a story across several generations - a rare occurrence in English literature - is itself a way of practising "reproductive consciousness," looking at the physical and emotional consequences of actions in the long term. While Kogawa's struggle in *Obasan* is to find an assertive enough voice to speak for restitution of past wrongs perpetrated by the Canadian government upon Japanese-Canadian war victims, Lee's project is rather to uncover the family secrets, to expose the greed and contempt and insecurity that exists within the Chinese extended family, which in her view have been fed to a large degree by the narrow circumstances forced upon it by racism in Canada, but also, as the narrator increasingly recognizes, by the narrow-

minded patriarchal mindset of the traditional Chinese family system.

At the heart of the novel is the secret of incest, perpetuated across several generations in the Wong family. It is a secret which Kae, the narrator, has sensed intuitively since she was born, a silent anxiety which festers in each family member, poisoning relationships until it is finally exposed. The occurrence of incest threatens the structure of the patriarchal family in a radical way. On the other hand, it may very well be fuelled by the desire to perpetuate and protect the privileges of patriarchy. The incest dynamic may even be, as some theorists have claimed, somehow endemic to the patriarchal family structure, with its premises of (male) mastery, ownership and the father's name.[15] This is why the "secret" carries so much weight in incestuous families, because the integrity of the family name and ultimately the structure itself depends upon it. As the saying goes among incest survivors, "Incest was never taboo. It's talking about it that's forbidden." In the Wong family, incest is fuelled by the desire in both mother and father, great-grandparents of the narrator, to further their social standing in the Chinese community. Both suffer a lapse in "reproductive consciousness," we might say, in the name of the symbolic, the Name of the Father/Son. Gwei Chang abandons his first-born son, Ting An, largely for racist and capitalist reasons, because his mother Kelora was Indian, to find a "real wife from China." Mui Lan, his Chinese wife, on the other hand, desperate for a grandson to boost her social clout, abandons her daughter-in-law, Fong Mei,

and sets up a secret liaison between her son and a local waitress. The understanding is that the waitress will give up her child to Fong Mei once it is born. The waitress, however, does not conceive a child with the son, Choy Fuk, since he is impotent. This dilemma necessitates a further secret liaison between the waitress and another man, to satisfy Mui Lan. Fong Mei, the disgraced and abandoned daughter-in-law, meanwhile, becomes secretly involved in a romance with Ting An, not knowing of course that he is Gwei Chan's abandoned son. Fong Mei bears three children from this liaison, while remaining married to Choy Fuk, thus rescuing her status with her mother-in-law, but under false pretences. The waitress, on the other hand, refuses to give up her son from her second liaison. In a small, closed community surrounded by racial hostility, as Lee demonstrates, such convoluted secrets will necessarily have spin-off effects on the next generation. The children from these various marriages and liaisons end up innocently falling in love with each other and bearing children of their own, all tainted by the shadow of incest. The intergenerational tensions created in this scenario are sometimes unbearable. By the time we get to Kae, the narrator's generation, the family secret has become a very loud, unspoken presence, with "evil tentacles" (*Disappearing Moon Cafe* 23) that reach into every family encounter.

The narrator is in the process of bearing her first child as the novel begins. Her impetus for hunting down the family secret, as writer, as "teller," thus coincides with her maternal desire, to know who her ancestors were, not just in name but in fact, in

flesh and blood, to know what genetic heritage she is passing on to her newborn son. The "gaze," in this novel, is associated with anxiety of reproduction, searching for signs of incest on the face and body of each new family member. The disjunction between signifier and signified, when recognized in the context of reproduction, can be painful in the extreme. Here is the narrator's description of her mother's first look at her new baby:

> She unravels his tightly clenched fists and reads his wizened little face. She pinches his ear lobes and prods his entire skull. Peering at private parts, she is thorough, even the underarms have to be examined. Afterwards, she sits down on her chair again, looking as if she wishes with all her heart she could unzip him to continue with her search inside.
>
> "What are you looking for, Mah?" I ask, although I figure I already know.
>
> "Nothing." She suddenly stiffens in a way that is very familiar to me. (*Disappearing Moon Cafe* 22)

Later, after unravelling the many layers of the painful, convoluted family secret, Kae and her friend Hermia are able to discuss reproductive identity in the following terms:

> Kae asks Hermia: "Is this what they call a forward kind of identity?"
>
> Hermia asks Kae: "Do you mean that individuals must

> gather their identity from all the generations that touch them - past and future, no matter how slightly? Do you mean that an individual is not an individual at all, but a series of individuals - some of whom come before her, some after her? Do you mean that this story isn't a story of several generations, but of one individual thinking collectively?" (*Disappearing Moon Cafe* 189)

In other words, once the question is taken out of the patriarchal family context, with its anxious and tenuous sense of connection between genetic continuity and the family name, between the truth of the body and the truth of words, human consciousness is free to assume its own real shape, as the sum of experiences touching an individual identity. Margaret Laurence makes a similar point at the end of *The Diviners*, when Morag exchanges Christie's hunting knife for Jules' plaid pin, with its motto, *My Hope Is Constant In Thee.* Clan Gunn, she recalls, did not have a crest or a coat-of-arms. But, thinks Morag, "adoption, as who should know better than [she], is possible." Reflecting on the motto further she muses, "It sounds like a voice from the past. Whose voice, though? Does it matter? It does not matter. What matters is that the voice is there, and that she has heard these words which have been given to her. And will not deny what has been given" (*The Diviners* 352-3). Inheritance, in Laurence's view as in Lee's, is ultimately a matter of recognition of what has "been given" to make up an individual's life. Both genetic and cultural influences are possible, and from a maternal point of

view, equally valid and not necessarily the same.

Disappearing Moon Cafe depicts, among other things, an extended dialogue between Kae and her maternal ancestors. While Gwei Chang and his activities are highlighted as the beginning and end of the story, and while his name and identity provide the frame of this family story, it is the women whose motives and feelings are most intensely portrayed, and it is they whom Kae must come to terms with emotionally in her own quest for freedom and wholeness. The narrative framework thus threatens to invert itself. Initially, the great-grandmother Mui Lan and the grandmother Fong Mei are portrayed as greedy, grasping, scheming bitches, in contrast to the more calm and centered Gwei Chang. As the narrative proceeds, however, we are given more and more insight into these women's lives and motives. One of the great tragedies for women in the patriarchal family is their loss of personal identity through marriage. Typically, they are forced to leave their families and friends, sometimes without ever being able to see them again, to become part of their husbands' lives. There, they are constricted by their husbands' desires and activities, into a narrow social context indeed. Mui Lan's desperate wish for a grandson, at any cost, is described with a lot of anger on the part of the narrator, but also, finally, with sympathy and insight. Fong Mei's infidelity, similarly, is portrayed with judgment, but she too, is allowed to assume a place of sympathy by the end of the novel. The personal growth demonstrated by the narrator in learning to tell this story is perhaps the most powerful aspect of the novel. There is a moving

scene in the chapter entitled "Feeding the Dead," in which Kae confronts the ghosts of her grandmother and great-grandmother, and "has it out" with them, so to speak, once and for all. Lee is not unaware of the melodramatic potential of such a scene, and carefully builds in a parodic element:[16]

> (I want a classic scenario of wailing women huddled together to "feed the dead." Lots of eerie mist. I want to make them weep from their own time periods and, at the same time, in harmony with each other.)
> (*Disappearing Moon Cafe* 188)

In spite of the "wailing" and "eerie mist," however, this ghostly confrontation is powerful and climactic. Fong Mei's confession, in particular, subverts the patriarchal frame of the novel in a profound and irrevocable way:

> What is this Wong male lineage that had to be upheld at such a human toll? I once thought it was funny that I could take my revenge on the old bitch and her turtle son. Another man's children to inherit the precious Wong name, all their money and power. I forgot that they were my children! I forgot that I didn't need to align them with male authority, as if they would be lesser human beings without it. (*Disappearing Moon Cafe* 189)

She goes on to imagine what her life could have been if she had

claimed it for herself instead of giving it over to the Wong name:

> Women, whose beauty and truth were bartered away, could only be mirrored, hand-held by husbands and men; they don't even like to think that they can claim their children to be totally their own. I was given the rare opportunity to claim them for myself, but I sold them, each and every one, for property and respectability. I tainted their innocence with fraud.
> (*Disappearing Moon Cafe* 189)

This speech is not without irony, in the narrator's mind. Fong Mei's confession is immediately followed by the image of Suzie, breaking down into tears and screaming. She is the daughter of Fong Mei who was most affected by the fraud of incest, and most victimized by it, mostly because she refused to buy into the lie, refused to play the family game. As the narrator says, "She never could be detracted from what she knew she must do" (*Disappearing Moon Cafe* 190). Fong Mei's post-mortem manifesto to claim her children for herself instead of for patriarchy, thus acquires a tragic ring. Not playing the game may result in less fraud, less confusion to pass on to your children, but it may also land you dead. (One is reminded here of the similar scene in Maxine Hong Kingston's novel, *The Woman Warrior,* where the mother tells her daughter about the No-Name aunt who was found pregnant while her husband was overseas and hounded to suicide by her neighbours, ending up at the bottom of the family well.)

Lee's answer to this dilemma would be for women (and mothers) to develop independent means of income, and to cultivate supportive friendships with other women, outside the family, as Kae does with Hermia.

The novel ends with the image of Gwei Chang, struggling to relax into old age but being forced to face his own misdeeds:

> When he opened his dim, old man's eyes, he saw his garden was in order, everything as it should be...But when he closed his eyes, he saw submerged violence. (*Disappearing Moon Cafe* 218)

Unable to undo the murder of Foon Sing, the Chinese houseboy whose legal conviction threatened the safety of the Chinese community many years ago, and unable to reconcile with his abandoned son, Ting An, whom he has employed without wages in his warehouse all these years, Gwei Chang is forced to die without recognition, a dethroned patriarch, with only the private memory of his first wife, Kelora, and her Indian simplicity, to sustain him in the hour of death.

Chapter Five:
"Everyone has their own story to tell": Katherine Martens' Mennonite Childbirth Stories

"Childbirth in the Mennonite Community" is a Manitoba oral history project, compiled by Katherine Martens in 1989. Martens collected 53 tapes, each an hour in length, representing 39 women recounting their experiences of childbirth, and three men with related stories, two of them doctors. The selection of interviewees, according to Martens, was done on a casual, word of mouth basis, and was intended to reflect as great an age range as possible. The oldest interviewee was born in 1897, the youngest in 1966. Some of the older women were interviewed in Low German; most of the younger women in English. Seven of these stories have been transcribed and in one case, translated from Low German, for this study. They are included here under *Appendix A*. My choice of stories was, similarly, random but intended to reflect the range of narrative interests represented in the project. I have also included two essays by Katherine Martens, about the interview process and the project as a whole, titled "Introduction" and "Conclusion."[17]

Using oral texts in transcription in the context of literary

study raises interesting theoretical questions about the boundaries between literature and "real life," and about the distinction between "natural" and "fictive" discourse. Speech act theorists and critics of autobiographical texts have of course been working along the blurred edges of these categories for some time. I shall briefly review some of their observations as a way of moving into the study of oral texts. According to Mary Louise Pratt, speech act theory provides "a way of talking about utterances not only in terms of their surface grammatical properties but also in terms of the context in which they are made, the intentions, attitudes, and expectations of the participants, the relationships existing between participants, and generally, the unspoken rules and conventions that are understood to be in play when an utterance is made and received" (Pratt 1977, 86). Literature itself, Pratt points out, is a speech context in this sense, in that like any other linguistic transaction, it depends on a set of shared, unspoken conventions and expectations between speaker and audience, which can be examined as part of the experience of the text. Furthermore, all the narrative conventions which govern our understanding of literary texts are also operative in the natural narrative speech situation:

> all the problems of coherence, chronology, causality, foregrounding, plausibility, selection of detail, tense, point of view, and emotional intensity exist for the natural narrator just as they do for the novelist, and they

> are confronted and solved (with greater or lesser success) by speakers of the language every day. (Pratt 66-67, cited in Godard, "Talking About Ourselves" 1985, 21)

Other theorists have tried to define differences between natural and fictive discourses by focussing on the differing contexts in which they arise, and the different expectations put on the listener as a result. Barbara Herrnstein Smith describes fictive discourses as "possible utterances with possible contexts," while natural utterances are actual utterances which occurred in a particular set of conditions (Smith 1978, 74-75). While fictive discourses invite us to interpret them according to a wide range of possible meanings, natural discourse, according to Smith, is frequently didactic, contextually purposeful, intending to convey a particular set of impressions and effects on the reader in a given situation. Fictive discourse is thus more detachable from its context, more self-contained, able to reach a wider audience. It is hard to see Smith's distinction as anything but the repetition of an old hierarchy between oral and written texts. Fictive utterances, like natural ones, occur in a particular context, a particular language, a particular historical moment, yet neither is limited to that context. Any linguistic transaction, in whatever context, will contain intertextual elements; every utterance, if it is heard by the listener, has the possibility of being transmitted to a third listener, outside that particular context.[18] Smith's argument is particularly problematic in the age

of electronic media, when the transmission of "natural" discourse is, if anything, accessible to a wider audience, since it is the mode of discourse privileged in radio and television, with its immediacy and mass audiences.

In addition, it seems to me, it is no longer tenable to argue, in a post-structuralist framework, that literature is universal and apolitical, while natural discourse is not. There have been too many analytical links made between psychoanalytical, socio-economic and literary structures ever to see them as wholly separate again. Looked at semiotically, "literature" is not separate from other signifying practices; it is a particular mode of production, but it is like every other semiotic practice, part of a larger "social text" (Kristeva 1986, 87). Jeannette Armstrong, a Canadian Okanagan Indian writer living in British Columbia, describes her purpose in writing, as a woman who inherited an oral Native tradition but writes for an English-speaking literate audience, as follows:

> My responsibility is to strive for correctness in my presentation, correctness of purpose and accuracy in my use of words in my attempt to transcend the simple actuality of the things I have seen, to the image of those same things in the context of my entire history and the sacred body of knowledge that we, as a people, have acquired. (Armstrong 1990, 28)

She describes the way words have been used to destroy, to cause

pain, to cause divisions between people, between individuals and races, and between the sexes. Her own purpose, says Armstrong, is to testify to this "colossal misuse of words," and create a healing process for her children and her people. There is no distinction made between natural and fictive utterance in Armstrong's approach. Making up stories, in Armstrong's view, and telling stories that really happened are interchangeable for the purposes of the reading act, in that both involve imagination in dialogue with experience, both engage an audience, and both have real, political ramifications in the real world. It may well be, as Barbara Godard argues, that the whole idea of elevating "literary" and "textual" utterances above other, less formal modes of discourse in the Western cultural tradition, had more to do with establishing and maintaining a hierarchy of values, than with any inherent formal properties in the discourses themselves - with the covert purpose of devaluing the kinds of linguistic exchanges common to women and people of other races, in favour of professional letters, accessible mainly to men (Godard, "Talking About Ourselves" 5).

On the contrary, we might argue, with Walter Ong, that "orality" as a cultural mode offers certain advantages to its practitioners, including greater access to the unconscious, and an inherent practical sense of the connection between the speech act and the community (Ong 73-82), qualities which writers coming newly out of orality often strive to retain in their texts. You can see this in Armstrong's writing and also in Marchessault's. My own writing probably falls into this category, including the way

this thesis has been constructed.

"Autobiography" and the newly dubbed "life writing" are genres which subvert the traditional distinction between natural and fictive discourse by foregrounding the concerns typical of the natural speaker, conveying information, telling what happened, making sense of a particular series of life experiences, as the organizing structure of the fiction. Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* was published as autobiography; it received the Pulitzer Prize for non-fiction, yet many of us read it exactly as we would read fiction. In fact most of us refer to it as a novel. The same could be said for Ondaatje's *Running in the Family,* and a whole host of other traditional and contemporary texts. According to Godard, what makes a storyteller's account "biographical" and not just the relation of events, is the speaker coming to terms with her own experience, as somehow shaping her identity (Godard, "Talking About Ourselves" 20). However, we can imagine a writer resisting coming to terms with his/her identity, as for example Ondaatje does in much of his writing, preferring to let the moment speak for itself in random fashion, a quality he has been much praised and criticized for as a result (Solecki 1985, Mukherjee 1988). On the other hand, a writer like Daphne Marlatt claims, as would Jeannette Armstrong, that most women's writing is "life writing," in the sense of "writing for your life," making sense of the disparate parts of our lives, and coming to see their connectedness (Marlatt 1990). This is true, Marlatt would argue, for all people who have been rendered absent or other in the dominant narrative tradition. Enacting the self, for

marginalized people, can happen only through "the energetic imagining of all that we are." Text thus becomes context, and narrative becomes "interaction with what surrounds us." Writing for life, Marlatt insists, is intensely political, in that it "ditches dualistic polarities [and] dodges the hierarchies" (Marlatt 1990, 17).

Theoretically, then, there is not much justification for reading oral texts in transcription differently from other literary productions; in both cases we need to pay attention to the text as well as its context. (The transcription, of course, *is* a written text, bearing the traces of orality in qualitative and stylistic markings, whose impact on the narrative might make an interesting futher study.) In this particular study of maternal narrative, we can make further connections between the contextual shaping of these interviews/stories and the larger, cultural framework of Western narrative, in which the mother story was marginalized, silenced, and otherwise omitted. "To be excluded from a literature that claims to define one's identity is to experience a peculiar form of powerlessness," writes Judith Fetterley," - not simply the powerlessness which derives from not seeing one's experience articulated, clarified, and legitimized in art, but more significantly the powerlessness which results from the endless division of self against self, the consequence of the invocation [in this case] to identify as male while being reminded that to be male....is to be *not female*" (Fetterley xiii). These words are particularly apt in the case of the *Mennonite Childbirth Stories* being looked at here. The Mennonite tradition

has been almost exclusively male-defined in the public and social sense. The telling of these stories thus represents the breaking of literally centuries of silence, and therefore powerlessness, among Mennonite women, on a subject central to their experience of being female, the subject of childbirth. The fact that these stories were told "privately," to one woman with a tape recorder, only serves to emphasize their subversive nature as social and literary text. Most of these women would not consider themselves writers in any sense, most would not dare to speak out publicly on this or any other issue. Yet in the context of Katherine Martens' sympathetic listening ear, they are able to articulate to an amazing degree - for all the world to hear - the reality of their experience in childbirth, and the way it differed from the expectations imposed on them by doctors and other male professionals.

In her concluding essay to the project, Martens describes the interviewing process as an intensely personal exchange: "If I was distracted by worries about the tape recorder or any such thing," she writes, "it always detracted from our rapport" (Martens 207). She describes the pains she took to make sure the conversation would be interactive and dialogic rather than judgmental or objectively scientific:

> The single most important necessary ingredient to make a successful tape was for me to enter into a relationship with the interviewee....I concentrated on understanding each woman but not judging her....I was open to whatever

> a woman wanted to talk about....I did not intend to be coldly objective, but to be a living person who listened and responded to the story. (Martens 207)

Martens' approach differs profoundly from the traditional anthropological approach to collecting oral material, a fact which was made very clear on the Manitoba Writers' Guild Conference panel in 1989, where she spoke along with anthropologist W.C. Wolfart. Wolfart talked about narrative patterns in the Cree oral tradition. His approach was impersonal and analytical. Someone in the audience asked Wolfart how the Cree Indians felt about his academic use of their material. Wolfart's reply was, "That's a political question," implying that the politics of gathering oral material could somehow be divorced from the material itself, and that the listener's ownership of the material unquestionably took priority over the teller's claims. For Martens, on the other hand, the "politics" of the exchange is central to the narrative itself. In fact, she is careful to examine her own motives in the interviewing process, since they inevitably impinge on the conversation:

> A very personal problem for me was determining why I was going to tape a particular person and whether I had ulterior motives in choosing them. Invariably something went wrong in an interview in which I had not thought through my motives, though I would not want to say there was a direct connection, it began to feel very ominous to

me. (Martens 197)

The context for Martens' *Mennonite Childbirth Stories* is thus both private and public, individual and communal, and the text, insofar as it represents the lives of women coming self-consciously into narrative, into self-identified, woman-identified being, as equally fictional and "natural." I am reminded here of Mary O'Brien's claim that the moment of childbearing, more than any other, represents the coming together of "nature" and "culture." According to O'Brien, developing "reproductive consciousness" on a global scale involves first of all paying attention to this crucial moment in which historical continuity is mediated and reproduced, through the woman's involuntary/ intentional act of giving birth - in contrast to the man's alienation from nature/history from the moment of ejaculation (O'Brien 1986). Equally important in this context, is the act of community performed between speaker and listener. In a culture in which women were traditionally separated from their families at a young age in order to get married and have children, and in which absolute loyalty to their husbands and children prevented them from establishing any real rapport with one another, the conversation initiated by the interviewer with one woman after another represents a profound restructuring of female relations in the Mennonite community, along feminist lines.

Martens uses the image of midwife to describe her role as listener. This is a particularly rich metaphor, given the context. "I began to see the process of telling our stories as similar to

that of giving birth, which is unique for every woman," reflects Martens. "I saw myself as the midwife who was there to be with her but not to dictate the structure and form her story should take." In the stories themselves, the role of midwife is contrasted, in several instances, with that of doctor. Evelyn Paetkau describes the difference as follows:

> putting the mother in full charge, and yet with all the backup and the resources there, and that it's just a very natural course of events and also that the woman follows her intuitions, you know, there's no set guidelines, and I remember her telling me that one time a mother was going through quite a long labour, I think, a difficult labour, and all of a sudden the mother said, "You know, I feel like taking a bath." And Darlene [the midwife] got the bath ready for her, and the baby was born in the bathtub, underneath the water. And it was just sort of, you follow how you feel, whereas that just never ever happens, I mean that's just the opposite of the hospital — [KM: Where you follow *their* routine.] Yes, what the doctor wants. (Paetkau/Martens 339-340)

The trope of midwife not only highlights the personal and interactive, non-interventive nature of the interview process, but also implies a profound revisioning of the way we think about the narrative process in general. For Martens, the process is dialogic and communal. Unlike the medical doctor who puts himself at the

center of the drama of childbirth by rendering the mother passive and inert, intervening with drugs and forceps and whatever else he thinks might speed up the process, unlike the doctor of anthropology who "masters" languages and cultural events by categorizing and analyzing them for his own purposes, the interviewer here sees her role as assisting in bringing forth stories out of women's experiences, in their own voices. She is not the "expert" but a listener, a receiver. Her document is not analysis but a conversation. The protest against the cultural appropriation of "voice," by Native and other non-European women writers in Canada and the U.S., has been made along similar lines. Story-telling, according to this argument, whose proponents include Jeannette Armstrong, Lee Maracle, Dionne Brand, Annharte, Joy Asham Fedorick and Paula Gunn Allen, is not analagous to the scientific process of observing and recording data without regard to the feelings and wishes of the beings under scrutiny, but is rather analagous to such personal and intimate exchanges as a grandmother speaking with her grandchild, or a person learning to listen to animals and trees (Allen 1986, 7).

Teresa de Lauretis has posited the term "experience" to account for the difference women (and other marginalized people) bring to language in the Western European tradition, which in so many ways denied them subjectivity. What she means by "experience" is the ongoing process by which subjectivity is constructed semiotically and historically, through the continuous engagement of a self or subject in social reality (de Lauretis

1982, 82). This concept is useful in describing the differences Martens and her subjects bring to the interview process and the narratives they construct, which in every case run counter to the male-centered definitions imposed on them socially. Most of the women in *Mennonite Childbirth Stories* do not have access to a symbolic structure that acknowledges and validates their experiences of childbirth. The older women, particularly, have little access to any texts which name their experiences. Pregnancy was rarely spoken about, even between sisters, or mothers and daughters. Martens refers frequently to the mode of "secrecy" surrounding childbirth in the Mennonite community, even inside the family. Some of the women interviewed have access to extensive medical information through nurses' training, personal reading, and in one case through European midwife training, though most of the literature runs counter to their subjective experience. Many of the older women entered the experience of childbirthing with little knowledge or information whatsoever. Maria Reimer, who raised ten children, describes her lack of information as a young bride, as follows:

> Before I was married, I knew very little about "being in the other time," how do you say it, 'pregnant.' When my younger siblings were born, we had to go to the neighbours', that was a big treat, and we didn't know for how long, but in the morning we would come home and there would be a baby! But when we were already engaged, my husband went to Chicago and worked there

for a year, and during that time my eldest sister talked to me about "other circumstances," about pregnancy. And she said too, among other things, that the baby moved, in my stomach! (laughs) And that seemed so grotesque to me, I found it so repugnant, and I thought, Oh, I am never going to get married! I would never get married! That was too terrible. And for a while I wished that Peter would never return from Chicago. But we were engaged, we had made a commitment to each other, and I knew, when he came back we would get married, but it just seemed too terrible! And so I was always between those two: I wished that he would come back; I know I will have talked about it with my other sisters, about pregnancy, but this is what I remember so very clearly. And I will have, I think, talked about it with my friends, but we knew much less than what they now know from earliest childhood on! We didn't know that. And, well, he came back in August, and on the first of November, 1924, we got married. And not even a year later, just ten and a half months later, we had a baby. And that was terrible. (laughs) (Reimer/Martens 208)

Maria Reimer goes on to describe a gruesome, terrible birthgiving, with much pain and bleeding, some of it no doubt caused by the doctor's method of delivery: heavy doses of chloroform over two days ("every once in a while he would let me regain consciousness"), and tearing out the afterbirth, inch by

inch, with his hand. His doctor's gown, she remembers, was completely red instead of white. She prefaces this account with an expression of narrative ambivalence: "I don't even know if I really want to say it or not." We can posit several reasons for her ambivalence: the tradition of silence and secrecy on the subject of childbirthing, fear of reliving a painful memory, inarticulate anger at the doctor's mode of assistance, and impatience with a social structure which gave so very little support to women in the difficult work of maternal labour. We can imagine silence as one of the most important social strategies available to women who have no other recourse to changing the system: by not naming the horror of medical practices around childbirth and the immense suffering inflicted on women as a result, they are "protecting" their daughters and sisters from the experience in advance, so that they will have the courage to enter marriage and undergo the same horrors themselves. They are also protecting themselves from feeling all the negative emotions attached to their experience of childbirth at the hands of a medical doctor. Maria Reimer does not criticize the doctor or his method; she probably does not have access to other methods for comparison. She reserves her criticism for her mother's presence, "my mother was there, too, but she shouldn't have been. She should not have been there. She screamed too!" (Reimer/Martens 208) She also criticizes her husband:

> ...sometimes I thought, Oh, if only he could understand me a bit better! He had authority over me, but if only he

> could understand me better! But what can you expect from a man who has never been pregnant? or has never been a woman? And a woman is built differently. (Reimer/Martens 213)

Criticism of a husband in Mennonite culture is, in my estimation, rare.[19] The only other woman who criticizes her husband in the stories included here is Anna Fullerton, who married outside the community and is now divorced, and then she only refers to the difficult time she had with him obliquely. Maria Reimer is surprisingly forthright in this regard; however, she tempers her criticism with the following comment, which allows her to express disappointment in men while at the same time accommodating to the *status quo*:

> I sometimes think a woman should not expect too much from a man. She can love him, be submissive to him, and make him happy, but she should not expect too much; if she feels she has to pour out her heart, she has to do that with another woman, a trustworthy, devout woman, and they can understand each other better. That's how I often thought over the years. And that is what I have also experienced. (Reimer/Martens 213)

Most of the women, on the other hand, with the exception of Maria Reimer, are outspoken in their critique of the Mennonite church and Western medical practice, and the way these

institutions have mistreated women. Of course, as Katherine Martens reminds us in the "Conclusion," the women speaking here represent "those who have made their peace with life and can talk about the past without overwhelming regret or too much pain" (Martens 205). Martens describes meeting with half a dozen women who changed their mind about being interviewed after their initial conversation, citing "reasons of privacy or variations on that theme. They were not inclined," adds Martens, "to disturb the past which brought feelings of sadness or depression." One elderly woman told her, "If I can't tell the whole truth I would rather not tell the story" (Martens 204). We can therefore imagine a second narrative, running alongside these stories and in counterpoint to them, in which the women either have not found accommodating strategies for their anger and pain, or in which they've accommodated so much that their voices have been suppressed altogether. This second narrative is an important one to remember when reading these stories, indeed, it is an echo which informs all of Western literature, a gap in the cultural text we've inherited, the background against which the mother story must be reconstructed.

Aggie Klassen, who grew up in Russia and trained as a midwife in Germany during the war, offers informed criticism of North American medical practice in the area of childbirth, based on her professional and cultural experience:

> You see, a midwife was judged by her good performance by having the woman bear the child without tears. Yes.

> It had to go a slow way, and so very few women had the problem of tearing, or they didn't cut. Except on very special occasions, and I was really surprised that that was allowed here, the fastest way, and that wasn't done the fastest way but the safest way, for the woman, for the later years, that could affect her later. (Klassen/Martens 232-233)

She does not say "I was angry," or "I was appalled," even though she explains with some knowledge what the dire later effects of unnecessary medical intervention could be. Martens pushes her to talk about her own experience of childbirth in Canada, asking questions such as, did the doctor encourage her to breastfeed? Aggie Klassen replies that she couldn't breastfeed, no, probably because of the anaesthetic she was given: "my doctor, he didn't give me any answer for that....he was a family doctor...he should have known a little about it." This comment is followed, however, by self-criticism, another common accommodating strategy for oppressed women: "But our children were all big, so they needed more milk than maybe I had" (Klassen/Martens 235). It takes enormous strength and courage to insist on the validity of one's knowledge and experience against a powerful symbolic system designed to invalidate it, even with a sympathetic listener, even at a distance and in retrospect!

Anna Fullerton criticizes her doctor for the way he talked:

> once he said, "You know, I might have to break your

> tailbone." Oh, that did not go over very well. I think what he meant was during the delivery...I found out later that that was his way, that he would talk before he thought many times. He wasn't thinking of his patients. (Fullerton/Martens 247)

She remembers the kindness of one of the nurses in the hospital, by comparison:

> she would come and talk with me and hold my hand and I just appreciated that so much....I thought that was very normal, you know, for a woman to need another woman close by and comfort her and talk with her and hold her hand and rub her back. (Fullerton/Martens 247-8)

Later, she describes the near-death ordeal of giving birth to her third child. She was hemorrhaging badly, and the doctors were busy with someone else downstairs.

> After a while I could feel the life go out of me, starting at the tips of my toes, and I wasn't scared, it was a very peaceful feeling, but I had just had a baby, I had had a girl, I had two children at home, I didn't want to die! I wasn't ready to die....I thought he would never get there, I thought he would never get there, I thought I would die before he got there. And nobody seemed to be in any big panic. (Fullerton/Martens 267-8)

Afterward, she adds, "I was — annoyed isn't the word, I was concerned about that, how I could have gone just like that, and they had not prepared for an emergency; at least that's how I felt." The word "concerned" here is startling, given the context of a life-threatening ordeal, and suggests anger, held carefully in check, against the requirements of patriarchy. Again it is a "warmhearted, compassionate woman" nurse on the ward who helps her through the experience by staying with her.

Despite their rhetorical stance of politeness and restraint, the women whose stories are included here offer substantial, detailed criticisms of medical and hospital practices. Peggy Regehr comments on the helplessness of the mother during the birthing process - being strapped onto a table, being excluded from decisionmaking, and being drugged with little choice in the matter (Regehr/Martens 278). Peggy Regehr comments further on the enforced distance between infant and mother during the first days after birth (Regehr/Martens 278). Edith Klassen speaks critically about the doctors' advice about breastfeeding on strict four-hour schedules (Klassen/Martens 297). Aggie Klassen and Peggy Regehr complain about the lack of information about proper breast care and in some cases, outright dissuasion against breastfeeding by medical professionals (Klassen/Martens 234, Regehr/Martens 279). Robyn Epp is very articulate about the confusion and disagreement about appropriate treatment she encountered among hospital staff, and the brutal impersonality of hospital routine (Epp/Martens 310). Most of the women also

complain about the endless, isolating labour of childrearing following the momentous occasion of childbirth.

Anna Fullerton reflects on this problem as follows:

> later on, when I found it hard having children around me so much, and having to discipline them mostly on my own, take care of them on my own, I often thought that I should never have had children, I wasn't really a fit mother. I wasn't patient enough, I needed more room for myself. Possibly if I did it again, I would not have had children. (Fullerton/Martens 271-2)

Maria Reimer, on the other hand, with characteristic humour, jokes about the endless labour of childrearing: "I have sometimes said my profession was (laughs) washing dishes and washing diapers! That was my profession! (laughs)" (Reimer/Martens 209). She describes the pleasure of seeing the "long clothesline full of swaying laundry, it was a real joy! But in the winter," she adds, more soberly,

> it wasn't such a pleasure, we had to hang it outside and it was like boards, the sheets and the diapers, we would bring these stiff boards inside and then we'd put up a line inside and hang it up there and usually by morning it was dry....We also boiled the laundry, so the stains would all come out, we boiled them on top of the cookstove, the white wash. (Reimer/Martens 209)

For the younger women, whose families are smaller and who have more access to education and household utilities, the bigger burden is the loss of financial and social independence following their children's birth. Robyn Epp reflects, "Sometimes I wonder now, why did I have kids?! because they're hard to, I didn't expect raising children to be quite as difficult at times as it is" (Epp/Martens 324).

Very few of the women, however, perhaps with the exception of Anna Fullerton, actually regret the experience of childbirth. Most refer to it as a transformative experience, despite the long years of unpaid labour it engenders. Maria Reimer describes the transformation as follows:

> The person becomes renewed. Somehow it's an experience that I can't quite explain, but it is a 'renewal experience.' A joyous experience. Even though it was difficult, but your whole body is refreshed, renewed. And even the, how do I say it, the relationship with the husband, as if it's something completely new. (Reimer/Martens 210)

It is impressive and amazing to see how clear and articulate each woman is about the truth of her own experience, without much narrative support other than Martens' sympathetic listening ear and occasional prompting. The text they construct individually and together engages with the official, received language of

Western culture, but runs profoundly counter to it. Maria Reimer uses Biblical language to express her experience in several instances, but it is difficult for us to see their application as anything but a private interpretation. For example:

> When our Peter was born, between the labour pains, I suddenly saw the heavens open. There was a circle, and I could see directly into heaven! And then the other labour pains, they were also long and difficult, I saw Jesus looking down, from the edge; from the place where I could see in, Jesus was looking down. And that was very joyous for me, it strengthened me, and gave me courage to push more....And with Henry, I had those two boys, with those two the Lord wonderfully, he gave me a Bible verse, I didn't even realize that I knew it by memory: *"Wir sind sein Werk geschaffen, in Christo Jesu zu guten Werken."* (For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...) I didn't even know how I was supposed to apply it to the birth. But it just came to me, through and through. *"Wir sind <u>sein</u> Werk geschaffen <u>in</u> Christo Jesu zu guten Werken."* (Reimer/Martens 209-10)

Instead of making narrative connections between Maria Reimer's own experience and the larger narrative and cultural framework of the Bible, this account actually underscores her alienation from it, since we are unable to see anything in these images and verses except the extremity of her pain, and the desperate need

for consolation, however irrelevant the language for it might be.

Robyn Epp uses the language of contemporary Western medical practice to describe the hospital procedures surrounding the birth of her children. This is because, as a diabetic, she has had to verse herself in medical lingo. However, when it comes to describing the emotional reality of the experience, she uses colloquial language which contrasts sharply to the impersonality of professional medical discourse:

> ...there was this one man, he sticks out in my mind. He did a vaginal check, and he didn't use lubricant! And he's, you know, he was really rough. My gynecologist came in, my obstetrician came in, and the nurse handed him just this disinfectant, and he said "Where's the lubricant?! I can't do this without lubricant!" and I just thought, no wonder that other thing hurt so bad! And I was here, I felt like I was just being pressed against the wall, and it hurt so bad, because I'd only had one before, like they just never did them routinely, like my mom said she had them routinely, well I didn't, because they were doing fetal assessment, that sort of thing, they didn't do them, and this guy was so inconsiderate! (Epp/Martens 312)

Peggy Regehr uses the language of social work and feminism to describe her activities in the Mennonite community:

> ...while I was dealing with issues of women in leadership

> within the church, I was also dealing with other issues, such as spouse abuse and abortion and various other kinds of issues that affect women within the church as much as they affect women in society.
> (Regehr/Martens 285)

Despite her confident articulation of feminist issues in the church, however (for which, she informs us, she is presently losing her job in the church), Peggy Regehr remembers childbirth as an "uncomfortable experience" due to complete lack of information and communication with other people on the subject. What we hear most loudly in these accounts is each woman's isolation, within a culture which professes to hold the mother in high esteem, but in fact, gives very little support for her labour. On the one hand, then, there is the received cultural text, the Bible, folk and family customs, and professional information from a variety of sources; on the other hand, there is, reluctantly and passionately, the reality of each woman's own experience, running directly counter to the dominant text. Mother stories, these women show, even in the case of devout, Mennonite, domesticated women willing to conform, to practice "obedience" to male authority and full-hearted allegiance to the "family," are revolutionary in shape.

Two stories in this collection stand apart from the rest, the one for the extreme hardship depicted in it, the other for its utopian, self-directed vision. Aggie Klassen's account of growing up in Siberia under extremely harsh, prison camp conditions, is

heart rending. At one point she describes foraging in the forest for food, using potato peelings found in a garbage dump and sometimes grass, for soup. As Aggie Klassen describes the experience, "it wasn't enough for living and not enough for dying" (Klassen/Martens 227). Her father died of a heart attack two years after they arrived in Siberia. Her mother, Aggie Klassen tells us, died of hunger. She and her sister, ages 13 and 19, decide to escape a few months later, and do so by selling their few belongings and running away through the forest. After escaping from the police on foot, they buy a ride with a trucker, who takes them through the guarded border. Their most precious belonging is their "Mother's golden ring," which they eventually sell for food and train tickets to a neighbouring city, where they find relatives to stay with. A macabre detail in this tragic mother story is that the day before they leave Siberia, the girls decide to visit the mother's grave. They quickly realize that dogs have dug up her body, and eaten the flesh. All that's left is a pile of bones. Aggie Klassen's syntax breaks down in describing this memory:

> before we left, early the day before, we went to see, to my mother's grave, and here we realized that the dogs had opened the grave which was very, which wasn't as deep as we have buried our people, the bones of my mother just left, and the rest were, had the dogs, the meat, I mean the mother's body was gone.
> (Klassen/Martens 223)

What is there to say about such an experience, even at a distance? Aggie Klassen merely continues, "So we early in the morning, we left before it was dawn and we walked about for almost three days." This is a scene in which the motif of the absent mother and the military conquest which enforces her absence, we might say, is played out with a vengeance.

The second story which stands out in this collection is Evelyn Paetkau's account of delivering a child in her home, in Altona, Manitoba, by choice, attended by her husband and a midwife. This story glows in comparison with the rest. Unlike the other women who remember their childbirth experiences with pain and bitterness due to mistreatment by hospital staff and procedures, Evelyn Paetkau describes her home birth experience as "very special," even though there was some anxiety in anticipating the event, including lack of support from family and friends, and even though the midwife didn't actually arrive until after the baby was born. Evelyn Paetkau reflects on the difference between hospital and home birth as follows:

> [T]he whole childbirth process is a very natural process, it's not like a pathology, which the doctors' approach seems to treat it as. And the other thing that we really felt with Darlene was that I was in control, you know, and that she was there to assist me, but that I was the one that was making the choices and doing the work, in a sense. (Paetkau/Martens 339)

Interestingly, Evelyn Paetkau makes a connection between international politics and the possibility of home births. When her mother pressures her to have a third child, she tells us, she replied, "Off the top of my head, 'Not unless there was nuclear disarmament, world nuclear disarmament, or I could have a home birth (laughs) would I have another baby' " (Paetkau/Martens 330).

Paetkau's statement may have been made facetiously, but in fact it cuts to the heart of one of the basic metaphors of Western culture. Nancy Huston, in an article entitled "The Matrix of War: Mothers and Heroes," exposes one of the recurring epithets in Western male discourse: "How long will men make war? - As long as women have children" (Huston 1985, 153). Huston interprets this statement to mean that "men make war *because* women have children." She goes on to delineate how completely and consistently men have appropriated the language of childbirth and motherhood to describe the exploits of war: "How many revolutions," she asks, "have been compared to 'labor pains,' violent convulsions preceding the 'birth' of a new society?" (Huston 168) Huston attributes the metaphorical association between war and childbirth to a competitive attitude in males, who feel alienated and excluded from the childbirth process and therefore attempt to construct a narrative of male heroism based on the reversal of the reproductive cycle. Most mythical war heroes in the Western tradition, she points out, were not born of woman. Much of the cultural productivity of men in our history has consisted in imitating and controlling and obliterating the

reproductive labour of women. (I'm reminded of the recent Gulf War, in which the tears of women whose sons and husbands were killed in the war were loudly celebrated in the media along with the prowess of the military, as though making wives and mothers weep over the negation and destruction of their nurturing labour were indeed part of the project of the war.) Huston concludes her article with the dire warning that unless men stop making war and women stop having so many babies, the world will collapse under the weight of the nuclear and demographic explosions which currently threaten us.

