



RETURNS AND DEPARTURES THROUGH GIRLHOOD

Memory-Work as an Approach to the Politics of Place
in Mother-Daughter Narratives

Teresa Strong-Wilson

This chapter combines an autobiographical with a biographical approach to a project of exploring what may be described as a *coming of age* relationship between a daughter and her mother, in the sense of a relationship coming into its own (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2008). The chapter explores the mother-daughter relation (Grumet 1988) through the prism of the author's almost decade-long memory-work with her mother, Maggie, at a time when she was starting to experience memory loss. An auto/biographical approach considers the relationships between autobiography and biography (King 2004); one line of inquiry suggests that, in lieu of "metaboliz[ing] the story of the other" (Cavero 2000: 91–92), an autobiographical self may wish to be told through the life of another. Clearly this is a delicate project. Central to mine was girlhood, specifically the idea of a productive return (a *coming of age* in the mother-daughter relationship) through a reappreciation of girlhood and the transition from girlhood to womanhood.

Emerging from the inquiry were certain principles that have guided the writing. First was Benjamin's (1988) notion of intersubjectivity, which argues for mutual recognition of the mother by the child, which is predicated on recognizing the mother as an entity separate from the identity of the child, and especially the daughter. As Benjamin also points out, the child typically metabolizes the mother. This chapter is also grounded in Giorgio's (2002) thinking around the potentially productive role of culture in mother-daughter narratives; in other words, the idea that womanhood (and therefore also girlhood) involves developing a shared sense of identity where that identity often involves place. In my relationship with my mother, that shared place was real (namely, Scotland) but was also largely imaginary (in the sense that our only referent to it was through story—stories heard from relatives,

stories remembered from childhood and reading fiction and non-fiction set in Scotland). Within a politics of place, though, this shared interest in place acted as a catalyst for a mother-daughter/woman-to-woman relationship coming of age, and where that belated journey involved a return to, and through, girlhood. I argue that such a coming of age is first and foremost an imagined relation, and more precisely, a matter (indeed, a project) of reimagining the past through the present and future.

The first part of the chapter sets the scene for the mother-daughter inquiry. The second part introduces my own narratives in the voice of Teresa, and composed over the last two decades, but essentially emanating from two different entry points in imagining girlhood and womanhood. The third part, in the voice of Maggie, experiments with my mother's voice, a voice very much informed by her girlhood. The final part explores the implications of the narratives for the role of girlhood within reimagining the politics of place in girls coming of age to be women.

The Suspended Grape

On Thursday evening, we were all there in the seniors' home: the lock-down facility where my mother resided. It was always a question of the degree to which my mom was suffering from Alzheimer's. On the occasion of our December visit (she passed away less than three months later), my mother was already attracting comical attention because of the white sock on her left hand. My mom often helped with the laundry and had clearly befriended a wayward sock, expending energy in putting it on and taking it off her hand, carefully inspecting it for folds and creases. The sock served multiple purposes, as became apparent, one of which was to wipe tables. We were seated in the common room and my mother began moving systematically around the table, wiping the edges. My father, meanwhile, tried to catch her eye and engage her in conversation. Just a few minutes before, she had been on his knee and small affectionate kisses had been exchanged. It happened that as she was polishing, my father suggested she have one of the green grapes that we had brought as a gift. Yes, she indicated. My father was always trying to encourage my mother to use her wits to solve problems so as to keep those synapses actively moving. After several attempts to tease a grape from the plastic Ziploc bag, he gave her one, nudging it into her mouth as she polished. She took it in slowly, then stopped, expelling it, then pulled it back in, pushed it out, in and out, like a child playing with its tongue, until the grape finally hung by a thin thread. Meanwhile, she continued moving around the table, polishing. We—myself, my two children of sixteen and fourteen, my older sister, my father—watched the grape with growing suspense. It began to dangle precariously. She continued to rub and polish, rub and polish, as if blissfully unaware of her audience while my father continued

to gently taunt and tease her, increasingly anxious about her intentions with respect to this grape, until he finally rushed over and caught it as it dropped. There was a chorus of laughter. She finally looked up at him directly as he went to sit down and gravely gave him a mock boxer's punch as if to say (as had been her practice over almost sixty years of marriage) "right in the sucker." Nothing wrong with her wits, was my thought.

