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Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies
Western Washington University

Senior Summary and Evaluation Narrative

**Stories to Thrive In:
*Narrative Psychology & Whole Systems Thinking***

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“Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies at Western Washington University cultivates student responsibility for designing and assessing learning through interdisciplinary inquiry, creativity, and scholarship. With an emphasis on justice, social and environmental responsibility and cultural diversity, we challenge ourselves through active, innovative, and experiential learning to examine our choices, roles, and purposes in the world.”

Source: <https://fairhaven.wvu.edu/>

Fairhaven seniors culminate their academic journey with a deeply reflective senior seminar. This seminar supports students in the creation of their Summary and Evaluation essay which is a narrative accounting of their personal academic journey. This is mine.

Signed,

Jessica Kristine Navedo

Introduction

Fairhaven is a powerful tool: A container to grow in, a site of self-discovery, a means of autonomy through the act of learning. I come to the completion of this season of academics engaged with the circumstances of the world. I am interested in the quality of the future and how I can contribute toward shaping the thriving world we know is possible. A polymath and generalist, I am drawn to high-impact projects and ignited through collaboration with interdisciplinary groups. This gives me scope and purpose as I identify patterns in complex processes, information, and ideas. I am curious and creative, alive with a living passion, inoculated by hope, holding a meaningful vision. This makes me an inspiring and effective leader.

My experience in academia has been thoroughly promiscuous – in a purely intellectual sort of way. I’ve been fed by variety and opportunity, pushed to adapt under the pressure of rapid quarterly cycles and challenges characteristic of the dense curriculum I’ve sunken into. This has been an opportunity to discover my strengths and understand how my diverse areas of interest converge in exciting ways. Not only has Fairhaven particularly expanded my worldview, it has also helped me to examine and integrate my deeply held beliefs and attitudes. I’ve been disassembled, interrogated, and have reformed my sense of self. As I’ve engaged with research and academic studies, my emergent and etheric quality, the natural intuitive intelligence that permeates my way of being, has also been honored and given reverential space to develop.

I remember the small pebbles pressing into my legs, mixed with rough sand where I sat on the river’s edge, impressions forming on my skin. A low rock face over the deep swimming hole peeked across the serpentine river toward the stony beach I sat on, thick forest falling below the crown like hair covering a crevassed brow. Trees spread each direction as far as I could see. A hoary forest. I saw the river bend out of view downstream to the right of me like a green-blue ribbon chasing the sunlight and I saw the river winding up and around toward the mountain source like a silver cuff at my left. I sat on that gravelly beach and the ground sank down, filling a hole before me with water. The hole rose up and it was a heart-shaped cup, but the cup was in my image and the heart was my arms reaching round the edge. I picked myself up and I sipped the water until it was gone. I bit into the airy crispness of my teacup-self like a wafer, crunching light pieces in my teeth. And then I was a silver fish, swimming upstream. I swam and I swam, through the currents and froth, up the rocks and under the ground. I swam and I swam, this silver

fish, until there was a light shining through the clear dark waters. I swam through the bright rushing light, up, and emerged and there I was, the horse drinking from a spring in the rock. And as the horse, I turned away from the spring that started the river and I moved through the alpine trees who were dwarfed by the cold and the mountain's height. Running, I drew closer and closer to that thing at the top of the mountain. I could feel myself drawing closer to it, going to see. And I was terrified. I wasn't ready. And so, I came out of my trance, legs crossed on my cushion, in front of the fire. I tried to show myself the place I fear to look but I was not ready to know.

The Early Years

"I was raised on Star Trek and the Bible", I sometimes say. I smile. I'm half joking but sort of serious. The idealism, moral probing, the inquiry into the nature of being characteristic of both have threaded the core of my life. Soul and imagination. Speculation about the future: *How might culture, spirit, science grow from the germ of this moment right now?* My father, inspired by the passion of Christ, was a pastor and, thrilled by possibility, a SciFi buff. On family nights, my brother and I would lounge and wiggle on the living room couch, slinking from cushion to floor then cushion, small children, while he read us Tolkien's Lord of the Rings or animated Revelations' beasts and apocalyptic scenes like prophecy to be prepared for. A set of excited minds, prone to flights of imagination and intense critique, my father and I have always had an intuitive – even psychic – connection and a shared brilliance. His favorite stories were dramatic, full of beasts and symbols easily brought to life in our family psyche. He showed me the power of story to inspire and motivate the trajectory of your life, an understanding that has strongly influenced my work in psychocultural theory at Fairhaven. I remember the cold seat of his banged up bright blue Subaru, the gray sky above Walnut Drive outside, being captivated by his description of Heaven – a place filled with great magical creatures and beings-not-of-this-world, where souls lived together in acts of pure service and love. He described it as *joy*. The beasts were exciting, but in my childish way I wasn't thrilled about an eternity in servitude. Now, the center I move from is so much nearer the gravity of his joy.

