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"Looking back (and forth)": Acknowledging the people who make personal narratives plausible

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ABSTRACT

The past decade has seen a noticeable rise in the number of people embracing autoethnography as an "alternate" research methodology. As a result, a plethora of first-person narratives and pieces of creative non-fiction now exist for truth-seeking scholars to access for authentic inspiration. The author's unique contribution to the ongoing conversations was first inspired by the professional confessions of a friend and former colleague. Sociological introspection, packaged as a piece of creative non-fiction, should stimulate sociological imagination, evoking a memorable, equally meaningful reaction. In this paper, the author's goals is to inspire rather than inform, encouraging readers to take time to think about their sport management memories and the meanings attached to their sport management experiences. Readers should question the plausibility of producing professional narratives of self. Readers are encouraged to have a conversation between themselves and the various leaders, legends, and legacy-makers they have followed in order to become who they are. The author encourages readers to reflect on the things they have seen, the places they have been, and the lived experiences they have produced along the way. Readers are prompted to consider the costs and consequences of presenting autoethnography through the guide of creative non-fiction.

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1. Setting the scene: the purpose of the paper

> Back and forth autoethnographers gaze: first they look through an ethnographic wide lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations . . . I wanted to be there . . . I wanted to use a form of representation, which would not violate my desire to be alongside the people . . . I turned to autoethnography, a blend of ethnography and autobiographical writing that incorporates elements of one's own life experience when writing about others, a form of self-narrative that place[s] the self within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 38, cited in Wright, 2011, p. 311).

Autoethnographers situate themselves within their social and cultural context, transporting both writer and reader to new places in space and time (Bochner & Ellis, 1996; Boyle & Parry, 2007; Chang, 2008; Dashper, 2013; Ellis, 2004; Holt, 2003;

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Humphreys, 2005; Sparkes, 2002a; Tolich, 2010). At the same time, they can evoke emotional reactions from the reader (the consumer). Dashper (2015, p. 3) defined autoethnography as "a form of narrative research which recognises that stories are an important way in which people try to understand and make sense of their world(s). "Like Reed-Danahay (1997), I found autoethnography at a time when my personal memories were overshadowing those being shared by others. Autoethnography certainly helped me make sense of my inability to distance my personal and professional identities. In 2008, I fully embraced the freedom it allowed me to situate my self within my study of sports tourism, choosing to bare all for the future benefit of others. I opted to put my heart and soul into the production of an evocative autobiographical narrative that has truly changed my outlook on life, love, loss, and the leveraging of legacies.

Having survived a decade of soul searching and serious self discovery, moving back and forth between the fields of leisure, tourism, events, sport, and recreation management, I've finally found a place where my multiple identities appear comfortable. I've found a space for me to grow up, settle down, and lay my roots. By encouraging compassion and promoting dialogue between the author and audience, autoethnography has allowed me to target my storytelling at sport management scholars struggling to make sense of their lived experiences. My research philosophy, for what it is worth, is essentially underpinned by ontological relativism, which proposes "reality" as something which is "multiple, created and mind-dependent," and epistemological constructionism, which argues that all "knowledge is constructed and subjective" (Smith, 2013, p. 134). My personal offering to this special edition showcases the views of Laurel Richardson, Andrew Sparkes, and Brett Smith, all three of whom have identified story-writing as a valid form of narrative analysis (Richardson, 2000; Smith, 2013; Sparkes, 2002a). Smith (2013, p. 135) notes how, using Richardson's (2000) creative analytical practices (CAP), "a storyteller aims to produce an analysis in storytelling and show rather then tell theory in and through the story." Autoethnography and ethnographic creative non-fiction are subsequently identified as one of many CAPs available to the academic storyteller (Smith, 2013).

The value and validity of producing autoethnography has been argued on multiple occasions over the past decade, with many authors dedicating significant parts of their personal narratives to providing definitions and detailed explanations of how it differs from other forms of qualitative research (Boyle & Parry, 2007; Dashper, 2015; Holt, 2003; Tolich, 2010; Tomas, 2009; Wall, 2008). Ellis (2004, p. 38) believes that autoethnographies "showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness" and can take the form of "short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, scripts, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose." In 1999, she coined the term "heartful autoethnography," to acknowledge the artistic sharing of evocative, traumatic, emotional, and life-changing/defining stories that not only come straight from the heart of the author, but also targets and talks to the heart of the reader (Ellis, 1999). A couple of years prior to this, Ellis and her partner, Art Bochner (1996 p. 25), revealed that autoethnography can "expose the reader to stories that would other wise be 'shrouded in secrecy'."

While Ellis and Bochner are widely regarded as the forerunners in the advancement of autoethnography, as both a method and methodology, David Hayano is widely credited as the first person to place the auto (one's self) in front of the ethnography (the study of others) (Bochner & Ellis, 1996; Dashper, 2015; Ellis, 2004; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Sparkes 2002b). In 1979, Hayano suggested, "while auto-ethnography is not a specific research technique, method or theory, it colors all three as they are employed in fieldwork" (Hayano, 1979, p. 99). Heartful autoethnographers seek to conjure an immediate emotive response from the reader, using evocative language, imagery, and imagination-capturing plot lines (Ellis, 2004). Anderson, however, offered a much more structured and systematic way of situating one's self within their socio-cultural study of others, calling in "analytic autoethnography" (Anderson, 2006). The following year, Boyle and Parry (2007) advocated the idea of organisational autoethnography, specifically targeting individuals operating within the realms of human resource management and organisational culture. Their rationale was based on the belie that autoethnography "has the ability to connect the everyday, mundane aspects of organizational life with that of broader political and strategic organizational agendas and practices" whilst "autobiographical and retrospective approaches are more likely to unearth and illuminate the tacit and subaltern aspects of organization" (Boyle & Parry, 2007, p. 186).