Paetkau, I think, is imagining a new world scenario, in which the energy of war is converted into "reproductive consciousness," so that the labour of childbearing and childrearing can be recognized as central to human life on this planet, along with the caring use of natural resources. War, on the other hand, will become obsolete as a means of proving male valour, once men can begin to see themselves as supportive companions in this process, along with midwives, instead of as competitors against and controllers of the regenerative birth process. In his sense, her narrative of home birth represents a moving episode in the practice of "disarmament." Brian, her husband, and father of the three children, participates as supportive (if somewhat anxious) companion, and the baby is born without drugs or physical violence, and without the kind of institutional alienation common in hospitals. Most crucially, perhaps, the mother is allowed to remain independent and in charge of her own labour. She is not rendered helpless or docile or humiliated or silenced in any way

during the birth process. (Evelyn Paetkau recalls a touching moment in this regard, shortly after the birth, when the midwife arrives: "Brian said something about his involvement, I can't remember what it was, and she just in a very gentle way reminded him that I had delivered the baby (laughter)..." Paetkau/Martens 339). We can imagine this mother continuing to act in politically conscious, independent and responsible ways after this experience. In this way Evelyn Paetkau's narrative contrasts sharply with that of the older women represented here, whose identities were literally swallowed up by the trauma of childbirth, their lack of choice in the reproductive process, and the subsequent endless labour of childrearing resulting from far too many pregnancies and births. Like the other women interviewed in *Mennonite Childbirth Stories*, Evelyn Paetkau wanted children but not too many, not enough to jeopardize her identity as an independent adult human being. Unlike the others, she seems to have found enough resources to help her practice this vision from the moment of conception onward. In this sense, her story represents a profound new beginning in the evolution of "maternal narrative" on a personal, practical scale.

Some Concluding Thoughts

The mother stories by Canadian/Québecoise women writers represented in this study show some remarkable similarities, for all their variety of cultural backgrounds and subjective differences and narrative concerns. All, for example, agree on the fact of the mother's oppression and silencing under patriarchy. All share in the political/artistic struggle to bring her back into story, and hence into public, social discourse. Each of these writers also, in her own way, affirms the metaphorical (and biological) connection between maternal narrative and concern for children and the environment. Each envisions, in more and less explicit ways, a society in which the maternal will no longer be feared and silenced and despised but rather, protected and emulated. At the same time, these writers imagine, maternity will come to be regarded as a conscious, responsible option for women rather than biological and/or patriarchally imposed necessity. These common concerns point to the possibility of genuine cross-cultural, cross-gendered conversation in this country and elsewhere, a dialogue in which it will be possible to say, with Hélène Cixous, "I will look for the other where s/he is without trying to bring everything back to myself" (Cixous 1981,

55 n. 5). They also look forward to a future in which the world is still standing: in which enough women and men will have acquired enough *reproductive consciousness* to begin to reverse the destructive trends in technology and medicine and international politics which threaten us today.

Jovette Marchessault's Aboriginal, shamanic vision of the cosmic Grandmothers offers a startling challenge to readers who have been educated in the European and Oriental narrative traditions. While it takes tremendous effort for non-Aboriginal writers, like Laurence, Marlatt, Kogawa and Lee to construct maternal narrative, to stay with the *mother's* point of view and interests instead of lapsing into the daughter's and/or father's, as our patriarchal traditions have taught us to do, Marchessault very easily, it seems, ranges over the entire cosmos in search of maternal and grand-maternal figures, and finds them in every rock and star and tree. There is not the same struggle to remember and revision the possibility of mother stories. The construction of female subjectivity in Marchessault's fiction very naturally falls back on larger-than-life, grand-maternal figures which together make up a portrait of her cultural history and, she would say, the universe itself. This is so despite her grim depiction of maternity under the aegis of the Catholic Church, and the post-war poverty of inner city Montreal, and Marchessault's own professed rejection of maternity as life choice. While writers like Laurence and Marlatt obliquely point toward a forgotten women's history as a model for reconstructing the mother story in our time, in dialogue with the concerns of

contemporary feminism (including ecofeminism and the "new science"), Marchessault can call on the relatively recent memory of pre-colonial Aboriginal culture (in addition to these other modes of thought), to assist her in revisioning the universe in feminine terms.

Marchessault's exuberant grand-maternal vision tends to corroborate Paula Gunn Allen's contention that:

> The physical and cultural genocide of American Indian tribes is and was mostly about patriarchal fear of gynocracy....The colonizers saw (and rightly) that as long as women held unquestioned power of such magnitude, attempts at total conquest of the continents were bound to fail....the invaders have exerted every effort to remove Indian women from every position of authority...to ensure that no American and few American Indians would remember that gynocracy was the primary social order of Indian America prior to 1800. (Allen 1986, 3).

The same could perhaps be said about the pagan cultures of pre-colonized Europe and the patriarchal agenda which ensured that the goddess religions and stories did not survive any official histories, a view strongly held by such feminist scholars as Mary Daly and Riane Eisler. Marlatt broaches the question of a more egalitarian, and woman-centered, pre-Christian European society pre-dating our written records in *How Hug a Stone*, in her description of a visit to the old pre-English monuments at

Avebury. While the narrative concerns of the text take Marlatt away from further speculation on this subject, and back to questions of signification and subjectivity, the possibility of a cultural memory pre-dating patriarchy with its imperialist imperatives lingers beyond the pages of the book, and offers one visionary model for bridging the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal thinking (like Marchessault's sunken Atlantis), through a shared (albeit fragmented) common memory of a more maternally centered time.

One of the motifs that interests me in the mother stories under discussion here is the shared notion that maternal subjectivity implies also its opposite, the anti-maternal. In order to be a mother, consciously, intentionally, and responsibly, these writers suggest, women must be able to claim their own subjectivity, prior to and apart from the needs of the child. Adoption and abortion are two related alternative motifs, the one signifying a gap between the act of childbirth and the act of childrearing, and the other a gap between conception and childbirth which, according to the writers represented here (with the exception of a few of the Mennonite women interviewed in *Mennonite Childbirth Stories*), can and ought to be negotiated intentionally, by choice, by the women whose bodies are centrally in question. The fact that these particular gaps in the reproductive process have been the site of much controversy in patriarchal cultures indicates how central the question of maternal subjectivity is to the construction of society. It would be interesting to look, further, at mother stories which extend

the notion of motherhood, beyond the parameters of biological maternity, to adoptive and surrogate mothers, e.g. Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?*, Lois Braun's *The Pumpkin Eaters*, and Marian Engels' *Lunatic Villas*. Magdalene Redekop refers to Munro's maternal figures as clowns, mothers in disguise (Redekop 1992), which implies a whole range of displacement strategies we might examine in women's fiction around the mother's problematic subjectivity. Infertility in women raises another intersting question: how are stories of women who choose not to have children, or who can't have any, situated in relation to maternal narrative? Susan Knutson's idea of "symbolic motherhood" opens another rich area of investigation, in suggesting that the act of social mentoring between women is a maternal (rather than sisterly) activity, a notion which explodes the narrow parameters of maternal subjectivity in Western culture wide apart. Once it is generally recognized and understood that mothers are subjects with their own stories, we can also begin to listen for narratives in which mothers have relationships with other mothers - this is another of the tragic, unwritten stories of Western culture which the writers represented here hint at obliquely.

A further question raised by this study, particularly by Marlatt's vision of a secret women's tradition running alongside and counter to the official history of Europe and North America, and the *Mennonite Childbirth Stories* with their strong evocation of a women's narrative tradition, however covert and unspoken, is whether indeed there is an ongoing women's cultural history we

might investigate in the Western tradition as antecedents to the mother stories being written in our time. If so, my sense of the mother's "absence" in Western narrative (shared by such critics as Marianne Hirsch, Luce Irigaray and Adrienne Rich) needs significant revision. I am thinking, for example, of such uncanonized texts as Margery Kempe's and Alice Thornton's autobiographies, and the tradition of quirky animal stories passed down through the generations as bedtime stories told to children, with their wily, crafty mother figures able to outwit tricksters and thieves, e.g. The Little Red Hen, The Mother Goat and Her Seven Kids (my own favourite as a child). The whole question of orality as a characteristic facet of women's cultural experience, and how it impacts on women's cultural production, also needs further clarification.

It would be interesting to look further at "failed mother" stories in contemporary fiction, those mothers who went crazy or had too many children or were otherwise disabled and/or unable to defend their daughters against violence, and how their maternal subjectivity shapes the narrative, e.g. Sandra Birdsell's *Agassiz Stories*, Margaret Laurence's *A Jest of God*, and Sylvia Fraser's *Pandora*. The newly popular genre of incest writing might prove a particularly fruitful area of investigation in this regard, including such examples as Sylvia Fraser's *My Father's House* and Elly Danica's *Don't*. My concern, however, would be to avoid setting up these failed mothers, bearers of too much responsibility and too little social support, as post-Freudian figures of blame, thus re-inscribing the patriarchal icon of the

all-powerful mother who must be killed.

Another question raised by this study is the iconography of the mother's body. How is the maternal body represented, brought into fiction? The mother's body, as Magdalene Redekop explains in her article, "The Pickling of the Mennonite Madonna," has often been imaged (when it is present at all) as grotesquely other, an archetypal screen, a big white "mound of maternity" on which we might project our needs and desires (Redekop 1992, 100). Examples include the Grandmother in Sara Stambaugh's *I Hear the Reaper's Song* and Prin in Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners.* If we think of the mother, however, as the subject of her own story rather than unconscious vessel of others' needs, as speaking voice situated *inside* the maternal body, how is her body to be portrayed? *Mennonite Childbirth Stories*, along with Laurence's description of Morag giving birth to Pique in *The Diviners* and Marlatt's depiction of childbirth in *What Matters*, are perhaps as graphic and specific portraits in this regard as we have in contemporary Canadian fiction, and it is surely appropriate that the inescapably physical, intensely challenging experience of childbirth be the site at which the maternal body re-enter the imaginative consciousness of Western fiction in new and powerful ways.

Appendix A

Mennonite Childbirth Stories
Katherine Martens in Conversation with Seven Women

Maria Reimer, Steinbach
Aganetha (Aggie) Klassen, Winnipeg
Anna Toews Fullerton, Winnipeg
Peggy Regehr, Winnipeg
Edith Klassen, Winnipeg
Robyn Warkentin Epp, Boissevain
Evelyn Rempel Paetkau, Carman

(From "Childbirth in the Mennonite Community: An Oral History Project", Mennonite Heritage Centre, 1989)

Prefatory Notes by Katherine Martens, 1989

There are 53 tapes representing 42 persons. The following consent forms are missing the initials in the restrictions section: Sara Kroeker, F.P. Doyle, Elizabeth Thiessen, Anna Fullerton, Robyn Epp, Helen Elias, Dorothy Wiebe. I have written them to ask them to sign a xeroxed copy which I will forward when they are complete. There is only one biographical sketch missing, for Dr. F.P. Doyle. At that time I was not as conscientious about completing the forms as I was later. Tape #13 is not included as I want to transcribe it because the sound quality is poor. Three other tapes, #10, 26, and 34, may be added to the collection eventually.

Looking back over the past twelve months when I have been working on Childbirth in

the Mennonite Community, an oral history project, I feel as if I have been on a journey or quest. I wanted to hear the story of mothers, mine and others. I began with a few questions, some fear, buried anger and burning curiosity. Why did our mothers give up breastfeeding, why did many of them want to be put "out" for the birth of their babies? I wanted to hear from those whose lives were dominated by their mothering role, those who had up to fifteen children in a span of years which included the Depression years. In the pursuit of this quest I gathered much history which is also part of the lives of these women. They gave birth in the context of events that took place around them.

Childbirth happened in the context of family and community life and as such it was best that women, particularly older ones, told their whole story. Indeed the ones who declined to tell their childbirth stories often cited the fact that to do so would involve too much pain in dredging up the past.

The selection of women was done on a very casual, word of mouth basis. There were always more women I wanted to include but time and energy ran out. I tried to include more older than younger women and then get some balance of younger and middle-aged interviewees. The oldest interviewee was born in 1897, 91 years old, and the youngest was born in 1966, 22 years old. Fourteen were born in the first decade of the 20th century, 5 born in the second decade, 4 in each of the next five decades. The age distribution was a pure matter of chance which I discovered when I counted them. Two doctors, both male, and one other male are part of the project. I probably contacted about 80 women. Right now there are 53 tapes from 42 persons. Unless I knew the person I usually had a pre-interview in which we got acquainted and about a week later the taping session would take place.

Some said no after only a brief discussion. One woman said that the subject was a private family one and should not be discussed. Another one after a lively pre-interview had a dream in which her husband appeared and said, "Leave that alone, Tina." Her story included the flight from Russia and a hard beginning in Canada. About a half dozen changed their minds about being interviewed in the interval between the pre-interview and the taping session, citing reasons of privacy or variations on the theme of a disinclination to disturb the past which brought feelings of sadness or depression. One elderly woman declined to be interviewed because in her words, "If I can't tell the whole truth I would rather not tell the story." For what ever reasons she did not feel she could tell the whole truth on a tape. She did talk to me at length.

The women who agreed to be taped, then, are not the silent ones, but those who have made their peace with life and can talk about the past without overwhelming regret or too much pain.

I learned to listen attentively because I found it very disconcerting to listen to the tape and hear myself ask foolish or self-evident questions which had already been answered by the interviewee. I learned to keep an open mind even when my mind was already made up! I tried to understand each woman without judging her. Keeping in mind that it is often painful though also therapeutic to talk about the past, I was open to whatever a woman wanted to talk about, so sometimes we strayed far afield from the subject of childbirth. I began to see the process of telling our stories as similar to that of giving birth, which is unique for every woman. I saw myself as the midwife who was there to be with her but not to dictate the structure and form her story should take. If my opinions jump out of the tape in spite of that it is because I did not intend to be coldly objective, but to be a living person who listens and responds to the story.

The interviewees found a willing listener. Women have a tradition of story telling. My last interviewee paid me a compliment when she said, "You didn't do anything [during the interview], but I had the feeling that you listened to every word." For many it was the first time in years that they had talked about an experience which they still recalled very vividly. In some cases memories of childbirth brought with it the memory of the death of a child or of a husband. Sometimes it seemed the interviewee was bent on trying to find out what it was that I wanted rather than concentrating on what it was that she had lived through. In that case it seemed best to open up the interview with a general statement of tell me about your life rather than specific questions.

The interviewees each got a copy of their tape if they wanted it. They got the opportunity to contribute a part of their story for future generations and the chance to tell part of their story for the therapeutic benefits it has. Many times I found myself on a high after an afternoon or morning of taping. When I brought that to the interviewee's attention, she told me that she too had been full of energy and positive feelings after the taping session. One older woman called me to say she had more to tell after making two tapes and we went on to make four tapes in all. She is the one who talks the least about actual childbirth, but her recall and description of life in the Mennonite village of Reinland in the early 1900s is a priceless addition to oral history.

Just as I cannot imagine life without my children, now I cannot imagine life without having done this oral history project. My horizons were widened, my capacity to listen compassionately without judgment was stretched.

The negative aspects of the project for me was the inevitable moment when I had to make the summary and type it which seemed to take an exorbitant amount of time. The only other negative aspect was spending a lot of time with a person and then having them turn down the opportunity of doing a taped interview. If they said so fairly

directly it was better than if they were indirect, which also happened.

A very personal problem for me was determining why I was going to tape a particular person and whether I had ulterior motives in choosing them. Invariably something went wrong in an interview in which I had not thought through my motives, though I would not want to say there was a direct connection, it began to feel very ominous to me.

For the Mennonite Heritage Centre this collection of tapes will be an important resource source for information on the lives of girls and women in the Mennonite community. The students at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College family studies course will have access to raw material which is rarely found in such forms. As the Heritage Centre already has tapes, this project will add significantly to their collection on an aspect of life which is not often aired. Since stories of women's lives are often not considered worthy of historical mention it will go far in increasing an understanding and awareness of that part of our community. When viewed as a whole the collection ranges in time from life in Russia, the emigration to Canada, the trek to Mexico and South America, the intersection of the lives of Russian Mennonites with the earlier immigrants, to the generation of women now in the childbearing years. The interviews were geared to more than factual historical data, they were meant to explore the way women feel about their role as mothers.

There are 8 tapes recorded in the Plautdietsch dialect, and two are in the German language. It would be best if these could be transcribed and translated into English so they would be more accessible.

In conclusion the necessary ingredient to make a successful tape was for me to enter into a relationship with the interviewee to the extent that we could make a tape together. As time went on this seemed to become easier.

Introduction by Katherine Martens, 1989

In August 1935 on a farm in southern Manitoba, eight children play late into the summer evening while their parents visit with relatives who had returned from South America. Mother moves slowly and languidly through the house, then tries to sit on the couch but she can't seem to find a comfortable position. She is due to give birth any day now and she keeps reminding herself she must be aware when labour starts, this will be a hospital birth. The first eight were born at home with a doctor or midwife but this time they will go to Winnipeg, to the Mennonite Concordia hospital.

She notices the first unmistakable signs of labour early in the evening, but she says nothing, she is shy with the guests, they are practically strangers to her, they are her husband's relatives. Surely they would go home soon and after the children are in bed . . . But the guests don't leave until late and her husband reproaches her for her lack of interest, "You hardly spoke to my relatives," he scolds. "I was hoping they would go soon, because the baby is going to come tonight," she replies.

There is no gasoline in the car and the prospect of an 80 mile drive at night is suddenly not an adventure any more, but there is no thought of turning back. The doctor is expecting them. Upon arrival at Concordia in the wee hours of the morning the baby is born almost immediately. "Mrs. Klassen, you have a baby girl, but look at that, your baby has red bumps on her forehead, she must have been trying to be born, I guess you didn't want to have a baby in the car," jokes the nurse who brought the baby for feeding in the morning. "What are you going to do, nurse or bottle feed?" "Oh, I've decided to take a holiday from nursing, she will be bottle fed."

When Mother and baby got home after the customary ten days in the hospital her milk had dried up already. The grandmothers looked askance at the bottle and tut-tutted about the baby, predicting dire consequences of this unnatural method of infant feeding. No doubt they agreed that any problems the baby had were due to the newfangled "English way" of feeding babies.

It is September 1962. A young woman, born that night in Winnipeg 27 years ago, has just checked into a large hospital in Toronto to have her first baby. She is passionately determined to breast feed her baby and hopes to give birth in as natural a way as possible, but on entering the huge hospital she is overwhelmed by the strangeness of

going into a place where she knows no one. At home her labour pains were strong and frequent but they became weaker and less frequent when she enters the hospital. She felt abandoned by everyone, she longs for a familiar face, a hand to hold hers, to be touched with tenderness, but not even her doctor is here, he has a substitute. Her husband is told to go home. The doctor came to tell her not to be a martyr, take the Demerol and try to get some sleep and the baby would be born in good time. It sounded so easy. When morning came and the doctor came back there were no labour pains, only a tired and worn out young woman who was not used to taking a drug.

Though it is easy to blame the doctor, or the hospital, none of them alone are at fault. What is she doing in a hospital when birth is not a disease but a natural process? Where are her sisters and her mother, where are the women who used to take care of the birthing mother? Why is she surrounded by strangers when birth is an intimate and sensual experience, could she not be surrounded by her husband or her women friends? What kind of culture is it where women are stripped of all personal power and decision-making during a rite of passage in which they give life? The medical profession has for the past century had birthing women assume the worst possible position, one that is unsafe for both mother and child, one that is convenient for the doctor but not for the woman in labour. Her baby was delivered with the use of forceps in the late afternoon after she had been given a drug to stimulate labour pains. He was brain damaged and lived less than 24 hours. I was that woman in labour.

Images of that experience come back to haunt me in the anniversary year when the child which did not live would have been 25 years old. My hope to resolve an old grief prompted me to apply for an oral history project called Childbirth in the Mennonite Community in which I interviewed 42 women on their birth experiences. Women of all ages, ranging from 20 to 90 years, remembered the events and the feelings, calling into question the old saying that childbirth, because it is painful, is quickly forgotten. In fact that truism only held if the outcome was good and if the process of birth had no unhappy interventions. A wide range of experiences is covered in the tapes: birth in the home with midwives in the twenties and thirties, birth of children when the mother feared abnormalities, caesarean birth in the high tech atmosphere of a big city hospital, the burden of repeated pregnancies, and the agony of infertility in the Mennonite community where having a child was the necessary ticket to adulthood. One articulate woman describes how her first childbirth experience caused her to live in her body in stark contrast to eh intellectual activity of graduate English study. The range of feelings prompted by childbirth runs the gamut of joy and excitement to the depression cited by some who declined to be interviewed.

I was interested to find out why women had abandoned breastfeeding and why it was and still is difficult for women to feed their babies the natural way. Because I felt so strongly about it I wanted to be careful not to convey the strength of my own feelings in my questioning. In time I found that in listening to another woman's story if I concentrated on understanding her feelings and actions in the total context of her life there was no way I could possibly judge her, just as I could not blame and judge myself for not having a homebirth in 1962.

Out of the mouth of one of the women who talked Plautdietsch came the observation that when a young woman said she did not have enough milk it was in her heart that she did not have enough milk. The enormous workload carried by the women with large families was enough to cause them to lose confidence in their ability to breastfeed or to let other work take first priority. In a culture in which women are prized more for their beauty as sex objects than valued as mothers the decline of breastfeeding is not surprising.

I wanted to hear about the return of midwife assisted births at home or in the hospital currently in vogue. One extreme usually begets another. After childbirth, which is not an illness, became medicated, structured and dominated by hospital routines and techniques, it was no wonder that some consumers (in this case also the producers, i.e. the women) began to want to be actively involved in their own labour. I was able to interview four women who had given birth to babies at home in the 1980s.

In no way were they merely returning to the old ways. The modern woman choosing to give birth at home is well educated, self-assured and makes the choice out of informed knowledge. The midwife is not just the woman who comes along for the birth, the pregnant woman has been seeing her for most of the nine months for up to an hour at a time usually in her own home where the midwife can also meet the husband and family. Positive images of childbirth are nurtured during this time along with prenatal preparation. The midwife does not necessarily have medical training, she is after all preparing for a normal birth which has been going on for centuries. One of the interviewees saw both a medical doctor and a midwife. She found the medical visits focussed on pathology and provoked anxiety while the visits of the midwife were centred on nutrition and ways of ensuring a healthy pregnancy. Midwives have come back in response to a need for their services. The majority of women still prefer a hospital birth for the guarantee of a safe birth and changes have been made in hospital routines since 1962. Among the interviews are two made by doctors and one by a director of nursing where these changes are described.

During the months when I was interviewing women my mother's life was coming to

an end. The time spent talking to women became a spiritual quest for me to make my peace with my mother and to honour the eternal female, giver of life. I saw some parallels between the beginning of life and the end of life. Both times we are facing the great unknown. In both cases we have moved from the home to the hospital to save ourselves inconvenience but I believe we are paying a high price. We need to examine what the institutionalization of birth and death do to the family and to our sense of community. The setting for the activities we engage in sets the tone for the quality of the experience.

Though the project is called Childbirth in the Mennonite Community, women gave birth in the context of their lives so the tapes include many other subjects with the major focus on childbirth. Copies of the tapes and a typed index of each tape are stored in the Mennonite Heritage Centre and in the Provincial Archives and are available for research purposes. I began the project with fear and trembling but as time went by I became convinced that each woman has a story to tell and I was privileged to be the midwife while she brought it forth.

Conclusion by Katherine Martens, 1989

You have a story to tell and I have a story to tell. It may not be the story that others want to hear but it is our story. Each day when we recount the happenings of the day to our family we are telling our story. It is best if I tell my own story, not some other person's story. I happen to believe that telling our story is so important that when we stop telling it we die. My interest in collecting oral stories of women may have developed as the result of reading a lot of psychology and psychiatry books some years back. It struck me that the case histories were sketches of women seen through a professional's eyes. The writer then interpreted, discussed, labeled and analysed the woman's behaviour.

I was left with the nagging feeling, "But what happened to her?" Many case histories later I became aware that all my life my mother had been trying to tell me her story in her own way but I had paid no attention. After I started listening to her the stories began to hang together better. Her stories were like yarn, the strands twisted and turned but what seemed to be digressions were merely strands that intertwined with the other strands. She was my first example of stream of consciousness in real life. "Now where was I?" she might say and this too became a question I heard often in taping sessions.

When I first asked my mother to tell me the story of my birth I was fascinated by all the material that came out as the result of one question. Shortly before her death in March, 1989, she told me the story once more and she came to a surprising new understanding of her younger self at age 33. That alone could make a story.

In 1983 I collected oral stories for a book I was writing about my family. I visited the late Mary Wall, a contemporary of my parents. The mystery and secrecy that surrounded the coming of a new baby came alive in her story. She described how when her mother's time had come the young children were brought to a neighbouring relative with no word of explanation. They stayed the night and went to school from there the next day. Coming home the next day they were surprised when the kitchen was strangely empty. When they looked for mother in the bedroom the first thing they saw was that the cradle which was usually stored in the attic was beside mother's bed. Listening to Mary filled me with the burning desire to hear more stories of women's

lives. I decided to focus on Mennonite women's stories of childbirth experiences.

When I asked women to remember their pregnancy and childbirth I opened up a floodgate of memories. After an initial pre-interview to get to know each other one woman told me she could not sleep and another one had bad dreams and declined to be interviewed and taped. Because I had already done a number of interviews for the book I had written, All in a Row: The Klassens of Homewood, I knew that the process of remembering could bring old feelings back to the surface and function as therapy.

Someone has said, "If you want to know yourself, study others, if you want to understand others study yourself." By listening to the stories of others I found my place as a member in a clan, a community and family, even though I am no longer a member of a Mennonite church. It seems trite to say that I found myself or discovered my identity, but that is what I did.

I like to think that the work I did in collecting oral history for my book represented by coming to terms with my father, and the project Childbirth in the Mennonite Community was my way of finding my mother. There were times in both projects in which the emotional aspects of the memories the stories triggered were intensely painful, but after going through the process I find myself free of pain. I thought at the time I was learning to forgive my parents, but when I said those words out loud they sounded false and presumptuous. Now I think of it more as learning to understand them. When I reach a certain level of understanding without judgement—forgiveness is irrelevant.

There are 52 tapes in the collection representing 42 persons, they are stored in the Provincial Archives and at the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

Looking back over the twelve months when I worked on Childbirth in the Mennonite Community, an oral history project, I feel as if I have been on a journey or a quest. I wanted to hear the story of mothers, mine and others'. I began with a few questions, some fear, buried anger and burning curiosity.

Why did our mothers give up breastfeeding, why did many of them want to be put "out" for the birth of their babies? I wanted to hear from those whose lives were dominated by their mothering role, those who had up to fifteen children in a span of years which included the Depression years. In the pursuit of this quest I gathered much history which is also part of the lives of these women. They gave birth in the context of world events that took place around them. During the life span of the oldest women in the project, birth moved from being a private family affair in the home to a public event in a large city hospital where the mother was surrounded by strangers, often many miles from home.

Childbirth took place in the context of family and community life and as such it was best that women, particularly older ones, told their life story. These older women were more reticent about talking about their conflicts on tape. But either before or after the session they confided the bind they were in when they weighed the Biblical injunction "Wives submit yourselves to your husbands" against the moral repugnance they had for birth control.

The selection of women was done on a very casual, word of mouth basis. There were always more women I wanted to include but time and energy ran out. I tried to include more older than younger women and then get a balance of younger and middle-aged interviewees. The oldest interviewee was born in 1897, 91 years old, and the youngest was born in 1966, 22 years old. Fourteen were born between 1900-1910, 5 born between 1910-1920, and there were four born in each of the next five decades. The age distribution was a pure matter of chance which I discovered when I counted them. Two doctors, both male, and one other male are part of the project. I probably contacted about 80 women. We usually had a pre-interview in which we got acquainted and about a week later the taping session would take place.

Some said no almost immediately. One woman told me the subject was a private family one and should not be discussed. Another one after a lively pre-interview had a dream in which her husband appeared and said, "Leave that alone, Tina." Her story included the flight from Russia and a hard beginning in Canada. About a half dozen women changed their minds about being interviewed in the interval between the pre-interview and the taping session, citing reasons of privacy or variations on that theme. They were not inclined to disturb the past which brought feelings of sadness or depression.

One elderly woman said no because, in her words, "If I can't tell the whole truth I would rather not tell the story." For whatever reason she did not feel she could tell the whole truth on a tape. She did talk to me at length. The women who agreed to be taped then are not the silent ones, but those who have made their peace with life and can talk about the past without overwhelming regret or too much pain.

I learned to listen attentively. Usually I would replay the tape almost immediately so I could learn from my experience. If I heard myself ask foolish or self-evident questions which had already been answered by the interviewee it was a lesson to keep my ears open. I concentrated on understanding each woman but not judging her. Keeping in mind that it is often painful though also therapeutic to talk about the past, I was open to whatever a woman wanted to talk about, so sometimes we strayed far afield from the subject of childbirth. I began to see the process of telling our stories as similar to that of giving birth, which is unique for every woman. I saw myself as the midwife who was

there to be with her but not to dictate the structure and form her story should take. If my opinions jump out of the tape in spite of that it is because I did not intend to be coldly objective, but to be a living person who listened and responded to the story.

The interviewees found a willing listener. My last interviewee paid me a compliment when she said, "You didn't do anything, [during the interview] but I had the feeling that you listened to every word." For many it was the first time in years that they had talked about an experience which they still recalled vividly. In some cases memories of childbirth brought with it the memory of the death of a child or of a husband. Sometimes it seemed the interviewee was bent on trying to find out what it was that I wanted rather than concentrating on what she had lived through. in that case it seemed best to open up the interview with a general statement of "tell me about your life" rather than specific questions.

The interviewees each got a copy of their tape if they wanted it. They had the opportunity to contribute a part of their story for future generations and the chance to tell part of their story for the therapeutic benefits it has. Many times I found myself on a high after a taping session. When I brought that to one interviewee's attention she told me that she too had been full of energy and positive feelings after the taping session. One older woman called me to say she had more to tell after making two tapes and we went on to make four tapes in all. She is the one who talks the least about childbirth (she always promised to talk about it), but her recall and description of life in the Mennonite village of Reinland in the early 1900s is a priceless addition to oral history.

Just as I cannot imagine life without my children now I cannot imagine life without having done this oral history project. My horizons were widened, my capacity to listen compassionately without judgement was stretched. I feel very fortunate to have heard the stories of all the women, no other person has had the good fortune to listen to all of them. When I think of each individual I can recall the season, how I felt, the mood I was in and where I was in my continuing process of coming to terms with the material I was recording.

At some time during the year I was asked to write a chapter about childbirth to be included in a book. When I read my first draft I found a lack of connection between the stories of the older women and the younger women. I turned to some middle-aged women to create a bridge.

I saw the lack of connection between the older and younger women symbolic of the silence between mothers and daughters about an event in their lives which is at the core of their very being.

Childbirth has the potential for the expression of our individuality but is or has been

disappointing to some of us because we have removed all the spiritual and ritualistic elements from it and made it into a strictly medical event.

One example of how the veil of secrecy was lifted is the contrast between my mother's generation who tried to keep their pregnancies a deep secret and the present-day openness. In my family I am one of the youngest daughters of six. I lived many miles from home when I got pregnant so I told my parents in a letter. My sister next to me in age was impressed that I was so open about my pregnancy quite early in the nine months. It may well be that when you lived in close contact with your family you valued your privacy and you knew they would observe it all in good time, but if you lived far away you wanted to share your good news with blood relatives.

The negative aspect of the project for me was the inevitable moment when I had to make a summary of the tape which seemed to take an exorbitant amount of time. The only other negative aspect was spending a lot of time with a person and then having them turn me down. One elderly woman who lived with her unmarried daughter had been recommended by her son as a good source. I visited her and felt she would make a good interviewee, but every time I called to set a date her daughter thought of a good reason to postpone the interview. Finally a date was set but when I arrived after more than an hour's drive a note on the door told me they had gone to visit family members in a nearby town. In retrospect I had to admit that I had never felt quite confident of the daughter's approval but I had underestimated the lengths an unmarried daughter would go to to keep her mother from saying something inappropriate.

For the Mennonite Heritage Centre this collection of tapes will be an important resource source for information on the lives of girls and women in the Mennonite community. The students at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College family studies course will have access to raw material which is rarely found in such form. As the Heritage Centre already has tapes, this project will add significantly to their collection on an aspect of life which is not often aired. Since stories of women's lives are often not considered worthy of historical mention it will go far in increasing an understanding and awareness of that part of our community. When viewed as a whole the collection ranges in time from life in Russia, the emigration to Canada, the trek to Mexico and South America, the integration of the Russian Mennonites into communities with the earlier immigrants, to the generation of women now in the childbearing years.

The interviews were geared to more than factual historical data, they were meant to explore the way women felt about pregnancy and childbirth in the context of their lives.

There are 8 tapes recorded in the Plautdietsch dialect, and two are in the German

language. It would be best if these could be transcribed and translated into English so they would be more accessible.

The single most important necessary ingredient to make a successful tape was for me to enter into a relationship with the interviewee. At least three things were going on while we talked, her story, my perception or understanding of her story and the interaction between me as listener and her as the story teller. If for any reason I was distracted by worries about the tape recorder or any such thing it always detracted from our rapport. As time went on and I dropped more and more of my pre-judgements it all seemed to become easier.

I have been asked over and over whether I intend to write a book with the material on the tapes. I had no intention to do so, partly because of a growing feeling that I was becoming seriously imbalanced in my experience of the world. Instead of experiencing the world through all five senses I was overwhelmingly tilted toward using my eyes for reading written material for my understanding. Listening to the stories of my mothers and sisters had convinced me that "In the beginning was the word" and it was not written but spoken.

February 1989

Maria Reimer, Steinbach

Translated from the Plautdietsch by Heidi Harms

MR: Before I was married, I knew very little about "being in the other time," how do you say it, 'pregnant.' When my younger siblings were born, we had to go to the neighbours', that was a big treat, and we didn't know for how long, but in the morning we would come home and there would be a baby! But when we were already engaged, my husband went to Chicago and worked there for a year, and during that time my eldest sister talked to me about "other circumstances," about pregnancy. And she said too, among other things, that the baby moved, in my stomach! (laughs) And that seemed so grotesque to me, I found it so repugnant, and I thought, Oh, I am never going to get married! I would never get married! That was too terrible. And for a while I wished that Peter would never return from Chicago. But we were engaged, we had made a commitment to each other, and I knew, when he came back we would get married, but it just seemed too terrible! And so I was always between those two: I wished that he would come back; I know I will have talked about it with my other sisters, about pregnancy, but this is what I remember so very clearly. And I will have, I think, talked about it with my friends, but we knew much less than what they now know from earliest childhood on! We didn't know that. And, well, he came back in August, and on the first of November, 1924, we got married. And not even a year later, just ten and a half months later, we had a baby. And that was terrible. (laughs) I don't even know if I really want to say it or not. Not that the pregnancy was so difficult, but the birth was so difficult. Two days. And I had such long and such difficult labours. And we were living on the farm then, and the doctor came; for five hours I was under chloroform, and every once in a while he would let me regain consciousness, and when the baby was finally born, everything was supposed to be just fine, but then came the most terrible part. And that was, my afterbirth was stuck. It was stuck, and the doctor put his hand in and tore it out, inch by inch. And that was very, very terrible. I screamed. The whole time. And the doctor had on his white gown, but he looked like a, a red, it was completely red instead of white. Yes. And the doctor said, he was an older doctor from

Lorette, he said in his thirty-two years this was only the second time he had encountered a case like this, that was this difficult. A bit, maybe, but not this extreme. And my mother was there, too, but she shouldn't have been. She should not have been there. She screamed too! She should not have been there. That's how I felt. And I think she felt that way, too.

And at that time the doctor usually brought a scale to weigh the baby, and the mothers usually brought an old coverlet, it was nice and soft, and ripped it up for diapers, so the first little diapers were very nice and soft, and on the farm, well, we also had to get the bed ready, we would put on 'rubber sheeting,' but some of the poor people would use an oilcloth tablecloth! They would often have an old one that they would have ready, and of course a lot of rags were used, a lot of rags. And water was of course a big thing, 'a big item.' We had to make sure we had water, we'd either pump it or melt snow, and heat it, and the tubs had to be ready, the containers; and everything was outside, so it had to brought in and warmed and the stove readied so this could all be done.

And doing the laundry was of course also a big thing at that time. I have sometimes said my profession was (laughs) washing dishes and washing diapers! That was my profession! (laughs) Mind you it was a pleasure, seeing the long clothesline full of swaying laundry, it was a real joy! But in the winter it wasn't such a pleasure, we had to hang it outside and it was like boards, the sheets and the diapers, we would bring these stiff boards inside and then we'd put up a line inside and hang it up there and usually by morning it was dry, we had an oven, an 'air-tight heater.' We also boiled the laundry, so the stains would all come out, we boiled them on top of the cookstove, the white wash. — Yes, that's something from long ago, yes? — And my first three children I had at home, and the last seven were born in the hospital.

KM: They were born at home with a doctor though, right?

MR: Yes, yes, I yes. Not everyone could always have a doctor. I had difficult births, but the doctor was present at each birth. And frequently, too, during my pregnancies, I sensed God's nearness. When our Peter was born, between the labour pains, I suddenly saw the heavens open. There was a circle, and I could see directly into heaven! And then the other labour pains, they were also long and difficult, I saw Jesus looking down, from the edge; from the place where I could see in, Jesus was looking down. And that was very joyous for me, it strengthened me, and gave me courage to push more. And I was also frequently reminded of Bible verses. And with Henry, I had those two boys,

with those two the Lord wonderfully, he gave me a Bible verse, I didn't even realize that I knew it by memory: "Wir sind sein Werk geschaffen, in Christo Jesu zu guten Werken." (For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...) I didn't even know how I was supposed to apply it to the birth. But it just came to me, through and through. "Wir sind *sein* Werk geschaffen *in* Christo Jesu zu guten Werken." — Yes. Once the babies were born (laughs), that was a very good feeling. It was just like the Bible says, you forget then, in the joy that the child has come into the world. And you know, well you've experienced it too: the birth of a baby, the pregnancy and also the experience of birth, that is a 'renewal experience.' The person becomes renewed. Somehow it's an experience that I can't quite explain, but it is a 'renewal experience.' A joyous experience. Even though it was difficult, but your whole body is refreshed, renewed. And even the, how do I say it, the relationship with the husband, as if it's something completely new. And I think it's so unfortunate when women don't want to have babies. I know one of my daughters said to me, when Peter, my husband, had taken her with him to the hospital to see me and the baby, she said, "Oh Mom, you looked so young, and so beautiful, you looked like a queen!" (laughs) Oh my, that was very... And one of my daughters,when I was concerned about her having babies, because she too had difficult births, and I was so concerned about her, and then she said, " Mom! Look at everything that will happen if I have a baby! I'll be a mom, and Hans" — Hans, that's his name, Hans Gerbert — "he'll be a father, he'll be a daddy," and she said, "The population of the whole world changes, and I trust in heaven, too, if I have a baby. And that has to cost something. And the cost is not too high for me." It was worth it all. It was worth it all. Well! that shut my mouth; I couldn't keep feeling so sorry for her if she had such a good attitude. — Yes.

And you also had something on that paper about breastfeeding. I'm sorry (laughs) when I talk so much about the difficult part, because it is also always connected with much that is good. But breastfeeding a baby was hard for me, because I had such sore nipples, they would crack and hurt so badly; but then we always had our methods that we used, people would give me advice. One of these was, we would crack open a walnut and then tip it over them. And then [a few indistinct words] and seemed to heal them. There was some healing power in them, an oil or whatever in them, and that helped. That helped. But otherwise I really enjoyed giving my babies the breast, particularly if they fell asleep during the feeding, that was very enjoyable. — Yes, there are many things that come to mind from that time, maybe not exactly the most necessary or important things to repeat; but one woman who had no children, she said, "Those women who have babies, they can sit down once in awhile, to nurse their babies, but I

always have to work!" (laughter)

Yes. And what we wore when we were pregnant, well, we did make clothes especially for that, but frequently we would just wear a large apron. And that was supposed to hide it a bit, but it did exactly the opposite: that exactly gave it away! (laughs) "Oh, she's wearing a large apron, she must be pregnant!" (laughs) But being pregnant was kept a bit secret. Quite different from now. We kept it quiet as long as we could. And for me, and I think for other mothers, it was like that. It was a bit of a secret between me and God. Well, between me and my husband, too; other people didn't know. But it was also a bit of a secret between me and God. And it was, how should I put it, a 'partnership, to fashion an immortal soul. A partnership with God.' And it had a beginning, but no end. And that was important. It was very important to me.

KM: How do you mean, "no end"?

