

*An Ordinary Teacher:
An Auto ethnography*

by
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*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding:
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your path.*

(Proverbs 3:5)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Declaration	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Illustrative Material	vii
Dedication and Prologue	x
Abstract	xv

PART ONE - THE LANDSCAPE IN VIEW

Introduction and rationale	1
Problem statement	8
Aims of the research	8
Teacher self-study - alternative or 'alterative' research?	9
Research design and methodology	10
Rationale for methodology	13
Method of data production	16
Further data sources	19
Data analysis	21
Situating the researcher	22
Trustworthiness	23
Ethical issues	24
Overview of the thesis	25

PART TWO - LIFE IN THE FIELD

CHAPTER 1 - YEARS OF PLOUGHING AND PREPARING THE SOIL 1945 -1964

Introduction	29
Reflection on early beginnings	34
Exclusion from the family	39
Shaped by context	41
Preparation for my future career	48
My destined soulmate	55
The door to my future	58
A debilitating affliction	64
Synthesis	65

CHAPTER 2 - YEARS OF SOWING 1965 - 1972

Introduction	67
Lessons learned in the early years	68
Intuition takes precedence	73
Engagement and marriage	75
Labelled as useless according to cultural expectations	76
Motherhood	78
Returning to a former field	81
First entry into the field of business and entrepreneurship	82
First privately owned registered Nursery school	86
Deregistration and rejection	96
Synthesis	99

CHAPTER 3 - YEARS OF GROWING 1972 - 1995

Introduction	102
Apartheid era	104
Down memory lane	108
A special gift	115
First experience in a different field	117
Experience with weight gain and loss	120
The 'Mystic' experience	120

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL

Number	Description	Page
1	The wrought-iron gate which conjures up many memories	30
2	My mother and father leaning against the intruder	31
3	As a baby, dressed from top to toe in my mother's handiwork	32
4	A picture of my mother and three of her children taken in 1997 Note the 'black sheep' in the middle. My siblings and mother are dark in complexion, with black hair	33
5	Table time at the Grossi's - 1990. Left to right me, Mickey, my father and mother	36
6	Oh my papa! Deep in my heart... I miss you so today	38
7	My situ, Alice Akal	43
8	Myjidu, Abdoo Akal	43
9	The original licence of Mrs. Akal's shop	43
10	The original shop, 262 Stamford Hill Road. My father grew up in the premises behind the shop	44
11	The original expansion housing a general dealer, butchery and three flats on top	44
12	The original service station	45
13	Building in progress on the three-storey block of flats, plus shops and service station underneath	45
14	The completed businesses	46
15	The completed businesses	46
16	Mickey and I doing the 'twist' in the 60's	47
17	Matric results. I just made it!	53
18	My hero!	55
19	The early years ... Mickey and I (aged seventeen and eighteen) standing at the front gate that holds so many memories of the home of my youth, 160 Windermere Road, Durban	57
20	Marks and comment for the Cape Dutch Architecture assignment, 1963	62
21	Marks received for Psychometric assignment 35 years later	62
22	Page 38 of my assignment on Cape Dutch Architecture	63
23 a	First report from Department of Education	68
23 b	Notice of appointment from Department of Education	69
24	Michael, aged three	80
25	Michael today, a father of three	81
26	Nursery School licence	86
27	The front of Wonderland in 1972	86
28	The front of Wonderland in 2005	87
29 a&b	The playground in 1972	87
30 a&b	The playground in 2005	88
31	Mickey and I on the original verandah in 1961	89
32	The enclosed verandah, that is now my office, with the original front door to our home	89
33	The exterior of the enclosed verandah, which is my office, in 2005	90
34	Jodi, aged 6	91
35	Jodi today, mother of two	91

36	Article in Your Family magazine, September 2004	92
37	Article in The Cedar Leaf, a Lebanese periodical, in 1973	94
38	Me with a group in 1976. I am privileged to have four of these children's children at Wonderland in 2005. Jodi is on the far right of the last row	101
39	Section of registration certificate	107
40	Section of a letter written to me by my mother in 1974	108
41	Taryn and I as the ballet teacher's wedding attendants in 1986 Taryn is on the right	110
42	Letter from Taryn received May 2005	111
43	Taryn, 2005	111
44	Ryan the reindeer (on the left) at the annual school concert in 1978	112
45	Ryan (in the centre) and I with Embury College under 10 rugby team, 2005	112
46	Picture in the Daily News, 1975	113
47	Picture in the Daily News, 2003	114
48	Richard aged two	116
49	Richard, 2005	116
50a	A dress I designed and beaded	118
50b	Letter from Tracy Saunders, an ex-pupil and now a parent	118
51	I wrote the words to 'Because of your love,' Side A, Track 3 on this album	125
52	I wrote the words to 'Could You Live Without Him,' Side A, Track 1 on this album	125
53	Words and music of a song I composed	125
54	Picture of the cake I made for Jodi's wedding	129
55	Mickey and I and our three children in 1987. What stood out for me in this photograph as I reminisced is that each member of the family is touching another member in some way	134
56	Letter sent to Department of Education in 1995	138
57	Article about Catherine	142
58	Catherine and I at her graduation, 2004	142
59	Labour Department contract	143
60 a&b	Wonderland Baby Care, established 1996	144
61	Train-Au-Pair course learning areas	148
62	Remedial diploma	149
63	Embury College advert	153
64	Article in Daily News, 1997	154
65	Mickey building Embury College	155
66 a&b	The Victorian flavour of Embury College Private School	156
67	Article in Daily News, October 2000	157
68	Notes from two pupils in the Combined Class	167
69	Jenna's certificate	169
70	The cricket team. Nicholas on the far right (back row) and Craig (second left, in front row)	170
71	The first Combined Class. Nicholas on the left, Jenna behind him and Craig (seated)	170
72 a&b	About Golden Key	172
73	Certificate of Merit in Pastoral Care	173
74 a&b	My oil paintings of student teachers with pupils	175

ABSTRACT

In my search for work of and about autoethnography and teacher self-study, I realised the lack of this genre not only in South Africa, but also in other countries. After a thorough search I have ascertained that, as far as I am aware, there is not one autoethnography that examines the holistic life of a teacher, nor one that covers the education of students from birth to University.

This autoethnography, drawing on Ellis' work, is a teacher self-study which explores my experiences in the field of education over a period of 41 years in Durban, South Africa. In this personal narrative, which is rooted in qualitative research methodology, I draw on Krall's reflective framework as a guide to the research. As the roots of self-study are embedded in humanism, I attempt to map out my progress in life based on Maslow's theory of self-actualisation. This autoethnography examines and interprets important nodal moments and decision points in my personal life and in my career as a Lebanese woman, educator and entrepreneur in the context of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. The narrative starts as far back as I can remember and is grounded in my particular experiences of life and education. Through the use of stories I explore personal experiences to come to a deeper understanding of myself and my practice, allowing others to reflect on theirs. Four distinct chapters in my life are identified to portray the complexities inherent in different phenomena. In my research I use a range of creative forms including poetic text, art, photographs, documents and articles as representation, verification and confirmation of my life story. To ascertain the value of the autoethnography, or according to Ellis, the validity, a selection of women were asked to respond to my work.

This research has implications for teacher self-study and postgraduate research, and speaks to women of all ages and in all professions. Hence, although the major contribution appears to be to the field of teacher self-study, this research also offers a contribution to the genre of autoethnography.

PART ONE - THE LANDSCAPE IN VIEW

Introduction and rationale

*The only book that should ever be written is one that
flows up from the heart forced out by the inward pressure.*

A.W Tozer (Syverson, 2005:4)

My life has been so busy that I have never taken the opportunity to stop, reflect, and explore my personal experiences in the field of education. This autoethnography allows me to do just that as I focus on the academic as well as the personal aspects of my life, the main purpose being to arrive at an understanding of myself as teacher. This autoethnography also contributes to the celebration of my life in the field of education over a generation. It is a means to 'remember and honor the past' (Ellis, 2004: 111). Could this piece stimulate the readers to reflect on their own experiences? Could it make a contribution to the literature on teacher self-study and teacher education? Will it make a contribution to knowledge?

In 1961 I asked my father to send me to the Cape to train in the field of education for the deaf and blind child. My father replied in the negative, and repeatedly enquired 'Why can't you be an ordinary teacher?' The word 'ordinary' struck a chord deep within me. Me? An ordinary teacher? He is my father! How could he possibly equate me with other 'ordinary' teachers I had encountered during my schooling? I felt quite deflated at the rejection of my request but, in retrospect, I realise that his wisdom overshadowed my emotions, as I was probably not ready to leave the family nest at the age of sixteen. Could I have left the security and warmth of the family home? Could I have left my childhood sweetheart for four years? Was I independent enough to succeed on my own? Would this move have resulted in a different life path? Would I still have been an 'ordinary' teacher?

With all research, the researcher's choice of topic will always be made as a result of his or her interests. My interest has always been the teaching profession, and thus I was pleased to note that Hollingsworth (1997:165-182) theorises that women teachers' contributions of lived educational experience will greatly enhance the foundation for teacher education. Bearing this in mind, I find it quite perturbing that in my research I discovered that among the more than 200 names of distinguished women educators, past and present, born before

and after the dawn of the 20th century, only one South African name appears, that of Dr. M. Ramphela, who in 1996 was the first Black woman to be appointed vice-chancellor of a South African University (Bois, 2005:6). Where are the contributions of other female educators that add to teacher education? Do all the missing names belong to 'ordinary' teachers? Were we so schooled and brainwashed by the Calvinistic outlook of the former Nationalist Party government in South Africa, that the role and identity of female educators was only assigned to the classroom? When I embarked on this thesis many topics presented themselves, all embedded in my life story. My equilibrium was disturbed as the story of my life in education screamed to have a voice, and autoethnography presented itself as the only option for my thesis. Therefore, this piece speaks of subjective real experiences in the field of education, and focuses on the reflection of my personal and professional experiences and accomplishments during 41 years as an 'ordinary' teacher in South Africa.

Being one who values the pride each individual takes in her teacher identity, I found myself disillusioned with society in the sixties. Within the South African education system, especially in the apartheid era - that is before 1994 - women educators suffered greatly due to gender discrimination. At the beginning of my career in education, female teachers were considered as less important competitors for positions of authority than men, who were widely perceived as the main breadwinners. Senior positions were allocated to mainly white Afrikaner males who, although on the same educational level, were already earning a larger salary than females. Female teachers generally retired holding the same position as when they began, that is, a class teacher. Horowitz (1997:75) explains that when gender is used as a basis of discrimination and oppression, it dehumanizes both men and women. Essentialist perspectives on gender consider the above a permanent trait thus disregarding any differences in the group (Epstein, 1998:2).

To further exacerbate matters, in my Lebanese cultural context males are also perceived to be dominant as they are regarded as the family heirs, and females are expected to be 'in the kitchen,' as it were. Lebanese parents encourage their daughters to choose 'a nice Leb boy' as a husband and, according to custom, it is the woman's duty to serve him. As my father was of the 'old school,' my brothers inherited the shares in the family business while the females were excluded. I now realise that racism and sexism stem from the same root of prejudice, discrimination, oppression and power, the consequences thereof being the same. Both racism and sexism can be internalized and horizontalized and need

a dominant group to keep them alive (Adams, Bell & Griffen, 1997:5). Most of the new generation of Lebanese males do not hold to this practice in the 21st century, as parents, the media and education play an important role in shaping, and reshaping, minds and attitudes. Education is more than what we learn at school - it is the messages we receive about our roles from family, friends and society.

If we divide our people by sex, by race or by nation, we all lose.

(Garg & Hardy, 1996:2)

Autoethnography is a new genre, and is conducted by an autobiographer who places the story of her life within the social context in which it occurs (Reed-Danahay, 1997:9). I draw on Ellis' work on autoethnography as she is, as far as I am aware, the leading proponent of this genre. Kraver (2005:316), in her critique of Ellis' methodological novel, *The Ethnographic I*, states that Ellis successfully 'captures the changing nature of this disciplinary genre.' I have found Ellis' work engaging, educational, a 'good read' (Settlemaier and Taylor, 2001:6) and beneficial to the study of this genre.

As autoethnography is a combination of the story of one's own life and ethnography, which is the study of a particular social group, it can relate to a collection of stories about one's experiences in the culture of education (Montgomery, 2004:1). Thus teacher self-study in an autoethnography is a worthwhile exercise, as it can be used as a tool for inservice and preservice teacher development. Although I am acutely aware that we all have stories to tell, I was initially hesitant to engage in this genre for my thesis, as I struggled internally with the fear that the reader might find me self-absorbed, narcissistic or boastful (Sparks, 1994:166). I trust this will not be the case, but that the reader will actually hear my voice and gain an understanding of my passion for the teaching profession as my life story unfolds. South Africa has a unique, culturally diverse community of teachers. It is my desire that this work stimulate many South African educators to reflect on, and perhaps recount, their own experiences.

In the early 1980's stories about life were out of fashion in research and writing (Berteaux & Martin, 1984:231). However, a decade later personal narratives flourished and some autoethnographies became international bestsellers, such as *Nisa, I, Rigoberta Menchu* and *Aman* (Driessen, 1998:1). Noteworthy autobiographies by South African Black women

since the mid 1980's have made their appearance, for example, Ellen Kuswayo's 1985 novel, *Call me Woman*, and Emma Mashinini's 1989 work, *Strikes have followed me all my life*. South African Indian women, for example Fatima Meer and Agnes Sam, have also contributed widely to the literary field (Govinden, 2006a:2). Ellis (2004:50) affirms that reflective writing started in the 1970's, when there was a shift from '... participant observation to the observation of the participant.' She further states that in the last two decades qualitative research has included autoethnography - an impressionistic, evocative, artistic, narrative practice which overlaps the arts and science. Feminism played a significant role in the acceptance of the life story approach and the shift from the realist, detached history to the humanistic life story (Driessen, 1998:8), where the emphasis is placed on individuality and diversity (Cohen, 1992:8). Therefore, can autoethnography of and about teacher self-study, using the humanistic life-story approach, not also be classed as a case study with the intention of reaching deeper within in order to reach further without?

The autoethnographic genre is in keeping with the postmodern age which rejects the view of absolute and universal truth, viewing this outlook as merely 'illusions instructed by Western academics' (Mc Neill & Chapman, 2005:185). Postmodernists advocate a varied approach to research in order to capture different interpretations of realities which exist in a postmodern society. In her article, *Doing Autoethnography*, Muncey (2005:1) argues that an individual identity is worthy enough of research. However, I take cognisance of the fact that postmodernism embraces the notion of multiple identities in opposition to the modernist perspective of identity as singular and unitary. On the other hand, can I ignore personal experiences which moulded me into the teacher I am? Therefore, as no two teachers are alike, teachers have a plethora of experiences which can be used as worthwhile contributions to the profession through self-study practices.

Stacey, a professor at Humboldt State University, names Pratt's autoethnographic essay, *Arts of the Contact Zone*, a 'forbidden text,' acknowledging that autoethnography differs from the norm expected from students, especially those writing for an academic audience (Dyer, 2004: 2). Indeed it is different in that it allows for creativity in representation. The use of creative expression as a medium to explore the lived experience draws on the notion that there are certain phenomena within human reality which touch us so deeply that creative forms are the pre-eminent ways to highlight and present meaning (Brearley, 2004:8). Autoethnography also permits a blurring or 'muddle' of the genres, allowing

authors to cross boundaries (Ellis, 2004:21).

A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write,

if he is to be at peace with himself.

What a man can be, he must be.

This is a need we may call self-actualisation.

(Maslow, 1968:153)

In response to the words above, I have, among other things, composed words and melodies for songs, written poetry and painted on canvas. In my career as an 'ordinary' teacher I have had the privilege of founding five different educational institutions, namely a Baby Care Centre, Pre-Primary School, Primary School, High School and Teacher Training College, and co-founding an Inservice Teacher Training facility. I have devised many learning programmes for schools, engaged in many hobbies, and enjoy life to the full.

Humanism, autoethnography and self-study

Allender (2004:484) explains that the roots of self-study are embedded in humanism as the theories of Maslow, known as the father of American humanism, were 'derived from a fundamental focus on self.' Allender credits Maslow for providing the focus on the connection of all learning with personal growth. Allender further explains that, although there is no body of literature called 'humanistic research,' in the last twenty five years humanistic psychology has had a great impact on the 'new' methods of educational research, such as teacher self-study. A pivotal point in this regard was the publication of Reason and Rowans's book in 1981, *Human Inquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research*. One of the reasons why Abraham Maslow's theory appeals to me is that he dared to depart from what was considered the norm in his day, as he expressed his new and controversial viewpoint. Many times I too dared to depart from the norm, which cost me dearly in some instances, but resulted in inner peace and satisfaction, and afforded me a state of equilibrium. I am aware of the criticism levelled at Maslow's theory. However, Maslow was concerned with individual people and personalities - is this not akin to interpretive research and teacher self-study where the focus is on the individual?

Since the rise of critical theory and multicultural studies in the 1960's and 1970's, the traditional humanistic stance has been critiqued. According to Bilgrami (2006:1), the

humanist, Edward Said (1935-2003), also of Lebanese descent and noted as one of the most influential scholars in the world, argued for a more democratic type of humanism - one that incorporates, frees and enlightens. I concur with his argument. Said believed, as did the great Lebanese poet, philosopher, artist and author, Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931), that self-knowledge is 'the highest form of achievement' (Bilgrami, 2006:1). Grieshaber and Cannella (2001:54) remind us that dominant perspectives of progress dominate and normalize causing power relations, hegemony and injustice, thus denying people an identity. However, my intention in using Maslow's theory is far from this assumption. Maslow's theory has always held a fascination for me as it appears to relate to my personal situation in life in the context in which I grew up. I draw on his early works from 1943 through to the 1970's as I need to understand his work, as well as the man behind the theory I am using. I also draw on more recent texts relating to him.

Autoethnography is an explanation of how one is 'othered.'

(Duckart, 2005:1)

Many people, of which I am one, look for meaning and purpose in their lives. Maslow is one of the pioneers of the direction of thought that psychology is first and foremost about real people in real lives. Autoethnography and teacher self-study also concern real people in real life. Contrary to the main schools of thought in the psychology of his time - that is Freud and Skinner - Maslow was not pessimistic, nor did he rely on statistics to arrive at certain conclusions. In contrast with Freud, who studied mentally ill people, Maslow studied exemplary people and disagreed with Skinner's tendency to paint every person with the same brush as it were (Gwynne, 1997:1). Maslow's critics, however, point an accusing finger at his methodology of choosing a small group of people, whom he termed self-actualising, to derive at meaning (Prager, 2002:2), but I correlate a thread between autoethnography and Maslow's approach.

Maslow 'read' the lives of others to make meaning - is autoethnography not the penning of a life story for others and self to make meaning? On the other hand, Boeree (2006:12) suggests one view the term self-actualization as a 'life force that drives all creatures,' so that acknowledgement can be made regarding circumstances or things that prohibit or interrupt the complete effectiveness of that life force. An example of this, therefore, may be that should a person for any reason be deprived of their basic needs, they may

continue surviving but their life would not be as fulfilling as it could be under different circumstances. Bourdieu's contention with Maslow's theory is that, due to the innateness of individual needs, the question of social interaction and culture are considerably downgraded (Trigg, 2006:1). I, however, see the innate needs play themselves out in a context which could facilitate or hamper self-actualization. Nonetheless, personal experiences are the very essence of autoethnography, and exploring my experiences will be underpinned by Maslow's theory, which suits my life story, as I view it through a self-study and write from a privileged point of view.

Ellis (2004:30) confirms that the narrative text of autoethnography 'focuses on generalization within a single case extended over time.' This teacher self-study, drawing on the tools of autoethnography, does just that, using Maslow's theory as a measure of progress. Maslow asserts that people act in a specific way according to the desire to fulfill certain needs (Gwynne, 1997:2). It has always been my belief that unless a person has had her basic needs met she cannot evolve into the person God created her to be. In my opinion my physiological, safety, love and esteem needs, according to Maslow's theory, have been met in the following ways. Homeostasis has been established as far as my physiological needs are concerned, and the stability and consistency of my early and present home and family life, plus the consolation of my religious beliefs, ensure that my safety needs are adequately provided for. According to Maslow, humans have a desire to belong to groups and to feel loved, accepted and needed by others. These needs are fulfilled through my family, friends, religious affiliation and profession. Gwynne (1997:4) asserts that there are two kinds of esteem needs - the self-esteem that arises from competence and achievement, and the reputation, appreciation and recognition that comes from others.

I believe many people are capable of self-actualisation, a term originated by Kurt Goldstein, which is the instinctive need of a human being to utilise all her potential and to become all that she can be. It is also my belief that teachers who are prepared to play an active role in their self-development by engaging in self-reflective practices, set themselves on the path of self-actualisation, thus benefitting themselves and, in turn, the learners.

Autoethnography is an act of love in which we seek to create a charged exchange with our readers that encompasses all parts of love - desire, pain and longing, wisdom and irony.

(Ellis, 2004:143)

Problem statement

*If we have courage and faint not in the search,
it would seem (that) research and learning are wholly recollection.*

Socrates (Rosen, 2000:147)

Autoethnography enables the researcher to journey back in time to recollect lived past experiences which shaped her life and destiny, and to share these with an audience (Eisner, 1997:259). The research problem can therefore be stated as 'What can an autoethnographic exploration of the experiences of a female educator in South Africa contribute to her understanding of herself in deeper ways? Will the piece cause reflection for the reader? Will it make a contribution to knowledge and benefit the teaching profession?'

Aims of the research

*Sometimes the impetus for writing autoethnography
... comes from desire to remember and honor the past.*

(Ellis, 2004:111)

As early as 1926 Lindeman (1926:9) saw the value of experience in contributing to learning, and coined the phrase a 'living textbook.' Thus I would like to open my living textbook to assist me in recalling specific nodal moments of my life pertaining to the field of education, particularly Early Childhood Development, in order to make meaning of past experiences and reach a deeper understanding of myself. Personal narrative will be employed to explore my personal, academic and entrepreneurial experiences in education and industry in order to understand my progress according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. This autoethnography, drawing on teacher self-study, is also intended to evoke a response from school principals, teachers, student teachers, mothers, daughters, grandmothers and future entrepreneurs and to possibly free them to value and to recount their own personal stories in order to understand their experiences. It is of importance to note that altered teaching practice may be a result of self-reflection and transformed thinking, and the evidence can make a worthwhile contribution to society (Mc Neill & Chapman, 2005:102). Would that this piece does just that! To some degree ethnography not only makes one think differently about academic discourse, but may result in one doing something differently (Dyer, 2004:2).

That thought is foremost in my mind as I write this.

Teacher self-study - alternative or 'alterative' research? (Ellis, 2004:194)

Although autoethnographic work is presented in a personal narrative form, this genre does more than simply tell a story. It offers reports that are 'scholarly and justifiable'(Duncan, 2004:3) and which could be valuable to the teaching profession. Ellis (2004:194) suggests that the term 'alternative research' should possibly be replaced by the words 'alterative research' as autoethnography differs from traditional research. Teacher self-study is the analysis of one's experiences in the profession which can be viewed as applications of autoethnography (Vryan, 2003:1). Teachers make meaning through their practices. This maximises professional growth and results in innovative classroom practices (Senese, Fagel, Gorleski & Swanson, 1998:1). This, in turn, can invigorate the teaching profession.

At present teacher self-study is regarded as very much an alternative form of research despite the formation of the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices Special Interest Group (S-STEP SIG) of America (Cole & Knowles, 1996:1). Is it marginalized because of its potential to stir, to challenge or to perhaps effect change? I have found self-study to be an 'alterative' practice as it brings about change. Although interest has only been shown in this area of research in the past decade, and literature is still quite scarce, there are some substantial publications, for example Russell and Korthagen's *Teachers Who Teach Teachers*, two issues of *Teacher Education Quarterly: Self-Study and Living Educational Theory*, by Pinnegar and Russell (Cole & Knowles, 1996:3), a two-volume *International Handbook of Teacher Self-study of Teaching and Teacher Education* (Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey and Russell, 2004) and *Just Do We Think We Are? Methodologies for autobiography and self-study in teaching*, by Mitchell, Weber and O'Reilly-Scanlon (2005).

The first biannual international conference on teacher self-study practice was held in 1996 in East Sussex County, England. However, two years later at the second S-STEP SIG International Conference held at Herstmonceux Castle, Sussex, in August 1998, sixty one papers were presented including two by Mitchell and Weber entitled *What Can a Teacher Do With a Camera* and *Seeing (through) the Teacher's Body in Self-Study* In July 2006 the group will celebrate its 10th anniversary at a conference at the same place. (It is indeed gratifying that the concluding of my own study correlates with this event.) Therefore, within

ten years self-study appears to have carved out its own niche in research. However, Cole and Knowles (1996:4) reported that many individuals, in order to survive the academic 'tensions and dilemmas' concerning this type of research, show a '... traditional face to the academic public. A failure to live with this split-personality syndrome was, and still is, punished by expulsion from academia.' Will the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee at my University accept the 'living educational theory?' (Whitehead, 1999:1). After all, Whitehead, who hails from the Education Department at the University of Bath and who eventually received his PhD. in 1999, entitled *How Do I Improve My Practice?: Creating a discipline of education through educational enquiry*, experienced two failures of his submissions, and was even threatened with termination of his employment as a lecturer at his University, for proposing a thesis similar in kind (Cole & Knowles, 1996:4). Precedents like the above have, however, paved the way for academia to be open to, and accepting of, work that methodologically pushes the boundaries.

*One way to study and understand the phenomena of the everyday world,
including one's own work, is to embrace the text-based,
interpretive tools of the hermeneutical-phenomenological research tradition.*

(Wilcox, Watson & Paterson, 2004:281)

Research design and methodology

Autoethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture.

*It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research
that displays multiple layers of consciousness.*

(Ellis, 2004:37)

Autoethnography lends itself to a qualitative, rather than quantitative, design as data is presented in the form of words, images and impressions which represent real events. There is a tension between two discourses in qualitative research. One discourse interprets human behaviour through critical and feminist perspectives, whilst the other relies more on empirical inquiry into human experiences (Foster, McAllister & O'Brien, 2006:46). This piece falls into the latter discourse, the epistemological underpinning being that knowledge is constructed by meaning-making and understanding. The autoethnographical approach falls into the postmodern paradigm as it rejects rigid genre distinctions and

favours reflexivity and self-consciousness. In contrast to modernism, postmodernism celebrates fragmentation, identity and individualism (Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001:3). This research is also framed by Florence Krall's five fold model of hermeneutic motion which is venturing, remembering, comprehending, embodying and restoring (Renner, 2001:1) and suits autoethnography, a method of 'knowing' (Ellis, 2004:171).

Research approaches such as phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology and hermeneutics are usually employed in a qualitative research paradigm (Henning, Smit & Van Rensburg, 2004:5). As such, these contribute to the epistemological underpinning of autoethnography. Phenomenology, which has philosophy as its root discipline, enquires as to the essence of the experience of the phenomenon. It is of interest to note that humanistic psychology developed from phenomenology. It is therefore of importance to note that the 'humanistic spirit is integral to self-study'(Allender, 2004:507). Symbolic interactionism focuses on understanding social reality and society from individuals who make meaning of their world through social interaction. However, the emphasis is on politics and social change and, although intervention and change is not the primary purpose of autoethnography, they may be 'by products of good writing'(Ellis, 2004:136). Ethnomethodology, having social psychology as its root discipline, inquires as to the way meaning is constructed from one's everyday experiences. Ethnomethodologists believe people communicate meaning by means of words, among other tools, as they search for underlying patterns of behaviour (Phelan, 2005:14). Ethnography concerns others - autoethnography concerns the self. Hermeneutics, drawing on theology, philosophy and literary criticism as the main root discipline, is concerned with interpreting and making meaning of conditions under which human acts take place (Henning *et al*, 2004:136). Therefore, the focus of autoethnography is on experience and interpretation, the aim being to develop an understanding of individual cases.

Drawing mainly on the work of Ellis (2004), this research is exploratory, interpretive and impressionistic, and embraces personal narrative, autobiography, self-study and reflective practices. The use of poetry and free verse in autoethnography provides an evocative channel which 'retains the signature of the creator' whilst allowing for several possible interpretations (Butler-Kisber, 2005:97). I have found that I 'say' more using the poetic form, as I draw from my visual and auditory memory and, in so doing, recapture certain emotions. However, I am aware of the simplicity of my free verse. Nonetheless, this is my

signature and to self I must be true. I have also used quotations from the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series in favour of something more academic as it is my desire that the notion that I am first and foremost an ordinary person, an ordinary teacher, must not be forgotten as one engages with my life story.

*Poetic representation is an arts-based vehicle in qualitative research
that allows the heart to lead the mind rather than the reverse,
and in so doing, elicits new ways of seeing and understanding phenomena.*

(Butler-Kisber, 2005:108)

Autoethnography concerns a personal account of the writer as part of a specific culture and frequently portrays the author as being 'different'(Duckart, 2005:1). However, according to Ellis (2004:200), cultures are not uniformly shared and people 'criss-cross' many borders in their daily lives. Ellis further states that bicultural people have to 'make it in several different worlds.' This, therefore, makes them more interesting.'Opportunistic researchers' illuminate the culture and settings they belong to, and feminists, in their quest to recognise women's life experience and views on the social world, have advocated the use of life histories as a '... rejoinder against male bias, the deficiencies of quantitative methods and positivistic principles of research' (Reinharz, 1992:46). Therefore, is autoethnography not an excellent tool for teacher self-study? Will it not illuminate the profession? Will it not enhance professional practice? After all, is not good sociology, the study of social lives of humans, derived from empirical evidence? Ellis (2004:200) reports that 'Personal narrative has been proliferating into humanities, and forms of writing associated with humanities have been proliferating into social science research.'

Robson (2002:43) advocates that the researcher use a design that suits the particular research problem and Mc Neill and Chapman (2005:187) concur, advising that some postmodern societies advocate pluralism in methodology. I have enjoyed the freedom of creative expression in this piece and am of the opinion that it enhances the thesis. However, although Corey and Nakayama (1997:58) refer negatively to autoethnography as 'poeticizing scholarship,' Ellis (1997:4) rebounds with the questions 'What counts as scholarship in communication? What does scholarship do? How is it used? Does it give meaning to our lives as academics?' Van Maanen (1984:51) however, recognising the value of artistic forms of inquiry states 'There exists a humanistic dialectic between lived life and art: art

interprets life and life interprets art.' Therefore, as autoethnography is an artistic form of expression, meaning will be verbalised as it unfolds thus 'capturing the complexity' of critical reflection (LaBoskey, 2005:133). In my reflections, the autoethnography about and of teacher self-study represents an important new direction in the scholarship of teacher education, as is evident by the rapidly increasing work in this genre.

A life story is a fairly complete narrating of one's entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects.

(Atkinson, 1998:8)

In the Lebanese society, as in many other societies, including African, knowledge is gained by the relating of life stories. Knowledge is arranged differently in postmodern societies, one learns things not just to know them but in order to use the knowledge gained. An example can be found in Outcomes Based Education, Curriculum 2005 and the Revised National Curriculum Statement of 2002 in South Africa, where Outcomes of Significance require that students be prepared for the conditions they will face in the real world (Spady & Schlebusch, 1999:47), and where educational policy emphasises skills and training not just for the gaining of knowledge for knowledge's sake (Klages, 2003:7). The same principle applies to teacher education. There is a great need for classroom narratives, especially from South African teachers, and a continued search for evidence of 'reframed thinking' resulting from self-reflective practice (LaBoskey, 2005:132). As previously stated, the focus of postmodernist theory is on multiplicity, other, culture, representation and difference, and there are no 'grand' or 'master' narratives of truth, order and expectations to gender (Cannella, 1997:51). However, according to my familial culture, as a female, specific roles and identities are a 'given,' and in my profession most female class teachers remain just that - identified *en masse*

Rationale for methodology

You don't choose autoethnography - it chooses you! (Ellis, 2004:26). Although autoethnography challenges the genre of academic research writing, it enhances self-study research which concentrates on what is perceived by the senses. Whereas traditional research relies on external informants, self-study relies on critical self-reflection and memory. Photographs, certificates and letters play an important role in arousing a memory that

may be dormant in sections, and it appears that critical reflection is a skill that develops the more it is used. Is not every individual unique? Therefore their lives should be viewed because of their uniqueness and peculiar identity (Roberts, 2002:34).

*Narratives are designed to do what art does so well.
The greatest achievement of art is to lay bare questions
which have been hidden by the answers.*

(Settelmaier & Taylor, 2001:6)

An unexamined life is not worth living.

Socrates (Duckart, 2005:1)

One can employ the metaphor of a camera to depict autoethnographic writing as that which focuses on the 'rarely heard stories,' zooming inwards and outwards, backwards and forwards, from one dimension to multiple dimensions (Luitel & Taylor, 2003:5). As autoethnography allows the researcher's personal experiences and findings to be expressed, and as Lebanese people are renowned for being expressive and emotional, this genre of research speaks to me. It should be understood that in order to explain some phenomenon in the social world, one needs to be aware of the thoughts and feelings of the people involved. McNeill and Chapman (2005:18) argue that people are active and conscious and are well able to make decisions regarding their actions, and individualised focus can highlight critical events that may throw light upon the direction people's lives take. Bearing the above in mind, I ask the following question 'What better way is there to present my world and experience in research than by writing an autoethnography?'

*If a man for whatever reason has had the opportunity
to lead an extraordinary life,
he has no right to keep it to himself.*

Cousteau (Canfield, 2005:1)

In the 1920's Park emphasised the range and values of people's experiences and advised his students to forsake the study of books and papers and the viewing of constant experiments, replacing them with the study of human experience (Palmquist, 1997:3). Thus I chose autoethnography, a personal case study of human experience, aiming to add value to

society in some way. Contrary to a positivist approach, interpretive research opposes the notion that 'the researcher and the research can be detached from the phenomena' (Schaller & Tobin, 1998:42). Therefore, in this autoethnography, I play the part of researcher, the researched and the phenomenon to relate my life story in my own way, looking through my personal lens, as I seek understanding of my peculiar experiences.

*When the essence of the particular is expressed in an artful form,
it evokes an embodied response
and a different kind of interpretation and understanding.*

(Butler-Kisber, 2005:96)

Creative forms of research, such as autoethnography, enable one to develop insight, to perceive more clearly and to feel more deeply (Ellis, 2004:323). Therefore autoethnography endorses poetic licence and permits works of art as substantiation of written text. Richardson states that poetry is akin to embodied speech, which is able to evoke emotions easier than prose, and that the lived experience is like poetry (Ellis, 2004:201). My lyrical poems contribute to the representation of my lived experience. Their simplicity reiterates the notion that I am an ordinary person and my work, contrary to that of more conventional research where 'authors write in a scientific, all-knowing voice,' reveals this (Butler-Kisber, 2005:97). Ellis (2004:205) refers to Austin, who employs the use of poetry in her piece, *Composing Ethnography*, and states that students from various disciplines, including education, publish their poetry in the *Qualitative Inquiry*, a scientific journal. Other researchers, for example Christine Kiesinger and Lisa Tillman-Healy, write 'narrative poetry' to explain a story (Ellis, 2004:203). Thus narrative poetry will be included in this life story. As I have always loved words, my own unpretentious thematic verse will introduce each chapter, and will be used intermittently throughout the piece. Furthermore, all artworks eventually become self-portraits, just as research is a portrait of the researcher and the one researched (Pearse, 2004:4). This, therefore, affords me the opportunity of including photographs of my own artworks to reveal myself to myself and to the reader. Autoethnography utilises storytelling as a process of healing and discovery, a journey to seek in-depth understanding of self and the sharing of lived experiences, as the author reflects on her life. Through this the reader comes to a deeper understanding of her own life (Kawalilak & Dudley, 2002:1-3). Successful examples of this genre are included in Appendix 1.

*Using art to express what your body-mind is saying will enable you to connect,
perhaps for the first time, with your deepest feelings and emotions.*

(Ganim, 1999:21)

Method of data production

*Autoethnographers turn participant-observation inward;
they observe and write about themselves as they participate in the real world.*

(Marvasti, 2004:58)

I used three data production methods; a coherent narrative, co-constructed narratives and written comments from readers.

A coherent narrative

In an autoethnography the author's personal experiences and emotions constitute the data (Tellis, 1997:14). Ernest Becker says in his book, *Living Between the Lines*, 'What human beings fear is not growing old, but growing old without things adding up' (Brand, 2005:1). Thus I 'added up' my experiences, subtracted the ones that had less meaning, sifted through multiple layers of consciousness and divided them into chronological order to present a coherent narrative. Settelmaier and Taylor (2001:6) advocate that a 'good autoethnography' should be a good read highlighting pivotal moments of the author's life, in order to enable the reader to gain insight into the self. Mainstream social science classifies autoethnographies concerning academic careers into the genre of memoir (Ellis & Bochner, 2000:742). The word 'memoir' conjures up in my mind events, scenes, images, and particularly meaningful moments in one's life, the person being unravelled by a writer now much older and wiser. 'A memoir is not what happens, but the person to whom things happen' (Brand, 2005:1). Thus, by producing a storied life, the past is kept alive in the present.

Although teacher self-study should not only be engaged in by an 'older' teacher, memoirs of teachers are a valuable tool for learning for both preservice and inservice teachers. Naturally, a common thread in the study of autobiographical memoirs is the strong connection to the self, as both the experience and the product of the experiences. 'Embodied' writing, one of the characteristics of autoethnography, is that which moves in and out of oneself and

events, observing the observer, focusing the spotlight on ourselves, writing practically, evocatively and narratively about our own experiences, conversing with ourselves and the readers, exposing ourselves in order to make sense of the multiple layers of our experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000:747). Thus, storytelling is used in my autoethnography as a method of exposing myself, of coercing the readers to place themselves in my shoes and to reflect on their own experiences, as I move in and out of my life story. In my opinion, my story falls closer to art than science as I recall certain lifetime events that affected my innermost being. It employs 'naturalistic generalisation' and interprets past events from my present day position (Ellis, 2004:30).

I also embrace characteristics of fictional writing, for example, 'internal dialogue, dramatic recall, flashbacks, imagery and action, scene setting and dialogue' (Ellis & Bochner, 2000:752). However, contrary to fiction, I relay the truth as near to the experience as I can remember it. This has therapeutic value as it evokes understanding of events and enables participants in similar circumstances to understand and cope. This could be of particular value to teachers who may encounter similar experiences.

Each chapter in Part Two of this autoethnography represents a stage in my life story pertinent to my personal experiences in education, and reasons for certain choices are provided. I deem this research as re-search, that is 'looking again' with a new lens and, as I am to be the topic of the research, the first-person voice will be employed. First looking through a wide-angled lens, then moving the lens inward, I explore my interpretations of, and the emotions evoked by, significant nodal points in my life. Taking advantage of the characteristics of a multi-genre practice, recreated dialogue, poetic expression, artworks, memoirs, articles and photographs, amongst others, will be employed to validate and enhance the autoethnography.

*Different projects call for different strategies, depending on subject matter,
intended audience, and desired place of publication.*

(Ellis, 2004:199)

Without close, empathetic, interpersonal interchange and relationships, researchers will find it impossible to gain meaningful insights into human interaction or to understand the meaning people give for their own behaviour.

(Maguire, 1987:20-21)

Co-constructed narratives

The second method of data production is that of co-constructed narratives. Unmediated co-constructed narratives are included in the piece as the removal of a single voice and the inclusion of multiple voices within the research adds to its trustworthiness and provides a 'rich array' of interpretations or perspectives (Gergen & Gergen, 2005:8). Ellis (2004:72) advises that the goal of a co-constructed narrative is to represent the experiences of the partners and the two storytellers become co-authors as it were. The resultant co-constructed story should be empathetic, embrace both voices, and at the same time invite others into the 'intersubjective world' of the narrators.

I think it's time to give women their due.

They deserve credit according to their contribution, not to their sex.

*We need to know what they did and how they did it
so that we may learn from them and be inspired by them.*

We need this to be common knowledge.

(Bois, 2005:1)

*The question of the relationship between practice competence
and professional knowledge needs to be turned upside down.*

*We should start not by asking how to make better use of research based knowledge
but by asking what we can learn by careful examination of artistry.*

(Schon, 1987:13)

Written comments from readers

The third method of data production concerns the written comments of the readers. There needs to be some accountability as to the legitimacy of research, and Childs (2005:148) argues for the compliance with accepted research techniques wherever possible. In this regard, I rely on Richardson's (2000:15) work when reviewing personal narratives and employ it in the autoethnography. First, substantive contribution; *does the autoethnography*

enhance our understanding of social life? Second, aesthetic appeal; *is the text artistically presented? Is it boring?* Third, reflexivity; *why did the author choose this method?* Fourth, impact; *does this piece move me emotionally and/or intellectually? Does it make me question or influence me to take action?* And fifth, expresses a reality; *does the text speak of genuine lived experience?* Keeping Richardson's points in the back of my mind, I selected people representing my intended audience and asked them to read my autoethnography and comment in writing on the text.

A representation of the intended audience:

Former principal, teacher, mother (aged 50)

Vice-principal, teacher, lecturer, mother, daughter (aged 33)

Teacher, wife, daughter (aged 27)

Mother, daughter, typist of the script (aged 35)

School secretary, former pupil, wife, daughter (aged 28)

Teacher assistant, mother (aged 40)

Student teacher, daughter (aged 19)

The selective reduction technique using reasoning strategies was employed; units of meaning were noted from the written responses and delegated into categories, which led to the formation of specific common themes (Mouton, 2001:150). A literature control to recontextualise the findings confirmed similarities and differences (Poggenpoel, 1998:354).

Further data sources

My autobiography

Although the fields of anthropology and sociology have valued personal experience for many years, educational research has taken a long time to recognise its importance (Renner, 2001:1). My autobiography, which I penned over the years 2002 - 2004, is a textbook of my life which I would enjoy opening to enable me to reflect upon and share with others, the effect of pivotal points in the journey of my life thus far. In recent years particular interest has been shown in autobiographical writing, and Roberts (2002:64) refers to the work of Peter Ackroyd and Antonio Byatt, amongst others. In postmodern vein, historians posit that the writing of history is a literary genre for establishing the truth of the past

(Munslow, 2000:73). My autobiography, a written account of my life story, and intended for my grandchildren, rests on the shelf in my home office for the moment. I would dearly have loved a copy of my grandmothers' memoirs.

Documents, articles, poetry and photographs

Documents, prospecti, newspaper articles, photographs, articles written to parents, letters from parents, students and family members, educational programmes, poetry and lyrics will be used to support statements and to validate the existence of the institutions and my experiences in the field of education. Renner (2001:2) narrates, as he recalls memories of his father, 'I remember him as being adamant about us common folk having to strive to better ourselves and to take pride in our hard-earned achievements. He used to stand over me, slapping the back of his right hand into the palm of the left, for emphasis. You need to collect documents to prove that you're worthy, he'd say.' Unfortunately, throughout the years many documents, letters and articles have been discarded, but those selected are used with a purpose - to prove that I am 'worthy!' Thus personal documents are relevant, and include autobiographies, memoranda, letters and other materials, which Clandinin and Connelly (1994:419) consider to be 'field texts.'

There has been a growth of interest in both textual and visual mass media as secondary data, for example, newspaper reports have been used by Stan Cohen and Jock Young, as main documentary evidence (Mc Neill & Chapman, 2005:159). It can also be argued that in 2006, the worldwide web is more democratic and representative than some academic texts and research. Hence, internet articles, books, newspaper articles and journals are used as literature support throughout the autoethnography. I have been more successful in retrieving articles concerning autoethnography from the internet than in finding books about the topic.

Art

I regard my art as an extension of my person, and, as I reflect on the paintings which have elicited the most joy and satisfaction, they relate to children or women with children. I equate them with love, joy, tenderness and togetherness. Some artworks are portraits of learners and preservice teachers from my own institutions and portray my lifelong motto, and the motto of my school, 'Love Conquers All.' McNeill and Chapman (2005:16) argue that Western culture, as a result of television and advertising, is a visual culture, and it

can be said that the 'state of the visual has overtaken the written word.' A piece of art has always been not merely an object perceived in the mind of the viewer, but a subject which expresses it (Gadamer, 1975:118). Indeed I have discovered that my feelings are expressed in my artwork, especially when painting a portrait. Does the artist not only paint with her hands, but also with her emotions? Gadamer argues further that the object of art is being changed as it becomes the experience of the viewer, and the viewer's being is changed by experiencing the work of art. There is always an interpretive component to the question 'What does this mean?' Art-making embraces a mutual exchange between thought and action in the form of ideas, feelings, images and the self, and writing complements art (Pearse, 2004:1).

Data analysis

Arts-based educational research is inspired by and borrows its methods from the humanities, literature, and the visual and dramatic arts.

(Diamond & Van Halen-Faber, 2005:81)

To evaluate and analyse the data, the researcher needs to consider the raw evidence to find links between the research objective and the outcomes according to the original research question, remaining open to new revelations. Due to the flexibility of information-gathering methods in autoethnography, researchers are provided with opportunities to employ data which ensures trustworthiness such as memoirs, photographs, documentation and letters, and so on (Lubbe, 2003:6). However, in an autoethnography the researcher's personal experiences and feelings about the topic represent the data, the analysis of which needs to be examined, categorised, tabulated, or otherwise 'recombined' to address the critical proposition of the study (Tellis, 1997:14). Therefore, every study should have a general analytic strategy to decide what will be analysed, and for what purpose. With reference to my autoethnography, the strategy employed was to select pivotal points in my life in relation to teacher self-study, examine them, categorise them into time-frames, tabulate important points relating to my educational experiences and 'recombine it,' by adding additional pertinent points to the story of my life as an ordinary teacher. Hence this autoethnography is presented in three parts, Part Two encompassing the four main chapters of the story itself.

Situating the researcher

*It may be the case that if we increase our understanding of a social problem,
then we put ourselves in a better position to do something about it.*

*But in doing something about it, we are no longer operating as sociologists,
as students of social life: we are operating as social reformers, as politicians or citizens.*

*As sociologists, all we can do is to study social life
as carefully and as competently as we can.*

(Mc Neill & Chapman, 2005:189)

From an ethnographic viewpoint, education is viewed as a culture, with teachers being fieldworkers (Van Maanen, 1988:1). These two elements are represented in the teaching profession, education being the culture and teachers the fieldworkers in that culture. Van Maanen further explains that '... fieldworkers are people who stay for extended periods in a culture, observing and becoming familiar with that culture.' Is 41 years considered an extended period in the culture of education? Have I done sufficient fieldwork to enable me to write about it?

As the emphasis of the role of the questioner, interpreter and presenter of a research text has in recent years shifted from an objective to a subjective one, researchers are obliged to indicate not only their relationship to the study, but their social background, including gender, race, social class and religion (Roberts, 2002:13). These are interwoven in my autoethnography as the intention is to gain an understanding of one's experiences in life within one's socio-historical context. Roberts (1999:21) states that lives have to be understood as experiences in a specific time and 'time is experience to narrative.' The role of the researcher in this research must be viewed as an interactive one and reflexive researchers monitor their own presence in the auto/biography (Roberts, 2002:87). As far as education is concerned, autobiographies have included reflexive work on the researcher's own social context and educational experiences as well as 'auto/biographies of learning' (Parker, 1998:118) and stories of some aspects of teachers' lives (Roberts, 2002:91). However, this autoethnography hohstically covers my life as a Lebanese woman and teacher in the socio-historical context of apartheid and post-apartheid in South Africa.

The subject of education in auto/biographical research is an area in which auto/biographical researchers can readily examine their own schooling within the educational biographies of others.

(Roberts, 2002:91)

Throughout the different stages in the various chapters in Part Two of the study I cover aspects of who I am and my identity as a teacher, as I share nodal moments of my life as a child, adolescent, newly married woman, teacher, mother and grandmother, as well as my spiritual and creative growth. These narratives therefore give experience an understandable shape and is invaluable to the study of 'who we think we are' and 'what we want our work to do' as teachers (Mitchell & Weber, 2005:8).

Trustworthiness

Too many rules will conventionalise experimental ethnographic writing.

(Ellis, 2004:252)

Postmodernists reject the concept of validity as they view it as the imposition of rules and regulations concerning research (Roberts, 2002:5). Such critique suggests that truth and authenticity do not apply to research, as they are not universal realities. However, according to Roberts (2002:6), more use is currently being made of secondary data as a measure of validity. As autoethnography involves the reflection, writing and sharing of one's life story for the public good, the author should be entrusted to be honest and open. Settelmaier and Taylor (2001:6) agree, and advise that 'History should be engaged forthrightly' by the researcher taking an honest stand. Should the story be fictional, as some are, the author should declare this. Therefore, this autoethnography, a teacher self-study, should enable a connection to be made to the actual, and my voice should sound clear and truthful. Roberts (2002:18) confirms that the test of validity is whether the participants verify it as a true account of their life. I employ photographs and printed articles as verification of my statements, which Adler and Adler (1994:372) refer to as verisimilitude, that is, the appearance of truth or reality.

Ellis (2004:124) has a different viewpoint and considers validity in terms of what happens to readers and the research. Therefore the work should evoke in readers a feeling that the

experience described is lifelike, believable and possible. Hence, written responses from persons connected to, or who have read, this research are included to provide authenticity. For example, letters from my mother, sister and children verify my early, middle and later years in the field of education and as a person (Appendix 7). Written comments obtained from readers inform as to the purposefulness and success of the autoethnography.

Furthermore, I also draw on Van Maanen's (1988) four characteristics which mark a realist tale (Russell, 1998:2). 'First the narrator tells the story in a confident, dispassionate third person voice. The narrator is invisible and assumed to be speaking the truth.' However, I tell my story in a confident, passionate, first person voice, and am totally visible as I speak the truth from my heart. In describing a common feature of autoethnography, Russell further explains that '... it is the first person voice-over that is intently and unambiguously subjective. Second, the text has a certain structure with headings to allow the reader to come to a desired conclusion.' The text in my autoethnography follows a structure, complete with headings and subheadings, and an analogy is drawn between the ploughman and the researcher in the headings of the different sections. An analogy precedes the introduction to each chapter of Part Two and depicts the ploughman and his land, that is the researcher and his field. 'Third, the author uses quotations to support her view.' In this autoethnography quotations, documents and secondary documents are used as substantiation and support. 'Fourth, the author only offers data to support her view, and no alternative view is considered.' This might be considered too narrow in terms of conventional research.

Ethical issues

Integrity is fundamental to the work of a researcher and it is expected that researchers act in a manner consistent with the highest standards of ethical practice. Josselson (1996:60) reminds authors of their responsibility in giving a truthful version of a story, and Ellis (2004:152) advises that when other people are referred to in an autoethnography they may be identified and a researcher may interpret these individuals' experiences. In deciding what was and was not ethical to include in the piece, I eventually took the advice of Kant (1724-1804) who claims that people should always be treated as 'ends in themselves,' never as just the means to an end! (Muchmore, 2002:8).

As autoethnography is, according to some in academia, a questionable alternative form of research, I was particularly careful to ensure that throughout the work I be aware of placing ethical considerations before the desire to include certain stories. I found this difficult as I had to weigh my purpose in recording certain incidents and the obligation I felt I had to the public good, against the obligation I feel towards the participants in the story. Under the guidelines of the National Research Act law passed in 1970, still in use today, and issued by the United States Congress, researchers in the United States have to acquire 'informed consent' of the participants in the study, and the same applies to researchers in South Africa. Some of the people referred to in my autoethnography are deceased. In these instances I obtained permission from the families concerned to refer to the deceased in the thesis. There are other people with whom I have lost contact, therefore pseudonyms have been used to refute any possibility of unethical practice. Those mentioned by name in the study have signed an informed consent form (Appendix 6).

However, some researchers have of late questioned the practice of 'stripping' research participants of their true identities, and Schulz (1997:104) maintains one should give 'full naming credit' to the co-participants in a study. On the other hand, every study is unique and therefore there are no 'universal prescriptions' to ensure ethical behaviour (Muchmore, 2002:13), although Ellis (2004:46) suggests one write from an ethic of care and concern.

It is worth mentioning that the language used by Lebanese people is read from right to left and the 'letters' would be useless to the reader were they to be used in the text. Therefore the Lebanese words have been transcribed phonetically into English, and the interpretation of the words is according to my understanding of them.

Overview of the thesis

One emergent ethnographic writing practice involves highly personalised accounts where authors draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture.

(Reed-Danahay, 1997)

This thesis is presented in three parts. Part One covers the epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of the piece. Part Two embraces the application of the autoethnography

and is divided into four main chapters namely *Years of Ploughing and Preparing the Soil, Years of Sowing, Years of Growing and Years of Harvesting*. Part Three calls upon different voices to attest to the success of the piece.

In chapter one I recall my childhood, home background, era and the area in which I spent my youth in South Africa. As my autoethnography is arranged in chronological order, I start with my early years and recall events and people that have had a positive or negative influence on my life in the field of education. Thus the first step of Krall's model of hermeneutic motion, that is 'venturing,' will have been entered into. According to Krall, the process of venturing begins when students start a disciplined writing method in order to discover and clarify questions and issues. This is accomplished by writing 'thick descriptions' of educational experiences in their past (Renner, 2001:1). I also attempt to convey the idea that the first three steps of Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs theory' have been successfully ascended in my life.

Chapter two brings to light and re-examines many 'first' experiences. The second movement in Krall's model of hermeneutic motion is 'remembering,' the aim being to recall and access the essence of that which made an impact (Renner, 2001:1). 'There are no chance memories,' claims Alfred Adler - an individual chooses to remember only the things which impact upon his situation (Nachmias, 1998:29).

Chapter three speaks of my 'frenetic' exploration of many creative hobbies. The fourth rung of Maslow's ladder is that of esteem needs, and in this chapter I explain my views on how these have been met. Maslow (1970:150) loosely defines self-actualisation as the 'full use and exploitation of talents, capacities, and potentialities.' In chapter three I also reveal my 'mystic experience' and the consequences thereof, as sense-making and identity are often intertwined with spiritual outlooks (Ellis, 2004:98).

Chapter four metaphorically speaks of my experiences in the harvesting of the fruits of my labour in the field of education. According to Maslow (1971:48), self-actualisation is a continual process of self-development and the development of one's potential. This has nothing to do with intelligence or great talent but rather the use of abilities and intelligence and 'working to do well, the thing that one wants to do.'

In Part Three different voices will be called upon, as Krall speaks of 'comprehending' as the third step in her model of hermeneutic motion, and suggests students invite voices from books beyond the field of educational practice to support, challenge or compare with the descriptions of lived experience (Renner, 2001:2). Bullough and Pinnegar (2004:333) confirm that voices are 'integral to defining the work of self-study.' Therefore, in Part Three three different voices will be heard. First, my own as I reflect and theorise on the writing process itself; second, voices from literature contextualising teacher self-study and teacher identity, to recontextualise my lived experience; and third, the voices of the readers.

*When we begin to understand the deep meaning of the complex milieu of personal life,
we are able to see the unfolding, shimmering path of our intentional behaviour.*

*We move toward mature adulthood by accepting responsibility
for our part in our circumstances,*

but more so by accepting the social consequences of our autonomous acts.

(Renner, 2001:2)

According to Renner (2001:2), Krall's fourth and fifth stage of hermeneutic motion is embodying and restoring. In the embodying stage Krall suggests the author take a break before the restoring stage. In Part Two I recall my lived experience, layered with personal knowledge, and now the final section, Part Three, must address the 'so what' question. What has been revealed and discovered by venturing, remembering, analysing, comparing and describing, now needs to be 'polished,' and a 'new centre' should emerge (Renner, 2001:2). Other questions include, 'Has the reader been changed by this autoethnography?' If so, 'In which way?' 'Did the writing evoke emotions?' If so, 'Which emotions?' 'Has meaningful insight been gained into human behaviour?' 'Can this autoethnography contribute to inservice and preservice teacher training?' 'Is it boring?' 'Have others been encouraged and motivated?' Certain individuals, representing a cross-section of women, were asked to read and comment in writing concerning the message they gained from reading this piece. This is integral to the viewing of the piece as sufficiently trustworthy as an autoethnographic teacher self-study.

I trust that this autoethnography would contribute to the burgeoning literature on teacher education and teacher self-study and encourages many teachers to spread their wings as they engage with my life story.

*How sad for the bird in the gilded cage
who is not free to explore his intended purpose of creation.*

*He is trapped by humanity -
trapped in the midst of the finest riches,
trapped because his wings have been clipped by man.
Even when his cage is opened he will still never be free
as he is trapped by habit and comfort
as he returns to what he knows ...
he resists change, he is trapped.*

Because of this resistance he misses out on what nature and life provides.

Does he not know that change will open up a new, more exciting world?

Will he stay trapped forever?

(Edwina, 2005)

PART TWO - LIFE IN THE FIELD

CHAPTER 1 - YEARS OF PLOUGHING AND PREPARING THE SOIL

1945 -1964

*With shielded eyes the ploughman stands
Viewing his plantings o'er the lands.
The soil is good, half the job is done.
The ploughman and his task are one.*

(Edwina, 2005)

Introduction

*Every individual is born into the world resembling a naked field.
And each person who walks upon that field
Leaves an impression, a footprint in the bare soil.
However, there comes a time when every individual
Must take up a plough himself and work the soil of his own land.
For the ploughman alone is responsible for the nurturing of his own plot.
Will his hands be fruitful in directing the growth of his harvest
Or will his land continue to lie unturned?
Each person is born into the world holding his destiny in his own hands.*

(Edwina, 2005)

'Narrative is the way we remember the past, turn life into language and disclose to ourselves and others the truth of our experiences' (Ellis, 2004:126). Krall suggests a five-movement strategy of personal historical research, the first step being 'venturing,' where the researcher starts by writing 'thick descriptions' of past educational experiences, which grounds them in their own experiences (Renner, 2001:1). As I consider my home background to have been my first educational experience, I begin by exploring my childhood home and upbringing, and the years of preparation for the teaching profession, as I relive poignant and critical moments in my life.

A self is always rooted in its past.

(Griffiths, 1995:185)

One of my earliest, happiest memories is of standing behind the ornate, white, wrought-iron front gate of our home in Windermere Road, Durban, in the shade of a beautiful Jacaranda tree in full bloom. I was waiting in anxious anticipation for someone pushing a pram to appear. That gate conjures up many pleasant memories! It was useful as a swing in my early years, as a leaning post and meeting place in my teenage years, and as an entrance to my first business premises at the age of twenty-six.



Photograph 1

The wrought-iron gate which conjures up many memories

In the 1940's and 50's there were very few working mothers. As a result, many enjoyed daily walks with their young offspring carried in clumsy perambulators. As they passed the gate I would smile and pose the questions, 'Please may I see your baby?' 'Is it a boy or a girl?' 'How old is he/she?' 'What is his/her name?' I recall always thinking and commenting on how beautiful the child was. Upon reflection, there must have been some children who were less physically attractive than others, but this fact escaped me. I now realise that my love of all children is inherent; something bestowed on me by my Maker, and that it was evident from a very early age. Was this quality part of the preparation for my destiny as an adult? Maslow's (1968:5) basic assumption is that each person has a unique, biologically based, inner nature which can be termed natural, given and intrinsic. In response to Maslow's assumption, my instinct has always led me to gravitate towards children. My love for children is most certainly intrinsic, and has remained unchanged through the years.

Receding into my memory bank, I retrieve the highlight of my youth concerning social

play, which was the game, 'schools.' It usually involved my cousin who, being the elder by two years, naturally assumed the role of teacher. How I longed to play this part and, on the odd occasion, when this 'awesome' role was delegated to me, I recall being in my element. I was transported into another world where I experimented with different methods of teaching my pupils using my imaginary blackboard, charts, objects, pictures and different coloured chalks. When engaged in solitary play, my dolls metamorphosed into pupils. Susie was beautiful, but slow, and in need of encouragement to reach her full potential. 'Well done, my girl,' I recall saying, and imagined the effect of these words on her. I too felt the joy of making 'someone' else happy. Elizabeth, on the other hand, always finished first and got up to mischief. 'Elizabeth, you can draw so beautifully. Now please draw me a lovely picture,' 'John, I know you can do that sum. Here are some counters to help you,' I would offer. How I enjoyed story and music time with my little pupils! This game allowed me to use my vivid imagination and elicit the most wonderful stories from somewhere deep down inside me.

