Mothering, Community, and Friendship

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Beyond DNA

Janice Tuck Lively and Mary Barbara Walsh

Janice and Mary in One Voice

We, Janice and Mary, became friends late in life, after our mothers' deaths and as our children stumbled towards and through adulthood. Our friendship began as a function of our work but quickly transformed to centre around shared elaborations of the struggles and the joys of mothering. Despite profound differences regarding race, marital status, and disposition, we discovered an affinity in terms of our experiences of mothering and being mothered. Together, we reflected on and digested our experiences and together we struggled with our ongoing challenges as mothers. There are things about mothering that only become apparent during the sharing of our experiences: mutual care and vulnerability as well as friendship. By sharing our experiences, our friendship eased, just a bit, the anxiety attendant to motherhood and enhanced, just a bit, the joy possible in mothering. Beyond friendship, we found our community of support, comfort, and encouragement. We intend to offer a glimpse into that community and to share what we learned about mothering through the lens of our friendship.

In more academic terms, in this chapter, we engage in the process of reciprocal dialogue as a means of grappling with various representations of mothering. Through this reciprocal dialogue, we hope to provide space for the expression of our unique narratives as well as the possible emergence of a shared narrative regarding mothering. In 1999, Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman proposed reciprocal dialogue as an

approach to feminist theory as it "does not reduce each one of us to instances of the abstraction called 'women'" (486). Reciprocal dialogue demands that we, Janice and Mary, each alternatively position ourselves throughout this chapter as an insider and as an outsider, listening and inquiring in a spirit of engaged friendship and genuine sisterhood. We invite our readers to do the same—not to look for answers, definitions, or directions but rather to share in the process of listening and learning.

To engage representations of mothering beyond our own, we also incorporate a process of call and response. In this case, the representations of mothering act as the call for our reciprocal responses. According to Maggie Sales, the call and response process "depends upon the repeated interaction of the one and the many" (43) and allows the meaning of the exchange to evolve in and through the process. In this way, meaning is neither stagnant nor monolithic but rather communal, multiple, and evolving. Importantly, the call and response process represents an ongoing process that ultimately ends with a call to continued engagement and exchange. We hope that this chapter represents one moment in the evolving exchange regarding mothering.

I. From the Start . . .

> It's well known that the transfer of mitochondrial DNA from mother to offspring, often called maternal inheritance, occurs in humans.... You inherited your mitochondrial DNA from your mother, who inherited hers from her mother and so forth. Maternal inheritance also gave rise to the idea that there exists a "Mitochondrial Eve," a woman from whom all living humans inherited their mitochondrial DNA.
>
> —Steph Yin

Mary's Voice

If you were to play a game of "one of these things is not like the others" with my mother, my sisters, and me as the prompts, I would be designated as the odd daughter out every time. My mother, a graceful, slender blonde gave birth to four tall, blonde daughters—and me, a stubby, brown-haired throwback to someone earlier in the chain of DNA or perhaps to my father's heartier stock. How I envied the long-

legged, freckle-less bodies of my mother and sisters. But my siblings and I all share blue eyes, inevitably so, given that both our mother and father were blue eyed. Through these blue eyes, we can trace our heritage—my mother's, my siblings', and my own—back to a smallish, damp green island just off a bigger, imposing island across the Atlantic Ocean. To this day, if I close my eyes and try to remember the physical reality of my mother, it is her soft blue eyes I remember best—eyes that did not probe, or interrogate, but rather that drew me in and held me in their sweet, warm glow.

Janice's Voice

From as far back as I can remember, I was always told that I looked just like my mother, who in turn looked like her mother. Our bodies were lean and slim with just enough derriere to make them interesting. Our features tended to be like those of many Black women: full lips as well as the Nubian nose commonly found in those of African descent—a longer bridge and wider nostrils, large expressive brown eyes, and skin tones in varying shades of brown. Within three generations, we had three distinct skin tones: mine was café au lait; my mother's was cinnamon brown, and my grandmother's was a warm chestnut. Based on cultural standards at the time, there was nothing exceptional about our beauty through the genes we passed from mother to daughter. My younger sister, in contrast, seemed to look nothing like us. She looked like our father, inheriting the petite full-busted voluptuous body of his five sisters, along with their minimal derrieres, warm sand-coloured skin, and slightly slanted eyes that seemed to close when she smiled—eyes that harkened back to some precontinental drift Asiatic ancestor. Hers was a more exotic beauty that I envied and wondered why my mother hadn't imparted to me. My sister always longed to look more like our mother and me; she wanted to feel like she belonged to our tribe.

