

Befriending a life myth through fairy story and unfolding

Finding myself from the inside out

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Illustrations by Simon Kneebone

A final project submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for recognition
as a Processwork Diplomate
from the Process Work Institute, Portland, Oregon
December 2019

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Abstract

This project is a deeply personal journey that has been a process of finding myself from the inside out. It is a dedication to unfolding life myth in the processwork paradigm and exploring how my unique myth has shaped who I am and the work I do in the world. In it I explore the basic patterns guiding my life and seek to understand how these have shaped me and my role as a facilitator. I use a fairy tale to communicate my story and then share insights and awareness I have gained that enable me to more consciously manifest more of my true nature, more of who I really am, and help me to reconnect with parts of myself I felt I'd lost. In embracing more of my parts, I believe I have strengthened my connection with the universe and its ability to move and guide me.

Keywords

Life myth; processwork; awareness; facilitation; fairy tale

Life is in motion, “becoming becoming.” The motions of life swirl inward to the creating of self and outward to the creating of the world. We turn inward to bring forth a self. Then the self extends outward, seeking others, joining together. Systems arise. Extension and desire organize into complex and meaningful forms.

Life takes form from such ceaseless motions. But the motions of life have direction. Life moves towards life. We seek for connection and restore the world to wholeness. Our seemingly separate lives become meaningful as we discover how necessary we are to each other. Meaning expands as we join life’s cohering motions. Meaning deepens as we move into the dance. (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1999, p. 88)

Owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is the bravest thing that we will ever do. (Brown, 2010, p. ix)

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this project to the memory of my parents, Marie and David, for who they were as people, and for all they have given me. I would not be who I am and have had the opportunities to continue to grow into more of who I can be without the foundation they gave me. For them, my love and gratitude.

This project would not have been possible without the incredible love, support and skills of my Study Committee: Susan Kocen and Jai Tomlin. Your excitement for this project was inspiring and made me believe that my story was worth telling and that I had something to offer. Thank you for all your guidance, for diving into the depths with me and for holding me so gently yet powerfully to my edges when I needed it most, and for staying the distance. You helped me to find more of myself than I knew existed. with me. You have my heartfelt thanks, deep appreciation and love. I could not have done this project without you.

Susan, I also want to acknowledge our deep and abiding friendship, built up over many years of study and supervision. Your insights into my process and embracing of my bendy, twisty, quirky style and process have been a balm to my soul. I feel seen, loved and valued by you. Thank you for co-creating magic as part of this project's process and for being the best Final Project Advisor I could ever have had!

My deep gratitude and heartfelt thanks to my therapists, Emetchi and Venetia Bouronikou. Your loving support helped me to stay close to my process, even in the most difficult times, and enabled me to find the freedom and joy in these

experiences. You helped me to grow and learn to love myself more wholeheartedly.

My heartfelt thanks to Howard Aaron and Kristin Konsterlie for giving me a home in Portland for months on end, for being so generous, supportive and fun, and for the wonderful times we spent together. Your friendship made the journey so much richer.

My thanks to Simon Kneebone for the wonderful illustrations in the fairy story. Your ability to bring my words to life in a drawing is a true gift.

My gratitude and thanks to Hellene Gronda for helping to set me off on this final project journey and for loving my ideas from the beginning.

To David Glazbrook, my partner in life and friend, words are inadequate to express the depth of gratitude and love I feel for you and all you have done to support me in this intense journey. Your patience, love and generosity have been incredible. You came up with the idea of the Witch of Bentness when I was stuck and the project felt impossible. I knew she was the piece of magic I was missing as soon as you suggested her. From then on, I knew the project was possible. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Finally, to Arny and Amy Mindell and all the awesome teachers who have worked so hard to create and bring Processwork and Worldwork into the world, thank you. You have given me a way of being in the world that helps me to try to be all of who I am and to bring this to the way that I live, work and play with others.

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Introduction

A call to action

There have been many times over the past few months when I thought: Why on earth am I doing this project? I must have been mad to think I could do this! I felt lost, full of doubt, and my inner critic was having a field day. I couldn't see my way forward and wondered if I would ever be able to make sense of what I was trying to write. How could this project be of any value to me, let alone to anybody else?

The most daunting aspect of this project is that it is about me. I share a deeply personal journey that has been a process of finding myself from the inside out. I explore and seek to understand who I am and how I want to be in the world and, in doing so, I make myself visible in ways I never dreamed of. I also stand up to a myriad of taboos and insecurities that have helped keep my story silent until now.

I am a white, cis-gendered, heterosexual woman living in Adelaide, South Australia. I have a great deal of rank and privilege in my life: I come from a middle-class family background, am well-educated and a university graduate. I have a loving partner and am loved by my family and close friends. Together with my partner, I own a house.

I also have a successful career as a facilitator. Facilitation *happened to me* about 30 years ago. I fell into it when I became the voluntary President of a Student Council at the university where I was studying horticulture. In turn I fell into it professionally when working for government in the Community Landcare Program, a farming and environmental initiative supporting farming families and communities to work together to address land degradation issues.

In this role I facilitated a diverse array of meetings, planning sessions and forums with departmental officers and community groups. With community leaders, I also co-designed and staged an annual community conference to support, educate and inspire people involved in Landcare from across the state. From there I moved into an organisational development role, with a focus on training government workers, leaders and managers. Having developed credibility as a facilitator, I was fortunate to facilitate a range of events with industry leaders and community members from agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, forestry and mining, as well as scientists, researchers, environmentalists and government representatives. Through all of these experiences I met many amazing and passionate people and learnt a lot about their hopes, fears, triumphs and struggles.

I love facilitation. I love the challenge of finding ways of engaging people in conversations that matter to them; conversations which enable all the different and often conflicting viewpoints and voices to be heard, so that there is the possibility of creating connection and shared understanding.

In 2008, my love for facilitation and a desire to build my skills through an immersion in processwork drew me to study the Masters in Conflict Facilitation and Organisation Change (MACF) at the Process Work Institute in Portland, Oregon. Undertaking this program was a dream come true. Amongst other things, I learned to hone my signal awareness to better follow an individual or group process, to understand new ways of working with conflict, and to develop the tools and skills to apply central processwork frameworks, such as the different levels of reality and

deep democracy, to my every day facilitation work. It was an amazing experience and a journey that deepened my experience of groups and organisations, and helped give me the confidence to leave government and set up my own consultancy practice as a facilitator.

Looking at me from the outside, many people probably see a capable, confident and successful woman with a credible professional reputation, who knows her own mind. At times I am these things. What isn't always so obvious is the uncertainty, self-doubt, insecurity and lack of self-esteem and self-confidence with which I have been grappling for many years. Commonly I feel like a fraud: where I have no idea what I'm doing and believe my skills are totally inadequate for the task.

In addition to these feelings of not being enough, an insight I had while undertaking my final project for the MACF program was that, as a facilitator, it is easy for me to hide myself in the stories and work of others. A measure of a facilitator's success is often about how invisible they are in enabling a group or individual to do their work. Trying to stay hidden is not new to me. I have spent most of my life keeping parts of myself hidden, in many ways from myself and certainly as much as possible from others. These are the places in me that are both sacred and sources of potential shame and humiliation. These are also the places where magic and unexpected skills exist.

In 2017, when deciding to do the Postgraduate Certificate in Advanced Process-Oriented Psychology (or AC, Advanced Certificate, for short), a key motivation was to give myself permission to dig deeper into my personal psychology, to explore

questions about who am I and what patterns or dynamics are part of what make me who I am and how I interact with the world.

I knew, deep down, I had developed strong facilitation muscles for working in what are generally fairly conventional contexts with different stakeholder groups. I feel proud of who I have become as a facilitator. However, as I continued developing my professional self, I had a growing sense that I still wasn't whole: it was as if I had left some important and valuable parts of myself behind. I felt an internal disconnection. I sensed there was more to me than 'the facilitator' and also more of me I could bring to my facilitation role.

I was clear the program was an opportunity to learn further skills, and also to do some deep and challenging personal development. I knew this would be tough. It would require going deeper into myself than ever before and grappling with long-term edges. But something in me yearned to know myself more completely and become more of who I can be in the world, despite all the inner criticism that was against this. It was going to require every ounce of determination and commitment and a lot of self-love and external love and support. It felt urgent; now or never.

As the title suggests, this project is a dedication to unfolding life myth in the processwork paradigm and exploring how my unique myth has shaped who I am and the work I do in the world. In February 2018 I was fortunate to attend Arny and Amy Mindell's seminar on the coast: *Why Were You Born?* In introducing the seminar topic Amy talked about how we all have basic patterns guiding our life and how these patterns of our true nature can help us manifest who we really are and not be so

afraid. Arny suggested that our lack of connection with our basic nature and patterns is one of the reasons why there are so many problems in the world. Although we sense our contact with the universe, we don't pay enough attention to this connection to something larger behind our lives which moves us. He commented that there isn't enough training being undertaken to help us to reconnect with these parts of ourselves and with the infinite universe. Arny voiced the need for all of us to become more in touch with our own basic nature and patterns if we are to ease the level of conflict in the world, and sustain our own wellbeing and capacity as facilitators in complex group situations.

I was profoundly moved by these ideas which awakened what felt like a latent or flickering inner call to action. This project offered me a unique opportunity to connect with and explore the basic patterns guiding my life and understand how these have shaped me and my role as a facilitator. I believed I would gain insights and awareness that could enable me to more consciously manifest more of my true nature, more of who I really am and help me to reconnect with those parts of myself I felt I'd lost. In embracing more of my parts, I hoped I would strengthen my connection with the universe and its ability to move and guide me.

In early conversations about my project with my Advisor, when I talked of the link between my life myth and the work I do, she added "and the work I don't do". I immediately thought about the things I would like to do in the world, but am afraid to do. This led me to a curiosity about the polarities in what I identify as doing in group work, and what also 'gets done' less consciously.

One of the parts of myself I keep hidden and secret is my love of fantasy literature. This genre transports me into a world of magic where the impossible becomes possible, where a part of me relaxes and feels completely seen and at home. It is a place where I feel like I belong and one of the ways in which I escape “reality” and balance out my worldly life. In keeping with my intention to explore how my connection to more secondary, less identified with worlds informs my path in life, I chose to write part of the body of this work in the style of a fairy tale.

Each fairy tale is a magic mirror which reflects some aspects of our inner world, and of the steps required by our evolution from immaturity to maturity. For those who immerse themselves in what the fairy tale has to communicate, it becomes a deep, quiet pool which at first seems to reflect only our own image; but behind it we soon discover the inner turmoils of our soul—its depth, and ways to gain peace within ourselves and with the world, which is the reward of our struggles. (Bettelheim, B. 1976, p. 309)

Research question and methodology

My study and explorations are based on the following key questions:

- What does my life myth tell me about who I am and my fundamental direction and patterning?
- How does my life myth help me understand my deepest edge to stepping fully into who I am and want to be?
- How might my exploration inform and be of value to others who want to find out what being themselves really means?