*I saw tomorrow marching on little children 'sfeet;
Within their forms and faces read her prophecy complete.
I saw tomorrow look at me from little children s eyes;
And thought how carefully we 'd teach, if only we were wise.*

(Bronlow, 1993:20)

Photograph 2
*My mother and father
leaning against the 'intruder'*



Albert Bandura (1986:395), a leading psychologist in research on self-regard and success, states that 'People who regard themselves as highly efficacious ... produce their own future, rather than simply foretell it.' The special game with my imaginary pupils would take place in the large family garage, which, in my vivid imagination, was converted into the most exciting classroom. Much to my disdain, I was forced to share my special classroom with a green, two door, hump-backed, 1949 Pontiac! Although always excited when my parents returned from work, I dreaded 'five o'clock,' when that cumbersome car would traverse the driveway with, I imagined, mocking eyes and a grin on its face,

the headlights resembling eyes and the bumper a smirking mouth. I had to hastily remove myself, my pupils, the classroom furniture and my equipment to make way for this intrusion into my secret world, and resented the fact. Many years later this 'game' was to be played for real. According to Ellis (2004:32), 'some stories insist on being told,' and thus the game that turned into reality, now insists on having a voice.

To write vulnerably is like Pandora's Box.

Who can say what will come flying out?

(Behar, 1996:77)



I was born in Durban, South Africa, on 19 December 1945, the second child and first daughter of Ernest and Sylvia Akal, second generation Lebanese immigrants. It was the end of the second world war, but the eve of the National Party coming into power in 1948 bringing with it Apartheid philosophy. However, I was oblivious to all of this, and in my mother's words I 'came like a ball of fire,' choosing not to wait for the doctor to arrive to deliver me. Was this entrance into the world prophetic of my future entrepreneurial experiences?

Photograph 3

As a baby, dressed from top to toe in my mother's handiwork

'Are you sure this is the Akal baby?' my relatives asked the nurses. 'The Akal babies normally have black hair. This one is too fair, and no-one in the family has auburn hair.' I was different from the start, and became known as the 'black sheep' of the family. My siblings have black hair and the typical beautiful olive skin of the Lebanese people. They are shy, reserved and gentle and I cannot recall them ever getting a hiding. My younger brother could have rescued me from this title had he not been born thirteen years later. My mother reports that I was always smiling, happy and very active. From the time I can

first remember there was never a doubt that I was loved, and I, in turn, loved my parents, two brothers and sister. What caused me to feel so loved? Was it my warm, nurturing Lebanese background? Was it because my parents had such a deep love for one another and their offspring, or was it my personal lens that perceived it this way? 'We see things not as they are, but as we are,' wrote Immanuel Kant (Holden, 2005:60).



Photograph 4

A picture of my mother and three of her children taken in 1997. Note the 'black sheep' in the middle. My siblings and mother are dark in complexion, with black hair

A prerequisite for success in life is a positive attitude, which usually arises from positive self-esteem, and a child's formative years are the most important time for instilling such attitudes. Delport (2004:1) concurs, and refers to Nussbaum who stresses that an individual's emotional life, which is pertinent to education, originates in childhood. Humphries (1996:64) confirms that the root of self-esteem lies mainly in the experiences of childhood within the home, and, in my opinion, correctly argues that self-image is the 'key to your life story' and the liberator of talent. By nature I am a happy person. Can I ascribe this to my home background, or is it something inherent? Is this 'nature' or 'nurture?' This I cannot answer, but instead quote from Martin (2005:58) who says that happy and secure children usually have a good relationship with their parents, as I had the privilege of experiencing.

Reflection on early beginnings

Child specialists generally agree that early development in a positive setting is a main reason for the child's future successes.

(Maxwell, 1993:53)

As I reflect on my early years, once again feelings of love, acceptance, recognition of self-worth and, '*joie de vivre*' engulf me. I remember my mother's words, uttered so many times, 'Edwina loves life.' Was it the experience of a nurturing, happy and secure life that prepared the platform for building my future as a teacher? In my childhood, qualities such as empathy, impulse control, obedience, respect for others, respect for the law, sensitivity towards other people's feelings, honesty, the ability to know that certain actions have consequences and obedience to those in places of authority, were constantly demonstrated. My parents, although loving, embraced the idiom 'Spare the rod and spoil the child.' Was I driven by fear of the rod to comply with their set rules? Why was I the only one of their children who ever attempted to push the boundaries? Dobson (1997:106) advises that there is security in defined boundaries and a child who tests the resolve of the parents and needs to explore the limits of her world, will push a parent to a state of exasperation! Was this the reason my mother often used to say 'Edwina, you make up for ten children. You are worse than all four of my children put together?'

Piaget, Erikson, Bruner and Loevinger believe that children learn internal discipline by first experiencing external structure (Friel & Friel, 1999:103). However, I resented not being able to explain my reasons for the boundary lines to be extended! I was bursting with words that would be considered as cheek, and deserving of a hiding, dare they be uttered! Strong memories of words exploding from my mouth, resulting in dire consequences as my body reeled from the hidings delivered, are still with me, because, hard as I tried, I could not help but give voice to my feelings. 'Because I said so,' my mother would answer whenever challenged. This was not an answer! I needed to know WHY? Is this why I chose autoethnography to explore unanswered questions? Was it the reason for my entrepreneurial ventures in the field of education in later life? Maxwell (1993:43) states that the person whose attitude causes her to approach life from an entirely different perspective, is usually misunderstood. She is a 'no-limit' person, one who does not accept the normal limitations of life like others do. She is unwilling to accept what is normally

deemed 'acceptable.' Her response to limiting conditions will probably be a 'Why?' instead of an 'Okay.' According to Maslow (1968:xviii), physiological needs take the first priority and, once met, should cause a person to turn towards the need for safety. Maslow uses the letter B, which stands for 'Being,' to refer to the 'non-striving unfolding sort of motivation' that occurs after certain needs have been attained and stabilised. He is also of the opinion that if one's inner nature is allowed to guide one's life, the result will be an individual who is healthy and happy. Martin (2005:59) confirms this, and states that a common characteristic of happy people is the ability to be optimistic. Although Maslow (1968:5) describes this inner nature as easily overtaken by habit, cultural presence and wrong attitudes, he also explains that even if this nature is denied, it will always be there, waiting for self-actualisation.

My family life demonstrated that it is in and through the family unit that an individual builds self-esteem and gains acceptance. I brought my own children up this way, with the exception that I allowed freedom of expression recalling my former frustration when this was denied. I firmly believe in Proverbs 26:6 which reads 'Train a child in the way he should go and when he is older, he will not depart from it.' My parents never studied childcare but instinctively taught their own values for their offspring through storytelling and by direct teaching, as they emulated their parents' Middle Eastern ways. I recall my parents being 'fun,' but having high moral standards, which gained my respect. The Oxford Dictionary (Hornby, 1999:757), defines mother as 'origin of,' and Glennie (2001:73) is of the opinion that a mother sets the stage for life, psychologically and biologically, for her child. She argues that 'whatever experiences your mother offered to you, it is the origin of one of your most potent life lessons.'

What the mother sings to the cradle goes all the way down to the coffin.

Beecher (Honor Books, 1994b:45)

Fortunately my mother sang uplifting songs to my cradle. Thus my childhood physiological needs, as described by Maslow, were more than adequately taken care of. In my generation, as children, backchat to our parents or any figure of authority, throwing tantrums or demanding our own way was taboo. Respect for elders was assumed unquestioningly. Although I complied with these unwritten laws, I felt trapped and stifled as I battled to suppress many questions and demands for explanations.

According to Mwamwenda (1995:338), each person is unique and inhabits his or her own inner world, which cannot be understood by another. It frustrated me to be unable to express my feelings, and I often found myself asking and answering questions myself. McDowell states that rebellion is often the result where there are rules not accompanied by relationship (Dobson, 1997:45). Probably the relationship I enjoyed with my parents overruled my feelings and resulted in my not rebelling as a youth. Under different circumstances I could well have joined the 'Hippie Generation' which surfaced in my era. Our home was a happy, albeit noisy, one. Upon reflection, it must have been my mother and I who were the noisy culprits as my father, brothers and sister were very reserved! To this day I recall the feeling as my mother would take me by the shoulders and bend until we saw eye to eye. 'Please, please, please,' she would entreat, 'be quiet, don't talk, give me five minutes rest.' Those five minutes took what felt like a month! 'Has five minutes gone?' I would agitatedly enquire as each minute ticked by. What was wrong with laughing, singing and talking? Could my disenchantment with silence at that time have been a prophetic sign of the future noisy years in a busy Pre-school?

Supper time saw the family gathered around the table, a practice which I continued with my children as I learned the value of 'table time.' Items such as proposed outings were discussed, thus involving the whole family in decision making, and emphasising the importance of each member. Even today, when faced with an important decision, my family gathers around the table. Our table was never used to scold, reprove or nag. Meals were always taken in a relaxed, happy atmosphere, accompanied by a great deal of laughter. My mother was an outstanding cook, who used all the right spices for the delicious Lebanese food she prepared, and she baked to perfection. In later years, my husband never ceased



to be amazed at the variety of food on offer at mealtimes - a Lebanese custom. However, I discovered supper time was the only time that afforded me success in refuting my mother's will.

Photograph 5
Table time at the Grossi's - 1990. Left to right me, Mickey, my father and mother

My mother was, and still is at 84, a very smart woman who is very particular about her weight. She has always had a beautiful figure, her tiny waist being in perfect proportion to her ample bust and rounded hips. Her tight-fitting dresses are always enhanced by complementary jewellery and other accessories. She took note of what entered her mouth and attempted to note what entered mine! I discovered the only opportunity to demonstrate my lack of appreciation of being controlled by my mother in all areas of my life was to request an extra serving of 'fattening' food like roast potatoes or pudding. As it is considered a great compliment in Lebanese tradition when people enjoy the food on one's table, '*Sagtyn ma albi*' (Lebanese for 'enjoy it my darling'), my dad would say. 'Sylvia, let the child eat,' he would entreat as she attempted to deny the request. My father was always seated at the head of our large table, my chair directly opposite his. Once my mother had been forced to accede, my dad would catch my eye, smile and wink. I recall feeling warm inside. Lebanese people are renowned for their hospitality, usually equating food with love, care, consolation and kindness. I understood Dad's language, his message being, 'I love you and will always be there for you.' Thus I would have my own way in one sense, but to the detriment of my figure! My mother prided herself on the fact that her 'tins are always full.' And so they were - full of homemade biscuits, shortbread, cakes and tarts. After she had baked, someone had to approve her expertise, pronouncing the unchanging verdict of 'mmm, delicious!' That someone was inevitably me, as my siblings who were usually approached first, were always emphatic in their refusal. I, on the other hand, could not bear to see the disappointment on her face, and enthusiastically obliged. Compounding the weight problem was the fact that I find it difficult to disappoint people. Why did my mother allow me to do the tasting when she was so concerned about this issue? Why was I not strong enough to emulate my siblings in this regard? Do I blame my mother for my future battle?

At this point of the autoethnography, I feel urged to recall a portion of the lyrics of the song entitled 'Oh, My Papa' sung by Eddie Fisher in 1953, which reflects my deep feelings for my father, although not negating what I feel for my mother.

Oh, my papa to me he was so wonderful,

Oh, my papa to me he was so good

No one could be so gentle and so lovable,

Oh, my papa, he always understood.

Gone are the days when he would take me on his knee,

And with a smile he 'd change my tears to laughter.

Oh, my papa, so funny and adorable,

Always the clown, so funny in his way.

Oh, my papa, to me he was so wonderful,

Deep in my heart I miss him so today.

Oh, my papa. Oh, my papa.



Photograph 6

Oh my papa! Deep in my heart... I miss you so today

Exclusion from the family

*Performing autoethnography allows the writer to capture
the lessons learned and share these lessons with an audience.*

(Saba, 2004:1)

A significant episode in my childhood occurred at the age of four when I contracted Scarlet Fever, a dreaded, highly-contagious and often fatal disease in the forties. I had to be transported to hospital by ambulance, with my father assuring me that I was going to my grandparents' farm in Bloemfontein, while my mother sobbed. The fact that my parents lied to me still disturbs me. I find it difficult to come to terms with their 'betrayal,' as it were. Compounding the deliberate lie was the fact that, through the years, my mother used 'stories,' according to the Lebanese custom, to teach me important life lessons. Being the gullible kind of person I am, I believed these stories, something she marvelled at when this was revealed many years later! One of the stories, depicting the necessity for parental discipline, involved a child who had a habit of hitting her mother, who was unable to discipline her by tendering a good smack. The child died and was duly buried, but her hand remained above the grave and would not recede until the mother mustered the courage to smack it! This tale affected me for many years, until I finally realised it was fiction. However, coming from an immigrant family, my maternal grandparents had taught their offspring using stories and parables, and my mother was just emulating their example. As I reflect on some of these shocking tales, I cannot help but debate why my mother deliberately lied to me, yet was so opposed to non-truths. Throughout the years I found I could never deliberately lie to my children, even when it involved favourite characters such as 'the tooth fairy,' 'Father Christmas,' 'the Man in the Moon' or the 'Easter Bunny,' - lies parents glibly tell their children. I broke with tradition when I refused to repeat them to my children. My friends registered disapproval. The children did not 'lose out,' however, as they still received presents at Christmas time, or money for the loss of their teeth. On Christmas morning gifts were displayed in the lounge but, before they were allowed to be opened, the existence of the Christmas story was related, namely the fact that 'God so loved that He gave' and now we, as parents, so love that we also give gifts to our children on this day. When my children enquired about Father Christmas, I asked whether they believed in his existence. The answer was always negative. When their teeth fell out they placed them in a shoe in a specific place and in the morning were

delighted to find money and a little note, or drawing, as a replacement. Considering the above, the greatest compliment ever paid me was 'Mom, you have never lied to us, so I will always believe and trust what you say.' I have discovered that many children fear mysterious people or animals, like witches, goblins, elves or wizards. Why should they be subjected to these fears? Throughout the years I have heard children express fear of the 'Man in the Moon,' who watches over them at night. No wonder so many children have nightmares! Why do I feel so strongly about this? Is it because I am so gullible myself, and wonder why people would lie?

Both positive and negative experiences should be used as tools in preparing children for life.

(Maxwell, 1993:73)

In hospital I was isolated in a small, white room with a square glass window through which white-masked people would peer at intervals. To this day I fear needles, remembering the daily entrance of the white-clad, masked figures, requesting me to 'turn.' I still cannot watch 'hospital' movies, and have only recently informed my dentist why my eyes automatically close from the moment I sit down in his chair until the mask is removed. To this day I cannot tolerate the smell of a hospital as it evokes deep, unpleasant memories. I recall my long auburn ringlets being snipped off before my head was shaved. I was isolated in a room with nothing but a bed and a small white cupboard, in which my toys were stored. There I remained, absolutely bewildered by what was happening to me, in solitary confinement for six long and lonely weeks. Was this experience preparing me, the one who was so disenchanted with silence, for the many long hours I was to spend alone studying, writing educational courses and programmes in the years to follow? Is this why I so enjoy my own company today? The findings of the Piatt Report of 1964, a government committee set up to investigate the welfare of hospitalized children, reveal that the most effective way of easing a child's psychological stress of being hospitalized is to allow the mother to be present (Woolfson, 2000:121). I recall, intermittently, seeing the blurred faces of my parents staring at me with tear-filled eyes through the sealed window. When I was finally discharged I remember being excitedly ushered into my bedroom, in which sat the ugliest doll I have ever laid eyes on. My parents, in their joyful anticipation of my return, had impetuously ordered the latest 'walkie-talkie' doll from England as a homecoming surprise. Her blank, staring blue eyes did not speak to me. Her red-painted lips were parted and the

black hole between them reminded me of the black hole I had just experienced. She was stiff. I could never have her as a pupil in my class as she was taller than me and would look ridiculous next to my other pupils! This 'thing' frightened me and had to be removed, although the extravagance set my parents back financially. I remember pining for my toys, my constant companions and pupils in the little white room, which were burned when I left the hospital. Could this traumatic event explain why I am consumed by sadness and experience a real sense of loss when I think of many past pupils? Today I shudder when parents use hospitals to threaten children. Although initially bewildered by my parents' desertion during the hospital interlude, the roots of real bitterness or rejection never took hold. The knowledge that I was greatly loved and appreciated never waned, although six weeks in solitary confinement is a long time for a little child to endure. Was it the fact that I knew I was so deeply loved that enabled me to accept this temporary 'rejection?' Did this lengthy time spent in solitude steer me towards self-reliance? Lamprecht (1995:36) states that when the need to be cared for, to feel secure, to belong to a group, and to be recognised have been met, the climate for self-actualisation has been created. The last of those needs encompasses the role of the child in the development of her own potential. As the child becomes less dependent on others and more reliant on her own ability to discover things for herself, she realises that 'becoming a winner' is her own responsibility. I recall crying bitterly on my first day in hospital, but soon realised the futility of the exercise when the doctor explained I would regain my health, 'If I was a good girl.' Was this experience a platform upon which independence and acceptance of responsibility was to develop? Farber (2000:27) advises that 'adversity builds character if you face it with the right attitude.' Although it is human nature to resist change, adversity challenges us to do just that.

Shaped by context

Autoethnography, a vulnerable and public sharing and expression, manifests out of a critically reflective process intent on the exploration and meaning making of lived experience and concerns itself with ... the moral, ethical and political consequences.

(Kawalilak & Dudley, 2002:2)

In recent years great interest has been displayed in the notion of the Emotional Quotient (EQ) or Emotional Intelligence (EI). This is, in brief, being able to recognise, understand, control

and discuss one's thoughts and feelings. It is also being able to identify and empathise with another's emotions, skills which should be possessed by every teacher. These skills are not always inherent and are usually acquired by transference - most often from the mother or father. This was the case in my Lebanese upbringing. Goleman (1996:353) argues that the common perception of intelligence is too confined, and is of the opinion that our emotions have a greater impact on thought, success and decision making than is commonly acknowledged. Vermeulen (1999:19) agrees that having a high Intelligence Quotient is no guarantee of success in adult life, and states that possessing social and emotional skills is of more value than intellectual ability. The influence of our emotions drives our behaviour, not the intelligence. Stability, peace and security in a child's life are vital to the formation of a healthy Emotional Quotient. I was fortunate to experience this.

In the 1950's Morningside was densely populated and stretched from Windermere Road in the East to Marriott Road in the West, encompassing Ridge Road in the North. The very wealthy resided on the Ridge, between Essenwood and Musgrave Roads, in grand, stately homes with wonderful sea and city views. In lower Morningside our family home, which was renovated into a large brick and tile structure, was flanked by many tin and iron houses. There were no burglar guards or high walls surrounding properties and one felt safe in the neighbourhood. Morningside was akin to a quaint English village, and boasted two general dealers where most things could be purchased, from a box of matches to fabric; a butchery; local hairdresser and even a dairy farm.

Akal's, the larger general dealer, was divided into two sections - one trading in groceries and the other in haberdashery, crockery and cutlery. My *situ* (Lebanese for grandmother), Alice Akal who, together with my *jidu* (Lebanese for grandfather) hailed from Beirut in Lebanon and arrived in South Africa en route to America, originally founded a little tin and iron shop selling a few necessities. Prior to this, however, they were hawkers selling vegetables. My father often related tales of my grandmother's thriftiness; apparently she never discarded a vegetable or fruit, choosing rather to eradicate the tainted piece before including it in the family meals. Platteau (2006:7) reports that 'in many societies entrepreneurs have been members of an alien group.' For example, the Chinese in Southeast Asia, Marwaris and other Indian people in Southeast Asia and East Africa, the Lebanese in West and Central Africa and the Jews in many countries in Western and Eastern Europe as well as South Africa.



Photograph 7
My situ, Alice Akal



Photograph 8
Myjidu, Abdo Akal

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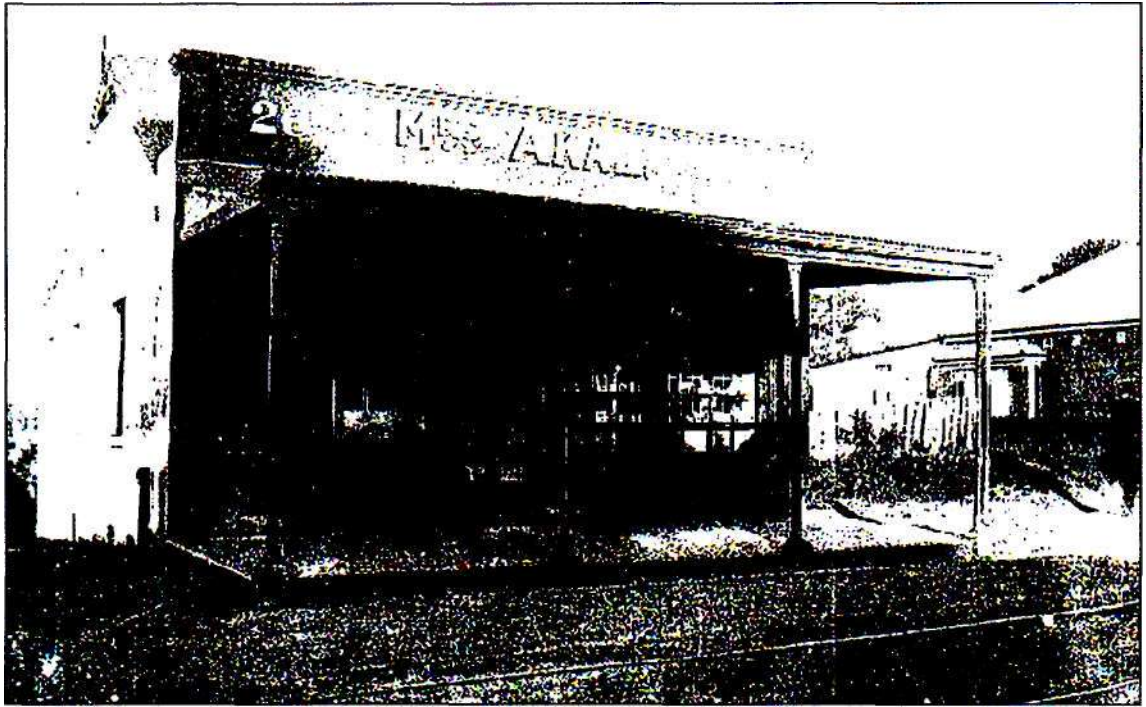
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Photograph 9

The original licence of Mrs. Akal's shop



Photograph 10

The original shop, 262 Stamford Hill Road. My father grew up in the premises behind the shop

This shop eventually expanded as my grandmother purchased the surrounding properties and ultimately established a general dealer, butchery, petrol station and motor repair workshop with a three-storey block of flats on top of the premises.



Photograph 11

The original expansion housing a general dealer, butchery and three flats on top

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SERVICE STATION

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Photograph 12

The original service station



Photograph 13

Building in progress on the three-storey block of flats, plus shops and service station underneath

cricket, charms, hopscotch or marbles in the streets or in one of the five big parks - one of which is presently occupied by Windermere shopping centre, another by a reservoir and a third by street people. Mothers pushed heavy prams as they took their babies for a daily walk. To me life appeared peaceful, predictable, relaxed, happy and quite wonderful. In a suburban area in the 60 's there were no restaurants, laundromats, movie theatres, hotels or bars and, between the homes and churches, one usually found an efficiently functioning police station and a few Primary schools catering for the vast population. The radio, or 'wireless,' was a great source of entertainment. How I enjoyed 'Consider Your Verdict' on a Friday evening, and the Top 10 Music Hits on a Saturday afternoon. Elvis Presley made his debut and I danced to, and knew the words of all his songs. Until then music had



appeared staid and routine, but this new hip-hop beat, which breathed fresh energy into my sleepy generation, was cause for great celebration. Humphreys (1996:30) states that twenty years ago, discipline problems were very rare in schools and children belonged to three main systems, namely the family, the school and the church. This was the case in the years of my youth between 1945-1964, and I do not recall encountering any disciplinary problems with learners in my class throughout my schooling.

Photograph 16
Mickey and I doing the 'twist' in the 60 's

Lower Morningside was a very cosmopolitan area comprising different racial groups living together in harmony - mainly Coloureds, Indians and Whites - but in the 1960's the notorious Group Areas Act, 'the foundation of residential apartheid,' was passed by the South African government, which was in place till 1994, when all this was to change (Mandela, 1994:141). Any form of discrimination whether it be on the grounds of race, sex, gender, ability, class or age is oppression which, like a cancer, spreads and has ramifications that destroy many aspects of life for the oppressed. It forms a barrier to self-development and renders people as subordinate, powerless and inferior. All forms of oppression are interconnected but oppression is always characterized by the systematic control of a group on a personal, institutional, social and cultural level, by a dominant privileged group which enjoys favourable economic and social powers. Unfortunately, many people in South Africa

have been oppressed and, as Adams *et al*, (1997:5) state, 'Whites ... gain[ed] privilege as a dominant group because they benefitted] from access to social groups, [held] the majority of positions of power and influence, and command[ed] the controlling institutions in society.' Morningside was declared a 'Whites only' area and we, as Lebanese, were 'privileged' to be classified White while our friends of colour were forced to move to areas designated to particular races. I could not understand why Patricia and her family had to move - the Muhammed family were greatly respected - they were my friends! 'What is wrong with the family?' I recall asking my parents. I was confused, sad and very disturbed, and felt helpless. 'Do something,' I begged my equally devastated parents. However, 'In the 1960's the breadth of apartheid laws and the power of the police made it impossible to legally protest against the system' (Apartheid in Cape Town, South Africa, 2005:6).

Preparation for my future career

On the 19th December 1950 I celebrated my fifth birthday and entered my first educational institution in January 1951. Today a child that age is still in Grade R. On reflection, it would have been wiser for my parents to have waited another year before allowing me to start formal education, as my reports always stated that I was a chatterbox and battled to keep still. On the other hand, I'm still that way inclined, so maybe it would not have made a difference! I must have had a very strong calling to be a teacher as, when I returned home after the first day at school, I informed my mother and anyone who would lend an ear, that I would be a teacher one day. I never wavered from this statement for an instant during the rest of my schooldays.

Some write evocatively with concrete detail, action and dialogue.

They tell a real story. Theory helps me understand more about them,

myself, society, the world ... that's the stuff of autoethnography.

(Muhr, 2002:28)

The importance of a good, kind and empathetic teacher can never be sufficiently emphasised. Maxwell (1993:66) reminds us that although a person does not often recall the words a teacher used, they remember the fact that they were loved. They may not remember the teaching but will not forget the feeling of either acceptance or rejection. Mrs. O'Kallaghan, my Grade 1 teacher, a lovely lady with long auburn hair, possessed all the qualities of a

good teacher. I recall with warmth her beautiful wide smile, exposing a set of perfectly formed glistening white teeth, and her gentleness of touch. She understood what Hendricks meant when he said 'Teaching that impacts is not head to head, but heart to heart' (Bronlow, 1993:16). What a lovely place that school was. How could my older cousins say otherwise? In Grade 2 I learned the answer, when I had Miss Sander as a teacher. A teacher can make or break a child, and her mission appeared to be the latter. I recall my body stiffening in her presence and can still picture her vividly. A teacher should always be pleasant to be near, but I often recoiled at the smell of stale cigarette smoke which clung to her. I was only six years old and became a wreck in her class, experiencing the worst day of my school career. One unforgettable day Miss Sander informed me that I would be staying behind because of a spelling mistake. It was the day assigned to my weekly ballet lesson. Our domestic worker walked me home from school daily and I had never 'stayed in' before. I pictured her returning home without me as I would not be among those leaving the school at the end of the day. I was terrified that my family would not know where I was. How could I walk all the way home by myself? I began to panic. Would I have to sleep in the classroom all night? They locked the school at night! The more my six-year-old mind deliberated, the more I panicked, eventually crumpling into a tearful heap. One should always explain things to little people! Miss Sander came gliding over with a glint in her bespectacled eyes - she had broken me down at last, as she had most of the other children. En route to my seat she pounced on a bucket, used as a wastepaper container, and commanded that I kneel in front of it. 'Fill this with your tears,' she said sarcastically. I would not be allowed to go home until this task was completed, she added. I realised I would have to cry for a very long time to fill the big silver bucket. Many children have been emotionally damaged by cruel and senseless remarks and actions by teachers who are in the wrong profession. Fourteen years later I was appointed as Afrikaans teacher to Grade 3 - in the self-same school and classroom. Sometimes, when I entered the room, my mind flashed back to pictures of Miss Sander standing at the desk. The remembered pain was very real.

The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil.

Emerson (Canfield & Hansen, 2002:178)

I began to realise from this tender age what constitutes proper conduct in a teacher, and the impact a caring teacher has on the life of a child. I have never forgotten one of the

times tables learned by rote in Grade 2, and my spelling is usually very good, but at what cost? I lived in fear every day and dreaded going to school. Many a teacher has broken a child through arrogance and a lack of empathy. In my opinion, a teacher is one who leads by example, therefore she (or he) should be worthy of emulation, exhibit exemplary behaviour, dress code, conduct, speech and attitude. A good teacher is one who is patient and kind, understanding and complimentary, gentle yet able to maintain good discipline, loving in both speech and actions, able to be trusted, has no favourites being conscious of always giving each child equal attention, able to sense when a child is withdrawn, confused, emotionally upset, ill, sad, lonely or in need of a hug and a special word of praise. A good teacher is one who realises that humans generally respond to loving concern; one who encourages pupils to try and demonstrates that one learns from mistakes. Miss Sander should, clearly, not have been a teacher. My Grade 3 teacher was an old, short, stocky Irish nun who kept a long stick on her desk. There was always deathly silence in her cold, sparse classroom. I began to question why little children should have to attend school daily just to be punished for doing things wrong. This may, in retrospect, have helped to teach me that making mistakes is one of the ways we learn. It certainly taught me to distinguish between positive and negative characteristics of teachers, classrooms and teaching styles. Once again, everything was learned rote fashion and just you dare ask a question! The next teacher was a privilege to have for two consecutive years. Mrs. Bunburg, a kind, middle-aged lady, loved each and every child and restored my faith in educators. How I loved going to school! She taught with love and understanding. Although, upon reflection, she was not physically blessed, to me she was beautiful!

*Our autobiographies as learners in childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood
frame our approach to teaching at the start of our careers,
and they frequently exert an influence that lasts a lifetime.*

(Settelmaier & Taylor, 2001:50)

In his book, *Life in Classrooms*, Jackson concludes that 'For all the children some of the time, and for some other children all the time, the classroom resembles a cage from which there is no escape' (News and Review, 2000:1). Grade 6 found me in a private, girls-only school. I had loved being part of a co-educational school and was quite displeased by the segregation of the genders. Perhaps because I had two brothers and many male cousins, it seemed abnormal to be part of a school community of one gender only. Sending me to

this private school was a big mistake I discovered as, on my first day, I encountered the reincarnation of my Grade 2 teacher! Miss Connor had a long, thin face with a pointy nose, on which rested rimless glasses. She sported the same hairstyle and had the same smell as Miss Sander. Once again the ruler made an appearance and one dared not make a mistake or even whisper a word. I became nervous once more, and so afraid of making mistakes. This woman struck terror into the heart of every child in her care, without having to wield the cane she carried, as she walked up and down the aisles of the classroom. I was ten years old and, although the youngest in the class, adding to my anguish at school, was the first to wear a bra as I matured at an early age. I wore a blazer all year round. On those hot, humid, Durban summer days the perspiration would pour from my face, but there was no way I would remove my blazer to reveal the signs of a bra strap peeping through the back of my dress! I knew if 'the girls' happened to glimpse it, I would be teased mercilessly. My experience of school then is a far cry from what I deem a school should be. In the fifties there was no choice of subjects at this school, only of 'career paths,' as it was termed. Were one academically inclined, an academic matric was prescribed, but, should one wish to be a secretary, a 'commercial matric' was the norm. The academic matric compelled one to do Maths, Latin, English, Afrikaans, Botany, Geography and History, while the commercial matric embraced subjects such as Typing and Shorthand. The very idea that I was going to enter the teaching profession, and therefore chose an academic matric, produced a scornful look on the principal's face. In the fifties and sixties there were very limited career opportunities for women. They were expected, at best, to enter the nursing, teaching or secretarial realm. I knew which world I belonged in, but felt quite deflated as I interpreted the principal's facial expressions.

*Remember, the difficulty only becomes a problem when we internalize
unfortunate circumstances.*

(Maxwell, 1993:90)

In my matric year, 1961, the Maths and Latin teacher discovered midyear that she had been given the wrong Maths syllabus. The principal was responsible for English and History and hardly ever made an appearance (something usually delayed her), and our Botany and Geography teacher often lost track of time, forgetting her lesson. The only constant was the Afrikaans teacher, who sat glued to her chair. How uninteresting school was. The class each had a turn to read a paragraph out of *Man's Environment, Part 2* in Geography, and other learning areas proved just as uninspiring. We had to attend school on a Saturday

for lessons in Mathematics. An awful incident is permanently etched in my mind. I still relive the pain and humiliation it produced. It happened at the start of that year. The school housed two classes each of every grade, and it was customary for Grade 8 to Grade 12 pupils to vote for the Head Prefect. The day after the voting an angry, tight-lipped principal stormed into the classroom with the results in her hand. 'I am very disappointed in the results, as the voted Head Prefect is one I, personally, would never have chosen,' she said. A pause ensued during which time she appeared to be mustering strength to carry on 'Edwina, come and fetch your badge,' she eventually announced.

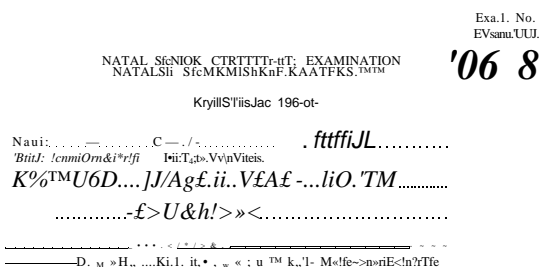
*Bitter or thoughtless words poured into the ears of the young
have blighted many lives in advance. We all know people whose
unhappy lives twist on a set of words uttered to them on a certain
unforgotten day at school, in childhood, or at university.*

(Okri, 1997:88)

I was totally dumbstruck and highly embarrassed. I recall feeling hot and flushed in the face, although the rest of my body was ice cold. I stood up after a few agonising moments and, for the first time in my life, answered back to someone in authority. 'I regret that this has happened, and wish to decline,' I said. 'I do not want the badge, the title, the so-called honour, nor the responsibility that goes with it.' Deathly silence filled the room as the girls' wide eyes flitted from the principal to me, and back again. Her eyes grew small and steely and her thin lips pursed as she retorted venomously, 'You bold creature.' By this time some girls had started to shuffle uncomfortably in their chairs, bracing themselves for the next onslaught. After a few seconds, which seemed like hours, she hissed 'You will fetch this badge.' With my friends whispering encouragement, my defences dropped and I slowly proceeded down the long aisle of the narrow classroom until I reached the table where she sat. She did not pin the badge on me, but instead left it on the edge of the table. I was forced to pick up the cold object. This incident led to another uncomfortable one when, at teatime, I was accosted in the toilet area by one of my swollen-eyed fellow classmates. When I asked what the matter was, she sputtered 'Lillian, Karyn and I have been at this school since Grade 1. Our mothers do a lot for this place and one of us should have been made Head Prefect. You only came in Standard 4 (Grade 6) and your mother does nothing for the school.' With that she turned on her heel and stormed out. I was rooted to the spot, feeling bruised and bewildered. Why was this happening to me? I went straight to the

principal's office and calmly requested she award the badge to one of the three girls Denise had mentioned. Once again I was booted out, with the same words, 'You bold creature!' Having just turned sixteen, I was the youngest in the class and now had the responsibility of organising prefects and their duties, knowing how some people felt about the situation. After the initial embarrassment, but thrilled by how proud my parents were, I was determined to be the best Head Prefect that school had ever seen! A few weeks later Denise followed me into chapel one morning, humbly apologised for her bad behaviour and thanked me for choosing her as a prefect. Many years later I approached a new parent as she fetched her baby from my Baby Care Centre. 'You remind me so much of someone I was at school with, and haven't seen for thirty years,' I said. 'May I ask what your mother's name is?' 'Denise,' she replied. That moment is deeply etched in my mind, as is the memory of the moment when Denise came running into my school and hugged me tightly, tears rolling down her face. How privileged I felt to have her beautiful grandchild at my school. Tracy (1997:24) advises that negative criticism in one's childhood could result in the fear of failure and possible rejection in adulthood. Did the initial rejection and criticism by some of my classmates and the principal have any bearing on my future? Did I fear it might happen again later in my life? Or were these incidents preparing me for future rejection on a larger scale? Towards the end of 1961 the same principal informed me that I would not be allowed to write the Matric exams, as I was very young and would most likely fail and lower the pass rate for the school. The conditional letter of acceptance from the Durban Teachers' Training College (Dokkies) flashed before my eyes as I metamorphosed

into the 'bold creature' she had twice labelled me, and insisted I be permitted to write the exams. My parents were furious and threatened to report the school to the relevant authorities should I be denied this opportunity. Seventeen girls wrote matric that year.



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Photograph 17

Matric results. I just made it!

Only a few obtained a Matric Exemption. I was one of them. How I achieved this the Lord only knows, but I was totally unconcerned as I finally had my entry ticket into 'Dokkies,' and was on the long-awaited path to becoming a teacher, albeit just an 'ordinary teacher!'

When the principal and I met at a school function after the announcement of the results, the only words she uttered to me were 'Your extra Maths lessons got you through.' Maxwell (1993:56) advises that at times in our lives we will meet certain people who will assist in forming or altering our perspective, and gives a true account of how one teacher in one day affected a person's self-image for a lifetime. Could she not have given me one word of praise or encouragement? Ellis (2004:xvii), speaking of 'emotional recall,' affirms that a person writing autoethnographically recalls her feelings, thoughts and emotions, and Reed-Danahay (2001:47) confirms that through the explanation of a particular life, a way of life will be understood. So, how did I feel at this additional rebuff from the principal in front of so many people? I felt hurt for a moment, but my overwhelming joy at having passed Matric with an exemption, and the knowledge that I was able to enter the premises of the Durban Teachers' Training College in January 1962, suppressed any negativity that threatened to overshadow my elation. I enjoy the words of Lipkin (1998:58), 'If you are angry with someone else, you allow them to live rent-free in your mind.' There was no way I would allow negativity to cloud my goal in life. Although I was set on the journey to becoming an 'ordinary teacher,' in my mind I pictured an extraordinary teacher; one who would never adopt the attitude of this particular headmistress. Cordeiro (2001:16) posits that concerning success in life, one's attitude takes precedence over one's skills. Vermeulen (1999:21) confirms this, stating that high marks are not a pre-requisite for a good entrepreneur and/or teacher. Little did I know that one day the principal and I would cross paths again, and the tables would be turned! The impetus in my Matric year was my enrolment at the then Durban Teachers' Training College in Queen Mary Avenue, fondly known as 'Dokkies,' and later renamed 'The Durban College of Education,' to be trained as an 'ordinary' teacher. As the years leading up to the final one at school progressed, I developed a burning desire to teach the child experiencing barriers to learning, and I was particularly drawn to the deaf and the blind. After having ascertained where the only training centres for teachers of deaf or blind children were, I approached my father to send me to the Cape. In reply to my request, he asked:

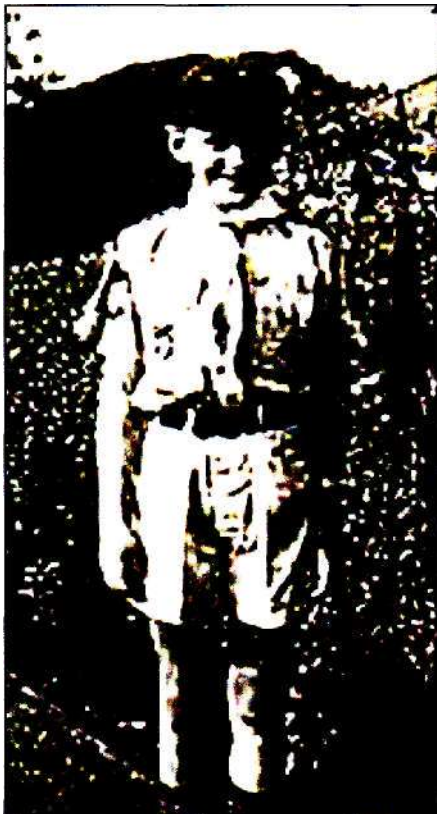
'Why can't you be an ordinary teacher?'

'One day when you are older you can teach any type of child you want,' he continued, 'but at this stage you are far too young to leave home. Why can't you just be an ordinary teacher?' he asked over and over again. The word 'ordinary' stuck in my mind -I didn't want to be an ordinary teacher. I wanted to be an extraordinary teacher!

To write about the self is to write about social experience.

(Mykhalovskiy, 1997:229)

My destined soulmate



Photograph 18
My hero!

In 1955, at the age of ten, I experienced an exciting, very significant moment when I met the person who was destined to be my lifelong friend, partner and soulmate. One memorable Saturday afternoon, before girl guides started, my friends and I were engaged in the game, 'Dare, Truth or Promise.' My turn arrived, my choice was 'Dare,' and I was duly dared to ferret out the name of a certain scout who, at that precise moment, was bending over a bucket of water at a nearby tap. To me this was not much of a challenge, as I had brothers and had attended a co-ed school, but to the other females, the dare really called for bravery. When I nonchalantly enquired his name, the eleven-year-old turned to me, flashing the most handsome smile as he enquired, 'why do you want to know?' I explained the game to him, and my part in it, and I

looked into his soft, brown eyes as he replied, 'Michael.' I thought I had met an angel! Thereafter, every time we met, a hint of a smile or a shy wave passed between us.

Mickey's thoughts

That first meeting as a skinny, reserved eleven year old shook my very foundation, and left me in limbo for many, many months. The last thing I wanted was a 'girlfriend' - I was too busy with scouts and surfing to be distracted by an 'alien.'

'Hello. What's your name?' she said. Was it that flaming auburn hair, the cheek of her question or the brown eyes which disturbed me? A magnetic magic was created in an instant and still continues today each time I hear her voice or see her face.

Two years later the guides and scouts were taken to Hout Bay in Cape Town for a summer camp. The girls were housed in a hostel while the boys 'roughed it' a fair distance away in the bush. On a beautiful, sunny New Year's Day that heralded the year 1957, while travelling together in a hired bus to the annual 'Coon Carnival' in Cape Town, the girl seated in front of me asked my companion to enquire of Michael, whose nickname was Mickey, if he 'liked' her, as she really 'fancied' him. Was that a pang I felt in my heart as I stared out the window? This was a new experience for me! Why was I relieved to hear his negative reply? When my companion enquired 'Is there anyone you like?' he pointed at me and said 'I like her.' Fifty years later, he still confesses 'I like you!'

Life is full of moments. One moment after another.

Some moments pass by with you barely noticing.

Other moments stay with you forever.

They change the way you think,

you see, you live.

(Holden,2005:xi)

Every day Mickey would offer to run the mile to deliver messages to the girl guide hostel and perhaps snatch a moment where we could chat. One evening as we all sat around a campfire singing 'Campfire's burning,' he took my hand. I felt as though the fire was burning right through me. So it happened that, at the age of twelve, I swore my father to secrecy as I confided in him that I had already met my future husband! 'Dad, something wonderful has happened to me. It's a big secret and please promise you won't tell Mommy, because I know she will be very cross. I have met the man I'm going to marry one day,' I said. When my dad was in his 70's, he still vividly remembered that moment and swore he never revealed my secret. The third step of Maslow's theory is for social needs and a sense of belonging. I belonged to a group of girl guides and, at that early age, maybe someone realised I had leadership qualities, as I soon advanced to the position of Patrol Leader. This responsibility was taken very seriously and I successfully did everything in my power to win the weekly award. Did this contribute to the next need, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs - that of self-esteem? Martin (2005:59) confirms that the connection between self-esteem and happiness differs according to the kind of society one belongs to, and thereby acknowledges the important role of the social context.

The door to my future

*In autoethnography ... the story often discloses hidden details
of private life and highlights emotional experiences.*

(Ellis, 2004:30)

My first day at the Durban Teachers' Training College, sadly closed in the year 2000, was filled with excitement and anticipation. I was determined that from that day on I would only produce of my very best every day of my career; a mind-set which has never wavered.

Success comes when you love what you do and commit to being the best in your field.

(Tracy, 1997: 75)

It was so exciting being at College - I loved every moment of my preparation for entry into the field of education. What really amazed me was the attitude of so many teacher trainees. Many of them put so little effort into their assignments and tests, being satisfied to merely scrape by. As I had 'studied' teachers in my schooling days, from the very outset I could foresee students fitting into the categories I had established in my mind - the future exceptional teachers, mediocre teachers and poor teachers - just by observing their attitude. Sadly, according to my evaluation, a great number of students were relegated into the second category, and most fell into the last one. Students bunked classes, some had a lucrative business helping others with assignments, and others handed in assignments only attempted the day before submission. Some staggered into class suffering from a hangover, while others sat bleary-eyed through the lectures.

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.

Aristotle (Moncur, 2004:7)

How ironic it was that the original 'classroom' - that is our home garage - metamorphosed into a 'classroom workshop' during the years of training. It was there that empty Mills cigarette tins, which were to house little reading cards for future pupils, were first coated in bright colours of paint before being adorned with a picture and sealed with clear varnish. Mickey and I painted cotton reels, blocks of wood, and counters, amongst other apparatus, in preparation for the future. With hindsight, I must have suffered from tunnel vision,

as my only focus was my career and the children in whose lives I was to play such a big part. The candle burned late every day, including weekends. Because of my burning passion to be a teacher, I immersed myself in my studies and went the extra mile at every opportunity, especially with assignments. I had never been given an assignment to do before and willingly accepted this new challenge. I recall my mind going into 'extra' mode as I planned and re-planned the front cover, the presentation and the content, and began working on an assignment the day I received it. Mickey and my family were brought into the 'adventure' and played their part heroically. As there were no shopping centres in the suburbs in the early sixties and my mother worked in town, she was assigned the job of purchasing items required for the adornment of the covers; for example, pieces of felt and raffia. Mickey would be dragged off to the nearest bus stop to accompany me to the reference library in town. I recall with gratitude Mickey's response to my initial assignment on Ancient Crete when, having located the chapter required from a certain book, I casually handed the volume to him, requesting he transcribe the gist of it into my notebook.

A co-constructed story ... is intended to be an empathetic and evocative text incorporating both partners' voices and subjectivities and inviting outsiders into the inter subjective world of the narrators.

(Ellis, 2004:72)

Bochner and Ellis (1995:201) affirm that unmediated co-construction is similar in nature to 'interactive interviewing.' At this point I think it prudent to interview Mickey about his experience during my initial year of study which, I feel, was a highly significant episode in our relationship.

Edwina: *Mickey, how did you feel when I first asked you to accompany me to the reference library when I was at Training College?*

Mickey: *I was excited to be going on an outing with you.*

Edwina: *Did you know what my intention was in going to the library?*

Mickey: *No, not at all, but knowing your poor sense of direction, I thought I would just accompany you there and wait until you had finished!*

Edwina: *How did you feel when, after I had selected a book, I asked you to summarise a particular chapter on Crete for me, as I carried on searching for more information?*

Mickey: *Although it was only a small book and a short chapter, I was totally consumed with fear and embarrassment, as I had never read a book in my life. I battled with languages at school and had a block concerning reading.*

Edwina: *But why didn't I sense this? You never let on, but looked as if you knew what you were doing.*

Mickey: *Well, you were the only person who just assumed that I was able to do this. For so many years I had been subjected to ridicule at home and at school, as I was constantly being compared with my older brother. Now, not wanting you to sense my inferiority complex, I just got down to the task and found I was able to meet your expectations.*

Edwina: *How did you feel then?*

Mickey: *I felt as if a weight had lifted from me and could see that I had been accepting of the labels people had given me, and had conformed to the ceiling they had imposed on me. It was the best confidence booster I have ever experienced. I felt that a flame had been lit, and thereafter became so hungry for knowledge. At last I was free of the chains on my inner being.*

Edwina: *How did this affect your life?*

Mickey: *Remember at this time, Edwina, you were seventeen and in your first year of Teacher Training. I was eighteen and still rewriting Grade 10 at a new school. I felt totally inferior in every area, and wondered what you saw in me. Well, this simple task of summarizing a chapter for someone who had total faith in me, boosted my morale and confidence and set my world alight. I went back to school a different person and confounded my critics as I skipped Grade 11 and received four distinctions in Grade 12. Although you were in your second year of Teacher Training by now, I felt on a par with you, cognitively, for the first time.*

Edwina: *Are you an avid reader today?*

Mickey: *Today I read the daily newspaper and enjoy books on modern and ancient history and civilisations, especially books relevant to Biblical studies and archaeology.*

Edwina: *What other assignments do you recall helping me with after this?*

Mickey: *There was one on the Zulu nation, but I especially loved the one on Cape*

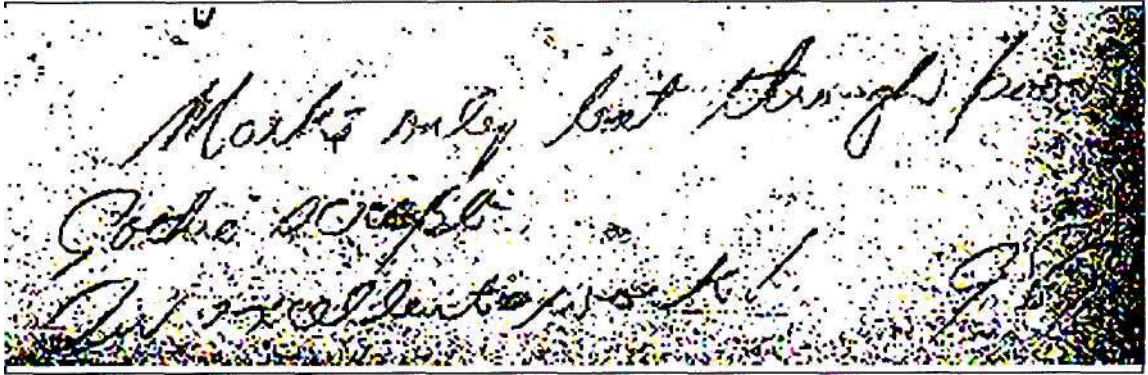
Dutch Architecture. I remember being excited about the research and even correcting you on aspects you had misinterpreted.

Edwina: *Do you think this had an effect on our relationship?*

Mickey: *Yes, it made it deeper as I felt totally involved in your life. It caused such a strong bond to develop between us. You were not afraid to correct my mispronunciation of words and I, in turn, corrected your misinterpretation of facts. Also, you did not appear to have a good general knowledge and, as I listened daily to the news on the radio, I taught you about the world. All my previous interests and friends seemed insignificant. My world was now consumed by you and your studies, and my newfound passion for reading.*

Humphreys (1996:31) maintains that to change self-esteem, one needs to employ the same means that resulted in the present level of self-value. This is as a result of relationship experiences with parents, teachers and other significant adults in childhood. Thus the incident recorded above is used as a tool to prove the value of teacher/parent expectations. Lamprecht (1995:41) confirms that expectation is one of the most powerful methods of motivation.

I never achieved less than a distinction for any assignment, my highest mark being 98% for the assignment on Cape Dutch Architecture. Marks lost for this assignment were for 'Poor Gothic script' and this assignment is still in my possession. Thirty-five years later I was to earn the same mark from Rand Afrikaans University (now known as the University of Johannesburg) for a Psychometric assignment in their Remedial Educational diploma course. Did the original mark received from the Training College set a precedent or a standard? I believe one needs to begin as one intends finishing, and that recognition for effort is a motivating force towards continually striving for excellence.



Photograph 20

Marks and comment for the Cape Dutch Architecture assignment, 1963

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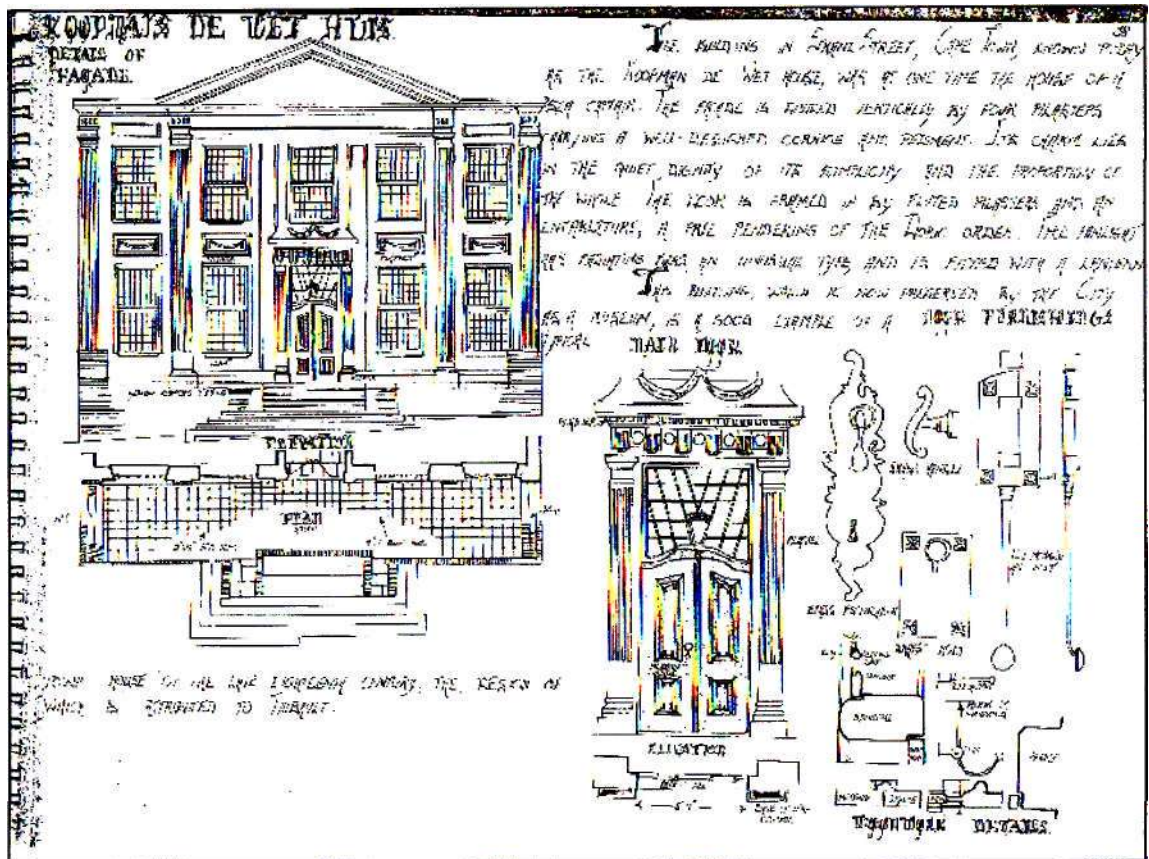
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Photograph 21

Marks received for Psychometric assignment 35 years later



Photograph 22

Page 38 of my assignment on Cape Dutch Architecture

I had to put great effort into my studies in order to achieve the results I desired, as it takes me a while to grasp new concepts. How I loved the practical side of the training, which, unfortunately, was only six weeks long. The realisation that this area in the training of a teacher was lacking, was to play a pivotal role many years later. In the sixties, one crammed into two years at Teacher Training College what should have been covered in three and, if desired, one could specialise in a particular field in a third year of study. I was in my element when placed in Grade 2 at a wonderful school for practical teaching in my second year of training. As I entered the assigned classroom I was beside myself with excitement. 'At last I have arrived,' I thought. The early years of make-believe in the forties and fifties became a reality as I told a class of 'real pupils' a story. As I gathered the little ones around my feet and looked into their expectant, fixed eyes, I felt as if I could actually fly. All those years of practising for this moment had become reality. The expressions on their faces, the widening of their little eyes, the anticipation some showed as they stood up during exciting parts of the story and flicked their fingers, conformed exactly to the reactions of my former imaginary pupils. At the end of my practical session the principal of the school offered me the Grade 1 post, which was to become available

the following year. What a predicament! Three things influenced my wanting to accept; first, the fact that I would be posted to a school within walking distance of my home (most students were posted to distant towns in Natal); second, the fact that I would be assigned to the Grade I so desperately wanted to teach at a lovely school; and third, that at last I would be earning some money! However the one deterrent, which in my eyes was a huge stumbling block, was the need to gain further knowledge concerning the Foundation Phase of education. I was eighteen years old and my colleagues thought I was crazy to refuse such an incredible offer. To my knowledge I was the only student in my year to be afforded such an opportunity. But, it was back to College I went and, at the end of my final year, the school I had initially attended as a pupil, within walking distance from my home, and sadly no longer in existence, requested that the government assign me to the Grade 1 post. There I taught Grades 1, 2 and 3 for seven happy years. I have learned in my life that whenever one door closes, another appears to open, sometimes just in time, and when one reflects one is thankful for the closing of the first door.

A debilitating affliction

As you might suspect, ethnographers come in diverse shapes and colours.

(Ellis, 2004:27)

Migraine headaches are a pattern in my family. I recall lying next to my mother in a darkened room, caressing her hair or rubbing her feet, as this appeared to soothe her pain. Medication offered no relief, as was proved by her mother and brother. Unfortunately, my younger brother and I inherited this debilitating affliction which became a thorn in my flesh from the age of sixteen. Migraine pain is indescribable and always chooses to attack the right side of my head and face. The warning signs are unmistakable. I either wake up with the pain or suddenly experience my right eye 'popping,' as it were, as a kaleidoscope of tiny shapes and colours clouds my vision. Nausea is one of the side-effects, as is impeded speech. This is the only thing in my life that succeeds in slowing me down. I seldom tell my family when I have a migraine; they recognise the telltale sign of a right eye that is half closed due to pressure and pain. Unfortunately, in my case, migraine headaches usually take five days to dissipate. However, one has choices in life - do I hibernate for five days out of every fourteen, or do I learn to live with it and carry on as normally as possible? I chose the latter. I resolved I would never allow this affliction

to prevent me from becoming an extraordinary teacher. Tracy (1997:71) advises that one needs to establish what price one is willing to pay for the accomplishment of a goal, and then pay it. I had never heard of Tracy at the age of sixteen, but have proved his words to be truth - 'Intense, burning desire is the motivational force that enables you to overcome any obstacle and achieve any goal.' I absolutely refused to look down, electing rather to look up at the stars where I was reaching. Voltaire likened life to a game of cards where each player has to accept the cards dealt, 'But once those cards are in the hand, he alone decides how to play them to win the game' (Maxwell, 1993:72).

*Not in the clamour of the crowded street,
Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng
But in ourselves are triumph and defeat.*

Alfred Tennyson (Pridmore, 2005:4)

Another thorny issue was discovering that my body would gladly accept any extra calories as extra padding. From an early age I subjected my body to different 'gimmick' diets. In the sixties there were no weight clubs or books concerning diets and weight loss. I am ashamed to admit that my body was treated disrespectfully, forced to be satisfied with diets such as an egg and tomato three times a day for a week, the cabbage soup diet, the grapefruit diet or just peppermints and water for days in a row. However, I managed to maintain my figure at a size 34 for many years. I had discovered that chocolates exacerbated migraine headaches, so steered clear of this delicacy. It had also come to my attention, via my mother, that slimming machines from America had made their debut at a 'slimming salon' - the first, as far as I am aware, in Durban. There, encouraged by my mother, I presented my size 34 body for pummelling and exercise by machines. I recall the owner looking at me askew but I just said, 'You don't understand.' 'Be careful,' was her reply, 'Be very careful...'

