The Open Book
Stories of Academic Life and Writing or Where We Know Things

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The Open Book is a radical genre blend: it is an experimental co-memoir exploring the role of writing in academia. It contains stories about life without censoring and without distinguishing between traditional work/life domains and academic/non-academic ways of writing. This is done through discussions of conferences, research collaborations, supervision, taboo pleasures of ‘fun’ writing projects, the temptations of other work, and the everyday life encounters and experiences that stimulate academic thought and writing. Some of the main characters you will meet are researchers, their colleagues and students, sons and daughters, mothers and grandmothers, husbands (past and present), supervisors, pets, old and new friends, and creatures from myths and dreams. Some of the settings include kitchens, fireplaces, couches, gardens, universities, cars, and trains. These characters and places are all there to help examine what the above elements of an ordinary human life might mean in research and for research. Thus, it becomes possible for you as a reader to recognize the stories as both truly human and genuinely academic. This is the first book in a series of publications and projects from the Open Writing Community: a collaboration of academics from different disciplines and countries that seeks to push the boundaries of how we understand and practice academic work and writing.
The Open Book
IMAGINATION AND PRAXIS: CRITICALITY AND CREATIVITY IN 
EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

VOLUME 13

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SCOPE
Current educational reform rhetoric around the globe repeatedly invokes the language of 21st century 
learning and innovative thinking while contrarily re-enforcing, through government policy, high stakes 
testing and international competition, standardization of education that is exceedingly reminiscent of 
19th century Taylorism and scientific management. Yet, as the steam engines of educational “progress” 
continue down an increasingly narrow, linear, and unified track, it is becoming increasingly apparent 
that the students in our classrooms are inheriting real world problems of economic instability, ecological 
damage, social inequality, and human suffering. If young people are to address these social problems, 
they will need to activate complex, interconnected, empathetic and multiple ways of thinking about the 
ways in which peoples of the world are interconnected as a global community in the living ecosystem of 
the world. Seeing the world as simultaneously local, global, political, economic, ecological, cultural and 
interconnected is far removed from the Enlightenment’s objectivist and mechanistic legacy that presently 
saturates the status quo of contemporary schooling. If we are to derail this positivist educational train and 
teach our students to see and be in the world differently, the educational community needs a serious dose 
of imagination. The goal of this book series is to assist students, practitioners, leaders, and researchers 
in looking beyond what they take for granted, questioning the normal, and amplifying our multiplicities 
of knowing, seeing, being and feeling to, ultimately, envision and create possibilities for positive social 
and educational change. The books featured in this series will explore ways of seeing, knowing, being, 
and learning that are frequently excluded in this global climate of standardized practices in the field of 
education. In particular, they will illuminate the ways in which imagination permeates every aspect of 
life and helps develop personal and political awareness. Featured works will be written in forms that 
range from academic to artistic, including original research in traditional scholarly format that addresses 
unconventional topics (e.g., play, gaming, ecopedagogy, aesthetics), as well as works that approach 
traditional and unconventional topics in unconventional formats (e.g., graphic novels, fiction, narrative 
forms, and multi-genre texts). Inspired by the work of Maxine Greene, this series will showcase works 
that “break through the limits of the conventional” and provoke readers to continue arousing themselves 
and their students to “begin again” (Greene, Releasing the Imagination, 1995, p. 109).

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The Open Book

*Stories of Academic Life and Writing or Where We Know Things*

*Ninna Meier and Charlotte Wegener*
*Aalborg University, Denmark*
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An old academic joke goes along these lines: “There are two steps to solving the work-life balance of academia. Step one: define all life as work. Step two: you’re done.” The joke paints a picture of academic work as never-ending and all-consuming: it permeates all life. Yet somehow, this only applies to the amount of work you do: even though you work 24/7 as an academic, references to your body, your emotions, and your so-called “private life” magically disappear or are left out of the majority of academic texts.

