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STUMBLING INTO CHANGE AND OVERCOMING MY CREATIVE FEARS IN THE PROCESS:

MY CCT EXPERIENCE IDENTIFYING AND OVERCOMING UNCERTAINTY AND FEAR IN MY CREATIVITY

A Synthesis Project Presented

by

LORNA RIACH

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2012

Critical and Creative Thinking Program

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ABSTRACT
STUMBLING INTO CHANGE AND OVERCOMING MY
CREATIVE FEARS IN THE PROCESS:

MY CCT EXPERIENCE IDENTIFYING AND OVERCOMING
UNCERTAINTY AND FEAR IN MY CREATIVITY

May 2012

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Abstract:

Though I originally enrolled in CCT as a means to prevent me from *working too much*, I ended up discovering I actually needed to do *much more work* –toward my creative development, instead of my professional development. While my "head-on" approach had proven effective and successful in my professional development when faced with challenges, it turned out that the same approach would be ineffective toward my attempts at personal change. Fears quickly emerged in my creativity that required my consideration - before I could enjoy any level of success. This synthesis considers the development and manifestation of my fears in creativity, and shares my experience, actions, and reflection in overcoming these fears in my personal creativity. Through the trial of seven actions focused on overcoming fear, I share how my thinking changed – which resulted in me finding comfort in creativity, and not discomfort with uncertainty.

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CHAPTER 1

NARRATIVE:
MY “FEARRIS” WHEEL

Narrative:
My "Fearris" Wheel

Fear manifests itself in some of the usual ways for me. My fear glows in my bright cheeks and dances in my trembling voice when I have to share my writing aloud. It flutters in my stomach when my boss says something in her "very quiet" voice - because with her, I've learned, the quieter she says it...the louder she really should be saying it. It coils my stomach when I hear people yelling at each other. And fear squeezes my throat and chest when my loved ones are sick- as my heart fears for the uncertainty of our tomorrow. But, my fear has a sense of humor, too - like when it moves to deep within my colon and hits "EVACUATE" - regardless of my proximity to a bathroom. And my fear has a protective side, too, as it attempts to save me from danger. For example, it's there at the start of my sprint triathlons -screaming at me, "Get out of the water - you can't swim!" Apparently my fear can have memory problems too, because it never remembers my Adult Tadpole Class at the local YMCA – where, at 36 years of age, I finally did learn how to overcome that fear of swimming. .

But as much as fear can take up residency in my existence making me sound, look, and feel different than I think I am – that's not really the fear that bothers me. That fear is like my Auntie Gina- who somehow always makes her presence known to everyone around her. You may not know my Auntie Gina, but you know when she's in the room. Correction: when she's within fifty feet of the room. And it's the same for that kind of fear - I know when it's there; and knowing is a great advantage.

However, it turns out my resident fear has an evil twin- one with anesthetizing abilities to carry out stealth-like missions bringing silence to my thoughts and actions completely. And this is my Real Fear. It slides up right next to me so that I hear nothing but silence. It's not like the kind of silence that makes your ears hurt...that kind of silence you know exists. But this one...I

don't even know I can't hear a thing. Yet this is the fear that manifests in my personal creativity and in my writing. It isn't like writer's block - this is like forgetting that I speak language, have a computer, or even have electricity.

Real Fear short circuits my emotions, numbs my intellect, slows my personal drive, buries my curiosity, and depletes my energy. It makes me passive and accepting of everything in front of me without any level of consideration or challenge. But - it's tricky, too. Because I'm still totally functional - working, eating, sleeping; working, eating, sleeping. It keeps me going through this perpetual cycle. I'm always going, going, going. Spinning, spinning, spinning.

The constant spinning looks impressive and fairly productive to outside eyes, but in reality - it's slowly draining my creative fulfillment with each revolution on what I've nicknamed my "fearris wheel." Because I'm too busy spinning, I don't do the things that interest me personally and instead, I operate under the guise of "exhaustion" from…so much going. Because of the exhaustion, I simply avoid even doing those things to begin with - which is the underlying goal of Real Fear. I avoid it all, the risk and the reward associated; instead I just keep....going.

Days become weeks, weeks become months - and I'm spinning, spinning, spinning. At work, projects get completed (on time and often with fantastic appraisal!); at home, clothes and small dogs still get cleaned -but the small car stays dirty; family needs come in and get attended to - almost always too late for crisis prevention, yet still early enough to allow for some crisis mitigation; medications get picked up and mostly taken; bills get paid; toenails get clipped; hair always gets colored; legs mostly get shaved.

Every once in a while I "support the economy" and go on a shopping spree. Shopping probably functions more as a method by which I create illusionary self worth - after all, I've got to get something for all this going, going, going. But, more often than not, the next day I feel

remorse. So I rationalize everything I purchased that week - clothes, books, coffee, Life Savers - under the basic premise to average it all out to one price. It doesn't matter that the Life Savers cost me $25.85 - so did the $129.00 dress - and I am convinced that it's too good a deal to pass up.

It boosts my spirit for a little while, but only so that I can return to my spinning, spinning, spinning. In other words: life goes on. This is life, after all.

This is life?

After all?

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

Introduction: Stumbling into Change

When I entered the Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT) program, I had no idea what I would end up doing for a synthesis project, never mind the depth of personal change that could be associated in completing such a project. In fact, I had no idea I even "entered" CCT when I took my first class in September of 2008. After surfing the web looking for where I may find a class to break the monotony of work (note that my original intention was just "a" class), I stumbled across the CCT program and was intrigued. Slightly intrigued by the concept of the program (which appeared very different from my undergraduate experience), and then more intrigued when Peter Taylor, responded to my email the very next day, within a week I found myself sitting every Monday in a 'too-small' desk in the Wheatley Building attending Critical Thinking.

Unknowingly, I had just entered the CCT Program - because I would matriculate at the end of my Critical Thinking class. So, in some senses I stumbled into change. Little did I know that four (fast and yet transformative) years later I would be completing a synthesis exploring a topic that I stumbled into, as well: fear in creativity as manifested in my writing. This topic has allowed me to explore personally interesting topics such as cognition, emotion, creativity, and reflection – and help me dive (not stumble) toward personal change that I once didn't know I sought.

Writing is a large element of the CCT program – through the standard papers required for each class in which students are required and encouraged to share their thinking on the readings; and through the reflective writing in which students have the opportunity to evaluate and express their own metacognition. Truth be told - I've struggled with sharing my writing and my thoughts in writing, since the beginning of my CCT experience – in Critical Thinking. The very first

reflective paper I had to turn in for that class (on week 2 or 3) felt like I was handing in a thesis. I can now connect the feeling to fear of having my words (and thoughts) shared.

Performing the writing wasn't the problem – in fact, learning to crystallize my thinking and digesting of information through writing has been one of the most freeing and rewarding experiences of CCT. It was in the sharing of the writing (with professors or students) in which I would start sweating. I was a bit unsure of what "Critical and Creative Thinking" meant and how that related back to the assessment of my writing from professors and students. Would they think I was *critical?* Would they know that I wasn't *creative?*

While I likely had a *sense* that I could be creative (although I am not sure I would have used the word 'creative' to describe what I sensed), I entered CCT fairly certain that I wasn't *creative*. A good problem solver? Yes. Capable of divergent thinking? Yes. But yet, I would not necessarily have considered myself *creative*. Because back then ("then" being pre and early CCT), creativity was a word I reserved for *artists*. And that...I was convinced I was not.

However, my experience in CCT allowed me to see the assumptions in my thinking about creativity - as it applies to others and me. It showed me that creativity wasn't just reserved for artists. And that *artist* was a title that I had inappropriately assigned definitional limits. I started to see that creativity resides outside any one method or medium, but instead could be found within a person, in a given time and situation. CCT has allowed me the framework, resources, and experience of deeply reflecting upon and exploring my own creativity so that I can safely now state: I am a creative person.

I now consider writing a large part of my creativity - and it is the focus of this synthesis as it applies to my creative process. I was hardly aware that I even had a passion for writing until my final year in CCT. Before that, I think I knew I *enjoyed* writing…but in my Creative

Thinking class in spring 2011, I was able to fully explore personal writing for the mere *pleasure* it provided me, and start to see the personal growth and level of reflection it could make available for me. This realization was a monumental surprise for me in my CCT experience – the first pivot in my journey which directly contributed to my transformative experience and toward this synthesis. Thus, I was excited to explore and include my writing process (as it enables my reflective practice) as part of my synthesis.

As my joy of exploring writing continued, however, I learned that the more I wrote- and allowed myself to explore writing - little fears would amplify a*s a result* of my writing. Therefore a puzzle presented itself very quickly because I knew now that I liked writing- and that writing made me feel creative and was leading to a more meaningful reflective practice – but that the amplification of these fears was hindering my enjoyment. I really wasn't ready to let go of my newfound enjoyment, and so I felt ready to explore these fears more deeply in hopes of tackling them 'head on' - the way I normally took on other problems.

But, these fears were tricky, and it turned out my usual 'head on' approach would prove somewhat ineffective - as I simply couldn't just *identify and fix them*. Sometimes these fears would present as loud and negative thoughts; and sometimes as exhaustion; and other times as blindfolds that would appear to almost brainwash me to stop thinking and wondering. For the latter, I couldn't even see that they were influencing my thinking, and therefore my beliefs, and actions. But once I identified them through my writing, I couldn't ignore them! Therefore, I was brought to the second pivot in my journey and I had to explore this feeling of fear in creativity as part of my synthesis.

Lastly, it was through developing a reflective practice (in conjunction with my writing) that I could see the impact of my fears in writing (and the associated thoughts, beliefs and actions

that they brought me) were much more deeply rooted than I would have expected. In fact, the patterns that I saw in my writing were evident throughout other experiences and areas in life as well. These fears eliminated my ability to feel that I had a right to *be heard* (or that I had something worthwhile to say*),* and as a result - I had stopped taking chances and risks, and had a decreased sense of personal wonder or inquiry. Realizing this through my reflective practice was a third pivot for me, and I thought to not include it in my synthesis would have been irresponsible - as this is the depth of change that was evident and most surprising.

Therefore, I've used my opportunity for synthesis to personally *synthesize* and expand my knowledge about fears in creativity so that I could identify and try methods to overcome such fears and feelings of uncertainty. An important current that has kept this project moving has been my development of a reflective practice which has allowed me the means and voice to articulate my experiences in a much more meaningful way. This reflective practice serves to monitor and fuel not only creating a writing practice (by helping to overcome any challenge, including fear) - but also serves to connect my writing experience to my reflective practice experience and connect each of them to *life in general.* And thus, this synthesis serves to provide an example of change that is possible through the use of reflective practice.

This synthesis is written in two parts. The first focuses on the review of *fear* as a philosophical, emotional and cultural concept and its role in my life and creativity. In it, I consider the different ways that fear can manifest itself in our emotions, perceptions and actions. This was important research for me to synthesize - as I couldn't have developed a plan for overcoming fears without a better understanding of them. However, I must note that any of the manifestations that I've included *could be their own synthesis* and thus, the information I've included is only the "tip of the iceberg." By no means have I represented a complete argument

for any of them - instead, I've presented the key elements that I thought were important to share as a primer for the second half of this synthesis: my plan on taking action against the fears.

Thus, the second part of this synthesis focuses on just that: my development and trial with actions to overcome fears. It reveals my reflections and experiences trying out seven methods that I identified during my research. Between the two parts, I've included a mid-synthesis transition chapter (chapter 6) to orient the reader to the more experiential and reflective second half. Lastly, throughout this synthesis there are four of my own creative non-fiction narrative pieces created during synthesis using the methods and actions I identified. Instead of placing them separately at the end, I have chosen to weave them into the piece as a representation of my whole experience.

