University of the Sunshine Coast

Alison L Black

Time to remember: a portrait of my mother

Abstract:

This creative work is a personal response to difficult events. The matter of this work concerns the nature and processes of writing about universal themes of love and loss. It explores 'Life Writing in Troubled Times' through processes of storying an intimate and foundational relationship – a relationship which continues to have an active presence in my world and inner life. I am mourning my mother. She has been gone twelve years. Venturing into history, into what this amazing woman gave and has given to me, and as a way of mediating emotional pain, I play with concepts and expressions of *time*, while excavating deeper stories and past-present-future relationships. For me, and for my mother, writing has had an important role to play in processing life events and the human condition, in processing moments-years-decades of loss …and love. My mother's own writing has supported a process of witnessing her life and lived experiences. It has offered a 'protective workspace' for my own contemplation and writing, magnifying my awareness of relationships and enabling a 'being with' and a 'writing together' even though she is no longer here (Walsh and Bai 2015: 26). Writing this piece sustains my connection to her in her absence. It offers a place to dwell amongst generational and everyday stories, the fragments that are known, read, or overheard. And, it creates new spaces – authentic, honouring, embodied, and generative spaces – enabling mourning, connection, responding and becoming.

Biographical note:

Dr Ali Black is a narrative researcher and early childhood educator. Her arts-based research and scholarly work seeks to foster connectedness, community, wellbeing and meaning-making through the building of reflective and creative lives and identities. Ali is interested in storied and visual approaches for dismantling personal/professional binaries and representing lives. Her research and writing is concerned with the power and impact of collaborative and relational knowledge construction.

Keywords:

Creative writing – autobiography – mourning – lived lives

Introduction: remembering personal histories

Writing about our personal feelings and struggles is important – it provides companionship for further thinking and responding. Memory and writing are discursive sites where we can explore processes of meaning making. This kind of writing is a 'relational rather than solitary act … It is in and through the writing that relations, previously unrecognised become visible and audible for the writer' (Hasebe-Ludr et al. 2009: 29).

Life writing meets me at the heart of grief and mourning. I am writing my life, writing my mother's life. As I do, the writing offers insights that help my struggle with loss, that show me how I might live in and through difficult times. It holds open spaces for sorrow and for hope, for emotional truths and 'frank speech' – 'speech which reflects and connects what we say to who we are in the world, as opposed to speech that is disembodied and links us only to other people's words and ideas, and not to our lived lives' (Silin 2017: 92).

As a writer, I have discovered the agentive potential of story and how shifting life experiences – such as loss, grief, depression, aging – fuel my desire to write autobiographically and creatively. I have discovered the therapeutic effects of life writing, poetry and experimenting with language to create images that represent the complexity and emotion of intimate relationships. Wanting to preserve the connection and attachment I feel with these much-loved women, I have found myself leaning into the stories of my mother and grandmother. And, as I have leaned in, I have wanted to write alongside the stories they have lived and told. In the writing process, their stories actively direct my attention, reminding me of values and beliefs, teaching me how to live with hope.

Jenifer Mary Wright (nee Dawson) 27 September 1942 – 29 May 2006

I awoke, May 29, 2016. The sky was still dark, no bird song could be heard. I listened to my husband breathe and then fumbled for the torch as quietly as I could. I focused it on the small clock on my bedside table. 12.37am.

Something foundational shifts inside as I remember … *It was about this time …*

It was about this time you drew your final breath

You died in 2006, Mum. Ten years ago. Just after 12.35am. How can so many years have passed already?

Time flies [even] when you are [not] having fun

How did it get so late, so soon?

I am in mid-life.
Too close to fifty for my liking.

It is startling to look in the mirror and see the middle-aged woman looking back at me. This woman with the giveaway-silver-strands at the roots of her 'number 323 – dark chocolate' brown hair. This woman with the crosshatched creases on her forehead, strategically hidden by her fringe. As I look at my reflection I think of you at this age – and your courage, integrity, faith and grace.

Time heals

I still feel your presence with me. I love that I do. I can sense your spirit is near. Quirkily, as was always your way – creative even in death – you send me reminders in the form of number plates with your JW or JMW initials. Driving in a day-dream haze I refocus on the car in front and see, yes, I see another one. You place them in front of me. Most days.

Our mother/daughter relationship was/is something unique. You were my best friend. My biggest fan. I could count on you. Emotionally you were there for me. Fiercely backing me. Loving me. Believing in me.

