Tales from the Dinner Table: Deconstructing and Thickening a Shared Cover Story

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‘You see,’ Franny would explain, years later, ‘we aren’t eccentric, we’re not bizarre. To each other,’ Franny would say, ‘we’re as common as rain.’ And she was right: to each other, we were as normal and nice as the smell of bread, we were just a family. (Irving, 1981, 207)

Just a family. It sounds so simple. I grew up in a small town in Ontario where my blended family stood out against the backdrop of ‘normal’ families, meaning a family with a Mom and a Dad. As a result of remarriages that happened when I was 7, I have four parents, but my real parents are Mom and Norris (Nor), who is my step-Dad. That ‘parents’ cannot include my father is not exactly normal, is it? Here’s something else that is not exactly
normal: Nor was a man I knew well when he married my Mom because he was Mom’s sister’s ex-husband, my uncle. Sound confusing? Our blended, reconfigured family consists of Mom, Doug (my brother) and I, plus Nor and his two kids (my first cousins), Pat and Sarah.

When I read about the unusual story of the Berry family in *Hotel New Hampshire*, I began to realize that normal is a matter of perspective. It is only in the presence of others that the Berry family, and any family, notices their eccentricities. Within the walls of my family home, of course we were normal. What could be abnormal about two parents, four kids, a dog, and two cats? It was when we had to talk about our family outside of the house that it was easy to lose sight of normal. My sister and I did a really good job of convincing ourselves (and others) that being step-sisters who used to be cousins was normal, and that we were, after all, just a family.

Curriculum at Home

The coming together of our two families was a complex process, full of intentions, choices, and the forging of new traditions. Grumet (1991) links this process of “making a shared life” (85) with the process of curriculum and locates the heart of curriculum not in schools, but in the home. According to Grumet and other curriculum theorists (e.g., Pinar, 1975), the process of curriculum involves “the ordering of daily life, … the incorporation of alien cultures, objects, meanings, the blending and crossing of boundaries, the choosing of sacred objects, sacred spaces, secret names and jokes and curses and songs” (Grumet, 1991, 76). The processes involved in the ordering of daily life are experienced and then recounted in the stories we construct of ourselves as individuals and as a family. Meaning does not lie in our experiences (Grumet, 1991; Morgan, 2000), however, but emerges in the sharing or telling of experience. Telling stories is our way of saying ‘this is who I want you to believe I am,’ and this act of sharing creates bonds between people (Harju, 2008).

I have always felt that my family was especially rich in stories because we are a blended family: We have two times the stories, as well as all the ways in which those two threads of stories weave into one. My family has always talked a lot about our own process of blending and becoming a family. Most of this storytelling happened around the dinner table, the physical heart of our home, the place where we gathered every evening to eat and share snippets from our days. Dinnertime was one of the most salient rituals in our daily lives and, for me, it was “instrumental in our becoming a family” (Personal Reflections, 2006).

In this article, I look to the heart of my childhood home, my place of origin, in order to further the argument that home is a place where we first experience curriculum. As Grumet (1991) argues, “domesticity has always been denigrated as a source of knowledge” (75). Thus, by weaving together threads from my family’s written reflections, and key concepts in narrative therapy and curriculum studies, I embark on a narrative exploration in which I seek to shed light on the significance of exploring the multiple layers of the stories that are located in domestic knowledge. After all, these are the stories that recount the lived experiences of the processes of curriculum where we first experience it.

Sharing the Family Story: Daily-ness of Dinner

In order to explore the curriculum in my home, I not only reflected on what I remembered about dinnertime at 28 Verney Street, but I also asked my family members to contribute their memories. My request sparked a flurry of phone calls and emails, communication that
we had all been putting off for too long. There was an excitement in our messages; we delighted in the nostalgia of sharing that period of our lives when we spent time together every day. This collection of narratives breathes life and continuity into the community of our family (Grumet, 1987) as it is remembering that binds people together (Kuhn, 2000). In the process of remembering, my family reconstructed a story about a curriculum that was planned by my parents and then infused with the subjectivities and tensions (Aoki, 2005a) of our daily lives.

