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By

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PAINT/WRITE: A HEURISTIC JOURNEY

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND
ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

BY

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DEDICATION

For Isabella and Madeline.

I love you both to the moon and stars and back, forever and ever and ever!

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Abstract

Two research questions guided this research: (1) How does paint/write unfold in my personal experience? (2) How might extended interactions with paint/write influence my painting and writing abilities and therefore my identity as an artist and writer? Moustakas' (1990) heuristic research design was followed with data collection including freepaints, freewrites, reflective journaling, and ongoing literature searches.

Findings suggested that flow theory, active imagination, and transcendent function worked in concert to allow access to past memories and a wealth of writing inspiration while building self-efficacy in writing abilities. Growth in writing was shown through artifacts including authenticity through transparency of emotions, heightened awareness of surroundings and subsequent imagery through descriptive scenes and emotions, extensive poetic writings and metaphor. Development in painting abilities included use of light and shadow, perspective, and small effects such as use of borders and the blending of colors. The sum of these advancements led to a personal transformation, establishing an identity as an artist and as a writer.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Many life experiences have led me to this research. In this first chapter, I describe my initial engagement with the topic of my research, using a narrative style to describe the context including childhood events, general teaching observations, and graduate college courses that influenced my pedagogical beliefs and the beginning of my journey as a writer.

Background

Most of my life I have been driven by a desire to write…strings of words, short stories, poetry…something profound. Anne Lamott (1994) writes, "You are lucky to be one of those people who wishes to build sand castles with words, who is willing to create a place where your imagination can wander" (p. 231). As a small child, I wrote poetry about the people in my family (and subsequently sold the poetry to said family members for $1.00 each) and asked for a typewriter for Christmas. I will always remember that small burgundy and tan Brother typewriter. When it was plugged into the wall socket it gave off the most delicious hum…full of promise!

Now that I am a bit older, although I still had the desire to write, it seemed to have grown hard, in fact, most of the time it was like pulling teeth, extended hours spent in front of a computer or a blank sheet of paper starring off into the distance and hoping that words would surface. Every once in awhile, though, the thoughts flowed freely like a river onto the paper, and I reread them thinking…did that come from me? Other writers that I know call this "being in the zone."

Lamott (1994) suggests that the unconscious is key to reaching this "zone" in her book *Bird by Bird*. While discussing the importance of dialogue in character development, she says:

> My friend Carpenter talks about the unconscious as the cellar where the little boy sits who creates the characters, and he hands them up to you through the cellar door. He might as well be cutting out paper dolls. He's peaceful; he's just playing." She goes on to say, "You can't will yourself into being receptive to what the little boy has to offer, and you can't buy a key that will let you into the cellar. You have to relax…try to remember that to some extent, you're just the typist. A good typist listens (p. 72).

Indeed, the zone is a wonderful, miraculous place, but somewhat elusive. I often wondered what triggered entry into "the zone." How could I force myself to get there and write something?

In the summer of 2008 I enrolled in a class at the University of Oklahoma with Dr. Michael Angelotti entitled "Paint/Write." It sounded interesting, especially for a summer course where I could lose myself in the course content. It was in the Paint/Write course, that I first encountered ekphrasis. Ekphrasis is defined very simply in *Side by Side* by Jan Greenburg (2008) as poetry inspired by art. Dr. Angelotti took the process of ekphrasis a step further by encouraging the creation of "paints" (putting the paint on the paper in a freeform, expressive manner) then freewriting in response to one's own visual art creation. He calls this process paint/write. One former student described it in this way:

> We used freewrites (stream-of-consciousness writing) and freepaints (spontaneous, intuitive painting) to unleash our imaginations. We wrote, painted, swapped paintings and wrote poetic responses to each other's paintings, and exchanged poems and painted responses to each other's poetry. This process liberated me; splashing and dripping bright colors across the canvas freed my innate but dormant creative voice (Courtney-Smith & Angelotti, 2005, p. 56).

For the purpose of this research, I will use the terms "paint/write" and "ekphrasis" interchangeably to refer to the process described above.

During the Paint/Write course I was amazed to find that I could predictably put myself in "the zone" by painting. That is, when I allowed myself to openly create, it also translated to my writing. It seemed that there was some mysterious link between these two processes that resulted in a synergistic relationship, the painting feeding into the writing and the writing feeding into the painting. When I participated in ekphrastic experiences, I found myself losing track of time and the writing flowed onto the paper quite easily.

In *Writing Down the Bones*, Goldberg (1986) explains the power of freewrites saying, "First thoughts have tremendous energy. It is the way the mind first flashes on something" (p. 9). Freepaints are very similar to Goldberg's freewrites as they follow several of her instructions including keeping your hand moving; losing control; not thinking, not getting logical. In short, freepaints and freewrites allow us to play with creativity in both visual representations as well as linguistically.

The result of playing with visual art and writing resulted in increased awareness and creativity. After the first week of the course I wrote:

> During the first part of the week, it was as though a floodgate of creativity had opened. I really enjoyed playing with color combinations and brush effects. My writing began to open up as well. Interestingly, I noticed a similar effect of looking more closely at nature and the effects of light and shadow. This also happens when I am regularly writing. I begin to observe interactions between people and the quirks of being human.

I began to reflect on the connections between the painting process and the writing process. I saw this as an opportunity, not only to improve student writing, but to integrate the visual arts into schools more regularly. I imagined how I could pitch this idea in the Creative Experiences course I teach at a nearby university, encouraging future teachers to capitalize on the magic that happened when I put paint on paper then wrote about it. Each time I tried to approach the idea with my students, my colleagues, and area teachers I found that I did not understand the process enough to fully explain it. I found myself describing the paint/write interaction using terms such as "magic" and "it just flows." I needed to be able to formulate a coherent explanation, a description of this process and how it produces such powerful creative work.

The two questions that surfaced as I experienced paint/write then began to process the experience were:

- *How does paint/write unfold in my personal experience?*
- *How might extended interactions with paint/write influence my painting and writing abilities and therefore my identity as an artist and writer?*

Moustakas (1990) wrote of a search to know, to come to understand, a phenomena, and an inside out investigative methodology, which begins inside the primary investigator then the new understanding is applied to the outside world:

> Heuristic inquiry is a process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one's self and the world in which one lives. The heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social—and perhaps universal—significance (1990, p. 15).

After embracing the wonderings I had considered a personal puzzle, I determined that these questions would require an investment of extensive time immersed in the process of paint/write while journaling to further explain the creative relationships that occur. The primary goals of heuristic research methodology are insight into the nature and meaning of an experience (Moustakas, 1990) and exploration, discovery, self-transformation (Sela-Smith, 2002). Further, a heuristic study aids in uncovering meaning and knowledge deeply embedded within oneself through experience and understanding (Sela-Smith, 2002).

Purpose

The primary purpose of this study was to immerse myself in the paint/write process in order to examine and analyze the interactions between the two creative outlets and to discover the effects of devoting oneself to this process of writing and artistic creativity. I was able to concentrate my studies on the creative process and all the layers of experience inherent in this process as well as examining related literature

throughout the process of the research. By devoting myself to a heuristic process of studying this phenomenon, I was able to implement it more effectively in my own teaching. Further, the research enabled me to explain and justify the use of ekphrasis in professional development venues.

It is important to note that the focus of this study was on myself as a creator of art and writer. Although I teach a creative arts course at my university, it was my goal to provide an introspective, rich description that provides a depth of experience. Edward, Gilroy and Hartley (2002) point out the importance of this type of inward searching for knowledge and understanding in their book *Rethinking Teacher Education: Collaborative Responses to Uncertainty* saying, "Learning, therefore, is as much a question of personal transformation… as it is increased familiarity with scientific concepts of pedagogy and their relevance" (p. 107). Zehm (2011) further explains the importance of reflective writing practices, "Storytelling and writing is an alternative form of life history that can be used to assist prospective teachers in examining their own learning, beliefs and understandings of self" (p. 48). In the future, I hope to further this research by studying the classroom experiences of pre-service educators using paint/write techniques.

Significance of the Study

This study has enabled me to share a vision and a vehicle for creative arts education in an articulate, clear manner with current and future teachers. Ernest Boyer, of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1987) notes the importance of a creative arts education with three key points:

- Arts education helps children express feelings and ideas words cannot convey.

- In our current subject oriented system, students are not gaining a sense of wholeness, but through the language of the arts we can help integrate our splintered academic world.
- Arts education is necessary because the arts provide the child with a language that is universal.

Dr. Michael Angelotti further addresses the importance of arts integration in his article *Paint-Write: Art, Word, and Image in English Teaching and Learning* published on the University of Oklahoma website saying, "We English teachers are, perhaps, too focused on the words themselves, and the rules we have made to govern them, and not enough, perhaps, on the arts in their expression, and the wonder of the impressions they make on those who enter them."

Acknowledging the vast importance of an arts education, this study has enabled me to be a better teacher educator by offering me firsthand experience immersing myself in a creative process. According to Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987),

> A teacher who has never gone through the process of creating in a specific art material may never understand the particular type of thinking that is necessary to work with clay, paint, or whatever. This means that the teacher must have been truly involved in creating with materials, not in dealing with them in an abstract way by reading or mechanically carrying out some project. The material and the expression should be as one. (p. 62)

The significance of these words was clear. If I did not have personal, prolonged experience with the arts; I could not truly understand how my students, or their students for that matter, felt when they entered into the creative process. Indeed, self-

understanding and self-growth occur simultaneously in heuristic discovery. Through this heuristic journey, I have undergone a personal transformation, both as an educator of educators and as a creative being.

Further, I have built a personal identity within the arts and within authorship that has in effect begun an evolution of knowing. What I mean is that my ways of knowing my environments have changed and the perspectives through which I view my surroundings have been colored by this new identity I have draped upon my shoulders. I read books differently, studying the author's craft, noticing the use of metaphor and rich descriptions—the raw human condition present in the writing. I look at the visual world more closely, noting the shadows and light, the stark lines of iron bridges and the colorful graffiti bringing life to tired old trains. By undergoing this transformation, I am better able to guide my students along the path, showing them this new world that I see, and pulling them along with me into the world of authorship and artistry.

Chapter 2 - Methodology

This chapter details the general ideological framework of my dissertation. I describe the process of my research and explain the layout of coming chapters to aid readers in following the unfolding of my search to understand paint/write and the interaction of these two symbol systems in moving a writer and a creator of art forward in her craft.

Theoretical Lens: Postmodernism

Though I did not have a term to describe my theoretical lens for viewing education, creativity, and the teaching of writing at the onset of my graduate program, I have subsequently come to understand that I view education through a postmodernists' mindset. Postmodern thought shifts from *the* truth, *the* identity, and *the* knowledge toward *a* truth, *an* identity, and *a* knowledge (Linn, 1996). All knowledge is subject to multiple ways of knowing as interpreted by individuals whose lived experiences color their understandings of the world. Specifically, I believe that this especially applies to learning and creativity as I have observed it to be highly individualized in myself, in pre-service teachers, and in children. As an educator, I continually see the value in recognizing the story of the culture and community of each student, the learning style of that student, and customizing my teaching approach to help engage each child in the wonders of writing.

Further, I apply this postmodernist approach to art, wherein the process of art-making and the thought that takes place during and after the creation of art matters more than the final product (Linn, 1996). In my case, the art is often interpreted within personal, social, and biographical contexts. As images spoke to my subconscious and

text was composed, more of my own identity was revealed than I had ever anticipated. As a result, I came to understand the importance of the researcher's openness to incorporating some measure of personal narrative into qualitative inquiry.

I do not expect that this study is generalizable to every individual who immerses herself in paint/write for a period of time, nor do I believe that it must be generalizable to be valid or useful as a scholarly work. The story I have sought to tell is one of self-reflection and searching for truth and meaning, a story of transformation and building identity. It is what I believe to be the very core of research in education.

My research is based on these concepts:

1. Identity is a key educational element. Specifically, in this research project, identity is significant as it pertains to my own emergent views of myself as an artist and writer.
2. Painting and writing are semiotic texts. Visual art holds and constructs information and knowledge that can greatly enrich understanding of meaning construction.
3. The format of a study should reflect the researcher's purpose and individual identity.

By weaving sequences of paintings, creative writing, reflective journal entries, and theoretical text, I have represented the process of my research. The effects and influences of paint/write in reshaping my identity, writing experience, art and text products are discussed throughout Chapters 3 and 4. In Chapter 5, I will reflect on how this research has informed my life as a reader, writer, and a creator of art, my pedagogy, and how it will inform my future research.

Heuristic Inquiry

According to Moustakas (1990), heuristic inquiry honors both the researcher's lived experience and insights (intuition and tacit knowledge). It is "a search for the discovery of meaning and essence in significant human experience. It requires a subjective process of reflecting, exploring, sifting, and elucidating the nature of the phenomenon under investigation" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p.40).

Heuristic inquiry is a variation of phenomenological research. Because heuristics clearly acknowledges the essential role of the researcher, in fact, the transformative effect of the inquiry is central to the research, it fit well with my research. Moustakas (2001) wrote:

> From the beginning and throughout an investigation, heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery. The research question and methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration. My primary task is to recognize whatever exists in my consciousness as a fundamental awareness – to receive it, accept it, support it and dwell inside it" (p.263).

Heuristic inquiry is a journey toward inner knowing. This journey requires participation by engagement and surrender. In fact, it requires "a passionate, disciplined commitment to remain with a question intensely and continuously until it is illuminated or answered" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15).

A research inquiry based in freepainting and freewriting fit naturally into the heuristic research model as the process of creating art draws out tacit knowledge (Carolan, 2001). In his reviews of heuristic methodology, Hiles (2001) writes, "The works of writers, poets, artists, spiritual leaders and scientists, all invite participation,

and all of these can be usefully treated as the creative products of heuristic inquiry" (p. 7). This methodology is suited well to artistic expression and creative pursuits; therefore, it fits nicely with the research questions:

- *How does paint/write unfold in my personal experience?*
- *How might extended interactions with paint/write influence my painting and writing abilities and therefore my identity as an artist and writer?*

Heuristics is essentially a research method intended for the examination of a phenomenon, utilizing the self of the researcher. The natural flow of the research process is through "exploratory open-ended inquiry, self-directed search, and immersion in active experience, one is able to get inside the question, and become one with it, and thus achieve an understanding of it." (Moustakas, 1990 , p.15).

Initial Engagement

The first phase of heuristic inquiry is initial engagement. Moustakas (1990) set forth clear goals for initial engagement:

> The task of the first phase is to discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications. The research question that emerges lingers with the researcher, awaiting the disciplined commitment that will reveal its underlying meanings (p. 27).

As Moustakas (1990) states, "I begin the heuristic journey with something that has called to me from within my life experience, something to which I have associations and fleeting awareness but whose nature is largely unknown" (p. 13). This description

is quite similar to my initial experience with paint/write in Dr. Angelotti's course, the reawakening of my writer's self, then the echoing questions left in my mind.

The most poetic description of discovering the research question, and the description that resonates within my heart is:

> The heuristic researcher is not only intimately and autobiographically related to the question but learns to love the question. It becomes a kind of song into which the researcher breathes life not only because the question leads to an answer, but also because the question itself is infused in the researcher's being. It creates a thirst to discover, to clarify, and to understand crucial dimensions of knowledge and experience. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 43)

As stated in the first chapter, I have circled around this question, this wondering, for several years. Paint/Write truly found me and was a mystery waiting for exploration. In time, I embraced the journey of immersing myself into the process and sought to understand the synergy that occurs with freepainting and freewriting.

