KEEP CANDY IN THE HOUSE: EXERCISING ARTS-INFORMED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN LIVED EXPERIENCE OF EULOGY WRITING

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Abstract: My mother's love of Tootsie Rolls was the only fact I could grasp after her sudden passing. I wanted to share this and other memories of her through a eulogy that was whimsical, far-ranging, and entertaining, but I struggled to write one. My struggles reminded me of other writing challenges, such as my recent dissertation proposal, although there I was partly guided by my arts-informed research methodology framework. Gradually, I found some of those methodological elements could illuminate parts of eulogy writing: formal concerns, audience, presence and engagement, subjectivity, and meaning-making all resonate with arts-informed research's commitment to form, audience, creative enquiry, researcher presence, and holistic quality. These connections show arts-informed research affords lifelong learning opportunities apart from academic practice; in this case, arts-informed research is a resource tool for navigating lived experiences of grief and grief writing. Moreover, arts-informed research encourages affective narratives and socially-constructed meanings to produce new

understandings, which I realize here by including eulogy excerpts to produce an artistic representation of "research" about my mother (including her undying love of chocolate).

Keywords: methodology; arts-informed; eulogy; lifelong learning; writing as representation

My mother had a legendary sweet tooth, and one of her favourite treats was Tootsie Rolls: the nightmarishly misshapen gooey dark chunks made out of who knows what. Sitting on the couch, my mother would hold a few of them clenched in her fist, taking one at a time to twist open its brown-and-white-and-orange wrapper and chomp down each treat in two bites. When she finished her handful, she would crumple the wrappers she had neatly stacked beside her leg, and call for my father to bring her just a few – "two, no, three, I meant four," more. Because, as far as my mother was concerned, there were always more sweets in the cupboard, and there was always candy in the house. This was the paramount idiosyncrasy I wanted to share about my mother through my eulogy at her funeral in 2017.

Because that was who she was, the centre of our family universe. The organizer of holidays and the singer of songs; the player of pranks and the manager of finances. She was the follower of local news and the favourite of every family pet; the answerer of phone calls and the lover of chocolate.

When my mother passed, I was studying towards a doctoral degree in Education, and had recently written my dissertation proposal, which proved to be a convoluted task that revealed my insecurities about undertaking advanced research work. The eulogy I was to write and deliver as a result of my mother's not-wholly-unexpected but nevertheless surprising death was juxtaposed with this academic writing. With these two acts of written communication, I was tasked with massively disparate and unbelievably momentous attempts at meaning-making through language.

The overlap of these writing tasks seemed to me to have cosmic resonance; one called upon me to recognize and celebrate the experiences of a life that had ended, while the other prompted me to acknowledge the start of a long and difficult journey in pursuit of knowledge. I could see connections between them: their impacts on the shape of my world, processes of transition, and learning was almost immeasurable. These connections held themselves in the techniques and elements of the arts-informed methodological research framework I had selected for my doctoral studies. My mother's death and my research preparation required I produce two distinct pieces of writing; yet, the work I had done to understand the structure of arts research process made possible my creation of a written homage to my mother. In applying the elements of arts-informed research to writing my mother's eulogy, I was better able to unpack, consider, and

facilitate a public composition based in my earliest childhood memories during the painfully raw presence of her passing.

In this article, I reflect on the process of writing my mother's eulogy, sharing my uncertainties and then-growing awareness of likenesses between a cognitive research sensibility and a set of achingly emotional personal circumstances characterized by grief. To organize my discussion, I focus on my personal lived experience of eulogy writing, literature on grief writing, and the elements of eulogy composition, the counterparts of which are found in arts-informed research methodology. I explore how the research of my mother's life and my academic work are represented in writing, and the ways that this connection strengthens knowledge of adult learning by affording a resourceful framework through which meaning can be made.

Lived Experience

In 2017, I was living and working on Canada's East Coast on my final revisions for my Education doctoral dissertation proposal when I received a 3:00 am text from my sister, telling me that our mother had passed away in my Southwestern Ontario hometown. She had turned 75-years-old the month before. The funeral arrangements were prepaid, so besides decisions of soundtracks and slideshows, the major task for my sister and I was each to write and deliver a eulogy.

Flying alone back to Ontario, I made my first attempts at writing the speech I would read over my mother's body, and then, in an effort to distract myself, tried to revise my dissertation proposal's final section, entitled "*Coming Home*." Despite these intentions, I was in no state to compose anything.

I was in the same state shortly thereafter, when, alone in my hotel room, I struggled to set down any words relating to my mother's life. The memories rising in my mind consisted of Hallowe'en costumes and birthday favour bags, my mother's fears of swimming, cats, and often of my father's driving, and, of course, of her legendary sweet tooth. But in language, there was nothing.