I miss you, Mum. What I would give to hear your voice once more.

I remember back, to your last hours, and your last moments. I had stayed by your bedside, talking to you, rubbing cream into your hands, wiping your brow with a damp cloth. But, I needed to use the loo.

'I'm just going to go and do a wee, Mum'.

Coma-like for many hours you became immediately agitated. I knew to stay.

'It is okay, Mum, I don't need to go just yet. I will stay. I am staying. I am definitely staying'.

Your body and breath relaxed. I am so glad you wanted me to stay. To stay with you.

Moments later the nurse came in …

Running out of time

The nurse feels your pulse, nods with confirmation. Soon, very soon, minutes, seconds. And then you will be gone.

I hold your hand. I watch your face. The rise and fall of your chest.

I love you with all the love I have.

And then, there it is. Your final breath.

Time stands still

You are so obviously gone. The essence of you has evaporated away into the spirit world. Just like a cicada shell, your body conveys it is simply a casing.

I have seen this before, when Grandma passed away – your mum. We waved her spirit heavenward at her deafening final gasp. Her life stolen by cancer too. But, at that time of grief, you and I were together. We coped with the grieving and the goodbyes together.

I hear myself sobbing – heaving anguished cries. The nurse hurriedly closes the door. I am disrupting the quiet and the night. Other patients will be woken and alarmed by my sounds.

Even though I knew the hour had come, I rock in shock at the finality of death.

This is it. The beginning of my life without you.

Time-wise

Growing up, I would so often see you reading. Often at night, propped up in bed, three or four books on the go. Seeking, learning, searching for answers. Hmmm. I smile. I do this now. Now I am the mother, propped up with pillows, head in a book, heart open. What solace. Reading is like a sanctuary, isn't it? Key authors illuminating possibilities, helping us listen and connect to ourselves. Reading offers a sacred space to think, to attend to what resonates and speaks into our lives.

And writing. You were a writer, and my grandmother too. Poetry, stories, observations of life. This too, a tool to use and process the experiences of lives and living. Writing ourselves into being. Writing ourselves into our wounding and our pain. Into our waiting. Into our living. Into our growing and becoming.

Writing these stories is helping me live through this sadness. Writing is offering suggestions for self-care and self-compassion. For contemplation. For rest. For healing.

Rewinding time

In the year before you died you retold bits and pieces of your life in a manuscript entitled *'Never call it quits'* (Wright 2005). A mantra you lived by. That you beat the odds by. I find it strange how you recount. The short sharp bursts of facts. Snippets. Scatterings of funny anecdotes. A commentary of absent information. Never the full story. A glossing over of deep and raw emotion. Surface stories. The telling of dates, events, names, trivia. I wonder at your telling.

At what you do not tell.

Because you knew. You knew uncertainty and pain. You knew sorrow and loss. But you rarely spoke of it. You looked to the future with hope and grace.

I know some of what you have left out, what you could not allow yourself to speak. What you could not say. What you have not said. So many things too painful to explore beyond the naming? And yet, an insight: you choose to tell stories of the everyday. Everyday moments. Moments of connection and relationship:

> From the age of five I began helping my father to muster cattle. I think dealing with cattle was in my blood because I could always anticipate what a beast or a mob of beasts were going to do and take the necessary precaution to prevent a catastrophe.
>
> I really enjoyed the years spent with my father. He taught me the names of trees, showed me where to find wild flowers, and all the things to do with cattle – dipping, mustering, droving, and what to do in a storm. I remember the little flowers that he showed me and one of the varieties was fringed violets. Beautiful little purple flowers with a fringe all around. He taught me about animals and bird life.
>
> He was proud of me as a horse-woman and he asserted that I was a better rider than the sons of the other men in the district. I remember droving cattle to our coast country, approximately fifteen miles away. We drove the cattle there because the grass was greener and sweeter and it was dry at home. When we were preparing to muster, mum made us a lunch which might have been corned meat and pickle or plum jam sandwiches (that I hated) which we would put into our saddle bags. We all had a quart-pot which was flat on one side and at lunch time we lit a fire and boiled the billy (Wright 2005).

You were so loved. A treasured daughter. Jenifer. Jenny. Jen. J. An athlete, an academic, so gifted, so sporty, bright, curious and funny.

