*Seventeen minutes and thirty-one seconds*: An auto/biographical account of collaboratively witnessing and representing an untold life story

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**Introduction**

Auto/biography carries with it elements of privilege as certain kinds of lives are narrated while other lives remain untold. As Arthur Frank (2004) has observed, those lives that are storied are rendered worthy of notice, while untold lives are implicitly rendered absent or insignificant. In our research we have seen how these processes can conspire to further marginalize individuals and populations whose lives are already marginal. This is the sharp edge of social exclusion. In this chapter we explore one particular instance of a creative and collaborative process we have used in an effort to avoid perpetuating exclusion and marginalization in our research. Ours is a story about how, through artistic and creative collaboration, we may begin to reanimate our own and others’ lives through including the kinds of life stories that are typically omitted in social research. Our focus is on responding the questions of how to access, witness and represent elements of an otherwise untold – and potentially untellable – life.

**1. Flat Tyre**

Do you believe in telepathy? I’m not sure I do, but sometimes, like when you’ve been working with someone for years, perhaps you feel as if you know what he or she is thinking. It was like that during our first steering group meeting prior to starting a research project looking at the needs and experiences of people over 55 living in urban supported housing.

There were eight of us crammed around a board room type table and while it was cordial, we all had our roles. Opposite and to my right were two representatives from the local council. Sitting next to them to my left was someone from the Trust. At the head of the table sat George, director of the charity who’d commissioned us to do the research and in middle there was us, sipping instant coffee from white china mugs. We had an agenda, and we hoped for some conversation, to get a handle on what had been happening. We wanted to learn from them – about the problems and challenges – and we were striving to be open minded.

As we began to talk through how we wanted to approach the research one of the city council representatives jumped in: “That won’t work!” We’d suggested an ethnography and invitations to residents to take part in interviews or focus groups. She continued: “And we tried having a consultation but no one came to that either.” I didn’t turn to look at David but I knew he’d be thinking, *I’m not surprised they wont talk to you with that attitude! I wouldn’t either*! But he didn’t say that. He sat there quietly and all I could see were his hands making notes on the pad in front.

There was little resolution and the meeting was brief. We thanked everyone for their thoughts, but it wasn’t the kind of start we’d hoped for. An air of negativity seemed to hang in the space between us. We left but didn’t really speak until we got in the car. Then David sounded like a car tyre going flat as a long exhale of air seeped from between his lips. He looked over and silently shook his head. He didn’t need to say, *what in the hell were they on*? But he did. I didn’t need to say, *I can’t believe those two!* but I did. He started the engine, slightly deflated, and we were off.

**2. Silences**

How do you act respectful, when you are in someone else’s home? By that I mean, how do you notice and *not* notice things. We were making our first visit to a housing scheme the local authority had labelled “elderly preferred housing”. As we wandered through the corridors we chatted with the housing support advisor (who was showing us round) and through glances and expressions to each other shared our awkwardness and discomfort over the less pleasant things we noticed.

“Oh yes,” said the former warden, former mental health nurse, now resident and gatekeeper, “what you smell in this corridor is urine.” She wasn’t over emphasising it, or being over dramatic. She was just stating things we didn’t like to notice in someone else’s home. “He pisses in the corner there,” she said, pointing. She paused, momentarily then added, to alleviate any doubt, “just to annoy us”.

I didn’t want to register the stench but it was acrid, impossible to ignore. We exchanged another glance, this time David screwed up his face. The smell stung my throat at each intake of breath. We walked on in silence, me longing for the double doors to bang shut, to climb the stairs to something less potent. A slow realisation began to register that it was so much easier for us to say nice things than talk about what we were feeling, noticing, smelling.

“These are OK,” she said, as we entered the second corridor, “quite nice even.” Then pointing to number 23: “he’s not here anymore”. I raised my eyebrows and smiled at David – an empty flat and one less resident to interview. “And he’s died”, she said as we passed 27, “so you won’t be able to speak to him either.” Then a little mischievously added, “unless you got some connections you haven’t told us about!” David’s eyes were now dancing and he smiled. We all shared the joke and walked on.