It is my hope that I effectively synthesized my CCT experience for three main purposes for two specific audiences: "myself-in-the-future" and future CCT students. The first purpose is that it provide a roadmap *back* to productivity if the feeling of being "creatively stuck" exists (or creeps back in). The second purpose is to provide a tangible example of the level of change *possible* when a reflective practice is utilized during personal change. Lastly, it is my desire that the synthesis is written as a narrative piece and is enjoyable to read – in a way that holds the reader's attention and feels like a conversation that exists on paper. Since the focus of my creativity has been writing, I want to acknowledge the importance of the writing in this synthesis and hope it reads like a narrative, itself.

I have included as Figure 1: Synthesis Map an overall depiction of this paper. This presents the overall process that I discovered during my CCT experience in which I realized the struggle I had in maintaining balance toward my personal creativity. On one side, "Wonderer's Block" – representing the most creatively stuck and focused on *task performance*. On the other

side, “Consciously Curious” – representing the most engaged with personal creativity and creative immersion. I’ve included as a representation of these two ends the depiction of my thoughts, feelings, and actions as manifested in my own writing. A main focus of this map includes the seven actions that I identified can take me *from* Wonderer’s Block, leading me *toward* Creatively Conscious which are detailed in Chapter 8.

This is not a perfect portrayal of a perfect journey toward a perfect ending. However, it is a portrayal of my experiential journey - and while my journey has come a long way, I acknowledge that it is still developing in terms of potential growth and development, and in so many ways feels like I’m at the *beginning*. But it's fun to have been on this journey - and to be reminded of how exciting a *beginning* can be!

I came into the CCT program under the guise of wanting "a class" to break my monotony of working too much - I wanted something else to show up for, to put in my schedule, and require that I wouldn't be compelled to work so much. I had no idea what was in store for me, or how wonderful the experience of consciously realizing what one has unconsciously sought. As I conclude my CCT experience, I don't so much have the feeling of wanting to end so that I can finally *be done with all the work* that is required when in class; I'm excited to end because I have *much exciting work to be done.* Work that is personally motivating and inspiring - and leads itself to a more personal sense of balance than I could likely ever attain by simply signing up for classes offered, putting them in my calendar so that I could sit in a 'too small desk' and just...show up.

CHAPTER 3

NARRATIVE:
30 THINGS I FEAR (AS OF FEBRUARY 16, 2012)

Narrative:
30 Things I Fear
(As of February 16, 2012)*

1. Spiders, snakes, and most any type of bug (but definitely not lady bugs).
2. Big dogs with pointy ears.
3. Scary movies, haunted houses, dark places.
4. Doing something or saying something that will hurt other people's feelings.
5. Being alone. Dying alone. Being lonely.
6. Exposing my thoughts to others.
7. Embarrassing myself in social situations.
8. My teeth falling out. Especially in public. Especially the ones in the front of my mouth.
9. People who are yelling and fighting. Even if it's over nothing.
10. Horses (but not ponies). Including the dressed up ones down by the Common.
11. Being accused of a crime I didn't commit, without having an alibi or witness defense.
12. Disappointing people - including myself. Especially myself.
13. Having to be responsible for my parents financially.
14. Unemployment and homelessness and poverty.
15. That I have nothing worthwhile to say. And never will.
16. Getting sick.
17. Getting hurt.
18. Dismemberment, impalement, being shot or stabbed. In short, physical harm.
19. Not taking advantage of opportunities when they arise (AKA: regret).
20. Losing family and friends.
21. That I am incapable of loving someone forever. Or worse- vice versa.
22. Of becoming an ugly old lady. Possibly without front teeth.
23. That I won't have the chance to become an ugly old lady. And that I'll havewasted time worrying about becoming an ugly old lady.
24. Being late. And not knowing it.
25. Being judged. And knowing it.
26. Not being liked by others. Not being included.
27. Tsunami's, tornadoes, funnel clouds, hurricanes and earthquakes.
28. War, terrorism, humans killing or hurting each other.
29. Falling. In every sense (see #11, #18, #19).
30. Losing my optimism.

*Subject to change.

CHAPTER 4

DEFINING FEAR AND THE ROLE OF RATIONALITY

Defining Fear and Considering Rationality

Throughout the process of this synthesis (and crystallizing in writing *30 Things I Fear),* I have come to realize that I have a lot more fears than just sharing my writing. But...in order to use the term as it applied to my writing (and make a plan to overcome them) - I had to start by just asking myself: *What is fear?*

Performing a literature and Internet search of this inquiry led me to explore many different aspects of fear - ranging from the physical response, to the emotional response, to even social phobias and the pharmaceutical ads on intent on claiming they can help! Eventually, however, I came across a book called The Philosophy of Fear written by Lars Svendensen in 2008 that was to become my primary source for explaining fear in ways that I could connect with not only this project, but with life in general. To initially answer my inquiry, Svendensen (2008) wrote that a central concept "of fear is the assumption of a negative future situation. Although not every negative future situation gives rise to fear, something has to be at stake" (p. 39).

Svendensen (2008) described that the experience of fear is our *perception* of a situation where our emotions are responding to being in the situation and to the stimulus of what is evoking our emotion (p. 41). There's a lot going on in this concept, though - and none of it is straightforward! There's the concept that we identify fear through our biological response and *physiological* feeling of it. There's the concept that a *thing or something* (which may or may not be object) can induce fear. There's the concept of *perception* inducing fear - which means I could possibly perceive myself to be in a situation that is not entirely real. And there's the concept that we associate fear *when we recognize our emotions of it* - which we recognize through our physiological response.

Svendensen (2008) further shed light on the complexity of this when he wrote that "one

does not necessarily have to believe that what is feared will actually happen" (p. 39). So...the *thing* that induces fear and the *situation* to which it is connected may be real or not - and one may not even believe that it is worthy of fear. Further complexity can even be found when considering the display of fear physiologically - for example, the *physiological* feelings (heart racing, flushed cheeks) associated with fear may also be present in the emotions of anger or pleasure. This is very complex!

The concept that one can experience fear, without actually *believing* it is fear worthy, is really at the core of my experience with my writing. In fact, when I was first reflecting on fear (as a way to better understand fear) – I initially wanted to rationalize *my* fear away. Because if I could rationalize it, and if I really didn't *believe* it was worthy of my fear - then I should be able to just stop my experience of fear. The fact is I *know* that I shouldn't be feeling fear when sharing and/or reading my writing - in fact, I think it's sometimes plain *silly* that this is how I feel. It seemed that rationality was my solution.

However, *this is how I feel* and rationalizing it didn't seem to be working. In fact, the ineffective application of my rationality toward the specific fear is a cause for phobias - in which it is common that one understand that something is not risky, and yet they still fear it. The topic and consideration of phobias is out of the confines of this synthesis, but it was important in my own consideration of rationality - and my acknowledgment that *fear could not always be rationalized away*. Doing so put me in new territory...I would not simply be able to rationalize my fear away to "get it done" and off my check list for synthesis.

That's not to say that rationality will not come up again in this paper - because it will. Svendensen (2008) claimed that rational assessment of a situation is an important part of our fear process - especially in our response/recovery (p. 38). Because human perception (interpretation)

is a conduit for fear - it is not always going to be rational -and it turns out that this is a benefit for our own protection and survival. It's precisely that "irrational" element which makes it so powerful as it alerts us to dangers that are sometimes hidden in situations that may otherwise appear to be "normal." I review more about the influence of fear on actions and behaviors in a later section - but this was an important concept for my understanding of fear in general, as was it important for me to understand the role of emotion in my thinking.

CHAPTER 5

PHYSIOLOGICAL AND COGNITIVE PROCESSING OF FEAR

Physiological and Cognitive Processing of Fear

To further consider the role of perception in our fear experience, I was actually led to consider the physiological and cognitive roles. Our brains control everything we see, hear, smell, feel and think through circuits of communication and synapses which generates some type of response, which then generates more synapses to generate other kinds of responses. Just as these synapses control our movement and responses to stimuli - they are responsible for our interpretation and response to fear. The human brain is the core of any emotional experience - including fear. And like other emotions, fear is recognized when we *feel it* physically. Thus, the connection between cognitive and physiologic is a tight one.

Personally, I have many different experiences physiologically with fear. When I have to share my writing, I can feel my heart racing, my face burning, my hands becoming clammy, and my voice is coming out as weak or shaky. Alternatively, my fear of "the dark" (or things that happen in the dark!) is felt as chest pounding, voice squelching, adrenaline rushes which actually leave me tightly tethered to the ground I am standing on - completely unable to move. And lastly, when I am scared during personal experiences such as seeing a loved one suffer, or being witness to an argument, my fear is felt deep in the pit of my stomach. Although each response presents as different feelings in different parts of my body, the central command station for these sensations stems from my brain - specifically from a small almond shaped part of the brain called the amygdala. Quite appropriately, the amygdala is buried deep under the covers of our own brain - appearing to even be hiding from the rest of the brain!

LeDoux (2003) described the brain's function as it relates to fear as one being a series of inputs and outputs from the amygdala to other regions of the brain, and that the exchange of inputs and outputs allows the amygdala to receive information that it perceives as threatening,

and consequently send a signal to the brain stem area in order to *express* the fear, while simultaneously sending a signal to the prefrontal cortex (PFC) for the experience of fear (in our conscious thinking) (p. 733). This means that we can respond to threats *before* our consciousness has had a moment to 'catch up' and see what's really happening in front of us - which is the result of the amygdala in action.

Carson (2010) described the amygdala's primary role of unconsciously responding to something before we are consciously aware, when she wrote that its first job is to determine whether something we encounter is risky or not (p. 51). This means that when our brain is responding in a fear situation, different circuits are activated to be busy, and as a result, our other processing functions are diminished. While this brings a heightened state of awareness to the situation, Svendensen (2008) explained that it also means we are unable to stop and rationalize (or make sense of) the situation for a moment (p. 25).

This links back to the concept of rationality in fear, and the role that amygdala and the PFC play in both fear response and the use of rationality to respond/recover. In my research I came across a story on www.abcnews.com and www.cbsnews.com of a woman (S.M.) who had brain damage to her amygdala, and was therefore unable to have a fear in response to situations, leaving her to *only* have rational responses. This prevents S.M. from seeing the danger in situations; for example she is not frightened by tarantulas, and she once walked up to a stranger on a park bench at night because the stranger requested she do so, which resulted in him threatening her at knifepoint. She never experienced fear during or in the recall of the situation. S.M. responds to threatening situations in a way that would generally be considered *inappropriate*. Instead of having a sense that something is *wrong* - she considers each situation rationally and doesn't apply the *context* in which she is experiencing it.

