

Sacred Struggles:

An autoethnography on the role of place-sharing in becoming a folk high school teacher

by

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Thesis for the Master Program in Theology and Ministry

NLA University College, Bergen

Submitted Spring 2020

Abstract

This research project examines the journey of experiences of a first-year folk high school teacher. The main focus is the interpretation of encounters that surround the relationships in a Christian folk high school community. I would like this research project to gain a clearer understanding on the impact of relationships. The research method of autoethnography is applied to share personal, lived and concrete experiences through narrative analysis. With an awareness of current literature on the folk high school movement, I intend to offer a theological understanding of relational practice. My research could also provide insight for those who are considering a career in folk high school or provide other employees in the Christian folk high school movement with a framework to relate to, and reflect on their own experiences.

Folk high school researcher Johan Lövgren (2018) stated that there is a lack of research on the Norwegian folk high school movement. It is safe to say that many people can remember quite vividly *what* their first year in a new job setting entailed. I am curious to find out *how* these first-time experiences could change, shape and somehow form a person. Norwegian Professor and researcher Tom Tiller (2016) suggests that there is a research perspective that has been forgotten: Research *in* your own experiences. I have accepted Tiller's challenge to conduct research *in* my own experiences as a first-year folk high school teacher.

Taking on a new job can stir numerous expectations, hopes, fears and anxieties. Struggle is a natural part of the process and may not be completely understood without reflection. I hope this project will introduce folk high school teachers to opportunities that allow place-sharing to occur.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues at Sunnfjord folk high school who encouraged and challenged me in my first year as a folk high school teacher.

Thanks to my family, especially my mom, Elaine. You have been an example for me in so many areas of my life. There are many miles between us, but your faith-filled life lies close to my heart.

To my friends and family near and far, thanks for your prayers, support and interest in a project so close to my heart.

I would like to give acknowledgement and appreciation to my professors at NLA University college in Bergen. Thank you to my supervisor, Knut Tveitereid, for your guidance and wisdom and supporting me in this project.

My wife Kristy has been my greatest supporter. You have offered more than was necessary to support me on this long journey. Thank you for your wonderful patience and hard work in keeping things in order throughout this endeavor. My daughters Elly Clara and Nora were my biggest fans and gave me hugs, encouragement and cookies.

And finally, to my late father, Howard B. Johnson. When I turned 40, I enrolled in a master's degree program at NLA college in Bergen. While some men my age were training for extreme sport races, I decided to enter a different race, a race my dad started 65 years ago in Canada. He started his theological studies and struggled but was unable to continue. I too struggled and almost quit but had the extra motivation to finish for him. I dedicate this project to my dad.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Searching for cracks

It was not just another ordinary day for this onshore Canadian oilfield worker in Norway. My morning ritual began with a cup of coffee with my colleague in the workshop. I was gazing at a decorative Euro pallet that my colleague and I had marked with cartoon drawings and inspirational quotes. The first 100 words of the working day was a conversation of carefully chosen words, listening eyes and collaborative motivation. My job for the last three years of finding cracks was the same, but the working space was completely different than inside the usual workshop. I was inside a dark, cold and echoing 5000-liter chemical tank. My task that day was to test the welds that connected the many sections of the tank. My mind was racing back and forth between concentrating on finding a sign of a crack and waiting for a phone call about a recent job interview I had attended. Finding actual cracks or faulty welds does not happen very often and, in this particular case, I may make 300 tests and not find anything. So it requires patience, concentration and a sharp eye. A job as a volleyball teacher at a Norwegian folk high school also does not appear very often, as there are only three other job titles like this in the whole world.

I had a gut feeling that this could be the "dream job" that I had been waiting on. Hopefully, the people who interviewed me did not see any significant cracks in my interview, CV or past life.

I got the call at 09.30. I had been offered the job as a volleyball teacher at a folk high school! I was still standing on the ladder in a dark chemical tank and I just screamed a big "YES" with an echo that reverberated off the steel walls of a giant cylinder onto the rungs of the ladder on which I was standing. I almost couldn't believe it was true after I had been thinking so much about this job over the last two weeks. Lunch was not for another hour, so I just kept working. I was so elated that I didn't tell or call anyone for the rest of the day, as I just wanted to keep it to myself. It seemed to me that I needed some time to reflect on what had just happened. So I kept my cool and tested another weld, and sure enough, there was a sign of a faulty weld. When I did another test, it was indeed a crack. The chances of getting offered my dream job and then finding a crack was surreal. It was a satisfying to find a crack in a cargo unit or a chemical tank because it meant I had to call on a certified welder from our workshop to repair it.

This meant that we would discuss the situation, combine our skills and repair the damage together. I found the crack and he repaired it. In a collaborative effort that often entailed laughter and positive conversation, I would go back into the dark tank and search again for cracks. I'm not sure if the highlight of these days was finding a crack, or the sense of camaraderie with my colleague to repair it together. The combination of finding a crack and a dream job on the same day was unbelievable. I was ready for a new challenge. I would leave my oilfield work and start a new career as a volleyball teacher at a folk high school.

What does a first-year volleyball teacher from Canada have in common with a Norwegian folk high school movement started by a Danish pastor? Struggle. What does a Norwegian folk high school movement have to do with a first-year Canadian volleyball teacher? Struggle with him. The odds were against me. I was not that good at Norwegian; I did not like going on mountain hikes; I could not make things out of wood; and I was not a big fan of the main meal of choice: bread. Before taking this job, I felt I could excel at the 60% of the position that required teaching volleyball. However, it was the other 40% of the various other tasks that I was unsure about. I had a desire to perform not only from a first-year perspective but to also prove that a Canadian could succeed in a Norwegian folk high school. This is not a research paper on finding out "how to become a great folk high school teacher" but a reflection on how relational encounters during times of struggle made a significant impact on my transition from a volleyball coach to a folk high school teacher.

Folk high schools are often called the world's freest schools (Folkehøgskolene, 2019). These schools have no grades, no rigid curriculum and no exams. According to online information, approximately 11% of the national cohort (19-year-olds) choose to enroll in a one-year program at a folk high school (Folkehøgskolene, 2019).

I have had numerous encounters with people who have stated that their year at folk high school was a wonderful time in their lives. However, my curiosity was focused on how the staff felt about "the world's freest school". Since I could not find any book in the library about *What can you expect as a 2nd career, first-year folk high school volleyball teacher*, I decided to write a personal diary about my thoughts and reflections. In the beginning, I thought about writing a few sentences every day, but it turned out I had more reflections and thoughts than expected. I wrote an average of 70 words per day for 41 weeks. My diary became a conversation with myself and was filled with questions, thoughts and the names of people whom I encountered in this new phase of my life.

I started the master's degree program at NLA in Sandviken, Bergen with one curious thought: Can there be something sacred or transcendent about relationships at a Christian folk

high school? This research project examines the perceptions of a first-year folk high school teacher, focusing on place-sharing throughout the journey. A method of autoethnography has been used to share the emotional and personal encounters through a personal narrative.

This project is about constructing and reconstructing my first-year experience as a folk high school teacher. In a reflexive manner and using thick descriptions I will apply the theory of place-sharing regarding the interactions and relationships I encountered. I will reflect on what I learned, gained, lost and let go of by analyzing these personal diary entries.

My research thesis is called “Sacred Struggles: An autoethnography on the role of place-sharing in becoming a folk high school teacher”. The term “in becoming” was chosen because I am researching my experience from an insider perspective while also living it. Each year I described myself as making a new attempt at “becoming”. In the fall of 2020, I will be making my "sixth attempt at becoming a folk high school teacher". I do not believe that I will ever arrive or "be", because it is through relationships that I am always becoming. It is through relationships that I look to answer the research project question: How does a first-year folk high school teacher experience place-sharing in relationships?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Although a decisive part of Norwegian culture and pedagogic practice, folk high schools have received little attention as a field of research (Knutas & Solhaug, 2010 p. 16). The following studies focus on some of the research on folk high schools in the last two decades. There is very little literature on first-year folk high school teachers.

In this literature review, I will briefly mention three studies that focus on the broader folk high school movement over the last decade. I will then follow this with research in recent years on Christian folk high schools, focusing on faith and life within these learning communities.

Birkelund & Midthaugen (2019) discuss first-year teachers in their article “*Ny som kroppsøvlingslærer - hvordan oppleves det første året i yrket?* [A brand-new physical education teacher – what was your first year in the profession like?]" Their qualitative research uses a method of semi-structured interviews of nine first-year physical education teachers. One of their main conclusions was that newly educated teachers found that the actual teaching of the physical education class was the least challenging part of their job (Birkelund & Midthaugen, 2019, p. 87). Another interesting find from their research indicated that the relationship between the parents of the students and the teachers was problematic. This challenge was due to the parents' lack of knowledge regarding the class curriculum. (Birkelund & Midthaugen, 2019).

In his book *The Learning Code* (2016), Norwegian Professor Tom Tiller analyzes letters

sent to him by previous folk high school students and staff. Tiller describes an analytical process that tries to unlock the secret of learning that happens in folk high schools. In one of the seven imperatives, Tiller emphasizes that relationships make a positive difference to learning.