**3. Success**

Success is meeting your targets, right? And maybe we had at the back of our minds those two people from the council who said no one would speak to us. But here they all were, coming down to coffee mornings, agreeing to one-to-one interviews, agreeing to focus groups, and seeming to enjoy the opportunity to talk. Of course we were learning, heaps, and people were so different, some funny, many appreciative, often generous.

The West Indian man in number 23 talked about his GP: “If it wasn’t for her,” he smiled through missing teeth, “I’d be a gonner m’luv, a gonner.” He was serious and funny in showing recognition for the influence of his doctor in stopping his excessive consumption of strong alcohol.

Another Jamaican man described his roller coaster life, being thrown out of the navy for something he wasn’t responsible for, then buying a gun, going to prison, time passing, trying to make a go of a business, and finally his family, ageing and illness. He reflected on his life: “I go through a lot of tribulation here,” he said, “but I have learned that if you cannot learn to forget, learn to forgive, right? Because if I couldn’t forgive I wouldn’t be here talking to you now, alright, ‘cause we are talking about *things*. So this is why I need my freedom, because if I don’t have that I can’t do anything.”

We wondered, what were those tribulations? Why wouldn’t he be ‘here’? What were those ‘*tings’* as he pronounced it?Maybe it was what Jane was getting at when she said: “This place I just hate. I hate the smell. It doesn’t smell as much at my end, it just smells down there. I just feel trapped really. I think quite a lot of people here feel that too. It’s dead. I mean this room, you used to be able to smoke in here and things and make tea and coffee and all of that stopped. And people don’t want to get involved, you know, we’ve got people with problems here. We’ve got one resident … in number 26…” she paused “…there was a lot of…” she paused again, then seemed to change track: “but he has quietened down now. I think a couple of the other residents went down there and threatened to beat him up.”

What *wasn’t* she saying? What *couldn’t* she say? Why the silences?

As the number of people we had yet to interview reduced, so did our curiosity about the man in number 26.

**4. The Man at Number 26**

I left Kitrina drinking coffee in the community room hoping that maybe I could find at home one of those ‘elusive’ residents we hadn’t managed to interview yet, give it one more try. Or *we* thought *we* needed to give it one more try. Partly I still had those council housing folks voices in my head, telling us people wouldn’t talk to us, and partly because I was motivated by an internal ethic, we did want to hear everyone’s story. It's a matter of duty, a moral accountability we hold ourselves to, to at least try to gain every resident’s perspective, to avoid writing about *them* without including *all of them*.

So, there I was once again, walking the corridors, turning corners, and once again knocking on the door with the beaten-up paintwork. I’d heard a lot about this door already. How it had been knocked down by the police late one night when he refused to open it following disturbance complaints from neighbours.

After a brief pause, the door opened and there he was. The ‘he’ who was feared and avoided by many of the other residents. The ‘he’ whose noise late at night had become a curse for his neighbours. The ‘he’ who residents said would urinate in the corridors, was frequently drunk, high or both. The ‘he’ rumour had it, had been electronically ‘tagged’ and required, by the courts, to be in his flat between the hours of 6pm and 6am.

I suddenly felt like I was in a scene from *The Fisher King* and was looking at Parry, the Robin Williams character, complete with ragged dirty clothes and hair and bushy, unkempt beard long and dishevelled.

“Hello,” I said.

His reply seemed more of a grunt than a word so I continued: “My name is David and I’m here as part of a team who are doing research into the residents’ experiences of living here. I wonder if you might have some time to talk to me?”

Another grunt noise was followed by a pause as his body moved out of the way and the door opened further “mayswell” mumble “lucky” mumble, “catchmem usyou.”