Synthesis

/ think and gather information like an ethnographer, but I try to write like a novelist.

(Ellis, 2004:334)

Ellis (2004:366) affirms that when writing autoethnography, one calls on past events and

attempts to remember interactions with others and the resultant feelings. Thus, in narrative fashion, my early life before entering the field of education is truthfully represented above, as I listened to the voices in my heart and my soul. I was blessed to have a wonderful foundation on which to build. Maxwell (1993:54) states that often the initial impressions on our lives make the most impact. However, Cordeiro (2001:17) maintains that 'Ten percent of life is made up of what happens to you, the other ninety percent is how you respond to what happens to you.'

Although most autoethnographies appear to be centred on troubling experiences, due to the fact that 'social science from the beginning has been grounded in understanding deviance, evil, dysfunction, moral illness, abuse and abnormal behaviour' (Ellis, 2004:43), mine is not, as life has afforded me very few emotional upheavals, but many moments of happiness, joy and fulfillment. For this I am most grateful.

Self-study or autobiographical qualitative research has increased exponentially in the last decade as the roots of feminist research, post-modern thought and arts-based work have taken hold in the educational research community.

(Butler-Kisber, 2005:104)

CHAPTER 2 - YEARS OF SOWING

1965 - 1972

Sow the seed in furrows deep

Through love and care

Goodness into the soil will seep.

Now the seed is plump and full

Bursting with life to do its will.

(Edwina, 2005)

Introduction

Every individual is born into the world resembling a naked field.

And each person is responsible for the seed he sows.

Will he choose to sow seeds of love and care

Or will he choose negativity and despair?

For the ploughman alone is responsible for his plot.

Will his hands be fruitful in directing the growth of his harvest,

Or will his land continue to lie unturned?

Each person is born into the world

Holding his destiny in his own hands.

(Edwina, 2005)

In autoethnography not only your work,

but your personal life is scrutinised and critiqued.

(Ellis, 2004:19)

The third step in Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' is acceptance and love from others, and a sense of belonging (Prager, 2002:2), and the second movement in Krall's model of hermeneutic motion is 'remembering,' the aim being to recall 'what stands out' (Renner, 2001:1). Bearing these two factors in mind, what stands out in my life between the years 1965 -1972 are many 'first' experiences which reinforced the knowledge that I was loved and accepted, and afforded me the knowledge that I 'belonged.' I was accepted into the field of education and immediately felt I definitely belonged in this culture. Up to that point in my life, my physiological, safety and social needs were fulfilled thus, according

to Maslow's theory, the need to feel important was to follow (Prager, 2002:2).

Autoethnography is an ethnographic presentation of oneself by a subject usually considered the 'object' of the ethnographer's interview.

(Gracki, 1999:1)

Lessons learned in the early years

One of my most poignant memories of this period is realising that the adult had replaced the child. I had been assigned by the Department of Education to the primary school I attended as a child, and now as a teacher I walked the same path, crossed the same streets, saw the old familiar houses, and greeted the same folk on my way to and from school.

NATAL SDUJA riON_ .wrAiv^tsHj

Name of Teacher - 111 an T?,'!\ Akal
School - St. Agnes Gov. Kebool
Work {cUaRHes/Subjects) - Claao i 30 mipils
Date d* Visit - S4L*n August, 19fi6.
Decision - Cotiftrmation <>£ Appointment

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HKPOK'I

Hi ssi Ak&l hart made a freafc aunces-i of her first year of teaching. Thin achievement ie entirely due ti> hi*r jnt-l-
Hetent application of modern Infant SuhooT oiethodg. fi«"
work in the claimroom ia a credit to the Durban Toauh«rs' Training College where ah-j received apcuia* fcr-iining In Infant School teaching.

KIBJI Akal shovnd unusual interest in hor work und vrig not content wtf.h Itin teaching aldo aho 7>r«pa.re«l at College but steadily added to her oupp'ly of educational material..

My nature Ki.as Atol is cheerful and -vi^o\oug but above all purposeful in all ahe docs.

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Photograph 23a

FZ>*/ report from Department of Education

Photograph 23b
 Notice of appointment from Department of
 Education

Dear Mr. M. idncea,
 You have been appointed to the undermentioned post in the Natal
 Education Department:
 Rank: ASSISTANT DEPUTY HEADMASTER Grade: ...
 Salary: ...
 Period of Probation: ...
 Report for duty as School Principal: ...
 2. Your grading and remuneration have been determined with due regard to documentary proof submitted by you in respect of:
 (a) ...
 (b) ...
 4. Rji! Warrant No. ...
 5. This appointment is subject to the regulations governing the appointment, remuneration and salaries of teachers in force at the time of the issue of this notice, which is in the possession of the School Principal. Salient points in this notice are:-
 * West* advise us whether ...
 (a) ...
 (b) ...
 Yours faithfully,
 DuUkfoR <E OUCXTHW

Should I have felt elevated by this progress of position from child to teacher? Why do I not recall any emotional change within myself? Photograph 23a is a copy of the report I received from the Inspector confirming my appointment as a teacher. I was delighted to unearth it from a file which had not been opened for 39 years. The report reads I showed 'unusual' interest in my work. I wonder how my interest differed from that of other teachers? In the same file I came across my

appointment as teacher (photograph 23b). I recall reading and re-reading this document at the time thinking that at last I had achieved my dream. I kept it as it is very precious to me.

Research on human performance in the workplace has revealed that a personal sense of accomplishment is the cornerstone to on-going high motivation levels.

(Glennie, 2001:5)

It always amazes me how well a teacher remembers her first class. I remember the first Grade 1 class I taught as if it were yesterday, although forty-one years have elapsed. I have had the privilege of having many of my first pupils' children at the Pre-school and the parents are surprised how clearly I remember them as children.

Anthony

Anthony, a blonde, chubby-cheeked little boy, the youngest in the group, was emotionally immature and battled to keep up with the rest, especially in maths. I anticipated his repeating Grade 1. After the July

holidays, Anthony returned to school a more mature child who was ready to accept a challenge. His concentration span had lengthened and he was focused on learning. We had six months' work to catch up on, but we did it! Anthony advanced to being the brightest child in the class, as far as maths was concerned.

I met Anthony's mother many years later and related the incident to her. She proudly informed me that today Anthony is a very successful accountant. How wonderful it was when this six foot something 'hunk' later brought his own child to the school and allowed me to hug him once again. While hugging him I recalled the way this little boy with the big dimples, although very shy, used to love my hugs and revelled in the praise concerning his incredible progress in maths. In my opinion, a hug, positive comment and praise from a teacher is more effective and will be embedded deeper in a child's mind than any star chart. I have never used a class star chart as I believe children must compete with themselves. I firmly believe that a kind touch is worth more than a thousand words. A good teacher knows each child in her class. She should know their capabilities, personality, good traits, home conditions, birth order in the family, past illnesses and whether they have any allergies or physical problems. In short, a good teacher knows her children intimately, even their month of birth, which is one of the most important things to bear in mind. It is very difficult for a child born almost a year later to be on the same level as the children who are a year, or even six months older, and therefore generally more mature socially, physically, emotionally and cognitively. Of course there is always the exception. During the first seven years of my teaching career I learned invaluable lessons about life from parents, pupils and teachers, but it was from the many children who came from deprived homes that I learned the most.

Petros

Petros, the most gorgeous child with brown hair, brown eyes and matching freckles, held the twelfth birth position in his family, and Alain, Jus friend and neighbour, shared a flat with his family of eighteen. These two were the happiest children in the class. Petros was always the first to give me a hug, followed by an embarrassed smile. In the 60's 'Nigger Balls,' round, hard sweets which sold four for a penny (cent), were very popular. The sweet changed colours as it was sucked, starting off black, then turning different hues until only a white ball remained. I noticed a protrusion in Alain's cheek early one morning and unobtrusively observed as he repeatedly transferred an object from his mouth into his worn blazer pocket, and then back again, at intermittent intervals. At the close of school, Alain lingered behind until the last child had left. His eyes revealed that he wanted to speak to me alone, and as I purposefully took my seat at the table, he came darting over. Staring proudly at me with his beautiful, shiny blue/grey eyes, from his blazer pocket he produced a white object covered in a myriad of minute black hairs, and said, 'This is for you.' The memory of that moment is indelibly etched in my mind. I was overcome with emotion, as waves of warmth washed through my body. 'Forme, my darling?' I asked. 'Yes miss,' he replied, 'I saved it for you.' What should I do? He was so clearly enjoying the privilege of having a sweet, something he rarely had, yet he now stood before me, handing me the last piece, the best of all! I wanted to say, 'Alain I'd rather you have it,' but just could not disappoint him. He stood there with a look of pride and happiness on his face, his eyes alight and his lips stretched in a smile over his crooked

front teeth, as I placed this disgusting, furry object in my mouth, feigning a look of sheer delight as my body felt revulsion at the texture in my mouth. Through the years I have been privileged to receive many expensive, beautiful gifts from pupils, but never one as special as this. *That day I learned that it's the little things in life that make a difference.* I recall feeling so humbled, so grateful and so privileged to be in the teaching profession, and so honoured to play a part in this child's life.

Did these two boys really smile because they were noticed and felt loved for the first time? Were they always happy because they were learning? Did they feel important being part of a group? While most children in Grade 1 sported new items of clothing, Petros and Alain wore white shirts that had turned grey, minus buttons, with fraying sleeves, collars and button holes; grey pants which were originally black; black blazers aged to a subtle shade of grey; black, threadbare socks; shoes with permanent crease marks across the front, which had a habit of slipping off at the back; ties which once sported the colours red, white and black but were now pink and grey, and caps which matched their blazers. From these two boys I learned the truth of the saying 'love conquers all,' which was to become my school motto many years later.

What's done to children, they will do to society.

(Canfield & Hansen, 2002:239)

Georgeos

Georgeos suffered from separation-anxiety, which I discovered as he screamed and shouted when his mother left in the mornings. He refused to enter the classroom, choosing rather to place himself outside the door waiting for the end of the day when his mother would once again make an appearance. For the first two weeks I taught groups of children at the front of the classroom, which was near the door, in an attempt to include Georgeos. However, after two weeks I felt deflated and as if I was losing the battle, but decided to employ one more strategy. I began telling a most exciting story to the group, which was as usual seated in the front of the classroom, using my flannel board and story aids, but using my voice differently. Georgeos shuffled nearer and nearer in order to hear as I purposefully lowered my voice to almost a whisper, until at last his little body was in the classroom. Ignoring him completely I carried on with the story, making it last as long as possible but including him with my eyes. At the end of the story, pointing to a chair, I said 'This chair is yours Georgeos,' as I walked away. Was that the day that I learned the power of Winston Churchill's words, '*Never give up, never give up, never give up?*' (Canfield, 2005:365). Did the memory of this experience cause me to retain my fighting spirit when situations seemed impossible?

Teach as though you were teaching your own children.

(Canfield & Hansen, 2002:119)

Karen

Karen, a motivated learner who thoroughly enjoyed learning to read and being given new reading books, was forced to remain at home due to a bad case of chicken-pox. Knowing the effect being 'behind' in reading would have on her, I visited her home daily after school, taking with me little flash cards of new words I had made especially for her and the reading books in which they appeared. Being an enthusiastic

learner, it did not take long for Karen to learn the new maths concepts as well. She returned to school three weeks later and slotted easily back into her position in the top reading and maths groups. I knew Karen would have returned to school very demotivated and quite 'lost' had I not spent this special time with her. She will probably not remember this, but I do!

A teacher affects eternity; no one can tell where his influence stops.

(Canfield & Hansen, 2002:304)

There was more to learn about teachers! One elderly teacher reported me for going 'too fast' with the teaching of reading! She informed the principal that in June my pupils had almost completed the set reading books for the year and that I had enquired about extra books. I was commanded in no uncertain terms to slow down the reading pace as I definitely could not borrow the next grade's readers, nor was the school able to purchase any more. How could I allow this? I am a teacher who believes that a ceiling should never be imposed on any child's learning. Vygotsky posits that children develop cognitively when they attempt tasks within their zone of proximal development (Gouws, 1998:82), so I made my own books, my pupils were motivated and progressed according to their ability, and I was satisfied. Was this exercise in preparation for the future designing of learning materials? Is this the reason why today I feel so strongly about imposing a ceiling on a child's possible achievement? Lamprecht (1995:4) agrees that many children are underachievers due to vague expectations.

*Good or effective teaching is not simply something that happens
among a gifted few born with natural talents,
but is, moreover,
a consequence of hard work
and thorough preparation.*

Hamachek (Kruger & Adams, 1998:125)

To my dismay I learned that many teachers have 'favourites' and do not attempt to camouflage this fact. I remember repeatedly saying to Mickey, 'This is a sad situation - it is so sad all round - sad for the teacher who does not notice the beauty in each child, sad for the rest of the children who perceive they are not favoured, and sad for the 'favourite' who will, in the near future, have to learn to be just like the rest!'

If only words were a kind of fluid that collects in the ears, if only they turned into the visible chemical equivalent of their true value, an acid, or something curative - then we might be more careful.

Words do collect in us anyway. They collect in the blood, in the soul, and either transform or poison people's lives.

(Okri, 1997:88)

How sad too, I discovered, is the fact that many a child is 'destroyed' by the very words a teacher repeatedly utters in the staff room, so that by the time the child reaches the next class, the new teacher already has a preconceived opinion of the 'crucified' one. However, noting the disastrous consequences of unfavourable words spoken about a child, I learned to discover and repeat to the child, the parents, the staff and the pupils, the good points in every child.

To belittle is to be little.

(Unknown)

Intuition takes precedence

*Perhaps every story worth telling ... is a dare,
a kind of pornography, composed of whatever
we 're not supposed to say,
for fear of being drummed out,
found out, pointed out!*

(Ellis, 2004:142)

At this point I need to explain that my father, although forced to leave school at the age of twelve, was a very astute and intelligent man. As a child I recall him sitting at the diningroom table either reading the dictionary or books on mathematics. He was self taught and could converse on any subject, never made a spelling mistake, understood the meaning of seldom-used words, and mentally calculated the addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of exceptionally large numbers. As a child I clearly recall battling with maths, especially long division, and the effect this had on me. My father would patiently explain over and over again and, just when I had grasped the concept and employed his strategies,

the teacher would exclaim in horror at my using the incorrect method! That was the start of my intense dislike of the subject at school and the beginning of the realisation that 'there are many ways to skin a cat!' After all, I reached the same answer employing my father's simpler strategies! Despite this, maths became the subject I enjoyed teaching the most! I was exhilarated when the 'penny dropped' as it were, and a child's face took on that smug, happy look, a look bursting with pride and self-satisfaction! One of the most embarrassing moments during the first two years of my profession took place in the principal's office.

*Schooling will succeed when knowledge is not force fed to children,
but rather children are encouraged to construct their own ways
of representing knowledge.*

Santrouck(1994:243)

At the Teachers' Training College we had been trained in two different methods of teaching maths in Grade 1. Combining the best from the two and adding my own strategies, I took my cue from my pupils' responses and understanding, and was prepared to employ different strategies for different children. In my second year of teaching, a new method of maths instruction was introduced to schools in an effort to combat the high rate of failure in this learning area. I recall taking a long, hard look at the 'syllabus' for Grade 1 in utter disbelief as I deemed it too complicated and 'wordy' for little children. There was far too much writing required of a Grade 1 pupil who was still in the process of learning to write and read! There was talk of 'elements' and 'sets' and pupils were expected to initially write the words 'is equal to,' 'add' and 'minus' instead of using the signs. Pupils in Grade 1 had to use the signs greater than ($>$) or less than ($<$) and writing one sum took almost the whole lesson, causing total confusion. I recall going into panic mode as I instinctively knew I could not employ this method. However, when the principal sent for the books she would expect to see some form of the new maths! So, once again, combining diverse methods, I devised my own strategies. One unforgettable afternoon I was summoned to the office where, seated in the two plush chairs, were two strange men who were not initially introduced.

The Principal: *Miss Akal, tell me what you think of the new maths?*

Edwina: *Mrs. Jones, I doubt that whoever devised this programme has ever*

been into a Grade I classroom, nor have they even attempted to teach a Grade I pupil.

The Principal: *But you are using it. I've seen your books.*

Edwina: *Mrs. Jones, you see circles with pictures or numerals in them. As this new method has certainly not been formulated with the five-year-old in mind, I have had to simplify it!*

The Principal: *Miss Akal, meet Mr. Van Wyk and Mr. Els, the co-authors of the new maths programme.*

Edwina: *I'm terribly sorry but I am responsible for teaching maths to thirty nine five year olds, and I cannot see this method working.*

The Principal: *Thank you. (With a nod of the head, I was dismissed)*

I felt so humiliated and embarrassed! The blood rushed to my face, burned my cheeks and ears and then rushed down to my feet, leaving my face icy cold. Here I was, a young lass of twenty, with only three years' training and only a year's experience in the field of teaching, divulging to two 'intelligent men' her opinion of their programme. How was I supposed to answer? I was asked a question and answered it truthfully! Was this going to affect the principal's report or opinion of me as a teacher? If the exercise were to be repeated, with my being aware of the reputation of the two gentlemen, would I offer the same answer? I was not popular with the principal for some time but, in my defence, the programme was discontinued after just a few years!

*To perform at your best, you need to know
who you are and why you think and feel the way you do.*

(Tracy, 1997:21)

Engagement and marriage

*For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven.*

(The Bible, Ecclesiastes, 3:1)

In the 60's every white male citizen was expected to do military training for a period of nine months, after which they were to attend an annual three-week camp for a period of four years. Mickey celebrated his twenty-first birthday doing guard duty in a lookout

tower in Pretoria, but two days later was afforded a weekend pass, during which we got engaged. I recall going to bed that night with a torch knowing that my overwhelming joy would make it impossible to sleep. I shone the torch on my hand at least fifteen times during the night, and battled to contain my excitement. My mother would not consent to marriage until I had turned twenty-one, which enforced a two-year engagement. I think it highly significant to recall a conversation that took place between my mother, Mickey and I, before our marriage. That day a seed was planted in my soul which was to mature into a nodal point twenty-one years later. However, in order to comprehend my mother's stance, it is important to note the reason for it. From the age of ten, much was expected of her. My grandparents lived on a farm in Spitzkop, Bloemfontein, where every Sunday after church about sixty Lebanese folk would gather for a 'Sagree' (a day of card games). My maternal grandmother, a tall, strict, gracious woman, expected young ladies to be familiar with the finer details of housekeeping from a very early age. She was very capable and could do most things - from baking rusks and making pickles, to milking cows and making butter. Thus she ensured that from a very young age my mother was trained in the art of 'proper housekeeping' as befitted a Lebanese maiden. Besides being an outstanding cook and baker, I vividly recall my mother crocheting, knitting, sewing, beading wedding dresses, making exquisite hats and bridal tiaras, embroidering, doing tapestry, making rugs, playing the piano, piano accordion and banjo, amongst many other things. Our home was adorned by two of her oil paintings, exquisite pewter mirrors and hand-painted drinking glasses. Mother, you certainly were a hard act to follow!

Labelled as useless according to cultural expectations

If necessity is the mother of invention pain seems to be the father of learning.

(Tracy, 1997:20)

As I cast my thoughts back, I am convinced that the main reason for my mother not consenting to my marriage before the age of twenty-one, was that in her mind she presumed this would afford me two years in which to learn how to cook, bake, knit and sew, qualities which in her eyes were vital for any Lebanese bride-to-be. However, I recall her becoming more and more disillusioned as she realised her eldest daughter was not the slightest bit inclined towards what I regard as domestic 'trivialities.'

My mother: *Edwina, come into the kitchen and watch me make Tabouleh and Kibie (The most renowned traditional Lebanese fare). If there's any hushwe (meat and onion stuffing) over I'll show you how to make Koesa (stuffed marrows).*

Edwina: *I can't, I have books to mark and apparatus to prepare.*

My mother: *Come my child, let me show you how to mend socks.*

Edwina: *No, I'll just bring the mending to you when I need to!*

My mother: *Ya hai bishul (Lebanese for shame on you!) What will the people say? Edwina, you are getting married soon, let me show you how to iron.*

Edwina: *Don't worry, Mickey knows how to iron!*

My mother: *Ya hai bishu! The man has to work all day, now you expect him to iron! What will his mother say?*

Did she not know that this Lebanese lady was not interested in tradition or what people thought of her? Did she not realise that this Lebanese lady was primarily interested in becoming an extraordinary teacher? One Saturday morning I overheard my mother lamenting her daughter's lack of domesticity to her own mother, who suggested she cajole me in front of my future husband. Thus it happened that on a Saturday afternoon six weeks prior to our wedding, Mickey and I were summoned to an 'important' meeting. My mother began by 'apologising' for her daughter's ignorance concerning domestic matters, and begged Mickey to encourage me to learn from her while I had the opportunity. When I laughingly protested she asked and answered the following questions, which still reverberate in my head:

Can you cook? No, she answered her own question.

Can you bake? No, she answered herself again.

Can you sew? No, she answered.

Can you knit? No, again.

Can you crochet? No.

Can you mend his clothes? No, once more.

Can you even iron his clothes? No, was yet again the answer she gave.

You see, you are useless! she finally exploded.

It sometimes seems to me that our days are poisoned with too many words.

*Words said and not meant. Words said **and** meant.*

Words divorced from feeling. Wounding words that conceal.

Words that reduce.

Dead words.

(Okri, 1997:88)

I am of the opinion that had she realised the impact of her last statement - said in jest, but meaningfully, she would never utter it again. 'Useless' is a very strong word which has such a great impact when used on a person. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary explains the word 'useless' as 'not fulfilling the intended purpose; having no purpose; giving no benefit to anyone' (Hornby, 1999:1316).

I laughed raucously at the time. I found it hilarious! Why, then, did I allow the seed of the word 'useless' to take root in my soul? Suddenly I began to lose my self-confidence, but not in my teaching career. All the things she had mentioned; sewing, cooking, knitting, crocheting, baking and even ironing, became huge stumbling blocks in my mind. Fortunately Mickey could do all these 'brilliant' things, except crochet. I knew how to boil peas and bake frozen fish cakes and we ate this same boring meal many a night when it was my turn to cook. On those nights I really felt 'useless,' but Mickey never complained.

Motherhood

What price success if one fails as a mother?

Foot (Honor Books, 1994a:52)

I had managed to keep my clothing size at a 34. This was probably due to the fact that we did not possess a car, which necessitated a daily walk to and from school. We were on the bus route but, due to my low salary as a teacher and Mickey's equally low one as a bank teller, we could not afford the daily bus fare. When I got married I started taking the contraceptive pill, a new introduction to South Africa, which was against the teaching of the church I attended. If I thought I had migraines before I got married, they were mild headaches compared with what I was now forced to endure. Mickey often came home to a darkened bedroom, aware of the fact that every step he took reverberated in his wife's

throbbing head. It was only years later that I connected the worsening of the migraines with the contraceptive pill. Would I have discontinued had I known then? I doubt it, as we definitely could not have afforded to bring a child into the world at that stage. Did my disobedience to the teachings of my church affect me? Why did I feel guilty to be taking communion on a Sunday? Why did I never 'confess' this as 'sin'?

Two years after our marriage I produced our firstborn, Michael, a colicky, allergic, asthmatic child who drove me to distraction as I was ill-prepared for the role of motherhood, but who also filled my heart with the most incredible love. Did I get a rude awakening! I was 23 years old and so shocked at the demands of a baby, especially one who cried incessantly, that it made me feel incompetent, 'useless' and confused. My mother omitted to ask the question 'Can you even look after a child?' in her interrogation into my capabilities. Words cannot explain the feelings of helplessness, anxiety and hopelessness that beset me. Unasked and unanswered questions raced through my mind day and night. Does every new mother experience these feelings or is it just me? Is it my fault that I cannot cope with this tiny baby? Why do I feel so mixed up and confused? Is this how it is going to be for the rest of my life? Is this the end of my career in education? Am I really that useless? My mother was right - I am useless! On the other hand, could my feelings have been intensified as a result of my 'useless' label, coupled with the fear of making a mistake?

I felt so unprepared for motherhood and the many changes it wrought in my life. Suddenly, without any preparation, I was responsible for the wellbeing of another life, and did not appear to be exhibiting any success at it. Unfortunately, there is no preparation for motherhood, although today one has access to books, talks, television programmes and the internet as sources of information. I was totally exhausted and felt and looked like a dishcloth that had been tightly squeezed. I had a continual haziness in my head from lack of sleep, and a permanent headache. We had to move in with my parents as I just could not cope and, although my mother was still working, she assisted me in the evenings. Although this made me feel even more incompetent, I felt safe in the home of my youth. I recall Mickey coming home unexpectedly one midday, to find me still in my night clothes, frantically pushing the pram up and down in an attempt to put my distraught baby to sleep. I was so tense and had such a terrible migraine. It was the first time he had ever seen me dissolve into tears.

Why do I still remember my mother's words when I had an aversion to breastfeeding and chose the bottle after the second week? 'Ya hai bishu! A proper mother doesn't do things like that. What will the people say?' Was I also to be labelled as an 'improper mother' because I did not breastfeed my child? However, motherhood proved to be a good teacher. Only once I had a child did I understand a mother's love; only once I had a child did I realise my unsympathetic dealings with some parents during my teaching years! I recall being very upset when parents did not listen to their child's reading or sign their homework book. Excuses like, 'I have four children to see to,' or 'I never had time,' or 'He fell asleep before I could get to him,' or 'The baby wasn't well,' were just not acceptable to me. Only now did I understand what they were experiencing, and wish I could turn the clock back but 'even God cannot change the past' (Unknown).

Ode to my son, Michael

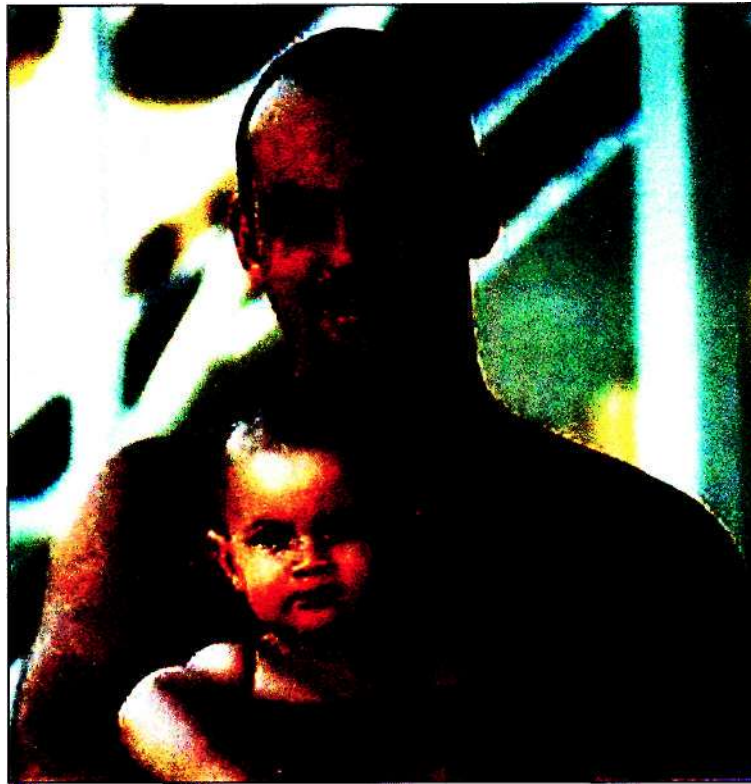
*I remember as if it were yesterday
Your beautiful face and the things you used to say.
For those little sparkling eyes always filled with much love
I always thanked the good Lord above.
The years have gone by so very quickly -I don't know where - they have just flown!
Suddenly you 're a big tall man
My son - now fully grown.
Michael, my first-born, I'm so proud of you
And the wonderful person into whom you grew.
In my heart you will always be
A most precious gift from God above, to me.*

(Edwina, 1999)



Photograph 24

Michael, aged three



Photograph 25

Michael today, a father of three

Returning to a former field

Clouds that thunder, do not always rain.

(An American Proverb)

While still on maternity leave I was, surprisingly, contacted by my former high school principal, requesting me to assist with Grade 1 for a week, as a teacher had undergone an emergency operation. What I discovered in that period, which stretched to six weeks, shocked and disturbed me. When I approached the same principal who had formerly labelled me a 'bold creature,' to explain how little the children knew, and the unacceptable way in which the pupils had been taught (parrot-fashion, with no understanding), her reply was 'It is only Grade 1.' 'Grade 1 is the foundation of a person's scholastic career,' I replied. As she stared back at me, I could hear the words she was thinking, 'Just who does this bold creature think she is?' I recall feeling distressed but deeply satisfied as I looked into her widening eyes and noticed those once puckered lips were now wide open in disbelief as I explained that employing untrained staff for the lower grades could result in many children developing so-called learning disabilities, or experiencing barriers to learning. Bloom's

taxonomy reminds us that we certainly want our learners to be more than parrots (Kruger & Adams, 1998:131). Did this experience deposit the seed of the idea of founding my own Primary school in the future? Was this yearning a result of this experience?

*Barriers can be located within the learner,
the centre of learning or
the education system.*

(Kruger & Adams, 1998:247)

First entry into the field of business and entrepreneurship

*Possessing foresightedness may mean
taking steps when no one else sees the need to.
This takes a certain courage, especially when others object.*

(Goleman, 1998:123)

Most mothers did not work in the sixties but we desperately needed the extra income, especially as Michael was diagnosed as being allergic to many substances, and soya milk was advocated. This was imported from America at the time, and was both scarce and very expensive. Fortunately, my mother and sister-in-law took care of Michael when I resumed my former post. However, although I enjoyed being back in the classroom, I found leaving my son in someone else's care very traumatic. I approached the principal with my dilemma and impending resignation, and she suggested that my two-and-a-half year old son accompany me daily to school. This happened only once. That was the one day in my career that I did not do justice to my profession, or to the pupils in my care. I contemplated sending Michael to a 'Nursery School,' as it was known then, and began to research schools in the area. I was distressed at my findings.

The good government Nursery Schools in the late 60's appeared to accommodate children whose parents had a certain social standing. I did not possess a car, was a 'working mother,' and therefore did not fit the perceived mould. However, I would not have contemplated sending Michael to the private creches I visited. One particular school sported interior walls halfway painted black. This really affected me deeply. Upon asking the reason, I was informed that the children dirtied the walls! At another Nursery school, which had

no grounds, a long line of little children, headed by a single old lady wielding a stick, was beginning the daily ascent of a steep hill, and the crossing of a busy road to the park. At yet another school, before even entering the front door, the stale smell of urine greeted me. I observed the emotional behaviour of the little children in many schools and noted how sad, dejected, lonely and bored they appeared. My heart ached for them. I wanted to enfold them in my arms and assure them that life could be fun. Did this experience result in a future, very significant chapter in my life?

One Sunday afternoon, while discussing with my parents my heartache at leaving Michael, I presented my idea of using their home to open a 'little' Nursery School which Michael could attend. I envisioned a place where I could open up an exciting world for children, and where I would still be teaching and earning some money. The home of my youth consists of four double-sized bedrooms, each of which is larger than most lounges today; two enormous double lounges, a huge playroom, an enormous kitchen and pantry, a double garage, three outbuildings and a very spacious garden. Having no money didn't deter me at all. I saw the big picture.

Today I realise that all people do not act in the same way with regard to ideas. Some only see the big picture, while others see the finer details needed to bring an idea to fruition. Still others are balanced, and see both sides. I belong to the first group - I see the big picture and jump in head first. Fortunately, my husband sees both sides. Thus we complement one another perfectly. Once an idea presents itself, I can visualise the whole picture, and begin to draw pictures and to furiously record my plans. In my mind I was already preparing little children for school and devising ways to make learning fun, although my father had not yet given his consent! That night, trying unsuccessfully to sleep, I pictured the classrooms. For the children it would be like being in fairyland. I pictured the layout of the school, where children would walk with looks of wonder and delight. At three o'clock that morning I decided I would call my school 'Wonderland.'

The secret to entrepreneurial thinking is being pro-active as opposed to being re-active.

(Jude, 1998:37)

I was bubbling with excitement by morning and, although my father asked for more time to consider my proposal, in my mind it was already a *fait accompli*. My mother appeared to

have bought into the picture, but my father was confused, which baffled me. Did he really think I would remain an ordinary teacher forever? Why was he scared to take a chance? Why did he need time to think? Think of what? Why did my father find change difficult? In hindsight, I realise it was virtually unheard of in those days for a twenty-six-year-old to have her own business, and a Lebanese woman at that! Some of my relatives, especially the men, found my vision ludicrous and sowed doubt in my father's mind, saying, *'Edwina is very young. She will probably have more children. Is a private Nursery School a good thing? Who will send their child to such a place? There are no businesses in this road. What will happen if it is a failure and the house has already been converted? Town Planning will never allow a school in this residential area!'*

One of my negative male cousins remonstrated with me personally concerning my 'stupid idea' - *'How could you do this to your parents? You have really gone down in my estimation Edwina. Do you know what you are doing? Have you considered the consequences?'*

While my relatives spoke negatively to and of me, I trained my mind to 'switch off and replace the negative words with a visual picture of the name of the school standing proudly outside the premises. I visualised myself doing puppet shows in the same old garage - not for dolls, but for real little people! I would definitely not be affected by negative words! I had never read a book on the power of positive thought, yet instinctively knew I had to adopt this stance. Was this in preparation for bigger chances I had to take in the future?

The power of positive thought means taking conscious control of your thought process.

(Jude, 1998:25)

Plans were immediately put into action after an initial consultation with my former lecturer at Training College, who later became the Inspectress of Nursery Schools in Natal. She was delighted and encouraged me by confirming I was perfectly suited to working with young children, and reassured my parents that her personal endorsement would accompany the application to the Department of Education. Thus Wonderland became the first licensed business in Windermere Road, setting a trend that would see the conversion of this road from residential to business within a period of twenty-five years.

The number one reason why people die inside is that they severely underestimate their own abilities. They believe all the lies they 've been told about themselves by others during their lifetime. They 've become bitter not better. We become what we believe.

(Lipkin, 1998:24)

While renovations for the conversion of the house into a Nursery School were set in motion, as well as holding my teaching position, I sold ladies' handbags in the afternoons and hosted make-up parties in the evenings in order to earn extra money for the outdoor equipment of the school. My knowledge of cosmetics was non-existent! However, I reasoned that 'where there is a will there must be a way,' so, back to the library I went, and soaked up all the information I could concerning the skin. I wore only a little lipstick at the time. In the 70's one could purchase 'Vanda' make up only through a house party. After many such parties I had saved enough money to purchase the materials needed for the construction of equipment. We purchased off-cuts of masonite and together Mickey and I made jigsaw puzzles, templates, and threading equipment. We painted blocks and cotton reels, and made garages and farmyards. Sheets of masonite became toy car ramps with streets, houses, trees, and petrol stations. We made dolls' houses and furniture; created a shop with a counter and a till, utilising empty cereal boxes and other such commodities to equip it with groceries; a mini hairdressing salon and an office with typewriters, adding machines and paper. We even made our own books!

Experts on the science of success know

the brain is a goal-seeking organism.

Whatever goal you give to your subconscious

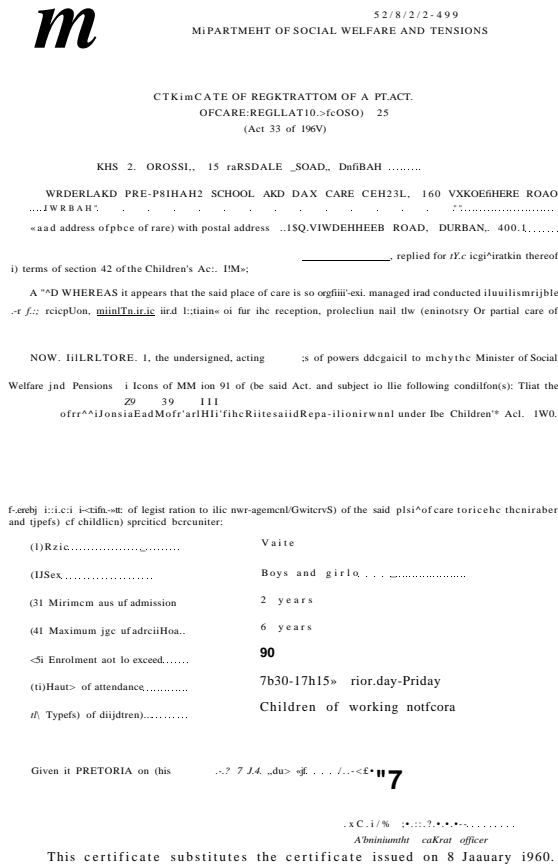
mind, it will work night and day to achieve.

(Canfield, 2005:51)

Mickey went on a week's bricklaying course in the evenings after work, which proved to be invaluable to the future success of my business. His first construction in the playground was a sandpit and a fort, where children ecstatically played imaginative games such as cowboys, armies and Superman. Although the fort was rugged and off-square, this bright red, turreted structure became a dolls' house, a castle, a hide-out, a shop, or a den in turn. This was the beginning of Mickey's 'building career,' which was to earn him a Conservation Award from the City of Durban and the Heritage Committee twenty-seven years later.

First privately owned registered Nursery School

I had unsuccessfully tried to fall pregnant from the time Michael was two years old,



and had undergone many medical procedures. However, four months before the school was to open I discovered I was pregnant with my daughter, Jodi. What a dilemma I was in. Plans for the conversion had been drawn up, applications to the various departments had been submitted and wonderful apparatus had been made. Mickey was incredibly supportive, reassuring me of my coping skills. On 1 August 1972, Wonderland Nursery School opened its doors to fifteen beautiful children, with a four months pregnant principal!

Photograph 26
Nursery School licence

Oh what joy! Not one child cried, and when 12.30 came, no one wanted to go home! I felt exhilarated, in another world, and so grateful for the privilege of having my own school. The school opened with myself as principal and teacher, my mother as secretary and supervisor, and a cook-cum-cleaner. We never advertised but by the first of December, five months later, I had my full quota of children and more teachers. Parents were



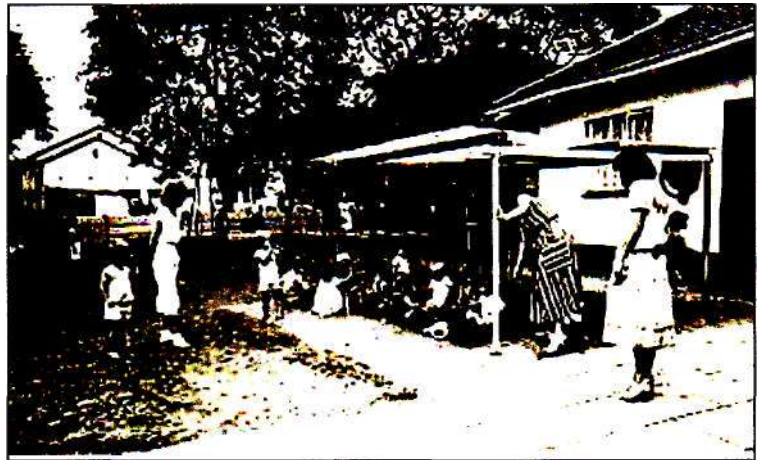
recommending Wonderland to their friends, and very soon the various Departments were approached to increase our initially requested quota of children to 175.

Photograph 27
The front of Wonderland in 1972



Photograph 28
*The front of
Wonderland in 2005*

As I reflect back, gratitude towards my parents fills my heart. Would I do the same for my daughter when she was 26 years old? Would life afford me the opportunity to repay my parents? As Mickey and I were financially unable to undertake building alterations, my father financed the installation of toilets and basins and the conversion of our front verandah to an office.



Photograph 29 a & b
The playground in 1972





Photograph 30 a & b
The playground in 2005



The verandah, which was converted to my office, has witnessed many precious moments, and holds a special place in my heart. Were that verandah able to speak, it would say:

'Edwina, do you recall when it rained and you were forbidden to go to the garage, I became your classroom? I remember how you sang to your pupils, taught them little verses and explained the meaning of 'big' words. Do you remember that in your youth you chose to do your homework here ? I recall in your Matric year how you illuminated me as you sat studying from three o 'clock in the morning. This was also your favourite place to sit with Mickey, and I was privy to many an interesting conversation, especially when he proposed to you! Edwina, for the past thirty-four years I've been your office, adorned with children's beautiful work and paintings. I have witnessed those children's broad smiles and seen their chests puff with pride as you lauded their efforts just as you imagined it would be so many

years ago. For the past thirty-four years I 've watched as little people sauntered into your office for a chat or a hug. I was there when parents made application for their children to join, when they related stories of heartache, or when they needed some sound advice. Mickey has tried to betray me by offering to build you a beautiful big, plush office, but I knew you would refuse, because of the memories I evoke in you. You and I have walked a long road together - a path spanning sixty years.'



Photograph 31
Mickey and I on the original verandah in 1961



Photograph 32
The enclosed verandah, that is now my office, with the original front door to our home



Photograph 33
The exterior of the enclosed verandah, which is my office, in 2005

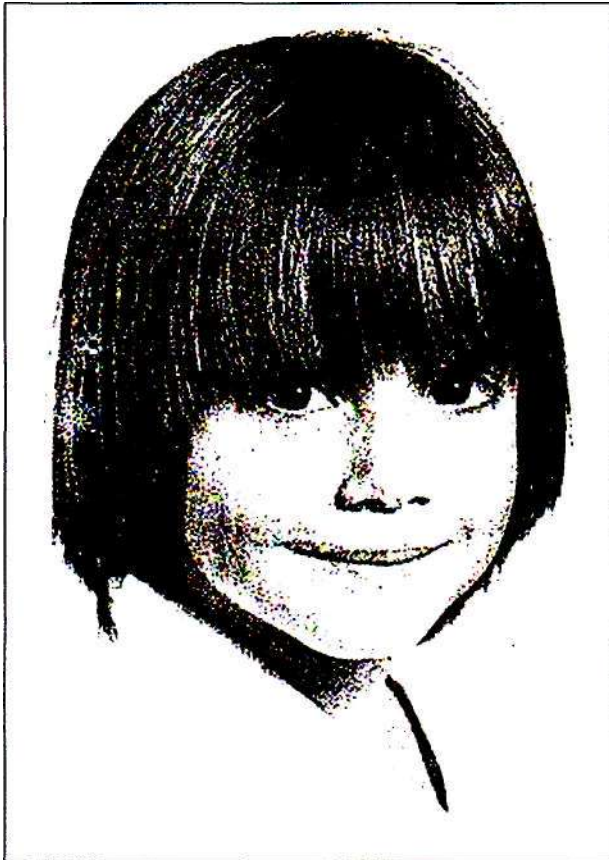
On the sixteenth day of the first January of Wonderland's existence, my precious daughter, Jodi, was born. In complete contradiction to Michael's arrival, this was a painless birth with no stitches. What joy! I remember climbing off the bed after she was born to walk to my room, much to the consternation of the doctor and nursing staff. In the 1970's one stayed in hospital for at least a week after having given birth, but I insisted on going home the next day. In contrast to Michael, Jodi was a placid, calm baby who seldom cried. My confidence in myself as a mother of a young baby was restored.

*As researchers have explored the art form of found poetry,
it has become apparent that it gets at the essence of a narrative,
yet permits multiple interpretations.
It is more evocative than the typical, linear kinds of research writing
because of the embodied and melodic nature of the text.
At the same time, found poetry retains the signature of the creator... .*
(Butler-Kisber, 2004:97)

Ode to my daughter, Jodi

I remember as if it were the other day
The first time I held you in my arms,
The unspeakable joy that filled my heart.
You were such a delight - right from the very start.
Your perfect features, your beautiful smile
Your lovely heart could be felt from a mile.
The good Lord certainly smiled down on me
When He gave me this treasure of humanity.
And through the years you've made me proud
Your loving care just speaks so loud.
Jodi, I want the world to know
You're my daughter, and I love you so!

(Edwina, 1999)



Photograph 34
Jodi, aged 6



Photograph 35
Jodi today, mother of two

Mother and daughter du*

Edwina Grossi
and Jody Hayden

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Edwina surrounded by all her grandchildren: her daughter Jody and her son (right) and her daughter in law Rachel, with her three kids.

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Photograph 36

Article in Your Family magazine, September 2004

What an exciting, albeit busy time! However, in the 70's there was no television and not many books on child care, and I greedily scavenged any articles I could lay my hands on. I even started to read medical books, taking particular note of children's problems. I began formulating questions future parents might ask, and rehearsing the answers. Every night when my children were asleep I prepared handwork for the different groups, made charts for the walls or parent posters, and on the weekends my children loved having the school all to themselves as Mickey and I scrubbed, disinfected, painted, fixed and produced more equipment. We made bookshelves, lockers and all the tables, some of which are still in existence today, thirty-four years later. We painted and varnished, painted and varnished, and although my nails were a sight, I was engulfed by my passion.

*You only have control over three things in your life -
the thoughts you think, the images you visualise, and the actions you take.*

How you use these three things determines everything you experience.

(Canfield, 2005:9)

As a child I attended ballet lessons in the afternoons after school and as a teenager I did Ballroom and Latin American dancing but now, as more mothers were working, children could not be taken to extra-mural activities. Thus I approached a ballet teacher, and a ballet school for the children at Wonderland was born. Today many other optional extramural activities are offered, including pottery, arts and crafts, computer lessons, and speech and drama. I founded a swimming school at my home in 1988 and over 150 pupils are taught to swim annually. Ironically, I have never learned to swim.

*Those with initiative ... take advantage of opportunities
before they are visible to anyone else.*

(Goleman, 1998:123)

In the 70's most Nursery Schools operated on a half-day basis. In the mid-seventies recession took its toll on the economy, inflation was affecting the working class's disposable income, and divorce was rampant, forcing more women to head for the workplace. From 1974 Wonderland offered a 'full day' service. Extra staff were hired to enable me to spend time at home with my own children in the afternoons, but often this backfired, as my children pleaded to stay for the full day!

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By EUNICE GOODMAN

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Photograph 37

Article in *The Cedar Leaf*, a Lebanese periodical, in 1973

When we started the system, approximately 5 % of the children stayed for a full day. Today this figure is close to 90%. As far as I am aware, Wonderland became the first registered Nursery School offering a full day programme. This service involved a cooked midday meal, a time of rest for each child, and an afternoon programme. The cooked meals, which my mother organised, became legendary. Today when I meet ex-pupils they still remember Wonderland's Spaghetti Bolognese! Twenty years ago a pupil had to undergo a heart operation and refused all hospital meals as they did not compare with Wonderland's food. So to the hospital every lunch time went 'Uncle Mickey,' with either spaghetti bolognaise and custard; cottage pie, vegetables and ice-cream; chicken-a-la-king with rice and vegetables, and vanilla pudding; savoury mince and vegetable stew, and strawberry jelly; meat balls on mashed potatoes with gravy, vegetables and rice pudding, or fish cakes, mashed potatoes and vegetables, and bread and butter pudding, to be delivered to the delightful and delighted patient. Over the years many pupils have had Wonderland food sent home to be deep-frozen for their weekend meals, as they refused their own family meal! This practice still continues today.

Noting a gap in the market for 'After-School Care,' that is care in the afternoons for school-going children, which requires transport from primary school, the provision of a hot meal and supervision of homework, Wonderland became the first registered Nursery School to provide this service. Today most Nursery and Primary Schools have their own After Care section. I recall consulting with City Health about this type of facility, discussing rules and regulations, as if it were yesterday! Further alterations had to be undertaken, certain areas had to be blocked off and more toilets installed to accommodate the older child. Once again, Mickey's building skills were invaluable.

When Wonderland first went into operation only children over three years of age were admitted at government Nursery Schools. Although my initial certificate from the Social Welfare Department permits children of two years of age to be admitted to the school, this applied mainly to Creches. One does not have to be qualified to open a creche or play centre. However, due to mothers having to re-enter the workplace, coupled with the fact that most day-mothers were insisting that the two-year-old child be removed from their care, as they had outgrown the necessity for a cot, I recognised a niche in the market to accommodate the two-year-old child. After lengthy discussions with City Health officials, Wonderland, as far as I am aware, became the first Nursery School to admit children of

this age. This had wonderful repercussions. I designed a special programme for the two-year-old child and discovered that when they reached the three-year-old section, they were more cognitively advanced, more independent and emotionally secure than the three-year-old who had never attended Nursery School. I found the original program presented not much of a challenge for them. This resulted in all my programmes undergoing a major change! I have always written my own programmes and compiled my own workbooks for the different ages. Although I personally believe children should only be at school from three-years-old, I cannot deny the fact that children starting school at three have a lot to learn from those who have attended school from the age of two.

Derigistration and rejection

Rejection of my person and school came from some of the established government Nursery Schools in the 70's. I received anonymous calls from people who demanded that I remove the name 'Nursery School,' as I was not trained in the field. I was threatened, ridiculed, and berated, but this only forced me to work harder to excel. Exclusion from the Nursery School meetings caused me to feel that my school was not good enough, and nor was I. When the Inspectress visited the school and enquired why I was absent from the meetings and workshops, I related the story of the phone calls and the fact that I had never received an invitation to a single workshop. Furnishing me with the date, she requested that I attend the next meeting.

I entered the hall hesitantly that afternoon, not knowing a soul, and took a seat behind a group of ladies who turned to survey each new person as they entered. Just before the speaker picked up the microphone, one of the ladies turned around and asked 'Excuse me, dear, do you know which one is Mrs Grossi?' 'I am,' I replied. I wish I could have bottled the look on her face! The speaker, none other than my ex-lecturer, who was now the Inspectress, related her disappointment at how the principal of a new school was being treated. She recounted my achievements as a student under her tutelage, and thereafter as a teacher in the Foundation Phase under her inspection, and related how she personally endorsed my principalship to the Education Department. However, the damage had been done as far as I was concerned, and because of the attitude of certain members of the Nursery School Association, I declined the few ensuing invitations.

If a cat sits on a hot stove, that cat will never sit on a hot stove again.

(Maxwell, 1993: 82)

After that meeting I began to speak to myself once again, and kept repeating that my school and I were different; that I would not follow the 'norm' according to Nursery Schools, but would follow my instinct and continue to devise unique programmes, events and methods, creating a unique school. I would not allow others' perception of my deviance from the norm to cloud my happiness and fulfillment.

The most important conversations you hold in life are the ones you hold with yourself Your own inner dialogue is an important key to success.

(Holden, 2005:81)

Wonderland Nursery School had been in operation for seven years, was listed as a private Nursery School with the Education Department as well as Town Planning, the Health Department and Social Welfare, when the new Open-Plan approach was adopted by the Education Department. I had heard about this approach but did not feel comfortable with it. According to the few articles I had read, the new Open-Plan approach allowed children to choose what they wanted to do and when they wanted to do it, and ensured a lot of unnecessary paper work for the teacher in charge of certain areas. The name 'Nursery School' was also undergoing many changes - from Pre-School to Educare Centre, to Pre-Primary. Mickey and I went to Pietermaritzburg to view a 'converted' school in operation. A particular child I observed did not choose to do anything constructive - he did no handwork, jigsaw puzzles, or painting, but instead chose to play outside. My pre-schoolers had choices, but only after they had completed the task I had set for them - a task that was specifically geared for writing, reading or number readiness. When I approached the principal about this child's daily activity her reply was 'If that is what he chooses that is what he wants to do and, if he chooses to play on the jungle gym the whole week, so be it!' That horrified me - no wonder teachers were complimenting my children when they went to Grade I, and were, in fact, asking me to direct Wonderland pupils to their schools. They commented that the children from Wonderland were prepared for school, eager to learn and well balanced, had good fine-and gross-motor development, were disciplined, and knew about little, but important, things like waiting their turn. No wonder this wasn't happening to those subjected to their own choice - comments from school teachers about

these children included, 'The children don't want to do as they are told and do not know their place.' I have found that children cannot be left to their own devices. They need, and respond positively to, routine, guidance and some planned learning experiences.

However, I was forced to change my school to the Open-Plan system as demanded by the new Inspectress of Pre-Schools, which involved knocking down walls and dividing the school into different learning areas. This lasted exactly one month, after which I could not, and would not, carry on ignoring my inner voice. Because I acted on my convictions, I was de-registered from the Education Department, forbidden to use the name 'Pre-School,' and was now to be classed as 'Play Centre' or 'Creche.' How degrading, considering that Play Centres were just that - anyone could get a licence to watch children play! However, I was now free to follow my convictions, and felt relieved and much happier.

Those with self-confidence ... are better able to justify their decisions or actions, staying unfazed by opposition. Self-confidence gives the strength to make a tough decision or follow a course of action no one believes in despite opposition, disagreement, or even explicit disapproval from those in authority. People with self-confidence are decisive without being arrogant or defensive, and they stand by their decisions.

(Goleman, 1998:69)

I had previously been instructed by the new Inspectress to remove any printing on charts or cards (intended to encourage children to read) from the walls. Now that I was relegated to 'Play Centre,' I could display as many words and charts as I desired, without ever having to remove them for an official from the Education Department. I believe visual memory and recall is a pre-requisite for reading, thus words appear in many areas of my school. According to my way of thinking, the child who is ready may just connect the writing of the numeral 2 to the accompanying number of pictures. Bearing Piaget's theory of 'flight or fight' in mind (Bukatko & Daehler, 1995:49), one child may see and hear things which disturbs the equilibrium in his brain as he fights to assimilate and accommodate new knowledge into his existing schema. Once he has fought through it and it is assimilated in his brain, a state of equilibrium is reached until the next challenge. On the other hand, another child may look at and hear things which he chooses to 'flee' from - not even attempting

a fight to incorporate this knowledge into his existing schema. I am of the opinion that one can never say a child is too young to learn. I believe that incidental learning is very exciting to a child and encourages the construction of further knowledge.

Synthesis

Many things in life cannot be transmitted well by words, concepts, or books.

Colours that we see cannot be described to a man born blind;

only a swimmer knows how swimming feels;

the nonswimmer can get only the faintest idea of it

with all the words and books in the world.

The psychopath will never know happiness or love.

The youngster must wait until he is a parent in order to know parenthood fully

and to say 'I didn't realise.'

My toothache feels different than your toothache.

And so it goes.

Perhaps it is better to say that all of life must first be known experientially.

There is no substitute for experience, none at all.

Maslow (Clark, 2004:1)

Maslow's words, 'there is no substitute for experience, none at all' have been proved over and over again in my life, especially in the period 1965-1972, as there were many 'first times' for me.

I shall never forget my first day in a 'real' class that was 'really' mine, nor each child who made up that wonderful group. I still recall where they sat and, when I meet them today, I still remember who was an excellent artist, who battled with or excelled at maths, their birthday months and many other little facts, much to their amazement. My entrance into the field of business and entrepreneurship is one which I will always recall with joy. But the greatest of all my experiences during the years 1965 to 1972 came from motherhood. I felt fulfilled as a person, wanted, needed, and naturally had the best children in the world! During this period of my life I learned that change is essential for growth. Someone once said that although the world despises change, it is the only thing that has allowed progress (Maxwell, 1993:125). I realised that the art of teaching is never static and one will never

gain 'mastery' over it, as it is forever changing.

I also learned from first hand experience in this period to apply positive thinking to my life long before books on positive thinking were popular. I read uplifting articles on people who succeeded in life, and Edison, who refused to be discouraged or to accept negative comments in his life, was a great inspiration to me. I realised too that one could choose and cultivate a good attitude.

Maslow maintains that there are two types of esteem needs, the first being that which is as a result of competence or mastery of a task, the second being recognition status (Tutor2U, 2005:1). Krall reports that students become self-conscious about using too much time for their personal stories (Renner, 2001:1), and Ellis (2004:172) advises that the author of autoethnographic material is usually concerned that others will think her narcissistic. While penning this chapter I found this to be absolutely true, as my feelings and thoughts were exactly as Krall and Ellis predict.

*Feminist voices concerned with issues of power, reflexivity,
and the marginalization of voices in research challenged me
to seek alternative ways of representing my work
to avoid the hegemony that is inherent in more traditional texts,
to situate myself in the process, and portray what otherwise
might have been silenced stories.*

(Butler-Kisber, 2004:95)

*In the morning of my life I shall look to the sunshine
At a moment in my life when the world is new,
And the blessing I shall ask is that God will grant me,
To be brave and strong and true
And to fill the world with love
My whole life through.
And to fill the world with love
And to fill the world with love
And to fill the world with love
My whole life through.*

(Verse 1, Hymn - In the Morning of My Life)

(Frederick Douglass)



Photograph 38

Me with a group in 1976. I am privileged to have four of these children's children at Wonderland in 2005.

Jodi is on the far right of the last row

CHAPTER 3 - YEARS OF GROWING

1972 -1994

*Is that a little shoot I see?
Are the roots firmly planted like a tree?
Will it be damaged by pests or rot?
By its purposeful gait, methinks not.*

(Edwina, 2005)

Introduction

*Every individual is born into the world resembling a naked field.
And each person, after sowing seeds in his soil,
Needs to care for and nurture the growing crop.
If the ploughman fails in this task,
Though his seeds be good, he cannot expect a good harvest.
For the ploughman alone is responsible for his plot.
Will his hands be fruitful in directing the growth of his harvest,
Or will his land continue to lie unturned?
Each person is born into the world holding his destiny in his own hands.*

(Edwina, 2005)

Goleman (1996:35) states that those who have a high level of Emotional Quotient, are usually better able to master the 'ups and downs' of life than those with a high Intelligence Quotient but few life-skills. Bar-On, the Emotional Intelligence expert, confirms this, and posits that social and emotional skills are more valuable in life than intellectual ability (Dawda& Hart, 2000:1).

*Marshalling emotions in the service of a goal is essential for paying attention,
for self motivation and mastery, and for creativity.
Emotional self control underlies accomplishment of every sort.*

(Goleman, 1996:43)

In retrospect, even before concepts such as Emotional Quotient came to the fore, I realised that character is not simply something a child is born with, neither is it something that can

be simply taught. Rather, it is a slow, gradual process of development and growth motivated and influenced by the attitudes, principles, standards and values in the child's immediate and then gradually expanding environment and, most importantly, by the positive example of parents. An interesting paradox, states Goleman (1998:11), is that today as children increase their Intelligence Quotient, they decrease their Emotional Quotient. From past experience I have realised that often my behaviour in life is driven by my emotions not my intelligence, and have found that this inevitably results in the formation of an attitude. 'Attitude' is a word that fascinates me. I tend to break it up into syllables such as 'at it dude' or 'go for it dude,' which motivates me to attempt new challenges.

A hardened attitude is a dreaded disease.

It causes a closed mind and a dark future.

*When the attitude is positive and conducive to growth, the mind expands
and progress begins.*

(Maxwell, 1993:24)

Through the years I have realised that if one keeps a positive attitude at the beginning of each goal or task, this single factor has a greater effect on the outcome than anything else. Cordeiro (2001:5) confirms this, and states that surpassing any other factors, one's attitude will also determine the quality of one's relationships with others, the ability to turn a problem into a blessing, and whether one becomes a victim of defeat or a student of success. In 1994 I was invited to be guest speaker at a motivational seminar for school counsellors. One particular statement I uttered earned the greatest applause 'When one feels defeated and depressed it causes one to look down at 'de feet' (the feet) instead of looking up to see 'de way out.' I have perceived that if one's thinking is negative, one's perspective will be too. A good example is Viktor Frankl who survived five years in Auschwitz, a Nazi concentration camp. He emphatically believes that his survival was a result of the way he chose to view whatever happened to him. Frankl states that the enemy could do whatever they wanted to his body, but could never touch his attitude (Lipkin, 1998:29).

*In the Auschwitz Concentration Camp, I discovered the ultimate human freedom,
the ability to choose your attitude irrespective of circumstances.*

(Lipkin, 1998:2)

It seems like every time I write about my past self

I discover something new.