"Relationships are required not only to be strong, but must also possess a vital spark of empathy, and they must warm people around them when activated" (Tiller, 2016, p. 149). Tiller finds that the personal relationships and social development promoted by the school provide the students with a unique basis for the building of character. Most of the students wrote about a secure, caring environment with plenty of human warmth, fulfillment and joy of life. (Tiller, 2016).

Margunn Dahle (2019) recently published "Mediehverdag, livssynsdanning og kristen tro" [Everyday Media, Worldview Formation and Christian Faith]. With a framework of Religious Pedagogics, her report focuses on both qualitative and quantitative research based on the role that media plays in forming a worldview in three different folk high schools. One of her research findings was that over 70% (265 of 395) of students claimed that they watched TV alone in their room (Dahle, 2019, p. 21). With these findings, Dahle encourages Christian folk high schools to use a holistic approach when communicating the Christian worldview. The use of media and film as a lens to communicate the understanding of life and worldviews is a natural way to guide young persons during their formative years.

In his book *Tro i praksis [Faith in Practice]* (2014), Johan Lövgren researches the relationship between faith practices and learning at a Christian folk high school. Through questionnaires, interviews and observations, he wanted to shed light on the different experiences of students at a Christian folk high school. By using Etienne Wenger's social learning theory, he helps us understand and describes what happens when Christian faith is understood from a practice perspective. By combining a community of practice centered around a faith object, a "faith practice" can be established in folk high schools. Lövgren claims that by combining Wenger's learning theory and faith practices, the students can find tools to reach the goal of becoming "tomorrow's architects". He believes that by collecting these tools that come from practicing faith, they may help create a society characterized by respect and openness. In turn, this will help build an understanding towards a Christian world view. Ultimately, it is the community that can help negotiate meaning (Lövgren, 2014).

The primary concept addressed in this literature review is the faith practices at Christian folk high schools and their impact on religious learning for the students. The developing theme of faith practices in folk high schools has been the subject of two further studies over the past five years. Below are two groups of research that function as theoretical and methodical points of departure.

In 2018, NKF (the Norwegian Christian Folk High School Association) conducted an

action research project for folk high school development on the subject of Youth, Culture and Faith (UKT) lead researchers Vegard Holm and Johan Lövgren, assisting researchers (participants in the class) theoretical (lecturers and literature) and practical element (the practice in individual folk high schools) (Holm & Lövgren, 2018). The action research comprised a questionnaire related to 832 students' perceptions of their folk high school experience. In designing the contents of the UKT project, the NKF decided that its goals were: 1. Increase the awareness of the school's Christian identity, 2. Increase the teachers' knowledge within the area of youth, culture and sharing of faith (Holm & Lövgren, 2018).

The above literature review reveals a lack of research on first-year teachers at a Christian folk high school. However, an indication of this area has been found in the UKT action research project (Holm & Lövgren, 2018). Its research focused on four processes. The fourth process states: "We must work systematically in order to develop our language for faith and increase our knowledge of faith and life conversations." (Holm & Lövgren, 2018, p. 16). I hope to provide some empirical evidence of how this knowledge is perceived in the faith and life conversations.

As mentioned above, the NKF conducted a comprehensive and systematic action research project. In this comprehensive project, which lasted three years and had a budget of NOK 1.5 million, a key conclusion was: "Our summary is based upon a theology about Christian youth work in which Root describes the relational encounter itself as a resonance of the incarnation, as a place where God is (Holm & Lövgren, 2018). The theoretical framework around Root's incarnational theology is a term he describes as "Place-Sharing". This research project will build upon NKF's research to understand more about "How to be a Christian folk high school in practice." It is therefore necessary to build upon their conclusion about Andrew Root's theory of incarnation by providing empirical data on the practice of place-sharing.

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer developed the original idea of *place-sharing*. Bonhoeffer (1954) claimed that what it means to be a person is to belong in a community through others. He suggested there can be no such thing as a singular human, for we are persons whose being is in and through relationships.

American practical theologian Andrew Root developed Bonhoeffer's concept of place-sharing into a theory applied to youth ministry. According to his book *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry* (2009), Root argues that for too long, youth ministry has been focused on influence. He encourages those working in youth ministry to "take an alternative approach to develop a relational youth ministry based on place-sharing" (Root, 2007 p. 54). Root defines place-sharing as "... to stand in for the adolescents, to stand fully in his or her place, not so that the adolescent no longer needs to take responsibility for his life, but in a manner that joins people in their existence and invites them

to share in ours." (Root, 2007, p. 54). He goes on further to explain his meaning of place-sharing within youth ministry:

1. A relational youth ministry of place-sharing means standing in for the full person of the adolescent.
2. A relational youth ministry of place-sharing means "to suffer with."
3. A relational youth ministry of place-sharing is a richer picture of the incarnation and the koinonia of the Trinity. (p. 54–62)

Root's term "youth ministry" is applied within a church denominational setting. As he develops his theory of place-sharing, Root introduces *Four Shapes of Faithful Place Sharing*:

1. Open and Closed
2. Barrier: Judgement and Confrontation
3. Corresponding to Reality
4. Freedom in Mutuality. (p. 119–132)

This research project will attempt to use Root's three definitions of place-sharing and the four shapes of place-sharing as a lens to interpret empirical data through narrative analysis. I believe the definition of place-sharing and the shape of place-sharing are different. My purpose is two-fold: 1) To identify areas in a first-year folk high school teacher's perception as a definition of place-sharing and 2) To highlight areas in the empirical data that could be interpreted as the shape of place-sharing. As mentioned above, Root's development on the theory of place-sharing is based on church-related programs. I intend to establish whether the *definitions* or the *shapes* of place-sharing are evident in the periods of struggle experienced by a first-year folk high school teacher.

In the UKT project (Holm & Lövgren, 2018), reached the strong conclusion that Root was a crucial factor in their research. They concluded: "For the participants in the action research project, the meetings (encounters) with each student were recognized as a key theme in the folk high school." (p. 187) What the NKF project lacked was an empirical emphasis on how place-sharing happens. My empirical data of self-reflective personal diaries containing 17 000 words will provide more insight into place-sharing. The NKF's action research supporting Root's (2009) theory of place-sharing was a too-good-to-be-true situation. This meeting point of these two research fields is my point of departure. The two stems of research unite and provide an excellent opportunity to investigate "how place-sharing occurs".

Chapter 3. Autoethnography (Method)

3.1 What is Autoethnography?

For the purposes of this study, I use the qualitative methodology of analytic autoethnography to provide a personal narrative about how a first-year teacher experiences relationships in a folk high school community. Autoethnography has gained significant popularity over the last two decades and researchers have varied in their opinion of how it should be defined (Anderson & Austin, 2006). Autoethnography is known to be self-reflective and introspective and is an important research method for exploring and examining the human experience and its meaning (Ellis, 1999). "Autoethnography emerged to account for the role of personal experience in research" (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013, p. 33).

Chang (2013) describes the method of autoethnography as follows:

1. Autoethnographers use their personal experiences as primary material (data) for social investigation.
2. Autoethnography intends to expand the understanding of social phenomena.
3. Autoethnographic processes can vary and result in different writing products (p. 108).

Several different methods are used to write an autoethnography. One characteristic that binds all autoethnographies is the use of personal experience to examine and/or critique cultural experience (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013, p. 22). The method of autoethnography that I will use is described as analytical.

Leon Anderson (2006) describes analytical autoethnography as the balance between analysis and description. Analytical autoethnography requires internal reflection while keeping a scholarly focus (Duncan, 2004). When using analytic autoethnography it is important that the researcher can discover or better understand aspects of theoretical models (Vyran, 2006).

Autoethnography can appear in different forms, such as research reports, poetry, performative scripts, songs, films and performing arts. Chang (2013) addresses autoethnography using a social science focus. Chang's emphasis on the social sciences in autoethnography supports my analytical approach. "Such reports usually contain narratives (descriptions) with vivid details, the analysis of the experiences, and the interpretation of the meaning of these experiences framed within sociocultural explanations" (Chang, 2013, p. 118).

The autoethnography inquiry I use is a narrative story from my personal diaries. By using

thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973), I create a better understanding of the culture I am experiencing. Geertz points out that in using “thick descriptions” not only must you account for what you see but also try to find a context that will account for what you see.

In 2006, Anderson introduced analytic autoethnography as "ethnographic work in which the researcher is:

1. a full member of the research group or setting,
2. visible as such a member in the researcher’s published texts, and
3. committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena (Anderson, 2006, p. 375).

My autoethnography is a first-person narrative, reflecting on my first-year experience of becoming a folk high school teacher, framed around a chronology of my experience. What I wrote in my personal diary at the time was not meant to be research. They were a series of self and spiritual reflections that describe my encounters with people. I was not considered a researcher at the time, so there is a question about this being a research project without “field notes” and not having “full” research status at the time. My personal diary contained elements of field notes when I reflected on events, people and cultural experiences, all within a specific timeline. I claim that there was an advantage of *not* being an ethnographic researcher during my time as a first-year teacher. If I had decided that this first year would involve research on relationships at a folk high school, my agenda each day could have been to write field notes. Such an agenda would have affected the natural setting in which relational encounters to occur.

