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— **Narrative Inquiry**

Experience and Story in
Qualitative Research




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What Do Narrative Inquirers Do?

Before we go on to explain what narrative inquirers do, we offer a parallel. It is always useful to establish a context of purpose. To do this, it is necessary to clarify what one is *not* going to do in order to clarify exactly what one *is* going to do. We use the work of Joseph Schwab to illustrate this point.

Schwab's article entitled "What Do Scientists Do?" (1960) was part of an intense debate about scientific method. Schwab pointed out that much of the discussion about scientific method and the nature of science was without reference to the doing of science but, rather, tended to be built on considerations of scientific logic and the coherence of scientific concepts. Analytic philosophy with its abstract emphases on language construction played a large role in the scientific method literature of the time. Schwab, by his title, signified his intention of entering the discussion by providing an account of what scientists actually did. In the article, Schwab specifically did not want to deal with what people *thought* scientists should do, nor did he wish to offer metalevel logical or analytic and linguistic *interpretations* of what they did, nor even to expand philosophically derived notions of what

science was. He wanted to study scientific thinking as expressed in what scientists actually did.

INTRODUCTION

Likewise, in this chapter, and throughout the book, we wish to address the topic of what narrative inquirers do. We do not deal with the huge literature—some modern, much postmodern—that talks about narrative. An example of what we are *not* doing is what Richardson does in her chapter on narrative and sociology in a section entitled "What Is Narrative?" (1995, p. 200), in which she defines narrative. Just as Schwab made clear that he was not setting out to define science nor even the methodology of science, we wish to make clear that we are *not* setting out to define narrative.

We see our task as similar to Schwab's, as one of trying to provide an answer to the question, *What do narrative inquirers do?* As with Schwab, we are interested in inquiry terms and the spaces these terms create for inquiry. We are interested in exploring how these terms define and bound narrative inquiries—how they bound the phenomena, shape what passes for evidence, and determine what makes defensible research texts.

We discuss the terms that we choose to use in our inquiries, which derive from the Deweyan view of experience (particularly *situation*, *continuity*, and *interaction*). This leads into an examination of our research framework, the *three-dimensional narrative inquiry space* and the "directions" this framework allows our inquiries to travel—*inward*, *outward*, *backward*, *forward*, and *situated within place*. Finally, we demonstrate how our inquiry process is used with two examples from our work.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY TERMS AND NARRATIVE INQUIRY SPACES

What are the terms for narrative inquiry? Readers familiar with the narrative literature might imagine an array of terms derived from modern and postmodern writing and from literature studies. So numerous are the terms that there is even a dictionary of narratology (Prince, 1987). Our terms emerge not from this literature but from our concern for experience and from our purpose—which is to think

through the doing of narrative inquiry. As discussed in earlier chapters, our terms for thinking about narrative inquiry are closely associated with Dewey's theory of experience, specifically with his notions of situation, continuity, and interaction. Our terms are not rigorous extrapolations of Deweyan theory. Indeed, a Dewey scholar might find much to criticize. Dewey's work on experience is our imaginative touchstone for reminding us that in our work, the answer to the question, Why narrative? is, Because experience. Dewey provides a frame for thinking of experience "beyond the black box," that is, beyond the notion of experience being irreducible so that one cannot peer into it. With Dewey, one can say more, experientially, than "because of her experience" when answering why a person does what she does.

With this sense of Dewey's foundational place in our thinking about narrative inquiry, our terms are *personal* and *social* (interaction); *past*, *present*, and *future* (continuity); combined with the notion of *place* (situation). This set of terms creates a metaphorical *three-dimensional narrative inquiry space*, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and the social along a second dimension, and place along a third. Using this set of terms, any particular inquiry is defined by this three-dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places.

Elsewhere (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994), we wrote about two of these dimensions, following Dewey's notion of interaction, by focusing on what we call four directions in any inquiry: *inward* and *outward*, *backward* and *forward*. By inward, we mean toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. By outward, we mean toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment. By backward and forward, we refer to temporality—past, present, and future. We wrote that *to experience an experience*—that is, to do research into an experience—is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way. Thus, when one is positioned on this two-dimensional space in any particular inquiry, one asks questions, collects field notes, derives interpretations, and writes a research text that addresses both personal and social issues by looking inward and outward, and addresses temporal issues by looking not only to the event but to its past and to its future.