(Ellis, 2004:181)

Apartheid era

I was born and socialised into the era of apartheid in South Africa. Apartheid was an aggressive system that resulted in people of colour being classed as inferior to Whites, and ended the domination of the English over the Afrikaners. The Population Registration Act of 1950 labelled all people according to race, and the Group Areas Act of 1950 was the beginning of residential apartheid (Mandela, 1994:130). In 1953 the Bantu Education Act was passed. According to Mandela (1994:195), Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd meant that 'Africans did not and would not have any opportunities; therefore, why educate them?' Africans were segregated and forbidden to board the same coaches as whites in trains or buses (Mandela, 1994:105). Blacks were forced to carry identity documents or a 'pass' should they work in a White area. This excluded their spouses and children from the area. Interracial marriages were prohibited. As a child I recall travelling on buses which had only the back row reserved for non-whites, encountering street and park benches labelled 'Whites only,' beaches with clear signs of 'Whites only,' and post offices and banks indicating separate entrances for Whites and people of colour. Mandela (1994:85) says 'Blacks were given the crumbs from the table, and had no option but to accept them.'

*Human beings often resent being rubricized or classified,
which can be seen by them as a denial of their individuality.*

(Maslow, 1968:145)

Having been brought up in this regime one never questioned the practice as a child. However, as I matured the injustice of the system became more evident.

An incident that still causes me to burn with hurt and shame occurred when I was thirteen years old - a time when a child is easily embarrassed. My mother had always emphasised the fact that children were to offer the elderly their seat on the bus or at the bus stop. One day, while seated on a crowded bench at a bus stop in town, I noticed an old African woman standing waiting for the bus. As I rose to offer her my seat my mother hastily pulled me

down, whispering 'Skittie' (Lebanese for "don't do it"). 'This bench is for Whites only.' I was just obeying my mother's incessant teachings about manners and consideration! Why did this not apply to all old people? Shamefully I glanced back at the old woman, who stared back at me with tired, expressionless eyes, although the smirk at the corner of her mouth seemed to say 'Have you only now registered that I am black?' I remember taking Michael to Mitchell Park playground one Sunday afternoon, fourteen years later. Crying and hanging onto the fence were two little children of colour who were perplexed as to why they were forbidden to play on the equipment. Their exasperated, highly embarrassed parents attempted to explain, but how could they? I never returned to that playground. I could not bear the shame! How could little children comprehend the apartheid system of our country? And how could I have just accepted the regime? Were these incidences so embedded in my mind that they were to play a significant part in changes at my school many years later?

*Allowing research to become more personal
is complex and there's no special formula.*

(Ellis, 2004:136)

According to my father, my paternal grandparents' surname was really A'al and my maternal grandfather's name was Kahlil E'blen. When they arrived in South Africa, en route to America, the first introduction to the country in the late 1800's was having their surnames changed to Akal and Kaplen respectively. Surely people's surnames are part of their fibre, their very being, their identity? In the same vein Africans were compelled to adopt an English and an African name (Mandela, 1994:16). Reflecting upon this intrusion into their lives, I feel disturbed. The Lebanese immigrants were also made to feel inferior as were some other cultures. Accone (2005:1) relates his Chinese family's experiences of '... a terrible limbo of marginalization, selective inclusion and absolute exclusion' in South Africa at this time, and Govinden (2006b:3) contrasts the expectations the Chinese people harboured of the new life they were to enjoy in South Africa, with their actual degrading experiences. I quote from my father's memoirs published in *The Cedar Leaf*(200\):2), a Lebanese South African periodical, regarding discrimination (Appendix 2).

*The early days in Durban were not easy for the Lebanese and the Jews.
The English speaking community were in the ascendancy and foreigners
were looked down upon. I could not say that we were downtrodden,*

but we were made to feel inferior and were taught to be condescending.

In the 1930's Durban North Estates auctioned some land.

My brother, Alec, put in a bid and acquired some land.

Six prime spots to be exact. There was controversy at the time.

Jews were not allowed to purchase land in Durban North.

When we, a Lebanese family, bought this land,

we were not allowed to develop. We were forced to sell.

I don't think this could happen today.

Ernest Akal (The Cedar Leaf, 2001:3)

Another incident apartheid left in its wake affected my husband's grandparents, who owned a general dealer's shop in Red Hill, Durban. When the Nationalist government decided on the Group Areas Act, they were forced to sell their business and home at a great loss, as this area was allocated to the Coloured population. When one speaks of Apartheid in South Africa one automatically assumes White versus Black. However, as is apparent from my father's memoirs and the experience of Mickey's paternal grandparents, apartheid affected all races. Could this account for the reason why in 2004 I took great umbrage at a student's constant referral to 'what the 'Whities' did to the Blacks' in a particular lecture at University? However, although South Africa has always been associated with apartheid, I find it emotionally disturbing that racial discrimination is a practice that happens worldwide.

Education is the great engine of personal development.

It is through education that the daughter of a peasant

can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker

can become the head of the mine,

that the child of farmworkers

can become the president

of a great nation.

(Mandela, 1994:194)

Apartheid had a detrimental effect on equal education for all South Africans. White people received the greatest share of allotted government funding, including free schooling, books and stationery, and some were even supplied with food. African pupils, on the other hand, had to bear the cost of books and stationery, and were allocated only a few government schools, which provided an inferior education (Naicker, 1999:75). During the apartheid

era my registration certificate for the Nursery School from the various departments concerned displayed the same words written on benches and beaches, 'Whites.' I railed against this injustice. Realising the consequences of not receiving a basic education, and motivated by my overwhelming love for all children, I started accepting children of all racial groups, in defiance of the law. The first children were my friend's domestic worker's two grandchildren (Appendix 7).

hereby i>uc a cettitlcatc of registration to (he management/owncrC*) otitic said place of care to receive the number and typ<:(s) of child(rcn) specified hereunder:

- (1) Rsee.....*!>ite.....
- (2) Sex.....Boys and girls..... ..

Photograph 39
Section of registration certificate

It was not the lack of ability that limited my people, but lack of opportunity.

(Mandela, 1994:42)

When the Health Department representative arrived for inspection, it was customary for my secretary to usher the children of colour out the back door, engaging them in a walk in the lane until the inspection was over. One morning when the Department official arrived, I was determined to cease this hypocritical practice, and as she stood on the step at the entrance to my office, I looked her straight in the eye and briskly but firmly announced, 'I have been enrolling non-white children for some time as to me children are children. Were you to threaten to report me, resulting in the possible closure of my business, I will remove them from your view immediately.' She initially appeared a bit flustered, but maintained eye contact until she regained her composure, and replied, 'Mrs Grossi, I will only see children.'

I felt the sense of power that comes from having right and justice on one s side.

(Mandela, 1994:54)

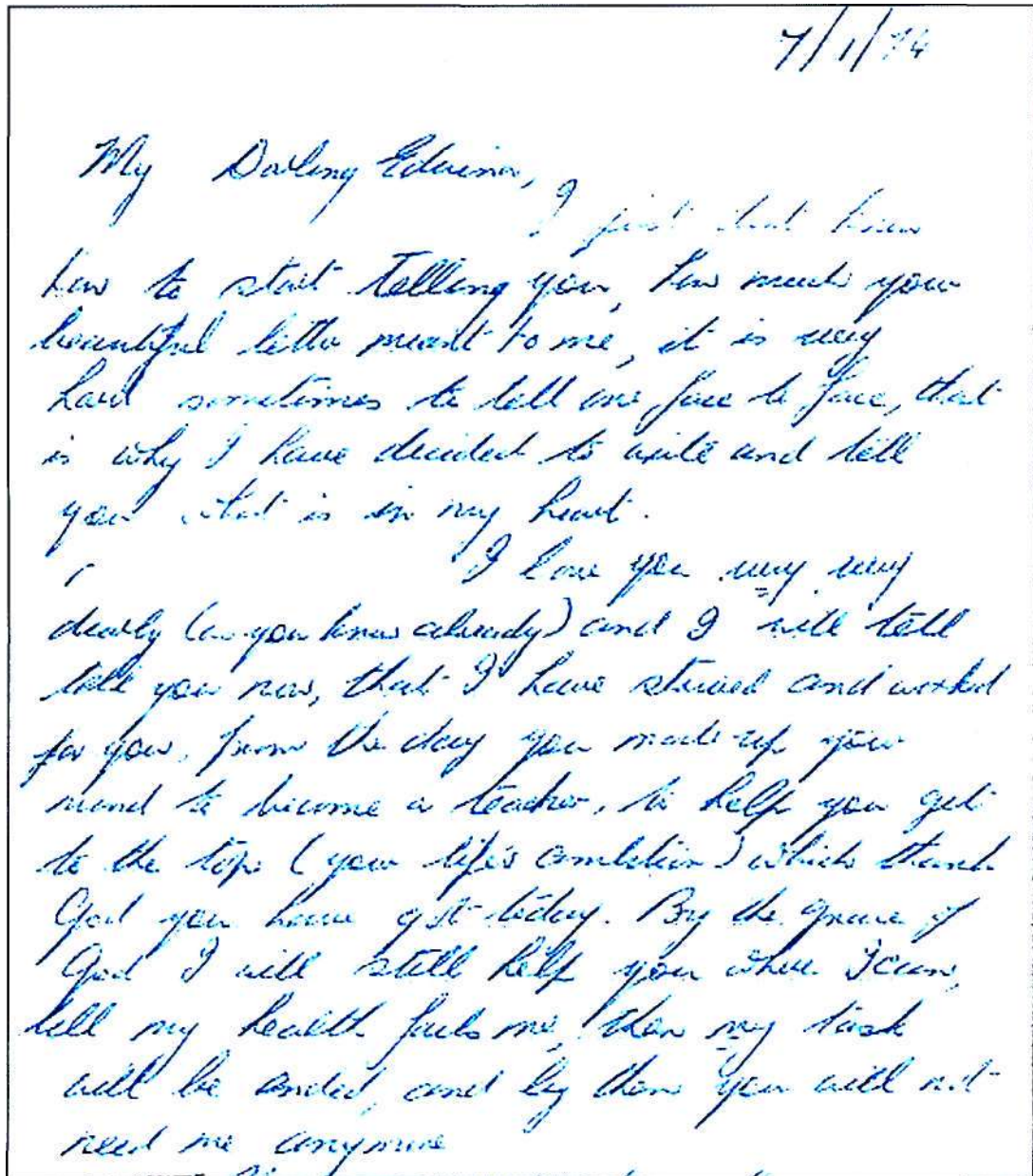
I never hid my precious dark jewels again. However, one thing I noticed was that the relegation of specific roles according to race was quite evident during fantasy play in the dolls' corner. The children of colour were always allocated the role of nanny, cook or cleaner by the white children in the early stages of the 'inclusion.'

Down memory lane

It takes soul to create an unfolding drama with developed characters that pull readers into the experience and make them care about what happens.

(Ellis, 2004:99)

My mother was so proud of me - she almost gave others the impression that I was the Director of Education! She thought I had reached the pinnacle of my life's ambition when I founded the Nursery School.



Photograph 40

Section of a letter written to me by my mother in 1974

Many memorable experiences concerning pupils occurred throughout the years 1972 -1994.

These experiences were worth their weight in gold for the knowledge they imparted and for the fond memories they evoke.

Natasha

Natasha had a healthy appetite but suddenly started crying whenever she caught sight of the mid-morning sandwiches or lunch. After a lengthy discussion with her mother, who was equally puzzled and distressed as this was also occurring at home, I accompanied Natasha to the beach where we played, ate ice cream and chatted. During the conversation the child confided, 'My Mommy has only two monies in her purse. When the monies are finished we won't have any more food.' Previously this poor little soul had requested a toy from her mother whilst shopping. Her mother replied that she was short of money, offering the contents of her purse as proof. Later that evening the child overheard her mother complaining to her ex-husband on the phone that she hardly had sufficient money to feed herself and the child. The child, oblivious to the fact that her mother received a monthly salary and maintenance, imagined that the 'two monies' had to last them their lifetime! Once explained and understood, Natasha began to eat with relish again. From this experience I learned the power of words and the imagination, especially with regard to children. When words are misconstrued, they have the power to affect the emotions. I am often criticised for explaining the minutist details and for my simplicity of speech and writing, and my promoter constantly remonstrates with me for quoting directly from literature. Could this be as a result of the experience with Natasha?

*Everyday above ground is an opportunity to have an adventure,
to experience a moment of wonder, to inspire another human being,
to learn something new and be the person your creator meant you to be.*

(Lipkin, 1998:7)

Dean

Dean had been so traumatised by a bad experience at a previous school that it resulted in his mother accompanying him to school daily for three months until he overcame his fear. On his first day at his previous school Dean had been placed in a 'crying' room and the door had been shut. This despicable act occurred daily for a week before his mother, against the principal's advice, removed him from the school. Only then did she realise the damage caused as Dean, a previously confident and outgoing little boy, became clingy and insecure and began to wet his bed. I do not believe in ever closing a door on a child as this may instil fear, but I do believe people guilty of such a heinous act should be imprisoned for the damage caused to a child's emotions. I initially felt so helpless as I endeavoured to reassure this mistrustful little boy of my genuine love and concern for his wellbeing, but time and patience assisted in the rebuilding of Dean's trust in other adults.

Simon

Simon was new to the school and appeared to have serious behavioural problems, so I contacted his previous principal. 'Don't fret,' was her reply to my concern, 'When he gets in that mood I usually put him under an ice-cold shower. That sorts him out!' Throughout the years I have discovered that some children regress emotionally should there be an upheaval in life, for example a move to a new house, a new school or a new sibling, which can manifest in bed wetting, stammering or reversion to childish behaviour. However, this was not the case in these two instances. From the above two experiences I learned of the damage that can be caused by unqualified or unsuitable caregivers or teachers. This was a nodal point in my life which was to send forth a shoot many years later.

Gerald

Gerald was a delightful little boy who refused to utter a word at school, and spoke only when necessary at home. His exasperated mother engaged the services of a speech therapist to no avail. How relieved and excited I felt after spending one afternoon alone with him in his bedroom playing with his toys, when he eventually 'opened up' to someone other than his immediate family! It is at such times that one

realises the priceless joy of teaching. How the tears flowed when Gerald sang a solo in our concert at the end of the year and how proud we were when he was the first child chosen in Grade 1 at his primary school to read at assembly. From this incident I learned that time invested in a child's life will always bear sweet-tasting fruit.

Michelle

Michelle was a bright little girl whom I suspected was not hearing accurately. As her parents did not belong to a medical aid, she was taken to a Government Hospital where her hearing was diagnosed as normal. I vehemently disagreed and accompanied her to a private Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist who advocated an immediate operation. Today, in her profession, Michelle helps many children who are in danger of losing their hearing.

However there are not only exhilarating times at Pre-school. Over the years I have discovered children's partial blindness and two children whose parents were completely unaware that they were profoundly deaf. One set of parents was quite indignant, stating that the child responded to them and made sounds! I was to meet up with one of these beautiful children many years later.

Bella

Bella, a former Wonderland pupil, was in grade 4 when her father and I met unexpectedly one evening. Upon enquiring as to Bella's wellbeing, he reported she was having fainting spells, which five doctors had attributed to 'growing pains.' However, I felt uneasy, and insisted he take the child to a specialist and personally made the appointment. The parents, upon my insistence after they cancelled the initial appointment, begrudgingly took Bella to the specialist. One lung had to be removed and the other had an abscess on it. Bella's life hung in the balance for the three months she was in Intensive Care, and her case has been cited in Medical Journals.

Taryn

I have been privileged to teach Taryn's father, his three children and two nieces, who incidentally, today both lecture at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. At the age of three the ballet teacher and I noticed Taryn's remarkable poise, grace and co-ordination in the ballet lessons. She was the only child I have ever singled out to dance a solo at the end of year concert. Today Taryn dances worldwide, having recently performed for the Queen of England and Prince Phillip.



Photograph 41

Taryn and I as the ballet teacher's wedding attendants in 1986. Taryn is on the right

It all began at Wonderland Nursery School. ...

At the age of 1 year old I put on my first pair of ballet shoes and began Seaming my first steps which gradually through many years of hard work led me to be one of the best dancers in South Africa.

Wonderland opened my door to the world of dance and watered the seed of passion I had for this art form. The end of the year concerts that Wonderland held stalled this journey I am now traveling as a dancer.

After finishing at Wonderland Nursery School I had decided to commit myself to dance my dream: "To be the best dancer that can be!"

I attended dance classes and did examinations throughout my schooling. Thanks to my very supportive and proud parents I was able to achieve great awards and results in my past years as a dancer. I trained in RAD Ballet, IDTA Modern, and some acrobatic; too to all my examinations I received the highest marks one can achieve.

Every year I entered The SASAD Dance competition and at the age of 15 was the first dancer in the history of that competition to have won all categories in Ballet, Modern, and acrobatic, receiving 15 trophies and the award for the best dancer overall in each Dance Style. At the age of 16 I was awarded the Most Artistic Dancer of the year from Professor Sneddon and that same year won The Cape Town Trophy Championships, which I received two weeks of tuition in New York at the Alvin Ailey Dance School.

After matriculation I decided to make dancing my profession. I headed off to Johannesburg to the State Theatre Ballet (now known as the South African Ballet), where I was a graduate. After their financial instability they closed down. I realized that the only way I was going to further my career was to leave South Africa, so I left to dance in Cleveland, Ohio. I danced with a new Contemporary Dance Company, Cleveland Contemporary Dance Theatre for half a year. I then was offered a full scholarship to The Dance Theater of Harlem's Professional training program and soon after I was offered a contract with their second company. I lived in New York for nearly two years and then decided to return to South Africa to share my dancing experiences with younger dancers here.

Now at the age of 23 I am dancing as a lead role in the musical African Footprints. We have been touring around Germany, Holland, Austria, Italy and recently London, where we were invited to perform at a Royal Function for the Duke of Edinburgh at The St James's Palace. I was privileged to shake hands with the Duke of Edinburgh, what an experience! My dream has only just begun and one day I will return to South Africa to create a world of dance. I wish to share my experiences and knowledge for the benefit of all.

Photograph 42

Letter from Taryn received May 2005

Photograph 43

Taryn, 2005



Ryan

Ryan was a young man who determined exactly what he required of life from a very early age. The Nursery School had its full quota of pupils, boasted a long waiting list, and he was too young, when Ryan's mother applied for his enrolment in 1977. After the interview, Ryan refused to leave the school he threw himself down, banged the floor with his plump little fists as he shouted 'kool, kool, my kool.' I loved his fighting spirit and allowed him to remain at the school until the end of that day. The following morning saw Elaine accompanying her eldest son to school with Ryan in tow, fiercely and proudly clutching his suitcase as he marched down the driveway to his 'kool.' I was powerless to resist! I recall placing him on my desk so that we could be eye to eye as I chatted to him. I can still hear his squeals of laughter as I kissed his chubby cheeks, legs and arms.



Photograph 44

Ryan the reindeer (on the left) at the annual school concert in 1978

In 2003 I was delighted to receive two visitors at the school - Ryan and his pregnant wife. In 2004 Ryan and I embarked on the journey towards postgraduate studies together, and in 2005 he became the first appointed teacher at Embury High, the school I founded in 1998.



Photograph 45

Ryan (in the centre) and I with Embury College under 10 rugby team, 2005

As I grow older, I pay less attention to what men say.

I just watch what they do.

(Honor Books, 1994b:74)

How different times were in the 70's! I recall hiring a bus each December and taking the whole school to Albert Park where the department store, Greenacres, put on a wonderful display. Father Christmas would arrive with his reindeer and a sleigh full of refreshments for the children. This was only one of our many exciting outings and the children were always well behaved, so excited and grateful. However, sadly, things are a little different today. Are our children used to getting too much in this age of technology?



15 »x ~r\$
VHE 80 pupil* of Wonderland Nur-
sery School, Durban, entertained
fheir families and friends for Ithree
hour* on Saturday afternoon with
some 60 song-atKcedance routines,
rhetr materlarranged from the hits
U In) Tomb) to Oirttima* carols

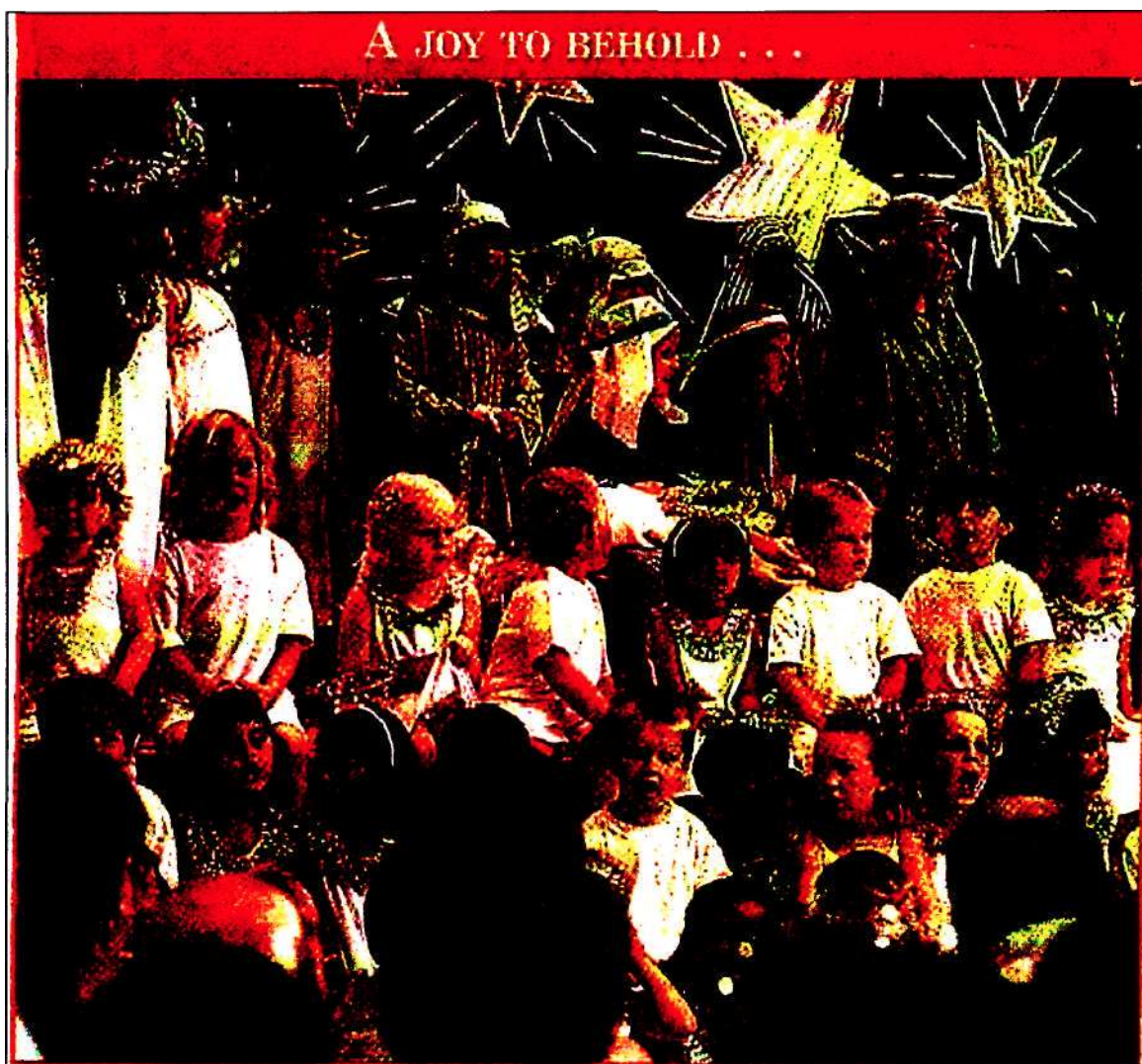
and a selection of Spanish songs.
Here Kelly Redman and Earl BUM
Ibeth ilx) do the cha-cha to A
Utile Spanish Town. An exhatntnt
programme? "At the end, they
wanted togbonanddo » all «»in, I
laughed Mrs; E. Grossy. headnto
tress and areanlser 4t ihj 'Tllhfff.

The annual school concert usually lasts two-and-a-half hours and had most parents, before the days of booking seats, seated up to four hours before the commencement. How I labour for these productions! Each scene is framed with an appropriate background and stage props and the children's costumes are bold, colourful and imaginative. I recall Miss Eliza Doolittle in our production of *My Fair Lady* - the opening scene found her a shabby flower seller, while in the final scene her lacy dress, matching hat, gloves and umbrella elicited gasps from the audience. In the production, *Hello Dolly*, the elegance of the children's costumes and their acting and singing ability drew so many compliments.

Photograph 46 Picture in the Daily News, 1975

A Tribute to Elvis called for such a diverse range of costumes from sequined outfits to those for inmates in the Jailhouse Rock scene. *Music through the Ages* included songs from the 40's in the 'World War 2' scene, and the scene, 'The Roaring Twenties,' saw

the children dressed in the most exquisite Gatsby-style gear. How the audience clapped, shouted and jumped to their feet as some children danced the Charleston, while others swung their long strings of pearls. The most recent show, *Proudly South African*, brought the audience to their feet as they participated in 'Mama Tembu's Wedding.' In producing these shows I came to realise how malleable young children are. Did I initially produce the shows to satisfy my love for the arts, which was not yet apparent? Reflecting on the possible ulterior motive behind the shows, I realised it was the joy and satisfaction received from providing pleasure to others via the arts, and the resultant escalation of self-esteem in my pupils. Why do children lose their confidence to perform for an audience as they mature? Is society guilty of causing this loss of self-esteem?



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Photograph 47
 Picture in the Daily News, 2003

A special gift

The terms confessionals or ethnographic memoirs are rooted historically in the personal diaries and journals.

(Ellis, 2004:50)

Four years after my daughter, Jodi, was born, against my doctor's advice but without having received a thorough explanation of the dangers I faced, I conceived another child. In the early seventies most pregnant women consulted their general practitioners who delivered their babies. Had I been wiser, I would have consulted a gynaecologist regarding my toxæmic state in pregnancy. It was a difficult pregnancy and I had to stay in bed for many weeks after two scares at the critical stages of three and seven months. I was so desperate to give birth to this baby that I obeyed every order and recall lying stiff and still, so as not to disrupt anything. I was one of the first people to have a scan at one of the large government hospitals when this machine was introduced in South Africa. It revealed that a portion of the placenta had dislodged. A child is the most precious gift to his/her parents. Would that teachers be always aware of this fact. Many parents endure great hardship to bring a child into the world. Before Richard was born, en route from the bathroom, I felt what I believed to be 'the baby,' but instead retrieved a portion of the placenta! Mickey and I were alone in the hospital room and, although very frightened, I repeatedly reassured myself that I would produce a normal child. I kept reminding myself of that belief to help me stay calm. When Mickey finally managed to alert a nurse, it was panic stations ahead! Thank God Richard, a most beautiful child, was safely delivered and completed my family. Twenty-six years later, whilst in theatre, a urologist discovered I was born with one deformed kidney, which had contributed to my toxæmic condition. Why, though, did I not suffer migraines while pregnant? Surely toxæmia should have exacerbated this condition? Why did I not heed the doctor's advice? Was I acting impetuously in trying to fulfill my desire to have many children of my own?

Ode to my son, Richard

*Against all odds you were given to me
Such a joy I never expected to be
My heart is so filled with love
For you - my special gift from God above.
Your kind and caring ways you so subtly try to hide
Fill me always with such gratitude and pride.
Your beautiful 'half smile' will stay
In my memory forever and a day.
I look at you and feel so proud -
Your unique qualities speak so loud.
Richard, you 're a giving soul in such a humble way
My son, I thank God for you every single day.*

(Edwina, 1999)



Photograph 48
Richard aged two

Photograph 49
Richard, 2005



First experience in a different field

*Part of doing an autoethnography is to include
as much of the experience as possible.*

(Ellis, 2004:128)

Mickey established a bookkeeping practice at home in the 70's and a clothing factory servicing its own two shops formed part of his client base. When the owner decided to sell, Mickey and I debated long and hard whether to purchase this business and, although aware of a 'niggly' sensation inside - as I did not possess any background knowledge of clothing design, the fabric or retail business - I chose to ignore my doubts. Mickey needed someone to assist him and that someone was me! Leaving the Nursery School in the capable hands of one of my staff members, I began my career in the fashion industry in 1982. From the onset I realised I was a foreigner in this world - a world, in my eyes, of falsity, conceit, self-awareness and selfishness. By comparison, children are so open, honest, unopinionated and totally unaware of, and unconcerned about, bodily or facial flaws. Children love unconditionally and are sincere in their speech and actions. I was completely out of my depth in this milieu. I felt defeated, deflated, confused and trapped, as if I were drowning in a turbulent sea. This proved to be one of the most trying times of my life. I could not be myself or express my opinion as this might upset the designers, pattern makers or fabric sales people. Once again, as in my youth, I had to stifle my opinions and emotions. How I resented those overseas buying trips with the designers! I was frustrated that the majority of the fabric houses worldwide, which met annually at the Interstoff Fair in Frankfurt, refused to supply South Africa because of the sanctions imposed due to the apartheid system. The United Nations General Assembly in November 6, 1962, passed Resolution 1761, condemning South Africa's Apartheid policy. After the World Conference Against Racism in 1983, a disinvestment movement was started and investors refused to do business with South Africa (Mandela, 1994:389). However, after a couple of months in the industry I seemed to acquire something of a flair for design and began to understand the style of garments that would be the most lucrative. This irked the designers but pleased Mickey as revenue was his main concern. One day, true to my 'bold creature' label, sensing a certain fashion statement in a particular style of blouse, which I named the 'Princess Di,' I overruled the designers and ordered 120 units of this particular style to be cut in one colour only, that is white, in one fabric only, a fabric named '606,' a

This won me the trust and co-operation of the entire factory. Throughout the past two years I had sensed their disdain at having a schoolteacher as supervisor and 'boss's wife.' For the first time the cutter actually smiled at me; for the first time the sample machinists began to heed my advice; for the first time the designers willingly accepted my suggestions regarding saleable garments and the amendment of certain styles. Maybe all the years I was forced to page through 'pattern books' at the departmental shops with my mother had contributed to my appreciation of design? Maybe the observation of my grandmother's prowess at designing and making children's clothes for departmental shops played a role? I was also surreptitiously offered a job as saleswoman by a rival company, which did not realise I was the boss's wife! A woman approached me with a wink of the eye and a sideways nod of the head, indicating I was to go to her, and whispered that she had observed my prowess as saleswoman for Indigo (at times I also had to play this role) and was of the opinion that I would be an asset to her company. 'Name your salary,' she said. On another occasion a customer highly commended me to the 'boss' (Mickey) saying she trusted he paid me a good salary for the excellent service I delivered. However, this success in a world to which I did not belong, brought little satisfaction. Although I had learned a great deal about the fashion world, this was not my environment. Mickey argued that he needed me in the business and hinted that it was time I experienced another field. 'You've had so many years with children,' he said over and over again. I became depressed and withdrawn. I could not understand my metamorphosis. Eventually I discovered the truth of the following statement -

*There is no such thing as a hopeless situation,
only people who become hopeless
about the situation.*

(Lipkin, 1998:15)

Consulting a doctor regarding my 'illness,' the truth I had stifled came bursting forth. 'I feel ill inside - the pain is so deep - I need to be around children - I miss the children - I need to use my God-given talent,' I said. I can still picture the expression on Mickey's face as I informed him of my decision to return to the Nursery School but ensuring him of my continuous supervision at the sample fittings two afternoons a week. I did not enjoy the silence that ensued between us, but felt as if a heavy burden had been lifted from my shoulders. After my first day back at school, I felt I had shed a tight-fitting skin and emerged

as an exhilarated butterfly. This experience proved that if one is in the correct profession, that is one that gives satisfaction, fulfills a calling and caters for a God-given talent, one will be fulfilled. The job I undertook in the clothing industry altered my whole personality and mindset! Why did I endure this two-year interlude in my teaching career? What was it in preparation for? What was I to learn from the experience?

Experience with weight gain and loss

In the two years at the clothing factory I discovered the work was well suited to weight gain! Being so occupied between the school and the factory, little thought went into the daily preparation of meals. Breakfast and lunch were usually ordered from the restaurant below the factory. Upon reflection I realise this was the origin of 'comfort eating' to drown my sorrows and compensate for the trauma of finding myself in an alien world. Having access to whichever garments I desired also played a significant role, as the sample machinists would make any garment to fit me in the fabric and colour of my choice. This led to my ever-weight-conscious mother's suggestion that I undergo 'magical' treatment at the hands of a doctor specialising in weight loss. Despite my aversion to needles, I endured a series of bi-weekly injections and the daily absorption of a cocktail of medication, including pills to stimulate the thyroid, pills to eliminate the appetite and pills to induce nocturnal sleep. Added to the programme was a compulsory daily half-hour walk, which I duly undertook at 05:00 each morning. Within a few weeks I once again wore a size 34. However, the horrifying consequence at the end of the treatment was that the original weight loss returned with interest! I embarked on a further series of 'quick-fix' weight loss treatments, with even less success.

The 'Mystic' experience

Sense making and identity often are entangled with religious and spiritual beliefs.

(Ellis, 2004:98)

Whilst I realise that we all have our individual philosophies and beliefs, and would never presume to attempt to impose my own faith on the reader, I have included the following section concerning my spiritual 'awakening' because it has become an integral component of all the work I do. The love that I receive from my Maker, is the love that I am able

to share with all the children I work with. I was brought up in a religious system which embraced the following practices. Later I began to question, and ask WHY?

Communion
 At the age of six, I celebrated my first Mass. I was told it was the body of Christ that was receiving the most

Mortal sin There are certain degrees of sin, the worst being mortal sin. Should one not attend Mass on a Sunday, this would be classed as mortal sin and, if one died with mortal sin on the soul, one would definitely not be destined for heaven.

The Only One to read the Mass
 Only the priest is allowed to read the Mass. I interpret the scene as

Confession As a child I found myself in order to confess the following day. What is sin? I recall the error of my ways in confession and did not enjoy the dark circle we were in, although I was told from him by a thin priest that penance was required for my sins, consisting of a number of certain prayers which were to be said.

Indulgent An indulgence is a remission of the temporal punishment due to sins after death. We were told that after death, the soul retreats upon a purgatory where it is purified before ascending to heaven. Sufficient masses are said to release the soul.

The altar and the Eucharist
 The altar is where the Eucharist is celebrated. It is a table covered with a white cloth. The priest stands behind the altar and says the words of consecration. The bread and wine are then transformed into the body and blood of Christ.

Steps to heaven for a baby At school we were given a card about 30cm long and 20cm wide on which were steps 'leading to heaven.' At the base of the steps, facing heaven, stood a small child made of cardboard. The child would be able to ascend a step for every ticky (2 cents) given and, if my memory serves me correctly, there were about ten steps. I only received a ticky pocket money every Friday, but every Monday I ensured 'my' child would be a step closer to heaven!

The only time I remember questioning my faith was at the age of nineteen when one morning I entered the church attached to the school I taught at, to pray. I recall sitting on the bench - not kneeling as was customary - and staring at the altar upon which burned a red light which depicted the Lord's presence in the Tabernacle. I recall quietly asking 'Lord, are You really in there?' This was the last time I was to stop at the church before school. Many years later my sister-in-law related an experience which changed her life. She informed me that she had been 'born again.' I thought she had 'flipped' and inwardly sympathised with my brother. One afternoon she invited me to tea where five other 'born again' women were listening to a tape by Pat Boone. It left me stone cold, and critical of the emotions expressed by the group as they listened in awe to his testimony. However, I

then realised that the only thing that moved me to tears was a child's illness or misfortune. I remember questioning why a supposedly good God would allow children to have terminal illnesses? How can a good God explain a child being run over by a car? Even after the saddest movie, where every woman would exit with red, swollen eyes, I would be the only one smiling happily, chatting away, declaring it to 'be merely a story!' I must have really hardened my heart with layers of barriers because even when I was moved to tears, very few teardrops fell. Why couldn't, or wouldn't, I cry like most other women?

Interlude: Mickey I'm missing the X factor! (1978-1979)

'Edwina, what's wrong with you?' Mickey asked. 'Mick, there's an emptiness or a hollowness deep inside me, like a deep longing for something,' I answered. 'How can you say that?' Mickey replied in astonishment. 'Look around you and see how fortunate you are, compared with others.' 'You don't understand,' I replied, 'There is something missing in my life, and it's not material things.' 'Well, what more can you want? You have everything your own home, your own car, your own business,' he said in a gentle way. 'I don't know what this longing is deep inside me - it's like the X factor is missing ... don't worry, I'll be okay!' I said. 'Yes, you say that now but in a couple of weeks time you will tell me again that your life is not complete! I can't understand it, what more do you want?' he said shaking his head as he left the room. Maybe, I thought, I lack excitement in my life? Should I plan a weekend away? Should I sell this house and look for another? Should I sell everything to live on a farm and open a farm school? Such thoughts raced through my head as I searched for the elusive X factor.

On 17 January, 1979, my sister-in-law invited me to a charismatic Christian meeting. I went grudgingly. During the service the preacher invited those who wished to dedicate their life to the Lord, to come forward. Did I perceive a stirring in my heart? I held tightly to the back of the seat before me. There was no way I was going forward. What happened next never fails to affect me emotionally, as I recall this special moment in my life. I felt a hand pushing me gently forward. I looked behind, but saw no one! Shrugging my shoulders I tightened my grip on the bench in front. However, I was powerless to resist the gentle pressure of the hand, and found myself walking forward, along with around 30 others. Ministers stood waiting to pray for those who had come forward. Reason took over my mind for a split second as I thought, 'This is madness!' I prayed, 'God if there truly is a God, and this is for real, then please prove Yourself to me and send the preacher himself to pray for me first.' This would be a true test, I argued, as the man was not among those praying for others, and I was positioned in the middle of the long line. Then the preacher turned, descended the steps and came to a halt in front of another person. 'Yes,' I thought, 'I have been conned!' However, he stopped, inclined his head to the left and looked straight at me. He walked towards me with a puzzled look, as if listening to an inner voice, and prayed for me, the first person he was to lay hands on that night. Words

cannot describe my feelings. I did not experience tingling or shaking, but instead a deep knowledge that my life was to change, that the void was being filled. I stood, numb, as hot tears began to prickle my eyes and run down my cheeks. I had not cried like this since my experience in Grade 2. But these tears were different. These were not tears of fear but tears almost cathartic in nature. I felt weak, yet strong, frail, yet healthy, bursting with joy tempered by calm. As I relayed my experience to my husband, I had no doubt that I had experienced a significant turning point in my life. His sceptical words about 'not bringing funny things into the home' had little effect on me. The next day, as I stepped outside, I felt that scales were dropping from my eyes, and I noticed for the first time the beautiful colours of nature, and the spectacular composition of flowers. Nature came alive for me for the first time in 33 years. I felt clean and 'washed' on the inside. A joy never before experienced filled my being as I became aware of my love for all humanity. It did, indeed, feel like a re-birth. I had found the X factor.

*I have myself had the mystic experience ...
[in which I experienced something]
so intense that it left me almost weeping.*

(Maslow, 1968: xix)

I felt I could no longer attend my previous church. My life had altered. As I began to attend the first non-denominational church in Durban, I experienced life in a different dimension. I cared not that as I sang in church, tears would flow freely down my face. Before Mickey was 'born again,' seven months later, he requested that I refrain from listening to tapes or reading the Bible in the home, so I would set my alarm - sometimes for 03:00 in the morning - in order to read the scriptures while my family slept. I had so much to learn! Both our parents were devastated when we resigned from the church we had been brought up in, as they perceived this as a denial of faith and of God Himself. I clearly recall the Saturday afternoon I apprehensively informed my parents of my decision, knowing my father's stance.

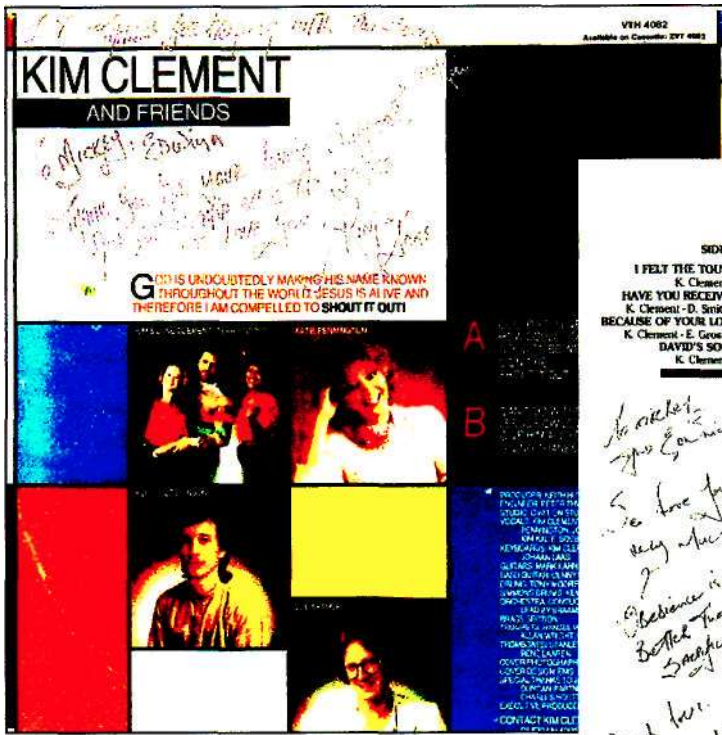
Edwina: *Dad, I've started to read the Bible. I read that one day we each have to face the Lord to give an account of our lives, and the words I most want to hear from Him are 'Well done thou good and faithful servant,' I said nervously.*

My Father: *Me too, he replied, looking quite startled at my unusual topic of conversation.*

- Edwina:** *Dad, I have, for the first time in my life, come to know what a relationship with God truly means,* I offered.
- My Father:** *How wonderful, darling!* he said, as he smiled proudly at me.
- Edwina:** *Dad, I have been born again and have been attending an inter-denominational church where there are no rules, regulations or ceremonies, but where only the word of God is preached.*
- My Father:** *You what?* A long silence ensued as he appeared to ponder on his reply. *Well, you have had this experience, now go to confession and come back to the church and to the Lord.*
- Edwina:** *Dad, you don't understand, I'm not coming back to your church -I can't. I question too much, I have learned too much,* I replied in a gentle tone. *I never left the Lord. The church is not God,* I said.
- My Father:** *As the Jewish people tear their garments when they mourn for the dead, so I tear my sleeve as today I have lost my daughter. To me you are dead, now please go,* my beloved father said as he dismissed me.

Noting the colour drain from my father's face and being aware of an intense inner pain, as if a knife were being turned in my heart, I gathered my three children and left my parents' home. I recall driving with blurred vision. I could barely see the road ahead for the tears that welled in my eyes. My darling father had 'thrown me out,' discarded me, disowned me and never wanted to see me again! This was unfathomable to me. How was I to respond? Did he expect me to reject my newfound joy? Confusion and pain filled my mind as I battled with the choice between my heavenly or earthly father. I loved my earthly father so deeply - my gentle, loving, kind dad who was always there for me, but I could not deny my conscience and convictions. The next day found me unable to concentrate at work. Sometime during the course of the morning I mustered the courage to phone my parents. My mother answered very quickly almost as if she were expecting my call. 'Mom,' I said, 'Please tell Daddy that I love you and him very much. Please don't do this to me,' I pleaded. From that day on our relationship had moments of strain whenever religion or church was mentioned, and my father, in vain, asked many a priest to 'reconvert' his eldest daughter.

In 1979 I met Kim Clement, an outstanding musician and minister of the Gospel, who was to become one of our best friends. Kim can often be seen on Trinity Broadcasting Network (T.B.N.), and is renowned in America. I have had the honour of writing words for some of his songs - some of which have been recorded - and have composed and written words to sixty other Christian songs; something I thoroughly enjoy as I find words therapeutic.



Photograph 52
I wrote the words to 'Could You Live Without Him,' Side A, Track 1 on this album

Photograph 51
I wrote the words to "Because of Your Love," Side A, Track 3 on this album



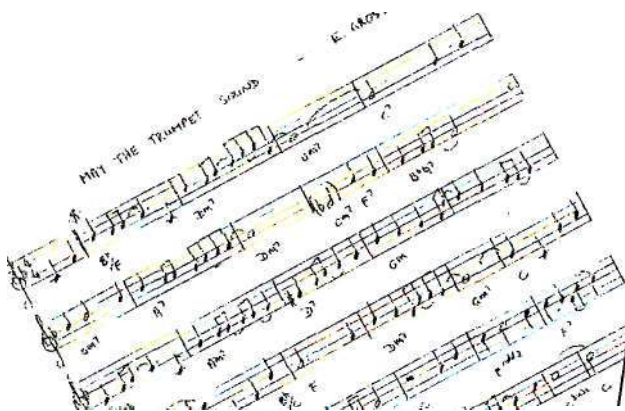
Handwritten notes:
The notes say "I love you" and "I will bless the Lord".

"Singing new songs and ministering unto the Lord has been neglected by millions of Christians throughout the world. Psalm 22:3 says that God inhabits the praises of His people. What an experience! Just to think that we can experience the fullness of God's presence just by singing Him a new song. As you listen and experience each of these songs which I received while being in God's presence, you will move into a new realm in the Spirit. You will experience peace, joy, harmony, healing and love... in His presence.

Special thanks to: Nanmi Lou for all your love and support God bless you And to my lovely wife Jane.

IGatatiMB 522-ASCAP

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Handwritten musical notation:
May The Tr an a & cross
May tttt At, A S: * **
* » > » * * * a w * * * * * * *

Handwritten musical notation:
^ ^ r^8 » #1 f3

Handwritten musical notation:
^" SW, "'a or our i-ord



He

Photograph 53
Words and music for a song I composed

Handwritten musical notation:
e ^ ^ ^ , w j «WSts/o * J3/ws **to/ip

This mystic experience caused my love of humanity, especially children, to grow even deeper. I now looked at children through what I term 'God's lenses.' I saw children belonging first and foremost to God and then to their parents, and felt accountable for my teaching practice to Him. In my opinion a teacher self-study should embrace the study of the whole person - spirit, soul and body.

The flowering of creativity and further studies

One of the factors that make you a powerful qualitative researcher is that you still see the world as data.

(Ellis, 2004:322)

In the 1980's times became tough in South Africa and many people started to leave the beautiful country of my birth. There was a depressed atmosphere that was almost tangible. 'For many, it was as if the clocks had rolled back to the thirties and the time of the Great Depression' (Schuller, 1993:13). Many businesses could not sustain themselves in the economic climate. Many people were retrenched and school leavers experienced difficulty in obtaining employment. Mickey's clothing business was affected significantly. After much deliberation I challenged him not to return to the clothing world, nor to his bookkeeping practice, but to work together with me in expanding my business.

Every negative event contains within it the seed of an equal or greater benefit.

(Canfield, 2005:47)

Thus began the extension of Wonderland Nursery School and the freedom to explore the possibility of founding other institutions in the field of education. Mickey immediately added three more classrooms, which were instantly filled from the long waiting list of children.

*We have an innate desire to endlessly learn, grow, and develop.
We want to become more than we already are. Once we yield to
this inclination for continuous and never-ending improvement,
we lead a life of endless accomplishments and satisfaction.*

(Canfield, 2005:164)

The year was 1986 and the infamous 40th birthday was upon me. On this auspicious day, I took a long, solitary walk along the beach while reviewing my life. I had not heard about the practice of self-study twenty years ago, but this practice proved to be a significant turning point for me. Realising that half my life had passed by in a flash, I concluded that I was dissatisfied with my achievements and progress in all those years. I recalled my mother's words uttered twenty years before, and realised that I had indeed fulfilled her prophetic words. I was still 'useless,' according to Lebanese evaluation, and had still not accomplished the things she had envisioned for me so long ago. She was right, the only thing I could do well was teach! Somewhere deep inside I must have still been smarting from her words to recall them so vividly. I realised then the brevity of life. There were so many more avenues I wanted to explore. I determined that day that I would set myself an annual challenge, or challenges, until I had mastered ideals which prove me as 'useful' to myself. I care not for custom.

Creativity is love, a very high kind of love.

(Okri, 1997:126)

At around the age of nine I recall (the only time) expressing my desire to sew, and being discouraged by my mother's answer that it was 'very hard for a little girl.' She confessed she had battled for years and, even then, was limited in her expertise. Thus the seed was planted that sewing is a formidable task, reserved for the elite few who are naturally gifted in that area. The spoken word has such great power! My grandmother, who lived in Bloemfontein, was commissioned to make little girls' dresses for a well-known shop, and, while spending a holiday with her in my late teens, I recall examining the beautifully created garments, concluding that she must be a genius! The thought of constructing garments held a fascination for me. Mickey, aware of this, bought me a sewing machine for our first wedding anniversary, and a year later I enrolled at the Technikon for a sewing course. What a disaster! I am a visual learner, but the teacher positioned herself in the front of the class and shouted instructions to the class of twelve. A teacher really needs to be *aufait* with the various styles of learning and the background each pupil brings to her lessons. After the fourth lesson I admitted defeat when I sewed up the sleeves of the garment! What a fiasco! I really felt 'useless.' My first sewing machine, housed in a beautiful cabinet, formed part of the furniture never to be used, and was given away ten years later. Thus I determined, at the age of 40, that the very first thing I would conquer in

order to build my self-esteem was the great giant of sewing. It was my Goliath.

*If a man does not keep pace with his companions,
perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.*

Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured, or far away.

Thoreau (Kruger & Adams, 1998:215)

I contacted a sewing teacher who specialised in craftwork and was very excited, yet nervous, at the prospect of starting my lessons. What if I made a fool of myself? What if she confessed she could not teach me? Had she ever taught anyone who could not even thread a needle, let alone a sewing machine? In the very hot month of February 1987, I began my sewing lessons, a pivotal point in releasing my creative side. The first lesson left me with such a migraine from tension that I was forced to take to my bed. Aware that I was a teacher, Joan presumed I was familiar with certain common aspects of needlework, and instructed me to buy lace for a traycloth for the second lesson. Why do people make rash assumptions about others? Even in the teaching profession some teachers presume all children have the same background knowledge. At the next sewing class Joan stared, flabbergasted, as I proudly pulled metres of different types of lace out of my bag. 'What's this?' she asked, as she picked up and dropped the pieces. 'I didn't know how much lace to buy,' I replied. 'You are going to be using hundreds of metres by the time you're finished making toilet seat covers, tissue box covers, toiletry bags, table cloths and covering baskets. One metre gathered would never even fit around one edge of a traycloth,' she said. Thus, on my next visit to the haberdashery shop, I purchased 100 metres of the same lace! This has been a standing joke between us for many years. I could not believe what I had to pay for 100 metres, and Joan could not believe I had bought it! However, she had said 'hundreds of metres' to me and, being the gullible person I am, I took her at her word!

*Entrepreneurs recognise that mistakes
are part of the growth process.*

(Jude, 1998:34)

What a wonderful experience learning to sew was. I realised then that I should have confronted my fear sooner, and that nothing in life is impossible. I sewed relentlessly for many years, creating exquisite bedspreads, cushions, curtains, toilet seat covers and

bathroom accessories for my home, my children and the school. Conquering this obstacle boosted my self-confidence as I discovered that success usually results after making and correcting mistakes, and taking one small step at a time. After all, Edison failed many times before perfecting the light bulb, and Henry Ford went broke five times before achieving success! (Maxwell, 1993:98).

*Factors such as self-confidence, a high level of aspiration
and experiencing success usually go hand in hand,
and result in a positive circle of self-development.*

(Lamprecht, 1995:37)

I have continued the practice of listing my annual goals, some in the creative field and others in the field of education, and for the past twenty years have crossed off many challenges in my diary once they have been faced and conquered. Some achieved goals include attending part-time Bible School for a year, baking and icing wedding cakes (making all the flowers and lace by hand), smocking, beading garments, making jewellery, embroidery, tapestry, making and beading bags, flower arranging, learning to play the piano, calligraphy, painting, writing short courses for child care workers, writing a two-year programme for aspiring Pre-School teachers and teacher aides in the Primary School, completing a two-year diploma in Remedial Education (*cum laude*) and completing an Honours degree (*cum laude*).



Photograph 54
Picture of the cake I made
for Jodi's wedding

None of us can change our yesterdays, But all of us can change our tomorrows.

(Canfield, 2005:214)

I often wonder why some plants bloom and flower in the most beautiful hues, yet others have green leaves but bear no fruit. Were they planted in the right soil, and how often and with what fervour did the gardener tend to and prune the plants? In my imagination I picture humanity as being like trees planted in the same ground. How one flourishes and blooms depends on the amount of water, light and soil food received. I am fortunate to have obtained much soil food, and I believe in giving credit where it is due. Beside me stands a man who never fails to encourage me to succeed at my various self-imposed challenges. I keep a diary in which I pen sayings or verses. Here is an excerpt from notes written on 16 December 1999 -

Mickey - because of your absolute faith in me and the fact that you overlook my shortcomings so gently but sincerely, you give me the courage to attempt new ventures. You have always made me feel that I am capable, lean do things that appear enormous to me. And so you build me up on the inside until I don't see any obstacles in my path, but instead see the outcomes of my imaginings. For this I thank you.

(Edwina, 1999)

Death of my beloved father

I even included other events in my life, like the death of my father, which is relevant to the story.

(Ellis, 2004:137)

In the late 1980's my father experienced a back problem but the doctors decided not to operate as his heart would not withstand the anaesthetic. As my mother, who is a slight woman, could not attend to him on her own (he needed to be turned and assisted to the bathroom), Mickey and I enjoyed the privilege of nursing my father in our home. We made our bedroom comfortable for my parents, and my husband cooked my Dad the most delicious meals, feeding him himself in order to coax him to eat. How privileged I felt to make his daily breakfast and to sit chatting to him at this time. As I assisted him to the bathroom I recalled the many times in my youth when he would carry me to the bathroom when I was ill. Now the roles were reversed and I was so grateful for this opportunity to nurture and serve him. Dad recovered slowly and three months later was able to walk again

and return to his flat. In October 1991 I received a frantic call from my mother - my Dad had projectile-vomited blood. The specialist diagnosed a burst ulcer and Dad, despite his weak heart, had to undergo an emergency operation. He survived, and was soon released from High Care to a private ward. After leaving the hospital on his second day in the private ward, I prayed as I was driving home 'Lord, when the day comes for my father to depart this life, please may I have the privilege of being beside him.' The day after my prayer, my sister and I were to attend a calligraphy class, but I felt uneasy and needed to be with my father. That afternoon as I sat crocheting in the chair while he slept, I glanced towards my father's bed and noticed that something was amiss. Rising from my chair and keeping my back to my mother, to avoid alarming her, I took his hand. He became restless and a single tear fell from his left eye as he passed away. Then pandemonium set in - machines started buzzing and nurses came running - as I steered my mother out of the room. I had never witnessed death, yet knew my Dad had passed away. What was I to say to my mother, who is so highly-strung? My parents were very close and had been married for 50 years. When a great person dies the Lebanese people say a Cedar of Lebanon has fallen. A whole forest of Cedars fell for me on that day.

Sometimes we can only write about events after time has passed.

(Ellis, 2004:177)

I seated my mother in a comfortable chair in the passage before banging my fists on the wall and praying aloud 'Lord, You said in Your Word that You will give peace beyond all understanding. I need it now!' My mother later related that in her confused state she wondered why I was repeating this over and over again. I became aware of warmth surging through my body, moving from my head to my feet. It felt like soothing oil being poured over me. I experienced the most incredible strength as I comforted my mother and phoned my siblings. As a family we entered the room where my father lay. I recall kissing him and calmly pulling the sheet over his face before proceeding to pack his suitcase and make arrangements for the undertakers. Where did my strength come from? Why was I so calm? As I ushered my mother out of the hospital and drove her to my home, she was in a complete daze. I was pleased that my parents did not hold on to many of the Lebanese traditions by this stage of their lives. I recall attending a funeral of one of my relatives ... what a cacophony! Traditionally Lebanese folk hire professional wailers to attend a wake and the funeral. Lebanese people in Durban appear to have abolished this ritual. I

did not attend work for the three months it took to nurture her through her bereavement, feeling privileged to be able repay her for her kindness throughout the years. From that day I inherited what appears to be another child as my mother constantly confesses I have adopted my father's place in her life and I, in turn, accept responsibility for her. This is quite taxing emotionally, as I feel torn between my mother, my husband, my children and my grandchildren. On 28 June 2005, as I held her hand crossing Windermere Road en route to the shoe shop in Windermere Centre, the reversal of roles made a such deep impression on me. I recalled the many years she had held my hand crossing that road, and the many times she bent down to check the fit of my toes in new shoes. Now I was purchasing her shoes, but not until I was satisfied regarding comfort, quality and suitability of style for her bunioned feet. Fourteen years have passed since my father's death. Why have I avoided reading his memoirs, listening to the tape he made or even looking through his photographs? Why do I avoid speaking of him to my mother? Why is this the first time I have been able to write about him? Why do the tears gather and fall as I pen these words? Why have I found this the most challenging and difficult section to write in my autoethnography?

Synthesis

To embrace autoethnography, I had to let myself float down this river, let it move me, and feel confident I wasn't going to drown, though there might be waves and rocks along the way.

(Ellis, 2004:297)

The second half of Maslow's esteem needs, according to Gwynne (1997:4), is the need for the attention and recognition that comes from others; the need for power, as it were. I cannot fully comprehend this 'need for power,' as I have searched my heart and can honestly say that I abhor the thought that I might subconsciously wish to possess power over another being! I do not respect others for the power they wield - be it due to the position they hold, or wealth and material goods. Rather, I respect those who deserve it for their exemplary way of living. However, if this 'need for power' were related to having power over seemingly impossible situations or tasks, then I admit to my need of it. Gwynne further explains that people whose lower needs have all been met often drive very expensive cars as this raises their level of esteem, and refers to this fact as the 'Hey, look what I can afford' phenomenon! In reply to Gwynne's assertion, I have no need of

material things to raise my level of esteem. I bought my first new car - which can be classed as 'middle of the range,' as recently as 2003. I have no desire to live in a mansion, nor do I indulge myself in luxurious holidays or expensive clothing. Will this make a difference to the diagnosis of self-actualisation status?

*We have what we may call the desire for reputation or prestige,
recognition, attention, importance or appreciation.*

(Maslow, 1943:382)

Florence Krall uses the word 'comprehending' as the third step in hermeneutic motion and Renner (2001:32) describes comprehension as an 'invasive and exhaustive' act. Krall's fourth step in hermeneutic motion is 'embodying,' which too, is exhausting. Thus Krall suggest students step back from their work and pause for a time. Renner (2001:2) suggests that our being is altered each time we understand something and speaks metaphorically of 'sacramental intake and incarnation.' I must confess that up to this point I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience of writing the autoethnography but have found the piece invasive and exhausting, particularly reliving the altercation between my father and I, his illness and death. This chapter is entitled 'Years of Growing,' as it embraces my extension and growth in other fields, besides teaching. However, I now realise that all the experiences of my life have been intertwined in teaching. I believe they unlocked a creativity and maturity which 'spilled over' into my career. I was compelled to mature emotionally as my family grew, and as I took the bold step of standing up to my father regarding my religious beliefs. This is rarely heard of in the old Lebanese tradition. I also stood my ground against my husband's decision regarding my choice of business and career. In dealing with my father's death - the first death to affect my immediate family - I realised at the time that one has to face emotional conflict in life with strength and courage. I also now realise the healing power of writing. My 'mystic experience' matured me spiritually, and the many creative tasks I have pursued matured me socially, emotionally and cognitively and raised my level of self-esteem. I believe all the above was in preparation for the explosive years in my career as educator from 1995 - 2000.