Anderson (2006) makes reference to Hayano experiencing a tension between demands in his fieldwork, such as his desire to “keep on friendly terms with most of the players in the card rooms, on one hand, and his need to be an effective poker player to forcefully push relationships with other players to the breaking point in fast, aggressive games” (1982, p. 150). This type of tension was avoided as I was not considered a researcher at the time. Despite not having official field notes, I was doing fieldwork.

One essential component of my research is an ongoing self-reflection and questioning (of) my actions, decisions and behaviors throughout the empirical data examination. Michael Schwalbe (1996, p. 58), whose fieldwork in the men's movement verged at times on autoethnography, observes that “every insight was both a doorway and a mirror – a way to see into their experience and a way to look back at mine”. Another essential component is my use of reflexivity, which generally refers to the awareness of one’s own beliefs, attitudes and assumptions during the research process. Reflexivity has helped me gain insight into my well-being and personal growth in the research process.

3.2 Why is Autoethnography useful in this assignment?

Why do I want to conduct research on myself in a culture? This is a daring quest, but I am intrigued by the personal experience of the method. I was interested in the formation of a folk high school teacher because it would be a second career. I felt that I did not have much time to figure out this new career path, try it for a few years and then do something else. It was an “all-in situation” in which I made a big move into a new community, work environment and neighborhood. Had this been my first job after university, then my method would have been different. I could have interviewed the “veterans” in the field and discovered knowledge to help me fit into a new role. I wanted to be in this role for many years, so I figured that it could be valuable to learn and examine my own experiences at this time in my life.

Ronai (1995) notes that traditional social scientific research is impersonal. It fails to account for the “intuitive leaps, false starts, mistakes, loose ends, and happy accidents that comprise the investigative experiences” (p. 421). The lived, concrete and personal experience of a culture is beneficial in this assignment because the data contain memories on paper, but it is personal data that are waiting to be included in a story. This could also be valuable for someone else interested in folk high school, particularly someone thinking about as a second career. I was interested in writing about a culture that I was part of and was going to be part of for some time. It was not a typical ethnography in that I would be presenting the culture I was living in and then leaving. I would be immersed in this culture for many years to come. I was not an ethnographer who would engage in fieldwork for one year; but would be staying here to work for many years.

But why would I want to do qualitative research on myself? This is not a common method. However, I was intrigued when I read an extract from Tom Tiller's book *The Learning Code*. He offers a challenge to “research your own experiences”. “When we do research in our own experiences, there is a greater chance that the silence will start speaking, in other words that knowledge is converted from implicit to explicit” (Tiller, 2016, p. 165). I felt comforted by Tiller's challenge to the next generation of researchers and was convinced that this method would work best for my research.

I chose this method because I am surprised by the lack of research on Norwegian folk high schools. There are projects that specifically focus on students, culture, or even global trends. However, I wanted to see research from another angle. I was looking for research on the teachers who form part of the folk high school movement, but it was difficult to find. I hope this can contribute to a turn in folk high school research. There is only so much research we can

conduct into youth and student culture. Maybe it is time for research to change direction and focus on the teachers. Through this process, I will provide a highly personal and emotional account of my encounters in my role as a new folk high school teacher.

I was curious about how I was affected by 33 weeks of living and working in a new culture, mainly because of my fascination with the unique folk high school concept. If the folk high school's goal was personal development, then I wanted to know how I had developed as a first-year teacher with others. The data used for my research are my personal diary entries from 2014–2015. When writing this diary, I had no intention of using them for an academic or research project. I believe this to be valuable in the fact that the data are very raw and honest. The intention of the diary at that time was to:

1. Write down some specific events or activities that happened that day.
2. Reflect on how these events affected my thoughts, feelings and behavior.
3. Provide a spiritual meaning and focus during this period of my life.

When I started my master's program, I was very clear about my topic of research: The Significance of Relationships in Folk High Schools. However, I was very unsure about my approach to methodology and data collection. I hoped to provide a good picture of the perceptions of a first-year folk high school teacher. I planned to interview folk high school teachers. However I felt an inner hesitation whenever I was about to start the interview process. I felt selfish and felt like there was an ulterior motive because I wanted to gain knowledge from others. Through the potential interviews, I could have received guidance in how to be a better teacher. I was concerned that this ulterior motive would conflict with or get in the way of what I was curious about. After reflecting I concluded that the best way to be a better folk high school teacher would be to learn from my own experiences. It was then that I suddenly realized that I had great data that were untouched on my bookshelf at home.

I had originally written my personal diary to remember what had happened in my life at that time, but I could now use it to find out who I was becoming in this new environment. A few weeks later I discovered the method of autoethnography. I wanted a method that could make my data speak. I wanted to deconstruct my experiences and transform them into stories that presented a new meaning for me, in a culture and in the relationships that had deeply moved me five years ago. This is my autoethnographic account of my first attempt at becoming a folk high school teacher.

3.3 How does it match my research question, my data, and my theory?

If the goal in autoethnography is the connection of self and others (Ellis, 2013), then this will be a good match for my research question: What are the perceptions of place-sharing in the relationships of a first-year folk high school teacher? There are many interactions and encounters in my relationships in a folk high school environment. In this culture, connections are made every day in the way in which you relate to yourself and the culture around you.

Autoethnography is about showing self-moving in time by constructing and re-constructing a story. (Ellis, 2013). My data fulfill this purpose as the diary has a "timeline." They begin in August and stop in May. There are 35 weeks of making diary entries. The culture of folk high schools also has a "timeline". There are only 33 weeks of school. My narrative stories and the folk high school culture have similar starting and stopping points. There are authentic parallels in my observations because I am moving in time with the folk high school calendar. Another point to make is the importance of the data because I do not leave the school culture, as a typical ethnographer would do. The culture observed and the personal diaries have equal starting and stopping points.

Autoethnography matches the theory due to a strong emphasis on reflexivity. "Reflexivity entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one's actions and perception in reference to and dialogue with those of others." (Ellis, 2013, p. 73). The autoethnographic inquiry provided through my data will help me to pursue a reflexive understanding of the challenges, successes and failures of my perceptions of place-sharing with others in relationships.

Autoethnography involves looking at the themes of how people are changed. The theory I am using in my research is Andrew Root's (2009) place-sharing theory. It is mostly referred to in a Christian theological context and is used to describe how faith communities interpret relationships. The culture I was part of is a faith-based Christian educational institution. Place-sharing explores how people participate in relationships. The combination of autoethnography and place-sharing provides an interesting starting point for my research. Autoethnography as a method focuses on what these relationships mean to me within the folk high school community.

Chapter 4: Narrative analysis

My Stories

1. Stained Glass Baptism

14.08.14

A night of anticipating meeting the other staff. Woke up at 4:00 am. Bus trip to Ålesund. Great seminar and especially the walk. The whole gang has been such a help. Great hike and then supper. Wonderful church service. To feel Christ's presence in the room was amazing. I'm so grateful for this opportunity.

I started my folk high school career at a church in Western Norway. Together with around 75 other folk high school employees, we were on our way to a church service and wrapping up a day of staff training. I felt like a nervous wreck and was very uncertain of my role as we walked towards the church in the parking lot together with my brand new gang of colleagues. I was the only "rookie" on our staff. Could I actually do this job well as a first-year folk high school teacher? The workshops we had that day were quite complex as we learned how to handle emergency procedures, risk analysis and crisis management. This was no child's play on day one, as I felt I could probably have benefited from a session with a guidance counsellor, had I been offered one.

When we entered the sanctuary of the church, I was fascinated to see 96 stained-glass windows that surrounded all the walls of this six-sided sacred building. Each 1 x1 meter window was placed alongside each other, 3 meters high on the wall near the roof's crest. I quickly realized that I was a part of something bigger with my fellow folk high school teachers, and 96 stained glass biblical images telling a story that we all appeared to be a part of in one way or another. We were all allowed to "wander" before the church service started, and I quickly asked my new friends what they liked best. Some of them liked the old testament images; others couldn't really get the meaning. We were attracted by the images that were colorfully illuminated by sunlight, which was about to call it a day. A few of us gathered behind the organ, where some of the images were hard to see. However, a subsequent trip would reveal the beauty in these as well, it just took us longer to find them.

After our wandering and wondering, it suddenly dawned on me that I would soon become part of the story of 95 folk high school students. After this, I realized that I could now see the stained-glass windows in a different light. I whispered to myself: *Maybe this job will be more about being instead of having. Maybe it was not about having skills but more about being involved in their stories.*

I could not help but keep my eyes on the glass windows and the surroundings while listening to the liturgy. The sunset outside was changing the images in the stained glass. At different points of the service, the sun shone through and brought life and color while at other points of the service the images darkened. The light was coming in at different times during the service. The darkness would come and reduce the image to just a shadow as the colors faded. Seeing these images reminded me about paying attention to how the light will shine at different points of the year on our folk high school community.