Immersion

Secondly, heuristics requires immersion. According to Moustakas (1990), during immersion, the research question is lived 24 hours a day, in waking, sleeping and even dream states. For the purpose of this study, immersion included art making, freewriting, journaling about the paint/write process (a type of written self-dialogue), as well as an ongoing study of available literature. I began collecting freepaints, freewrites, and journal entries in the summer of 2008 and continued until the fall of 2012. Immersion required alertness, concentration and consistent, prolonged self-

searching. Anything related to the question was analyzed as raw material for the immersion phase. Moustakas (1990) explains immersion saying,

> From the beginning, and throughout an investigation, heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery; the research question and the methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration. When I consider an issue, problem, or question, I enter into it fully . . . I may challenge, confront, or even doubt my understanding of a human concern or issue; but when I persist in a disciplined and devoted way I ultimately deepen my knowledge of the phenomenon. I am personally involved. I may be entranced by visions, images, and dreams that connect me to my quest. I may come into touch with new regions of myself, and discover revealing connections with others (p. 11).

As I attempted to maintain a journal capturing a narrative of my own experiences with ekphrasis, I began to understand the importance of metacognition to the transformational experience of heuristics. Goleman (1994) discussed "meta" thought by saying, "At a minimum, it manifests itself simply as a slight stepping-back from experiences, a parallel stream of consciousness that is 'meta': hovering above or beside the main flow, aware of what is happening rather than being immersed and lost in it" (p. 47).

Metacognition encompasses meta-knowledge, an awareness of your own thought process, and meta-memory, or an understanding of your own memory processing (Flavell, 1979). These concepts aided in understanding the types of thinking I engaged in as I painted and wrote. Meta-processing must be intentional with the

expectation that the practice will result in an increased ability to adjust experiences for increased success (Dyer, 2004).

Metacognitive ability results from self-development and a measure of self-discipline. Metacognition is "the cultivation of inner capabilities. It involves narrowing one's attention so it becomes a force that can be directed" (Hawley, 1993, p. 134). Exercises in meta-thinking provided an opportunity for me to direct my attention toward understanding the process of paint/write rather than the constant self-evaluation I tend to engage in, judging both the visual art and the writing, deciding whether it is worthy of sharing or whether it should be censored, placed in a drawer or the trash.

Incubation

The next phase of a heuristic study is incubation. Incubation serves as a retreat from the intensity of the concentrated focus required by immersion. This space allows the tacit knowing of the researcher to surface, encouraging intuition to "continue to clarify and extend understanding on levels outside the immediate awareness" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29).

Moustakas (1990) believes tacit knowledge is implicit while explicit knowledge is observable and describable. Intuition is seen as the link between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge, making integration, unity, and wholeness possible:

> In actually obtaining data, the tacit dimension is the forerunner of inference and intuition, guiding the person to untapped aspects of awareness in nonlinear ways that elude analysis and explanation. In this sense, the tacit is visionary. Tacit knowing operates behind the scenes, giving birth to the hunches and vague,

formless insights that characterize heuristic discovery (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 49).

Heuristic inquiry requires acknowledgement and valuing of the tacit knowledge dimension as well as the essential bridge of intuition. As Moustakas (1990) states, "Without the intuitive capacity to form patterns, relationships, and inferences, essential material for scientific knowledge is denied or lost. Intuition facilitates the researcher's process of asking questions about phenomena that hold promise for enriching life" (pp. 23-24).

In short, incubation is a process of stepping away from the research, but still allowing it to maintain a corner of the mind. Incubation, for me, occurred while doing the dishes, driving to work, or folding laundry. These almost automatic tasks allowed my body to take a break from immersion and continue to process the material I had read, written, or painted recently. I searched for links between the books and articles I was examining and my own paint/write work. Sometimes this resulted in furiously scratching notes on napkins or the back of a used envelope to capture a thought before it disappeared or scurrying into my office, logging onto the computer and opening a blank word document while still in my winter coat just to key in a few thoughts before teaching class.

It is also important to note that I experienced immersion and incubation as a recursive process. My hurried notes would lead to additional searching at the library, rereading a passage, or reexamining ekphrastic artifacts then I would continue to process and ponder on those elements as I went about daily household tasks. This process was quite organic and flowed in a very natural fashion, not at all linear.

Moustakas (1990) stresses indwelling throughout the immersion and incubation periods. Indwelling is a conscious turning inward to process the understandings resulting from immersion and incubation. He explains, "The indwelling process is conscious and deliberate, yet it is not lineal or logical. It follows clues wherever they appear; one dwells inside them and expands their meanings and associations until a fundamental insight is achieved" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 24).

Illumination

Illumination is the result of openness to tacit knowledge and intuition on the part of the researcher (Moustakas, 1990). This phase of heuristic inquiry occurs for the researcher when an awakening occurs, new awareness is achieved, corrections are made to distorted understandings, fragmented knowledge is synthesized, or a new discovery is made.

During this phase, it became clear that Carl Jung and Mihalyi Cziksentmihalyi's theories, which I will cover in more detail in Chapter Three, were central to understanding the phenomena of paint/write. I was able to examine my own paintings, creative writing, and journal entries in concert with the theories of Active Imagination (Jung, 1958, 1978) and Flow Theory (Czikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1996). The artifacts of my immersion paired together with my own tacit knowledge, began to take the puzzle pieces of insight I had experienced and create a larger picture.

Several months later, as I sorted paint/write artifacts, I began to see emerging threads in my writing, rich descriptions of scenes, interesting combinations of words and the increased use of metaphors, several entries written with an open rawness that is

unusual for me. I began seeing evidence of development in art and writing which was eventually shaped into the information presented in Chapter Four.

Explication

The explication phase allows a full examination of what has awakened in the consciousness, searching deep within the various layers for meaning (Moustakas, 1990). At this time organization occurs, and a comprehensive portrayal of the core themes is developed that brings together the major essences of the experience. During explication, I was able to create a visual image of my own paint/write creative process, including how both Flow Theory and Active Imagination played an integral part in how I experience ekphrasis and how it has changed me as both a painter and a writer. The visual image, along with further descriptions and details on these theories are included in Chapter Three: Uncovering the Process.

Creative Synthesis

After explication comes the creative synthesis phase. During this phase the components of the research are reported using various types of narrative accounts, a report, a poem, story, drawing, painting, or other reporting format appropriate to the research. For the purpose of this research, the creative synthesis was the writing of this dissertation which took shape by weaving together an ongoing literature review with emerging themes discovered through freepaints, freewrites, and self-dialog journal entries generated during the research. For the purpose of capturing the essence of my research experience, the selection of artifacts for inclusion into this document was a painstaking process. In the end, the artifacts I chose to include demonstrate the clearest relation to the theories and concepts that emerged as central to understanding the

paint/write phenomenon, and strongest evidence of development in artistic and writing abilities.

Validation

In heuristic inquiry, validation is a question of meaning. The researcher must make certain that the final account comprehensively captures the meanings and spirit of the experiences with accuracy and detail. My end result? I have attempted to create what Moustakas described when he wrote, "Essentially in the heuristic process, I am *creating a story* that portrays the qualities, meanings, and essences of universally unique experiences" (1990, p. 13).

Chapter 3 – Uncovering the Process

This chapter explores the research question: *How does paint/write unfold in my personal experience?* I present a model for the ekphrastic experience, present literature in the areas of art therapy, Jung's Active Imagination Theory and the Transcendent Function, and Flow Theory while highlighting artifacts from my immersion period that provide evidence of these theories at work in paint/write.

Ekphrasis and Creativity

Creativity is the spirit and ability to create. To create means to make or craft something from the imagination. Creativity is instinctual and energetic in nature (Jung, 1978). As with all instincts, creativity yearns to be fulfilled (Hillman, 1993); however, creativity can be easily extinguished. Six methods for killing creativity are: expected evaluation, surveillance, reward, competition, restricted choice, and extrinsic orientation (Joyce et al., 1999). Thus, the well-meaning voices of teachers, parents, or critical self-talk can be internalized as constrictive rules that serve to block or restrict free expression and creative exploration. In my own K-12 education, creativity, doodling, or drawing was often viewed as disrespectful, refraining from giving full attention to the instructor. I cannot recall even one teacher who encouraged visual self-expression in any form. As a result, I did not see myself as creative in this way. I was quite tentative of painting, and of sharing my artistic expressions for fear they were not good enough or realistic enough to be of value.

Cassou and Cubley speak of the intuitive nature of art making:

> If you do not listen to your intuition, it will stop talking to you. Your intuition is like a sensitive friend. If you question it, censor it, judge it, it gets hurt and

> becomes silent. When you paint for process, you don't decide what is and is not acceptable. The gift of spontaneous expression has been given to transcend that choice, to open you to what you do not know, cannot predict or expect (1995, p. 81).

Specifically within the area of creativity, I was concerned with freewriting and freepainting as interrelated and synergistic processes. Both freepainting and freewriting are inherently focused on the process, not the end product. If Cassou and Cubley are correct, then the opposite should also be true—that in trusting creative intuition without judgment we encourage its existence and its voice.

My initial interest in paint/write occurred because it seemed to predictably accomplish entry into this zone of creative flow. Here the ekphrastic process is described by Foster and Prevallet:

> Any student who tries *ekphrasis* (writing that takes its inspiration from visual art) becomes a participant in the kind of dialogue that has engaged artists and writers for centuries. Listening to works of art and participating in a conversation with them can produce exciting and shifting responses in each of us: poems, stories, self-portraits, essays, and other creative works are generated that "talk back" to the visual stimulus. (2002, p. 14)

The heuristic process did not come easily to me as I had imagined. Each step was a struggle, a battle against my own insecurities and misconceptions. Admittedly, I originally thought that a self study would be easy, no IRB, no statistics, but I found myself longing for the clean nature of numbers and T-tests. Heuristic research requires

such an intimate relationship with the study and a measure of self-examination that was sometimes torturous.

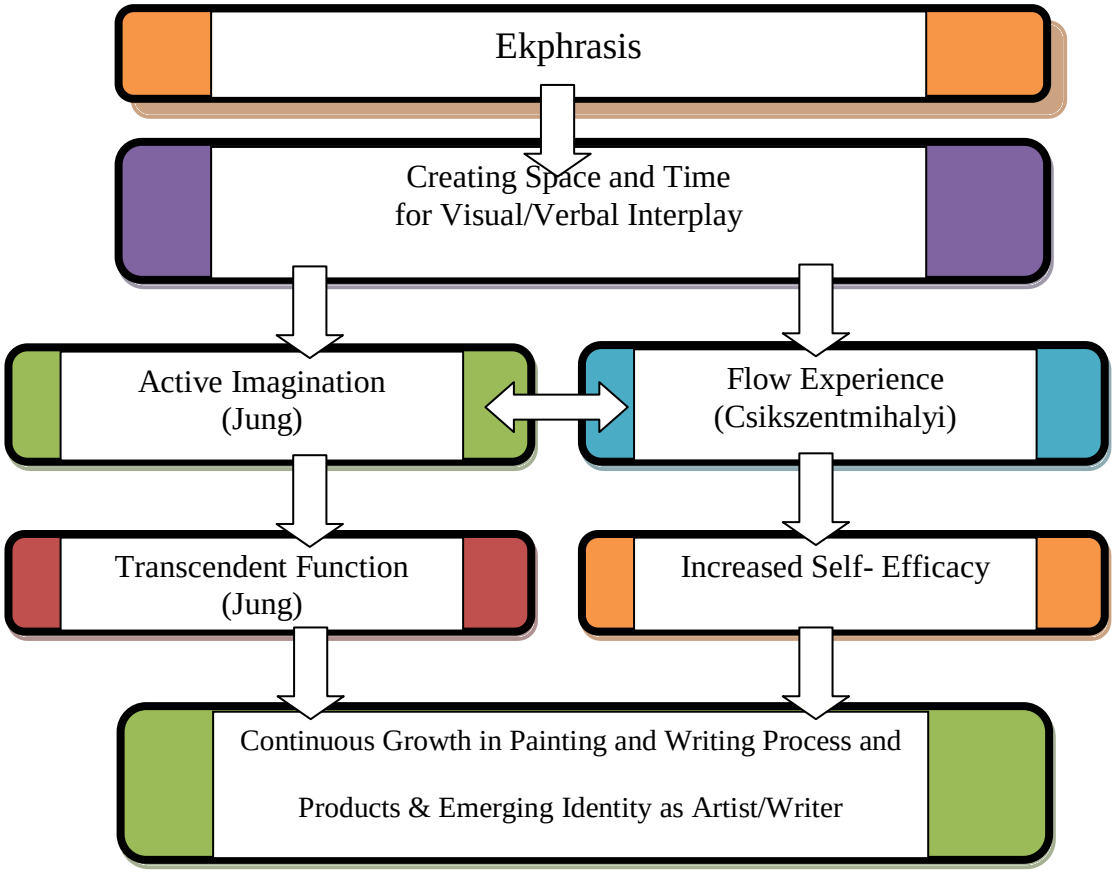
In addition though, I found a flow and an ease with my creative writing through the ekphrastic process. I struggled as I attempted to write a scholarly piece that would satisfy my doctoral committee. What were they looking for? What would please them? I would write paragraphs then erase them completely thinking that it was not academic enough or based in theory. In the end, I embraced writing in my own voice to illuminate my own experiences with ekphrasis. Negative internal dialogue sometimes overshadowed my desires to write; however, the more I wrote, the greater my self-efficacy. The result is a mixture of theory and very personal writings. I have attempted to open windows into both worlds and weave the two into one cohesive story.

Ekphrastic Experience Model

As I highlighted in Chapter Two, Moustakas (1990) explains that during the explication phase of heuristic research, the researcher is able to conduct a full examination of what has awakened in the consciousness, searching deep within the various layers for meaning. At this time, organization occurs and a comprehensive portrayal of the core themes is developed that brings together the major essences of the experience. During explication, I was able to create a visual image of my own paint/write creative process, including how both Flow Theory and Active Imagination played an integral part in how I experience ekphrasis and how it has changed me as both a painter and a writer. Prior to this phase, I maintained a disciplined schedule of freepaints and freewrites, followed by journaling and regular literature searches and reading to find answers to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon I knew as

paint/write. I had collected a massive amount of paints, freewrites, and journal entries and knew that Jung (1958, 1978) and Csikszentmihalyi's (1990, 1996) works were important to understanding the inner workings of paint/write, but I was still unable to put all the puzzle pieces together. One day, while sorting and resorting texts and artifacts on the king sized bed in my office space that was also our extra bedroom, I began to get a mental image of how these theories might fit together and how they feed into improvements in writing and artistic capabilities. The model below was created that day in my home office; it has undergone several minor adjustments as my understanding of this process solidified.

Figure 1. Ekphrastic Experience Model



Each piece of this model is represented either in the current or following chapter. In this chapter, where I explore the process of paint/write, I will explain the interactions of creating time and space for visual/verbal interplay, active imagination, the transcendent function, and flow experience. In Chapter Four, I consider my self-efficacy and growth as a writer and an artist as well as gaining an identity in both these fields of study.

Psychic Energy and Physical Space

Focused attention, creating a physical space, and creating a mental space for ekphrasis were essential to the immersion period of my research. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) wrote about psychic energy as a "priceless resource" that must be honed and exercised regularly in order to properly function as an individual strength. Further, he pointed out attention, or psychic energy, determines the information available within consciousness and is the trigger for all other mental events, including remembering, critical thinking, and feeling emotion.

Looking back over my immersion phase, I am painfully aware of moments in time when my psychic energy wavered from this research. I saw a difference in my writing, in my painting, and in my experience of flow. It became harder to throw myself into my creativity as I was distracted by a myriad of outside concerns. Family, deadlines at work, stress—they all came knocking on the door of my consciousness, claiming a seat at an already crowded table. It was only when I very carefully and stubbornly claimed a space in my house as well as a space in my schedule for ekphrasis that the creativity flowed and barriers to the conscious and subconscious were broken.