*Now that we know that high grades don't necessarily produce good entrepreneurs,
teachers, lawyers, or business managers, we can get off our children's backs and help
them to learn some of the more helpful life-skills as they grow.*

(Vermeulen,1999:20)

Photograph 55

Mickey and I and our three children in 1987. What stood out for me in this photograph as I reminisced is that each member of the family is touching another member in some way

*In the noontime of my life I shall look to the sunshine
At a moment in my life when the sky is blue,
And the question I shall ask will remain unchanging,
To be brave and strong and true
And to fill the world with love
My whole life through.
And to fill the world with love
And to fill the world with love
And to fill the world with love
My whole life through.*

(Verse 2, Hymn - In the Morning of My Life)

(Frederick Douglass)

CHAPTER 4 - YEARS OF HARVESTING

1995 - 2005

*Flowers and fruit burst into brilliant form
And very soon other little saplings are born.
With shielded eyes the ploughman stands
Viewing his plantings o'er the land.*

(Edwina, 2005)

Introduction

*Every individual is born into the world resembling a naked field
And each person is responsible for the reaping of his harvest.
Were the ploughman slack, the harvest would not be bountiful,
Were the ploughman diligent in his mission, what was sown would surely be reaped.
Each person is born into the world holding his destiny in his own hands.*

(Edwina, 2005)

The influence of a positive mindset has been emphasised throughout time. Marcus Aurelius, the great Roman philosopher, said 'A man's life is what his thoughts make of it,' and Ralph Waldo Emerson, the leading American philosopher of the nineteenth century, agreed, saying that 'A man is what he thinks all day long' (Murphy, 2000:242). The Bible, penned long before these men were born, states 'For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he' (Proverbs 23:7). Self-study has the potential to challenge and to bring about personal change. If progressive teaching and the improvement of teacher education is valued, and, indeed, the fact that teachers themselves by employing self-reflective practices can reach the state of self-actualisation, then in some cases a paradigm shift in one's thinking is necessary. The term 'paradigm shift' was coined by Thomas Kuhn, who explains that nearly all significant breakthroughs in the field of science happen after a break with tradition and with old ways of thinking (Covey, 2004:29). I implore teachers who are 'set in their ways' to break with tradition and set themselves free of ropes that bind them, bearing in mind that one's mindset and attitude is the number one contributing factor towards success. I have realized that some people do not advance in life because they fear change, and this is related to mindset. The mind, instead of seeing positive aspects of change, sees only negative factors, causing resistance to any deviation from the norm. In my youth I was

forever asking the 'Why?' question, and became very frustrated when a satisfactory answer was not forthcoming. While learning to drive I recall the instructor telling me to put the car in second gear. 'Why?' I asked. 'Just do it, the car needs it now,' was his agitated reply. Is that an answer?

*The entrepreneur's curiosity keeps forcing him or
her to question why this way and not that way?*

(Jude, 1998:30)

In my opinion one of the greatest stumbling blocks to change and creativity is the old adage 'We've always done it this way. It works.' What would have been the outcome had Thomas Edison held onto the belief that there is only one right way? Albert Einstein said, 'I think for months and years. Ninety-nine times, the conclusion is false. The hundredth time I am right' (Jude, 1998:38). Maslow (1943:8) refers to people who are satisfied in their needs of physiology, safety, love and esteem, as 'basically satisfied people,' and suggests it is from these people that we may expect the fullest (and healthiest) expression of creativity. According to Maslow's criteria, I am a 'basically satisfied' person and by adopting the practice of setting and achieving annual goals, I have achieved beyond my dreams. However, I have found the familiar quote of John Donne 'no man is an island,' quite true in my life, as without the positive influence of my parents and husband, my dreams might never have materialised. Without a positive mindset, would I have achieved my desired goals in the field of education? Without realising the benefit of change, would I be classed as an entrepreneur today? Without forever wanting to know 'Why?' would I be where I am today?

Train-a-Child Teacher Training College established -1995

*For me, the true purpose of success, is not to gain advantage over others;
it is to serve and inspire people.*

(Holden, 2005:xvii)

Looking back, were I to choose what I deem to be the most successfully accomplished goal, rendering the most satisfaction, the answer would be the compilation of the initial one year course in Pre-School Teacher Training for Train-a-Child College, which I founded in

1995. I had been pondering on the need for training young ladies to work in Pre-Primary schools but questioned whether I, an ordinary teacher with only a three-year diploma at the time, would be adequately qualified to teach others. When I observed the way Jodi interacted with children, and the interest and love she displayed, I was convinced she had inherited some of my genes! However, Jodi emphatically informed me that she did not wish to follow in my footsteps, denied having a calling to work with children and decided she would make her own way in life once she discovered where her talent and calling lay! I had relayed, as gently as I could, my suspicions that she had an innate ability to work with children, but was aghast to discover that she considered it to be 'expected' of her to follow 'Mommy,' as was suggested by her peers. I felt confused - was I incorrect in pointing out her talent? She definitely had the makings of a good teacher. What is wrong with embracing the same profession as one's parent? Jodi decided to *aupair* overseas for a year. However, having no formal training and no experience an *au-pair* position did not materialise, and she was forced to resort to making sandwiches all day and night at a very busy sandwich bar in central London. She soon realised her calling lay in the teaching profession. Sometimes one has to be removed from a situation to see clearly!

When Jodi had been in London for some time, Mickey and I decided to pay her a surprise visit. On the aeroplane I turned to Mickey and announced my intention to open my own Pre-School Teacher Training College even if it meant having only one student - that is Jodi - on the register, and immediately began to formulate the course on the back of a serviette. Thereafter the Pre-School Teacher Training College consumed my thoughts for two years. I debated long and hard, considering the information I would have welcomed before entering the teaching profession, and concluded with the headings of five learning areas. Armed with the course material, City Health officials were approached. Although overjoyed at the prospect, they could not give it their official stamp of approval, nor recommend the course to the many unqualified people working in child care institutions. The frustration this caused me was almost unbearable. I knew the course material was expedient for every caregiver as so many in the child care profession were, and still are, causing damage to children through ignorance. I still feel very strongly about this. The Education Department in Ulundi was sent an official letter requesting approval, but I was disappointed by their noncommittal reply. Eventually the representative of the now defunct Association of Private Colleges of South Africa (APSCA) made a thorough study of my notes, inspected the proposed lecture room, the facilities and the programme, and

granted me unconditional approval. Under normal circumstances a college had to be in operation for a year before being subjected to inspection and acceptance, and I became the first person to be given instant accreditation.



PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

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REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT STAMP OF APPROVAL ON TRAIN-A-CHILD DIPLOMA COURSE IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

I, Mrs. T. Oroisi, submit the following proposal, which I feel, would greatly benefit the education of all Pre-School children. At the first, I must stress that I do not require any form of state aid, my request is purely for a Government stamp of approval from the Education Department.

I qualified as an infant specialist with the N.E.D. in 1965. After having taught the infant classes in a Primary school for seven years I founded Worderland Pre-Primary School in 1971 where I have been the principal to date. In January 1972 I successfully established "Train-a-Child", a one year diploma course in Pre-School education. The course subjects include Child Development, Health and Nutrition, Child illnesses, Pre-primary School Daily Activities, School Readiness Programmes and Practical Administration of Pre-primary School.

My motivation for developing the Train-a-Child course was prompted by the dearth of need for skilled and trained Pre-School teachers in the KwaZulu-Natal region. At present there are limited Government Pre-schools in operation in KwaZulu-Natal, and the resources of these few Government schools do not even touch on the requirements of a growing nation. The lack of available Government facilities has opened up a large, private Pre-School market, which has led to the employment of mainly unqualified and untrained Pre-School teachers. There are no necessary requirements for teaching positions at private Pre-Schools, and in my 31 years experience I have seen how, time after time, irreversible harm may be caused by an untrained teacher's influence on a young child's life.

BASIS FOR REQUEST

Conclusive evidence proves that the first six years in a child's life are the most important and it is no other period when he or she learns as much. As a child's mind develops he or she becomes more intelligent and how intelligent the child becomes depends substantially on the child's environment. Adverse conditions in a child's environment negatively affect not only his or her intellectual development, but also his or her social, emotional and physical development.

Hearing in mind the violence and destruction that has, over the past years, torn the lives of so many of South Africa's children, the single stabilizing factor, that is the right of each child, is a solid educational foundation. More and more it is recognised that this foundation does not only begin with

I hereby certify that the above is a true and correct copy of the original.

Photocopied by "Sf"

Letter sent to Department of Education in 1995

Pre-School years, when the child is most receptive. This foundation of skilled human resources

include:
skilled human resources in health care, childhood education, programme recognises "Education" as the most important of the RDP highlights Education as an integral part of a

Teachers who are committed to RDP goals and equipped in 10 understand and respond to the challenges which will be geared to dedicate themselves to enhancing the quality of the education system

theoretical training opportunities in the area of Pre-School education for women, irrespective of race, colour, class or religion.

Effectively developing knowledge and skills which will enable individuals to cultivate our society, through the education of our children. The education of our children will in turn will effect every sphere of our society - economic, social, political, moral, cultural and environmental

In conclusion I would like to emphasise that I believe that the greatest natural resource a country can have is its children. I have a genuine love for children and they are the most important element of this request for Government stamp of approval on the Train-a-Child course. I believe the children of South Africa hold the key to the future of our country, and I know that to effectively train them, there is a desperate need for human resources in this area. My course in Train-a-Child, provides these necessary skills

Thank you for your kind consideration. I look forward to learning from you in the near future.

Yours faithfully

Mrs T. Oroisi

Train-a-Child College was advertised once only, and I envisioned an enrolment of perhaps four more students, besides my daughter. I was overwhelmed at the 28 applications received. Some girls hailed from the South Coast while others came from inland, which required that they find board and lodging. There was no other institution where young ladies could study for Baby Care and Pre-School teaching. Teacher Training Colleges and Universities catered mainly for the teaching of the Foundation Phase, requiring a matric exemption in order to qualify for acceptance. I found this a bit harsh, as there are many people who would make wonderful teachers but are not accepted into training because they lack a matric exemption, sometimes because a particular subject was written at standard instead of higher grade. Jodi, for example, did Afrikaans at standard grade, and therefore did not qualify for an exemption. I had previously employed a young lady who had qualified with excellent results after her four-year training at University, but who made an exceptionally poor Pre-School teacher. Often highly-qualified people are excellent at theory but dreadful at practice, and *vice versa*. My foremost thought was the fact that there needed to be a proper balance between theoretical knowledge and practical experience. It became my mission to provide a programme whereby the trainees would learn to develop a child holistically, setting him/her on a sound path. The College was initially named 'Train-A-Child' after Proverbs 22:6, which states 'Train a child in the way he should go and when he is older he will not depart from it.' That wonderful first year saw me in my element as I personally lectured all five learning areas, while administering a busy Pre-School. At last I was engaging in conversation and in practical experience with those who wanted to become 'extraordinary' teachers. Feelings of joy and self-satisfaction enveloped me as I watched the young ladies blossom. The assignments produced were outstanding. To this day students have never produced stories and story aids which compare favourably with those of that first group of students. It was an exciting year in which I learned a great deal, and there are many special moments I treasure.

Melanie

Melanie had a genuine love for children and was an eager student. During a lecture on 'unconditional love for each pupil' I demonstrated to each student the power of a hug. As I hugged the first student teacher, Melanie, seated in the third row, blushed and asked to be excused. I sensed something was amiss but carried on hugging each student. When Melanie returned I was waiting for her. 'Please Mrs Grossi, don't hug me,' she said. 'Why, my darling?' I asked. 'Just don't. Please -I beg you -just don't,' she answered. 'Melanie, how will you be able to hug little children or their mothers if you can't hug me?' I asked. 'Mrs Grossi you don't understand. My mother died when I was two. My father and stepmother have never hugged me or touched me in any way,' she said. 'Melanie, I love you,' I said, as I enfolded her stiff body in my arms. Slowly but surely her muscles began to relax as she sobbed and let go of her pain. We stood hugging and crying for what seemed like hours. There was not a dry eye in that lecture room. From that day Melanie hugged me every morning and I was moved to tears as I observed little children running up to her for a hug. One day her eye caught mine as a little head lay nestled on her shoulder, comforted by her arms. As she lifted her head from his, our eyes met and the unspoken message I read was 'Thank you for helping me release my power to love and be loved.'

Many girls who graduated from this class later established their own business - one working with babies, another with After-School Care children, and others catering for children aged two to four years. After the course one girl was offered the position of *cm pair* to a travelling psychologist with two children. Many went on to further their knowledge as, in those days, the course was only of a year's duration and I constantly encouraged the students to study further.

When someone is taught the joy of learning it becomes a lifelong process that never stops, a process that creates a logical individual. That is the challenge and joy of teaching.

Collins (Canfield & Hansen, 2002:255)

It was a busy and happy year and the students and I were sad when it ended. I will always remember the song they sang to me at Graduation. Looking at them that night and thinking of all the lives they would touch with understanding and kindness, brought a lump to my throat - this was part of the answer to my prayer 'Lord, let me touch as many lives as I can.' In 2005, one of the children whom I discovered many years ago to be deaf, sat in the front row of the lecture room at Embury Institute for Teacher Education, (formerly known as Train-a-Child College), in her first year of study towards becoming a teacher to the deaf. Her mother, who once sat in my office and remonstrated with me when I voiced my suspicions about her daughter, sat next to her to interpret the lectures. *'Dad, through her and one of my former students I'll finally teach the deaf child.'*

Catherine's Story

The year is 2000. The event is Open Day for students wishing to follow a career in teaching. I am one of the interviewers of possible candidates and the person I am interviewing is Catherine Gcwabaza.

Mrs. Grossi: *Afternoon, Catherine. Tell me, why do you want to be a teacher?*

Catherine: *I'm 32, have three children who live with my mother and I'm a domestic worker earning R120 a month. But I've always wanted to be a teacher.*

Mrs. Grossi: *Catherine, do you have a matric?*

Catherine: *Oh yes! But I don't know how I can learn to be a teacher. I've been praying. I think God sent me here.*

Mrs. Grossi: *Catherine, if you want to be a teacher so badly I will help you reach your dream. It's going to be a long walk, but if you are strong we'll do it together. I'll see you in January 2001. I will sponsor you and give you an afternoon position in the school.*

2001

Mrs. Grossi: *Catherine, how are you doing?*

Catherine: *I'm working so hard!*

Mrs. Grossi: *Catherine, the Pre-School teachers say you are wonderful in the classroom. Well done!*

2002

Mrs. Grossi: *Catherine, how are you doing?*

Catherine: *Mrs. Grossi I've just taken a Grade 1 lesson. I was shaking, but I did it!*

Mrs. Grossi: *Catherine, you're halfway to reaching your dream. You are going to be an excellent teacher!*

2003

Mrs. Grossi: *Catherine, how are you doing?*

Catherine: *Mrs. Grossi the students have been so good to me. They've bought me a computer and a desk, and I'm learning fast.*

Mrs. Grossi: *Catherine, you are a star! You are already shining!*

2004

Mrs. Grossi: *Catherine, I heard the news. I am so proud of you!*

Catherine: *Mrs. Grossi, can you believe I have been given a Grade 1 post at a Government school next year? I'll be earning R7, 500 a month!*

I'm going to get my children back and they will also come to the school!

'Thank you Lord for yet another miracle. I know You have a plan for her in the teaching profession. This student has excelled against all odds. She has displayed determination and great strength of character. I'm so pleased I gave her my award for excellent progress in the field of teaching at graduation this year - she more than deserves it.'

WV t>

Dedicated woman realises her dream

AKHONACIBA

SOOUKkt away at dirty pots and para and sleeping in the cinders Clndmlla's fighting spirit and a dream for a *btvkv* life WW! Cay KKII liur luni giving ii3 -Cattierir* Gcwitonza's stnry te Jn<t lik» a Wry tab

The 38-year-old former domestic worker from Tn:hanga has re:Uis<l her jlggnr dream fty bKomiDK a qualified teacher.

Gwflhozn started working when she was in Grade 7. Then, she ronald wirk ir the iasar L'an« Mite during her school holidays in hep her another take uav or the uuttrvx. Ann suu hid oompleted matric, she went lu work at a jrocty *omr** and jninad the Rei Cms; whc:u she arts trained in first aid and karat how to deal with incitlual aiwigoicifis.

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Photograph 57
Article about Catherine



Photograph 58
Catherine and I at her graduation, 2004

The only thing that marred my joy in this period of my life were those debilitating migraine headaches! However, I would not accept that barrier. Cordeiro (2001:40) puts it so humorously - 'When you go through hell, don't stop to take pictures.' But, joy of all joys - a 'new' wonder cure for migraine was advertised. Having tried every pill, to no avail, my doctor, at my insistence, begrudgingly issued a prescription for the 'new' cure. The night I took the pill the doctor sat with me for hours, injecting me with adrenalin as my throat began to swell interfering with my breathing, and my pulse began to drop. Two years later I pleaded with the same doctor again for assistance - the migraines were more frequent, more intense, and even more debilitating. He suggested a certain antidepressant which, according to research, has a wonderful effect on reducing the frequency and intensity of migraine attacks. However, one of the side-effects of Tryptanol is either weight loss or gain and, although the migraines subsided considerably, my body chose weight gain as a side-effect. The doctor gives me free choice whenever I lament the side-effect of this pill, saying 'The choice is yours - migraine or weight.' I always choose the latter I have no other option! In December 2004, after taking this pill for many years, I reckoned my body was now older, hormonal problems should have settled, and questioned whether the migraine headaches were a thing of the past. Gradually I weaned myself off the pills, but in January 2005 the migraines returned with a vengeance. Once again, for five days at a stretch, I worked with excruciating pain throbbing in my right temple, behind my eyes and in my neck. And so the struggle with my weight continues! I went back to the pills.

Photograph 59

Labour Department contract

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Labour Department Course -1996

In February 1996 I was approached by the Department of Labour to devise a three-week training course in child care. However, I declined as I felt at least two months' instruction was needed for a basic grounding in childcare. This has never been done,' replied the official. 'We only offer fifteen days training in any field.' I stood my ground and a few days later received a call. 'Mrs Grossi, you have been granted your wish, this is a first for the department,' the official informed me. Thus a two-month programme was compiled and I thoroughly enjoyed the training.

Establishment of Wonderland Baby Care -1996

*Autoethnographies depict events in a powerful way
and generate a kind of understanding
that traditional research reports cannot.*

(Gaitán, 2000:3)



Photographs 60 a & b
*Wonderland Baby Care,
established 1996*

When the property adjacent to the Pre-School came on the market, Wonderland Baby Care was born. It could accommodate ninety-five. Ninety-five babies! What a challenge! The biggest and the most frightening one to date! One would imagine that as I had produced three babies and been involved with the two-year-old child for so many years, this task would be simple. However, it proved to be the most daunting! Was it due to my experience with Michael, my firstborn? Was I 'mother' enough to meet the needs of these babies? Did my mother's words that I was not a 'proper' mother, due to my aversion to breastfeeding, play any part in my overwhelming fear of establishing this centre? Mickey had exactly one month to prepare the premises. I needed eight rooms, eight changing areas with running water, a sluice room, a beautiful playground, amongst other things, and this he accomplished by working from 07:00 to 20:00 daily for 30 days, in order for Wonderland Baby Care to be in operation on September 1, 1996. I recall agonising over the proposed plans - drawing and writing reams of notes. I had forgotten the different stages of growth and development of the very young infant - thus many hours were spent in research. Once again Town Planning, the Health Department and Social Welfare were involved and, naturally, I was determined to produce the most beautiful Baby Care ever created, so that mothers would feel relaxed about leaving their tiny bundles for the day, and that the babies would have a 'Wonderland' in which to develop.

*We cannot always build the future for our youth,
but we can build our youth for the future.*

Franklin D. Roosevelt (Canfield & Hansen, 2002:189)

A great deal of thought, effort, chart making, and sewing went into the preparation for the Open Day which was to be held on the last Saturday of August, 1996. A professional artist decorated the walls with beautiful pictures and the place was, in truth, a 'Wonderland.' The colour scheme was pale lemon, periwinkle blue and white. Cots had mobiles which played merry tunes, and instructional charts were compiled for new parents. My mother assisted me as I sewed special cot sheets and made little checked blankets. Metres and metres of pretty frilly white curtains with self-embossed spots adorned the windows. Was I pleased with my sewing skills? Was I satisfied by my mother's request that I teach her to make toilet seat and tissue box covers? Many people visited the Baby Care 'Open Day' out of sheer curiosity! They milled around and reportedly found the atmosphere and premises thoroughly therapeutic. City Health officials took a video of these premises as well as those

of the Pre-School to be used as examples to others. Tea, coffee and eats were served while parents questioned and cross-questioned me. After one such session I was summoned by my apparently agitated mother into one of the rooms, where she enquired, 'What kind of businesswoman are you? You are telling the people to leave their babies at home.' She had overheard me advising parents to leave their babies at home with a trusted caregiver or relative rather than send them to a Baby Care. 'Business or no business,' I answered, 'I have to speak the truth.' I still advocate that young babies need to stay in their familiar home surroundings as long as possible. '*Jsmis Saleeb*' (Lebanese for God be with you) she said, as she walked away shaking her head.

*Opportunity is a haughty goddess who wastes no time
with those who are unprepared.*

(Glason, 1998:18)

Wonderland Baby Care opened its doors on 1 September 1996, with my daughter-in-law, Rachael, Tracy, one of the young ladies I had trained (she is my personal assistant and right hand today), and fourteen other staff members, including a pharmacist. On the first day Mickey and I were so tense that for the first time we actually absconded and went home to nurse terrible headaches! In the process of preparing to open the Baby Care I had endured many sleepless nights, wondering whether this was a mistake and if I would even get ten babies, let alone 95. How would I pay the bond, staff, and so on? I recall for the first time in my life waking up in the middle of the night with what felt like 'panic attacks.' Of all the ventures I have attempted this was the one I was most nervous about. However, I soon had my full quota of babies, with a waiting list, and to date there is a far greater need and longer waiting list for this particular facility than any of the others! How sad I feel for the mothers, though, when the staff are witness to a baby's first steps or word. How wonderful it is to observe a child reach his/her milestones! What a privilege it is to have the opportunity to observe a baby mature and develop into a child starting formal school. However, it saddens me that as they mature they shift from calling me 'Aunty Edwina' to 'Mrs. Grossi.' Baby Care was to prove not only another business venture, but such a great teacher! I learned the importance of stimulation in the early years and the foolishness of presuming a child too young to assimilate and accommodate knowledge. My babies of sixteen months hold paintbrushes, participate in music rings and are told stories. The Baby Care has offered an education I could not receive from the best University in the world.

I compared children starting Pre-Primary School for the first time at the age of two years, with those advancing to the Pre-Primary School from our Baby Care, and found the latter more advanced in every way, and much more emotionally mature. Although I am of the opinion that little children should be in their own home environment for the first couple of years, I cannot deny the advancement of those who attend school from babyhood. Is it because they have learned from one another? Is it because they have had to wait their turn and share caregivers? Is it because they have learned not to be so demanding or egocentric? Is it because they were given 'tools' very early? These children are confident, eager to learn, willing to attempt new challenges and much more independent than their counterparts. Our first Down Syndrome baby in the Baby Care section, Cheryl, is a fine example of my experience. By all accounts she should not have progressed as quickly as she did, but Cheryl was treated as the others were, and was never made to feel 'different' in any way. In my opinion all learning and physically challenged learners should be included in mainstream schools. Unfortunately, the old system still dictates; the system that divides, segregates and labels. However, in 1997 a single inclusive education and training system was advocated for South Africa and the introduction of Outcomes Based Education facilitated this move, based on human rights as established in the Constitution of South Africa (Naicker, 1999:13).

I recall interviewing a particular woman for a staff position with the youngest babies. She had been working with babies for a number of years and proceeded to inform me she 'knew it all.' Upon questioning her concerning the daily routine she advocated that breakfast would be at 08:00. 'What would happen were a mother to bring her baby later than that?' I asked. 'Well, the child would have missed out on breakfast and would have to wait till tea time,' was her reply. And this woman had been working with babies for twelve years! It really is a shame when little children are expected to fit into a system! I would never even contemplate employing such a caregiver, regardless of glowing testimonials from parents or employers. A system, routine, timetable, or curriculum should be flexible and make allowances for circumstances and different cases. Why do people with no empathy or kindness dare to work with children, let alone babies? Did this interview stir something within that will hopefully come to fruition in 2006?

Train-au-pair founded -1998

In 1997 I recalled that when Jodi went to London, lack of experience prevented her from securing an *aupair* position. With this in mind I developed a six-week *au-pair* course, Train-Au-Pair, offered to schoolgirls in the July, September and December school holidays. Students received practical experience with children in my schools (which did not close in the holidays) and were given informative lectures and a manual.

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COURSE SYLLABUS

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CHILD DEVELOPMENT

- a) Mental Ability
- b) Development of Vision
- c) Development of Hearing
- d) Development of Speech
- e) Physical Development
- f) Social Development
- g) Emotional Development
- h) Bladder and Bowel Control
- i) Effects of Stress
- j) Security / Insecurity

CH^°

BABY CARE

- a) What a new baby can do and how to handle and hold a newborn
- b) The needs of a new baby
- c) Crying
- d) Feeding and bottle feeding
- e) Keeping a baby clean
- f) Bath time
- g) Baby clothes and nappies and the protection of baby's bottom
- h) Nursery equipment
- i) Excreting
- j) Vomiting
- k) Teething
- l) Everyday care

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Photograph 61

Train-Au-Pair course learning areas

for half my allotted daily study time. A half-hour before or after supper was usually taken up with non-essentials, so this also formed part of the timetable along with another hour sometime before bed. Saturday mornings became 'assignment time,' while Saturday afternoons were allocated to family and friends. Saturday afternoon is usually a social gathering time for many at the Grossi's, a custom which I thoroughly enjoy. However, it was during this time that the 'self took a backseat. I no longer walked for an hour on Saturday and Sunday mornings, or took pains to ensure that my diet was correctly balanced. Instead I opted for meals prepared in haste, not considering the effect on my waist!

We pay a physical and emotional price when we actually break through our perceived limitations and enter into a new area of further potential.

(Maxwell, 1993:81)

Although life was controlled by the clock, I thoroughly enjoyed the two years of correspondence study, and my empathy for children experiencing learning barriers became even more intense with my increased knowledge and the many practical assignments. I had not studied or written exams since 1964 and was delighted to achieve my goal of obtaining my diploma *cum laude*. During exam time I would wake at 03:00 most days. Very few things in life come easy. Success is the result of hard work, determination, effort and self-discipline. Success does *not* come to the person who is clever, but to the person who is determined, as I have proved. I mention that I obtained my diploma *cum laude*, not for the purpose of boasting, nor to appease an exaggerated ego - it is as a lesson to other ordinary folk like me that, if you set your goals high (but not too high), you will achieve your dreams. However, had I not attained *cum laude* I would not have berated myself, knowing that I had done my very best. If my goal, as is the case with so many students, was always just to pass to 'get that piece of paper,' there would not be much of a challenge, or the incentive to set further challenges. One should strive for excellence in any challenge, realising that success spawns more success. However, William James, a modern psychologist, refers to 'the moral flabbiness of the bitch-goddess success,' characterising the egocentric craving for success as a 'national disease'(Holden, 2005: xv). Is success a craving or is it a human instinct as described in Maslow's hierarchy of needs?

Establishment of a private Primary School -1998

*The point is that you 're not trying to emulate the rules
about standardizing procedures of science; you 're trying to understand
the meaning of what people think, feel, and do*

(Ellis, 2004:68)

Having heard many parents lament the fact that their children had to leave Wonderland, a happy, warm place where children experience love and unconditional acceptance, and enter a 'cold, strict place called school,' noting the many changes in education and the attitudes of many teachers and principals, and bearing in mind the seed of my dream of founding a private Primary School, I realised in 1997 that the time was ripe for that seed to bear fruit. In the mid-1990's the education system changed to Outcomes Based Education (Spady & Schlebusch, 1999:54). This model of education is very good, but, unfortunately, there were thousands of teachers at that time who were either not trained or were untrainable, as they resisted change. Many teachers opted for the 'package' and the system lost hundreds of outstanding educators. Teachers were confused about the new model and refused to accept the challenge, resulting in frustration and loss of interest in their profession (Zinn, 2000:2). It was at this time that the urge to start a Primary School really took hold of me. For many years I had dreamed about it, and voiced the idea, and now the time felt right. Many people scoffed at the idea. Some laughed in my face, saying 'Now I know you are crazy.' 'How can you open a school?' 'Do you know what you are doing?' 'This will never be allowed!' 'Who will give you permission?' 'You're not the government, you're just an ordinary teacher.' This last statement was the final straw.

Whenever I'm about to embark on a new venture my 'inside' appears to sense a disturbance, akin to excitement, even before I am aware of what is about to transpire. I have concluded that this is the Lord's way of preparing me. I become aware of a restlessness inside, like something waiting to burst forth, and cannot settle until whatever is causing the disequilibrium is detected, pondered on, decided upon, written down and acted on. I recall experiencing this sense of unease for several weeks, until one Saturday I burst into the bathroom and announced to Mickey that I intended establishing a private Primary School. Mickey paused in the middle of shaving and looked stunned as he stared at me in the mirror. I read his mind. 'Now my poor wife has really flipped!' Having expressed

my intention, I promptly began penning my goals and the steps needed to accomplish this awesome mission. I decided that before investing in any more property I would utilise two classrooms of the Pre-Primary to 'test the waters.' Now that I had decided to start the school in a section on the existing property, the 'how' part followed. Just how does one go about opening a private school? I had never read an article, book or even seen a movie concerning this. The personnel I phoned at the Education Department fobbed me off from one to the other, until in desperation Mickey and I drove to Pietermaritzburg, where we encountered a frazzled woman, overloaded with reams of paper, who confirmed the possibility. She handed me a form to complete and to this day, ten years later, I still await feedback! However, not being one to give up easily, I eventually ferreted out a person of authority in KwaZulu-Natal, who advised me by phone to open the doors. I was told that only once I had 20 children and had been in operation for a year, would I be subjected to inspection by the Department of Education. I wasn't entirely satisfied with the response, and needed confirmation. On 19 June 1997, whilst in the middle of a discussion about the opening of the school, I had the overwhelming urge to dial an alternative number I had tried many times in vain. Within minutes the phone was answered and a Superintendent of Education Management confirmed the information I had received. As I lifted my head, with eyes like saucers, I stared into Mickey's face to see even bigger eyes. I slowly replaced the receiver and announced 'a school is born today!'

Excitement is like electricity. Very little happens without it.

(Lipkin, 1998:42)

How exciting, but nerve-wracking were the months that followed. What was the school to be called? What uniforms were the children to wear, and would I have enough children? Who would be the first Grade 1 teacher? How would I incorporate this new project into my existing business? I appointed a Principal and many meetings ensued. The first thing that needed to be established was the school's name. Should we name it Wonderland Primary? That sounded too childish! What about Windermere Primary after the name of the road? After many days the name Emberry was decided on. It embraced my initial, E, Mickey's initial, M, and berry for the 'fruit of our labour.' However, when I penned the name, the 'berry' section was not visually appealing so 'bury' was substituted, and looked proud on paper. As far as the uniform was concerned, we agreed on something casual, cool, comfortable, durable but smart to suit the Durban climate. However, the uniform agents

were not prepared to 'take a chance' until there were a considerable number of pupils. This necessitated designing, making, storing and selling our own comfortable denim uniforms. Was this the reason for my stint in the clothing industry? Using our family crest as a base, my son, Richard, incorporated patterns and colours to signify aspects we deem important in education, to formulate a significant badge. The four quadrants symbolise the four bands of a person's academic development, according to Curriculum 2005, namely Early Childhood; General Education and Training; Further Education and Training; and Higher Education and Training, all of which we either catered for, or had visions of catering for (for example the High School) at the time. The book denotes the Bible and the Book of Knowledge. The cross symbolises the spiritual aspect of a child's development. The armour represents the armour of God and is for the protection of all associated with the school. The colours in the school badge represent happiness (yellow); purity and peace (white) and excellence (purple).



Photograph 63

Embury College advert

Embury College opened its doors to one grade of fifteen pupils in 1998 (incidentally the same number as Wonderland's first intake), with the intention of expanding annually, and Mickey did a fine job of extending and modifying the Pre-School to house Grades 1 and 2.

facing homes were listed as heritage sites, and would therefore have to be restored to their original condition. What an exercise! It was an incredible challenge. How does one convert two ordinary homes with outbuildings and a warehouse into a school, in keeping with the Victorian flavour? In addition, we had not yet completed the renovations to the two houses when the owner of



Photograph 65
Mickey building Embury College

the adjacent property approached us to purchase his home. I knew this property would complete the facade of the school - I already had the image imprinted on my mind!

The biggest hurdle at this stage was finances. The bank I had done business with for many years would not advance any more capital. However, prayer works miracles, and at the eleventh hour our prayers were answered by another bank which realised the value of the properties. They had been approached by Michael, my eldest son. Once the properties were completely restored and functioning as a school, we received a Conservation Award from the City of Durban at a special ceremony in the City Hall. Mickey and I were so tired and overwhelmed by this stage that the enormity of it all made no impact. Pictures of the school have appeared in newspapers many times, and couples use the facade as a background for wedding photographs. In 2004 we acquired an adjacent property at the back, which was converted into a further four classrooms. Mickey, together with a professional team, constructed an air-conditioned school with sixteen classrooms, a media centre, computer room, hall, staff room, toilets and offices. In 2006 we had the opportunity to procure a further 1,296 square metres.

Embury College is very beautiful. A professional landscape gardener designed a Victorian garden complete with water features in the front of the school, the colour scheme being

white, green and silver. Victorian pots with round balls of ivy, and Victorian benches are strategically placed. The original stained glass Standard Bank window, which is over 100 years old, is a find I greatly appreciate. This arched window, which measures about four by three metres, was restored and placed in the main office. All the stained glass doors were restored, as were the metal pressed ceilings, which originally hailed from Scotland in the late 1800's. A school must be beautiful!



Photographs 66 a and b
The Victorian flavour of Embury College Private School

While the school was being built, pupils were shown the plans and witnessed, among other things, borer-eaten wood being replaced, and the original tiled floor being unearthed under layers of carpet and linoleum. How wonderful it is for children to learn from experience! They enjoyed feeling the borer-eaten wood and seeing how windows are replaced, and many other incidents offered visual learning experiences. One little boy was so fascinated that, of his own accord, he did a study on borer. This proved to me once again that if a person is interested in a topic, he/she does not need to be coaxed to learn about it. What a wonderful way to teach English, Maths, History, Biology or any other subject! While searching for information and writing about borer, this child was improving his English, learning methods of research and, although young, was learning Biology! We made full use of the construction experience - Numeracy had never been more fun as we measured and estimated many things to 'help' Uncle Mickey, for example how many pieces of new wood he would have to order, as well as the size and number of windows needed. Maths came alive for my Grade 1 and 2 pupils as they experienced the value of this learning area. A copy of the plans was displayed in each classroom and the boys, especially, took great delight in informing me of the progress of the building. I took equal delight in pretending to rely on their calculations regarding the time of completion of certain tasks, and the number of items that still needed to be ordered (e.g. bricks, fascia boards and tiles). The pupils were fascinated by the installation of the toilets, basins and electricity. Many declared their newfound profession for their future lives. Learning should always be meaning-based and relevant to the learner. The psychologist, Vygotsky, speaks about the social element of learning and teaching in the zone of proximal development. He also advocates learning being mediated or extended by an adult or older child. The zone of proximal development is a level to which the child's knowledge may rise if he/she is extended or taken a step further (Bukatko & Daehler, 1995:353). In the same way, as teachers, we all have different backgrounds and experiences and construct our own meaning through professional practices. Teacher self-studies have the ability to enhance the professional development of preservice teachers, to extend them a step further, to act almost as a ladder to that zone of proximal development Vygotsky speaks of, and to also breathe new life into the teaching profession.

Fictional discussion with a Grade 8 group

Boys and girls, I've explained the different ways people learn. We are all different - some

are visual learners, others learn by hearing and yet others from experience and touch. We learn through our senses. Some people do things others find difficult and *vice versa*. Today I'm going to read this piece of writing to you twice. Jot down anything you want to - anything that comes to mind. I'll give you some time. Remember you will all have different answers and no answer will be incorrect or of no benefit. Here we go ...

Mrs. Grossi: *Sam, what did you get out of the piece?*

Sam: *Mrs. Grossi I felt that if I were on the bus that you read about, I'd ask the driver to stop for me to take pictures of the beautiful fields of sunflowers, the olive vines and the setting sun.*

Mrs. Grossi: *What would you do with the pictures, Sam?*

Sam: *I think I would bring them to school to show everyone.*

Mrs. Grossi: *Sam, your art is so expressive ... would you consider painting the scene from your imagination?*

Sam: *Wow! I didn't think of that -I can already see it in my mind!*

Mrs. Grossi: *You know what I loved best? What actually framed the picture for me were the words 'the sun painting streaks of gold in the sky.'*

Boetie: *Wow! Words are powerful!*

Beth: *Yes, because you use your imagination. Now you can see the picture.*

Mrs. Grossi: *Quite right, Beth. That's what we need to do when drawing, writing poetry or writing. Use the imagination and be descriptive so that the person reading your work can see the picture without having a photograph. Beth, you have a flair for words ... would you like to compose a verse using words like 'the sun'- 'streaks of gold' - 'the field of sunflowers' - something like that?*

Beth: *Do you think I can do it, Miss?*

Mrs. Grossi: *Why not? I loved your last poem. I've framed it and put it in the staff room.*

Sipho: *Mrs. Grossi, you said we learn through our senses. Do you know what I heard? I heard the people in the square - the young ones laughing and the old ones whispering proudly about their grandchildren to each other. I also heard the young children asking 'Ma, where's the Nutella? I'm hungry?' Do you know I even heard the Italian accent they used?*

- Mrs. Grossi:** *That's excellent! Could you use that sense in story-writing?*
- Reena:** *Absolutely! I'm also going to look up the Afrikaans words in the dictionary and use this scene in my Afrikaans essays as well.*
- Sipho:** *Imagine me writing about Nutella in Zulu!* (The class laughs. Sipho has such a good sense of humour. How relaxed they all seem, and so attentive. I can see they are engaged in this lesson.)
- Amara:** */ heard other things. I heard music and laughing.*
- Mrs. Grossi:** *Wonderful, Amara! So did I! Instead of writing in an essay 'the music was playing' what could you now write? Do you remember how the author put it?*
- Amara:** *I'd write 'the music changed from a slow foxtrot to a tango'. That was what you read! I wrote it down.*
- Mrs. Grossi:** *This is incredible! What else?*
- Heinrich:** *I've never heard of a 'tarantella.' Is it a dance? I'll look it up on the Internet.*
- Mrs. Grossi:** *Yes - in that way you 'll extend your knowledge. I don't know anything about the tarantella myself. Please won 'tyou let me read what you download? Better still, Heinrich, won 'tyou tell us all what you 've learned? Let me know when you 're ready.*
- Maria:** *I'd love to do Latin American dancing one day. I'm going to look up all the different kinds of dancing on the Internet as well.*
- Mrs. Grossi:** *Fantastic! I did a bit of dancing when I was younger and would love you to share with the class what you have learned, Maria. Class, do you notice what's coming out in this lesson? There is not one person in the world who knows everything - there's always more to learn! We all have talents and one talent isn 't better than the other.*
- Yvonne:** *Miss, I felt a little sad that the group missed the celebration in the square.*
- Mrs. Grossi:** *That's why it's so important to check things. Don't rely on a travel agent telling you about a certain festival in Italy - look it up yourselves on the Internet. Always do your own research, guys! However, Yvonne, having said that, we must realise that often things happen in life for a reason, don't dwell on what might have been, look at what is, and rejoice. Maybe if they had been in time for the celebration party they would have*

missed the beautiful moment in the square!

Yvonne: */ think I'm going to do a study on this area in Italy and the different festivals.*

Mrs. Grossi: *Yvonne, I sense you would be outstanding in drama. How about organising a group to re-enact the scene for us?*

Yvonne: *Cool!*

Sabrina: *All this talk of Italy makes me hungry miss! My mother is Italian and she makes the most wonderful food, especially lasagne. I could just taste the food as you were reading.*

Mrs. Grossi: *Do you know how to make lasagne Sabrina?*

Sabrina: *Yes miss. I enjoy cooking.*

Mrs. Grossi: *Sabrina, would you like to demonstrate to us how lasagne is made on Thursday in our life skills lesson? Can you ask the secretary to make a copy of the recipe for each of us as well? I'd love to know how to make lasagne properly. Remember, you are going to have to double or treble the recipe so that we can all have a taste! It's okay if you want to bring your mom to help. And Sam, can you take the art lesson on Wednesday? In the beginning just read the piece to the class again to refresh their memories, and maybe give a few suggestions as to colour and form. Give a choice of medium.*

Lieben: *Well, I'm going to write a story. I want to be an author when I'm big so I'll begin with the story I already have in my mind from your reading.*

Mrs. Grossi: *Well done Liebs! Can you bring chapter by chapter to read to the class as you complete it? How exciting for us to be involved in a novel from the beginning. It will be a wonderful addition to our library. Imagine - you 'll be the first pupil to have a book in the school library! And Liebs, will you take the creative writing lesson on Friday?*

Thembe: *Can I do the same as Lieben?*

Mrs. Grossi: *Of course! We need different inputs because no two writers write the same way and you 'll bring a completely different version to the class. Now we ll have two books from this class. Wonderful!*

Timothy: *Mrs. Grossi the music also got to me! I just love music. I'd like to research different musical instruments.*

Mrs. Grossi: *A fantastic idea! Who 'd like to do this project with Timothy? It's quite a*

big one. Edrich, I know you play the French horn. Won't you play for us next music lesson? I am fascinated by this instrument.

Natasha: *Timothy, I have a few instruments at home. Let's do a display table together. Maybe Edrich can add his horn to the table.*

James: *Can I paint the background? I'll do a frieze of the different musical instruments!*

Diana: *Can I help? I play the piano, you know.*

Mrs. Grossi: *I'd love to be able to play the piano one day! You need to give us a treat Diana. We have a piano in the hall.*

Mickey: *Well I play the guitar...*

Mrs. Grossi: *Mickey, I didn 't know you could play a guitar!*

Mickey: *Yes, Miss.*

Mrs. Grossi: *Mickey, would you play for us in our next music lesson?*

Mickey: *With pleasure, Miss. Do you know I sing as well? We have this little band ...*

Mrs. Grossi surveys her class. How wonderful they are, and how exciting teaching is! How happy and motivated they all seem. There is Mickey who is experiencing a barrier to learning but plays the guitar and sings, to everyone's amazement! How proud he was when the children said 'No way! Do you really play! Cool!' Right, Mrs. Grossi thought. 'Mickey, you are going to love reading - I'm going to find as many books on guitars as I can.'

Mrs. Grossi: *Girls and boys, form yourself into groups; those interested in music with Mickey, those wanting to paint with Sam, those wanting to write verse with Beth, those wishing to write stories with Lieben and Thembe, those wanting to be involved in drama with Yvonne and those doing research with Heinrich.*

John: *Miss...*

Mrs. Grossi: *Yes, John.*

John: *My cousin in Grade 10 is going to drop out of school and the family is, like, upset because he's not like, thick and all that, you know what I mean?*

Mrs. Grossi: *Why on earth does he not want to finish his schooling?*

- John: *He says school sucks. He says learning is boring and monotonous. The teacher always shouts at him - like he makes mistakes, and he hasn 't got time to do his homework properly because he has to look after and help his mom who's very ill, and things like that. Miss, I wish he could come to our school. Learning is such fun - we know we will make mistakes but it's part of learning. The way we learn is meaningful. We understand it. I mean I, we, you, the whole class is always involved in each other's learning. We help you - we teach you, you teach us - we learn from one another and we learn by researching ourselves. It's cool!*
- Lieben: *Yes Miss, he's right. I find learning incredibly exciting. One day I want to be a teacher, too.*
- Bradley: *Ja, then when you 're old you could write a book on it I Hey I Didn 't you say you want to be an author? How can you be a teacher and an author?*
- Lieben: *Why can't I write about the different ways I teach and the effects on the children? Or maybe I'll write about my life in the teaching profession.*
- Mrs. Grossi: *Lieben, that's called an autoethnography.*
- Lieben: *A what... ?*
- Mrs. Grossi: *An autoethnography. It's about your life in a particular field. You know, I think every teacher should write an autoethnography. We all have so much to learn from one another.*
- Mrs. Grossi: *Tamie, why are you so quiet today?*
- Tamie: *Miss, I've heard some bad news. Can we talk at break?*
- Mrs. Grossi: *I'll be waiting for you.*

The Combined Class

*God has a history of using the insignificant
to accomplish the impossible.*

(Honor Books, 1994a: 19)

Nicholas

At the time of my search for a property for Embury College I met an agent whose eldest son has a learning disability. He proposed that I consider organising something for children with learning disabilities. Did he know this thought was already in my mind? Did he sense my deep love for learning challenged children?

Was this the reason for my obtaining a diploma in Remedial Education? During our conversation he related his feelings of helplessness as his son, Nicholas, kept asking why he could not attend his brother's school, in the vicinity of their home. Nicholas had to travel a long distance to his 'special school' and was very lonely in the afternoons as his brother played sport. I arranged for our permanently employed Educational Psychologist to meet Nicholas and his family. Being young and very sporty she saw Nicholas two afternoons a week, accompanying him to places of interest and playing sport with him. I would often enquire about Nicholas' wellbeing, and one day she reported some devastating news. Nicholas was refusing to go to school. He did not understand why he was not allowed in a 'normal' school, and was objecting to the daily travel.

It was the year 2000 and I was studying for a B.Ed Honours degree, one of the modules being Barriers to Learning. 'Lord,' I prayed, 'why do I feel a gentle nudging inside? Is it because You know my feelings for children faced with learning challenges? Is it because You know how nervous and insecure, yet on the other hand confident, I feel about providing quality education for these children? If it is so, Lord, please let me know somehow!' I was so excited to actually attend a University! In the first lecture, as the lecturer spoke of children experiencing barriers to learning, tears welled in my eyes. The more I attempted to control them the faster they fell. I don't know what the lecturer thought, but I realised at that moment, as the pain of those children burned in my heart, that my next challenge was soon to present itself. This was confirmation of my prayer.

I invited our psychologist and Nicholas for tea one Saturday afternoon. Nicholas, a handsome, olive-skinned, fair-haired child, was cerebral palsied due to oxygen deprivation at birth. His eyes are affected, as are the muscles on one side of his body, resulting in his walking with a lopsided gait. Nicholas has a younger brother who excels in all areas at school, including sport, and Nicholas' dream was to play cricket like his brother. When I asked of the psychologist what Nicholas' interests were she answered, 'He is cricket mad!' She also warned me that he would probably not speak to me. I must confess I know little about sport, so I paid a visit to a bookshop to see what I could glean on cricket as an enticement for Nicholas to talk to me. I found an excellent cricket magazine and learned a great deal. In yet another magazine I came across a glossy poster of the South African cricket team. Armed with these two items for Nicholas, and a lovely chocolate cake I had baked on that memorable Saturday morning, I prepared to meet my new acquaintance after praying for God's guidance. At the appointed time the psychologist arrived with Nicholas in tow. It was love at first sight! He appeared awkward for a moment only, but as soon as we started talking the conversation flowed easily. No-one was more surprised than the psychologist and no-one more thrilled than I! At some stage, when I gauged I had won his

confidence, I asked Nicholas his reason for not attending school for the past month. He informed me in no uncertain terms that he would never be returning to school, repeatedly asked why he could not attend his brother's school, and why he would never be allowed to play the sport he loved. He also lamented the fact that he had to travel for almost an hour to get to school each day. On the advice of the psychologist, Nicholas would need one-to-one teaching in literacy and numeracy and would not cope in a 'normal' class. I casually assured Nicholas there would be a class for him and a few friends, should he approve of my school. I will never forget that moment, as he tried to comprehend what was being offered him, yet questioned what would be required of him in return. He is such a sharp child!

Edwina: *Nicholas, I have a school, a place where learning is such fun that children are upset when it is holiday time. I would love you to be part of it.*

Nicholas: *No, because you are going to make me read.*

Edwina: *Me? Make you read? Oh no -I don't make children do anything. Children must enjoy learning.*

Nicholas: *Well, what will I do?*

Edwina: *I know you love cricket. We '11 follow the South African Cricket team on the map as they play all over the world. We '11 look at pictures in the cricket magazine and your teacher will read cricket magazines and the newspapers to you and your friends. There is a television in one of the rooms and you will be responsible for informing the school of the score.*

Nicholas: *You promise?*

Edwina: *I'll only promise if you will allow me to show you my school today. There are a couple of empty classrooms so, if you like the school, you can choose your classroom. Here is a cricket magazine I bought. Inside is an excellent coloured poster of the South African Cricket team that we '11 pin on the wall before we leave.*

Nicholas: *Is the school far? I want to go to my brother's school - it sjust near where we live.*

Edwina: *Take my watch. I will drive from your house to your brother's school. Let's see which one is the closest. You will be surprised!*

Nicholas: *Will you let me play cricket like my brother?*

Edwina: *And why not?*

Nicholas: *Because they say I'm different. I have cerebral palsy, but there's nothing wrong with my brain. I'm very good at maths but my eyes hurt when I read.*

Edwina: *We 're all different in some way. Don 't you think it would be a boring world if we were all the same? I'm not very good at maths and you are. You don't like reading and I do. I don't know how to follow cricket and you do.*

Nicholas: */ remember all the cricket scores from every game.*

Edwina: *So your memory is excellent!*

Nicholas: *So, why can't I go to my brother's school?*

Edwina: *Because God kept you for my school. He heard when I asked Him to choose children for me. If you were at your brother's school I would never have met you - that would be very sad for me.*

Nicholas: *My brother's school sucks!*

His mother reported that Nicholas was so excited, yet so afraid that it was just a ploy to get him to a school. That night he repeatedly enquired if I would change my mind, and if what was happening was really true.

Craig

When I first laid eyes on Craig I knew this was going to be my biggest challenge ever. I fell hopelessly and utterly in love with him. He is the most beautiful-looking child with big, brown, doe-like eyes. At our first meeting Craig stood in my office and stared nonchalantly out of the window with a 'what now? -I don't really want to be here' look. He did not, or could not, look me in the eyes and refused to answer one question as he continued to stare blankly out of the window.

My office is at the Pre-School, Wonderland, and Embury College is a little way along the road. All the way there Craig walked behind his mother and uttered not a word. I wondered if he was autistic or just extremely shy. I showed them the school and the classroom but Craig still looked blank. He appeared to be so distant from his surroundings. Torey Hay den's book, *Somebody Else's Kids*, flashed through my mind. I had read most of her books about life as a teacher of children who were challenged in some way. I wish more teachers would write books! An event permanently etched in my mind was the day I stood at the classroom door and challenged Craig to hug me. For weeks I would visit the class and make a point of touching him and he would shift and shrug his shoulders until he had put a distance between us. Sometimes he could not escape and I sensed how uncomfortable he was feeling, yet how pleased he was to be noticed. However, as I believe so strongly that love conquers all and that touch is the expression of love, I knew I had to

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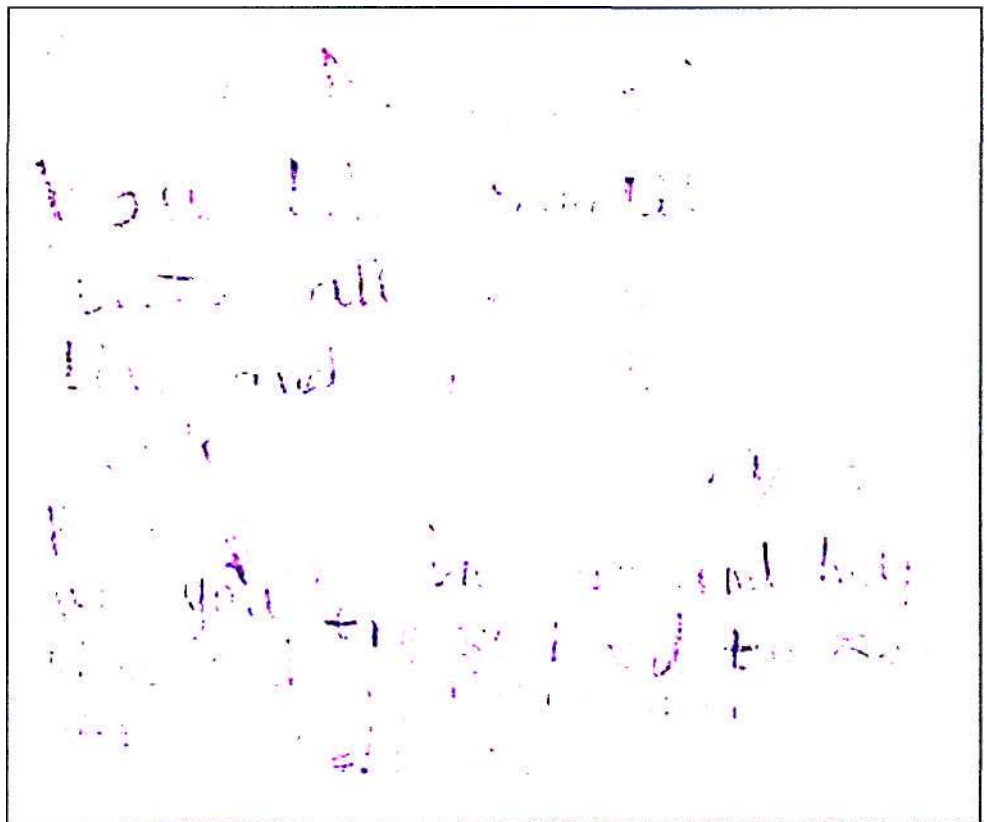
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Photograph 68
Notes from two pupils in the Combined Class

break through the wall that Craig had erected around himself. Positioning myself at the classroom door I challenged 'Craig, if you love me and this school, you need to get out of your chair and come and hug me.' It took a while for him to move. I stood with bated

breath wondering if this time I had gone too far. But that was the day that slowly, but surely, Craig's defences started to crumble. Today he is one of the first to give me a hug. How I sobbed when the English trophy was awarded to Craig at the end of his second year. Every child in the school was eligible to receive this prize, and each teacher had to state reasons why a particular child was nominated. I was not informed beforehand of the names of the recipients of the various prizes. My mother, who was seated next to me at prizegiving that evening, kept asking why I was crying so 'bitterly' as she put it. How does one begin to explain the deep pain in one's heart for the child who battles? How do I explain to my Lebanese '*imi*' (mother in Lebanese) that the best-cooked meal can never afford the 'deliciousness' of such a moment. How can I tell my '*imi*' that the most wonderfully constructed, mended, crocheted or ironed garments can never offer the satisfaction and happiness of that moment? How can a teacher ever explain the overwhelming joy at seeing a child progress so incredibly in every area, to someone who has never had the pleasure of teaching? As I recall that moment the tears flow once more. Six months later my mother handed me many magnificent diamonds she had collected over the years, with the instruction that I should have some fine pieces of jewellery made for myself. Can anyone understand that, while I was overwhelmed by her gift, I did not cry? Nor did I experience the same wonderful feeling I had when Craig received that trophy. When those beautiful brown eyes met mine, when the unspoken words were understood without a sound being made, when the look of pride was interpreted and the restoration of self-esteem was acknowledged, how could I not be moved to tears? Is there anything else that can compare with this in a teacher's life? God, thank you for this wonderful privilege!

The above two children were to be the first of many in my 'Combined Class,' named as such as the children are all on different levels and in different grades for various learning areas. However, the day I cried in front of the class was the day Nicholas read a verse he had written to my lecturer on her first visit. He informed me of his insatiable love of reading, to the point where he was completing more than three books a week! Nicholas progressed in leaps and bounds as we utilised his knowledge of cricket and past cricket scores as a basis for lessons and to boost his self-esteem. Learning, for Nicholas, became meaning-based and important. If anyone asks what has given me the most pleasure, satisfaction and joy in my life, I would have to answer 'opening this class.' To watch Nicholas and Craig, the first two mistrustful pupils, evolve before my very eyes into happy, contented children who could not wait to come to school in the mornings and whose self

confidence was slowly, but surely, increasing, was a joy I have no words for. No sum of money, no extravagant present, no coveted prize can ever compare with the gift I received from these children.

Jenna

Jenna was the first girl to join our 'Combined Class' in 2000. Jenna's mother is a diabetic and had a traumatic pregnancy as Jenna's twin brother died 'in utero' at six months' gestation. Jenna was born breech six weeks prematurely, necessitating a month-long stay in an incubator. I was privileged to have her at the pre-school when she was in Grade R in 1992. At the end of the year I phoned the department to request permission for her to repeat the grade, as it was clear to me she was not ready for school. The request was declined, due to her date of birth. I explained that had Jenna been born full term, on her correct birth date, she would have been eligible to repeat the grade. My pleas fell on deaf ears, however, and Jenna duly started school, where her teacher used the word 'stupid' when speaking of her, and hit her when she could not produce the required work. Jenna repeatedly confessed to feeling incompetent and very lonely.

Jenna's mother and I, with the assistance of an educational psychologist, arranged for her to attend a remedial school. Unfortunately the department rules that a child has to attend Grade 1 first and then be referred to a remedial school. My suggestion - that if Jenna were not allowed to repeat Grade R that she be permitted to attend a remedial school from their Grade 1 - was deemed not possible. Why did she have to attend a 'normal' school first when we knew her self-esteem would erode? Why do teachers use words like 'stupid?' To my mind all this does is render the teacher 'stupid.' How can a teacher physically attack a child? Had she been trained correctly she would have been taught to apply remedial techniques to assist her pupil. I used Jenna as the subject in an assignment for Orthodidactics and Psychometrics during my studies towards a remedial diploma. At this stage she was nine years old. I realised that Jenna had difficulty writing down her thoughts. At the age of thirteen her mother approached me to find out whether it would be possible for her to join the 'Combined Class' I had opened, as she had taken her to many high schools, but she was either refused entry or felt overwhelmed. Jenna became my first high school pupil in this group.



ELIZABETH SMITH
SWLVi LNStIttJCTOIItS
ACADEMY

*ELEMENTARY
INSTRUCTORS COURSE CERTIFICATE*

Awarded to

_____ Jenna Cameron

Photograph 69
Jenna's certificate

I quickly noticed Jenna's swimming prowess. She is a remarkable swimmer, and became swimming captain and *victrix ludorum*. Jenna started to blossom - the round-shouldered, shy, blushing little duckling turned into a graceful, popular swan. Noting how the younger children gravitated towards her and relished her gentle, kind ways, I requested that Jenna be excused from school for a week, and placed her in my Baby Care section to gain 'work experience.' She excelled! At the end of her sixteenth year, realising Jenna's potential with children, plus her incredible talent for swimming, I sent her to be trained as a swimming

instructor, on condition that she be permitted to be tested orally at the end of the course. She passed with flying colours. Today Jenna teaches swimming to the pre-primary children in the summer months, and assists the teachers in the Baby Care section of Wonderland. For the past two years she has

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Photograph 70 *The cricket team. Nicholas on the far right (back row) and Craig (second left, in front row)*



Photograph 71
The first combined class. Nicholas on the left, Jenna behind him and Craig (seated)

been studying my course on Basic Child Care and correctly answers the questions at the end of each section. I am so proud of what Jenna has become - a confident, happy person who feels wanted, needed and appreciated. Many people have failed their first attempt at obtaining a learner and driver's licence, but I am pleased to report that Jenna obtained both on her first attempt. I regard her as one of my most significant success stories. It fills my heart with pride and joy as I observe her daily interaction with the children and their parents. Wouldn't her story encourage so many others?

If the roots are deep and strong the tree needn 't worry about the wind.