Therefore, while the emotional response can heighten our experience and sometimes turn out to be unnecessary (as in the times when it causes us to feel fear about something that later turns out was not worthy) - it's clearly a needed piece of our fear response system. In this sense, the *lack of fear* in S.M.'s judgment if a situation was threatening or not - was actually putting her in riskier situations. It was this type of response that Svendensen (2008) had in mind when he explained that our lack of responding in an emotional way to a stimulus can be considered an "irrational" response to a threatening situation (p.38). Considering my initial plan to rationalize fear away (in order to overcome it), this was a very interesting point - that the *rational responses could be irrational!*

CHAPTER 6

CULTURAL AND PERCEPTUAL INFLUENCES OF FEAR

The Role of Culture and Perceptions in Fear

Svendensen (2008) discussed the impact of norms on fear (using emotions as a broader representation of fear) when he noted:

> Emotions have an evolutionary, a social and a personal history, and if we are to understand them, we must take all three into account. Emotions are not simply something 'natural' and direct; they are also social constructs....What we fear, and how strongly, depends on our conceptions of the world, of what dangerous forces exist in it and what possibilities we have of protecting ourselves against them. Our knowledge and experience of emotions are not independent of the social context in which they occur. (p. 24)

Svendensen (2008) explained that emotions manifest as a result of our cultural norms - and how one person attributes the emotions will be different than another, based on the norms of that person's culture (p. 22). While emotions may be considered more universal across cultures, what we feel is based on our own perceptions, experiences and norms in our social and cultural settings - and even by our imagination. For example, we are taught emotions by watching their display and appropriateness in different situations and in different contexts throughout our lives. Just as what we love, what makes us sad, what we find acceptable, and even what we find to be humorous is developed and refined through cultural and social experiences - so is fear. We learn how to fear, to an extent, by watching it manifest in our surroundings.

This concept that we *experience and respond to emotions as a result of our cultural perceptions* resonated most with me, when I consider how I typically consider and deal with fear. I come from a family that has a self-described *warped* sense of humor, and I grew up in a

household where *no topic was off limits to humor*. This is a coping mechanism for our family that I learned through observing my family's use and display of it in situations. This often means that I am the one snickering at a funeral, or inserting humorous asides into the retelling of some horribly emotional moments - but the root cause definitely stems from the fact that humor was (and is) a large part of my family's emotional dashboard.

Even in fear, humor has a role for my family's response and recovery. When I was scared as a child, my father would find ways to use humor to break fear for me and bring me back to reality. For example, one Saturday morning (around 6:30am), while we were driving on I-93 North to go to my dad's work, he pulled over into the breakdown lane and explained that I would drive the next five miles. My dad had been "pulling over" for months - first, in abandoned parking lots so that I could just feel the accelerator and break; then at the top of our street so I could practice sharp turns into the driveway. But this was the first time he'd ever pulled over on the highway - and the first time I would be going faster than ten miles per hour! I knew better than to protest, even though in retrospect my silence was always a dead giveaway for my level of comfort. I adjusted the seat and the mirrors in his van, buckled in and pulled the gear shift down into "D." After what seemed like eternity (but was probably more like three minutes) my Dad turned and said to me "It's OK to blink and drive, sweetheart. You know...it's not illegal!" To which I replied - "It may not be illegal to blink and drive on the highway, but I happen to know it's illegal to be driving on it at the age of fifteen!" He and I chuckled...and then I blinked.

Even during my dad's final days of life, humor was present as I was overcome with fear preparing for the transport ride that I would take with him from the ICU to Hospice House. Grasping his hand and acutely aware of the slow pulse of fear in my blood, I said to him "Pal, if there was ever a time for that *Great Escape* we've always talked about - now would be it. When

the doors open, you just give me the signal..." And he started to laugh...which made me laugh, which then allowed me to release my fear and instead to be tethered and focused on him in the moment.

I've often used humor as a way to deal with the fear I experience in writing. Whether I try and write something that I know I'm going to share in a humorous tone (as was the case for the piece I describe in my narrative piece *When will I stop sweating?*) Or when I use it as a coping mechanism during the processing of my fear experience in reflection – it becomes a way to laugh at myself and my responses, and even enforce action. In any event – humor is definitely a major way by which I *deal* with my fear experiences...in general and in writing.

CHAPTER 7

MANIFESTATIONS OF FEAR IN BELIEFS AND BEHAVIORS

Manifestations of Fear in Beliefs and Behaviors

The last manifestation of fear that I've included in my research is exploring its impact on our beliefs and behaviors. By far, the most commonly known action or behavioral response from fear can be considered the classic *fight or flight* response that was first identified by a researcher named Walter Canon in 1932. Taylor, and Klein and, Lewis and Gruenewald (2000) wrote that this response is generated when a human responds both biologically and behaviorally to a situation (p. 411). Taylor et al (2000) reported that the human experience of fight or flight occurs when we encounter a stressor in our environment and we need to make a decision that, at its core, is really based in the idea of human survival (p. 411). Taylor et al (2000) detailed that during this biological/behavioral combination, the body is:

> Producing a hormonal cascade that results in the secretion of catecholamines, especially norepinephrine and epinephrine, into the bloodstream. In addition to its physiological concomitants, fight-or-flight has been adopted as a metaphor for human behavioral responses to stress, and whether a human (or an animal) fights or flees in response to sympathetic arousal is thought to depend on the nature of the stressor. (p. 411)

Fight or flight represents (likely) the gravest of scenarios under which we feel fear. However, it provides more than enough evidence to support how we show fear through our actions and behavior. This response is also evident in phobia disorders in that an individual's fear influences their behavior. LeDoux (2003) also described how fear-based expression/behavior occurs as part of the Pavlovian conditioning response (p. 728). Pavlov's theory was initially proven when dogs heard a bell just before they were provided with food. Over time, the conditioned physiological response of salivation was induced each time the dogs heard the bell

(regardless of the provision of food). This 'classical conditioning' can be applied to fear as well - with the exception that the response one endures is considered negative (fear) - instead of positive. When one experiences Pavlovian fear response, one is responding automatically in their behavior, nerve and hormone response systems. LeDoux (2003) wrote "The responses are not learned and are not voluntary. They are innate, species-typical responses to threats and are expressed automatically in the presence of appropriate stimuli" (p. 728). Thus, research exists that we can be 'conditioned' to express fear in our actions and behavior - even when the real reason for the fear is not present.

Svendensen (2008) shared how even back in the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas had considered the impact of fear on our behaviors (p. 40). Aquinas noted how fear can impact our behavior when it makes us behave as result of comparing 'one side' of our choice to the 'other side.' Svendensen (2008) reported that to establish his claim, Aquinas noted how humans sometimes choose riskier behaviors over choices which would be safer (physically and emotionally) due to fear - in what I think would be more commonly described as *peer pressure (*p.40). In this sense, fear can make us do things we wouldn't ordinarily do otherwise.

I experienced a bit of this behavioral influence one hot, late summer night during a writing class before my synthesis began. In my narrative piece, *When will I stop sweating?,* I share my example of change that this kind of emotional response can bring. During the creation of a piece in my class, I was literally sweating (something I don't often do), and turning pink, my voice was trembling, and my hands were shaking. Not only was I demonstrating every outwardly sign of fear -but my piece was actually written about these very feelings - as I had written about the social unacceptability of women sweating and the challenges in staying cool in the summer heat.

Yet, Fear's impact on our action is not limited to it making us do what we otherwise wouldn't do. In fact, Fields (2011) reported on the exact opposite when he discussed how experiences of uncertainty influence our behavior due to a fear of judgment (p. 32). He described that the greater the risk present when doing something, the greater the chance of us being judged by outsiders...and this exposure or judgment (or *fear of judgment*) has a direct influence on our behavior. Fields (2011) stated our "aversion to being judged, to being told something doesn't measure up, leads so many to either cut creative quests short or, worse, never even begin" (p. 32). In this sense, it is our fears that influence our action by preventing us from taking any action at all.

In my own experience, this is the nadir of fear's influence on our behavior and actions. It represents a complete shut down, and a lack of action - and for me, it represents a major way that fear does manifest itself in my personal creativity (and to an extent, influences life actions). I speak directly about this experience in my narrative piece *The Fearris Wheel,* and in the last section of this paper, I return to this concept and include my own reflections on the *greater implications* of this project in my life - but making the connection between fear and my own behavior was important (and pivotal) in my journey. And once I had a better concept of what fear *was,* where it *came from,* and a better understanding of how it could *influence behavior* - in general, I was better prepared to focus how it influenced my behavior in order to *overcome fears in creativity.*

CHAPTER 8

NARRATIVE:
WHEN WILL I STOP SWEATING?

Narrative:
When will I stop sweating?

It started in the Summer of 2011 with a promise I made to myself at the end of CCT Seminar in Creativity course. In fact, it was a two-part promise. The first part was that I would continue writing, and the second part was that I would find a place where I could share my writing to get feedback. It was that very promise that got me to sign up for a few writing workshops over the summer, and it was that same promise which led me to a workshop on the use of humor one night in mid-September.

The first part of workshop was spent reviewing various written products using different types of humor. And then the instructor gave us very simple instructions: write about something that is generally unacceptable or not spoken about; or write about some horrible time in your life. Write it in twenty minutes. And then we'll share.

Now, to fully appreciate all that was happening in that moment, I need to confess that even though I had been writing and I had been going to workshops, I had not been sharing so much. And by "so much"...I mean not at all. And lately, I started to feel disinterested and unorganized in my writing, preferring instead to read about writing. This had me feeling uneasy. But there - on a very hot evening at the close of summer – I came to a few realizations. First, that I was keeping an empty promise to myself; and second, that I usually had no interest in people who gave empty promises. And third, that this was my last writing workshop for quite some time. So, with a deep breath I chose that this group was as good as it was going to get if I was going to make good on my early summer promise to myself.

After twenty minutes of writing, the group started to read. Writers shared stories of horrible childhood memories and family decay; stories of struggles to find their way as new parents; and there was even a creative story that provided how-to instruction with a title: "How

to Cover Up Your Alcoholism at Work." After each reading and before the next, I didn't raise my hand. I wasn't going to raise my hand. In my defense, however, I had managed to find the only seat at our round table that was behind the teacher, so I convinced myself he wouldn't have seen me raise it, anyway. I'm embarrassed to admit that I probably would have broken my promise and left the class that night not reading, if the teacher hadn't turned around and looked directly at me. After apologizing for unknowingly blocking me for three hours, he simply asked if I wanted to read.

"Sure", I lied.

I didn't want to read, but I knew I needed to read.

I started my way through a piece that I titled "When will I stop sweating?" And as I continued reading I realized that I could answer my own question – when I stop reading. I got through the piece. And I got some feedback which I ferociously scribbled down in my notebook. And it's a good thing I did that, because I actually blacked out almost all of the reading and the subsequent feedback - and had to use my notebook to recall it. What I vividly recall, however, is leaving the workshop shortly after my reading (I was the closing piece) with my face burning red and my head tucked so low until I reached my car. In fact, I don't recall when I stopped sweating.

In the days and weeks that followed, I found that if I even started to re-read the story (which is HORRIBLE in its structure and more closely resembles that of a bad stand-up comedy routine) that it made me.... start sweating again. I was physically uncomfortable trying to reread my piece, even though I was sitting safely at home, in my cozy chair. If I couldn't make it past the first sentence, or paragraph - I simply closed my eyes, shook my head, sighed, and put it away.

But I continued to return to it over the next few weeks, each time reading more words and getting both more and less mortified simultaneously. Eventually, I made it through to the end. But it bothered me that I continued to react as I did. And I started to reflect on why this piece made me feel so uncomfortable: what I had experienced was not stage fright. It was fear.

Another realization was that I *wrote this in a state of fear*. My creative process was completely framed in it, and because of that - I wrote like a different person, in a totally different voice. I wrote and said words that night to complete strangers that I usually reserve for my own head or for my best friend's company. I even wrote in a penmanship that didn't resemble my writing.