That September was achingly hot, and I was grateful for the air conditioning blasting past the blackout curtains. The cold allowed me relative comfort as I stared for some time at the blank computer screen awaiting my input. For our respective eulogies, my sister and I had equitably split family stories of picnics and school plays, so I had material to draw on, but could not find a starting point. I took my fingers from the keyboard and got up to open a chocolate bar. The sludgy mess it left on my fingers

reminded me of my family's ice cream cake food fight, initiated by my mother, in December 1991 when I was 17.

Seeing the evidence of the genetic propagation of my mother's sweet tooth on my hands brought forth that memory, which remains one of my most cherished moments of family belonging. Unusually, one of us had a camera at the kitchen table when the fight erupted, and the ensuing combat photography produced four snapshots: my parents playfully wrestling frosting onto one another, my sister smiling under the hunk of vanilla ice cream in her hair, my panicked face as I tried to block more chocolate crumble from landing on my overalls, and my mother's inscrutable expression as she licked her fingers clean. That memory, those images, brought out in me anguish and tears anew. How could I communicate the fit and joy and love of that absurd moment? The funeral, which would take place in two days' time, would not wait for me or my writing; it was lurking, like the late September swelter just outside the hotel window.

Gradually, I became aware these feelings of struggle were somehow familiar; they reminded me of the awful, imperative unknowing-ness of writing my dissertation proposal. I was hesitant, overwhelmed, panicked, and no longer confident language would suffice. Plus: what to write? This realization distracted me. Its objective safety made momentarily tolerable the act of choosing the last words I would speak in (some manifestation of) my mother's presence.

The association with my research proposal made me momentarily yearn for that less emotional, cognitive endeavour about adults' informal learning. At least there, I thought, I had a methodological framework to guide me. And then inspiration struck: I could emulate research work in my treatment of the eulogy. Mimicking the stages of knowledge production could help me frame and write into and along my mother-knowingness. Bolstered by academic practice, I could use research methodology to keep my incoherent sobs at bay, at least long enough to write my mother's story. This awareness turned the computer screen before me into a primed canvas; I wiped my fingers clean, and started typing.

I know no one, including myself with 13+ years of postsecondary education, who was as keen on learning. My earliest memories are of sitting on the green couch in the living room beside Mom, waiting for [my sister] to come home from school for lunch, and we would read. "Mom has her book, and you have your book."

Process Unfolding

With a series of steps set more clearly before me, I selected my favourite, if traditional, way into writing: definition. What makes up a eulogy? Memories, obviously, and grief, particularly shaped. Or did a eulogy consist of common knowledge of the deceased? If I were going to speak appropriately of my life's infinite traces from this woman, I needed to be as sure as I could be. I was desperate to get right this last, final act of writing about my mother. Besides, I was just far enough into doctoral study to fret about the need for grounding work in the literature. The writer in me believed that as a form, a eulogy likely had stylistic conventions I could emulate, but online searches provided only examples, not direction. In reading other eulogies, I found impressions of people and their lives, but not a methodical means to produce the form. It appeared that eulogies were not written via templates, but to be fair, had I found one, I would likely have dismissed it expediently; using a prefabrication would not do justice to my mother. In fact, in similar fashion, I had previously rejected several doctoral research methodologies emphasizing rigourous structure and linear thinking. Here, I wanted to understand what a eulogy consisted of, but not necessarily replicate those elements.

I was aware, too, that I would be reading the eulogy for an audience of relatives, friends, well-wishers, acquaintances, and funeral staff with varying knowledge of my mother. Some of them had known her longer than my forty-two years, while others were there supporting my sister or me and had little knowledge of my mother's recent dementia. Once, years earlier, around the dinner table, accompanied by my teenaged sister's friend, my mother began a frank discussion of bra sizes; it was typical conversation for our family, but not for the friend, judging from her horrified expression. I felt responsible for that moment, and to all of those listeners in the audience. I had to engage with those who knew her best, and reach those who knew her less profoundly. I was cognizant of acknowledging who and how my mother was, yet finding a way to make her ongoing presence clear to those relating to her on their own terms.

In the late autumn days prior to the funeral, time for me seemed to be simultaneously expanding and collapsing. The eulogy deadline, like a written assignment, was rushing towards me, even as I was trying to compress into comments a lifetime of memories of my mother. I was desperate to honour the shared way my mother and I made sense of things, which was heavily influenced by curiosity and our feelings in the moment.

She would happily go for a visit, meet up for a cup of coffee, have a cup of tea or just sit and chat. She genuinely liked people and wanted to know what they were up to, what made them tick. That same inquisitiveness made her get a seat with her back to the wall at every restaurant, just so she could see what was going on around her.