In this earlier work, we included the dimension of place within the environment. We now believe it is preferable to see place as a third term, which attends to the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes.

A STORY OF WORKING IN A THREE-DIMENSIONAL NARRATIVE INQUIRY SPACE WITH MING FANG HE

Unbeknownst to either of them when Ming Fang He knocked on Michael's door and asked if she could be a member of his research team, she was beginning a doctoral journey that would carry them both back in time, her to her origins in precultural revolution times in China and Michael to growing up in a rural cattle-ranching community in western Canada where Long Him ran Long Him's General Store in the nearest two-store town. The ranching area had been settled primarily by British Isle immigrants, though by the time Michael attended the one-room country school, central Europeans were in evidence. Still, they all seemed and spoke like Michael and being a second-generation Canadian, he grew up in what now appears to him to have been a mostly homogeneous cultural community. Long Him was, to Michael's 1990s adult recollection, the only person who did not fit easily into the cultural landscape. Long Him could speak enough English just to conduct business. As a child, Michael accompanied his parents to town for bimonthly, sometimes weekly, shopping trips, and though his parents patronized the other store (the owners being longtime friends), they usually managed to visit Long Him's.

Thinking back, Michael knew almost nothing about Long Him, and his guess is neither did his parents. Michael had no sense of Long Him's being integrated into community life. When a traveling preacher started up a once-monthly Anglican church service, mostly everyone attended, but not Long Him. Michael does remember what seemed to him then to be an exotic story unfolding, as Long Him showed off a Chinese bride one Saturday. The arrival of this mysterious bride, who spoke no English, was explained by an equally mysterious "mail-order" process. She did not last through the first winter. Michael also recalls being fascinated by a chest-high water pipe that Long Him would smoke, especially if asked to do so by Michael's parents to please the

children. Michael recalls the store, full of dark, secret hiding places as a marvelous place for a favorite childhood game of hide-and-seek.

Meeting Ming Fang and working through her thesis led Michael to wonder where Long Him had come from. Moreover, his encounter with Ming Fang led Michael to wonder about himself, his family, and his community life and how his story of himself in relation to other cultures was shaped by family and community stories on the rural landscape. Long Him was no doubt dropped off at Lundbreck, as the railroad was built with stations every four miles. Canada was knit into a country by the railroad, a railroad built on the backs of labor brought from China.

Michael has begun to puzzle, now that Ming Fang has finished her thesis, over who she and he are, relative to Long Him. Long Him was, as far as Michael can remember, his first multicultural experience. In his memory, there were no others until he attended a residential high school, where members of the Peigan Indian reserve of the Blackfoot Nation attended. Ming Fang brought Michael back to these experiences, and only now is he beginning to puzzle over his own attitudes, sympathies, and outlooks toward people from other settings. Both Ming Fang and Michael journeyed back to their childhood beginnings through *her* inquiry. Her completed dissertation on who she is helped Michael start to wonder who he is in a multicultural world. But she too is faced with a new puzzle as Michael's stories of Long Him are brought forward, and Ming Fang wonders about the place of Chinese in Canada.

Ming Fang He is a mainland Chinese woman who went through the cultural revolution as a young girl, spent time on a reforming farm, received her bachelor's degree in China and her master's degrees in English and in linguistics at two different universities in Canada. She took out landed Canadian immigrant status and as her dissertation work began was a citizen of two countries. She and her women friends with similar backgrounds were deeply puzzled and confused over who they were. At the time her dissertation proposal took shape, this confusion was expressed as one of experiencing a variety of culture shocks. She found community and university support networks inadequate in helping her attain a strong sense of self. She partially supported herself by teaching English as a second language to immigrants, many of whom were Chinese. She found little to clarify her sense of dislocation in this teaching and in the literature supporting

it. This literature is essentially based on the notion of cultural adaptation through language acquisition. Her experience of Chinese and Canadian culture, and her movements back and forth between them, led her to think that much more was at stake than language and culture adaptation.

It was out of this cluster of experiences and considerations that she articulated her thesis proposal, which she ultimately conceptualized in her completed dissertation abstract as "a study of identity formation and cultural transformation of three Chinese women teachers as they moved back and forth between Chinese and Canadian cultures" (He, 1998). The thesis is an intensive study of the lives of three Chinese women, Shiao, Wei, and Ming Fang, tracing their lives from the late 1950s through a series of political and cultural upheavals in China, their move to Canada, and the further upheavals they experienced in living in Canada and in the study of higher education in Canada. Due in part to ongoing political sensitivities in China, and in part to the limitations of biography and autobiography, she created a method she calls *composite autobiography* to narrate each woman's identity formation and cultural transformation.