This project is both phenomenological and creative. It has been a process of heuristic inquiry to deepen my understanding of who I am through a personal exploration of my life myth and its relationship to who I am, including as a facilitator, and how I use (and don't use) my particular facilitation skills in the world.

Moustakas (1990) describes heuristic research as “a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience” (p. 9). The investigator is central to the inquiry as the source of the initial “data” is within them, it is a phenomenon with which they have had “a direct personal encounter” (p. 14), and the purpose of the study is to discover and elucidate the nature of this experience. Thus, as a result of the inquiry process, in the researcher’s search for meaning they find self-knowledge, awareness and an expanded sense of self, enabling their transformation.

This approach has been invaluable as I sought to use my life myth as the source of data, to reveal basic patterns guiding my life and, by examining these, discover insights into how have they have shaped me and are present in significant life events, my lineage and upbringing, relationship patterns, chronic body symptoms and addictive tendencies.

The research methodology resonated with what felt like my inner call to awareness, as Moustakas (1990) acknowledges that heuristic journeys begin with something that calls to us from within our life experience, “something to which I have associations and fleeting awarenesses but whose nature is largely unknown” (p. 13).

The process also spoke to a part of my deepest nature for, as Moustakas (1990) explains,

[it is] one that cannot be hurried or timed by the clock or calendar. It demands the total presence, honesty, maturity, and integrity of a researcher who not only strongly desires to know and understand but is willing to commit endless hours of sustained immersion and focused concentration on one central

question, to risk the opening of wounds and passionate concerns, and to undergo the personal transformation that exists as a possibility in every heuristic journey. (p. 14)

As I hope to share in the pages which follow, this process fits with the dynamics in my life myth and speaks of my relationship to time.

In the creative part of this project I offer a story in the style of a fairy tale as a way of sharing key aspects of my life in a more mythic, magical and, hopefully, accessible and entertaining format. This approach gave me permission to be playful with my lived experiences and enabled me to become more in touch and in tune with my deepest nature and my connection with the universe. It was a challenging and profoundly freeing process, but one I believe may be of value to others.

Chapter outline

In Chapter 1, I present a brief review of the literature on the things which have influenced me in undertaking this project. Chapter 2 is an autobiographical story, presented in the style of a fairy tale, which sets the scene for an exploration of my life myth. Chapter 3 describes the key energies and dynamics in my life myth as seen through my earliest childhood memory and explores how these play out in my professional life, in recurrent and long-term experiences, relationship patterns, chronic body symptoms and addictive tendencies. In Chapter 4, I summarise the outcomes of the project, the extent to which it achieved what it set out to do and how I have changed as a result. I also share some of what my future might hold.

Chapter 1: Literature review

As I look back, I realise I probably owe my career to not belonging. First as a child, then as a teenager, I found my primary coping mechanism for not belonging in studying people. I was a seeker of pattern and connection. I knew if I could recognise patterns in people's behaviours and connect those patterns to what people were feeling and doing, I could find my way. I used my pattern recognition skills to anticipate what people wanted, what they thought, or what they were doing. I learned how to say the right thing or show up the right way. I became an expert fitter-in, a chameleon. And a very lonely stranger to myself.

As time passed, I grew to know many of the people around me better than they knew themselves, but in that process, I lost me.
(Brown, 2017, p. 16)

When I read *Braving the Wilderness: The quest for true belonging and the courage to stand alone* this quote resonated strongly with me. As I entered into this project, seeking to find the parts of myself I felt I'd lost, Brené Brown has been one of the people who inspired me. As a researcher and author, Dr Brown has spent sixteen years studying courage, vulnerability, shame and empathy. She defines belonging as "the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us" (Brown, 2017, p. 31) and believes that it is "not something we achieve or accomplish with others; it's something we carry in our heart" (Brown, 2017, p.32).

Her work helped me to see that much of my unconscious behaviour was still caught in trying to fit in and gain approval rather than coming from a place of authenticity. Her writing connected with a growing awareness that I was afraid to let my true self be seen and known.

As Brown writes: “Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make every day. It’s about the choice to show up and be real. The choice to be honest. The choice to let our true selves be seen” (2010, p. 49). I knew it was time for me to choose. This project was the opportunity to let go of who I thought I was supposed to be and embrace who I am, imperfections and all.

As I wrote in the introduction, this was going to take courage. I have been developing self-awareness for many years and knew I was going to have to confront some aspects of myself I am less comfortable with and, at times, ashamed of. For Brown “[t]he foundation of courage is vulnerability—the ability to navigate uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure” (2017, p. 144). She also believes it is the “birthplace of love, joy, trust, intimacy... [it is] everything that brings meaning to our life” (Brown, 2017, p. 153).

In my life it is not uncommon for people to see me as courageous. However, I believe courage is a very subjective experience. What may look like courage to me, may not be experienced as courageous by someone else and vice versa. Yes, there are times when I have acted courageously. However, in undertaking this project, secretly I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to change. I wouldn’t be able to find a way to become more accepting of the parts of myself which, up until now, I had consciously or unconsciously wanted to hide.

Nonetheless, I also knew I was ready for this emotional and spiritual quest. I was willing to stand in the “wilderness—an untamed, unpredictable place of solitude and searching” (Brown, 2017, p. 36) and become that wilderness in order to live from my

wild heart. I was willing to own and engage with my vulnerability and not let my fear of the discomfort and pain I might experience keep me in a state of internal disconnection. I was willing to show up and be seen, to “dare greatly” (Brown, 2010, p. 16).

I also believed that my positive experiences of the therapeutic effects of processwork would continue because, as process oriented therapist Joe Goodbread (1997) writes “connecting people to parts of themselves of which they are unaware tends to make those parts less problematic” (p. 30).

So why study my life myth? How would this help me in my quest to become more whole?

In the processwork paradigm, a person’s life myth can be thought of as “the basic blueprint behind life’s meandering path” (Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 147). It was described by Jung as “a patterning for life-long personal development” in which childhood dreams reveal “an archetypal or mythic pattern for a person’s life” (Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 148).

In *The Leader’s 2nd Training: For Your Life and Our World*, Mindell (2019) develops this concept further suggesting our earliest childhood dreams or first memories are fundamental organising patterns that guide us throughout our lives. He proposes that our life myth can be found in recurrent and long-term experiences, relationship patterns, chronic body symptoms and addictive tendencies. Our myth also

encompasses “tendencies related to parents, ancestors, cultural context and historical background” (Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 148).

In her book, *Your Unique Facilitator Style*, Amy Mindell explains that, “we are born with these mythic patterns, and they are always in the background, *dreaming* us on our life paths; though, most often, without our awareness” (2019, p. 238). Life myths exist throughout our lives, and with awareness practice, “a person can work with a life myth consciously and creatively, instead of being unconsciously propelled by it” (Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 148).

Indeed, according to Goodbread (1997), one of the processwork practitioner’s tasks is to discover this pattern behind a client’s process, since “bringing a client into contact with the deeper, longer-range significance of his immediate process will also often have a therapeutic effect, and bring a stuck process once more into movement” (p. 31).

Given that processwork is an awareness paradigm, it is perhaps not surprising that the Mindell’s have devoted considerable time and energy to developing ways in which we can make these patterns in our life myth more conscious. This was the focus of their February 2018 seminar on the coast titled: *Why Were You Born?* which Mindell takes further in *The Leader’s 2nd Training: For Your Life and Our World* (2019).

A driver behind this invitation to become more conscious of our mythic patterning is a concern for our individual and collective health, whether this be physical, emotional,

psychological or spiritual. According to Mindell, the energies in our personal myths are life giving. He suggests that “[p]ersonal myths are ‘nuclear’ cores. Connect to that and you find the energy and passion of a lifetime. If you deny that core, you get depressed because of lack of energy” (Mindell, 2010, p. 176). He also suggests the power contained with this mythic energy can be both “amazingly creative or destructive” (Mindell, 2010, p. 176).

Mindell (2019) believes knowing who we are, understanding and being in touch with the most basic patterns guiding our life and why we are on this planet is an essential part of living a more authentic and leaderful life, which is needed if we are to help with the problems, issues and conflicts besetting individual and the world. He even asks us to consider the possibility that each of us is born to manifest our particular dream parts and powers, and their basic patterns.

Contained in our earliest childhood dream or memory are a dynamic of energies which reveal our mythic pattern. Often, we will experience one of these energies as negative, or more problematic, while we see another energy as positive. As Mindell (2019) acknowledges, it is natural for us to identify with only one part of our childhood dream or memory. However, the challenge is to get to know and befriend all of the parts or energies that our dream or memory contains. Our mythic pattern can then become a gift that the world needs us to live more consciously. By understanding and staying close to our larger dreaming pattern we have a map or pattern that can help us in our personal lives, in our relationships and in the work we do in the world. As Mindell writes: “You are not just an accident. There is an

apparent reason that you are here: to realise and use the power of your own specific pattern. The world needs your pattern” (Mindell, 2019, p. 230).

Mindell’s invitation to become more conscious of our deepest tendencies includes developing an awareness of the intelligence he calls “processmind” (2010). To comprehend the concept of our processmind, it is important, first, to understand that in the processwork paradigm there are three levels of awareness that we exist and function in.

The most familiar level is what we call *Consensus Reality*. This is the realm of our everyday lives and experience. It is where the ideas, attitudes, or activities which are more or less accepted or agreed upon by most people are regarded as normal or conventional. It is represented by mainstream views and societal norms and what is generally agreed upon as “real” (Diamond & Jones, 2004). *Consensus* reality includes data, facts, structures, goals, practices, finances, stakeholders and issues or problems that are openly discussed and needing attention.

The second level of awareness is referred to as *Dreamland*. This is the realm of less tangible, less visible, and subjective or dreamlike experiences that are not generally agreed upon as “real”, such as emotions, fantasies, projections, gossip, and other experiences which comprise our inner world. At this level of experience, dreams, dualities, double signals, disturbances and conflict occur.

Dreamland experiences can be found in stories, myths and history; in creative tensions and impulses, such as excitement, jealousy, and power struggles; in the

roles that people rarely identify with, but project outside themselves onto other people or groups; and in the problems or events that happen to an individual or group. As it is not a reality agreed upon by the majority, in processwork it is referred to as a non-consensus reality.

The third level of awareness is a sentient level processwork calls the *Essence*. This is the realm in which everything is interconnected and there is a sense of universal and undifferentiated oneness. It is a “sentient reality beneath the threshold of awareness, an unbroken wholeness out of which signals, dreams, and all other experiential phenomena arise” (Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 13). It is dreamlike, non-temporal, nonlocal, and permeates everything.

In the essence realm, disturbing polarities no longer exist, and things are only partially measurable and hard to articulate. This level of awareness can be found in moments of unity in a group and when roles, polarities and conflict disappear.

Once again, as the essence level is not a reality agreed upon by the majority, in processwork it is referred to as a non-consensus reality.

It is here, at the essence level, that we find the *processmind*. Mindell (2010) defines the processmind as the “palpable, intelligent, organising “force field” present behind our personal and large group processes and, like other deep quantum patterns, behind patterns of the universe” (p. xi). It is a nonlocal, invisible, dreaming intelligence behind all our experiences, present as the deepest part of ourselves, a wisdom that simply knows “now this” and “now that.”

