

## Sacred Spaces: Places to Call Home?

Kim Stewart

### Our Kitchen Table

I am not sure if a drop leaf table is meant to be used as a kitchen table. But in our family, a table is a table. The first drop leaf table that I remember was at my grandmother's house. It needed a book or a folded newspaper under each leaf to ensure that the table was level. This table was a constant at our Tophill home and has outlived many family members. My grandmother purchased it in the *Family Herald* for \$5.00. \$5.00 for a table that now embodies 80 years of memories and stories.

*—Personal journal entry, February 2017*

It is difficult for me to write about my research without writing about my writing process, without writing about the chair that I sit on, without writing about my moleskin that has become my chosen notebook, without writing about our kitchen table where I sit to write. Doing so provides me with the space, materials, and time to reconceptualize literacy practices in home and educational settings.

It is the layers of intra-actions, entanglements, and entwinements (Kuby, 2019) between myself, the table, the paper, and the wood grain that connects the eighty years of memories and my sense of being and becoming, that give me the words to write. "Einstein famously called this 'spooky action at a distance' because entangled particles cannot be independently described.

Their fates are bound together" (Kuby et al., 2019, p. 69). We cannot describe one without including the others because one

impacts that other. We may even be unaware of the entangled interactions that may be acting upon and through us during literate encounters.

I have discovered that writing is a method of inquiry to learn and understand about myself and my participation in the literacy practices of others (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). I question, validate, and explore new ways of knowing, being, and becoming through my writing. As a posthumanist, feminist writer, and educator, I write to document and record thoughts, events, and experiences that I do not want to forget. I write to uncover the relationship between bodies, materials, space, and time and the entanglements of humans and more-than-humans. I write to help me believe what I have experienced. I write so I can resist, relive, revitalize the stories that have and continue to define who I am. Who another is? Who my sons are? I write to understand my realities and give meaning to the complexities of living (Munro Hendry, 2010). I am revisiting my autobiographical narratives; perhaps because, as Canadian author, Camilla Gibbs, describes “we are always in want of a home” (as cited in Brand et al., 2018. p. xvi). The act of writing has been my sacred place to call home while working in an educational system—a territory that at times felt foreign, restrictive, disrespectful, and unwelcoming. This happens when “people can’t ‘be themselves’ in any given territory, when the literacies they embody just don’t fit in or when people don’t understand, know or accept the literacies that others embody within a space” (Thiel as cited in Enriquez, 2016, p. 92).

Throughout my career as an educator, school principal, literacy coordinator, and consultant, I actively strive to construct sacred spaces. Richardson (1997) describes sacred spaces as:

What might I mean by “sacred space?” I know it is not “innocent space” but a space where, minimally, four things will happen: (1) people will feel “safe” within it, safe to be

and experiment with who they are and who they are becoming; (2) people feel “connected” – perhaps to each other, or a community, or nature, or the world they are constructing; (3) people feel passionate about what they are doing, believing that their activity “makes a difference”; and (4) people recognize, honour, and are grateful for the safe communion. (pp. 184-185)

Ironically, on more than one occasion, as I type the word “sacred” I have mistakenly typed the word “scared.” Each time I tap the delete key to correct the word, scared, I have thought, yes sometimes a “sacred” space is a scared space to delve into. Writing in any space is an invitation to take risks and embrace our vulnerabilities but within these sacred spaces “we produce time and space *to be with* rather than aiming for a never-to-be realized future goal of mastery over” (Jones as cited in Kuby, p. 112). In my research, I am reliving stories to uncover how new literacies unfold and sustain us through human and more-than-human entanglements. Our stories sustain us by offering loving recognition, joyful acceptance, and holding gentle possibilities in the face of adversity (Mitchell, 2018).

### **Entanglements: Thread and Veins of Motherhood**

Our youngest son Jack was born February 9, 2006. When the umbilical cord was severed, separating our physical connection, Jack’s heart started beating independent of mine. That was the moment in the delivery room when he told us that something was wrong. Horrible infant screaming filled that space. Unknown to us or the doctors, a vascular malformation was attached to Jack’s right hand. Within thirty-six hours of birth, Jack was airlifted to the Izaak Walton Killam Hospital for Children in Halifax. We followed his flight by car—a six-and-a-half-hour drive through snow, freezing rain, and hail. Jack’s health crisis required the collaboration of numerous

doctors from around the world because there was no recorded history of such a crisis. In fact, the medical doctors didn't know exactly what to do for Jack. Reliving our story, I experience how "*new literacies* are produced through new entanglements, and they take responsibility for what they produce in the moment" (Jones as cited in Kuby et al., 2019, p. 112). These doctors labeled Jack, "one in a million." Thirteen years later, at the Harvest Jazz and Blues Festival in downtown Fredericton, Jack, who is now thirteen years old, ran into Dr. Krishnaswamy, the pediatrician who was responsible for Jack's continuous care when he returned to Fredericton. We thanked him once again for the care of our son, and he reminded us, "Your son survived because of his determination. It was always his strong will."