MR: Well, life. Life has no end, even when we die here; so the life that's inside you when you are pregnant, it has a beginning, but it will have no end. Even a baby that is never born, I mean not born alive, it had a beginning, but no end. And I think it's too bad, now with the 'abortions.' And I think too of Mary! When the angel Gabriel was there and said that she was going to be a mother, that she would conceive Jesus, would get pregnant through the Holy Spirit, it says there, oh, and I think it is so, how should I say it, so loving of the Saviour, of God, that he immediately told her: "There's another woman, she is pregnant, too." And possibly her mother was no longer living, but whatever it was, but he reminded her: "There is another one, she is also pregnant, that's your cousin." And then she got up, it says "in those days," and she goes there and Elizabeth says, "Oh!" she is quite astonished, "How is it that I am worthy of this, that the mother of my Lord comes to me." Mary had borne no child yet, and she already calls her "mother ," she calls her the mother of her Lord; that which will be born is already a person. That is very much against abortion, I would say. — And when we were pregnant, my sisters would be concerned, I had a lot of other little children, [a few indistinct words] and once she phoned me, my sister, and said, "Marie, what are you doing?" Oh, I said, I baked bread, and fixed a spring on the screen door (so the flies wouldn't come in, it was supposed to stay closed all the time), and I had nailed the well shut (we had a well outside, where we got our water) so the children wouldn't open the trap door to look in, or fall in. Those were some of the (laughs) preparations! There was much to get ready. — We had a healthy family; we had a large, healthy family, and yet we did have a lot of illness. The children had the measles, I had pneumonia, we had the

chicken pox, also diphtheria, or scarlet fever, I'm not sure now; scarlet fever is also sometimes in the throat; scarlet fever would break out in spots. And the worst thing we had, that lasted longest, was whooping cough ["bleive houst," literally "blue cough"]. When the eldest four children had the "bleive houst" we had to stay up day and night, when someone was coughing, because they would stop breathing. When the other children had the "bleive houst" it wasn't quite so bad, but the eldest four, and during the day I couldn't do just anything, when Peter wasn't home; I did the laundry at night. I did the laundry at night, so Peter could look after the children. All the children were very small, they were just over a year apart; and they also had diarrhoea, our children, severe diarrhoea. One child in particular. And staying up at night because of sick or restless children, that was not, how shall I say it, yes I would get tired, but it was not an experience that made me not want the children, it was part of 'the whole game' (laughs), it was a job that we did, that was also 'meaningful.' We had four girls and a boy, again four girls and a boy. Our Peter, the oldest boy, he was in between the girls, but he wanted a baby brother so badly, and when we had another baby and it was another girl, he stood next to me, he was six or seven years old, I was looking after the baby, and he asked, "Mom, will it change into a little boy yet?" He thought, maybe it would become a boy! He was fifteen when his little brother was born, and he willingly [a few indistinct words]; he didn't mind a bit if the girls saw him.

KM: You said last week that there was someone who had said how you could have a boy. If you used a particular name. What was that, if you were to call the last girl...

MR: Oh yes. Yes yes. When we had the fourth girl, my mother said, "Oh you're not having a boy because you don't want to have a Tina!" That wasn't a nice enough name. But then Peter phoned mom and said, "Mom, we have a Tina!" (laughter) "Oh," she said, "then you'll have a boy next!" And sure enough, the next baby we had was a boy, that was Peter! — Yes, Tina gave us much joy. A very bright little girl. She went into the mission field, spent thirty-three years in Africa.

Yes. One time we had visitors, I was preparing food, the children were in the other room with the guests while I was preparing food, and I heard the woman ask, "How many children do you have?" "Oh," said one of the girls, "we have seven, and then we have Peter." (laughter)

When I was expecting my tenth child, I was not happy. I already had two sons-in-law, and I thought, "Oh, what are they going to think of those old people! Now it was time for them to have babies, not for us!" But I also did not want to have a child that

was not 'wanted,' and I prayed, and God gave me the grace; oh and I didn't tell anybody, either, and our older girls, they asked me, "Mom, what's the matter? Why are you so sad? Tell us what's the matter!" And I didn't say, I was too, how should I say, too dissatisfied, not resigned. But finally I said, "You wouldn't be happy either if I told you." Yes, I was supposed to tell them anyway. — I think they had some idea already. But when I told them, they said, "Oh, but mom, there are so many people who will love that baby!" And that gave me a lot of strength. So in that respect, I had no experience of that, that our children didn't willingly accept it. Some mothers had it very hard that way, but I didn't. — And I said, during the months that I was carrying him, I wanted to learn what I was supposed to learn, and if this last one — I didn't know of course if this was the last one — I said to God, he should teach me whatever it was he wanted to teach me through this. And then it occurred to me, and I am sure it was from God, I was to pray for other women who were pregnant. I did that for many a woman; she wouldn't know that I was praying for her, but I was, and also for her birth, because I had had it so hard. And that's still my job. (laughs) I haven't maybe always done it, but many, many times it occurs to me, and I do it gladly. I do it gladly. And my husband was very understanding, he had authority over me, but sometimes I thought, Oh, if only he could understand me a bit better! He had authority over me, but if only he could understand me better! But what can you expect from a man who has never been pregnant? or has never been a woman? And a woman is built differently. And I sometimes think a woman should not expect too much from a man. She can love him, be submissive to him, and make him happy, but she should not expect too much; if she feels she has to pour out her heart, she has to do that with another woman, a trustworthy, devout woman, and they can understand each other better. That's how I often thought over the years. And that is what I have also experienced.

The oldest children also always help to raise the younger ones. That is another thing. If they know about right and wrong

KM: What is the advantage of having a big family?

MR: I would say, what I already said earlier, that the oldest children, if they are obedient, then they help a lot to raise the younger children. And particularly if they are saved at a young age, that helps the younger children a lot, and that's what our children did. And that meant a lot to me.

KM: You always lived in Steinbach, right?

MR: Yes.

KM: Where were you born?

MR: I was born near Steinbach, and I grew up in Steinbach. I went to school there. I wanted very badly to go to school longer, and my girl friends were able to go longer, but my parents were poor, and so I had to help at home, and then I would always walk from the summer kitchen to the fence, there was a picket fence along the street, right where d'8 Schtove is now, we lived just behind there, the house is still there. Yes, that's where we lived. I would always walk out there in the morning when it was time for school, and my girl friends would walk past and ask, "Can't you come too?" and I said, "No; I'm going to ask again." (laughs) And I was really sorry about that.

KM: How long did you go to school?

MR: Up to grade six. But I learned a lot later on! (laughs) I loved to read, and that's why I was so sorry about it. I wasn't at the top of the class, I was somewhere in the middle.

KM: From where did you get books?

MR: Oh, we had books. Yes. We had books, my oldest siblings had books...

KM: Can you describe your first house?

MR: Yes, the first house, where I, right at the beginning when I said, I had to go to the neighbours, it's still there, behind d'8 Schtove; we had to cross the street to the Peter Barkmans. But it had one of those beams that actually held the house together, and the beam is still there; we always had to step over it in the one room, in the other room they had already evened it out a bit; and they had added on a long kitchen where we ate and cooked and everything. We didn't have cabinets like we do today, we had a pantry. It was cold; at night everything froze; we would either have to bring everything that wasn't supposed to freeze into the living room, and if we hadn't completely emptied a pail in the evening it was sometimes frozen in the morning, and all of that always had to do with being poor.

KM: Were you the oldest, or the youngest, or —

MR: No. My parents had nine children; they would have had more, my mother miscarried (expression used is "kaum to Schode" followed by a few indistinct words), but anyway, I was in the middle, more with the younger ones, I had a few younger siblings.

KM: And how did you meet your husband?

MR: Oh yes. Yes. That was quite interesting. My father did what used to be called 'teamster' work, he was a drayman. There were no highways, or trucks, and so everything was —

KM: And no trains, either, right?

MR: There was a train that stopped in Giroux and La Broquerie. And all the wares for the stores and the lumber yard were all transported from there by horse and wagon. And that's what my father did. He had a pair of 'dray' horses and transported all these things home from there. He had a weak heart, and poor blood circulation, and he always had to walk; it would be so cold and he'd be wearing his Preeßje (moccasins), and he would walk behind the horses, but it got to be too hard for him; my oldest siblings were married, and they helped our parents along, and they bought a farm for our parents, or rather they guaranteed the mortgage, I should say. They didn't live there for very long before my father died, because of his weak heart. We always thought he had asthma, because he had such trouble breathing. But there on the farm is where I met my husband, also farmers, they were a preacher's family in the Kleine Gemeinde, Heinrich R. Reimers, and I got to know Peter. And we also got married on the farm, and lived there for a few years, on the farm, too.

KM: How old were you when you married?

MR: I was twenty years old when I married. Peter had already been in Chicago by then, and [a few indistinct words].

KM: And how did you make a living in Steinbach?

MR: My husband had a small bargain store, Reimer's Bargain Store. And he sold small items, also second-hand goods, a bargain store, and we were able to live off it. And we had a big garden, a very big garden, and the children worked in it; in summer we had raspberries which we sold, and Peter would also take them to Winnipeg, to the hospitals. And when the children were old enough, the oldest girls started too, they all, well, they did a lot of things; I mean at that time there was a great shortage of teachers, and they could already start teaching with grade eleven — they never taught in Steinbach, not those children. But they found employment, and brought their money home. But then later they did finish high school; some continued going to school after that, some attended Bible School.

KM: That was a busy time!

MR: Very busy. Very busy. And always in autumn it was time to make decisions, they would all want to go; some mothers would tell me their children did not want to go to school, and I said for us it's that they all want to go! And then decisions had to be made, whether Leona would stay home or Amanda, or Lenchen, or Tina, who would stay home. So they would discuss it and say, when Mother does the laundry, then this or that one will stay home. And when Father goes to Winnipeg to make purchases for the store, it would be this or that one, usually it was Amanda who would work in the store.

KM: Oh, so that way they could all go to school and just miss occasionally. Oh, I see, very good. — You said last time that the hospitals even did some canning, of your raspberries. That's interesting.

MR: Yes. Yes. That's what I think; I would sometimes go along with him to the hospitals, and as far as I could tell, they bought great quantities. I even saw the sisters in the St. Boniface Hospital cutting up beans for canning.

KM: Could you tell me something about your wedding?

MR: My wedding took place on the farm. My husband's parents had a relatively big house, and the wedding was in the house. There were approximately a hundred people, and the wedding was simply in the house. The minister who married us, our father could have married us, he was a minister, he was a minister and had also been a schoolteacher for twenty-six years, that was Heinrich R. Reimer, and almost all the

other siblings had been married by Father, but Peter was the oldest son, and he said, he was my only teacher, well he also attended school in Gretna, for a little while; he said, Father has been my teacher and was always the minister, and we've worked together on the threshing machine (chuckles); and so we were married by Father's very good friend, Heinrich Dyck. They came by horse from Kleefeld across the field, a hay field, a huge hay field, to the farm at Prairie Rose, to marry us. And stayed for night, we were all at the parents' place for night. And the text for the service was Romans 12:12. That is something I will never forget, it was "Seid fröhlich in Hoffnung, geduldig in Trübsal, haltet an am Gebet." (Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.) And that was very useful to me.

KM: A brides would wear a dark dress at that time, right?

MR: Yes. well, my dress was what they called 'sandalwood.' It was between brown and — I had red hair! (chuckles) — and the wedding was in autumn. I sewed my own dress.

KM: Did you do all the sewing?

MR: I did all my own sewing, all my own sewing, for the children; I made coats and shoes, everything myself. I didn't always make everything, but the clothes yes.

KM: You were talking before about "Preeßje." What are those?

MR: "Preeßje" are moccasins, I made those for the children, too, for the winter. Winter shoes.

KM: What were they made of?

MR: Oh, from old overcoats. I would turn them inside out, old coats and old clothes, and on the other side they would still look very nice and new. And they always had to wear hand-me-downs.

KM: So before you were married, you were baptized, right?

MR: Yes. We were baptized in September of 1923, and then Peter went in October of that year to Chicago, and returned the following autumn. He and my brother and a few

other friends; and it was almost like going to Babel, going to Chicago, they would get lost in the world, forever. But it wasn't quite like that. My husband, Peter, he went to the Pacific Garden Mission, have you heard of them? [KM: Yes, I think so.] Yes. And that is where he had truly received peace with God. He had not experienced "Heilsgewißheit" [assurance of salvation], he had not experienced that at the time of his baptism. But he loved me, and he wanted to be obedient to his parents, and the parents were also aware that we were in love, and he was the oldest son, and they wanted very much for him to be baptized; I think he did it to please his parents and to please me. But really he believed that God would not let people be lost; God loved people, and he would not let them be lost. But then he realized that he was a sinner, and that he was lost if he did not accept the Saviour, and then he received assurance of salvation. And later, during our married life, he often felt conflict because he had not been baptized upon his faith, that he had only been converted after baptism, and the Enemy caused him much agony over that, and he feared for his soul; he had a low blood count, he was weak, and when the body is weak the Enemy is strong, and he had to struggle a lot with this. In the winter he would frequently get 'blood transfusions.' How should I say, no no, I don't mean 'blood transfusions,' I mean 'liver injections.' He got 'blood transfusions' before he died, when he had 'cancer.' This was something else.

KM: How old were you when he died?

MR: I was fifty. I was fifty, and he was fifty-six. And our children were small, our baby son, Henry, was eight, and Marina ten, and that's how it went, the oldest, I mean two of our daughters were in Africa. The same day Peter died here in Steinbach a grandchild was born to us in Africa. And afterwards, when we counted the hours, it was the exact same hour; the Lord had given life and had taken life away. There was of course no chance of their coming home, I mean they were there, but one of them, Lenchen, she got to hear about it before the funeral, but Tina was living in the bush, and there was no telephone, and she only learned of it a while later. But then we also had — it was very cold, it was the 19th of February, it was very cold; the funeral was on the 24th, and people said it had been the coldest day of that winter, the day of the funeral. But when he died, I had to stoke the fire in the basement, we were heating with wood in the furnace, and we had to walk through the summer kitchen into the basement, and I had slept a bit, but I said to the Lord that night that he should speak to me, and that he should somehow comfort me, somehow give me strength, or to say something to me before other people would speak to me. And I was reading the Bible, and came to

Proverbs 3:5-6, where it says: "Verlaß dich auf den Herrn von ganzem Herzen, und verlaß dich nicht auf deinen Verstand. Sondern gedenke an ihn in allen deinen Wegen, so wird er dich recht führen." (Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.) And he has done that now for thirty-three years. Thirty years we were married. We had a happy marriage, but we went through much hardship, how should I say, everyone has a cross to bear, yes? Everyone has their own story to tell. But the Lord has always helped, and we had no debts when he died, not many, we had some debt, but not too much; we had a house, and Peter, our Peter, ran the store for us. But he also had a wife and several small children; well actually only Penny had been born when Peter died. But anyway, over time he bought the farm and the car; and so it went. And then they began to pay out pensions; I was fifty, and you started getting pension only at age seventy. But by the time I was sixty-five that age had been lowered to sixty-five as well. It was always to my advantage! (chuckles) Always to my advantage, and it always worked. "Er wird dich recht führen" (He will make straight your paths). He has always done that. I am thankful.

KM: And you were always very involved in the church?

MR: Well, yes. I had a Sunday School class since the time our Henry was two years old, Peter was still living at the time, yes, yes. And I enjoyed that very much, but I didn't always do it full justice. (chuckles).

KM: Well, but for such a long time, how many years did you do it?

MR: I think for thirty-eight years, until I was eighty.

KM: How did it feel when you quit?

MR: Like a funeral. (laughs) I said at the time, it felt like a funeral; the last Sunday that I did it was just — you see Sunday School begins in September, and the 26th of August was my birthday, and it was exactly on a Sunday, I was eighty years old that Sunday, and (laughs) oh! it felt so — this is the last time!

KM: It was always in German, right?

MR: Yes, always in German. I had the women's class. But the class had grown much smaller. My class, when it first started, when they elected me, more women kept coming, and there were thirty, up to forty women in the class. But then we divided the group, and eventually there were five classes where earlier there had been only one, it kept growing. And now, the last years, it was diminishing. Some had died, one sister from across the street here got married, or even two of them, some moved away, some became sick, and old, so that the class had grown much smaller. And now we have it again the way we had it right at the beginning in the Kleine Gemeinde: the women and the men together, because of the language. You see, we now have only one German class, and that is the one in which the older men and women are together. And the changes took place over the years. — And then I also had the opportunity to attend Bible School, not full-time, but I took evening classes, and that helped me, too.

KM: And you also talked about a "prayer call."

MR: Yes. A 'prayer call,' yes, we had that this morning too. On Tuesdays — we started this once when my sister was here from Henderson, Nebraska, Mrs. John Bergman, she and I started it; she was actually just visiting, but she told me how they had this practice, every Tuesday. And so we started it, and we had it in the church every Tuesday at six in the morning. And that was especially with one theme, let's say, and that was to pray for unsaved people. We also had 'sharing,' we would 'share' what we wanted to pray for, but mainly for unsaved people who were not on the road to heaven. And so we started that, but it too 'dwindled' down; in winter it was so cold; the church was always unlocked, but sometimes the door was open and the snow had blown into the foyer of the church. In those days the churches were never locked, nowadays they are always locked, but then they were left unlocked. So we started every other day — oh, I just wanted to say, the men did it, too, but then sometimes only a few women and a few men would come; you know starting something is one thing, but keeping it up is more difficult. It says: "Lasset uns aber Gutes tun und nicht müde werden." [And let us not grow weary in well-doing...]. And doing good is something we can do well, that's 'okay,' we can do it with joy and courage and 'enthusiasm', but "nicht müde werden" [not grow weary], that's the second thing, that's something else (chuckles). And that's how it was with the prayer meeting. And finally it got so far that we didn't go to the church any more, we just stayed at home, but we pray at home. We have been doing this since 1948, for forty years. Every Tuesday morning at 6:30 I phone someone, I let it ring once, and that's a 'call to prayer.' Some sisters have said to me that there were men at

the prayer meetings, too. Their husbands would get up to pray too when I called. And there have been conversions; of course we don't know how God works, but one sister told me, her son had said to her: "Mom, why does the phone always ring once?" So often he heard it ring; he didn't realize it was every Tuesday. And then she said, "Oh, you know, that's when people are praying for you," and that was so important to him, she thought he had become converted because of that. But she didn't know of course if it was specifically because of that, the Holy Spirit works in many ways. But we have also had other reports that people have become converted.

KM: You also said something about obedience.

MR: Oh, yes, Kathy. That is something. Obedience. — If I think of my pilgrimage, my life in this world [tape break]

Aganetha (Aggie) Klassen, Winnipeg

KM: Aggie grew up in Russia, and has lived in very many different countries and places and lived through a wide range of experiences during the war, during the occupation of Russia, and moved to Paraguay in 1947. During her time in Russia she was exiled to Ural, Siberia, that was in 1930-33. So your life has spanned a lot of changes, and I hope you'll incorporate some of those things into what we talk about today, but first of all and mainly I want to ask you why you chose to study midwifery and how you enjoyed that occupation or what your involvement was in there, and to tell us about your growing up and life in all these various countries in the Mennonite community. Do you want to start with your childhood and then talk about how you chose your profession?

AK: OK, my childhood, what I remember, was in Neu Schönwiese, where I grew up. I was eleven years of age when we moved from there, but we lived close to all relatives, where we enjoyed each other's company and I was quite at home with them too. My parents were ... everything was taken away from them, well, because of my father, he was a preacher, they tried to take everything away from him; and secondly, he didn't want to join the Colkhos, and so the government slowly but steadily taxed him and he couldn't pay any more, because he had nothing left, so they took our home, the house and everything else what we had away from him, so to save his life he disappeared to Einlage,and my sister and I, we stayed in the house till they had an auction sale, whatever was in the house they auctioned off, and after that we left for the place where my parents were already, in Einlage. And then my father found a job as a worker, and it didn't take long, he was arrested, and for a number of months, and the government, or in jail, the people tried to give him a chance to get free, with the condition that he would promise never to preach. So he didn't. He loved his Lord, and he didn't intend to deny his Lord. So they said, OK, then we'll send you to Siberia. At that time there were many people that were arrested, and in the same situation as my father was. These people were united; most of the time the fathers were reunited with the families, and we were put into a train and were sent into exile. My father died of a heart attack in exile after two years, and my mother died from hunger, and after ... my oldest sister, which has

worked in a home, in a private home, which had other single people, single people in exile, she worked for them, so she didn't suffer as far as hunger. So she had more energy left. And after my mother died, she decided we would try to escape. But my older brother, he was, he escaped before already which I didn't know at that time. And so she sold whatever we had. We tried to get as much money as we could for the trip, and that was about hundred rubles. And just the day before, my mother, before we wanted to leave, my cousin from the Ukraine or Russia sent us 25 rubles. And we had a loaf of bread and a few pounds of dried fish. That was our food that we had. But before we left, early the day before, we went to see, to my mother's grave, and here we realized that the dogs had opened the grave which was very, which wasn't as deep as we have buried our people, the bones of my mother just left, and the rest were, had the dogs, the meat, I mean the mother's body was gone. So we early in the morning, we left before it was dawn and we walked about for almost three days. And on the way we met ...

KM: Did you walk during the daytime too, or just at night, or

AK: Yes, we tried to walk during the day, too, but, and there we met the police, the patrol of the road, and there was only one road which led to the next train station. And well we met, they met us, they took our money that we had in our little purse; the food they left, but the money they took, but the hundred rubles we had sewn in our seams, clothes seams, so we kept them. And then they asked us to follow them, they were on a horse and buggy, and after they took a corner, we decided we would run into the forest, that was all forest, where we walked, there was only one road to flee down, so they didn't follow us into the forest, so they left us, and we stayed until it was dark and then we walked on the road after for a while, till we got to a place where someone tried to make a mud house and it was half done, so we stayed there for the night and the next day we travelled, we walked again. By the way, I was in really poor shape, I was swollen from hunger, and I was very weak too, so it was a very slow walk, we didn't progress too much, but we made a number of miles. The next day in the afternoon it started to rain; towards the evening, we were completely wet, so we managed to get to a little village which we hoped someone would accept us into their home, but we knew the rules were people weren't allowed to take people in, but we prayed about it, and the first home we approached, the people allowed us to come in, and they saw our needs, and that we were very tired, we got in and they fed us and they allowed us to sleep, and then towards the evening the man of the house came in and said, if we had a few

dollars, a few rubles, there was a truck going to Sverdlovsk, where the first train station was, and we maybe could go along. So that was our ... saviour, shall I say, saved us from walking many miles. But I should go back a little bit. Before we came to this village, we were approaching a corner, and around that corner there was a hill, and on top of the hill there was the police, the guards that were supposed to stop all the people that would go by. And we knew if they would arrest us, that meant back to our exile. So both of us were really afraid, and naturally if you are afraid you just have to go to the washroom, that's what we did, and while we were there we prayed that the Lord may protect us. And I felt like in the Old Testament, where the prophet Elijah talked to his helper, who was afraid when they tried to escape, and Elijah prayed that God may open his eyes that he could see how many angels protected them from the soldiers that tried to get them, and that's what we felt it was, my first miracle that I experienced as a non-Christian at the time.

KM: You thought of it at that time, though?

AK: Yes, I thought — later on it was more clear to me. Now I'll continue on from the place where we went on by truck. They covered us, because it rained first of all, and secondly for protection from the road patrol. And we arrived in Sverdlovsk just we saw the tail of the train that left, that we would have gone along, so we had to wait for twenty-four hours, and it was — we were really afraid that they would approach us. But we were protected, and another thing, we were told not to buy a third-rate ticket. There was first, second and third class. Second-class ticket they didn't need any documents. The third class everybody was controlled and checked for passports. So we had enough money to take a second-class ticket, and the people in that car were really kind, they realized naturally who we were; my sister was OK, but I was swollen, and especially, my sister mentioned, that after I slept I was very swollen, my face and swollenness from my body showed more up. And so we travelled a number of days till we got to Moscow, and in Moscow we had Mother's golden ring which we sold, and we got a little bit of food, and the rest of the money we were using for our train tickets.

KM: Were you still in danger while you were on the train, too?

AK: Yes, yes.

KM: But nobody approached you?

AK: Not with the second class train. But in Moscow, we bought again half a ticket, I should mention that, half a ticket, I was then already fourteen, fourteen-fifteen, but the rules were till twelve years of age you could travel by train with half a ticket. And with fourteen I should have actually had a full grown-up ticket, which we didn't have the money for, so we bought half a ticket, and I guess I saw older out, but I hadn't grown since we came into exile. So we got our tickets and went to the train and went into the car and here it was third class, and here they approached us and asked us for our train ticket as well. They didn't ask for our passports, though. And they saw me and they said, "You are older than twelve," and they threw us out of the train. So I said to my sister, "Let's try another car," so we passed a few cars and went in again; anyway, and there my sister approached a person, she hoped he would help, and he did help. He said, "Have you a few dollars, a few rubles, we maybe can give them to the conductor that will check you," and so that's what we did, and he allowed us to stay till, we had to take another train, and there we, my sister went to a market place where we, I had to take some clothes off and we sold them, and we added that to our train ticket, and so we got finally to our destination.

KM: What was your destination?

AK: At that time it was Arkadak, where my sister knew those people, I didn't; she felt that those were farmers, it would be better to stay there for a while and so I would regain a little bit more strength. And then from there we left for Dniepropetrovsk, to my aunt's place, and there I stayed.

KM: Were you in danger again, if you had been found out that you had come back?

AK: Yes, we never could, we tried to stay away as far as, never told the people from where we came, where we were, we had been, and as I came to my aunt's place, I stayed a number of months at home till I, well she enrolled me into school, because of my, I wasn't capable of thinking, I guess I wasn't strong enough. And there the danger was they could find out who my parents were and they wouldn't give me a passport, and I had to receive a passport when I was sixteen. But then I was still in school. So then they asked me if I was, where my parents were, and I said they died, and that was sufficient for that time.

KM: I think we forgot at the very beginning to say when you were born. This took place in 1930-33, and you were fourteen then.

AK: Yes, I turned fifteen in August, this was August-September, when we came back to Dniepropetrovsk.

KM: So this was before the war, the second world war. You were born when the first world war started, in 1918, but that you won't remember anything of, I guess.

AK: No, only from my parents, see they were in Arkadak, and the revolution was on, and they came back in 1921 to the place where my father was born. His parents lived at that time yet.

KM: Your life began in very troubled times, and continued that way for quite some time.

AK: Right. Actually I never had a normal life; not childhood as well as, wasn't normal, like we call it here, let's put it that way.

KM: Do these experiences come back to you ever in memories, or dreams, or things like that?

AK: I never dreamt about them, but I find it very hard to talk about the details of, especially the exile. The details, I didn't go into the details, about how we lived, the sanitary part, it was very very gruesome.

KM: It must have taken tremendous courage to decide to leave, though.

AK: I thank my sister for that.

KM: How old was she, how much older was she?

AK: She was four-and-a-half years older than I am. She was nineteen at that time. Yes, she had the courage; but we had no choice, we knew if we would stay there, we wouldn't survive, not I. I would only have lived a month or two, not longer.

KM: What were your rations, or was there nothing, did you ...

AK: At the beginning we had some flour along and a little bit of oil or whatever; in a short time my mother had to get ready, my father was in jail, and everything was taken away from us, so we had nothing. So the first year I guess was OK, but later in the year, in spring especially, we just had to go into the woods, and we had grass which we gathered, and we put it into, made soup, with no oil, we didn't have oil, no vegetables, nothing; and then the little bit of ration that we got I don't remember, except bread, we had 200 grams of bread; the workers got a little bit more, but it wasn't enough food for gaining strength, they just had to — it wasn't enough for living and not enough for dying. But after my father died, there was nothing left, he tried to go to farmers to get some potatoes, get something, I remember only once I went to town, I was still strong enough, where my sister worked, where a special big jail, how do you call them here (KM: penitentiaries) — yes, like penitentiaries, but they worked there out in the woods, those people got some dried fish, and then she cut little pieces, like the head of the fish off, and she gathered them for us, and kept them, and my mother gave me a little white bag along, and as I went to my sister, picked that up and then I saw a garbage dump where they dumped everything from that jail, out of their jail, the dumping place, the garbage place, and I tried to gather some potato peels. And some of the guards saw me with that little white bag, and wondered who I was. It was unusual, having a white little bag, and here I was using potato peels, and then I came home to my mom's place, where we were, we could walk around, but my father and other people, they were I guess they were too weak to work. So we just washed those little peels and tried to put them into the soup and baked them on the top of the stove, and that's what food was, she put it into a soup. So it was actually just to keep fluid into your stomach and that's all.

KM: How long after your mother died did you move?

AK: My mother died March the 30th, and we left in August.

KM: Were you living in a house, or were you living in a large compound with many other people?

AK: With many other people. And we had only a little corner, from where you sit to the wall, that was for four people, and just boards, ordinary boards across, and that's all what we had, slept. And naturally, and every day a few people died, and we were about maybe ten, fifteen people in a barrack, we would call it, died every day.

KM: Were you there as prisoners, or to work, or both?

AK: Both, I guess, they just tried to get out you as much as they could, and they didn't pay you and they didn't give you enough food to survive, and you slowly, your body couldn't take it, it slowly went down until you died.

KM: And you mentioned your brother had escaped earlier, but he wasn't with you; had he escaped from somewhere else then?

AK: No, from the same place, but they told me; you know, we never shared things, it was too dangerous, but they told me he was in the hospital, and actually my cousin that died just last year, she told me that he had arrived in the Ukraine where she lived, in Zaporozhye, about half a year earlier than we did, so he escaped. And it was very dangerous to go with a man, so we decided we would try to do it, us two girls.

KM: Why was it more dangerous to go with a man?

AK: They watched men more, they wanted to keep them all.

KM: For working.

AK: Yes. The women worked too, but I was, because I was so small, and — from twelve years on you had to go and work in the woods, too, but I was eleven when we arrived there, so I didn't.

KM: What was the work in the woods?

AK: They cut trees down, and, I guess for their own needs, as well as for the, the government needed the wood for

KM: Fire?

AK: No, not fire, no those were big trees for their own use.

KM: For pulp and paper, lumber ...

AK: For lumber, yes.

KM: So did they have equipment for cutting these trees down?

AK: Just ordinary saws, no power saws, two people just pulling the saw, it was hard work. And then they had rations, if you didn't fill out the kind of norm, you got less food, too.

KM: This side is almost finished, so we'll continue on the other side.

KM: ... three years that you were 12, 13, and 14?

AK: Yes.

KM: And when you came back, you needed to find a profession, or to find some work.

AK: Yes, but I wasn't ready for it, I had to go to school, and so I finished seventh grade, and after that I tried, well my aunt helped me to choose, she saw some qualifications in me which sometimes you yourself don't see, but I always liked to help people, so there was one way of helping women, and that's why I chose being a midwife, and not only that I had to see, to help my aunt too, it was a burden for my aunt to support me, because her husband worked, she didn't, I had to be sufficient on my own. In the meantime my uncle died, while I was still studying, so she had me as a relative only; after I graduated from midwifery, we were asked to go into the country and work there in the smaller hospitals, not, let's say hospitals, where we would get our practice, not only practice, but work.

KM: You were learning as you were working.

AK: No, no, I worked, we practiced, to be able to graduate I had to accept 125 babies, in delivery.

KM: Alone or with someone else?

AK: Someone else was beside me, but I was delivering the babies. And because of my

aunt being by herself and of age, I chose to stay in the city, and I worked in a maternity hospital, where I worked with newborn babies, I treated them and worked with the doctors, I had up to 40 healthy newborn babies that I took care of, and sometimes I worked in the department where the babies were sickly babies, and underweight, they needed special care, and so we had up to 14 babies like that. It was a big maternity hospital.

KM: You were still very young when you studied this, midwifery.

AK: No, I was, how old was I, I was nineteen, twenty. Because I missed three years of school in Siberia.

KM: Oh, so you had to make that up first.

AK: Yes. So I really enjoyed working there. Except the nights, I didn't like to work night shifts, but I enjoyed working with the children.

KM: Better than midwifery?

AK: No, I liked that, too, but there was no choice for me, that went hand in hand. The midwives worked individually, too. We had one doctor on a shift, and if there were cases where the doctor had to help along, he was always there, otherwise the midwife was independent.

KM: So the midwife had to decide whether she needed to call a doctor or not?

AK: Yes.

KM: You knew when something was going wrong and you needed to call a doctor, you could tell.

AK: Yes, yes and no, but the doctor was available, he was, like, went through the hospital and checked the patients, and so this went hand in hand. We took care, the babies were in one department and the mothers were in a different one, they didn't have the babies with them. But we had different doctors for the ladies as well as for the babies. That was divided.

KM: Did you feel your experience there helped you when you had your own children?

AK: Oh yes, I knew how to treat them, what to do, naturally, what you go through as a woman, so many don't know anything about their own body, which for me it was normal, ja? It was, like we studied different sicknesses of children, what was involved with children, so that was all involved.

KM: What about, did a midwife ever use anaesthesia?

AK: No. Except you had Caesarean.

KM: If you had a Caesarean.

AK: Yes.

KM: Then yes. But otherwise not.

AK: No. No, we didn't give, it was normal, what we call normal birth, without any painkiller. But one, while I was still studying, we had a case where a lady, and now I assume she was a Jehovah Witness, she wouldn't accept any blood transfusion, and she had a placenta prarium [?], so it was impossible for her to bear the child a normal way, and they wouldn't give in, they thought it had to come the normal way, meantime, for three days she lost a lot of blood, and finally they decided they would go for the Caesarean, and there she died on the table. I was the one who had to give her the anaesthetic, while two doctors operated on her; so she had a beautiful, healthy child, and she herself was a beautiful, healthy young woman, but died because she wouldn't accept a blood transfusion; there are cases like that there too. But at that time I didn't realize what happened, why she wouldn't take the blood transfusion, because I wasn't a Christian, because I was cut off completely from all the churches, there were none, and what I got from home, I was quite young yet, but I lost it while I was... You need food for growing in Christian way. But anyway, that was a very interesting and sad experience for me what I never forget.

KM: Did the women come, they were in that city, they came for their babies to the hospital?

AK: Yes.

KM: I'm just interested in how they managed it. Did they walk around while they were in labour, or were they put on a bed right away? What was the practice at that time?

AK: No, they walked around till they realized that was necessary, and we had, like the situations just like here, too, and, but

KM: What about birthing position? Some now squat or...

AK: No, no.

KM: Just lying down.

AK: Lying down, yes. No, that wasn't, maybe in the country they had that but, I mean without any other help maybe they did it, but not in the hospital.

KM: What about forceps, were they used often, or rarely?

AK: What?

KM: Forceps. — What do they call them in German —

AK: I don't know what forceps is.

KM: Zangen.

AK: Oh. Yes, oh sure, we, yes if the woman was too narrow, then they had to be helped along, or if she was too narrow to bear the child the normal way, she had an operation.

KM: What about, do you know what an episiotomy is? Schnitt, cut.

AK: Yes. You see, a midwife was judged by her good performance by having the woman bear the child without tears. Yes. It had to go a slow way, and so very few women had the problem of tearing, or they didn't cut. Except on very special occasions, and I was

really surprised that that was allowed here, the fastest way, and that wasn't done the fastest way but the safest way, for the woman, for the later years, that could affect her later.

KM: What did they feel were the effects later, if they had a...

AK: Oh, the womb could, lower you know, couldn't hold the womb, you know, it's, I can't explain myself, I had it in Russian, when I should talk in German or in English, it's, I can't use those words...you know, sometimes a womb —

KM: Tips, or —

AK: Yes, the tipping, that is different again, it tips, but it can push, come out —

KM: Rupture, is it a rupture?

AK: Not necessary, it comes more out, you know they have problems holding, the muscles are so stretched, the muscles don't hold the womb up, they just, it falls out.

KM: So, I'm interested in that, the midwife was judged according to how, the less damage to the woman, the better.

AK: The better. Yes.

KM: What else was different from your experiences?

AK: From my experience: women were very much encouraged to nurse; very few, very few ladies that didn't nurse their children. And I felt, my first child was born without any anaesthetic, and I could nurse her till seven months, and the rest of the children I couldn't nurse. But work was involved with me, too, that when I worked with my hands, that affected my body,so I didn't have milk. But I always felt the anaesthetic, the injections that we got, at least from my experience for myself, I felt maybe that that affected me, some are more sensitive and some are less, that's why I asked my doctor, and he didn't encourage to nurse, here in Canada.

KM: Was that in Altona?

AK: Gretna.

KM: How did he discourage it, or how did he put it?

AK: Well if you can't have milk, that's OK, that's fine. He didn't try to reassure, or to make you relax, or to help along, he didn't, the main thing was the child, that the child was healthy, and was fed.

KM: Well, do you feel now that nursing is better, do you regret that?

AK: I find it very important the mother nurses the child. First of all she gives with the milk the, the, children don't get sick, I can't say the word now...

KM: allergies, or

AK: No, not allergies

KM: immunity

AK: Yes, yes. That, the immune against sickness, the children, they are protected more than if the mother doesn't nurse. That's all built in, and I find that's very important. But that was a new era, and I find now they encourage women to nurse, before they didn't.

KM: You felt though that was a new era at that time, other people weren't nursing their babies either.

AK: Yes, right. But I was against that, against not nursing. I preferred to nurse.

KM: Yes, but yet in some way it must have influenced you, because you didn't.

AK: I couldn't.

KM: You couldn't, no. You think it was emotional, or what?

AK: Like I mentioned before, I felt that was the anaesthetic that I got, that that maybe

affected me, but my doctor, he didn't give me any answer for that.

KM: Well, he doesn't know, either.

AK: No, I guess not; he was a family doctor, though, he should have known a little bit about it, but I guess he didn't [encourage?], this was something new, and he felt it was better, it was OK. But our children were all big, so, they needed more milk than maybe I had.

KM: Well there are many things that influence you, too, about nursing; if you are tense, or you have a lot of work to do.

AK: Yes, the work, that I knew from my first child; I was washing the diapers, I had milk, but the washing, I don't know, the movement or the soap or the hot water, or whatever it was affected me; when I stopped washing diapers, my milk came back. And it was very important for us, because Karen was three weeks old when we started on our trip.

KM: To come to Canada, you mean.

AK: Yes.

KM: So it was very convenient to be nursing.

AK: Very convenient, oh yes, and I felt that was very important, too, healthwise, for the child. — So it gives you different experience if you are in different countries.

KM: And different living conditions, what you have to cope with at various times.

AK: Yes, right. And everything was new to me here in Canada, a new language especially. But my in-laws, they were very nice, they always very kindly spoke German for the first time, but I always tried to speak English, wherever I could, where I had a chance to be able to learn the language a little bit more; I still have to learn a lot.

KM: What about your children's children, have they been breastfeeding their children, did they go back to it again, because it has come back again, in vogue.

AK: Yes, they tried. Rhoda is very much for home delivery.

KM: Oh, is she!

AK: Very much so.

KM: Did she have any of her children at home?

AK: No, she didn't, but she had a special, she had a midwife beside her and then the doctor, too. Oh, I wouldn't encourage people except you know sure that everything would be okay; I prefer to go to the hospital with my child, I mean to have my child. At home you never know what can happen, especially if it's the first child, and

KM: So your first child was born in the hospital, too, in Paraguay.

AK: Yes. But personally, that's what I feel , I would rather go to the hospital than have my child at home.

KM: Do you think it would be good, though, to have a midwife in the hospital, rather than just the doctors and nurses?

AK: I agree, a midwife, maybe men are there, we had some men midwives, too, but maybe a woman understands a woman better than a man. We had lady doctors, more than we had at the beginning when I came to Canada. And I find that's very important, now we have more. Like while I worked in the school, we had three lady doctors; that wouldn't have happened here, not at the time while I came to Canada.

KM: There have always been more women doctors in Russia, though, I think, than here, or that's the impression I get.

AK: I guess so. At least in my time, I guess it was more encouraged, equality, a woman should do any kind of work what men do, maybe in some ways it was ahead, I don't know if it's always, hard work which women are involved in in Russia, I guess that part was there, too, where women weren't involved in Canada, which I would approve of.

KM: Going back to the midwife in Russia: did she stay with the person throughout the birth, or were there shifts, too, when she had to go off.

AK: Shifts.

KM: Another midwife would take over, though?

AK: Yes. We worked twelve hours a shift.

KM: So it could happen that she would have her baby in that twelve-hour shift.

AK: Yes. We had some for forty-eight hours, and sometimes it happened, but sometimes the child is damaged, brain-damaged, sometimes it was okay, but there are some complications if it takes that long. Some got an operation.

KM: Did you have any experience with the stillbirth, where the baby has died several months or a month before already, and then comes out?

AK: No, not in my practice, no. We had some other children that were born that were both sex [?], and some that didn't have some fingers or some toes, and so often it happened with doctors. Two cases that I recall, those were doctors, the ladies were doctors that had children with missing fingers or toes. If that had something to do with the medicine they handled or were taking medicine, I don't know.

KM: The word "midwife" I imagine comes from the German word "mit Weib." To be with the wife.

AK: There you say "Hebamme."

KM: Yes, in German, that's right. In English it's midwife. But I think it comes from the German. — In what way do you think family life has changed, or hasn't it changed. Of course you say your childhood was not normal.