This book is borne out of written conversations about knowing, bodies, time and space, pain, doubt, love, sorrow, hope, anger, happiness, freedom, and research. It contains conversations about our shared ambition to dissolve what we experience as a false duality between life and work. If our work is not concerned with life, what makes it worthwhile? If life and work are opposites, life is effortless and work is death. We do not experience it that way. Our life and work as academics are interwoven with our life and work as mothers, daughters, wives and lovers, and friends. Some of the main characters you will meet are researchers, their colleagues and students, sons and daughters, mothers and grandmothers, husbands (past and present), supervisors, pets, old and new friends, and creatures from myths and dreams. Some of the settings include kitchens, fireplaces, sofas, gardens, universities, cars, and trains. These characters and places are all there to help us examine what the above elements of an ordinary human life might mean in research and for research. Writing the book was necessary: it was a way of making sense of, and coping with, the academic work-life balance (what a concept!) and, not least, coping with our life and all it entails. It fostered a friendship and nurtured a plethora of other writings (articles, conference papers, blog posts, research projects, and books). In the process, we grew to write in and out of each other’s texts. Sometimes we replied to each other’s accounts. At other times, we just added new perspectives and moved on. Academic writing is often infected by competition, inferiority, showing off, obedience to real or self-imposed conventions, and even feelings of aversion or anger. In this book, we aim for something very different.

There is a circularity to this kind of braid-writing that is strange: more than the sum of the parts. We have shared stories about our life without censoring, and without distinguishing between life domains and academic/non-academic ways of writing. We have explored how these experiences relate to what we may know and indeed how and where we may know – which, after all, are essential to a researcher’s life and work. None of these experiences and life events is voluntary: they all come to us, or as Nadine Gordimer (2003) puts it, the subject chooses the writer. These kinds of writing involve a fundamental loss of control and a surrendering to events that occur relentlessly. What will happen in our life and in our writing? This is not entirely for
the writer to decide. For us, this kind of writing allows us to draw upon experiences that are usually private, because they do not belong to our mundane academic work procedures. Thus, being in these places that we have visited here does not foster creativity or potential per se; but as we connect our experiences to each other and to the writing of other scholars, we place them in a space of appearance: we make them public, sharable, and thus potentially powerful (Arendt, 1958). We make it possible for you as a reader to recognise them as truly human and genuinely academic. They strengthen our ability to convey in writing not only how and that, but also what it is like (Worth, 2004).

We started out just writing, word by word (King, 2010). As the book matured, we became aware of the fact that what we were doing spilled over into our research in unforeseen ways and changed the trajectory of our individual careers and collaboration. Through iterations of thinking-writing-talking, we found ourselves aiming to carve out a field of research that examines the role of writing in academic work and the concept of resonance in research. We have learned through our own process a way in which we can deliberately sensitise ourselves as research instruments by being opened up to many sources of insight. We can practise writing about it in a variety of ways to become as skilled writers as possible. However, we also need to ask: what makes these writings relevant to others, and (how) do these writings bring our research fields forward? We invite you, our reader, into a continuing dialogue about this. We hope you will be inspired to explore what drives your writing, what your grievance is (Van Maanen, 2010). Perhaps this text may even inspire you to start writing and publishing texts that expand the size and shape of the playground of academic writing.

How do we walk the line between detached, impersonal writing and self-conscious, declaiming writing? No one has expressed this imperative more aptly than David Foster Wallace in an interview with Bryan A. Garner (both deeply in love with words and language):

there’s a real difference between writing where you are communicating to somebody, the same way I’m trying to communicate with you, versus writing that’s almost a well-structured diary entry where the point is [singing] “this is me, this is me!” and it’s going out into the world. One of the things that the college drummed into me is, “Welcome to the adult world. It doesn’t care about you. You want it to? Make it. Make it care.” (Garner & Wallace, 2013, p. 34)

We have attempted to live the advice of the many novelists who have written about writing, but first and foremost we have tried to get out of the way and just channel what comes (Shapiro, 2013), dispense of moral judgements (Kundera, 1988), and explore what it is to be human and write what is true (King, 2010). As we all know, when we write, we write with everything we have, even though it may not always be visible. Thus, this book can be read as ways in which we “press against the bruise” (Shapiro, 2013) with two specific purposes: firstly, we want to explore
what this method can do for academic writing, to intentionally share reflections and experiential knowledge that may seem personal, non-academic even. Specifically, we want to do this in a way that allows for resonance and further reflections in the reader on this strange and wonderful work-life that is academia and academic writing. Secondly, we want to explore what our instrument is, what particular sounds we can make when we play it, and under which conditions we play our best. We want to make a difference in the world and we believe the way forward is to examine and fine-tune our most precious instrument in research: *writing*.