My mother has always been a pure form of intelligent compassion, walking her life of faith to this day. Dedicated and buoyant, her meaning is experienced in relationships. Her, with the resilient and clear mind, the blazing inner light, my father's doorway to redemption. Through her family's demonstration of unconditional love, their full embrace of him, my father was mentored, disrupting a legacy of domestic abuse. Everything in my family returns to our foundation of faith, no matter the inquiry or debate. I enjoy a love and stability rooted in Christian identity even now as I've travelled further away from the religious teachings which shaped my early life. Capable and respected in her industry, my mother, a banker, has also been our family's breadwinner for a long time. She's supported me during my time in the academy. The service demonstrated by both of my parents seeded my studies which advance the wellbeing of the eclipsed and the marginalized.

As a girl, laying in my bed with the evergreen forest cloaked in night outside, I could hear the low fog horns on Humboldt Bay several miles west. Magnificent and mighty, the giant Redwoods and dramatic coasts give me a sense of place and home. It is enchanting, vast, verdant. Yet the isolated area has a complex social tapestry. Radical ecoactivism, every-day American right-wing values, and intergenerational drug abuse play a drama set on a stage of wild natural beauty and dynamic weather. The residual taste of tragedy eventually grows stronger when I visit, but the homing signal encoded in the land still pings my cells. Folded into the contours of ancient coastal woodlands, my vibrant community of artists and intimates draws me back on a two-year cycle.

I could walk to Sequoia Park from my house as a kid. I even brought my oldest child there when he was very small. I remember birthday parties and community gatherings near the playground and countless treks through the second growth forest. Second growth Redwoods are still massive trees... The smell of damp humus would swim in my head as I turned over chunks of logs nestled within the roots of clumping fern and thick moss, revealing silvery newts. The habitat of childhood. Steep trails zig zagged down the forested hills to the duck pond, a good hike, where I later found Suzie blackout drunk and laying prone in her own vomit, breath starting

to sputter, surrounded by the disinterested boys with teardrop tattoos on their faces and slicked back hair who we'd come to drink with. As the emerald trees turned from acid green to deep dark forest, my best friend Star and I picked Suzie up and carried her through the lightless trails to the main parking lot. We called my dad from a payphone to come get us. This was the same park I'd see Dalila for the last time on the night she sold her identification papers and ran away. Many of my friends were foster kids or from the Mexican community concealed within the mostly white population which I was part of. Their parents were farm workers, service workers, or owned restaurants. I loved going to Baptismals and Quinceañeras. These Mexican family parties were my first introduction to dancing. They were my entry point into Salsa and Samba. Sometimes I doubt my path. I wonder if I've done the wrong thing running away, exploring the world and myself, if I should have stayed to work in the community, if I ran away from a necessary fight. I didn't. I know that deep down in my hollow bones. What I do now is connected to all these things: Race, poverty, dysfunction, the craving for community, the drive toward joy.

My grandparents lived in Southern Humboldt which was further inland than Northern Humboldt where I grew up along the coast. They had warm summers and their home overlooked the Eel River. I caught water dogs with their fat fiery bellies when I was a child, noticing as I grew older that they had begun to disappear with the frogs and toads as the river changed. A closeness with Nature helps you notice. I developed an intimate awareness of ecology and concern for the planet very young, which was cultivated in the Humboldt County culture. "Aren't the trees beautiful?" I asked my mother as we floated down a river in Washington the summer of third grade. "Too bad they won't be here when I grow up."

The first rupture between my own sense of truth and my family's faith occurred when I was small enough to sit between my grandparents in Grampa's little pickup truck with the giant NAPA Auto Parts truckers cap on top of the cab. Driving along the ridge above the Eel River, excited to visit Aunt Trudy in Richardson's Grove, my Grampa and I argued about the nature of man's dominion over the land. The space in the cab felt

oppressive. The Bible suddenly felt oppressive. I don't remember what was said, how we took such firm and opposite stances. I only remember feeling like I was exploding and didn't have anywhere to go but in. I felt small and powerless. My father would later frame this relationship as a great responsibility, an appointment to steward the land. But this incident was significant in the development of my individuation.

Hyperliteracy extended my reach far into the worlds of literature and research at a young age. It gave me access to ideas. I would read sitting on my moss-cushioned log over the stream, nestled in a Redwood stump, sitting in a pit protected by the wind on the coastal dunes, in the hot tub at home, in my room, escaping from parties on the river bar... Literature has informed me, driven me, obsessed me, defined me. *Who am I and what do I have to do with these things I observe?* Literature goes beneath my surface and runs along my nervous system. It is intimate, stirring the muse in me awake.

I remember the well in the golden field where I went down to the dry bottom. There was a portal, and through the portal I went. I followed the tunnel right, then left, then right, then left, then left, then right again, always sloping downward until a door opened into the egg-shaped cave. I stopped on the edge in the wall of the cave with the saturated darkness cupped in a great bowl below and I saw myself, naked, there, in the center, floating. And I was there, naked, in the center, floating, with all of the things in me I fear writhing at the bottom of the cave below, churning in the black bowl, waiting for me. I called him up, the most terrible one, and he was angry and violent and secret and evil and in me. And I was afraid, so without my having to call, the white dolphins were there at my side, they knew, sensing my fear, my guardians were there at my side, and the great white whale hovered over me. And I was safe and I am safe. I return sometimes to understand: What are these things? How they are part of me? What shape are they really? Where do they fit? How do they go?