II. Our Mother's Love...

Love set you going like a fat gold watch.
The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry
Took its place among the elements.

—Sylvia Plath, "Morning Song" 156

Janice's Voice

Newton's law states that an object will remain in motion unless acted upon by an external force. My mother lived this law of physics, always in motion. We, my sister and I, were the external force, compelling her ceaseless motion and providing the friction that got in her way. She was the mother planet continually revolving around two suns, my sister and myself. We seemed to be the reason for her being. On this swirling axis, she was constantly washing, cooking, cleaning, sweeping, mopping, and sewing—she was always preparing something—while instructing, correcting, and guiding our lives. Perhaps the seeds of this came from my grandmother. From the time she told my grandmother she was pregnant with me, and my grandmother responded that my mother had better not even stub her toe out of fear of miscarriage, my mother's singular purpose in life was the care and covering of my sister and me. She, like the apostle Paul, "poured herself out like a drink offering" for her two daughters, and we greedily sucked up every ounce she had to offer, never fully appreciating the price of that drink. In my earliest memories of my mother, she was a conglomeration of powerful hands, arms, and feet. Once a week, she bent over a bathtub full of clothes with a scrub board, a box of Tide, and a bottle of Clorox bleach; she first washed the white clothes then the coloured ones, all by hand. It would be several years before we could afford a wringer washer that would be hooked up to the kitchen sink. The knuckles on her hands were always red after the hours of rubbing against the board. It was a task that seemed to consume her entire day.

Those hands and arms seemed so strong. In my mind, they were as commanding as Popeye's after eating his spinach. Pumping veins ran up her arms and throughout her hands creating superhuman muscles that powerfully wrung out wet sheets and towels, my father's shirts and pants, our dresses and underwear—all of which would later be

placed across radiators and windowsills to dry. We never had a dryer. Later that night, in that same bathtub, those hands would lovingly bathe us, and those arms would tenderly hug us goodnight. She would then go stand on what had to be weary feet over the ironing board until midnight, first starching, then ironing all that she had washed. "Mommy, are you going to bed?" "In a while, baby, I have to iron these clothes while they're still damp." We had no steam iron. My only memory of my mother in repose was when she sat quietly in the living room. As we sat in the kitchen eating the dinner she had prepared, each evening she quietly slipped away into the living room and read the five daily newspapers, the current *Jet* or *Ebony* magazine, her recent selection from the Book-of-the-Month club, or one of the Hollywood scandal sheets. Her books, newspapers, and magazines catapulted her beyond the walls of our four-room apartment, and all of its demands, out into the larger outside world of ideas and discourses. A world in which, on most days, she was in but of which she was not a part.

Mary's Voice

True to her Irish-Catholic heritage, my mother was pregnant eight times over twelve years, bringing to life and nurturing to adulthood seven unique beings who would eventually outgrow her care but never her loving gaze. My mother could have been a juggler in the circus having mastered the art of cradling a baby in one arm and pushing a stroller with two small children crowded inside (this was before double-seated strollers) while instructing another two children to hang tightly onto the sides. There were always diapers soaking in the toilets (this was before disposable diapers), dozens of baby-bottles drying on the dish drain, and heaps of laundry on the landing of the stairs waiting to be tossed to the basement and magically returned as clean, folded clothes for use the next day. As a child, I navigated around these minor obstacles, yelling for a sibling to vacate the diaper-free toilet, climbing over the mountain of laundry, and sometimes kicking and thrashing in the pile for fun or in revenge for the inconvenience it represented to me.