While my feet responded to the door opening, it took me a while longer for my head to work out what he had said. I think he’d said something like: *You* *may as well come in. You’re lucky to catch me – I’m usually out.* But his voice was so rough anyone would struggle to understand what he was saying. My attention was fully on trying to work it out and I didn’t notice, as he closed the door behind me, him slipping the chain across. The ‘gottcha’ sound of the chain in the catch startled me and as my eyes met his I wondered if he could read my fear. I wonder if could feel the tremor splitting through my body, an electric bolt, trapped.

He waved me on and I felt compelled to walk through to, well, it might have been the bedroom or the living room or – it was hard to tell. There was none of the furniture I’d expect to see in either. No bed, no sofa, no dining table. No desk, no bookshelves, no TV, no stereo. But, at the same time the room was completely full of, well *stuff*. If I’m honest it looked like a small municipal waste disposal site. Negotiating my way through used tins, empty been cans, old newspapers and magazines, I picked my way across little bits of clear floor, eyeing dirty duvets and cushions, greying maybe once white clothing, and knee-high piles of empty *Special Brew* beer cans in the corner, some crumpled and crushed. In another corner there was a pile of grubby duvets which might have been a bed. A bowl of food – a runny red vegetable stew it looked like – sat on a small side table. Flies buzzed around the room.

“Schit dawn,” he said, “sch’anywhere’s fane.” There were only two chairs – two old, broken office chairs. I picked the nearest – backless and piled with of scrumpled newspapers. I could see the ripped blue fabric of the chair between the papers. I went to move the papers out of the way before thinking better of it. He disappeared from view into what sounded like a kitchen while I perched on the edge of the chair. Feeling uncomfortable. My hands were wet, and I had to stop myself wringing them, I could feel my heart beating faster and heavier, my mouth was dry and I couldn’t swallow. I didn’t feel safe in this man’s flat – I worried about being trapped, locked and bolted in. I worried about how it would look if he became violent: me a younger physically strong looking man, him an older frail looking man. He looked and talked like he was wild. And I thought about the un-hygienic conditions in the flat, imagined the bacteria and germs that inhabit a room like this. I wanted to get up and leave but felt obliged to stay.

After a couple of minutes he returned with a large mug. I think he said he’d make me a drink later but was relieved he didn’t bring me anything as there’s no way I would have risked drinking it. He sat on the other chair, set down the mug on the floor, picked up the bowl of food and took a spoonful. Then he started talking, or making noises: “Donbescarothem. I’ve goawholelotoclearupodo. Y’know whathat is?”

I had no idea what he’d said. “What was that?” “Pardon?” “Can you say that again?”

He spat words and food, saliva and venom: “Fruit flies!”

All this – the physical environment, my inability to decipher much of his speech, his physical appearance, actions and demeanour, the chain across the door – was increasing my discomfort. My anxiety.

I decided to begin the interview as I had with the other residents: “How long have you lived here?”

Instantly, he replied, “Toooofackingloon*g*.”

“Yeah?” I pause a beat before continuing. “Where were you…” but he cuts me off “sfars rehab’s concerned, inaway yar barkingupthe wrong tree cause” then increasing the volume and leaning in “I’s nata fackingjunkie. But, havingsaydthat,” he paused, kicked a beer can across room, and eyeballed me again, “everywan’s a lickle facking…” His eyes drifted sideways for a second. Then back they came staring right at me: “… lickle weed! Remember Bill and Ben? At th’end o’ tha day we’rrre flob flob flob, alobalob. Weeeeeed! And weed alwaseems to hatheanswer, come upasun-time, said time to go sleepienow. And that was hypnotic for the,” he makes a noise. Then: “Wasn’t it?”

“OK,” I respond, having again failed to understand any of what he said. Was he toying with me? Playing a game? Might he become violent? I tried to be calm, but ready to take evasive action. I found myself looking for an escape, but was also trying to keep the conversation going, to do my job. It was torture, he was in control and I felt he could take this where he wanted.

“Y’know,” he continued “at that point imylifeIwasgoinoschoola 9 o’clock at 9 yearold andfivepassnineawafucking off anclimbinguptrees.”