My dad had his psychotic break after my mom threatened to sue his neurologist for malpractice. When she and I had taken to supervising his chewing because he was constantly too drugged to safely eat, she had our family friend Lewis record a day of his life. Armed with evidence, she confronted his doctor who responded by cutting him off his narcotic and psychiatric prescriptions suddenly, with no transition plan in place, and refusing to see either of my parents. One afternoon my dad and I lay on my parents' waterbed as he orated the psychedelic scene of cars and characters moving across the ceiling like an acid rock video. Things went on like

that for a while. This was the first indicator of schizophrenia, which he would hide in isolation for another fifteen years. The experience is what gave me a drive to investigate the medical industry, especially mental health, and then the homelessness crisis in the States when I began higher education. It's what first piqued my interest in constructing new ways of understanding spirit and neurodivergence without the victimization and pathology infused into my lens.

I dropped out of Eureka High School in tenth grade after a Science unit on paradigms. My parents enrolled me as the first high school student in California charter schools. Free to follow the many paths of my passions, I thrived in the spirit of learning. This was a precursor to the way I'd approach interdisciplinary scholarship in my thirties. Returning home after a prestigious creative writing program at Cal Arts Valencia that summer, I met Larry Glass at The Works while pestering my friend Berto the Metalhead. I got a used copy of Jimi Hendrix Blues on cassette. Before Junior High, my parents had only allowed us to consume Christian media. Larry was enamored by my innocent exuberance. "What do you know about music?" he asked. "Nothing!" I blurted, laughing. "Do you want a job?" Larry asked. Berto was horrified. I started a few days later. My time at The Works slinging used CDs and records would be one of the richest educations I could receive. It was a doorway into history, politics, fashion, art. Music is an expression and embodiment of people, an artifact of the moment it is created. I suddenly had access to the world in all its diversity and depth. I was insatiable, digging into genre and diversity that I had not known existed. The musty stacks of records and databases growing online were the site where I began to hone research and study skills which I wouldn't appreciate the power of until I entered academics as an adult. Music has brought an interdimensional attribute to my life and the culture of the independent, local shop made sure I would grow into a critical and discerning citizen.

Baptismals and Quinceañeras turned into VIP entry to shows The Works sold tickets to and sneaking into clubs with the older Chicanas Star hung out with. After returning from Reggae on the River one summer, I met JSun at the record shop and was initiated into the underground scene. JSun was a Puerto Rican boy with green

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eyes. A gifted poet and House DJ, he was going to the local university earning a water sustainability degree. The renegade scene in California in the late '90s and early 2000s was potent and vibrant. We'd haul generators, massive sound systems, easy-ups and colorful lights to the tops of mountains and into old farmhouses. We created secret and sacred environments, pocket universes outside of the dimension we'd have to return to, outside of the default world. I found a part of my soul dancing in the sand, immersed in the bass, the full moon bouncing off the mirror surface of Stone Lagoon bathing my skin into an alabaster glimmer, the saltwater from the churning Pacific crashing on the shore and stinging my nostrils. This was an entirely new sort of freedom for me where I could express myself in all of my own ferocity and move in response to the energetic currents I channeled on the dancefloor *without anyone needing to touch me*. It was liberating. I still come home to this underground liberation after all these years. I still believe in intentional spaces, immersive experience, disruption, and transformative moments. Fairhaven also has been a container to investigate how these things are created and what impact they have on the self and society as a whole.

Adulthood is a Growth Curve

My family moved to the Seattle area when I was seventeen, hoping to sever my brother's ties to drugs and gangs, but he just found bigger trouble in the urban environment. I moved back to Humboldt at eighteen where JSun and I fizzled out and he introduced me to Michel, an older Puerto Rican trumpeter who was playing my favorite Jazz night at my favorite venue on my twentieth birthday. Michel was like a man and a woman, intense and dominating with a feminine sensuality. He'd been traveling the world, recently moving to Humboldt from Portugal and even more recently separated from his wife. He shared music I hadn't yet discovered and introduced me to the fine art of world cuisine. He had a sense for the affluent life, but not a sense for making a livelihood. He taught me how to be a gardener. I made him art and clothing and jewelry, developing my craft in fiber arts and beading. During the first two years of our relationship, Michel and I fell in love, produced a year of genre-shattering Jazz shows, had a baby, and completed his first album. But our relationship was difficult,

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spiraling into more and more toxic patterning. We permanently separated after eight years, a second child, and a move to Seattle where our kids have grown up. I found city living overwhelming and isolating. I craved community, especially when my children were small. Since, I've unearthed deep traumas rooted in my turbulent marriage as I've dug into the difficult work of healing afterward, traumas which have impacted my ability to engage in some of the somatic and relational psychology practices I've studied at Fairhaven.