Although it is missing from the list of options provided by Ellis, creative non-fiction offers autoethnographers a means of presenting truthful personal narratives (Caulley, 2008; Hackley, 2007; Smith, 2013). According to Hackley (2007, p. 101), creative non-fiction is "a personalised but factually-based style of writing that uses the essay form" that "can be transforming for reader and author and contributes to a better understanding of the world and of the person in the world." Caulley (2008, p. 426) acknowledges that an ethnographic creative non-fiction "is deeply committed to the truth," while Smith (2013, p. 135) refers to it as "a story using facts developed from systematic research, but uses many of the techniques of fiction (e.g., contextualized, vernacular language; composite characters; dialogue; metaphor; allusions; flashbacks and flash forwards; tone shifts and so on) to communicate results in compelling and emotionally vibrant ways."

Arguably, the most comprehensive source of information on the production of creative non-fiction is a publication by Gerard. When discussing the renaissance on non-fictional narrative, Gerard (2004, p. 4) reminds his audience that the storyteller "must always rein in that impulse to lie, in all the subtle ways we can shade the truth in something less than – or more than – the truth. The nonfiction writer must be more truthful than we usually require of ourselves or of each other." He concedes that this is not as easy as it sounds, adding:

> We [academics] lie a lot . . . . We embellish. We misremember. We inadvertently change what somebody actually said because we didn't happen to have our tape recorder handy. Or worse, we paraphrase their words, giving them a different emphasis, a sharper tone. We conveniently leave out details that make ourselves look bad and leave out other information because it seems irrelevant and leave out still more details because we plain didn't see or hear them. And what's left out

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> can change the story of what happened – a lot. We're limited by our point of view – from where we stand, we can see only so much of the action. Our vision is blocked, or crucial things happen in several places at once and we can be only in one place at a time. We assume a God-like objective omniscience that equally distorts pure fact. We make judgements about which characters (we've already turned them into characters) is [sic] important, which event deserves emphasis, which detail best conveys the feeling of the moment. And we tell it out of order . . . (Gerard, 2004, pp. 4–5)

Looking back, my doctoral thesis was an authentic piece of creative non-fiction packaged as heartful autoethnography (i.e., the mirror opposite of this paper, which is arguably a piece of heartful autoethnography packaged as creative non-fiction). I produced a personal narrative that spoke openly to the reader. I told a true story to get people thinking. I put everything I had into the creation of a highly subjective, deeply personal, and equally philosophical thesis that focused on the importance of incorporating the lessons learned, the lives changed and the legacies left as a result of my professional actions. I created something in which I truly believed. I produced something that I hoped would generate more than just a handful of peer-reviewed publications and a full time position in the academy. I conquered my demons and climbed my own Everest, producing something to change my world (for the better). By the end, I was sick and tired of the sight of it. I never wanted to see it again. I needed to escape. I chose to walk away (without looking back). I couldn't handle the truth. I hated the subject and the source of my sleepless nights (I hated myself).

That was then, but this is now. Plenty of water has flowed under the bridge, and I want to revisit and remember the autoethnographers who made my personal narrative plausible. In doing so, I hope to leave you thinking about, and possibly talking to, those around you, especially the autoethnographers who have helped you establish your academic identity. Granted, you may not know anyone who has produced and published an autoethnographical narrative, especially if you're a sport management scholar who only consumes the papers published in sport management journals and the presentations given at sport management conferences (but more on that later). I can guarantee that you will know someone who has let their personal memories of past lived experiences influence their present day professional actions. I am certain that your paths will have crossed at least one sport management scholar with a history of researching the sport they have consumed on multiple occasions as either an active participant or a passive spectator. I am equally confident that you will have some existing understanding of what it feels like to have been influenced, if not inspired, by the socially constructed memories of someone else (van Manen, 1997).

What follows is a personal narrative inspired by the leaders, legends, and legacy-makers that continue to inspire me. Whilst some have published their personal narratives, some have not. For some, the content of this piece of creative non-fiction will come as a complete surprise; for some it will not. Having essentially called us all a bunch of liars, Gerard (2004, p. 5) argues that, by labelling something as a piece of nonfiction, "we are announcing our determination to rein in our impulse to lie. To test our memory more carefully, do a little research to fill in the holes in what we witnessed, draw clear lines around what we are offering as objective fact (as if such a thing exists) and what we are offering as opinion." He concedes that the toughest part of writing creative nonfiction is that "you're stuck with what really happened – you can't make it up. You can be as artful as you want in the presentation, draw profound meaning out of your subject matter, but you are still stuck with real people and real events. You're stuck with stories that don't always turn out the way you wish they had turned out" (Gerard, 2004, p. 6). And never has a more truthful word been said. I know of many people who have manipulated their findings to fit their original objectives (or vice versa). I know of ethnographers who have turned a blind eye in order to keep to their deadlines (and word limits). What follows is not always easy to read but, trust me, it was even harder to write (and to get right).