I tried to keep the conversation going, making guesses as to what he was saying, clinging to a few words and trying to sound as if I knew what he was talking about. He’d mentioned school right? And climbing trees and came out with, “Cause it was more fun than being in the classroom?”

“Yep. Yeah. Butahactualllearnta lot morathe university of life, climbing trees and playinwicatsndogs. But TV, in those days there weren’t no TV’snowhere. I remember when I were 9 year old I used to go up to my mate Geoff Harley, godbleshimman, 9 and 10 year old, anuhIhadngota fucking clue, I justhouit was meunmemate, ah hadn’tgota fucking clue. And get this one fera crack – is that running?” He points at my audio recorder, “You’re gonna fucking lovethisun!”

“Do you want me to stop it?” I ask, not knowing where he is going next.

“No!” he replied laughing, “The first time heevertasteddeath. And what comes with it. The coffin, the tears, the black clothes.” He paused. “The wake. Sangndancedngodrunk with the dead.”

I just didn’t know what to make of it all – perhaps too stunned to speak. This is not like any other interview I’ve ever conducted. More to myself than to him, I settle on: “Oh God.”

“No, God ain’tgotnothingtodow’it. We were Pagan, nifyou lookaitthatway.” He muttered something “Is God around? Is Jesus around? Is thisnthatntheother?”

What should I say? I go for: “Yeah?”

“Thastoofuckinho. Don’tworry, don’t panic, just don’t fuck-ing panic whatever youdo. Don’t make any sudden movements, whatever you do. Do you know what happened to me a long time ago? Pete and Jonny, either one of them, you wouldn’t want to box off. Pete was a retired boxer but being a fucking vodka head, don’t blame the drink, blame the head. Being a vodka head he’s likely by the time he’s had the second bottle of vodka,” he halts and stares at me, intensely. “He could it like that. I’m doing this on purpose, one minute he’d talk, he’d be looking at you like that, lit a cigarette, y’alright, y’alright, what football team d’you support? And he’d be on your case then, and he’d just duel with you for ages. And he’s like a bear mauling something that he’s gonna kill in a minute. Playing with it, nudging it and then *Bam*!” He smacked his left fist into his right hand.

By now I’m starting to feel more than just anxious. From the few words I grasp in the moment I’m feeling threatened. *Is this a direct threat from him to me?* Hoping otherwise, I try to clarify: “And did he do this with you?”

But it does anything but bring clarity: “Naw!” Another pause. It don’t really matter if you get m’meaning.” He pauses again to crack open a can of *Special Brew*, takes a swig and continues. “People in the fightgamedotendta hit people” he says with an emphasis on the *HIT*. “And I don’t know ha’many timeserwhy you’ve ever been hit,” another dramatic pause, “buusually whenyoubeen hit, you either know whatitsfor or you don’t. There’snotwoways about it. And the otherslike, how s e r I o u s l y whereyou hit. You eitherknowyouwerehit or youwahalf fucking hit, whacked. N’thenthere’s the thing about, there’s somany sides. I’s like, what d’you call it, a dodecker-fucking-hedron. Its an itchy angle that one. N’alsowhatgoesroundcomesaround, know what I mean?” He answers his own rhetorical question with a mumble. “And the root of all evil isn’t money, it’s the wanting. The wanting and needing. Ss’the loveodesire. In Arabic wacalltha *naff*. S’inlike naff, i’s naff. But naff means desire in Arabic.”

“Alright,” I reply.

He doesn’t pause. “Soslike you want it. Naff means want.”

“Yeah, OK,” I’m just saying something to avoid saying nothing now.

“IsnoghtlikeIwannasandwich or I wannacupotea. slike I *desire* something. And its usually something that’s *eeeeevil*.”