Generations

Typically a daughter initiates narrative projects with (or, mostly, on) the mother (Giorgio 2002). In our case, it went both ways. In 1993, when my daughter was three years old, we gave her grandmother/my mother a gift. It was a hardcover book called *Generations: My Grandparents' Reflections* (Discovery Toys). The book contained prompts such as "Do you have a favorite grandparent memory?" and "What fads do you remember from when you were young?" and spaces in which to write the responses (see Figure 8.1). Little did we know that with the *Generations* book, my mother would initiate and sustain a systematic inquiry into family stories and origins. She was sixty-four at the time. My mother had always been interested in history, especially of the British Isles. She read both fiction and non-fiction. She particularly liked to read biographies of kings and queens. She was also an inveterate writer. What she

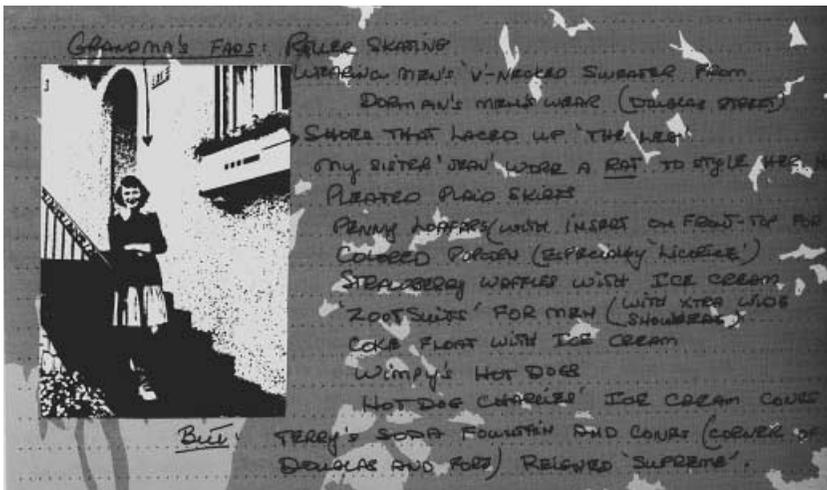


Figure 8.1. From *Generations: My Grandparents' Reflections*. Photo of my mother as a girl and her response to the question: "What fads do you remember from when you were young?"

wrote primarily were notes. Upon their house being sold, my father and I started to go through the things collected over the years. I found my mother's writing everywhere—in books, in magazines, on notepaper, clipped inside recipe books, in letters, in Christmas lists, on the backs of photographs, in kitchen drawers on papers neatly collected in small Ziploc baggies. Both of my parents were interested in memory, although my mom was a veritable student of the past. When my mother was passing away, I stayed with my father in his small apartment. He shared with me the little things that he missed, like the memory game they used to play on going to sleep. One would say a name of someone from the past and they would go back and forth, back and forth, trying to generate as many names and stories as possible connected to that person. My mother returned the *Generations* book to us almost a decade later, in 2000. It was filled to brimming with narrative anecdotes, family trees, photographs, newspaper clippings, and cultural history, especially on the Scottish side, but it had clearly been a collaborative effort involving my father. Its full significance was not appreciated until around 2002, after I began to write short autobiographical narratives in which my mom figured as a main character (discussed later).

The life history project did not formally begin until 2005 and consisted of interviews conducted over the phone and in person, which were audiotaped. In 2007, we also engaged in photo elicitation interviews, with my father, my mother, and I sitting at the kitchen table and my parents telling stories as we pored over the photos in their albums. I also kept a commonplace book in which I would note interview questions, transcribe tapes, write reflections, and collect various artifacts that had become connected to the project with my mother.

Sifting through the loose papers at the front and back of my commonplace book, I find a page from a Maxine Greene article, in which she talks about the importance of having a project: "We are trying to become what we are not yet by acting on perceived deficiency, or on perceived possibility." This is followed by a belated birthday card from a friend; pictured is a bouquet and a stubby writer's pencil, the one (writing project) being related to the other (life's bouquet). What drove the inquiry was a late meeting of my mother's and my inner selves. What I write about in this chapter I would have never known about my mother unless I had embarked on this project with her.