According to Mindell (2010), the processmind influences our overall direction in life. While, at different times in our lives, we may follow many paths and be pulled in different and unpredictable directions, the processmind tends to pull us in a specific and predictable overarching direction in life which corresponds to our deepest self.

In my facilitation work, whether with groups or an individual, I can stay too long in my cognitive, rational brain, working with what processwork describes as the client's primary process. As Goodbread (1997) explains, "[the] primary experience is that which we embrace, to which we attend, and with which we identify" (p. 13). By practicing a process oriented approach, my aspiration is to be able to access more of my inner feeling awareness that connects with the dreamland and essence levels of reality, to the processmind that "dreams" me, to enable me to have greater fluidity in unfolding a client's secondary process. These secondary experiences are the parts of ourselves or a group's experience that we are reluctant to identify with and tend to disavow "as being foreign to some essential quality of our self-experience" (Goodbread, 1997, p. 13).

Exploring the energies in my life myth as I searched to reconnect with parts of myself that felt lost or less in my conscious awareness, I was also hoping to develop more fluidity in accessing the processmind. I had a sense that this background dreaming intelligence would be a necessary ally as I struggled with aspects of my less known identity or secondary process. As Mindell (2010) explains, aspects of the processmind include its compassion and embracing of our diversity.

It allows you to feel and appreciate two or more things at the same time, even if they are opposites. ... to know this profound truth and live it in the best

possible way, you need to be close to your processmind and not just your everyday self, which, as a part, is often in conflict with other parts. (p. 31)

Another fundamental and unique concept in the processwork paradigm is *deep democracy*, an attitude to diversity and levels of awareness “which respects all individuals, trends, and states of consciousness. It includes the awareness that ... everyone and every state of consciousness is needed to represent reality” (Schupbach, 2004, p. 4). In other words, both the measurable and non-measurable aspects of reality are equally valued and all parts of an individual are seen as equally important and inseparable from one another and provide access to a more complete and comprehensive picture of the whole person (Schupbach, 2004).

The perspective of deep democracy has relevance for my work in recognising and, where possible, embracing both the less welcomed parts in a group or client situation and personally in welcoming my own disavowed parts. To find *myself*, I needed to cultivate an attitude of deep democracy for all of who I am and not only those aspects of me with which I currently identified. Central to the processwork paradigm is its support of individual and group development and change by acknowledging, valuing and bringing into awareness those aspects of the nonconsensus worlds of dreaming and sentience that are typically marginalised, so parts and lived experiences can be seen that are normally hidden from view.

This attitude was going to be necessary as I began to attend to the more secondary aspects of my personal experience, where I would encounter what processwork calls the “edge”. This refers to the boundary between my primary and secondary identities, where the world that is embraced and understood ends and beyond which

are generally disavowed and often more difficult experiences which threaten the identity (Goodbread, 1997).

In her thesis, *Exploring the Concept and Experience of 'the Edge'* (2013), Hellene Gronda describes a common essence of personal edge work as “this sense of being challenged, sometimes to the very core of my being, ... an essential and inherent characteristic of the edge phenomenon” (p. 10).

In recent years, as he endeavours to make the facilitation of inner and outer conflict more fluid, Mindell (2017) has expanded processwork to include the idea that a person or group goes through *phases* of process, of which he names four, and is often in one particular phase at a given time. He explains that phase 1 is characterised by an attitude of “let’s be happy”, a state of primary process contentment, and a desire to avoid thinking about problems, tensions or conflict. In phase 2 we are in tension or conflict where there is an ‘other’, an opponent, a critic who is against our phase 1 state of mind. It is an interruption, a disturbance, a symptom or fight we are in where we are one sided and stuck. In phase 3, we access processmind states through deep innerwork exercises, and as we become closer to those levels of awareness find we are able to move beyond the desire only to fight and be disturbed, and can find the *other* in ourselves through the process of role switching and the flow between sides. Phase 4 takes us momentarily to the processmind state, and gives us an experience of detachment and being moved by the universe.

In undertaking this study, I was aware that I had moved out of phase 1 into phase 2, where I would grapple with more secondary and marginalised aspects of my identity and experience in the hope of moving into phase 3 and possibly even to phase 4 as I began to integrate these more newly conscious aspects of my process.

Lastly to my quest and my decision to present some of the body of my work in the style of a fairy tale. From the outset, as indicated in the introduction, there is something magical and mythical for me in the idea of working on my life myth. In imagining a way of capturing and sharing this feeling atmosphere in the presentation of my story, I could not escape my background love of magical stories and the fantasy genre. Despite never having written my own story, let alone a fairy tale, I was inspired to do so.

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell (1993) suggests that the role of mythology and the fairy tale is

to reveal the specific dangers and techniques of the dark interior way from tragedy to comedy. Hence the incidents are fantastic and “unreal”: they represent psychological, not physical, triumphs. Even when the legend is of an actual historical personage, the deeds of victory are rendered, not lifelike, but in dreamlike figurations. (p. 29)

He adds that the hero’s journey follows a pattern of “a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return” (Campbell, 1993, p. 35), during which obstacles are encountered and overcome and fantastic forces are sought and won.

A common theme in these mythical adventures is that these powers the hero is seeking are shown to have been within their heart the whole time and were waiting to be seen and brought to life (Campbell, 1993).

In *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling*, James Hillman (1996) echoes Mindell's ideas that each of us enters the world called into being for a reason. He captures this in his *acorn theory*, "which holds that each person bears a uniqueness that asks to be lived and that is already present before it can be lived" (p. 6).

Hillman goes on to suggest that

the soul of each of us is given a unique daimon before we are born, and it has selected an image or pattern that we live on earth. This soul-companion, the daimon, guides us here; in the process of arrival, however, we forget all that took place and believe we come empty into this world. The daimon remembers what is in your image and belongs to your pattern, and therefore your daimon is the carrier of your destiny. (Hillman, 1996, p. 8)

The idea of having a unique daimon has been an important tool in creating my fairy tale. It has allowed me to create a magical character to represent one of the particular energies of my life myth and have her carry this directive role through the body of the story.

Hillman also suggests that myth has a liberating psychological function. He proposes that

[t]he myth leads also to practical moves. The most practical is to entertain the ideas implied by the myth in viewing your biography—ideas of calling, of soul, of daimon, of fate, of necessity... Then, the myth implies, we must attend very carefully to childhood to catch early glimpses of the daimon in action, to grasp its intentions and not block its way. The rest of the practical implications

swiftly unfold: (a) Recognize the call as a prime fact of human existence; (b) align life with it; (c) find the common sense to realize that accidents, including the heartache and the natural shocks the flesh is heir to, belong to the pattern of the image, are necessary to it, and help fulfil it. (Hillman, 1996, p. 8)

Psychologist Bruno Bettelheim writes, in his book *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1976) that, “[i]f we hope to live not just from moment to moment, but in true consciousness of our existence, then the greatest need and most difficult achievement is to find meaning in our lives” (p. 3).

In his work with children Bettelheim focused on the role that fairy tales could play in healthy childhood psychological development. He suggests that such stories convey important messages to children about the inevitability of encountering significant difficulties in life, that these are part of being human, and that by meeting and mastering these obstacles and trials it is possible to win through in the end (Bettelheim, 1976).

According to Nagy (1976), Bettelheim saw fairy tales as giving expression to inner processes, making them comprehensible and so easing the integration of aspects of a maturing personality.

Bettelheim (1976) explains that a feature of fairy tales is to state “an existential dilemma briefly and pointedly” (p. 8), without unnecessary complexity so it is accessible to the child. These stories require simple plots, clearly depicted and typical characters, and the elimination of all but the most important details.

With these thoughts in mind, I now turn to the fairy tale.

Chapter 2: A fairy story

Once upon a time in a land far away a baby girl was born. Her name was Bec. Unbeknownst to her, she lived in a land where every new-born child was allocated their own witch or wizard. As luck would have it, at birth she was given the Witch of Bentness a creature whose magic was to cast her wonky spell over Bec any time things became too ordinary or straight. So, it seemed, her fate was sealed. For, any time she was too straight, her daemon witch's enchantment would make sure to see her twist and bend and curl.

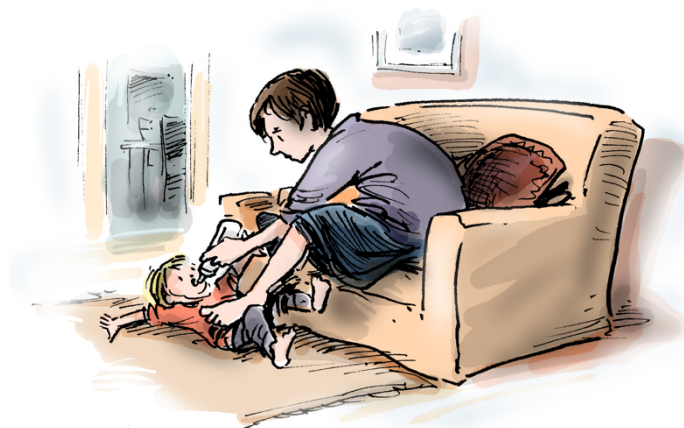


Bec was born to Queen Inconsistent and King Happy Family. Queen Inconsistent was named so for her unpredictable and narcissistic temperament. King Happy Family was dedicated to this ideal of his, but blind to the many instances where his dream was un-lived.

There was an older brother Prince Near Perfect who was almost everything a mother could want: he looked like his mother, was happy, fed easily and slept well unlike Bec, who resembled her father more than her mother (not a good thing), and didn't take to breast feeding or being bottle fed. To add to the queen's infuriation small Bec did not like being picked up and held! So much so that she'd wriggle and arch her

back trying to escape from whoever was holding her; her ally of Witchy Bentness appearing through her zigzags and curves.

Movement was in Bec's nature: climbing up on things or swinging off things it didn't matter as long as she was free to be in her own world. This didn't go down well with Queen Inconsistent—who though fickle herself demanded obedience from others—particularly when it came to feeding time. Although tiny, Bec was strong and one day things came to a head. As her mother tried to feed her, Bec bent and arched and wriggled her body so much that Queen Inconsistent put her on the floor, placed her foot on Bec's chest and tried to keep her still long enough to get a bottle of milk into her mouth!



This encounter with her mother's foot, this attempt to straighten her spirit of bentness, became imprinted in Bec's body's earliest memory: the strength of the wiggle and the weight of the foot would become part of her life's pattern. It was also the first time she was forced to straighten when she didn't want to; she wasn't going to win this particular battle of the wills. The Witch of Bentness's spell had met a worthy opponent.

It didn't dawn on Queen Inconsistent that Bec might not want to be fed. With Mr and Mrs Nosy next door there was no way Queen Inconsistent was going to risk any of her children going hungry or looking malnourished. Queen Inconsistent may not have wanted children, but she was damn sure, now she had them, that they were going to be as polite and well-behaved and clever as she could make them. Yes, she'd show Mr and Mrs Nosy and the rest of those royal society onlookers that just because she was an artist (as well as a queen), and had an inherently wild nature, it didn't mean she couldn't produce the best children in the kingdom!