I wanted others to understand that I knew my relationship with her coloured my memories; I was her youngest daughter, and she was inconsolable dropping me off in Nova Scotia for university. She told me she admired how little I was influenced by others' opinions, and that she valued my spirit and creativity. My experiences deserved sharing, in order to afford others their own expressions of grief. This eulogy would not be about me, but it would carry my imprint of being my mother's daughter.

Mostly, on her behalf, I wanted this speech to be good. I wanted her to know that my years of postsecondary schooling had taught me to write well, to get a message across, and to do so in ways that were entertaining, and heartfelt, and articulate, and meaningful. It was important to me that I be as authentic as possible in celebrating her with other people, so they would know she was wonderful and my loss was devastating. The eulogy would be funny in parts, and kind, and occasionally serious, because she was. I wanted the eulogy, like my mother, to be graceful, if a little unpredictable, but ultimately well-meaning and steeped in love.

These features stood out for me in constructing what would become my mother's eulogy: form, audience, presence and engagement, subjective understanding, and making meaning in a world without her. These are also features recognizable in arts-informed research methodology; my fears were mitigated by viewing them through that lens, rather than directly confronting the loss and grief in which I was immersed. As it turned out, switching between readings of research and recollections of experience was serendipitous, because literature about writing for grief shows there really is no single way to process loss through writing.

Grief Writing

Research on grief and writing is wide-ranging, and does not advocate for a single best practice. Shared elements consist of various entry and exit points throughout grief stages (Katz, 2010; Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014), routine and relationship changes

(Kunkel et al., 2014; Oates & O'Rourke, 2011; Walter, 1996), forecasts of imminent adjustments to life events (Park, 2010; Rosenblatt & Elde, 1990), and the development of new ways of being (Maddrell, 2016; Mitchell-Eaton, 2019). Although I intuited some of these challenges, I was incapable of articulating them at the time. There is evidence that those who experience loss "avoid the intense distress connected with the grief experience and…the expression of emotion necessary for it" (Lindemann, 1944, p. 11). Part of the hardship of grief is the difficulty in specifying precisely "what has been lost and what has changed through bereavement" (Stroebe & Schut, 1999, p. 201). Adopting a methodical approach to writing, in my case preparing a eulogy for my mother, seemed to provide a degree of stability and offer me respite from the weight of grief.

The approach I took brought the written elements of my mother's eulogy: form, audience, presence and engagement, subjective understanding, and meaning-making, in line with elements of arts-informed research methodology used in my doctoral proposal writing. I began to see this adaptable academic framework could guide and enrich the process of writing my mother's eulogy. With this discussion, I consider what these eulogy elements comprise and how they assist in grief processing, and connect them with similar elements in arts-informed research methodology. I explore the opportunities to represent understanding and research in eulogies and academic proposals, and draw parallels with other applications for adult learning. I offer excerpts from my mother's eulogy throughout as examples of the ways these elements can be incorporated into a eulogy text.

Form

When dealing with grief, individuals "express…sorrow and sense of loss" (Lindemann, 1944, p. 16) through memories and experiences that form narratives of the deceased. According to Neimeyer, Klass, and Dennis (2014), "mourning, in both its private and public moments, draws heavily on narrative processes to establish the meaning of the deceased's life and death" (p. 487). Among the narrative strategies available to them, eulogizers have the opportunity to address unresolved matters, seek or achieve catharsis, romanticize the deceased, and/or show appreciation for relationships or lessons learned (Kunkel & Dennis, 2003) in their eulogy. A eulogy's formal aspects may praise the deceased, establish the speaker's credibility, disclose emotion, offer suggested actions, promote positive coping, and affirm past relationships, as well as acknowledge continuing bonds with the deceased (Kunkel & Dennis, 2003). In my eulogy, I wanted to share the story of my mother's coming to terms with my sexuality, because I admired and valued that she

was so unafraid of what was new that she
worked to meet me where I stood. Just like she
did everyone else.

Bloom (1970) recognizes the eulogy as a design through which grief work can be carried out:

> It is a public expression, one in which others concur by their very presence, and one which can provide a framework for dealing with the reality, as well as the guilt, anger, rage involved, and the ultimate meaning of life and death. It can be a source of hope and courage to the family and to the mourners who must go on. (p. 45)

Rules of grammar and written expression shape mourning into comprehensible communication through the form of a eulogy – "the act of writing is an act of attempted comprehension, and, in a childlike way, control; we are so baffled and exhausted by what has happened, we want to imagine that giving words to the unspeakable will make it somehow our own" (Oates & O'Rourke, 2011, para. 13). Writing a eulogy formalizes affect "by putting feelings and thoughts about that which has been disturbing and confusing into language" (Kunkel & Dennis, 2003, p. 4–5). Eulogy writing helps name and frame grief formally.