Ready for adulthood. You won a teaching scholarship but your father's ill health and early death at age 44 meant you had to leave that dream behind to help with the running of the cattle property. Dipping, mustering, droving, the life of a jillaroo. Fatherless, only 19 years old.

Soon after, you met Keith at a dance. He was a teacher at the local school. Handsome. Troubled. Passionate.

Besotted. You announced your engagement at your 21st birthday.

Twenty-one

A milestone, an initiation into adulthood.
Unlocking possibilities.
So happy.
Such promise.
So fleeting.

Not long after your engagement, you went out mustering. You got off your misbehaving horse to close a gate. A terrible pain in your side disabled you. You simply couldn't get back on the horse. Home was three miles away. Somehow you walked this distance. Pain debilitating your every step.

You had kidney disease.
Perhaps it was from the cattle dip – immersing yourself in DDT can't be good. Doctors said 'Nephritis'. They never knew for sure.

One year later, a wedding.
And a funeral.
You and dad married at Easter time. A time of hope and new life.

Except it wasn't.

Newlyweds.

A storyline of loss takes hold.
You did not know what was happening.
Your kidneys failed completely.
Dangerously low blood pressure.
Your body labouring.
You lost the baby you were carrying.
You had a stroke.
Dire predictions.
A coma.
Ten days to live.
Such prayers were prayed – like never before. Your husband and mother down on their knees.
Bargaining.
Twenty-one.
Somehow you lived, somehow your kidneys began to function again.
Is this prayer at work?
Faith?
A miracle?

I try to travel back in time …

I was not there. I was not yet born. I do not know the full details. The loss. The naming and burying of a baby while a mother lay dying. The faith required to live each day. The effort to sit, to wait, without wailing, screaming, flailing about. The utter disappointment in fairy-tale endings. So much waiting and not knowing. Long hours. Then, eyes opening. Bittersweet minutes. She will live. Agonising minutes for the young woman-wife-daughter awaking from a coma, trying to form sounds, to communicate simple requests. The realisation that the baby is gone.

That the baby is gone.

So much loss. For you all.

It was a time warp

The love of a mother and a daughter. My grandmother, her love so big. She helped you to begin again.

This beginning again … it was the beginning of a lifetime of sickness, and a lifetime of courage. Your life, a long and constant battle with illness, a display of unswerving

strength, willpower, cheer, determination and hope. How did you manage this? How did you always lean into cheerfulness? You detached from the dire predictions and opportunities for gloom. You were incredible, Mum.

Over your life you lost so much, coped with so much. Your health challenged what you could bring to your young marriage. You lost your child, your firstborn child – your son – my brother. John. You didn't get to see him. Or hold him. Or name him. And when you awoke, childless, you could not speak, a stroke paralysing the left side of your body and stealing your voice.

How did you go on? So much loss. Your child. Already buried. Your voice. You had to learn to talk again. The use of your body. You could not walk. An athlete no longer.

Grandma nursed you, helped you recover. Over time she helped you learn to speak and take first steps once more. Your balance. It never returned. Your carefree youth. Stolen from you.

Over your life so many health emergencies, and endless check-ups and tests, with so many medical staff – general practitioners, nephrologists, endocrinologists, gastroenterologists, dermatologists, reconstructive surgeons, eye surgeons, thoracic physicians, physicians who specialize in infections, gynaecologic oncologists, orthotists, cardiologists, naturopaths, herbalists, radiotherapists, chemotherapy oncologists and more ...

Did you ever know a pain-free day?

Tracking time

At age thirty, your kidneys failed acutely and for good.

To remain alive, you needed to be on dialysis and you needed a kidney transplant.

> Two years of dialysis.
> Three times a week.
> Four peritoneal operations.
> Four shunts across your wrists and ankles. Blockages, infections. Constant danger.
> Eight-hour train trips, twice a week, to get to the hospital with the dialysis machines.

Grandma looked after me when you were gone. Dad's job took him away as well. So, I lived at Grandma's house for my first year of school.

It was all so precarious …

> *… Someone had to die for you to live …*
> *... A young man on a motorcycle …*

In your thirty-first year, the day of your birthday, you received a kidney transplant.

Kidney Health Australia identify you as one of the longest surviving kidney transplant patients in Australia. Most patients are told to expect 15 years. Your kidney lasted 33 years.

Your kidney was still going strong on your 63rd birthday. But the anti-rejection drugs prescribed for life wrecked your body, suppressing your immune system. Your kidney would have kept going had it not been thwarted by oesophageal cancer.