As Michael read and reread Ming Fang's, Shiao's, and Wei's stories of growing up in China, he came to understand something of how that time and place shaped their lives and the stories they tell of them. The more Ming Fang worked to understand the relationship between her memories of her life and the landscape on which the lives of the three Chinese women were played out, the more Michael realized how limited his knowing of Long Him was, and how what little he did know was milled by the peculiar cultural qualities of his childhood landscape. In her dissertation, Ming Fang traveled back to a place where her stories first unfolded. Though Michael too traveled back to a place where his stories first unfolded, he realized there was no Chinese place in his story of Long Him. Long Him was, in Michael's story, almost wholly constructed from Michael's experience of him as he appeared on Michael's rural Canadian landscape. Michael had a distant observer's stereotypical sense of China, in which his childhood stories of Long Him were embedded. Michael remembers two things in this regard. The first is his mother's admonition that they should clean off their plates because, she would say, "Think of the starving children in China," as if his eating were linked somehow to their starvation. The second thing he remembers is the entrancing thought that if he could

dig down far enough, he would come out in China. He has no remembered links of how these stories were connected in his mind to Long Him's experiences of growing up in China.

Ming Fang's narrative inquiry carries Michael to the place of these experiences. He is—through Ming Fang's thesis—a "world traveler" in Lugones's (1987) sense. It has taken a lifetime for him to even wonder about becoming a world traveler to Long Him's world. Ming Fang's long-ago China stories and present-day Canadian ones help us, as Blaise (1993) suggests, "live in their countries, speak their language, negotiate their streets on their buses and turn our keys in their locks" (p. 201).

THREE-DIMENSIONAL NARRATIVE INQUIRY SPACE

We earlier created a metaphor of a three-dimensional space, in which narrative inquirers would find themselves, using a set of terms that pointed them backward and forward, inward and outward, and located them in place. We saw these dimensions as directions or avenues to be pursued in a narrative inquiry. As we come to Ming Fang's and Michael's inquiries, we might think of these terms in several different ways.

In terms of the grand narrative, we might imagine the terms as an analytic frame for reducing the stories to a set of understandings. For instance, looking backward would be illustrated by Ming Fang's stories of the cultural revolution, and looking inward would be represented by her feelings of culture shock as she entered Canada and began her dissertation studies. If we persisted in developing the terms as an analytic frame, we might go on to state findings developed for each set. For example, at the intersection of place and time, we might claim that the China of Ming Fang's early life is a construction that now only exists in her remembered stories. At the intersection of looking inward and place, we might claim that Ming Fang experienced culture shock as she moved from one place, China, to another place, Canada. At the intersection of looking outward and place, we might claim that it was the difference between the two places that caused the culture shock.

To turn the use of the terms more toward their experiential origins, we could think of them not so much as generating a list of understandings achieved by analyzing the stories, but rather as pointing to

questions, puzzles, fieldwork, and field texts of different kinds appropriate to different aspects of the inquiry. Thus, we might see Ming Fang collecting memory records of the cultural revolution through conversations and interviews with her participants or, perhaps, reviewing posters, slogans, and news accounts of the era. As she focused on the personal, we might see how, perhaps through letters with her parents, she reconstructed a sense of how she felt about herself and her family during the cultural revolution. This use of the terms is how we develop the remainder of this chapter.

What is unsaid, a third use of the terms (and not possible to say with the stories so far presented), is the ambiguity, complexity, difficulty, and uncertainties associated with the doing of the inquiry. These doings, the "stuff" of narrative inquiry, can only be sensed and understood from a reading of the full-blown inquiry. Though we do not explore this complexity here, we will come back to it in these and other stories.