Secretly, Queen Inconsistent longed to escape to her garret tucked away at the top of the castle. Here she could lose herself in colours and textures as she mixed her glorious array of paints and potions to create magical things that made her heart sing. She could transport herself into another world, shutting the door on responsibility and the judgemental, prying noses of those straight-as-an-arrow busy-bodies.

Meanwhile, for King Happy Family, life was sunny as long as his adored wife was happy. He loved his children, but the Queen came first. Deep down away from his worldly duties, he too had a wild side, a passionate nature and an inclination for adventure and building magical machines to transport his family into unknown realms. If you couldn't find King Happy Family, and he wasn't busy healing his patients (he was a doctor as well as a king), he'd probably have snuck off to his workshop hidden in the basement of the castle to tinker away on his latest gadget, inventing the next wild journey, away from the straight and narrow that so many others in the kingdom followed.

From the moment Bec was born she was a spontaneous and exuberant child. This greatly disturbed Queen Inconsistent. No doubt troubled by her own hidden secrets, the queen once again tried to knock some of this unpredictable bentness out of her daughter in an effort to turn her into a good little girl.



She sought to curb her daughter's high energy and curious enthusiasm, as these were just far too much and bordered on wilful and excessive! Thanks to Queen Inconsistent's determined efforts Bec could be found on school mornings in clean clothes, with her hair in pigtails, her socks pulled up and a serious look on her face. On weekends however, Bec's hair flew free, her clothing never

matched, and her shoes were always scuffed.

Despite her bent ways, Bec tried very hard at school to stay on line, to learn and get things right. After all she was expected to be clever, and she was, but in the spiral ways of communication and feelings, coordination and exertion. Remembering facts and figures didn't come easily. She had a curly mind.



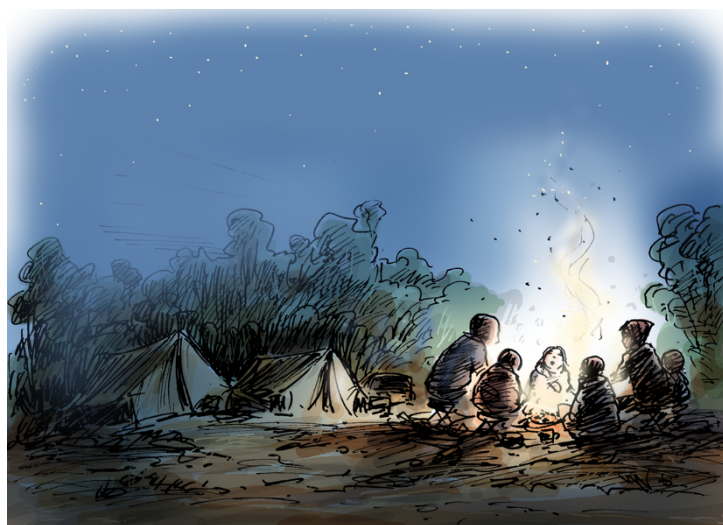
And although she didn't mind being in class, she was happiest in the playground, swinging as high as she could go or hanging upside down and gazing at the world through a different lens. The Witch of Bentness lived in and through Bec's joy.

Growing up in the castle wasn't always easy either, and Bec's childhood was a mix of experiences. As her name suggests, the Queen was inconsistent: sometimes she was imaginative and fun, reading her children wonderful stories full of wickedly naughty characters and creating playful and artistic cards for their occasional birthday parties. At other times she was distant and unkind. On one occasion, when Bec was very young, Queen Inconsistent noticed something strange with her daughter's eyes: one eye seemed to wander off without the other one, it was literally "out of line"! Bec hadn't noticed, happy as she was in her wiggling, bendy worlds. Horrified that Bec had been born with a 'lazy' eye, Queen Inconsistent quickly fixed that with a trip to the eye doctor. Bec was made to wear a patch at home over her 'good' eye which made it harder to see. It was a difficult and unhappy time and the experience left Bec feeling very small and 'wrong'; yet another example of the presence of the Witch of Bentness.

Another not-so-happy time was when Bec cooked her first meal for the whole family. She thought if she could cook she'd please her mother and make her proud. However, Queen Inconsistent couldn't bear to watch her daughter's muddled way of doing things, so she gave Bec a children's cookbook and left her alone in the kitchen to get on with it. Bec cooked a delicious quiche for lunch which the family ate with gusto and, though praised for her efforts, Queen Inconsistent couldn't refrain from complaining about how long it took or that Bec had needed to 'use every dish in the

castle'! Her mother's displeasure and unkindness were hurtful. The Witch looked on, proud of her protegee and wondering how best to serve Bec in this world.

King Happy Family was usually so busy with his doctoring or kingly duties or tinkering in his workshop that he was oblivious to his wife's erratic behaviour. Queen Inconsistent was a bit kinder when the King was around. This was particularly true when the family went camping. King Happy Family built a magical camping trailer for the family to take on holidays into different and secluded parts of the realm. Here, away from the prying eyes of society onlookers, the whole family were free to follow their true natures, their own particular form of twisting and spiralling, meandering and dreaming. They were relieved of their everyday selves and responsibilities, free to follow spirit and path, unhindered by map or task. Queen Inconsistent could paint to her heart's content and the children were left to themselves, free to be in nature, immerse themselves in books or dream or play. At night they'd pitch their tents and camp under the stars. These were marvellous and happy times for Bec and her family.



As she matured into a teenager, Bec's body changed and, as her Witch ally would have it, developed bends and curves of its own. She was also muscled and strong and still loved the feel of the earth under her feet and the joy of experiencing gravity and motion. Sadly though, even bodily curves weren't permitted in Bec's family and, as Queen Inconsistent's unhappiness increased, so too did her disapproval of Bec. She told her daughter she was fat, talked too loudly and walked too heavily. Bec grew to feel that she was always *too big* or *too much* in some way and never good enough in her mother's critical eyes. She tried to stay small and curb her boundless, spontaneous energy and enthusiasm, but she couldn't escape the Witch of Bentness's spell over her and, inevitably some of Bec's more inside out, upside down ways of doing things popped out for all to see.

However, something was shifting in Bec. One day, when Queen Inconsistent was in a particularly mean, angry mood she slapped her daughter's face and called her names for dropping clothing on the floor of her bedroom. Bec was shocked by this injustice: she always kept her room neat and that day had missed the pants on the floor. In the moment the Queen's hand hit her face, she knew deep down she was never going to let her mother do that to her again. Her Bendy Witch's force was stirring in a new, empowered and interesting way. The slap awoke a strength in her Bent self she hadn't known before. Something seemingly unbendy was saying "Enough!" Not for much longer would she be held to the narrows and straights of others; her nature was demanding she bend and twist, flow and surge as her life needed her to, and if that included pants on the floor, so it would be.

It wasn't long after this Bec discovered some new and strange powers of her own. On her way home after visiting another part of the realm, she came across a very large horny toad who barred her way, demanding to be kissed. Now kissing frogs is one thing, but toads are quite a different story and forceful toads even more worrying. Bec knew she was in danger. She didn't want to kiss this toad. Although he was big and scary and she was quaking in her boots, without thinking about what she was doing, Bec started talking to the toad. As she did so she began to bend; she angled and arched creating a field of communication the creature had not expected. She explained to the toad that she had been on long journey and was on her way home. She said she was tired and made it clear she wasn't going to kiss him. She flexed and leaned into her words, and against all her instincts to run or scream, she just kept on talking. Eventually the aggression and bluster went out of the toad, who shrank back to his usual size and said he was sorry for frightening her. Bec looked at the toad and said sternly: "just don't do that to anyone ever again, all right" and continued on her way back to the castle.

Instead of expressing any heartfelt concern for her daughter's wellbeing or praising Bec for her swift wisdom and clever easing of this dangerous scene, "the impertinent toad" was all Queen Inconsistent had to say and that as far as the queen was concerned was the end of the matter. But Bec knew it wasn't. She had seen with her own eyes something that was dangerous become transformed. In some mysterious way, the dangerous scene had changed shape by engaging with it in her own bendy, curvy, wriggling way. Although surprised by her magical powers, Bec had felt them clearly and she knew Queen Inconsistent could not be relied upon to know what curious talents her daughter had in her.

Then, when Bec was sixteen, her life took an unexpected turn. Queen Inconsistent came home from her travels to another part of the realm, bringing with her a group of artists and potion makers she'd met, who stayed at the castle for a few days.

Amongst them was a handsome, blond-haired, lean and muscled young man, Prince Truly Dreamy. When he and Bec met they fell madly in love. Bec found her heart was as bendy and flowing as was her spirit. Prince Truly Dreamy was magical to Bec. He was never still, never stagnant. He did gymnastics, raced fast on his bike, ice-skated, surfed, played guitar, loved music and the outdoors and had a car. His life in motion matched Bec's wiggles and spins, and he thought Bec was beautiful and clever too. They spent as much of their time together as they could.



For some reason, possibly because he was a very good artist as well as a Prince, Queen Inconsistent didn't try to stand in the way of Bec's relationship. However, it was a tricky time and Bec had to constantly navigate her mother's increasingly difficult mood swings. The Witch of Bentness had certainly cast a strong spell over Bec when she was born. Nothing in her life ever seemed simple or straight-forward. Her path of heart was always full of twists and turns and her path of action and of unfolding talent was guided by the curves and flow of nature, and the unknown. Bec

knew her heart sang when she was with her prince. She couldn't contain her deepest nature, but must tumble fast and exuberantly to love and to fly as she needed to fly. The path was never direct.

As a princess, Bec knew early her responsibility to the kingdom was a priority. Whatever gifts she had were to be used wisely and to serve all. After finishing school, she pursued studies in the healing arts at an academy away from her family and the known confines of the kingdom. Here she found a whole new world. It was an exciting time, meeting new people and enjoying the freedom and adventure of different activities at the academy.

Then, as she was about to turn eighteen Prince Truly Dreamy asked for Bec's hand in marriage. But the Witch of Bentness's spell came into play again and our fairy tale takes another turn. Although her Prince was almost everything Bec could want in the partner of her dreams, she felt too young to marry. To be wed was to straighten. To be wed was to take her from her wild and roller coaster path. She knew deep in her heart she wanted to see more of the world and experience other relationships. So, even though she knew her decision would hurt him, Bec declined Prince Truly Dreamy's proposal and they parted ways.

Eighteen turned out to be a time of significant bends and twists in Bec's life. Queen Inconsistent finally couldn't take being Queen anymore. She surrendered to her own wildness and spontaneity and ended her marriage with King Happy Family. She left the kingdom to live in wilderness and wild earth spots with a passionate and intrepid

cook, free to paint and mix potions unhindered by other's expectations of how she should behave and what she should do.