But the best was yet to come. The benediction or the “sending” came at the end of the service. The benediction was sung to us by staff from another folk high school. When I heard the Celtic blessing sung in my native language, English, something changed inside of me. My worries, fear and anxieties about starting a career as a folk high school teacher were erased in these five powerful lines of the Celtic blessing. They were singing me into the folk high school movement. I felt welcomed into a community of people that wanted to participate in the lives of its students. The schools would soon be filled with writing, painting, climbing, acting, skiing, hiking, adventuring, playing, falling, wandering and forming stories of what it means to be a folk high school student.

Upon exiting the church with goosebumps and a sense of calmness, I wondered to myself, *Where will God fit into this?* I quickly gazed at the eight windows depicting three well-known biblical parables: the lost sheep, the lost son, and the seed that dies to grow.

Hmm...interesting, I thought. Will these three parables resemble the students or me over the next 33 weeks?

15.08.14

What a great two days in Ålesund. A great way to build up the team and it was fun for me to meet some of my old teachers. We had some good sessions today about generation Y and a good workshop on emergency procedures. I thought our group was really neat. Kristy may be given an opportunity to work at the school, so we will continue to pray. It was great to have a pizza party last night.

The two days of staff training would provide a good match with Root's first definition of place-sharing: *Standing in for the full person of the adolescent*. Although I wasn't an adolescent at 38 years of age, I felt like the rookie. Root (2009) mentions that with the above definition, there is no agenda and that place-sharing is about being present with others. There were hints that people were struggling after attending the workshops, which included a variety of topics for the upcoming school year. The topics were centered around being prepared for when a crisis might occur at a folk high school. I had not yet completed a "real day" at the folk high school with a

full student body. I was comforted by the stained-glass windows and place-sharing from the other staff surrounding me. Those two days felt like someone else was filling my shoes. By participating with the other staff, there was a large community of place-sharers that helped me prepare for the soon-to-be stories of the 85 students I would be "standing in for".

2. False starts

16.09.14

The start of mobility week. I walked to school. Got some things ready. Don't know how it will go. Went to Puls (fitness center) and talked with the guys. Good thing to video. Doing a trial tonight with "longest volleyball game attempt". Stressed to get back answer from the competition office. I had the 9 pm-12 pm shifts. I returned home. Felt like crap.

My first period of struggle occurred after four weeks of school. Our school decided to attempt to play "The World's Longest Indoor Volleyball Game." The previous record had been set at 96 hours. It began as a wild idea but blossomed into a project that the whole school would own. The folk high school movement was celebrating 150 years in Norway, so doing something like this would be perfectly suited to our culture of community spirit. Here was a chance to show the folk high school culture by being crazy and not afraid to do something different. Fortunately, I considered myself a creative and flexible type, so I was ready to strap on the work boots and attempt this awesome project. I was tasked with following the official requirements and rules.

Throughout the week, I knew that the final decision would all come down to how well I gathered the material and presented the correct information. I had butterflies in my stomach and I realized that if they made the 96-hour goal, it could require 96 hours on my part to get the documentation package together. The package would have to include video, documentation of witnesses who watched the game, games logs, score sheets, as well as official documents from the police, referees and political figures in our local town. These issues were becoming a concern to me. I felt that this event would be my "rite of passage" into the folk high school teacher club. If I were able to prove to the rest of the school community that I could pass this test, I might somehow leave a mark on my first year as a teacher. As long as I could make it through the week and submit the correct footage and documents, somehow the folk high school gods might look down and say: *You have passed the ultimate test. Now go on and don't do anything crazy like that again, we want you around for more than one year.*

22.09.14

One of the craziest days I have been a part of. We don't have any witnesses for the record attempt!! We started calling around at 10 am. There was a seminar at school all day. I didn't attend anything. In the office, not eating or drinking. Way too much last minute stuff. I can't function like this. I can't get much done in the office. I am in a really weird state. I have failed so badly with these tasks.

This event was the first significant team-building project. I got to know the staff in ways I could never have imagined. It felt like the world stopped for five days and the focus was on volleyball. There were many interactions with the community, and the event was being live streamed on public websites. Our school was part of something big! The whole nation was watching. The papers were interviewing me, the local community was interested and the little sport of volleyball was receiving national attention in the media. I was meeting police officers, local teachers, past employees and neighbors in the area. Every student and staff member at the school had a specific role that helped the record attempt. My role was to coach the night shift from midnight to 6 am each night. I decided to move my family into the school. I stayed in one of the dorms where we lived for the week. I felt I was surrounded by a great group of people who were willing to spend a week doing something crazy. We were chasing a record for the world's longest volleyball game. We were attempting to play for 100 hours.

During the week, I was introduced to a former staff member of the school. We talked for around 20 minutes about our backgrounds. He told me about the school's history and how the volleyball program had started. It was more like a history lesson on being introduced to the names and the people in the volleyball community around our village. Our 2am coffee conversation was about people and wasn't about performing for an event. I told him a bit about where I was from and my background and we had some laughs.

This was my most enjoyable experience over the 100 hours because over the last few days my mind had been racing, my heart pumping and I had butterflies in my stomach. I was proud of the players. I was happy for our school, but I was most grateful for this calming 20-minute conversation, instead of the inner dialog going on in my head about performance, pride and record-setting. He was the only person I talked to during those 100 hours who didn't say anything about the event itself. This was my first big test and would remain the most prominent one of my whole year. There would be many things I would not remember about that week, but this conversation stayed with me for a long time and was something that would help me get this "longest game of volleyball" burden off my back.

25.09.14

Looks like we are going to do it. I slept until 2:30 am. I am not myself. I am worrying so much. I have never felt like this before. So passive and tired. NOT SURE OF MY ROLE IN THIS. Have to be myself. The best thing I have done is to talk with each player.

There were many people connected to this event who I did not want to let down. I hung on to the hope that the documentation would be sufficient to claim the record. It never happened. The record was never approved. It became a thorn in my flesh. This "world's longest volleyball game" would always be referred to as a *record attempt* but never a *record*. The only thing to be broken would be the hearts of 14 players and 80 volunteers.

12.06.2015

Heading to Mallorca, Spain. It has been a rough month. School ending, moving, visitors and volleyball record documentation still not completed. Burdens are weighing me down. We have also moved out of our apartment in Innlegda. It will take a while to get some energy back. It was a late flight in. Got to the hotel at 2 in the morning.

The narrative analysis above portrays a struggle of not allowing myself to say stop. This world record attempt enters around a category of struggling about *what I ought* to be doing. I was fascinated with this event, and I wanted to make a good impression on the students, but I forgot to set some boundaries for myself. My encounter with a former staff member could possibly be considered what Andy Root calls a shape of faithful place-sharing as "opened and closed" (Root 2009). He suggests that the youth workers' role is not to exist only to meet people's needs. In this event, I was so focused on making a good impression with the teams that I forgot to say: "No, this is too much for me right now, and I need to take a break."

The whole school was behind this crazy project, but I simply became too involved in passing the test and took on too much. I moved my family into the school that week, thinking it was a smart idea. It was fun for them, but not for me. "Sharing another person's place happens at times rarely anticipated, and often it is in the middle of crisis that we are called to enter others' lives" (Root 2009, p. 122). The former staff member entered my time of crisis at 2 a.m., a time I felt tired, weak and very uncertain. His presence allowed me to just be myself, and for those 20 minutes, I closed myself off from everyone else and said: "I'm going to take a break and step aside from the game and talk with him." This conversation carried me through the rest of the event and reminded me that saying no can also mean saying yes to something else. A common mistake with youth workers is thinking that relational ministry is about being open with kids; but it is also necessary to be closed (Root 2009).

3. Happy Meals

16.08.14

*A classic Saturday. Went to the Eikeffjord Days with the kids. The best bit was the girls dancing at the concert. We had ice-cream, svele and lots of junk!!
Back to Førde and an enjoyable supper and dessert at our new friends.
Getting excited about a new week at school. We will meet the second year student leaders tomorrow.*

There are many spaces for learning at a folk high school. There is not just one space in which learning or teaching takes place. Many of the spaces at folk high school are classrooms, and the dining hall is one of them. Can education take place when sharing a meal together? The students eat around 760 meals together. Four times a day, they gather around a table and have food as their learning arena. The dining hall fills up with all kinds of emotions, sounds, tastes and smells. It is filled with stories of how our lives intertwine with one other, and how food can bring focus back to our lives. Eating 760 meals will shape a person in one way or another.

One of the ways I was shaped that first year was from neighbors who invited me over for meals. I was invited over to share in a meal, not just eat food.

28.09-14

Nora's first day of Sunday school. We were excited. Great experience. Lots of kids and families. Then we went home and hung out most of the day inside as it rained and rained. Invited friends over for dinner. We had chili. The kids played. Sundays are a great day. I missed a student baptism at church, but never mind.

One day I was feeling exhausted after working six Saturdays in a row. It had also been raining on all those Saturdays. My emotions were all over the place. My phone was ringing and I thought about not answering so I could just be alone in my melancholic raining mood. I picked up on the 12th ring. I thought that they might hang up and I could send a text message that I was feeling tired or make another lame excuse for not answering. But my neighbor was patient and didn't hang up after 12 rings, so I picked up. He said enthusiastically: *It's been raining for 75 days straight; why don't we celebrate with a meal?* I got off the phone and started laughing because this was such a great thing to celebrate! To celebrate the grey overcast days filled with torrential rain from all directions, wind straight in your face umbrellas-flying type of weather. The feast celebrating 75 days of consecutive rain was a place-sharing around the meal. Why not get together and share in celebration of the weather? The dismay at the weather was transformed into a joy in friendship.