Pregnancy and parenthood have brought me closer to Nature, health, and other women. It's made me vulnerable. It's been my path to the art of the kitchen and hearth, deepened my relationship with the world, and given me opportunities to develop my skill as a gardener and herbalist. Working in the beading industry during my late twenties, managing customer support at FusionBeads.com during their transition from small- to mid-sized company, placed me in a world run by women every day and I found significance in helping my employees and customers grow confident in their creative abilities and aspirations. I also loved learning more about communications, service, website technologies, warehouse systems, and brand building through an online presence. I developed a large technical manual detailing website operations. My ability to identify flaws or errors in systems grew and I was excellent at fixing them. Solving the puzzles and seeing change felt good. During this time, my reality became increasingly embedded online. Making ends meet for my family of three was still a struggle, but I was growing in my creative and professional identities, filling out the size of the professional space available to me at the level of experience and education I had.

There was an electricity in the air as the Arab Spring came to a crescendo in Tahrir Square in 2011. Angie was nearly three, Marquez was halfway through kindergarten and I was feeling the competitive squeeze of survival in a capitalistic state. Every day was pressure and I was aware of it in my own life and at a global scale – a weight constantly felt through the growing population on the streets of Seattle living in the exposed shadows of high-priced new construction. A familiar sense of justice and outrage bubbled beneath the surface of my tight exterior, pressure building. I watched the Arab Spring bloom across the screens of my media. Finally, the old

rigid power structures were being dismantled. I was prepared for a global movement. Toward the end of the year, Occupy Wall Street would gain popular momentum... but while there were so many groups prototyping new ways of organizing movements, and prototypes would continue to develop, the powerful structures and systems seemed to be relatively untouched. When the power vacuum left in the wake of the Arab Spring resulted in new horrors taking root, I started to look at movements from a more complex and long-term view. I was confused about how to effect change if protest wasn't working and policy shifts were slow and beyond the scope of my interests. What was my role? And, importantly, was there really any hope?

Awakening In Dreams

One Friday in August 2013, I left work a few hours early and arrived at my gynecologist's office for a simple procedure. It would last a few minutes before I'd be on my way home with some cramping. I was naked under a chintzy cotton gown, feet up on stirrups and a light shining between my spread-wide legs. My doctor's frizzy hair was a halo above magnifying goggles, her warm demeanor coming through despite the awkwardness of our respective positions. I was usually relatively relaxed during minor medical procedures. It wasn't a big deal.

"This might make you a little anxious," she said easily and casually. The pinch of an injection.

"Yeah..." I laughed, unsettled. "I'm pretty anxious!" More forced laughter. Inappropriate laughter is how I deal with stress. I get it from my mom.

It was like a crank in me began to turn and turn and all my cells were accelerating to speeds my body couldn't keep together. Needles walked up my spine, up my neck. I scream.

"My head hurts... *My head hurts!*"

I keep on screaming. They inject something ineffective into me. The doctor frantically finishes the procedure between my legs. Then all the energy of the universe burst through the top of my head. An invisible field captured the force, clamping it down onto the rupture in my crown.

I woke up in the hospital with a pain far beyond either of the natural births I'd experienced. For six weeks I surrendered to a hypnogogic state in a slowly deteriorating pain. My dad's migraines are also my own. I've experienced them since I was twelve, usually as I writhed with period cramps excused from school. My kids were used to me sleeping in darkened rooms for lengths of time just like I had been used to with my parent. But this was something else. A head trauma, unclear causes, no explanation. The pain was relentless and disrupted my touch with the world. *Was this my new normal?* I worked to manage it and accept it. This is the space where I discovered yoga nidra, the waking sleep of the yogis, and began to listen more attentively to my intricate inner world.

I remember the first time I met the whale. I was sleeping and dreaming a dream under water. I swam in a deep blue expanse, calm and perfectly at home in the sea familiar to me. And the great white whale came next to me, so we swam, together, and this was my ancestor, too, like the man in the cave below the well. Here there were large rocks at the floor of the sea like a reef and we swam together, safe and calm. Me alongside the great white whale who led me into the mouth of a cave far under water. We entered together and the blue deepened even more still. We swam and I woke before I could see.

I seek for meaning in the visions that fill me, the sight that comes onto me, the metaphor I live. I'm a riddle to myself, constantly studying clues and new understanding, seeking. Always, I become more ready to see what's on top of the mountain, to embrace the terrible man in the darkness, to enter the cave under the water. These are some of the places which construct my inner world, a place I visit in dream and meditation, a place I discover.

Sometimes life is a series of ruptures, coming undone, reassembling the material of yourself, healing from the trauma. My neurology never went back to how I was before. *What a gift I received.* It was the abruptness that made it serious and the extremity of the pain which made it necessary for my family and

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community to support me through the ordeal. Without this I wouldn't have the catalyst paired with the container to experience the initiation, the spiritual awakening that I did. My inherently sensitive body was altered in significant yet subtle ways, making it now more vulnerable to exhaustion and requiring I attend to it with more awareness and patience than ever before. I began to sense my higher self and could no longer avoid the severity of my neurodiversity. It became apparent that I wasn't honoring the significance of the deeply spiritual work I am here to do, I wasn't in alignment with my truth, I couldn't make it to the mountain top. I was just striving and surrendering my power over and over, afraid of my power. Being broken like this made me see the beauty and strength in my brokenness. A year later, I had quit my job in ecommerce and started higher education at the age of thirty.