Attendance at dinner, between 5pm and 6pm, was mandatory. In fact, the only time one of us kids was ever grounded was when Pat missed dinner because he had gone fishing with a friend. This parental rebuke “sent a pretty strong message that supper was important” (Nor, Personal Communications, 2006). We each took turns making dinner on a different night of the week and everyone had ‘their’ meal. Doug made macaroni and cheese, Sarah spaghetti, Pat lentil soup, and I made curried chickpeas and tofu. Mom would often concoct an experimental vegetarian casserole that received mixed reviews at the dinner table and Nor made crock pot chili. Sometimes on Sundays “we slowed it down with picnics on the living room floor” (Nor, Personal Communications, 2006). Nor would make two big pizzas, lay a blanket out in front of the fireplace, and we would relax on the floor, sipping fresh apple cider from the farmer’s market, talking long after 6pm.

It seemed that there were a lot of rules surrounding dinner, including “take turns talking, share the food, eat what you like but don’t take more than you want, don’t trash the cook, and keep your hands to yourself” (Nor, Personal Communications, 2006). Whoever didn’t cook had to help set the table and do the dishes. These guidelines created a sense of shared responsibility and community. Also the Boys couldn’t wear hats, even though sometimes their rebellious hairstyles were harder to look at, and Nor always bothered me about sitting on my knees, even though I was much smaller than everyone else. Once, he offered me a telephone book to use as a booster seat so that I could be up higher and still hang my legs down. He remembers that I was insulted by this suggestion (Personal Communications, 2006) and I don’t doubt that I was. As the youngest of four, I was always trying to be bigger than I was.

My parents, both of whom were working therapists, must have been conscious that the recipe for a well-blended family is not as simple as two cups of flour, one cup of water, and a teaspoon of yeast. They knew that the co-creation of our own family story through shared experiences and family rituals was the key to blending two diverse families as smoothly as possible, so they drafted an outline that laid out the plan for this daily ritual. However, Grumet (1991) writes that, “the dailiness is hard to recover… [it is] often record[ed] only as a backdrop to the drama that interrupts it” (74). This is true in our reflections, perhaps because it is the “particular and not the general that triggers emotion” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 8) and therefore remembering. Sarah writes,

I hardly remember any specific mealtime incidents, but if I were to locate the heart of the Verney street house, it would be the kitchen/ dining room...There was the time Doug didn’t come home for dinner and Beth called the police and all his friends and a search troupe was sent out in the neighbourhood. Later we discovered he was just upstairs in the attic doing his homework and hadn’t heard us calling (Sarah, Personal Communications, 2006).
Notice that she says ‘the time’ and not ‘a time,’ because of course, we will all know exactly what time she is talking about. This story has become a part of the shared story that ties us together as a family. It stands out as a salient detail that we have collectively selected and noticed against the backdrop of the daily dinner ritual.

A Story of Success

As I was reading through our six very unique reflections, a theme began to emerge. Despite the differences in our actual memories, there is a commonality. Our reflections tell a story of success, of succeeding against all odds to become a ‘normal’ family, normal and nice as the smell of home-made bread. Here, I explore the co-construction of the success story as it was expressed in our reflections. In my parents’ reflections, the story of success comes through as a result of specific parental intentions. Mom writes,

Dinner was very busy and often chaotic, but felt really important to us as a blending family. Nor and I talked a lot later in the evening about the ways that we worked as a family and tried to strategize about how to help everyone feel as if they belonged (us included) (Personal Communication, 2006).

Nor recalls that, “a lot of planning took place at those meals, planning regarding rides to lessons, and permissions, and forms to be signed” (Personal Communication, 2006). From our parents’ perspectives, our succeeding in becoming a family was the result of careful planning and attention to details.

This intentionality is a central element in what Aoki (2005a) calls curriculum-as-plan. It is the outline, or the framework in which goals are expressed, and activities and strategies determined. This is only one part of curriculum, however. Aoki (2005a) also distinguishes curriculum-as-lived-experiences, which adds life, tensions, and subjectivity to the realization of the plan. My parents designed their curriculum-as-plan in their evening meetings behind their locked bedroom door, and then their curriculum-as-plan became infused with bodies and experiences and feelings and tensions that always ended up coming back to the dinner table. The centrality of the dinner table is apparent in Pat’s reflection, where he let his thoughts wander to other memories of 28 Verney Street life.