(Honor Books, 1994a: 102)

Second year of teacher training established. Diploma course -1998

In the same year as Embury College was founded, that is 1998, I embarked on a new mission in the Teacher Training College as I began to formulate a second year of study for student teachers. There was talk of 'inclusion,' a principle I agree with, and I realised the future necessity of teacher aides. Thus, included in the second year of training are learning areas such as Disability Studies, Barriers to Learning and Psychology of Education. The second year of Train-A-Child was inaugurated in 1999 and only saw six students in the first intake. An educational psychologist was employed to lecture these students, to assist in identifying learners with possible barriers to learning in the Pre-Primary and Primary school, and to liaise with parents and other professionals. A few Primary schools in the area were initially approached to host the second year students. Today a total of 36 schools in the Durban area host our students. A few of my students were offered governing body positions at some of these schools - in Grade 0 and Grade 1. While I felt a student needed more training to be teaching these grades, the Principals informed me they were well trained and efficient. When I pondered upon this statement I realised that these students had received more practical training than those graduating from other institutions. Experience is a great teacher. However, I do believe that theory needs to be balanced with practical experience. Thereafter I began to envisage the students studying further to complete a third and fourth year, thus obtaining a Bachelor of Education degree. Once again many (mainly teachers) scoffed, saying that this time I was really going too far - it would never be allowed! 'Only a University can ever offer a degree.' 'Just who do you think you are?'

someone asked me. I wonder why people are afraid to venture - why they are afraid to take great strides, why they are afraid to dream big and to follow their dreams?

Bachelor of Education (Honours) Degree - 2001/2002

Time to go back to University I decided in 2001, the challenge being to obtain a B.Ed Honours degree. I recall bursting with joy on the first day I attended the University of Natal

Golden Key

International Honour Society

About GoldettKey

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Photograph 72 a & b
About Golden Key

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2001

Photograph 73

Certificate of Merit in Pastoral Care

(now the University of KwaZulu-Natal) for my bi-weekly lectures. It was the first time I had ever set foot in a University! What difference did it make if I was old enough to be the mother of the students (and most of the lecturers)? How I enjoyed those two years! How I battled to find time to complete assignments, case studies, literary reviews and other projects! However, at the age of 55 I obtained my degree *cum laude*, having gained tremendous insight into many areas. During these two years I specialised in Disability Studies and was delighted to be awarded a Special Merit certificate for an assignment on Pastoral Care in Schools, and awarded membership of the Golden Key International Honour Society. I thoroughly enjoyed the module, Barriers to Learning, and include a poem written for an assignment in 2001.

Barriers

*You called me dumb, but I couldn't get to school
No money, no transport, so I'm known as a fool.
Sandy went, she lived next door -15 kilometres - she left at four.
By ten o'clock she could not think
All she needed was food and drink.
For this basic need she'd have to wait
Maybe Mom would bring something home at eight.
Home - dare she call it that - with Dad and that awful cricket bat!
If a drink he could not buy
She knew she would pay with a blackened eye.*

*Sipho was called names, amongst them 'Thick'
Couldn't they see he was just very sick?
Medication and advice was really his due
But with no clinic nearby, what does one do?*

*John was labelled 'slow,' so slow he became
Were they not aware of the importance of a name?
Excluded from the system, he became uptight
Looking for John?
You'll find him among the gangs that fight.*

*They called Maria disabled - she had polio you see
And therefore was educated under a tree.
She was born with a high I.Q.
But due to her affliction, no one knew.
Where is Maria today?
Watching little children as they play.*

*Gladness was slow due to a language barrier
Is there any chance of a future for her?
Teacher has no time to wait
The curriculum the pace does dictate.*

*Prejudice is an ugly thing
Prejudice leads to labelling!
Labelling is discriminatory
Theshlin was labelled - he had a disability!
There's no hope for him they say
Why send him to school and waste our pay?*

*My dad's been looking - no jobs by the way
We know too well - no job, no pay.
He's got no needed skill you see
Had to leave school to support his family
Now Lara has, due to pregnancy.*

*Language, attitude, lack and fear
Are things that cause a barrier.
Before it's too late will anyone see
What can be done for a child like me?*

(Edwina, 2001)

Extension of creative hobbies

Praxis is that which one does as an artist, teacher or artist - teacher - researcher.

(Pearse, 2004:1)

Praxis, explains Pearse (2004:1) 'is theory into practice, practice out of theory.' In praxis, there is always an element of action, a reflective component where one considers emotions a critical component involving questioning, an evaluative component as one contemplates the worth of the action and an interpretive component as one poses the question 'What does all this mean?' Gadamer (1975:118) views a work of art as a form of representation.



Photographs 74 a & b
*My oil paintings of student teachers
with pupils*

In 2001 I again experienced a sense of disequilibrium as I perceived an urgency to use creativity as a means of expression. And so began my experimentation with art, using charcoal, pastels and oil paint as mediums. The subjects I gravitate towards are mainly women and children, some of whom are my pupils and student teachers. My art appears to resonate with happy and tender moments in life, and I am drawn to bright colours and paint images which 'speak to me.' Maslow said, 'A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be at peace with himself. What a man can be he must be. This is a need we may call self-actualisation' (Performance Unlimited, 2004:18). (This is a purposeful repeat of Maslow's quote - c.f.p 4)



Photographs 75 a & b
*Oil on canvas. Water-fun day at Wonderland.
The child on the right in the picture above is my
granddaughter, Rebekah*

*Pictured on the right is a child from my Baby Care section
which is the same child, a little older, pictured with the
student teachers on the previous page*



.....being a Grandmother

dedicated to David and aUmy future grandchildren



Its wonderful - r's crazy - ii's deep love. you became young again as yau 'perform' to make him eugn. - you put »oureeif oul - yoi cancel rare outnya fc ftabjot rum -yaw neart aches for him when you're away - wh«n he puts his arms around^ou and hods you light and says 'I lave yau nanny' - (he cant say granny y*)... •» w * h » TM I o n dolla-s • when he's sick, ycu're sick - pu find yojrself thinking MM I & this with my own children? When you bath fim. you trunk or all exciting bath aamcsto pity yw want to give him ail hs favourite things to eat - you (ale to hm continuously with tr* mnTKisp of increaslnahis vocabulary sna language sinicture- yuu find ynursw eominw

love him- you Start thnkingo' nis fuiur? andyou at up -you then upeii a 'rtvate Prtrmy eehool W j ^ _

OiYinny Edwina's ABC

A tefor Always... I will always be -Jere for you.
8 Is for flssuffuJ.... Which a w*ai ycc are to me.

C /s for Comfort and Caririrju Vy home E a place where you vM always find tr-s

D Is for Wfflcoon.... i wil always ba avail- able to guide and give you d.-rexc-n n yaur life.

Bis (or experience.. I sra sc rruc-. older that you and have experienced sa iv-'ch in my life.... (Hope some of wrsa! •^ave learr.t helps you alons the way.

F Is for fun... My tine wiJ- >< is f i'ed with such fun... you have made me yejfg again.

G Is for Sod., The very essence c' Love. Who gave you to me.

His forHappiness... Yojhavefc.-^Usumucli happi- ness into my life.

i is for Irresistible... Wnkt. is * ra : >cu are to rre when I sa* lhatctieeijy twinkle ir yos- &ea-tiful Crown eyes.

JIsfor Jay- Unspeakefcie icy ras fi led rry hezrt since the day you were bom

K Is for Kindness... I mus teaci yQ" to always do urto others as you would have ic-e urtc ycu.

L is for love... My bve Jcrycu is ia:ally unconditional. Love is ltie greatest lthing ,n f'e

M fefor Memories... Thank yc; for tenewng mine.

N Is for !lanny.... Tmnsr.a you firs; gave me!

O Is forObett/enee... Tie telanse of love ard dis:l- pline Is essential for you lo grow irtc an ertectivo adult.

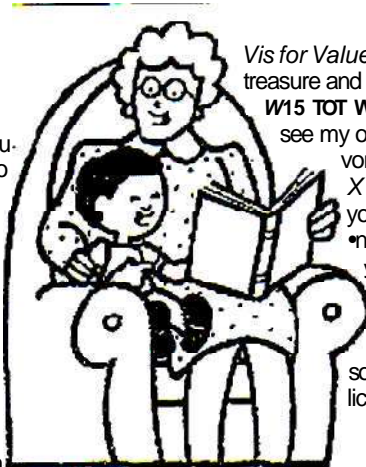
Pis for Presmco... I nee: :o always cs sware that my presence speavts more than my presents.

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T Is for Tendr.... I icve >cur s^S-heartedness and gen- tle nfture.

U is forUnderstanding... i i.Tidersand aw! knew yw. your needs, and your liSte character



Vis for Value... nou are audi a blessing... a treasure and gift of th< greyest value.

W15 TOT WOncter... As I look at you and see my own child I am still struck with vondErt

X Is for eXpviwce.. Through your eyes I can exp«ioncc so manywonders again.

y ia Tor KJU.... YOU art unique - no-one will ever take your pace.

ZfcfarZZzaizz... The sweet sounc of you slewing after a h*e- lic session of babysitting I

Whore Have Alt The Grandmas Gone?

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Photograph 76

Photocopy of an article in Edwina's journal, November 1999

Becoming an in-law and grandmother

During my two years of study for the Remedial Diploma many exciting and wonderful events took place. My eldest son, Michael, married Rachael in 1994 and in 1997 my first grandson, David, was born. What an experience! He was a repetition of his father and my poor daughter-in-law was exhausted, bewildered and shocked by this sudden intrusion into her previously calm life. Michael, Rachael and David moved in with us, history repeating itself, so we could lend a helping hand. At last I realised it was not only me who had faced a bad experience as a first-time mother, and was able to reassure my daughter-in-law she was 'normal.' Experience certainly is the best teacher. Although it was such a pleasure, it was exhausting trying to juggle my life at this stage, but I was determined not to abandon my studies. Cordeiro (2001:37) advises 'Never allow an outside storm to become an inside storm. It's inside storms that sink ships.' I recall staring at David in an attempt to decipher which characteristics he had of mine, of Mickey's, of Michael's. Four years later his sister, Rebekah, was born - the complete antithesis of David - a cheeky madam who was far too alert to rest her weary head on anyone's shoulder. Four years later Jesse joined their family. I am so proud of these children. They are loving and kind and altogether wonderful. It always amazes me that two people can produce such different children and proves that genetics play a very big part in a child's make up. The question 'Is it the genes or the environment that plays the biggest part?' is often asked. Many are of the opinion that both play an equally important role. From experience I tend to feel that environment weighs the heaviest on the scale at times. Other events that transpired during the two years of my studies were the engagement of my daughter, Jodi, and her subsequent marriage and relocation to Port Elizabeth - a place 'on the other side of the earth' as far as I was concerned. Jodi founded a Pre-School in Port Elizabeth, history repeating itself yet again, and two hours after my final exam for the Remedial Diploma, Mickey and I were *en route* to Port Elizabeth, armed with curtains and other items needed for the school's decor in preparation for the Public Open Day. How proud I was as I noted the professional way Jodi conversed with the public. She enjoyed tremendous success with the school and the parents, staff and pupils were devastated when Dean was transferred to Durban two years later. Today Jodi and Dean have two independent, happy, friendly, adorable, mischievous little boys, Matthew and Daniel. As I observe her with her children I feel fulfilled and extremely proud of her mothering skills. Today Jodi has her B.Ed degree, having gained ten distinctions in the fourth year, and administers the Pre-School, Baby Care and After

School Care section of Embury College with me.

Establishment of Embury Education and Training Centre - 2000

*The genre of autoethnography is based on, and designed for, the use of self
Without the self there could be no autoethnography.*

(Holt, 2003:13)

While distance studying through the Rand Afrikaans University (now known as the University of Johannesburg) for the Remedial Education Diploma in 1999, I attended 'contact sessions' in Durban. On a specific Saturday a lecturer from the Durban College of Education who was *aufait* with children with special needs, replaced our usual lecturer. As Mr. Wessels addressed the class I sensed something moving inside my being, but could not fathom what it was. I noted in his manner of speech a deep, genuine concern and passion for the child who has to face barriers to learning, and was acutely aware of his gentle spirit and kindness. After the lecture I requested his contact details. I surprised even myself with my 'forwardness.' He, in turn, did something apparently out of the ordinary when he handed me his card! I kept Dan Wessels' card in my filofax for six years. Frequently I would retrieve it, saying to Mickey, 'One day I am going to work with this man.' Six years later I felt the same inner nudge and the thought that the time was right for me to contact Mr. Wessels was overwhelming. The Bible states that God works in mysterious ways and that His timing is always right (Isaiah, 55:9).

*If you want to do something and you feel in your bones that it's the
right thing to do, do it. Intuition is often as important as the facts.*

(Brown, 1993:668)

What was I to say to this man? He would never remember the student, the 'old lady' he lectured for four hours, six years ago. However, the moment I spoke to Dan he remembered the course I was studying when we met. The Lord must have already prepared the way as, shortly after my call, Dan was seated opposite me in my office. I now had to face the fact that I did not know why I had phoned him! What did he think as I repeated something that he already knew - that many children were battling at school due to the inadequacy of teacher training? I mentioned my suspicions that many children were in

'special schools' unnecessarily, something that could have been avoided were the teachers trained to recognise and support learners experiencing problems. I am of the opinion that teacher self-studies in this area would be of immense benefit to the teaching profession. I related that with the introduction of Outcomes Based Education and the negative feelings expressed by inservice teachers, the time was ripe for the training of practicing teachers in specific areas of the new curriculum, particularly in Special Needs, Barriers to Learning, Maths and Science, Outcomes Based Education and Early Childhood Development. Dan agreed, and informed me of the imminent closure of the College of Education where he was employed as Head of Department, and of his planned redeployment as Superintendent of Educational Management for Special Needs schools. He suggested I meet his colleague, Johan Human, who had accepted the severance package and resigned from the Department. He felt we would be of benefit to one another. As Train- A-Child College had received the South African Qualifications Authorities' approval, Johan needed an 'umbrella' to work under for the short course he had written on Economic and Management Sciences, a new area in the curriculum. Thus Embury Education and Training Centre was established in 2000 with Dan, Johan and I as partners. Today, inservice teacher education and training short courses of six months' duration are offered in many regions of Natal, as part of the professional development of practicing teachers. The courses embrace Economic and Management Sciences, Computyping, Early Childhood Education (level 4), Natural Science and Technology (this course is offered in collaboration with the Science, Mathematics and Technology Education unit of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University); Learners with Special Education Needs; School Management; Computer Science; and OBE Specialist. Embury Education and Training Centre (later known as Embury Institute for Teacher Education) is recognised and respected by people in the KwaZulu - Natal Department of Education. In 2006 we were awarded a tender by Nasou Via Africa to run 69 workshops in new learning areas - 23 in Accounting, 23 in Business Studies and 23 in Economics, in all nine provinces of South Africa, from May to September. I devised the Level 4 course aimed at non-matriculated teachers who are in the field of Early Childhood Development without any training. Many teachers have enrolled for the two six-month courses, which are held on a Saturday at various centres throughout Natal, and the manual and accompanying workbook has been translated into isiZulu. The fact that, albeit indirectly, I will play a role in the lives of so many more young children gives me great satisfaction. How touching it was to present certificates to the many teachers who so eagerly followed the course and who play a part in the answer to my prayer of reaching as many young children as I possibly can, to make a difference in their lives.

At the first meeting I informed Dan and Johan of my desire to create a pathway for my Train-A-Child students to complete the further two years towards a B.Ed (Foundation Phase) degree. Dan and Johan both have Masters degrees, have lectured distance students for a number of Universities in South Africa and have been in Teacher Training for many years. I still wonder to this day whether they considered me completely 'flipped' to have the vision of my students obtaining a degree on our campus? Perhaps I should ask them this question! I cannot really blame them as the wonderful college they taught at was now defunct, and here was this ordinary teacher hoping for extraordinary things!

To achieve a big goal you are going to have to become a bigger person. You are going to have to develop new skills, new attitudes, and new capabilities. You are going to have to stretch yourself, and in so doing, you will be stretched forever.

(Canfield, 2005:60)

Prior to my meeting Dan and Johan, I had spent time with the Director of Education in Pretoria, and had approached several Universities to recognise my accredited programme. Having spent a large amount of money and endured many frustrating meetings, I concluded that they were either too nervous to accept a new challenge, or did not fully comprehend the meaning of the newly-instituted National Qualifications Framework, which allows for lifelong learning and provides a way for all the people of our country to better themselves.

Everything you want is just outside your comfort zone.

(Canfield, 2005:70)

At last, after many hours of frustration - because deep down I knew it was possible, I had the pleasure of meeting a forethinker, a risk-taker - a person willing to listen to my proposal. Armed with my notes, accreditation certificate, a video of the premises and some of the students' work, Mickey, Johan and I met with Professor Bean as well as the Dean, and various Heads of Departments at the University of Port Elizabeth (now known as the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University). After much deliberation, and many questions and answers, the deal was agreed upon and the third year of study was on the cards. Johan, having Curriculum Development as one of his many fortes, worked around the clock to marry the two programmes in order for the University to comfortably issue our students with

their degree in the fourth year. At the first parent, student and lecturer meeting that year, Professor Bean and the head of the Foundation Phase of the University of Port Elizabeth, flew to Durban to address those present. It was like a dream unfolding - like something being birthed, as it were, after many years. When I reflect on this occurrence I realise that Professor Bean was willing to take a risk and had a spirit of *Ubuntu*, as it is known in the African tradition. *Ubuntu* is a way of life and those who practice it are hospitable, helpful, willing to go the extra mile for others, compassionate and fair. They are an example to others in the community. Would it not be wonderful if we all, and particularly teachers, lived this way, in the spirit of *Ubuntu*?

Sometimes our light goes out but is blown into flame by another human being.

Each of us owes deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this light.

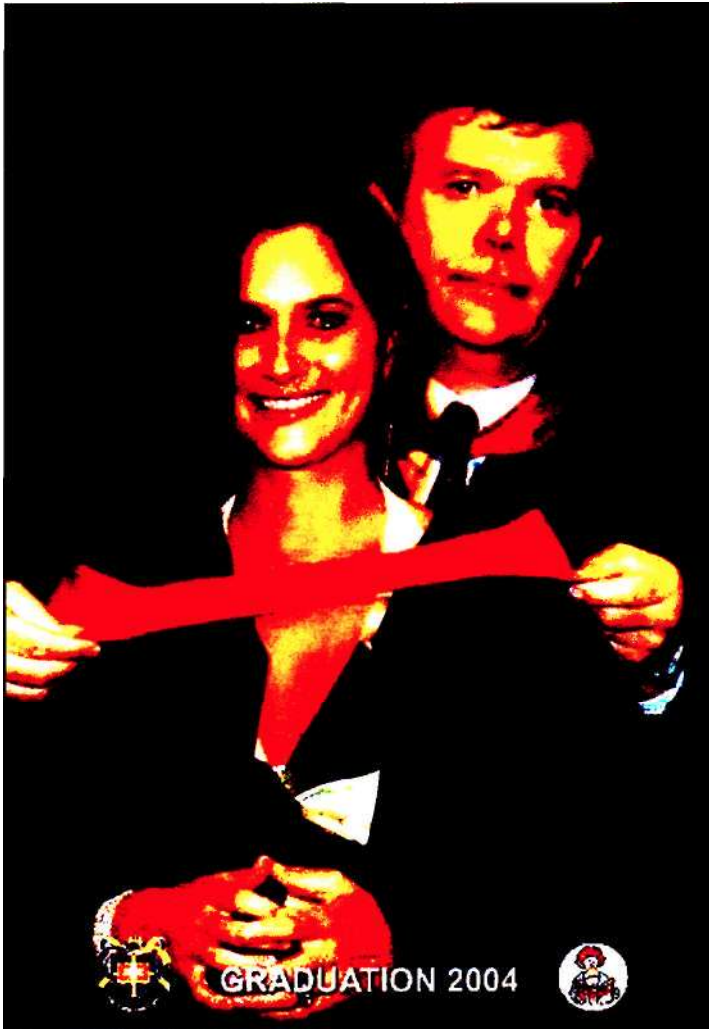
Albert Schweitzer (Canfield & Hansen, 2002:39)



Photograph 77

Handshake between myself and Professor Pat Bean from the University of Port Elizabeth, 1999

The first third year class was initiated in the year 2000 and my daughter, Jodi, was one of the first students. I realised that both the school and the college would require bigger premises in the near future. Diagonally opposite my Primary School stood the three-storey Durban Child Welfare building. It was for sale at the time, but the asking price was way beyond my means. Three months later huge signs on either side of the building informed the public of the auction date. I surveyed the three-storey building with hundreds of little offices and, although its magnitude overwhelmed me, perused the plans for a couple of days, waiting for that certain feeling. By now I knew the way the good Lord worked with me!



Photograph 78
*Jodi and Professor Bean at her
graduation*



Photograph 79
My beloved daughter and I

My eldest son, Michael, had to undergo an operation to his sinuses and I waited patiently beside his bed for him to regain consciousness. Once fully awake, I laid out the plans, advocating that we share the building as he, too, had outgrown his rented premises. We attended the auction with a fixed offer in mind, after consulting the finance company about increasing our existing bonds. (This is the way I have been able to purchase all the properties.) However, when we heard the starting price at the auction, we realised it was way beyond our budget. As we walked away from the auction that day Mickey turned to me and said, 'We'll only be ready for that building in two years' time and, if it's God's will, it will be ours. We will need it for the Training College.' I agreed, and replied that I too felt deep down that the premises were already ours. The building was duly sold to a buyer with a 'back up' offer from another person. After the auction I approached the buyer, informing him of my interest in renting the ground floor, and my son the second floor. The buyer verbally confirmed the offer and I never heard from him again! The first buyer's plans were thwarted and the 'second buyer' paid me a visit. He was willing to give me the top floor, which I declined. Suddenly that certain feeling washed over me as he spoke and I knew that no matter what happened, that building would somehow become a Teachers' Training centre. The second buyer's plans did not materialise and once again enormous 'For Sale' signs appeared on either side of the building. There they stayed, month after



Photograph 80

Embury House stands tall and proud

month. Two years later, when I felt the time was right, I contacted the agent, only to be informed an offer had already been made and plans for the conversion had been submitted. The consortium were awaiting a partner's return from overseas. They intended to convert the building into medical offices, with a clinic on the top floor. Recognising a 'prompting' in my spirit, I hastily submitted plans, but they were rejected due to insufficient parking space. The doctors were going to excavate for a parking garage and were installing a lift, which pleased the Department. Mickey and I had already consulted two engineers, a draughtsman and an architect, who informed us of the impossibility of acquiring the 64 parking places required by Town Planning. Eventually another architect advised us to remove part of the building to accommodate more cars, and for the third time new plans were hastily submitted! Unbeknown to us someone in high places was routing for the doctors, but ultimately Michael and I, against all odds, became the owners of 119 Windermere Road at the end of June 2002. Michael informed Mickey he would be needing his section in the middle of August that year when his lease expired. Once again Mickey worked miracles, and Michael had magnificent premises just in time. I was to move in January 2003. We have six huge lecture rooms (the hall doubles as a lecture room), six offices, a computer centre, boardroom, library and satellite centre. I still cannot believe this miracle!

Embury House stands tall and proud - a stately lady accommodating many teacher trainees and a satellite centre for the Universities of Stellenbosch and UNISA (University of South Africa). Telematic transmission of lectures (via satellite) from the Universities of Stellenbosch and UNISA for educators in distance education programmes, medical doctors, lawyers, dentists and other professionals are managed by our centre, which has twenty telephones for 'students' to contact their distant lecturers. She is the official tuition centre for UNISA South students for Intermediate and Senior Phase Teachers, B. Ed. Honours as well as for UNISA's Access Programme for matriculants without matric exemption. She is also the tuition centre for the University of Johannesburg and the exam centre for the Universities of Stellenbosch, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, and for the law faculty of the University of Johannesburg.

In 2005 the names Train-A-Child and Embury Education and Training Centre were combined to become Embury Institute for Teacher Education. The most overwhelming honour ever bestowed on us was the granting of Higher Education status and accreditation to offer our own B.Ed Foundation Phase degree by the Council of Higher Education, a

first in the country for private colleges.

Another first-time, history-making event is that the Embury Institute for Teacher Education has been awarded the mandate to train Level 4 Pre-Primary teachers in KwaZulu -Natal in a three year project, funded by ENGEN in collaboration with the Education Department. At the recent prestigious launch of the programme my only comment to the officials, principals and future trainees was to express my delight that, through them and this initiative, I would

be reaching so many more children. Imagine how many children I will be able to touch through the training of so many dedicated teachers! I have learnt so much from these students - from issues concerning customs to those concerning the position of the teacher in the community. They have been encouraged to carry out self-reflective practices not only for their own development, but for the benefit of all teachers.



EMBURY INSTITUTE FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

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PROSPECTUS



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Official Tuition Centre

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Photograph 81

Cover of the Prospectus

Photograph 82

Picture in Berea Mail, 2005

The Embury Institute for Teacher Education



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Photograph 83

Article in the South Coast Sun, October 2004

Establishment of Embury High School - 2005

In 2004 I realised my initial pupils at Embury College were nearing the completion of Primary School and asked myself 'Dare I approach Mickey with my idea of starting a High School?' I dared - and Embury High was established in 2005, starting with sixteen pupils in Grade 8. What an experience! Each child has his/her own workstation, which Mickey built, with his/her own computer and work timetable. It is a high school with a difference. However, the most awesome part is that their teacher, the first teacher in the high school, is none other than one of my Pre-School ex-pupils, Ryan, mentioned on page 108 of the thesis. The workstation arrangement in Ryan's class allows a learner who emigrated to London last year to remain a registered pupil, receiving his daily lessons through satellite link up. To my knowledge this is a first among Durban schools.

Back to University!

Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance.

(Honor Books, 1994b:32)

While reflecting at the end of the year 2003 I said to myself 'Edwina, you have only two more years left before you turn 60. Therefore if you are to reach your goal of further post graduate studies you need to return to University.' Being principal of a busy Pre-Primary school and Baby Care Centre, co-director of Embury Institute for Teacher Education and owner of Embury College Primary School, rendered attending University two evenings a week and having to complete weekly assignments, plus a main assignment for two modules per semester, a formidable task. I greeted the early dawn most mornings as I could not sacrifice time spent with my mother, husband, children, grandchildren or businesses.

One of the beauties of teaching is that there is no limit to one's growth as a teacher, just as there is no knowing beforehand how much your students can learn.

Kohl (Canfield & Hansen, 2002:147)

an appropriate style of teaching in order to maintain his/her self esteem and to reach his/her full potential. Occupational therapy to strengthen co-ordination and muscle tone, is also advised. Children with Dyspraxia present as being clumsy, have difficulties with things like catching a ball, find writing tedious and may have a very short concentration span (Kirby, 2004:1).

Prison venture



In October 2005 I was privileged to provide training manuals and a workshop for one of the most exciting ventures of my life. Did I think the end of my career was in sight? No, it is far from over. Seventeen enthusiastic warders from different areas in Natal were earmarked to start Pre-primary schools in the prisons in a venture between Correctional services and the Education Department. To think that all these years female prisoners had to keep their children in their cells until they reached school-going age! I apologise to these children for our apathy in this regard.

Photograph 85
*Introduced to the trainees as
'the one who made it possible!'*



Photography 86
*Conducting a workshop for
the chosen warders*



PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

UMLAZI DISTRICT OFFICE

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Dear rdw'.na

REQUrST TO USE YOUR TRAINING MATERIAL

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This was a shoit notice reqqct ss th;ir I lead Office arc expecting this to happen before the end of the year. Since our Department deals with grade R specifics, we ilifljck of you so give u\ support by using your material :'er Child Care since it covers children from 0-i \«ars of arc.

We have sited t;c Wcs!viile Prison and we have seers ihese children who are confined in une place without any stimulation and we tc'l tiat yourcntrib-ition ir. terms of giviniru<; u mandate to r.se your manuals will mean a lot to our uixmuniy.

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The training will tike place on the :
Date : iO- 14 October 2005-10-05
Venus; BH next to La Lucia Mai!
Tinie_: 8h30 for 9h00

We will appreciate if you can give us 3 training manuals as well as organise 17 copies of participants manuals for ths groLp.

Your support in ECD is always appreciated.

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A. G. Mthembu
District Dir?ctor

Photograph 87
The request to use my materials

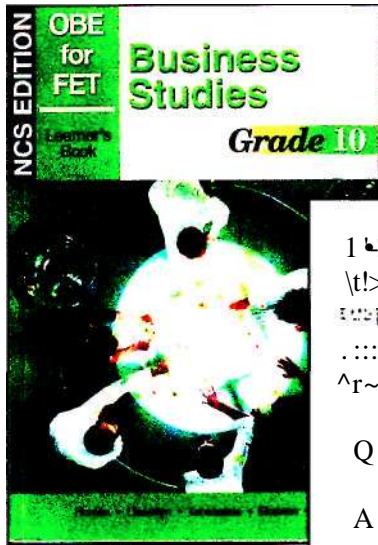
Entrepreneurship

Each of us as an educator-researcher provides the initial stock for the further budding growth of self and others.

(Diamond & Van Halen-Faber, 2005:84)

Dilks (2005:1) offers an alternate term for autoethnography. He calls it an autosciethnopedageohistoigraphy, as the practice of writing a life story weaves together

'personal perspectives, cultural observations, educational and theoretical explanations, material and other facts, in a complex, self-conscious and empathetic sense of geographical



and historical contexts.' May I take the liberty of adding the letters 'entrep' to the end of the word, as this autoethnography includes all the above factors plus entrepreneurship?

I have a personal perspective on this. The person in the white costume is a student who has been assigned to create a character for a drama project. The character is a 'business student' who is 'entrepreneurial'. The student has created a character who is a 'business student' who is 'entrepreneurial'. The student has created a character who is a 'business student' who is 'entrepreneurial'.

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Photograph 88
Extract from Grade 10 Business
Studies Learner's Book

I contemplated whether to insert this section in the piece and was swayed to the positive side by the fact that entrepreneurship is a new area of study in Outcomes Based Education, the new education model in South Africa. Denzin suggests that ethnographers should become more like journalists, who are committed to the public's good (Ellis, 2004:149). The 'public's good,' in my opinion, is that more teachers become entrepreneurs in their field, whether it involves establishing centres of learning, the production of teaching aids or the compilation of teacher self-studies, and encourage learners in this area. According to the report of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM report), as part of an International study, particularly in the developing world, entrepreneurship plays an important, positive role in economic development in developing countries (Harding, 2004:3). However, it appears that in South Africa entrepreneurship is only half of that in developing countries. This, Harding speculates, could be due to the education system, which does not encourage self-perception and entrepreneurial skills in learners. He concludes the article with the words 'Remember, entrepreneurs are not born, entrepreneurial ability is an acquired skill' After having almost completed my autoethnography, I speculated as to the veracity of the above statement. Is entrepreneurship an acquired skill or is it in the genes? If it's acquired then entrepreneurs need to pen more autoethnographies for the public good, and the schooling system needs to encourage this skill. Thus I was delighted to be interviewed in 2005 as a 'teacher entrepreneur' for the Grade 10 learner's book, *Business Studies* (Human, Llewellyn, Tshabalala, Eksteen & Miller, 2005:195). How I wish I had this book when I was at school!

Synthesis

Eric Fromm said that to be successful requires an 'inquiry and education about our identity (who am I?), about our personal values (what do I want?), about our vision (what is my life for?)' (Holden, 2005:40). This autoethnography has clarified my sense of identity, personal values and vision. However, it must be noted that the Success Quotient, unlike the Intelligence or Emotional Quotients, demands that wisdom be applied to success. Holden (2005:65) states that in present times we live in a 'Success Culture' and people judge their life on whether or not they are successful. As far as I am concerned, the measure of my success is answered by the positive response to the question in the last verse of the hymn, *In the Morning of My Life*.

*In the evening of my life I shall look to the sunset,
At a moment in my life when the night is due.
And the question I shall ask, only I can answer,*

Was I brave, and strong and true?

Did I fill the world with love my whole life through?

Did I fill the world with love?

Did I fill the world with love?

Did I fill the world with love?

My whole life through.

(Verse 3, Hymn - In the Morning of My life)

(Frederick Douglass)

Photograph 89 involved my signing a pledge in 1995, together with Mrs. Ina Cronje, Minister of Education in Natal, and other dignitaries, to uphold and enhance training in Early Childhood Development in KwaZulu-Natal. At this point I was moved to tears to be counted as one of the stalwarts of education for the young child. This in the 'evening' of my life. As I signed the pledge, and lit and placed a burning candle on water, I realised once again the enormity of the responsibility of an 'ordinary' teacher. The flame spoke to me of the light a teacher brings to the life of many children and also the guiding light of God in our lives.



Photograph 89

Signing the pledge, 2005

The influence a teacher has on a person's life truly is never-ending. Thank you, Lord, for my profession! Was I brave and strong and true? Did I fill my world with love my whole life through?

*A master can tell you what he expects of you.
A teacher, though, awakens your own expectations.*

Neal (Canfield & Hansen, 2002:138)

We are known as the 'Manic Society.' Everything is rushed and life is full of 'busy-ness.' However, the danger is that 'we leave ourselves behind, we leave behind the truth' (Holden, 2005:7). I have realised that, although we have to commit to giving ourselves to an ideal wholeheartedly, life must never become so manic that we forget to 'stop and smell the roses.' Carl Jung said 'Man can meet the demands of outer necessity in an ideal way if he is also adapted to his own inner world; that is, if he is in harmony with himself (Canfield, 2005:59). At this stage of my life I am in harmony with myself and feel fulfilled in my profession.

It's not the years of your life that counts - it's the life in your years.

(Abraham Lincoln)

How do I feel when I reflect on the 'life in my years?' To be completely honest I have never stepped back, surveyed the land and said 'This is what I've done.' Every moment of my life has counted and my mind is constantly occupied. While writing this chapter I sensed an uneasiness and recalled Ellis' words ' ... but I also worry that people will think I'm full of myself when I write autoethnography' (2004:172). Valuing traits of modesty and humility, this started to eat at me. However, the words of Vermeulen, 'If you live your passion, your vitality will naturally motivate you,' encouraged me as I realised that my profession has always been my passion and my passion has always been my profession (1999:120). How else could I have portrayed my passion but through my profession? Did my vitality motivate me? Will my story motivate others?

And so ends the story of an ordinary person, an ordinary teacher with an extraordinary passion, but I realize the truth of the saying 'The past should be a springboard not a hammock' (Honor Books, 1994:141) as I contemplate what the future holds for me.

PART THREE – LOOKING BACK

Have you followed the ploughman's seeing?

Has a new self been brought into being?

Do you understand just how he feels

As he looks at the land and

Thanks God for its yields?

(Edwina, 2005)

Introduction

Every individual is born into the world resembling a naked field

And, at the end of his life on earth, has to give an account as to his plantings and yields.

Will the ploughman be able to stand before his Master and hear the words,

Well done thou good and faithful servant

Thou hast poured love into many a heart and hast left fertile fields for thine own children.

Thou hast fulfilled the task I created thee for, now welcome into My rest?'

Or will the ploughman have any regrets?

Each person is born into the world holding his destiny in his own hands.

(Edwina, 2005)

This final part of the thesis is presented in three sections as there are three overarching 'what' questions that need to be answered. Ellis (2004:199) refers to the thematic analysis of the stories in an autoethnography. Therefore, in the first section I begin by asking 'What are the voices I hear in my heart and my soul as I reflect on the writing of the piece?' In this section I draw together issues that emerged during the writing process and theorise about it. In the second section I call on voices from the literature of teacher self-study as a body of emerging knowledge as I ask 'What is the purpose of teacher self-study and studying teachers' lives?' This is framed in the international work of self-study reflective practice in narrative inquiry and I reflect on its place in the South African education context as a whole. However, Ellis (2004:195) reminds us that the true test of this work relates to the impact it has on the reader. Therefore, in the final section I return to the significance of the autoethnography more broadly as I ask 'What is the public's opinion of this thesis?' In this regard, I highlight emerging themes from the analysis of the readers' responses and

recontextualize it even though, according to Ellis (2004:199), 'you don't have to privilege theory' in the analysis.

Bateson argues that women read and write biographies to gain perspective on their lives (Reed-Danahay, 1997:242). In this final section of the thesis I therefore respond to this statement. Bateson further posits that women read the biographies of other women in order to learn about their private worlds; how other women lived their lives and how they balanced their work and domestic lives. Would that this autoethnography assist in this regard. Would that this autoethnography be especially of value to teachers and be used as an agent of challenge, an agent of stimulation, an agent for the recognition of self-study and as a valuable tool for professional development.

*When we started telling stories we gave our lives a new dimension:
the dimension of meaning-apprehension-comprehension.*

(Okri, 1997:113)

Krall's fourth and fifth stage of hermeneutic motion is 'embodying' and 'restoring' and she suggests that the author rest before the restoring stage (Renner, 2001:2). Rest? Why? This is the most exciting part of my autoethnography. What has been revealed in the past chapters and discovered by venturing, remembering, analysing, composing and describing, needs to be examined, allowing for the emergence of a 'new centre' which could lead to a change in self-knowledge (Renner, 2001:2).

*Artistically crafted novels, poems, films and paintings, and photography
have the capacity to awaken us from our stock responses.*

(Eisner, 1995:2)

*What arts-based educational research can and should do
is change the people who teach and who teach teachers.*

(Diamond & Van Halen-Faber, 2005:81)

Reflections on the writing

People like to tell their stories to try to make sense of their experiences.

(Ellis, 2004:311)

Hesitantly I hand my research proposal to my promoter. I am so excited about doing an autoethnography drawing on teacher self-study! Will my particular life story suffice as an autoethnography? Will my promoter think me a 'bold creature' for even contemplating it? At our first lecture students were required to introduce themselves and state their position in the field of education. I recall my reply, 'My name is Edwina Grossi and I work in a Pre-Primary school.' Now I need to let my promoter have a glimpse of my life. 'Let me show her my vision which became a reality, and let her decide,' I thought. The words 'Yes, I think you have an abundance for an autoethnography,' were music to my ears. However, what if the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee does not accept my proposal? Will they accept one in an alternative genre? If need be I may be compelled to be an 'ordinary student' completing an 'ordinary thesis' to obtain an 'ordinary degree!' However, the following e-mail confirmed that I had not wasted my time in beginning to pen my autoethnography.

Wonderland

From: "Naydere De Laigc <Delar.gen@u<zn ac.za>
To: <.vonder@clcne.co.za>
Sent: 09 February 2005 0533
Subject: P'oposal Acceptec¹

Hi Ecwiev.
l'mpofcil &>2f]»fid! l.et Hi: fjn begin!!!!
Sec you at rrcjs-nwon trcr.rcrsvr (10 l'ebTiwry 2H-S j
r.'ydzr.t

Photograph 90

E-mail bearing good news

Immediately I felt my promoter could already sense the 'fun' I was to experience, and would share in my enthusiasm for my career and my thesis. This piece of work consumed me, and saw me working in the early hours before dawn most mornings. I find it quite emotional that this story, the living, breathing, textbook of my life, has finally come to an end. I have relived and breathed deeply my passion for the teaching profession, and have loved every moment of the writing and organisation of this piece.

However, telling the story is not over when we think we have permission to tell the story as an academic text. Like Ellis (2004:264) who describes some of the tensions that her students experienced in convincing the academy that autoethnography is an appropriate

mode, and like Whitehead (Cole & Knowles, 1996:4) who experienced difficulty in getting his doctoral work on self-study accepted, I also have experienced challenges. Rather than relegating them to an epilogue or a post script or some version of a 'story from the trenches' that doctoral students tell 'after the fact' or at a conference, I consider it important to include these challenges as part of the story. Two other dissertations that I have located, one by Linda Anderson (1990) and one by Anne-Louise Brookes (1992), take on aspects of the academy as central to the study. In Anderson's case, she is interested in the patriarchal structures of a Canadian University that 'govern' the writing and knowledge production of mature female doctoral students who 'return' to the academy in their thirties, forties or fifties. In Brookes' study, she contests the right to frame her experiences of sexual abuse within her doctoral research, arguing that it is the power structures of the academy that are not unrelated to the power structures responsible for her childhood experiences.

*I've always felt that stories about loss and pain
make the most evocative autoethnographies.*

(Ellis, 2004:110)

On a predetermined Thursday morning I arrive at the University prepared for 'the slaughter of the innocent.' I want to upgrade my Masters to a PhD. My thoughts turn to the condemned criminal walking the long path to his executioner. I sense a little of what he feels as I am summoned to 'walk the plank' down the long corridor to the boardroom where I and my work would come under scrutiny. As I enter the boardroom, seven pairs of eyes on me, I joke with the Committee. I already feel so exposed ... after all, they had all read my autoethnography. 'Shall I strip?' I ask as I point to my clothes, 'that's all that's left now,' I continue. The room is quiet. Do they not know that autoethnography strips one almost bare? I sense previously uttered words hanging ominously in the air and presume the debate prior to my entry into the room could have been quite heated. I steal a quick look at my promoter's face. It is expressionless as are the others. It is all too quiet in the room, as if each person is waiting for the next to start talking. I begin. Not now silly woman ... this is a solemn affair!

I am afforded 10 minutes to give a presentation of my thesis, I had spent so much time preparing for this moment but... the background pictures I had meticulously chosen for the projection of each section were too faint. Is this an omen? Was that my voice reading the

words? I shouldn't have bothered even preparing, as the words I had carefully chosen were not sufficient. 'Where is the data?' 'What is your contribution to society?' 'What is the purpose of the study?' 'Is it about ECD, teacher identity or ... ?' 'What's the use? So many questions!

After the presentation the first professor's question put me at ease. 'What different kinds of autoethnography are there?' or something like that, the professor who is *au fait* with autoethnography asked. I shouldn't have relaxed so soon. As the next questions came flying from all sides of the room, many thoughts raced through my mind. Do they really understand what autoethnography is about? I was joking when I asked if I should strip as I entered the room... now I really felt stripped, stripped of my dignity, stripped of my intellect and stripped of any knowledge I thought I had gained from researching autoethnography. Why did that same feeling I had in Grade 2 threaten to engulf me now? Why did I feel I was once again being stripped naked for the 'mistake' I had made and the ensuing punishment was soon to follow? Ellis' words I had read somewhere rushed through my mind. I'm so glad I remembered them ... they confirmed my thoughts ...

The reviewer didn't get it, or refused to get it.

Instead she yearned, as she said, for a feminist confession ...

She wanted me to write my past as we (or she) might wish it had been,

given the current cultural perspective.

I had tried to write it as I understood it had been.

(Ellis, 2004:22)

Some of the academics were clearly taken aback by the non-conventional format of the thesis. Thank goodness I remembered Sparks' (2002:21) warning that establishing autoethnography as 'proper research' is problematic for some who do not realise that such work is 'located at the boundaries of disciplinary practice.' Thank goodness the face of First professor was like an open book; I was somehow able to read her disapproval and approval at certain moments. I must remember to tell her that the nodding of her head as I answered some questions was so comforting. I had quoted from many of her articles and books in my thesis.

One professor said, 'I thoroughly enjoyed your thesis. I couldn't put it down.' Why did I feel tears prickle at my eyes? Oh yes! I remember... I had prayed that someone in the room

would utter the same words that each and every reader of the thesis had, in order to confirm one of the points Richardson uses when judging the worth of narratives. Was she trying to console me or did she really mean it? From the warmth in her eyes I realised she really meant it. My relief was soon shattered when someone said 'It's very self-indulgent.' Oh dear ... maybe she had skipped the parts where I had twice explained this does, and should, happen. After all, there would be no autoethnography without the I ... would there? Could there? 'What about the critical element? Where is the... ? Where is the... ? Where is the... ?' 'But my work falls in the interpretivist paradigm,' I try to answer. 'Oh no it doesn't... you need to read about critical psychology. I'll give you some references.' Did she not read that in this study I embrace the interpretive framework, just like Ellis, and the tools of hermeneutics and phenomenology? Did she *really* think I would dare do a thesis without knowledge of the different frameworks? I knew where I had located it. 'But there is the word 'change' in it. That falls in the critical paradigm.' ' Well,' I'm tempted to answer, 'Ellis (2004:136) says that although intervention and change is not the primary purpose of autoethnography, they could be by-products of the writing. I have found that personal change in my own life has been a by-product of this method. The readers also responded by referring to change on a personal level' Don't even go there, I think to myself. Unless a person has done an autoethnography they will never understand.

Why did they want me to include so much else? Did they want me to write a whole new thesis? Why did they say one would never be able to tell this story took place in South Africa, that it could have taken place anywhere in the world had they not known where this thesis had been written? Did they perhaps skip the section on my experiences of apartheid in South Africa as a child in the first chapter? Did they not read where I quoted from my father's memoirs of his experiences of being Lebanese in South Africa? Maybe they also skipped the chapter where I explained my non-compliance with the South African law under apartheid when I accepted children of all races into the school, and where I also discuss education in South Africa at that time. Maybe they also skipped the chapter when I explained about the recession in South Africa when so many left the country, which resulted in the closing of our clothing stores. Maybe they had forgotten the very research question. Did I not put the words 'South Africa' in the research question? Damn it! This is my autoethnography ... the way I experienced my life. Just nod and smile, I thought.

I dared to sneak another glance at my promoter's face. Is that a tightening of her lips I

perceive? Someone was offering me readings on teacher identity when the next bombshell fell - definitely NO Maslow in the thesis I was informed. This decision seemed to arouse a unanimous 'yes,' except from my promoter and First professor, who has had much experience in this genre in Canada. Find another theory! 'NO MASLOW my inside screamed. Does autoethnography and teacher self-study not have their roots in humanistic practices? Did Allender (2004:484) not say that 'self-study is essentially humanistic?' Isn't Maslow considered the father of humanism? My whole thesis is based on Maslow's theory. I may as well burn the piece ... no, wait, I won't burn it I thought, I'll just have it printed as a novel minus the academic' stuff'. Should I make an appointment to confer with Ellis? What would she say when I told her some academics were erecting, instead of allowing for the crossing of, boundaries in autoethnography? I perceived they were trying to fit the piece into a neat little box of their own making. Ellis, Richardson, Bochner, Mitchell and Weber would have a fit!

As the meeting drew to a close I felt as if the battle had been lost. My promoter's face now told a story. Although I am older than her, I take comfort in the fact that she is my mother - my academic mother. She didn't appear happy. I got the impression it was because they really had undressed 'her child'. I needn't have joked in the beginning. It really did happen! However, First professor appeared to sense that by now I had 'switched off' and was thinking of finding a previous reading where someone somewhere somehow recalled the same experience I had just been through. Who was it that said she had felt raped by academia? Oh yes, I think it was Brookes! I feel the same. I must find that reading. First professor drew the meeting to a close with words that went something like this 'You must realise Edwina that this is a first of its kind for this University, and, to the best of my knowledge, it's a first of its kind in South Africa.' I felt a little better. I silently thanked God for her. 'From now on people will be quoting Grossi,' she continued with a smile on her face.

However, I have no intention of changing my theory. 'Does that mean I won't get through?' I want to ask. I remember just in time that I have to speak only when I'm spoken to. In court is the victim not asked 'have you anything to say?' before the verdict is reached? Unfortunately, I was not afforded this opportunity. Was my 'crime' in attempting something different from what academia is used to, that bad? The song *Little Boxes* starts going through my head. However, it is immediately followed by the song *Don't Fence Me In*.

When I do autoethnography with students, I get intimately involved in their lives. The mentor-student relationship becomes an autoethnography in itself.

(Ellis, 2004:290)

*As a text autoethnography can't be wholly and perfectly united,
coherent and logically developed, because mixed things never are,
especially mixed things that involve language.*

(Dyer, 2004:3)

Dividing my life into chapters in chronological order in Part Two, my initial reaction was to pen a short verse relating to a ploughman and his field, as an analogy of myself and my life in the field of education, to begin each chapter. I was delighted to discover one of Kahlil Gibran's pieces, albeit only when I had completed the thesis, which speaks of a ploughman and is relevant to my autoethnography. An introductory verse for each chapter was written which, upon reflection, speaks of each person being responsible for her own life. This self-responsibility thread resembles a *'leitmotif'* a repeated theme, which was not planned but performed unconsciously. The three verses of Frederick Douglass' hymn, *In the Morning of My Life*, resembled certain intervals of my life story. I admire this heroic Black American leader of the 19th century who demanded an indictment against racism and slavery, and gave a voice of hope to his people (Ferris & Wilson, 1989:1). He reminds me of South Africa's Nelson Mandela. I later discovered that Maslow studied Douglass as one of the exemplary people he used to arrive at his theory of self-actualisation (Gwynne, 1997:1). Coincidence?

*There is no reason why the poet, if possessed of practical intelligence,
cannot survive as well as the politician, or the banker.*

Don't become a dying breed.

Dare to stick around for the hard and beautiful harvest.

(Okri, 1997:15)

My biggest challenge was the lack of literature on autoethnography. South African booksellers appeared taken aback when I enquired about the availability of material concerning this fairly new genre of academic writing. Ellis' book, *The Ethnographic I*, was despatched from America and every bookshop known to me in London and Ireland,

including those belonging to Universities, was visited. Once again the attendants, aided by their catalogues on the computer, thought I was speaking a foreign language as I requested literature on autoethnographic writing. However, one bookshop in London discovered Reed-Danahay's book, *Auto/Ethnography*, somewhere on a computer and had it delivered to South Africa. Maslow's book, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, was also despatched from America. Hence I found myself relying heavily on Internet sources. Yet another challenge was to forsake my penchant for using direct quotes. In Part Two, chapter one, I narrated the 'disgrace' of making mistakes, as conveyed to me by my early teachers, something I uncovered from doing this autoethnography. Could this be the reason for my paranoia about misinterpreting another's work? Could this trigger that emerged in my reflections assist teachers in their dealings and understanding of the perception some learners may have of themselves? Deny (2005:44) writes of her self-study, 'This study has convinced me that art-based self-studies of our own childhood can give us rich information that can help us understand the experiences of children today.'

Hermeneutics is the analysis of texts to gain meaning thereof.

(Mouton, 2001:167)

Reflection on Part One

My ever-calm promoter advised that Part One should explore the theoretical and methodological underpinning of the thesis. I mentally divided the three parts and their chapters allocating a certain number of pages to each in order to arrive at the usual number of pages required. However, I was advised to 'flesh out' much of the first section and disregard the number of allocated pages. Now I felt free! Free to write from the heart as I recalled nodal points in my life without being restricted by something as mundane as a number. Part One includes the purpose of the thesis and, if I were to be questioned about what I gleaned from the work in this chapter, my reply would be to quote Solomon (Ecclesiastes, 1:9), 'There is nothing new under the sun,' because as far back as 1926 Lindeman (1926:9) advised his students to forsake the study of books and study human experience instead.

While penning this chapter I realised why the psychologist Abraham Maslow and his work had intrigued me ever since I first learned about him. On reflection of my life story in education, I now understand one of the reasons to be his acceptance of change moved

by strong inner convictions, with which I strongly identify. However, I now question my initial perception of self-actualisation. At the outset I perceived it to be a state of satisfaction after the gratification of all the lower needs, when one has made the most of one's abilities. Gwynne (1997:4) confirms that the need for self-actualisation is the desire to fulfill one's capability, and describes self-actualisation as the instinctive need of a person to utilise their unique abilities to the full. However, I now realise that self-actualisation is a 'growing force,' (Gershaw, 1999:3) a continual driving force, and is episodic, running its course within a contextual situatedness. It is not a static state, not an emotional-cognitive-expressive state, but a passing change for people in a peak experience when they approach the core of their being. One can therefore never become self-actualised, as it were. Prager (2002:2) suggests that at the self-actualisation level people seek to fulfill their purpose in life, to realise their potential. Therefore, are teachers who engage in self-study not striving towards the full use and exploitation of their talents and potential? It is worth noting that self-actualisation is a never-ending gradual process of improvement attainable by all. Heylighen (1992:42) posits that the most common feature of self-actualising people is their 'openness to experience.' Is teacher self-study not an opening up of oneself to one's own experiences? Heylighen further describes self-actualising persons as those who question the conventional way of doing things and do not rely on the rules, values and opinions of others, their world view being independent of their culture or the society in which they live. This has been my experience and, as stated previously, I am writing from a socially, culturally and economically privileged point of view.

*Maslow's achievement is enormous. Like all original thinkers,
he has opened up a new way of seeing the universe.*

(Wilson & Spencer, 1990:565)

Reflection on Part Two

Collecting data for this piece required sifting through memories, memoirs, photographs and documents and caused a range of emotions, from surprise to deep sadness. I was forced to face photographs of my father - photographs I deliberately shied away from looking at because of the memories and the pain they evoked. Reading all my school reports I recognised the genes my grandchildren have inherited - they too are lively, talkative and never still. My granddaughter, Rebekah, never stops singing and my son repeats the same words as my mother 'Please, please, please be quiet, stop singing, stop dancing, stop

laughing, sit down and be quiet for a while.' I, on the other hand, am fascinated by the child's happiness and love of life, and join her in holding concerts for an imaginary audience. Could self-reflective practices not stir the memory of the self at certain intervals of one's life, and assist teachers in the understanding of the different personalities that exist in a class? It has been my experience that often different personalities exhibit different ways of learning. How I would have enjoyed a more interesting schoolday! As I recalled my background I realised the importance of teachers' awareness of the different backgrounds, cultures and customs children bring to the class, and, indeed, the effect their own background may have on their teaching. Collecting the documents, newspaper articles and letters was a lengthy but worthwhile process. These memorabilia were housed in various places but once gathered and spread out before me, they told a story.

*I now understood that prior to this exploration,
I could only see through my limited vision.*

(Ellis, 2004:287)

The 'fun' really began in Part Two. As I started exploring and reflecting on my early years in chapter one, a deep longing for the past engulfed me and I found myself crying at times. What caused the tears to flow? I had such a wonderful youth. Was it that? Was it gratitude? Did I cry for the many children in the world who have not been privileged to experience an upbringing as my own? Did I cry for the many children in the world who do not have access to quality education? Was I crying for the family of my youth, who are no longer 'together,' one being in Cape Town, and another deceased? Is it a longing for the past, when I had little responsibility and my constant thought was my future career? What a relief when my thoughts returned to the sweetness, innocence and beauty of my first, enduring love.

I also realised that my paternal grandmother had the first business in Stamford Hill Road, and my paternal grandfather the first business in Florida Road. Sandwiched inbetween, and running parallel to these two roads, is Windermere Road, where I started my first business. Coincidence? Throughout this chapter I appear to have woven a thread - a thread of my deep longing to be an extraordinary teacher and to foster in others the joy and love of learning. It is indeed worthwhile engaging in teacher self-study to remind one of one's initial purpose and goal when entering the field. I also speak of my preparation for entry

into the field of teaching and cite examples which could have thwarted my ambition and leadership potential. This was not intentional - it just 'happened'. The argument appears to be that one must constantly keep an eye on the goal one sets oneself in life, disregarding any negative influences.

As I recalled my early Primary School days I realised why today I prefer to get clear cut instructions - I am still afraid of making mistakes. Writing this chapter afforded me the most satisfaction and joy as I discovered the truth of Albert Einstein's saying 'Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions' (Canfield, 2005:81). As a child I imagined being a loving, encouraging but firm, teacher. Diamond and Van Halen-Faber (2005:92), speaking of teacher self-study, state 'I know that my arts-based inquiry practice will be affirmed when my imagination, more than any capacity, breaks through the inertia of habit, and I am open to possibility and change.'

At the conclusion I pondered why I regard my early childhood as having been so idyllic, and drew an analogy between my perception and Kant's words, 'We see things not as they are, but as we are' (Holden, 2005:60). I have often been accused of being naive and child-like. Does this encourage me to look through rose-tinted glasses? This may well be the case, but I still perceive my childhood as one to be eternally grateful for. The main revelation that hit me - like a bolt of lightning - was that from a very young age I questioned 'Why?' I had never considered this fact to be of any significance. This trait has never been lost as I still ask 'Why?' whether it be of my hairdresser, gardener, husband or lecturer. For the first time I read that this is a trait of an entrepreneur (Jude, 1998:30). My grandson, Matthew, has the same trait and I cannot help but advise his exasperated mother to answer his incessant questions. I also realised that asking the question 'Why?' can be a stimulus for teacher reflection, for example, 'Why do I do things this way?' 'Why am I teaching?' 'Why do I prefer teaching one particular learning area?'

A further revelation from writing the piece was the realisation of the reason for the start of my battle with weight gain. I realised it was a tool used in rebellion against my mother! Could I subconsciously still use this tool in rebellion against 'the norm' as prescribed by society? Yet another significant realisation was my gullibility from a very young age and my abhorrence of untruths. My husband remonstrates with me for being too straight, too 'blunt' as he calls it. I now realise the reason for my directness and dislike of 'beating

around the bush.' At the completion of the autoethnography I realised why I included in this chapter my first assignment from the now defunct Durban Teachers' Training College. Upon reflection, I noted that it was the impetus I needed, and the benchmark I set myself, for future achievement. Recognition of achievement certainly is a great motivator. Would that teachers be aware of the impact of positive verbal and written comments.

Understanding of others comes through understanding yourself.

(Ellis, 2004:287)

Chapter two of Part Two begins with my early years in the field of education - into which I was accepted with open arms - and ends with rejection by those in the same field. Why? Because I would not conform to the accepted norm? However, I have now discovered it was not rejection of *me per se*, but the rejection of something new, a rejection of change. How I wish I had understood this earlier! Writing this chapter I realised that change appears to frighten people, such as teachers, in the same way as making mistakes did me in my youth. Is this why some teachers are loathe to accept change? Are they afraid of making a mistake? Do we lay the blame at the feet of our mothers? Our teachers? Do teachers unconsciously, or even consciously, infer that making mistakes is a 'punishable sin'? I also confirmed that negative words or experiences are a hindrance to success. Do people become too accustomed to their 'comfort zone,' as it were, and are therefore afraid of the challenges of getting used to the new? Another revelation gleaned from writing this chapter was that I unconsciously employed strategies that ward off fear of change; affirmations and self-talk, creation of internal images of desired goals and a corresponding change in behaviour.

As far as my mother's labelling me as 'useless' is concerned, I now appreciate that she only knew one set of criteria for classifying a Lebanese bride-to-be as 'useful'. I did not live up to those expectations at the time. I was different. Today I can do the things that were expected of me then, but I still don't enjoy most of them. I am, however, still passionate about my profession. Is success not doing what you love to do, well? I wonder how many learners experience the same feelings of inferiority as I did then? I had forgotten about the incident with the authors of the new maths programme until I started to draft the chapter. I then realised that, although I was unafraid of change, from my earliest years of teaching I did not enjoy following 'every new whim' - I chose, instead, to follow my inner

convictions. I now see that this is exactly what transpired when the new Open Plan system for Nursery Schools was put into motion, resulting in my 'rejection' by the Department of Education at that time. I was amazed and relieved to discover it was not the people or the system that rejected me; I rejected the system. Was this why the Principal termed me a 'bold creature?' I dared to deviate from the norm. Is this the inevitable fate of one who questions *Why?* 'Are there other teachers who would also appreciate an answer to their *Why?* questions as has been my experience in this self-study?

If you write only positive things, you have a flat story, not an engaging or evocative one.
(Ellis, 2004:288)

Writing the third chapter of Part Two compelled me to read Mandela's (1994) book, *Long Walk to Freedom*, in order to understand the 'other' and I was struck once again by the enormous impact apartheid had on education. This was the first time I felt a very significant change was being wrought and a 'new' me emerging. This piece of writing energised me to take further action to assist in the aftermath of the system. This chapter led me to approach the Early Childhood Development Department of Education with my intended plan for the development of Pre-Schools, starting in rural areas. This also made me aware of another stirring in my heart, which led to my recording a goal for 2006, that of compiling a handbook for teachers of the Pre-School child. Does teacher self-study further inspire one to share more broadly the knowledge one has gained? Mullen and Kealy (2005:155) refer to teacher researchers as pathlamps for planting as they '... share their deeper learning with the academic community.'