This piece is essentially a publication five years in the making. It is a tale of life, love, loss, and the leveraging of legacies. It opens with a short vignette, replaying my movements, motivations, and memories of the morning of Tuesday January 19th, 2016. It continues with a brief synopsis of a doctoral thesis that, in the past five years, has been downloaded over 3500 times in over 85 different countries (University of Otago, 2016). It is not your traditional piece of sport management literature but, as you are about to discover, I am far from being your traditional sport management scholar. I am an evocative storyteller who has recently transferred his professional allegiance from the world of event and tourism studies in the hope to convince you to consider the merits of adopting alternative methodologies to advance the study of sport management. My article offers a long overdue tribute to the leaders, legends, and legacy-makers that made the production of this paper plausible. Ultimately, I want to show how the simultaneous production and consumption of autoethnographical creative non-fiction could potentially leave you and other sport management scholars with a tale worth telling and a legacy worth leveraging.

2. Ready or not (here I come)

I wonder how many have consumed it from start to finish. I wonder how many have read the dedication, abstract, acknowledgements, or the 400-plus footnotes. I wonder if it has been accurately translated for all the Chinese downloaders. I wonder what lessons have been learned. I wonder what lives have been changed. I wonder why none of the downloaders have ever taken the time to track me down for a private conversation. I enter my office unable to think about anything else, and find myself needing a moment to reflect upon the experience and myriad emotions encountered since reading Dashper's two papers for the second time the previous evening (Dashper, 2013, 2015). I hear her voice in my head as I replay extracts from her 2015 paper. I shut my eyes, to get a clearer picture. I can see her face. She is with me in my office.

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My head feels heavy. I am alone and the room is spinning. I feel nauseous. I feel the need to sit down. I can not breathe. Not again. I can not do this again. I am not ready. I sit on the couch and breathe (in . . . then out . . .). My eyes shut once again. I can not see anyone or anything. The darkness is blinding. My mouth is dry, but my palms are not. I wipe them on the cushion to my left. I am experiencing my first anxiety attack of the year (it will not be the last, but somehow every one always feels like the first). I find myself thinking about the future. My wife is pregnant (I am soon to be a dad). What will my child think when he or she is old enough to appreciate what his or her father does for a living? I start to replay the edited highlights of my life. I start to list all the things that I had wanted to achieve before fatherhood. I think of the countries I have visited and the mountains I have climbed. I think of those that still need climbing. I think of the events I have attended and the many that remain on my bucket list. I start thinking about my lack of peer-reviewed publications and my recent failure to gain promotion. I think of all the reasons why I have found it so hard to turn profitable research activity into publishable research outputs. I replay all of the excuses given over the past five years. Something has to change.

Without needing to stand up, I pull my thesis off the shelf and place it on my lap. It feels a lot lighter than I remember it. It looks new, yet has a thin layer of dust on the top. It smells a little musty. I read the gold writing located down the spine of the black plastic cover. The words are all capitalised; "FROM THE ABBEY TO THE ACADEMY," followed by "WRIGHT." I am hit by an unexpected, much needed, wave of nostalgic sentiment. Perhaps I can do this after all? Maybe I am ready? Maybe it is time to open it up? What's the worst thing that could happen? They're only words on a page. What harm can they do? When did I become so pathetic?

For the first time in five years, I find myself face-to-face with the abstract written on the day that I finally crossed the finish line. I recall how it was produced whilst the rest of the chapters were being printed and photocopied. My mind considers the cost and consequences attached to that *final* deadline. Failure to submit would have cost me another semester of international fees (something I did not have at my disposal). Failure to submit would have forced me to apply for an international student visa extension (something I may not have been granted). Failure would have made it increasingly difficult for me to start my new Job at the UK Centre for Events Management (something I had recently secured, much to my parents' delight). Failure to leave New Zealand could have easily led to the end of a relationship that I was desperately keen to maintain (something that kept me from giving up and throwing it all away on several occasions). I owed it to all around me to get it in on that day. Failure was not an option. I was sick of all the secrets and lies.

I can not do this now. My desk needs tidying. I have emails that need reading. I look across at the framed PhD certificate leaning on my windowsill. It needs hanging. I turn my attention to the newspaper cutting pinned to the wall by my seriously messy desk. It shows my grandparents standing proud at the Abbey Stadium. They were being thanked for their longstanding loyalty to our football club (Cambridge United). They were being offered a place in the posh seats for the new season. My grandfather looks much older than he looks in my memories. His jacket appears several sizes too big. I shut my eyes hoping to picture him more clearly. I hope to hear his voice one more time. He was gone within weeks of the photo being taken. He was my best friend. He was the maker of so many memories, many of which were included in the thesis sitting closed on my lap. He helped make me who I am today. I would not have made it to sixth form, let alone university, without his help. He was my study buddy. He was the greatest storyteller that I have ever encountered. His memories live on in my mind. I can not wait to tell his soon-to-be-born great-grandchild all about him and the many adventures we experienced together. I can not wait to pass his stories onto the next generation.

I find myself thinking about all the broken promises found in my thesis. I revisit the Christmas Day and the New Years Eve of 2008, both of which were spent alone (and drunk). I recall the months when sleeping only occurred at times when my brain could no longer operate my eyes or make my fingers hit the right buttons on the keyboard. I remember the migraines caused by hours of staring at thousands of words on a screen. I can picture the faces of the friends and former colleagues, many of whom were oblivious to the suicidal thoughts running through my mind. I replay the secrets and lies that were created to protect and prolong the innocence of those around me. I saved all my truths for the thesis.