He writes,

Saturday morning tea and trip to the farmer’s market, …the clan walking in the woods in the clear fall air with a crispy Macintosh apple, quietly gliding through deep snow with twelve skis, twelve poles, and four paws all moving in unison, cuddling up to Dad and his newspaper, listening to him breathe and feeling safe, feeling Beth’s strong hands on my shoulder…encouraging me by example to take on challenges way bigger than myself. (Personal Communications, 2006)

Although Pat’s reflections stray from the dinner table itself, he admits that, “any one of these events had elements that must have made it to the dinner table.” The curriculum-as-plan was centered on the ritual of dinnertime, and we all brought tales of our experiences from both inside and outside of the home back to that place, to the heart of our home. As Mom wrote, dinner was often chaotic (it still is) and it was not uncommon for two or three different conversations to be crossing the table at the same time. By talking and sharing,
we were not only constructing and reaffirming ourselves as storied individuals (Strong-Wilson, 2007), we were also co-constructing a sense of togetherness, of family.

This interplay that Aoki (2005a) describes between the planned and the spontaneous fits in with what Grumet (1991) calls *sprezzatura*, a renaissance concept that symbolizes “the careful balance of order and disorder” (82). It reflects a conscious effort that is deliberately concealed (behind the locked bedroom door). *Sprezzatura* involves making challenges appear simple, seamless, and effortless. One response from the kids after reading all of the others’ reflections was that we don’t remember there being any element of planning or intention behind the routine of dinner. It was just something that happened everyday; it was our given, which differs greatly from the perspective of and experience of the parents, the designers of the ritual. Nor remembers that they strategically placed themselves “at either end of the table to enforce a few basic behavioural guidelines” (Personal Communications, 2006). The parents also “engineered a seating swap to separate the blood families a little and make conversations more inclusive” (Nor, Personal Communications, 2006). Us kids remember the seating plan, there being a “girls’ side and a boys’ side” (Sarah, Personal Communications, 2006), but not the change in the seating plan.

While the parents’ reflections show intentionality in their actions in seeking to build a successfully blended family, the success story is subtler in the kids’ reflections. For example, I wrote that, “I remember listening to the parents’ tales of their messed up clients. We knew from these stories that families could involve fractured relationships, vicious side-taking, and rejection. Nor would look around the table, sigh, and say how lucky he felt that we were all okay.” Pat also makes reference to these “moments where Nor and Beth discussed which clients were suicidal and which evil drugs the doctors had over prescribed” (Personal Communications, 2006). These familiar dinnertime stories belonged to other people and other families, yet they were influential in the creation of our own story. They provided a point of reference against which we could judge our own family. *We were not like them—just look around the table.* This reinforced the idea that the people with struggles were out there, which contributed to the co-creation of the success story we crafted together.

This story, in the kids’ reflections, is also seen through a lens that is informed by how we thought our family was seen by outsiders. Doug writes: “The thing about the dining room table at 28 Verney Street was that it was ever-evolving. It went through periods of extreme growth where each of us would have at least one friend/ girlfriend/ boyfriend over to share in what *I’m sure they all thought of as a great family experience.* (Personal Communications, 2006; my emphasis). Sarah echoes this sentiment: “Friends loved to come over for dinner because our family was so fun and chaotic (Personal Communications, 2006). And so, from the inside, the success story was reinforced by the comparisons we made to the families my parents were working with and from the outside, we were something special, something that other people liked to be a part of, even if just for one hour over dinnertime. These two influences helped create and sustain the success story.

The success story in the kids’ reflections also lays in an undertone of having ‘made it,’ both individually and as a family. Doug’s reflection is a characteristically long-winded ramble:

I’ve just had another earring put in and my hair has toothpaste in it trying to hold together these damn dreadlocks together. But alas, I can’t avoid going home, as it just happens to be Macaroni and
Cheese night again. Didn’t we just have this last Wednesday? Oh well. If they don’t complain, it’ll be easier to contemplate whether I’m an anarchist, an atheist, a punk, or just some messed up teenager trying to find his way. The Johns/ Crump/ Turner dinners were a routine that could be counted on when everything else was confusing.” (Personal Communications, 2006)

My interpretation of these reflections tells me that we all made it through the trials of being children and teenagers and, in the process, we succeeded in becoming a family. Dinner was a cyclic daily rhythm (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) and it provided the framework for a story to which we could all comfortably cling. Even though the parents and the kids wrote about it, and experienced it in different ways, the particularities of the conversations during our dinnertime ritual contributed to the co-construction of a success story. What gives us the strong sense of familial ties that we now celebrate is that we share the story that we are a successfully blended family. This shared story of success defines us as a family and gives us a powerful and important sense of closeness to one another.