Travelling down 'Memory Lane' with past pupils brought a lump to my throat as I reminisced about the many happy hours we had spent together. How grateful I am to have been chosen to play a role in their lives and in the lives of so many other children. Do teachers realise the enormity of the responsibility they have towards each child who crosses their path? Does teacher self-study reinforce this truth? Reliving the years in the clothing field was a nightmare! Feelings of dissatisfaction, emptiness, frustration, futility and entrapment surfaced once again. However, for the first time I was able to look back and think differently - think of the benefits of the experience versus the experience itself. It was a cathartic exercise. Is this the result of writing an autoethnography?

For the first time in fourteen years I was forced to discuss my father, to read his memoirs and to focus on his photographs. I realised that I had blocked out these things, just as I had mentally erased negative comments regarding my establishing a Pre-Primary school in 1972. I must have subconsciously cut myself off from the memory of my father and his death. In the past when thoughts of him entered my head I immediately substituted them with other, less painful, memories. I believe that by recalling his memory throughout this autoethnography, by the very title of this piece, I was forced to face the fact that I failed to mourn my father's death (as is necessary for closure), as I had to be strong for my mother. This autoethnography allowed me to mourn freely, and lose the fear of recalling beautiful memories of my dad. Even as I write these words, healing tears flow. Yes, I am changed in this aspect. I am free of the heaviness in my heart occasioned by the 'missing link' in my family chain.

In chapter three as I reflected on my earlier days of teaching, I realised that often teachers have to use a 'sixth sense' when dealing with problems. Through teacher self-study this knowledge could be explored and could prove useful to inservice and preservice teachers. I also realised the value of collaborative study among teachers, and the personal growth from reflective practices. How I wish I had known this then.

She's trying to smooth out the chaos by storying her experiences.

That's part of understanding her story and re storying herself.

(Ellis, 2004:266)

In chapter four I realised the truth of the saying 'success breeds success' (Unknown) as I recalled the establishment of my series of businesses. I realised that as soon as one business was established, my mind immediately gravitated towards the next. I also realised that the business side of me took over when negotiating the purchase of the properties.

In the past I questioned why I never extended my studies earlier on in life. I appreciate now that there is a plan for our lives, and I might not have coped had I embarked upon further studies any earlier. This chapter resolved my continual remonstrations with myself on that score. I felt relieved. Finally I had an answer to my burning question. It was probably because I would not have established the businesses in time to include them in an autoethnography, because the genre was not yet established in academia and

perhaps because now that I am older and more experienced, I can reflect and write more thoughtfully.

*Maslow says there are two processes necessary for self-actualisation:
self-exploration and action. The deeper the self-exploration,
the closer one comes to self-actualisation.*

(Performance Unlimited, 2004:6)

A question I originally needed answered is 'Have I reached self-actualisation according to Maslow's theory?' However, upon completion of this autoethnography I need to answer that question truthfully with 'I don't really care any more. I feel I don't need an answer. I am satisfied deep within. I feel fulfilled!' From the day I learned of Maslow's theory of self-actualisation, I was urged to find if and when I could ever reach that point. Now I ask, 'Why?' Why did I feel a certain way all these years, yet feel differently now? Is it because I finally realise that it is not a static but a transient, ongoing process? Is this sense of fulfillment a result of this self-study knowing that I do not have to strive for the former self-perceived status of self-actualisation, but should rather take cognisance of what has been revealed through this research? Is this the result of doing this autoethnography?

*Self-understanding is not merely a reflection on what we are
but what we are in relation to the world.*

(Krall, 1998:119)

Emerging realisations in Part Three

Ellis (2004:viii) maintains that autoethnography is an opportunity for doing something meaningful for yourself and others. 'Have you made meaning of your past experiences and achieved a deeper understanding of yourself?' my promoter, external moderators and other academics may ask. Yes indeed! I have uncovered a pattern, a golden thread, woven into my life from infancy, which wove itself throughout my days as a daughter, teenager, young woman, wife, teacher, mother, entrepreneur, businesswoman and grandmother. This golden thread has been the unconditional love of children of all ages, classes and creeds, combined with a positive attitude and the desire to be all that I can be as a teacher and, in so doing, making a difference.

*Life can only be lived forwards,
but it can only be understood backwards.*

(Lipkin, 1998:77)

'Has this autoethnography changed you?' I hear my promoter ask. 'Have you learned anything, Edwina?' Yes. It has deepened my appreciation of my profession and enabled me to see the reason why I teach; it has charged me to become an ambassador for teacher self-study; it has moved me to act upon my desire for the improvement of Pre-Schools, and to consider the title for a new book; it has also opened my eyes to the fact that art-based research needs to respect the demand for order but must also embody the vital basis of the arts in order to become a channel for communication. I have realised that 'The poet is he who inspires far more than he who is inspired' (Okri, 1997:1). I have also discovered that the Emotional Intelligence develops as we progress through life and learn from our experiences, and that making mistakes is a tool for learning. Goleman (1998:7), Bar-On, Tranel, Denburg and Bechara (2003:1790-1800) confirm this and posit that our Emotional Intelligence is not genetically inherited, nor does it develop only in early childhood. Emotional Intelligence can be learned and is a necessary component of Success Intelligence. A growing body of research on the Emotional Intelligence, directed by Bar-On, a clinical psychologist, confirms that success is based more on emotional development than cognitive intelligence (Bar-On *et al*, 2003:1790-1800). Will teacher self-study not reveal areas in our own emotional development that need further expansion?

A major decision was reached on completion of the first draft of this autoethnography in December 2005. I needed to hand over the principalship of the Pre-School to my daughter. Was I holding onto this position and main area of my work for security? Because of comfort? Because of habit? Was this the unexpected result of writing this autoethnography? Did I finally realise what my daughter must be experiencing as she attempted to stamp her identity on a school onto which her mother held with tight reins? This was a tremendous step as this has been a vital part of my identity for the past 34 years. However, I know from experience that change brings growth and I happily anticipate the development of other areas in my life. I find this exciting! I have been invited by two Universities, one in South Africa and the other in America, to speak on autoethnography in 2006. At the latter University I will also address Early Childhood Development and Entrepreneurship and speak in their chapel. This University will simultaneously host an exhibition of my

art, titled *The Heartbeat of Africa*.

Throughout the autoethnography I have woven an account of my problem with weight. I start with my earliest memories and end with this 'thorn in my side!' After having read through my 'discoveries,' I found one more thing which enabled a new self to emerge - I need to take heed of my own advice to conquer my perceived Goliath - my weight.

*Fear of rejection, mistakes and failures causes people
to make the worst mistake of all -
that of doing nothing.*

(Maxwell, 2001:52)

I have also learned that some people see mistakes as a sign of failure or weakness, instead of regarding them as learning experiences. This view may hinder them from reaching their full potential in life. I realised the importance of the fact that a child's 'Why?' should always be answered as fully as possible, and that teachers should always bear in mind that each pupil brings a unique background to the classroom. Teachers would do well to remember that if pupils' basic needs are not met their performance is sure to suffer - they need to experience safety and a sense of belonging in order to perform according to their potential. One needs to constantly bear in mind that each person has something worthwhile to offer society and every teacher, through teacher self-study, has something new to learn about herself and something to offer other teachers, because of her uniqueness.

I have realised that people are successful not because they are better than anyone else, but because of inner desire, persistence and resistance to negative thoughts and sentiments. Resisting change may just be fear of the unknown. I have also realised that the mind is a powerful tool and the one who visualises herself as a failure, will be so. Although success appears to come to one who discovers a need and fills it, having a vision is a requirement for success. In my life success was reached with the assistance of many others, and some of my dreams took a lifetime to materialise. I wonder how many opportunities are missed through fear of the unknown, lack of vision, heeding the uninformed advice of others, and not heeding one's inner voice? I have discovered that true happiness is found by giving and sharing what one has with others, be it expertise, experience, encouragement, praise and, most of all, unconditional love. I enjoy the way Maxwell (2001:120) phrases it, 'Divide

up all of God's blessings to you, and give them out to others.' Although every experience in life contributes in some way to one's success, it is unfortunate that 'A great many people in every generation are unhappy failures for no other reason than that they've not found themselves or their proper vocation' (Maxwell, 2001:100).

*There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood,
leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound
in shallows and in miseries. On such a full sea are we now afloat;
and we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures.*

(William Shakespeare)

Krall speaks of 'restoring' as being the last step of hermeneutic motion, which Renner (2001:2) refers to as 'restitution.' This is when the student addresses the 'so what' question, and reveals what she now believes and values. I now believe I have used my God-given talent and value the opportunity to share my autoethnography with others. I also value more deeply my calling in life, and the consolidation of the knowledge that my life has been directed by a force of love so strong it can only be termed divine. Childs (2005:145) advocates that 'A good self-study should demonstrate evidence of authentic growth and of lessons learned.' Does this piece demonstrate growth? Does it speak of lessons learned?

*It is one of the beautiful compensations of this life
that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.*

Emerson (Canfield, 2005:418)

'So what?' one may ask. 'You'll never know what my life story may accomplish. Maybe someone will read it and gain confidence and motivation to fulfil their mission in life,' will be my reply. 'Maybe someone will realise the law of the harvest reigns; we will always reap what we sow - no more, no less (Covey, 2004:305). Maybe teachers or teacher trainees will benefit from my experiences in the field or realise the benefit of self-study. Maybe a child's life will be changed'

*My stories stimulate others to tell theirs.
Sometimes people tell me that one of my stories changed their lives.
I have to tell you that's like manna from heaven for an autoethnographer.
That's what you hope for - to change your life
and the life of others -for the better of course.*

(Ellis, 2004:35)

Reflections on self-study and study of teachers' lives

In writing the autoethnography a whole array of pertinent issues emerged which contribute to the emerging body of work placing teachers at the centre of change, offering lessons for 'further conversations'(Cunningham & Jones, 2005:2) on teacher self-study, education and teacher development in South Africa and teacher identity. Therefore, a first conversation about teacher self-study will draw on the literature of teacher self-study more generally. A second conversation will discuss the work that has been done in this regard and in education as a whole in South Africa. Finally, I address teacher identity.

Teacher self-study

Mitchell and Weber (2005:4) report that there is a lack of self-study by teachers, due to a possible lack of understanding of 'how' and 'who' and 'why'. They posit that many do not realise the benefit of 'looking inward' and its value to scholarship. The authors agree that self-study in the field of education is one which is still 'evolving', and offer a selection of work from the mid-1900's as examples of self-study. Mitchell and Weber (2005:6) also admit to the need for visual and arts-based methodology and cite those who have been successful in this area, for example, Mary Lynn Hamilton who explores the work of Homer Winslow, an American artist, Linda Szabad-Smyth who explores teachers' 'artful' and 'artless' experiences and Diamond and Van Halen-Faber who use visual metaphors and batik. Several autoethnographies deal specifically with self-study through reflection based on work with beginning teachers in Australia and the United States; for example Linda Lang bases her work on drama education; and Katherine Childs reflects on her dealings with young people who embrace self-study in an adult education programme. Other recent examples of autoethnography concerning teachers are *Finding oneself in the classroom: A critical autoethnographic narrative chronicling the risks and rewards of a teacher and her students as they engage in the practice of a critical pedagogy*, by Nancy Horan at the

University of Minnesota; *Navigating unfamiliar territory: Autoethnography of a first year elementary school principal*, by John Patten at the University of Utah; and *Our experience says we know something: we are still here! An autoethnographic study for African American women principals in Massachusetts*, by Yvonne Spicer at the University of Massachusetts (Digital Dissertations, 2005:1). However, it appears as if little autoethnographic research has been done on teacher education.

Teacher self-study involves the reflection on teaching experiences and the drawing of certain references from one's memory. However, the role of self in a self-study is not as much as the examining of one's self but concerns the '... looking at what is going on between self and practice' (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001:15). The past decade has witnessed a growing interest in the use of the life story to facilitate teacher development (Muchmore, 2002:1). I find it easier at times to remember the details of an autobiography I have read than to recall some truths in a theoretical book. Cole and Knowles (1996:5) claim that teachers who engage in self-study are usually committed to teaching and the teaching profession. The authors assert that penning narratives concerning personal experience in teaching is valuable in that it is 'close to the bone'. I am of the opinion that there are many committed teachers who merely need to be exposed to the benefits and powerful reform of this practice.

According to Strong-Wilson (2005:228), inservice and preservice teachers should have the chance to probe the spaces between experiences and narratives, a very fertile soil for teacher self-study. This results in one becoming more conscientious in self-reflection. Strong-Wilson further suggests that in self-study one explores the writing of other teachers but, although I did as she suggests, I found what was burning inside of me to be vastly different from what I read. This attests to the value of self-study by many teachers - we all have different stories to tell, we all possess the potential to develop and be further empowered, and to encourage others, in the teaching profession. For example, Muchmore (2002:4), quoting from a teacher's life experience, reports 'In the early years I thought of the students in a deficit mode, that they were coming without skills, and coming without ways of doing the work they needed to do ... I saw myself very traditionally as the person who was to mitigate error, sort of standing between these students' texts and the ideal writing ... '. Narratives of teachers' careers can therefore serve as encouragement for reflection on what is going on between the self and personal practices, for professional development, and as a tool for the exploration of other ways of teaching. Strong-Wilson (2005:218) reports that

'Beginning teachers often feel overwhelmed within their first year, alternating between despair and hope.' Indeed, the curriculum itself can be studied and explained through the teaching texts of inservice teachers. Donmoyer (1990:175) argues that people learn when they read about others' beliefs and practices, and Holt-Reynolds (1994:13) states that preservice teachers often adopt practices taught in University without fully comprehending the theoretical base. From personal experience, I agree with Holt-Reynolds. How I wish I had an in-depth engagement with certain theories many years ago!

Muchmore (2002:7) explains that teaching should be understood as an artistic form of self-expression. I have noted through the years that most teachers have some inclination towards the arts and appear to be very creative but are either unaware of, or do not know how to utilise this gift. In fact, I believe teaching is an art, a drama, the actors being the teacher and the learners. Furthermore, teachers who embark on self-study research would be able to challenge the educational constraints to respond to the real world of students from all backgrounds (Kincheloe, 1991:65). Thus by researching their own practice through self-study, teachers contribute to the development of others, both personally and professionally, and to teacher training relevant to modern society. The process of reflection concerns inner exploration, analysis and critique and the resultant learning may result in personal, emotional, cognitive and spiritual change. I have found that the self-reflective practice I engaged in twenty years ago, that is on the day I turned forty (c.f. pi23), encouraged me to 'spread my wings,' as it were, and to achieve beyond which I conceived.

*Engaging in self-study teaches us that we teachers and teacher educators
must first learn to take our beliefs and ourselves seriously...
to learn to listen and pay attention to our own voices
so that we can then take those we teach just as seriously.
This is a chain reaction that is part of the profession we have chosen.*

(Childs, 2005:152)

Although many films have been made by people inexperienced in the field of education about educators, for example *Mr. Holland's Opus*, *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, *Coach Carter*, *the Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Mitchell & Weber, 2005:2), too few films have been made, and books written, for teachers by teachers or even by teachers for the public good. The practice of teacher self-study could enable seeds to be planted and lifelong learning to be

encouraged. Some may receive answers to questions by looking deeper into another's lived experience realising that certain 'lifetime events influence beliefs, attitudes and choices' (Szabad-Smythe, 2005:70). Others may realise that self-reflective practices can encourage self-actualisation or fulfillment as a person.

Telling stories about the past, our past, is a key moment in the making of ourselves.

(Kuhn, 1995:2)

Teacher development in South Africa

Since 1994 South Africa has undergone social, economic, cultural and political changes. Many people and organizations worthy of mention in this thesis were involved in reshaping education in South Africa after apartheid. The first minister of education in the new democratic South Africa, Professor Bengu, unified the system of education by introducing Outcomes Based Education and Kader Asmal, following in his steps, reviewed it (The Teacher, 2006:23). This system affirms the constitutional rights of all learners, including those who experience barriers to learning, to an education.

An example of an ordinary principal accomplishing the extraordinary is found in Nditsheni Ramugondo, principal of Mbilwi Secondary in Limpopo. He is particularly worthy of mention for his excellence in educating children 'in a depressed part of South Africa' to excel in all learning areas, especially maths and science, and in so doing helped contribute to a generation of people occupying positions such as doctors, actuaries and accountants, which is vital to our economy (The Teacher, 2006:23). Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa, organized the building of many schools by corporate companies and continues to encourage education for all. As previously mentioned, Outcomes Based Education replaced the education of the apartheid era. However, the system lost many excellent teachers due to the many changes. Rationalization drained the teaching core (Zinn, 2000:2). Unfortunately, taking strides to correct past inequalities left the profession unstable for the last few years. Zinn however, argues further that key policies are now in place and that there is a '... huge drive at the moment to improve the quality of teaching and learning in South Africa.'

Norms and Standards for Educators, which refer to a generic compilation of seven roles and competencies required in a teaching qualification, are in place. These in brief are

being a learning mediator; interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials; leader, administrator and manager; scholar, researcher and lifelong learner; assessor; subject specialist and fulfilling a community, citizenship and pastoral role (Zinn, 2000:2). A minimum compulsory requirement, according to the Educator Development and Support Document, of all teachers is the engagement in 80 hours of professional development. Professional development can be through a formal qualification or in-service training. All higher education qualifications in South Africa are reflected on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which is monitored by South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), ensuring that all qualifications offered by any College or University is of good quality. This system correlates and encourages lifelong learning where credits for experience and qualifications count (Spady & Schlebusch, 1999:55). However, Garson (2006:2) explains that, although the present government is 'bent on rectifying the imbalances in education,' the apartheid legacy lingers on in many areas, especially in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, where many schools are very poorly resourced, and current crucial areas of priority are Early Childhood Development and Adult Basic Education and Training. Other challenges due to the backlog the apartheid system left in its wake, include the poor training of teachers in township schools. The 'liberation now, education later' stance taken during the struggle for liberation from apartheid, damaged the 'culture of teaching' in schools and Universities which became sites of protest (Garson, 2006:3). Pithouse (2004:73) reports that inservice teacher training at present is still not as it should be.

Current work by South African individuals involved in the field of teacher development in four main areas, namely Research and Teaching; Teacher and Reflective Practices; Curriculum and Teaching and Teachers' Professional Development, is recorded in a South African book, *Teacher Development at the Centre of Change*, edited by Balfour, Buthelezi & Mitchell (2004). Of particular pertinence to the study, *An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography*, are the articles by Mitchell dealing with memory and reflection in preservice teacher education; Gabela, *What Makes a Good Teacher*; Grant, *Reflective Journals: A Strategy for Developing Reflective Practice*; Pithouse, *"It's Because I Like to Teach, It's in Me ": Rethinking Teaching as an Artistic Experience*; *Teacher Reflection: Easy to Talk About - Challenging to Understand and Implement*, by Thelma Rosenberg; and Moletsane's *Toward a Learning Profession: Rethinking Professional Development in the Age of Educational and Social Crises in a Globalising South Africa*. These provide a basis for encouraging teacher development through self-study and reflective practice.

Teacher identity

*Face to face with my students, only one resource is at my immediate command
my identity, my selfhood, my sense of this "I" who teaches ...
without which I have no sense of the 'Thou'who learns.*

(Palmer, 1998:4)

At present teacher quality, character and identity are under the global spotlight (Webb, 2005:1). I am aware of my many identities but, as I reflected throughout the autoethnography, I realised that every experience played a vital role in shaping my identity as a teacher. I have also realised that teacher growth is not static - therefore one's identity as a teacher hinges on contexts and experiences, and develops and changes as one matures. According to Webb (2005:4), Graham and Phelps (2003) challenge a modernist notion of an unchanging essence of self, as this perspective favours personal experiences prior to teaching as the most influential factor informing teacher identity. On the other hand, Beattie (1995) suggests that teacher identity is exposed in the stories people tell of their experiences and a shifting of identity may be perceived in the narratives. Beattie further explains that shared storytelling is a 'significant part of making sense of emerging identities' (Webb, 2005:4). Teacher self-study is meritorious in this aspect.

Palmer (1998:4) purports that teaching comes from one's innermost being, and suggests that self-knowledge of the condition of the soul is of paramount importance to good teaching. Good teaching, therefore, suggests Palmer, comes from the 'identity and integrity' of the teacher. Barty (2004:1) concurs that teacher identity is influenced by personal experiences, teacher training and socio-cultural factors. The forming of teacher identity therefore differs according to individuals - there is no 'one size fits all'. Gaudelli (1999:15), on the other hand, claims that teacher identity categories are also determined by factors such as gender, religious and sporting background, family history and ethnicity. These factors, suggests Barty (2004:1), will influence teachers to adopt different strategies in their teaching. Gibson (1995:74) concurs that teacher identity is also influenced by our former ideas of teachers before formal teacher training. In this regard I concur that the greatest impact on my identity as a teacher stemmed from my childhood experiences and emotional status. This was further influenced by my observation of my former teachers, my unconditional love for all children, dedication to the profession and from experience.

*Intellect, emotion and spirit depend on each other for wholeness.
They are interwoven in the human self and in education at its best,
and we need to interweave them into our pedagogical discourse as well.*

(Palmer, 1998:3)

Teachers should be able to connect and engage with the learning material and the learners and through this connectedness reveal who they are. In similar fashion, in an autoethnography concerning teacher self-study, the same connectedness should be experienced between the author, the reader and the material. This should enable the identity of the researcher-teacher to be revealed.

On the significance of the autoethnography

With shielded eyes the ploughman stands viewing his plantings o'er the land.

'I think I'll leave it fallow, 'he's heard to say

'In case I need to plant on yet another day.'

With shielded eyes the participant stands viewing the layout of the land.

'Has it been viable?' the ploughman asks.

'Have I been successful in completing my task?'

(Edwina, 2005)

Finally I return to the significance of the autoethnography more broadly to apply a 'true test' of the value of the work in relation to its impact on the reader. As mentioned before (c.f. pi 8), Richardson (2000:15) applies five criteria for judging autoethnography. These are - that the text makes a substantive contribution to the understanding of social life; has aesthetic appeal in that the work is artistically arranged and not boring to read; causes reflexivity; is impactful in that it moves people emotionally and/or intellectually resulting in their taking action; and speaks of genuine lived experience. In my analysis of the readers' responses to the piece, I arrive at themes or critical areas and include excerpts of the responses to this type of work. A final section will map out the ways in which autoethnographic endeavours must open up to other scholars.

*Try to write in a way that pulls readers into your experiences,
then provoke them to enter into their own,
and then step back to observe,
compare, and analyse.*

(Ellis, 2004:366)

The people I asked to read this autoethnography represent a cross-section of women with specific designations (c.f. p19). In her book, *The Ethnographic I*, Ellis (2004:307) records her conversation with the characters she portrays after she asked for a general reaction to her story. Some of the characters penned their responses to Ellis (2004:285). I also chose to collect written responses from my readers. From these responses I identified themes relating to the usefulness of my autoethnography. The question posed to the selected readers was 'What is your response to this autoethnography?' The seven readers' responses were analysed, employing the selective reduction technique using reasoning strategies (Thorne, 2000:68) (Appendix 3a). Units of meaning were noted and delegated into categories, which in turn led to specific themes (Appendix 4). A literature control recontextualised these findings and confirmed similarities or differences (Poggenpoel, 1998:354) (Appendix 5, Field Notes).

*Change is an active process wherby teachers learn
to make more public ... the intuitions and meanings
that they make out of a lifetime of teaching,
especially those involving their own
developing teacher-selves.*

(Diamond & Van Halen-Faber, 2005:81)

Diamond and Van Halen-Faber (2005:81) posit that arts-based educational research, like autoethnographies, should bring about positive change in teachers and in those who train teachers. Therefore the research should lead to renewed understanding and encourage the practice of self-reflective studies in teachers. The fact that an autoethnography is a powerful tool to bring about motivation, change and self-understanding in the writer and the reader; to transfer valuable learning material to inservice and preservice teachers; and to 'speak beyond' the educational system, was clearly evident in the resultant themes. These themes relate to the intelligences: Emotional Quotient, Intelligence Quotient and

Success Quotient, three overarching themes concerning the efficacy of the research, which emerged from the analysis of the readers' responses.

Positive emotional and social change

Self-reflection and change

One of the signifiers of the success of an autoethnography is if it generates stories from others in order for them to make sense of their own experiences (Ellis, 2004:310). Although an autoethnography carries the writer's voice and signature, it presents an account of the way in which the researcher made sense of certain activities with an expressed goal of 'offering lessons for further conversation' (Cunningham & Jones, 2005:2). It also has the potential to uncover personal biases or misconceptions. As far as the teaching profession is concerned, self-reflection can facilitate the formation of new parameters and new ways of 'doing' as teachers reflect on past experiences (Armour, Moore & Stevenson, 2001:1). It can cause reflection on one's own life and facilitate an understanding of the importance of the emotional intelligence in one's own, as well as in a child's life, particularly concerning progress and the reaching of one's full potential.

Autoethnographies are means of understanding (and healing) ourselves.

(Gaitan, 2000:2)

Gaitan (2000:4) explains that reading autoethnographies assists in the realisation of the effect of personal experience on understanding. This could impact on teachers' personal development as they gain a deeper understanding of the effect of their own and of pupils' backgrounds. Richardson and Bochner (Ellis, 2004:254) confirm that a good narrative brings about positive change through increased self-understanding. Denzin and Clough go a bit broader and maintain that cultural criticism should be found in a good autoethnography (Bochner & Rushing, 2002:150). Clough (2000:278) also advocates that autoethnographic writing be aligned with theory in order to encourage reflection and the formation of new parameters of the social. The above is reflected in the autoethnography *An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography* (c.f. Part Two) and readers' comments concur with the above.

'I remembered my own school days. As a teacher I found it good for me to look back and recall my feelings.'

'This chapter forced me to cast my memories back to my own childhood and my school days. It made me think of the reasons why I became a teacher.'

'This brought to light the fact that I must refrain from hampering his (my son's) lively spirit.'

T found my thoughts wandering back to my teenage years.'

I will always remember one evening at home ... it is such a warm, fond memory of mine'

T didn't realise what my mother was going through and felt I wasn't there for her.'

'After having read this chapter I found myself questioning my own priorities and looking deeper into each child.'

'This autoethnography made me take a serious look at my life - past, present and future. I realised that it is not only "special people" that do amazing things in life; it is ordinary people.'

'This autoethnography has proved to me that I need not imitate others or her but I need to follow my inner convictions. I used to feel inferior - I now realise I myself allowed this to happen.'

T was trying to concentrate but my thoughts kept going back to my own teachers.'

'There's so much in life to learn yet I don't take the opportunity.'

T now look at my autistic charge in a different light.'

'It made me remember my own school days and teachers who made my life a misery. I was not outspoken and suffered inwardly. They caused me to feel "thick" and of no worth to anyone. I now feel different about my life. I also have something of worth to give others.'

T was unexpectedly moved as I related to some of the incidents I read of. I realised I must be more careful in what I say to my children. I get aggravated when my youngest questions and asks 'Why?' In the future I will take time to explain'

Therapeutic value

Ellis (2004:297) enquires of Valerie, a student, 'Did you take things you learned in autoethnography back to your therapy practice?' Valerie replies 'Yes, and I'm a much better therapist as a result.' Therefore teacher self-study through autoethnography could enable teachers to gain insight into who they are and how childhood experiences and cultural codes 'shape the teacher I am' (Weber, 2005:13). Ellis (2004:136) states that researchers have to be comfortable with revealing emotions and competent in their support of others. She is of the opinion that the best autoethnographers are also good therapists, and emphasises the word 'therapeutic' as a characteristic of good autoethnographic writing.

Both therapy and autoethnography require courage, self insight and an ability to articulate feelings. The two processes are similar in that to be successful an 'ah-ha' moment must be reached when people understand themselves better or gain new insight into their problems.

(Ellis, 2004:296)

Storytelling can be therapeutic in itself and could encourage others to write about their survival status in certain areas, in order to offer closure or hope (Ellis, 2004:320). This could be of benefit to teachers who find themselves in difficult circumstances. People usually cannot work together successfully until they understand the difference in the personalities, beliefs, customs and ways of thinking of their peers. Understanding of these points will be of therapeutic benefit and will ensure peace. However, Hirsch (2002:267) disagrees, stating that only facts must be taught in school to prevent conflict in the community and to encourage a more successful learning environment. Eisner (1997:58), on the other hand, believes that a qualitative study is only useful if it assists readers' understanding of a confusing situation and enables things to 'fit into place.' However, I have experienced that autoethnography can highlight certain emotional needs, for example self-esteem, and enable a person to be inspired and to grow and develop. The practice of autoethnography allows voices that may never have been heard and gives insights that may '... otherwise have been too subtle to elicit' (Cunningham & Jones, 2005:3). The value of autoethnography should be attributed to the findings and the ability to apply certain themes to other situations.

*/ am not writing the story solely for myself,
but also for others going through the experience... .*

(Ellis, 2004:33)

The above is reflected in the autoethnography *An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography* (c.f. Part Two) and readers' comments confirming this are:-

'I need to take the time to understand and appreciate myself more.'

'It inspired me to forgive and forget.'

'I used to feel inferior. I now realise I myself allowed this to happen as I just received and remembered negative words spoken about or to me. I now feel stronger on the inside.'

'I also cried for my father when I read your words about your father. I felt relieved as I also stifled my feelings.'

'I also have something of value to give to others and I also have time to improve myself. I feel encouraged that I am useful. I now feel different about my life.'

'The most impacting parts for me were Edwina revisiting her father's death and his influence on her life.'

'Being recently divorced I have been so mixed up. Now I realise my life is not over.'

Even as a child I was captivated by why people do what they do ...

I'm intrigued to understand different people and ideas.

(Ellis, 2004:318)

Meaningful insight into human behaviour

Angrosino (1998:97) posits that the success of autoethnography is measured when the reader does not ask 'Did this really happen?' but says, 'I understand what these characters are going through.' Autoethnography, therefore, should arouse certain emotions such as empathy or sympathy, as the reader begins to understand the way in which others see and experience happenings in their lives. Stories invite others into the life of the narrator, promote understanding of the writer's feelings, enable others to see through her eyes and to do what she is doing, and can stimulate others to be more understanding and tolerant. Clough (2000:290) believes that autoethnography has the ability to form new ways of thinking to extend social barriers. Ellis (2004:253) agrees, and includes class and gender in the extension of the barriers.

Stories have the power to portray unforgettable scenes and characters, which is a wonderful tool to provide insight into human behaviour. Rosenewald and Ochberg, acknowledging this positive result, published *Storied Lives*, a volume of autobiographical stories giving insight into who 'others' are and what constitutes acceptable behaviour in their world (Ellis, 2004:284). Autoethnography can also be a valuable tool in educational and family therapy (Ellis, 2004:71). For example, Ben's book, *An Unconventional Family*, depicts gender equality in a family (Ellis, 2004:35); Muncey (2005:1) writes of the experience of teenage pregnancy; Mieczkowski describes alcohol dependency and mental illness (Gaitan, 2000:2); and Tillman-Healy describes her lifelong fight with bulimia (Gaitan, 2000:3). Therefore autoethnography is a powerful medium to generate understanding, and does so beyond the boundaries of traditional research.

The above is reflected in the autoethnography *An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography* (c.f. Part Two) and in the readers' comments.

'Many times I witness parents shouting at a child because he has left something behind in class. I very seldom hear loving words. The parents today seem too busy, always in a rush, always some appointment to

go to (usually the gym!).'

'I read of how you made your own equipment when you had no money.'

'You can feel her love for her family in her writing. This is also impacting as you read her story.'

'I loved reading about the culture and how women were just expected to do things.'

To conclude, theme one focuses on self-reflection which causes change, is of therapeutic benefit and gives meaningful insight into human behaviour, which in turn brings about understanding.

*Answers that seem obvious to us
appear that way because of our perspective
everything we know about the subject
and everything we have experienced.*

*When we communicate our ideas, though, we need to consider
not just what makes sense to us,
but what would make sense if we
looked at the situation with a completely different background.*

*A presentation is the best expression of your ideas,
not to an audience consisting of you,
but to an audience that has never
seen the world through your eyes.*

(Niven, 2005:144)

A learning tool for preservice and inservice teachers, enriching their 'intellectual and moral excellences' (Hargreaves, 2001:490)

*With a personal story you are saying,
'This is my experience.
I present it as a true story.'*

(Ellis, 2004:175)

A learning tool for inservice teachers

The purpose in autoethnography, explains Ellis (2004:175), is to write meaningfully and

evocatively about a topic from a concerned point of view in order to make a difference, and authors use their life story of personal experience in a culture to bring about a new perspective. I have written about my life as a teacher to enrich my own and teachers' understanding of the culture of education.

Teachers could, with a range of tools such as reflection, artistic approaches, or by using photographs, engage in self-study which, in turn, could be the basis for an autoethnography. Were I able to start again in the teaching profession, the first thing I would do is to keep a reflective journal, a practice which Duncan (2004:6) wholeheartedly supports. I have witnessed incredible success with this practice as my student teachers reflect on every lesson they give. In their journals they truthfully judge and comment on the success of, and on ways to improve, their lessons. Rousmaniere (2000:4) argues that when teachers reflect on the experiences they had at school they view their own development in a new way - they connect the past to the present.

Autoethnography can provide a meaningful tool in teachers' professional development as they connect past experience to present day practice. This tool raises the possibility of innovative changes to raise standards. As teachers are a school's greatest asset, they have the ability to empower learners to change their own lives. Armour *et al.* (2001:9) cite examples of teachers finding their profession 'not varied enough' and with little chance of promotion. However, by engaging in autoethnographical practices teachers can be empowered to enhance their performance and set themselves challenges. Teacher self-studies are also useful in continuous professional development in highlighting good practice. Hargreaves (2001:490) argues that many teachers in Britain lack a culture of professional learning. He notes further that effective schools should enrich the professional lives of the teachers and their '... intellectual and moral excellences.' What would be the situation in South Africa? Could autoethnography not be useful in this regard?

Autoethnographic practices are also a good tool for collaborative learning for those who share an interest in a particular learning area, according to Armour *et al.* (2001:10). Schwandt (1994:129) terms the autoethnographical researcher a 'connoisseur,' an 'instrument' with the ability to speak or write from past experiences, and describes a 'connoisseur' as possessing '... a kind of heightened awareness or educated perception - a particular kind of attention to nuance and details, to multiple dimensions or aspects - that comes from intimate familiarity

with the phenomenon being examined.' Reading an autoethnography is valuable in that it allows many to draw on personal experiences as a source of data, or to obtain further knowledge of a topic. Therefore a deeper understanding can be reached.

Mitchell and Weber see the art of remembering and reflecting on teacher identity as 'integral to professional development' (Bryce, 2003:4). This research is based on my present and past reflections, emotions, understanding and life experiences with the express purpose that it 'speaks beyond itself (Ellis, 1997:1), that it shows rather than tells. The autoethnography *An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography*, embraces the above (c.f. Part Two). Comments from readers confirming this are provided below.

'I am a teacher assistant to a child with autism. I'm sure it would help others (moms of autistic children, teachers, and teacher assistants) if I wrote about how I deal with him.'

'It inspired me to be more understanding and tolerant of the different cultures and beliefs of my pupils. Thought provoking - it didn't tell us how to be a good teacher, we learnt it in the stories.'

'It is not the status of the school that counts but the heart of each child in the school.'

'I found myself questioning my own priorities and looking deeper into each child. It has inspired me to be more creative in my lessons.'

'It has made me look at the less popular children in the class...'

'I am going to keep a journal of my lessons - I will mark the good ones.'

A learning tool for preservice teachers

Gaitan (2000:2) explains that autoethnographic texts are 'powerful depictions of human experiences,' their aim being to 'do' something to the reader. Therefore autoethnographies allow the reader to exercise the imagination when he or she has never experienced a certain situation - providing a prime source of learning; they are useful in that they assist readers to anticipate future possible occurrences and scenarios. Thus they highlight points of a situation that may otherwise have gone unnoticed. Autoethnographies also identify ways to apply self-directed learning, as a beginner in a new area may lack self-direction. Cunningham and Jones (2005:1) state that autoethnographies enable students to gain knowledge and insight quicker and allows them to understand the 'fine-grained picture of a culture.' The 'quick-and-dirty' approach, explain the authors, involves a collection of short studies in the field to tease out important facts. The authors suggest preservice teachers also use other tools such as a self-reporting diary to assist with 'blind spots' in order to reflect on their own experiences.

Rousmaniere (2000:4) states we need to spend more time asking questions like *Why teach?* 'and *What is the purpose of education and the purpose of schools?*' Therefore, autoethnography is a window into the ways that 'passions and motivations drive other teachers' (Armour *et al*, 2001:7). In developing themselves, students should also write about and share their own professional developmental experiences with a group aligning them with literature on policy and practice. Connelly and Clandinin (1999:4) argue for 'stories to live by' as a means of understanding how knowledge, identity and context are linked.

*If teachers in structured contexts engaged in critical autoethnography,
they might gain a better understanding of themselves,
each other, education, and the things they need to know
in order to change practice and become more effective.*

(Armour *et al*, 2001:11)

The autoethnography *An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography* (c.f. Part Two) deals with the above, as is evidenced by the readers' comments.

'It helped me in many ways to predict things that may happen in a class and how to deal with them.'

' I understand Piagets' theory of flight or fight for the first time.'

'Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs came alive and meant something to me.'

'I think if more teachers write stories about teaching it would be wonderful for students to learn from.'

'I also thoroughly enjoy reading Tory Hayden's stories about children in her class and how she deals with certain situations.'

'Thought provoking - it didn't tell us how to be a good teacher, we learnt it in the stories.'

'But one teacher I remember in particular - she made me feel I was good at something. Thank you for giving me something to base my children's upbringing on.'

'Only one teacher really made a difference in my school days - she believed in me and built my self confidence.'

'The third thing that impacted me was her incredible passion for children.'

'I now look at it and deal with my own child and charge differently, reading of your experiences and how important it is for a good background for each child.'

On the continuum of needs, the system's need dominate individual needs.

(Armour, *et al.*, 2001:6)

A tool for enriching the profession

Rousmaniere (2000:87) refers to educational autobiography as 'the sound of silence breaking,' and cites an example of how autoethnography brought to light the experiences of a young teacher who left the teaching profession - a profession in which he intended to bring about positive changes in the lives of his students - due to lack of developmental structures, a lack of action research, the negative atmosphere of the school and other limitations imposed by 'workplace conditions.' It irks me that the profession probably lost an outstanding educator! If only all teachers had access to autoethnographies which would assist in recreating educational practices! If only all teachers would engage in the practice of self-study. In her essay, *Arts of the Contact Zone*, Pratt (1999:2) voices her opinion that her son's schooling system afforded him no meaningful activities besides baseball! Surely as teachers we want to contribute significantly in children's lives?

*In using ethnography in system development,
the emphasis is on understanding the context of use
for the proposed system through activities in natural settings*

(Cunningham & Jones, 2005:1)

Cunningham and Jones (2005:3) posit that significant arguments are in place for the inclusion of autoethnography as a tool in system development, as understanding of the user's perspective and experiences is an advantage in the designing of any system. Mary Louise Pratt, bell hooks and Hirsch, whose respective essays *Arts of the Contact Zone*, *Teaching to Transgress* and *What Every American Needs To Know* (O'Donnell, 2002:2), argue that the real world is not a homogeneous society and teachers need to be taught how to work with different personalities to encourage unity, acceptance and diversity instead of facts and national mainstream culture, as advocated by Hirsch (2002:288). Therefore, autoethnography can be used as a means of enrichment, and self-reflective thinking can elicit powerful ideas for the recreation of educational practices. The autoethnography, *An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography*, (c.f. Part Two) deals with the above as is evidenced by the readers' comments.

'As a lecturer I have become aware that my teaching style is not thought provoking enough nor is it interactive enough with the students. I intend revising this.'

'I think success and emotional intelligence should be taught.'

'I found the lessons tiring and boring. I would often switch off and do something else.'

'I wish school was different - we knew what to expect every day and it was boring.'

'Most of the teachers were not interested in the pupils - it seemed as if they were only interested in finishing the syllabus and then giving us tests to see how well we had learnt things off by heart.'

To conclude, theme two appears to have the intelligence quotient as an overarching theme as it portrays the use of this autoethnography as a learning tool for enriching the 'intellectual and moral excellences'(Hargreaves, 2001:490) of inservice and preservice teachers. In present times teachers are faced with an enormous proliferation of knowledge and the South African education system, in particular, is confronted with many changes. The role of the teacher is changing and teacher self-studies could be an enormous asset to others in the profession.

A motivational tool

*Autoethnography lets me examine my beliefs and theirs
and get a handle on the differences.*

(Ellis, 2004:318)

This autoethnography can be used as a motivational tool primarily for teachers to engage in self-study. This practice will, in turn, flow over to and benefit the learners. According to the International Youth Foundation (2004:1), the main reasons pupils leave school is due to low academic achievement and little motivation. Learners need to be motivated to achieve success. Due to the number of children experiencing diverse barriers to learning in South Africa, be they as a result of language, physical, cognitive, emotional or systemic factors, strategies to motivate and keep them interested in school are of paramount importance (Tucker, 2004:1). However, as far as literature is concerned, there appears to be few life stories or autoethnographies being used as a motivational tool for teachers and learners. This, I feel, is a powerful tool which speaks of reality, possibility and hope, especially within the South African context (c.f. Part Two). The Success Quotient appears to be the overarching theme of this section. The fact that this autoethnography could be used as a motivational tool, is reflected in the readers' responses below.

'I was left feeling encouraged and motivated to improve myself- there's so much in life to learn ...'

'I need to make a list of things I would like to learn about. It gave me a feeling of courage, a feeling of positiveness and the feeling of motivation, to realise I can conquer almost anything that is sent my way.'

'This thesis has motivated me, an ordinary person, to attempt new things and to further my studies in every area. It has made me want to further my knowledge in other areas of my life.'

'This autoethnography serves to be inspirational.'

'But now I am going to venture out and learn other things. I feel excited knowing I'm going to learn many things.'

The response of the readers to this autoethnography appears to have successfully answered the second half of the problem statement, 'Will the piece cause reflection for the reader? Will it be of benefit to society and the teaching profession?' (Appendix 8)

Entrepreneurship

I have been unable to locate an autoethnography that fosters and encourages an entrepreneurial spirit among teachers and the youth. There are many books on motivation and a few on entrepreneurship but none, as far as I am aware, in the form of autoethnographies. Nave (1990:1) reports that American education is at a crossroad and states that it is '... imperative that every classroom in America becomes a place in which each student's chance of success is optimised.' This should be the focus of every South African classroom too.

*South African townships are plagued by high drop-out rates, or low success rates...
and a significant number of learners fail to perform according to their potential.*

(Msutwana, 2004:1)

Moletsane (1998:215) is of the opinion that educators need to recognise and accommodate different styles of learning, and Lucas and Lowenberg (1996:24) confirm that when an educator knows how a child learns, be it visually, auditory or kinesthetically, it will ensure that he or she is taught in a way that facilitates understanding and learning. This autoethnography highlights the notion that different children bring diverse talents and backgrounds to the classroom and that it is imperative that teachers be constantly aware of this, and that success in life is possible for all. One's life can also be a great success in the field of the arts - music, art, drama, writing, or in other fields such as design or cooking. These inherent talents need to be recognised, nurtured, expanded and encouraged

in the direction of entrepreneurial pursuits in life (c.f. example of Grade 8 discussion, p 158). In this regard, Blumenfield affirms educator effort to encourage involvement in a topic of interest to the learners results in higher levels of interest and learning (Eggen & Kauchak, 1997:10).

Implications

This autoethnography on the study of a teacher's life in education has highlighted some issues which I will raise as implications in this section. I will refer to two key implications, one relating to the autoethnography as teacher self-study, the other to autoethnography as methodology.

As the change in the socio-economic climate, especially in South Africa, demands that adjustments be made to teacher education to equip teachers to adjust the manner in which they teach to match current realities (Bolowana, 2005:5), I maintain that work such as this could be of assistance in this regard. Writing my story of a young Lebanese woman born in South Africa has contributed to deepening an understanding of my own roots during apartheid and post-apartheid. More cultural stories need to be told and heard. Autoethnography could be an effective tool to extend knowledge beyond the self to others, to understand human behaviour and make experience accessible to others.

It is vital that new researchers completing honours, masters and doctoral studies in South Africa gain a deeper understanding of how their own experiences can 'make a difference'. As Mitchell argues in a publication (in press) on 'shifting the boundaries' in research to ensure greater support for narrative arts-based approaches to research, this is a vital area for the National Research Foundation and other funding organisations to consider. While she is speaking there of community-based research, it seems to me that support for methodologies that place at the centre methods for studying the personal are critical to 'moving on' from our pasts. Would it not, therefore, also be beneficial if Universities make opportunities available for alternative and alterative research?

Recommendations for further research

This autoethnography is the story of my life informed by my culture, context and position. There are many other stories I would have loved to tell. However, the focus was on a personal teacher self-study. Therefore, first, I would recommend the penning of many more autoethnographies by teachers in South Africa to learn about their life histories. According to Ellis (2004:120), 'More white women do autoethnography than any other group.' Therefore not only should more women be encouraged to write autoethnographies, but also men. One wonders what men's stories would look like!

Second, considering that this autoethnography spanned the whole spectrum of education, autoethnographies of South African teachers, especially in Early Childhood Education, should be undertaken.

Third, autoethnographies of teachers of different cultural identities, including border identities, would be invaluable, especially in South Africa, contributing to the growing body of knowledge on teacher self-study.

I have also suggested that autoethnographies be incorporated into preservice teacher training. What would a teacher education program that includes the writing (and reading) of autoethnographies look like? Therefore, for the fourth recommendation, it could be of interest to research how autoethnographies could be used in a South African teacher education context.

Conclusion

'So Edwina, what new contribution have you made through this autoethnography?' my extraordinary promoter asks. I reply, *'This autoethnography embraces the holistic life of an ordinary teacher in South Africa.'* Ah-ha!' she responds. I ask, *'Do you know that in my frenetic research of autoethnographies I was unable to locate a piece studying the holistic life of a teacher from preservice to inservice teaching, covering her life as a class teacher, lecturer and principal and her dealings with children from birth to University. Have you come across any?'*

As DNA can be modified in today's society, so the Emotional, Intelligence and Success

Quotients can be manipulated by 'splicing' through this autoethnography and allowing it to evoke personal responses. This research was a worthwhile effort for myself as a teacher self-study, and could possibly be used by other ordinary people in ordinary fields to arrive at conclusions which will enhance their personal and professional lives. Although I have found this self-study quite challenging in some ways, as I felt totally exposed, its benefit as a cathartic and, indeed, teaching agent cannot be denied.

With apologies to Frank Sinatra - sung to the tune of 'My Way.'

And now the end seems near

But no my dear

There's much more inviting.

I've lived my life with joy

And found it all to be exciting.

My dreams have been fulfilled

I've loved it all

I've had a ball

But more, much more than this

I've done it my way.

Fulfilled? Oh yes indeed

And so I plead

Come taste the wine.

I've laughed, I've loved, I've cared

And now with you, my life I've shared.

I've walked a long, long road

I've travelled on so many byways

But more, much more than this

I've done it my way.

Advice? I've this to give

You have one life

Just learn to live

With faith, give it your all

And very soon you will stand tall.

And follow your every dream

Nothing's as hard as it may seem

And more, much more than this

Just do it your way!

(Edwina, 2005)

On Self-Knowledge

And a man said, "Speak to us of Self-Knowledge."

And he answered, saying:

Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the nights.

But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart's knowledge.

You would know in words that which you have always known in thought.

You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams.

And it is well you should.

The hidden well-spring of your soul must needs rise and run murmuring to the sea;

And the treasure of your infinite depths would be revealed to your eyes.

But let there be no scales to weigh your unknown treasure;

And seek not the depths of your knowledge with staff or sounding line.

For self is a sea boundless and measureless

Say not, "I have found the truth," but rather, "I have found a truth."

Say not, "I have found the path of the soul."

Say rather, "I have met the soul walking upon my path."

For the soul walks upon all paths.

The soul walks not upon a line, neither does it grow like a reed.

The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless petals.

Excerpt from *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931)

Lebanese poet, philosopher, author and artist

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Appendix 1

Brief bibliography of successful examples of autoethnography

The following brief bibliography refers to successful examples of this genre:

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Appendix 2

The Cedar Leaf Magazine



THE Cedar Leaf

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December.20C

Serving the Lebanese South African Community

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In this^v edition:

<* *TheAkaVs*

~ *Gibran - a Celebration of his Life and Works*

«* *The K^dachi Family the memoirs of Ernest Akal*

.» *Letters to: the Editor*

.» *-Trie Phoenicians -from the memoirs of Ernest Akal*

-- *A visit to Lebanon, Summer 2001 - by Zak Shewan*

Tact or Fiction - by Rosemarie Ansara (nee Peter)

<•> *To our Darling Situ....by Irene Stevenson*

Tribute to our Jidu..... Maroonie Habib Antonie

L...—

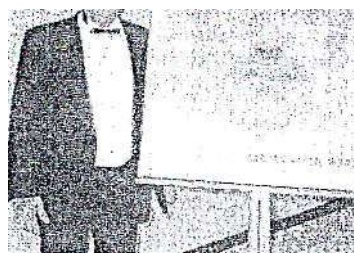
SPORT

Who was the first
Lebanese to win a world
title boxing match in
South Africa?

First correct entry to
reach "Cedar Leaf will
win a free Al Bowly CD

Clue: It is not Vic Toweel

i-f/h'f



IM'

As Rss! Acat0 R'ght: Joe Sham,
S illifii World Lebanese Cultural
i, i i UBS and Mr. Greg Gabor, Chapter
4' " ". Chapter WLCU, President

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Treasure Life:

*"Because life is a precious gift that is given only once and
Deserves to receive only the best. "*

The Akal Family

From Tea Room to Tycoons

ANOTHER TRUE STORY ON LEBANESE SOUTH AFRICAN FAMILIES - By Ken Hanna

Our story begins in a remote mountain village just east of Beirut. The period, the turn of the nineteenth century. About a days journey 'by da donkey' from Beirut lies the village of Bzedine. It is in the Lebanon Mountains and the road to it is torturous and steep. When the Akal's left their village there was no other means of transport but 'by da donkey'.

It was the Akal's only means of explaining distance. The climate is conducive to producing the nicest fruit and vegetables probably in the whole world.

It's claim to fame is that the Akal's of Durban originate from that village.

In 1901, a certain Abdoo Akal and his young bride, Alice decided to go to America. A country synonymous with wealth and prosperity. Alice's brother wanted to accompany them. They reached Durban, and ran out of money. They stayed. The Durban of one hundred years ago is not the Durban of today. It was harsh and hard. Little could Abdoo Akal know that the little tea room he and his wife were to start would become one of the most respected Durban businesses a>; o^{ne} of the largest motor spares, fishing tackle and cycle vt 'Sesalers in South Africa. Mr Akal was a shoemaker, and started up business in Florida Road. The family has traded in that area ever since. The nine year period from 1902 until they opened the tea room in 1910 were difficult years.

Abdoo Akal worked as a hawker and his wife had to scrub floors, cooked and brought up her family. There were five sons and one daughter from the marriage.

In 1910 the family's fate took a turn for the better. -The family moved to Stamford Hill Road and Mrs Akal opened a tea room in rented premises. It was here that they brought up their family... Sons, Alec, George, Fred, Edward and Ernest. Their was one daughter, Doris. Because of the ill health of Abdoo, their mother became the driving force of the family and indeed the whole Lebanese community in Durban.

During the peak seasons all Lebanese holiday makers were invited to the Akal home. Lebanese from the Transvaal were always welcome. The qualities of Alice Akal became well known throughout the Lebanese community in South Africa.

On the home front the Lebanese families such as the Warby's, the Habib's (Kiaat Taylor), the Saad's, the Joseph's, Bectar's and later the Mezher's, Sanan's, Paola's and others formed the nucleus of a community.

Tf.:ji.-ghout Mrs Akal's life she had a vigorous mind. Her mental abi?;.ies were amazing. She maintained this prodigious gift until practically her last days. She had great faith and hopes in "Our Lady" and would often say "Ja Adra". She also prayed constantly to Saint Charbel, a Maronite monk.

This is the spiritual ethos of the Akal's.

Abdoo Akal died on the 19th April 1934. Alice Akal was to lead a very lonely life after her husband's death.

As a devout catholic, Mrs Akal would attend daily mass and holy communion. There was no Maronite church in Durban, so the Akal family went to the Catholic Churches and schools.

Like most Lebanese throughout the country they are ever grateful for the love and commitment displayed by the Roman Rite Catholics. This is what Ernest Akal, the scribe of the family has to say:" I was an altar boy from the age of six and always had the greatest difficulty carrying the missal from the epistle side to the Gospel side of the Altar. I had to know the response in Latin, and I came to know and love the Mass. There was a Father O'Donnell, an Irishman, he was dynamic, loving and understanding."

Many a night he would stroll to our home and my father would spend time with him. They would converse about Aramaic, in which subject he was very interested in. It is the language spoken by Jesus, and in the mountains of Lebanon, until the 16th Century. In remote areas in Lebanon, Aramaic is still spoken and is the vernacular.

About his mother, Ernest has this to say: "My mother was frugal and whatever and whenever anything had to be saved she took advantage of the situation. Mother was an excellent cook and her meals were always tasty and inviting. She made the most delicious bread. A knack only she knew how. She would make her mixtures and with her one arm and one hand only would work her mixtures to her own consistency until instinct told her this was right. Thousands of year of tradition was with my mother. She was worldly wise, and yet daily she would come out with the expression... You are never to old to learn. Mom was born on 14th May 1882 and passe away peacefully on Christmas eve 1950.

Never give credit to a young fellow who was short of cash and badly needs a packet of smokes.

Rather give him the packet.

Such a man would always be a patron.

Quote: ALICE AKAL

PART TWO

THE AKAL'S MOMENT OF DECISION

The name Akal in Lebanese means the clever one. The one with brains. 1920 was a key year for the Akals. Their business was ticking along comfortably. They were approached by the landlord. Buy the building on which the tearoom was situated and the adjacent lot or go. The Akals purchased the building - the first of many buildings the business was to own:

DISCRIMINATION

We quote from the memoirs of Ernest Akal.

The early days in Durban were not easy for the Lebanese'affd thj Jews. The English speaking community were in the ascendancy and foreigners were looked down upon. I could not say that we were downtrodden, but we were made to feel inferior and were taught to be condescending.

In the 1930's, Durban North Estates auctioned some land. My brother Alec put in a bid and acquired some land. Six prime spots to be exact.

There was controversy at the time. Jews were not allowed to purchase land in Durban North. When we, a Lebanese family, bought this land, we were not allowed to develop. We were forced to sell. I don't think this could happen today.

The year is 1928. They build a double storey on the vacant store next door. They are now in the grocery business and move into the flat above. The family demolish the old building and build another double storey.

The second eldest son, George, was assigned to run the butcher shop, which was part of there-development site. In 1931, they bought a site across the road where Akals motor spares, sports shop and toy division was situated. Fred had entered the building industry and became a carpenter. Fred was interested in motor cycles so in 1931- he approached the petrol companies, t start a garage and repair shop.

Edward joined him and a year later, A.Akal & Sons was formed.

This was all done in the depression years, when many lost their jobs.

In 1951, the Akal brothers treble the original development to 5000m¹ and a total of 39 flats.

But because of subterranean streams, completion was delayed by nearly a year and the family experienced grave financial problems. Building Society payments had to be met and there was no income. Properties had to be sold to meet the bond payments. R12 000 was realised.

It took 25 years and over R1 -million to repurchase the sold properties. In 1954 the third generation of Akals started joining the business.

Ronald, Fred's eldest son was the first followed by Patrick.

Decision making must be by consensus and there must be a high level of trust.

the PATRICK AKAL

...Contd

PATRICK AKAL

Patrick joined in 1956 but left after a year. He went to Rome to study for the Ministry. He obtained a Masters Degree in Canon law. He was away for fourteen years, rejoining the firm in 1971.

Bernard, Alec's eldest son joined in 1958.

Warwick, Fred's youngest son joined in 1960 followed by cousin, Derrick, Ernest's son, in 1961.

FAILING HEALTH

In the mid-sixties, the health of some of the older generation started to fall and in 1966 Alec died. In March the following year, the business was formed into a Limited company - Akals (Pty) Ltd.

In the early 70's, Bernard's brother, Rodney, joined the business. George's youngest son, Terrence, join in the mid-70's.

Neil, Edward's son was the last to join in 1983.

Ernest's younger son, Stephen, joined the business, but subsequently left.

ANTHONY AKAL

Anthony is the only grandson of the founder not to enter the family business. He became a school teacher. Anthony became Head Master of Marist Brothers College in Durban.

Today the Akal grandchildren have control of business interests in diverse fields, concentrating mainly on their property interests. Today, Ronald, Patrick, Warwick and Derrick head the Akal empire, worth multi-millions. On the question on whether a family business can meet the demands of expansion, he said: "On the one hand, we have the high level of motivation and flexibility of decision making associated with family businesses, and on the other hand we believe our management expertise is comparable to that of the professionals.... A winning formula!"

A winning formula indeed.

It has taken the Akals to the height of success. Yet still retaining that quiet reserve and humbleness. It encapsulates the four pillars of Lebanese success and achievement, namely... Faith, Family, Finance and Fellowship.

The four legs of the Lebanese table. It is the legacy and the commitment and the dedication which has prompted the great spiritual leader in our Community, Father Michael Chebli, who has served the Lebanese faithfully for over thirty years in South Africa to comment.

The Lebanese are one of the fine small communities in South Africa of the 20th century.

The Akals are part of that community.

KmJaclnowledgements:

- * Patrick Akal
- * Ronnie Akal
- * The memoirs of Ernest Akal
- * Sunday Tribune, June 16, 1985

u? 2*e3 DURBAN CORPORATION.

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UCEHSHC OFFICER for the Sano.^ of Dufan.



The five cousins who combined with the running of the business when the 5 brothers stopped.

Left to Right: Warwick; Patrick; Neil; Ronald; and Derrick

LETTER FROM HIS SISTER, DORIS, TO ERNEST AKAL

Dearest Ernie

You wanted the information on my Birth Certificate. There is no address on mine it just says "Durban". The date is 5th June 1915 and that is all, except that my one and only name is Alice. Nothing more on it.

To get back to stories of Mom and Dad. In the season from June, Jyh/ and August, Mom would invite every Lebanese that visited Durbars phone up every hotel to contact them, send one of her sons to fetch Wern and entertain over 90 people every Sunday night to supper and a lard evening. How she kept it up was too wonderful. I don't know how she did it!

When Raymond was born she had made a suit case full of knitted and crocheted baby clothes for him, whole sets made by herself by hand. I wonder if we could equal her exquisite handiwork?". Each set could have been put on exhibition some of it in 2-ply wool and other in silk thread from France.

She was only 50 years old when Dad died and her grief was very intense After all, 50 is not old, is it?

No - I'm afraid I don't have much more to remember, but I'm sure you can remember a lot more. Oh yes - there was a time-when "Dad was hawking odds to make a living in their very early/days in Durban. He had to cross the Umgeni River so he put the huge basket on his head and tried to cross over, but it was deep and he nearly drowned. You can imagine Mom wasn't having anymore of that kind of risk!

You know the Kerdachi girls must remember Dad and Mom's ear?,, years. Mr Kerdachi was God-father to some of us.

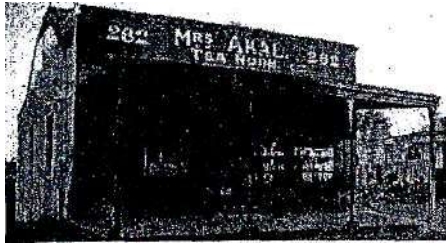
When Dad was in Florida Road, making shoes to order, Mom did the fine stitching to help him in his trade. They had a very hard and difficult life, very little money and Mom scrubbed floors, cooked and brought up her family. Until Dad went to Johannesburg for an operation for sinus and mom borrowed the money take over the small tea room in Stamford Hill Road, where they made a better living and slowly got on their feet. All this I'm sure you know.

22-05-1985. It is exactly two years today that Phil died. Masses are being said for him and I will attend.