Training a Midwife

Seeking more meaning in my work, called to embody an altruistic presence, I desired skills that would have relevance regardless of geography and give me mobility. Having a strong attraction to transitions and portals, I started Pre-Nursing classes at Shoreline Community College (ShCC). I would be a midwife and through this practice I could impact and nurture community – society – at the most potent point in life: pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum “fourth trimester”. The fractal nature of experience and being has always been an intuitive way for me to navigate my choices and this was a profound act aligning with that knowing, shaping society through small individual actions, embodying the world I want to live in.

After some time at ShCC, I noticed that the nursing students had little in common with my unusual and expansive interests. I was also beginning to understand that the neurological issues I was experiencing were becoming more complex and unpredictable. Nursing was necessary for my midwifery practice as I fear being separated by the medical system while a mother who depends on me is in crisis. However, I am compelled to identify issues in rigid systems and work to resolve them in creative ways. I was called to midwifery, but not

aligned with the terms of a medical profession or coming up against the medical industry with little power to make holistic change. I switched to a Psychology degree.

I began to identify the type of unique intelligence I am gifted with, a sort of non-linear way of consuming and synthesizing information that I've always fought against in order to conform to the shape of social containers and expectations. I immersed myself in my academics: Anthropology, Religious and Cultural Studies, Symbolic Logic. I developed myself as a writer, drafting my first academic research paper on deinstitutionalization and its effects on the homeless mentally ill population, connecting this to re-institutionalization through the prison-industrial complex. I took songwriting and found a ritual transmutation in ceramic and darkroom work. This nonverbal creative processing would prove vital for my success at Fairhaven. During my Biological Psychology course, I studied parts of my brain *as they were failing*. Occasionally, a colorful ribbon would absorb large swaths of my vision, an unregistered blind spot, then I'd say something to someone and the wrong sound would come out, gibberish. While I thrived in the acquisition and production of knowledge, I didn't thrive in the classical structure. My strengths were also the source of my dysfunction. I graduated on the ShCC Dean's List. I was still called toward midwifery, but by now my vision had expanded and the calling scaled up. I want to midwife a revolution. *What skills would I need? If systems of oppressive power were dismantled, how would we fill the inevitable power vacuum without performing the same mistakes of the past disguised in new costumes?*

I was so inspired by Bernie Sanders' run for presidency in 2016. His message was about change through real action and citizen engagement. It wasn't about him – it was about lots of little people at the grassroots level working together despite and because of differences. It was about equanimity and decentralized movements. When the Democratic Party ran Hillary Clinton as their candidate, I was happy to see a woman so close to the Oval Office yet frustrated that it was someone protecting the status quo. The day of the presidential election, I was in Greenlake in Seattle. In early afternoon, the bottom fell out of my energy, which happens sometimes,

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and my body demanded sleep. I climbed into Roxy Rose, my 1985 Dodge Starcraft van parked by the lake, and collapsed on the bed, sleeping for hours. Everyone knew Hillary was going to win. It was evening when I woke up and results from the east coast would be reliably coming in by then. I checked election progress on my phone. My stomach sank. It turned. I wanted to throw up. I felt a disorienting sliding sensation as I realized that Donald Trump, that vitriolic conman, was winning and Hillary didn't stand a chance. I was suddenly and sickeningly lodged in an alternate dimension, a different timeline, a reality that was all wrong but I couldn't escape back to the right one. I still feel this way often when the face of authoritarianism becomes more and more clear, rising above the caustic crowds of proud American people who can't see what's in front of them.

The weeks following the election were despairing. I felt helpless, hopeless. I was that small girl in the NAPA Auto Parts truck, wedged between the adults, realizing I didn't have control over how the world was treated, that I was just a speck in the breeze. That Winter Solstice, I went to a ritual event held by my Zepto Space friends. We moved through an otherworldly experience with giantess fates offering honey jun and prophecy, witnessed a cosmonaut traveler orate the story of the Universe, and were mesmerized by Titus' clear words and spinning staff of fire. Converging at the pool in the longhouse, women dancing on fire in the water, we wrote what we'd let go on scraps of flash paper. This we ignited and quickly released like ether dissipating, then wrote what we'd ground into, bring into manifested futures, on a white rock. Mine says:

flow
present the artist
define
apply skills
FLEX POWER

Titus and I spoke after the ceremony, eating dates and cheeses, immersed in the Zepto decadence created in a pocket reality outside of the default world. My community is an embodied disruption. I told him of my despair, my hopelessness considering global crisis and the sociopolitical turn in the US. Everything was falling apart. And he told me about his excitement *because* things were falling apart, how the fractures in the Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Senior Seminar S&E

structures began to crack open to reveal the soil underneath. This was the time to plant our seeds, he said, seeds that will expand the cracks and emerge with new beautiful structures that we will tend, new beginnings full of life. I took his words to heart. They are in my heart now. The speck in the wind was a spore. The next month I applied to Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies at Western Washington University (WWU). It was the only school I applied to. I was clear about where I was going and unable to explain why. I knew being away from the urban thrum, having access to natural spaces, escaping the controlling grasp of Michel, would be healthy for my brain, would help me to manage the burden of the larger issues I'd become more concerned about. Though I couldn't justify the move away from my children and Seattle, the choice to pursue an interdisciplinary degree in Bellingham was the first time in my life that I had a totally crystal-clear confidence that I was in complete alignment with my true self, walking in my purpose. And so, I went.