And, lastly this product was *delivered in a complete state of fear*. By the time I wrote it, I had already learned that fear could *block* my creativity, and fear could make me *fuzzy* in my thinking. And, I knew that fear *prevented* me from wanting to share much of anything that I create. But that night, fear had me emerge on paper as a sweaty, foul-mouthed narrator describing in detail how she'd disrobe in public to get even momentary relief from the suffocating heat. And it wasn't just in the words on the paper - this was the very state in which I delivered this piece to my workshop.

It was as if someone else created this product, and I felt like an impostor reading it.

Who was this person that fear encouraged in a mere twenty minutes?

CHAPTER 9

MID-SYNTHESIS EXPERIENCE OF FEAR IN ACTION: STRUGGLING FOR CLARITY

Mid-synthesis Experience of Fear in Action: Struggling for Clarity

I must admit that I had some struggles pulling this synthesis together (as a cohesive piece of work). This was due to a multitude of factors which included: digestion of large concepts in both research and in reflection, merging different writing styles and pieces that go along with them, and identifying what could and should (and therefore *could not* and *should not*) be included. My original goal was to create a project with elements of a standard research paper mingling with metacognitive and reflective pieces, and even more mingling with my creative non-fiction (narrative) pieces. In fact, this project led to many a topic discovered (most beautifully researched and written, if I may say!) that have been filed in my computer under *Lovely Little Pieces*. This file contains research and writing on creative experiences, the creative process, the exploration of unconscious thought influencing our actions and creative thought processes. If time, resources, and ability aligned - the content of this file would have landed between the first section of the synthesis (with the exploration of fear) and this second section of the synthesis (with the emphasis on action overcoming fear) as an exploration of creativity and creative thought. However, the content of this paper started to feel a bit unwieldy and I had to remove them.

My struggle in content decisions was evident even in trying to ascertain the right "voice" for this synthesis, as I discovered that I have different voices for each of my mingled writing. However, as much as this *was* a struggle - it actually allowed me to reflect on my writing in a way that I may not have had the opportunity to experience otherwise. For my *research writing* voice I am the most personally distant from the 'center' of the thought processes. In this type of writing, I *become* the student digesting and relaying information from other's work that I believe to be important. In contrast, in my *reflective writing voice*, I am the *most* connected - as this displays how I connected the information to my past, present and projected future situations. And

in the *creative nonfiction writing voice*, I found freedom in that I'm *allowed to choose* (and therefore control) the person and voice I use in the pieces. In this sense, I have the most license to try on different hats (or different perspectives) that I've never exercised my opportunity to do before.

These different voices were difficult for me to manage and meld into a single format. In fact, I switched the format several times and for a short time I even considered doing a purely research-based synthesis on creativity. However, I came to wonder if perhaps what was really pulling me in the direction of research wasn't so much my desire to learn more and more about creativity - but instead so that I would have less and less reflective and narrative writing as part of this synthesis. Because it is in these reflective and narrative voices that I feel the most fear in sharing - as they represent my own thoughts. If I did this, it would only pull me further and further away from the real direction and change that I sought. This was a mid-progress reminder that even in the progression of synthesis about fear, fear could influence (and almost did) my thoughts, beliefs and actions.

So, about 6 -7 weeks into the semester I clarified my own goal for this synthesis, and the remainder of this paper now shifts to what resulted from that clarification and focuses on my actions and reflections of my own experience in trying to overcome fears (in support of bolstering my creativity), and thus moves away from a more philosophical and researched exploration of fear.

CHAPTER 10

HISTORICAL CHALLENGES IN TAKING ACTION TOWARD CREATIVITY

Historical Struggles in Taking Actions Toward Creativity

Before I reveal the actions that I found instrumental in my overcoming fears, I would be remiss if I didn't include an important experience with my historical attempts to take action toward creativity. In my Creative Thinking class, in the spring of 2011, I completed Cameron's (1992) *The Artist's Way* process a year prior. This process is based in taking small consistent actions toward creative healing and rediscovery. While many of the elements of the process were very effective for me, there was one particular element which I failed to accomplish and it became evident only later (during the preparation of this synthesis) as to its importance.

While I was actively participating and enjoying the different tasks that were part of Cameron's *The Artist's Way* process in spring of 2011(including morning page writing at 4:15 in the morning!), I admit to struggling with the "artist date." Turns out... I don't prioritize my own time with myself. In fact, I never accomplished even one of them.

I truly *struggled* with these - I would set a date in my calendar, assign an alert, and yet the alert would sound…and the time would come and go as I busied myself doing other things. I tried to bring myself to a coffee shop, to the beach for a walk, to a museum, to the park across the street, to the dry cleaners, even. By the end of the semester, I gave up trying.

My daily interaction with *The Artist's Way* decreased after the class; however it came back to my attention in my Reflective Practice experience in the fall of 2011 when I found as I was trying to write more consistently, and adjust between the daily writing/reflection writing and more narrative creative non-fiction writing, that I just couldn't write some days. I had trouble transitioning from my thoughts and thinking from work or school into that *voice* that was needed for the narrative pieces. (And, as a reminder – this was before my identification of the 7 actions in the next section of this paper).

While I had started to resolve that I was still making progress toward a synthesis as I *was* writing more, doing other things related to writing, and seeing my "kinder self" show through reflection - I still felt as if I was missing something. I recalled Cameron's *The Artist Way,* and found my book to re-read my notes. I identified almost immediately that I felt more "artistic" and "connected" during her twelve week process- and these feelings resonated as what could possible by the *something* that I was missing. Starting to get back into the routine of school and work (and gearing up for the demands of synthesis) had me feeling a bit less like a *writer* and more like a task-master just doing, doing, doing - whatever next needed to be done. Attempts at daily writing had become a *task* - and I had added it to my schedule at the expense of my pleasure for writing.

Reading my *The Artist's Way* notes reminded me of my difficulty with the artist dates (which I had nearly blocked out entirely) and I found myself re-reading week 10, which focused on self protection and the behavioral manifestations that result from our blocked creativity. Cameron (2002) wrote that "in creative recovery, it is far easier to get people to do the extra work of the morning pages than it is to get them to do the assigned play of an artist date. Play can make a workaholic very nervous" (p. 166).

I could see (in light of my current school/work/family obligations) that being a workaholic didn't have to mean *only* the work that I perform for someone who pays me. Rather, I had categorized and assigned *all kinds of work* for my school, work and family obligations. And *they* got the priority of my attention. I had lost some movement in my greater goal of personal creative development and instead I had just "scheduled" myself to write. In doing so, I had *diluted* my experience to a degree by making writing one of my "to-do's" (with the focus only on product) and making less time for the "ta-dah's" that it brought (with the focus on

process and engagement in creativity).

But, this tasking wasn't *new* for me - and so I could finally understand why the artist's dates were so difficult! In my own reflection, I could see that I had a history of putting things to "be done" as a priority over time *to play* - or for me, *to practice.* This helped me see the connection that I wrote about in the Overview/Introduction to this synthesis - joining CCT to add another thing to my schedule, so that I could *dilute* my energy given at work.

Thus, this is (and will likely be) my weakness in managing my creativity – the struggle to prioritize my own priorities with work priorities – and will be something to monitor as I forge a creative path in a post-CCT life. However, the biggest advantage I have is that I *know this is a weakness* - which (similar to my knowledge now of fear in writing) is a whole lot easier to manage and monitor than if I didn't know it was my weakness.

CHAPTER 11

USING A CCT APPROACH TO SELECTING ACTIONS TO OVERCOME FEARS

Employing a CCT Approach to Action

As I was researching fear, in general and as a method of better understanding my own – I also started planning my actions to overcome them. First, I accepted fear's presence in my own writing and creative experience; and second, I used reflective practice to identify my past actions, experiences and behavior around writing; and lastly, I used research to identify actions that would help me both improve my writing (through practice), and gain experience and support from others by sharing my writing for feedback. These three steps helped me identify the actions in this synthesis.

Many of the books I read during research provided very similar actions for overcoming fear. For example, Fields (2011), Lamott (1994) and Cameron (1992) all state the need for a positive creative environment; the need for *socialization,* or sharing, of creative products; and the need for gentility (in process and product) during the initial phases of creativity- while reserving critical judgment for the revision phases. In this sense, they echoed the divergent and convergent thinking of CCT that I had experienced time and time again in my CCT courses.

By all means, this synthesis project was created and represents a CCT framework. This balance of creative and critical thought has been the most fundamental, but also one of the greatest, lessons applied from CCT to this synthesis. In early drafts, the divergent thinking and creative license was very evident - and with each revision, a tightening of concepts would occur as more critical thinking lens was applied- ensuring continuity, clarity and direction.

This was even evident in my selection of actions. I had to choose actions based on their ability to meet two goals: first, they provided a way to develop my writing practice; and second, they were tangible enough that I could garner enough experience with them to at least initially reflect on them for this project. I think the seven actions I have included meet both goals.

When my actions/experiences relate back to a specific piece of narrative included in this synthesis, I have referenced it (in that they were specifically *practiced* with that narrative piece). When they don't specifically tie back to a piece of writing, it is because they apply more generally to my writing - the daily, consistent, purposeful *practice* of writing that I have adopted.

I have tried to write about each action with the goal that they serve not only as a reminder for "myself-in-the-future", who may be struggling with the practice of writing outside of the ticking clock of a semester, but that they may also serve as motivation for any CCT student (or writer) who is struggling with their own practice or creativity. While the direct application of the actions relates to my experience in writing, I think they all could be applied to any form or personal creativity.

My Seven Actions to Overcome Fear in Personal Creativity

Practice & Reflective Practice

My first experience of "action" in overcoming my fears in writing actually happened on that hot, late summer night in my writing workshop that I wrote about in *When will I stop sweating?* For it was in this class that I felt the pressure to write and share my work - and did end up sharing it. I didn't quite know at the time how instrumental that moment of pressure (and my response) would become in the completion of my synthesis of taking action against my fears (although looking back at it, I could *feel the importance* of that moment in my body).

In the transition time from the end of my Seminar in Creativity class (June 2011), but before the start of my Synthesis class (December 2011), I developed a deeper understanding of writing as a result of a few actions: actually writing, reading about writing, and (attempted) daily writing about my writing. Summertime passed into early fall with me still consuming books about the craft of writing, practicing daily writing, considering the connection between my writing and reflective practice, and developing a *writing voice.* I started to immerse myself in a

new world where – through my actions - my writing was given a priority.

Admittedly, the *actual narrative* writing during this time was sporadic (due to the fact that I was trying, trying, trying to get into a habit of daily writing...even though the chapters I was reading *about writing* were way more attractive for me to devote my time). But, this was an instrumental period in my writing practice development- and in the initiation of this synthesis- because at the core of the experience, what I really got to do was *practice*.

The connotation of *practice* has become an important one for my writing. *To practice my writing* means I don't have to be 'good at it', it doesn't have to 'be perfect', and I don't have to 'know what I'm doing', or even 'know where a piece is going.' The *act of writing*, however, had an entirely different connotation to me- one based in <u>product</u> and of knowing what I wanted out of my writing. I just wasn't there yet. Practice was a way for me to *play* and *discover* and *try new things*. However, I should note that it was entirely helpful that I got to do this on my own time - and not under the construction of a syllabus or class outline. This allowed the nature of my *practice* to more organically develop using divergent methods of thinking and writing – and thus allowed practice, itself, to start to alleviate my fear.