You had oesophageal varices which bled four separate times. Apparently, it is rare for a patient to survive even one bleed. So, you did know miracles, many miracles, even though they were sometimes hard to see.

You had more than forty operations across your life – you stopped keeping track of them. But you still had to count.

> Sixteen tablets in the morning.
> Five at lunch.
> Eight at dinner.
> Insulin four times a day.

Passages of time

An Easter wedding – you are 21.

Barely a month later, you suffer a stroke, you lose your son – you are 21.

> When I finally came to, several weeks later, I had had a stroke and was unable to talk. Mum taught me to talk again. I had lost the baby I was carrying which only lived for a few hours. Mum had to name the baby and make funeral arrangements. She gave the baby the name of John. I was in hospital probably four months. My doctor, Dr Learmonth used to ask me to whistle, but as I never could and still can't, he changed the therapy to reading from the newspaper out loud. I can remember reading 'The Prime Minister Mr. Menzies said...'
>
> While I was in hospital I could not see anything outside. I wondered if I would ever see sky and trees again. Keith was a handsome man and there were always lots of nurses checking to see if I was alright whenever he visited me. Other times I had a hard time, such as being left naked on the bed in the middle of being sponged while my nurse went off to see to someone else. I was so cold. It was winter time.
>
> It was renal failure that sent my blood pressure so high, so high that it caused me to have the stroke. I had to have injections every four hours for the renal problem and there was not one part of my thighs that had not had a needle in it. I used to cry when I saw the nurse coming. The contents of the needle were thick and creamy. The needles were big and blunt (Wright 2005).

You give birth to me, an emergency caesarean – you are a mother again, age 26

> Alison was born six weeks prematurely by caesarean on 13th January 1968. She was taken to the nursery and I could only look at her through the glass door.

Kidney transplant – you are 31.

> On 27th September 1973, I received an early morning phone call. It was the Princess Alexandra Hospital ringing to tell me they had a kidney for me. Keith was more nervous

> than I was. I made him a cup of tea to settle his nerves. When I got to the hospital as I was going in the ambulance entrance, my surgeon, Dr Lionel Hartley was coming out.
>
> He said, 'We've got a good match for you Jen, I'm just going home for a sleep before we start the operation'.

Marriage over – you are 41.

> Keith's and my division of the property that we jointly owned was highly amusing. It went something like this:
>
> Keith 'Do you want the T.V. or the record player?'
> Jen: 'I'll have the record player.'
> Keith: 'Which lounge suite do you want?'
> Jen: 'I'll have the old one'.
> Keith: 'Well that's it then' (Wright 2005).'

You lost your mother, my grandmother – you are 53.

Together we held Mary's hardworking hands, we heard her last exhale. The moment after – deafening. Grabbing each other we waved her spirit heavenward. We waved. Together.

An overseas trip, Turkey, Greece, a tour of the holy sites, despite your health, despite the wars and the collapse of the World Trade Centre, such determination – you are 60.

Upon your return, Listeria awaits. It creates a hole in your heart. You need a valve replacement. The heart operation goes wrong, it takes too long. The doctors say you may never recover.

Home is now a nursing home – you are too young.

You move from high care to low care as the confusion subsides. Wanting to seize the day, and embrace the clarity you had lost, you gather friends and family together to celebrate your return to us. You hire a band and a venue. We dance and drink champagne!

This celebration marks the 30th anniversary of your kidney – and your 61st birthday.

A precious chum makes you a chocolate butterfly cake, so specially crafted, with real butterflies that emerge and flutter out and around. Symbols of life.

Your last years were hard. Heart surgery. Extended confusion. High care needs and requirements. You had to relinquish so much – your home, loved possessions, driving, cooking, your ability to be hospitable and social in your own surroundings, your independence, your ability to oversee your medications and self-medicate. The last straw was the removal of control of your insulin. You took such pride in your control of your diabetes and the management of your medications.

> In the 1970s, kidney transplant patients were encouraged to know what medication they were taking, what it was called and why they were taking it. We were told not to surrender our medication to a G.P. or a hospital. I was sitting in out-patients with a lady one day and the doctors were really giving her a dressing down because she had been to a G.P. and he had interfered with her medication. Three days later she died.