Csikszentmihalyi claimed:

> We create ourselves by how we invest this energy. Memories, thoughts, and feelings are all shaped by how we use it. And it is energy under our control, to do with as we please; hence, attention is our most important tool in the task of improving the quality of experience" (1990, p. 33).

Csikszentmihalyi also noted the importance of carefully structuring space; I found that physical surroundings were especially important as well. Devoting an extra bedroom as my creative space changed the tone of my experience as well as the attitudes of my family. It validated the importance of my research and provided a lab much like a scientist requires for work of a similar nature.

After claiming both physical space and psychic energy to devote to my research, I was able to go deeper into my paint/write experience through Jung's (1958) active imagination and transcendent function as well as predictably enter into Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) state of flow.

Art Therapy

After researching the use of image making as therapy, it appeared that there were very useful ties to unleashing inner creativity. Jungian analyst, Robert Johnson (1986), explored the mind's unique treatment of images and dreams as a dialogue between unconscious and conscious. He claimed that by encouraging active imagination and image making, we could bring unconscious thoughts to light. Further, Johnson (1986) stated:

> Although we seem to be individuals, we are actually plural beings. Each of us has a multitude of distinct personalities coexisting within one body, sharing one psyche. We know that the human mind experiences the world as a duality: We

> divide the world and our own selves into darkness and light, good and bad, and we stand eternally in judgment, siding first with one side, then with the other, but rarely undertaking the terrible task of integrating all this into a whole (p. 36).

Paint/write certainly allowed me to explore the "whole" of my being, acknowledging the plurality of my personality, both my darkness and my light. Art making and subsequent writing helped me to develop a sense of self and a wholeness that has potential to affect every aspect of my learning and teaching.

In his book, *Art as Medicine*, McNiff (1992) pointed out the affect and effect relationship of art making, he suggested art is both formed from life and feeds back into life. He wrote:

> Forgetting myself as best I can, I study the nature of the image, its colors, forms, and emotional qualities and I open myself to its influences. This attitude is the basis of art as medicine. Imagination is the sympathetic medium in which dialoguing with images occurs, the faculty through which we establish compassion, understanding, and respect for things other than ourselves. Our lives influence the nature of our paintings, dreams, stories, and other creations, images come through us like children, and they inherit biological and psychic traits, but like children, they have autonomous lives and souls that quickly begin to influence and change the lives of their makers. (p. 38)

While the art therapy aspect of paint/write certainly holds power for writing, it may also hold unpredictable results. In my own experiences, detailed later in this chapter, memories were reawakened and subconscious thoughts were brought to light. Granted, I spent upwards of two years submersed in paint/write interactions, which is an

unlikely scenario for any traditional classroom environment. This type of access to the mind can be treacherous territory for a classroom teacher or university professor. Perhaps, in situations where extended paint/write interactions are utilized for classroom purposes, a trained counseling professional such as a school counselor should be available should the need arise.

Active Imagination and the Transcendent Function

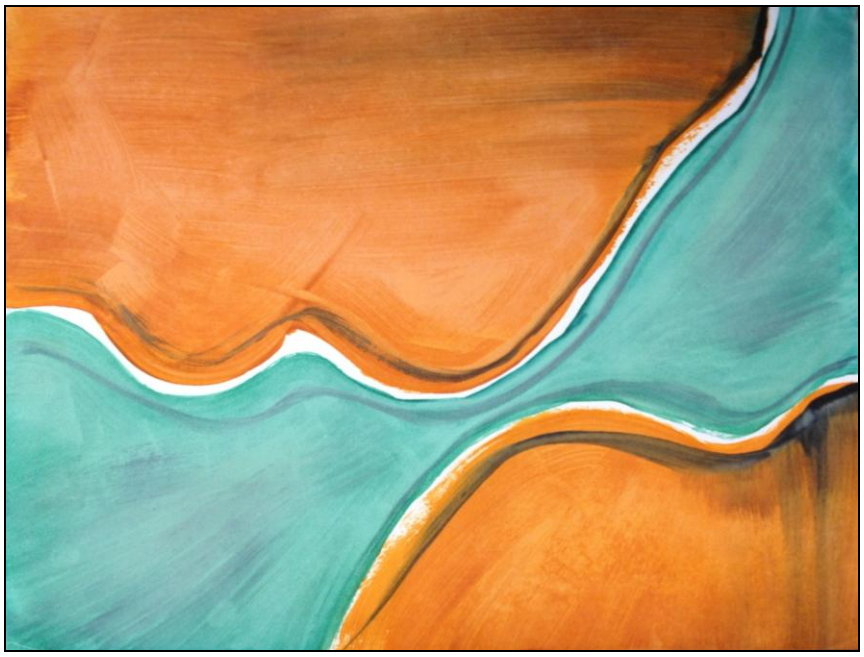
One of the main threads I initially discovered as I immersed myself into the paint/write process was the awakening of childhood memories previously unavailable to my conscious thoughts. Carl Jung (1958) coined the terms active imagination and transcendent function. Active imagination is a method of purposefully engaging in dialogue with the unconscious. Jung claimed that exercising active imagination activated the transcendent function, a fundamental shift in consciousness achieved through the unification of the conscious and unconscious minds. He utilized child-like play to enter into this state of consciousness, employing imaginative play, block play, and art as a means to unify the mind.

One of Jung's (1958) methods of achieving active imagination was painting. He explained that participants must start with an image without trying to make it into something, instead listening for what the figure has to say. He pointed out that the aesthetic quality of the final product was not important. The focus was to understand the image. Speaking of art therapy, Jung said, "in the course of this activity my thought clarified, and I was able to grasp the fantasies whose presence in myself I dimly felt...I had no answer to my question, only the inner certainty that I was on the way to discovering my own myth" (1958, p. 24). Similarly, Walsh-Piper explains that

ekphrastic writing "reveals something we know but had not fully realized or expressed before" (2002, p. xxvii).

In many of my paint/write experiences, I noted revelations of thought that seemed to appear "out of nowhere" in my writing. Motifs would emerge that may as well have been conjured up out of thin air then the accompanying words wound themselves into tales I had never deliberately imagined. As these artifacts demonstrate, childhood memories that I did not consciously recall came flooding back through the creation of images and freewriting.

Artifact 1. Tornado Creek



Freewrite:

In just a few short steps, I could enter into another world, a world filled with green, with trickling water, and alive with adventure. That tiny trickle of a creek was only 100 yards from my front door, but it felt like another world. One day it was a jungle and I was Mowgli, being raised by the tigers in the laws of the wild. Another day

it was an undiscovered frontier and I was a world renowned map maker, sent to capture the contours of the raging river for future settlement.

Yes, that creek was many things but my favorite game was "tornado." I was the lone survivor after a terrible natural disaster. I opened the door of the old abandoned Ford truck to peer inside, nothing but ivy marching straight up through the floorboard. A hand crank washing machine lay on its side and I wondered what dismal fate had claimed its owner. An old home's foundation was all that remained, but I was much too frightened to explore the rotten wood scattered like a fallen house of cards in piles on every side. I imagined reviving bodies I found strewn across the tall green grass, crying and celebrating with the rescue team that had, of course, arrived by now. Yes, adventures abounded up that tiny creek…wonder what I'd play if I could go there today?

Journal:

It's strange that I haven't thought about that creek and playing there in many, many years. I certainly didn't set out to write a story about my childhood or my play experiences, but here it is. Paint/Write seems to allow me to access memories that have been stored away. I always tell people that I don't remember very much of my childhood, so these memories are especially valuable to me and wonderful to gain access to. The human mind seems so mysterious in how it stores and retrieves information…how connections are made and bridges built. Current brain science is emphasizing the importance of synapses, linking information for understanding. Could paint/write literally provide some sort of visual/verbal bridge?

A second childhood memory surfaced as I wrote after creating this image:

Artifact 2. Moonlit Path



Freewrite:

moonlit path
silvery leaves
something splashes into the creek
his flashlight
hangs lifeless from his wrist
preferring instead
the magical moonlight
bathing the woods
washing away fears
transforming the world
for now

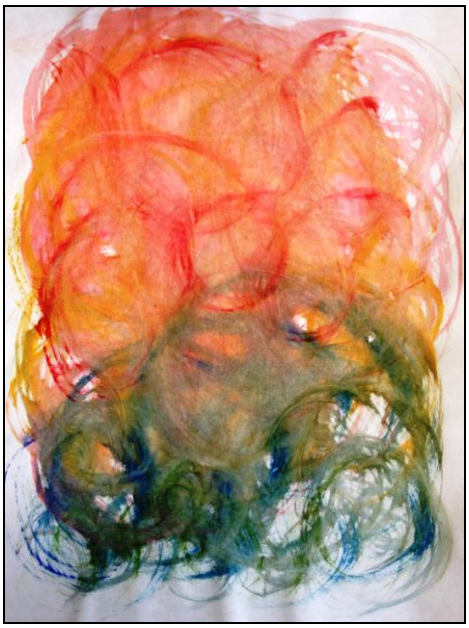
Journal:

This memory is so vivid, strange since I did not know it existed just moments ago. I remember camping with my grandparents and my grandfather suggested going hiking in the dark. I was so afraid to go out, but the moon was full and so very bright that night. I had walked that hiking trail a million times, but it seemed transformed in the moonlight. We whispered as we walked for some reason, and the sounds of the night were no longer scary, but beautiful.

It also strikes me that many of my best childhood memories are connected to nature and the outdoors. I wonder if that is why I have always felt most at home when I am outside, and where I gather positive energy.

I later rediscovered a memory of playing with my cousins, collecting tadpoles from a drainage ditch that ran just beside their home.

Artifact 3. Murky Waters



Freewrite:

There I am wading into the murky, stagnant water of the drainage ditch, rolling up my jeans before sinking, barefoot, up to my ankles in glorious mud. Rusty coffee cans full of that cloudy water were soon alive with tadpoles, frantically searching for a portal back to their homes. I scooped upward with my fingers outstretched, catching a few in my palms for each valiant effort. The coffee cans would soon find their way onto the concrete slab behind our trailer and I would watch the tadpoles transform, rushing out after school each warm and humid spring day until they had all hopped away.

Journal:

The swirling motion of the paints reminded me of the tiny whirlpools in the flowing water that day…though I hadn't truly remembered this before I began writing. It's nice to have these memories written down and captured. Seems that I dwell on

negative childhood memories and hold on to those in my conscious memories, but all these positive ones were there all along, hidden away and waiting to be discovered. What a lovely gift.

In one unique instance, an image began as an observation of the physical world, followed by a poetic quick write then a freepaint. While running one morning, I noted my shadow…pondering the existence of a seemingly dark reflection of self. In my mind I began to conjure a poetic write, but without a method to capture it, the words had to wait until I was in my office. When I finally had a pen and paper, I wrote my thoughts.

Later that same day while teaching class, students were experimenting with paints and I joined in, creating what I thought filled the requirement I gave to my students, "Paint Nothing." I was pleased with the image and took it back to my office, pinning it up. Still later that day, was taken aback by the sudden thought, "It's the shadow! I painted the shadow!" Here are both the words, written earlier in the day, and the painting, created later in class:

Freewrite:

Is the shadow
A reflection of who I am
Or of that which I hide?
Is she a true, transparent projection of my heart
Or a sheer shocking shell of all my mistakes?

Artifact 4. The Shadow



Journal:

What does my experience with the shadow reveal? This chain of events leads me to believe that there is certainly some interplay between the subconscious and the paint/write (or in this case write/paint) interplay. During class I was whole-heartedly embracing the challenge to paint nothing; however, my subconscious seemed to have had something else in mind. Though I had moved on to work responsibilities, my subconscious mind continued to explore the concept of shadow and how it related to our hidden selves.

During the same month, I painted what appeared to be an egg during a freepaint, followed by a quick write that revealed a powerful metaphor.

Artifact 5. Broken



Freewrite:

Broken

egg
crunchy cracking
shells
once perfect oval
containing
life giving yolk
perfectly packaged
new generation
now lay discarded
broken
useless
as the skillet sizzles

Journal:

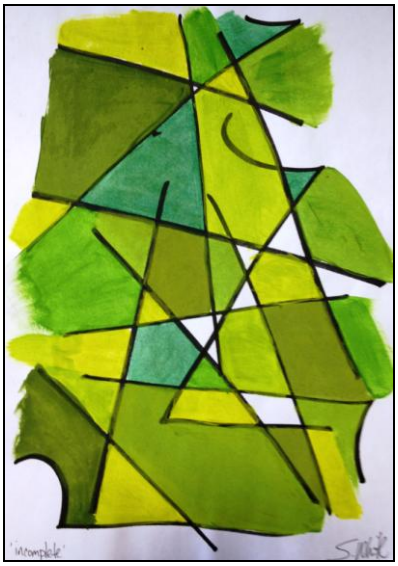
I started with no idea what I would write about an egg…or why I'd been drawn to paint an egg. The description of a pure, natural object turned out to be a metaphor for the fragility of life in our next generation. As I was writing, thoughts of broken families began to surface; specifically some of our friends who have recently divorced, and the immediate effects on their children. Maybe the world is the skillet?

I am struck by the metaphors in my ekphrastic experiences lately. Is there power in metaphorical thought and does ekphrasis encourage this kind of thinking? I

know it is an effective writing tool because I often tag examples of metaphorical writing in novels to use as mini-lessons when I teach writer's workshop...perhaps that is the reason I am drawn to it. I need to continue to think about this.

In a second piece I explored metaphors by writing about women and relationships by speaking of captivity and our desire for approval.

Artifact 6. Taken



Freewrite:

Taker culture
will steal your soul
put you in a box

Fenced in
unable to roam
you will mourn
lost freedoms

Life interrupted
power contained
No longer captivating
But captured

You will die
Because of his desire
To own you

Journal:

As I began this creative visual art piece, I drew random lines with a Sharpie marker then took out my paints and began to basically color in the lines. I was struck by the frustration of having to stay in the lines and began to reflect on my daughter's experience in kindergarten…as I had told her real artists don't color in the lines then she received a frowning face on top of one of her school papers and a note asking her to try harder. But, isn't this our culture, control and submission? Fall into line! Do as you are told! No talking! Everyone get out your blue crayon! We begin so very early and we train our children, especially the girls, to be quiet and behave and just maybe they will earn a smiley face. Looking back, I am quite sure that this desire to earn the sticker is what I've struggled against for many years. I must break through the culture of ownership to be my own person, unique and me. Not owned, and not seeking anyone's stamp of approval—just me.

I was struck by how the process of beginning with lines led to a true insight and powerful writing. Another paint/write seemed to capture this idea of accessing the subconscious through painting. It was done prior to my discovery of Jung's work, but it is suggestive of his active imagination concept.

Artifact 7. The Portal



Freewrite:

The first brush stroke is a portal…it opens thoughts that were once buried beneath the rubble of today. The act of putting paint on paper clears the cobwebs and the dust, revealing the writing below. The paint makes once blurred memories come alive with vivid detail and life. First words on paper are a clown's kerchief, tugging out more and more detail from our minds.

Journal:

Today the painting felt very simple, moving paint around on paper, finding patterns and lines, but revealed an important thread that I have noticed in my experiences. It seems that paint/write opens a door in my mind, allowing subconscious thoughts to the surface. Rescuing them from loss and bringing them into the light.