Audience

To an extent, writing a eulogy calls for understanding listeners' desires for comfort and reassurance, and providing affective connections: "A special rhetorical challenge for the eulogizer concerns his or her need to console self as well as audience while also paying tribute to the deceased" (Kunkel & Dennis, 2003, p. 2). The public face of eulogy writing is similar to a performance, in that one's own mourning is presented for others.

I have the incredible gift of possessing some of
my mother's private writing, and I can read in
those lines her worry about the health and
safety of the people she loved, and her concern
about changes in the world and in her.

With the deceased as the lead actor and focus, the audience of eulogy listeners are there to hear tales: "the story of the death itself and our changed relationship to the

deceased are personally narrated, socially shared" (Neimeyer et al., 2014, p. 486). The group of listeners offers commiseration, collective memories, and sympathy: "To the extent that it involves listening, acknowledgment, and affirmation of what is said and of associated feelings, shared reminiscence can be understood as support" (Rosenblatt & Elde, 1990, p. 208). In helping actively to interpret and recognize the deceased's life journey, the audience to a eulogy becomes a socially significant co-constructor in the act.

Presence/Engagement

Presence is variously regarded in the context of grief. In the literature, simply the company of friends and family has been identified as a positive support strategy; for the bereaved, "offering one's presence, expressing the willingness to listen, and expressing care and concern are consistently evaluated as helpful" (Rack et al., 2008, p. 423). Kunkel and Dennis (2003) find it is possible for those in mourning to continue bonding with the deceased; in this way, the deceased's presence takes up a viable subject position. Finally, grief itself has a lingering presence: it "is ongoing, with the experience being recursive and folding back on itself" (Moules, 1998, p. 149) despite obligations of daily activities for the bereaved and other mourners.

I used to dread church for a variety of reasons; one of the biggest was the fact that Mom would stop and catch up with everyone. Her recall of events and others' passions was complete; people's birthdays, anniversaries, promotions, children's graduations, grandchildren's achievements, hairdressers' house renovations, coworkers' in-laws' travel plans, the lady in the coffee shop's dog-walker's knee surgery, she knew it all. Not only would she know about it, using some mysterious combination of prescience and nosiness that you could never work out, but she would remember it, and ask you about it.

Adjusting to the deceased's absence through ongoing acknowledgement can be achieved "by sharing stories regarding the deceased, disclosing dreams of the lost other, attempting to narrate their inner landscape of feeling or seeking spiritual significance in a striking coincidence" (Neimeyer et al., 2014, p. 487). Taking part in

these recollections allows other mourners to engage with the realities of loss, and to do so sustainably, since "rather than a finite process to be completed within an appointed timeframe, grief is recognised as a potentially life-long engagement" (Maddrell, 2016, p. 172). Presence and engagement allow for immediate and long-term personal and shared coping in response to loss.

Subjectivity

In grief, subjectivity becomes a search for understanding based on one's own experiences: "Loss of a person who has been so important in defining self and situation provides a character to grief. It gives grief qualities of searching for meaning, of uncertainty about one's self, uncertainty about what to make of what has happened, disorganization, confusion, and nonconfidence" (Rosenblatt, 1988, p. 68). Despite the emotional discomfort it generates, grief processing has beneficial aspects (Parkes, 1972; Bowlby, 1980), such as the reflexive recognition of self-growth through experiencing grief (Lichtentahl & Cruess, 2010, p. 492).

As much as any other wonderful quality my mother demonstrated, she was gracious. Once I phoned her in tears, explaining I had an awkward encounter with an ex-girlfriend and didn't know what to say at that time. My mother's response was something I will not forget; she said, "You tell her that you hope she found happiness."

Subjectivity also insinuates into grief our own impending mortality: "Bereavement begins with the deceased, with our loss of the person, but it always moves to our own mortality, our own fears of losing the world we know, losing ourselves, and being lost to others" (Young, 2007, p. 365). That is, "eulogies also help the survivors face their own demise" (Davis et al., 2016, p. 317).

Mourners can exchange with others their individual memories of a shared event in which the deceased appeared: "People seemed to feel more understood by somebody who could share the reminiscing because of personal knowledge of the deceased and of the events discussed" (Rosenblatt & Elde, 1990, p. 208). Grief processing that moves towards reshaping the bereaved's personal and social identity is a shift in subjectivity: "Death creates a relational liminality in which the surviving loved one is in a state of social liminality – between social roles, relationships, and contexts.

Eulogies help survivors to move through this liminal state into a newly constructed identity" (Davis et al., 2016, p. 325). Subjectivity involves narratives of the self and others shared with a wider social community.