AK: No. At least, in many ways, we had, there was never freedom, you had to be always careful, you couldn't share your feelings, you couldn't share thoughts with friends or even in a family sometimes it happened, and my family could, but my aunt,

she didn't share her feelings towards me about religion, for instance. When I came back from exile, I just had a longing to go to church. She didn't say anything. She allowed me to go, I mean, not that she said "you shouldn't," she didn't discourage me, and so, and that was precautious, because her feelings she wouldn't tell me either, because in school they worked against Christianity, and by accident maybe I could have said "Oh my aunt is teaching me religion," or "My aunt is doing this." To prevent that I rather wouldn't know, so that's why the sharing wasn't there. And if her husband for instance was arrested, and he didn't know about his sons' feelings in certain areas, he could honestly say, "I don't know." And sometimes through his father, through son, or through other relatives which I experienced, they were arrested. Because they were pressured, they were tortured. Not willingly, maybe, but to save their own body, they talked about other people, which sometimes wasn't true, but often was, and so that happened, that that person was exiled. So the sharing wasn't done at all, so that the family life was different than what we know here, we can say anything, it stays in the family.

KM: I can see that would stay with you for a long time, though, thinking that you should be careful.

AK: Be careful, and you don't share, and you stay more on your own, don't share your feelings.

KM: Don't trust anybody, not even your own family, really.

AK: No, that part isn't in me, I just come out too often (laughs), too soon maybe. No I share, but sometimes I, it depends on where I am, I don't share, less. That freedom isn't in me, that I come out and share my feelings, and sometimes it should be maybe more done, but I don't.

KM: When you went to Paraguay, did you go with your sister or alone?

AK: With my sister, actually *because* of my sister I went to Paraguay, I didn't want to go to Paraguay. I wanted to stay in Germany, I had a good job, what I called a good job, and some friends where I lived, and yet my aunt here from Winnipeg, she encouraged us to stay together, and I see that now, too, because my sister and I in a way, we never lived together. She lived far away from the place where I lived, and we didn't travel as

much as we do now; we didn't travel, period, we didn't have money. So we weren't very close; only after she came to Winnipeg, we helped her over, we got closer. She was a completely different person than I was.

KM: What did you do in Paraguay; I think you worked in an office there again.

AK: Yes, yes.

KM: And you didn't live with her there?

AK: No, no, she lived far away again, I got, just happened to, by accident, not by accident that was chosen. And we just were writing and so we weren't close together.

KM: Then you met your husband in Paraguay?

AK: Yes, I lived with the MCC workers, and he was teaching in high school, and I worked in, the office was on the same campus, same area, they offered a place for the refugees as they came in, to take us in for a certain time, and after they left, I stayed in the house and then some other MCC worker came and we had a cook, and through the MCC workers that we associated with — we, I said we, my friend and I we worked together, we were very close, she lived with a different teacher, but not MCC teacher, that's where I got to know Menno, they got together as MCC workers, there were a number of young people.

KM: So then you made another major move, to Canada.

AK: Right. Now I had in mind anyway, not this, so many people maybe thought, because Menno was from Canada, that's why we got to know each other, we got to know each other as well as we got married, and that wasn't one way of getting out of Paraguay at all, some people maybe feel that way. No, but I had some cousins and my aunt lived here, and I wanted to, wished, at least, I had, would have gone, anyway, to Canada, that was my aim. We should have waited only in Germany for a longer time. After the war, the relatives here from Canada were allowed only first the closest relatives were allowed to come in and then the other relatives, that were further off, they got in. And our papers in fact arrived in Germany, my uncle applied for us, after we were gone.

KM: So you had always wanted to come to Canada anyway.

AK: So that was prearranged, I didn't know my uncle at that time, they applied for us, for my sister and me.

KM: Are there any places you would like to go back to, where you have lived?

AK: Menno and I went to the World Conference, and we went to see the place where I had lived with the people, and we had just a beautiful, a beautiful reunion.

KM: In Germany?

AK: Yes, in Germany; they just said, "Jetzt haben wir eine große Familie." [Now we have a big family.] So they got to know my husband and my relatives that picked us up.

Anna Toews Fullerton, Winnipeg

KM: First of all, would you like to give me an overview of your life?

AF: Well, I was born the fifth child in a family of ten. I was born in Greenland at home; Greenland is in Ste Anne Municipality, not too far from Steinbach. I've really come a long way from that beginning. I went to Teachers' College, which was really not that common for women where I was from; in fact there's been only a handful of women I'd say from the families there that have gone into teaching. And then I got married; I went to teach at Swan River, I got married, married a farmer, and I raised three children there.

KM: Was it fairly unusual too to marry someone outside the Mennonite faith, or not?

AF: It was and it wasn't, because I had already left my Holdeman roots at a fairly early age. I had decided that it was too restrictive. There were so many things that I wanted to do and see, I just couldn't see myself staying in a narrow outlook like that, so for me it was the thing to do; it was very hard though, at first especially, because you were often ostracized, and ... but when I left home at an early age also, it was hard, but I never really regretted it, because there is no other way.

KM: It's a very closed community.

AF: It is still in some ways, but things have changed a lot. You mean in the religious community.

KM: Yes, the church.

AF: Yes, it is still very, very restrictive. And only one of my brothers out of all the ten children belongs to the church that my mother belongs to.

KM: So you weren't the exception at all.

AF: No, except that many of my brothers and sisters had never joined in the first place; I did. So when you leave or you are asked to leave, you have quite a stigma attached to you.

KM: Were you asked to leave?

AF: No, I wasn't, but they still made it very hard for me. As if I was really doing something very wrong, very wrong.

KM: When you say "they," do you mean your family or the church?

AF: I'd say the church. The church. But I've certainly never regretted that. Because it's not me.

KM: Did you feel that way when you were growing up already or do you know when you started to feel that way?

AF: Yes, I did. My father was a little more liberal-minded than many other people in the community, and then he was put out of the church. We were never told why, but his, you know his theories and his philosophy on life; it certainly had a big bearing on the way I felt. So I joined, I think more because I wanted to belong, because the others who were my age were joining the church, and i wanted to belong.

KM: At what age was that?

AF: I think that was age twelve.

KM: Is that right! So early!

AF: Oh yes, age twelve. There was a lot of pressure put on you to stand up, you know when they had the revival meetings, a lot of pressures. It's very difficult to really be able to resist that pressure.

KM: Oh yes. Yes, I'm familiar with it too; I know what you mean. I shouldn't just say

"Oh yes." [they laugh] I don't think anybody who has ever not lived through it knows what it is like, at that age especially.

AF: I agree. It's just — it's such an alien sort of a world that people just don't understand. And then to have been so young and left, and I really feel that I didn't — my mother of course didn't want me to leave, so I had the resistance from *her*, a lot. And sometimes, if I would say things that — this was when I was in my teens — I would say things to her that she didn't agree with, she was really very angry with me, and she'd, a few times she would slap my face, and that just made me more angry than ever, of course.

KM: You say your mother. Was your father not living any more at the time?

AF: My father died when I was eighteen, when I was in Steinbach Collegiate.

KM: You hadn't left the church then yet.

AF: I can't remember now if it was legal or not, I mean if it was on paper or not, but before that, yes, I had written some of the ministers in my, in the Greenland church, to say that I did not want to belong to that church. So I can't remember now if I was already technically not a member any more.

KM: But you don't remember any discussions that you had with your father about the subject.

AF: Well, when my older sister and I joined the church, we joined together, he was already either put out of the church or he was already leaning that way. So he did not really encourage us to join. And then when they had the first communion, which is a very grim, sobering experience in that church, with a lot of weeping and so on, foot washing also, he just would not let us go, and I was annoyed with him about that, but later I was so thankful that he had not allowed us to go to that.

KM: To the first one.

AF: To the first communion. And I never went. I never went. And I was always — maybe I sometimes felt that I would have liked to go out of curiosity, but if you can just

imagine some of the atmosphere that was in. Because I used to go to members' meetings, and there was already a very solemn, kind of a grim atmosphere there. I didn't really want anything like that.

KM: What was discussed at these members' meetings that was so ...

AF: Oh, some of the things, the "do nots," the things the people were not supposed to do, and then people would sometimes stand up and confess their wrongdoings, and I did that once. I can laugh about it now, but at the time and for years and years I felt very ashamed and guilty. Ashamed, more than anything, because I stood up in church and said that I was sorry that I had been wearing jeans to school. Now that sounds very trivial to anyone, but in those days you didn't do that. You didn't do that in most communities, and certainly not in that one. Because girls wore dresses all the time.

KM: Yes, you have to keep in mind that it was a different time.

AF: Yes, it was a different time.

KM: Now you say that you felt guilty, that you had done this? That you had confessed or that you had worn the jeans?

AF: No, it wasn't either. Maybe not so much guilty. It was the feeling of shame that I felt, that I had made a spectacle of myself. That was the shame. Because really I wasn't very sorry for what I did. But I was under pressure again, to be like everyone else, to confess my wrongdoings. So it was more the being made a public spectacle, you know, that people will remember, and I felt dumb, I felt kind of silly about it. But for years I couldn't even talk about it, because I still felt so ashamed about it.

KM: Because in one sense you weren't true to yourself, really; you were true to what was expected of you.

AF: That's right. And I think that's even harder to accept, when you're not true to your own principles.

KM: And your mother didn't understand any of it, or your feelings.

AF: I never talked about it with her. Because she wasn't at that meeting. My sister was, my sister Alice. But we just didn't talk about those things with my mother, and she was always — well in most ways she was against me. She was always on her side, and ... because she was under pressure, too, to stay true to her traditions.

KM: She still is a member of the church?

AF: She still is. She is more understanding now of most of us, but she's still, and we can accept that, that she needs to be true to her traditions. But when you're an adolescent and you're rebelling and you're wanting to be independent, you're not going to be very sympathetic towards your mother.

KM: Well we got off on a tangent, I guess ...

AF: Yes, we did.

KM: Doesn't really matter. It's not really a tangent, everything is central. But I don't know if this is what *you* wanted to talk about.

AF: Oh, that's fine, that's fine.

KM: So we started off with that you grew up in Greenland, and you mentioned that you went to the collegiate in Steinbach and became a teacher and moved to Dauphin.

AF: No, not Dauphin, Swan River. Yeah, I got my education the hard way. I had only one year high school, that was in Steinbach, and I took more courses than the average student would because I was trying to finish my grade ten, and get as much of grade eleven as possible. And that was also the year that my father got sick and died, so it was a very, very difficult year for me, and of course for all of our family. And I had to go back to work, and I wanted so badly to stay in school and graduate with the others, the kids that I knew, and I liked the teachers, but I couldn't stay, that was really hard. I wanted so badly to graduate ... I had to go to Winnipeg and work. But I did work on some of my courses, and then I eventually was able to finish my eleven and twelve. But many people nowadays, especially young people, they take education for granted, in fact the parents have to push them. But with me it was so different.

KM: Your parents did encourage you though?

AF: Not really, no. Nobody really encouraged me; I wanted to. I felt it was ... I can't quite describe it now, but it was just a world, a different world that I could get into if I could get an education.

KM: It was the window, to get out.

AF: Yes. And at that time even high school was quite an achievement, that was in the late fifties. Course now high school isn't, it's still good for young people to have high school, but it's not quite the achievement that it was in those days.

KM: What about the rest of your family, did any of the others go through high school, too?

AF: Yes, my younger sisters went, all of them went, and some of them have even taken university, either a degree or started on a degree. My younger brother didn't. But then when Father died, he had to take over a lot. My older sister did, too.

KM: Did you start teaching at Swan River right after Normal School?

AF: Actually I had a year before that, permit teaching, which was near Riverton, and I felt that I wanted to go on with teaching, to keep it up and I did, then right after, yes, I went to Swan River, Swan Valley, really, because I went to a rural school.

KM: What would you like to talk about next?

AF: Oh probably when I started raising a family.

KM: OK, I can go into my mode. — When you first found out you were pregnant, were you happy? were you planning it? or were you surprised? were you unhappy?

AF: No, I was very happy, because I had already quit teaching, I had taught for three years in Swan Valley, and I had got married, I had decided to stop teaching, and at that time not that many women were working after they were married, it wasn't really the custom very much then. And we were on the farm and there was a lot of work to do, it

was a new community for me, so that was a little difficult, but we lived near my husband's parents and some of his brothers, and I enjoyed being on the farm, but it was a letdown, because I had been working for so many years and it was a very different life. But I was very happy to be pregnant. And I had had problems when I menstruated, I had a lot of problems, and I had been hoping that when I got pregnant and had a baby that these difficulties would be overcome, and as it turned out, that's what happened. And with the first pregnancy I was really very anxious at times because my mother was not there; I talked with my sisters-in-law and asked them a lot of questions. There were really not any prenatal classes at that time; I went with the second pregnancy, I did go to prenatal, so it did help some, but I felt fairly good on the whole through the first pregnancy.

KM: What about your doctor, was he any help? [both laugh a bit]

AF: Well, sometimes he made me more anxious than ever.

KM: In what way?

AF: Well, I had some pain in my tailbone [laughs a bit], and once he said, "You know, I might have to break your tailbone." Oh, that did not go over very well. I think what he meant was during the delivery.

KM: But was he serious, do you think?

AF: Yes, I found out later that that was his way, that he would talk before he thought many times. He wasn't thinking of his patients. — In many ways, yes, I felt fairly comfortable with him, but when the time came for the delivery, I was anxious. And I'll never forget that morning, May 20th, 1965, I'll never forget that morning. My water broke, very early, about five or five-thirty in the morning. And it was a beautiful spring day, just lovely. And we drove to Benito, which is a small town on the #83 highway. The birds were singing, it was just such a lovely spring day, the sun was out. And I was anxious, of course, with the first delivery. And we came to the hospital and one of the nurses was very good to me; she also was there when I had the second son, the second baby. And when I had such bad back pains, she would come and talk with me and hold my hand and I just appreciated that so much. And later I would talk about it, and people seemed to think that there was something the matter with me, you know, that I

needed that, as if I was talking too much, you know, about my emotions. And I thought that was very normal, you know, for a woman to need another woman close by and comfort her and talk with her and hold her hand and rub her back.

KM: Was she able to be with you the whole time?

AF: Not all the time, because it was a small hospital, it was a little nursing unit. But she was there a lot.

KM: Enough, anyway, you felt.

AF: Oh yes, yes. I think I started to go into labour shortly after I got there, and the doctor told my husband to go have a cup of coffee and not to come back, because my husband almost got sick when he came into a hospital. So he went, or maybe he even went home, and I think the doctor had told him that the baby probably wouldn't be born for hours. But as it turned out, the baby was born I think about two in the afternoon, so that my husband came back quite a bit later, and the baby was already born. He was surprised, I was happy that it was all over.

KM: That was the first one you were talking about.

AF: That was the first one. The baby was a few weeks early, he was very long and kind of skinny [laughs a bit], he had some birth, what do you call them, some red marks on him, which did worry me for a while, I think his nose was even folded over a bit. But the marks disappeared eventually.

KM: Going back to when you were pregnant: Did you tell anybody immediately or did you keep it a secret for a while?

AF: Oh, it's such a long time ago. I think I did try to keep it a secret, but I believe I did tell some of my sisters, because we were fairly close. And I think I told my mother-in-law fairly early too, because it was special, you know, I had married their oldest son, and he was 34 when we were married.

KM: Was it their first grandchild?

AF: Oh no, it wasn't their first grandchild, no, but I felt that it was special for them.

KM: Because in your mother's generation they didn't tell. [both laugh a bit]

AF: That's right.

KM: And I guess it was because they had so many children that it was no great excitement, except for the first one, probably.

AF: Yes, yes I suppose.

KM: But it seemed to be that there was a sort of competition to see who could keep the secret the longest.

AF: I guess that's true. And there was a certain amount of that, too, when I was having my children, yes there was.

KM: There were still traces of that left, too.

AF: Oh yes, quite a bit, now that I think about it.

KM: It was almost a point of honour to be able to keep it secret.

AF: Yes, that's right, and me, well, I couldn't always keep a secret, or you know, you'd tell a friend and maybe she wouldn't keep it to herself. But I guess because my children were all planned, every one of them, that was perhaps a little different, too. I think if one child had come along or had been born and hadn't really been planned, I might have felt differently.

KM: Now, I'll go back again to the reason for your feeling not good about leaving teaching, or your change in role. What was the part that you missed most about teaching?

AF: All my independence, definitely, my own paycheque, and I had my own car, and I had to get rid of it. I missed going places when I could go by myself, and I knew I would miss it, but I didn't realize how much I would miss it. Because I used to go away for

weekends, and then I'd have Christmas holiday, Easter holiday and summer time. I really did miss that, because I was bound now, and that was difficult. I no longer had a say in when I could do things and where I could go. I found that extremely difficult.

KM: So in a way the job was a symbol of independence, or it allowed you to take that right.

AF: Yes, and also the teachers that I worked with, or the people I met while teaching, they were in a different category, they were more professional than people I got to know after I was married. And there's a difference there.

KM: And this was in a different place, so you didn't have any contact with those teachers any more?

AF: Very little; I did have some contact at first with some of the teachers, and one of them did get married, also to a farmer, but she didn't stop teaching, she kept on working. But I did have some contact, but on the whole, no. And I missed that, I really did miss it. I guess it was much later, actually, that I really realized how much I missed being with other people on a daily basis. It was a type of deprivation. But at the time you felt that you were doing what you were supposed to do, and you did it.

KM: And in a sense you wanted the children, but not at the expense of your

AF: Yes, in a sense I wanted to be at home, I wanted to have roots. I felt good about being on the farm and having roots and feeling like a part of the community, although that didn't really happen for a while, because it takes some time when you're going into a new community, especially if you're then raising children, but later I got to feel like a part of the community.

KM: Again, back to pregnancy: Did you feel you knew enough about it or at least where you could get the information?

AF: No, I didn't feel I knew enough. I'd never really been interested in it before, and suddenly here I was pregnant, and there wasn't really any information. I did buy one or two books, but they didn't really give you what you really wanted to know. There were no books available, or if there were, I didn't know where to go to get them. They

certainly didn't have them in the libraries at that time, and this was in the early sixties, or middle sixties. No, I did not, I did not know enough, and I couldn't ask my mother very many things. She was more helpful to me later, after the child was born. Then I felt more of a bond between her than I had ever felt before. Then she could help me more, but no, when I was pregnant, I guess most...

KM: On the other side of the tape you were talking about communion, and I didn't want to interrupt you at that time. It's my feeling that there is healing in being able to tell our story and that has been abused by the church, I feel, in asking people to confess in front of the church. And for some reason or other those sessions were not healing in many ways, at all. And often women were the ones who were asked to confess, especially if they were pregnant before they were married, or something like that. Do you care to comment about that?

AF: Well, it certainly was not healing for me, because it had such feelings of trauma all my life until a few years ago, when I started to talk and write about it. It was not healing because of the attitudes of the people who were there in the congregation. They were there to judge you. They were not there to comfort you but to judge you and to tell you, "You can't do this, you don't do this. You will go to hell if you do this. You will have everlasting eternal punishment." And those negative feelings stay with you, sometimes all your life. Such deep, indelible impressions that were made when you were younger. And you grow up, and you never really question a lot of your past, your experiences, because you don't really look into them very much, and then when you talk to people about completely different backgrounds, or about similar backgrounds, but you are together challenging and questioning and talking, then it hits you, you know. You had such a unique experience, many people just couldn't possibly understand it, but many people have told me, you know, that I had gone through so much, oh I guess hurts, in my life, that ... but at the time, when you were growing up, that's when you really needed someone. And you didn't have anyone. There was no one to turn to, no one to talk with.

KM: I don't know if you want to talk about your church's practice of shunning. Did that come into it then already?

AF: Oh yes, very much. Very. And I knew what I was up against, because of what they had done to my father, how hurt he was.

KM: Could you explain just briefly what it means? Because many people have never heard of it.

AF: Well, there's a verse in the Bible, I can't remember which verse, but I used to know, but I don't really read the Bible any more; it says that you're to stay away from people who are dishonest, who lie, and — I can't even remember. But to me it really means some criminal, fairly criminal activity, but people in the church, the Holdeman church, took this literally. Or they took it for the meaning they wanted to take it. Because I guess people had this need for control, power, and they would, if people who had belonged to the church committed certain, I would call them small misdeeds or misdemeanours, or sometimes they were even criminal acts or hurting other people, but often it was just for very minor disagreements, and they blew it up. And the shunning would involve avoiding people. That's what they'd call it, avoidance, practicing avoidance. And — I'm just trying to think of the other word now — excommunication, OK, but practicing avoidance, that was the word that was used and that I'm more used to, and they would — OK, my father had had a store in the community for many years, and he wasn't really a farmer, he was happier in the store, and he was very friendly, he liked dealing with the public. And he also had more to do with other ethnic groups around us, he had many friends in the other ethnic groups. But once he was not in the church any more, most people would stop buying groceries. So of course that hurt the whole family, not just my father. Now tell me if that is christian charity. That was deliberately done to hurt, not just my father, but the whole family. I can't see anything good that comes out of that. And then also there's the avoidance when people of the church don't eat with the person who is involved. Now *that* I would say hurts.
The other practice, for instance, when my father lost business at the store, that was economical, but this was deeper.

KM: So members of his family were not to eat with him if they belonged to the church?

AF: That's right. They were not supposed to. And really my mother wasn't supposed to either, but at that time they weren't as strict as they were a number of years later. So my mother continued to eat with my father. As far as I remember she did. And he almost stopped going to church, so she did too, she didn't go by herself. I think it was because she felt she had to go along with her husband, even though she had her own opinions, but that was her place. But I remember a number of times going to visit at relatives, my father's brothers, and what they would do then is they would have my

mother and father sit at the table first to eat, and they would sit and visit. That's not very comfortable. And then later on, when we found out that my father had stomach cancer, that's what he died of, we felt that he probably had an ulcer for many, many years, and he should have taken care of it better, of course, but then he didn't go to the doctor. And he should have been eating many times a day, and so this practice of avoidance wasn't good to him physically, either. Or I'm sure to anyone.

KM: Because eating is bound up a lot with your feelings of kinship and closeness and love with other people.

AF: It is. Very. So I guess then, when I saw these things happen, and it just reinforced all those feelings of shame that I was talking about before, that we were always different, we were below, you know, we were down on the ladder; we were poor, but not just poor, we were different, because we, of our religious beliefs. We were treated like second-class citizens, and that hurt. Really hurt. It's a very deep hurt. I don't know if you can ever really overcome that, now when I think about it. I don't think you can ever completely, you really, you think you do, but I think it's always there. [pause] And then of course when I left the church, it was much different for me, because I wasn't at home that much, and I knew that it wouldn't affect me the same way as it had affected my father. But it still hurt. The people would — and for many years I refused to go back to the church in Greenland, I just wouldn't go, because of the way you were treated: you were either ignored, or people would say "Oh, it's so good to see you back in church!" and then a few days before I got married, one of my friends that I used to go to school with came and visited and brought a gift and said, "Well, maybe you and your husband will both join the church." And I was angry, I was just furious. What right have you to say that to me? And it's so unrealistic, because nothing would ever be farther from the truth. I was very angry. But I still had that same feeling, that I was, because I didn't measure up, the same feelings of I guess worthlessness.

KM: The only way you could gain acceptance is to belong to the church and to confess.

AF: And go along. Not question, because I guess I always had questioned. Everything. And you were immediately branded. As one of my cousins said to me one day — he was a teacher also, and we would drive to summer school together — he said, "When I start to doubt, I go and talk to the ministers." Well, I wasn't like that. I had no intentions of that, because by then I was already away from the church, and I did have some good

conversations with this cousin, and he never really at that time gave me the impression that I might want to come back to the church, but the feeling was still there. We were on different ground.

KM: Church somehow became something that came between family members.

AF: Very much. Very. And then when there was that wave of persecution, I think it was in the early seventies, that's when it really did, it came between. And it also, there was a gulf that widened between some of our family members, very.

KM: The ones who stayed in the church and the ones who aren't.

AF: That's right. But not just those, it also — there were some rifts between other family members, too, because the family is, you know, we're all, there's this interrelationship. But then after that, my mother did not eat with me any more at the same table, but until, until that time, oh perhaps the mid-seventies, she used to, but not any more.

KM: And it was something to do with the climate in the church that she stopped eating with you.

AF: That's right, yes. [pause] But it doesn't bother me as much as it did for a while; my children don't like it, that's one reason they don't want to come to Grandma. I had warned them about it, though, before; we hadn't gone to see her for quite a while, and when we did go I had warned my children that — and I tried to explain to them why, but they couldn't understand, they could just see the negative, the harmful side of it. And I've tried to, even now, to explain to them. But there's still that feeling that they, they would like to go and see her, but — But. [pause]

KM: Well [pause] , it's something that's very hard to grapple with, because you can see that allegiance to, in their case they feel it's an allegiance to God, somehow, has the higher priority than allegiance to family. And yet something must be wrong if that' s so —

AF: Yes, it seems to — and I think women more so, women have suffered very much in a church climate like that. Because women are not supposed to speak up at all; if anyone

questions, it's the males. And the males are really the active ones. The women are just supposed to be quiet and go along and be good mothers, good wives, and do, you know, certain community work that just the women do, and it's the males that have the power. And God is seen as a male. So it's all of it very male-dominated.

KM: Well, you mentioned that women go to the membership meetings. Do they ever speak out at all?

AF: Yes, some of the women did, I think. They would occasionally make a statement. But I'd say it would have to be a fairly minor statement. This is what I can remember, and of course I've tried to forget a lot of things, so — but, yes, the women went, too. The women would generally be weeping. Mind you, a lot of the men would, too.

KM: I don't understand that; what brought the climate of weeping, was it so, who guided the meeting, and what went on?

AF: Well, this would generally happen when there were revival meetings. And at that time it was once a year, now I think they have them twice a year. And it's the, that climate was brought on by, I'd say partly the influence of the evangelist, who generally came from the States. Very, very, you know, what's the term ...

KM: High pressure?

AF: Yes, high pressure, you know, fire and brimstone, kind of evangelist. And then people were brought to, well, sort of brought down to their knees to the point of confession and penitence and, what else, and mourning, I guess.

KM: I guess I misunderstood before, I thought you meant those membership meetings.

AF: Well, yes, they would have them during the year though, too; and — OK, if someone had transgressed, a member had stepped out of line, then that would also be a reason for this, for everyone mourning for that person's actions. So, but at the same time it was also judging.

KM: So it was more a God of judgment than a God of love.

AF: Oh, definitely. I never really heard about a God of love until I went to some other church meetings; I'd say the United Church more so. It was incredible. There was not such thing as love.

KM: Did you join a different church later?

AF: I did, yes, I did join a Baptist church in Winnipeg,but then later I found out that it was, outwardly it was very different from the one I was a member of as a young girl, but many things were the same, so I eventually left. After that I did not join any more churches. I went: when I was married I went to a church, that was evangelical also, but there was very little Christian charity, I felt, there, when you really needed it, and that really, that turned me off organized churches. That was it.

KM: Do you think it has anything to do with the fact that, well I think we've been talking about that, that the women are excluded, that there is so little [love?] ...

AF: Yes. That the men make the decisions, and the men have the power, and tremendous power sometimes, and the women do not have enough. They're put in the kitchens and in the back pews to tend the babies, that's what they're for, they're not, because the women just don't, don't have a say, they're, as if they're not really humans, they don't have the intelligence. [pause] I did go to a United Church in Swan River, and I really did like the minister, and I still like him, and occasionally I go to hear him speak, because he is a very, he is a true christian person. And I know of a few other people whom I would call genuine Christians, but there are not that many. I mean for those who profess to be Christians. I don't know if I even, I don't really consider myself really as a Christian now, I consider myself more of a humanist, because I believe in the whole person. But I've certainly come a long way. Well, maybe full circle, from my beginnings. And I guess I feel good about it. I feel good that I've been able to do that. Many people probably envy me, even though they would not admit it, but it hasn't been easy, but I've done it, and I can be proud of that.

KM: Do you have, or have you ever had a group of women that you have felt a sense of community with, or belonging. That can be anybody, I don't necessarily mean a formal group, but do you ever feel that you find some sense of community with other women?

AF: Oh yes, I guess the first group of women that I really felt good about was when I

went to work after I had left my marriage, and it wasn't a professional type of work, but as it turned out, that really helped me in my healing. Yes. And we used to have fun, and we'd talk about, there were three of us who were separated, and we all had children, so we really had a lot of things to hash over, and yet we had a lot of fun. That was the first time, and I have had other groups since. But I think that is missing, though, that women do not have enough support groups, where you can feel that you have roots in that group, that has security in your life, and we women do not have enough of these groups.

KM: In the sense that the people would be there for you when you need them, not just in good times, but also in hard times.

AF: That's right. And yes, that you felt that there was one refuge that you could go to, that you had some security, because let's face it, a lot of us women have not had much security in our lives. I move a fair amount, so that's in itself a lack of security, and I know that many other women are in the same position. We do not have enough security.

KM: We don't have enough places to meet, either, really, do we.

AF: Well, I think we could have places, if enough women decided to form a group that would continue to meet, even if the women themselves would leave and new ones come in, I think if women just decided to start a group, they could have a successful group, a supportive group.

KM: This may seem unrelated, but I'm thinking back to our mothers. Do you think they had any of that in their sewing circles, or with their sisters, or something like that, because somewhere they must have got their support.

AF: Yes, I think my mother, because my mother, she had a number of sisters, I can't remember how many, but I'm sure she did get together with them and she still does. So that is some support; and yes, they did have their church, their sewing circles; I believe my mother still goes. But other than that, yes, our mothers didn't really have too much, either, like a support group. And that's very important.

KM: We didn't get past your first baby last time, so maybe you want to talk about the period right after your first baby today and then go on to your other children's births.

AF: I hadn't had any real training or any prenatal classes before I had my first baby, and there was a lack of literature, and since my mother was very far away, I mostly talked with my sisters-in-law, my husband's sisters, or his brothers' wives.

The birth itself wasn't really very long or very, what should I say, a lot of problems, not really; I did have some tearing, so I had to have stitches, I forget how many, I think about ten, and I did have, I think I mentioned this before, that I had one of the nurses, the LPNs, they were very good, they talked with me during labour, and it was a very new experience for me. But it's something every pregnant woman knows she has to go through with, there's no way out, after nine months, or shortly before, you know you have to go through with it. And that in itself is sometimes very, causes a lot of anxiety.

KM: Did you have anaesthesia or forceps used at the first birth?

AF: No, I just had some whiffs of whatever it's called. That went for all three babies, I never had any heavy anaesthesia.

KM: Like an epidural, or...

AF: No, nothing like that, I was told to take whiffs every now and then, I think when the pain was coming, when the contractions were really bad. That much I remember. What ...

KM: I'm sorry, I broke your train of thought. You mentioned that every woman knows that at the end of those nine months you've got to go through that experience.

AF: Yes, that's right, and there's no way out, so you just have to accept that, and you don't know how long the labour will last; some women have perhaps frightened you, because they've told horror stories, and you didn't really want to hear that, especially with the first pregnancy, so you try not to think about those things. And this was a small nursing unit. I had faith in my doctor, but this was my first baby! After the baby was born, well, there's, who can describe the feeling, you know, of birth. The miracle of birth is always there, I think, after every birth. But the first baby, the first delivery, is always a little special because of it being the first. And you've never had a child before that is part of you and part of your husband; it's something you can't really

describe.

KM: You think it's more than just a physical experience?

AF: Oh, it's just overwhelming, really, for a while. I think most women would feel that way, that it's very emotional, very. That here is something that's part of you, and before you were alone, then you got married, there were two, and now there are three! And then of course you realize the tremendous responsibility, that really hits you, too, it really does; you know, I am responsible for rearing this child, and it's so new to you, it's frightening.

My baby was six ten, six pounds ten ounces. He was born a few weeks earlier; he was born on May 20th, 1965, that will always be a special day. It was a very warm morning when we went to the hospital, but the next day it started raining, and the rain turned into snow, and it was quite a little storm we had, but then this was Swan River, it's several hundred miles south of Winnipeg, so—

KM: North.

AF: north of Winnipeg, so this is quite, I guess, usual. And my mother came to stay with me about a week after the baby, and I think she had arrived with someone. I think I woke up that morning about five o'clock and I was breastfeeding the baby, and it was very new to me, too, it was, again, I had some anxiety; how would I, would I succeed, because I had really wanted to breastfeed, because I felt there was no comparison. And that was in the days when it wasn't really accepted. But my baby managed to eat fairly well, and then, well I had problems with sore nipples; oh, I don't think I'll ever forget that. That was painful. And another thing that I won't forget is, when I was in the hospital, a few days after the baby was born, I had to have X-rays. And I remember how sore my breasts were, how *sore*, and how full. And not just that, but when I went for the X-ray, my nipples were dripping, just constantly, just dripping away, and it was a little embarrassing and very painful and uncomfortable. Another thing, my two sons were both circumcised; at that time most baby boys were circumcised, and you didn't really question it.

KM: Your doctor suggested it, you mean.

AF: I don't remember now, I think my sisters-in-law probably said that theirs had been

circumcised, so it was the thing to do.

KM: How do you feel about that now?

AF: I would question it, if it was really necessary. Because with the oldest boy, he had to have corrective surgery before he went to school, because he used to, my doctor told me that it was soap that he'd got under the foreskin, and that really caused him to scream a few times. Anyway, that was really very hard for me, when this little tiny baby, just a few days old, had this operation, and the doctor would say, well it won't really hurt the baby, or it's no big deal. And I could hardly bear it, hearing that baby scream, because I think he was the only baby in the nursery there. And it was very hard for me. But then at that time you didn't really question it, now I would, if it was really necessary.

Then again going back to when my mother came; I got off the track there. I woke up that morning at five o'clock, and at that time I was very active and you know I wanted the house cleaned up, and yet I wasn't really very relaxed with the baby yet, because this baby was also causing me some trouble and a lot of loss of sleep. He was colicky, as I found out, and he cried a lot. And I sometimes didn't know what to do with him. Then, but, I think most of that colic would come later. When my mother came, and I didn't get enough rest, as I found out later, so when she came, we sat and chatted and I was still fairly tense, and then in the afternoon suddenly my milk was gone, and I couldn't understand it, because I'd had so much milk. And here I didn't have any, what was the matter! And my mother suggested that I was too tired. And I hoped that she was right, I really hoped. So I did go and rest, and I think we probably gave the baby some juice, or whatever. I think we had some, perhaps some formula, that might be it, and gave it some formula to have it stop crying. So my mother probably rocked the baby to sleep, and I had a rest, and it was true, later the milk did come back, and I was very relieved. So that never happened again with the other children, because I learned that I had to have my rest.

KM: I wondered if anybody helped you with the sore nipples, tell you what to do for them too?

AF: I think I, yes, the nurses in the hospital were really quite good. They told me, they gave me this, whatever it was, ointment, now I can even smell it, it's like beeswax and honey, and they told me what to do, and

KM: Had your doctor helped you prepare your nipples at all beforehand for nursing?

AF: No, I'm sure he didn't. He was fairly new himself, and sometimes he was very confident when he really had no reason to be (laughs). But no, there was a lot of things I wasn't prepared for. — I can even remember now those breast pads that we used to buy, I'd forgotten all about them, and the nursing bras, of course, well I'm sure they've been around for a while, but that was very necessary, but at that time there was no way we women were supposed to nurse our babies in anyone's company, not even, not really even, well maybe if you were visiting with another woman, or maybe two, but in mixed company, no, it was not acceptable. It was shameful. There goes that shame again.

KM: Yeah. And yet it made it, did you ever feel, when you had to retire to a different room, that you would have liked to stay in company?

AF: Oh yes, again, I felt (laughs) shunned (laughter), that old feeling. And I guess, although I don't really remember that much, it was an inconvenience, yes, plus the feeling that, I guess the feeling of shame, that it was inconvenient, yes, sometimes you wanted to hear a conversation or just stay where you were, and then you had to leave.

KM: I was just thinking of the connection between having to leave and drinking in secret (laughter). In some ways, once in a while, I liked going away from the rest of the people, but other times I would have preferred to stay.

AF: Yes. I'm sure that at that time I probably would have felt more comfortable away by myself, also.

KM: But partly that was because you knew that made the others uncomfortable.

AF: That's right! Because it wasn't the accepted thing to do.

KM: How soon was your second child born?

AF: A little less than two years after. Again, I had planned this baby. I was very anxious to have another one soon, because I felt that two children together, close in

age, would be good. I knew it would be tough; I didn't know how tough. And I had been on the pill sometime after the first child was born, and also I found out, to my great relief, that my premenstrual troubles were over after the first baby was born. That was a terrific relief, because I used to get really sick, I used to get so sick I would hallucinate. And this didn't happen any more. No more cramps, nothing much anyway, no going to bed the way I used to.

KM: Was it premenstrual or during menstrual?

AF: It was, I guess the first day. And one gynecologist in Winnipeg had told me that he could not promise that this would happen, but he said with many women it happens, after the first baby then those cramps go away. But it happened! and I was very glad about that, and that was also one reason why I had a baby so quickly, because, what was it, about ten months after we were married. And in those days, people would, they still do!, count on their fingers. But I was home, I wasn't working, and I felt I wanted a baby, so we had the baby in less than a year. And the second one I didn't get pregnant as soon as I wished, but of course that was really a blessing, but I was fairly happy when I did, and it was quite different. And yet, because I knew more of what was coming or what was supposed to come, I dreaded it a lot. But I also had timed it so that I would have the baby in the spring, because I felt that spring was the best time to have a baby, especially on the farm, and other women had talked about being pregnant in the hot hot summer, and I just couldn't face up to anything like that, so I had all my babies in the spring.

My second baby, when I was pregnant, I started having contractions very early, and it worried me. Then, I think it was in March, we had just had a very bad snowstorm, or was it just before the snowstorm, I was spotting, and it was worrying me, so I went to the doctor and he put me, no it was just after the snowstorm, okay, that was the legendary storm of March, end of March '67. My sister-in-law was in the hospital at Benito, this was the same hospital, and she'd just had a boy, so I was in the same room with her, and I didn't want to be in the same room with her. I wasn't feeling that comfortable. But we did get to know each other a little better, and I did learn from her, it was her third baby, but I ended up going home with no baby. It was false labour that I had. And the nurse, I think this was a different nurse, but she was quite good, she was a little sloppy, but she was a good nurse, and she was good to me. She said, "It's probably just as well that your baby has a little longer to mature, so he'll be healthier when he's born, or she." We wanted a girl, there were very few girls in the Fullerton

family, in fact just one up to that point. And we had wanted a girl for the first baby, and now for the second baby we wanted a girl. I don't remember if I bought, in those days you bought pink you know for girls and blue for boys; I don't really remember if I bought anything pink; I didn't like to, because I felt that was superstitious to buy the colours beforehand. Now that's the only superstition I can really think of, but — oh another one is having a baby shower before the baby is born. To me that wasn't right. What if something should happen? So maybe it wasn't just a superstition.

KM: It was a fear.

AF: A fear, what if something would happen, something would go wrong. So then when I was home for about almost I guess for three more weeks, and I was having pains, and I was back in the hospital at Benito, and again I didn't have the baby when I went in. And I was getting a little impatient, but another storm came up, so I was very happy to be there (laughs), very happy. And my other boy was with Gramma and Grampa, my husband's parents. And I knew that, you know, Marty was in good hands, well I thought he was; Grampa sometimes told some colourful stories (laughs); by that time my oldest was about two. So one evening I did realize the baby was going to come, and I believe it was two hours after the water broke. So that was very short compared to the first one. And — oh that's right. The birth itself was not really very eventful; I felt that this baby, or had I even seen the baby, yeah, I guess I'd seen it, he seemed to be a placid baby, and bigger than the other one. So this baby was different. But then the afterbirth retained itself, and my doctor told me that I would have to have anaesthesia and he would have to get hold of the nurse, and this was, I believe this was at night, and the streets in the town were closed. So he phoned the nurse, and she came by skidoo. So I was very happy when she was there. He was by himself otherwise, and it had to be an RN, so she was the matron, that's right, that's what I forgot, and she gave me the anaesthesia, and that was ether. I had never had ether before, and I've never since, I hope I never, because I had some very strange experiences while I was under the drug. Later on I fully realized that it was the ether that did it, but very strange. It was, it felt like I was in a vacuum, in a time space, there was timeless, there was no time at all, and as if I had been there for centuries, and I was all alone. It was not a very good feeling. And as I was coming to, I heard the ringing, and sometimes I hear those ringing sounds on the TV, and it reminds me of that experience that was not very pleasant. And I was, I realized later that when I was starting to come out of it, the drug, that's when I had these, like a dream state. I heard the doctor and the devil. And the devil was

bargaining with the doctor. The devil told the doctor: "I will let her go, if you admit that you made a mistake." During the surgery. I can't really remember any of the very little details, but I just remember the awful experience that this whole, this part had, and then I don't really remember what else they said, but then I slowly woke up, and I could hear the doctor talking, and I could see him, and things began to be real again. I was out of that isolated timelessness, and then gradually I forgot about that experience I had. I didn't talk to anyone about it until weeks later, I mentioned it to my younger sister, and she thought it was very interesting. Then years and years later, because I always wondered, you know, did the doctor do something wrong, did something go wrong during the surgery?