My digital audio recorder indicated that we are 6 minutes and 2 seconds into the interview – what is going on? I want to get out. I *need* to get out. But my inner voice of practicality kicks in, *maybe you’re being overly sensitive*, it whispers. Then it begins to reason with me: *you do have a job to do*. And reminds me: *You did ask him to let you interview him and he said yes.* *He is in his 70’s, unfit. He invited you into his home.* I look down at my notes, try to clear my head. OK, yes that’s right, be respectful, honour his story. I look up and now he has a knife in his hand. A big theatrical-looking knife. *Shit! Where did that come from?* Is it real? Fake? He’s just sat there playing with what looks like something Captain Jack Sparrow would wield. But this isn’t Hollywood, the blade is steel and the end looks sharp.

At 8 minutes 11 seconds, I’m still watching him toy with his knife. *How long do I need to stay here to do that? How quickly can I leave without being rude or insultin*g? Time is dragging and my stomach is turning. I get a sharp pain in my side. My heart is racing and thumping to get out of my chest, and now too my head aches. I try once more the question I’d begun, faking confidence: “Have you been living here for long?” And I try to ignore the knife.

“S’leven years.” He replies. “S’mad. Naw, thatsjustnobtuse remark. While yaw’re recordin’ I dan’t wannna sound like a facking luunatttic.”

“OK.”

“Buironically, I’m a…” I can’t make it out. Then he continues: “S’tookfuckingten yearst’finallygeta fucking place. And really, n’mattawhatahsaid, rightly or wrongly about the buildingn’bout therulesn…” something else I can’t discern. “Its an indoor prison only I gat the key not you the screws. Bu’thescrew’soutside that door! You coming in here like a vicar havin’ aninterview ’nI’sdoin’ facking life here now’.

Then he shouts, loud: “FUCK YOU!”

I jump, startled at the volume and intensity. “Would you like me to leave?”

“Nat you, ya dick!” He laughs. “Did I make you jump then?”

“Yes you did, yeah.”

“Well good!” He spits onto the floor. A gob of saliva that slaps the ground. “Because’tha’s wha I did wi’them.”

15 minutes 58 seconds. OK, I’ve talked with him for quarter of an hour I tell myself. Not long, but respectable. A decent effort under extreme circumstances. I decide then that I’m going. Now. But how to leave safely and without incident? The knife, the lock, how am I going to get out?

I announce, “Alright,” and stand. “I’m going to make a move. I’ve got some other people I’ve got to call on as well,”

“Nah!” he says.

My heart literally misses a beat and thumps hard in my chest. Did I hear him right? *Is he going to try to keep me here?* He doesn’t. Instead he says: “Ivegottogo on but thank you fa’talkin’ tome. Y’er alright man.”

I am now shocked in a completely different way, not sure how to take this late and unexpected vote of confidence but manage, “I appreciate that,”

He hands me the front door key. I didn’t notice that he had locked us in as well as putting the chain across. “A’least you’reno’a Jehovah’s Witness!” He laughs as I hurriedly undo the locks.

“That’s true” I say. “Thanks a lot.” I unlock and open to door to leave, but my unsteady hand drops the key. I bend to pick it up, feeling exposed and vulnerable, and hand it back to him.

“D’youseetha’there?” he asks, pointing at a splintered hole in the door. “Watch! I didtha’onpurpose.” I prepare myself for him to repeat the damage but he doesn’t. Instead he says something – although I can’t make it out now or when I listen back to the recording. I hear voices outside in the corridor. Safety. Relief. Relief that I am no longer alone with him in his flat.

“Thasthe police fo’ya,” he adds. “G’night.”

I go to say “cheers now” but he’s already slammed the door.

**5. Shock**

I wandered into the corridor, all was quiet. I’d visited number 14 as we agreed, had a coffee and chatted with a couple of the housing support officers in the lounge, then popped my head out into the corridor wondering where David was. There was no one around. I kinda got the sense he should be there by now, but then again, if he’d begun an interview it would take an hour or so. So I wandered back in, sat down, got on with some work until I heard footsteps. I looked up. I’ve seen this man lean back casually on two legs of a chair and ask a question that would pull the rug from under me. I’ve watched him negotiate with some of the most obstreperous members of our mental health group over the rules of golf, when anyone else would have lost their temper or patience or both. I’ve seen him take on huge ocean waves than can render a person unconscious, rise up and paddle out to the next wave. I’ve seen him deal with arrogant and ignorant sportspeople in some of our research and CPD. I’ve heard him sing when a bar is full of drunks, and sing when a bar is full of his fans. But I’d never seen his eyes so dark before, his whole spirit suddenly old, ill, pale, shaking, and unable to talk.