Meaning-Making

The eulogy permits the expression of feelings that may seem impossible to handle: "one wants to find some kind of meaning and not to admit that there is no meaning; and so, the feelings must be gotten out" (Bloom, 1970, p. 39). Authors of eulogies are faced with the task of creating a text that can, among the other elements of form, audience, presence and engagement, and subjectivity, produce "positive reappraisal and the reconstruction of meaning as instruments of grief consolation" (Kunkel & Dennis, 2003, p. 26). Without a eulogy's textual catharsis, these feelings and impotencies can lead to repetitive thoughts characteristic of depressive thinking (Park, 2010).

Meaning may be made by connecting socially to remember the deceased: "communication also has the potential for constructing feelings, not just reporting them" (Rosenblatt, 1988, p. 76). Co-constructing the deceased's life as an assortment of stories has meaning in rich and wide social contexts of how people deal with grief:

> the intense narrative activity that characterizes these "efforts after meaning" are themselves nested within overarching cultural narratives that construct death, loss, and the bereaved themselves, as well as the community or society of which they are a part, along certain lines, as are the very forms in which such meanings are couched and shared. (Neimeyer et al., 2014, p. 496)

Although it's impossible to reduce the incredible connections, achievements, discoveries and kindnesses of my mother's life to a single point, I think I would be happy for her if people remembered the ways she extended her thoughtfulness, supportiveness and intelligence into the world.

Writing a eulogy "is not a task that can be taken too lightly" (Bloom, 1970, p. 45); the elements of form, audience, presence and engagement, subjectivity, and meaning-making are delicate and complicated by grief processing. Such was my attempt to

rationalize my unfathomable grief, mindful that my arts-informed methodology could offer me resonant insights. The written composition of a eulogy shows itself to be congruous with a handful of arts-informed research tenets.

Arts-informed Research

The words of the phrase "arts-informed research" appear to me in cardinal red, the same colour as my mother's favourite dress-up blazer onto which she would pin the brooch of the season. The fire-engine excitement of arts-informed research is a license for connection, and connecting differently. Elliot Eisner maintains that our general attitudes towards research arise from "our conception of meaning, our view of cognition, and our beliefs about the forms of consciousness that we are willing to say advance human understanding" (1997, pp. 5–6); through arts-informed research, my affinities for different approaches to process, spirit, situatedness, feeling, and alignment are supported. Arts-informed research is "a way of redefining research form and representation and creating new understandings of process, spirit, purpose, subjectivities, emotion, responsiveness, and the ethical dimensions of inquiry" (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 59). I selected arts-informed research as my doctoral methodology for investigating informal learning in public sites, because "the multifaceted nature of arts-informed inquiry can reveal a depth of understanding and communication arguably not possible through the use of one semiotic system alone" (Ewing & Hughes, 2008, p. 515). I felt a single theoretical approach to materialities, space, and learning would be insufficient, just as one way to weep cannot serve all of the facets of grief.

My arts-informed methodology relied heavily on Cole and Knowles' (2008) eponymous chapter; I came to see imprints of arts-informed research's adaptability, largesse, and evocation on my attempts to process and write about my mother's life. Moreover, in advocating non-academic connections to knowledge, Cole and Knowles (2008) describe definitive arts-informed research elements' potential for application, notably in lived experiences gained through customary situations and interactions.

For instance, Cole and Knowles highlight *commitment to a particular art form* that guides research "to frame and define the inquiry process and 'text'" (2008, p. 61). In my case, I looked to other eulogies as exemplars of form regarding content and to illuminate expectations about their function. This was similar to the ways in which I had explored the conventions of a doctoral research proposal, and what that form could look like through an arts-informed perspective. I did not dismiss customary eulogy or proposal features, but their depiction was carefully framed to meet my needs. Cole and Knowles (2008) suggest that the research purpose is instrumental in producing forms

that are "optimal for full and rich communication of ideas and constructs" (p. 63). In my eulogy for my mother, such forms included anecdotes, familiar sayings, jokes, recollections, and one very unprintable nickname to impart what my mother was like in the world and to illustrate how much of my life would change with her absence.

In terms of the arts-informed research element of *audience*, I understood that through my eulogy, I was cultivating a relationship with those who attended my mother's funeral. The methodology of arts-informed research sees audience as those different groups for and with whom research must be shared: "there must be an explicit intention for the research to reach communities and audiences including but beyond the academy" (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 61). In my eulogy, I was led by the varying needs for comfort amongst the range of friends, relatives, and acquaintances who knew my mother differently than I did.

For me, I hope that what I knew as a child –
that I was proud of my mom, and lucky to have
her – resonates in my relationships and actions
that I have and do now and that are yet to
come.