To return, then, to the second use, namely to the use of the terms to show how an inquiry is structured by the inquirer—that is, to see what the narrative inquirer does—we pick up on the temporal dimension. Ming Fang began, in her present time, with a feeling of culture shock. She described this feeling as personal, situated in the present time, and located in her Canadian place. She looked backward in time to her feelings in China. She remembered a calm, intellectual childhood interrupted by the turmoil of the cultural revolution. As she engaged in this process, she remembered not only the personal but also the intersection of the personal with the social. Her research text, minimally described above, constitutes a dual personal and social narration. Throughout her narrative inquiry, she remains in her Canadian place while traveling back in time and place, in memory, to a China that no longer exists. The three-dimensional space in which her research is situated creates an ongoing sense of dislocation as she moves from a remembered past in one place to a present moment in another, all the while imaginatively constructing an identity for the future.

To return to Michael's remembered stories of childhood, he realizes that the terms also structure his (unexpected) narrative inquiry. He began in the present time with his work with Ming Fang. In telling stories of Ming Fang to Jean, he moved to recollecting memories from his childhood, then to memories of the first Chinese Canadian, Long Him, he had ever met. In so doing, he moved backward in time and

place, composing new stories for his present time and place. Thus, Michael composed yet untold stories of visiting Long Him's store. But he also recollected stories his mother had told him. Both kinds of stories were lived in his childhood place and time. Both were told from his adult place and time, and in the bringing forward, both were placed alongside his present-day story of Ming Fang and her long-ago stories.

In composing Michael's stories of another place and time, he was called to consider how he felt. Here, he began an imaginative process based on faint memories of an environment—a dark store, a water pipe, a Chinese wife briefly seen. But as he located himself within the three-dimensional inquiry space as we wrote this research text, Michael began to awaken to how Long Him had “world traveled” to his place and to the significance of the fact that he had not “world traveled” to Long Him's Chinese place and to Long Him's inner conditions. Michael composed his relationship with Long Him from his place on the rural western landscape, from his child's time, with his child's feelings, all milled and crafted by the landscape of childhood. As Michael composes this research text, he sees new possibilities as he restories his knowing of Long Him, Ming Fang, and himself in relation to them. Being in this space is complex for the narrative inquirer because all of these matters are under consideration all of the time.

In this story, we play within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. Place shifts from Ming Fang's long-ago China to present-day Toronto, from Michael's long-ago western Canadian place shared with Long Him to Toronto. Time shifts from childhoods in western Canada and China to present days in Toronto. Inner and existential conditions for Michael as a child, for Ming Fang as a child, and for both of them as adults are recounted. Long Him remains as partial memory, as partial imaginative construction, a figure in Michael's puzzling over who Ming Fang and he are in this modern world broth of cultures and ideas. He wonders what Ming Fang's written words of living in between, and either belonging nowhere or belonging everywhere, might mean on the inside. He wonders at what Long Him made of his own life in the two-store ranching community town, and he wonders what his parents would think to hear their son, a generation later, question the community's sensitivity to people of other cultures. He can only imagine they would be shocked and offended because, as he remembers them, they were so conscientiously egalitarian.

In the next story, we play again within a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, but this time we locate the place within schools, as we move temporally backward and forward. We work again with field texts of memory relationships and field texts of research transcripts.

A STORY OF WORKING IN A THREE-DIMENSIONAL NARRATIVE INQUIRY SPACE WITH KAREN WHELAN

There are five people gathered at the table in the Centre on a cold, crisp, sunshine-filled day in winter. It is Saturday and the light filters in the window. The sky is an unbelievable blue but they hardly notice. This is one of their research Saturdays. Chuck and Annie have driven up from Calgary to meet with Janice, Karen, and Jean to talk about and share their research. The tape recorder hums softly in the middle of the table. They are intent on their conversation even though they have been sitting for several hours.

They are part of an ongoing research group—teachers, principals, and teacher educators—who are trying to understand their places on the professional knowledge landscapes on which they live. In what follows, Jean shares a fragment of the transcript made from that conversation (as picked up by the tape recorder), in which Karen Whelan speaks:

I think sometimes when you do feel strongly about things though, that marginalizes you. I can remember the first year with that principal. I just got red faced arguing with him over these report cards because he wanted every kid to be evaluated the same way. Like we're going to say that, you know, a kid in your class is operating at a grade-one level, and a kid is operating at a grade-three level in a grade-three classroom. We're going to evaluate them the same on the, we're going to, we're going to check off for the kid operating at a grade-one level always failure, failure, failure because they are not working at grade level, so they're always on the bottom, and I mean I can remember, I was in hysterics almost that he could even be thinking this way. How can you always mark a child as failing? And when I get upset about those things, I tend to get really passionate about them. Like I get tears in my eyes and I'm almost like incredulous, how can this be happening?
[group conversation, January 18, 1997]

The conversation goes on, as they weave their talk across their own childhood memories, their student stories of remembered classrooms, their teacher stories of remembered classrooms, their sharing of transcripts from ongoing research projects, one story calling up another from one or another of them, from their pasts, from the data they had collected. The tape recorder continues to record their talk, some of it memory relationships and some of it sharing of research field texts, such as school board documents and transcripts of research groups.