2.11.14

We had pancakes and then Sunday school. It's so nice to be a part of this ministry. We came home and then met up outside with our neighbors. Fun to be out, despite the rain. We were invited over for cupcakes. When returning home I talked with a friend from Canada. It felt good to encourage her. God is listening to our prayers.

At times during that year there were sunny days. There were also storms inside me as a result of my efforts to perform and progress. It was comforting to simply be invited as a guest and simply share a meal together. This type of place-sharing was a part of how I became a folk high school teacher. This helped me gain a perspective of the community of our students and staff who might be weathering different storms throughout the day and never being afraid of saying “let's celebrate and share”.

Many of these gatherings in place-sharing during mealtimes taught me about the celebrations of everyday life; celebrating the joys and the struggles that are a part of a normal day. In the community that I served, there were so many ways of greeting something new and saying farewell to something old. Gathering around the dining table was a chance to reflect on life. Just like trying something for the first time, we were introduced to many different flavors, tastes and traditions. It shaped me into what food-centered place-sharing is all about: being with others to share our joy and struggles in everyday life.

4.12.14

A night for Tilsyn(evening shift) again. I coached a terrible volleyball practice. The main gym was booked so we had to practice at school . Getting fed up of not having any access to a larger gym. Had a quiche (supper) at neighbors. Back to Sunnfjord for a half assed volleyball practice. Tilsyn was too busy trying to fit in all the student interviews. Had to drive to collect a student from the bus station! But a good day of meetings. Tired and in bed at 1:30 a.m.

It wasn't necessarily what we ate that I remember but how I felt after sharing meals in the different phases of ordinary life. It brought things back into focus and offered me a way of feeling different about my job. Those Happy Meals did not include a cheap toy that would be ruined or forgotten in a few days, but rather left me with a sense of celebration. A celebration of just being together was the prize. A comfort in the ordinary life that appears to make more sense when being together.

04.02.15 Another beautiful winter's day. Working on the musical. Good to see Kristy back at school. Had a great meeting with a volleyball friend. It was fun to talk about volleyball and plans. Went to our friend's place for moose stew. Really tasty! Kristy went skiing. That was nice for her. I stayed home and got an earful when she got back for not cleaning up.

Another theme that evolved when analyzing the data was food and fellowship.

Surrounding the periods of struggle were meals with friends or neighbors in which we shared their recipes, but also our struggles. This could fit into Root's second definition of place-sharing: *A relational youth ministry of place-sharing means "to suffer with"*.

Root writes: "Life's beauty rests in our ability to be honest about our suffering and to invite others to join us in it." (Root, 2009 p. 61). It could be argued that "suffering" may be a strong word, but there were definitely indicators of burn-out in this time of year.

The times I shared a meal with friends also allowed me to be transparent with others. I did not have to put up a guard or protect myself. In reflecting on this today, the data pointed to how what I thought was suffering could be narrowed down to a restlessness, struggle or fatigue. This was a question of neighbors and friends place-sharing around a dining table and not avoiding the hardships, struggles and suffering but sharing in them together.

4. Mission Possible

tHe MaStEr kEy
(written by a rookie FHS teacher)

13 KEYS at SUNSET
In steel and 2 socks
WAITING 4 THE master
TO 96 DIFFERENT LOCKS

A POKED BUZZED 8 times
THE OTHER only 3
REPORTING 7 stories
SHARING 5 apples off the tree

screams in two below
a fire from ONE above
these THREE will not open
until there's flesh and love

new hands at sunrise
in sandals and muddy socKs
theRe Is no maSTer key
only valUable open lockS

11.09.14

It was morning gathering at church. The pastor talked about little miracles. Friendship and how Christ shows up in people, sacraments and spaces we don't expect. One student talked about his miracles. I was on tilsyn (night shift) again. I dropped in on a student gathering where they were singing and sharing stories about faith and life. It was a powerful meeting and it felt amazing. God's presence lifted my spirit. Very uplifting. Tilsyn was a good experience.

The poem "Mission Possible" reveals a different kind of struggle: I will refer to it as a joyous struggle, and perhaps the most meaningful one. The poem is a reflection on my night shifts, called "Tilsyn" in Norwegian. In the above poem, I describe my tilsyn experience as a summary of the four seasons of the year. At the start of the year I was focused on checklists while making sure all doors and locks were secure. The start of the poem contains numbers, as I was focused on my "duties". The first shift of locking all doors and checking things took me almost three hours. The last verses of the poem do not mention any numbers. As the numbers disappeared, my agenda for "lockdown" also vanished. When I began to talk with students and let them tell me their stories, It felt like I was being unlocked. Each time I had a shift, something unlocked inside of me. It wasn't a door, but an encounter with another person that unlocked me so that I could experience the beauty that each student brought to the community. Place-sharing can happen in the least expected spaces.

There is a term in English for someone who works an 8-hour night called "the graveyard shift." Throughout the first year, I had conversations that went like this: "What do you do for a living"? asks a stranger. "I work with students at a folk high school". And then I get an explanation as to who has the better job: "Oh yes, you guys are quite busy having to work extra shifts and staying overnight at the school. It's more a lifestyle than a job. I much prefer working from 8–16." Or there is another conversation that goes like this: "I would love to work at a folk high school because you teachers get all this time off in the summer." My defense mechanisms start to react and I politely reply "The main reason we get this time *off* is because we have used so much time *on* building relationships. This type of learning is not on the "timetable"; it has no agenda. This extra time *on* participating, sharing, growing and listening to the students' stories has made the biggest difference in my first year. We teach the students about learning from 8am–4pm and then they teach us about life from 4pm–12am.

It seemed there was something different during these shifts. It was more a feeling that I *get to* go to work instead of saying *I must* go to work. Strangely, I found myself relaxed and at peace when I oversaw 83 students, 7 buildings, 25 fire alarms and finally: myself. I was able to

see, hear and sense the stories of the kids outside of their classes, projects, performances and agendas. Each night shift told a different story: a door to unlock; a key that got demagnetized or a soul who needed comforting; a person who needed to share their story or simply someone to provide a listening ear. No matter what my role was on the evening shift, I enjoyed working behind the scenes and beside the students.

16.11.14

I had tilsyn today. It was actually pretty good. Nice to make some contact with the students. Talked and prayed with a student last night. Had a good chat with another. On my lock down round I checked the school chapel that was supposed to have an evening gathering for the students, but it appeared to be cancelled. That made me sad. Spent some extra time cleaning, which was good. Asleep at 0230.

When analyzing the data about the night shifts, I noted there was a different pattern. I started seeing patterns of questioning and uncertainty. But when it came to these shifts, I noted a different struggle: struggling with and for others. There were many things we had to fix on evening shifts such as locks on doors, food or a midnight snack. Sometimes we had to fix a light, while other times a broken chair. But what I found out quickly on my graveyard shifts was that we weren't there to fix people. Sometimes it required praying with a student who just needed someone to be there. It was a time to observe and listen to what was happening in their lives. When fixing a door, I could have a conversation in the dormitory with a student. If I were fixing a light bulb in a room then I could listen to a student about dorm life. I could fix *something*, but I could never fix *someone*, and these were the greatest lessons I learned on the graveyard shift.

The total number of night shift hours for the year is around 270. I had a lot of time to spend on getting to know the students for who they were. It was a time to work on all different kinds of relationships. I had a tough time with some of the students but the value came from seeing the *relationship* as tough, never the *person*, once I understood that it wasn't about working *on* a relationship but working *with* a relationship. I started to think that it was just as important to participate beside the student where they were at, instead of trying to perform in front of them to advance them along the way. This kind of environment was transforming me from a volleyball coach to a folk high school teacher.

I was also able to unlock this mystery of tilsyn through the place-sharing of a colleague. He helped me on my first night shift. As he followed me around, I was comforted by his presence. I feared the worst that first night in September: a fire, an accident, someone needing to go to hospital, or merely students not wanting to go to sleep. But my colleague was sharing my reality and was also place-sharing. When we got to one of the doors we had to lock, after trying all the

keys, we realized that the door would not lock. It was a double lock and we needed a different key to open the door from the other side. My colleague said he would walk around the building and unlock the door from the other side. As I stood in the dark for two minutes, I realized that he shared in my reality of being anxious. When he opened the door from the other side, my fear of uncertainty was also unlocked. This door remains to this day, my favorite one to unlock from the other side. My colleague shared in my humanity so, in turn, I could share my humanity with others on the shift. Lives can be opened when the practice of place-sharing is lived out.

It wasn't a graveyard shift for me because I came alive with each shift throughout the year. It was the 83 students who brought the life out of me with their stories, full of many chapters, in ways I could not have imagined. I was a part of their stories through those sacred night shifts. Participating with the students kicked the life back into me. The most important lesson that came from the 8 hour "graveyard shift" was: LIFE.

