

# Foreword

## Opening Conversation

**Carolyn Ellis**

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

**Arthur P. Bochner**

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

'You want to go where?' Art asks.

'Melbourne, Australia,' I [Carolyn] repeat.

'On the same trip as Rotorua?' he asks.

I nod. 'Hey, if we're going to New Zealand, we might as well go to Australia. They're really close.'

'If you mean the same hemisphere, maybe. I figure they're about 1800 miles and two plane rides apart—each way,' says Art, calculating. 'And the jet lag. You tend to forget about jet lag.' Then, 'Let's check out Melbourne on the Internet,' he says, and I know he's game.

'Dear Julie [White],' I write the next day. 'Art and I are going to speak at a *Reflective Practice Conference* in Rotorua, New Zealand next September. Since you've expressed interest in the past in our speaking at your university, we thought this trip might provide an opportunity for a stop in Melbourne. What do you think?'

Julie responded enthusiastically, got to work immediately, and devised a plan. A year later, from August 20 through September 18 2008, Art and I found ourselves traversing the globe to speak about creative approaches in qualitative research and health care practices. For some time, we've been committed to building an interdisciplinary and international community of qualitative researchers and practitioners who share interests in moving research closer to lived experience, creating meaning, healing ourselves and others, and promoting social justice. Our work focuses on storytelling, autoethnography, and collaborative research practices. We find common ground with all those who share our goals and desire to experiment with novel and artistic forms for expressing lived experience, and who want to connect scholarship with practice and social science with the arts. The product of research—whether an article, graph, poem, story, play, dance, musical composition, or a painting—is not something to be received but something to be used; not a conclusion but a turn in a conversation; not a closed statement but an open question; not a way of declaring 'this is how it is,' but a means of inviting others to consider what it (or they) could become. For us, the heart is as important as the mind, the imagination as important as rigour, and meanings as important as facts.

I started our travel in late summer 2008 in New York where I led a workshop at ResearchTalk for researchers and those working in a variety of corporations interested in writing personal stories and using expressive forms in their work lives. A few days later, on August 20 2008, I met Art in Tampa Florida, and we left for Rotorua, New Zealand to attend the *14th Reflective Practice Conference*, hosted by the School of Nursing and Health Studies and Waiariki Institute of Technology. This conference was convened by Christopher Johns, a Professor of Nursing at University of Bedfordshire, United Kingdom, and a spirited and energetic developer of research and pedagogy on reflective practices. More than one hundred

health practitioners and researchers attended this conference, which featured performance, poetry, stories, autoethnography, practice-oriented sessions, artwork, and more traditional research sessions. Art and I gave separate keynote presentations and a day-long workshop on personal narrative and revisioning the self in reflective practice. Many of the participants in our workshop were palliative caregivers, and we felt exhilarated to learn that health care practitioners already are using arts- and narrative-based qualitative practices in their work. We got caught up in the excitement of their projects, what we could learn from them, and the enthusiasm of those practitioners being introduced to the possibilities of creative and reflective practices for the first time.

After the workshop and a dip in the hot springs of the Polynesian Spa, we headed to Melbourne, where we were hosted by Julie White (School of Education), Bruce Rumbold (Palliative Care Unit) and Jean Rumbold (School of Public Health), and others on The Bundoora Campus at LaTrobe University. There we gave a joint lecture on 'Bringing Emotions and Storytelling to Research' in a large room packed with over 150 people. We also gave two workshops on personal storytelling, one on end-of-life narratives for about 30 practitioners in palliative care who were curious about how storytelling might improve their practices and the lives of their clients, and one for about 60 researchers who were curious about how autoethnography and creative narrative might fit into their research projects and impact their research lives, the lives of those they study, and the lives of those who read their work. The research workshop consisted of an interdisciplinary audience representing diverse fields of inquiry—anthropology, sociology, communication, education, and psychology, from all over Australia. The workshop for practitioners included nurses, social workers, chaplains, creative arts therapists, counsellors, hospice volunteers, nursing home workers, teachers and students. Everywhere we went, researchers across disciplines and practitioners across health care fields were clamouring to know more about creative qualitative approaches. It felt like we were in the middle of a social movement gathering more and more momentum!

Shortly after we arrived home (and before we could say 'jet lag'), we attended yet another conference in Sarasota, Florida sponsored by the TAOS Center on *Dialogues that Deliver: Generative Practices in Collaboration, Conflict and Community*. Headed by social psychologists Ken and Mary Gergen, this gathering joined practitioners and researchers to discuss and enact collaborative and participatory practices, transformative dialogue, and storied and performative inquiry that might lead to making a positive difference in our lives, relationships, organisations, communities, and the world.

As we write this, I see on my e-mail a notice listing the readings for Rita Charon's workshop on 'Narrative Medicine' that I am attending later in the month in the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University in New York. This workshop will assist health care professionals and scholars in developing attentive listening, role taking, reflective writing, and close reading skills in responding to illness narratives. As I scroll down, I notice an announcement of the Fifth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry meeting to be held May 20-23 2009 at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana under the direction of Norman Denzin. This annual event attracts over nine hundred participants from more than fifty countries. The focus is on interpretive and critical approaches to issues of social justice, ethics, human rights, and the research process. The next e-mail comes from faculty member Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, who has invited me to give a keynote presentation at a conference on 'Autoethnography and Music' in September 2009 at the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre, Griffith University, in Brisbane, Australia. The last e-mail I open

is from Julie White announcing the Biennial Conference of the Association of Qualitative Research at RMIT in Melbourne in November 2010.

Surely a movement in creative approaches to research is gaining ground, stretching from New Zealand to Australia to the USA and countries in between, from social sciences to health care practice to business to music and the arts, and disciplines in between. The conferences and workshops we mention here are only the tip of the iceberg. The events being held in Australia and the introduction and development of this timely journal on 'Creative Approaches to Research' demonstrate that Australia is on the cutting edge of these developments. We're delighted to be part of this spirited movement as scholars and practitioners join hearts and minds, and their artistic selves and research practices to unfurl arbitrary boundaries separating fields of knowledge and narrow definitions of what it means to know and to be.

'I'm trying to decide how I'm going to manage to go to the music and autoethnography conference in September 2009 in Australia,' I say to Art, after reading the e-mail regarding my participation there.

'Have you forgotten how much jet lag we just experienced?' Art says. 'It took us two weeks to get back to a regular sleeping schedule. And with all your trips, you're going to be in a perpetual state of jet lag.'

'Seems worth it though, given all the fun we're having and the new people and projects we're being introduced to,' I say.

'It is exciting, isn't it? The conversations we had in Australia and New Zealand are still circulating within me,' Art responds. 'And the possibilities for more collaboration are endless. Just remember that next September you'll have to teach the day after you return from Australia. You won't have the luxury of being on sabbatical that we have now.' I raise my eyebrows and smile. 'Okay, I know. You're going no matter what,' Art says. I nod.

'I can teach your classes for you while you're away,' Art offers. 'Including the first one after you're back, if you need me to. I'm happy to contribute. The conversation must go on.'

Go on it must! So, 'Bah! Humbug!' I say to jet lag. 'You're the best,' I say to Art. 'Have fun participating in the conversations that the editors and authors open up in this journal issue,' I say to readers. 'See you in Australia!'