> These days, there are so many rules that prevent you from having your medication with you as it is always locked away and distributed by the nursing staff, who may or may not know what they are doing, so one has to be extra careful to go through all the pills before one takes them, as others are much more likely to make an error than a well-educated patient. Now that I have diabetes I have trouble getting my insulin at the proper time and even after ringing the buzzer it takes staff ages to get to me (Wright 2005).

I saw changes in you over those last few years. You became less resilient, feistier, less tolerant, more stubborn, less easy going, more pedantic, less ready to accept your lot, more demanding, less content. And who could blame you. I don't blame you, Mum.

Pressed for time

It feels bad to complain. But, it was difficult for me too. In the times prior to this period in my life I had been able to drop everything, anytime, to help you out and be with you at small and large times of need. Now, I was a mother. A working mother. Brodie was 16 months old at the time of your heart surgery and it was a huge challenge for me juggling motherhood, full-time work and your practical and emotional needs. Making daily hospital visits over those three months wasn't easy. And many of them you didn't even remember.

When the doctors said it looked like you wouldn't recover, I had to pack up your home and make hard decisions. You couldn't tell me what you wanted to do. It was like you were permanently concussed and confused. I found a nursing home close to my work, close to your old church, to where we once lived.

At the nursing home, you would ring me up with small requests. 'Could you drop in a bottle of soft drink?' or 'Bring over my winter coat?' Such simple requests, but how to fit them in my chock-filled days of getting kids to/from child care and school, and managing work? I felt so stretched. And guilty.

And somewhere along the line I became a parent figure and somehow you slipped back to adolescence. Perhaps karma for me!

Tears well as I remember our fights as you demanded to leave the nursing home. Just weeks before the diagnosis of your tumour you had made final plans to leave and move out on your own. You had shown me the brochures, picked out the apartment, readied your deposit. You would not listen. You were being bloody-minded. We disagreed about the sensibility and romance of moving. There was no 'what to do in emergency backup plan' beyond 'me'. You didn't understand my position or my fear. And we disagreed about the motivations of your boyfriend who of course supported the move. He had already proven his hopelessness during your romantic trip to the Gold Coast. You had collapsed in the shower (an infection ignored) and I had to speak to the motel receptionist and organise the ambulance from my home in Brisbane while he, right there, was completely clueless in terms of getting you any help! 'Ring Alison' the answer yet again.

Our fights took me back to my own teenage years and forward to what I might have ahead with my own children. I was tough on you. You were tough on me too. I am so sad that we fought.

When I asked you for forgiveness in the last weeks of your life for my reactions and my very tough love you said, 'Don't cry darling, I can't even remember it happened'. Such a big heart you had.

[I need to] … Pause ...

Cancer of the oesophagus. Pneumonia. Your earthly life cycle ends – you are 63.

A terrible dying but a gentle death.

Divine timing

The nurse feels your pulse, nods with confirmation ...

I am here. Holding your hand. We are together for the last time.

[I need to] … Pause ...

I wave you goodbye, just like we did for Grandma.

I imagine Grandma's voice ringing through the heavens to welcome you home. I picture her singing the hymn she bravely sang at your father's funeral:

> *Beyond the sunset,*
> *O blissful morning,*
> *When with our Saviour*
> *Heav'n is begun.*
> *Earth's toiling ended,*
> *O glorious dawning;*
> *Beyond the sunset*
> *When day is done.*
>
> *Beyond the sunset,*
> *O glad reunion,*
> *With our dear loved ones*
> *Who've gone before;*
> *In that fair homeland*
> *We'll know no parting,*
> *Beyond the sunset*
> *For evermore!* (Brock, Brock, and Hall 1936)

How fortunate I have been. I have been so blessed to have such women in my life.

It was an honour to have been there at this crucial time. With these women who I have loved with all my heart. And who have loved me with all of theirs.

[I need to] … Pause ...

Mum, I watched your spirit leave your body. I held the empty shell you left behind. I felt the shifting in both heaven and earth.

Something significant. Momentous. Your wondrous spirit taking flight. What the caterpillar calls the end, others call the butterfly.

[I need to] … Pause ...

You loved life. You transcended the storms and the sadness. You leaned in to hope and joy. You lived in the moment. The magic of everyday moments. You saw the days that were given as a gift. You saw your grandchildren. You loved your grandchildren. Brodie and Bella.

You had the time of your life

You chose to *live* your one and only life. To be present. To be thankful. Laughter was never far from your lips. A strong ready laugh. Real. Genuine.

You were a collector of friends, loved by so many.