My doctoral proposal audience was a small group consisting of my academic supervisor and committee members, each with research design and disciplinary knowledge, and arts practice expertise. I was able to broaden the scope of my writing by attending to their range of cognitive and practical perspectives and strengths. Hartel (2014) points out that despite academia's favouring of the philosophical analytic argument, "there are many other audiences and forms of intelligence that can be tapped on the matter of information" (p. 1350). Arts-informed research suggests that different groups' knowledges offer value, so I allowed room for listeners to reflect on their own encounters with my mother.

You didn't know exactly what would set her off,
but when she began to laugh, you couldn't help
joining in. Even my dad's helpless shake of the
head was a testament to her irresistible
humour.

A more expansive arts-informed research element is the characterization of research work as a *creative inquiry* process. Cole and Knowles (2008) find that emergent properties are likely to result when an arts-informed lens is adopted:

> Rather than adhering to a set of rigid guidelines for gathering and working with research material, a researcher using arts-informed methodology follows a more natural process of engagement relying on commonsense decision making, intuition, and a general responsiveness to the natural flow of events and experiences. (p. 61)

Being attentive to a "natural flow" asks the researcher to be mindful and engaged during moments of understanding. This is an apt description of my state of mind in writing my mother's eulogy; as I sat alone in my hotel room, my memories of her impact on others, her beliefs, her favourite sweets (the overall winner being chocolate chip cookies), and her love came to mind, so I wrote of them. Although my attempts to research eulogies' form and content seemed to belie this statement, instinctively, I fashioned comments as I became aware of the memories to which they referred. Within my grief, I attempted to remain consciously open to responsiveness and a natural flow of expression.

The process of being "in the zone" also took place during doctoral proposal writing, although my 36 drafts seem antithetical to a "more natural process." Yet, none of the drafts felt ineffectual; each iteration brought me closer to my vision for the final document. Barnacle (2005) argues that doctoral degree success is an ongoing pursuit inextricable from the etymology of philosophy – *philos* meaning a form of love and *sophy* meaning wisdom: "As long as one remains a philosopher one's undertaking will never be complete – the striving will continue" (p. 184). Being present and engaged with ongoing circumstances, especially when transition is at hand, is one version of creative enquiry similar to composing a eulogy, when thoughtful associations are noted as they are recalled.

Arts-informed research methodology also draws strongly on *researcher presence*, not as the subject of study, but so that the author of the work is visible "through an explicit *reflexive self-accounting*; her presence is also implied and *felt*, and the research text (the representational form) clearly bears the *signature* or *fingerprint* of researcher-as-artist" (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 66). My grief was my own, but publicly addressed in order to communicate my reflections to others. In writing my mother's eulogy from my unique position as her youngest daughter, I generated remarks inspired by the place I held/hold: "Eulogies are specific ritualized forms of communication in which the bereaved focus on self-identity as they articulate their experience of grief" (Davis et al., 2016, p. 325). While my sister prefers ice cream, I, like my mother, love chocolate and candy; our shared weakness for Tootsie Rolls was the inspired memory that gave me an opening for this article. The ways in which my mother's death was

distressing and profound for me within my role in our family moulded the slant I gave to my remarks.

As a researcher writing a proposal, I was just as aware of my need to situate myself: "In arts-informed research the 'instrument' of research is also the researcher-as-artist" (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 61). I had to locate myself and my research plan philosophically, theoretically, and methodologically to show I had a widespread understanding of related knowledges; arts-informed research sees this situating as a version of artistic practice. I recognize, too, as a point of note, that these instances of eulogy and proposal writing for me were safe, without threat to personal or academic relationships; such advantages may not be available to all with more tenuous connections or fraught subject matter. These viewpoints assembled my interpretations through which I wrote my eulogy and my proposal: my individual mother-daughter relationship – a relationship similar to what other women may have shared; and, my unique researcher-artist position – also similar to that of other scholar-practitioners.

Finally, there is a *holistic quality* to arts-informed methodology, which refers to internal consistency, coherence, and "authenticity that speaks to the truthfulness and sincerity of the research relationship, process of inquiry, interpretation, and representational form" (Cole & Knowles, 2008, pp. 66–67). The character and manner of thinking, writing, speaking, and displaying needs to be aligned so that meaning is made through insights resonant with one another. I was unwilling to be anything less than utterly honest in writing my mother's eulogy and writing my doctoral proposal. I claimed this intention in my eulogy when I confessed to not knowing where, how, or when to end my reminiscences; my uncertainties about my doctoral proposal's clarity, readability, import, and style were equally destabilizing. For both endeavours, I simply had to see the processes through to their ends. Timeframes, for the funeral and of my proposal defense date, ultimately pushed me to conclude these tasks, as strongly evocative of what I did not know would come next.