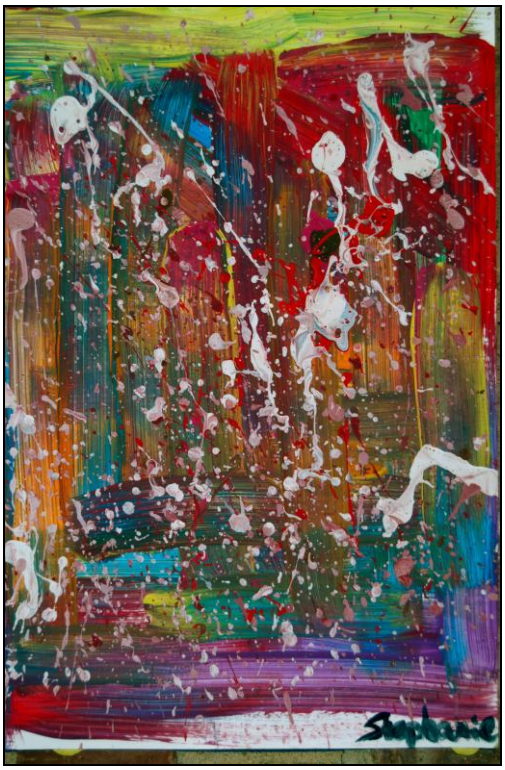
Flow Experience

The journaling section of the following early artifact, completed near the beginning of my study, captured my initial thoughts on flow as I was just beginning to

explore the very surface of writing about my personal life during the paint/write course. Previously, I had struggled with a very strong self-imposed divide between professional and personal life and writing.

It is also important to note that at this point in my research, I had not discovered flow theory; however, I used the word flow to describe my experience.

Artifact 8. Chaos



Freewrite:

Chaos
Noise
Arguing
Clean-up time
They're worn out
We're worn out

Soon we'll all retreat
To the silent stillness
of our own soft beds
And recharge ourselves
for another hectic day.

If I'm lucky,
A sweet, snuggly body
Will silently slide between the sheets
In the stillness of the night
Wanting reassurance from her momma…

A few precious hours

Journal:

The writing and painting flowed today! I found that I didn't even pause between my paint time and writing time, diving right into the thoughts that surfaced as I created the image. I did not even think about the words; they just poured out onto the paper. Because of this, my writing was a bit more real and I think I dropped the veil a bit. Why do I try so hard to separate my professional & personal lives? These "lines in the sand" sometimes hinder my writing. I need to explore the wholeness of my soul...although we build walls between our realities, through our own eyes, it creates one whole, a life, and what happens after 5:00 is a part of that reality. It felt good to explore my home life in this piece.

Through this immersion period, I found that ekphrasis alleviated those painful moments, often stretching into hours, of staring at a blank page, waiting for the words to come. Immediately after painting, I was consistently able to turn to the second creative mode of writing without even a moment's hesitation. I used the word "flow" to describe this river of thoughts that my hand was transcribing; however, as my experiences continued, I was driven to search the literature for answers. Had anyone described the writer's euphoria, the zone as some call it? Had another researcher or theorist written about this state of inspiration that I had felt? I soon discovered the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1996) and learned a great deal about his Flow Theory.

Flow is a concept describing a state of being in full engagement in an activity for intrinsic purposes with complete energized focus, relief from stress, feelings of spontaneous joy, and a loss of awareness of time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In addition, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) identified nine factors that tend to be linked an experience of optimal experience (or flow), though he was careful to note that not all are needed for flow to be experienced during a single event:

1. Clear goals must be present;
2. Immediate and frequent feedback;
3. Balance between challenge level and skill level;
4. Action and thought are perfectly merged;
5. Intense concentration;
6. Absence of fear of failure;
7. Lack of self-consciousness;
8. Sense of time becomes distorted; and
9. Intrinsic motivation (pp. 120-122).

The free nature of paint/write matches well with these conditions. In freepainting and freewriting, the goal of the activity is to put either paint or words onto paper (canvas, etc.) and nothing more. Freepaints and freewrites allow the user to utilize the blank page in any way she wishes. This freedom naturally satisfies allowing personal control over the activity, and through choice the individual sets her own goals for the activity as well. Certainly, for individuals who have been conditioned to seek the approval of others, this can be a challenge. After some practice the goals of paint/write become quite open and individual, removing any outside influence.

Feedback is immediate in paint/write, sometimes resulting in paint sweeping across a canvas to offer a fresh start and another chance to allow adjustments to behavior. Because the choice of sharing paintings and writing belongs to the creator, there is a lack of self-consciousness. During paintings and subsequent writing, my focus is singular and time falls away. I've begun to set a timer on my phone to alert me if I have an impending appointment because I will most certainly miss it when I become absorbed in ekphrasis. I believe the challenge level comes from the individual as well, in the form of curiosity. In my journal I wrote, "*I often set out my paints and brushes, pens and journal, wondering what I will discover today. That is the joy I've found in paint/write. It is a surprise to me what my mind has in store for the session today.*" Finally, the feedback comes from standing back to view the image or reading back over the words so hastily written. I sometimes saw immediate adjustments based on my own feedback.

Dual Coding Theory

Perhaps another theory to help understand the complex storage and retrieval methods at work within the human brain is the dual coding theory. Baddeley and Hitch (1974) suggested a two-part processing system for memory called the working memory model. The visuospatial sketchpad and phonological loop tend to work in parallel - one visual and one verbal/acoustic. The working memory system allows humans to concurrently process input coming from our ears and eyes. According to working memory theory, multimodal instruction is especially beneficial.

The suggestion that information presented through both verbal and visual mediums is more apt to be remembered led to Paivio's (1986) dual-coding theory. The

dual coding theory is a cognitive theory which suggests that visual and verbal information are processed uniquely and through separate channels in the brain resulting in separate representations for the information processed through the two different channels. Visual and verbal codes are both used to catalog incoming information into information that can be stored, retrieved, and acted upon in the future. Paivio stated:

> Human cognition is unique in that it has become specialized for dealing simultaneously with language and with nonverbal objects and events. Moreover, the language system is peculiar in that it deals directly with linguistic input and output (in the form of speech or writing) while at the same time serving a symbolic function with respect to nonverbal objects, events, and behaviors. Any representational theory must accommodate this dual functionality. (1986, p. 53).

Paivio (1986) also suggests that there are two types of representational units: "imagens" hold mental images while “logogens” are utilized for verbal entities. Logogens are stored in terms of hierarchies and associations while imagens are organized according to part-whole relationships. According to dual coding theory, each channel has limitations.

Sadoski and Paivio (2001) addressed the application of dual coding theory to the composition process in their book *Imagery and Text*, pointing out that authors often report images serving as "generative" inspiration for their writing (p. 155) as well as serving in an "organizational" role through the conceptual peg hypothesis (p. 159). The conceptual peg hypothesis is that "imagery serves as a mental peg on which related information is mentally hung" (p. 63).

This theory provides another way of understanding how information might be stored in the brain; however, I do not feel that it is particularly bent toward explaining how abstract images might trigger distant memories. It seems to me that it is more applicable to the question of storage rather than retrieval of information, or memories, in my particular case of paint/write because my images tend to be more abstract. I do believe it is related to my study as a way of understanding how the information may have been encoded into the brain and stored away for us to discover at this later date through the paint/write process and it is an interesting theory of the visual/verbal interplay at work in the brain during paint/write.

Summary

Two main theorists repeatedly emerged in my research and my experience continually pointed toward their theories. Jung's theories of active imagination and transcendent function allow a writer to access both imaginative portions of the thought process as well as memories that have been stored away in the subconscious, out of reach from the writer. In addition, Csikszentmihalyi's (1990, 1996) flow theory allows the writer to quickly enter into the painting and writing experiences and to continue creating over long periods of time with high productivity and high satisfaction. In the next chapter, I will continue to discuss my ekphrastic experience model, discuss self-efficacy, and show how extended, in-depth interactions with paint/write affected my painting and writing abilities as well as my identity as an artist and a writer.

Chapter 4: Writing and Art Development

My second research question asked, "*How might extended interactions with paint/write influence my painting and writing abilities and therefore my identity as an artist and writer?*" This chapter highlights the literature, paints, freewrites, and journal entries surrounding this particular question. I will highlight my development as a writer and draw attention to the artifacts that demonstrated growth as I immersed myself in the paint/write process then subsequently examined the works.

Trends in Writing Research

Beginning in the 1990's, writing research saw a renewal of interest in the cognitive process approach (MacArthur, Graham & Fitzgerald, 2006) perhaps due, in part, to innovation in brain research and technology (Berninger & Winn, 2006). Generally speaking, cognitive theorists suggest that the act of writing can be organized into "codified phrases that can be taught" (Breuch, 2003, p. 97) in which the thought process loops repeatedly among logical phases of writing found to be both predictable and generalizable to a large number of writers.

As a variety of translations of cognitive theory have been put into practice in classrooms, Murray's (2003) initial process model of pre-writing, writing, and re-writing has been interpreted as a linear and formulaic method of producing text even though Murray states, "It is not a rigid lock-step process. It is the process of discovery through language" (p. 4). In response to educators' misinterpretation of this model, post-process theorists have responded by critiquing the process trend in composition studies (Breuch, 2003). In fact, Breuch points out the need for a re-examination of the definition of writing to define it as "an activity rather than a body of knowledge, our

methods of teaching are indeterminate activities rather than exercises of mastery, and our communicative interactions with students are dialogic rather than monologic" (p. 99).

I believe both the post-process theories and the codified process have a role in the act of writing. The codified phrases provide a sort of framework for writers, especially beginning writers, to structure their writing activities; however, as I examined my own writing process, I saw that I followed a more recursive process, as opposed to a linear movement, through the stages of writing. Foster (2002) points out, "Teachers who attempt to control all of their students' learning processes could well be teaching strategies without helping students become metacognitive" (p. 11). As an educator, Foster's words are both convicting and enlightening. As writers, these words call us to reevaluate our own process and grown in awareness of our cognitive processes as we move through the experience of constructing a written piece.

There is some agreement that writing teachers ought to be practicing writers (Atwell, 1998; Augsburger, 1998; Cremin, 2006; Graves 1990, 1994). Because the writing process is not predictable or fixed, teachers writing alongside students can offer an insider's voice and insight into the risk-taking involved in the creative process (Cremin, 2006). Both the freewrites and journals included in the artifacts of this research represent the free flow of ideas. Walsh-Piper (2002) discusses this type of writing as "writing that springs from the heart and surprises us—writing that reveals something we know but had not fully realized or expressed before, writing that is inventive in its use of language" (p. xxvii). When kept regularly in a writer's notebook, these drafts are often a buffet of thoughts and stories, a glimpse of a character or a

fleeting look of a setting, buried within musings of birds bathing in grocery store parking lot puddles and lengthy diatribes about snow.

Increased Self-Efficacy Leads to Growth

Self-efficacy was introduced as a concept by Bandura (1977). The term refers to an individual's belief that she can attain a desired level of performance at a given activity. Bandura proposed that self-efficacy led to higher motivation, resulting in determination, and resilience in the endeavor. Further, he asserted that these beliefs were more powerful than the individual's actual abilities.

As I have practiced a prolonged ekphrasis experience, I have witnessed a strong link between Flow Theory and self-efficacy in my own writing. Flow has an acknowledged association to enhanced performance, thus my feelings of confidence in my skills as a writer. Accomplishing a flow state is positively linked with heightened performance within artistic creativity, learning, and teaching (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). In addition, Csikszentmihalyi points out that those who enter flow regularly experience "growth towards complexity," in which participants thrive as their successes increase and subsequently develop increasing "emotional, cognitive, and social complexity" (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 1993).

Growth as a Writer

As I devoted myself, psychologically and physically, to spending a great deal of time within the process of ekphrasis, I found that I began to break through barriers in my own writing. I stopped censoring my writing and dove into some difficult topics, striving to become more transparent in my craft. In addition, I began to live in a more observant way, taking note of my senses as I walked through day-to-day experiences.

At times it was as if my emotions and observations were magnified, and I paused to take it all in.

Death of the Inner Censor

In her newest book, *The True Secret of Writing*, Natalie Goldberg (2013) quotes one of her students as saying, "I used to try to please the teacher, get my fellow students to like me. Finally I just started writing about the hard stuff in my life and what hurt" (p. 48). Goldberg goes on to say that in her workshops she emphasizes to her students, "In order to write, you have to be willing to be disturbed" (p. 48). Later, in the same book, Goldberg says, "If it feels naked, you are not hiding and covering up. Writing comes from your true life, not from being polite, cautious, censored" (p. 63). These are hard words for polite southern girls. I have struggled as a writer with self-censorship, always considering how my family would feel if they read these things or trying to maintain an outward image for my students, family, and friends while struggling inwardly with emotions or thoughts. I think we are all taught as children to keep up appearances and stuff some secrets deep into the back closets, but good writers know better. In *Bird by Bird*, Anne Lamott (1994) says:

> We write to expose the unexposed. If there is one door in the castle you have been told not to go through, you must. Otherwise, you'll just be rearranging furniture in rooms you've already been in. Most human beings are dedicated to keeping that one door shut. But the writer's job is to see what's behind it, to see the bleak unspeakable stuff, and to turn the unspeakable into words – not just any words but if we can, into rhythm and blues (p. 198).

Lamott goes on to say:

> But you can't get to any of these truths by sitting in a field smiling beatifically, avoiding your anger and damage and grief. Your anger and damage and grief are the way to the truth. We don't have much truth to express unless we have gone into these rooms and closets and woods and abysses that we were told not to go in to. When we have gone in and looked around for a long while, just breathing and finally taking it in – then we will be able to speak in our own voice and to stay in the present moment. And that moment is home (p. 201).

Author Ray Bradbury (1994) also addresses the stifling effect of the inner censor in writing: "So, too, embarrassment, self-consciousness, remembered criticisms, can stifle the average person so that less and less in his lifetime can he open himself out" (p. 36). Bradbury goes on to describe "freeing the writing muse" through real uncensored writing when he states, "At the exact moment when *truth* erupts, the subconscious changes from wastebasket file to angel writing in a book of gold" (p. 44).