My initial goal of writing once per day changed as I failed to meet it. First, it became every other day, and then it became at least once per week. Sometimes other things got in the way: some big (like my unexpected two week trip to Florida because of my father's leg infection which was 'a few days short of gangrene'); and some small (like trying to find recipes for corn...since the CSA I recently joined was intent on delivering six ears of it every five days); while some were just plain-old-life intervening (like figuring out how to balance working, with exercise, with making corn salsa or corn bread pudding, with reading about writing, and actually trying to write). I was imperfect at creating this daily writing practice, but I knew it was okay

because I was *practicing* and no one but me was watching.

Looking back, my acceptance of my failure to meet my daily expectations was greatly impacted by my simultaneous deeper understanding and development of my reflective practice – which, through a consistent writing practice, had really solidified itself as personal routine. While the *practice* of reflective writing was a result of making the time to do it, the *deeper understanding* was the result of my general CCT experience (in which reflection is always an important consideration of learning). Two specific CCT experiences provide examples.

The first was my experience with Julia Cameron's (1992) *The Artist's Way* during my Creative Thinking course in spring 2011. My experience with specific actions from her process follows in this synthesis, but because her process is positioned from a place of kindness and support for one's own 'artist' - the experience allowed me to dissociate a bit and allow a more metacognitive approach to my own creative development and reflective practice. Instead of focusing simply on results, I could see how the experience was affecting my thinking and thus, I learned to be "kinder" to myself - and treat the development of my creative habits in a more gentle approach. This meant that failures in my practice to *actually* perform daily writing in (when I was reading about writing) could be acceptable – as long as I was still doing *something* toward my creative development.

The second specific experience was that in September 2011, I enrolled in the CCT course Reflective Practice. The monthly schedule of classes allowed me to shape my experience and apply it to my writing practice and synthesis preparation. This was instrumental and I think served as a catalyst for both my writing practice and my reflective practice - as they developed much of a synergistic response to one another during this semester.

During this time, the concept of *practice* became important as I was learning that setting

expectations was an important part of practice- but only when tethered with kindness, reflection, and a bit of reality. As a result of Cameron's (1992) *The Artist's Way* and my reflective practice development, I was more aware of the need to approach my creativity foals in a kindness mindset. In that, I developed a sense of a "Kinder Self" image. This allowed me to make goals and then change them, as needed as a model of continual improvement. That way, when it applied to my writing goals and practice, Kinder Self kept me going and framed my thinking toward this change as one of gentility – allowing for an ebb and flow of change. Reflective practice allowed me the lens through which I could assess my progress and make goals that were best suited for the stage I was in - or adjust goals in lieu of my progress; it was giving me a little room on the line while keeping one eye on my thinking and the other on what I was actually doing. Reality meant that the little room on the line didn't become me totally off hook, as this framed the measures by which I would assess both my process and my product. This combination led me to finally understand that *practice was really about making time to do what fulfilled me in my writing* - and that meant I could *practice* writing in a variety of methods: by reading about writing, thinking about writing, and adjusting the goals of my writing - because I was doing *something* toward it.

This synergistic combination of reflective practice and writing practice allowed me to develop and confront my ultimate goals for this synthesis - which was to overcome my fears in writing. And *practice* has become a much more meaningful term for me. It relates to every action that I have included in this synthesis - since without practice (no matter how small or lofty a goal I could create), there is no movement toward getting over fears.

Small Steps to Get/Keep Writing

It's common knowledge that when making a personal change, a good approach is to apply *small steps*. And while this was a common theme in my research for both developing creativity and overcoming fears, no source more simply and consistently described it than Cameron's (1992) *The Artist's Way*. *Small steps* is an action that she promoted as a way to return to creativity - and for me, it was an action with both immediate and long term impact. At its very foundation, I think *small steps* worked for me because it was a simple concept for me to understand. It allowed me the framework to not only take stock in my writing practice development, but also when I noticed that I hadn't been writing it gave me direction in how I may return, and for taking steps in overcoming my experience of fear in writing. One of the biggest lessons I took away from Cameron's process was that small amounts of effort devoted over a consistent period really will be enough to make a difference.

As I got used to *small steps* and even reflected on its influence on my success, what was a bit frustrating was that this seemed so *basic* and so *obvious* that I wondered why I hadn't just adopted this before? I thought - *did I really need a Self-Help process to tell me to take small steps toward change*? Its concept is prevalent in things I often hear or say, like: "Rome wasn't built in a day", and "You can't turn an aircraft carrier on a dime." But, when I considered how I applied those thoughts to changes I sought in the past, I found that I was focused on "Rome", or "the new direction we were flying" - and not on the small step of what was happening right in front of me. Yet, it is in the action of what is happening right in front of me that *creates the change*. And, so, this is where the gold was for me in this action - the realization that change can be *right* in front of me, and that my process and product would be bettered if I could stay focused in the moment (at least some of the time) as I worked towards "Rome."

Small steps are important in every piece of writing I have worked on - because this is the *action* by which the were completed. And while it was most important during my initial development and experience as I completed *The Artist's Way* process, *small steps* really showed their magnitude in August 2011 when I was in Florida visiting my parents. This was an unexpected two week visit that required most of my time be spent in medical facilities or medical supply stores. However, I had brought my computer with me in hopes to do some writing (as I was still trying, trying, trying to get into that daily habit). When I got back home and settled into my "normal" routine once again, I opened my computer to see one lonely little piece of writing (at about 200 words) created in the entire time I was there.

Prior to adopting a small steps approach, I may have taken the opportunity to be harsh on myself by only focusing on my writing progress. I could have easily found myself thinking:

So....you've only written once in almost three weeks. Maybe you don't really like writing? Maybe it's not the thing for you?

But, instead - I read the excerpt that I wrote, and ignored all of the white and empty calendar space around it. And what I saw wasn't that I *wasn't writing* - but instead, that I had only an hour of free time (alone and uninterrupted) in my almost two weeks time there, and I chose to spend it writing. I chose writing. This was one small step that spoke much louder to the importance that writing had started to take in my life, then would ever translate as product.

This small step was not so small, after all.

Three Hundred (300) Words to Prevent Blocks

Anne Lamott's (1994) *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* proved to be a remarkable reference for my development as both a novice writer and one overcoming fears. She

offered many examples of actions one can take to *get writing,* in general, for novices or experienced writers who have stopped writing due to blocks or fears.

One of the easiest actions came in her chapter *Short Assignments*. This took the familiar concept of *small steps* from Cameron's (1992) *The Artist's Way*, but crystallized it specifically for writing. Lamott (1994) explained that blocks in writing can occur "when you're at your lowest ebb of energy and faith" (p. 179). This is why feeling blocked can be so overwhelming and if blocks are stemming from fears, you simply don't have enough stamina to face them, anyway.

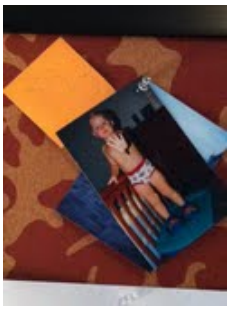
I'd been curious about blocks in that when I read about them, they seem so *apparent*. The frustration, angst and emotion over not being able to write seemed to be something that would at least be easily recognizable. However, this wasn't the case for me and my own blocks, as described in my narrative piece *Fearris Wheel.* To keep an eye on my surreptitious blocks (in attempts to thwart them), I have adopted a practice of *300 words* from Lamott to more actively manage and control “the blocks” in the first place.

Lamott (1994) recommended *300 words* as the amount of writing needed to just get yourself *feeling* like you’re writing - in a sense you're physically either pounding a keyboard or moving a pen across paper- which is enough for your unconscious to believe that you *are writing.* It's a simple (small-steps approach) to get writing with the premise: if you want to write, just write. Write something- anything. But write 300 words of it, then transition and busy your consciousness with something else for a while. According to Lamott (1994), if one does this, eventually the block will clear itself (p. 182).

This action has worked for me many a time when I don't think I have *time* to write, when I don't think I have *material* to write, when I don't think I've got *anything* to write about. I have

gained enough confidence and belief (through *practicing 300 words)* to know that I can pretty much write 300 words about anything - at anytime. Which is the goal of this action – it's not a magnum opus…it's 300 words. Three hundred words can be done in less than 20 minutes - but often it is what keeps me going for another hour. But if not, I pack it up for the day and move on.

There's a simple post it on a pin board above my writing desk with "300" written on it. It's nestled beside a picture of my nephew, who at two years old is standing on a Tupperware container at the foot of my bed wearing only his Underoos and Hotwheels™ slippers. He's standing confidently with his hand stretched out in front of him in a "STOP" position. I love that picture - and use it for both control and inspiration for my writing of 300 words. Sometimes he's telling me to STOP at 300 words. Other times, he's telling me to STOP any negative thoughts if my writing seems sporadic or disconnected. While even other times, he's telling me to STOP limiting myself at 300 words- if I've got more in me. And frequently, he's telling me to STOP because it's getting too late and I've got to get to bed (a great sign of writing flow for me!) But he's so confident in his posture, with a fearless look that seems it could only live on a two year old's face. In that sense, it's a reminder that I, too, was likely once that confident and that I can be confident in my writing room, at my desk, with my writing.



Ritual to Provide Certainty

Another important action that has helped me write with more confidence has been my use of *ritual*. In the last action, *300 words,* I mentioned the push pin board above my writing desk. This hints at an element that has become important for me to write comfortably - the use of a dedicated and devoted space. In fact, my writing space was created during my Seminar in Creativity class in June 2011. Prior to this time, I had been doing most of my work and writing at my dining room table, at the library, or (ugh!) on my bed. Each of these areas allowed me to receive and process information in order to write a final paper, digest an understanding of the reading, or create any other byproduct of class or work. But for narrative writing - in which I'm creating mostly from my own abstract ideas and connections - it wasn't working so well.

So, during my Seminar in Creativity class, I converted a spare bedroom in my home into a 'library/writing room' as part of my final project. For the course, we had been tasked with developing objective measures for our final projects and the instructor had provided an example in which past students had even used the time to create the space in which they create. I had never considered the role that *space* or *venue* would play in creation. With a small amount of planning and a weekend, I created the space which I have been using ever since.

Because the space was "new" to me as I was developing my writing practice, the first time I sat down to write at my desk I was very conscious of it, of my environment and my surroundings. The push pin board (empty at the time) was put up from my vision to not only fill empty wall space, but to provide me a place to 'push' the things that most inspire or energize my writing. Everything has its place in this room.

Every space in this small room is organized; while there is a lot of furniture, there is absolutely no clutter. The color choices are my favorites with chocolate brown, black, and teal

green and whites. The pictures on the walls have either been created by nieces and nephews, or taken with my own camera. When I first sat down in my room, I was consciously aware that this was a place that welcomed and celebrated personal creation. And each time when I was done writing, I would take the few minutes to return it to maintain its "new" look.

Thus, when I walked back into write the next time - it was exactly in the same condition and appeal as when I first walked in and experienced that sense of excitement and potential. There have been only rare occasions that I have walked out without putting everything back in place because of late nights that were fast approaching my waking mornings- after which I noticed that when I sat back down the next day...the energy was different and not as desirable. So, now I always restore it when I'm done. Even if that means a small, organized pile of books and papers are stacked neatly on my chair (out of sight for my re-entrance).

What was happening in this phase of my creative development could be chalked up to my natural tendencies for tidiness, neatness and organization. But, what I was really creating was my *ritual* in my writing experience. I almost always write in the early evening after work, and in the mornings on the weekend. I walk into my space with either coffee or water, and sometimes a snack and I wear comfortable clothing like yoga pants. After working at a hectic job, the calmness of this space inspires my writing. All of the intricacies have become rote behavior for my writing, in fact, and have lead to a ritual in my writing practice and a comfort in developing my writing voice.