The Multiple Layers and Complexities of Hidden Stories

Recently, while sitting around that same wooden dinner table, which “facilitated conversation and was also a symbol of our common ground and history,” (Norris, Personal Communications, 2006) Nor told me about narrative therapy. As he explained the distinction that is made between thin and thick stories, I found myself wondering what this perspective would have to offer the success story that I had discovered in our reflections.

Thin stories are those that allow little space for description of the complexities of life, but because they allow people to form bonds, these tend to be the stories that dominate our life narratives (Morgan, 2000). Thick stories, on the other hand, allow for an exploration and acknowledgement of the complexities and contradictions of life; they are rich in description and detail (White, 1995). Narrative therapy takes the approach that stories are “co-authored within a society, and within the context of organizations and family structures, [and] there is much in life that is inconsistent, discrepant, incoherent, disharmonious, muddled and irrational. It is this excluded material that can be restoried, after deconstructive exploration” (Boje, 2005). Deconstruction is the process of loosening the grip of a dominant thin story and thickening that story with details and particularities.

The distinction between thin and thick stories is parallel to the characteristics of curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived-experiences. The former is the thin and dominant story; it reflects the guidelines, the outline of a plot, and it is full of intentionality, rationality, consistency, and language that “speaks of goals and objectives” (Aoki, 2005b, 298). The discourse of the lived curriculum, however, “speaks a somewhat different language—more concretely situated, embodied and incarnated, often narratively told” (299). It reflects a thicker story, rich with particularities, details and subjectivities. The process of deconstructing a story is an exploration, of making links and building bridges.

Another parallel that I see is that thin and thick stories resemble what Olson and Craig (1988) have called cover stories and real stories. Cover stories are “one way to explain how individuals come to terms with contradictions between the stories they desire to author and the stories expected of them by others” (164; my emphasis). Cover stories are an expression of negotiating expectations. We construct cover stories in situations where there is tension
between a dominant story or curriculum and our own subjective experiences. As Sharkey (2004) says, stories are “powerful learning tools but they are also powerful censoring tools” (507). Understanding cover stories, therefore, requires double-vision; looking in to the stories within us and looking out to the stories that surround us.

The success story of my family has a great deal of merit, but in light of my recent discussion with Nor, as well as my readings of Aoki and Olson and Craig, I have realized that our success story is thin. It is a shared cover story that we expect to hear retold and it is based upon the intentionality of my parents’ curriculum-as-plan. It is comfortable to let this story dominate, because it allows us to be ‘normal’ when we leave our home. However, this story is not full of narrative space, space where we can talk about home as a “place of conflict, of improvisations, of shifting loyalties and cultures” (Grumet, 1991, 81). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) point to the importance of broadening, burrowing and restorying, because the more perspectives we gain on a story, the more we enrich our present and future experiences.

**Thickening the Story**

What follows are several short narratives of memories from my childhood, as well as one of Mom’s stories. I have included the last one because it takes place at the time of my childhood, and it gives a different perspective on what lies beneath our shared cover story. Multiple perspectives and those stories that have remained hidden, unsaid, enrich the narrative of my story. Some of the narratives are followed by a short narrative turn (Olson & Craig, 2005), a reflection on the memory, which is included because “each telling offers a different lens through which to make sense of experience” (165). This opens up space in which a thicker story, with new perspectives, can emerge.
Memory: Making Sense of Family—in French

I am in the second grade in a French immersion program, which means that I am supposed to speak French all the time with my friends and my teacher. It is morning recess and I am walking around the playground hand-in-hand with my teacher, Mrs. Wright. Parent-teacher night is coming up soon. Mrs. Wright asks me who will be coming to meet with her. I tell her, “Maman vient.” She asks if Dad will also be coming. My stomach does somersaults and I try to think of the best way to answer this question. I am not even really sure who my Dad is. The one I call ‘Dad’ lives in Toronto with his new wife, and the one who is now my step-Dad used to be my uncle and I call him Nor. If I say that Nor is coming, do I
call him ‘Dad’? If I say ‘Nor,’ how can I explain who he is? I try to think of the word for step-Dad in French, but my mind is blank. Mrs. Wright repeats her question. My answer: “Il ne vient pas, parce-qu’il est mort.” I know that I have done something bad, but quickly change the topic. When I get home from school, I run to my favourite hiding place, behind my giant wicker basket of toys. As I cry, I try to make sense of this huge feeling of shame. I am scared that when my Mom comes home from work, she will want to disown such a rotten child.