KM: What do you mean, surgery, was it really surgery to take the afterbirth out?

AF: Well, I don't know. Whatever it was, I don't know if it was called surgery or not, but — what was I going to say.

KM: I'm sorry, I shouldn't interrupt you.

AF: Oh, I, years later I did ask my doctor, because I thought, I really would like to know, and I asked him, and he laughed, that's all. He just laughed, he never said anything.

KM: Did you tell him about the dream?

AF: Yes, yes, but to me that almost said, maybe he had done something, and yet he didn't want to talk about it, you know, I wasn't supposed to know about it. Because the patient isn't supposed to know. So I will never really know. And now it doesn't matter so much. But the baby was a happier baby, much more relaxed, I felt very close to the baby, very close, and I breastfed my second child for six months. And I guess being home more too, with the second one, and having the other child, we didn't socialize as much, so this second baby grew up to be much more quiet than the other children. I don't know if that had anything to do with it, maybe, but it was his personality I think more than anything.

KM: Did you not nurse the first one as long?

AF: No, I didn't. I think he didn't get enough milk, I think that was it, I had to supplement my milk with formula. And at that time babies were supposed to have cereal and even meats, very quickly. Now it's not done that way. And my older child had, seemed to have an upset stomach a lot. So now I really question. He probably shouldn't have had meat so soon, in fact I think even at that time, I did start to cut it out a bit, because I felt that he wasn't really ready for it.

KM: In those days they used to spit half of it out anyway, didn't they. They really weren't interested yet.

AF: Not really, no, no. It was because we thought, or the doctors thought that the babies needed it. And cereal, too, often you threw half of it out.

KM: But we listened to the doctors, we didn't question the authority.

AF: That's right, we didn't.

KM: So how long a space did you leave between your second and your third one?

AF: There were four years between the second and the third. And since I had another boy, I still wanted a girl; somehow I felt that I was being cheated. And yet I didn't really want any more children in a sense, because I felt

KM: On the other side you were talking about your third child. Would you like to talk about her birth?

AF: Yeah. She was four years younger than the second child. And I had planned it that way because I wanted a break. But then later I realized, it's so hard once you've got all the diapers done away with, and that baby is more active and independent, then you have to start it all over, so I was almost sorry. But it was done, and again I was wanting a girl; I had asked my husband if we could adopt a girl, and at that time there were still babies to be adopted, not like nowadays. He said no, raise your own, and I really dreaded the pregnancy, because I forgot to mention here, but with the second pregnancy I was very, very depressed at times, extremely depressed, and I think in January or early February I just wondered, how can I go through this, I just — the months and the weeks seemed so long and it was wintertime, and not just that, but with

the second pregnancy, my husband caught, I believe it was the mumps, and he was told to stay in the house for two weeks. That was a long time to be in the house with a man who is used to being outside a lot. So I found that a little trying. He started watching "The Edge of Night," a soap opera; I never watched any, but after he started, I got hooked on that one, and I did watch it a fair bit, but I know a few times I had to drive into Durbin, which still had a store at that time and go for gas and get groceries. I remember once I had a flat tire, it was extremely cold, and here I was very pregnant and very uncomfortable. But one of the men from Durbin, a young man, came and, or was it Bud's brother, who has a garage there, that could be it, but anyway, they did get the tire changed and I didn't have to worry about it, so that was good, they were very good to me. And it was, I was very thankful it had happened in town, not on the road, because it was so cold. Then I guess I realized, you know, I can't take chances so much, I had left the other baby with my husband, but I have to be more careful, what if something happens when I'm out by myself, so I guess that scared me, so I stayed home more. But with the third pregnancy, things were very different again; I realized more than ever that there was something drastically wrong with our marriage, and that certainly played a part with the third pregnancy. And there were things that happened that I won't talk about now, but it did not make life very easy; in fact I was very lonely and depressed many many times with the third pregnancy. And I remember, I think I read a lot, my boys were, I think the one, I think my older one was in kindergarten, that's right, I took him to kindergarten till Christmas, once a week, or was it more than once, but he was away, some — am I getting mixed up here? He would be six. Anyway, I'm getting confused here, but the boys were older, and they could play by themselves. I remember one day I lay down, and I had to lie down every afternoon, because another thing, my varicose veins with the third pregnancy were very very bad, they'd never been that bad, and I had to wear thick stockings. Often it was painful just to walk. So I was told again and again to take care of myself, and to lie down, elevate my legs. And so that was an extra problem. But I remember one day I lay down, and I had had a nap, and I had shut the bedroom door, and I guess I was awakened by the older boy. He said that his brother had lit a match. And he could have burned the house down while I was sleeping! So I had to keep an eye on him about that. We just had one bedroom at the time, and we were supposed to add onto our house, but it wasn't, I think we had started, but it wasn't finished. And I found that very hard, too, because Marty had, he was still in the crib, and he was, oh I can't remember, about five, and I thought he should be in a bed, and I felt very badly about that, in the living room. And Michael was in our bedroom, in a smaller crib, but now both those cribs would be condemned probably,

because of the bars, but my second son used to rock himself to sleep by banging his head against the end of the crib, and I didn't like it, but it didn't bother me, when I read about children doing this. I felt too he should not be in our bedroom, but what can you do? I mean you wanted to do the work on the house when you had the money, and not have to borrow. Oh I remember too when I was pregnant with the third baby; as I said, I had to lie down a lot. I read *Grapes of Wrath*, somebody told me not to; I did get depressed reading that book, very depressed. I probably shouldn't have read it then, but I did, and somehow I got through that pregnancy. I remember the last, towards the last, Christine was born April, April 13th, but for weeks, and probably a month, I had to sit in a high chair, because I found it so hard to get up, you know, sit down. And I was wearing my thick stockings, they weren't very pretty (laughs), and of course there's a lot of work involved with two other children. Then again I was in the hospital early, but this time it was in Swan River, a bigger hospital, better equipped, my doctor had moved to Swan River at this time; he was dissatisfied with the small town hospital and also he was being restricted more. But for me it was good, as I would find out later. I was in the hospital, and I was put into the labour room when I got there, because I had labour pains, but then they stopped, and I was getting so bored. I was told to walk around a lot, but I felt conspicuous. I did walk a fair bit. Then I also had one of my attacks. For years I had had attacks tachycardia, my heart would beat too fast. And that was scary, the doctor said it was nothing serious, but it scared me. I had one of those in the hospital, I had oxygen, but I felt you know what if something happens to the baby? But nobody seemed very concerned about it. Then I was, I think this was the third day I was in, I was so bored, and my two boys now, two of them, were at Gramma's, and I knew that they were lonely, especially the younger one, so I thought I would go home the next morning, and just wait it out at home. But it happened that night, Christine was born, and I was in labour for about an hour. So that was very fast. But, and she was a lovely baby, she was nine pounds two ounces, very nice looking, chubby baby, but then things started to go wrong. Again, the doctor told me that I had the same thing, placenta retention, that I had with the second baby, but this time I started hemorrhaging, and it was very scary, very scary; I'd never had anything like that happen. After a while I could feel the life go out of me, starting at the tips of my toes, and I wasn't scared, it was a very peaceful feeling, but I had just had a baby, I had had a girl, I had two children at home, I didn't want to die! I wasn't ready to die. And the doctor was waiting for the other doctor, who was the anaesthetist, the other doctor was busy sewing up someone's head wound downstairs, and I thought he would never get there, I thought he would never get there, I thought I would die before he got there. And nobody seemed to be in any big panic. I

couldn't, later on I really was — annoyed isn't the word, I was concerned about that, how I could have gone just like that, and they had not prepared for an emergency; at least that's how I felt. The nurse, who was on duty, the RN, was a, I'd say she was a very warmhearted, compassionate woman. And she helped me through this ordeal. I did not have ether this time, it was sodium pentathol, so I did not have the same unpleasant effects. Finally the doctor came to administer the anaesthesia, and when I saw his face, I was so happy, I was so relieved, and then before I knew it, I was under, and when I awoke I was told I was lying in a pool of blood, and they, my bra was so soaked, I just said throw it away, and the same, well I guess that was all. But I was alive. And this was about five or four in the morning, and here I could have been dead, and I was not, I was alive, and that was a good feeling. I mean, that's the understatement of the day; but I survived. And I said, phone my husband up. I knew he would be happy to have a girl, but I wanted him to realize, get him out of sleep and have him realize that I had really gone through an ordeal, but I don't know if he ever really understood.

KM: He never was with you with any of the births.

AF: He was never there.

KM: He didn't want to?

AF: He didn't want to particularly, and I guess maybe after a while I didn't either, because I felt that ... I could do it better on my own. And I think I was right.

KM: It wasn't the norm in those days yet, either, was it.

AF: No, it wasn't, it wasn't really done, no. — And I had so many things happen to me, even during the hospital, although this time they kept me in bed for at least a day, and that was very different from the other births, I was up that same, well maybe within eight hours, but not this time, because I had lost blood, they kept me in bed longer. And when I did get up, I think it was this third birth, the first time I got up, or one of the first times, I fainted. And I had never in my life fainted, so that was a new experience for me. I had been given blood, an IV, glucose, a lot of things happened. They also put me in a room by myself near the nursing station. And one night I had a terrible nightmare, and I screamed, and the nurses came running.

KM: Do you remember it?

AF: I remember parts of it. There was a big black bear somewhere, and I believe one or two of my sisters were in the dream, and it was just very scary at the time.

KM: Were you depressed after the birth, too, or did that go away? You said that you were depressed during pregnancy.

AF: I wasn't depressed until shortly after, until I had been home for a while. But in the hospital I had been nursing, I had been breastfeeding the baby, and it was going good, things were going fairly well, until I came down with a fever. So I had to stop nursing, and that really hurt me. But they told me that once I was over it, and I believe I was taking a drug to counteract the fever, they said I could take up again later. Which I did. But my legs started swelling, and that really scared me, I had never had anything happen like that. My regular doctor was away, and I was in the hospital I think over a week, because they wanted to check me, to see that I was doing all right. Then I felt that I might as well go home, and so the other doctor said I could go, on the condition that I would have someone to help me at home. But I don't think my husband ever took that very seriously.

KM: Did you have somebody help you then?

AF: Later on I did, yes, but for me it worked out fairly well, but I found that fairly stressful, too, and my husband was not very concerned about me, I think that hurt more than anything. Then I had been at home for about six weeks and I no longer had help; by the way this girl who came to help me, I had taught her at school, and I got along with her, and she was good with the children, but there were things I had to teach her, and I found that stressful. Then after she was gone, I started hemorrhaging, this was about six weeks after the baby was born. And my husband wasn't even home, I was scared, I was really scared. So I phoned the doctor right away, and he said I should lie down immediately. And when I could get to the doctor, he put me back on birth control pills, and he said, "your milk will slowly dry up," and it dried up much sooner than I thought it would, and I was very disappointed, very. But the baby was doing very well. But she did have some, she would throw up, it was like a geyser. I remember one night especially, I was, I would be so tired. I would get up in the night and I would put her in bed with me and give her a bottle, I guess at that time I had her on the bottle, and then

just like that she would throw it all up, it would just gush out, I was concerned about that, but she was all right.

KM: She eventually got over it.

AF: Oh yes, she was very healthy. Very very healthy baby. — As far as the support from the family, I guess there was a certain amount, I think some of my sisters-in-law were concerned, especially the one who had had the baby a month or so before I did. We got together a lot, we were fairly close there for a long time. — There were, that's right, there were two other women in the district who also had a baby about the same time.

KM: Did that help, that you had other people?

AF: Yes, yes it did. I would get together with the women. And now those girls are, two of them are very close, my daughter and one other, and the other one is some, also. Yes, that helped.

KM: What about your relationship with your mother, you mentioned improved after you had children, or had you talked about that already, the fact that, when she came to see you.

AF: Oh, yes. I guess I didn't mention it too much. My mother and I hadn't really been very close for years and years. There was a big gulf between us, a lot of it because of my disbelief in some of the traditions that she hung onto. Partly other things, partly also the fact that I was never able to talk with her about many things. But after I had the first baby I felt very close to her, because now I had what I was supposed to have, I was married, I was on a farm, I had a child, and I was at least the closest to what she wanted of me!

KM: You measured up.

AF: Yes. And she did give me a fair amount of advice about babies.

KM: Was she close to the children too, did she enjoy them?

AF: Yeah she did, yes. I'd say she always did enjoy them. But because she was so far away, they were more attached to their other grandmother, and Grandmother Fullerton would babysit with them, so they got to know her more. But my mother and stepfather used to come for a few days and stay.

KM: Going back to your experience with the ether, you said there was something connected with your church that you wanted to talk about.

AF: At the time, well I don't really remember what I did think, it was just something I buried again, or tried to, but when I was under ether [a few indistinct words, including "doctor," "devil"]. But later on I realized that it was all tied up with my feelings years before about when I had left the church, the Holdeman church, and how I was in Hades for three days, it was about three days after these ministers had met with me, I felt that I was doomed eternally. And I'm sure that that experience I had under ether, it was a subconscious replay or whatever, about those earlier feelings. But like so many things, it took me a while to realize what it was about. And some people, if I had told them, they would have said, "that's nothing, it's just like a dream, I don't see it like that."

KM: But it was your experience, so you can really ...

AF: It was tied up with my earlier experiences with the church, that guilt, the guilt that I was put on, and the being banished eternally. But at the time I was [indistinct]. — But I was also going to mention, when I was in the hospital with my last child, and I was, I guess this was before I had the fever, and I was feeling good, a friend of mine phoned and — I guess she did phone, she must have called me later — but you know here I was in the hospital, and yet she was telling me, she was very upset, she had a dream the other night, she said, and she was crying while she told me the dream. She said that she'd dreamed that her husband had left her, and she felt so abandoned. And I was, here I was listening to her, I was feeling fairly good, but I was not feeling good about my marriage. And these thoughts were going through my mind as I was listening to her. Here I was trying to get her to feel better, and so it was a little ironic, that that happened to me later. — Now, if there's anything I would change now, perhaps yes, but at the time I couldn't, because I had my mind up about certain things. But later on, when I found it hard having children around me so much, and having to discipline them mostly on my own, take care of them on my own, I often thought that I should never have had

children, I wasn't really a fit mother. I wasn't patient enough, I needed more room for myself. Possibly if I did it again, I would not have had children, and I would have missed that, but you don't really know what you miss if you don't have it.

KM: On the other hand, did you have an example of your mother taking time for herself? You know, can one have children and also have a life of one's own?

AF: Well, my mother, yes, she did in her way, she had her retreat by reading. I remember that. She used to read and my oldest sister would be like a second mother to us. Or we would take care of ourselves, which we did a lot. So yes, my mother did, if you want to call it that, have time for herself. She had to. But there were so many things where there was no comparison between when I raised my children and when she raised hers, things were so different. But certainly now I'm very happy that I had my three children. Now one of them tells me that he will never have children. But I also know that he may change his mind, but that's, nowadays there isn't the pressure to raise children, your own children, or anyone else's. And I probably wasn't ready to have children, but then, would I ever have been?

KM: That's a good question. — Well thank you very much, Anna, I think we'll stop there.

Peggy Regehr, Winnipeg

KM: Peggy, you were born in Winkler, and you've lived in many parts of the world. You were born in 1928; your father and mother were missionaries to India for many years. You've lived in various parts of the country, in Winkler, Dalmeny, Saskatchewan, Sardis, B.C., and you've been a teacher for two years before you were married. Then you attended Taber College to get a Bachelor of Arts, and since then you've raised three children, born in 1952, 1955, and 1960. — I forgot to mention, of course you're married to Walter Regehr, who has been a schoolteacher and a retired school principal now. You are now director of women's concerns with MCC (Canada).

When you hear the word "childbirth," what comes to your mind, and what do you feel you want to talk about first?

PR: (laughs) Oh, I don't know what comes to mind first. I guess what comes to mind first of all is my own lack of knowledge and information about anything to do with childbirth. The years that we were in India, my mother became pregnant with the youngest in our family, my only brother, and she never shared any information about that with her, at that time I was eleven years old; I did not know that she was pregnant, I didn't notice anything different in her; I must have been terribly unobservant, and one day my mother disappeared during the night and the next day my father called us together and told us that we had a young brother. My mother never talked about childbirth or anything in terms of the sexual aspects of becoming pregnant, so that when I went into marriage myself, I had very very little knowledge of what was involved, and when I became pregnant for the first time, I — I guess I knew enough to know that I thought I was pregnant, but I didn't have anyone around to confirm that with me, anyone around to talk to about that, or not anyone I felt comfortable talking about that. By that time I had done a little bit of reading here and there, although books were not easily made available to us in those years, so I had sneaked some books, didn't let anyone know that I was that uninformed and that I needed some information. I think that probably influenced me to a large extent. My mother never found it comfortable to talk about anything sexual, my mother never even talked to me, really, about the fact that,

the concept of menstruation, for instance; I remember once she — because we were in boarding school, and I was of the age where I would probably start menstruating — she had a very short meeting with me, in which she just told me, I mean she gave me the napkins, at that time we didn't have the kinds of things that we have now in terms of tampons and Kotex and all the other kinds of things that came later; we had washable napkins; she just told me that this would probably happen, never explained to me why or what the reason for it. And just told me at that point never to let a man touch my breasts, and that's all the sexual information I ever received from my mother. So I was moving into something with marriage that was very strange for me. And I became pregnant almost right after marriage. My daughter was born ten and a half months after we were married, and I had not even gotten used to the concept of marriage before I was suddenly not feeling well. And so that was a kind of traumatic experience for me. We were isolated, we were living out in the country in a small teacherage, a country school, a one-room school, away from family, away from my husband's family as well as my family; I was the oldest in the family, so I was the first one having this experience. And I guess it was rather scary for me.

Pregnancy wasn't the greatest experience. I was sick the first months with all of them. I guess I was really not prepared for pregnancy, and I didn't really know what to expect, and I felt the isolation very much, that I didn't have the communication with other people. And because of the kind of taboo about talking about things like that, I found for myself that it was an uncomfortable experience, because I really was very uninformed. So especially my first pregnancy was difficult for me. I remember at one point we were living, we had a little two-room house on the same yard as another family right next to the school building, and the woman of the house that had five, six children, and she, I guess she had noticed that I was not feeling well, and she came to me and asked me whether I was pregnant. And that was right at the very beginning, and first of all I didn't want to admit it, secondly I didn't really know whether I was or not, although she really knew. So I said, oh no no, you know; and, I mean she knew (laughs), she had experienced enough of that. I guess in one sense I lost an opportunity. She was a very fine woman. I lost an opportunity of saying, you know, yes, I think I am, like, can you tell me more. But I was always a very fearful child through all of my life. I didn't easily talk to people I didn't know well, I didn't ask people questions, I had spent too much of my years in boarding school and away from my parents in isolation and without really caring people around who I could confide in, so I didn't ever learn to confide in other people. And so I really carried that by myself and struggled through it. I knew enough that I needed to go to a doctor somewhere along the line, and then of course I had

the regular check-ups and things like that.

KM: Childbirth wasn't exactly celebrated either, in church circles, or in our community, was it.

PR: No, it wasn't.

KM: It was hidden.

PR: It was hidden, and it was something that was expected of you. I remember at that time that any young couple that was married a year, by the time you were married a year and you were not visibly pregnant, questions began to be asked of you, you know: how come you're not having a family; what's the matter, can't you have a child; that kind of thing. I mean, as women we were expected to marry and expected to immediately produce children because that was a woman's role, but in one sense, for the women in the community, in one sense it was an important event, but for the whole community it was never a celebrated event.

KM: It was a very individual event.

PR: It was a very individual event, and you went through that yourself. And if you had an extended family that could be supportive of you, then you possibly had that kind of support; I don't know, because I didn't have the extended family with me, so I don't know what it might have been. But I suspect that it was probably, at least among the women in that extended family, there was a kind of support for one another in that. But if you didn't have the extended family, you really carried that experience by yourself.

KM: Did you let your mother know, was she in India at the time?

PR: She was in India, yes, and we let her know as soon as possible. As soon as I knew that I was pregnant.

KM: And what was her reaction?

PR: I can't even remember. I really can't remember. All of our communication was by correspondence, because one didn't phone across the ocean at that time. And I still have

some of her letters; I don't know if I have those letters, whether I would get a sense. So I really don't know. I suspect that with my mother's own never coming to terms with her sexuality and with her inability to talk about it, that in one sense there may have been some joy, in another sense there may also have been, you know, because it was the natural thing to happen, once you were married. But I'm wondering whether there wasn't also some trepidation there. Knowing about her now what I didn't know then. Because the sexual aspect of marriage was always a problem between my parents, and especially for my mother, and I don't know, when I think back now, knowing what I know now, there was a lot of coercion, sexual coercion, which my mother responded to very badly. And so I'm not sure that there was probably a great deal of joy. But she didn't communicate that to me. So I don't know what her reaction actually was.

KM: There was just a silence, in some ways. You perceive it as a silence now because you don't remember, or you can't —

PR: It's strange; there's a lot of things in my life that I don't remember; I think some of that I've blocked out because of the own difficulty of my life; I don't remember my childhood, really, until I went to India, and that's eight years. I remember very little about my childhood. I remember certain things about my experiences in India. I probably remember more about the difficult experiences than the good ones. So those years in India had a tremendous impact on me.

KM: You mentioned the birth of your younger siblings, but I don't know if you mentioned where they took place, in the hospital? at home, I guess, eh?

PR: My birth and my sister's births were at home. Two of us were born in Winkler, then I had two more sisters, and they were born in Dalmeny, and I suspect they may have been born in the hospital, but I don't know for sure. I know that my birth and my sister's birth were at home in Winkler. My brother was born in India, and he was born in a hospital.

KM: So do you want to go now to your own pregnancies?

PR: Okay. I started talking about my first pregnancy before. I never really enjoyed the pregnancy very much; I didn't have a lot of real physical problems, other than the

feeling nauseated and everything; with my first one I was very very uncomfortable towards the end, I remember that, and my children were all overdue, in terms of birth, and I found the waiting, I found the uncomfortableness and the waiting always very difficult. I guess I accepted it as part of my life, I mean that's just what I was supposed to do, it was woman's lot, and so you just accept it as woman's lot and go through it. I have a daughter-in-law who really enjoyed her pregnancies. I can't say that about mine. With the last pregnancy, I had a severe fall on the ice at seven months, and I had pelvic separation with that, and I ended up for the next two months being absolutely flat in bed with already having two small children in the home, and I found that very very difficult; I couldn't get up for anything.

KM: Did you have help in your home then?

PR: Well, I had people dropping in to do some things for me, but somehow or other, between Walter and some occasional help — we didn't have money for help! so it was dependent on family and friends. And I did have help, there was one woman from the church came regularly once a week to do my laundry for me, for instance, and she just felt that that was something she wanted to do, and she did it. My, you know there were other people who came in and brought occasional help. My one daughter was in school, my youngest, my son was at home still; he learned to do a lot of things for himself during those two months. My husband tried to prepare food for the next day in the evening; you know somehow or other we muddled through a lot of things. But there was occasional help when people came in, some on a regular basis and some on a very occasional basis. And we managed. And I guess in one sense the birth was very difficult, and I know I'm jumping now to my third pregnancy. The birth was very difficult, because I had been flat in bed, so all my muscles were very very lax, there was no strength in them; he was also a very big baby. All my babies were big, but the last one was the biggest, he was 10, 4, and he was very long, and so it was a fairly difficult labour. Not as long as some of my others were, but long enough.

Childbirth itself was difficult in all cases. I had very long labours. And at that time, of course, women were alone, their husbands were not allowed to be there with them. And I didn't have my mother around, Walter was teaching out in the country, and I was having my baby in Winnipeg, and he had had to go back to school, so I was taken to the hospital, and I was left there by myself. And he was not even there after the baby was born, because he was back in McTavish. And I can't — you know, they drugged you, partially drugged you at that time, so you felt out of it, I didn't feel that it was a great

experience.

KM: You weren't really part of it, somehow.

PR: I wasn't part of it. I was strapped onto this table — when I go back to the first one — and that was a very long one, and I felt very alone, because Walter wasn't even nearby, not in the hospital, but not even nearby; I didn't know what to expect; and the nurses came in to do these things to you, they didn't explain what they were doing to you, you know, they prepared you for childbirth, they shaved you, they gave you enemas and they did all of that kind of thing to you, and then you were left by yourself, and then you had pains, and then every once in a while they would come in to check how dilated you were, but I didn't know what they meant by "dilated," and nobody explained anything, and then finally when they thought you were ready, they wheeled you into the delivery room and they strapped you in, and gave you something, you know, a mild amount of ether to keep you out of it — people did things to you, people did things to you, and you weren't involved; you were giving birth, but you weren't involved. And nobody had sort of created an atmosphere, not even during the time that you were going for your regular appointments to the doctor, that this was something exciting to look forward to, and — I don't know. It was not — I don't know how to describe it, I'm having a very hard time thinking back, knowing how to describe it. But it was something, especially for the first one, I was very uninvolved. And because I also didn't really know what to expect, a feeling like, like you were all alone, and nobody really cared about you as a person, and it was all very medical and very mechanical around you — that doesn't mean that there weren't some fine nurses there, there were some.

KM: But it was an illness.

PR: It was an illness! It was an illness! It wasn't a natural process. Nowhere had I been given any information, any sense of childbirth being a very natural process of a woman's life, that women had experienced this throughout the centuries, that they had given birth to many babies, naturally, without help; they had given birth and gone right on to doing, picking up their work again; and we were kept flat in bed for the first number of days, you know, you weren't even allowed to get out of bed, your babies were kept separate from you, they were brought in for feeding and they they were immediately taken away again; it was so, something outside of us. And so bonding you know, there's a sense in which I bonded with my children, but there's another sense in

which it wasn't easy to do that.

KM: You could have been brought the wrong baby, and you might not know.

PR: I would never have known. I would never have know. Because as soon as I gave birth the baby was wrapped up and taken out of the delivery room, I didn't even see her in the delivery room. Now with the last baby, they showed me Gerald after he was born, you know; but with the first one, I never saw the baby until the next day sometime. And so who knows what happened.

KM: They call it the Dark Ages of obstetrics. We didn't realize we were going through it. (laughter) — What about breastfeeding, did you want to do it, or was it not on your agenda at all?

PR: I wanted very much to breastfeed my daughter. That was one thing, I don't know where I got that from, I wanted very desperately to do that. I know that it was going out of style at that time, but I really wanted to breastfeed my daughter. But I had not been given any kind of instruction ahead of time in terms of how to prepare myself for breastfeeding. And then when my daughter was brought to me, and I tried breastfeeding her, I experienced a great deal of pain in my nipples. And that developed into sores, and I was devastated by all of this. Then I was given 292s for the pain, and then I was told to try — this was already after I was out of the hospital — told to use the breast pump in order to express the milk and to feed her and then eventually it would heal and then I would be able to go back to breastfeeding. But I could not cope personally with the pain and that whole process, I spent many nights crying, because I so desperately wanted to breastfeed, and I couldn't seem to manage it, and I finally gave up, with a lot of tears. I think part of the difficulty with that was also that my daughter was born at the end of the school year, and we were going to stay in the city for the summer, and we moved into my in-laws' home. And my mother-in-law had borne seven children, and this was my first child, and I felt very insecure. I didn't know how to bathe my baby, and she was there always looking over my shoulder, having problems with breastfeeding she was always over my shoulder. She was a very fine, caring person, I'm not saying anything about that, but it was this whole — she didn't know

KM: How to support you.

PR: how to support me, and instead ended up telling me what I should do, and in my insecurity, I resented that. I think if my own mother had been around, it would have been different, because I knew my mother. But my mother-in-law, I mean we'd been married less than a year, I did not have a really warm — I had a nice relationship! — but not a really warm relationship with her, and I could not take that supervision. I didn't know, like I mentioned earlier, I didn't know how to ask this woman where we were living about my pregnancy, I also didn't know how to ask my mother-in-law for help and advice, and I tried to carry that by myself. Which, looking back, was probably silly, but recognizing the circumstances at the time, I know why I didn't ask. I can understand that very very much. — So I was devastated. I was really thoroughly devastated by the inability to breastfeed. When my other children were born, I did not even try. I'd had such a traumatic experience that I didn't even try.

KM: Do you know whether they also fed your babies in the hospital with bottles?

PR: I suspect so. I don't know for sure, but I suspect so. Because at that time of course they brought them very rigidly every four hours. And sometimes they didn't nurse properly.

KM: Because they weren't on schedule.

PR: That's right. And when you have a lot of babies in a nursery, and a few nurses looking after them, it's very easy to feed them. With Janet I didn't have any problems with her not wanting to take my breast. That wasn't a problem. But what became a problem was my own physical reaction to that.

KM: Not having been prepared.

PR: Not having been prepared in any form or fashion. And I don't know, maybe I was just more sensitive than some women were in terms of my nipples and the soreness and everything else, maybe tolerance of pain was less, I don't know.

KM: It is a common problem, there are ways of overcoming it, but you need to know them. You need other people to support you.

PR: Yes. That's right. That's right.

KM: So many women say that only because there was a particular nurse who really supported them, or a relative or another person, that really helped; if there's none of that —

PR: See I didn't have any of that, I didn't have family, I didn't know where to go for all of that. I really feel that in many ways my own childhood of being away from home so much, being in boarding schools, and then my parents going back to India when I was just barely seventeen, and being left on my own, so that I went through, finished my high school, went through my college, my teaching, my marriage, my childbirth, everything without parents around. And not having extended family, my siblings were still in India until the year I was married, my other sister was still down in the States in Taber, going to college, so that I was very alone. My relatives, my aunts and uncles, were in southern Manitoba; I had an aunt who probably could have been helpful to me if there had been closer contact. We had no car at that time, we lived in the country in a small rural school; it felt very isolated. In the city I didn't know people other than my husband's family, and because the pregnancy came so early, and I hadn't built up any kinds of networking, I felt alone; I had felt alone so much of my life, I had had to manage on my own, I was always a very insecure person, and I didn't know how to ask for help and advice. And I know that that complicated the problem. But then on the other hand there was also no one there who sort of tried to help me in a way that would have been helpful.

KM: And the amount of books available at that time was unbelievably poor.

PR: It was almost nonexistent. There was Spock's childcare book, on which I absolutely lived after my daughter was born, because I didn't have anyone to ask anything, and so I mean I just perused that book, I read it and reread it, it was my bible, my childcare bible. But there wasn't very much else, there weren't books on pregnancy, on prenatal care, on what to expect —

KM: Or how to prepare for breastfeeding.

PR: Or how to prepare for breastfeeding.

KM: I accidentally somewhere found a line somewhere saying you had to prepare your

breasts beforehand, and I was lucky. Because I would have been in the same position as you, I would have given up, if I hadn't read that. Because my doctor didn't even touch the subject.

PR: No! Doctors just didn't. — So, to me, when I think about childbirth, whereas in one sense I was very detached from much of my experience, for me that was an emotional experience, that breastfeeding concept. Because I knew that women had done it through the centuries and that was — I guess I saw that as part of the bonding process, being able to breastfeed. I had also done some reading where that was romanticized very much, and I suspect that I was influenced by that to some extent. I still regret that I was not able to do [break in tape]

KM: To your birth: did you have anaesthesia? You mentioned anaesthesia, but did you have forceps or other medication used?

PR: I had anaesthesia for all of my births. I can't remember whether forceps were used, but I suspect they were especially in my third birth, where I had been in bed for two months and it was very long, or very hard birth, because it was also a big baby. I do remember that with my first birth, I tore badly, and internally, too, and the stitches were not very well done. And I experienced a great deal of pain even afterwards, when I came home. Not only was I struggling with the whole thing of trying to nurse my baby, I was also, I couldn't stand properly, and I couldn't sit comfortably, and it took a long time for those stitches to heal. The next two births, because all my babies were large, I was cut, so that it wasn't the random tearing of the first birth, and was much better job done of stitching me up afterwards, so that the healing was much much faster, so that it wasn't so bad. But the anaesthesia, given enough to deaden the pain and to sort of keep you sort of in a floating world where you knew that there was something happening, but you weren't really part of it, and while it did deaden the pain, and with the long labour I was very tired, I still feel that that being in such a foggy state at something which is such an important part of a woman's life was in a sense an injustice to me as a woman. So that I guess what came out of the whole experience for me was precisely that fact that as women we were doing something almost unnatural, that we were being treated as people who were sick, we were kept in bed long, we couldn't get up the first couple of days, we were kept in the hospital for a long period of time, and we were seen as invalids when we came back into the home, where we needed to have our mothers or our mothers-in-law there to look after us, to help us out, and where we

were expected to stay at home for a longer period of time, not to go out, both for the sake of the baby, you were to protect that baby, but also for your own health, you were supposed to have a period of recovery; so that the whole childbirth was treated more as something unnatural to us, rather than as something that women have done through the centuries, often without the kind of technical support that we had in the hospitals and so on.

KM: There's a whole body of literature discussing this, the fact that a lot of the medicalization itself causes the problems. One intervention leads to the next one, and then the interventions cause problems — the positions at birth and delivery, and labour, too, are very important.

PR: And that is devastating, being strapped in in that way, with your knees in the stirrups, you know that whole concept, lying flat on your back as you're also trying to —

KM: Fighting gravity.

PR: Fighting gravity, trying to push, and knowing that you can't push any more, because you seem to be pushing against something that doesn't want to give.

KM: You've gone back to work and experienced some reactions to that.

PR: I went to work — I was — Let's go back half a minute. I took upon myself the traditional role of a woman, which was to stay home, to look after her children, to look after her husband, to be at home, because that was the expected role for women through, well throughout our church: I mean, women just didn't do anything else. And I accepted that role, even though I had taught before I got married, even though I had seen my mother, as a missionary, as a very strong person, who had much to give and to offer, even though I had a degree and I had taught, I somehow or other let myself be hoodwinked into the idea that women's only role was for her family. And I lived my life that way, until I was fifty years old. I had begun to question that earlier, but after my children were grown, I began to think of getting out of the house and doing something, but I had gotten myself into a rut that I found I couldn't get out of. My home had become my safe place, my secure place, and the thought of moving out into society, into the world, whether to go back to school, to go to work, was for me a very fearful thing.

And while in one sense I resisted that — we had talked much earlier in our marriage, when we were having a lot of financial problems, about whether I should go back to work, and I always said no, you know, it isn't going to be good for the family, I would have to work evenings, because we didn't have childcare, and that meant we wouldn't have any family life. I realize now I did a lot of rationalization already at that time. But here I had grown children who were in high school, my daughter was married, and I was still afraid of moving out of the home. And my children started putting a lot of pressure on me, and telling me that I needed to do something with my life, that I should not just stay at home. They encouraged me to find a job; well I said, what kind of a job can I have, I taught on permit, I have never done anything except those two years of teaching, I didn't know what kind of job skills I had, and I didn't feel that, while I had worked for one summer as an invoice clerk in a business where I had done some typing and other things like that, I didn't feel that those skills were adequate enough for a secretarial job. And so they said, well then at least go to school. And I rationalized that away too, I said, well my major was in business and economics, that is all outdated, the field has changed, I don't really feel like I want to go back into that field, which means I've got to start from scratch. But they kept after me, they wouldn't leave me alone, until finally I decided that I would go back to our MB Bible College part-time. I was also very afraid as an older woman, of not being able to keep up with studies, you know, could I in fact do the work at fifty years of age. I finally decided one year that I would in fact go to school, but I procrastinated and procrastinated until it was too late to register. But I began to realize that year what was happening to me, and the next year I did go and register. For me that was the best possible thing that had ever happened in my life. Because I began to deal with issues around women's lives, and with my own life, and what had happened to me; I began — as a member of a church that had always been very sure in terms of what women's role was supposed to be, and that it was supported by the Bible, I began to get the theological tools for dealing with those issues, so that I could say: no, that is not all that we as women were meant to be. And so I got a lot of tools for my own dealing with those issues, but more than that, I also gained a lot in self-confidence as I began to recognize that I could study, that I could keep up, that I could interact with young people as an older woman and have a lot of good discussions and make good friends from among the young people, and that I was accepted for who I was, not for my role as a wife and mother, but for my role as an individual, who had something to contribute to other people. I gained a lot of self-confidence out of that. What came out of that for me were two things: a real commitment to want to work at some women's issues, as well as a realization that I needed to do something and to move

out of the home. It took several years for the right thing to come to me, but in 1984, three years after I quit college, MCC (Canada) opened up a position for a half-time staff person for women's concerns. And I realized that with all of my life's experiences, and with all I had learned theologically, and with some of the gifts that I had, some of the abilities that I had, that that was the right position for me, and so I applied for that position, and took that. It was only a half-time position when I started, and it was a voluntary service position, which meant that I was paid a small allowance, but I was not paid a salary. For me that was, I was willing to do that for a two-year term, but for me coming out of that was also the issue of the fact that we have expected women always to be the volunteers and the men were the ones who got paid, so that eventually became more of an issue for me. When I got that position, I went to my church and I spoke to my pastor about my job, and asked for an opportunity to share with the church something of my job, so that I could also experience the support of my church congregation. And within the church we allow various people who go into various kinds of church ministries to share on a Sunday morning where they are going, and then as a church, you know, we give our blessing to those people, we let them know that they will have our support. So I went to my pastor and asked for that kind of opportunity and for that kind of support. And he was very hesitant about doing it, feeling that women's issues were much too touchy an issue, not being sure that that was the right kind of thing to do, sharing his own discomfort with my position, and saying, well, you know, maybe somewhere along the line he would do that, but he would see first, he would talk to some other people. I never got the opportunity to do that, and I never had the support of my church for my work, even though it's a church-related work, and that I was dealing with issues about women, women who make up over half of the membership of our churches. And while I was dealing with issues of women in leadership within the church, I was also dealing with other issues, such as spouse abuse and abortion and various other kinds of issues that affect women within the church as much as they affect women in society. I have never — even today, many people in my church congregation do not know that I am working in this position, and are surprised when after four and a half years they find that I have been working for four and a half years with MCC, which is a well-respected organization within our churches. If we had sent an MCC volunteer overseas, we would have made a big thing about it, but because I was dealing with the kind of program that I was doing, and because I was moving into a position of leadership within a church structure, and we have not had very many women moving into leadership positions within our church structures, it was in a sense new for at least my own Mennonite conference; I was always kept on the periphery, and I was never given

opportunities, not only not to share with my church and to get their support, but not to bring my expertise to my own church congregation. Women have, of course, women from the church have worked for a long period of time, and we have many women in our church who have gone back to work; mostly older women, not young women with small children, but mostly older women whose children are already grown up, and that has been an accepted phenomenon. But I think it was the fact that I was dealing with the kind of issues that I was dealing with, and that I was in leadership position within a church organization, which was the stumbling block for expressing interest in what I was doing and support for me in my program. That lack of support has been an on- — no, that combination of issues has been an issue for me in an ongoing kind of way, as I have tried to address issues of women in leadership: both within the church, within our own organization and within the church, there has been a great deal of discomfort, even here, about some of the issues. We are slowly moving towards more women in program areas, but we still do not want to tackle the issues that come with women in an organization being ghettoized mostly at the lower level, in the secretarial and clerk level, and most of the people in the organization in the administrative and program areas being male, with the fact that often most of the people who are on voluntary service within the organization are the women at the lower level and the men are salaried. And the salary scales that there are. There is such a wide range between the women who are doing most of the lower-level jobs with the men who are doing the higher-level jobs. And it's been as I've tried to address some of those issues that I have found that I'm treading on toes and that I've experienced personal, that I have experienced resistance to what I am doing, unwillingness to tackle those issues, and in fact have taken some personal attacks and some personal criticisms about what I am doing. As a result of some of the things that I have been doing, some of the things that I have tried to do within the organization, I have as a result of that also, I am also, losing my job as of March, 1989. And while the issues have become personalized, they have also been to a large extent because the organization has not been able to deal with the women's issue, the discomfort with the program, and with the fact that it has been coming too close to home.

KM: If we can only do it over there, in India, or somewhere.

PR: That's right. We are very strong on justice issues for other people, and we don't know how to deal with justice issues within the organization. We are very strong on models of mediation and conciliation out in society, but we have been resistant, as I

have asked for, occasionally, to accept mediation and conciliation for resolving differences within the organizationa. For me that has been very disillusioning, for an organization that I deeply respect and have put so much of my time and energy into. It is also a problem for me to move from voluntary service to salary.

KM: You have done that, though.

PR: I have done that. Most men, when men do start on voluntary service, and not all of them do, they have worked on voluntary service for two years and then they say that they need their expertise to continue and they put them on salary after two years. After two years, I asked for salary, I was rejected. A year later I again asked for salary, and was rejected. But at that time I did not allow the issue to die. And I made it a justice issue, feeling that I needed to be treated the same way that men were treated. But I was told that I did not need a salary because I had a husband who supported me. And so eventually, my supervisor and I decided that — no, he decided that the only way that he would deal with that issue, since he and I could not resolve it, would be to go to arbitration. I wanted mediation rather, feeling that maybe we could come to a compromise situation on that. But he did not want that, he wanted both of us to state our cases to a forum of three people who would then decide between our respective positions, and I think that he thought that he had the stronger position. And the decision went for me, in terms of giving me salary. Even there, I found myself willing to compromise because of financial situations, I was willing to put that off for another six months. So that I had worked almost four years before I finally got salary. Shortly after that, the process began to take place that eventually pushed me out of the organization. So that I feel that my pushing for justice and for salary for myself also created a backlash, and the process began in which eventually I found myself being given a limited term instead of a three-year term in order to terminate me. Which would make it look not as if I had been fired, by giving me a term, but which in essence was a firing.