I found communion with my experience of writing my mother's eulogy in these arts-informed research elements. They also made possible the use of "alternative ... representational forms" (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 59) to dispense accessible scholarship, which is another purpose of arts-informed research. That is, in order to share my realizations that eulogy writing can be assisted by aligned arts-informed research elements, I ought to use neither a typical academic article nor a personal diary entry, but instead a composition amalgamating and demonstrating both. To communicate this knowledge widely and clearly for the benefit of others, I needed to generate my understanding within a new representation of writing.

Research Represented

During the writing of my mother's eulogy, I recognized that, as usual for me, the act of writing had become a safe space, infinite and free from consequence. Expressing ideas in writing through selecting words and phrases with extreme care is a lulling act for me, regardless of the topic's intensity or implications. In the instance of writing my mother's eulogy, I escaped gratefully into composition, and I did not want to take myself out of that state. Outside of writing was the unacceptable material reality of my mother's death and its aftermath. Inside writing, I could be jocular, ironic, irreverent, and iconoclastic. The "research" of my mother could remain somewhat detached from the heartbreaking reality of her absence. It felt comparable to writing my doctoral proposal, in which the security of the writing process allowed discovery of ideas and expressions. In that document, I strove to contextualize my blithe approach to learning and knowledge production through a colloquial tone, acknowledged inexperience, and precise textual spatial inconsistencies. These choices in my proposal reflected my attitudes and values, just as my impertinence as the free-spirited youngest child was evident in the recollections I shared in my mother's eulogy. Each writing activity consisted of representations, as well as expressions, of my beliefs and their meanings.

Writing has always allowed me the chance to understand my thinking, and imagine how to communicate through a number of avenues for meaning. It was the same as I prepared this manuscript for scholarly and popular reach. But grief processing, like academic study, does not come easily or quickly. Only now is this representation of writing seeing the light of day, four years after my mother's death and with my doctoral degree parchment hanging beside my desk; additionally, the global pandemic known as COVID-19 has altered our world and relationships. Cole and Knowles (2008) comment that the research endeavour "may change over time as the inquiry matures or develops and as ideas evolve" (p. 63). Neither of the states for which a eulogy or a doctoral proposal is required exist for me now as they did then, but the conditions of those writings still reverberate and the ideas are as topical, if not more so, during a time in which so many are mourning so much.

There is a thing called "second death," and it is the last reference anyone living makes about someone who has passed on. And although I have been attempting to prepare myself for some time for the loss of my mother, her "second death" is unbelievably difficult for me to

accept. That at some point in this world,
somebody will no longer speak about this vital,
inquisitive, kind, and much-loved woman –
because they did not know her, remember her
or can't see her magnificent smile – is not right.

The eulogy I wrote for my mother and the doctoral proposal I wrote to advance my research were representations made manageable because arts-informed research can shape a container in which experiences are held: "The generative act of art creation, alongside individual and collaborative interpretation had created a personal and shared visual and inter-textual vocabulary to express and begin to join up fragments of experiences, emotions and feelings to benefit discovery" (Eaves, 2014, p. 153). Had I not had the benefit of this framework, I cannot say how I would have made sense of the eulogy writing process. The experience of my mother's death required me to offer remarks at a parent's funeral with little or no preparation. Adults frequently experience such moments and must learn, informally, how to handle them without guidance; furthermore, research about the ways that adults learn shows that adults tend to seek out information when an immediate problem requires solving (Knowles, 1980). These are among the reasons why arts-informed research methodology is useful in navigating lived experiences, like these unfolding and urgent circumstances, supporting adult learning and generating greater understanding and meaning in life and study.

Adult Learning

While my mother's passing and my doctoral proposal writing were personal occurrences, my belief that they afford help for others' understanding is socially driven. Those who face similar circumstances may see the opportunity for learning in their own situations. Malcolm Knowles wrote that "people become ready to learn something when they experience a need to learn it in order to cope more satisfyingly with real-life tasks or problems" (1980, p. 44). Adults in particular are drawn to knowledge that addresses immediate, real-life situations. Using the work of John Dewey, Chris Argyris, Donald Schön, and Jack Mezirow to form a model of contributions to education writing, Marsick and Watkins (2001) depict the "lessons learned" from "everyday encounters":

> A new life experience may offer a challenge, a problem to be resolved, or a vision of a future state…Meaning making…in practice, is often more of an ebb and flow as people begin to make sense of a situation. With each new insight, they may have to go back and question earlier understandings…the steps are neither linear nor necessarily sequential. (p. 29)

This language evokes the continual reframings offered by eulogy writing and doctoral proposals, and is illuminated by arts-informed research; elements overlap and spill into one another like the messy wake of sorrow I still feel when I think of my mother. As a methodology, arts-informed research readied me to navigate the radical shifts of my mother's death. In adult learning literature, revolutionary transformation in outlook is known as a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991). One's landscape is disturbed by such a dilemma – consider the upheavals to society of pandemic-related challenges, yet disorientation can also imply growth. Disorienting dilemmas can be reframed as an invitation to carry out "a deeper form of learning about ourselves or our world" (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006, p. 132).