Fairhaven

The intensity of my passion burns bright, turning me to ether like flash paper on a Winter Solstice night. Life is a ritual and the self is our highest artform. In essence, I am a series of abstract experiences, defined by my surreal nature and interpreted through the construction of meaningful symbol. I weave stories to make sense of this strange existence and to help me interface with a social reality which is so dissonant to my own rhythms and harmonies. While talking to my friend Randy at The Coop on Bainbridge Island one night, after the instruments were quiet and the kids had exhausted themselves, he said to me, "Where your passion meets the greatest need of the world, you find your calling." This has become my guiding principle these last few years. My brilliance works best when it's channeled into what conducts the current of my passion. Fairhaven has not only allowed me to understand myself in a way that harnesses my brilliance, it's also provided an opportunity to understand the needs of the world with thoughtfulness and insight. It has been a container for my own deconstruction as I've dissected my attitudes and beliefs, turning them over in my hands like found stones from a familiar beach.

What are these made of? How have they come here? Dry, wet, twilight, afternoon: Do they change in different contexts?

My first quarter at Fairhaven inoculated the seeds planted throughout my life by my accumulated experiences, seeds which would unfurl and stretch during my journey, tended at first by Stan Tag the Poet, Dolores Calderon the Critical Indigenous Scholar, and John Tuxill the EthnoEcologist. I had stopped writing prolifically as a teen and started again at ShCC, but I hadn't yet embraced my identity as a writer. In Stan Tag's Poetry class, I finally recognized myself. I delved into my inner spirit and the musing emotions which ignited words like a blaze across the pages of my journals. It was a dam removal and the life of a river rushed forward, uncontained and wild. The chaos in myself began to edge into a form. I'd continue to write poetry in response to the content I'd dive into throughout the next three years, but this was the last class I took for a purely creative outlet at WWU. I had taken a creative course every quarter during my time at ShCC. The new qualitative and student-driven environment I was in allowed me to incorporate this necessary aspect of my experience within the curriculum I engaged, thus expanding the breadth of material I could access during my time there. Stan Tag sponsored my first Independent Study Project (ISP), an exploration into the prescient world of Science Fiction where the stories and novum would serve as an oracle, eluding to the shape of the future. The following year, WWU would follow in pursuit of this trend, highlighting Octavia's Brood edited by adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha as the Western Reads book, requiring incoming students to engage with similar conceptual currents to what I was swimming in. If nothing else, I am a futurist, working to shape the future, constantly considering possibility.

Dolores Calderon, sharp-minded and direct in her language, taught my Critical Indigenous Studies course. It was here that I would have my dedication to the scientific method thrown into a dubious light as I realized how theory and practice have been wielded as weapons of the colonizer throughout history, how it continues to be so. Constructs of the noble savage and the white savior, stories connected to my own Cherokee

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heritage and experience growing up supporting my Mexican friends, were entirely disrupted. I felt awful. I had always been adept at cultural studies, but this critical environment constructed to decolonize my mind felt like an assault on my foundations from an invisible and insurmountable force. Simultaneously, that force was me. Kevin Delucio became a key figure in my cultural studies, sponsoring my Multicultural Psychology ISP where he spent countless hours helping me to process guilt and confusion as I explicitly interrogated my whiteness, and my Consumer Behavior for Social Revolution ISP where I merged consumer behavior theory and sustainable behavior studies, riding a manic state as I pushed the boundaries of my ability to absorb and synthesize new information. In the stormy disruption of The Psychology of Race and Racism class, Dr. Bre granted me a cocoon to come apart in, allowing my soul to be seen in privacy through improvised narrative and my poetry. She was the one who offered me language during the painful process of my Concentration Seminar. Concepts in Narrative Psychology and Corporate Social Responsibility were the key to helping my faculty committee of advisors understand what in the world I was talking about by creating a conceptual framework and accepted definitions. Spira showed me literature that would seep into the cracks of my deepest self so that I'd agitate with the vivid experiences of queer women, the Audre Lordes and Gloria Anzaldúas of third-wave feminism, as if a ghost-self was tearing at my flesh, trying to get out. Birds and women flew through my thoughts... *Why do their words feel like they're my own? Where does this white woman end and the author begin? How are these stories my stories, how do they speak to the human experience, addressing both race and class while also transcending it?* The most unique aspect of Fairhaven has been the unwavering support of my process as I grapple with the pieces of myself, mining corrupt enculturated code, then reintegrate the bits. I've been empowered to trust myself, my abstraction and creativity in navigating these complex spaces, following my intuitive guides which call for ritual and expression in my healing.