I re-open my eyes, take another deep breath and decide to start with the dedication. It is directed solely at my loving partner (now pregnant wife) and my family, "without whom I would forever be lost and lonely-looking" (Wright 2011, p. iii). I look across at the newscutting once more, focusing only on the smile on my grandfather's face. I look across at the framed certificate, recalling how proud he was of all my academic achievements and my decision to try and build a life for myself on the other side of the world to everyone and everything that I had ever known. I feel ready once more. I thank Katherine (Kate) Dashper for forcing my hand, and inspiring me to reflect upon the impact of my thesis. The personal narratives, published in the *Sociology of Sport Journal* (Dashper, 2013) and *Contemporary Sociology* (Dashper, 2015), led me to look at my thesis for the first time in five years. Kate was a colleague of mine for a couple of years. We shared an office. We taught and travelled to conferences together. We talked about our future aspirations. More memorably, we shared stories and personal experiences from our past. I look up at another certificate pinned to my wall. The piece of paper reveals that I was awarded a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education on the 13th of December 2010. Kate and I completed that qualification together, learning as much, if not more, from each other as we did from those responsible for its delivery. Looking back, it was one of the most valuable experiences encountered during my short time at the UK Centre for Events Management (I really did not see it that way at the time). My email signature, and business cards, now include those five letters (PGCHE) after my name, alongside the three more globally recognised letters of PhD. Had I not left Leeds in 2011, I am certain that the two of us would have continued to work closely, collaborated on research projects and produced several pieces of sports event management literature. We promised to keep in touch, but have not spoken to each other in years. I return my gaze to the thesis with a

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sense of anticipation and excitement. I turn the page to the abstract and, for the first time since it was written, allow myself to fully engage with the words found on the page.

3. From the Abbey to the Academy (and back again)

> [T]his is not an average doctoral thesis. It takes both the author and his audience on a socially-constructed journey of self discovery. It explores the emotional world of evocative he*art*ful sociological introspection. I aim to target your imagination from the outset. I attempt to illustrate the unmistakable influence that our memories inevitably have on the way we subsequently (re)interpret our sense of personal and public belonging to the present. In doing so, I explore the multiple ways in which we all continually (re)establish and socially categorise our much needed self esteem. More specifically, I look at our unique attachment and emotional affiliation to the various cultural societies within which we are all located. This is my attempt to not only locate, but legitimise my personal involvement in the field of special interest tourism. This is my autoethnography . . . (Wright, 2011, p. i).

This really wasn't your average thesis. This was *my* autoethnography. I continue to the end, and flick effortlessly to the following page. My contents page reveals the songs that helped me reach the finish line. It reveals the names of two halves, four acts, and thirty-five chapters, each of which could be consumed in isolation, or as a part of the collective narrative. None were longer than 3000 words in length. 'Act One' contains the six chapters that introduce my multiple identities. It is a section in which my grandfather features heavily, as does the local football club who call the Abbey Stadium home. 'Act Two' contains four chapters, all of which centre on the creation of my original scholarship winning proposal. My hopes and dreams are openly shared within this section, including my desire to produce something 'safe' that would provide little more than the stepping-stone into an academic career. 'Part One' concludes with a chapter dedicated to the completion of my ethics application. There was nothing remotely risky about my original ethnography. I was going to observe sport tourists in their natural habitat. I was going to interview those willing to be interviewed and draw my conclusions from my analysis of the themes extracted from these encounters. I was to be all done by the end of 2008. I planned to graduate in 2009.

'Act Three' contains twenty chapters that focus entirely on my memories of a three-day excursion to Melbourne. I signed up for a "boys tour" package trip targeting people my own age, rather than the more expensive alternatives that target the older sport tourists with plenty of disposable income at their disposal. Being a sport tourist myself, I had expected to fit in from the get go and find plenty of people willing to talk to me. I had not anticipated that I would be a loner, surrounded by large groups of middle-aged New Zealanders who had no interest, or reason, to accommodate the English guy travelling by himself. They had no time to answer my questions, or indulge in my research experience. They were there to escape their everyday lives. They were there to relive their youth, forget their families, and to drink the town dry. Some never even made it to the Test Match that took place at the MCG that weekend, preferring the alternative adult entertainment found in the casino and elsewhere. I was not invited to join them. In fact, my presence was ignored entirely. I was invisible. I was an outsider. I had no place amongst them. The only memorable conversations occurred during my tours of the famous stadia and sporting facilities found in the city. I spent much of the weekend alone, wandering the streets of a city that I had always wanted to visit, wondering what I was going to tell those back home.

Feeling my palms beginning to clam up once again, I head straight to the start of Act Four. I know who I am and what I encountered during my trip. I really do not feel the need to remind myself, or relive the days and nights spent trying to make sense of it all. I will never forget. I only need to think of Melbourne to find myself sitting alone in that horrible hotel room, trying to think of ways to be accepted by the people down in the equally horrid hotel bar. I have been back to Melbourne several times since that first trip, all of which have been much more enjoyable occasions. None of which, however, have been as unforgettable as the first, not even the time I attended the Australian Open. Rather than dwell on the past, I find myself wanting to revisit my rationale for turning a failed ethnography into a piece of evocative autoethnography. I am keen to remind myself of the people who made it all possible, and to see what new lessons I am able to extract five years after it was first written. I want to focus on the future.