Further, in Jung's (1958) writings the transcendent function, achieving unique access to thoughts and memories stored in the subconscious, resulted in self-renewal and unexpected insights as well as psychological and spiritual growth. As I embraced ekphrasis fully and opened depths of my subconscious, I began performing a very spiritual sort of personal excavation. I wrote some of the things that I truly felt during those days. Here are some of the results:

Artifact 9. Invisible



Freewrite:

Some days I want to be invisible
Don't talk to me
I don't have the energy to smile
and pretend that everything is okay

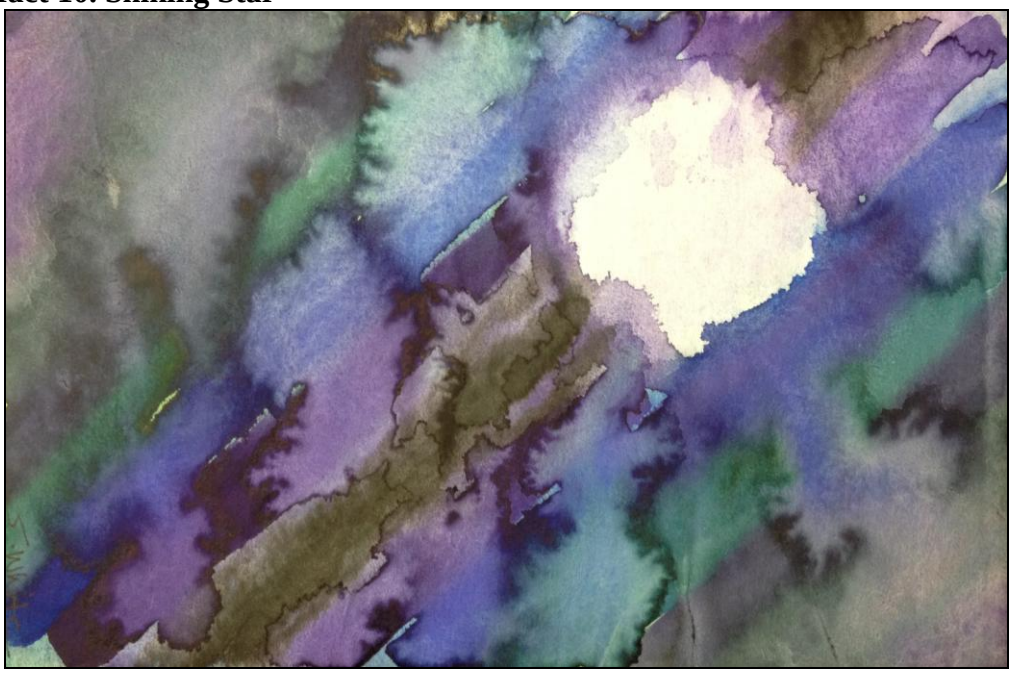
I want to disappear
Blend into the busy wallpaper
Of the world
And let it all pass me by

Journal:

Examining this painting, the yellow sphere seemed to be leaving the page…retreating. As I wrote this I had just walked through the hallways greeting several people and experiencing the same greeting we give one another every day, "How are you today? I am great! How are you?" I am so tired of fakeness and pretending. When do people get real with one another? Some days I don't want to get dressed, or step outside of my house. I am not "great" today…in fact, my morning sucked! My kids fought and I was out of creamer, which pretty much ruined my coffee then the lock on my front door wouldn't work which sent me into a breakdown

considering how many thieves would plunder my home today while I am here making a living! How was YOUR morning?!

Artifact 10. Shining Star



Freewrite:

She was a shining star...bringing a glow of happiness to all those around her. She was pure and right and holy and joyful. She'd faced breast cancer many times and although she'd been isolated during chemo each time, a fate she detested, she emerged out the other side of the struggle time and time again praising our God for His miraculous grace. She was a miracle, and her testimony was unbelievable...except that she stood right in front of you, with her face full of love, telling her story. She told of how she walked in on her first husband cheating on her and how she'd walked away from that pain...then she told of meeting her Tom and how they were puzzle pieces, meant to be together. She told of the bouts with cancer, how she'd been told each time that she had only months to live but she was given more time on this Earth and felt that she'd been spared for a reason.

For a reason, indeed. She was my prayer partner, my spiritual advisor, my trusted friend, my hero. But, she filled those same roles for so many others. For 13 years she'd only had months to live...and she did just that, she LIVED. She SHINED.

At times I would pull out an existing painting and engage in a second writing encounter with the image. The different viewpoints on one representation provided evidence that the viewer "reads" a painting much like a reader reads print, bringing her own experiences and mood, and those elements play a role in the interpretation. This instance was no exception to this observation.

At the time of the initial paint/write, I had just lost a dear friend to cancer. As a result, I interpreted the image very differently than the second encounter when I focused more on self-doubt and the façade of confidence and happiness that many of us try to maintain.

Freewrite #2:

Doubt
An oily cloud creeps
Surrounding me
It is a fog
That confuses me
Disorienting
Grabbing at my legs
Sometimes it is the Dust Bowl
Overcoming me in a rush
I can't breathe

It's all a façade
The self-confidence
The smile
It's all crap

Artifact 11. River Flow



Freewrite:

tame & tedious
day after day
same song
same dance
same problems
seasons come
seasons go
but I am stuck
like a rock at the edge
of a flowing river

Journal:

Whole stretches of time feel like that movie, Groundhog Day. We're all just going through the motions without much joy or fun or adventure. Show up to work, looking forward to being home. Go home then look forward to getting in bed. This isn't living life…it's getting through life. How to change?

Ekphrasis allowed me a moment to spill my emotions onto paper during a difficult time. I allowed myself to write without censorship, without hesitation, after painting this image:

Artifact 12. Lost and Alone



This paint was created during a time of intense emotion, during a challenging time in my marriage. I felt hurt, wounded and alone. This is what I wrote after creating this image:

Freewrite:

What if you'd said you had a wonderful weekend with me?
What if you'd kissed my cheek and thanked me for spending time with you.
What if you'd told me how much you loved me?
It could all be so different.
But I feel dead inside.
I am lost and alone.

I imagine things you might say to me to heal the wounds.
I keep walking toward you only to watch you walk away.
And you tell me it's my fault.

It could all be so different
But I feel dead inside.
I am lost and alone.

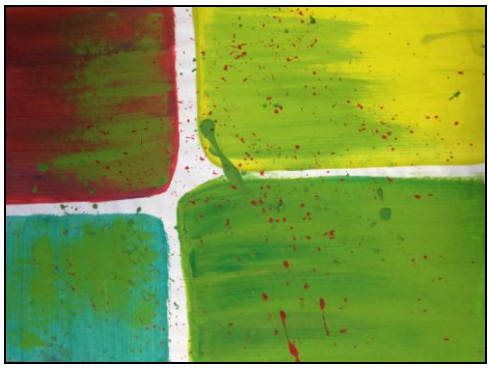
I am lonely and scared.
In love with the picture of a fictional family
we have created for others to see.

Journal:

It felt good to get this out of my heart and onto paper. Why do we feel the need to hide our problems? We all live a pretend life and cry alone. I am sure that all marriages go through difficult periods of struggle...what might happen if we opened up to others and shared those struggles. If we said, "We've been there, too!" But, we don't, we paste on our smiles. It is all so fake and yet I participate in it all. I don't know how to break this cycle, but I feel like I've broken a barrier that kept me from writing about it. We'll see if I can make it public for others to read. That will be the real test, won't it? Good writers tackle the hard issues and put themselves out there, though, so that is what I need to try to do. Stop pretending and be real.

This next writing occurred a bit later during my research, and was a bit grittier. In this piece I created a comparison between the natural world and the false superiority that humans claim.

Artifact 13. Who's More Evolved



Freewrite:

He pisses on her…all over her back, and she can't wait to return to his side. To her, presumably, it means that he loves her and cherishes her…wants the world to know she BELONGS to him. And in the dog world, this is a precious statement of love. Isn't it odd how different we are from the animals of the world? If a man pisses all over a

woman, she'd likely rack him and call the police, but Zoe turns around and touches noses with Zeke…"I love you, too," she says. Crazy, but then again who am I to judge?

What about swans? If a swan's mate dies, she will never again mate with another swan…they mate for life, and she will not betray her lover. Same thing for lobsters…that's right, I said lobsters. Bet you never thought of them as life-long lovers, huh? That is certainly not true of human lovers. Even those who are deeply in love and faithful in life will most likely remarry if they are widowed. We judge this to be acceptable, but the swans and lobsters would never consider remarrying an option. Of course, they don't marry at all, do they?

Men, on the other hand, sneak out, leaving their pregnant wives lying alone in a king sized bed to meet with their loves, bottle of wine in hand. They promise a future to this woman, too, "I never loved her," they whisper just before returning to rub their wife's bulging belly and whisper promises of joyful childhood dreams into her naval. He slides into their bed complaining of a long day at work, still tasting the kisses of another. It seems with all our knowledge and freedom; we've only gained more selfishness. Who's more evolved?

Journal:

After spending a great deal of time with this painting, I finally felt it was finished and I wondered what it might be about. I had passionately gone about painting it, shading and adding depth with color overlays, then at the last moment splattered red paint across the otherwise orderly painting. As I examined it, I suddenly imagined a tile floor, in the kitchen perhaps, and blood spattered across it. This led me to think about the fragility of relationships and I began to write. It certainly is a wonder that

animal species have such different mating expectations than humans…and odd how we judge ourselves to be superior.

I am not alone in this experience of deeply personal writing emerging during paint/write experiences. A fellow University of Oklahoma graduate student, Cody Wright, shared a journal entry from his paint/write course experience in his thesis detailing the commonality of this occurrence:

> One classmate shared a write that included very personal information. I thought it was exceptionally brave of her, and it inspired me to dig deeper, and I hoped that her reading would do the same for everyone else. I don't think that anyone is here for therapy, nor is that what this class is about, but from what I was told by previous students of the course, I won't be surprised to see someone have a breakthrough moment. And although everyone is willing to share and contribute positive feedback, I feel their reluctance to go too deep. I kept my head down and etched away at the barrier between me and the paint (2012, p. 57).

These writings reveal thoughts and feelings I generally mask. I may think them, I might even consider saying them aloud before stopping myself and considering how others will see me if I divulge these thoughts. Transparency is a painful, venerable, sometimes frightening proposition, but it is necessary to grow beyond censored, veiled writing.

Observant Living and Descriptive Writing

Lucy Calkins, in *The Art of Teaching Writing* (1994), wrote "I've come to believe that authorship does not begin in the struggle to put something big into print; rather, it begins in living with a sense of awareness." Moorman (2006) found when

exposing students to ekphrastic writing, they became more observant of the details in their daily lives. My experience in immersing myself in ekphrasis resulted in a heightened awareness of my surroundings and an attempt to make significance of these observations. In this particular example, I had noticed a couple at dinner, eating and sharing an obviously intimate conversation. They looked as if the whole room could disappear and they would not even pause to notice.

Artifact 14. Table for Two



In this painting, I used simple shapes and brushstrokes to capture the young couple in the center of a busy world full of words and conversation, symbolized by the newsprint background I chose. The various other tables around them appear; however, the occupants of the tables are irrelevant to this couple's awareness.

Freewrite:

> *You are my entire universe.*
> *Every moment we spend together*
> *is a lifetime.*

The opinions of others
do not dictate our reality.
They could never understand.
I would do anything to keep you safe,
to keep you with me,
to make you mine.

Journal:

Ah, teen love…or perhaps infatuation. When I look back, I enjoy remembering those moments. I know that some see it as unhealthy and spineless for a young girl to fall so helplessly in love. Why should we see young girls as damsels in distress? Why do they feel like they need a boy to complete them? For me, these were days of absolute delight. Sure, there were destructive relationships and short-lived loves, but being a teenager in love, or in infatuation, can also be sheer joy, unfettered fun, and butterflies-in-your-tummy. Perhaps our fondness for this feeling is why so many of us continue to enjoy young adult literature. Maybe I should explore the teen years more in my own writing.

In another instance, as we were driving down the road, my family noticed how beautiful the moon looked this particular night. When we got home, I sat to paint.

Artifact 15. Moon Glow



Freewrite:

The moon was so lovely tonight, as if I could reach up and touch its cool glow. As we talked and watched it journey across the sky, I remembered nights laying on the trampoline under the stars, summer evenings roasting marshmallows over hot orange embers, and floating in tubes in inky lake water watching the moon shine a path across the waves. The man in the moon holds so many memories and so many wishes. He and I have a great future together.

Journal:

What really struck me about this writing were the details…hot orange embers and the moon shining a path across the lake. These are visual pictures I could paint with my words. Being able to write descriptive passages that provide images to the reader is a skill that takes practice and careful observation.

This painting was one that I revisited several weeks later and wrote from again. I was again struck by the different meanings that a visual representation can hold as we grow and change and we hold new emotions inside ourselves when we view it. This time, my writing had a more poetic feel, but also was less hopeful and adventurous.

Freewrite #2:

Moonrise
Beautiful
Quiet
Crickets
Frogs
A loud silence

Thoughts
Mistakes
Quiet
Anger
A loud silence

Tomorrow
Sunlight
Noise
Resentment
A loud silence

Journal:

"A loud silence" is an interesting juxtaposition, but there are so many moments in life when that silence seems to beat at your eardrums and assault each nerve in your body. I wonder why the poem started out on a pretty pleasant note, but ended with tension. I think it captures how quickly a moment can turn from pure joy and wonder to sorrow and pain.

I also began to write with more description of scenes and emotions, helping my reader engage his senses. Ray Bradbury (1994) wrote, "If your reader feels the sun on his flesh, the wind fluttering his shirt sleeves, half your fight is won" (38).

In the following artifact, my class and I had gone into a courtyard on campus to complete a paint/write sequence. I had asked that students not talk during the exercise, but really seek to heighten their senses, to attend to their sense of smell, sight, taste, hearing, and feeling.

Artifact 16. Sunset Tree



Freewrite:

Sun warms my shoulders
Sirens blare in the distance
Sunlight filters through water

Water glides past softened stones
Leaves dance in the gentle breeze
People rush past, hurrying, scurrying to their next duty, looking past this quiet pocket

Seed heads twirl to the sound of the rushing stream
Shadows play on the sidewalk
Leaves crunch beneath my feet dried and ready for a snowy blanket

The AC roars to life – a surprisingly calming hum of a sound

Journal:

As I continue this tree obsession, it occurs to me that my reading is playing into my paints and my thoughts. I am currently reading Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder. I'm thinking a lot lately about the loss of nature to an entire generation. It's such a huge loss – TV and computers cannot replace standing in a dense forest and watching the dappled sunlight dance across the moss. TV cannot capture the beauty of the mountains in Colorado or the color of Lake

Louis in Canada. These are sights and experiences I'll hold in my soul, keeping me grounded in day to day office cubicle reality.

As I began to notice better descriptions in my writing, capturing an image or an emotion in words, I realized this is a piece of a writer's craft I had struggled with because I am visually minded. While I can see a scene in my mind's eye, I often struggle with the words to describe it in writing. Here are some additional examples of writing where I found evidence of improvements in my own descriptive writing.

In this first artifact, I completed two quickwrites based off one painting.

Artifact 17. Waves



Freewrite #1:

Soothing waves wash away the shore
changing the map with each undulation
shells are turned head over heels
and feet are sucked beneath the sand

Gulls hypnotize with their rhythmic caws
pausing to crunch up fallen Doritos
before spreading their angular wings
and rising to glide on the currents of salty sea air

As darkness falls, sand crabs emerge
scurrying across the beach
to tag the edge of the retreating tide
and send children darting toward light

Freewrite #2:

fighting these waves of emotion
is like trying to tame the sea
a storm raging on the horizon
so much bigger than us

she is at the edge of a change
saying goodbye to childhood
and entering into a new world
and I am immobilized

the sea will continue to rage
time will not cease
but rays of sun will shine again
so I hold her as close as she will let me

and I wait…

Journal:

The second quickwrite does not exemplify a scene description as much as an emotional description. Sometimes the most challenging task is to capture and communicate our emotions to a reader.

In the following example, the freepainting brought back a very vivid memory of hiking on a cloudy day when it just began to rain. I was surprised by the details and the descriptions in both the writing and in the journal:

Artifact 18. Summer Sprinkles



Freewrite:

Summer sprinkles arrived while we hiked at the river...little drops of life on a lonely canoe. Rain falling into a slow moving river births perfect concentric circles. Trees provide dappled shade on the water's surface and invite exploration of the other side of the water's edge. Funny, I don't even mind getting wet on this warm day. Watching the minnows flash their silvery selves…dancing in groups on the sandy bottom of the creek bed. Do you ever wonder how they know to move together? So in sync? Trail dirt sticking to my Converse, turning back, leaving the minnows for now. As the rain begins falling in heavy, hard drops.