Forgiveness was always your default position. Softness. A peace maker. You didn't struggle and resist your lot. You accepted it. You knew the meaning of surrender. Of letting go.

You had a warrior's faith. You wrote in your book: 'I find that my belief in God has kept me contented and fearless through all the many medical and personal difficulties I have had to face.'

> Contented.
> Fearless.
> And, such an understating of your difficulties.

A fearless woman of faith. Faith applied, faith in action. Every day I see more of what you were made of. I see your daily choice to live life with cheer, with fullness, with fearlessness. It takes courage and determination to live like that. Wholeheartedly. Believing.

Your life was never fair, never a fairy tale.

You didn't get what you deserved. Not ever. You suffered so much loss. You lost your youth. Your child. Your health. Your husband.

Your years were full of pain and sickness. Emergencies most months, most years of your life.

[I need to] … Pause ...

Somehow like a cloth polishing a battered metal, with every move you shone, your tenacity, courage and faith so extraordinary.

Time will tell

Writers have said that ‘death is a passageway to openness, abundance, transformation, a space between’ – are they right? (Cixous 1993; Walsh 2003).

> Choices.
> The wilderness strips us to our essence.
> It takes us into darkness.
> Wilderness … Darkness ...
> How will we use them?
> As places for stillness? For incubation? As invitations?

We are left to decide: What will we shed and leave behind? What will we step towards?

Our wounds, our writing, our stories, are a sacred key. A key to sacred lives. My mother – she shows me this. A woman, who despite everything, lived – chose to live – a deep, full life. A life that touched others. A life that followed beauty, creativity, connection, and love. A life that connected her to soul. And through her life I too am connected to soul.

Works cited

Brock, Blanche Kerr, Virgil P Brock and Anthony Hall 1936 *Beyond the sunset: sacred song* Melbourne: Allan & Co

Cixous, Helene 1993 *Three steps on the ladder of writing* New York: Columbia UP

Hasebe-Ludt, Erika, Cynthia Chambers and Carl Leggo 2009 *Life writing and literary métissage as an ethos for our times* New York: Peter Lang

Silin, Jonathan 2017 ‘Risking hope in a worried world’ *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 18 (1), 91-98

Walsh, Susan 2003 ‘Being-with, letting go: mindfulness’ *Educational Insights* 8 (1), Accessed February 13, 2014 at http://www.ccfi.educ.ubc.ca/publication/insights/v08n02/contextualexplorations/sumara/walsh.html

Walsh, Susan and Heesoon Bai 2015 ‘Writing witness consciousness’ in Susan Walsh, Barbara Bickel and Carl Leggo (eds) *Arts-based and contemplative practices in research and teaching: Honoring presence* New York: Routledge, 24–44

Wright, Jenifer 2005 *Never call it quits* unpublished manuscript

Research statement

Research background

Life narrative authors explore and respond to personally, culturally and politically difficult events and contexts. *Time to remember: A portrait of my mother* is an original autoethnographic creative work that addresses universal themes of love and loss and offers a creative and writerly response to my mother's lived experience and to my own mourning processes. The expressive approach taken in this work is authentic, embodied, and generative for me as writer, researcher and daughter.

Research contribution

This story, narrated in non-chronological fragments, expands understanding of a woman's rural life in a particular historical time and how significant medical problems can create secondary and generational trauma. Specific to its context, and universal in its themes, this work explores the complexity of intimate relationships and topics of grief, loss and transition. It demonstrates how creative writing of intimate relationships supports multifaceted meaning-making and expression of relational, embodied, and emotional experiences in ways that deepen understanding of trauma without further contributing to it.

Research significance

Re-narratised fragments of my parents' difficult lives and deaths have been published in *Qualitative Inquiry* (Henderson and Black 2018) and *Life Writing* (Black 2017). A version of this script 'Troubling time: writing my mother's life and death' was presented at the *2017 International Auto/Biography Association: Asia-Pacific Chapter* conference. This work extends the significance of these contributions. The exegetical deliberations contained in such works are useful to fellow researchers engaging with life writing and creative writing as research.

Works cited

Black, Alison L 2017 'I am Keith Wright's daughter: writing things I 'almost' cannot say *Life Writing* 14 (1), 99-111

Henderson, Linda and Alison L Black 2018 'Splitting the world open: writing stories of mourning and loss' *Qualitative Inquiry* 4 (4), 260-269