26.03.15

I had tilsyn today. Looking forward to it. Talked with a volleyball player and he is just never satisfied. Talked with another student tonight and thought God would like me to share with him. Enjoy seeing God's ministry at work on every tilsyn. He is here.

This narrative through a poem can fit into the third shape of place-sharing in what Root (2009) calls "Corresponding to Reality". Root claims that "...place-sharing is not about getting young people to conform to our world, but to understand their world and how it's impacting their person" (Root, 2009 p. 130). The diaries also mention that God seemed to be part of these night shifts. Could this then be a true encounter of place-sharing? Root (2009) suggests that it is difficult to be place-sharers if we do not allow young people to inform us in their language and observations in the world. "If we can simply spend time with adolescents with the simple-but-profound desire to know them and their realities, we have become their place-sharers" (Root, 2009 p.130).

5. The parable of the competitive son

15.11.14

Didn't sleep much. First volleyball league games. We got boot stomped. 3-0 both games. Safe travels and beautiful weather. I didn't sleep much the night before. It was good to be on a road trip. Maybe I am just not cut out for this work.

Once upon a time, there was a father who had three sons. The oldest son was a farmer who loved the land, the second son was a manager who loved people, and the third son was a volleyball player who loved competition. One day the youngest son said to his father "I want to go off to a faraway land and be a volleyball coach" So, the father bought him a plane ticket and sent him on his way. He quickly found success in winning games and reporting the results. The more he became preoccupied with the results, the more he became aware of how many friends he had lost.

He found himself alone with his competitive mindset and was losing more friends, even though he was winning more games. He started feeling like a stranger to himself and also where he belonged. After reflecting on his loneliness and being too competitive, he said to himself: "I need to take a break so I can return home and acquire some more wisdom from my father and brothers to help me discover the key to success." He decided to buy a plane ticket back to his homeland. He continued this tradition every year for 16 years. Each time he went back to his home country he thought to himself "I'm missing out on some important ingredients for success that my father and brothers seem to have. And it appears that they are knowledgeable about struggle, they handle it with joy." The more time the youngest brother spent with them, the more wisdom he acquired.

With his newly acquired wisdom, the son returned to the foreign country. He applied for a new job at a folk high school and said: "It's time to head to a new part of the country". There he met a group of spirited young boys who asked the competitive son: "Please sir, can you show us how to play volleyball?" Jumping up and down with joy he was ready to re-start his new non-competitive career.

28.11.14

TGIF. Getting ready for the Christmas market. It's still kind of foreign to me, but we will roll with it. It was hard to wake up today and be reminded of the big disappointment yesterday at the regional volleyball qualifications for the National School Championships. Why did I make the decisions I made? A really stupid coach. I don't feel like I've done a good job at all.

A few months into his new role, the students entered the gym and asked their teacher: "Dear coach, we would appreciate it more if you could teach us how to learn, instead of how to win." The coach was humbled, but he knew this was a good piece of advice. Later that evening the students came in, one by one, and said, "We want to play different positions on the court from the positions you thought could make the most effective team. We are up for the challenge." This idea felt like an impossible task for the youngest son, who had assembled the team to be a gold medal favorite. The coach also felt pressured to be successful at something in order to defend his decision to be a long way from his homeland and his father and brothers.

6.12.14

The last league games before Christmas. This is a long day. A Saturday seminar followed by games. Tough loss to Breim. One player is struggling. Should have played the other guys more. Long day. It's been six weekends in a row with work. . A long November it has been ... WOW.

The youngest son decided to accept the daunting task because he was so impressed by the energy of these boys. At times, the young boys taught the coach to be less competitive and embrace the values of struggling and learning. In this incredible new learning environment, a two-way relationship seemed to be happening. It was the coach and students learning not only *from* but *about* each other. The coach started enjoying himself more. When the coach started enjoying himself more he started making more friends with the people in his new village. This new-found environment of learning, growing and struggling was for everyone: the coach was learning *from* someone, not *for* something. There was new life in the youngest son. Later in the year, his boys won the bronze medal in national championships. The coach felt like a champion without actually winning a championship.

As the youngest son continued to travel to and from his home country, he always took his newly acquired insight to the folk high school learning community. He remembered what he learned from his father and his brothers and now his newly acquired group of 12 young men.

When the youngest son returned home for the 16th time, it was for his father's funeral. The youngest son didn't make it home in time to say a proper good-bye. He visited his father's grave beside the acres of newly planted fields where a harsh wind blew from the east. With his eyes full of tears and dirt blowing in his face, he recited the following words, which he had been practicing on the plane trip over the Atlantic Ocean: "Father, I am sorry that I left home and stayed in a foreign country all these years, but I have now discovered a wonderful group of young men, very similar to you and my brothers. Even though it didn't look very promising at the start of the year, we won a bronze medal in the volleyball national championships. This was

all because of the wisdom I learned from you and my brothers. We truly became a team, and I finally made the transition from a volleyball coach to a folk high school teacher. Thank you for allowing me to be lost and found every time I came home. Thank you for the royal treatment in the celebrations of my homecomings and send-offs for the last 16 years. This bronze medal is yours."

Then the son headed for home and told himself on the plane as it took off: "I will always have two homes: one for living in, and one for remembering". That day he lost his fear of losing and won back the joy of learning. He lost his competitiveness to be the best and found his contentment living an ordinary life surrounded by place-sharers.

25.01.15

Woke up to a beautiful sunrise in Ålesund. So many memories from this place. Good team meeting. The guys were focused. Told them the Fred Shero quote about winning today and walking together forever. They responded. The opposing coach told me about the bad attitude of our team before the game. It is also strange to think of how this team won bronze playing all the wrong positions. What a relief and I'm so proud of them for fighting back. God protected us, and my family. What a journey this team has gone through.

The above story is a third-person narrative written in reference to my overall approach to starting my year at folk high school with the official title of *volleyballærer* (volleyball teacher). The story describes my transformation from a competitive volleyball coach into a folk high school teacher. This is perhaps considered to be what lies at the heart of the overall struggle of being a first-year teacher. I wanted to "win my first year" as a folk high school teacher. I wanted to prove that I belonged. The agenda or ideals I had as a volleyball teacher did not match the philosophy of the school or the players whom I was working with. This fits into Root's fourth shape of place-sharing called *Freedom in Mutuality*. "There is no *ought* in place-sharing: there is no need to feel guilty that you should be doing this or that with adolescents" (Root, 2009, p. 131). Root emphasizes that adults can have too much focus on building relationships with adolescents, instead of just being with them. The goal, Root suggests, is to allow them to join in our lives, to come close to us and watch as we seek to live faithfully as authentic human beings (p.132). As I reflect on this today, it was a freedom that I discovered moving from an "ought to perform position" to an "allowing myself to participate position." The more I allowed myself to participate in the lives of the other people around me, the more I became a folk high school teacher.

6. A 52-hour smile

There's no monthly fee
 But one weekly gift
 They say there's no point,
 And it's better to drift

The equipment is aging
 The talk a bit strange
 Remember the future
 And receive some change

Through eyes of joy
 I work out my smile
 That's bent out of shape
 For climbing these miles

They do not run
 Or walk to complain
 For in these spaces
 I'm never the same

I have no sweat
 Or a personal best
 But I'm lost in a victory
 Of smiles and rest

Where did I find my place of rest amongst the changes that were occurring rapidly in my life? At some points of the year, it seemed like I was on a podcast being played at double speed; or rafting on white water on nothing but level 4 rapids. My official work week comprised an average of 52 hours. Add this total to the number of hours thinking about work, then the total number of hours was closer to 60. There was an adventure to this first year with everything being new – and a first attempt.

Other things turned the average of 52 hours into something probably closer to 55. Staying a bit longer to finish up a task or choosing to talk with the student and use up my lunch hour meant missing the fellowship with my colleagues. These extra minutes turned into lost time. Losing time with my colleagues meant that I lost track of myself. Working at a folk high school was supposed to be a joint project. Running across the campus heading for home and dealing with a request from a student to open a certain door or fetch the keys for the other buildings. Sometimes these extra errands would help me get to know a student. But other times they were just showing my family how busy I was.

31.08.14

Kristy's plans cancelled. Off to church and it was full. Quite amazing. Nora was running up and down. Met some people afterwards. Lots of activities. Went for a drive. Came back, had supper and played outside. Cleaned up. Kristy was exhausted today. She was really hoping to relax more.

One of the spaces where I found rest was in a church near the center of town with people who weren't in a hurry. There were two people in this church who were perhaps the most energizing, passionate and wise people I've encountered. This is the place where I found I could really rest. It was surprising that after being around an energizing folk high school community for 52 hours a week, I would find peace in another place where people gathered. I was encouraged and welcomed into their community just as much as the folk high school community.

Some of my friends asked me why I went to this place when it has no spirit or youth. I usually replied with the same answer: "I'm not attending this place to try and get something out of it. I am visiting it in the hope that God might get something out of me." I found out later this year that it wasn't something that God could get out of me, but more about something trying to get into me: other people. Attending the church was not about me having some kind of spiritual workout, but rather to participate with the other people sharing in my humanity.