It was only after I had established my routine in this room that I would learn that ritual is one of the major ways that we can overcome fears and uncertainty in creativity. Fields (2011) explained that "rituals...serve as a source of psychic bedrock. They provide just enough of a foundation to allow you to free up that part of your brain that needs permission to run

unencumbered in the quest to create the greatest possible something from nothing" (p. 46). The *energy* I was feeling was the grounding sensation of safety and consistency so that I could, therefore, be more creative.

The power of ritual also showed up in Lamott's (1994) instruction regarding writing when she wrote that "ritual quiets the racket. Rituals are a good signal to your unconscious that it is time to kick in" (p. 117). This tapping into the unconscious not only helps in general writing productivity, but also when overcoming blocks and fears in writing, too.

My room has remained in much of the same (albeit the push pin board now has many things to serve as inspiration) since its original design. It's where I have written every piece of writing for this synthesis - and I still walk in feeling the *energy* of creation that was intended during its creation. I know this will serve to inspire me in the future for my writing. For it's in this room and because of that energy that I allow myself to be...*a writer.*

Short Bursts to Allow Time for Insight and Recovery

For the first three years of my CCT experience I took only one class per semester. "One by one, until I'm done," I would say to myself and classmates - who were taking multiple courses at a time and therefore moved through the program at a faster speed. Part of my philosophy stemmed from the fact that I was initially unsure about my entrance into the program (even believing I would *ultimately* decide if I would stay after the fifth class!) But the other part was due to how I handled being in school and working - how I *created* a time/space/place in my life for non-working endeavors - and how I feared I couldn't handle more than one class at a time (or perhaps I feared that I couldn’t remove that much time or focus from my job!)

When I look back on how I used to prepare and engage in classes (and even large projects

at work), I created via a process that I've termed: *down the rabbit hole.* I have a remarkable ability to hold my attention for long periods of time - something I thought (and still do, to a certain extent) was a benefit in my thinking and creative process. However, if there's a hole - that means there's depth implied. And sometimes the hole I went down would be excessively deep, so that the time spent *down the hole* interfered with the performance of other things in life happening *outside the hole.* This is where my benefit became detrimental to my overall creative process, specifically in my writing, and to my experience in life, as well.

Fields (2011) described a process very similar to my *rabbit hole process* and explained that such a process can "pull our attention and sanity pendulums way out to one extreme and...allocate our energies in a way that is disproportionate to what we claim to hold dear in life" (p 166). In fact, he relayed how he once had a similar creative practice, but that he had applied a different methodology to the current book I was reading - which (to me) was very connected, engaging, and rich with information. Fields (2011) also wrote something that struck a chord with me the very first time I read it: "Genius requires craft plus insight" (p. 165). This quote is actually taped to my computer, as a reminder to: *take a break, allow insight to develop.*

There are two actions associated with the concept of short bursts. The first, which I have tried and written this entire synthesis using, is one by which I determine a block of time from start to finish that I will work – I know what time I want to *end* as I'm beginning. I've used timers, made appointments at times which would require me to stop, and even begged my best friend to come in and close my computer if I'm not out "20 minutes after XX time." She only had to do that once. When my 90-120 minutes of time is up - I am done for at least an hour - although sometimes longer. This frees me to do other things (and directly ties in with the next action, *exercise)* and allows me to break my mental process for a while. If need be (and time

allows) - I return to writing later the same day to do another *short burst.* This synthesis is living proof that this process works for me.

The second action associated with the concept of *short bursts* is one that I'm still researching and making a plan for in my CCT Course Action Research. This action is my examination of meditation or other attention training methodologies as a way to help focus energy and attention. This is not something that I was able to plan and attempt during this synthesis, but it is something I plan to use in my post-CCT life as a way to continue my writing evolution and creativity development.

Exercise to Reenergize Thinking and Vision

With a practice of *short bursts* effectively in place, I actually had some time to do "other things." Admittedly, sometimes the other things were writing related - because I needed time to work on this synthesis, my narrative writing, my CCT Action Research class. Other things, of course, included personal and professional work obligations. However, a more common use for me to apply *short bursts* was to give me time to exercise. In fact, three times a week I had scheduled a time to meet friends (or a trainer) so that I would *have to stop* my process to be there. Exercise was given a priority during my synthesis for two reasons.

First, it was researched and described in detail by Fields (2011) as a method to boost creativity by reenergizing thinking and motivation, serve as a *ritual* in one's creative process when done routinely and linked to creativity, and also positively impact one's creative abilities so that they are more willing to take risks and gain confidence in creating (p. 139). In this sense, exercise helps overcome fears in creativity. While on its own this could be sufficient reason to include it as an action for this synthesis - the real reason it made it "in" was due to my second

reason: I discovered a contradiction in my values and actions as a result of some reflective practice, and needed to address it. My values and actions identified that:

- Exercise is very important to me, my health and my life. It is central to my feelings of health, emotional stability and my ability to think better.

And the contradiction that:

- Exercise is the first personal habit I drop when my other obligations (including school) become overwhelming.

Hmmmm. How important a value is it, then?

Historically, I had no faith that I could create a level of work that I believed to be "to my best abilities" if I set parameters around the time I would commit to complete it. "The rabbit hole has no clock!" "There's always room to improve and make it better - if you've got a moment to spare, spend it here!" said my actions. I would lose hours, after work and on weekends, doing things toward whatever had my sense of obligation at the time. But then...class would end (or a project would implement at work) and I would almost immediately get back into exercise - readjust to being out of it, and try not to berate myself too much as a result of my suffering through running because I was feeling out of shape. And my “harsher self” would take those opportunities to remind me of how much I hadn’t done. But this didn’t occur during this synthesis, as I’ve maintained exercise as an important part not only for this project, but for my own life balance.

I have found that somewhere between 30-40 minutes of jogging something happens "on" my head, which then affects what happens "in" my head. It often feels like a tickling of sorts from the top of my scalp, that travels down behind my eyes, and then down to my neck. After this occurs, it's as if I'm more alert and energized- yet, calmer. I usually run in a small group, and sometimes we run together chatting and sometimes we separate. My best friend has

commented that even when I run alone, I look to be talking to someone else - complete with lip movements and hand gestures. In all honesty, I've caught myself doing this frequently! Whether I'm generating ideas, or countering my ideas that I just generated - there's some serious inner dialogue which impacts my writing. In fact, it was during running that I could suddenly see my actions of over scheduling as cyclical and thought it could be a Ferris wheel - which directly contributed to my image of my *Fearris Wheel.*

In preparing this synthesis, I've been utilizing a *short bursts* framework of creating in order to make time for exercise. Through my own tracking, I have been able to exercise at least three times per week during the semester - which is just shy of my ideal 4-5 times. As it happens to be, this is my heaviest semester for course enrollment, as well - taking two CCT courses and a ten week writing course. I've never had such consistent an exercise regimen – even when taking one class. In fact, I've tripled the time requirements of my school obligations, but have still managed to train for three road races and even lose 12 pounds in the process! I'm not sure that I can ignore these facts and ever drop exercise as a result of "other" obligations again.

Feedback to Externalize Writing

While all of the actions described thus far have been found as a result of my reading and researching overcoming fears in writing/creativity, none would prove as personally challenging to overcome than sharing my own writing. My personal experience with this was described in *When will I stop sweating?* - as it was the crystallizing experience of fear in writing for me. That being said, I have come to identify through this synthesis that while I externally displayed and felt this fear the most - it was not the only fear I had - it was just the loudest.

My fear of sharing writing required a simple action - a quick fix, even. In order to

overcome fear in sharing my writing - I needed to *share my writing.* Obviously, this left me in a predicament where the problem was the same as the solution. However, the theme of sharing was prevalent in much of the research that I consumed for overcoming uncertainty – *socialization, sharing, giving* - the core concept was the same: get what you've done out there to others. So, I took action toward this and signed up for a Sunday night writing to get feedback and *share my writing.*

Fields (2011) supported the value of feedback when he wrote that it is through "creative hives" (such as writer's groups) that we are able to even out and balance ourselves against judgment - a central concept of sharing fear (p. 66). In fact, he relayed both the need for a supportive environment and socializing creative output to receive input from others.

Elbow (1998) introduced me to the potential impact a writer's group could have on writing when he wrote about his own experience:

> I suddenly thought about how I don't have the kind of fear of the unknown I used to have when it comes to writing words down or reacting to words. I know very clearly what has caused this change. It's because I have engaged in feedback workshops over the last few years: getting feedback, giving feedback, hearing others give feedback different than mine; having discussions were the goal was not to agree with each other or figure out what is right, but to see the words through the other person's eyes; constant practice in experiencing and reexperiencing what a set of words can do. (p.272.)

Elbow and Belanoff (2000) provided 11 objective types of feedback that a writer may request from a reader, in order to learn how their words evoked a response from (or were interpreted by) a reader. Refer to Appendix A: *Elbow and Belanoff's Types of Feedback* for a summary of all Elbow and Belanoff (2000) responses. I experienced *sharing; sayback; pointing*

and center of gravity; voice; what's almost said; and *reply* with my own writing – either through CCT or in my writers group.

However, Lamott (1994) described in realistic detail how the *wrong* writer's group experience can be damaging to a new writer's process (p. 155). While she clearly made the point that in getting the right mix of people, you can achieve synergy - the fact that she spent the majority of her pages describing the negative effects of a *bad* experience had me actually quite nervous to join my Sunday night writer's group.

Regardless, for eight Sundays during my synthesis semester, I found myself sitting in a Grub Street writing class called "Creative Non-Fiction I." Each week, the instructor provided examples of writing that detailed the craft of writing, in the genre of creative non-fiction, as an attempt for us to improve our own writing. However, the second half of each class was spent work-shopping each other's writing.

Work-shopping could occur two ways: first, we submit writing that was created during the class - to be work-shopped "on the fly." And, second, we had two separate opportunities to submit longer pieces on one Sunday, to be work-shopped "in detail" during the next Sunday's class. The writing submitted "on the fly" allows for about 5-10 minutes of feedback, while the work submitted a week prior allows for 20-30 minutes of feedback. During a typical workshop session, the writer (termed the "narrator" at this point) sits quietly while others discuss their connections, disconnections, and thoughts on the piece – or reply directly to the writer's requested feedback type. In the final 3-4 minutes, the narrator gets the opportunity to ask questions of the group - but isn't really ever invited to 'defend' or answer the questions the group posed as confusing. The lesson isn't to verbally explain what you couldn't explain in writing; it's to return to the writing in order to explain it there. The structure is similar to that of a Dialogue

session - which I learned about in the CCT Course Dialogue during the winter of 2010 - in which the group's knowledge and focus is on the center - as opposed to any individual.

My writing was work-shopped four times in this class: twice "on the fly", and twice for a piece I sent home for input the following week. In fact, at the conclusion of this synthesis, I've included a narrative piece titled *The Safest Place on Earth* that I created and submitted for my second work-shopping experience. I've also included in Appendix B: *My Own Writing Feedback* a transcription of the notes I took during the work-shopping of this piece, which shows the conversation and comments that took place.

The experience of being work-shopped got easier the more I was exposed to it (and thus, ties directly back to my experience with *practice*). My exposure came from both my writing receiving feedback through the workshop, and when I provided feedback on others writing. While my overall experience was *really good,* there was some room for improvement as I identified some practices that could have been potentially negative for novice writers (like me!)