It was only as an adult that these memories came to represent the enormity of the work my mother faced alone each day. As a child, my mother's endless days and nights were invisible to me. She poured herself out to satisfy our thirsty demands; we gulped without any awareness of her sacrifice. Indeed, two of my most vivid childhood

memories of my mom were of her fruitless search for some respite from the endless chores she faced each day. Frequently, at least in my memory, upon my return from school, I would find my mother napping on the front-room couch (which she had reupholstered herself), tightly cradling the baby in one arm and trying to get a few moments of shut-eye before we all redescended on the house. In the evening, she hung herself, literally, with a weighted contraption attached to the top of the den door and designed to alleviate the aching, pinched nerve in her neck. As we watched the flickering black-and-white television in the crowded den, sometimes donning the purple floral jackets that she had crafted from the leftover upholstery fabric from the couch, she sat plastered against the den door, her neck stretched and her head and her eyes compelled forwards, trapped in place by forces, which she both chose yet which had also been thrust upon her by circumstances beyond her control.

III. Set Us Spinning...

> We need fully to understand the power and powerlessness embodied in motherhood in patriarchal culture.
>
> —Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* 67

Mary's Voice

Whereas my mother was the centre of my childhood universe, my father was the sun around which she revolved. It was my father's schedule that dictated the shape of her day, my father's tastes that determined her shopping list, and my father's job that framed the life choices of her marriage and family: where to live, what to eat, and if to vacation. My father loved my mother with an unwavering resilience, which led him to seek her presence whenever possible, to share a television show, to take a short trip to the store, or just to linger over a meal for one minute and talk. My mother, in contrast, sought opportunities to retreat from his dominating presence by burying herself in a book, turning to the dishes waiting in the sink, or playing a card game with one of us kids. My father's love for my mother, though both genuine and deeply private, manifested itself in a culture that demanded her sacrifices for his benefit and then made those benefits invisible to

both of them by reducing them to their roles in the family. My father led his family, and his wife, with a stern benevolence that drove his children to academic and professional success and his wife to retreat. I know their relationship did not begin this way. As an adult, I found a diary my mother kept as a teenager. On the pages, I found a frivolous young girl infatuated by the tall, dark, and driven young man that would become my father. My mother chose my father from among many possible options, neighbourhood boys and schoolmates who all, my aunts would later recall, doted on my mother, calling for her attention and companionship. On those pages, she loved my father deeply for himself and not merely for his role in supporting our family. At the beginning of their relationship, she sought my father out, always wanting him nearby, but this I only realized upon reading the pages of that diary.

Janice's Voice

My mother was one of the brightest, funniest, most insightful women I knew and an extraordinary storyteller. I believe my gift for storytelling came from my mother and my grandmother and all those nights my little sister and I sat around the kitchen table listening to them recount stories about their lives growing up in the South and about our various odd relatives. My favourite stories involved my Aunt Jane, a midwife in Alabama who was notorious for the black Stetson hat she wore, the white stallion she rode, and the bullwhip she carried when going to deliver babies. When Aunt Jane became exhausted and frustrated with her husband's beatings, as well as the confiscation of her earnings, she retreated to live in the woods with her horse as her companion. When my mother told these stories, her laughter filled the air, light emanated from her eyes, and power propelled her voice as she shared some perceptive wisdom at the end of her stories. She was transformed into another person, one who was alive and beautiful, one who I aspired to be. Most people who encountered my mother when they came to our home would not know this side of her. She seldom went anywhere unless it was to go shopping for a personal item we needed or something that was needed for the house, to go to the grocery store, or to go to my school for PTA meetings and events when parent volunteers were needed. Her forays into the world beyond our home were always need based. My mother would move mutedly through the spaces of our

house, carrying out one task or another while the other women would gather around the kitchen table and talk. She never raised her voice except to reprimand my sister and me for not doing something she had told us to do or for doing something she had told us not to do. She seemed to be in a permanent state of preoccupation and melancholy; when she smiled, it was faint, and when she laughed, it was quiet, not the robust uninhibited laughter that came from the kitchen table.