I have unfortunately caught a cold and don't feel too good, but I will still leave this Saturday for Johannesburg. God willing. I would like to phone you again before I leave to find out the latest specialist's decision of you. I'm sure it is a worry to you to know exactly what to do. Even though I have this cold, the germs won't carry after 72 hours. I wouldn't want to pass them on to you.

Bye for now. God love and bless you.

All my love
Doris



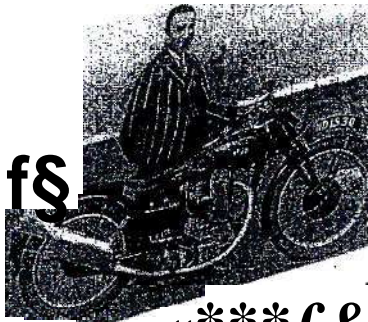
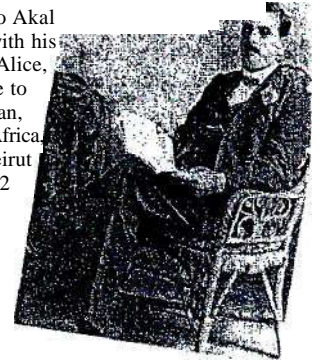
Mrs Alice Akal's original Tea Room at 262 Stamford Hill, Durban, Natal. This picture was taken in 1913

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Abdo Akal who with his wife, Alice, came to Durban, South Africa from Beirut in 1902



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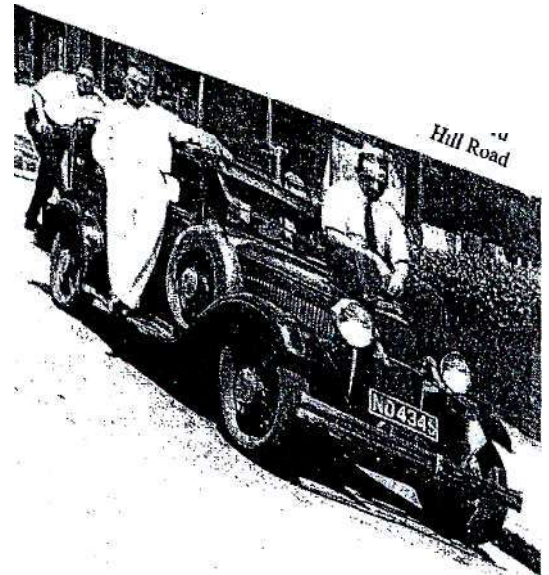
MARRIED 9TH JANUARY 1936
Fred Akal to Lily nee Mezher. The person in the right background is Doris Akal. The Mezher family originate from Jou in the south of Lebanon. Ronnie (son visited the Mezher family in 1966. Many of the Akal family have visited the Lebanon over the years and their ancestral village, Bzedine. Fred & Lily, Ronald, Marcelle, Patrick, Harr Akal

AJS



The Akals have always loved the "Sport of Kings" - Horse Racing. (Left to Right: Sylvia Akal (nee Kaplan from Free State area; Bill Mezher (Brother of Lily Akal, nee Mezher); Ronald Akal (The Rookie); George Akal (a well known punter); Alec Akal (not a regular) went once or twice a year only.

*kh_{or}cf,



Doris Akal and Phil Joseph of Bloemfontein married in 1935. Children: Raymond, Linelle, Vincent and Janine. Vincent is a dentist somewhere in Cape Town. Linelle married a French Mauritian, Janine (lost touch), Doris is retired, and lives in Cape Town. Phil became a Knight of Da Gama. He was elected Grand Knight.



3^211

**A single strand of grass is easily broken.
Five strands, intertwined produces a strong cord.
This is teamwork.
ABDOO AKAL**

Appendix 3a and b

Response Transcripts

Permission to ijse Transcripts

My response to the An Ordinary Teacher : An Autoethnography

By Jodi Hayden
(084 5161 357)

Chapter 2

This chapter forced me to cast my memories back to my own childhood and my school days. I thought about all the positive and negative things, teachers and occasions I experienced. I realized the truth of the statement made by Edwina that a teacher can either make or break a child. Only one teacher really made a difference in my school days-she believed in me and built my self-confidence.

This chapter kept me enthralled - I battled to put it down. It made me think of the reasons why I became a teacher. I actually found myself challenging my thoughts - did I become a teacher because of my mom and the Nursery School? Was it the route I was "supposed to follow". My mother never pushed me into doing anything, although I can never forget one special day in September 1993. I had just returned from overseas and was walking around the school with my mom. I stopped to talk to a child and knelt down so that I could be eye-level with him - something I wasn't told to do, it was just a natural response. I have never forgotten what my mom said to me - "Jodi you have a natural ability to deal with children - I see the way you bend down and touch a child, how you talk to a child at eye level". This stuck with me.

Reading about Mom's childhood and how active and talkative she was reminds me so much of my own son, aged 5. He appears to be a carbon copy of her. This brought to light the fact that I must refrain from hampering his lively spirit. I too beg him to be quiet!
lue grade 2 teacher should never have been allowed to do what she did!
This scene left me sad, tearful, cross and indignant. How could she do this to a child of 6?

Chapter 3

My mom still has the foresight that she had in those early years. This chapter really interested me. Although I know the history of Wonderland - I didn't know of her feelings. I tried to put myself in her shoes - pregnant, parents forced to relocate in order for her to start a business". I wonder if I could have handled or managed that?

I found my thoughts wandering back to my teenage years. I also was interested in cooking, baking, sewing, knitting. I still can't do these things today. Yet my mom never made me feel useless - she saw other things I could do and praised and encouraged me in those areas. But I know now I still have time to learn these things.

Chapter 4

Although I recall the Indigo fashion days, I don't remember my mom "changing". She was the same happy person at home as she had always been. We never realized her unhappiness. Having 2 children of my own today, I now understand why she never "let on"! A Q 6

I recall the "Kim Clement days" with fond memories. I used to love the laughter, the piano and the singing. I will always remember one evening at home when our family gathered around the piano and the family sang praises to the Lord. It is such a warm, fond memory of mine. SK E-£/ -rii ?

Reading about how Mom set and accomplished her goals (sewing, icing, etc) about furthering myself in other areas' u
? en^oura g ed me to think ^
"Everything is easy once you know how" - a quote from Mom which she is often heard to say. She has never pushed me into anything but allowed me to grow at my own pace, praising me for my achievements.

Reading about Grandpa's death affected me as I didn't realize what my Mother was going through and felt I wasn't really "there" for her. Reading her story has helped me to understand her feelings of being strong for her mother's sake. I've never forgotten my Grandpa's eulogy. Mom was the only one (out of 4 children) to say something about him and her speech about "The measure of a man" is forever in my thoughts. My admiration for my Mom really grew that day as I couldn't believe the strength and courage she displayed at this time. A / . R H V

Chapter 5

My first year at Train-A-Child, the Teacher Training College mom established was one of the most interesting years (lecturer wise) of all my years of studying. Mom lectured five subjects. I observed how hard she worked and learnt so much from her interaction with the students. One student in particular stands out in my memory - her parents had never hugged Mom slowly but surely broke down the "Vails" she had built. I recall the two of them eventually hugging and crying. Lectures were so interesting and we were involved in our learning amidst much laughter. The students did not want to leave at the end as we felt we had grown so much in all areas and knew there was so much to be learned. A ^ R ^ U TviPT sect , Tiff'e'

I got married in 1997. Whilst Mom was studying for her Remedial Diploma she organized my wedding and made and iced my wedding cake. Even though she was busy with her studies, she took the time to compile a personal recipe book for me. In it she placed the most beautiful words, sayings, pictures and recipes. I use that book to this day (8 years later) and proudly show it off to my friends. y

I recall looking around the empty buildings where Mpjijia^ envjsjojigd^ Primary School and wondering how-on earth^she_and JJa^jwojJld_a_c^CTnplisL. this, but they did. ~ ~ -

SY

The start of the Combined Class left me a bit apprehensive, as surely this was a private school with only the best standard of education! I never looked further into how acceptance into a school of excellence could change a child. wa^oTbTJcTTe^r5yTITe~scene when Craig received his reward. This made me realize that it is not the status of the school that really counts but the heart of each child in the school. After having read this chapter UoundjTiysejf questioning my own priorities and looking deeper into each child. I question what I would want - the best school with the best^ name or to touch and make a difference in Tinal^^

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What this dissertation has done for me.

n This dissertation made me take a serious look into my life - my past, _____ <7£ £ "present and future. I realized that it is not "special Beopleth.aLdo lirtazing "fiingslri life, itJs^jjJnary_p,gople.

n It made me realize that things don't just happen. It takes a person to have, 6/6 a vision, acceptance^ accomplish a dream.

n Although Life Skills is a new learning area, I think success and emotional intelligence should be taught.

n This dissertation has made me relate my personal life to Magjow's _____ hierarchy of needs. I have read many ins]D^alioliaTT^^ dissertation has motivated me, an ordinary person, to attempt new things and to further my studies in every area. I'm now also more aware of using Maslow's theory in the upbringing of my children.

U^f ?'
(

n As a teacher it has made me even more aware of how important it is to look into and know each child's background. It has made me look at the less popular children in the class and to uplift them, to make them feel important.

X ^ J

n It has made me want to further my knowledge in other areas in my life. I want to improve my cooking and baking skills, as I would like my children to come home to home-cooked cakes, biscuits and rusks, as I did.

M/SRC?

n My mom has always been an inspiration in my life, and now even more so! She has always encouraged and motivated me to do all that I can. I will achieve my goals.

n Mom has certainly created hard steps for me to follow (career wise), but this is something I will strive for. This dissertation has proved to me that I need not imitate others or her but I need to follow my inner convictions and

s&c

do things "my way". I used to feel inferior- I now realize I tnyseJtallowed SRC
thisjojiappen a s l j ^ J s U ^ e j ^
about or to me. I now feel strong on the inside.

't has inspired me to be more creative in my lessons - to recognize and J77/PV
use the talenf s ot each child.

I am going to keep a journal of my lessons. I will mark the "good ones" T T / / T
the reasons why.

As a lecturer in Practical Management of a Pre-School I have become T T I ^ T I
aware that my teaching stylejs not thought provoking enough, nor is it as
" " ' - " ' ~~~
^T^~^~^~^~^J^M revising this.

Who knows? Maybe I'll also write_a_n Aujoethnography one day. frf

Shannon Harvey

It was a wonderful invitation for me to be asked to read this autoethnography, and an experience that I found to be enlightening, educational and highly enjoyable. The historical element of the work is rich t{ & with interesting and intimate details that leave the reader longing to read of th^author's progress through pivotal life stages, as well as her progress ^ through 'Maslow's hierarchy of Needs'.

I recall the author wondering whether the reader would find parts of the work to be somewhat narcissistic. Narcissistic-No. To me it is refreshing when one can openly rejoice in their life and life's achievements. I do think that had I dared to compare my own character, achievements and experiences (however limiting) to that of the author's, it may be quite daunting or deflating, but rather than being any of the above this autoethnography serves H to be inspirational.

In conclusion...A thoroughly enjoyable and thought provoking read that , . a exhibits what determination can achieve.

What it did for me.

- I remembered my own school days. As a teacher I found it good for me 5K j ^cl to look back and recall my feelings.
- It inspired me to forgive and forget.
- It inspired me to be more understanding of the different cultures and beliefs of my pupils.
- Thought provoking - it didn't tell us to be a good teacher; we learnt it in the stories.

Debbie Martin
0823385473

Dear Mrs Grossi

What struck me about the Autoethnography?

I read of how you made your own equipment e.g. jig-saw puzzles, books etc when you had no money. My 5yr old daughter sits in front of the T.V. whenever she *-m%* can - I can't think of other things to do with her. This has given me food for thought. She battles to cut at school so making books, puzzles and card games together will be of great benefit in this respect.

I was left feeling encouraged and motivated to improve myself - there's so much in life to learn yet I don't take the opportunity. \$ \$(/ • |

I am a teacher assistant to a child with autism but there's little written about this subject. I now look at him in a different light. I'm sure I could help other (mom's autistic children, teachers and teacher assistants) if I wrote a story about how I deal with him. I now look at and deal with him differently. *XFI PT** charge differently reading of your experience and how important it is for a good background for each child. J£ I' \ \ i

It made me remember my own school days and teachers who made my life a misery. I was not outspoken and suffered inwardly. They caused me to feel 'thick' and have no worth to anyone. I now feel different about my life - I also have something of worth to give to others and I also have time to improve myself. I feel encouraged that I am useful *SR / U* *p ^* **T~ij-*

xr\?r

Gaynor Carlson
0834698084

Comment on Autoethnography Mrs Grossi -An ordinary teacher: An
autoethnography

When reading this autoethnography I felt all sorts of emotions. I was unexpectedly moved as I related to some of the incidents I read of.

I realised I must be more careful in what I say to my children. I get aggravated when my youngest son asks me why? In the future I will spend time to explain things to him, my answer won't be "because I said so".

I loved reading about the culture and how women were just expected to do certain things. I lived through the scene where you were made head prefect - I felt all the pain, embarrassment and frustration with you.

Being recently divorced, I have been so mixed up. Now I realise my life is no longer what it used to be and I need to make a list of things I would like to learn about. It gave me the feeling of courage, the feeling of positiveness and the feeling of motivation, to realise that I can conquer almost anything that is sent my way, as you have done and continue to do Mrs Grossi!

I really enjoy the poetry before each chapter and the ones you wrote to your children. One thing that concerns me today is that so many children are committing suicide. We have heard of two in the past week - children in our area. I question this. Is it because of home or school circumstances? I'm sure stories of success in life, no matter what the circumstances are, can bring hope to many.

Tracy Bolton
0825646193

Dear Mrs G

You asked me to read your thesis and comment on how I felt afterwards.

1. Speaking about your schooldays made me think of mine ~Jj^yfyhj|g_to_ concentrate but my thoughts kept going back to my own teac^JriTSomFof tKem were like the ones you had. I cried when I read of your grade 2 tl teacher ^^^^ o u ^^^ g M ^^^ d to fill the bucket with tears before you could go home. Shame on her! She should never have been a teacher. I didlioT^yic^oH~nraIsolouhd the lessoris~tmhg and bormg. Twould often switch off and do something else. Most of the teachers were not Q(A interested in the pupils - it seemed to me as~ifthey were only interested in finishing the syllabus andlhen giving us tests to see how wefTweJiad learnt things ofTbyiieaif~BliFone teacher I remember in particular she made me feel I was good at something even it it was just domestic science" CS^"
Q(A
SR | UB | I
2. SITtfrnja^n^n^ matric. One thing I wish was that they spoke about different careers and the choices we have in life. I had no idea what to do when finished school and felt so mixed up at this time. CSE
3. Ijalso couldn't help comparing my school\$, with your schools and the way_ ;^' N ^OHlsafih.. First of all you make everyone feel special and you always give each pupil time and love. I wish I could have spoken to my teachers the Way you chat with your students and pupils. I wish school was different W£-knew what to expect every day and it was boring. Maybe if it was more exciting we wouldn't have had so many pupils leave". CS£
4. This life story made me realise how important it is for parents to allow a child ton5e^a~chllaT"Many timesTwitness"paTeirts^h"oTifirIg^f "a~chld~ because he has left something behind in class. I very seldom hear loving words - the parents today seem to busy, always in a rush, always some appointment to get to after work (usually gym). I feel sorry for the children - most of them have been at school from 7.15-5.15. When I'm a parent one day I will always remember Maslow's theory - thank you for giving me something to base my children's upbringing on. I didn't know this before. ah
- 5- I also cried for my father when I read your words about your father. I felt ~T n relieved as I also stifled my feelings. After reading your story I found I was motivated to learn new things. I'm always scared of making a mistake and usually stick to things I know, But I now am going to venture out and learn other things..I don't read but now feel inspired to learn about different things. I like the way you said you learnt so much from books. I now feel excited inside knowing I'm going to learn many things - I often feel 'stupid'in conversations. ..
^
J
' \$r
h

I wish you would write a book about your thoughts on the way ajdaild^auld— CS^ be taughtLand what is important to each child is the most important thing. in_. their life - it could be the beginning of a dream for them.

Thought from [Leanne] on James

Contact: 855 555 1516

Yet I am blown away by Linda (Jrossi, ~) his "book" is written with incredible honesty, energy and love so evident for her family, - a passion for children and an energy and enthusiasm for life that leaves us all standing!!

The most impacting parts for me were Linda revisiting her father's death and his influence on her life. A brave venture to delve back into sad memories but these will probably give her the strength for her future years. Linda is an amazing mother; wife and daughter as well as friend and you can feel her love for her family in her writing. This is also really impacting as you read her story. C{ G

That struck me *again* is the reality of a woman who is not afraid of being a pioneer, - tenacity and OFWC, come naturally.

I had the privilege of working with Linda in the very early years of Rain-a-child as a lecturer, and found the third thing that impacted me was her incredible passion for children. I saw it with my own child at her preschool, I experienced it when I lectured for Linda and felt it again as I read her manuscripts. ifS>

Lara Jacobs
^828320804

Dear Mrs Grossi

I was surprised when you asked me to read and comment on your dissertation. From my perspective as a student teacher (in my first year)It confirmed I was studying the right calling in my life and helped me in many ways to predict things that may happen in a class and how to deal with them.

T
fi IIT

I understand Piaget's theory of flight or fight for the first time and Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of needs came alive and meant something to me.

XT"/ ^

I think if more teachers wrote stories about teaching it would be wonderful for students to learn from. I also thoroughly enjoy reading Tory Hayden's stories about children in her class and how she deals with certain situations.

"J
_X / / r l

I was shocked at how some of your teachers acted, especially the Grade 2 one. i know I will never become a teacher like that. I would love to make my pupils feel school is a happy, a wonderful place to be and make them want to learn instead of feeling homework and other things are boring.

I loved reading about your and Mr Grossi's life. I found it cute! I think I'm also useless like you were in sewing and cooking. But you did other more wonderful things like open schools. One day I also hope to or^enjriy_own Pre-School.

£

oAg^Y^hs,



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 Fax (031) 3126192

Edwina Grossi

B.Ed. (Horn.) (U.N.); N.T.S.D. (D.T.T.C.); Dip. Rem. Ed. (R.A.U.)

28 September 2005

Dear J&J7 H^{Q1}-folg-ru

I am a Masters student at the University of Kwazulu Natal and am doing an Autoethnography as my dissertation. I would appreciate it if you would read Chapters 1-5 and provide written comments on the piece. The question I would like answered is "What message did you draw from this dissertation?" The data from your written responses will be used in the dissertation and may be published. Please be so kind as to give written consent for this. However, please note you may retract at any time.

Thank you for your co-operation. Should you require any further information, please contact my supervisor, Professor Naydene de Lange at 2601342.

Yours sincerely,

J&J7 H^{Q1}-folg-ru

Mrs Edwina Grossi

I J&J7 H^{Q1}-folg-ru have read Edwina Grossi's dissertation, An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography, and have furnished her with a written response. I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my responses at any time.

Name Jodi T4=M<C1Q^

Date c^s Syfre^bar Aco5

Signature

J. Lange



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Edwina Grossi

B.Ed. (Horn.) (U.N.); N.T.S.D. (D.T.T.C); Dip. Rem. Ed. (R.A.U.)

28 September 2005

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Sincerely,

^&&&<^'. 'c->Si<-

Mrs Edwina Grossi

I Ms. Edwina Grossi have read Edwina Grossi's dissertation, *An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography*, and have furnished her with a written response. I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my responses at any time.

Name JHMNDH J~/n/ZVtY Date 28-09-2005

Signature



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Edwina Grossi

B.Ed. (Eons.) (U.N.); N.T.S.D. (D.T.T.C); Dip. Rem. Ed. (R.A.U.)

28 September 2005

Dear ws_

I am a Masters student at the University of Kwazulu Natal and am doing an Autoethnography as my dissertation. I would appreciate it if you would read Chapters 1-5 and provide written comments on the piece. The question I would like answered is "What message did you draw from this dissertation?" The data from your written responses will be used in the dissertation and may be published. Please be so kind as to give written consent for this. However, please note you may retract at any time.

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Vours sincerely,

Mrs Edwina Grossi

I, I JeJonve, ' Igyb\^ have read Edwina Grossi's dissertation, An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography, and have furnished her with a written response. I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my responses at any time.

Name Wl Date 3-^/0^ Ijyb

Signature_



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Edwina Grossi

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28 September 2005

Dear Gaynor Carlson

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Yours sincerely,

/g£.X^ ^^

Mrs Edwina Grossi

I Grodno/ Cg/ISO* _____ have read Edwina Grossi's dissertation, An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography, and have furnished her with a written response. I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my responses at any time.

Name Gaynor (ObO soe-i

Date ^S Septerotocv ztooS

Signature J CIM^&J



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Edwina Grossi

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28 September 2005

Dear Zs^_

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Yours sincerely,

yt£~ ^

Mrs Edwina Grossi

"Irac^i So I ton _____ have read Edwina Grossi's dissertation, An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography, and have furnished her with a written response. I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my responses at any time.

Name Ira/// fiolf/on

Date 21-1-05

Signature *Bolton*



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Edwina Grossi

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28 September 2005

Dear Heane Moran-James

I am a Masters student at the University of Kwazulu Natal and am doing an Autoethnography as my dissertation. I would appreciate it if you would read Chapters 1-5 and provide written comments on the piece. The question I would like answered is "What message did you draw from this dissertation?" The data from your written responses will be used in the dissertation and may be published. Please be so kind as to give written consent for this. However, please note you may retract at any time.

Thank you for your co-operation. Should you require any further information, please contact my supervisor, Professor Naydene de Lange at 2601342.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Edwina Grossi

I AjcUtAI kIX<fyjoUAjJU> have read Edwina Grossi's dissertation, An Ordinary TeacheH^An Autoethnography, and have furnished her with a written response. I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my responses at any time.

Name JkXOUJUAJI JVCXJCHJI- James Date axJ^j^OOS

Signature_ [Handwritten Signature]




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Edwina Grossi

B.Ed. (Rons.) (U.N.); N.T.S.D. (D.T.T.C); Dip. Rem. Ed. (R.A.U.)

28 September 2005

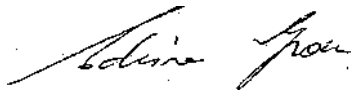
Dear


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Yours sincerely,



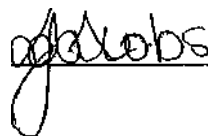
Mrs Edwina Grossi

Lara Jacobs have read Edwina Grossi's dissertation, An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography, and have furnished her with a written response. I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my responses at any time.

Name Lara Jacobs

Date 2% September-5005

Signature_



List of Coding

How units were grouped

List of Coding - How units were grouped

- * Sentences or phrases which meant something were underlined as I read the replies.
- * Notes were written in the margin concerning units of meaning e.g. "self-reflection, received an answer to a question", etc.
- * Possible headings under which a phrase could fall were written next to the quotations and codes were allocated

SR - Self reflection

SRC - Self reflection and change

EE - Evokes emotions

AQB - Received answer to question regarding certain behaviour

U - Understanding

UB - Understanding behaviour

LTI - Learning tool - inservice teachers

LTP - Learning tool - preservice teachers

CSE - Change system of education

TH-Therapeutic

EQ - Emotional Quotient

M - Motivation

E - Entr.epreneurship

SDO-School drop out

SU-Suicide

Similar codes were combined to form three sub-themes e.g.

AQB - Received answer to question regarding certain behaviour, U - Received understanding and UB - Understanding behaviour became - "Gives meaningful insight into human behaviour".

- * Thus the three sub themes gave me a main theme -

THIS AUTOETHNOGRAPHY CAN BRING ABOUT POSITIVE EMOTIONAL
AND SOCIAL CHANGE.

Jodi Hayden

This chapter forced me to cast my memories back to my own childhood and my school days

I realised the truth of the statement...that a teacher can either make or break a child.

Only one teacher really made a difference in my school days - she believed in me and built my self confidence.

It made me think of the reasons why I became a teacher.

This brought to light the fact that I must refrain from hampering his lively spirit.

I tried to put myself in her shoes - pregnant, parents forced to relocate.

I found my thoughts wandering back to my teenage years.

But I know now I still have time to learn these things.

Having 2 children of my own today, I now understand why she never let on.

I will always remember one evening at home ... it is such a warm, fond memory of mine.

Reading about how she set and accomplished her goals has encouraged me to think about furthering myself in other areas.

Reading her story has helped me to understand her feelings of being strong, for her mother's sake.

Her parents had never hugged her. Mom slowly but surely broke down the walls she had built.

Lectures were so interesting and we were involved in our learning

The students did not want to leave at the end...they knew there was so much more she could teach us.

I never looked further into how acceptance into a school of excellence could change a child

This made me realise that it is not the status of the school that really counts but the heart of each child in the school.

I found myself questioning my own priorities and looking deeper into each child.

I questioned what I would want - the best school with the best name on to touch and make a difference in many lives.

I didn't realise what my mother was going through and felt I wasn't there for her.

I recall looking around, the empty buildings and wondering how...

Debbie Martin

I read of how you made your own equipment when you had no money.

I was left feeling encouraged and motivated to improve myself - there's so much in life to learn yet I don't take the opportunity.

I am a teacher assistant to a child with autism but there's so little written about this subject. I now look at him in a different I

I'm sure I could help others (mom's of autistic children, teachers and teacher assistants) if I wrote a story about how I deal with him.

I now look at and deal with my own child and my charge differently reading of your experiences and how important it is for a good background for each child.

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I was not outspoken and suffered inwardly. They caused me to feel thick' and of no worth to anyone.

I now feel different about my life.

I also have something of worth to give others and I also have time to improve myself. I feel encouraged that I am useful.

Leanne Nixon-James

The most impacting parts for me were Edwina revisiting her father's death and his influence on her life.

You can feel her love for her family in her writing. This is also impacting as you read her story.

The third thing that impacted me was her incredible passion for children.

<p>This dissertation made me take a serious look into my life - my past present and future. 1 realise that it is not only "special people" that do amazing things in life, it is ordinary people. This dissertation has proved to me that 1 need not imitate others or her but 1 need to follow my inner convictions. After having read this chapter 1 found myself...looking deeper into each child.</p>	
	<p>SAC Sflc</p>
<p>1 used to feel inferior -1 now realise 1 myself allowed this to happen... .1 now feel stronger on the inside. As a lecturer in Practical Management of a Pre-Primary school, 1 have become aware that my teaching style is not thought provoking enough. nor was it interactive enough with the students. 1 intend revising this. This dissertation has made me relate my personal life to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. She saw other things 1 could do and praised and encouraged me in those areas. It made me realise that things don't just happen. It takes a person to have vision, acceptance of mistakes, courage and lots of hard work to accomplish a dream. I'm now also aware of using Maslow's theory in the upbringing of my children. It has made me look at the less popular children in the class and to uplift them, to make them feel important.</p>	<p>US u6 Lfjff</p>
<p>This dissertation has motivated me, an ordinary person, to attempt new things and to further my studies in every area. It has made me want to further my knowledge in areas of my life. 1 want to improve my cooking and baking skills. It has inspired me to be more creative in my lessons - to recognise and use the talents of each child. 1 am going to keep a journal of my lessons. 1 will mark the "good ones" and not the strategies 1 used. It is not the status of the school that counts, but the heart of each child in the school. 1 think success and emotional intelligence should be taught.</p>	<p>WSf fH3t</p>

Tracy Bolton

I was trying to concentrate but my thoughts kept going back to my own teachers.
I cried when I read of your grade 2 teacher and how you thought you had to fill the bucket with your tears before you could go home. She should never have been a teacher.
I did not enjoy school -1 found the lessons tiring and boring. I would often switch off and do something else.
I wish school was different - we knew what to expect every day and it was boring.
Most of the teachers were not interested in the pupils - it seemed as if they were only interested in finishing the syllabus and then giving us tests to see how well we had learnt things off by heart.
But one teacher I remember in particular she made me feel I was good at something.
One thing I wish was that they spoke about different careers and the choices we have in life. I had no idea what to do when finished school and felt so mixed up at the time.
I couldn't help comparing my schools, with your schools and the way you teach.
Maybe if it was more exciting we wouldn't have had so many pupils leave. When I 'm a parent one day I will always remember Maslow's theory - thank you for giving me something to base my children's upbringing on. I didn't know this before.
I also cried for my father when I read your words about your father. I felt relieved as I also stifled my feelings.
After reading your story I found I was motivated to learn new things.
But I now am going to venture out and learn other things.
I don't read but now feel inspired to learn about different things. I like the way you said you learnt so much from books. I feel excited inside knowing I'm going to learn many different things -1 often feel 'stupid' in conversations.
I wish you could write a book about your thoughts on the way a child should be taught and what is important to each child is the most important thing in their life - it could be the beginning of a dream for them. Many times I witness parents shouting at a child because he has left something behind in class. I very seldom hear loving words - the parents today seem too busy, always in a rush, always some appointment to go to (usually the gym).

Gaynor Carlson

1 was unexpectedly moved as 1 related to some of the incidents 1 read of.
 1 realised 1 must be more careful in what 1 say to my children.
 1 get aggravated when my youngest questions me and ask Why? In the future 1 will take time to explain.
 1 loved reading about the culture and how women were just expected to do things.
 Being recently divorced, 1 have been so mixed up. Now 1 realise my life is not over.
 1 need to make a list of things 1 would like to learn about.
 It gave me the feeling of courage, the feeling of positiveness and the feeling of motivation to realise that 1 can conquer almost anything that is sent my way.
 ...so many children are committing suicide. We have heard of two in the past week.
 I'm sure stories of success in life no matter what the circumstances can bring hope to many.

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Shannon Harvey

I remembered my own school days. As a teacher I found it good for me to look back and recall my feelings.
 It inspired me to forgive and forget.
 It inspired me to be more understanding of the different cultures and beliefs of my pupils.
 It didn't tell us to be a good teacher, we learnt it in the stories.
 The historic element of the work is rich with interesting and intimate details that leave the reader dying to learn more about the former generations.
 It's fascinating to read of the author's progress through pivotal life stages
 A thoroughly enjoyable and thought-provoking read that exhibits what determination can achieve.

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Lara Jacobs

As a student teacher it confirmed I was studying the right calling.
 It helped me in many ways to predict things that may happen in a class and how to deal with them.
 I understand Piaget's theory of flight or fight for the first time
 Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of needs came alive and meant something to me.
 I think if more teachers wrote stories about teaching it would be wonderful for students to learn from.
 I also thoroughly enjoy reading Tory Hayden's stories about children in her class and how she deals with certain situations.
One day I also hope to open my own Pre-School.

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Appendix 5

Field Notes

Field Notes

I was a little nervous to ask people to read my thesis as I felt they may think me a 'bold creature.'

I initially approached a Masters students but realised he was too busy with his own work. An artist approached me about reading my autoethnography and indicated it would be a pleasure to furnish me with a written report. However, although she read and discussed the piece with me (I was thrilled with her insight) she failed to furnish me with a written report in time as she received a few commissions and was too busy. However, she eventually gave me a report which I included in Appendix 8.

I then approached a cross section of women - a grandmother, mother, daughter, mother-in-law, married, single, divorced, single mother, ex-principal, lecturer, inservice teachers, preservice teacher, teacher assistant, counsellor, school secretary, minister's wife.

Unfortunately the counsellor was too busy but would love to read the autoethnography when she has time.

Two of the respondents approached me for permission for their friends to read the autoethnography.

Appendix 6

Permission to use names and photographs



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Edwina Grossi

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28 September 2005

Dear SZZ-t~v *fe^t:C&-zj*

I am a Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and am doing an Autoethnography as my dissertation. I would like to use your letter and photographs in the piece.

Thank you for your co-operation. Should you require any further information, please contact my supervisor, Professor Naydene de Lange at 2601342.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Edwina Grossi

I "l£AO{- Sq-uMp&gS (VfcBSTeg-) give permission for Mrs Edwina Grossi to use my name and photographs. I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my permission at any time.

Name ^&<-H SVKiNDe£-S

Date a~2>l~i\9~ooS

Signature ^£f^i^



15 Trematon Drive
Morningside
Durban
4001
Tel (031) 3123310
Fax (031) 3126192

Edwina Grossi

B.Ed. (Horn.) (U.N.); N.T.S.D. (D.T.T.C.); Dip. Rem. Ed. (R.A.U.)

28 September 2005

Dear fzAsr AJi_5S*/s

I am a Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and am doing an Autoethnography as my dissertation. I would like to use your name and photographs in the piece.

Thank you for your co-operation. Should you require any further information, please contact my supervisor, Professor Naydene de Lange at 2601342.

Yours sincerely,

sS-^Z*''' ^ ^ -

Mrs Edwina Grossi

I jjado Wf £Ssels give permission for Mrs Edwina Grossi to use my name and photographs. I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my permission at any time.

Name Q * n v\less>eis

Date 2^ bePTtmece 2006"

Signature



15 Trematon Drive
Morningside
Durban
4001
Tel (031) 3123310
Fax (031) 3126192

Edwina Grossi

B.Ed. (Hons.) (U.N.); N.T.S.D. (D.T.T.C); Dip. Rem. Ed. (R.A.U.)

28 September 2005

Dear

Jena

I am a Masters student at the University of Kwazulu Natal and am doing an Autoethnography as my dissertation. I would like to use your name and photographs in the piece.

Thank you for your co-operation. Should you require any further information, please contact my supervisor, Professor Naydene de Lange at 2601342.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Edwina Grossi

^ * ~

"Merino _____ give permission for Mrs Edwina Grossi to use my name and photographs. I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my permission at any time.

Name

Hemeran

Date

1^/10/2005

Signature

Hemeran



15 Trematon Drive
Morningside
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Fax (031) 3126192

Edwina Grossi

B.Ed. (Hons.J (U.N.);N.T.S.D. (D.T.T.C); Dip. Rem. Ed. (R.A.U.)

28 September 2005

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Yours sincerely,

Mrs Edwina Grossi

1JL. V< _____ give permission for Mrs Edwina Grossi to use my name and photographs. I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my permission at any time.

Name tTs //ucfi

Date 3/ H?-r

Signature _____



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Edwina Grossi

B.Ed. (Hons.) (U.N.); N.T.S.D. (D.T.T.C); Dip. Rem. Ed. (FLA.U.)

28 September 2005

Dear 4 & ^ . ^

I am a Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and am doing an Autoethnography as my dissertation. I would appreciate it if you would give me permission to use ^c£^~^> ' _____ name in the piece as one of the first pupils in the Combined Class.

Thank you for your co-operation. Should you require any further information, please contact my supervisor, Professor Naydene de Lange at 2601342.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Edwina Grossi

I, £ATMeMrO L^rn.Ri£ give permission for Edwina Grossi to use _____ name in her dissertation. I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my responses at any time.

Name C m M ^) Uh^Ri£

Date _ /&->

Signature f/fIL.A/*AM



15 Trematon Drive
Morningside
Durban
4001
Tel (031) 3123310
Fax (031) 3126192

Edwina Grossi

B.Ed. (Hons.) (U.N.J.; N.T.S.D. (D.T.T.C)); Dip. Rem. Ed. (R.A.U.J)

28 September 2005

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Thank you for your co-operation. Should you require any further information, please contact my supervisor, Professor Naydene de Lange at 2601342.


Yours sincerely,

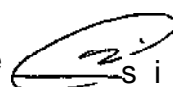


Mrs Edwina Grossi

I  _____ give permission for Mrs Edwina Grossi to use my name and photographs. I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my permission at any time.

Name 

Date  os

Signature 



15 Trematon Drive
Morningside
Durban
4001
Tel (031) 3123310
Fax (031) 3126192

Edwina Grossi

B.Ed. (Horn.) (U.N.); N.T.S.D. (D.T.T.C); Dip. Rem. Ed. (R.A.U.)

28 September 2005

Dear

-**2r

I am a Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and am doing an Autoethnography as my dissertation. I would like to use your story and photographs that were in the paper and taken at graduation in the piece.

Thank you for your co-operation. Should you require any further information, please contact my supervisor, Professor Naydene de Lange at 2601342.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Edwina Grossi

Qtik ^{en^e} _____ give permission for Mrs Edwina Grossi to use my name and photographs. I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my permission at any time.

Name C&jh *ime.*

uzcLutaJjGjX&-

Date

zholoS

Signature



15 Trematon Drive
Morningside
Durban
4001
Tel (031) 3123310
Fax (031) 3126192

Edwina Grossi

B.Ed. (Hons.) (U.N.); N.T.S.D. (D.T.T.C.); Dip. Rem. Ed. (FLA.U.)

28 September 2005

Dear £?/

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Thank you for your co-operation. Should you require any further information, please contact my supervisor, Professor Naydene de Lange at 2601342.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Edwina Grossi

IAS.ar^<^?^fiftXy29- -V^r give permission for Edwina Grossi to use C XTCXK'X, name in her dissertation. I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my responses at any time.

Name v\QJSSQX\.^Wn.ivAs-sQ-\e&fc Date L - M S O ^

Signature__ **I^I g^^V^**



15 Tmaton Drive
Mornlngside
Durban
4001
Tel (OH) 3123510
FPX (Oil) 3126192

Edwina Grossi

B.Ed. (Hom.) (U.R);N.XS.D. (D.T.T.C); Dip. Rem. Ed. (IU,U.)

2S September 2005

Dear. 

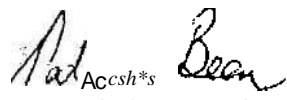
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Yours sincerely,

^^ r « ~

Mrs Edwina Grossi

 give permission for Mrs Edwina Grossi to use my name and photographs, I am aware of the possible publication and understand that I may withdraw my permission at any time.

Name 

Date 

Signature. 

Appendix 7

Letters of confirmation of facts

Mrs Akal
304 Musgrave Heights
Musgrave Road

28 August 2005

My name is Sylvia Akal, born on the 6 January 1922 and I confirm that I am the mother of Edwina Theresa Grossi. I have read this work and declare it to be truth as far as her younger days are concerned.

I recall the days and nights when we sat up till the early hours of the morning working on assignments whilst at Training College. Her desire to become a teacher was insatiable. But, back to the beginning, when, as a little girl, she had this incredible passion to be associated with babies, or rather her inquisitive nature took over whenever she came across a child and she needed to know a name and an age. I remember her 'playing schools' with her cousin who was a little older than her and how she longed to be 'the teacher' but was not often afforded that opportunity! She was a very spontaneous little girl who showed a lot of affection and who was never hurtful to others, but rather said what she had to and never bore a grudge.

Edwina was a very active child and very gullible! She was always laughing and the world was her oyster. She loved everyone and everything around her was great. She tried to do her best at everything (except sport!). She was very mischievous and got up to all sorts of things. She always wanted to be creative and this showed in her assignment books, which bore testimony to her work. She was very good natured and loved school and the company of her friends. She had plenty of love not only for them, but also for her brothers and sister and her mother and father, to whom she showed great respect.

My husband and I gave up our home in order for Edwina to turn it into a Nursery School. Little did we know at the time that our daughter would one day build an empire!

*I give permission for Edwina to use
her Father's Memorials in this dissertation.*
Sylvia Akal
S. Akal.

Dear Edwina

I have read this dissertation and reflect fondly on our younger days. I recall the days when you used to use our dolls as pupils and 'taught' them in the garage or on the front verandah. Do you remember how we used to sing and dance on the back steps (you've never left the 'platform'!) We attracted quite an audience from the neighbours children and they loved coming to our home, perhaps mainly because it was such a happy one and one which emanated a lot of love. I recall how freely we mixed with the neighbourhood children in our younger days before residential apartheid was the law.

How I laughed when I recalled our younger days in the kitchen; mom was such a wonderful cook and baker and our attempt to copy her failed dismally! It wasn't until much later in life that you were the one to take over from where she left off and I always admire (and envy too!) your incredible artistic ability.

I have such vivid memories of the day you were voted Head Prefect at Convent High School; the jealousy and the turmoil it caused amongst your fellow peers and how you handled the situation in such a modest way. During my high school years you were by far my best 'after hours' tutor! You helped me to understand and in fact I am convinced you helped me achieve a mark of 98% in my standard seven year when I came first in class - nobody could ever teach me the way you did!

Your profession and dedication was so important to you and you were always so engrossed in your work when you were studying to become a teacher; how you sat up for hours at night working on an assignment - it's no wonder you achieved such high marks for them!

I also remember the 'phone call I received to say that our home was to be converted into a Nursery School; I had mixed feelings at the time but little did I realise that my own two children would start their foundation to education there years later, and as irony would have it, my daughter, Lara, would train at Embury Institute for Teacher Training! I can never thank you enough for the sound advice you gave me when my children were eligible to enrol in Grade I - that it was in their best interest to start a year later because of their emotional immaturity and how they both benefitted tremendously by doing so. Both Clinton and Lara have stated what a wonderful role model and example you are to them and you have certainly inspired them to go the extra mile.

When I finished reading through your autoethnography, it made me realise that if you have determination and passion, the sky's the limit - you certainly always rise to the occasion. Although you started out to be an 'ordinary' teacher, you have achieved so much more to accomplish 'extraordinary' things. I have the utmost respect and admiration for you and I am so very proud to be your sister.

Love, ^ ,

Cheryl. /f' '

25th September 2005

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This letter serves to confirm that in the years of apartheid in South Africa Mrs Edwina Grossi accepted my former maid's two grandchildren. No other pre-school in Durban would accept children of other races. At the time I realised that this was against the law and illegal but fortunately Edwina saw all children as one. We were delighted at the children's progress .I have always experienced love and acceptance for every person in her schools

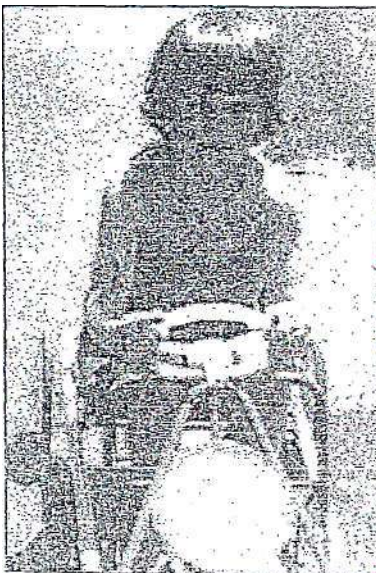
Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susie Van Niekerk', with a horizontal line underneath.

Mrs Susie Van Niekerk
Telephone No 031 2097660

My most vivid memory of Wonderland is that of a hot December afternoon, 25 years ago. I can clearly remember myself standing centre stage at one of Wonderland's many end of year concerts. The thick heat of the afternoon didn't deter the delighted parents who sat riveted to their seats, while the children on stage stole their hearts. For this particular concert I was dressed in military attire, proudly wearing the rank of sergeant major, and singing my heart out to the tune of "Underneath the Lamplight". The object of my affection was a little girl called Rachel whose most distinguishing characteristics were her missing two front teeth and the oversized red high heeled shoes on her feet! I will never forget those bright red heels as they ran behind me on our way to the hall... and in true female fashion... she was not easily rejected!

It was on this "sunny afternoon -that my days at Wonderland came to an end, and a new chapter of my life called 'big school' was about to begin. Since this day, the cycle of life has done a full circle..., as now my own son, David attends Wonderland, experiencing the same love, care and affection that I did a quarter of a century ago. ;...-



Wonderland's First Boy!

by Michael Grossi



Casting my mind back I believe the most effective way to describe the Wonderland experience, and the foundation on which it was laid is "love". It started with the love that a young school teacher had for her first blossom. This love was so strong, that when she could not find a nursery school which could meet her high standards and expectations, she changed her own life and founded one herself. Her boundless love has been imparted to all the children who have passed through Wonderland's doors over the years. The most distinguishing feature of Wonderland is not the impressive buildings, the highly trained staff, the educational programmes or the sound moral grounding that the children receive... it is rather the love that envelops every facet of its operation, from Baby Care to Embury College, the Primary School.

It therefore did not surprise me that my Mom chose the motto "Love Conquers All", nor "Love Changes Everything" as the school song when she founded Embury College! She has this all-consuming love for children which is her special gift from God. Love gives us security... it bathes us in peace and fills our being with a quiet, gentle confidence... how wonderful for useful children to be surrounded by this in their childhood years..

-Mom and Dad, I thank you for being my best friends, and for the wonderful upbringing which you have given me. Those happy days, culminating in my being sergeant on that hot summer afternoon, have been the foundation on which my life has been based.

Mrs Grossi's Comment : . . .
When I read the above article I was moved to tears. I recall so vividly how much Michael enjoyed his days at school and, although being only three years old, how he never displayed any jealousy, when I displayed affection for the other children. In fact he was treated as all the other children and accepted this. Many of the children and their parents did not even know that Michael was my child.

Even in these early years Michael displayed leadership qualities and was referred to as the 'leader of the pack'. He initiated most of the games and so kindly included every single child. These qualities stood him in good stead, for during his military training he was appointed an Officer and today he has his own Assurance/Insurance Brokerage, AIM Insurance Brokers. He has in fact just won a trip to the Rugby World Cup Finals for being one of the top consultants for an international investment company...

Besides Michael, Wonderland serviced my other two children Jodi and Richard: These two children also were wonderful in their acceptance of my love for all children and never ran into my office telling tales or crying, but accepted the fact that they were part of the school and were not privileged, and that all the children were treated the same.

I am now reaping the fruit of the early seeds sown - Jodi has owned her own Nursery School (see article on pg. 25) and Richard, after four years of study, has his own computer school (see article on pg. 52)..

Photocopy of an article written by my son, Michael.
Taken from Edwina's journal, November, 1999

Wonderland's Special Place in my H H ^ H "

by Jodi Hayden

Wonderland has been an integral part of my existence, even before I was born. My mom, Edwina Grossi, was four months pregnant with me when she opened the doors of Wonderland Pre-School in 1972. (At the time of her negotiations with Town Planning, City Health, Welfare Department and Education Department, builders, electricians etc. etc.... little did she know I was present, listening to all this!) I attended Wonderland myself when I turned two.

During my teen years I used to help out with the After-Care holiday programme, never imagining that one day the school would fashion and mould me into the person I am today.

After I matriculated in 1991, and not knowing which path I wanted to take in my life, I embarked on a one year working holiday in Europe. It was during this time that I realized my heart lay in working with children. (My Mom said she knew it all the time but did not want to influence my future decisions in any way!)

In 1993 I joined the Wonderland "family", and was fortunate enough to be given a chance to gain valuable practical experience working with each age-group. After searching for an effective child-care course for me to undertake, my Mom devised the Train-A-Child course, with me in mind. Along with a group of 25 other young women I was privileged to be a student in TAC's opening year 1995,

thus giving me the "head-knowledge" I needed. I consider myself



very fortunate to have been trained directly under my mother, as not only did she teach me how to work with children of all ages, but she taught me the importance of running a school in a loving but professional and efficient manner in order to maintain a high standard. Of course at times it was not easy being trained under her, red hair and all, as she was stricter and harder on me than she was on the other students and staff members. However, today I can look back on my training period and thank her for all that I have learnt. The experience gained from her is priceless.

Very soon Wonderland became a way of life for me. It was much more than a "job", and each day I looked forward to the challenges that lay ahead. Once you are a part of Wonderland, it is very difficult to let go... and this I found out the hard way!

In 1997 the man of my dreams "popped the question", and I had to make some life-changing choices. Since "love conquers all" my heart won, and I got married and relocated to Port Elizabeth. Leaving Wonderland and everything I loved about the school was heart-wrenching, however, looking back on it now, I realize it was the best thing that could have happened. Initially I used to cry on the phone to my mom about how desperately I wanted to return and her response always was that every part of life is a season with a lesson to be learnt. I never fully understood her words until I opened my own school in Port Elizabeth in 1998. Wonderland provided me with the training and maturity that I needed, making me a far more

independent person than I was be-

I opened Wonder Years with 22 children. Soon I had my full quota of children and the school gained a good reputation in Port Elizabeth. It was during this time that I recalled my mom telling me that no-one could ever fully understand the "24-hour-a-day sheer hard work" that was required in running Wonderland.... I was now experiencing it for myself. I can honestly say that the success of Wonder Years was directly due to my formal training.

In mid-July this year, God did the impossible and my husband, Dean, was transferred to Durban. I cannot express how wonderful it is to be back again. I know that I will once again restore the relationships I had with all the children, and "old" parents, and hope that my association with the "new" parents, who don't know me yet, will be a long and happy one.

Comment from Edwina

Jodi said "God did the impossible..." Jodi forget she had a praying mother and man's impossibilities are God's possibilities. In the natural it seemed impossible, but it just shows that prayer alters situations - it is a very powerful force!

Mickey and I flew to Port Elizabeth the night before the 'Open Day' at Jodi's school. She made us both very proud when we saw what she had accomplished and when we heard the excellent remarks from the parents. Within two months her school was full and the children made remarkable progress and loved every minute of their day. She proved to me that she really has what it takes! I am so delighted that she had the opportunity to run her own school. I know Wonderland was always her special place as she used to say on the phone - "but Mom, it's not Wonderland".

Sometimes we wonder why we land up in certain situations, but most times there are so many valuable lessons to be learnt from our experiences - good or bad!!:-

Photocopy of an article written by my daughter, Jodi.
Taken from Edwina's journal, November, 1999

Wonderland

From: "Rick Narain" <ricknarain@gmail.com>
To: <wonder@cknet.co.za>
Cc: <ricknarain@gmail.com>
Sent: 11 December 2005 12:47
Subject: Darien and Karissa Narain : Australia

Dear Edwina

I write to you today, with a heart filled with joy and pride. Darien has been awarded a high distinction award for academic excellence at Haileybury Edrington - his new school in Victoria Australia. Darien, still the youngest in his class, has coped brilliantly with the challenges of starting a new school in July in the third term, coming to a new country and culture, learning a new language (French) and new subjects (philosophy and visual arts). He has attained A+ grade in all subjects. We trusted your judgement when you advised us that he should start school at 5 years old - you were right!

Karissa who is in year 2, has coped brilliantly as well and according to her teachers, she is also performing at a level beyond her grade.

We are very proud that they have coped with all the challenges. We want to thank you and the teachers at Wonderland and Embury College for preparing our children so adequately. During a recent parent interview, the teachers at Haileybury commended the strong foundation that was provided by the teachers at Embury College. The presentation of their work, reading, writing, comprehension and understanding of concepts were also attributed to their learning at Embury College. The standards that you have set at your school are of an international level!

We will always hold Embury College close to our hearts and we will remember Embury and the teachers as the foundation of our children's success.

We wish you and your staff success in all your future endeavours and hope that you continue to provide the gift that you offer best - education!

Bless you Edwina

Regards
Shobana and Rick Narain
Melbourne
Australia

DEAREST MRS GROSSI

Another year has come to an end. Although we see each other regularly I never have a chance, due to time constraints, to say thank you or just how much I appreciate you and your staff.

Wonderland is just not another institution to us but is a part of our family. Due to the excellent grounding and teaching skills at Wonderland my older son has excelled academically and on the sports field at his current school. He is quite a mathematician. Even as a working mum I can say that it is due to the loving and nurturing qualities that you and your staff possess, that you are able to accomplish a job so well done. Kavish just loves his school and adores his teacher.

This is a big thank you to you and the wonderful staff members at Wonderland for taking such good care and for constantly inspiring my child in all aspects. Thank you once again for giving Kavish the opportunity to further grow at Wonderland. May you, your family and staff members be blessed eternally.

**With good admiration
Mrs Naidoo**

Edwina Grossi

From: "Gideon&Romy" <glevinsohn@sympatico.ca>
To: <edwina@letni.co.za>
Sent: 05 July 2006 04:16 PM
Attach: 7 months 030.jpg; San Francisco-June 2006 200.jpg; Sarah-7 months 026.jpg; summer fun-7 mnths 026.jpg; summer fun-7 mnths 008.jpg
Subject: from Romy

Hi Mrs. Grossi,

I was very excited to have finally found your e-mail address this morning—I have been looking everywhere for it since I returned to Canada a couple of months ago.

I am so sorry that I didn't get a chance to come to Wonderland to see everybody and especially to meet with Jodi, which I was very excited about. We landed up going to the South Coast (unplanned) and then by the time we got back, you guys had already closed for March Break. I drove past to see i; there was perhaps anybody there, but no luck!!

I don't have any contactable details for Jodi and I would love to be in contact with her...I can always e-mail her some of my assessments, monthly overviews etc. which I had planned to discuss with her. I am most likely coming back to Durban in October, so hopefully we can make a plan to meet up then.

I have new plans in the pipeline!! I am in the process of working on starting my own daycare/preschool. I will start off very small as a homecare with 5 children plus my little Sarah (that way I don't require a license as of yet) and then hopefully I will grow into something bigger in the future...I aspire to be like you© I can only hope and work VERY hard, as you did.

I hope you are well and thank you so much again for giving me the best training I ever could have wished for!! All the times I didn't understand why teachers were told not to talk in the playground, not to sit... I now understand and appreciate fully!! Thank you Thank you to you and Train-A-Child College for helping me be the best teacher I can be and certainly putting these Canadian teachers to shame!!! Thank you also for making the English language and Communication component of the course so important and of such a high standard—I was made the editor of all the written work in the school—wow, you should see what I have to edit!!!

Please could you forward my e-mail address to Jodi or send me Jodi's address so I can be in touch with her.

Lots of love to Tracy, Kerry and Jodi and all at Wonderland

I have attached a few pictures of my little Sarah for you to see©

***Aii my iov* atat \$mi fs\$aid\$
M@my***

Edwina Grossi

From: "Gideon and Romy" <glevinsohn@sympatico.ca>
To: "Edwina Grossi" <edwina@letni.co.za>
Sent: 12 July 2006 06:46 PM
Subject: Re: Re: from Romy

Dear Mrs. Grossi,

Thank you so much for your reply. I was so thrilled to hear back from you.

Of course you have my permission to use my e-mail, with the greatest of pleasure, love and pride!! That is wonderful news to hear that you have almost completed your Ph.D. So many years of hard work and dedication is certainly paying off- Well Done!

Thank you for your words of inspiration and encouragement. I am going to print your e-mail and keep it close by for all the difficult times (I know there is bound to be a few,) to remind me that my passion and love for children is a gift and that I am not only making my own dreams come true, but yours too. I will send you pictures and keep you updated on how it goes. Hopefully I will see you before I start when I am in South Africa in October.

My little girl is definitely a gift...a true blessing!!
I would love to see pictures of your grandchildren if and when you get a chance. I bet they have all grown up so quickly.

I will be in touch again soon.

Lots of love again

Romy

XXXX

>

> From: "Edwina Grossi" <edwina@letni.co.za>

> Date: 2006/07/10 Mon AM 11:30:54 EST

> To: <glevinsohn@sympatico.ca>

> Subject: Re: from Romy

>

> Dearest, dearest Romy,

>

> Thank you my darling for the beautiful e-mail and precious words. The

photos of your baby are too wonderful. What a beautiful, happy child she seems. God has really olessed you.

>

> I am SO proud of you! I am behind your every step and only an e-mail way. You must open your own place and bless all the children you can with the gift God has given you. Imagine how many children I will also touch, although indirectly, but through you! In my dreams to reach as many children as I can to nurture, love, guide and foster in them a love,curiosity and eagerness for knowledge, I must confess I didn'tinclude the children in Canada! Thank you for making this a possibility. Two other ex-students have also opened a school in Kloof and I went to visit them a coule of weeks ago. I feel so humbled that the good Lord has used my training to produce such wonderful results.

>

> I have just almost completed my Ph.D and would love to include your beautiful e-mail if I may. Do I have your permission? Use this address for Jodi until I can ascertain which address she wants to use.

>

> Looking forward to hearing from you soon,

> With lots of love,

> Mrs. G

>———Original Message———

> From: Gideon&Romy

> To: edwina@letni.co.za

> Sent: Wednesday, July 05, 2006 4:16 PM

> Subject: from Romy

>

>

> HI Mrs. Grossi,

>

>

>

> I was very excited to have finally found your e-mail address this morning-I have been looking everywhere for it since I returned to Canada a couple of months ago.

>

>

>

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Appendix 8

Letters from the language editor and an artist

17 Stathearn Place
Westville
3629
10 October 2005

To Whom It May Concern

Dear Sir/Madam

I met Mrs. Edwina Grossi for the first time fairly recently, and was only peripherally aware of her work in the teaching sector. I knew her as a fellow art student, and admired her proficiency with a paintbrush. Her high level of skill is paired with obvious tenderness for her chosen subjects - usually children and their caregivers.

When Mrs. Grossi approached me to copy-check her Master's thesis: *An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography*, I approached it in the same way I would any assignment for a client, and anticipated that my level of professional detachment would be the same as it always is. Having worked as a journalist for 20 years, I have developed the ability to view material with objectivity, rather than emotion. What a revelation *An Ordinary Teacher* has been!

Having been schooled in the mainstream, Nationalist-dominated South African education system in the period 1970-1982, my own experience paralleled that of Mrs. Grossi in many respects. Our teachers were a 'mixed bag,' - many of them rigid in their approach and extremely intolerant of any pupil who displayed original thought, or differed from the mainstream by virtue of ability, appearance or opinion. We were not encouraged to speak our minds, and corporal punishment was frequently meted out for 'transgressions,' either real or imagined. Rote learning was the norm, and in some instances pupils were required to memorise entire chapters, and then regurgitate them.

I was a sensitive, artistic child, and felt like the proverbial 'fish out of water' for most of the twelve years I spent at school. When I encountered the rare teacher who encouraged my talents, I drank in praise thirstily.

An Ordinary Teacher evoked such strong memories for me. Mrs. Grossi's experiences threw into relief the boredom, alienation and pain of my own school years. 'Why couldn't you have taught me?' I found myself lamenting. 'What might I have become if someone like you had nurtured me and celebrated what made me 'different,' instead of trying to stamp it out?'

I was moved to tears by Mrs. Grossi's story on a number of occasions. I so admire her stubborn determination to defeat the 'ordinary' label, and become extra-ordinary in every way, her refusal to allow others' negativity and fear to impede her progress.

The cornerstone of Mrs. Grossi's life philosophy - 'Love Conquers All' - will resonate in my mind always. This brave, special woman has the kind of reservoir of love we tend to regard as the preserve of famous healers and humanitarians. Hers is not a love conditional upon others' meeting her expectations. Rather it is a love given freely, precisely *because* we are all unique, and cannot be expected to conform to one stereotype for behaviour or performance.

In my opinion, *An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography* should be published and widely disseminated among teachers and pupils in our country and abroad. How's that for a 'lack of journalistic objectivity! This thesis is quite unlike any I have encountered. It shouldn't gather dust on the shelves of any library but, rather, become dog-eared through handling by many, many readers. Hopefully it will prompt a flood of other submissions in the same genre, helping to flesh out the history of education in our country, and map its future direction.

An Ordinary Teacher: An Autoethnography was as 'unput-downable' as a good novel. Only the finest novels linger in the memory. This autoethnography will remain in mine.

Sincerely

Vivian June Attwood (Ms.)

Journalist/ Copy Editor

2006

To whom it may concern

I recently had the pleasure of reading Edwina Grossi's autoethnography. Before I had completed it I had discussed it with several of my friends and recommended that they read it.

This autoethnography is a picture of authenticity, legitimate to the writer, a picture of a particular society over a particular period of time. I believe that the relevance of this genre of writing lies in the fact that it is a true voice - not a work of fiction or political biotribe. It's humanist rather than strictly 'academic' approach makes its very valuable contribution accessible to a wide audience.

Although in its essence it is a 'story' of personal liberation it identifies with many broader issues and has particular relevance for all women in patriarchal societies, martialing the courage to realise dreams and create change rather than subjugate to previous ethos.

It is a 'document' about courage, about education, a lesson for all of us in realising dreams and overcoming obstacles, about the hope and possibility of the ordinary becoming extraordinary.

I imagine in a decade or two, shelves filled with such writing - the possibility to learn about culture and history through the honest and individual voices of the lives that make and contribute to it.

Sincerely

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Dee Donaldson
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