Queen Inconsistent's departure left the kingdom in a real mess. King Happy Family was devastated; he adored his wife and had tried to do everything in his power to keep her happy and at home. He couldn't bear such pain and sorrow and retreated far away into his own inner world beyond the reach of his sons and daughters. As King Happy Family spun into wild and distant states, Bec and her siblings were left holding things together and keeping him as steady as they could in his spins. Bec loved King Happy Family who was a kind and loving man. She couldn't let the kingdom flounder without him. So she grew up fast and helped to keep the kingdom running with one of her father's loyal knights. Bec used her bendy smarts to love and stay with her father through these times, both steadying him in his states and wiggling with him till he returned.

Eventually his love for his children and the demands from his kingdom brought King Happy Family back to his kingly responsibilities and healing duties, but life in the kingdom was never the same again for Bec and her siblings. The wilderness of nature was now a presence in the kingdom. Over the next few years, every once in a while, all King Happy Family's pain, unhappiness and longing for a loving partner would surface and he'd spin off into his wild states and inner worlds again. Bec, her siblings and the loyal knight would quietly keep the kingdom running until her father reappeared.

It wasn't only a difficult time, however. At twenty, Bec's desire to see the world saw her set off on a journey across a number of new and foreign kingdoms. She loved travelling and relished the colours, cultures and languages of these different lands. Away from home she could move and flow as she felt was her way. She met wonderful people, had many curly adventures and something freed and expanded inside her with the sense of being part of a much bigger, more diverse and nuanced world.

When she got home her Witch's enchantment saw Bec's direction change course once more. Her love of plants and relationship with nature led her an academy to study plant lore. For the first time in her life, she found learning came to her more easily. The plants and trees, microbes and fungi spoke to her in a language of flow and community, of entanglement and deep interaction. A language that she understood. She also discovered collaboration was in her blood and studied with friends throughout her time at the academy.

On the home front though, it was a troubled time. Bec's sister, Princess Wildly Mischievous had been bewitched by an evil sorcerer and was dabbling with dangerous potions and spells. Always someone who lived a life of experimentation and risk taking, the family tried to free her from the sorcerer's destructive influence. Alas, they couldn't succeed and tragedy struck. Princess Wildly Mischievous succumbed to a particularly nasty potion and died. With her death, Bec's heart broke at the loss of her sister and her cheeky zest for life.

The Witch of Bentness's spell was about to strike again when Bec unwittingly found herself involved in student politics. Frustrated with her studies, she'd gone to the academy's Student Guild to complain. Rather than solve her problems, Bec got a shock when the head of the Guild said, "What do expect us to do? You're the Princess, you do something about it, get involved!"

So she did.

Just like that, her big spirit and love of transformation was ignited. Driven by her passion for change, two years later Bec was made Head of the Guild. This role gave Bec great opportunities to work with all kinds of people. She learned people have different motivations and about the importance of valuing and appreciating everyone's efforts no matter how big or small. Wherever Bec went the influence of the Witch was there, allowing her to see from many angles and to witness many forms, shapes and directions. Bending and flow filled her world and paradoxically steadied her in her deepest and unique nature. The unpredictable became second nature, the invitation to conflict and possibilities for resolution was open.

At the academy Bec's met a tall, smart, handsome, charismatic dark-haired man, Prince I'm So Radical, and at last she thought he would be "the one" for her. They fell in love, married and moved to his castle far away across the border into a neighbouring principality.

In this new kingdom, Bec landed on her feet. She found herself a job working with villagers helping to nurture and farm the land. The job had a very strange title (her

Bendy Witch's spell had struck again): she was called a *facilitator*. Apparently, she learned, to facilitate is to make easy, to flow. At the time, Bec had no idea this natural tendency of hers had a name. Now, professionally she began her journey into a whole new realm on a path of heart that had been with her from the start.

In this new job Bec didn't have a recipe book to follow. All she had to work with were her magical powers of curiosity, empathy and understanding, a willingness to listen and her capacity to flow and bend with what was present. She was good at holding space, gathering information and, thanks to Queen Inconsistent, could pick up on non-verbal cues. She cared about the people she met and valued the importance of their stories. And she was by nature passionate about the alchemy and magical transformation that's possible when people are supported to work together to solve a village's problems.

However, just when things were going smoothly on the work front, the Witch had her way again. Prince I'm So Radical wasn't quite so radical after all. He was a little too upright, too straight and unexpectedly narrow. He also didn't share Bec's passion for her work with flow and change. Their relationship entered rocky ground and Bec became incredibly torn between her passion for her work and her love for her Prince. She couldn't see how she could have them both. Then one evening, standing on the balcony of the castle looking out at the sky and the land, a voice in her head said: there has to be a better way.

Even in her darkest moments, Bec had always felt connected to and held by an energy field far bigger than herself. Whether this was nature, Gaia, or Mother Earth

in all her glory she didn't know, but she knew it was a profound and special gift. Hearing the voice and its message, and acknowledging there had to be a better way, Bec knew something eternal was inviting her to become more of who she could be in the world and she realised it was time to seek help. The Witch of Bentness was oh so happy! Fortunately, by coincidence, or so Bec thought, she'd recently met the kingdom's Wise Oracle. Bec turned to this ancient, but sprightly sage, asking her for help in finding a better way to juggle her competing loves.

Sadly, just as she was settling into getting help from the Wise Oracle, Prince I'm So Radical leapt in another direction and ended the relationship. Life can be cruel sometimes and Bec was devastated. It was a painful time. Bec was far away from King Happy Family and her childhood home. She felt very lost and alone, but friends appeared with hearth and home, helping her to nurse her broken heart.

Despite her sorrow, Bec continued to visit the Wise Oracle and, with the help of this ancient, sprightly sage, followed her need to discover more about herself and her potential. Little did she know her life was to take another turn again, turns being Bec's almost favourite direction. The Wise Oracle told Bec of a special gathering in the kingdom of witches and wizards from far away realms. She told her it was written in the stars that Bec needed to go to this unlikely event. The Witch of Bentness laughed out loud and was so pleased she did a bendy, curly dance on the spot.

With the blessing of her sage and her pack on her back, Bec gathered her wits and off she went to immerse herself in the magical, alchemical world of Many States Many Flows. This new world became a doorway into places she could not have

imagined. It was as if this world spoke in a language Bec had always known, but never been able to access or free to speak. Many States Many Flows, an awareness paradigm, spoke to Bec's heart and bendy ways of seeing and doing things. For the first time in her life, she felt a sense of home and belonging. She no longer felt so alone. There were others like her who moved between straight and curve, structures and flow. All was welcomed. Her Bendy Witch was so relieved.

Bec was hooked. She wanted to know everything there was to know about Many States Many Flows. She knew this was the key to finding a better way of living her life, and doing her work and she wanted to be part of this world. So began a new life and quest; one based on developing awareness, welcoming disturbances, building her sense of self and studying the arts of flow and balance.

Although a practiced and skilled facilitator, the world of Many States Many Flows offered insights, frameworks and tools that matched Bec's lived experience and welcomed the Witch's presence. She finally had models and words to help convey her ideas and thinking in her work facilitating groups. Bit by bit, she began to more fully trust her deepest way of knowing. She began to appreciate the deep wisdom that she had known from earliest times, a wisdom that resided within her.

Recognizing her own, she could now see and feel something similar in all the individuals and groups she encountered in her work across the kingdom. She began to blossom and grow into her bigness and magical powers and her Bendy Witch was with her every step of the way.

Meanwhile, the fates and her Witch of Bentness had been brewing some spell for Bec's personal life too, and this had taken a turn for the better. She found a place to live in the castle of Prince Very Very Charming. They got along well together, sharing many interests and becoming firm friends. They liked each other's wild and curly ways. Each had their romantic pursuits, but over time realised their friendship had become a deeper love. On a summer night they became lovers yet, though exclusive, did not feel the need to get married. In a perfect, meandering way, they had grown together in a mythic dance of togetherness and not-so-togetherness, of shared entangled worlds and also independent, often bendy paths. No matter where they were or what they were doing, their joy, passion and love for each other was steady and sustained and nurtured them. And so, with Prince Very Very Charming's presence and support, Bec continued on her quest for greater awareness. Needless to say, the Witch of Bentness was over the moon that Bec had found love with someone equally bendy who encouraged her to follow her dreams.

Through her studies in Many States Many Flows, under the tutorage of some of the finest witches and wizards in the land, Bec realised that facilitation was a gift she was born to. Her childhood with King Happy Family, Queen Inconsistent, and her siblings, had been an early awareness training, and her years of practice had helped hone her skills. Bec was finally able to accept that with her wiggles and curves she had developed her gifts and now had quite impressive facilitation muscles. Her ability to take many sides, to hold and welcome many voices, to deepen what was present and to bring out what was mysterious, bendy and unexpected was appreciated and valued by the groups she found on her path.

You might think our fairy tale ends there, a happy ever after story, but just as she was appreciating her skills, it dawned on Bec that a new layer of determination and flow was revealing itself. She recognized that, now that she identified with it, facilitation was also a way of staying small and invisible. In fact, the better the facilitation, the more invisible she became. And Bec was ready to see herself and be seen by others. She didn't want to stay small anymore. She realised she yearned to live more of her wild, spontaneous, exuberant self; the bendy wriggler which Queen Inconsistent had tried so hard to squash. The only trouble was, Bec didn't really know how to reclaim these deeply buried parts of herself. Fortunately for Bec, her Bendy Witch did. The Witch knew, when Bec was free to bend, her straightness could shine. When Bec was straight, her bendiness would reappear and serve. She just needed Bec to see this in herself.

The Witch of Bentness was good friends with one of the greatest and wisest wizards in the land, Woof Woof. (Woof Woof's partner Curly was one of the most creative and magical witches in the land.) It was thanks to Woof Woof that the world of Many States Many Flows had come into being. But he and Curly never stopped imagining new ways of understanding Many States Many Flows. So, one winter, when Woof Woof and Curly were holding a gathering on the magical topic of our *life's calling and mythic pattern*, her Bendy Witch made sure Bec was there.

And what an incredible gathering it was. As Woof Woof and Curly talked about our life's calling and mythic pattern, Bec felt something waking deep inside her. She knew instantly that she had been called into being a facilitator by magical and powerful forces, but a mythic pattern was a whole other thing. Bursting with curiosity,

she had to find out more. So she dug and she delved, she experimented and explored and she realised her mythic pattern was made up of *both* her wild, wriggling, bendy self *and* her straight, determined, focused self. Both were needed, both were valuable and her whole life would be about the dance and the flow between the two.

As Bec understood this she was filled with joy and lightness and in that moment the Witch of Bentness appeared by Bec's side. She looked at Bec and Bec looked at her and, without the need for any words, Bec knew this Bendy Witch had been with her always, and always would be, for she was also her.