KM: And you have no recourse to anybody?

PR: I have tried all the recourses, and I have not been able to get any justice. I have come to realize that organizations and institutions can be abusive, just as we can have abuse in the home. It's an institutional abuse, it isn't abuse of one person over another, but it is a power and a control issue, and there is victimization, just as there is victimization in spouse abuse. And I have learned a lot about spouse abuse in working

with that issue within the organization.

KM: And blaming the victim, no doubt.

PR: And the blaming of the victim. And keeping the person always insecure in terms of not communicating what is happening and what is going on. There are a lot of things that — some day I want to write something on institutional abuse, and I think I would like to apply it very specifically to churches and church institutions, so that it will be helpful to us within the church. But I think I need first of all to overcome some of my own anger and frustration before I can do something that will be helpful.

KM: Have you kept notes of your experiences?

PR: Yes. I have kept notes and I have a full file of materials in terms of correspondence and discussions and other things like that. But I guess what I've come to realize: that women as they try to move into society, into the church as equals, experience over and over again the same kind of experience that we experience in childbirth, where others have control over us, where we do not have the control over our own lives, where we are kept powerless often, in various kinds of ways, either through personal control, through the power of our doctors, through the power of our ministers in our churches, through the power of the administration and the boards which are almost all male within our institutions, that women still are kept powerless. And it is a pattern of our lives, which as we have described earlier with our childbirth experience, where we did not make decisions, we often didn't even know what was happening to us. We had to let others decide what was best for us.

KM: Power over us.

PR: It was always power over us, and that is something we are still experiencing, where we are not treated as adults who can make decisions about ourselves, and where we are not treated equally with men as people who can make adequate decisions about ourselves. And where if we come across differently than in that very fine, gentle, feminine way that we were taught to be — except that many of us weren't that way, neither my mother was a very gentle person, nor was my grandmother, they were strong people, and I've inherited some of that from them, even though I've always been a very insecure, very afraid person; where even, you know, if we come across strong,

as knowing what we believe and knowing what we want, we find no acceptance of ourselves, we are then those abrasive women, those pushy women who are trying to push their way into places of power, or to be like the men, or who hate the men, or you know all kinds of accusations that are thrown against us.

KM: Well, the fear is that we will use the power that we gain in the same way they have used it, over other people.

PR: That's right. And one of the things that I am discovering is that women have a much different concept of power. It's the concept of empowerment, not of a limited amount of power that if it's diluted too much and spread among too many people, we'll all have too small amount of it, but rather the concept of empowerment, where each one of us is empowered to make decisions about our own lives, to feel strong about ourselves, to feel good about ourselves, and to use who we are as people in some kind of way to be a benefit, either to society, to the church, to our families and our homes, if we decide to stay home, in whichever way we want to do that. And women are coming together in many different ways, in small groups, networking, where they are empowering each other, in women's conferences, where they feel empowered, where they operate on a very different basis, where they come for some mutual support and acceptance of one another. And my feeling is that that is the future for women. At least within the church, is for us as women to begin to sense our own power, which is not a power of power over, but a power of being, of who we are, and of what we have to offer, and of unity, of coming together and strengthening one another. And as we begin to use that power, and support each other, I think things maybe can change.

KM: I hear it in other groups too, it's not just the church.

PR: That's right, I know that.

KM: [I spoke with] the home birth support group, and they talked very much of empowerment.

PR: That's right. That's right. I think that is a very strong part of what is happening to women nowadays, as they're beginning to realize that there are more options for themselves, and they don't have to accept the 'power over' of men or authority figures in their lives to make decisions for them.

KM: I'm curious: do you have an idea of where you want to go from here then?

PR: No, I don't. At this point I don't. I have — I first of all was very devastated by this experience, and it has taken me a long time to deal with that devastation. I have a lot of ideas —

KM: Do you feel that maybe women have to divorce themselves from institutions and begin to work, like yeast, and change things?

PR: I think that's one of the things that I'm considering doing. While I think that there are benefits to working within the institutions, part of which is the finances that you have in order to do the kinds of things that you want to do, and the goodwill that there is often for the institution, so that it creates openings for you that when you're on your own, like yeast, trying to penetrate, you neither have the finances, you are not paid for it, nor do you have the natural inroads into the areas that you would like to penetrate. On the other hand, I still think that there is much that one can do from outside. And one of the things that you can do is work, I think to a certain extent, with greater integrity. You no longer have to be so conscious of the fact that the organization, for instance in the church organization, is dependent on a constituency for its finances, and if you overstep certain bounds, and say something a little too strongly, you are not helping the organization doing its many good things. And so there's a sense in which you feel stifled, and feel like you're being muffled, and you can't really say some of the things that need to be said, which you would like to say. Once you are on your own, you can also be a little more forthright in analyzing what the situation is, and naming a spade a spade. So that I think there are some definite advantages to that. For me, in wanting to do that, the difficulty will be precisely in trying to find the finances for that. Having been in the home most of my life, having been paid salary here for eleven months, having a husband who's on pension right now, retired and on pension, there isn't a lot of extra money. And so while I have a lot of ideas, I need to, I think I need some distance first of all from my experience here, and then I need to start putting those into a hopper and finding out where I can go with those. Whether that's working very specifically just on women's issues, and trying to do it on my own and finding some way of doing it, whether it's trying to move back into another institution, and I'm not sure that I could find the right place for myself...

Edith Klassen, Winnipeg

KM: I am interviewing my sister, Edith Klassen, today, in my own home, 701 Patricia in Winnipeg, for the project "Childbirth in the Mennonite Community." Edith is the sister who is younger than I am, my only sister who is younger; she was born after my parents moved to Homewood, but you were born in Winnipeg in a hospital, I think.

EK: Right. My mother was expecting me when she was moving.

KM: Right. Edith has lived in Homewood and in Winnipeg and in Toronto, Ontario at the present, from 1961 to the present. She has attended the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna, Canadian Mennonite Bible College, and has nurses' training, and has her R.N. degree, and is working as a nurse in a Toronto hospital. She has three children, she was married in 1961, and she has three children, born in 1962, 1964 and 1967, and I'll let her talk about the births in whichever order she wants to. Her children's names are, the first one is Jonathan, the second Joel, and the third Pamela. Or do you want to talk about your life ahead of your births, or do you want to dive right in?

EK: I think I'll talk about the births; I'd like to talk a bit more about after the births. With Jonathan, I was expecting, I became pregnant with him a year after I got married, and I remember at the time I was becoming restless about my work and was thinking of going into, working in pediatrics, with children, I was starting to apply to the Sick Children's Hospital, when I discovered that I was expecting a baby myself. And I remember that my pregnancy was very, I was very excited. I remember when I went to work after I found that I was expecting a baby, I was so elated I couldn't hold it back, and I told everyone that I was expecting a baby. And I just remember that I was very happy. I hadn't really, it wasn't as though I had been longing to have a baby, but when it happened, it was the best thing that had ever happened to me. And I remember also doing a lot of reading about what was considered to be, or, well, I guess what I expected parenthood to be like, and I remember reading a lot about the importance of the nurturing of the infant, and that helped me to become very aware of my maternal

instincts and my wish to nurture the child, and I also became aware that there were many things in society that did not confirm this, especially the way we gave birth and the way the mother was allowed to care for the baby after birth, and I think it was some article that I read about rooming-in that made me think about that, and this was in the very early stages of my pregnancy. I had been working in maternity, so I had seen the way women gave birth and the way they cared for their babies after, and the four-hour feeding, and letting babies cry; I always thought there was something not quite right about that. So I talked to my obstetrician about the possibility of having rooming-in in the hospital where he went to, and he said he would look into it, and he did, and they told him that this was against the hospital policy. So I then changed — what has always struck me is that there was something very strong within me that I would change the doctor that I was going to. And I went and looked for another doctor who went to a hospital where I could have rooming-in. And I always thought that the last thing I would do is have a baby in the hospital where I was working, because of everything I had seen going on there, and so I —

KM: So you didn't have the baby in the hospital you were working in.

EK: No, I didn't have the baby in the hospital where I was working, and I went to a hospital where I was able to have rooming-in, even though it was, the rooming-in at that time compared to today's standards was not really rooming-in.

KM: For a few hours a day, or something?

EK: Well, I had the baby all day and all night, because I asked for it, but I wasn't able to have him until two or three days after I had given birth. And I remember also after I had given birth, well with Jonathan it was more, the labour was induced, and when I think back now I think it was induced because the doctor wanted to go on a skiing trip, for reasons probably I was too defended [?] to think of that at the time, because I was, I wouldn't have wanted to think that he might do something like that.

KM: What reasons did he give?

EK: Well, I guess there was also, well there was a valid reason for me going into hospital, because when he, I'd had something, that I guess was false labour, or considered false labour, a couple of nights before, and when I went to see him for my,

and I was already three days overdue, I went to see him and he'd examined me and I was already dilated, so he wanted to admit me. I think I could have still gone on and had the natural, I mean it was only three days, so —

KM: What was it like to be induced?

EK: Well, basically all they did was break the water. They didn't, I didn't get to the point where I had the Tolson [?] or anything like that, so it really wasn't anything, like I really didn't feel anything.

My labours were all kind of uneventful, especially with Jonathan and Joel, they were both four hours. I guess I thought of them as being very painful, I remember saying to my doctor at one time that he hadn't really known what he was talking about when he said that it wouldn't be all that painful. (KM: Dr. Vernon?) Dr. Vernon, yeah. I couldn't have my husband there during the first two, but insisted on the third one.

KM: Oh, I thought you had had with the first one.

EK: No, no. He was there during the labour, but not during delivery. The third one, he was allowed to watch through a mirror, a window. And I guess —

KM: What about anaesthesia?

EK: Well, I did have the spinal, or epidurals.

KM: But not Demerol?

EK: You know, I quite frankly can't remember whether I had Demerol. I don't think I did, but I know with the third, the third one stands out in my memory, because she was in a different position, and it was very very painful, the labour, it was something that I couldn't quite imagine how anything could be so painful. She was born with her face up, rather than her face down. And I guess the back of the head pressing against the back bone was what caused such pain.

But what I remember from after the births was that I was always in a very elated state, and I guess I just loved it, I loved nurturing and breastfeeding, if anything — I always think now that if anything ever happened that I hadn't been able to breastfeed, that to me would have been very sad and very tragic. And sometimes I wonder why I

don't have stronger feelings about the fact that I didn't give birth to my children naturally, whether it's something that I'm not in touch with, or because I had such a satisfying experience after with them, that —

KM: Well, also your labours weren't very long, and nothing went wrong, seriously wrong, so—

EK: Mind you with Jonathan I sometimes wondered, because he had a very sort of shrill cry, what I thought was shrill, right after he was born, and I sometimes wondered, because I know that he was, I remember the forcep delivery more with him than with the other two.

KM: You mean there were forceps with all three of them.

EK: Yeah. I think so, anyway. With Jonathan I remember definitely forceps, and with Pamela as well. Joel was, I guess he's the middle child, things don't stand out as strongly in my memory with him. Except that with him, with Joel I was nauseated in the first three months, with the other two I wasn't.

KM: I've forgotten now what the reason is, I mean I had forceps delivery, as you say I can't remember too well either, I know with the first one for sure. But what is the reason for forceps again? To speed it up?

EK: Well with forceps, to speed it up, yeah, and I guess they're useful if there's a complication, but as far as I know — I remember also with Jonathan that there must have been some problem, because they said something about his fetal heart was low at one point, and that worried me a lot, and then together with all those things, with being induced, with this fetal heart, knowing that at one point it was a bit low, and then the forceps, I often wondered whether there had been some kind of trauma at birth. I have nothing really substantial to go by, because he's fairly, he's had some problems with adjusting to life, but he's fairly normal otherwise, and he's certainly intelligent.

KM: Yes, no severe problems, so —

EK: But it certainly was an anxiety for me at the beginning.

KM: Actually, often we're just happy to, I think in that era, we were just happy to get a successful outcome, didn't have very many expectations for a good experience, or an enriching experience, or

EK: Well, I didn't really have the sense that, I mean I had done some reading on that, but for some reason it wasn't as strong as the wish, you know even to have the rooming-in, like why I picked up on that rather than the natural childbirth; I know I read about natural childbirth, and I wanted it, but I didn't really, I didn't get involved — I didn't even go to prenatal classes with Jonathan and Joel, I only went with Pamela, and I know I tried some, I tried some, I know I went into the birth with Pamela wanting to have a natural childbirth, but then when it was so terribly painful I gave that up, because — so I don't know, it's something that I may discover later on in my life yet, but why, what...

KM: Do you know why you felt so strongly about nursing, or breastfeeding, and rooming-in?

EK: When I think of reading about infant care and the bonding, somehow, some of the things that I read were already pointing to what we now know about, is the importance of the bonding. Because I know that I used to have very strong maternal feelings towards them when I was carrying them, and certainly they became much stronger after I had them, and I just felt it was the best thing for them, and this was what I wanted and it was very important to me. And I remember with Jonathan I had very sore nipples, and I called my doctor one time, and she said, well do you want to give up breastfeeding, and that well was, I couldn't believe that she had even said it. Of course, it strengthened my determination to continue.

KM: How did you solve the problem then?

EK: I just kept, I would walk around the apartment with my nipples uncovered and I'd use a heat lamp.

KM: Did you get that advice from her?

EK: Yes. And I'd use lanolin cream.

KM: Were you aware of La Leche League at the time?

EK: I became aware of La Leche League with Joel, when I was nursing Joel, when I was having some problems, because he was one of these babies that refused to conform to the four-hour schedule. Jonathan more or less conformed to it; he would have his periods when he would want it more often; he would also have periods when he would sleep for a long, long time, and Joel absolutely refused to do any of that, he insisted on every two hours. And so I was at the point where I was worried, that there was something wrong or that he wasn't getting enough food, and I remember calling my doctor one day and I had been talking to him quite often about the problem and at that time he said to me, "Well don't you think it's about time to give up?"

KM: How old was he then?

EK: Joel? He must have been about — I think he was actually three or four months old. And that same night I was looking at the paper, and I came across an announcement about La Leche League. And I don't know whether I had, I think I had actually read, been reading the book, I think you had sent me the book, didn't you?

KM: I had one when I was nursing Rene, so maybe I did.

EK: Yeah. I'm sure you sent me the book and I'd been reading the book, but somehow the book wasn't enough. I needed some kind of personal support, and so I picked up the phone immediately and called the phone number and started going to some of the meetings, and actually became quite involved in the La Leche League, and I managed to nurse Joel until he was eleven months old. And I had many discussions with my doctor about how disappointed I was about the medical profession and their ignorance about breastfeeding.

KM: The first time you mentioned a "she." Did you have woman doctor with Jonathan?

EK: Oh yes, I went to a family doctor with Jonathan. She actually worked at the hospital where I was working, and we decided to go to her rather than to a pediatrician, until he had a hernia and I felt she was being a bit too casual about it, because there was a danger of it strangulating. So I went back to the pediatrician, and I just stayed with him.

KM: Had you been breastfed as a baby?

EK: No. From what I understand, no, I wasn't.

KM: Do you think maybe the strong feelings came from that, or —

EK: I've sometimes wondered about that, but I really don't think so. I think that the urge was very very strong, the maternal urge was very strong, and that's the way I experienced it anyway, and for me it was a very, well I still look back at it as one of the best times of my life, a very satisfying experience, to breastfeed.

KM: Had your nursing experience helped; you mentioned that you knew what you didn't want in some ways from that; in what other ways did it influence you do you think?

EK: My nursing experience, I guess the most important experience I had there isn't related to breastfeeding necessarily, but I remember working in pediatrics, and we had a premature baby on the ward, and we used to pick up this baby a lot, he was sort of the pet of the floor, and everybody picked him up and cuddled him. And then one day the head nurse decided that this baby was becoming spoiled, and she gave us orders we were not to pick up the baby. And I just thought that was, to me it just did not seem right, I mean I didn't have anything to go by to refute her decision or anything like that, but it didn't seem right, I didn't think that we could spoil a baby, and I thought it was very cruel to let this baby cry.

KM: And so you did, you had to?

EK: Well, we had to, when she was there. But, like I don't really remember whether we, I'm sure that we often picked him up when we weren't supposed to, but we did. But it was just that really left a mark on my memory, about how infants should be cared for, and somehow I've always felt that babies couldn't be spoiled by picking them up, and I think I struggled with that a lot with my first and my second, because with Joel, especially when he was always crying, every two hours, and I thought, well maybe, you know maybe there is some truth to this. But after my experience with, like when I started to go to La Leche League, I became more and more convinced that you couldn't spoil babies.

KM: Did you find other women who had babies that wanted to be picked up and fed every two hours, too?

EK: In the La Leche League? Oh yes, the attitude there was entirely different, I mean you just picked up the baby and fed it when it was crying, if it was hungry. If babies aren't hungry, they'll let you know. And also the whole idea that they need sucking, not necessarily food all the time, but they need the sucking, and that that's an important need, it's not something they should be deprived of.

KM: What about prenatal care, did you feel that the doctor took the time to talk to you about anything you wanted to talk about?

EK: I don't think I ever felt terribly free to talk to doctors, and probably because I was a nurse I had this idea that I didn't want to look foolish, you know, so I guess that doesn't stand out in my memory a lot, because I had three healthy pregnancies, and I was very healthy, in fact I think I was probably healthier when I was pregnant than, well at least I felt very healthy during that time, so I don't know whether there was anything more that I really wanted from them. I mean certainly when I look at now the kind of prenatal classes they have and the Lamaze and all that, if I could have had some of that, I would have been much better off, but I didn't really know, I mean it wasn't anything that —

KM: I don't know if they even existed at that time, or if they did just the beginning.

EK: Yeah, they were just beginning, yeah.

KM: No, what I'm trying to get at is, there used to be a lot of emphasis on weight gain. Was there also on nutrition or was it just weight gain, do you know? In your experience.

EK: I don't think I got the idea of the nutrition from my doctor, I think that was part of my knowing that what I ate would also produce, if I ate healthy foods I could produce, I had a better chance of producing a healthy child, and I think I became very self-nurturing, because I knew I was nurturing a child, it all ties in with having a strong conscience about it and also enjoying it, feeling that this was going to be an important part of my life.

KM: Did you have a certain weight gain that you were not supposed to exceed?

EK: Oh yes. I was not supposed to exceed twenty pounds, and I remember one time towards the end of one of the pregnancies, I went in and I had gained a bit more than he thought I should, and he told me I was eating too many peanut butter sandwiches (chuckles).

KM: Because I can remember that was very important, you know, you weighed yourself the day before and went on a crash diet one day ahead; you had to eat properly till then, but then you mustn't gain too much.

Were you working at the time when you were pregnant with Jonathan?

EK: Yes, I was working, I worked until November, I believe, and I had Jonathan end of December, and after I quit working, I spent many hours sewing little gowns and things for him.

KM: What about clothing for yourself, was that an important part of your pregnancy?

EK: Well, I made myself a uniform that I always liked, I felt very good in. I've always liked clothes, so I liked maternity clothes as well.

KM: Did you keep any of them?

EK: No, I didn't, you know, isn't that a crime!

KM: I didn't either, and I often regret that, one dress that I really liked. At the time you realize you're never going to use it again, but still.

EK: I never felt, I always felt that, I felt enhanced by my pregnancies, I didn't feel that I, you know some women say they can't understand how a pregnant woman can be attractive, but I never felt that it took away from my attractiveness. But the interesting thing is that I also don't have any pictures of myself when I'm pregnant.

KM: Really! I guess that really wasn't considered important somehow. I have one picture, it's a slide, it's not easily available.

EK: Well, I have some pictures that were taken at a shower, but I don't have any pictures taken in my own home.

KM: Was there ever any folklore or any superstitions about which sex of child you were carrying, or anything like that, do you remember?

EK: No, I don't remember that. I often wonder now when people can find out beforehand, what it would feel like, because to me it seems as if it would take some of the mystery away.

KM: So yours were fairly short labours, I mean four hours is not considered very long. Do you remember having labour pains at home and not going in too early?

EK: Well with Jonathan of course I wasn't in labour, in active labour anyway, when I went into the hospital. With Joel I went into labour in the middle of the night, and I don't remember too much before that, all I know is that it was the middle of the night and we had to take Jonathan to my girlfriend's, and if my memories serve me correctly, I got in around two in the morning, and he was born around six. With Pamela, I remember that she was two weeks overdue, and it was on a Saturday afternoon that I finally realized it was time to go, I'd been having contractions pretty well, milder contractions all day. And I just remember the doctor telling me when he got in that he had been in the midst of setting up a swing for his own children, so —

KM: And as soon as you got into the labour, were you put in bed, or were you allowed to move around, or

EK: I went to bed, but, well I know I was able to go to the bathroom, and I don't really think that I did walk around. I don't think I tried, either.

KM: Well it wasn't done in those days.

EK: No, the pressure to be a good patient was certainly felt. And even screaming was, I mean after having worked in obstetrics, you had an idea of what kind of a patient you wanted to be (laughter).

KM: You did not want to be the screaming type!

EK: No, you didn't want nurses to be speaking about, well "that woman over there"

(laughs).

KM: It would be interesting to interview a "screaming" type, although I have, women who had their babies at home, who told me that they definitely screamed, or made noises.

EK: See again there's that, I wasn't the same when it came to having rooming-in and having the baby with me, because I remember when Pamela was born, and they didn't give her to me right away, and I complained, and I said that I wanted her right away, and one of the nurses came in and told me that they didn't give the babies right away because the mothers would tend to pick up the baby too often. And I was outraged by what she said, because I mean this was my third baby, and I wasn't supposed to know when I could pick her up, and when not to pick her up, so I spoke to the doctor, and he got kind of impatient with me for challenging the rules, and he said it had something to do with preventing infection. And I said, well I had been told that it was because I might not know when to pick up the baby. I guess he realized then that that wasn't very logical, so he had the supervisor come and talk to me, and I had a nice long talk with her then about this whole subject of rooming-in and bonding and all this, and —

KM: How long did you usually stay in?

EK: Oh I stayed in the seven days.

KM: Well then it would make a difference, too, you see, how much they allowed you access, because it's a long time.

EK: Yes, seven days is a long time; that was the accepted time.

KM: You didn't have to stay in bed, though.

EK: Oh no.

KM: By that time you were being encouraged to get up after. Did you ever have help in your house after you came home with a baby? or from your husband, or —

EK: Yes, I had help from my husband, that's the only person that was around, I never

had any other help.

KM: Did you feel, or looking back do you feel that it would have been nice to have help?

EK: Oh yes, definitely.

KM: Let's say your mother had come, or

EK: Somebody to do some of the other work, and also to be there as a support when you're wondering whether — — well yes and no, it's kind of nice to be there on your own trying to figure out what to do as well.

KM: Yeah, I remember being ambivalent about that too; it would have been nice in some ways, but —. OK, when your children were sick, did you ever ask other women, or did you immediately call a doctor? I mean, I don't want to slant it that way (laughs), but I mean, usually we called the pediatrician, didn't we.

EK: I think I would sometimes consult with, because I had nurse friends, and I know I would often consult with Marilyn, because Marilyn and I became very close around that whole issue of, especially around the breastfeeding and the nurturing, and Marilyn also, she was working in the same hospital as I was, and the way we met was that one day we were walking to the hospital together and she saw my, she had been watching me in my maternity outfit that I had made, this uniform that I had made, and she was expecting a baby herself, and she asked me if she could borrow my uniform, because I was going to have the baby just when she was going to need one. So our whole relationship developed around our children. She also had a baby, that first baby died, and so actually there was both you and Marilyn.

KM: Oh that first baby that she borrowed your dress for died?

EK: Yes. And then we were, well we had a very open relationship around how we felt about caring for our children and nursing them, and —

KM: OK, this tape is coming to an end, so I think we'll stop for this side and play it back and see how it sounds.

KM: On the other side we just finished talking about your involvement with other women, your relationship with Marilyn as another mother. Did you, I'll just ask this question: In what ways was your church a support to your role as a mother?

EK: I think to be very honest, my move away from the church was precipitated by becoming a mother and what I was learning about myself and about nature; I think the church is not in touch with, at least at that time it wasn't, maybe more now, was not in touch with the natural relationship between a mother and child. I think it was because I became so much more in tune with my own self, with my nature, with the children's needs, that I found a discrepancy between that and the basic philosophy or the conceptions or the way people thought in the church. I certainly didn't get my support for breastfeeding from the church, from people in the church, in fact I found the opposite, there was a real sort of resistance to it there.

KM: A lack of encouragement, or an active questioning of the need for it, or

EK: Well, I guess I never went to anybody for support there, but if the subject of breastfeeding came up, and if somebody was having difficulty; I remember one woman specifically telling me that she hadn't come to me because she was afraid that I would encourage her to breastfeed.

KM: And she didn't want to.

EK: Well, she started off wanting to, but the sort of accepted thing was that as soon as you ran into a little bit of difficulty, you gave it up. There was no idea that you could persevere through something like that.

KM: Well, in what other ways do you feel that the church was not in support of close mothering or nurturing children? Were there other things in your life, too, that were not being supported by the church, that you felt a lack of support?

EK: No, I don't think so. I think — because becoming a mother and nurturing children for me was a very powerful force in my life, and I felt very much that it brought me in touch with my true nature rather than what was expected of me; and I didn't find, I wouldn't say that's the only reason why I started to move away from the church, but somehow I just found there was too much of a discrepancy between that and what the

church, I mean the whole lifestyle was not really, there's a lot of lip service given to the importance of children and how you care for them, but I didn't find that that was lived out in reality, and I guess it was the discrepancy between that that sort of made me. Of course going through a divorce also made that, strengthened that feeling.

KM: Well, is it the lack of interest or, I'm not sure of the words, in the body, or is it the denial of the body rather the church has sometimes preached, that you saw as a contradiction?

EK: Yes. Denial of the material maybe, at the expense of the spiritual, which when you deny the material, the spiritual also becomes questionable, you know, what is really the spiritual part of us if we have to deny the material, the natural. Like now you will occasionally see someone breastfeeding in church. When I was having my babies that would have been considered, well you still hear people saying that's not natural, that shouldn't be happening.

KM: OK. What — Is there too much division maybe made between emotional, spiritual, and physical, and so on; one part of you goes to church and one part of you stays home, and so on; do you feel that these things can be integrated, or were integrated in your birth processes?

EK: I think they were integrated, much more integrated in my own experience through the birth process and the nurturing process. I mean the birth process is only one part of it. Yes, I think that — well, I wouldn't want to single out the church here, because I think most of our institutions have this problem of not integrating the whole person. And the church may do it through religious dogma, but the medical profession does it through the conception of pathology and, you know, singling out a certain part of the person.

KM: And just dealing with that aspect of it.

EK: Yes, rather than looking at the whole person. And I wouldn't want to be down on the church too much, because I think there were some very positive aspects, the whole community; but if you couldn't express yourself honestly within that community, then it was very difficult to be a part of it. And certainly my children later on had a strong sense of belonging, which I couldn't share with them after a while.

KM: How do you feel you were changed by the experience of becoming a mother?

EK: Vastly. I think it was — well, it's an accepted thing in psychology and psychiatry now that becoming a parent is very valuable in that it helps us to work through some of our own issues. To what extent I did that at a conscious level I don't know, but I know that I just experienced very profound changes within myself and grew as a woman and as a person. It caused me some grief, because I didn't experience the same kind of growth in my marriage, and had a lot to do with why it didn't survive, but certainly for my own sense of myself, it was a wonderful experience.

KM: You were a very conscious parent, I think.

EK: Yes.

KM: You were conscious of what you were doing.

EK: Well I think I sort of woke up when I started to have children. I had gone through nurses' training, I'd gone through the ritual, the motions, but I never really connected with it in a very strong way, and I remember when I was at home with the children, that I often thought I could never ever go back to work in an institution, because it would be too restricting. But I guess, because I've had to go, I have been able to some degree to integrate the kind of growth that I experienced in that period, and it's still possible within, to a certain degree, in an institution. But I think for me it was definitely a period of an awakening and growth.

KM: Do you have any regrets?

EK: About becoming a mother?

KM: Would you know better now to do something differently?

EK: With my children?

KM: yes.

EK: Oh yes, many many things I'd do differently. But I'd be much more sure of myself,

much more, I wouldn't be intimidated by any kinds of, I mean if I could go into it now with the kind of knowledge I have now, I would not be intimidated by any kinds of social restrictions, I would go much more by my instincts and my intuitions. I remember one time Marilyn calling me when she was having difficulty with her second baby, and she had this sheet in front of her that she'd been given by the hospital about nursing the baby every four hours, and I told her, "The first thing you do is throw that sheet away, and then you follow your own instincts about what you think the baby wants." And so that was the kind of, certainly our relationship was very valuable to each other at the time, I think we grew together a lot.

KM: So you don't think you can imagine your life even without children.

EK: No, I can't; I mean I imagine if I hadn't had children I would have probably gone, eventually gone on to get a PhD or something like that, and my life would be different, and I guess the thing that I would have never known is what you experience when you're a mother. And whether or not the biological yearnings would have developed, I don't know, because I didn't really, I had my babies that early that I didn't experience that. I guess the only thing that I regret, or that I wish were different for mothers, is that they would begin to value motherhood, give it some status, and that mothers who choose to be mothers and don't have the financial support of their husbands, that they don't have to live in poverty and raise their children that way, because I think really it's, when you look at the reality of the way most people live, the majority of women now are sole support parents, and they're living close to the poverty line. And that I think says a lot about our society and how we value motherhood and children and human life in general.

KM: Yes, there's a lot of conflict for a woman too who wants a career, because those are the years when she should be thinking about becoming a mother too, and yet in our society it's also the time when you need to build yourself a career.

EK: That's why it's important that we start sharing it between, that men and women start sharing it, and that parenthood is seen as something, I mean that both people should really be taking time out of their careers and focussing more strongly on the parenting, so either you have your career established before you start, or you put off your career until after. I mean, career isn't everything, and parenthood is certainly *a* career that should I think take precedence during the children's formative years.

Robyn Warkentin Epp, Boissevain

KM: Jonathan Epp is with us, so he's going to talk into the tape sometimes, too. Not necessarily when we ask him questions, but just when it suits him. Robyn is a daughter of Bob and Agatha Warkentin; I've known her a while; she has two small children, she's married to Ernie Epp of Boissevain, she lives in Boissevain. She was born in 1964, and has two small children, and is going to talk about her birth experiences. — When you first found out you were pregnant, Robyn, how did you feel?

RE: I was very excited with finding out that I was pregnant with Marley, who is four now, and everyone else was excited, too. They were all pretty excited. So with me being diabetic then, I set off for a nine-month course of hard work, because to have a healthy pregnancy and healthy baby, you have to really strive for normal blood sugars and keeping the diabetes under control, so I found that a real challenge, because I was — I literally cut out everything. I ate exactly what I was supposed to and nothing that I wasn't, like I didn't even have a chocolate chip cookie! So I saw my doctor, my diabetic doctor who looks after that, so he helped me get started on that, so I did glucose monitoring every day, for the last, for the next seven-eight months. So I find it hard to remember exactly how that pregnancy went, except for the times that I had to go into the hospital, which was twice, and then right after Christmas, because I found out, well at that point the blood sugars were too high, and so then, and the reason that was, was because the, I guess the hormones produced by the pregnancy were fighting against the effects of the insulin, and that made it go out of control, regardless of what I did. So I found that frustrating, plus I was really concerned, you know, that everything would go well. So I went into the hospital for a week then, that was over '83 into '84, and then I got out, and then my husband and I moved to Winnipeg for three months, because I had fetal assessment twice a week, so that they could see that everything was going well. So that was fine, we lived in my grandparents' house, we were housesitting for them, my husband got a job in the bank where he had

worked before we'd moved here, so he had something to to do, and then about, well it was February 7th, I went into the hospital, and I stayed in till the baby was born on March 6th. I stayed in for a whole month.

KM: Wow! Oh I didn't realize that, I was away then.

RE: I stayed in the whole time. I found that really hard. At first I thought, well, I'll just be in for another week, and then it kept stretching, and finally it clicked in that I was going to be there till the baby was born! So I found that hard, because I was cooped up. I did a lot of needlework and read. Ernie came to visit, and I didn't get to even really go home on weekends or anything, until a week before the baby. Or the weekend before the baby was born. Then they let me out for two days. So it was hard, I found that rather — I was well rested, I wasn't tired, I could you know sleep when I wanted, didn't have to do any housework, but it was, emotionally that was hard, I was really alienated from people around me.

KM: You were in a place where there were sick people only —

RE: Well, not really. I was in the women's hospital, and there were all these other women there with high blood pressure or whatever. But a lot of them, they were either on bed rest, or I had these roommates that kept coming in for two days and then leaving, and that was hard, I was there for five weeks and these people were there for a few days. So I can't even remember how many people were sharing that room with me. There were, there had to be at least six. So I found that hard.

So I was patiently waiting, and waiting and waiting, I never really expected that I would go into labour or anything.

KM: What do you mean, you didn't expect to go into labour?

RE: I didn't think I would go into labour.

KM: You thought it was never going to end? (laughs)

RE: Well — yeah, I guess, I don't know. (laughter) You know, it would be: Oh I want this baby to be born! and the doctors would come in and say: "Well, just hold on a little longer. Just hold on a little longer." And so, like they brought me up to

thirty-nine weeks, so that was quite a long time, and they really watched closely. So I had an — I must have had an amniocentesis at about thirty-six weeks, and they said no, the baby wasn't ready. And nothing, you know I wasn't, it being, my diabetes wasn't affecting it that bad yet. So I guess they were always concerned, at one point my one doctor said to me he was concerned that the placenta would give out because of the sugars, which I guess is possible. Or, I don't know how to say it medically (laughs), you know, but they were just concerned that that would happen, so that that's why they watched so closely. And so, then they decided, then they did another amniocentesis, and they said well the baby was ready. So they said, well we'll try inducing. So that must have been on a Wednesday. The next day they took me to the labour ward at 6:30 in the morning, and they started applying a prostaglandin suppository, to start, well they said to ripen my cervix, to get it ready. And so I started having mild contractions all day. And then for some reason they stopped doing it, I guess they didn't want me to go into labour. Which seemed, I look back now and I think, well why didn't they just let me try it, you know? But they stopped it, I guess, for whatever reason. And so they left it and they said, "We'll try again on Monday." So they left me over Friday, so they let me out on the weekend, I had a great time with Ernie, and we went to this carnival at Meadows, I was walking around big as a house it seemed like, and then the next day we went to other friends' and had kind of a nice "this is it" party, and the next morning, on Monday then, I was in the labour ward again, and they put, started me on the IV drip, and that I found really hard. I had three heparin locks in, in three different places, was it three or, two or three. One for the IV, one was where the, the hormone to start labour, oxytocin I guess, that's where they had another one going, and then they had a heparin lock in because they were testing my blood sugars every two hours. So I look back at that now and I think, oh that was just awful.

KM: You were sort of hooked up.

RE: I was really hooked up. And I had a fetal monitor on me, I had things going. And I just lay there, and I felt like I wasn't even important. It was like the nurse would walk in for the next shift, "Well, how's the machine doing?" And they wouldn't ask how *I* was doing. I felt — and I don't think it was the nurses' fault. But I was just, I felt like I was just hooked up and this was just one big experiment. You know? So — and nothing happened. I didn't have any contractions, just mild little

things, nothing big. So obviously I wasn't ready to go into labour. So they unhooked me, I was there from 6:30 in the morning, and finally about 6:00 that night they said, "OK, nothing's happening, we'll unhook her and try again tomorrow."

KM: And how did that feel?

RE: I was so disappointed. I went to the phone and I called mom, and I just cried, I said, "Nothing happened." I had to go through that again tomorrow. That was hard. So I went back to my room, and we talked, and I was just so disappointed. Well we both were. You know we thought it would go, you know, (KM: smoothly) that something, that we'd have the baby or whatever, like I fully thought, well if nothing happens all day, they'll do a Caesarean. Today! Because I expected that. They said, "No, we'll try it tomorrow." So next morning again at 6:30 I went there, hooked me all up again. So I went through the whole thing again, and the thing is that bothered me too, was every time they did a blood sugar, like they did one through my finger every hour, and every two hours they did one that they would set like through a vein. So they would take out a two-, like because they put the heparin in they had to take it out of the lock, so that it wouldn't contaminate the blood, so they were taking two big things of blood out of me every two hours. So I was getting really weak. Like I was shaking on the table. And finally my obstetrician came in and said, "You know, nothing's happening," like he did a vaginal, and he said, "You're not even dilating. So we may as well go in and do a Caesarean." And then by that point, I was so happy, I was ready to jump on the table and say "Hallelujah!" (laughs) you know, I was, that was about 3:30 in the afternoon. So then I just said, "Great, let's go for it," because I'd been, you know, hooked up for two days, and it was just terrible. I just felt — we tried to keep it light, and I guess part of me, maybe if I was older I would have, I feel maybe I would have objected more, or questioned more what they were doing, but I kind of just said, "OK, we'll do this," because they were the doctors. So then when he said, we'll do the Caesarean, I said, that's fine; I expected that. So I had an epidural, and we'd kind of made sure that Ernie could be there, and he was; the doctor was great for that, in fact he really believed it, and I've talked to a lot of my girlfriends past [?] that, and none of them had had their husbands in at all. So at least he was there to experience it. So then, like having the Caesarean was really rather interesting. It was a little nauseating, like I could barely — they had it hooked so I could see, too, see what they were doing, so I could watch as they

cut and then I couldn't watch any more, it was too red, too much blood. But and then I could see when she was born, and then I cried, because I was so excited. And then I felt really — so it took 45 minutes, an actual hour from when he said he was, like she was, he said at about 3:30, or 3:15, OK, we'll do a Caesarean, and then it takes about 15, 20 minutes for the epidural. So I must have been in the operating room about 20 to 4, and she was born at 4:30. So 45 minutes, approximately. So then I felt relieved, but then I was shaking, and it was because I was very anemic. And I didn't have enough blood, very low iron, so I had a hard time recovering from that. Because I was so tired emotionally, and physically, from what I'd gone through for two days. So I was really up for when she was born, but I remember after, lying in the recovery room, and I felt like I was paralyzed, I was cold and shivering, and I could hardly move, my legs; they were trying to get me to move, because it helps to recover faster, and in pain. I just remember that. That was really hard. And then, see the next couple of days, two days, for me are actually kind of a blur. Because I was, it was kind of a hazy pain, and because I was so anemic, I was weak, so when they tried to get me up the first time, I felt like I was collapsing, and finally I guess they realized that I was very anemic, because I had two blood transfusions. And that made me feel better. In fact mom said, she said, "You looked so gray, and when you were getting that blood, you could just see the colour even just coming back." So, but I had a hard time recovering the next few days. And I don't know whether it was just I didn't know what to expect from a Caesarean, and the pain, or maybe just all the confusion and the exhaustion that I had gone through. So that was hard to recover from.

KM: It's hard to know which things are due to what, because you've just experienced it once, you've never experienced it before, and —

RE: Yes. That's right. And the second time it was much different, because I knew exactly what to expect, and so I prepared myself for it. And it wasn't even as bad as the first time. It took me a little convincing, actually, to have a second one, because I kept remembering, and I was certainly glad it wasn't too soon after having Marley that I got pregnant; I would have been very, I think I would have been devastated if it had happened even in the first year. I needed — it took quite a while for me emotionally to recover from that. And I don't know if I'm still — I have a hard time talking about it, because of the feelings — and the thing is, I'm so happy, I'm happy that I have a child, but I have such mixed feelings about the

birth, because of everything that I went through, in it, and really, I really trusted my doctors, but there were other ones that I was so — I was, I was used.

KM: Even the first birth?

RE: Especially the first. When I went that first time on the labour ward, they were doing some things that — I just felt they were so rude to your person. I really lost all sense of modesty there, because, like with the first time — I don't know, how graphic do you want me to get into?

KM: You can say anything you want. It's up to you.

RE: OK, OK. Well it was just, I really felt they were inconsiderate of women. I was like a 19-year-old girl, and — I don't know how they are with people whose — like I realized I was a high-risk pregnancy, but it wasn't — a lot of them weren't concerned about how I was feeling, it was just, "let's get this baby born," it was like the body and the diabetes were so much more important; my obstetrician was fine.

KM: You were just a body to them.