For example, a few members would forget to address "the narrator" and instead use "you, she, Lorna, Sam"... After the teacher attempted correction for the first couple of rounds, I think she either gave up, or forgot, herself. Additionally, some members said things like "I just didn't care", not only about my work - but about other's work, as well - including the instructor's! This, in particular, seemed harsh to me, and while I could see value in such input as "I didn't believe/buy it", I struggled to see such value in "I just didn't care." Admittedly, I was upset when I left that class after receiving such words on my first piece of writing submitted. But, after reading my notes (and removing the harsher tone I felt when I heard the words) and seeing the context in which it was provided, getting to know one another a bit more, and remembering what I had learned about Lamott's (1994) framing of synergy in the right group, I realized that

we were a group of 11 individuals - which is really enough for 2-3 writer's groups! The fact that only a couple of writers could seem "harsh" was actually pretty good!

In fact, the majority of writers had very useful feedback, as they pointed out when my story didn't connect or they struggled to understand parts - but they communicated it successfully so that I could focus it on the direction of my writing - and not on the incorrect association that my story was a not worthy of being cared about (translate to a novice: written or heard). Judgment, when delivered in a constructive way, was a very positive and influential experience in my writing, and I learned that I could tolerate it quite well.

The experience of a writer's workshop went a long way in helping me feel more confident in sharing my writing and my own opinions - something I didn't feel very comfortable doing in the past. Our class has since ended and one of the members sent out an email organizing a writer's group to continue beyond the schedule of the class. As it stands now, we plan on meeting the second Sunday of each month and I look forward to having the interaction be an ongoing part of my writing development!

CHAPTER 12

CONLCUSION: EXCITEMENT FOR THE FUTURE

Conclusion: Excitement for the Future

In attempts to depict in a concise summary what this synthesis process internally *looks like*, I have included Figure 1: Synthesis Map: Effects of Fear on my Thoughts, Feelings and Actions. In this one page depiction, I present the larger situation in which my seven actions resides and hope that it is a summary of the breadth of scope of my synthesis experience. In picture, it forms and summarizes my experience, and in its very existence I feel a sense of accountability to continue my progress in creativity – thus, ensuring I remain confident in my belief that I am a creative person.

During my reading and preparing of this synthesis, there was one quote which resonated about the power of writing, and it continuously serves to inspire my writing as a form of creativity and reflection. Lamott (1994) wrote that:

> So much of writing is about sitting down and doing it every day, and so much of it is about getting into the custom of taking in everything that comes along, seeing it all as grist for the mill. This can be a very comforting habit, like biting your nails. Instead of being scared all the time, you detach, watch what goes on, and consider it creatively. (p. 151.)

This has continuously inspired me to explore my feelings of fear in writing (and explore its role in my thinking, my social and cultural settings, in my beliefs, actions and behaviors). This synthesis has become a deeply personal exploration that -above all- has shown me the power of inquiry and the joy of discovering one's creativity. And it has directly led me to the belief that I am a creative person. The use of inquiry to frame my wonder, and examine my thinking and creativity with a lens of research and reflection, and to also externalize it for others by way of writing (making it tangible to other's learning and growth)...has been transformative. I

believe that the process of creating and experiencing this synthesis defines the critical and creative thought processes and techniques that I have learned about during my entire experience in CCT.

Indeed, the CCT experience and community has been monumental to my development of my own writing voice and my overcoming creative fears. From my first reflective paper turned in during Critical Thinking, to the first time I shared personal writing during my Seminar in Creativity class – the CCT community was my first "audience" and support group. This special community fosters and promotes personal risk taking by providing the very foundation of support. For this…I am grateful. It's comforting to know I can continue to be a part of this community, through my support of others in the program; through the production of this synthesis; or as an active member in the CCT community in the future.

It is my hope that this synthesis can purpose itself as a reminder to "myself-in-the-future" as a source of inspiration and a body of evidence which speaks to the level of change and courage that is possible when I commit wonder toward my interests within a reflective framework. I know that I will look back at the creation of this synthesis with fondness and with a special connection recalling all the decisions of what to leave in...and what to leave out. I feel this is a culmination and a representation of what I consider a successful CCT experience.

But, I also hope it serves as inspiration to *others*. Perhaps it will be through a connection with fear in creativity (be it screaming loud fear that makes itself known, or the silent, stealth kind to which they may be unaware) that they can use the actions I have identified to similarly start to overcome them. Or, perhaps it will inspire others by providing an example of how a reflective practices, in combination with creative practice, can be a powerful tool for personal change to (re)introduce creativity back into their life?

Above all- my biggest hope is that it is enjoyable to read - either in small sections, or in its lengthy entirety. If any one of these rings true - then, my CCT experience would be dually successful!

I entered CCT a little unknowingly, a little by happen-chance, and a little bit guided by unconscious thought that sought change in a way that I didn't yet know. I leave with a much deeper understanding of an example for seeking change. I leave with an established reflective practice that I believe in, and appreciate. I leave with a much better sense of my own creativity and writing, and the power that they bestow in both my experience in life, and my experience understanding it. And I leave with a plan to continue to evolve my thinking and encourage change through such actions as meditation and attention training. This change is not unknowing. It's not happen-chance. It's definitely change I seek.

But I also leave with the hopes that unknowing, happen-chance, and unconscious change is *still possible* and out there for me. Because...what a journey it's been!

CHAPTER 13

NARRATIVE:
THE SAFEST PLACE IN THE WORLD

Narrative:
The Safest Place in the World

When I was six my family took a trip from Burlington, MA to Disney World. The 1400 mile road trip was made manageable for my sister and I with endless hours of Mad-Libs and I-spy, and for my whole family with sing-along's to Johnny Cash and Willie Nelson. While road trips were not unusual for my family (it was not unusual to take one on a Friday evening for dinner in Northern Maine, even) - this was a special trip, for sure. The 'once in a lifetime' kind of trip that, even as a kid, I *knew* was special.

For this trip my mom continued her now signature fashion statement that we all wear matching outfits - a fashion statement, mind you, that simply didn't confuse me then the way it does now. And on this particular day, we had matching red shorts with white stripes on each side (except for my dad who had the opposite) and we wore complementing knee-high white socks with red stripes at the top. We also wore white tee shirts with "Burlington" on the front of them and on the back were our names in red shiny letters that cracked when you washed them. Nowadays parents are warned to limit the amount of personal information worn by a kid as precautionary measure against pedophiles. But this was the seventies and (at least according to my mom) Disney World was a safe place for a kid.

On our fourth or fifth day of our vacation, I found myself standing in line with my family because my ten year old sister wanted to go in the Haunted Mansion. I had no interest in going in - and I stated it frequently and loudly. In fact, I cried it. I stamped it out with my feet. I turned my back on it in a huff. I pleaded it on my knees. I didn’t like being scared. But, my sister wanted to go - and apparently because she had to go on the Tea-Cups with me, that somehow meant I had to go in this Haunted Mansion with her.

For the most part, we could be agreeable children and siblings - though we were very

different. She as blonde and blue eyed as I was dark hair and eyed. I liked stuffed animals, Barbie's…and dancing. She liked thunder and lightning, mystery books and...dancing. I never fought with my parents, while she was intent on finding ways and methods of arguing with them that would become a trajectory for her teen years. She found it necessary to tell them in words how she felt – and I think in doing so, she taught me that actions spoke louder than words. There's never been a time that I can't recall *knowing* that my sister *knew* she was older. For her - being born first meant she was obligated to protect me, lead me, educate me, and remind me that *she would know best* – for both her and me. By the time I was six, I suspected she was full of shit at least half of the time.

So, as we made our way through the long line for the Haunted Mansion, twisting and turning in a seemingly endless swirl that kept bringing me back to the same faces and corners that I had just seen, I only grew more and more apprehensive about going in. As we got closer, I could hear the screams of the people inside, and my imagination wouldn't let me forget that those screams would be mine in a matter of minutes. But the more I pleaded to my parents, the more confused my parents seemed to become. They confused my emotion for *exhaustion, hunger, crankiness.* My sister was completely ignorant of my emotion - she just kept telling me she knew so many things that happened in there - but she wouldn't tell me because she couldn't wait to see my response. All I heard was….*I know best; I know more than you and I'm making you go in.*

My vivid imagination told me that what I was feeling was more than just emotion - and that what I was hearing inside that Mansion was worse than any monster that I knew lived beneath my bed. Worse than the shadow monsters who occasionally crept on my bedroom walls at night. And so much worse than the closet monsters I knew waited for me to fall asleep so they

could kidnap my stuffed animals. There had been more than one occasion when I would inventory them all before bed - and do a head count the next morning. While they were always still there, I was certain Snoopy and Kermit had swapped places- thus, providing me enough evidence that monsters existed. And these Mansion monsters worse – because not only could I *hear them* - I could hear others *responding to them.*

As the last group ahead of us stepped in through the doors of the Mansion and I heard them start to scream, I knew two things in life. First, I had only moments until those doors would fling open again and I would be escorted in to my demise. And second, that I could have no part of that - so I needed to bolt.

I frantically looked around for my escape. There was a fence that went around the periphery of the Mansion, but there was an opening that I was certain I could slip through. On the other side of the fence, there was a small grassy ledge which led to a small drop in the ground which then led to a separate fence that lined Disney's Main Street. That was to be my escape route - I just needed to time it perfectly.

As the screams inside went quieter for only a second and I swear I could hear the doors start to open, I threw myself toward the fence opening, wiggled my way through and landed on the small ledge. Before I knew it, my feet were reaching for that lower ground and I was running for the fence below - to safety. That's when I heard the screams. But these screams…I knew quite well.

"LORNA JAYNE! LORNA JAYNE! WHAT ARE YOU DOING???"

I looked up to see a look on my parents faces that I hadn't seen since they caught me trying to "plug" my crayon into an electrical outlet in our living room. While I knew that their screams and looks meant I was in trouble, I couldn't stop now. I clung tight to the safety of my

fence - able to see both Disney's Main Street and the doors to the Haunted Mansion. As swarms of people were starting to move behind them, my parents were still screaming, and my sister was now looking at me with a mix of fear and hate.

"I can't go in there! I WON'T GO IN THERE!"

My parents now appeared to be running in place which caught the attention of a man dressed in a thick black hooded robe, who (from my appraisal) seemed to have gray skin and red eyes. As they were talking to him, they were pointing at me. I grabbed onto the fence even tighter. But then - they stopped pointing, and instead they were shaking their heads and almost smiling.

Just when I started to convince myself that my parents were giving me away, my father yelled, "L.J. - you stay RIGHT THERE! We are coming out on the other end in seven minutes and we're going to meet you RIGHT THERE. Do NOT MOVE! Do you hear me? Do NOT MOVE!"

I heard not only *him...I* heard relief. I didn't have to go! I could stay clutched to this fence the way my little Koala bear clip gripped my pencil. I nodded my head up and down, afraid to even momentarily remove my wrapped arms.

And then what seemed like seconds later - *poof* - they were gone. Into the Haunted Mansion they went. I closed my eyes tight.

At first, I had a moment of pure exhilaration - independence like I had never felt before as I realized my quick response had allowed me to act in a way that I wouldn't have otherwise. Then, while still tight-eyed and gripping to the fence, I really thought about what had just happened. And I realized that in less than seven minutes, my parents were going to walk out of the lower door of the Haunted Mansion and I would probably wish I was dead compared to their

punishment.

I opened my eyes again for a second and looked around, but when I saw that the greeter was still staring at me but was now kind of smiling and waving, I slammed them shut again and dug my chin into my chest.

I stayed in that position forever.