Filled with the awe of this realisation, suddenly Bec saw the witch begin to transform. She watched as a straightening-up appeared in her Witch's form and presentation. Bec watched, spellbound as the witch revealed with a smile, a courageous heart, a directness in her gaze and a purposefulness of her chin, her body elongated, spine erect and breath deepened and seeing it before her Bec laughed with joy. She saw instantly that there was also a much less bendy side to her wonderful, remarkable Witch. Another dimension to be revealed. Her witch had held the Bentness long enough, and now that Bec had embraced it fully in herself, the witch could become the next thing needed for Bec to learn and embody. It was a magical experience and Bec understood that this dance together would begin a new adventure, mysterious and at times unsettling. She knew she would never be quite the same again. And she knew that this was exactly what was meant to be.

Chapter 3: My life myth

In this chapter I describe how my earliest childhood memory contains key energies that form the main drama in life, my main challenge, my growing points. How these energies show up and interact is part of my unique nature, part of the signature of my life myth. So, what is my memory?

My earliest memory is a body experience. It comes from a family story about me as a very small baby. As indicated in the fairy tale, I was an extremely active baby who loved to move, but didn't much like being picked up and held. One day I was struggling so much as my mother tried to feed me, in her desperation, she put me on the floor and put her foot on my chest to pin me down and keep me still long enough to get a bottle of milk into my mouth. I can still feel the imprint of the foot on my chest.

This was a difficult experience for both me and my mother. When I work with this memory I feel the panic at being pinned down. I become breathless and my digestion is affected. As for my mother, there were a multitude of pressures she faced when I was a baby which led her to take such drastic action to feed me. I have a huge compassion for both of us and our experience. At the same time, what I find remarkable and exciting is how a dynamic of energies shows up in this earliest childhood event and also can be found in key events in my life, in my relationships, body symptoms and addictive tendencies. So, what are these key dynamics?

There are 2 significant energies in this childhood experience:

- 1) The foot—this is the pinning down energy

When I work with this energy, it is purposeful, determined, strong and immovable. It is going to hold the baby down and not let it move. It is going to feed the baby no matter what! It creates stillness and the constraint needed to get the job done.

Different images have come to me as I have worked with this energy. Sometimes I see images of a mountain and feel my stillness and immovability. At other times I see a sword and feel the energy of the blade that can cut through things with a purposeful and single-minded determination. I feel so focussed all else drops away.

- 2) The other energy is the baby—who is full of movement, wriggling and squirming, wanting to be free and to be away doing her own thing.

In working with this energy, I feel freedom and spontaneity which often conjures an image of a little girl spinning in the sunshine on warm sand. There is a joyfulness in being alive and the sense of a whole world out there waiting to be experienced. There are no constraints and anything feels possible.

One more important dream like aspect of this story is the mother and the milk—a third energy of caring, feeding and nurturing, a mothering that is trying to happen.

Mythic patterns

This project has been a journey of exploration as I have grappled with how these energies show up in my life. Through this process I am much more aware of some of the parts of me that manifest the energy of the free, spontaneous, wriggling child:

- I love movement, whether this is physical activity or psychological growth
- I am able to bend and twist and adapt to situations
- I love the awesomeness of nature and the world, and see this as invitation to exploration and adventure
- I am curious, playful and irreverent
- I don't really hear the word 'no', which feels like a form of being pinned down or constrained; instead hear 'not that way' and see the 'no' as an invitation to go around (or bend) to find another way
- I have a creative spirit and relish just "going for it," needing to dive into things by following my own particular inner direction
- I can find it hard to hold myself back when I am enthusiastic or excited by a conversation
- I have a need for time when I can be disengaged from relationships and the outside world and just be with myself
- I often struggle with being on time

As indicated in the fairy tale, at school I loved physical activity, whether this was playing hopscotch or 'elastics' (literally a jumping-in-and-out game over pieces of stretched elastic) or doing gymnastics or playing sport. Interestingly, although I loved team sport, I was always better at those activities which relied on my individual skills.

I suspect, in the latter, a bit of the 'foot' energy appeared in my desire to see how well I could do and the need for discipline and focus!

Another of my tendencies is to dive into things without thinking about them too much. I travelled overseas for six and a half months, when I was twenty. I went on my own and only booked my first night's accommodation. I wanted to be able to flow with whatever opportunities emerged, rather than adhering to a pre-determined plan or schedule. I didn't want to be pinned down by anybody else's needs or expectations. In travelling to different countries, I was 'moving' and my need for exploration and adventure was satisfied. I gained a sense of bigness of the world around me and the richness and depth of different cultures. It was a wonderful and formative time.

I have also become more aware of the parts of my life that manifest the foot:

- I am very determined and can be very purposeful and focussed
- I tend not to give up on things and have access to strong powers of concentration. Recently I realised this can manifest as a stubbornness to the point of being immovable!
- In my work I am steady and find it easy to slow processes down, to pin down roles and to frame what is taking place in groups I work with
- I can be direct, incisive and able to 'cut through' to the heart of what someone is saying
- I can be very engaged and present with people
- I can be very calm and steadying

As depicted in my fairy tale, some of the foot energy appeared in the incident with the horny toad, when I put my foot down and said 'no' to what was being asked of me. The foot was also present in the steadiness of my interaction, to not antagonise the toad or escalate the situation.

The foot was present in my decision not to marry Prince Truly Dreamy. While it had been the most amazing first love experience I knew with certainty I was not ready to settle down (an aspect of the free, wriggling child).

I also remember the implacability I felt when I was slapped by my mother and the sense of determination to not allow myself to be hit by her ever again. The steadying role I played with my father during the periods of his altered states is another aspect of the foot.

My continued commitment to my own growth and development also contains an aspect of the foot.

The nurturing one, the milk, the feeder is a deeper space that I give to myself—the time I take away from the world, away from relationship demands and consensus reality identity. The nurturing energy appears in my sinking into the altered states I find in my reading, and preferred genre of fantasy, the glass of wine, the inner focus and silence in yoga meditation, the mindless-ness of a game of solitaire.

My facilitation work and style

In my facilitation, I see the central energies of my life myth showing up in the flowing ways:

- My love of the potential of groups and their process and the wild organic nature of this
- My ability to pin a group down through structure and questioning
- My ability to hold down hot spots or cool spots
- My ability to notice and bring in flirts
- The deeper intention to 'feed' a group, to find what it is that will nourish their flow and process, the intention to provide to them what it is that will help them to grow.

In my facilitation I love the wildness of groups and their process, the possibility of what might be discovered. You never know exactly what's going to happen or what will emerge. You can prepare and plan and still there is always the unknown.

Working with every group is an adventure, an exploration into the mystery of the group, the field, the universe.

In my consultancy I am mostly employed by different levels of government to work with multiple stakeholders on issues which potentially impact them. Often these stakeholders have very different experiences and often competing views about how an issue or problem could be addressed. Government and community groups also employ me to help them with workshops to develop future plans and strategies.

Apart from Aboriginal participants, the majority of these clients and their stakeholder groups are white and come from more mainstream backgrounds and cultures.

An important aspect of my facilitation role is to support the client to become really clear about the outcome they want to achieve and their expectations of what they want to see happen. Through questioning and framing, a form of pinning down, I assist the client. I also bring structured questioning into my workshops or facilitation activities to enable the client's outcome to be achieved. All the questions I ask are a form of the foot, they shape what conversations take place.

At the same time, I use questions to enable participants to share and explore their views, perspectives, beliefs and emotions with each other. These conversations are the organic part of the process, where I am helping to unfold and deepen what the participants are saying. I notice flirts and take time with the group to delve into these. I watch for and hold down hot spots or cool spots.

Least named in my work in more mainstream situations is the need for what might be called the more intimate levels, the interpersonal relationships, the unspoken and unheard stories, they tend to be overlooked in the framing of the work that is being done, but repeatedly they appear in more personal interactions, perhaps away from the group, in breaks, off site, over coffee or a lunch, and hold central and vital information that moves things to their next place. This level does feel like a nurturing that is innate in me, a unique part of my style. It slips in, and is appreciated, and has a kind of effortlessness that also leaves me nourished by the process.

When I am at my best, I bring these three energies together. Then there is a dance or flow between the foot, holding and guiding and shaping the conversation and the adventure and exploration of what the participants are bringing into the field,

nourishing and inviting in the voices that need to be heard and are wanting to be known. My family background, where I needed to be able to sense my mother's moods, has also helped me develop good feedback awareness, a fundamental tool of processwork and facilitation, which helps me to flow with the unfolding process.

Parents and ancestors—my family lineage

Much in the fairy tale is true. My upbringing was a very mixed bag of experiences and emotions. I come from a privileged, white, middle-class family where education and academic achievement were important and wildness was secondary, 'it' *happened* but was never acknowledged or named. Wildness showed up in family holidays where we'd go off the beaten track and away from civilisation in a station wagon and home built camping trailer so mum could paint. It was present in my parents' sense of humour and love of the zany comedy such as the Marx Brothers and Jacques Tati. As I grew older, the wildness also appeared in addictive tendencies, when alcohol was a strong presence at meals times, and a spirited liveliness was allowed. This wildness took on a different character after my parents' divorce, when my mother married an alcoholic and struggled with her own addiction to alcohol. The wildness was also a role held by my sister, as she pursued her own experiences of altered states, and would devastatingly take things further than she intended, her death as I wrote in the fairy story was an irrecoverable loss for us all.

Growing up, the "foot" was constantly present in the pressure to be good, polite and well-behaved. Being smart and academic achievement were important and knowing facts and figures was valued more than intuition or expressing or showing emotions. As part of my parents' aesthetic, being fit and healthy, including not being

overweight, were important and the food was present in the vigilance about the food we ate. Fortunately, being a good cook was an aspect of my mother's creativity and our healthy meals included a wide variety of delicious vegetables.

My mother was one of the most creative, quickly intelligent people I have known. Both she and my father loved the beauty of nature and the Australian landscape in its myriad of forms. They had a shared aesthetic and I was privileged to grow up in houses that were rich in the colours of my mother's paintings and the comforting feel of treasured old wooden furniture sourced from second-hand shops during the early days of their marriage.

My mother was also a complex woman of many different parts. She was a well-intentioned, though inconsistent feminist. I remember one of her commitments to the cause was to make sure both my brothers could cook before they left home, so they could fend for themselves and wouldn't be a burden on any future partners, particularly if they happened to be women. She had a sense of style, poise and grace. She could also be irreverent and wickedly funny. Her tragedy was being born in to the wrong time. My parents married in the 1950s, a decade in Australia which was an era of the 'suburban dream' where the focus was on family values and having a house of one's own with the latest labour-saving appliances. It was also the decade which saw the introduction of 'pop' music and television. This brought with it a tension many women of her era found themselves in, exposed to freedoms they'd not had before, and the sense of being pulled toward ways of being they'd not seen previously in their experience as women.

At heart, my mother was a wild, passionate woman who felt caged in her marriage. She didn't want a sanitised suburban home and family; she wanted a life that was full of painting and adventure, surrounded by people who adored her. She loved us, her children, dearly and put her own needs aside for many years until, finally, she had to break free. For the last twenty years of her life, my mother lived in Coober Pedy, a small outback opal mining town literally in the wilderness, in the far north of South Australia, where she was at her happiest painting in the beautiful, ancient landscapes of the desert.