**6. Debrief**

“Shit!” was what David said as he sat down. Then a long pause before a flurry of words began to unravel. “Shit! What a bastard! He was drunk/fucked up when I arrived – and opened a *Special Brew*. He swore, F-ed and blinded continually and spat on the ground and eye-balled me, and then played with this dagger as he…”

“Slow down,” I urged.

“I’m so glad it wasn’t you in there! Christ, I…”

“You’re safe now.”

“He had to tell me about violence, boxing, all the time eye-balling me, and something about being ‘murdered twice,’ then he said ‘but I wasn’t there.’ What does that mean?”

David was still shaking. Almost incoherent. Deeply troubled.

“I really didn’t think I was going to get out of there for a while. Thought he might turn on me. With that knife. Or swing at me with his right hand, the one with the sovereign ring on it. I think him putting the chain across after I entered started me worrying. But what could I do by then? Leave straight away? I felt like I had to stay for a while, to give him chance to speak having asked. How long would be enough? I kept glancing at the recorder. I managed 17 minutes 31 seconds. It felt like two hours. Look, I’m still shaking. What must it be like for those who live with him, next door, down the corridor?”

**7. Telling the Untellable**

It was only once we’d transcribed the interview that we could begin to piece together what the man in number 26 had said. Slowly, going over and over little bits of the interview, we got most of it. True, there were still words and sounds we couldn’t identify, but it made some sense. We sat on the sofa playing the recording, reading along with the transcript. It’s no fun reliving bad experiences, or listening to a friend who was clearly struggling, but at least it was over quickly. I hadn’t even finished my coffee. But what to do with it? We sat in silence staring at the recorder on the table as if it were a deadly plague, we didn’t want to touch it. We each looked at the words on the page. There weren’t many. But both of us sensed in each other that we had to come up with something. But what? We couldn’t leave this out of the research. We couldn’t leave *him* out of the research. But how to include it? How could we represent what David and heard and witnessed in a way that would illuminate what life was like in this ‘elderly preferred’ supported housing scheme?

**‘Fruit Flies’**

[Voice of man in no. 26] *[Voice of housing support advisor]*

*Some of the residents say*

*“This place never sleeps!”*

*There’s always someone coming in*

*and out*

*Making a noise, causing a disturbance, but what do you do?*

*We’ve got one guy whose been tagged…*

Fruit flies

Acrid stench

No fucker gonna fuck with me

I’m not a junkie

You’re barking up the wrong tree

*…should be gagged*

But at the end of the day

Aren’t we all a little fucked?

*I try to steer clear of him*

*his language, every other word*

And I’ve tasted death, the coffin and the tears

Black clothes and a wake

I sang with the dead and got drunk

I don’t know how many times

but when you’ve been hit

You either know what it’s for

or you don’t

You know how hard you were hit

That’s the thing, there’s so many sides

and what goes around comes around

know what I mean?

The wanting and needing

The crave in your soul

It travels in your carcass

and you push it to the edge

You push – further than the SAS

It’s taken ten years to get this fuckin’ place, and

*and yes I know they need to live to somewhere*

*and we all use bad language*

*on occasion*

No matter what I said about the rules, the building

It’s an indoor prison

Only I’ve got the keys

not you, you screws

*some do it coz they’ve never read a dictionary*

You comin’ in here like a vicar, having an interview

And I’m doing life here

*some to shock or for attention*

I don’t want to be in here

I’m the ASBO fucker, I’ve been tagged

6pm to 6am and I can’t handle it

*but maybe its also help me*

I don’t want to live with these beep BEEP systems!