RE: Yeah! I really was, especially — some of these residents that were there, there was this one man, he sticks out in my mind. He did a vaginal check, and he didn't use lubricant! And he's, you know, he was really rough. My gynecologist came in, my obstetrician came in, and the nurse handed him just this disinfectant, and he said "Where's the lubricant?! I can't do this without lubricant!" and I just thought, no wonder that other thing hurt so bad! And I was here, I felt like I was just being pressed against the wall, and it hurt so bad, because I'd only had one before, like they just never did them routinely, like my mom said she had them routinely, well I didn't, because they were doing fetal assessment, that sort of thing, they didn't do them, and this guy was so inconsiderate! That resident. Intern or resident, I don't know what he was, you know, he was there. And I just felt, oh, you know, like, I don't know. So I lost a lot of sense of modesty after that, because I just felt, well, they don't care, so I shouldn't feel embarrassed. I never was embarrassed, I always felt I had a pretty open mind to that, but that really bothered me that that happened, you know, it was so unfair. And inconsiderate.

KM: Did you feel that there were too many people involved in it, or was that not a problem?

RE: That day, yes. I felt like an experiment, and I felt like an experiment after, too, when they were experimenting with my blood sugars. I wasn't quite sure what they should be doing with my insulin after the baby was born, like there was a drop and the whole bit. I was actually then too, I went with Marley — I must have started off I was taking about 40 units of insulin, a split dose. By the time I was at 39 weeks, I was doing 52 of lente and 52 of Toronto, which was over 100, so I had to take two needles in the morning, because there was too much for the syringe. You know? So that was hard, that sense of out-of-control, because when you're diabetic you're always wanting to be *in* control, and here at that point — so after Marley was born then, I didn't know what they were doing, my diabetic doctor was away, he came back, and I said, "Dr. — what are they doing with my diet?" Like I wasn't even sure if I was getting a diabetic soft diet, because I was eating puddings and stuff that were so sweet, I thought, "I don't think they even know I'm diabetic!" So I was really confused, and I was concerned about that. So he came in and he said, actually he went to the nurses' desk and he said, "What the hell's going on here, like what are you doing with my patient!" They were experimenting! It was like — well let's try this! Let's try that! — These were the interns on that ward, and I thought, thanks a lot. Like, I don't need this hassle. That bothered me, too. They were having a good time with me, when I sure wasn't. — So that was just my impression, what I remember from that.

So then, I wanted to breastfeed. And that was, I had a hard time with Marley, for some reason. She wouldn't latch on right, so — this is going to sound crazy, but I used a nipple from a bottle and I put it over my nipple, and she could get it through that, but she wasn't getting a lot. But I remember I was so frustrated trying to get her nurse and she wouldn't, and then the nurse would come in and "Here!" and then she'd grab her head and kind of cram her face, like they were just so, they just wouldn't let me have enough time, and I kept thinking, I can hardly wait till I'm home, and I can do this on my own! You know? By that time I was so fed up with being in the hospital, I'd been there for, well five weeks; I was just ready to go home.

KM: How long after Marley was born were you there?

RE: A week. A week to recover from the surgery. So then it took me a good month to get her to latch on properly.

KM: But you did it!

RE: Yeah, I did it, I was just determined that that's what I wanted to do. I'm basically lazy, I didn't want to have to sterilize bottles (laughs); it was easier just to breastfeed, and I enjoyed it, I really enjoyed that. So that was a positive thing, and I was very happy when I could get home. And it takes a while to recover from Caesarean. For me it did, anyway, because I was so anemic, and everything. And then we stayed at mom and dad's for another three weeks, so I really had it easy, I didn't have to come home and cope all by myself. Then we moved home at the end of March, and I had a great summer, I enjoyed having a baby. And it was worth it, too, form that long, all that hard work for the nine months before, you know, I really enjoyed her. I've had a few more struggles with her now growing up (laughs), but I guess trying to balance everything that I'm trying to do, or want to do, plus having them, makes it harder, but — Anyway, then when I found out I was pregnant with him [Jonathan], I was *really* concerned, well not really concerned, but — I conceived, and I knew I was pregnant, it was like, I know. Actually I went to Winnipeg even to get a blood test done, and I didn't even show positive yet. But I just felt, like we had planned him.

(Child needs attention; tape recorder is switched off, then on.)

KM: You were talking about being pregnant with Jonathan, and how you felt then?

RE: Yeah, well, we planned when we were going to have him. So we were very careful beforehand that we didn't have an 'accident' and, because I knew then I'd have to go to Winnipeg for two months beforehand to have fetal assessment, and that meant moving in with my parents, so I wanted to plan it a time when it would suit them, too, plus myself, because I was teaching in my home then, by that time, so I wanted to, you know have, so I could have a good year of teaching, that was a half-year, it turned out, that time, but — so I was very excited at first, with him. I knew it would be a lot of hard work. I was excited, plus I was leery, because I kind of knew, kind of dreading, I guess, having to go through it again, but, I think

Ernie was more excited than I was, he wanted a second child more than I did at that point. Anyway, so again I started nine months of really watching, monitoring my blood sugars and everything, and I felt really good. I got a lot of rest, because Marley was still having a nap at that point, I could lie down with her, and I did a lot of that, and the first time I went to my obstetrician, I was really leery about being induced again, so I asked him if I had to go through that, and he said, "Well quite frankly, you went through two days of hell last time, I don't think we'll make you go through that again," so then I was really, that really put some of my fears away, because I knew I didn't have to face that. And if I went into labour, fine, but probably that it would be planned Caesarean, so — I always kind of looked at it, I didn't really care how I gave birth, whether it was a vaginal or a Caesarean, I just wanted to have the baby. Because I'm working so hard to have a healthy baby, as long as she or he arrives, who cares what happens. So for me, a planned Caesarean was no failure. And I would read these books about giving birth, and how some women are so geared up for natural childbirth, and then they have a Caesarean, they have such a sense of failure, and I never had that feeling at all. I didn't care, and I still don't. Having a Caesarean is a painful way of giving birth, because it's so medical. You know. But if a healthy baby is the end result, it doesn't matter. So anyway, and because I kind of knew what would happen, I felt much more at ease, and I managed to stay out of the hospital the whole time, that was really great. So I moved to mom and dad's in the beginning of May, and so twice a week mom drove me, Marley and myself to Winnipeg to Health Sciences, where I had fetal assessment, and I got to know them really well there; I knew the receptionist, because she had worked at the Diabetic Education Centre, she was a secretary there, and then she transferred to Fetal Assessment, so I knew her, and so I kind of got to know everyone else that way, because I knew one face. So that was really great, I could come in and "Hi, how are you," and, you know it was really really a nice feeling. I guess because I knew them, and it just made it easier. But I enjoyed fetal assessment, because it's just so intriguing to see how your baby is growing and measuring the bones, and seeing these things; you could see that he had hair, like once he got a little older, further along, you could see that he had hair and everything, and it was really neat, really fascinating.

KM: Fetal assessment is done with ultrasound, you mean, or

RE: It's called ultrasound, I don't know what, it takes ultrasound waves of the

baby and then they have a computer keyboard there, and they can measure, they can do a digital measurement of the bones and the head circumference and the abdomen, so they see the baby is growing at a healthy rate. So actually we could, and they can judge the birth weight, or the weight of the baby, so he started off at about six pounds, and six and a half, seven, seven and a half; and it was really interesting, we kept thinking, oh my goodness, this kid's getting bigger and bigger, and I was getting bigger, it was just (laughs) really something. It was really hot that summer, so that made me, I didn't have any summer clothes, because I was pregnant with Marley fall and winter, so I had to go out and buy clothes, and luckily I did it before that week, it was 30 degrees that week, I was so hot, oh! And that was only in May, and I was due middle of July, and I kept thinking, Oh, I don't know how I'm going to survive! Just because of the physical discomfort, it was really something. So anyway, we kept watching, and at one point I had a little bit more amniotic fluid than I should have, so they said "You better stay off your feet a bit, because if this continues then you will be in the hospital," so then I rested more. So that meant that mom did a lot of running after Marley, because she was two at that point, and very active, so my mom did a lot. So I'm very, I'm indebted to her and dad. Like that was hard on our family structure, because I came back pregnant with a two-year-old, after I'd left, I'd been married four years already, and to come back like that, and then they had to have the pressure of my ups and downs and missing my husband, because he was here in Boissevain, he came and saw us on weekends. That was hard. That was hard on the marriage and hard on the family structures. We survived it, but, you know, that made it a consideration too, that we knew that would happen, with the second one, so we decided we didn't think there would be a third one, because of that, because we knew we'd have to be away, and this time I'd be moving home with two kids, if that happened, so we decided that was out. So anyway, we — because about three weeks before then my doctor said, "Well, I think we should book the room, the delivery room, for your Caesarean," and I was a little taken by surprise, I thought, three weeks? I thought, Oh! OK, and at that point I guess because I was (sound of door slamming, laughter)

KM: Surprise, surprise!

RE: I don't remember how many weeks I was, but it must have been, he was born at the end of June, so it must have been about the beginning of June, and I thought,

oh this is a bit early, but I thought, well in three weeks, who knows. So actually I gave birth, he was thirty-six weeks, thirty-six or thirty-seven weeks, when he was born. He was three weeks early, so

KM: "Normal" is about forty, is it?

RE: Yes, so he must have been about thirty-seven weeks, but he was almost nine pounds then, so I was relieved, I thought, boy, as it was, when they did the Caesarean, he made the incision a bit too small, so he couldn't get a good grab on his head? So he had to use forceps! to get him out, it was just amazing! (laughs) I couldn't believe it! Anyway, so that pregnancy then, they did an amniocentesis on the Wednesday, Ernie was still in Boissevain. He said, "Phone me as soon as you know." So I said, "When will you get the results?" to the doctor, and he said, "Well, about 3:00 o'clock." Well it wasn't till about 4:30. So Ernie phoned me already at 3:00 o'clock, he was so excited, he could hardly wait; I said, "Ernie, I don't know yet!" So finally I called and they said, "Yes, the baby's lungs are mature, so we'll have the Caesarean on Friday morning." And even that was a booked thing, because the one doctor was, my diabetic doctor was away that week, so he wasn't too crazy about it, he's like a mother hen when his pregnant diabetic patients have babies, because he's so concerned, he was so much support actually, because of that, you know, if I had a problem, I could come there, he would see me right away, and I was there a lot, sometimes I was just concerned or whatever, he would just, he would reassure me, he gave me a lot of support. (KM: Well that's good!) Like, more than he actually should have, or maybe that he's supposed to do. He's so concerned, and I was so thankful to him for [break in tape]

KM: -ling Ernie and telling him that you were going to go in, or

RE: Yeah. Go in. So finally I found out, phoned him, he was there, I think he made it in two hours (laughs), it's a three-hour trip. He was so excited, he could hardly wait. But I guess because he thought that we'd all come home then, and he was really happy that we were finally going ahead with it. So then that was a Wednesday, so the next day I went into the hospital, Thursday afternoon, so we had a — and we were just so much more positive the whole way! We knew what was happening, we were excited, and that night his sister, Ernie's sister

graduated from nursing. So he went to the graduation ceremony that evening then, so it was all kind of one thing at once, but, so I didn't get to go, but he did, and just, oh the next we'd have our baby, and we were just looking forward to it so much, so I tried to go to sleep that night, and I did, I managed to go to sleep, but I woke up at 5:30 in the morning, and it was just a beautiful day, and I just, I only had to wake up at 6:30 or so, but — maybe it was earlier, maybe it was five, I don't know, I just lay awake there, thinking, and it was, I just had a much more relaxed and peaceful feeling about it, you know. I was really excited, because I knew that the baby was going to be born, and I knew I didn't have to go through what I'd gone through the time before. So about 6:30 he came, he had hardly slept that night either, and we went to the labour floor, and I had another epidural, and I remember just lying there joking with the anesthesiologist and joking with the doctors, and just — we were all so excited, you know, you could just feel it, because it wasn't an emergency, it wasn't, we weren't tired, you know, we weren't emotionally tired, we were really up for everything, and so it really was really a positive thing.

KM: So the second birth was in general much more positive than the first one.

RE: Yeah. I was more prepared, and I just felt — just so upbeat about it. I felt, you know, if anything bad happened, I would feel with it, but I guess just the relief knowing that it wasn't going to be the same type of thing as the first time. Because I look back at that first experience now, and I still can hardly talk about it, because it's, without sounding bitter or just hurt, because I guess it did hurt, it hurt physically and mentally, to have that happen, you know. The only thing is, I don't want Marley to have a feeling, I don't want to give her the feeling "I caused my mother that" I don't want her to have the guilt of whatever, or feeling bad feelings about it, because I was happy to have her, but it was too bad I had to go a lot of that lousy stuff to have her, you know. But I guess because of the diabetes that was a possibility, and you just don't know what it's going to be like till you're going through it. And I was pretty determined with the second to have it more positive, and not so much feeling you know confused or left out. Like they really, and the second time too, they — I guess they — I felt more informed and that attitude must have been picked up, because I felt much more at ease with everyone.

KM: You were more in control of what was going to happen.

RE: Yeah. Still the doctor would probably call the shots, like I never did go into labour, so he called the shots of when the baby was going to be born. Oh yeah, that's what I was saying before on the other side about the one doctor was away and then the obstetrician the next week was leaving for a holiday, so he had to plan me before his holiday, I felt like, booking me into this slot because he had room, and that felt kind of strange, but you know he was going to be away and they didn't want to leave it another two weeks, because I would have had to wait until he got back, and I didn't really want another doctor to do it.

KM: That was the first baby.

RE: Second baby. When it was planned. Three weeks before; he said, "We'll pick this spot, because next week I'm going on my holiday." And I went (laughs) oh dear! So I went to my diabetic doctor, and he said, "I'm in L.A. that week, you can't have the baby then!" I said, "Well, listen, my obstetrician can't be there, because the next week *he's* going away!" So that was funny! because, you know they couldn't get together. Anyway then he was, my diabetic doctor too, came back and right away came to see me, and he was really excited too that I'd had a healthy baby, and he was pleased. So anyway, that was much more upbeat.

KM: And what about the nursing, was it easier, too, the second time?

RE: Oh, yeah! He got on the first try, the first time, and it was just like, vacuum cleaner! (laughter) This kid can chew! And when my milk came in, it was no problem. And also with Marley then, it took a while, my milk, I would just leak so much, I would be wet all over, the bed would be wet, everything. Him, I never had that problem. So that was nice. That was a real relief.

KM: Practice makes perfect, I guess.

RE: I guess so, and that was one thing I was really looking forward to, was nursing. I really enjoyed it. I guess because I'm so — it gave me a reason to sit down and just relax, and I had a good reason to be sitting there, you know? Whereas if I do it now I feel, I have something else I should be doing, and running

around, you know. So that was really really nice. And I liked it for summer, because it was so convenient, we could go camping, and I didn't have to worry about bottles. First one I was a little more flamboyant. Like I always made sure I was covered up, but I would do it anywhere. And some people found that a little hard to take.

KM: That is so wonderful, nowadays, that people can do it. When I think of when we were starting, it was so backward,

RE: You had to hide it.

KM: You had to hide it, yeah.

RE: So and I would, and my family would, both families, like they would be very accepting of it, but there would be other people that felt uncomfortable with it. But I felt, well that's their problem, not mine. And some people pointed out maybe I should have been more considerate of them, but I felt, I'm feeding my child! What's the big deal? (laughs) That's what they're for, you know? Anyway, so I nursed both of them for about eight months. [Child plays with the mike. RE to child: Interesting? We've found the mike!]

KM: Do you think that somebody who knows a little more about diabetes and pregnancy and giving birth could have given you some help in preparing for the first one, or is there no way that you could be prepared?

RE: I think it would have helped to read some case histories of what a diabetic's experience was.

KM: Did you ever find anything like that?

RE: No, I never did! I remember reading once that I knew that a woman had had three Caesarean births and they were all fine, but it was in no detail. And I think if I had had something to read or someone tell me that "this was exactly what my experience was, it might be like this," it might have helped.

KM: Because knowledge does sometimes help to prepare.

RE: Yeah, I think it would have helped me. I read a lot before, about birth in general and breastfeeding, to get prepared for that, and we did do, well we went to the prenatal classes here in Boissevain. But that was all geared for basically for vaginal birth and also just for someone who would have a normal and not a high-risk pregnancy.

KM: Well, I'm starting to think that maybe the literature should stress more and more that every birth is unique, and not to try to fit yourself into a mold, too. Because there's always this tendency when you read things to think, well I'd like that, and then feel inadequate or unhappy if you don't have whatever the ideal is.

RE: Yeah, well see even the term "high risk" set me back the first time I heard it, it must have been about the first week I was at, the first week with the first pregnancy at fetal assessment, somebody said "high risk," and I went, I am? And I thought, Oh, I guess I am! I hadn't thought of myself in those terms at all! And so that took me back, and even that, you can have the feeling, like, hooo! I feel like a guinea pig! you know? Like they look at you as if you're something really different. And I guess their primary concern is that you have a healthy baby, but a lot of the medical stuff sure gets in the way of that.

KM: In way do you mean?

RE: They're more concerned about how the machines are working than how you're feeling, like just that experience being induced. That was so degrading! you know? This one nurse actually walked in and said, "Well, how's it doing? How's it doing?" Like, *it*. It. Not, how is *she*, how are *you*, it was how is *it*. And I felt, it? I felt like I was plugged into a machine. And that was a very terrible feeling, but I guess that could be applied to anything, like people on respirators, or — they're plugged into machines, too, and that's keeping them alive, but —

KM: But it is a hazard, I've heard that. Instead of seeing the person, they start seeing the machine.

RE: Yeah! And that's how I felt, and by that day it was, I was tired. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and this person walked in and I felt like saying

"Forget it!" and ripping everything off, you know. I had tubes sticking out — yeah! I felt like, I said, "I'm doing fine," I said. I figured, you know, I'm supposed to have a baby here (laughs), not be the medical experiment, but —. That was a little hard. But I had never experienced anything like it, either, so I guess that made it even harder. So I don't know if it's possible for a diabetic to have a birth without all that paraphernalia around. It was a little easier the second time, but I guess, to some degree, because you want a healthy baby, it's going to be there. Because they are working hard, too. And there are certain things like babies dying for no reason at the end of the pregnancy, and things like that, and that would be very hard to go through, too.

KM: Oh yes, very hard.

RE: And I didn't want to think about those things, but you do think about them. So you're just willing to go through those things, because you do want that healthy baby.

KM: I'll just look at my questions and see if I can — I think you've pretty well covered everything. I have a question here that I use for older women, but I should ask younger women this too. Are there any special customs or superstitions that you heard during pregnancy that affected you at all, or, did anybody look at you and say, "oh I think you're going to have a boy, because you walk such and such a way"?

RE: Yeah.

KM: Who?

RE: Actually the nurses where my diabetic doctor works, they looked — I carried Jonathan really high. And they looked at me and said, "You're going to have a boy." (laughs)

KM: Really! And they were right!

RE: Because I was high, and they were right. And yet Ernie said, "Yeah, but somebody told me if you're carrying low, you're going to have a boy, I don't

know, who cares!" (laughter) You know? But I did carry him high the whole time, in fact, I didn't drop until about five days before he was born. And that was painful. Because when he dropped, he — this is going to sound terrible, but he pushed the fat through the stitches of the old scar, and it looked like a hernia! And it, well, it was very painful, that skin got all red and inflamed. So I went to my fetal assessment, and she couldn't even do a monitor over it, because it hurt so bad, so she said, "Well we better get your obstetrician to take a look at this." They had never seen anything like it before. So because of that, I went to my obstetrician, and he took a look, and he said, "Well it might be a hernia, so if it is" like, he didn't want to cut into it, so when he did the Caesarean, he did a — the first one was a bikini cut, and the second time he did an up and down one, belly button down, so he didn't do along the same scar, because he didn't want to cut into the bowel if it had been a hernia. So he figured it wasn't, so he figured he had just pushed the fat through when he dropped. But it was obvious that he had dropped, and it was very uncomfortable. So I was glad I didn't have to go another month of *that*, because — so that was a real strange thing to have happen.

KM: Is there a — I don't know how to word this — do you feel that birth is more than just a physical experience, does it change you in any way, having children? Well, I guess that's — I'm just thinking about the birth, I mean having children certainly changes you, because there are all kinds of changes in your life. The birth itself.

RE: Honestly, I didn't feel any mystical feelings about it like that.

KM: No, not necessarily either, but just in reflecting back.

RE: Yeah. It did change me, because it made me grow up. You know. I was exposed to some things that I hadn't been exposed to before that changed me, you know. It made me feel that you shouldn't implicitly trust a doctor just because he's a doctor, because they don't always know best. Not the doctors I had. The diabetic doctor I have a very close relationship with, so I trust him. The obstetrician took a little longer, but I did trust him too, because he would listen to me, and he kind of understood how I felt. But these other ones that I just kind of met, they're not sensitive enough to people.

KM: They're training doctors, I think, are they? In the hospital, the residents, they're training to be doctors.

RE: Yeah, yeah, they're training. And they, I got the sense that they didn't really care how you felt, they were just there to learn. And granted, they've got a hard job learning, you know, and some of them were on that labour ward for 36 hours or whatever; that's a long time! But I still felt they were sacrificing people for the stupid machines. People's feelings, or you know. And when you're, I guess whatever age, that's hard to take. Because you're vulnerable. You're laying your life at these people's hands, and they're just running roughshod over you, and that's pretty hard to take.

KM: Especially when you're having a baby, I think. You're more sensitive to feelings at that time, I think.

RE: Yeah. Yeah.

KM: Than you would be if you were deathly ill, maybe. Although maybe those people are very sensitive too! Who knows, it's hard to know, why speculate.

RE: I don't know, I haven't been deathly ill, so — but yeah. So that changed me, it changed some of my attitudes. So that the first time I was a little more cynical. — I don't know if "cynical" is the right word. More cautious. But also more determined to make it a little better. — I can't say objectively how it's changed me, I don't think. I haven't figured that out yet (laughs).

KM: No, it takes a long time.

RE: Maybe it'll take me another twenty years to figure that one out, because —. Sometimes I wonder now, why did I have kids?! because they're hard to, I didn't expect raising children to be quite as difficult at times as it is; maybe that's what I'm thinking. I didn't look past having the baby stage. And the babies are easy compared to having the toddlers. I feel.

KM: OK, I'm going to be talking to both your mother and grandmother, so maybe I should put in more questions that will show up the comparisons.

RE: OK.

KM: What about telling people that you were pregnant? Was that a problem, or what happened, did you keep it a secret, or did you tell people right away?

RE: Well, the first time, my one girlfriend, I would've liked to have told her, but there were other people around that I didn't want to know yet, so I didn't. So she was disappointed. So the second time, I had just found out, and we happened to be going to Winnipeg that weekend, and we met these people, and I just blabbed it all over (laughs), I said "I'm pregnant!" and they were all excited for me, they were really excited. But she had a hard time, because she wanted to be pregnant with her first one, even, and she hadn't conceived yet, and so she felt "Oh I envy you so much!" and I kept thinking, Ohh, that was just the dynamics of us then, but she's just had her first baby now, so she's experienced it, too, and actually she had a Caesarean also, after being induced. So I could relate to her that way, very much.

KM: You see, in my mother's age group, and maybe your grandmother's, well even my older sisters say that it was sort of a point of pride to keep it to yourself as long as possible, and not let anybody know. Like in church they would look at you immediately to see if you were showing already, or if you were pregnant, and older women would often say later on when they heard, "Well I could tell months ago already;" I don't know if they really could or not.

RE: Yeah. I still hear that.

KM: You still hear that?

RE: Ernie's mom had said that, "Oh, I could tell she was pregnant!" And I'm, you could?! How did you know?! (laughs) and they haven't said anything.

KM: Years of experience, I guess.

RE: I guess!

KM: But you see, for them it was something you tried not to tell anybody! But in my generation it was changing already, partly maybe because I didn't live in a closed community, where people would be watching me, and I was among strangers who could care less, so as soon as I knew I was pregnant, of course, I wanted to tell my family, who would rejoice with me! But it probably depends a little bit on where you live. But in your generation, I think it's already acceptable to talk about it immediately, right? Or not to everyone.

RE: Not to everyone, but I've heard of people actually in this community, where the girl said, "I'm pregnant," and then she had a miscarriage. See and my mom warned me against that, she said, "Don't tell everybody right away, because if something happens, then you feel —" I don't know, she didn't say what you would feel, but I would feel you would be embarrassed to some extent, because you told people, and on the other hand, you'd feel really upset and sad.

KM: You might have to explain to a lot more people.

RE: Yeah, if that had happened. So that would be difficult, but actually I didn't tell everyone either, I didn't go to the grocery store and broadcast it. And I tried to keep it a secret here in town, and I was working at the library at the time, when I was pregnant with Marley, and I didn't tell them right away, but I think the older ladies figured it out, because I was very green and very tired, I wanted to sleep all the time, and I had to work, and that was hard. And this one girl said, "Oh I knew that already," when I finally did tell them; I said, "How did you know?" because I hadn't told anyone except the family. But, small towns things get out of the clinic very easily.

KM: Oh yes, when you go and see the doctor there.

RE: Doctors or nurses, yeah. You know, they happen to see your file, and I'd been to the doctor, because I had a bad case of heartburn. With Marley I had bad heartburn, I couldn't sleep. So I went and I asked, and I said "I think I'm pregnant," and then that's — so he probably put it down in my chart. So anyway, people knew anyway, so I figured, well what's the point of keeping it a secret then, if they're going to find out anyway!

KM : You see in your grandmother's generation too they didn't wear special maternity clothes, but they started to wear big aprons when they were pregnant.

RE: (laughs) Oh wow! Well I would have loved not to have to wear maternity clothes, but I had to! And there too, my mom said, "Well don't wear them too early, because you'll get sick of them after awhile."

KM: And now you're the mother of two toddlers, and you're very busy. You do other things besides looking after them, I understand.

RE: Yes, I do. I teach music in my home, I'm a part-time home renovator (laughs), and I take voice lessons, so I'm studying voice again.

KM: Do you sing in a choir, too?

RE: I did at one point, but it was just a bit too much, so I withdrew from that. And actually I want to go into a little bit more part-time work with the piano, so I want to start teaching group music lessons. And I like to sew, as my hobby, so that sometimes has pressures that it puts on me, so I would say that keeps me going. And a bit of gardening in summer now. I think sometimes I make my life a little busier than it should be, but I also need a little bit of pressure just to keep me going. So it's a bit balancing between being happy in what you're doing and then overburdened. So it's a little hard at times, but I live a pretty full life, I think. I'm pretty fortunate.

KM: Well, thank you very much, Robyn, I think you've been very informative, I think it's a very good discussion, and I know it was hard for you to do it, but I'm very happy you did it.

RE: Thank you.

KM: Thanks.

Evelyn Rempel Paetkau, Carman

KM: Evelyn Paetkau was born in 1953, she attended schools in Winnipeg and lived in Winnipeg most of her childhood. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Social Work–

EP: Bachelor of Social Work.

KM: Bachelor of Social Work, I mean, from the University of Manitoba. Evelyn, you've had three children; I wonder if you'd like to just start and tell me about your experience.

EP: OK. Our oldest daughter was born in Goshen, Indiana, in 1980, and I had quite a routine kind of experience with her, with the pregnancy and delivery of her. I guess this is purely incidental: it was a very short pregnancy, because I only found out after I was about three-and-a-half months pregnant, and, because we weren't expecting the child at all, so it was a surprise [to her child:] would you mind just sharing it with him? and he'll give you a turn later on. Child: No he won't! EP: Sure, sure. — And at that time even I was exploring some alternatives. The whole experience was new to me; when I found out I was pregnant it was like stepping out into something completely new; I had never thought in terms of, well, we had discussed having children, but not the planning and the preparation for it, and that kind of thing. But I knew, and Brian knew, too, that it was something that we both wanted to be very involved in, to make the choices our choices, that sort of thing; so we checked out doctors, and we chose to have a doctor in Goshen rather than in Elkhart, because in Goshen there seemed to be more openness, and, well, stronger recommendations came from women who had had babies at seminary. But they wouldn't permit us to use the birthing room, because it was our first child, and they usually did that for successive births, but not the first one. And so we just sort of accepted that; I went through my labour in the birthing room, kind of hoping that things would work out that I could just stay there, but in the end we had to go to the delivery room, and I stayed my three days in the hospital, and then we were

discharged, and everything went very smoothly. It was an eight-hour labour, and most of that I spent at home; I wasn't in a hurry to get to the hospital, to go through it there. And then our second daughter was born in Altona, two years later, in 1982, and there our options were more limited. There was no birthing room, there was no — well, really, very few options; you went the structured route, and if there were any concerns, or anything that placed anyone at any kind of high risk, you were automatically sent to Winkler or Winnipeg; the hospital wasn't equipped to work with anything that was more involved. So we checked out with the doctor beforehand whether we could have the baby in the hospital and then be discharged immediately. And he was really reluctant to do that, that was not — and Brian also, we asked him if Brian could catch the baby, and he, that was out of the question, that he would not, he gave a definite "no" to that. He said he wasn't even allowed to catch his own children when they were born. But he didn't say a definite "yes" or "no" that I could be discharged the day that she was born, and as it was, our doctor was on holidays at the time of her birth, and so we used a different doctor, and after she was born, I asked if I could go home, and he said, "Well, what did the other doctor say?" and we said, well, he hadn't said that we couldn't, and so kind of by default we were able to go home, but it wasn't —

[asides to the child]

It was surprising to a lot of people; several people went to the hospital to visit me there, and found that I wasn't there; it was a kind of unfamiliar experience to them. (laughter)

[more asides to children]

KM: What other repercussions were there because you chose to go home early?

EP: Well, it seemed like a big inconvenience to the hospital in many ways, because usually the public health nurse comes to visit you, and makes a record of the baby's birth, and then they know how to follow up with immunization and home visits and that kind of thing, and that didn't happen, that didn't sort of follow its natural course. Sort of threw a hitch into, or made it a little more difficult and less convenient for them, which of course nobody really appreciates, and also the message that came through was: You'll regret this, you'll regret this later on, because you aren't giving yourself the rest that you need, and the care you need, and it'll catch up with you. That kind of

thing. We are so set in our way of doing things, and assume that that is the only way of doing things, and then when one chooses to do something differently, you have to take that whole responsibility on yourself, for whatever happens, regardless of whether it was as a result of what you did, or whether it would have happened, but this way you — that's what we found with Justin's birth too, you know, when you make your own choice, you make your own decisions, and those decisions go contrary to the way most people do, you are given a greater burden of responsibility for your choices, and so you hope things will work out well. You hope they will work out well anyway, but it's almost like —

KM: People would hold you responsible if something went wrong, whereas if something went wrong in the hospital, they might not hold you responsible.

EP: The hospital would be responsible, or it would just be sort of a natural event. Whereas any natural event, regardless of how unrelated it would be to the birth, people would make the connection, that it was like that. — And then Justin of course was born in '86, two years ago, and his birth was at home. And we planned — as soon as we knew that we were expecting him, we really felt that that was the route we wanted to go. I guess I should speak for myself: I really felt that was what I wanted to do. I remember after Tamara was born, we felt, our family's big enough, you know, this is, and I mentioned sometime in the course of a conversation with my mother that probably we wouldn't have any more children, and she sounded disappointed and surprised, sort of, and I said, well no, just off the top of my head I said, "Not unless there was nuclear disarmament, world nuclear disarmament, or I could have a home birth (laughs) would I have another baby." So as soon as we found out that we were expecting Justin, I was eager to pursue that, and Brian went along with me, he didn't object at all. But I think he would have probably more quickly, at that time, chosen to go the hospital route; I think he had more apprehensions, at least initially, now I don't think he would.

KM: Do you remember what prompted you, or had you heard of other home births?

EP: I had heard of other home births; I don't know if I knew of any one person in my generation that had a baby at home. But I had read about them, and I think through the La Leche League had heard of them and been involved in some discussions of them. And I'm not sure, I've often wondered, too, well what, I'm sure many other women have heard those conversations, too, but what is it that triggers it for one and not for another.

Because my hospital experiences weren't negative experiences. I think the only negative part of them was that I felt things were out of my control, you know. Fortunately for me, my pregnancies and deliveries were very normal, and went very well, and went quickly, and that kind of thing. So it wasn't like there was a lot of intervention. But it felt like my decisions were all made for me, and anything that I would want that was out of the ordinary was out of my control, kind of.

[child needs attention; tape recorder is switched off, then on]

KM: You were talking about why you had chosen home birth where another woman might hear the same stories and not be interested.

EP: I think also part of it was, you know that whole birth experience is such a, I mean there's no other event in life that really measures up to that, that is so special. And I think we wanted to keep it special, and somehow when you go through the routine, and you go through your ten-minute visits to the doctor, and that kind of thing, and it minimizes the whole thing. And I guess part of it was just that, you know it is such a big, it's like a wedding. You want to personalize that experience, and you want to do more than just streamline your whole process.

KM: It's a very individual thing.

EP: So I think that probably was part of it too. I remember when I became pregnant with Johanna, it was first of all denial, I just really didn't believe — with my oldest child — I really didn't believe that such a thing could happen to me. And it wasn't because I didn't want it to, I think it was because I really wanted it to and just felt that it was too great an event, how could I be so fortunate to have it. So I think that maybe was part of it, too.

KM: So you had a very positive attitude to pregnancy, period.

EP: Yes, I think so. Partly, you know, my pregnancies have not been difficult ones, I haven't had a whole lot of morning sickness; the first three months you don't feel great, but overall I can't complain at all.

KM: OK, how did you go about arranging for a home birth then, because obviously there

are not too many around.

EP: No. Well I had been to one La Leche League meeting, I remember, sort of a La Leche League meeting that brought in different areas, it was working with I think nursing toddlers, something like that, so it was women that I hadn't met before, and one of them was talking about having made arrangements for a home birth and gone through with that until she realized she was going to have twins, and then she had to take another route. And so I called her up, and she was from another community, and found out from her, tried to find out from her the names of anybody. And she referred me — I think this is the process — she referred me to a woman in Winnipeg, who had just had a home birth, and she turned out to be a Mennonite woman too, so I phoned her up and asked if I could meet her, just to talk about what was all involved, as well as who, what midwives there would be. And so I met with her, and she gave me the names of three midwives, and I think as far as she understood those were the only midwives practicing in Manitoba, and two of them didn't really like to go out of the city very much, so that was primarily Darlene Birch. So I phoned Darlene Birch, and she was very willing right from the start —

KM: And did you have a doctor too?

EP: Yes, I already had contacted a doctor, and had first of all, at my first appointment with him, had asked if he would be willing to come and help deliver our baby at home. And I remember that visit, he had also a student doctor with him at the time when I asked the question, and they were both so stunned, they didn't know how to respond, because I don't think they had had to deal with that question before, and it just caught them off guard. I remember them looking at each other and then sort of hemming and hawing about, and trying to say things that would make me change my mind about wanting that sort of option, and then saying, "Well, no, I would give you back-up services if you needed them, but I don't think I could do that." Which was what I expected to hear, but I wanted him to know that that was what I was pursuing, and was what I wanted, and I still wanted to follow through with prenatal care, because if I needed him in the end, then he would be familiar with what we had experienced.

KM: So you saw a doctor and a midwife. Are there any differences in their approach to pregnancy?

EP: Yes, yes. The visits were so different. I would wish for every woman a visit like the ones we experienced with the midwife. With my doctor it was in and out of his office in a matter of minutes, and he just did the very routine things, your blood pressure, feeling the position of the baby, charting your weight, measuring your — what is the measurement called again, I forget, but — listening to the baby's heartbeat, and that's about it. Asking you how are you, and giving me a chance if I had any questions to raise those questions, but it was very quick and very matter-of-fact. And the other day I just heard that doctors are paid through Medicare a total of, what was it, for all the prenatal visits and the delivery in normal sort of circumstances, a very small fee. It isn't worth their while to spend more time with the mother, you know, and they aren't paid for any of the extras, unless there are major complications, like a C-section, or something like that. So there's no incentive for them to treat you otherwise. Whereas with my midwife, I guess half the time we came to her place and half the time she came to our place for the visits, and no visit was under two hours. Mind you, there's a lot of visiting, but that also helped to give you the time to get to know each other and just ask a lot of questions that we might not otherwise have asked, had we not had that much time together. And the other really neat part of that was, the whole family was involved. When she would go to do the physical checkup part of it, usually the girls were right there on the bed with me, and she would take a doll and she would lay the doll on the top of my tummy to show them the position that the baby was in. And they were very much aware of what was going on and everything. So that was really good. Whereas otherwise I went by myself to see the doctor, and it was just a conversation between him and myself; the rest of the family, the children especially, were very distant from what was happening. And then there were occasions when, not many, one or two times, I guess, where I really appreciated having both of them to check out. Like there was towards the end of the pregnancy, I guess about the seventh month, when I had my visit with the doctor, he noted that there was no weight gain on the baby's part, or no growth on the baby's part, which really concerned him, and so he recommended that I go for an ultrasound. And his concern got me quite concerned and worried, but I asked him, well just how safe is an ultrasound? And he said, well it hasn't been around long enough for us to really know, in the long range, whether there are any effects, or side effects or anything like that for ultrasound, but it has been tested on — mice, I think he said, and there were no effects that would cause any concern, no effects at all. Well that really helped to make up my mind that I didn't want to do that if I had any option not to, because if he couldn't give me any more of a definite, what I wanted to hear from him was that we are 100% sure that there is no ill effects. So then when I got home and

felt so concerned, I phoned Darlene and asked her, and she asked me a lot of questions that he never seemed to consider, that he never discussed with me. For example, what had been my weight gain, and my weight gain had been considerable, more than in the past. And then she said that usually it takes, what, one or two weeks for the baby to take on that weight gain that you take on. So she said that if I wanted to give myself another week and see what happened, then probably some of that weight would be transferred to the baby. And the other thing she said was the position the baby is in. The doctor determines the size by making that measurement, and if the baby is leaning to one side the measurement won't be as great as if the baby's back is right in the middle. And so if the baby's position has changed, it will be different, too, and could well be less than before. So she came out, and sure enough, the baby had fallen to one side sort of, so it was off centre, and she was just so reassuring. And so I phoned the doctor and told him that I wouldn't, he was recommending an ultrasound, but he wasn't saying that I had to have an ultrasound, so we decided not to have it, and in the end, when Justin was born, he was nine pounds and five ounces, so there certainly didn't need to be concern about his weight gain.

KM: What about your friends and parents and acquaintances, what was their response to your wanting a home birth?

EP: Well, negative (laughs). We didn't tell many people, because we didn't know until the end, either, what would happen, and I was able to write my parents, they were overseas, and they wouldn't be back before his birth. So it was one thing to say it in a letter than to, and what I did, I had written them at the time when the doc- — oh yes, I never finished saying that when I asked the doctor initially whether he would deliver the baby at home, he said "no," when I returned a month later for my next appointment, he said yes, he would! He had thought about it, he had given it considerable thought, and he would do that. And then when I returned a month later, for my next appointment, he said no, he had discussed it with his colleagues and with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and they had discouraged him, they would not back him up, and he said he did not have the portable equipment he would need to do that. So he declined then. And I had written my parents after he had said yes, that my doctor had said he would attend the birth. So, and then when I learned otherwise, I never wrote them back to say that no, he had changed his mind, so we just never really talked about it further till after the birth. Somehow Brian's parents learned about it before Justin was born, too, and were very concerned, and very upset, and it was very hard for them. (laughs) To this day they call

Justin a miracle baby.

KM: Were their experiences bad, or do you know why they —

EP: Well both my mother and Brian's mother don't remember their birthing experiences. I mean, the actual birth of their children, because they weren't aware. And they had been, I think, led to believe that it is awful, that it is so painful, how can you stand to be awake and aware during that time. And when I listened to them tell me some of their experiences, I realized that they were put out just after they had experienced all the pain. It's at that point that they are put out, or put under, and that they didn't have any coaching, they didn't have anyone present to help them through the labour, through the difficult and more painful times. And so sure, it was awful, you know, not knowing what was going on, and being isolated from people that care about you and that kind of thing. So I can understand how they feel.

KM: In a way it is a miracle that you were able to go back to a home birth, not having been told about any in your experience. You mentioned last time that it was almost a political act though. What did you mean by that?

EP: Right from the beginning when we made the decision to try and pursue a home birth, we did that purely as an individual, or as a personal decision. It was just something we realized we wanted, and not that we felt anybody else should want or wish for; we could very much understand the feelings of other people, but we wanted that freedom for ourselves to make that choice. And so we didn't talk about it at any length with anybody other than the midwife, of course, and only after Justin was born, we began to feel the repercussions. The relationship with the doctor just went cold, really cold, and like not the doctor I had been seeing, and other people, especially nurses, who were friends, didn't understand, and I think the response was anger, when there wasn't understanding, anger a little bit, and but it was interesting, there were a number of people who came to visit me, especially some older women, who came, and unsolicited, told me their birthing experiences. And they were probably more accepting of it, and I'm not sure why, because — almost as though they had a feeling maybe that something had been taken away from them at one time, or — and also I guess because it just opened something up.

KM: Made them remember.

EP: Yes. It was something we could talk about because it was different, it wasn't just a routine kind of thing, that sort of thing. So there were different responses, but by far the majority of the people that we knew and encountered were, did not understand, really.

KM: So what was the experience then, the home birth; what happened?