Inevitably people looking for advice, or insight,
or validation, found their way to her too. I think it
was her moral compass, and her compassion.
She would not mince words as to her feelings
about someone's choices, but she didn't judge
anyone's decisions.

During my lived experience of grief, arts-informed research provided me with a parallel methodological framework offering strength, support, and a creative outlet for meaning-making. It allowed me to remember and share my mother's singing of "One-Eyed Purple People Eater" early on Saturday mornings, and her intentional mispronunciation of Dairy Queen Dilly Bar treats as Diddly Bops. Lifelong learning practice and arts-informed research share the tendency for understanding through affective responses. Captured in journaling and storytelling methods, or research approaches such as autoethnography or life history, "Emotional issues never seem very far from the surface in adult learning contexts" (Dirkx, 2008, p. 9). Infusing their lived experiences into learning encounters leaves space for adults to acknowledge the part emotions play in developing new cognitive approaches or theoretical understandings. I found it reassuring that arts-informed research endorsed the influence of feelings, and that with that lens, my learnings about eulogy writing and proposal writing were strengthened rather than discounted for their affective toll.

Lifelong learning instructors and learners can benefit from frameworks, such as arts-informed research, that celebrate more than customary modes of understanding: "I am convinced that as educators we need to attend to, and listen to, our spirits, our hearts, our inner life, our imaginations, our emotions, our bodies, our minds" (Leggo, 2004, p. 33). This claim in part explains my decision, here, not to offer critical

commentary on arts-informed research methodology; the affective resonances and spiritual comforts it provided to me during a time of crisis produced awarenesses that scrutiny does not serve. Cole and Knowles (2008) wrote that "the educative possibilities of arts-informed work are foremost in the heart, soul, and mind of the researcher from the onset of an inquiry" (p. 68). The need to process information effectively, to facilitate ongoing transitional states systematically, and to enrich eulogy writing privately and publicly is a direct application of an arts-informed methodological perspective that helps navigate these situations. And it helps a sometimes-empty heart to remember how one's mother liked to eat her Tootsie Rolls.

Conclusion

On the day I am revising this writing, the province of Nova Scotia in which I live is memorializing the anniversary of the worst mass murder shooting in its and in Canadian history. The world is entering the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, with losses of nearly four million lives worldwide (World Health Organization, 2021). My friend's colleague's husband has been diagnosed with stage 4 cancer.

There are no limits to the causes of grief, nor cessation of them. I and those around the world struggle personally and socially with the impact of a worldwide pandemic. The ways in which the COVID-19 virus has robbed humanity of its rituals of death are frustrating; funerals have attendance restrictions, and the delivery of a eulogy is generally now a technologically-distanced affair. Grief formerly shared with others is more often accounted for alone at this time, but making sense of individual experience in a manner that connects to others' experiences is meaningful work. Often, those who create are familiar with lone struggle: "writers have always holed up to work" (Bruce, 2009, p. 121). These hardships lend themselves to new and important discoveries by writers, artists, and arts-informed researchers. Consider the opportunities granted by meeting these challenges: innovative and collective means of documenting art, fostering creativity in socially-distanced public spaces, modelling ambiguous grief in atypical written forms, adapting non-formal learning for multiple application frameworks, and so on. These are the unexplored directions open to us. My mother loved shunpiking, where each Mother's Day, our family would pile into the car with our free map of local attractions a little off the beaten path, but nonetheless popular. Even in our own car, we were amidst throngs of others on the same trip. To be a shunpiker meant to be unique, a little quirky, and up for an adventure, just as my mother was.

Once again, I am at the end of a piece of writing that reveals my uncertainties, like the writing of my mother's eulogy and the writing of my doctoral proposal, but my

reservations are genuine and offer a foundation for growth. Arts-informed research methodology can be put to use in coping with the trials of eulogy writing and academic writing, offering understanding of the ways in which information/research can be communicated/represented, and how research is realized in non-academic capacities.

I am grateful to have reached a stage in which I can now write about my mother, and I think she would be pleased to know that her lineage is insightful for others on their own paths to learning. I hope that my gradual formulation of these connections can encourage others experiencing grief or abrupt changes to see through a lens of expansive, expressive research process, finding there, acceptance for their reactions and design for their dispositions.

I have scoured the text of my mother's eulogy, trying to find a stopping point, a conclusion, yet what I have written here – like my mother's spirit and my pursuit of knowledge – has no end. My mother was a kind and loving woman and a strong supporter of education and learning, and I hope to emulate her mark on the world in both arenas. In one respect, I have succeeded: like my mother, I always keep candy in the house.

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