At times, the 52-hour weeks were tiring. I looked forward to the Sundays so I could get some rest. I became a receiver of place-sharing. They shared their smiles that warmed my frowning soul. Their eyes smiled back at me and repaired my near-sighted vision.

30.11.14 First Sunday in Advent. Great to be at church again. Really wonderful with the kids singing. Those kids just brought many emotions to my heart. A tough day as Kristy was struggling. We ended up talking about all the logistics again and it just put a damper on things. God will guide us in all the decisions.

Somebody had one minute to share my place from a hangover from a 52-hour work week. I was feeling tired and exhausted at certain times of the year, but these two people met with the same joy in their eyes and smiles from their hearts. Their eyes didn't wander around, looking for the next person to talk to. The only thing they were hurrying to do was to place-share with every person they encountered that day. They communicated to people in ways that were meaningful, peaceful and whole-hearted. They smiled and laughed with their whole body. These were the best one-minute place-sharing workouts I had the whole year.

These two never caused any problems; they only demonstrated peace. They reflected Christ to me. They had no agenda, or point to make, argument to win or leave with the last word. They were simply a reflection and presence of a God that became human, that hung out with ordinary people. They place-shared with me, so I could learn how to place-share with others.

These two place-sharers lived out a language of love: Reflecting God's Love. They carried me for two minutes on a Sunday and I carried their smiles for the next 52 hours. A one-minute smile that lasted 52 hours. The greatest post-workout I ever had in my life.

01.02.15

I was feeling better so we went to church. It was great to be in the presence of God and the community. Meaningful songs and realizing that God is God and we are not. Beautiful sunny, wintery day. Had a walk and had cocoa. So good to see the Sun. Chinese supper and crème brule for dessert.

The above poem was written as a way of describing change. There was a change when I attended these services. I could not fit this into a definition or shape for this experience. I stated above “It was great to be in the presence of God and the community”. What kind of presence is this? Maybe there was just a form of positive influence that surrounded me on these Sundays. Root (2009) claims that "Relational ministry cannot be about influence because the incarnation of Jesus Christ has nothing to do with influence." (Root, 2009, p. 39) Here is where Root refers back to Bonhoeffer for a key element in place-sharing. "The action of place-sharing is radical and different, that is why, according to Bonhoeffer, it can never be done from within our own power but only from the power of One who is already present acting as place-sharer for all humanity, Jesus Christ" (Root 2007).

The above poem describes the sense of change I experienced when I attended a church service with other people. There were times in the year that I didn't feel like going, and it was at those times that I was the most changed. These were through the interactions with people that were not necessarily called "the regulars". They were not the ones leading the service or even involved in planning it. They didn't sit on any boards or committees but were regular place-sharers in my life. I encountered the action of place-sharing here. It was here that I experienced the "action of place-sharing". “The life of place-sharing is a life of selflessness; it overcomes the self-preservation and self-determination of the old humanity in the new humanity constituted by action with and for the other" (Root, 2007, p. 128). It was in this place that I could receive the life of place-sharing.

7. THUNDERSTRUCK and OH SUSANNA

Monday 13.01.15

Rough one. I didn't sleep all night. I decided to stay home but ended up sleeping until 11 am. Went to school for a meeting. Good to see the kids again. They are a great group. The boys played volleyball against Hafstad today and it was great to meet some more coaches. The guys played pretty badly. The family had a good day. Lightning struck! God woke me up. I was shaking and trembling.

My favorite warm-up song in my volleyball career was called Thunderstruck. I get goosebumps when I hear this song being played. I only imagine one thing during this song: hitting a volleyball as hard as I can onto the floor and the ball hitting the roof. The truth is I never was able to "roof" a ball. If a player could hit the roof in a volleyball warm-up without touching their hands to the net, they were declared the winner of the warm-up. Then the game started, and this person would never be able to "roof" a ball in a game. It simply never happens.

When lightning struck on this dark week in January, it came out of nowhere. I was trying to figure out where this storm had come from so quickly. I had been listening to the weather reports all day, and it hadn't been predicted. It was a storm that rolled in quickly and left just as fast.

There was one sheet of lightning and bolt of thunder. Then it was over. The lightning struck our neighborhood. The lightning was so powerful that it split a tree in two and uprooted it into what made the ground look like Play-Doh.

I was resting on the living room floor after being jet-lagged from a trip to Canada. The thunder echoed. The lightning was quick. It shook the floor and nearly destroyed a house just 400 meters away. I was shaking and trembling. Usually, I like thunderstorms as they remind me of the prairies back home. You can see a storm from miles away in the distance and ponder the powers of nature. But this thunderbolt was like a .303 revolver going off in my head. This storm was not a reminder, but a command to get up and face the thunder and look for some lightning. But it's the thunder of a personal loss that constantly echoed in my mind during those long weeks in January.

The resonance of the thunderbolt echoed in my head. The thunder was muffled in a big way six days later in my head when I heard the song "Oh Susanna" being played on an accordion. Our staff had gathered for a New Year's party. I was in no mood for a New Year's party because the "thunder" was still reverberating in my body. When a staff member brought out an accordion the thunder stopped. We sang and celebrated in the street while blasting the words to a childhood song I grew up with. *Oh Susanna, oh don't you cry for me. I come from Alabama with a banjo on my knee.* I had encountered "thunder", but I was looking for some lightning to

brighten up the dark sky. That night I encountered place-sharing through song and people. They turned my mourning into dancing, my thunder into lightning and five minutes of place-sharing that brought heaven and earth a little closer together. I saw lightning again through each one of the faces of the genuine people who I once called colleagues and who were now friends. Today they lit up in a different way and they shone like stars in the streets. They danced and sang in my place, and yes, lightning struck again, although there were no thunderbolts. Only echoes of place-sharing.

17.01.15

A great family day. I was up early. Had some great Bible reading. Caught up. Nice breakfast. We played with our kids at home and then watched the Volleyball cup final on TV. Brought back memories. We then went to the Christmas party. Cozy place downtown. Tapas and a good dessert. The highlight was dancing to "Oh Susanna" in the street. Great to be a couple and see the staff in a different light.

The above story relates to Root's second shape of place-sharing in *Barrier: Judgement and Confrontation*. I had been observing my colleagues for around six months in the ways that they worked and interacted with the folk high school community. Throughout the year they would provide me with encouragement, advice and the times when it was important to say "no". Through observing my colleagues, I was able to discover my own gifts, abilities and overall uniqueness. Root describes this as a way of forming our identity as we come up against the barrier of other people (Root, 2009). They showed me how it was important to challenge or confront youth in their everyday lives. If we don't act as barriers, there is a form of tolerance we can hang onto so we can influence them another day (Root, 2009). It was this type of hanging on to influence that I had to let go of. They helped me to abandon my attempts at being an influencer and to dance into place-sharing.

8. #GODISNOWHERE

28.04.15

Woke up early. I had a sleep over. Visitors came last night. A tough start to the day. A tragedy back home. We had a nice BBQ and we shared stories. Tilsyn was great. I was able to talk with some students. I shared with them and they brightened my day. They said: "Our friends have been praying for years and nothing has happened". Love through God's ministry. God showed up with brownies and ice cream.

The ink of the pen I was using on April 28 had a hard time hitting the paper. There were many attempts at licking the end of the pen with my mouth, trying to scribble 20 circles on a piece of paper that looked like a cat scratching the innocent blank sheet. I also tried shaking the pen endlessly up and down and from side to side until I almost dislocated my shoulder. Again and again, I was going to make this pen work.... but I eventually caved in and got a different pen, while throwing the other one across the room; surprisingly, it left an ink stain on the wall.

My hand was also having trouble holding the pen that was trying to hit the paper. My hand didn't have much energy that day. There was a tragic accident that happened back in my homeland and, all of a sudden, my desire to write and reflect on the rest of "my first-year adventures" year stopped. There was simply no energy to try and reflect over my life as a first year teacher, when someone else's live back home was lost. For 465 days, I had been keeping a diary to learn about myself, the folk high school culture in which I was immersed in and my spiritual life. I felt shattered and selfish for my attempt at some kind of self-improvement project. I was done trying to figure myself out, and where I was supposed to fit into this environment. I would simply finish the year with no significant analysis of what was going on, or whether I felt God was near. I knew one thing: He was nowhere to be found within these tragic events.

I contemplated calling in sick on my last tilsyn shift. I was not in a good space and felt I had nothing to offer to anyone on the shift. There would be no "ministry happening tonight" when God was so far away and absent from my life.

On the last shift, someone did offer something. It wasn't me, but some students who offered place-sharing. They leaned into my story and weren't afraid to offer some smiles, jokes or a cup of tea. This wasn't a big "heart-to-heart" conversation. There were no superficial comments like "that's too bad" or "things will work out", but rather..... "bloody hell.... what a completely meaningless day ...". I found out what a community of place-sharing was that day. It was about sharing our stories, the joys and the pain, and being an advocate for one another. When I realized this, my world was changed. In the above encounter my perception of place-sharing had changed from an individual quest to a communal one. The students said to me: "Our

friends have been praying for years, and yet nothing has happened." They were indicating that they did not feel anything from their friends' prayers. I should have told them: "Your friends' prayers have been answered in many ways. You sometimes just don't know what the answers look like." I felt the power of place-sharing through students who didn't know they were place-sharers. But through their friends' prayers, they gave place-sharing to me.