**Reflective Turn**

I don’t remember Mrs. Wright’s reaction to the declaration of my Dad’s death. When Mom came home, she was more worried than angry, and she talked to me about how to tell other people about our family. Mrs. Wright taught me the French words for step-Dad, step-brother, and step-sister. What amazes me most about the story I told is that I didn’t feel like I was allowed to speak my own language, when clearly my second language was clearly inadequate. It is possible, that at that point, my first language was also inadequate. Also, it was only in the past year that I was reminded of this story. My sister, a wonderful writer, showed me a piece she was working on in which she made reference to the above story. When I read it, that same burning shame that I initially felt came back as if not a day had passed since that day in grade 2. How could she remember something like that for so many years, when I didn’t? She had been carrying this memory with her for all these years, as one of many that define who Alison is to her. It is not easy to accept that I cannot control what others remember and know about me and what shapes their perceptions of who I am, or the stories they tell.

Grumet (1987) writes, “our stories are the masks through which we can be seen, and with every telling we stop the flood and swirl of thought so someone can catch a glimpse of us, and maybe catch us if they can” (322). However, we are not the sole authors of our stories even though it is appealing to claim ownership of stories. Sometimes, as this narrative shows, it is someone else who tells our stories and in hearing them, we catch new glimpses of ourselves. My sister owns one of my stories (and likely more). She does not feature in that story, yet she held onto it. I was the main character, but I let it go, reclaiming it only when it was unexpectedly given back to me. Telling a story is the careful process of selecting and noticing, but we can also choose which details to let go of.

**Memory: Cousins, Friends, Enemies**

Making the transition from cousins to step-sisters was not smooth for Sarah and me. We had to share a room. It was her own private room before little runt Alison came along and moved into her house. We put a piece of tape down the middle of the floor to mark our territories. Any item that touched the line or went out of bounds was fair game for destruction. At night her Dad would come into the room to say goodnight. Sometimes he would sit on her bed and talk to her for awhile. I hated those nights. There I was, trapped on the other side of a room that I wasn’t really wanted in, forced to listen to a tender Father-Daughter moment, something I don’t remember ever having. Even if I had wanted to be part of those moments, I couldn’t because I was stuck on my side of the room. I couldn’t cross the line.

Sarah and I fought a lot. Our fighting was held in check by the fact that when we left our room, we had to stick together to survive the teasing, the
picking on, and the aggression of our older brothers. Girls against Boys.

Sarah and I knew that our fighting was unproductive, and somehow realized that we needed to find a way to restrain it. We found three empty Kleenex boxes and marked each one with the words “small,” “medium,” and “large” —adjectives to describe the size of our fights. If we could monitor our fights, then we would know if we were starting to get along more. It was a good system in theory, but after a fight, we’d always find ourselves in another one in trying to agree on the size of the fight. Some things were bigger to me that they were to her, and vice versa. Luckily, after a year or so of sharing that room, the attic was refinished (the Boys moved up there, shared that room for years and never once fought), and Sarah and I moved into separate rooms, where we had our own space. In the end, however, I slept more nights in Sarah’s room than I did in mine, on her pull-out bed.

Reflective Turn
This narrative is full of the shifting loyalties that Grumet (1991) talks about; our fighting and then teaming up. It makes me think about other loyalties within my blended family and it occurred to me that in all the combinations of loyalties, my step-brother, Pat, and I missed out. My brother Doug and I still had our time together every other weekend when we went to visit our Dad and his new wife in Toronto. Sarah and I clung together as the ‘Girls,’ but Pat and I never had to learn how to be siblings. He was always a mystery to me and sadly, I have very few explicit memories of Pat when I was young. We are just now beginning to build a long overdue relationship and finding that we have so much in common. How could we not have found those commonalities when we were living under the same roof? Our success story, however, covers up the fact that this relationship was never truly formed.

Memory: Me and Nor

Saturday morning trips to the farmer’s market with Nor. I liked looking at the floppy-eared bunnies that were for sale, tasting different cheeses, or eating fresh sugar-coated doughnuts made by the Mennonites. I didn’t like being in the car with him. The silence was always awkward. I would think that if it had been Sarah in the car and not me, then they would be talking and laughing about so many things. I didn’t know what to say to him. I guess he didn’t know what to say to me either.