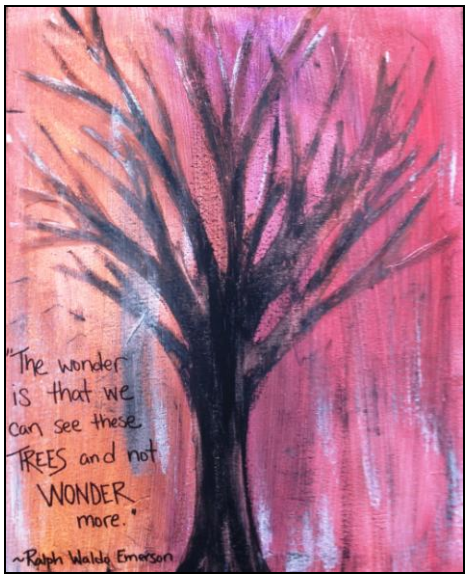
Journal:

This quickwrite was a memory…hiking in the rain. I never knew how much I loved rainy days until this drought. I long to stand in the chicken coop and hear the tink, tink, tink of raindrops on its tin roof. I miss the smell of wet dirt and the deep

green of the garden after it is washed clean of dust and is soaking in life. I miss the swish, swash, swish of windshield wipers as we drive splashing through puddles. When it does finally rain, you'll find me on the back porch, soaking it all in.

In another example, I cited the use of color and how important it was to drawing me into a familiar scene to describe and give rich, descriptive details.

Artifact 19. Wonder



Freewrite:

Just as the sun moves to its hiding spot behind the Wichita Mountains I pop out the back door...heading for the water hose. I choose to water at this time of the day because the sunsets we see over those mountains are amazing. As I make my way round our acre of vegetable and flower gardens, I check each plant's progress. Are there any green beans today? How's that tiny green tomato coming along? The peaches are almost ripe and the cantaloupe is taking over the west garden. I notice a few weeds and pull them up to give to Ginger, our little bunny. She loves to munch on the crabgrass and Johnson grass that plague our garden. Lately I'm trying to think of these weeds as a crop for Ginger so that they don't plague my sunset evenings.

Dragging the long hose behind me, being careful not to bulldoze the cleomes I've planted around the sand pit is a challenge, but the apricot tree has to be watered as well. The homesteading blogs I read are seductive, convincing me that our acre will someday be full of edible plants, herbs, and orchards, but I know that on our limited budget it will be many years in the making. Looks like the birdhouse gourds are growing well...maybe we'll have some dried gourds in the fall for a home study on the Native American uses of these amazing gifts from nature. Soon.

Journal:

I notice that this freewrite captured a very natural, typical train of thought for me as I go about my evening watering. I feel like this is related to the monologue writing that I did earlier. Train of thought writing would fold right into a short story or a novel. This is really typical of the freewrites that I do without painting, but much more descriptive. I think the colors used in the paint really drew me into a scene that I have lived so many evenings. It was easy to escape into the scene and imagine walking through that relaxing routine.

Reading as an Apprentice

As I saw stronger descriptions of scenes, the use of metaphors, and the use of raw emotions in my writing, I began to read more carefully, studying published authors and their works. In the opening scene of one of my favorite books, *Inkheart*, Cornelia Funke (2003) describes rain saying, “Rain fell that night, a fine, whispering rain. Many years later, Meggie had only to close her eyes and she could still hear it, like tiny fingers tapping on the windowpane" (p. 1). In *One Green Apple*, Eve Bunting (2006) describes hay saying it smells “like dry sunshine" (p. 8). In the book *Chasing Vermeer*,

Balliett (2005) captures an beautiful image writing, "A plum tangerine moon had just risen over Lake Michigan" (p. 1). As I have taught my students, writers read differently, and this has certainly proven true as I have taken on the identity of a writer. I have begun to save passages of fictional books like a child collects rocks, dog earring chapter books and adding them to my writer's shelf. I know that these passages provide inspiration, just as my painting does. These authors are my mentors—they know their craft and I intend to continue my apprenticeship.

Growth in Artistic Abilities

I initially believed this portion of my research was peripheral. For me, paint/write was a vehicle to authorship. It was a portal to the craft of writing. Naturally, as a byproduct of immersing myself in image making over the course of several years, I noticed a development in techniques of mixing paints and colors, choosing appropriate mediums, and adding texture and depth to my art. In *Writing Down the Bones*, Natalie Goldberg (1986) discusses the importance of a writer's choice of writing implement and notebook. The type of pen or pencil, felt tip, ball point, fine tip or medium, most of us know the importance of this issue. We have our favorite pens at the office and teachers, well, we certainly know the value of a Sharpie marker.

These same principles apply to the choices made in art. The mediums chosen to articulate the visual image can change the mood of the piece entirely. Consider for a moment the bumpy linen-like texture of a canvas versus the smooth texture of paper or the contrast of the fluid flow of water color versus the thick brushstrokes of tempera paint. As for the brush, I tend to choose a long-handled brush with wide, flat bristles. When I need a thin line, I turn the brush on its end to paint, and I rarely use water to

clean my brush in between colors because I do not like the way it dilutes the paint. I prefer to let the colors blend together more naturally or to brush off the excess paint onto an extra sheet of paper nearby.

In this example, the paints merge together creating secondary colors. This shows the painting effects that can occur when the brush is not cleaned between color changes:

Artifact 20. Iridescent Orbs



Freewrite:

Crazy iridescent orbs
house tiny rainbows.
Floating along in swift moving streams
of hot, humid summer wind.

Reflecting soft grass
and towering inverted trees,
leaving wet kisses
as they pop on my cheeks.

Journal:

The rainbows in these spheres, and the transparency of them, made me think of bubbles and lazy days letting the wind blow bubbles for my toddlers over St. Augustine

yards of lush carpets of lawn. I loved the surprised faces my girls would make when the bubbles would land on their little pudgy arms or their impossible cheeks. They were so delighted by a simple little jug of soapy bubbles. A rainbow of magic in that tiny bottle. Simplicity.

In this example I discuss painting techniques, adding light and shadow to introduce dimension to the image:

Artifact 21. Floating



Freewrite:

Floating
The wind our dictator
If we ever land
We will surely be destroyed
We must continue

Floating
Without rest
Without control
Without contentment or peace
We drift on

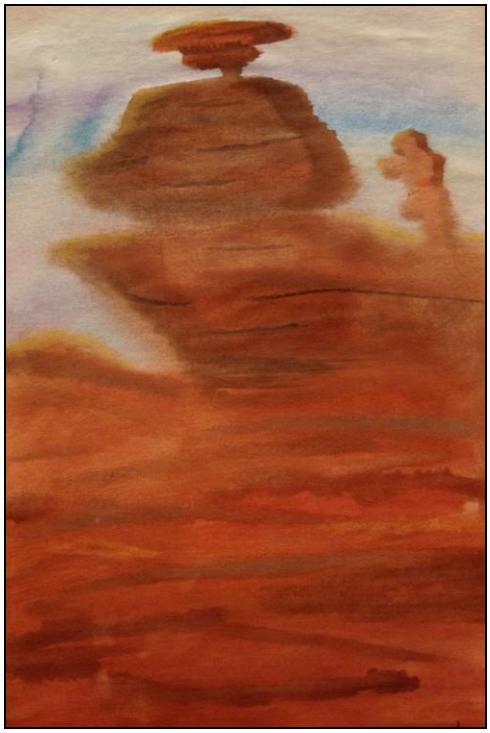
Journal:

Mastering light and shadow has become a goal. Light seems easier, visualizing where the sun would sit and hitting objects with a touch of it…funny how just that bit of

energy brings things to life and off a page. Shadow is harder, distorted and stretched as the day goes on. I think I'll wait a bit to try it.

Later, I did try shadow with some success in this piece:

Artifact 22. Bouldering



Freewrite:

As I face this delicately balanced boulder, I can't help but think how nature might orchestrate such things. But then, it defies the laws of nature, doesn't it, for the rocks to be perched here in such a way? This is why I come here, to this canyon...to see the rock formations and marvel at it all. The striations in the rock, the way the wind and rain have carved these sculptures without the help of opposable thumbs. Climbing them only gives me a closer view. See you at the top!

Journal:

Completing a paint/write as a monologue really brings a more realistic paint to life. I imagine that this would provide some interesting characters for larger writing

projects! This would also encourage interaction with paintings on a museum trip with my own students.

I did try to add some shadow here with some success…still needing work in this area. As I painted, I enjoyed how the watercolors captured the rock striations. Good match of medium/subject.

As with children in a writing center, it seems that changing the medium can inject new excitement into the experience of image making. During the paint/write class, I was particularly taken with wet on wet watercolor painting, that is, wetting watercolor paper by brushing it generously with water then painting on it with watercolor paints. At that time, I was taken with Prang watercolors as they have a deeper color than many watercolors that I have used in the past and Dr. Angelotti taught us how to prime the paints, to put a drop of water on each paint pot and allow it to soak into the dry paint a moment before beginning. I had spent days experimenting with wet on wet watercolor techniques until I arrived at class on Wednesday and Dr. Angelotti requested that I not to use watercolors that day, only tempera. Initially, it was frustrating to step out of the comfort of my favorite medium, but I have come to favor tempera paint and I am thankful for the challenge of that Wednesday. Occasionally I utilize a new medium, as in the previous example when I painted on newsprint, especially if I feel that I have become stagnant in my image making. In this example, I had just purchased some canvases and painted on one for the first time:

Artifact 23. Canvas



Freewrite:

I've always loved trees. It is just amazing to me that they are living things...huge sprawling Live Oaks engulfing what seems to be a half-acre with their reaching arms. Cottonwoods sing a song of the cool rushing rapids of Colorado while the Bradford Pears build a shell to protect nesting birds. Trees reveal the seasons and provide support for squeaky wooden swings. Others birth fruits that taste of summer and sunshine.

Their service doesn't stop in life, either. We harvest them as we would wheat, whacking and thwacking at their strong trunks before sling their flesh in the sawmill to create our homes, our furniture, and our backyard decks. We walk across them as they rot, never to know their fullest potential.

Journal:

Painting on canvas transforms the overall feel of the painting experience. The texture of the backdrop add another layer to the painting and I love the way the brown

from my brush gave a mottled feel over the sunset backdrop on this piece. It really was an afterthought to sweep my brush across and the results added a depth that would not have come on paper. Must buy more canvases…

Another artifact contained a freewrite that pointed toward painting techniques; however, in the end it proved to be a comparison with ego and selfishness and the challenge of raising sisters.

Artifact 24. Perspective



Freewrite:

Perspective is a hard painting concept to master. It all works out beautifully in your head, but on paper it turns out one-dimensional. Then you plant a big old tree in the foreground and it looks all artificial and out of place. I shouldn't be surprised, though, perspective is a hard one to master in life, too. Seeing things from someone else's point of view and stepping into their shoes for a moment is one of the most difficult things...teaching it to a child is really a trip.

"Why did you take Maddie's doll?"

"Because I wanted it!"

"Don't you think SHE wanted it?"

"Yes."

"So...why did you grab it?"

"BECAUSE I WANTED IT!"

Seems that's all that really matters.

Looking back through my artwork, I was struck by two similar pieces that did demonstrate some growth.

Artifact 25. First Bird in Tree Painting 1/16/2011



Artifact 26. Second Bird in Tree Painting 2/2/2012



Both showed trees. Both contained a small songbird. It is a familiar sight out my kitchen window where my girls keep a small bird feeder filled with thistle seed. The songbirds sit in that tree, silhouetted with blue skies and fluffy white clouds, grey storm clouds, or pink and orange sunsets lighting up the sky. These two paintings did demonstrate some growth in my painting abilities. As I examine the two, side by side, I note proportions of the birds, the tree trunks, and the spread of the branches. The use of the partial border in the second piece is also pleasing to me, and sets boundaries for the piece. Perhaps some of these differences can be attributed to the variation in media as the first was completed using watercolor and the second in tempera, and the latter admittedly offers more control to the artist.

While I am happy to see the development in my visual arts, I discovered the true value in the paintings, for me, was that they allowed time to lose myself in play and surrender to memories, observations, or censored thoughts that my conscious mind would not entertain. I believe there is significant value in the visual representations for me is to serve as more of a portal to enter into my subconscious thoughts…to get past the grocery list and thoughts of who I should call to fix the dryer, to the real writing material. I came to envision the conscious and subconscious as a frozen river. When we stand on the bank, we only see the still, lifeless crust atop, but underneath there is a strong current with fish darting in search of food. There are beautiful, perfectly smooth rocks tumbling along, struggling to keep up with the flow of the water, this is where we find the subconscious, the real writing material. I needed a method to get past the ice and into the current below. Perhaps then I should consider painting like an ice saw,

allowing me to cut through the crust to peer into the interesting part of my thoughts—that area teaming with life.

While I believe ekphrasis served to improve mainly my writing skills, it did offer confidence in sharing my paintings with others without fear of judgment as they were not necessarily the focus of the art making. I cultivated an identity as an artist as I practiced image-making and began to more freely display my art.

Summary

Revisiting my writing artifacts through this journey, I was initially taken aback by the swings in emotion, but then I read Ray Bradbury's (1994) words:

> The history of each story, then, should read almost like a weather report: Hot today, cool tomorrow. This afternoon, burn down the house. Tomorrow, pour cold critical water upon simmering coals. Time enough to think and cut and rewrite tomorrow. But today—explode—fly apart—disintegrate! The other six or seven drafts are going to be pure torture. So why not enjoy the first draft, in the hope that your joy will seek and find others in the world who, reading your story will catch fire, too? (p. 7)

So, then, I felt some satisfaction in having captured my weather report over the past two years. As I read back through these quickwrites and journals, they are, indeed, artifacts of growth and evidence of an author's craft. I see metaphors, descriptions of scenes, transparency of emotions, a rawness of the human condition. I see powerful words captured on paper. This is the gift that paint/write and this heuristic journey have given to this researcher.

Chapter 5 – Implications

In this final chapter, I comment on the implications of this research. I will devote some space in this chapter for Moustakas' (1990) explication phase, examining what has awakened in my consciousness as a writer and as an artist through the paint/write process. I will also offer pedagogical implications based on my findings. I review my findings and conclusions are offered in regards to the research questions:

- *How does paint/write unfold in my personal experience?*
- *How might extended interactions with paint/write influence my painting and writing abilities and therefore my identity as an artist and writer?*

Personal Implications as a Writer

I undertook the heuristic methodology knowing that there was an autobiographic element (Moustakas, 1990) and that primary goals included self-discovery and self-transformation (Moustakas, 1990; Sela-Smith, 2002). My journey certainly did not disappoint. In reflecting on the whole of this process in the explication phase, I see the intersection of creativity, writing, and psychology. A writer cannot find her truth in writing until she breaks through into past memories, subconscious thoughts, and the veil of political correctness into the real material.

As I revealed in Chapter One, I have always longed to be a writer, for as long as I can remember; however, I have not made space for it in my life, nor have I claimed it as part of my identity. Writing has taken a back burner to many other pursuits, coming to the forefront only on occasion, such as the summer of 1999 when I participated in the Oklahoma State University Writing Project Summer Institute and reconnected with a community of writers, or when I began my Ph.D. program here at the University of

Oklahoma and found friendships among a cadre of literacy buffs who wrote as much as they read.

In Chapter Three, I wrote about having discovered the power in claiming space, both physical and emotional, for my art and writing. As a piece of heuristics, this idea of creating an inward space is called focusing and is one of the core concepts of this type of research (Moustakas, 1990). Claiming this physical and emotion space is the catalyst that begins the chain reaction of ekphrasis; however, as a mother, a wife, and a full-time university instructor, maintaining that commitment must be purposeful. Educators all too often put the needs and schedules of others above our own, but for the good of my own writing and subsequent writing instruction, I must hold fast to setting aside this space for myself if I am to maintain the momentum that I have built throughout this research. I feel that it is a crucial point that I continue the forward motion in painting and writing that I have established because I know the difficulty of beginning again once I have stalled.