The day ends, transcripts are made, and some months later Jean is studying them. She studies them at her desk, reading and rereading them, stopping at this passage, for she is reminded of what she remembers thinking that day. She searches the transcript for it, but there is no record that she had spoken the words. She stops reading and begins to write. This is what she wrote:

In the midst of a project meeting discussing transcripts of conversations with participants and field notes of school classroom meetings, a story of my own long-ago surfaces in my mind. I remember a classroom of my childhood: the smell of floor wax, gestetner fluid, and wet woolen mittens and scarves. I remember the sounds of desks scraping on hard wood and her voice as she called out spelling words. The knot of anxiety clutches at my stomach, a feeling called forth by discussions of children's experiences of being graded on report cards in standardized ways. The smells, the sounds, the sights, the feelings create a picture and a story comes quickly to mind.

Jean is a child in the classroom, a classroom of the early 1950s in an old brick school situated in the small town to which she is bused each day. Donnie and Daryl, two big boys, ride on her school bus. They command respect on the school bus, and they always sit at the back of the bus. But when they come into the school, they come to Jean's grade-four classroom. And it is from within that classroom that she remembers the day of that spelling test.

As Jean sits at her university professor's desk, reading the transcript, she remembers herself as a child in that school, a child taking a test. She remembers a teacher standing tall in the center of the room, moving between the rows of desks. Is she marching? Do her high heels click on the floor? Does she stop at Jean's desk to observe her writing a word? Does she pause at Daryl's desk? Is Daryl really a bad boy? Does Donnie take the test? Does Jean remember that Donnie and Daryl are

fifteen and just putting in time in that grade-four classroom, waiting to turn sixteen so they can legally drop out of school? These wonders surface for Jean as she writes about the remembered day.

Still later, as we write this research text, we think about inquiry spaces. On that January day of the conversation, Karen took Jean and the others in the research group backward in time as she told her story. Karen described, from her vantage point of narrator, the conversation with her principal. She described herself as red faced, as hysterical. She felt passionate, she recalled, in the encounter. She described her talk with the principal, who wanted to have all students graded with reference to their grade level. She took the group back to that moment and pulled them forward into the future as she made the connection between that moment and how she now sees herself as marginalized on the landscape where standardized testing and grading is now the accepted story of school. She situated them in a place—a school in an urban center—where new policies on grading have come down the conduit, relaying from policy to principal, to Karen, as teacher.

Jean was, at first, a listener but Karen's story evoked a memory for her. She knows that she did not speak, for if she had, her words would have been captured in the transcribed conversation. It was only as she read the transcripts that she remembered that Karen's story had evoked a memory for her, which she had then written down. Jean recalled the long ago brought forward, first as a response to Karen's telling and subsequently by Jean's reading of the transcript.

Jean went backward to her long-ago classroom and forward to her present-day research and to questions of what it means to be a narrative inquirer on the professional knowledge landscape. All of this takes place within a place—her present-day place within a research university, where she does research and writes about her work with teachers, and her long-ago place, where she is a country child educated in a small-town school.

These are story fragments now stitched together in Jean's memory. When she was a child in that long-ago classroom, she was not a narrative inquirer. There was no intention to keep notes of those experiences. She now re-creates the narrative through memory relationships. From a temporal and spatial and bodily distance, she tells a story from the now: spinning a story of a teacher, of two boys, of a small girl, of a classroom. There are no field texts, no careful notes, no photographs, no transcribed conversations of the events in that classroom.