Reflective Turn
My story about my relationship with Nor has always been something like this: Nor is an incredible man, so gentle, kind and caring and I’m so lucky that he’s the one who is my father figure. This is all true, but it reflects my feeling of being pressured to conform to the success story that says that we’re all fine. This thin story left me no room to really acknowledge the ambivalence I felt towards Nor for a long time.

Another Forgotten Memory: Suicide Note

As the snow fell outside on a recent visit to visit my parents, Mom and I found ourselves sitting at the same dinner table that I grew up around, sipping tea, sharing stories, and comparing memories. She told me a story that she remembers vividly that I have to re-tell in her voice. It is not a
memory that I can dig up.
Alison, one day when you were in Grade 7, I got a phone call from Leslie’s mother. She had been secretly looking through Leslie’s school bag and she came across a letter that you had written to Leslie. In it, you wrote that you wanted to kill yourself. I didn’t know what to do. I couldn’t approach you about it because then you would tell Leslie and then Leslie would know that her Mom had been going through her bag. I didn’t want to get Leslie’s mother in trouble, but I was so worried about you. I threw out all the aspirin and any other pills that were in the house. I went on high-alert and watched you very carefully. I asked you how you were doing at the end of each school day and you always said, ‘I’m fine.’

Reflective Turn
Even after Mom told me this story, I still can’t remember it. Like with the memory that Sarah gave back to me, I feel embarrassed that this is part of my life narrative and that I don’t have control over the details of that narrative. Although grade 7 was tough for me, I do not remember being under my Mom’s close scrutiny. In retrospect, I guess I do remember feeling that there was an expectation that I say I was doing fine. And so, I have discovered how our shared success story dominated the way I constructed my identity within my family.

Memory: Everyone’s Fine, Except Everyone

After Mom told me the about my suicide note, a space opened up for her to talk about the struggles she dealt with when our families were blending (are we still blending?). She had a long commute to work everyday, and she would arrive home to chaos—four kids plus a friend or two blasting...
music, singing at the tops of their lungs, whipping together a meal, setting
the table, a dog barking, cats running underfoot, and some of those kids
needing her attention. She told me that sometimes, she considered just not
coming home, driving off the highway so she wouldn’t have to deal with
us.

**Reflective Turn**

When I was a kid, I thought that I was the only one who had things to figure out. That she
shared this detail of her story with me is important because it gives me a new perspective
on a story that we share, but that we experienced in our own ways. We were all living out
our version and experience of this cover story of success, and Mom was part of the team of
parents that designed the curriculum-as-plan for that story. The success story that we co-
created from our carefully edited shared and individual experiences allowed us to function
and bond as a family; yet, there is so much that lies beneath that story. What I have written
about thickens that story, but very slightly. There is so much more deconstruction to do.

**Significance of Deconstructing Stories**

What this narrative exploration has highlighted is that stories are multi-layered, with
undercurrents of untold, forgotten, and hidden experiences, and that the construction of
stories reflects the interaction between the two curriculum worlds that Aoki (2005a&b)
describes. The infusion of lived experiences into our shared lives allowed us all to end up
differently, though we were all “moulded by the same Thing” (Hoffman, 1990, 25). The
Thing, of course, is the curriculum-as-plan—the overarching design that is set up with
specific goals and outcomes in mind. My parents’ goal was to raise four responsible and
independent children, while also building a family. Our success story has dominated the
ways in which we have responded to experiences beyond the walls of our home. It allowed
us to stray from home with confidence, knowing that we had built a strong and long-
lasting foundation together.

Deconstructing a cover story unveils tension that dwells in the spaces between adhering to
our carefully planning and the spontaneity and irrationality of experience. The interaction
between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived-experiences reveals *sprezzatura*—
seemingly artless art. The process of gathering reflections from my family members has
shown me that the thin story of success that we live and tell was significant to our
becoming a ‘just a family.’ The need to feel ‘normal’ was overpowering and has impacted
on the way we constructed our cover story. This inquiry has also shown me that yes, we are
just a family, but we are a family with stories yet to uncover.

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**About the Author**

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connection to stories and the significance of pulling memories forward into the ongoing process of narrating a self, a process that still often takes place around the dinner table.