My mother died at the age of eighty-two. She entered a seniors' home in 2009, the first of three places, not including some time also spent on a hospital ward. Her decline had begun at home and became especially noticeable when she began to lose her capacity to communicate through speech, a stage of Alzheimer's identified by Shenk (2001).

During this period and until close to the end of her life in 2011, the family history work became a practice.

Teresa

For most of my life, I do not remember being close to my mother; in fact, I remember the opposite. It was a classic case of my not wanting to be trapped into being the woman that I thought my mother had become, and who I envisaged as the antithesis of what Heilbrun (1988) has called the feminist intellectual ideal. My mother has different memories—of herself, and of her relationship with me, especially when I was a young child and before I became conscious of being a girl (which is when our differences began). According to my mother's account, when I was young, we spent a lot of time together (see Figure 8.2), especially in literacy-related activities such as games and puzzles.



Figure 8.2. Picture of Teresa and Mom, with my mom's labeling of photo.

As a young girl, I have many positive memories of playing I-Spy on long road trips, these initiated by my mother. I also have memories of my mother, my father, and me playing cards on TV tables in the basement room and of watching figure skating championships on TV with my mother. There are several memories I have from when I was younger than ten.

The Sandbox

In our backyard, we had a small sandbox on the side of the yard, under the shade of the bushes. The next-door neighbors' kids, a German family, used to come over and we would make mud pies. My mother was a presence, someone watching over us as we played in the sun and the shade, and who eventually called us to come and sit on the steps and drink lemonade in plastic Tupperware glasses, and eat a cookie. This was when I was about three or four.

The Library

I remember going to the public library, which was located above the fireman's hall. We had to climb a lot of steps to reach it. I remember best the journey there, of my mother, myself, and my younger sister. I remember the little path to the library, a shortcut with green bushes on either side. I remember the heat and the dappled spaces of shade. I remember the magic of walking along what at the time seemed like a secret pathway leading to a highly desired destination.

Sewing

I remember accompanying my mother on her trips to buy material, sewing patterns, ribbons, or buttons. The few concrete steps leading to the basement door were shrouded in cool shade. A bell rang as we opened the door. Inside, it was even cooler. As my mother shopped, I listened to the thump, thump of the material as it was unrolled on the table and cut to precision. I never did learn to sew. My mother was an accomplished seamstress. But I did go through a period when I helped my mother with sewing, as she cut out the patterns and laid the thin paper on top of material distributed on the pool table and pinned the patterns to the fabric. I remember the ritual of Maxwell's instant coffee in mugs, with milk and three spoonfuls of sugar.

In these early memories (from which few photographs remain), I recognize my mother as presence, indirectly there and within reach, if needed; she is part of the fabric of my growing up, connected especially to those rituals like birthday celebrations and holidays around which

the curriculum of daily life is often organized (Grumet 1991): memories of birthday parties and a cake with green icing (I was born the day after St. Patrick's Day); memories of helping prepare the Halloween treats of mostly baked goods carefully wrapped in Saran wrapped portions; memories of Christmas and New Year's suppers and the plentifully laid dining room table, with its bread and sausage stuffing and, for dessert, hot Christmas pudding with white icing gently laced with rum; and the outlay of foods in the living room, from an assortment of various nuts and pickles, to the small white cupcakes filled with icing and topped with two delicate "butterfly wings" dusted with icing sugar. I remember my mother washing my hair in the kitchen sink. As a child, I owed my daily existence to a world whose parameters were created in whole or in part by my mother (as well as my father) but in which my narrative of myself has always been constructed around self-styled "moments of being" (Woolf 1978)—my inwardly generated reality. For instance, one of my most vivid memories of childhood/girlhood (apart from reading books; see Strong-Wilson 2006) is of hiding between the back wall of my mother's bedroom closet and her clothes, many shrouded in plastic wrap, as we kids played hide-and-seek. I knew that no one would dare to look for me there because I was in a place that was, strictly speaking, out of bounds for childhood games. And yet, I felt perfectly invisible and protected, mildly smothered by the heavy scent of my mother's perfumes and eventually needing to risk escape—but at the same time my choice of where to hide presaged my later contempt of my mother and all that about her that was symbolized by those perfumed clothes as I stood, pressed in—this combined with a deeply hidden desire to be more like her—as I strove to hide my own body from others, including myself (see Figure 8.3).