My relationship with my mother was difficult and there are tender places in me which still hurt. At the same time, I have so much of her in me. She taught me to love nature and cultural diversity. She was open to new things and loved adventure. She was incisive, didn't like being constrained and was determined and stubborn. I couldn't have written the fairy story without feeling her creativity and mischievous sense of humour inside me. She was inherently the free, spontaneous child, and she could be a powerful foot.

My father's story is from one perspective, a story of a man who, in spite of his difficult beginnings, rose to a level of professional, material and personal success both impressive and enviable. There is no doubt he had a good life. However, running through his early years were traumatic and painful experiences that I know he struggled with and, in this piece, are not my place to share. Suffice to say, he was one of the bravest men I know. Despite an horrific upbringing, he had a huge heart and a kind and generous spirit. He had his own bendy, twisty ways and these saw expression in a wonderfully adventurous spirit, home-built camping trailers, a

mischievous smile, and a magical mouse trick made with a handkerchief. He was a great story-teller and had a collection of humorous tales about the jobs he'd had during his university days. Over a glass of red wine, he'd say: "have I told you the one about...?" and, in our later years, we'd all groan a bit and then say, "go on Dad, tell us again". He was also one of the most determined and conscientious people I know.

Sometimes, however, he would be haunted by his past and his anxiety would manifest in a range of altered states. At these times he would let go of the tight psychological and emotional control he had over himself and out would come his wildness and spontaneity, all constraint and inhibition thrown to the wind.

My father was also the 'milk' in my life myth. He was consistently kind and loving, the carer and nurturer. He was totally committed to his family and took good care of us. I am so glad I have him in me and with me on my path.

I also have some strong mythic patterns from my grandparents. My grandmothers were extraordinary women, both pioneers in their time. My maternal grandmother was one of Australia's first women senators. One of my favourite stories about Gran is that she'd be home so late from her public office duties, she'd be in the kitchen preparing dinner, still in her hat and coat. The only thing she'd stopped to take off were her gloves. The double signal was that she was not landing at home, she was still out and about, wanting to be in one world and then having to place herself in the other. Although she loved her family, in a way it was a disturbance that meant she

had to come home. Her real work was to be fighting for social justice and strong community. She also could not bear the “foot” of compliancy and conformity.

My paternal grandmother was a more understated and unintentional activist.

Through impossible circumstances which she could no longer abide, in an ugly marriage she had to leave, she risked her name, her life, her freedom to change the legal interpretation of the divorce laws in Victoria, Australia. Having won her case in Victoria, she then had to withstand an attempt by my grandfather to have the court ruling overturned. This meant having to tolerate the scrutiny of intensely painful and humiliating aspects of her private life by members of the legal profession, from the Supreme Court of Victoria and then from the High Court of Australia, all of whom were men.

She was a university graduate, no mean achievement for a woman in the early 1900s. Having achieved her divorce, she picked herself up and made a successful career for herself as the secretary to the accountant of a major insurance company. Apparently when the accountant retired they offered her his job because they knew she had been doing all his work. She declined.

When I think of these two women and the energies in my life myth, they both had feet that pressed down on them to conform, and a mythic ability to apply pressure in their own unique ways. They were very determined feminist pioneers, and their commitment and courage and the paths they chose paved the way for women like me to have much more freedom and choice in my life. They fought to wriggle and

their efforts enabled me and many other Australian women to have more autonomy and room to wriggle than they ever had.

Relationship patterns

When it comes to relationship patterns, I have come to recognize that I am selective about who I spend time with. I don't like to be pinned down by social expectations that ask more of me than I want to give. I need freedom to follow myself and have a few close friends who know me well and accept me for who I am. I have a partner who also needs freedom to follow himself and is able to dance with my determined foot energy, particularly when we both want to go in different directions!

Body symptoms

In the spirit of myth and the courage to be transparent, when it comes to my body symptoms, these energies show up in the form of strong hot flushes which are like eruptions of spontaneous energy rising up through my body and out through the pores of my skin. They cannot, and will not be 'held down' no matter what I have tried! Sometimes these are so strong I experience a simultaneous sense of panic and breathlessness. I feel incredibly visible and exposed as I grow red in the face and neck and break out in a sweat. There is an energetic force that asks for attention, that disrupts my known identity, that makes me more open, seen, vulnerable—the essence of this project—to take the focus on myself.

I also experience different forms of skin disorders. One of the most disturbing is similar to a mild form of shingles, which manifests as a deep internal, non-localised ache in my left hip, followed by spontaneous eruptions on the surface of my skin.

Although more hidden because of its location on my hip, once again it is a process of being on skin level and of being seen by me and my partner. “I” don’t like it, it hurts, it looks weepy and ugly and at times is contagious. It is a part of myself, something less appealing, that is revealed and secondary to my known self.

Addictive tendencies

I love to play cards and do jigsaw puzzles on my computer as a way of relaxing, dropping out of consensus reality and letting go of the pressure of work. In addition to these empty-mind like activities, I love to read fantasy novels, which I could do for hours, days, who knows, even weeks. In these states of mind, I am uninterrupted. I don’t have to do any work or respond to anybody’s needs. I can just be with myself—entering other worlds, where I belong, where it is effortless, where I understand the clarity of the rules. In these worlds there are ethical ways of being, a respectfulness for nature, for other creatures—ideas beyond the homocentric universe—beyond the control of people, even if people are the main characters. One of my favourite authors writes of mythical animals and creatures whose magical powers are just as strong, if not stronger than any human character. There is an understanding of the sacredness of power and how power needs to be used, beyond the consensus reality of our current world. There is something in me, that would say, “if only we could live a bit more like this.” As I write, this it takes me back to my role as facilitator and that high dream deep in me that holds a potential for us to function in realms beyond what we think of as ‘reality’.

As my cohort knows, another of my addictive tendencies is my love of a glass of wine which helps to lift the ‘foot’ and allow my gregarious side to come out more.

With family and friends, when wine is in the field, I am freer to state my views, be playful, funny and witty, more likely to make fun of myself, and gently make fun of others. Sometimes, afterwards, I'm surprised that it was so much fun, and I was appreciated for my spiritedness, that I was so "out there", so free to reveal myself.

The alcohol allows me to move and flow in ways that the cultural and social foot which holds me in place stops me from doing. I am more transparent, more shared, open. I expose more of myself, my humour, my confidence, my joy!

Meeting these energies at my edges

While working on my childhood memory and the energies it contains has been challenging, and at times very painful, it has also been deeply satisfying. Ask anyone who knows me and they can tell you I'm a strong, independent person who can be purposeful and determined. I also love my freedom, am very curious, have a sense of adventure and possibility and know that my body needs movement. I can also be irreverent, playful and mischievous.

However, in this journey of discovery, I have become aware of the complexity of my relationship to the energies in my life myth. Some aspects of these energies are more known or more primary for me. These are the aspects with which I am more comfortable and more identified. Other aspects are less known or more secondary for me. These feel further away from my known identity and can disturb my every day sense of myself and it is in these places I find my edges.

My every day or primary self appears fairly ordinary and conventional. It is the part in me that is caring and engaged, strong and independent, purposeful and determined, the learner with a thirst for life. It is the professional facilitator who loves enabling groups to realise their goals and dreams and who has a passion for and success in training other facilitators. It is the householder who has stability and security and the partner who is clearly held in a sustained and cherished long-term relationship.

In many ways the energy of the foot is more of my primary style, the part of me that steadies, clarifies, and holds things down. As described previously, I use this consistently in my work.

An aspect of the foot which is more secondary to me is my edge to being pinned down that appears as the wriggler. I alluded to this in writing about the energies of my life myth in my relationship patterns. Particularly in groups, my primary style is one of engagement and caring. However, my secondary process is the part of me that wants to disengage and be in other states of being, typically less verbal, closer to my deeper nature, and dreaming. I realise one of the ways this secondary process can show up is in my struggle to be on time in groups. A timelessness that I sometimes get lost in—over-staying an appointment, staying late at work in the office because I have lost track of time in the quiet, uninterrupted spaces. I have an edge to being less engaged and caring of others and more engaged and caring of myself.

Another aspect of my primary process of caring is that I can be seen as too obliging in a group. People can take me for granted. My edge to taking care of myself means

it can also take me a while before I am ready to challenge people when they do something which I find disturbing or hurtful.

Other energies which are more secondary are the spontaneous wriggler and the nurturing milk. Over the life of this project I have become more conscious of the wriggle and how it *happens to me*, usually in the flow of my work. I am starting to be able to use this energy more consciously, particularly by paying more attention to the subtle wriggles of my body. I am also less comfortable about showing my playful side in public. I learnt early to be a very good girl, at the expense of my spontaneity and mischievousness, but there are times when this energy bubbles out of me. It happens to me as a secondary experience. One of the difficulties I face when working on this is the appearance of an aspect of my father as an edge figure. Sadly, because of his upbringing, my father tried to repress intuition and emotionality in favour of hard science. After all, he was trained as a doctor and relying on science is a crucial aspect of the work. As I was growing up, in offering my intuitive spontaneous views as part of conversations at the dinner table, I would be met with “show me your evidence for that.” My views commonly weren’t based on facts or data, but from an intuitive knowing and lived experience. To have my way of understanding and knowing be dismissed in such a way was a painful experience. I often silenced me. It was also difficult because, as an extroverted thinker, I sometimes need to think out loud in order to get to know my own thoughts and views. When these emerge, they are often almost as new to me as to the listener and I am usually not yet in position to be able to defend them. I still grapple with this powerful edge figure and work on picking up the energy of surety and confidence in my own unique style.

In exploring my life myth, I have come to realise how the energy of the milk, the nurturing one, the feeder is very secondary to me. I know this energy comes from a deep place inside me and is an innate part of my style, but my caring for a group is often unconscious and can leave me out of balance within myself. In working on this with my Advisor, I have come to see that nurturing happens without my intention or realisation. It is a 'parental' style, the one who will stay around at the end of a group to check in with everyone who lingers, before leaving the space. It is an interview I put thirty minutes aside for in preparing for a meeting, that becomes a two hour unfolding of a client's personal history and lived experiences. It is a collegiality of looking out for those I work alongside or have been employed by, knowing that if they are doing well, so too will I and thus the group or field in which we work. It is also a direction that I feel is my next step in my work in community—a deeper focus on these levels of our humanness, our environments, our communities and world.

Writing this paper, including the fairy tale, has been one of the hardest things I have done in my life. I would far rather facilitate a group of one hundred people than write about myself. I feel, by sharing my story, I am breaking every family taboo, as I shine a light on the hidden side of many of my life and my family's experiences, things my parents would think 'should stay private'. The aforementioned edge figure didn't help!

Reflections

In the process of undertaking this project, I began the fairy story by writing an extensive autobiographical piece, but knew it didn't have the magic I was seeking. Then I was stuck for weeks trying to create my characters. In desperation, I sought my partner's help and through our conversation he came up with the idea of the

Witch of Bentness. This figure immediately captured my imagination. I loved creating her as a character and she became the key to keeping fun and play in the story. She enabled me to bring the fairy tale into being and to keep my creative process alive.