'Act Four' was written in the weeks that followed the lowest point in my life. It was the section that signalled my recovery, settled my nerves, silenced my insecurities, and answered questions. Its construction helped convince me that I had made the right decision. It offers the theories needed to fully appreciate the entire autoethnography. The six chapters combine to form a series of multiple endings, multiple answers, and multiple conclusions. They focus on the pressures and pleasures attached to producing autoethnography. They provide the author and the audience with the evidence to support everything found in the first three sections of the thesis. 'Act Four' was the final part of the jigsaw, written with the end finally in sight. It is the section in which I acknowledge the autoethnographers who helped me pick up the pieces of my messy Melbourne excursion, and the section that I found the easiest to conclude. It was less about me and more about the authors who I have subsequently directed a lot of people towards. It is the section where I found myself talking to my examiners, asking them to consider the lessons learned and legacies established. It is the section where I acknowledge the influence and inspiration that I was able to draw from the tales told by a sports scholar that I longed to converse with in person. His name was Andrew Sparkes.

I am ready. It is time. The desk needs tidying, but it can wait. The emails can remain unread for the rest of the day. The certificate looks fine where it is. Right now, all I need is a pen and some paper. I need to record the emotions experienced when reading Kate's publications last night. I need to record the thoughts that were keeping me awake last night, and the

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number of people who have downloaded my thesis. I need to record the anxiety attack that thankfully ended before it really began. I need to record the faces seen, and voices I hear as I close my eyes. I want to write an article that incorporates the quotes found on the final page of my thesis. I want to share them with those yet to download my thesis. I need to acknowledge the people who made this lived experience happen. I need to acknowledge Carolyn Ellis and Andrew Sparkes, I need to thank Michael Morgan, and Richard Mitchell, and David Scott. Most of all, I need to talk to Katherine Dashper. Everything else can wait. I reached page 354 with relative ease. Like my abstract, the contents of the final six chapters are consumed with an unmistakable sense of self-satisfaction. The last page is dominated by the thoughts of others. Breaking from tradition, I did not want to have the final say. I left that to the leaders that I had followed. It seemed right at the time. Looking back, I still believe it was appropriate. I loved the quotes that I chose to conclude my story. I still do.

4. It's not the destination . . . it's the journey

> On the whole, autoethnographers don't want you to sit back as spectators; they want readers to feel, care and desire. If culture circulates through all of us, how can autoethnography be free of connection to a world beyond the self (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 24, cited in Wright, 2011, p. 354).

My first attempt at producing an autoethnography thesis came to its final conclusion in September 2010, with the submission of a suitably revised 120,000 word autobiographical personal narrative entitled "From the Abbey to the Academy: The Heartful Autoethnography of a Lost and Lonely-Looking Self Indulgent Sport Tourist." By the end of 2008 I had already consumed enough personal narratives and pieces of creative non-fiction to know that I was anything but alone, and that autoethnography was not as 'innovative' as most of the authors were claiming in their abstracts (Coffey, 1999; Hackley, 2007; Trahar, 2009). It was merely an alternative approach, unpopular with the traditionalists (Coffey, 1999; Holt, 2003; Sparkes, 2000, 2002b). My major concern was that my story was not good enough to capture the sociological imagination of my examiners (Richardson, 1995). I never doubted the value or the validity of the method(ology). I doubted my ability to produce something that others would want to read.

By the start of 2009 I was told in no uncertain terms that I *really* needed to stop reading, and really (*really!*) needed to start writing. But that was easier said than done. Going cold turkey was going to be tough, but I *really* trusted the two people giving me the same instruction. One was Richard Mitchell, my secondary supervisor. The other was Michael Morgan, the man who first introduced me to Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (figuratively speaking). With their voices in my head, I somehow resisted the temptation to consume more thought-provoking stories and focused solely on the production of my own autoethnography, using the readings already consumed to support my opinions and observations. Together, they made the following plausible.

Prior to 2007, I had never needed to enter the realms of sport psychology, sociology of sport, sport history, or sport management. I was not a phenomenologist. I was not a post-structuralist, or a feminist. I was a tourism planner, with a personal obsession for sport and sports event-related serious leisure activity. But all the theories and philosophies appeared to overlap and complement each other. By the middle of 2008, I had consumed more stories from injured athletes than I had from international sport tourists. More importantly, I had consumed the entire works of Carolyn Ellis and Andrew Sparkes. I could have comfortably sat in Mastermind's big black chair and confidently answered any question that the quizmaster chose to ask. I spent the next year consuming the stories of those referenced in their work, as well as those who choose to follow in their footsteps. I desperately wanted to join the club. I wanted to be one of them.

Upon its eventual acceptance into the academy (May 2011), my thesis was placed online for all to access. The aim was to ensure that my life-changing experience and the lessons learned along the way were not hidden away or allowed to gather dust on a bookshelf. I wanted to offer something from which others could draw inspiration. My goal was to produce something that people would find interesting to read, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or education. Much like this piece of creative non-fiction, my thesis includes a number of deeply personal confessions shared for the very first time. It takes the reader back in time. It concludes with a series of overlapping observations about the value, validity, and viability of postgraduate students producing personal narratives that document the lessons learned during their life-changing journey of self-discovery.