As the experiences and reflections we present are human, it does not matter who wrote what, and we hope you will dispense of the need to attribute voice to text and just *read*. Nonetheless, if you read like most people, you will probably want to keep track of the two voices in the text. To help you here, this introduction is also a reader’s manual of what to expect and how we hope you will trust the text to make it worth your while. We read it as an exploration of how life – being a human being – mingles with humanities and social science research through being constantly curious of human existence and how we interact with the world. How you might read it, what parts will resonate with you, and what you will take away from it is beyond our control (Meier & Wegener, 2016). Most of all, we hope you enjoy reading it and that the reading will make you *write*.

*Ninna and Charlotte*
CHAPTER 1

TORN APART AND PUT TOGETHER, SLOWLY,
CLUMSILY, OVER TIME

THE DISAPPEARING BODY

On the first pages of A. S. Byatt’s short novel *The Biographer’s Tale* (2001), the protagonist Phineas Nanson abandons his poststructuralist literary studies and walks out of the lecture hall into “real life” to become a biographer. In his quest for “things” and “facts”, however, he runs into considerable trouble. There are indeed things in the world but some are “thingier” than others. Some things are so airy that they continuously escape him, and things have unfortunately inscribed meanings far beyond their factual appearance. In his new area of study – biography – facts turns out to be scarce and slippery and do not lead to any coherent stories or insights. Through writing, however, Phineas is eliciting himself. He becomes a person, someone who really exists in the world with both his body and his intellect.

I am writing my way to the body through Byatt’s authorship. It may take a while… Today, I have a fever. I was supposed to get up, get dressed, drive my car for an hour, attend a meeting in an ongoing action research project, collect data, have coffee, be enthusiastic about the project (which I am), be empathetic to the project coordinator who has had a hard time (which I am), plan the next meeting, think clearly, include other peoples’ perspectives, drive home, answer emails… My Spelling and Grammar program says: “Long sentence. Consider revising”. I open the box: “Your sentence may be too long to be effective and may be hard to follow. For clarity and conciseness, consider rewording your sentence or splitting it into two sentences.”

This is exactly the point. My days are too long to be effective and the abundance of activities makes my line of perception too hard to follow. My body is falling behind. It may even be left behind. I need time for clarity and conciseneness, and I consider ways of re-inscribing the body in my processes of knowing. As John Dewey has taught me, epistemological and ontological processes are intertwined (Dewey, 1916). I do not intend splitting myself into two (feelings and thoughts, private and professional, pleasure and pain: ultimately, body and soul).

Today, I have a fever. My body is right here. I really missed it and needed it to make my work work.

I also need Byatt’s authorship.

In *The Biographer’s Tale*, Phineas sets out to write a biography of a biographer, Destry-Scholes. Since this biographer is a masterful storyteller and arranges fact so wonderfully to narrate other people’s lives, he himself must have been an intriguing
person worth portraying. This is Phineas’s reasoning. It turns out, however, that this may be far from the truth. Destry-Scholes’s stories, allegedly based on facts, may actually be somewhat fictional. Byatt describes it this way:

My own short novel, *The Biographer’s Tale* is about these riddling links between autobiography, biography, fact and fiction (and lies). It follows a poststructuralist critic who decides to give up, and write a coherent life-story of one man, a great biographer. But all he finds are fragments of other random lives – Linnaeus, Galton, Ibsen – overlapping human stories which make up the only available tale of the biographer. It is a tale of the lives of the dead which make up the imagined worlds of the living. It is a story of the aesthetics of inventing, or re-inventing, or combining real and imaginary human beings. (2001, p. 10)

Why is this so fascinating to me? The dead ones, the ones that left, the ones supposed to be there when we need them. The imprint of a body no longer occupying this chair. The sense of what this emptiness allows for. I reach out and grasp the air, the memory, the longing. Something is disappearing, and yet, something is appearing; it slips through my fingers; I touch it at the periphery of my range. I want to write about it. Writing makes sense, not because writing produces a coherent life-story but because the *act* of writing makes it all overlap – feelings and thoughts, private and professional, pleasure and pain. Body and soul. The inventing, re-inventing, and combining of the real and the imagined becomes the only available tale. How can we write about things that are gone, and things that have not yet materialised? Things that are here right in front of us, but that escape uniqueness and solidity?

Are we as social science researchers all in some way biographers? Who are we portraying and how? Which information is supposedly the “facts” and what happens to these facts as we arrange them into writing? Which facts do we include and which do we leave out? How does the arrangement of these facts ascribe meaning to them? And how do we keep questioning ourselves and each other about these issues?