My father was seldom home. When he was home, he was in the front room watching television—usually a movie or a show about war or a John Wayne western. My parents resided in two separate universes, hers in the back of the house, his in the front. When not watching television, he was sleeping, working the second shift at the post office, or visiting the neighbourhood bar. I watched as my mother's life with my father turned her more and more each day into the "incredible shrinking woman." My mother was a beautiful woman, and he was extremely jealous and didn't want her going anywhere unless he was with her. He was the one who defined the boundaries of her world, and she lived, at least physically, within the borders of those boundaries. I believe, however, that her mind allowed her to often travel beyond those borders. Those books she read as well as the things she knew and talked about when engaging in an uncensored speech at the kitchen table or on the phone with friends or with "Aunt Kitty," our neighbour from upstairs, as they sat playing two-handed whist on Saturday nights—all told me how she often travelled to places and embarked on adventures beyond our home and our limited imaginations of who she was. I don't think there was any malice on my father's part; he, like most men of his generation and society, had very definite ideas about what a good woman was. A good woman stayed at home, kept her house, herself, and her children clean, knew how to cook, took diligent care of her husband, and didn't run the streets. My mother was a good woman:

> "Girls and boys develop different relational capacities and senses of self as a result of growing up in a family in which women mother." Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* 173

Mary's Voice

My mom was addicted to several things: cigarettes, card games, and Harlequin romances. I learned to read with Nancy Drew mysteries and devoured the heaving chests, sharp indrawn breaths, and dainty waists of Harlequin romance heroines. My first experience of reading was not as an academic exercise or as a joyful exploration but an escape from whatever homework or responsibility I was avoiding. I surely learned this from my mother. My mother recommended *War and Peace* to all of her children but advised we skim or skip the war chapters, as they were way too dreary. Romance novels were both our escape and our prison. In these novels, our freedom and our choices were manifest in the broad shoulders and brooding desire of someone else, who we could capture but never lead, a hero who would ultimately capture us—the ironic result of the heroine's machinations. My parents' relationship was not a work of fiction, of course, but it echoed those gendered expressions of romantic and familial love. My mother's love for her husband and her children demanded her supporting role in their success and also trapped her in a tangled web of needs and love, obligation, and affection. She ironed shirts for my father and stayed up late, sometimes very late, typing my research papers for school. She packed for his business trips while working on our science projects. Our success was her success. But it was rarely, if ever, the other way around.

In the evening, we girls—my mother and one or more of my sisters—frequently gathered around our big, round kitchen table to play triple (or quadruple) solitaire, rushing to slap our cards in place before our competitors, our sisters, or our mother beat us to it. We laughed and cheerfully argued as my father sat in the den watching the television, occasionally calling for one of us to change the channel (the trials of those pre-remote-control days) or refresh his iced tea. From about the age of ten years old, I, like each of my siblings, knew how to make my father's martini. Using the special, double-sided shot glass that waited at the side of the sink alongside the drying baby bottles, upon his request (or demand), we carelessly sloshed the liquors (two shots of gin from the big side, one shot of vermouth from the small side) into a special gold-trimmed martini glass with a sliver of lemon.

My dad worked long, hard days in a skyscraper in the heart of the city. I had no idea what he did there, something with numbers and

prices and a multiple-worded title, but I knew he worked hard. Our life at home, his requests and our responses, including our mother's, recognized those long days that anchored our lives and shaped our futures. Our card playing occupied the space at the margins of that long day outside our home. My mother found joy and companionship around the edges of a life framed by someone else's day, around the edges of a life filled with family responsibilities and arduous, rarely acknowledged, other-directed chores. My mother treasured this life, loved her children dearly and sacrificed willingly for the sake of the family. Indeed, to the extent that a woman can choose her own life given the dictates and unconscious demands of our gendered culture, she chose her life. My aunt, her sister, once recalled how, as a young girl, she longed for babies, many, many babies. I don't believe that my mother ever regretted that choice. But every choice, whether real or a mere illusion, brings loss and regret. This momentous life choice was no different. She never once spoke of this loss. I have no doubt she felt it.