I have a deep love of this planet and it was in John Tuxill's course, The Garden and the Wild, that I was able to find language to deconstruct the dualistic ideas of civilization and wilderness that have irritated my sense

of the world since that ride along the Eel in Grampa's NAPA truck when I was a child. This course was where my interest in sustainability culture as a survival imperative and my investigations into the dualistic fracture between body and spirit, self and place, coalesced into a form I could view. I conceived of "Circular Economics", the title of my first research paper at Fairhaven, a term I'd later find was well in use and in alignment with my original thoughts. Over the years this line of inquiry has become more solid and focused. In classrooms, in the provision of poetic prose lauding the magical intimacy of Nature, and in the field wondering at plant anatomy, John Tuxill has guided and cultivated my learning in ecological studies and sponsored the development and execution of my first teaching experience in the university system. He's a mild mannered and intelligent man, able to understand complexity in living systems and cultural gradients. He has been an excellent counterbalance to my intensity and passionate tangents.

My perceptions have always been highly nuanced, filled with detail. I suspect being the daughter of a schizophrenic has given me an inability to filter out information and gifted me my ability to synthesize it. Certain objects will have a great degree of agency or certain ideas will draw me with their gravity. My projects and areas of interest are more or less governed by compulsion. I have an intoxicating relationship with data. I love to absorb incredible amounts of information, then sit saturated and savoring it as I synthesize. I'll change the format of information, reorganize it. Often, I'll ritualize it, making memes on scraps of paper, moving around space with them in a dance, using systems of symbolic imagery to study associations and structures, finding the patterns that emerge, rooting into the deeper meaning of things, associating them to levels of perception, studying the fractal, locating the edge. I've fully leaned into this chaotic process which has controlled my behaviors like tidal shifts my entire life. At Fairhaven I've had the opportunity to learn to use my intellect, applying a primal skill in formal, tangible, useful ways. Constructing my neurodivergence in a position of resilience and specialization has empowered me to access a degree of work far outside the scope of a typical BA.

My interest in religion and story probably extends beyond where my memories really start. A natural psychologist, I'm fascinated by people, always monitoring culture, trends, and changes in technology. When I arrived at Fairhaven, I had begun to identify patterns and motifs in how humans construct and navigate the world. I want to understand how things change and what that means in regard to creating more equitable, thriving, and fantastic futures. Religious Studies turned to Mythology which turned to Philosophy, Anthropology and Psychology. I had identified culture as the determining factor in the limitations and character of power. If culture is a parameter, the point in the center is where power is situated. Shift the parameter, shift the center. *How does culture shift?* I began to explore Cognition and Marketing on Western's main campus. Outside of the academy, I've been engaged in the creation of art and counterculture, or cultural activism, coproducing events, performing, and installing immersive exhibits. Through A.B.'s course, Acts of Activism, I investigated the production of art and the power of activism – spaces of profound transformation for myself – and their cooptation by corporate entities, as social clout for brand images and fuel for conspicuous consumption. I wondered how movements are most effective and if this process of cooptation could actually shape the corporate and cultural world for the better through subversive nudging. What is lost in this process and what is gained? I'm still not sure.

Imaginative and innovative, the evolution of technology is embedded into my own human history. It's a storyline woven through the narrative of Earth. Our coevolution excites me. Science Fiction is a medium giving insight into possible futures. I read it, seeking clues into which future we'll write. *How will we construct ourselves and design our lives?* I speculate. Scot Nichols' Embodied Futures course gave me an opportunity to drop into a space of open inquiry, examining how we each possess the potential for wholeness and connection, how we somatically embody the fractures radiating from our psyche and separating us from our embedded nature in the world, how technology extends from the character of ourselves. At the 2019 Imagine Convergence on Orcas Island, in a hall looking out over the driftwood beaches toward the island relatives of the first peoples, my

friend, Joseph Rastovich, asked Maurizio Benazzo of the Science and Nonduality Conference in California how to know if you're making a positive impact in community work which spreads. A master of analogy, Maurizio told us about his experience inoculating mycelium into a log. The instructions cautioned him to be very clean, to be mindful and take precautionary measures. He said to us, "Be a clean spore." Just like we are but a drop in Indra's Net, reflecting one another, replicating what we are throughout the entire interconnected web we exist in, we are the germ of our technology. Technology extends or enhances our natural ability. We are the spider in the center. To understand how the technology in my world is being developed, I found a class in the Computer Science (CS) department that connected with my greater academic themes: Design for Social Good with Dr. Shameem Ahmed. While Dr. Ahmed's golden heart shone with sincerity and a deep commitment to serve, I was astonished by the total lack of critical training in the CS students and slightly horrified by some of the responses to empathy exercises we did in the course. My group implemented a design aimed at supporting individuals post-incarceration. This was a personal space for me, part of my brother's story of suffering, challenge, and ultimately overcoming obstacles as an Aspergian – someone on the autism spectrum, in this case also a certified genius. My CS implementation experience grew a great concern for how powerful technology development skills are shaped without any understanding of impact on users or consideration for the wellbeing of society.