In sum, my thesis proposed that the global growth of the academy, the acceptance of inter-disciplinary fields of enquiry (such as sport management), and the arrival of new specialised/special interest subject areas (such as sports tourism) have essentially opened the door to those who deliberately target an alternative audience with their alternative methods. It showcased and celebrated those who suggest that autoethnography is more of a mindset and social movement than a method of data collection, and actively encouraged others to share their stories with people they will never meet in person. Looking back, I find it tough to remember what was or was not included in the final version of my thesis. There were so many last minute, late night, additions and edits made in those final days of self-discovery. Entire chapters were written, reviewed, and removed, prior to them ever being seen by anyone else. I was never in danger of falling short in terms of the word count (quite the opposite). The final draft was close to 200,000 words.

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5. Leaders, legends and legacy-makers

> I choose to foreground my own voice. This is not narcissism; it is not egocentric indulgence . . . critical autobiography is vital intellectual work . . . I assume that my subjectivity is filled with the voices of others and about worlds which we inhabit . . . because my subjective experience is part of the world, the story which emerges is not completely private and idiosyncratic (Church, 1995, p. 5, cited in Wright, 2011, p. 347).

In terms of helping me produce a life-changing personal narrative, Carolyn Ellis and Andrew Sparkes fully deserve significant praise and their positioning at the top of the bill. Special mentions are also due to Arthur Bochner, Deborah Reed-Danahay, Kathryn Church, and Laurel Richardson, each of whom have also played a significant role in helping me find the courage to situate myself at the centre of my sports tourism-inspired story. To me, these six much-cited scholars represent the pioneers of personal narrative production. They are the leaders, the legends, the life-changers, and the legacy makers. These are the people who have set the benchmark for all others to match (myself included). I am no autoethnography expert, but thanks to Ellis and Sparkes, I am without question a true believer. Despite the lack of publications, I am as big an advocate as you are ever likely to find, especially within the sport management space.

The people acknowledged in this paper are directly responsible for taking me to a place that I had previously never known existed. They have enabled me to see the power and influence of embracing one's sociological introspection with my own eyes. Unbeknown to many of them, they have provided me with the tools that I needed to ply my trade to the best of my ability, and for me to be the best that I can be. Unlike the leaders noted above, the following four are personal friends and former colleagues of mine. In 2007, Michael (Mike) Morgan provided me with the words of wisdom needed to initiate my initial steps into autoethnographer. In 2009, David (Dave) Scott started to challenge my understanding and approach to autoethnography, before opting to embrace Leon Anderson's analytic autoethnography within his own doctoral thesis. Since 2009, Richard (Rich) Mitchell has continued to show me the legacies that can be established through the simultaneous production and consumption of evocative autoethnography. Finally, as previously acknowledged, it was the the confessions of my friend and former colleague Kate that gave me the strength to sit down and pen this personal narrative. Although I have not sought their permission to tell it, in many ways this is as much their story as it is mine. I hope they like it. Three of the four will have the opportunity to respond. Sadly, one will not.

I first met Mike in 2006 at a conference hosted by the University that only eight years earlier had declined my application to complete an undergraduate degree in tourism management. I have no memory of my performance that day, or how well my presentation was received by an audience that included the man who, four years later, would examine my doctoral thesis. I can, however, recall every moment of Mike's presentation like it was happening in front of me right now. Mike presented his opinions and observations of the travelling sports fans witnessed during the 2005 British and Irish Lions Tour of New Zealand (Morgan, 2007). Closing my eyes, I can visualise the scene. I can picture him owning the stage at the front. I can see his holiday photos on the Powerpoint slides behind him. I can hear his voice in my head.

In 2006, Mike's research transported me back in time, far beyond the 2005 tour, to the weekends that I spent following my football team all over the country. Ten years on, and as I attempt to meet the deadline for getting the revisions to this article finished, he is having the same affect. Mike may not have had a PhD, but he was certainly a philosopher. We may have been separated by several decades in age, and living on the other side of the world to each other, but a friendship was formed nevertheless. In August 2007, he encouraged me to engage in some social introspection, and to document my sociological imagination. Ultimately, it is thanks to Mike that I found myself consuming, and subsequently consumed by, the unforgettable stories of Carolyn Ellis and Andrew Sparkes. It is thanks to Mike that I embarked upon a different way of doing (ethnography) and arguably a better ways of being (an ethnographer). Thanks to Mike, I am able to share with you this alternative way of sharing our opinions and observations. More importantly, thanks to Mike, I was finally able to acknowledge the voices in my head and respond with equal measures of confidence and conviction. The people asking the toughest questions back in 2007 were Dave, my former roomie, and Rich, my secondary supervisor.

The next acknowledgements go to Rich and Dave. Whilst the former offered regular re-assurance that the rewards would outweigh the risks, the later continued to push me to my limits, continually arguing the authenticity and applicability of what I was trying to create. Like Mike, Rich believed in the methodology that I had chosen to embrace. More importantly, Rich believed in me. He also embraced my desire to do something that few, if any, doctorate candidates had ever attempted. With my family (and Mike) located on the other side of the world, Rich and Dave became the people I turned to when my long-suffering partner was simply unable to help. Together, they took it upon themselves to ensure that I never gave up and continued to believe in my ability to find the finish line. Together, they helped me carry the weight of my world on my shoulders. They gave me time and space when needed. They also knew when I needed a break. Without question, they helped me find the strength needed to continue moving forward, albeit one small step at a time.