Sometimes I ask Phineas. During his quest for a new life beyond poststructuralism and uncertainty, he falls in love with two women simultaneously: one is a Swedish bee taxonomist, the other is Destry-Scholes’s niece, a hospital radiographer. The bee taxonomist is red-haired, burly, and bold. She invites Phineas to join her indefatigable fight to save the brown bee. The radiographer is pale, delicate, and elusive. She invites him into the secret world of X-ray images and cries disconsolately over suddenly diagnosed cancer.

Phineas becomes the lover of both. Whom to choose? This is, of course, not the question. The brown bee may survive; the cancer patient may die. It is the fighting, the crying, the passion that produces a life story. It is also the scientific knowledge about bees, biotopes, X-ray technology, and cancer cells.

In *The Biographer’s Tale* as well as in many other novels and essays, Byatt addresses the desire to transcend the self-referential postmodern subject. Her characters try to bridge the gap between language and an external reality and are
driven by a scientific curiosity to understand things in their biological aspects free from culture, allegory, or metaphor (Pereira, 2014). The body is indeed both biology and culture, the given and the made. Just like scientific writing involves both the reproduction and construction of life.

In an interview with Nicholas Tredell, Byatt states:

I get so distressed by literary theories which say language is a self-supporting system that bears no relation to things, because I don’t experience it in that way. I don’t have any naïve vision of words and things being one-to-one equivalents, but they’re woven; a sort of great net of flowers on the top of the surface of things. (Tredell, 1994, pp. 64–66)

Phineas, however, must face the impossibility of his quest for pure “things” and true “fact”. He finds only fragment upon fragment of text:

Confronted by both the fictionality and sheer absence of facts about Destry-Scholes’s life, Nanson’s task will, ultimately, lead him to himself, something that he acknowledges in the end, by stating “that because of Destry-Scholes’s absence [his] narrative must become an account of [his] own presence, id est, an autobiography, that most evasive and self-indulgent of forms.” (Byatt, 2000b: 214; Pereira, 2014, p. 492)

An absence materialises into a presence. I need to investigate this premise thoroughly. What we aim for is not autobiography, but maybe we need momentary self-indulgence to write in ways that do justice to the people we narrate and produce texts that touch our readers.

Time has passed and I have forgotten about my febrile body. Now it is time for self-indulgence again and I will stop writing.

ON BODIES, BIRTHS, AND DYING OR WHEN SOMEONE LEAVES BUT IS STILL THERE

When I was a university student, my favorite professor had a series of lectures each Tuesday morning from eight to ten on Modernity and Metaphysical Experiences. At this point in my life, I was 23-years-old, a single parent to a two-and-a-half-year-old boy who loved sleeping in and taking his time in the mornings. As I wanted to attend the lectures, I had to wake my son, get him dressed, fed, and ready for his day in the nursery, and somehow manage to get my body placed in the lecture hall before eight am. This was no easy task, and I distinctly remember arriving several mornings, out of breath, completely consumed with the stress of battling a strong-willed kid who had just refused to put on his overcoat and shoes. All my fellow students, it seemed, had arrived in good time, with their things in order and a nice, big cup of coffee and ready for whatever the day would bring. I, on the other hand, counted it a success if I managed to be there physically in time. If my mind was still lagging behind, concerned with feelings of parental inadequacy or all the tasks that awaited me at
home when I left the university, then that would just have to be how it was. When the professor would start talking about metaphysical experiences, I would think: “This is exactly what I live every day! The feeling that something is bigger than me: the awe of this experience; the bodily sensation of being a tiny piece in the big puzzle of everything, of bringing a new person into the world.” It would feel big, but look small when I attempted to put it into words: I didn’t feel I could raise my hand and share my personal reflections, although the professor distinctly pointed to birth as a metaphysical experience. Somehow, it just didn’t fit into the lecture hall that I had given birth to a child.

The other example he gave was death. In these moments, he said, we often feel connected to something beyond us, whatever we believe that might be. Art and nature, he said, referencing Immanuel Kant, are other phenomena that might allow us these experiences. In a way, I think, what he was trying to teach us back in the late 1990s is the fundamental human condition Hannah Arendt described in 1958: we are all the same, and simultaneously all unique. Why birth and death are experiences that open us to these feelings, I don’t know – perhaps because they are experiences that are certain in every human life? We are all born and we all die. And it is exceedingly likely that we will experience other people’s births and deaths throughout our lifetime, although these experiences are becoming more and more institutionalised and removed from “everyday life”, whatever that means (Gawande, 2014). At the same time, birth and death are embodied through and through: it is something you do, something your body does to you, without your will having a say in it. You cannot time it or plan how it will proceed, and you are fundamentally alone in going through it.