I was recruited from this course by Dr. Ahmed, to work with him on a small team investigating strength-based strategies toward developing information-communication technologies (ICTs) for individuals with autism (ASD). This team is a cell in a cluster of several related CS technology projects which aim to serve the autism community in different ways. With my unique personal experience and history with the ASD population as a sister, friend, caregiver and mentor, this was a potent place to ground my theoretical concepts and justify my systemic critiques of social services and the medical industry. The team began with me and one other student, led by Dr. Ahmed and supported by his wife, Dr. Sharmin. Our first project was broad and exploratory, drawing on content from several different disciplines in an effort to define what a "strength-based approach" really is

and determine the extent of this space. I emerged as the main thinker on the team and the work was greatly shaped by my interdisciplinary expertise. Our two-page paper, a long abstract, was accepted into ASSETS 2019, a technology accessibility conference conducted by CHI (pronounced “KAI”), one of the largest human-computer interaction (HCI) databases in the world. I presented a research poster in Pittsburgh, offering a unique perspective to a conference where most research is aimed at fixing problems or helping people adapt to what “normal people” look like and do. This emphasizes lacks and needs in the disability population, perceiving only brokenness, conceiving only charity, rather than accepting and supporting natural yet divergent ways of being. I advocated for approaching ASD as a powerful difference that should be legitimized and nurtured in more appropriate ways. I could see static perspectives on the faces of scientists and academics shift just a little. “Huh,” they’d say. The handful of disability theorists there applauded our work. We added another student to our team and our second paper was very specific, investigating the extent of explicitly strength-based approaches developing any HCI technologies for individuals with ASD. We found very little data. In this way, we’ve eked out a section of vocabulary in the HCI domain and have begun to draft implementation guidelines that center community voices and do not pathologize difference. Adding Dr. Kevin Delucio from Fairhaven College to our team, we are currently preparing focus group sessions in order to develop these guidelines in alignment with the way identities and strengths are understood in the ASD community.

Two phenomena which form our world have appeared for me: (1) economics as a story with ominous impact and (2) technology as a reinforcing extension of ourselves and cultures. At the end of 2019, I aligned with John Tuxill to pitch a course I designed titled Economics and Ecology: Emergent Approaches to Holistic Resource Management. During my first session with Fairhaven’s Curriculum Committee, John drew a clear line from my first essay, Circular Economics, and the advanced content of this course. In all my bumbling through my experience, I hadn’t actually realized that this was an expression of how far I’d come in my learning and development. The course was approved and offered through WWU’s official course catalogue for Winter 2020.

There is an old Hindu phrase: *To learn, read. To know, write. To master, teach.* It was important to me that the scale and quality of this work be validated by passing the litmus test for a university offering and that I receive the authority that I'd worked to obtain in this developing domain. Through this teaching experience, I've been able to stay grounded in emergent themes and interests arising in my small group of students while steering the course content through a vast complex of interlocking information. I established classical economic definitions and concepts early in the quarter, highlighted the benefits of the modern economic story and system, moved to problematize the impacts of capitalism, illustrating the history of its development, and investigated an extensive variety of perspectives and resources, focusing more and more on resilience, quality of feedback loops, and design. Economics converges on nearly every aspect of our lives. Teaching is demanding and time consuming. But mostly, it is enthralling to see something dense suddenly click for someone, to receive the reflection of informed and creative inspiration, and to know this course will shape the trajectory of these young and passionate students.

As my time at Fairhaven draws to a close, I recognize how beautiful this container of emergence, exploration, and critical challenge has been, how special it is to access these spaces in myself and others. The quarterly system is a rapidly changing format which has propelled my own growth exponentially. As I reflect on the journey I've completed, I consider my next steps into the world. In all honesty, I'm a bit nervous about "what's next". I've never had a clear conventional path. The things I'm interested in challenge the status quo. My way of experience is divergent. Fairhaven gave me more questions than answers. Yet I believe in the necessity of how I interact with and envision the world. Where there is need there is value. I'm part of a mycelial network that's been growing underground. I feel how the tips reach out to find external networks to connect with. I began school as an artist, a parent, a management professional, a website expert, and an explorer. Driven by the rhythm of projects like the rhythm of birth, trained to view complex systems in associative and critical ways, I approach the greater world with curiosity, prepared to know what lies on the mountain's top, my hands

ready. I leave the academy as a polymath, an innovator, a student of story, and a futurist. The teams and groups I work with title me an “Interdisciplinary Scientist” (which is still pretty cool to hear!).

I delivered a talk on emergent Economic theory at a recent climate action event and was struck by the profound inspiration and engagement of those in attendance. Inspiration, activation, the pollination of new ideas – recurring themes in the variety of areas and ways I work, the quality of my patterns. Rilke says, “Everything is gestation and then bringing forth.” I find my feet beginning to dance on the threshold of the unknown. And, like adrienne maree brown, I pray it is a portal and not a black hole. These next steps, wherever they may land, are an act of intuitive knowing and faith. They are an act of necessity and dedication. They are an act of trust in what is healthy and whole and right, in the intelligence of living things. In my own words: *Collective problems require collaborative solutions.* I coalesce with others, playful and creative, as we bring the beautiful future we know is possible into form. We are the fruiting bodies, growing from below the superstructure. This is the work I am called to do. This is midwifing the revolution.