This project has also been a journey of intense personal awareness as I worked with the energies in my life myth. I wrote the following after one such session.

Yesterday in a session I had one of those 'ah ha' moments. Like being struck by a bolt of lightning, I saw how a piece of what I have been projecting on to another is also me: at my core I go my own way and do my own thing regardless of what other people say or do or think. At my deepest level, I listen when I want to, act when I want to, speak when I want to and respond when I want to. And owning this behaviour is one of the hardest things I can do because it feels so arrogant and controlling: who am I to know stuff?! For years I have been kidding myself that I am easy going and go with the flow, but I realise I'm only these things if it's already the direction in which I want to be going!

Having this realisation was a shock, particularly the rawness and strength of the energy contained in the behaviour: the implacable determination; the complete surrender to an inner knowing or need or feeling that compels me to go in a particular direction or act in a particular way. Increasingly I am becoming aware of the strength of my beliefs and values and how they shape who I am and what I do, but it is more than this. It is like an inner calling in response to something I need to manifest in the world. I am shocked by the

degree of certainty in this knowing or direction, but when I am in it I am unstoppable.

On one hand, I am embarrassed to realise that this is a trait in me which has been obvious to others, particularly those close to me, and I have been blind to this aspect of my personal power. I have big edges to rigidity, being fixed, being opinionated and dogmatic, but there is something so unbelievably focussed in my approach. On the other, the challenge for me is to get to know this power more and become more conscious of what I am drawn to doing in the world using this power.

There is so much which goes along with this realisation. I can feel how I am the wriggling child who doesn't want to be pinned down to behave in a certain way, do a certain thing when it doesn't go along with where my focus is in the moment. I can also feel the foot energy that keeps me focussed on what I want to be doing and brings me determination, stubbornness, tenacity and immovability until I am ready to move.

A more familiar sense of myself is still uncomfortable with the extent of strength and power I have been given. It is no surprise these earliest dreams and memories are called Life Myths, for truly they are with us as constants, to be unfolded, explored and referred to over time. I have a big energy and was put down for this. I was told by family, by systems, by society that I was "too much" of many things. So being able to step into my full power, with awareness, to be consciously too much in the many layers and levels of this experience of too-muchness, this for me, as I write, is the

deepest understanding of my life path and the adventures I will meet. This too muchness will inform the challenges I will be faced with and the processes I will find myself in. The childhood myth encourages me to anticipate the next wave of its appearance, and the lessons it will bring with it.

Chapter 4: Why do this? Why go through this pain?

What cannot be talked about cannot be put to rest. And if it is not, the wounds will fester from generation to generation. (Bettelheim, 1984, p. 166)

As I wrote in the introduction, in addition to gaining more skills, I saw the Advanced Certificate program as an incredible opportunity to delve deeper into my personal psychology, to gain new insights about the patterns or dynamics which shape me and make me who I am and how I interact with the world. I was driven by a desire to connect my inner parts, to regain what I felt I lost as a child, the part which I had buried so much it was almost hidden from me and from others—the spontaneous, mischievous, irreverent, playful one who is free from restraint and responsibility. Something in me yearned to know myself more completely and become more of who I can be in the world.

I have a huge heart and an enormous capacity to love and I knew I needed to bring these hidden, less known aspects of myself into my conscious awareness so that I could love them too! I also wanted to help to heal the generational pain which is part of my family system.

On the surface of things, at a consensus reality level, my whiteness and my privileged background meant I could have got away with never working on myself my entire life. I could have stayed in what Arny Mindell calls Phase 1, just going along in my everyday life, thinking only about myself and trying to ignore any of my problems. (Mindell, 2017) However, even before I met processwork, something drew to me to

the world of self-development and awareness, moving towards disturbance rather than away from it.

Some signals were present early in my life which indicated that my path would be one of spiritual warriorship—the attitude of welcoming disturbances and conflict as potential for personal growth. For as long as I can remember, when things were really difficult growing up, I held on to a feeling that something bigger than me, some background energy or spirit of nature was holding me and looking after me. When I heard Arny speak about the processmind at different seminars and classes, the idea that there is an intelligent, organising field which pulls us in a particular overall direction in life resonated with me. That a deeper calling, some bigger background force field calls me to the work that I do in the world seemed to be a natural extension of my existing beliefs. It felt connected to the part of me which wanted to find a better, more conscious and sustainable way to live my life and balance my competing passions and interests.

I am clear that that I am called to facilitate and I want to be the best facilitator I can be. To achieve this, I need to be able to draw on and flow with all of who I am. This will be part of my life's work and this project has been one more step in this journey. By giving myself permission to explore ways of working with my life myth and study the basic patterns it reveals, I have gained a much deeper understanding of the interplay of energies and the ways in which they manifest in my life. I feel more aware of and in touch with my own basic patterning. This is a gift. Something sacred and precious, fun and ever changing.

However, the process of the project has taught me a great deal about myself too. As I have noted at different points in this paper, one of the roles of a facilitator is to be invisible, the focus is not on you, but on the client and their process. This has been very convenient for me. It has allowed me to kid myself that I can remain small and contain my big energy. It has allowed me to keep parts of myself hidden and private.

My partner reminded me of another experience I had growing up which fits with this. In my mother's attempt to keep us healthy and not overweight, we weren't allowed sweets at home except on special occasions. No cakes, biscuits or lollies for us, unless it was someone's birthday or similar. Our treats were an ice cream every now and then. In defiance of this regime, once we got to an age where we earned pocket money, my siblings and I would buy sweets and eat them on the way home from school. It was our custom to kiss my mother hello when we got home, whereupon she would smell sweets on our breath and sniff and say "been having sneakers have we," referring to the sneaked sweets we'd consumed.

"Having sneakers" was a way of breaking out of the good girl behaviour, it was a moment of wriggle and freedom from the tight constraint of my home life. What this story also helps to remind me, is how much of myself I contained and restrained and hid away because I felt so many parts of myself didn't fit the image or ideal of how I was supposed to be.

This project has been a hero's journey for me. I have shared more about myself in these pages than in the previous six decades of my life. However, just as the energies of my life myth might suggest, this has been an interesting, at times

exciting, and sometimes down right daunting ride. It has been an upside down, inside out and back to front process. I have wanted to wriggle out of it frequently, but the determined *foot* of intention and the trusting of process kept me steady. The project grew out of several months of personal work and supervision, mapping and working on the energies contained in my life myth. I then started writing the fairy tale, to portray a series of significant events in my life as a mythic quest and to set the scene for the discussion of my basic energies. My intent was to protect my family, while also wanting to find a way to capture the reader's imagination and invite them to think about their own life as a fairy tale.

Next, I began to articulate the dynamics within my life myth and, at the same time, tried to develop the literature review. Usually this component of a project exists to hold the body of the work. It provides a context and framing for the research being undertaken. However, every time I tried to write this section I became stuck and anxious. I had to put it to one side until the creative piece of the project was complete. I needed to be free and unconstrained, to find my story from the inside and bring it out into the world. The foot needed to be lifted to allow the fairy story out, then replaced to bring structure to form.

The process of this project has been one of flow. There have been moments of being pinned down that then enabled me to be free again and vice versa. In a way, I have been pinning down the energies in my childhood memory to be able to flow with them more into my every day awareness. This has helped me to become more comfortable with a natural flow that I had not fully recognised. My need to move between my focused, knuckling down, determined energies, which keep me

productive in my worldly identity, and the so-called distraction of playing cards and doing jigsaw puzzles, or reading fantasy novels until late in the night, which sustains my need for detachment and freedom.

Creating the Witch of Bentness was the turning point in this project for me. Until she appeared I was fighting my own creative process frustrated by my inability to do a project “normally” like everyone else. The Bendy Witch felt magical to me and became the vehicle through which I could channel my imagination and sense of fun. Every time I got stuck I would step into her character and think how can I be curlier and more bendy here?

Finding the Witch of Bentness has been liberating for me in other ways which I still struggle to articulate. She represents an aspect of the mother I never had but longed for. Her essence is love, her process is to remind me to bend and follow the twists and curls that are so important to the way I move in and through my life. And she does this with a wild and quirky humour that makes me smile and laugh out loud. I need this light-hearted playful side to balance out my serious directness.

She represents something else. Something at the core of my way of being. As the processwork paradigm explains there are always levels of experience that are asking to be unfolded. Toward the end of this project, I encountered some particularly difficult edges which I felt unable to tackle on my own. Although I wanted to reach out for help, I felt torn. A critical voice in my head said “everyone else can do their project on their own.” “You’re pathetic, no one else needs this amount of support.” In the end, despite my feelings of inadequacy I sought the help of my Study Committee.

What I realise, in reflecting on these experiences at the edge, was the number of times during the project when I felt I was back in the kitchen as a young girl, trying to cook something, but this time I didn't even have a cookbook. I felt like I was on my own. However, where I thought I would be alone in creating this project, the dreaming was to find myself accompanied, as the witch did in the story, and guided closely, every step of the way by two amazing spirits. Individually and together they filled the missing role in my childhood of a loving, kind and generous encourager and supporter who would hold my hand and walk with me until I found a way through my difficulties and could continue on my own again. They met me fully in my vulnerability and times of need. They believed in me and my process which allowed the "baby" in me to be held and I am changed by this experience.

In being a personal exploration, this project has inherent limitations. I have not tested the potential use of fairy tales as a mechanism for exploring life myth energies and patterns in others, nor did I interview other people to gain their ideas and perspectives about such an approach. However, I am inspired by the power in the Witch of Bentness to bring an aspect of my energies to life and, following this project, am keen to work with others to see if creating their own unique Witch or Wizard or other fairy tale creature is useful in bringing their mythic energies to life. Given the broad appeal of stories as a way to access our more secondary parts, creating fairy tale characters may prove useful in supporting more mainstream clients to explore their energetic tendencies without them needing to have any experience or understanding of processwork. Nonetheless, my ideas and approach remain untested beyond my own experience and are an area for future research.

Conclusion

I have grown through the process of this project. I have surprised myself by being able to produce the fairy tale and am delighted to have found a way to reconnect with the spontaneous, mischievous, irreverent, playful part of myself. This experience will stay with me and the Witch of Bentness will remind me to bend and twist and curl when I am becoming too fixed and constrained by consensus reality.

In *The Leader's 2nd Training: For Your Life and Our World*, Arny Mindell invites us to keep asking ourselves, "Why was I born?" because knowing this will help us to come closer our own sense of life and our work in the world. This project has been an attempt to do just that. It has taken courage to dare to believe that my story is worth telling and that it may help others and it has been liberating and energising. It also gives me the courage to want to work with others in exploring their personal mysteries, their mythic beings.

I sincerely believe one of the ways in which we can help to heal the world is by sharing and listening to each other's stories. In everybody there is an amazing story waiting to be told, if only we can take the time to listen and engage with each other. The moment we connect in this way and find the humanity in each other something shifts in us and in the field. We become closer to oneness, our shared common field and our processmind.

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