After setting aside space for writing, I was able to experience deeper, more introspective subjects emerging in my paint/write artifacts. This research brought about two surprisingly polar opposites in my writing that I did not fully recognize until I reached Moustakas' (1990) explication phase and began to fully examine the results of my research, beyond even the answers to my initial research questions. I was able to go beyond a safe, everyday quality in my writing to discover both light and darkness. First, I began to find my light. In Chapter Three, I point out how Jung's (1958) theories of active imagination and transcendent function allowed me to discover beautiful memories like the freewrite that flowed from the paint Moonlit Path, a memory of my

grandfather and I going for a moonlit hike during a camping trip. The second example revealed a memory of catching tadpoles with my cousins after a spring rainstorm in the freewrite that flowed from the paint Murky Waters. In my journal I wrote:

> *I hadn't truly remembered this before I began writing. It's nice to have these memories written down and captured. Seems that I dwell on negative childhood memories and hold on to those in my conscious memories, but all these positive ones were there all along, hidden away and waiting to be discovered. What a lovely gift.*

In the past, I have consistently struggled with a lack of positive childhood memories. When given an assignment to write about my childhood, I typically came up blank, staring at the page without any place to begin, not wanting to write about painful or embarrassing moments. I have always been one to seize on to negative incidences in my mind and mull them over, reliving mistakes I have made or hateful words spoken to me, holding on to those negative memories like precious photographs, filling my scrapbooks to overflowing then glancing around and wondering where my childhood had gone. All I thought I had left were cerebral snapshots of my hateful uncle yelling what a klutz I was or my mental Polaroids of tripping and landing spread eagle in the middle school hallway to the delighted laughter of a the in crowd, who happened to be standing nearby—just my luck. Digging up the treasures of those buried memories truly was, and is, a gift that ekphrasis has given to me. I am so thankful that they were stored in my mind and that I have found a pathway to retrieve them.

With that said, I turn to the darkness I was able to reveal in my writing. I discussed it in Chapter Four under the subheading "Death of the Inner Censor." An

admittedly dramatic subheading, however; it captured my overwhelming emotions at the moment when I was able to reveal feelings and thoughts that I previously would have hidden, even from my husband, family, and close friends. I am a secret keeper. As mentioned, though I may hold onto the negative, I would never have written it down! I veil feelings that I deem unflattering and shove them down deep within my core, all the while pasting a smile on my face for the outside world. This dark writing was entirely new to me.

Just after freeing myself to write from my core and release some of my true emotions, I set out to try to understand the implications of this loss of my inner censor through Moustakas' (1990) immersion. I read trusted authors finding affirmation in their words (Bradbury, 1994; Goldberg, 1986, 2013; Lamott, 1994), but I continued my research process, experiencing one of Moustakas' concepts he calls indwelling, defined as "Turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of the nature or meaning of a quality or theme of human experience" (1990, p. 24). In indwelling, I began to ask deeper questions of myself as I gained identity as a writer and an artist, such as:

- How much transparency is appropriate in the mainstream world?
- How much of our own truth is acceptable in educational social circles?

Cassou and Cubley (1995) address these issues as well, though they are focus on painting, it certainly applies to both the painted and the written products of paint/write:

> It is true that a lot has been stored in the reservoir of emotional consciousness. All repressed feelings accumulate inside and become more and more threatening as time goes on. The error is to ignore them. They may be huge, blood-thirsty,

> and glow in the dark, but they are cardboard demons, and they lose their power as soon as they have been painted. They are dangerous only when kept prisoner, and it requires lots of energy to keep them locked up and tranquilized. When they appear on the paper, a vibrant energy floods the body and you feel relieved because you don't have to stand guard anymore (p. 87).

Humans have a natural duality of existence in our public and private lives, with this identity I have gained comes a responsibility to be true to the crafts I am honing. I have to continually to remind myself of Anne Lamott's words, taped to the inside cover of my journal:

> But you can't get to any of these truths by sitting in a field smiling beatifically, avoiding your anger and damage and grief. Your anger and damage and grief are the way to the truth. We don't have much truth to express unless we have gone into these rooms and closets and woods and abysses that we were told not to go in to. When we have gone in and looked around for a long while, just breathing and finally taking it in – then we will be able to speak in our own voice and to stay in the present moment. And that moment is home (1994, p. 201).

Finding the balance in my writing between the light and darkness will come in time, perhaps, or maybe it is a pendulum that swings with the author's mood and life events. This is something I will have to gauge over time as I continue my paint/write journey.

Personal Implications as an Artist

During Moustakas' (1990) explication phase, I realized that there was a strong connection between Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) flow theory and the concept of freepainting as a stimulus to the paint/write cycle. Cassou and Cubley (1995) use different terminology as they discuss "process" painting, but it is certainly the same concept as the technique I have worked with for this research. In their book, *Life, Paint and Passion*, Cassou and Cubley write:

> If you paint for product you have a certain result in mind. You have a direction, a goal, a place you are trying to reach—you follow a map. If you paint for process you can go anywhere. There is freedom. Possibilities are endless. When you paint for process you listen to the magic of the inner voices you follow the basic human urge to experiment with the new, the unknown, the mysterious, the hidden" (1995, pp. 4-5).

As stated in Chapter Three, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) identifies nine factors that tend to be linked an experience of flow. By embracing this process painting or freepainting, many of these factors were satisfied; however, I am struck by the stark contrast of the experience when I attempt to paint for product. That small shift in purpose makes all the difference in the ability to enter flow. When I am painting for product and I have an image in mind when I begin painting, I do not experience the energy, spontaneous joy, and intrinsic motivation that are the earmarks of flow. It is apparent to me that maintaining the focus on process painting, or freepainting, is essential to my entry into a state of flow. For instance, there was a long stretch of time that I seemed to paint only trees. I had purchased some canvases to paint on and had

determined not to paint a tree one day. After painting for quite a long time one day, I wrote this journal entry:

> *I broke my own rules today and instead of freepainting, did not allow myself to paint the thing I have been drawn to paint for weeks, trees. I painted for hours, only to realize that I felt like the scene was terrible. I swiped through the whole thing with my brushes and painted…a tree…over it all. It was a lovely backdrop. Lesson learned: I have to allow myself to freepaint or I am just wasting my time. I will eventually come back around to what my mind wanted to explore.*

In this example, I did not achieve the flow experience until I allowed myself to surrender to freepainting. It is interesting to note that self consciousness over being stuck in painting trees, a fear of failure—that I might not be able to paint anything else, and a lack of intrinsic motivation were all involved in blocking my flow experience until I surrendered to my creative intuition and allowed my painting to emerge for itself.

Personal Implications as a Researcher

As I completed this project, I found that in heuristic research, the search is the true journey. In my haste to get to the finish line of my project, I almost overlooked the joy of the beast. Along the way I was lost and wandering for awhile, but at some point, I began to circle back upon myself. Natalie Goldberg (2013) wrote,

> Sometimes we fail for a week, a month, a year, a decade. And then we come back, circle the fire. Our lives are not linear. We get lost, then we get found. Patience is important and a large tolerance for our mistakes. We don't become anything overnight. (p. 38)

When I read those words in *The True Secret of Writing* I felt as though she might have been watching my dissertation writing process as I had certainly found periods of failure then periods of euphoric success. There were moments that I was ready to lay the whole process down and walk away. Then it seemed that every piece of research I combed through contained the same names and pointed toward the same theories. I began to see an image of how the seemingly random pieces of this puzzle might fit together. As I spoke of my research I became able to describe my work more clearly and elicit thoughtful, in-depth discussions from colleagues. The moment it all came together was when I finally gained the courage of my conviction to dismantle my literature review and to weave it into my artifacts, representing my research as it truly occurred, in a dynamic, recursive process of paint/write, and literature search. As I brought that tapestry of puzzle pieces together, the picture of my work formed.

Finding a framework to fit my research into was part of my creative synthesis. It was important to remain true to the recursive, blending of processes that I experienced; thus, naming the chapters after the phases of Moustakas' heuristic inquiry did not represent my experience—it was not a linear, lock step process that I had encountered. Staying true to Sela-Smith's (2002) recommendations, I had avoided mechanization of the phases of heuristic research, instead choosing to release control to see what each phase had to discover. I finally settled on a merged design, linking the common dissertation format, but incorporating the literature review into two findings chapters in order to maintain the ties identified during my immersion phase between my raw material (the paint/write artifacts), the literature, and my individual research questions.

Near the very end of my creative synthesis phase, another lesson was learned. I had written a very different Chapter Five, one that was not written in step with my research, but in an effort to make this dissertation appear like others I had read. My previous Chapter Five focused almost entirely on public education and not enough attention on the personal transformation that was at the center of this work. Dr. Angelotti advised me that I had lost my voice—that I had done all this work to find my voice and now I must protect it. Shortly after that meeting, I read these words in Cassou and Cubley (1995):

> Creation aims at the experience of truth, a truth that has not been filtered by anything or anyone else. Most of the pain and misery of life come when we surrender the intelligence of our spontaneous intuition to other people or outside ideas, weakening our inner strength and understanding. The process of painting is about reclaiming both. Teachers may be able to get you started and, perhaps later on, they can provide support by pointing out blind spots and patterns. But remember: You are doing the work. Keep it as your own. It is the wise urge of creation that makes you grow, expand, and enter yourself. The middleman is not important. Do not give away to another the beauty of your own process" (p. 162).

Dr. Angelotti was able to point out a blind spot, that I had stepped out of my research methodology in an effort to fit into someone else's frame of reference. That is a research lesson that I will take with me from this project and into future studies.

As I took a second look at my final chapter, I understood that pedagogy is still a piece of me and a piece of this research looking forward; however, for the purpose of

this study and in staying true to my research, the focus had to remain on the transformation that took place in my identity first and how it would affect my pedagogy as a secondary piece.

Personal Pedagogical Implications

I teach pre-service teachers at a regional university in southwestern Oklahoma. Now that I have a deeper understanding of the paint/write phenomena, I plan to utilize the technique as a teaching method in my courses along with explanations of the core processes at work during paint/write as well as the development in painting and writing that are possible when students are encouraged to freepaint and freewrite in the classroom.

My current students are in the process of forming their own teaching pedagogies and many of them realize the tipping point nature of the times we are in, with curricular changes going into effect and assessment changes coming soon after. Common Core State Standards has the potential to be framed in a way that views learning as holistic and project-based, affording a wonderful opportunity to re-envision teaching and learning in Oklahoma schools and across our nation; however, if the focus of education reform continues down a path of standardization instead of individualization, uniformity of outcomes instead of the development of identity, the development of the arts becomes superfluous. Ken Robinson speaks widely about the need for increased creativity in school curriculum and wrote about it in *Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative*:

> Current approaches to education and training are hobbled by assumptions about intelligence and creativity that have squandered the talents and stifled the

> creative confidence of untold numbers of people. This waste stems partly from an obsession with certain types of academic ability and from a preoccupation with standardized testing. The waste of talent is not deliberate. Most educators have a deep commitment to helping students do their best. Politicians too, make impassioned speeches about making the most of every student's abilities. The waste of talent may not be deliberate but it is systemic. It is systemic, because public education is a system, and it is based on deep-seated assumptions that are no longer true" (2011, p. 8).

Ekphrasis is a process that honors the writing and visually representing pieces of the language arts. Though I routinely teach that the language arts include viewing and seem underutilized in the classrooms as they complete their field experiences. Maxine Greene says, "Experiences with the arts and the dialogues to which they give rise may give the teachers and learners involved more opportunity for the authentic conversations out of which questioning and critical thinking and, in time, significant inquiries can arise" (2000, p. 277). These authentic conversations are the stimulus needed to draw in students who are standing in the wings of our classrooms, hesitant to engage in the real work taking place within our literature circles and writer's groups.

The creative arts include painting, storytelling, and poetry—they are the language of ekphrasis. As I discovered through this study, the arts are a pathway to understanding oneself and the world that surrounds us. Ekphrasis develops the ability to express feelings and ideas through different forms and modes of expression in authentic, individualized language arts experiences. In a time where standardized testing seeks to standardize children and learning, Maxine Greene said, "Education is,

or ought to be, a process of enabling young people to become different, to learn how to make sense of their lived worlds, how to look through the perspectives provided by the disciplines as they order and expand their experiences" (2009, p. 83). This is my hope for education and a lens I hope to provide for my students as well, that we might offer ekphrasis as a way to make sense of the lived world—to order and expand students' experiences, to develop their own identities and improve their skills in the arts and writing.

Further Research

This exploration has given me a depth of understanding of the paint/write process, allowing for a number of rich, meaningful interactions with my students, area teachers, and school administrators. As I had hoped, I am now able to fully explain the processes that take place during ekphrasis and how it might improve students' writing in the classroom. Now that I can communicate this synergistic relationship more effectively, I am ready to further research the process through my interactions with pre-service teachers and in public school environments.

Pre-service teachers who are comfortable in creating free art and freewrites will be more likely to use ekphrasis in their own classrooms. Future research will include tracking groups of first year teachers after experiencing ekphrasis in my course out into the schools to see if they utilize the technique, and to document their elementary students' reactions and writing using paint/write. Topics of interest within this research would include:

- teachers' self-efficacy in using paint/write in the classroom

- students' self-efficacy in their writing abilities after extended paint/write experiences
- development of the students' writing abilities with prolonged ekphrasis experiences
- students' experience of flow as they experience ekphrasis as a writing technique

Conclusions

In his 1934 book, *Art as Experience*, John Dewey stated, "We have no word in the English language that unambiguously include what is signified by the two words 'artistic' and 'esthetic.' Since 'artistic' refers primarily to the act of producing and 'esthetic' to that of perception and enjoyment, the absence of a term designating the two processes taken together is unfortunate" (p. 48). I would argue that ekphrasis, using the active painting technique, as opposed to simply viewing other's paintings, provides a bridge between 'artistic' and 'esthetic'. When paint/write is employed, it demands interaction during both the creation and the interpretation of the image. Further, this synergistic process meets each requirement for flow as described by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), inducing a euphoric "in the zone" experience for the individual.

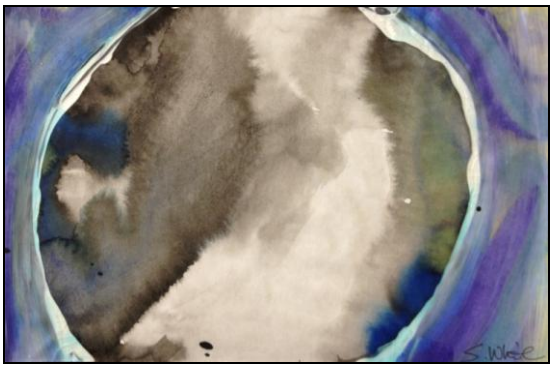
My initial research question was, "*How does paint/write unfold in my person experience?"* After an extended immersion period spent completing freepaints, freewrites, subsequently journaling, and ongoing literature searches, I found strong threads of existing theories at work in the ekphrastic process. It became apparent that focused attention, creating a physical space, and a mental space for ekphrasis was essential to the immersion period my research. After establishing focused attention and allowing space for visual/verbal interplay, I was able to experience two phenomena

labeled by Jung. The first, active imagination, is a method of purposefully engaging in dialogue with the unconscious. Secondly, transcendent function is a fundamental shift in consciousness achieved through the unification of the conscious and unconscious minds reached only through frequent exercising of active imagination. Active imagination and the transcendent function allowed me to use abstract visual images to access childhood memories I had not previously recalled. While Jung's theories address access to areas of the mind that are often unreachable, another theory was also at work. Flow is a psychological concept describing a state of being in full immersion in an activity for intrinsic purposes with feelings of energized focus and a loss of awareness of time and it allowed me to immediately begin writing after completing a visual arts piece with no hesitation or time lost to writer's block.