The students were true place-sharers. These stories of loss only require more sharing of life. Place-sharing at a folk high school is about participating in stories about ourselves together with others without an agenda or a result and leaving space for God to act and move. The results are up to God, but the participation is up to us.

When I gave up making diary entries I gave into place-sharing, and the last two weeks of the school year were a confirmation that normal human beings can bring small pieces of heaven to earth.

On April 28th I used my last drop of ink on the environmentally-friendly 3 x 6 sheet of paper. It was a day when God was far away and absent in my life and others in my homeland. But I am glad He was present and close in someone else's life here in Norway. Thankfully, our paths crossed that night in the tracks of place-sharing. Christ between us in the barrier of meaninglessness and possibility. I discovered a folk high school environment of place-sharers. I participated in the action of place-sharing in a community that helped me become a folk high school teacher.

9. BLANK

I had heard that the end of the folk high school year could be very meaningful. This is the time when students stay up late to sign yearbooks, write to each other about memories, encouragement and the last sign off. As I was observing the students in these last weeks, there was a sense of fitting it all in. What I noticed was a little bit of an awakening in which students that I had never seen together before were now hanging out. New groups were being formed and more students were showing up at the student events. Perhaps at this time of year what the students were finally realizing was what it meant to develop as a person together with others. Maybe I too was realizing something. It looks like this would also be my time to understand place-sharing by seeing it being lived out amongst them. This is where I would experience place-sharing. I was not writing about it or reflecting on it, it just happened. I gave in to place-sharing and allowed others to share in my humanity.

I noticed one more powerful image on my last shift of tilsyn. The students were busy writing, reflecting and doing more writing. There were 100 yearbooks lying around everywhere

in the student lounge. There was no talking, singing or activities going on. It was a whole community of folk high school people who were writing notes in each other's yearbook. This is a ritual that takes place every year at folk high schools at the end of April. It could be a message of thanks, encouragement, a memory or an experience. It was a big hug written on paper. They would simply write a greeting in each other's yearbook that contained their own picture. The students could be found all over the school writing in yearbooks. They were not students, but place-sharing authors. They were writing the stories of place-sharing into the pages of their fellow students. The students kept writing, reflecting, laughing, crying and rejoicing over what could have been the most meaningful year of their life. It was place-sharing on paper. They kept writing and I stopped – and discovered a community of place-sharing.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Summary

When looking at the diaries from a distance. I saw "struggle" as an overriding theme. But this struggle was often surrounded by people in my life who brought a sense of joy. These juxtaposed feelings of struggle and joy in a relational encounter created place-sharing. The struggles seemed to be about (1) different roles in the job, and (2) different times in life. No matter what kind of struggles I was experiencing, there were names attached to the people surrounding them. The data showed my encounters as a first-year folk high school teacher were about meeting people who had different agendas from mine. My struggles involved encounters with others who shared in my humanity. The connection I started making was that different types of people at different times of my life were a part of my story of struggle in one way or another.

The NKF action research project (UKT) conducted by Holm & Lövgren (2018) was interested in the following two questions: 1. What are some practical ways to be a Christian folk high school, and 2. What do values have to do with the way in which folk high school employees of folk high schools meet their students? They had undertaken an extensive research project that concluded by stating: "What we found that best reflects the school's intentions when it comes to encountering students was a theology in which the encounter itself is seen as a place where God is." (Holm & Lövgren, 2018, p. 137). The summary about the emphasis on values is: "The Christian folk high school's most important goal is to enter into every relationship with the highest value." (p. 137). It appears that the conclusion of the three-year action research did not have much to do with Christian faith practices at all. Their main finding was discovering a theology of incarnational relational ministry that resulted in Andrew Root's theory of place-sharing. It could be assumed from the UKT action research that if relationships are considered to be highly valued then there is a good chance that God could show up. Can God then, only be

present when the relationship is respected and highly valued? How can we know whether God is present or absent, and do our values and respect have any say in His presence?

Andrew Root (2009) may have an answer to how God can be present in an encounter with another. "Many of us, as adults, are still journeying in our faith. But when we assert that God is present in Jesus Christ in relationship (not in where we take the relationship), we are free, because God's presence is not dependent upon us...it's already a reality."(Root, 2009, p. 115). Thus, a question still remains about how this happens or what place-sharing may look like. Here it can be helpful to look at Root's two definitions of place-sharing: (1) Open and Closed and (2) Barrier: Judgement and Confrontation.

Open and Closed describes a balance in place-sharing. "Be wary of the person of the person who cannot be with others but be just as wary of the person who cannot be alone". (Bonhoeffer, 1954, p. 77). There may be a risk if you are supposed to enter into every encounter with the highest value" (Holm & Lövgren, 2018). As a first-year folk high school teacher, there were many instances when I had to say: "Sorry, I don't have time for this right now" or "I don't think I can help you with this". Root claims above that place-sharing is not dependent on us but God. Just because I may not feel like I am making an impact in someone's life due to time constraints, a bad day or maybe because I am just plain tired, that doesn't mean place-sharing will not happen. There is freedom found in place-sharing.

In Barrier: Judgement and Confrontation Root claims: "We discover who someone truly is not through the lens of culture but through relational bonds with another" (Root, 2009, p. 173). Adolescents can be studied, observed, researched, analyzed and put into categories that sociologists find convenient. It appears that culture and society is defining the adolescent generation with fancy slogans and letters of the alphabet that can give us a false indicators of who each adolescent is becoming. We have no right to use relationships for our own ends.

I will critique Root on his term *view of suffering*. "To be an incarnational in youth ministry is to enter into the suffering of adolescents; it is to understand yourself as their place-sharer. Relational ministry is not about having the answers or being "cool"; it's rather about gently and sensitively joining adolescents in their suffering" (Root, 2009, p. 84). This would appear to be a form of cultural conflict at folk high school. Students are only there for a year. They don't have the pressure of exams. There may be a danger of ascribing youths with problems they don't have. If the staff at a folk high school were to suffer with 85 students who had troubles, there might be a few cases of burnout. Root is writing from a Youth Ministry perspective where students are not living together for 33 weeks like in a folk high school. A youth group in Root's sense are students who engage in activities, meetings or events two or three times a week. Folk high school students live and spend most of their year together in a

close community. Encouraging folk high school teachers to suffer with their students can be too high a price. This would very quickly break the "open-and-closed" disposition of place-sharing within the folk high school.

Another weakness in Root's theory of place-sharing is that he fails to talk about the effects of place-sharing. I would call this the *resonance of place-sharing*. There is rarely a continued story of place-sharing in a time context. It is somewhat confusing to think that place-sharing is time sensitive. Looking at the wide scope of the data on place-sharing, there was a place-sharing type of network. The encounters were connected and supplemented throughout the year. The way I perceived place-sharing in relationships is that they resonated throughout the year. Faithful place-sharing is something that happens after place-sharing occurs. It seems that there is a resonance to place-sharing. I have these memories from my diaries but I am also carrying those names on the pages as I continue to become a folk high school teacher.

The encounters of place-sharing are something I carry with me today as I experience new joys and challenges. In some ways, the place-sharing does not stop, it keeps being carried. Perhaps this is my biggest discovery and what is missing from Root's theory. What happens after place-sharing? I have the yearbook to reflect on. It is not a yearbook for me, but I remember the yearbook of the place-sharers who were a part of my life and who still resonate.

Conclusion

Place-sharers are all around the folk high school community. Place-sharing appears in spaces that are different than the youth ministry found in a church. When looking at the data, I see that the other people shaped me in different ways. I understood myself better through the encounters of place-sharing. There will be encounters every day. The only way we can know whether place-sharing is occurring in our environments is if we stop and take some time to tell stories. If there was such a wide range of place-sharing in these diaries, then there must be more stories to tell. Too often, relationships and influences can be centered around the "teacher". Place-sharing occurs in so many more ways than through teacher-student relationships. There is a whole community of place-sharers.

My diary entries during the times of struggles were surrounded by many names. The place-sharers in the environment reflected *who* I was. They reflected "who I was as a folk high school person." The community at large and the folk high school community shared their place in my humanity. I was trying to pass the first-year folk high school teacher program with ambition. I discovered who I was in the relationships that surrounded me with place-sharing.

My transformation from volleyball coach to folk high school teacher was not defined in terms of *what I did*; it was defined by *who I was surrounded by*: A folk high school community of place-sharers.

We may never know, where, how and when place-sharing happens if the folk high school is only preoccupied with influence, programs, strategies and events. In my data, place-sharing took place in the least expected spaces, with the least expected people. I look forward to my sixth attempt in August 2020 to be surrounded by another unique community of place-sharers. This is how place-sharing is lived out at a Christian folk high school: Through normal human beings in extraordinary ways. Place-sharing is experienced in different places, spaces and faces in a Christian folk high school community.

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