Janice's Voice

My mother smoked Viceroy cigarettes, loved doing crossword puzzles, and was a voracious reader. She usually simultaneously engaged in the act of smoking and reading during the few quiet moments she was able to steal away for herself. These were such private moments that I was always embarrassed to intrude. I often stood quietly in the hallway peeping around the corner watching her read; she was so lovely in my eyes at those times, almost like a still life. She usually sat in profile on the sofa as light softly filtered in from the small window facing the gangway: one arm luxuriously resting on the back of the sofa with a cigarette in hand, legs crossed, book on her lap, gently turning the pages with her other hand. Luckily, I was unconsciously drawn to mirror her reading but not her smoking. I read both Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* as an eleven-year-old. Every month, I anxiously waited for her Book-of-the-Month Club selection. As we got closer to the middle of the month when the book came, I would often ask her, "Is it time for the book yet?" She would smile and say, "Not yet but soon." I think my enthusiasm pleased her. After she read each month's selection, she would place it in the small bookcase built into the headboard of her bed along with her other books. She would say, "The book is in the headboard." I would then

climb up on her bed, retrieve the book, and return it after I finished reading it. We never had discussions about the books, whether I enjoyed them or even if I understood what I was reading. It was the act of reading that we quietly shared.

When my sister and I came home each day from school and if we didn't have homework, we had to read for an hour. When we came home and even if we did have homework, after we finished, we had to read for an hour. When we were small, my mother would walk us to our neighbourhood library every two weeks to take out books. It was during those times that she would talk about reading, sharing with us some of the stories she had read, building our anticipation of what was waiting for us in the library. Once we were older, every other Friday we were expected to go on our own to the library and sign out books. During those times, I missed my mother's presence and the stories she shared as we walked. The trips to the library were never the same.

IV. Round and Round...

I loved you even during the years
When you knew nothing
And I knew everything, I loved you still.
Condescendingly of course,
From my high perch
Of teenage wisdom.

—Maya Angelou, *Mother, A Cradle to Hold Me* 25

Janice's Voice

I don't know when I started seeing my mother's quiet gentleness as a weakness. Her seemingly total submission to my father's will was something that I never understood or wanted for my life if I ever got married. I, in no way, wanted to be like her. Somewhere along the way, I lost perspective on those strong arms that could tirelessly wring out wet sheets and towels as well as the intelligent woman who read all five of the city's daily newspapers every single day and a new novel every two weeks. I started to judge her and the life she led. In the late 1960s, times were changing, the world was loud, and women were roaring and not whispering. They were using their outside voices inside and de-

manding to be heard. What it meant to be a strong woman looked nothing like what I saw in my mother. She seemed overwhelmingly passive and inadequate in my eyes. I didn't see her as a fighter and was ashamed of her, and she knew it. One day in a fit of adolescent rage, I shouted this loudly to her: "The only reason I respect you is that you are my mother, and I have to, and that's all!" She looked at me with eyes filled with hurt and simply said, "Janice Faye, just go to your room." Even though I knew I broke her heart that day, she remained consistently herself. The idea of that moment continues to shame me and break my heart, and I spent most of my adult life making amends for it.

The problem was I was looking at my mother through the wrong lens. While I was busy comparing my mother to those who I thought were the more powerful progressive women in the country, I didn't see how she was launching her own feminist campaign in her own small world. When I was in seventh grade, my mother and grandmother went downtown shopping one day. My mother came back home with a job. After lunch and a slow gin fizz for courage, she had walked over to Goldblatt's Department Store on State Street, applied for a job, and succeeded. After that, a cold polite silence filled our house. My father walked around the house for two weeks not speaking to my mother, angry that she had gotten a job. "What will people think about me if you start working? They will think I can't support my family!" he shouted. He tried to force her to quit. She refused. It was the beginning of the end of their relationship. My mother started as a stock girl and worked her way up to a salesperson in the ladies' shoe department. She was the first woman to sell ladies' shoes on State Street at a time when only men sold women their shoes. I didn't recognize the significance of her accomplishment until much later. All I noticed was the void that was left in the house once she started working and the chores I had to learn as a result. I later learned my mother had worked since she was sixteen years old and only quit working when she married and had children. She had always planned to resume working outside the home once my sister and I were out of elementary school. In my tunnel vision, I only saw this woman as my mother and not the quiet calculating revolutionary who was biding her time.