And you know what?

From the little fuckin’ squirrel

Comes the old fuckin’ acorn

And this is the nut:

I’m my granddad’s age

That’s why I got this place,

Cause I’m OLD

And they’re getting on my nerves

She’s getting on my nerves

*even though they will*

*fight you*

*every inch of the way*

So I go and rattle her cage

*and knock your head off,*

*you know*

And I’m wild and they come and they knock down the door

*there is a cry for help there.*

But I know the system

I been out in the cold

So I thought fuck it!

Become a little hamster

Live in a cage.

**Reflections**

Research for us has, it seems, always been a collaborative project. During our doctoral research, Kitrina suggested forming a research team and, although we had very different topics, we got together with another student (Lucy Foster) to read each other’s transcripts and reflect on what we each were learning. Although we didn’t at the time, nowadays we would call that collaboration. Later, in the final year of David’s doctoral research, we raised funding for a further golf project. We enjoyed, and gained a lot from, working closely side by side right from the outset of this study – from planning and preparation, through fieldwork, doing joint interviews and focus groups, working up our analysis and stories and interpretations, feeding back to participants, right through publication and presentation at conferences. Throughout the journey, we’d communicate with each other with the more usual forms of written and spoken word. We’d meet to plan things together, debrief after spending time doing field work, make and share notes together, sometimes one of us speaking while the other wrote, sometimes writing separately. But we’d also often find ourselves communicating so much through a look, a facial expression or a nod. And – sometimes – it was all about just being there side by side with and for each other.

These relational ways of working and being have been and are critical to our work, offering us a way to care with and for each other, to be on the look out for each other. Our particular ways of collaborating are, of course, intimately tied to the process and products of our research. Through working in these ways we do better research. But they are also entirely bound up with our own wellbeing – safety even – as qualitative researchers who must sometimes navigate the challenging waters of alienation, marginalization, trauma, abuse and distress (see, for example, Carless & Douglas, 2010, 2016, 2017; Douglas & Carless, 2009, 2014, 2015, 2018).

This has, perhaps, never been more important than during the events we’ve recounted in this chapter. The minutes of the interview were such an obvious fracture to our normal pattern. I (Kitrina) had never previously considered that David’s safety could be at risk when I wasn’t there. *What could have happened with the chain across the door, alcohol consumed and that knife pulled out?* While I (David) was relieved that it had not been Kitrina alone in that man’s flat. *What could have happened to a lone woman locked inside his home?* Once those 17 minutes were up, however, our interdependent collaborative way of working – being there with and for each other – came to the rescue and perhaps saved the day. ‘Debrief’ is an inadequate word in this context. Rather, David was able to find solace – be reassured, witnessed, soothed, calmed – through Kitrina’s caring presence. David was able to begin processing his experience of meeting this participant and ‘hearing’ his story. Later, as we continued our more usual ways of working, we were able to *co-elaborate* on David’s experiences of the interview and what the participant had said and done. Drawing also on Kitrina’s interview with a housing support advisor, we created the above poetic/lyrical performance piece ‘Fruit Flies’ to help build a rich, inclusive and dialogical answer our research question.

While we both feel assured of the value and importance (for the research and for ourselves) of working in these kinds of interdependent, caring, relational ways, we have less resolution concerning the complex ethical issues that arise from the events we’ve recounted here. On the one hand, this concerns socio-political questions such as: Which stories count and/or are counted? What kinds of experiences are allowed to come to the fore and which ones are suppressed? How might we speak up for those who cannot speak in their own name through fear of reprisal? When do the human rights of one person impinge so greatly on another that they must be denied? On the other hand, it concerns practical questions like: How can researchers be tolerant of someone who is verbally and/or physically threatening or abusive? *Should* researchers tolerate someone who is overtly threatening? And, finally, it concerns perhaps the biggest questions: What are the costs (for researchers) of including the most challenging voices in our research? What are the costs (for society) of *failing* to include these voices?

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