But then I heard them. My parents were screaming my name - their Scottish brogue thick and hyper. So I opened my eyes and looked in the direction of their voices. They still had that frantic look on their faces as they were jogging in my direction. My sister, positioned between my mom and dad, was skipping to keep up and it appeared like she was yelling, too.

As I lifted my head away from the fence, I was suddenly aware that the collar of my tee shirt was clinging to my neck soaked in hot tears. Eying them coming at me - yelling, running, frantic, I was more certain that I was going to "get it" now...and for a moment I actually started to hold my breath hoping I would pass out before they could reach me. But I coughed out my breath when my sister squeezed me telling me in her one breath of how great it was, and that it wasn't scary at all, and that she wished I was with her because she just knows I would have liked the 999 ghosts, and how the walls moved, and that the ghost who sat in the cart between her and my mom was really just a mirror and I would have really been ok - she just knew I would have been ok!

When she let me go, I noticed my father was waving to the mansion's greeter, who was smiling now, and appeared more normal in color…not as scary as he had been just minutes before. As my dad hugged me, he told me that I nearly scared the life out of him. I suddenly knew he wasn't going to yell at me. Instead, he started to chuckle and then said something that surprised me: he told me how proud he was of me. Hearing this made me cry even more hot

tears onto his round belly.

I stayed in that position forever.

And when I finally stopped crying, he asked me if I wanted some ice cream. And I kind of did want some ice cream.

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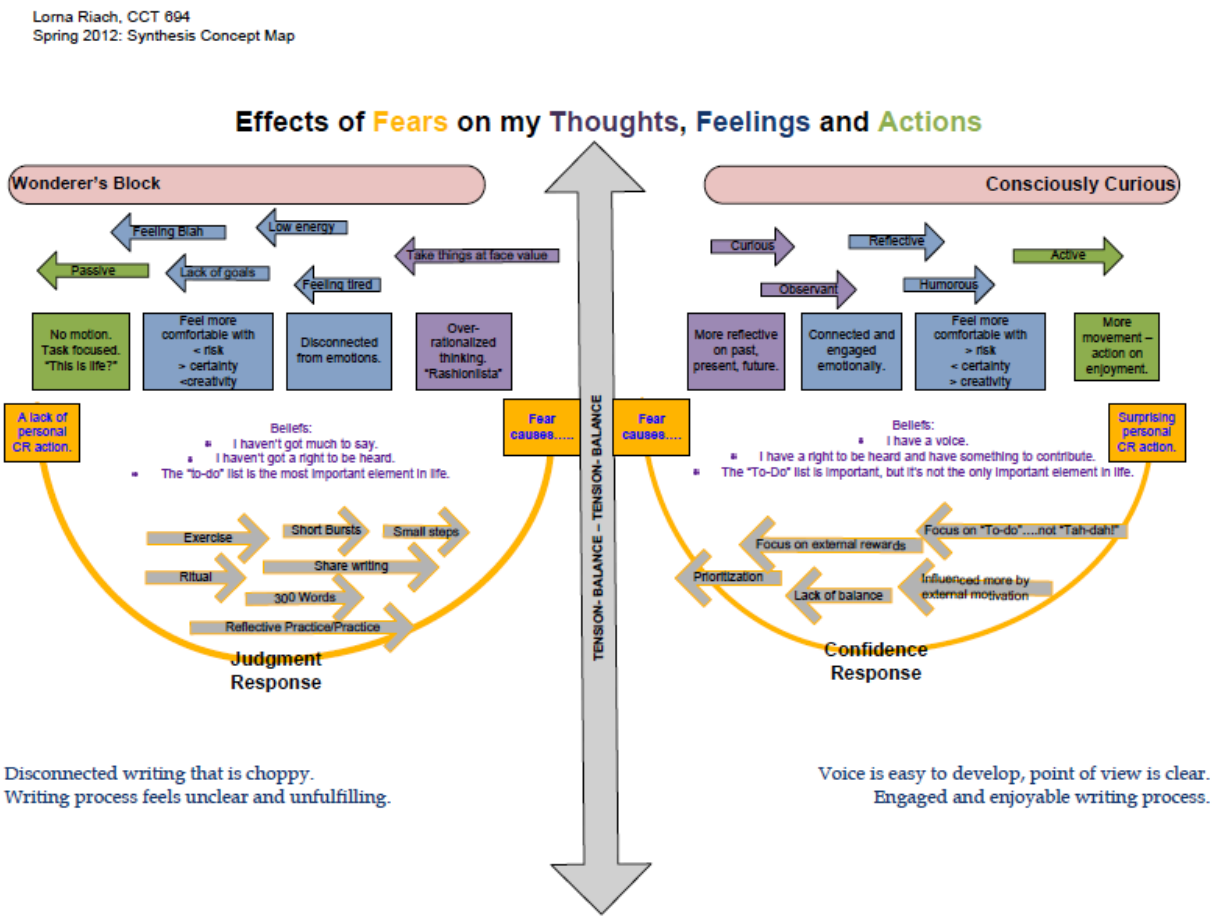
APPENDICES
FIGURE 1: SYNTHESIS MAP



APPENDIX A:
ELBOW AND BELANOFF'S TYPES OF FEEDBACK

Source: Elbow, P. and P. Belanoff (2000). Summary of Kinds of Responses, in Sharing and Responding. Boston: McGraw-Hill: 7ff.

Sharing – No Response:

The writer requests that the reader attentively listen to the writer read their own writing – without any feedback warranted. The writer gets to hear themselves communicate their own writing and listen to their "felt sense" of how they respond to it themselves. This is useful in early drafts and late drafts of writing.

Say-back:

The writer requests that the readers summarize and repeat verbally what they read as the text saying, and what the writer is trying to say. This allows the writer to see how their main idea is coming across or being interpreted. This is useful in early drafts when the writer is still developing their ideas for their writing.

Pointing and Center of Gravity:

The writer asks the reader what they specifically recall specific words or phrases, and what they liked best (or most connected with as a reader). This allows the writer to discover unexplored, interesting parts of their writing that can be further explored. This is useful in early drafts and late drafts of writing.

What's Almost Said or Implied:

The writer requests that the reader share what they'd like to hear *more of* or read *more about* and allows the writer to find out what has left the reader intrigued or wanting more. It allows the writer to hear how their words have been interpreted on levels that (perhaps) they were unaware – and even in a way that they didn't anticipate at all. This is useful in middle and late drafts of

writing.

Voice:

The writer requests that the readers verbalize back what they *hear* in the writer's voice or tone – it allows the writer an idea of the kind of person they think the writer is (or sounds like). This is useful in early drafts and late drafts of writing.

Reply:

The writer requests that the reader give their own thoughts about the topic chosen or the writer's view on the topic. Thus, it emphasizes the topic of composition – and not the writing, per se – which is why it's possible to do this feedback when you just have a concept or a few notes. This allows the writer to see holes in their thinking, or opportunities for better argument development. This is useful in early and middle drafts of writing.

Movies of the Readers Mind:

The writer asks the reader to explain what is happening in their minds as they read. This allows the writer to get a better sense of the emotional response (like, dislike, boredom, entertainment) of the writing. This is useful in later drafts of writing.

Believing and Doubting:

The writer requests that the readers either believe everything in the writing, or doubt everything in the writing and then provide additional ideas that either support/debate the claims in the writing. This helps the writer either get more ideas (believing) or understanding how strongly your writing states the argument (doubting). This is useful in middle to late drafts of writing.

Skeleton Feedback and Descriptive Outline:

The writer requests that the readers identify the main point, sub-points, evidence, and assumptions (Skeleton Feedback) and how the writing either "says" or "does" something through

the writing. This is useful in late drafts of writing.

Objective/Criterion Based Feedback:

The writer requests specific feedback based on criteria they have provided (like a rubric for a class grade). This allows the reader to see their writing examined against a standard set of guidelines. This is useful in later drafts of writing.

Metaphorical Description:

The writer requests that the reader describe their writing using a metaphor. This brings a new 'life' into the work for a writer, who may be in need for a new vision or direction for the writing. This is useful in later drafts of writing.

APPENDIX B:
MY OWN WRITING FEEDBACK

The following notes were transcribed from the notes I took during my Grub Street Workshop experience for the narrative piece: *The Safest Place on Earth*. I received feedback on March 4, 2012. The narrative included in my synthesis is the result of editing the original draft, after receiving this feedback.

- I love detail of the matching outfits. Are there implications of the family all being together? I think it brings in the idea of togetherness.
- Love the chipmunks and princesses.
- More about fight or flight response in the piece. I'm not sure I understand what this means?
- Your dad didn't think you had it in you. This is a nice surprise.
- Nicely brought the reader into the child's point of view.
- I wondered what was normal or what was the compass as to what was normal-did they have trips a lot? Did they dress a like a lot? What were the family dynamics? I wanted to know more about the family dynamics, especially the relationship with her sister.
- I needed a timeline for where you were and what was normal. I would like more color on the relationship between the narrator with her sister and her parents.
- Why was her behavior being ignored? All of the stomping? All of the huffing..... I like that part but I don't understand why the parents were ignoring it?
- There was greater power to the last line about the dad.
- I was looking for more of a connection between the dress alike and the rest of the story. I thought that was going to be important later.
- Was the tie in that there was family conformity, and this was a moment of breaking that?
- I was sort of confused by the monsters and demons in the room? What's going on?
- I got lost during the hanging onto the fence part. The details about the cliff and the fence.....and then I felt the need for more detail.
- It seems the narrator was very young when she runs away. Made me wonder what the relationship was between the parents and the child. Why would the parents choose to leave one child and both go with the other?
- I think she's six or seven years old. Demons and monsters are all in her imagination and this is what is causing her to be stressed at this event.
- There's an internal struggle I sensed more of here. She runs away and sees them go in. I wanted to know more about that moment of internal struggle between choosing her own independence and her pulling away from her family.
- Is it fear of being alone? Should there be more emphasis on alone?
- Why didn't the parents leave one out?

(A long discussion ensued at this point where my fellow writers were talking about the fact that this was the 70s and that those who were alive and of similar age could relate to the fact that this is normal for the 70s. Younger classmates could not understand why the parents would ever leave a child in such a dangerous place such as Disney World. This is very enlightening to me to

learn because I realized there was a generational gap of how we all thought about Disney in 2012 versus how we might of been thinking about it in the seventies. I was getting worried that this is turning into a discussion about bad parenting which was not my intention at all. But I could see how some of the younger classmates would have thought that as I listened to them talk about their perspective. I would never have thought that when I was writing this piece because it wasn't about bad parenting at all. This was an important lesson for me about how my writing can sometimes just be developed in one way but be received in a totally different way.)

- I think there's a need to bring in the adult narrator to explain some of this. Did the parents have to go through the fence how could they ever go into the haunted mansion without the child?
- I'm confused by the parents' responses. I think it's sort of horrifying. Could you ever figure out how the parents would respond? The parents' response just did not add up.
- Her sister had a really good time. The narrator needs to change the casino little bit better.
- I wonder if this really about fear? Haunted house versus losing family? Is this about overcoming fear or is it the worst is yet to come?
- The idea of fear is so big and there so many pieces being brought together in this wonderful piece. This emerges in some way and the dad is a very important part of this.
- I learned that she had away of standing up for herself.
- What is the "it"? Is it that she was always a pushover? Is it that she was finally learning to say something about fight or flight?
- I wonder how this connected to the first piece that the narrator brought about her father and the hospital. I think there's some elements here that might tie together and I think it's interesting.