Mary's Voice

My mother's gentleness infuriated me. Why couldn't she just post a list of chores and enforce the list? Why? Her preferred leadership style

with her children revolved around catching whichever child was closest to press them into action. Please take the garbage out. Please change the batch of laundry down the basement. Please fetch the bleach so I can finish scouring the tub. Please peel these potatoes. Each request was met with an endless barrage of excuses and refusals. Why me? Maybe later, not now! Not possible, on my way out. Too much homework. Bad stomach ache. This isn't fair. Definitely, not fair. More frequently than not, the captured child escaped, and my mother toiled on alone, regretting the time wasted with the entreaties. In reflecting on my aunt's more dictatorial style of mothering, my mom once observed that either way, the process is exhausting: The enforcement is as endless as the chores themselves.

I concluded silently that when I became a mother, I would choose the enforcement of a posted set of clear chores over actually doing the chores myself. Until I had children of my own that is. Then, faced with the unbridled determination of an eight-year-old, I wavered. It was not only the exhaustion that caused me to waver but also that my relationship with that child was framed by a history of endless giving and thoughtless, gulping receiving—a giving and receiving founded both in biological necessity (the infant's immense need and vulnerability) and also my love for that greedy little creature. It became difficult to distinguish my ends, goals, and desires. My child's ends became my ends, my child's happiness inseparable from my own. Once I had been the recipient of that endless love, basking in that love and gulping down the care of my mother. Now, as the giver, as the mother, I understood how one could lose oneself in that bottomless well of love and need.

V. Grounding Our Turns, Setting Us Free

> And so because you love me, and because
> I love you, Mother, I have woven a wreath
> Of rhymes wherewith to crown your honoured name:
> In you not fourscore years can dim the flame
> Of love, whose blessed glow transcends the laws
> Of time and change and mortal life and death.
>
> —Rossetti, "Sonnets Are Full of Love"

Mary's Voice

My mother taught me so many things. She taught me how to play cards with wild abandon, pushing others aside to slap cards into place with a light-hearted determination to win. She taught me to read for the sheer pleasure of reading, momentarily putting aside urgent tasks and heart-pounding anxieties. She taught me how to make huge pots of food, stews, chilies, soups—all of which were remarkably similar in taste and prepared to nourish the hearts and bodies of those she loved. She taught me how to comfort a crying baby, swaddling the writhing, screaming infant close to my breast, mending our bodies seamlessly back together, shifting hips and feet, and rhythmically erasing the flow of time that had separated us.

This last skill was not so much learned as acquired—a way of life that demanded that one approach each task while also attending to the needs of another person who is both of, and not of, oneself. My mother taught me how to firmly grasp that screaming infant, thrust a pacifier into its cavernous mouth, and firmly press that mouth to my breast, compelling the child to suck, calming both the baby's cries and my aching heart. With years of practice, my mother could comfort a baby while tending to a variety of other tasks, washing greasy dishes, combing a wiggly toddler's knotty hair, or lugging a batch of laundry up the stairs. In a moment of respite, she would cradle an infant in one arm, which also held a book open, while also smoking a Virginia Slims cigarette and monitoring the variety of children swarming around her.

Janice's Voice

The woman and mother I am today are because of my mother. It was through the life I saw her live, the wisdom she shared, and her ability for quiet restraint in situations where I would have wanted to scream—not that she didn't also scream at us on occasion—that I learned to mother. I marvel at all she and so many other women of her generation were able to accomplish with so few of the modern conveniences of today, all while trying to find some way to sustain their dreams and desires for personal growth. I fell in love with my mother all over again once I had children of my own. I came to understand my mother so much more clearly. She was my refuge and sensei to whom I ran when the treacherous waters of motherhood felt like they were going to take me under.

As adults, we established a weekly meeting that I called Blue Mondays. Every Monday, my sister would pick me up from my job when she got off from work. We would then stop by the store, pick up a bottle of wine, and head to our mother's house. There the three of us sat at her kitchen table sipping wine with our mother's jazz albums softly playing in the background—Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan, Dinah Washington, all the sad girl singers, hence the name Blue Mondays. Our mother would allow us to ask her questions about life, and she would answer as best she could. I once asked my mother, "How did you keep all the balls in the air that went along with being a mother without dropping them?" She smiled and simply said, "You just do what you have to do. Sometimes you do drop a ball. You have to forgive yourself and hope that things will turn out alright." She then laughed and said, "In the case of you and your sister, everything did for the most part." Agreeing with her, I took a deep gulp from my wine glass. With mothering, we all must find our own way to drink from the cup we are given. On another occasion when I was on my second glass of wine, with tears in my eyes, I asked her, "Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell me how hard it was?" She looked at me with a small smile and tears in her own eyes, more for me than for herself, and said, "Because you wouldn't have believed me if I had." I nodded, knowing she was right. Beyond the biological stages of pregnancy, no one can prepare you ahead of time for this thing called mothering. It is one of those jobs you learn to do while doing it. I raised my glass to my mother and took another sip of wine, thankful that I had her beside me to help guide my way.