EP: Oh, it was just, I'd repeat the experience again, it was just very special. It was, he was born later than his due date, which was a new experience, so we had to wait longer, and I guess as the waiting got on, Brian became quite concerned that things would run smoothly, and go the way we would wish for them to go, and being spring that he was born, and Darlene lived two hours away, and what if it stormed and she couldn't make it, and all this kind of thing. So we had already talked all this over with Darlene, and she had left her oxygen tank at our place, and she had left a very nice and simple manual kind of, that's written up for taxi-cab drivers, just a very quick reference, you can make very quick reference to whatever section you need. And he had reviewed that and reviewed that (laughs), and as it turned out, he was born in the middle of the night, and very quickly. My water broke around midnight and we phoned Darlene right away, but I almost felt like telling her, take your time, my water has just broken, nothing else had happened, just you know, don't feel that you have to rush or anything, but she said she was leaving right away. So in two hours we could expect her. And for the first hour we just got things ready, you know, we sterilized the things that she had left there for us and hauled a mattress onto the living room floor and just kind of got things ready. And then an hour later I started to have contractions, and they were extremely strong contractions, and they were just minutes apart. At that point, like for the first while I just, when the labour pains came, I went to lie down on the bed, and was very uncomfortable, it just didn't feel like a good position, and when his head crowned, it was the first time, actually in all my birthing experiences, that I felt I didn't have control of my breathing, and I thought, this is too much, I guess you know in fifteen minutes from nothing to his head crowning, there must have been a lot of muscle working there. And if I would have pushed, he would have been born at that time, but I just didn't have an urge to push, and then I felt the baby coming back up, going back in. And then Brian suggested that I get up and walk around, and so I did. We went downstairs and —

KM: You went down the stairs?!(laughter)

EP: Oh yes (laughter), and just walked. Walked and walked. And every time a contraction came, I just clung to him, and then walked again. And they were, we had a small house, and it was getting so that I could barely do one circle and the next contraction would come. So they were very, very frequent, and poor Brian was trying between these contractions to get everything ready, so he was really scrambling, and was looking at his watch, I hadn't realized he was doing that, he told me later one, he knew, he had a sense the baby was going to be born before Darlene was there, so he was quite nervous. And I can remember finally feeling I couldn't even walk any more, and so what I did was I just leaned over the chesterfield, like got down on my knees and leaned over on the chesterfield, that felt like that was what I needed to do. And he was rubbing my back, and he had this little taxi-cab's manual in his lap that he was flipping through as he was rubbing my back, and it really felt like the baby was going to be born, and he said "Hold on!" (laughter) "Twenty more minutes, hold on!" (laughter) And the head popped out. I didn't push or anything. I guess Justin just really wanted to be born, because I never once pushed for him to come out, and another contraction and his body came out, and Brian said it was just so slippery, he just felt like it was very, very slippery, and so he was born and just like that, and I remember just holding him, his cord was still attached and still inside me, and we were just looking at him, and it must have been several seconds later that one of us asked, is it a boy or a girl, like it was sort of, nothing mattered, it was just that here was this living, breathing human being, and then, like the way the cord sort came down between his legs, it wasn't easily apparent what sex he was. And then Brian went and woke our daughters, and we had ahead of time thought that they would probably be awake for some of the labour, we anticipated a longer labour, and they would each have jobs to do, and one of them, we had ice ready in the freezer, and one of them would give me ice and another one would get the towels and everything, so the first thing they did in their state of semi-sleep, it was about 2:20 or so, 2:15 in the morning, was they went to do their jobs. (laughter) And then they came and just held him, and they were so excited, they didn't go back to sleep until about 6:30 in the morning.

KM: And when did Darlene arrive?

EP: Twenty minutes after he was born. So we just sat there, we just sat in the living room, and held him, and didn't do anything, we just waited, and then Darlene walked in and she said, "Oh, he's a big boy!" And then she just checked everything out for us, and

it was a good, it seems to me it was almost an hour when she said finally that I should try and push the afterbirth out. And for that I had to really push, I guess that was, my body thought it had finished its work, but that came, and she examined that, it was a very healthy placenta, and we kept the placenta, and we've wanted to, I don't know how it would sound to many people, but we saved our placenta, we froze it and we thought, when we are in the place we are going to be, that we would plant it with a tree somewhere, do something significant with it. And then after that, she ran the bath water for me, and cleaned up everything for me, and gave me the baby in the bath tub, and Justin and I just were together, which was, I mean in the hospital you're not told to get the baby's umbilical cord wet, you just sort of sponge-bathe the baby and, like for myself, too, to go into the tub right away. But she said that that, just swabbing the umbilical cord with alcohol is not necessary, and so we never did it, and so it fell off a lot sooner, a lot sooner, and healed really well, which is kind of surprising, like then you wonder, why do they recommend such different kind of care in looking after it. And then Justin and I went upstairs to bed. And we had decided ahead of time what music we wanted, and stuff like that, we had Pachelbel's Canon in D, and it just, the house, it just felt, I mean that day still stands out in my mind as being a very special day. Later on our children, it was a very nice day, a very nice spring day, the children went out to play, and we were told later on by the neighbours that there were just a whole, we had a whole bunch of children in our community there, they had been all singing "Away in a Manger" most of that day, I mean this was spring, it was quite a bit after Christmastime, and Brian too was very tired, so he came up to bed with us, too, after a while, and two times we kind of woke up and here was at least seven or eight children, just standing over us, and the girls had led them into the house to come and see (KM: "Away in a Manger") (laughter) the baby and us, and I remember waking up a few times, and here were all these big eyes, and they were so quiet, they were just standing, and looking at Justin, and then they would quietly traipse out, and then the second time a slightly different group, some new children and some of the same children came and took a look at him and then went back down. So it was all very, well just such a good day, I think we will always remember that day as being very special. Just as the other births were, too, but very different kinds of memories related to that.

KM: The others were good in spite of the fact that you weren't in charge totally of the experience.

EP: Yes, that's right. The rooms, the delivery rooms were sterile. The people that were

around me were strangers, for the most part, and like when Tamara was born, Johanna had to be away, it just did not feel as complete, that kind of thing.

KM: What type of follow-up did Darlene Birch, the midwife, have?

EP: She made several visits to our home, and sometimes she brought her whole family, or part of her family, and sometimes she came by herself. Her follow-up was as comfortable and as thorough, I guess, as the prenatal visits were, and just, well I just really appreciated it, those lengthy visits again where we could discuss any of the questions that we had.

KM: You weren't just suddenly cut off.

EP: No. In many ways it felt like she was my mother, you know, that all the questions you had, all the uncertainties you had, there was a place to take them and to bounce them off and that kind of thing. Whereas with the doctor it was your regular six-week checkup, and that was about it, and then your baby has the ongoing six-month and twelve-month kind of follow-up. But this just felt — and I have always, although I haven't seen Darlene for a long time, felt that she was available to me, if I needed her, and that kind of thing.

KM: What is there about the philosophy of midwifery, in your experience, that's different from going to a doctor?

EP: I think largely that, well for one thing that the whole childbirth process is a very natural process, it's not like a pathology, which the doctors' approach seems to treat it as. And the other thing that we really felt with Darlene was that I was in control, you know, and that she was there to assist me, but that I was the one that was making the choices and doing the work, in a sense. And I remember when she arrived right after his birth, and Brian said something about his involvement, I can't remember what it was, and she just in a very gentle way reminded him that I had delivered the baby. (laughter) And that really struck Brian, and he probably won't ever forget that. But just that kind of, in a very gentle sort of way, putting the mother in full charge, and yet with all the backup and the resources there, and that it's just a very natural course of events and also that the woman follows her intuitions, you know, there's no set guidelines, and I remember her telling me that one time a mother was going through quite a long labour, I

think, a difficult labour, and all of a sudden the mother said, "You know, I feel like taking a bath." And Darlene got the bath ready for her, and the baby was born in the bathtub, underneath the water. And it was just sort of, you follow how you feel, whereas that just never ever happens, I mean that's just the opposite of the hospital —

KM: Where you follow *their* routine.

EP: Yes, what the doctor wants —

KM: For instance, Darlene wouldn't have suggested to you either, to take a bath, because that wasn't your intuition, you followed your intuition.

EP: Yes, yes.

KM: It sounds ideal.

EP: It was.

KM: What other things were different? You mentioned something about natural remedies.

EP: During my pregnancy for a while I had a vaginal infection, and the doctor gave me a prescription for some suppositories, and they were really expensive, for three of them it was something like, oh I don't even remember, I just remember being appalled at how much I had to pay for three of them, and then one of them I inadvertently dropped in the toilet, so I only had two, and they just really cost me. And I felt uncomfortable using it, because I didn't know what they were made of, I didn't know what the ingredients were for them, so I also told Darlene, and she had all kinds of natural remedies and suggestions she made, which actually were more helpful than the suppositories were. And if one didn't work then she had another, and another, and they were, like I could use them with a lot of confidence because they were just natural remedies. And also she related things to diet, and we never once discussed diet in the doctor's office.

KM: In what way, what did she...

EP: Well, we don't eat much meat at all in our family, and she had said that, now what was it, that a lot of breads and grains can probably cause that sort of, create an

environment where that kind of an infection would grow, and so she said she knew that we probably wouldn't do that, but something like chicken or fish would, you know, if we had more of those in our diet, and less bread and less grains, that kind of thing, that that probably would lessen it a bit, too. She also said a lot of yoghourt, eat a lot of yoghourt, that would help. And the doctor had never once questioned diet at all. So it, yeah, I just felt very comfortable with her.

KM: If you knew someone who was pregnant right now, would you advise them to do the same?

EP: I would like to, there's that part of me that would say, you know, I had a really good experience with my home birth and would recommend it to anybody, but would recommend that to you, too, but I haven't. There have been one or two women that have called me, and when they approach me, then I do, you know, when the question becomes theirs. But because I, because of the response I got to our experience, I know that many times that would be a turn-off, more than a helpful thing. You can kind of sense from the friends that you know well enough where that would be appropriate and where it wouldn't be appropriate, and I guess because I don't want to make light of it, I don't just recommend it to anybody who will see that as something very harmful or wrong to do.

KM: In other words, it's not something that is for everyone, if they have strong feelings against it, it probably wouldn't be good for them.

EP: No, no, that's right. I think it certainly has to be someone who really feels that that's what they want to do. And I don't think any of the women who are making that choice are doing that in ignorance or doing that on a whim or doing that because they think it's the thing to do, without a lot of personal reflection and consideration and study.

KM: So the type of woman who does do that probably has a different attitude, maybe, I don't know, has a different attitude to childbirth, to child*raising*, too, would you think there's some connection?

EP: Well, I have wondered, I have wondered. We have just in the limited number of people we know who have done that, they certainly are strong advocates of breastfeeding their children; we have seen amongst them a number of home-schoolers,

and just a wonderful acceptance of their children, and just as women have that choice, what kind of a birth experience to have and putting that control in the mother's hands, also giving children more choices and more control over their own lives, not being so rigid in terms of the expectations one might put on their children. But that's, I mean I say that very, very generally, because certainly there would be many parents who would feel that way who have had hospital births, and, so that's a very uneducated kind of a statement, I guess, that I'm making. The few people we have, we certainly have a lot of respect for in terms of their parenting and the choices that they're making.

KM: Thank you very much, Evelyn; I think we'll stop there for now.

A postscript to this is my question to Evelyn: What experiences, even further back, probably prompted you to choose home birth? Living in Washington, you mentioned.

EP: Yes. We lived, this was before we had any children, we lived there for two years, and I worked with a lot of lower-class families, mostly black women, who were single parents, and there was a hospital in the inner city there where most of these women were referred to because they catered more to the lower class, that was where they were situated and that was primarily their clientele. What was so shocking was to learn that 50% of the births there were C-sections. So these women who would come there, did not know what kind of birth experience —

KM: C-sections are Caesareans.

EP: Yes. And I just remember going there with them and feeling the fear with them, like it wasn't me that was having the baby, but not even being able to prepare them, and feeling like I couldn't even give them, what's the word,

KM: Moral support?

EP: Moral support and the ammunition, to be able to stand up for themselves there, you know. So they would go in there, and many of them would have a C-section, because there were a lot of student doctors there who did their training there, and these women were without spouses, they were without anybody to speak for them, and you know it was just such a feeling of helplessness and loss of control. And even though I had never

had any children and wasn't giving thought at that time to having children and what I would do, I just remember feeling very angry at that whole situation, and some of these mothers had had quite a number of births already, and then, they were saying to these women, if you've had three C-sections, you can't have any more, and so making those kinds of decisions for them as well, and

KM: What did they have to do then?

EP: Their tubes tied, or that sort of thing. It was just a very, very frustrating kind of experience. But also, in that city where there is so much diversity, we were also exposed to home births and very short hospital stays, six hours, or whatever, and I think that really widened my understanding of births, and my knowledge of births, and so I think I felt that I had more options open to me. If I would have just grown up in Altona, say, I don't know if I would have done the same thing, if the exposure had been different, or hadn't been as much.

KM: Well, I guess the common conception is that if you go with the hospital, you'll be safe, nothing will happen, or at least if something happens, something goes wrong, there's backup there. How do you deal with that?

EP: Well, we've really felt that by making choices, even when we chose to come out of the hospital right away after our second child's birth, that we were, we had to take more responsibility than other people did, in terms of what would happen to me and what would happen to the baby. Because whatever happened, how unrelated it was, people could point to our decision to leave the hospital early. And the same thing with having a home birth. We just really hoped, as we were working with that, that things would work out well, because we knew we would be held responsible for anything that happened, even though it could have happened in the hospital, or whatever. And the thing is you point out to people that some things happen *because* one is in the hospital, because of certain interventions, or whatever, but that's always excused, you know? It's still upheld as the safest way to go, and that hasn't been proven. That hasn't been shown by any studies that hospital births are by far safer than home births.

KM: We talked a little bit about the sex of the midwife. Do you feel it has to be a woman?

EP: I think so. And I think probably a woman who has had a baby, too, of her own. A woman who has gone through that experience.

KM: She has more sensitivity or understanding?

EP: Yes, I think so. I wouldn't want to say a completely unqualified yes, but I would suspect that that kind of person would have just a whole lot more to offer.

KM: As you mentioned before, it was the mothering aspect of Darlene's...with you.

EP: Yes, yeah I really felt like, that as the relationship went on that I was relating to her almost as a mother, you know, someone who was looking after me as a mother would look after her own daughter, and that she had that kind of wisdom that comes from experience, not from a whole lot of knowledge. That wisdom certainly ran deep.

November 21, 1992

Letter of Permission:

I hereby give Di Brandt, author, permission to discuss and quote from my story, included in **Mennonite Birth Stories: An Oral History Project**, by Kathy Martens in her PhD. thesis, **Maternal Narrative in Contemporary Writing by Women in Canada and Quebec,** (University of Manitoba, 1993), Chapter 5, "'Everyone has their own story to tell': Mennonite Birth Stories." I also give her permission to include a transcription of the story in the Appendix.

_____This also consitutes permission to publish the above chapter in a scholarly journal, anthology, or book. (Please indicate yes or no.)

_____ _____(Name)

_____(Address)

c/o P9.

_____

_____ Nov. 27/92 _____ (Date)

November 21, 1992

Letter of Permission:

I hereby give Di Brandt, author, permission to discuss and quote from my story, included in **Mennonite Birth Stories: An Oral History Project**, by Kathy Martens in her PhD. thesis, **Maternal Narrative in Contemporary Writing by Women in Canada and Quebec,** (University of Manitoba, 1993), Chapter 5, "'Everyone has their own story to tell': Mennonite Birth Stories." I also give her permission to include a transcription of the story in the Appendix.

YES This also consitutes permission to publish the above chapter in a scholarly journal, anthology, or book. (Please indicate yes or no.)

_____(Name)

_____(Address)

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA, R

December 1, 1992 (Date)

NOTE
Permission is given to Di Brandt to use my story on the condition that the names of my parents are not included in the transcript of the tape. P.R.

November 21, 1992

Letter of Permission:

I hereby give Di Brandt, author, permission to discuss and quote from my story, included in **Mennonite Birth Stories: An Oral History Project**, by Kathy Martens in her PhD. thesis, **Maternal Narrative in Contemporary Writing by Women in Canada and Quebec,** (University of Manitoba, 1993), Chapter 5, "'Everyone has their own story to tell': Mennonite Birth Stories." I also give her permission to include a transcription of the story in the Appendix.

Yes This also consitutes permission to publish the above chapter in a scholarly journal, anthology, or book. (Please indicate yes or no.)

_____(Name)

_____(Address)

_____

November 26 1992 (Date)

Notes

1. Burton L. White, *The First Three Years of Life* (1975) is a recent example of well-intentioned developmental psychology, aimed at mothers, but focussed entirely on the needs of the child. Chaucer's Wife of Bath and poor, hapless Griselda are early English types embodying the metaphor of woman as unpredictable and unreliable "earthly vessel" (unreliable precisely because she does not give up her subjectivity), and shadowy, selfless caretaker and companion, respectively. Mrs. Garth in *Middlemarch*, Mrs. Barton in *Mary Barton*, Dolly Winthrop in *Silas Marner* represent fictional versions of the perfect though marginal and ultimately expendable mother. Mrs. Gerson in *The Diviners* is another such figure.)

2. Paul Smith concurs that the feminist project, even its broadest formulation as the claiming of independent, female subjectivity, is necessarily a contestation of power: "patriarchy has marginalized femininity as the other by means of which its own identity can be formulated and guaranteed....[thus, feminist] demands for equality are not simply that - they also necessarily comport a threat and a resistance to dominatory structures" (Smith 1988, 138).

3. For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to identify "the mother" as a woman who gives birth to a child and then spends a significant portion of her time and energy taking care of it, i.e. the biological mother who is also the active, caretaking mother of the child. I understand there might be other ways of defining "mother;" for example, adoptive mothers and full-time nannies would both fit the second half of this definition but not the first. A "surrogate mother," as she is commonly called (although I think it's a misnaming), would fit into the first category but not the second. Sara Ruddick's definition of "mother" as a person who engages in maternal, nurturing activities implies that anyone, male or female, regardless of parental status, can be a "mother" (Ruddick 1980). My concern in this context, however, is to foreground maternal narrative against a history of

maternal absence. Since it is the biological mother who has been predominantly absent in Western literature (there have always been plenty of stepmothers and housekeepers and unmarried aunts in fiction), it is her presence, as maternal reproductive body, and as intentional, thinking subject, I am most interested in looking at her. Similarly, I wish to avoid a repetition of maternal absence by metaphorical displacement. If anyone can be the "mother," then at some point the word loses its specificity and can very easily be used to justify or cover over maternal absence in narrative. At the same time, it is impossible to highlight the mother as subject without becoming aware also of the maternal metaphors and powerful recurring motifs which extend her concerns beyond the personal into the public, and beyond the literal into the symbolic realm.

4. Harriet Rosenberg claims the severe stress factors in motherwork have been largely underestimated and misunderstood in this society. As Kathryn F. McCannell and Barbara M. Herringer explain, "it is the job design itself that creates difficulties [such as postpartum depression and fatigue], rather than some flaw in the worker's personality," cited in McCannell and Herringer 1990).

5. See Peter Brooks (1980) for a Freudian reading of "plot" in the Victorian novel. Brooks does not address the significance of maternal death in the novel *per se*, but claims that "the high incidence of orphans in the nineteenth-century novel clearly...present an an author with the greatest possible opportunity to create all the determinants of plot within his text" (Brooks 505). Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1966) and Judith Fetterly's *The Resisting Reader* (1978) represent contrasting attitudes toward the typical American male narrative celebrating adventure as getting away from home.)

6. See Marni Jackson, *The Mother Zone,* for a popular contemporary version of this story, 1992.

7. Margaret Laurence depicts a similar dynamic in the relationship between Rachel Cameron and her mother in *A Jest of God.* In Laurence's version, too, the daughter must come to terms with her own lack of mothering, and the dilemma of having to care for her mother without having received proper nurturing herself. Her declaration, "I am the mother now," made unconsciously under anaesthetic and again later in full consciousness to her mother, suggests that she has found enough

inner strength to be able to nurture her (by now) aging mother without jeopardizing her sense of self.

8. O'Brien contrasts traditional Western male-defined concepts of history based on "alienation" from time and the reproductive process, with female reproductive consciousness, mediated by the labour of childbirth, which she claims "negates the separation between women and genetic continuity." Women therefore stand in a relation to "*time* mediated by experience," in a way that is impossible for men except through conceptual knowledge. O'Brien argues that both men and women need to develop a greater awareness of their relationship to the reproductive process, in order to practise "reproductive consciousness" more responsibly in our time. (O'Brien 1981, 151-2; see also O'Brien 1986)

9. Diana Fuss deconstructs some of the issues around "essentialism" in poststructuralist theory in her book *Essentially Speaking* (1989), by arguing that "If essentialism is more entrenched in constructionist logic than we previously acknowledged, if indeed there is no sure way to bracket off and to contain essentialist maneuvers in anti-essentialist arguments, then we must also simultaneously acknowledge that there is no essence to essentialism, that essence as irreducible has been constructed to be irreducible" (Fuss 4). Fuss concludes that "constructionism may be more normative, and essentialism more variable, than those of us who call ourselves poststructuralists hitherto have been willing to acknowledge" (Fuss 119).

10. Cf. Teresa de Lauretis (1989), Gayatri Spivak (1984/85), Diana Fuss (1989),,and Elizabeth Grosz (1989), for an elaboration of the politics of essentialism in contemporary feminist /poststructuralist debate. Spivak argues that "the great custodians of the anti-universal" are as committed to a great narrative, the "narrative of exploitation," as are those who risk universalizing their position in order to enact a political struggle for change (Spivak 184).

11. R.C. Lewontin, in his recent book *Biology as Ideology,* offers an analogous critique of modern science as a doctrine of biological determinism parading as "truth," which erroneously holds out the promise of human mastery over physical organisms through the discovery of the DNA code. Instead, Lewontin offers a picture of the universe as infinitely capable of transformation through the ongoing,

continuous interaction of its inhabitants: " the relation between organism and environment is that the very physical nature of the environment as it is relevant to organisms is determined by the organisms themselves" (Lewontin 1991, 91).

12. See Eva C. Keuls' fine discussion of the splitting of the female psyche in ancient Greek discourse into opposing categories of "wife" and "harlot," distinctions which Keuls argues were maintained in Greek society with violence, and still characterize the way women are regarded socially and professionally today, for example, in the contrasting popular images of teacher and waitress,1986 ch. 8.

13. See Susan Knutson, on the Milan Women's Bookstore collective's articulation of the "symbolic mother" in this regard, 1991, 2-12. In effect, Knutson explains, "the symbolic mother legitimates female subjects in a 'female gendered' frame of reference.' " (Knutson 7)

14. Cf. also Walter Ong, on the differences between orality and literacy in relation to the symbolic: "Oral speech is fully natural to human beings....Talk implements conscious life but it wells up with consciousness out of unconscious depths" (Ong 1982, 82). Also the following: "Most of the characteristics of orally based thought and expression...relate intimately to the unifying, centralizing, interiorizing economy of sound as perceived by human beings. A sound-dominated verbal economy is consonant with aggregative (harmonizing) tendencies rather than with analytic, dissecting tendencies....It is consonant also with the conservative holism (the homeostatic present that must be kept intact, the formulary expressions that must be kept intact), with situational thinking (again holistic, with human action at the center) rather than abstract thinking, with a certain humanistic organization of knowledge around the actions of human and anthromorphic beings, interiorized persons, rather than around impersonal things." (Ong 73-74)

15. See Lynda E. Boose 1989; Naida D. Hyde 1986; Ellen Bass and Laura Davis 1988.

16. Rita Wong, in an unpublished M.A. dissertation on *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, criticizes the novel as "excessive" and "overemotional" (Wong 1992, 16). Writes

Wong, "I feel embarrassed, signalling my wariness of this seemingly pure emotion and distancing myself from this pain," though she also admits that Lee's melodramatic stance allows her to rebel "against (self)censorship and realist aesthetics" (Wong 17, 31). I disagree. While Lee's emotional tone is unusual and somewhat startling to English-speaking readers, I find it both powerful and moving.

17. The "Introduction" was published in 1990 with the title "There is as Much Pain as Joy in Women's Description of Childbirth," *Mennonite Mirror* 18/6 (February 1990): 7. The "Conclusion" was presented at the Manitoba Writers' Guild *Common Ground* Conference, as part of a panel on the use of oral texts, with H.C. Wolfart, Winnipeg, October 14, 1989.

18. For an extended description of the rules and conventions governing language in oral cultures, and the way these have been obscured in our over-emphasis on textuality, see Walter Ong 1982. See also Native women's writing on oral copyright rules, e.g. Joy Asham Fedorick 1990.

19. I speak primarily from my own observation and experience of growing up in a Mennonite community in southern Manitoba.

References Cited

Aeschylus. *The Oresteia.* Trans. Robert Fagles. Penguin Books, 1977.

Allen, Paula Gunn. *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.

Armstrong, Jeannette. "Words." *Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures.* Ed. The Telling It Book Collective. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1990.

Austen, Jane. *Emma.* Penguin, 1986.

Bass, Ellen and Laura Davis. *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse.* New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

Bersianik, Louky. "Agenesias of the Old World." *Trivia* 7 (1988): 33-47.

Birdsell, Sandra. *Agassiz Stories.* Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1990.

Boose, Lynda E. "The Father's House and the Daughter in It: The Structures of Western Culture's Daughter-Father Relationship." *Daughters and Fathers.* Ed. Lynda E. Boose and Betty S. Flowers. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, 19-74.

Brandt, Di. *Agnes in the sky.* Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1990.

_____. *mother, not mother.* Stratford: Mercury Press, 1992.

_____. *questions i asked my mother.* Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1987.

Braun, Lois. *The Pumpkin Eaters.* Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1990.

Brooks, Peter. "Repetition, Repression, and Return: *Great Expectations* and the Study of Plot." *New Literary History* 1980: 503-526.

Brossard, Nicole. *The Aerial Letter.* Trans. Marlene Wildeman. Toronto: Women's Press, 1988.

_____. *These Our Mothers: Or: The Disintegrating Chapter.* Trans. Barbara Godard. Toronto: Coach House Quebec Translations, 1983.

Buss, Helen. *Mother and Daughter Relationships in the Manawaka Works of Margaret Laurence.* English Literature Series #34. Victoria University Press, 1985.

Butler, Robert. "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged." *Psychiatry* 26/1 (1963): 63-76. Cited in Rooke, 38-40.

Butling, Pauline. "Changing the Iconography of Mothers: Women Imagining Women in Western

Canadian Fiction." University of Calgary, unpublished paper, 1991. 1-34.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. "The Canterbury Tales." *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer.* 2nd Ed. Ed. F.N. Robinson. Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1957.

Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

Chodorow, Nancy, and Susan Contratto. "The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother." *Rethinking the Family.* Ed. Barrie Thorne with Marilyn Yalom. New York: Longman, 1982.

Christ, Carol P. *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest.* 2nd Ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.

Cixous, Hélène. "Castration or Decapitulation?" Trans. Annette Kuhn. *Signs* 7/1 (1981) 41-55.

_____. "Sorties." *New French Feminisms: An Anthology.* Ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. New York: Schocken Books, 1981. 90-98.

Cixous, Hélène and Catherine Clement. *The Newly Born Woman.* Trans. Betsy Wing. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Clarke, Margaret. "Review: Margaret Laurence, *Dance on the Earth.*" *Prairie Fire* 11/3 (1990) 72-3.

Coldwell, Joan. "Hagar as Meg Merrilies, The Homeless Gipsy." *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 27 (1980): 92-100.

Cowan, Doris. Review: *White Pebbles in the Dark Forests*, by Jovette Marchessault. *Books in Canada.* March 1991: 42.

Crow Dog, Mary, with Richard Erdoes. *Lakota Woman.* New York: HarperPerennial, 1991.

Daly, Mary. *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1978.

Danica, Elly. *Don't: A Woman's Word.* Charlottetown: Gynergy Books, 1988.

de Lauretis, Teresa. *Alice Doesn't. Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 19482.

_____. "The Essence of the Triangle or, Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, the U.S., and Britain." *difference* 1/2 (Summer 19489): 3-37.

Dickens, Charles. *Little Dorrit.* Penguin, 1975.

Djwa, Sandra. "False Gods and the True Covenant: Thematic Continuity Between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross." *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 4 (1972): 43-50.

DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.

Eisler, Riane. *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future.* San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.

Engel, Marian. *Lunatic Villas.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986.

Eliot, George. *Middlemarch.* A Novel of Provincial Life. Oxford: Clarendon 1986.

_____. *Silas Marner.* The Weaver of Raveloe. New York and Scarborough: Signet, 1960.

Fedorick, Joy Asham. "Fencepost Sitting and How I Fell Off to One Side," *Artscraft*, Fall 1990, 9-14.

Fetterley, Judith. *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978.

Fiedler, Leslie. *Love and Death in the American Novel.* New York: Dell, 1966.

Fraser, Sylvia. *My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and of Healing.* Toronto: Doubleday, 1987.

_____. *Pandora.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* 24 vols. Ed. and trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 1953-74.

Frye, Northrop. *The Anatomy of Criticism.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.

_____. *The Bush Garden.* Toronto: Anansi, 1971. Cited in Hauge 122.

_____. *The Secular Scripture. A Study of the Structures of Romance.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976.

Fuss, Diana. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference.* New York and London: Routledge, 1989.

Gaskell, Elizabeth. *Mary Barton.* London: Dent, 1969.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979.

_____. *The Norton Anthology of Women's Literature: The Tradition in English.* New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1985.

Godard, Barbara. " 'Body I': Daphne Marlatt's Feminist Poetics." *American Review of Canadian Studies* 15/4 (1985): 481-496.

_____. "Talking about Ourselves: The Literary Productions of the Native Women in Canada." *The CRIAW Papers*, No. 11, 1985.

Griffin, Susan. *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her.* New York and London: Harper Colophon Books, 1981.

_____. *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature.* New York and London: Harper Colophon Books, 1981.

Grosz, Elizabeth. "Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism." *Inscriptions* 5 (1989): 87-101.

Hauge, Hans. "The Novel Religion of Margaret Laurence." *Crossing the River: Essays in*

Honour of Margaret Laurence. Ed. Kristjana Gunnars. Turnstone Press, 1988, 121-32.

H.D. Helen in Egypt. New York: New Directions, 1961.

_____. Trilogy. New York: New Directions, 1973.

Hirsch, Marianne. *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Homans, Margaret. " 'Her Very Own Howl': The Ambiguities of Representation in Recent Women's Fiction." *Signs* 9/2 (1983): 186-205.

Huston, Nancy. "The Matrix of War: Mothers and Heroes." *Poetics Today* 6/1-2 (1985): 153-80.

Hyde, Naida D. "Covert Incest in Women's Lives: Dynamics and Directions for Healing." *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health* 5/2 (1986): 73-82.

Irigaray, Luce. *Le corps-à-corps avec la mere*. Montreal: les editions de la pleine lune, 1981. Trans. in parts by Marianne Hirsch. Cited in Hirsch 1989.

_____. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

_____. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Irvine, Lorna. *Sub/Version*. Toronto: ECW Press, 1986.

Jackson, Marni. The Mother Zone: *Love, Sex & Laundry in the Modern Family*. Toronto: Macfarlane Walter and Ross, 1992.

Jacobus, Mary. " 'The Third Stroke': Reading Woolf with Freud." *Grafts: Feminist Cultural Criticism*. Ed. Susan Sheridan. London and New York: Verso, 1988. 93-110.

Jung, Carl et al. *Man and His Symbols*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1968.

_____. *Symbols of Transformation: An Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967.

Kahane, Claire. "The Gothic Mirror." *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation.* Ed. Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane and Madelon Sprengnether. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985. 334-51.

Kamboureli, Smaro. " 'Seeking Shape. Seeking Meaning': An Interview." *West Coast Line* 6 (25/3) (Winter 1991/92): 21-41.

Kempe, Margery. *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Excerpted in *Norton Anthology of Women's Literature,* 22-27.

Kertzer, Jon. M. "*The Stone Angel*: Time and Responsibility." *Dalhousie Review* 54 (1974): 499-509.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior. Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. New York: Knopf, 1976.

Knutson, Susan. "Imagine Her Surprise..." *Tessera* 10 (Summer 1991): 5-12.

Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan*. Boston: David R. Godine, 1982.

Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Ed. Leon S. Roudiez. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.

_____. "Semiotics: A Critical Science and/or a Critique of Science." *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

_____. "Stabat Mater." *Poetics Today* 6/1-2 (1985): 133-52.

_____. "Women's Time." Trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, *Signs* 7/1 (1981): 13-35.

Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1977.

Laurence, Margaret. *The Diviners*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974.

_____. *The Stone Angel*. Toronto and Montreal: McClelland & Stewart, 1968.

Leach, Edmund. "Complementary Filiation and Bilateral Kinship." *The Character of Kinship*. Ed. Jack Goody. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973. 53-58. Cited in Boose 22.

Lee, Sky. *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990.

Lessing, Doris. *The Four Gated City*. London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1969.

Leviton, Richard. "Through the Shaman's Doorway: Dreaming the Universe with Fred Alan Wolf." *Yoga Journal* 105 (July/August 1992): 48-55, 102.

Lewontin, R.C. *Biology as Ideology: The Doctrine of DNA*. Toronto: Anansi, 1991.

Maeser, Angelika. "Finding the Mother: The Individuation of Laurence's Heroines." *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 27 (1980) 151-66.

Magnusson, A. Lynne. "Language and Longing in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*." *Canadian Literature*, 116/88, 58-66.

Marchessault, Jovette. "Chronique lesbienne du moyen-age quebecois." *Lesbian Triptych*. Trans. Yvonne Klein. Toronto: Women's Press, 1985.

_____. *Like a Child of the Earth*. Trans. Yvonne Klein. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1988.

_____. *Mother of the Grass*. Trans. Yvonne Klein. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1989.

_____. "The Angel Makers." *Lesbian Triptych*. Trans. Yvonne Klein. Toronto: Women's Press, 1985.

_____. *White Pebbles in the Dark Forests*. Trans. Yvonne Klein. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1990.

Marlatt, Daphne. *Ana Historic: A Novel*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1988.

_____. *How Hug a Stone*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1983.

_____. "In the Month of Hungry Ghosts." *Capilano Review* 16/17 (1979) 45-95.

_____. "Self-Representation and Fictionanalysis." *Tessera* 8 (Spring 1990): 13-17.

_____. *Touch to My Tongue*. Edmonton: Longspoon Press, 1984.

_____. *What Matters: Writing 1968-70*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 19480.

_____. "writing in order to be." *SP/ELLES: Poetry by Canadian Women*. Ed. Judith Fitzgerald. Windsor: Black Moss Press, 1986.

_____. *Zocalo*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1977.

Martens, Katherine. "There is as Much Pain as Joy in Women's Description of Childbirth." *Mennonite Mirror* 18/6 (February 1990): 7.

McCance, Dawne. "Julia Kristeva and the Ethics of Exile." *Tessera* 8 (Spring 1990: 23-39.

McCannell, Kathryn F. and Barbara M. Herringer. "Changing Terms of Endearment: Women and Families." *Living the Changes*. Ed. Joan Turner. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1990. 57-66.

Meisner, Lucille. "The Look: Women and Body Image." *Living the Changes*. 136-44.

Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick*. New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1967.

Miller, Alice. *The Drama of the Gifted Child*. Trans. Ruth Ward. Basic Books, 1981.

_____. *The Untouched Key: Tracing Childhood Trauma in Creativity and Destructiveness*. Trans. Hildegarde and Hunter Hannum. New York, London, Toronto: Doubleday Books, 1990.

_____. *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child*. Trans. Hildegard and Hunter Hannum. New York: Farrar Strauss, 1984.

Mukherjee, Arun. *Towards an Aesthetic of Opposition: Essays on Literature, Criticism and Cultural Imperialism*. Toronto: Williams-Wallace, 1988.

Munro, Alice. *Lives of Girls and Women*. New York: Signet, 1971.

_____. *Who Do You Think You Are?* Toronto: Macmillan, 1979.

Nepinak, Doug. "Earth." *Prairie Fire* 12/1 (Spring 1991): 51.

Neumann, Erich. *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*. Trans. Ralph Manheim. Princeton, New Jersey, 1956.

Neumann, Shirley and Robert Wilson. *Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch*. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982.

O'Brien, Mary. *The Politics of Reproduction*. London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986.

_____. "Feminist Theory and Dialectical Logic." *Signs* 7/1 (1981): 144-57.

Ondaatje, Michael. *Running in the Family*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982.

Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. Penguin, 1982.

Orenstein, Gloria Feman. "Jovette Marchessault: The Ecstatic Vision-Quest of the New Feminist Shaman." *Gynocritics: Feminist Approaches to Canadian and Quebec Women's Writing*. Ed. Barbara Godard. Toronto: ECW Press, 19487. 179-198.

Pollack, Sharon. *Doc.* Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1981.

Pratt, Mary Louise. *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse.* London: Indiana University Press, 1977.

Radcliffe, Ann. *The Mysteries of Udolpho.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Read, Donna. *Goddess Remembered.* 54 min. video, National Film Board of Canada, 1989.

_____. *The Burning Times.* 56 min. video, National Film Board of Canada, 1990.

Redekop, Magdalene. *Mothers and Other Clowns: The Stories of Alice Munro.* London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

_____. "The Literary Politics of the Victim." *Canadian Forum*, November 1989, 68/83, 14-17.

_____. "The Pickling of the Mennonite Madonna." *Acts of Concealment: Mennonite/s Writing in Canada.* Ed. Hildi Froese Tiessen and Peter Hinchcliffe, 1992. 100-128.

Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Women's Voices: Visions and Perspectives.* Ed. Pat C. Hoy II, Esther H. Schor and Robert DiYanni. McGraw-Hill, 1990. 290-312.

_____. *Of Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose, 1976-1978.* New York: Norton, 1979.

_____. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution.* Tenth Anniversary Edition. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986.

_____. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women. Ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1985. 2044-56.

Rooke, Constance. "Hagar's Old Age: *The Stone Angel* as Vollendungsroman." *Crossing the River.* 25-42.

Rose, Hillary. "Hand, Brain, and Heart: A Feminist Epistemology for the Natural Sciences." *Signs* 9 (Autumn 1983). Cited in Eisler 191.

Rose, Marilyn Russell. "Politics into Art: Kogawa's *Obasan* and the Rhetoric of Fiction." *Mosaic* 21/3 (1988), 215-26.

Rosenberg, Harriet. "Motherwork, Stress and Depression." Fam*ily Bonds and Gender Divisions.* Ed. Bonnie Fox. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 1988. Cited in McCannell and Herringer 64.

Roy, Gabrielle. *The Road Past Altamont.* Trans. Joyce Marshall. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1984.

Ruddick, Sara. "Maternal Thinking." *Feminist Studies* 6/2 (1980): 342-67.

Rush, Florence. *The Best Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children.* New York: McGraw Hill, 1981.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism.* London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.

Scheier, Libby. *SKY.* Toronto: Mercury Press, 1990.

Scott, Gail. *Spaces Like Stairs.* Toronto: Women's Press, 1989.

Scott, Walter. *Guy Mannering, or, The Astrologer.* New York: Macmillan Co., 1925.

Shakespeare, William. *King Lear.* Penguin Books, 1986.

Smith, Barbara Herrnstein. *On the Margins of Discourse.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Smith, Paul. *Discerning the Subject.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Sophocles. *Oedipus at Colonus.* Trans. E.F. Watling. Penguin, 1947.

Solecki, Sam, ed. *Spider Blues.* Essays on Michael Ondaatje. Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1985.

Spivak, Gayatri. "Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution." *Thesis Eleven* 10/11 (1984/85): 184.

Stambaugh, Sara. *I Hear the Reaper's Song.* Intercourse, Pennsylvania: Good Books, 1984.

Swayze, Walter E. "Knowing Through Writing: The Pilgrimage of Margaret Laurence." *Crossing the River.* 3-24.

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd Ed. Rev. and Ed. C.T. Onions. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.

Tostevin, Lola Lemire. "Daphne Marlatt: Writing in the Space That Is Her Mother's Face." *Line* 13 (1989): 32-39.

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* New York: W.W. Norton, 1977.

van Herk, Aritha. *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey.* Toronto: Seal Books, 1987.

Warland, Betsy. *Open is Broken.* Edmonton: Longspoon Press, 1984.

White, Burton L. *The First Three Years of Life.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975.

Williams, David. "Jacob and the Demon: Hagar as Storyteller in *The Stone Angel.*" *Crossing the River.* 81-98.

Williamson, Janice. "It gives me a great deal of pleasure to say yes: Writing/Reading Lesbian in Daphne Marlatt's *Touch to My Tongue.*" *Beyond Tish.* Ed. Douglas Barbour. Vancouver and Edmonton: NeWest Press/Line 1991: 171-191.

Wolf, Fred Alan. *The Eagle's Quest: A Physicist's Search for Truth in the Heart of the Shamanic World.* New York: Summit Books, 1991.

_____. *Taking the Quantum Leap: The New Physics for Nonscientists.* New York: Harper Books, 1981.

Wong, Rita. "Pressuring the Surface: Approaches to Melodrama in Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe.*" Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Alberta, 1992.

Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse.* Triad Grafton, 1985.