My autobiographical narratives, written as a doctoral student, slipped out as easily and smoothly as water. The narra-



Figure 8.3. Swimming hole. Everyone else is pictured in a bathing suit. I (on the cusp of adolescence) am safely shrouded in a large bath towel.

tives centered on my adolescent body and opposed my own awkwardly developing body with my mother's womanly one (or womanly garbed one). I use my intellect—and burgeoning body—as a weapon against her. The following excerpt was part of the teaching autobiography that I wrote for a graduate class.

[Tea] meant tea, coffee, cookies and cakes spread out on fluted fancy plates on top of crocheted doilies, and hot beverages served in Royal Doulton china cups with saucers. It's high English tea or rather high Scottish tea ... My mother, slim and well-dressed, sat poised on the edges of chairs or couches, sipping her tea, while holding the saucer circumspectly so as to catch any wayward drops ... I, on the other hand, inelegant, in no apparent need of dessert, luxuriated in the tasty treats then retired to a corner with a Nancy Drew mystery. (Wilson 2000 in Strong-Wilson 2012)

Another of my stories recounted trying on clothes in a department store, my mother in the stall with me (Strong-Wilson 2012); I use third-person narrative.

She [Teresa] is partially unclothed. She is trying to pull on pants, some stretchy pants, and they're not budging, they're refusing to climb over the hills and valleys and troughs of her skin, which buckles and folds, as first she attempts the improbable and then cold hands intervene, painfully wrenching, tugging, bloodless tears falling on unrepentant flesh. Flesh touching flesh. Fleshes flinching. She is being corseted, and her prospects for marriage are becoming slimmer the more difficult it is to find an appropriate pair of stretchy pants to fit her. Her mother glares, her mouth a thin line. It's no use. Disgusted, she flashes angry advice: "Stop eating!" Her daughter's tears fall heavy and wet, plop, plop, and the sobbing infuriates her. "Just get dressed." All that year she wears ugly checkered pants, size large or extra large or maybe they're extra extra extra extra large (she flashes back) and her mother abides their presence, eyes averted (Wilson 2001 in Strong-Wilson 2012).¹

In "Old Narratives Break Apart" (Strong-Wilson 2012), I have expressed my distrust of these narratives; they are compelling pieces that ring true to the adolescent girl I remember, but I wonder now how complete they are. I also recall that the narratives were written at a time when I was going through separation and divorce. Narratives of girlhood—of the tensions experienced with my mother—often blended with those of my ex-husband, with one being seen as a segue into the other. I recently reflected that they came from a fierce place, full of emotions like anger, resentment, fear. They helped make sense of experiences that had long "lain" (Chambers 1998: 32) in me. Some stories were no doubt of a younger self narrating. The ones that featured my mom sprang from a real place but exorcised demons created by my adolescent imagination; she was a caricature, more a reflection

of what I perceived and failed to perceive than of what she truly was or may have been. They were stories that, in becoming public (on the page or screen), helped heal a part of me—stories that took care of me by running through me. And in running through me, they escaped. ... I think at the time of writing, I misunderstood their real power, which was to be told and then forgotten, so as to create new space for myself, yet to be defined.

In my childhood album, which my mother composed (there is one for each of her three daughters), I am pictured as moving from babyhood to early then later adolescence, followed by adulthood. The chronology pictured is perfectly accurate; there are no obvious lapses. When I look at these photos, though, what I fail to see is the deep angst—and anger—that informs my “department store” narrative and that I also remember; it is as if my adolescent coming of age is absent, accompanied by no corresponding visual image of me in horrible checkered pants. I now see only a plumpish young girl growing into a young woman. I went on a self-administered diet and exercise program early in high school (see hands on hips approach in Figure 8.4), and lost weight that



Figure 8.4. Teresa in grade eleven.

I may have struggled to keep off but did not gain back until I became pregnant, when I also remember my mother commenting after my second pregnancy on the weight I had gained. Such comments stuck—and had the same effect as they had had when I was ten: I read more and I did anything but stop eating. Looking back, my mother and I clearly needed to invent a different language and story for our relationship. Any loss in weight, though, had not resulted in a closer relationship with my mother. There are several photographs from my late teens and into my twenties in which my mother and I are in the same physical space but are clearly miles apart. I am often turned away from her.