VI. Janice and Mary in One Voice

From the start
our mother's love
set us spinning
round and round
grounding our turns, setting us free.

—Janice Tuck Lively and Mary Barbara Walsh

More than forty years ago, Adrienne Rich called for the recognition of a distinction between the institution of mothering and the potential of mothering. Through an examination of history, philosophy, and feminism, and with insights gained through her relationships with her mother and children, Rich pointed to the difference between the institution of mothering, which is inextricably bound to the patriarchal forces in which it is actualized, and the potential of mothering, which is tied to the essentially human, everyday—mundane and profound—labour of mothering. The reciprocal narratives articulated here, like the narratives of every other mother and child, illustrate both the pain of mothering and the possibility of joy rooted in the potential of mothering—a joy resonant in the profound connection between mother and child. Mothering, as it is tied to the exhausting work and exhilarating labour of relationships founded in care and need, is also tied to the infinite love and binding obligations persons realize in caring for one another.

Each of the narratives articulated here illustrates not only the particularities of a mother's love as it is actualized in a racist, classist, and patriarchal society but also the potential of mothering for grounding deep, genuine love. But our voices are merely two among many voices—an infinite number of voices across the globe and through history, voices as varied as the time and the geography in which they emerged. Disentangling the pervasive, patriarchal aspects of historically realized mothering from the potential of mothering demands that we listen to and engage with the infinite ways in which mothering is actualized. Perhaps, discourse founded in friendship, whether across a boardroom or a sandbox, an international border or a cultural divide, spoken or written, provides an avenue to disentangling those historically contingent aspects of mothering from the essential character of mothering. And, in this way, in friendship and a spirit of a growing community, we can continue to challenge the gender oppression endemic in historical, patriarchal mothering while recognizing the joy and fundamental humanity of mothering.

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Mothering, Community, and Friendship is an anthology that explores the complexities of mothering/motherhood, community, and friendship from across interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives. Through personal, reflective, critical essays, and ethnographies, this collection situates the ways mothers are connected to communities and how these relationships form, such as in mothering groups and maternal friendships. By calling attention to these central and current topics, *Mothering, Community, and Friendship* represents how communities and friendship become means of empowerment for mothers.

"Motherhood is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks faced by human beings– without formal training, without explicit guidelines, without a map. As explored in this collection, motherhood is made viable, sustainable, and joyous when mothers find solace, support, and solidarity through friendship and community, near and far, formal and informal. In fact, it is friendship and community that makes us stronger, less alone, and open to the universalities of motherhood while being fully cognizant of the disparities and differences. My greatest wish is that this message reaches all mothers, everywhere. We need each other. Together, we are stronger."—Michelann Parr, Professor, Schulich School of Education at Nipissing University and co-editor of *Writing Mothers: Narrative Acts of Care, Redemption, and Transformation.*

"This book is a welcome, and absolutely enjoyable read! Through prose and poetry, the book tells stories of mothers, mothering, motherhood and community and transports the reader through, between and among the realms of the arduous journeys of mothering. The book situates mothering work within socio-politically fraught contexts and takes the reader through the beautiful, challenging, traumatic, inspiring and transcendental experiences of mothers and mothering. As an 'academic mama', I enjoyed the intimacy of the stories shared; and especially the reminder of timeless traditions carried out sometimes without the support of the proverbial village in our globally interconnected—if also profoundly lonely- world. The book will appeal to varied audiences who will come to it, engage and leave it, from (and at) different entry points."—Dr. Sylvia Bawa, Associate Professor of Sociology at York University

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