Death is a moment in which the human body undergoes the most profound transformation it possibly can: from being alive to being dead. In losing my mother, I knew things in my body more than in my mind, and in the months to come, having been there in person in the room was a central aspect of really understanding that she was, in fact, dead. If knowing is embodied and emotional, what is it that makes us downplay these important aspects in the way we talk about knowledge? The day my mother died is etched into my memory. It is as Dani Shapiro so eloquently puts it: pain engraves a deeper memory (2013, p. 106). I can revisit it voluntarily at all times, and it also comes to me at others, brought on by the weather, a scent, the passing of an undertaker’s car in the street.

The event unfolded as follows: on Saturday 9 April 2011, a little past 7.30 am, my mother finally dies. It’s a beautiful morning, and it feels like the hospice is this big organism that has been holding its breath, waiting for this to happen. My sister is with her at the precise moment that her breathing changes. For days, we have had to witness her breathing, an automatic and seemingly difficult, coarse, and loud gasping for air; the whole of her body moving, her chest rising and falling, with every breath, around the clock, no change, no relief. We are all there in her room for the one-and-a-half days it takes her to die. We listen to music, talk, and try our best to make the background to her dying as homely and safe as possible. She is
unconscious and the nurses tell us she is in no pain, but we can’t know. Perhaps she can hear us being there? Even this isn’t sure. For what feels like the longest time, I have been looking at her, searching for signs of how much time I have left with her, monitoring her slow and relentless loss of even the most basic physical and cognitive abilities. When she lost the capacity to swallow, I knew that we had taken one step closer to the end, but as the nurses keep telling us when we ask them: “There are no certain answers, and everyone’s process is their own. Some patients seem to wait for their loved ones to leave the room, it’s like they can’t let go, when the people they love are sitting right there, holding on to them.”

Right before she dies, her breath changes to light, peaceful, almost graceful breaths, and it is evident for us all that it is time. We gather around her bed silently. I have never seen anyone die, yet I know with every fibre of my being that this is what comes next. It is a perfect example of the difference between being certain and having knowledge, as Ludwig Wittgenstein taught me, and it is beyond anything I can articulate. I am relieved and heartbroken at the same time. We take her hands, stroke her hair, and tell her things we want her to hear in those last moments. It’s mostly for us, I think: she hasn’t been conscious since Wednesday evening, where she started vomiting due to the pressure of the tumours on her brain. Her chest is barely moving, her breathing only involves the upper part of her lungs, almost like gentle, gentle sighs. The rhythm becomes less systematic, the pauses longer, and eventually it happens. She doesn’t take another breath and she is dead. After a while, two nurses come in and tell us it is time. They are polite and respectful but insisting, and they explain that they have to wash her and dress her within a given timeframe or the rigor mortis will complicate things considerably. Again I note how they give us enough information for us to understand why, yet spare us all the details. My sister and I stay and help the two nurses; they move the bed into the middle of the room, so they can better walk around it. Looking at this, I am reminded that while the image of my mum dead in her bed will always stay with me, this is just another day at work for them: this is what they do on an everyday basis. They move slowly, as if their bodily movements can somehow signal respect, and they talk to her while they are undressing her, constantly telling her what they do: “Now I will move your arm and remove your nightgown over your head.” It takes a while; they have to remove her catheter, the IV access through which she received her medication, and she is not easy to turn over in the bed. Although many of her muscles are gone from weeks and weeks of lying down, her body is dense, heavy, and we all help each other in carefully getting her ready.

Grief is a strange thing. It ignores the main parameters by which we live our lives: time, space, dream, and reality. The writer Joan Didion wrote a book about the loss of her husband called The Year of Magical Thinking (2006). After my mum died, I didn’t really experience magical thinking. Rather, I had to work hard just to understand that she was dead: it felt unreal and if I said it aloud, it felt like I was lying. Right after she died, it was as if my body and mind were in different worlds. It was as if a large part of me was still stuck in the world where she had been ill and we
had taken care of her, and after her death, the door to this world closed, but I didn’t get all of me with me as I left. I dream nightmares, not in the traditional sense, but even more cunning and horrible: frankly, I am appalled that my mind can conjure up these situations while I am asleep. Why doesn’t it give me a well-deserved and much-needed rest?