When they retired, my parents lived in a little house in a trailer park in Cobble Hill, British Columbia.² Some of my fondest memories are of visiting my parents in this place during the 1990s, when I myself was married and had young children and my mother was primarily a grandmother. In July 2012, after my parents' passing, I returned to the area, staying with a close family friend of my parents. In a notebook, I wrote cryptic notes about the trip: "Suffusion of memory ... Feeling as if childhood spent there (second childhood through kids/parents' retirement years)." It is as if in my relationship with my mother, I have been moving back in memory to a time when I could reimagine myself as a girl—and my mother as a girl.

My mother's journey has also been one towards the past. My parents left Cobble Hill for Victoria, where they had lived first in a Lions Club retirement home (my father had long been a member of the Lions Club) but then on my mother's instigation, moved to an apartment building in James Bay.³ James Bay, a small community lying between the Parliament Buildings and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, is a beautiful location, right beside the ocean. Maggie grew up there in the 1930s. At that time, it was populated by immigrants seeking a new life and with few means at their disposal. My mother's family moved four times as her parents relocated from one rented home to another, staying in each place for six to seven years. Some of my mother's fondest memories as a girl are of this time and place. On moving back several decades later, she found that it was not the same place she had remembered. My mother's onset of dementia dates from this time and place, when she was least happy in the place of her growing up. Her brother also passed away. My mother was in her early seventies. My parents were very proud people who believed in self-reliance and dependence on one another as a married couple. My father had also had past experiences of visiting a co-worker on a psychiatric ward, as well as memories of caring for his father, who died of pancreatic cancer in a "poor man's" hospice, and so

was terrified of my mom being taken away and confined in some kind of institution. Eventually, around 2002, he poured out the story of my mom's recent erratic behaviors and upon being briefed, I could then see her. I was in my mid-forties. I was expecting to see someone who was frail and diminished. The effect on me and on our relationship of that meeting was striking.

When Maggie came up my stairs, her green eyes were deep translucent pools. Her eyes, welling with tears, shone in the darkness. The tears colored her vision and mine as well. I was seeing this woman as if for the first time. Her self, resplendent, blazed through me. Veils of shadows, lingering from the past, fell away. My father waited patiently in the car. My mother didn't come in the house but stayed in the porch with me. We hugged as if we had been forcibly separated for a long time and she had finally been able to escape and make her way back.

The mother, Benjamin points out, "is external reality—but she is rarely regarded as another subject with a purpose apart from her existence for her child. ... Yet the real mother is not simply an object for her child's demands; she is, in fact, another subject whose independent center must be outside her child if she is to grant him the recognition he seeks" (1988: 23–24). The next part of this chapter tries to explore Maggie as "subject" and especially as girl entering into young womanhood, and in which Maggie speaks in "her own" voice about her life and about her mother whose name was Peggy.

Maggie

Alec and Peggy

My parents came from the Scottish Lowlands. My father, Alec, was born in Cockenzie, where he grew up and which at the time (the late 1800s) was a small but thriving fishing village close to the Firth of Forth. He had his own boat and used to sell fish door to door. As a young man, he moved to Kirkcaldy, a bustling town on the opposite side of the bay. It was there that, living on Links Street, he met my mom, Peggy, whose family was living 'back o' the toon' on Overton, close to the Italian ice cream place, probably in one of the council houses built for workers. At one time, my mom worked in one of the linen factories but then she worked in people's houses. My dad was selling his fish door to door. My mom would be in the kitchen or making lace. Whenever the women could see my dad coming to the door, they would run to her and say, "There he is! There he is! Go open the door!"

Growing up in James Bay

I loved playing by the water in James Bay. Our house was only a short distance from Dallas Road: a simple two-story structure. I slept upstairs with my two sisters. At night, I would huddle under the covers for warmth, heated bricks wrapped in towels by my bare feet. My father worked in the Parliament Buildings, uptown, but only a few short blocks away. If my window had not been facing the strait, the B.C. Government would have been my backyard neighbor. My father was a janitor there. A small, wiry man, he would walk to work in the wee hours of the morning, his pockets stuffed with rocks to keep the dogs away. In his heart, he was a fisherman. When not at work, he could be found in his garden or down at the beach where he would collect firewood or take his small rowboat along the coastline. I liked to help my father. Sometimes I collected rocks. I also collected shells. I liked to rest my warm feet in the cool waves. The only frightening time of growing up in James Bay was when our windows had to be covered in black paper. I would try to sleep in the total darkness, waiting for the Japanese bombers that would surely come to invade the still night. My sister loved to sew; she stayed inside and made doll clothes. I liked to play baseball and basketball. I loved to be outside. When we kids played "Run Sheep Run," one person stayed to count at the telephone pole and we would run for blocks and blocks, all around the Bay.