It was arguably what happened after I completed my life-changing journey of self-discovery that set Rich Mitchell apart from everyone else. In 2011, he wrote the following words in a card that I received in the post; "Absolutely Awesome work . . . A truly unique thesis that has the power to make a real difference for those that followed." Until now, I have never acknowledged how valuable those words have proven to be. Unlike my thesis, these are words that I have (re)turned to on many occasions over the past five years, typically the morning after a long sleepless night or yet another unexpected anxiety attack. They are not, however, the only words of life-changing significance that Richard Mitchell has shared with me since I left Dunedin. Since the submission of my thesis, he also sent me the link to his own attempts at producing personal

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narratives, seeking my opinions on the memories that he had chosen to publicly share via a highly evocative online blog. To my relief, he chose to hold nothing back, talking openly from the heart about his near death experience, his fear of losing his family, and his ongoing battles with his body. Around the same time, Rich also wrote a resignation letter, announcing his desire to take his professional career in a new direction. He chose to follow his heart and embrace a new challenge. The man is a legend!

Back in 2009, as I waited anxiously for the examiner's report on my thesis, my new colleague Kate Dashper was busy putting the finishing touches on her own sport management-focused doctorate study. The following year, as my changes were finally completed and approved, I was happy to offer my thoughts regarding her thesis examiners feedback, particularly the comments that called for her to explicitly acknowledge her place within her research. Fast forward five years and, much to my surprise, I found myself sitting in bed unable to sleep, feeling aggrieved that my name was nowhere to be seen in either of her two recently published autoethnographical manuscripts. Rather than celebrate a friend's decision to produce and publish her personal narratives, I found myself experiencing feelings of professional frustration, envy, and even jealousy. In my eyes, it was me who not only introduced her to the genre, but also the authors that she had chosen to acknowledge. Looking back, I was being an absolute idiot. My reaction was at best self-indulgent, at worse narcissistic. It was not justified. It certainly was not appropriate. Thankfully, it was not too long before I started to feel deeply ashamed, embarrassed, and remorseful. Upon reading her stories for a second time, I soon found myself in a much best place. I found myself feeling proud to know the person behind these excellent narratives. I found myself pleased that she had achieved what I had so far failed to find the time to achieve. More importantly, I found myself lying awake at night, planning the day that was about to follow. I was going to go online and see how many people had seen my thesis. I was going to go to work and open the hard copy sitting on the bookshelf. I was going to re-acquaint myself with my autoethnography. I was going to take some time out of my busy life, to thank the people who made it happen.

6. Working with the benefit of hindsight

> The most admirable thinkers within the scholarly community do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such discussion. They want to use each for the enrichment of the other. You must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work (Wright-Mills, 1959: pp. 195–196, cited in Wright, 2011, p. 354)

For the past five years, I have sat in relative silence, struggling to come to terms with the legacies created as a consequence. I never lost my voice, or my passion for producing personal narratives. I simply struggled to find anything meaningful to add to the conversations already well underway amongst the sport sociologists I now consider as friends and colleagues. It is no longer a rarity to find editors and conference organisers willing to accept first-person narratives or academics willing to acknowledge the influence of lived experiences on their research. What was once deemed risky, somewhat contentious, and treated with suspicion or scepticism (Collinson & Hockey, 2005; Sparkes, 1996; Tsang, 2000) would now appear to be encouraged/embraced. The number of sport-inspired autoethnographies published over the past five years suggests that the genre is no longer fighting for a place at the table (see, for example, Allen-Collinson, 2012; Carless, 2012; Chawansky, 2015; Coghlan, 2012; Dashper, 2013, 2015; Forde, 2013; Kodama et al., 2013; Parry, 2012). The fact that a sport management journal has chosen to produce a special edition on alternative methodologies suggests that the psychologists and sociologists listed above may soon have a new audience and outlet to target, and that those who call themselves sport management scholars might be encouraged to pull up a chair and join the conversation (better late than never). Hopefully, the subject of my story may resonate loud enough to evoke the reaction that I seek.

The purpose of this paper is to not to share the content of my doctoral thesis, but to explore the legacies created as a consequence. My goal is unashamedly to inspire you to go and access it online in your own time, allowing you to read and reflect upon its relevance to you (and your area of research activity). At the time of submitting this paper, my autoethnography has been downloaded 3733 times from the University of Otago online research archive (University of Otago, 2016). Whether this number is higher than average is unknown, but it is far higher than I had ever imagined plausible back in 2009. It has been downloaded in over eighty-five countries. The USA (976) is top of the list, followed by China (384) and the UK (269). Chongqing (China) tops the list of cities (174 Downloads), followed by Chicago (124) and Kansas City (103) (University of Otago, 2016). Sadly, the stats do not reveal how many have actually opened it, read it, or understood it. They also fail to tell me the reasoning behind their decision to download it or the discipline areas within which the downloader is located.

To conclude, autoethnography is an alternative way for sport management scholars and students to make sense of the social world within which we all live. In my eyes, it can be linked to the practices and principles of the sociological imagination (Wright-Mills, 1959). With the benefit of experience, I can assure you that neither autoethnography nor creative non-fiction represents a quick and easy option that you can simply enter or exit whenever you wish (Gerard, 2004; Wall, 2008). You can not just turn it on and off at will (Tomas, 2009). Your motives have got to be pure and relatively simple. It has to come from deep within. It can not be shallow or superficial. It needs to be believable. It has to be authentic and accurate. It has to come from the heart and appeal to the reader. It has to be written exactly how it sounds in the head of the author. It has to include everything seen through their eyes. It is all or it's nothing!