My second research question was, *"How might extended, in-depth interactions with paint/write affect an individual's painting and writing abilities and therefore her identity as an artist and writer?"* As I have practiced a prolonged ekphrasis experience, I have witnessed a strong link between Flow Theory and self-efficacy in my own writing. My experience resulted in writings that contained a transparency of emotions, showing a rawness of the human condition, heightened awareness of my surroundings and an attempt to make significance of these observations in my writing. I began to use more description of scenes and emotions. I also began to utilize the poetic device of metaphor in my writing. Development was also apparent in my painting abilities in the use of light and shadow, perspective and the use of small effects such as borders and the blending of colors. All these developments had the effect establishing an identity as an artist and as a writer.

By devoting myself to a heuristic process of studying this phenomenon, I was able to implement it more effectively in my own teaching. My goal was to provide an introspective, rich description that provides a depth of experience and I believe that I fully achieved that objective. In the end, there was one paint/write that I continued to come back to, time and time again:

Artifact 27. Dreams



Dreams

Owning a small farm
Raising chickens
Harvesting fresh produce for my family
Just moments before cooking it

Running a quaint little bookstore
Up in the mountains of Colorado
Hiking each morning
And bringing my dog to work

A life unhurried
With time, precious time
To pursue that which pleases me
And fulfills the cavern named creativity

Watching my children grow
Into remarkable adults
With dreams of their own
And a pocketful of marvelous memories

The third stanza especially rings true for me, for my pre-service teachers, and I believe for our schools. We must all allow ourselves a bit of that precious commodity called time to fill with creative endeavors. Paint/write is a powerful tool for fulfilling that cavern and reaching a new generation of potential artists and writers. Natalie Goldberg wrote, "To find your writer's voice is to find your spine; it is to connect your breath of inspiration with the world's breath" (2013, p. xvi). This was the journey of paint/write, a transformation, to find my writer's voice and my artist's brush. Now it is my privilege to lead others along the path.

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Appendix: Additional Immersion Artifacts

Artifact 28. The Shack



Freewrite:

The shack is a space to go and meet God, to hear Him and to speak with Him, without the distractions of the modern world. Without the constant humming and whirring and revving that fill the space that I call home, I can find His voice. Trouble is, lately when I head out to the shack and close the old, creaky wooden door, I still hear the world in my ear screaming its constant opinions and judgments, speculations and plans for the future. Suddenly, the shack is no longer a place of peace and a place of quiet, a place of solitude and introspection...it is a place of doubt and fear filled with the distraction of noise. Airwaves, heat waves, and sound waves clash in a war of diversion that seductively escorts me away from Him.

Journal:

I'm thinking a lot lately about getting quiet and spending time in meditation and prayer. It seems that constant rushing around that our family does is not conducive to a spiritual life or a walk with God. I enjoyed having this paint/write time to think about

this problem. I never thought about ekphrasis as time to think, or meditate, or pray, but it could be that as well. Time out. Quiet time. It sort of is my shack, isn't it? It is my peace and quiet. It is a place where I de-stress and just breathe. I process the day or things I'm reading. Hmmmm...interesting...

Artifact 29. Fellowship of the Cinders



Freewrite:

Shadows gather
Whispered tones
Fellowship of the cinders
Gather here
Springtime meetings
Time stands still

Journal:

There is something quite primal about a campfire and a group of friends huddling round to talk. It is a struggle to pull yourself away, even for a moment, pulled back to the flames, to stare into them. It seems that the world's biggest problems might be solved there. As if you are isolated from it all in your bubble of light. Coyotes yip in the distance and the stars are spread out in the sky. What I wouldn't do to make those nights last forever. The next day, the smell of woodsmoke lingers to remind you of the evening…the warmth and the friendship and the conversation.

Artifact 30. Songs of Tomorrow



Freewrite:

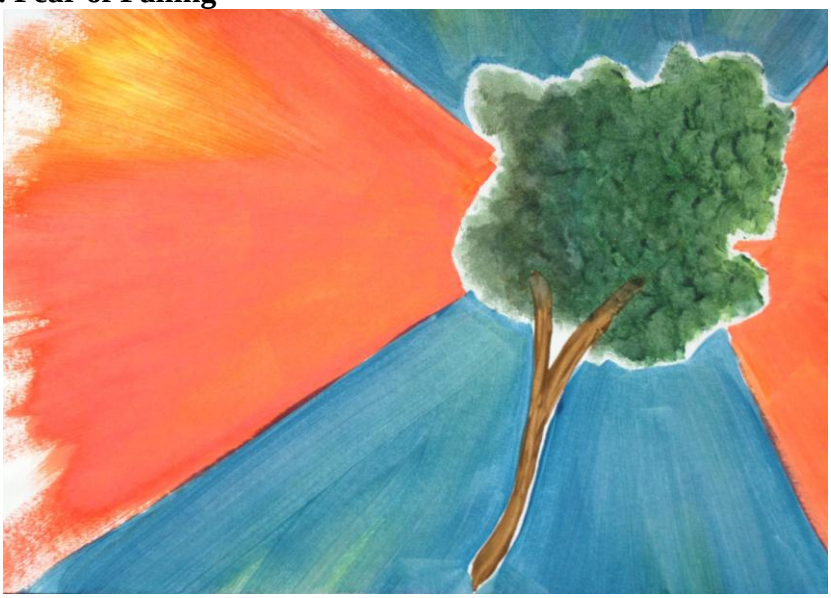
Dark days
hope remains
shadows capture the essence
without color
without dimension

Dark days
birds remain
singing songs of tomorrow
times will change
hope remains

Journal:

I'm immediately interested by the fact that the tree is so dark, but the surroundings are full of color. It makes me think of a silhouette against a Seussville sunset or sunrise. As I painted, I realized that what I was actually creating was a background...then came the outline of a tiny bird. Finally, the tree came, off center to add interest and to provide a perch for that little bird. I tried a new brush and found it captures the movement of nature, squiggly imperfect lines. I like the look of the partial borders, anchoring the piece, but without making it too formal.

Artifact 31. Fear of Falling



Freewrite:

My fear of falling has kept me from many things...like rock climbing and diving boards. I struggled with skiing in Santa Fe because of it, and refused the very idea of bungee jumping. The one thing I refuse to give up is hiking. I remember hiking the switchbacks in Colorado one summer when we came up on a wash out on the trail. The rest of our crew took this inconvenience in stride, literally, by jumping the gap without any problems. I, on the other hand, sat on the steep incline that was the side of the mountain and scooted sideways across the expanse of traillessness that stood between me and the peak of the mountain. When we reached the top of the mountain, the fear of falling hit once again as everyone else approached the edge of a rock outcropping to take in the panoramic view. "I can enjoy the view from here!" I say from five feet back...and I did.

Journal:

Fears can be absolutely paralyzing. They are an interesting writing topic. Main characters with crippling fears, or honestly sharing your fears in writing with

your children. Why do we always try to hide our fears, as if pride can cover them over? I think I rather prefer both characters and friends who are real, with both strengths and weaknesses. Even superheroes have limitations!

Artifact 32. Empty Vessel



Freewrite:

Stand Alone
An empty vessel
Gathering experiences
Learning, growing
…stand alone

Though the world burns
With activity, energy,
Hustle-bustle and stress
…stand alone

Though your enemies
Sling oily black judgments on you
…stand alone

Though anger surrounds you
As you walk your way
…stand alone

Journal:

When I began writing, I truly had no idea where this was going. An empty vase was my first thought. When I was painting, I was just concentrating on the shapes and the curves of the vase. I don't usually paint with such clear lines, so this was something different for me. I was surprised that so much meaning could be carried by such a simple visual representation.

Artifact 33. Frazzled



Freewrite:

Random and orderly at the same time, is that even possible? The more colorful the day gets – more activities, packing supplies for the day, everyone in the car – NOW, WE'RE LATE – the more frazzled I feel. I'm so thankful for friends, for healthy children who want to juggle soccer, 4-H, gymnastics, and ice cream stops, but I'd like to find the lever that stops this machine.

Slow down. Cuddle on the couch. Cook brownies together. I keep saying we're going to slow down, then stare hopelessly at the calendar, wondering when.

Journal:

Looking at this art piece, the bright colors at first seem random, but on closer inspection, you see the purposeful graduation in the shading. I experimented with negative space, taking away color for the stripes to the right of the purple sphere. That purple felt like the slow down, quiet piece of the day, and the lines represented movement and hurried parts of the day. I'm beginning to look at art like a musician looks at sheet music, looking for signs and clues. What does this tell me?

Artifact 34. Girls' Night Out



Freewrite:

Girls' night out, talking and laughing till my cheeks hurt, sharing common struggles and frustrations, victories and fears. Drinks, Hibachi steak, loud music and mini vans. All of us streaming into a tattoo parlor, and only one of us sticking it out to get a tattoo. I didn't have girl friends growing up, too much drama, couldn't be trusted, but these ladies are my rocks. They know my heart and they hold me up when I feel like a complete failure. Girls' night out. Laughing till my cheeks hurt.

Journal:

I love the shape of the glass in this piece and the shading. It almost feels like a glow. I think this paint/write reflects how life experiences can color our art and our writing. Girls' night out is pretty unusual for me, not a monthly or usual occurrence, it's just hard for us all to schedule time to all go out together. In fact, going out at night is pretty out of the ordinary! It is nice to see a change of pace in my work and to know that life is reflected. I look forward to seeing travel experiences and seasons of time reflected in my art and writi

Artifact 35. Spring Grass



Freewrite:

Green is my favorite color – it speaks of spring, of life, of newly broken soil and garden possibilities. Bright blue sky, water, and a bit of sunshine are all that's needed then the garden rows begin to take shape – always with a promise of a weed free plot this year! As I plant that garden I can see what it could become, at the height of the growing season, and I picture all four of us working in it together as the summer crawls along. All that gardening soon gives way to cooking and canning – sweet times spent in the kitchen with my little ones. These are the family memories that I hold to each year.

Journal:

It is amazing how color evokes a feeling and a memory. Simple shapes can capture a whole thought, the paints don't have to be complicated to inspire writing. This artifact is proof of that to me. As I continue this process, it is important that I not focus too much on pressure of representing objects in the paints, sometimes objects come through, other times very abstract images hold meaning. Both forms of ekphrasis are equally meaningful and valid. I think I might like to paint a whole room with this simple, crazy grass, it just evokes such joyful memories and is so undemanding and effortless.

Artifact 36. Playful



Quickwrite:

Two years apart, but growing at breakneck pace. Wish they would slow down a bit and give me a chance to savor the moments. To catch it all in a jar. To save it for later. I feel like I'm missing it all some days. Like I'll look back and be sorry that I worked or sorry that I went to school. Today I want to just sit here...and play.

Journal:

This mom job is not for sissies. Juggling it all can feel like a mountain on your chest one day then the very next day you believe you are superwoman for packing a bynto lunch and sending in homemade Valentine cards. I love my career, and I love my family, so it all has to fit. Another writing topic for sure. As I talk to other moms, I know we are all feeling the same way, there should be more fiction out there that we can relate to...not self-help books for goodness sakes, good contemporary realistic fiction starring us...crazy busy moms. Someday maybe I'll write it. But then that would make me more busy, wouldn't it?

Artifact 37. Marble Collection







Freewrite:

Marbles in a jar
are joyous little things.

They hold memories of play
with sunshine and dirt
with sticks and rocks.

They speak of laughter and friends
without chargers and apps
and without glowing screens.

Marbles in a jar
are joyous little things.

Journal:

It's interesting to see different perspectives on one object. That's what happens with art, in my opinion; we each bring ourselves to the work so that each person interprets it differently. My students have a difficult time with this concept, posturing and pouting when someone gets the wrong image from their paintings. Perhaps this activity would be a good way to make the point that art is a conversation between the artist and the viewer…each conversation is unique because of the prior knowledge and life experiences of the viewer. It's what makes a trip to the museum such a personal experience.

Artifact 38. Punctuation



Freewrite:

Sunsets
Sunrises
Capital Letters
Question Marks
The beginning of a thought
Wondering what tomorrow might bring

Journal:

Both ends of the day are expectant with meaning, whether it is dread over events to come or regret over words spoken too quickly. Some ends are full of excitement and joy, filling the ends of the day so full that it spills over into the middle and fills the night, too. Once again, simple colors in a row carry meaning and the form of the colors is not central to the process. This is a great example to save and share with my students to emphasize that you don't have to be a gifted artist to engage in ekphrasis.

Artifact 39. Just Dance



Quickwrite:

Feel the music
Without caring
Just dance
Rhythm and beat
Splashes of color

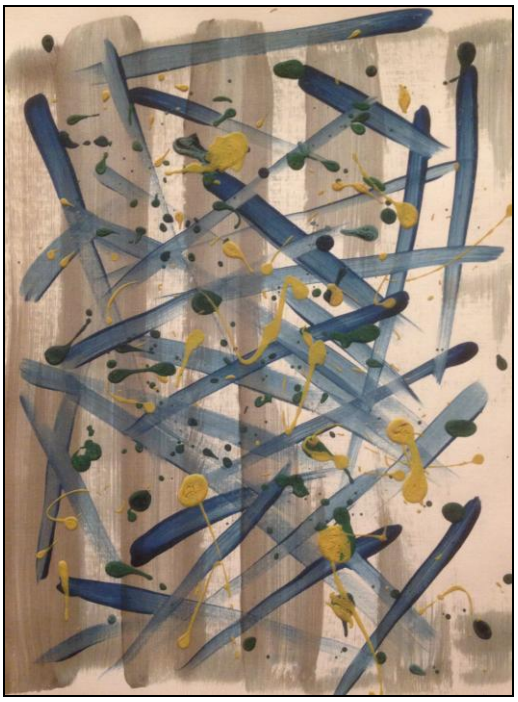
Feel the music
Deep in your chest
Ringing in your ears
Beads of sweat gliding
Down your spine

Journal:

I came across this ad in a newspaper and thought it would be fun to use in a mixed media paint. The motion of the image was so intriguing that it was fun to try to mirror with a few brushstrokes and splashes of color then set the whole thing off by framing it in metallic bronze and silver paints.

Honestly, it has been quite a long time since I have been dancing, the vivid senses of my memories were surprising to me. I may never grow tired of the way ekphrasis allows me to visualize a scene and give a rich description. I think it may be time to go out dancing again.

Artifact 40. Pieces of Me



Freewrite:

Pieces of me. This painting makes me think of how we are all just scattered pieces of history. We all have a story, and it is really told in bits and pieces...coffee mugs and photos. My parents live at my granny & grandpa's old homestead. They've built a new home there and they use granny's old house as storage. Years ago, after my grandparents had both passed on, vandals broke into their home and stole so many things, even the wood stove. It was terrible and heartbreaking to lose all those family heirlooms, those pieces of me, but I was thrilled when I discovered that granny's enameled cast iron kitchen sink was still in the house. My dad and husband recently pulled the sink off the wall for me so I could build a garden sink & resurrect granny's beloved farm sink. It feels like I have another piece of me, of my history, here in Oklahoma. Right along with canning jars and grandpa's biscuit cutter, and now my

journals and knitting needles become pieces of my history. All pieces of me that my girls will someday think of as pieces of themselves.

Journal:

Family history is such a powerful idea for me. My family is not full of writers or photographers, so much of our history is not really recorded anywhere. There are boxes of generations old photos without labels, their stories lost. I hope to change that by laying a foundation, by writing, recording, journaling. I am so thankful that words carry this power to preserve a story and a history. Now to get it all down on paper...no small task.