Our purpose in giving this example is to demonstrate the use of terms that structure our three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. We began in the present with a segment of transcript from an inquiry group meeting in which Karen describes a year-ago encounter with her principal. Karen's words take Jean further back along the temporal dimension to her own childhood. But as we slide backward and forward temporally, it is clear that we stay rooted in a place called school, a place where grading is practiced, and children's experiences are sorted according to those grades. We go inward to Karen's intense feelings and outward to the conversation with her principal, who is describing the mandated report cards and the grading system. Jean too goes inward to old feelings of anxiety produced by a spelling test and to stories of classmates who were visible evidence, to her child's-eye view, of what happens when tests are failed. What starts to become apparent as we work within our three-dimensional space is that as narrative inquirers we are not alone in this space. This space enfolds us and those with whom we work. Narrative inquiry is a relational inquiry as we work in the field, move from field to field text, and from field text to research text.

A REFLECTIVE NOTE

As we worked within our three-dimensional spaces as narrative inquirers, what became clear to us was that as inquirers we meet ourselves in the past, the present, and the future. What we mean by this is that we tell remembered stories of ourselves from earlier times as well as more current stories. All of these stories offer possible plotlines for our futures.

Telling stories of ourselves in the past leads to the possibility of retellings. We saw this in Michael's story in his relations with Ming Fang and Long Him. We saw it again in Jean's story with Karen and Jean's grade-four classroom. It is not only the participants' stories that are retold by a narrative inquirer. In our cases, it is also the inquirers' (Michael's and Jean's) stories that are open for inquiry and retelling.

As narrative inquirers, we share our writing on a work-in-progress basis with response communities. By this, we mean that we ask others to read our work and to respond in ways that help us see other meanings that might lead to further retelling. We shared this chapter and received, among the responses, some that were surprising to us,

especially with respect to Michael, Ming Fang, and Long Him's story. Among the responses was one that suggested that Michael was racist in his portrayal of Long Him. The response seemed to suggest that racism was apparent in the use of stereotypical language, such as water pipe, mail-order bride, and exotic. In this response, our language was taken as representative of our present-day tellers' point of view. We have reworked the text to strengthen the narrative links between then and now.

This response made us stop and wonder, for we had intentionally chosen the language to represent, as memory would have it, the attitudes at work in Michael's childhood landscape. As tellers of the story, we deliberately embedded what we realized were cultural stereotypes and insensitive attitudes available in his childhood landscape. We are now clearer in our thinking for having taken the response seriously. Why do we portray Michael's childhood as we do? Partly, we use the language we do to make it clear that these were our stories. We did live out what we now call cultural stereotypes. This telling of ourselves, this meeting of ourselves in the past through inquiry, makes clear that as inquirers we, too, are part of the parade. We have helped make the world in which we find ourselves. We are not merely objective inquirers, people on the high road, who study a world lesser in quality than our moral temperament would have it, people who study a world we did not help create. On the contrary, we are complicit in the world we study. Being in this world, we need to remake ourselves as well as offer up research understandings that could lead to a better world.

We could have left Michael's story out or glossed over what seemed less than proper in our current view of the world. We could have created a script that suggested Michael's first encounter with Chinese Canadians was with Ming Fang, a script that would have left him as a wise present-day inquirer without a humbling narrative past. His place in this unnarrated script is present-day Toronto, a city the United Nations calls the world's most multicultural city, a place from which Michael could readily claim unparalleled insight on cultural matters. But such a script removes Michael from the world, as if he were not also part of the phenomenon, as if he were not a person with narrative blinders like any other.

What this response has highlighted for us is that as narrative inquirers we work within the space not only with our participants but also with ourselves. Working in this space means that we become

visible with our own lived and told stories. Sometimes, this means that our own unnamed, perhaps secret, stories come to light as much as do those of our participants. This confronting of ourselves in our narrative past makes us vulnerable as inquirers because it makes secret stories public. In narrative inquiry, it is impossible (or if not impossible, then deliberately self-deceptive) as researcher to stay silent or to present a kind of perfect, idealized, inquiring, moralizing self.

CHAPTER FIVE

Being in the Field

Walking into the Midst of Stories

As we worked within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, we learned to see ourselves as always *in the midst*—located somewhere along the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social. But we see ourselves in the midst in another sense as well; that is, we see ourselves as in the middle of a nested set of stories—ours and theirs.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we take a look at several researchers' experiences in the midst. We examine the complexities they must negotiate. Specifically, we explore key areas that researchers must learn to work through in their fieldwork—negotiating relationships, negotiating purposes, negotiating transitions, and negotiating ways to be useful.

BEGINNING IN THE MIDST

As researchers, we come to each new inquiry field living our stories. Our participants also enter the inquiry field in the midst of living their