One night I dream that we are all back in my mother’s old house, the house I grew up in. My two sisters and I have been visiting her for a period of time, a holiday of sorts. It’s been great having some time together and I remember feeling happy and grateful. Everything appears normal; no one talks about the fact that she is dead, but as I am getting ready to leave, I know and I can’t say anything. I feel torn: it is so fantastic to get this brief time with her again and I am not going to spoil it by telling her and the others that she is dead. At the same time, I feel so immensely alone: it is like I am simultaneously occupying two different dimensions: one where she is alive, and one where she is dead.

As we are getting ready to leave, I keep postponing because I know that once I leave the house, I will never see her again. I tell my kids to hug her and give her lots of kisses. They look at me as if I am strange: “Relax, Mum, we’re just going home, not leaving the country or anything.” But they don’t know, and I don’t have the heart to tell them that is the last bit of time they will ever have with her. I still vividly remember standing in the hall: everyone is ready to go, bags are packed, and she is standing there, looking at me, probably wondering why I am making such a fuss about leaving. I hug her, long and hard, and try to imprint her embrace, try to remember what it feels like to hug my mum. Then I look at her, really look at her face, and say goodbye. Abruptly, I wake up, my throat is all bundled up from not crying, and I hurry out of bed and tiptoe downstairs, making sure not to wake the kids. As I go into the living room, I fall down on my knees. And I scream. I don’t cry. I scream with everything I have got. There are no words to explain what I feel. I scream until all the muscles in my back hurt and my lungs are in pain.

I wake up in my bed crying. It was a dream within a dream, and because I just spent this time with her, it feels like I have to reboot the system to get it: she’s dead. My head doesn’t want to know what my body is certain of.

When someone dies or leaves but is still there in memory and in dreams, time acquires a hint of mercilessness. From that point on, when the body of the one you love is gone and the emptiness remains, all past time spent together is viewed through the lens of the present absence: the person missing. Moreover, time spent with others, still in the present, takes on a different character because you know that the move a body makes from being there to not being there can be abrupt, is not under your control, and has the potential to shake your life and mind quite alarmingly and lastingly. I sometimes long to tell other people, people who have not yet been touched by the mercilessness, that it may change all too fast – they should cherish their time together! But it is pointless: this is not knowledge you can give to other people, only experiences you can share with others who have been through
similar things. Why is that? What is it in these kinds of experiences and this kind of knowing that makes them simultaneously universal and so very individual?

ON THE SMALLEST PARTS AND THE LARGEST WHOLES

I keep thinking about having been torn apart and put together, slowly, clumsily, bit-by-bit over time. It is as if trauma and grief displaces your body and mind in time and place, and for me, writing is one of the ways in which I can be put back together.

Two great storytellers, musician and song-writer Sting (2014) and author Stephen King (2010), suggest that you write about what you know. This does not mean that you should publish your diary – don’t write about you. Rather, they suggest that you sidestep your own ego and give voice to someone else. In this, Sting’s method is to empathetically stand in the place of others and give voice to their viewpoints and experiences, while King draw on his and others’ experiences, mixes them with imagination, and moulds them into stories. I go about this in my own way. I want to write about my experiences of taking care of my dying mum, because I believe they contain more than a personal narrative: they are stories and reflections about death and dying, about love and grief, about research, work, and life, and about the marvellous and awe-inspiring human mind. In short, it’s about all the things I learned while taking care of my mother as she was dying from brain cancer, and all that it cost me.

The brutal truth is that this experience also stirred my academic imagination and left me curious: I want to know more about knowledge: where do you know something? How do you know you know and when, and how are you certain? Can certainty be shared? And what is the role of the body in storing certainty, knowledge, memories? Are they stored in your body (remember, your brain is part of your body), or is knowing something we are capable of only when we are in the right place at the right time? For me, knowing is often place-bound: I know where I was when I learned something or thought specific thoughts. For these reflections, I need to go back in time and re-know the things I knew back when I studied philosophy at university: they are still there, but I need to read the books again to read them with my new brain, my new filter for understanding and for putting into context. I was too young then, too “clean” a slate.