Hard Times

Your great-grandfather was killed in the quarry in Kirkaldy. That was in 1925. Gran had three boys and four girls. We always called her Gran. I loved her Scottish brogue. And like her, I have a sentimental attachment to Scotland and to things Scottish: watching Scottish dancing; hearing the bagpipes and kettle drums. She used to go dance at the Caledonia downtown on the corner of Yates and Broad. Then go for fish 'n' chips across the street. But those were tough times, coming here to Canada, finding jobs, finding a place to live. At one point, my Gran and her kids lived with our family; there were sixteen of us in the house. My sister was born just before boarding the boat to come here. They say she was so small she had to be kept in a shoebox in a warming oven. My Gran had seven kids. My mom had four who survived. We could always tell when my mom was pregnant. She would faint. One day when we came home from school, we found her out cold on the floor. It was hard in those days. You had to heat your iron on the stove. Heat hot bricks for your feet at bedtime. Because the houses were cold—none of them had furnaces, except people who had money—and you couldn't afford the heat. We didn't have money. I used to sit with my mom in the hallway, near the stove and knit. She had bad arthritis from the age of thirty-nine; they say, from having a wet sock on her knees while

she peeled potatoes when she used to work at the fish 'n' chips shop. When we lived on Oswego, we didn't use the living room because my parents rented it out. Us kids had to wait for Mr. Donaldson to get out of the bathroom to get ready for school. But it was a good life, with lots of fun and laughter.

Becoming Independent

I loved school. I used to babysit after school and earn a bit of money to buy material to sew clothes. My older sister was an excellent seamstress. I liked the tartans best. For my first job, I got called to the principal's office. I had to go downtown to the Parliament Buildings. It was raining the day I went. I put on my kerchief, as girls did in those days. I went for the interview. My future boss said, go home and fix your hair. So I did. I went back after lunch and I was hired. I never had to look for a job; jobs came to me. And I liked to work. I'm reserved like my mom. She was the glue that held our family together. I was shy, too, but more independent, which I was glad of.

Sifting further through the loose pagination of the commonplace book, I (Teresa) find handwritten quotations from an old-fashioned Victorian advice book (originally published in the late 1800s) called *What a Young Woman Ought to Know*, by a Mrs. Mary Wood-Allen. When I found this book in a bazaar, certain passages seemed to echo my mother's stories on how my father courted her, her movement from young girl to young woman in love but keeping some of her feelings in reserve, to keep my father guessing. "Refuse to be flattered, to be played with, to be treated as a female, but insist on being treated as a woman with intelligence." It was a practice that late in her life, I saw her using with my father—*still* using since it was clearly one that likely escaped my notice, given the chip on my shoulder that I regularly carried for years when it came to anything connected to my mother. It was with some admiration late in life that I observed these playful exchanges that established my parents as separate, yet connected, selves. Again, Maggie:

Maggie and Art

It was our first Christmas since going together. Art stood grinning from ear to ear. There in the middle of my parents' living room stood a chimney. My parents were as perplexed as I was. For the life of me, I couldn't figure out what it was. He had the present put together like a chimney. I don't know where he found that wrapping paper! And it was quite a large present. I knew it couldn't be a ring. "Open it," he encouraged me, smiling all the while. So I opened it and inside I found a set of suitcases: a large bag and a smaller one. They were

beautifully made, with a brick-like color and pattern on the outside, stitched carefully around the edges, and on the inside, filled with deep wine-colored material, with customized places with a hanger for me to put my slacks without them getting creased. I just about fell over. "You haven't travelled anywhere yet," Art announced. I guess I was about to. And it was then I understood that he had expectations of staying together.