When this life altering situation occurred, I lived within a heightened sense of awareness and alertness of the space around me, that typically I do not live in my daily life. Because my child's life was at risk, I lost all sense of time. This alertness took me to another way of being where I cared for Jack, attending to his physical, emotional, and medical needs, with eyes wide open for days and months. As I reflect on this situation, I realized that humans were not enough. In the critical space between dying and living, everything that once mattered no longer matters. I resided in a sacred space of living.

As I searched for meaning, material artifacts, personal journals, a family package that arrived from Quarryville, NB, and a quote from the movie *Shawshank Redemption*, "That's all it takes, really. Pressure, and time" (Darabont, 1994) provoked lines of flight that grounded me in unsuspected and unanticipated ways. The entangled interactions of keeping a journal and receiving materials from the world beyond the hospital grounded me in the hope of living. At that same time, we followed Jack's lines of flight which

offered a map of what could happen if we took him seriously, like Dr. Krishnaswamy did within twenty-four hours of Jack's birth.

I wrote this journal entry ten months after Jack's birth while attending a school district Enrichment Committee meeting. I was given the following quote to respond to in writing: "Our lives are woven by the weavers of time in a pattern we cannot see" (Flavia). Reading the quote, my mind-body returned to those weeks with Jack in the hospital and I wrote:

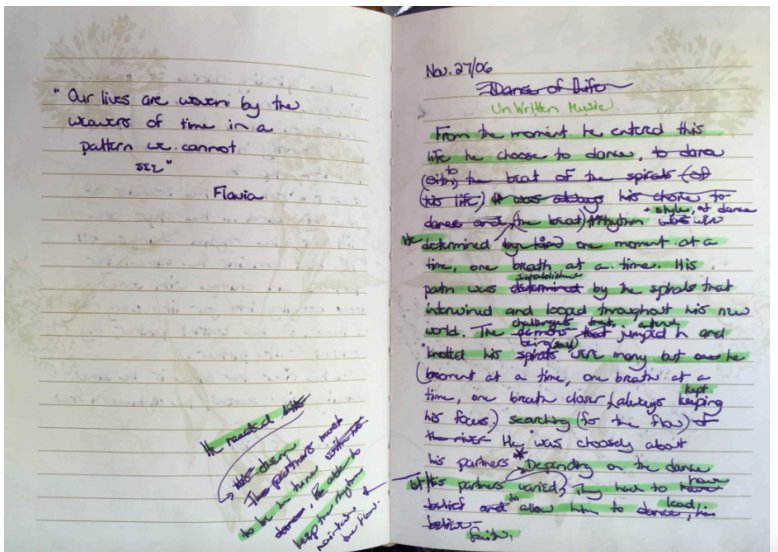


Figure 1. Personal journal entry, 2006.

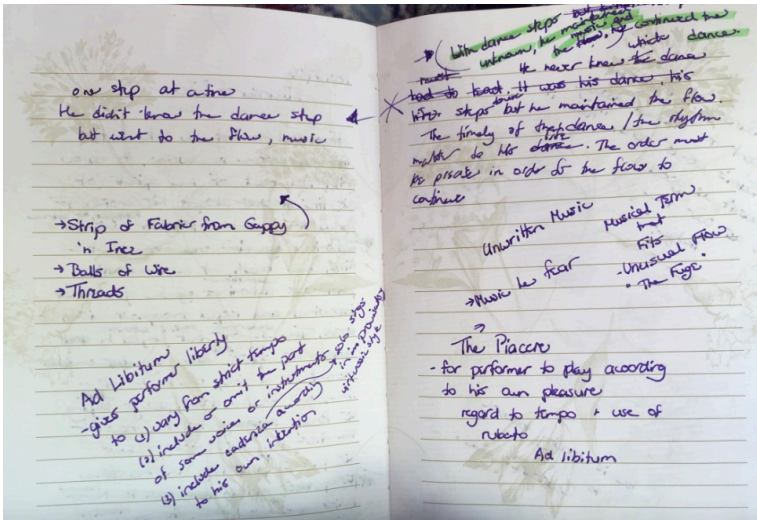


Figure 2. Personal journal entry, 2006.

### Unwritten Music

From the moment, he entered this world he chose to dance. He determined the rhythm and style, one moment at a time, one breath at a time. His path was entangled by the spirals that intertwined and looped throughout his world. The challenges that entered and knotted his being were many, but he kept searching. His partners varied, depending on the dance. He needed us to be in time, able to keep the rhythm. We had to allow him to lead. With dance steps unknown, he maintained and continued the dance.

(Personal response, October 2018)

Deleuze (1997) reminds me that writing is always becoming and incomplete; “It is a process, that is, a passage of life that traverses both the livable and the lived” (p. 34). Jack’s first year of life was turbulent, livable, and lived. As I wrote during the district enrichment meeting, I was reliving our shared embodied, material-discursive moments. These moments and memories will never be removed from the depths of my skin (Thiel as cited in Enriquez et al., 2015). I turned to that sacred space on the page to write, to theorize and understand new ways of knowing/being/doing. Perhaps, like Camilla Gibbs, I was looking for a home to rest my thoughts for a few moments.

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