The Alzheimer's had progressed to the point where walking was becoming an issue. My mother's sleep patterns also became erratic. For days on end, she would be awake all night, walking the hallways. Run, sheep, run. Her knees would sometimes buckle and then she would fall. We tried a bike helmet to at least protect her head. She saw other residents living in their wheelchairs. The staff talked about wheelchairs within earshot of my mom. They took her for a practice run. "What if her medication is causing her to lose her balance," asked my father. As soon as her mind was clear, she refused to eat and let it be known by her actions that she had chosen the ending to her own story.

Returns and Departures

Our lives are shaped by the stories we choose to tell about them and by the stories we choose to live. Giorgio, in "renegotiating" how the relation between mothers and daughters is written, points out that the maternal figure is often "a metaphor of origins, encompassing not only kinship but also race, ethnicity, and language" (2002: 32). For me, it became my mother. For my mother, it was her grandmother, with her Scottish brogue and Scottish ways. We gave my mom the *Generations* book in 1993. By 1994, Maggie was the proud owner of MacGregor's *Scotland: An Intimate Portrait*, in which I later found a stapled sheaf of notes, one of which lists pages, starting at page two. As I looked up each page, I realized that my mom was creating an itinerary, for in and among his observations on Scottish life, MacGregor recommended places to visit. My parents were supposed to travel to Scotland—they had made their reservations on a cruise that would travel around the islands—but it was abruptly canceled upon their hearing of foot-and-mouth disease. All of her married life, she had been Marge (Margaret). Around 1994, she asserted herself as Maggie (see Figure 8.5), the name of a younger self, a girl who imagined herself as being from the (Scottish) Isles and deeply connected to her Scottish roots.

From the time I was young, I also wanted to visit Scotland; this desire persisted even during the time when I was not close to my mother. We

had a small collection of books in the house. Among these was a set of *Reader's Digest*, kept on a high shelf in the living room, separate from the encyclopedias in the hallway. When I was in my early teens, I read a story set in Scotland about a girl with second sight. The image of Scotland as a place of castles, moors, green pastures, and visionaries captured my imagination. My mother and I were both caught in a nostalgic prism of a young girl's longing to "go home" and where home, imaginatively, meant Scotland.

However, the relationship between our Scotland project and our mother-daughter relationship is much more complex than may seem at first glance. I am persuaded that our coming of age as two connected women occurred through a return first and separately to who we first imagined we were. This imagined self would have first appeared in girlhood—in my mother's growing up by the water in James Bay and in her curious return to self through her dementia, as if she had forgotten who she was then remembered and was holding for dear life to this memory, and in my sheltered existence in the suburbs which is remembered primarily for my dwelling in books and in reading (see Strong-Wilson 2006), a past dream that I saw reinvigorated with my decision to complete my doctorate and to which my mother's presence became linked through my developing interest in memory. This moment of connection between my mother and me happened at the top of some stairs, and it happened and it happened again and again in deep tender moments of genuine enjoyment in one another's company over the course of my mother's and my life history project together, and until the end of her life.

Mutual recognition, Benjamin (1988) suggests, provides the basis for intersubjectivity—in Giorgio's (2002) formulation, for mothers' and daughters' conscious reappropriation of their (potential) connection. Perhaps, Radstone (2010) also suggests, a productive nostalgia can conceive of home as a place of departure rather than of regret. For my mother and me, our common project around place(s) marked a departure that also signified a return, to ourselves as young girls first imag-



Figure 8.5. Maggie's book stamp in MacGregor's *Scotland*.

ining ourselves in the world *and through this memory-work, re-imagining one another*, as Maggie and Teresa. Our dreams, though they may have involved many things, shared at their core a realization of the important *place* in the world of love and mutual recognition in our coming of age.

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Notes

1. Short excerpts from this writing have appeared in Wilson and Oberg (2002). Also, my published writings up to 2003 appear under the name Wilson; after 2003, under Strong-Wilson.
2. Cobble Hill, populated by close to 2,000 people, is a small rural community located approximately forty-five kilometers north of Victoria on British Columbia's retirement mecca, Vancouver Island.
3. James Bay is located on the south side of Victoria's Inner Harbor, behind the Parliament Buildings and Victoria's inner core and main tourist attractions (e.g., the Empress Hotel, the Royal B.C. Museum, First Peoples House). It is now a residential neighborhood of high density and prime real estate.

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