Gerard (2004) identifies five characteristics found within all attempts at creative nonfiction and, as the finish line comes into view, I think that now is the right time to share them with you. Firstly, he acknowledges the need for both an apparent

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and a deeper subject. Whilst the apparent subject may be "spectacular or mundane . . . it is only part of what we are interested in" (Gerard, 2004, p. 7). In other words, the auto (self) cannot exist without the ethno (other) and the storyteller has got to inspire the reader to read between the lines and create their own ending. The second characteristic is the inevitable removal of "time" from the equation. Though this narrative is based on me looking back (and forth), my memories are only as old as the day they were transferred from my mind into my manuscript. Creative non-fiction is always produced and consumed in the present (i.e., now), as opposed not in the past or the future (i.e., then). Third, according to Gerard (2004, p. 9), "creative non fiction is narrative, it always tells a good story." Fourth, it contains a "sense of reflection" where the "underlying subject has been percolating through the writer's imagination for some time, waiting for the right outlet" (Gerard, 2004, p. 10). In my case, it has been five years, and the outlet is a special edition on alternative methodologies in sport management. The fifth and final rule, according to Gerard (2004, p. 11), is that the author must demonstrate an attempt to master the "craft of writing", which can include "interesting turns of phrase, fresh metaphors, lively and often scenic presentations, a shunning of clichés and obvious endings, a sense of control over nuance, accurate use of words, and a governing aesthetic sensibility." In sum, in keeping with all the other forms of autoethnography, the writing is of equal importance as the subject (Gerard, 2004). I hate clichés, love a good metaphor, and, as you will soon discover, have opted to end this piece of creative non-fiction in a far from obvious manner.

As noted in the abstract, the aim of this piece of creative non-fiction was to acknowledge the autoethnographers who have inspired me to produce personal narratives that help me make sense of my world. I hope that you are able to identify elements of Gerard's (2004) five characteristics in the personal narrative that you are about to conclude. I hope that you will find yourself returning to them again in the future, preferably as you assess the validity of your own personal narrative. It was my intention to target your sociological imagination through a piece of sociological introspection. My goals were to showcase how evocative autoethnography can be utilised to get people thinking, talking, and thanking the lessons learned from their own lived experiences. More specifically, my goal was to get you to reflect upon the legacy-makers you would want to publicly acknowledge if you ever found yourself facing the prospect of producing personal narratives or innovative pieces of creative non-fiction. It was not to argue the advantages or disadvantages of embracing autoethnography (as so many others have already done). It was not to offer an authentic reproduction of my doctoral thesis (something I believe to be impossible). Those wanting more should take a look at the sources of reference found at the end of this paper. Alternatively, you could enter "From the Abbey to the Academy" into Google, open the online repository and add yourself to the ever-growing number of downloaders.

Personally, I do not have to access Google to identify the legacy of my first attempt at creative non-fiction. I can just shut my eyes and think about the people acknowledged in this paper. In 2009, Mike asked me to produce a chapter for a book that he was co-editing on the leisure and tourism experience. Saying no was never an option, despite my desire to follow my thesis experience with something much less intense. The book was published whilst Mike was battling what turned out to be terminal cancer. He lost on Christmas Eve 2010, leaving the world a much poorer place as a consequence. Thanks to Mike, I find myself in a position where I would like to inspire other aspiring philosophers to trust the voices in their head. Thanks to Rich and Dave, I want the number of downloads to continue growing, particularly amongst those who have found themselves situated within the sport management space. Thanks to Kate, I am now ready to take the next step and to start publicly leveraging the legacy of my own lived experiences. Thanks to Kate, I found myself wanting to produce and consume autoethnographical creative non-fiction once more.

Kate's confessions helped me to appreciate the extent to which I had missed the production and consumption of personal narratives. As a fellow sport event management scholar, she provided the fuel that I needed to re-awaken the post-structuralist trapped in my head. To me, the relevance of my story to the study of sport management is obvious, and somewhat unmistakable. To me, sport is a socially constructed phenomenon that relies on the production and consumer of active, equally passionate participants. We may be able to watch it from the comfort of our sofa, but you can not beat the experience of actually being there. Sport management not a subject for those with no past connection or present interest in either the production or consumption of sport. Like tourism and event studies, sport is a subject that attracts students and scholars with inside knowledge of how the game is played. Doloriert and Sambrook (2012) introduced three emergent possibilities attached to Boyle and Parry's (2007) notion of organisational autoethnography, effectively highlighting the benefits attached to telling stories that reveal the mundane, ignored and distorted, revisit past work experiences and require collaboration with colleagues who share the same work environment.

Tell me I am wrong. Tell me that you are not a sport fan or follower. Tell me that you have never dreamed of what it would be like to represent your country, or to be an elite-level performer who is paid to travel the world. Tell me that you are not interested in leaving behind a legacy for those that follow, or that your personal interests have never once influenced your professional activity. Tell me that you have never read an (auto)biography, or watched the sports news. Be truthful. Look back. Look around. What or who is preventing you from submitting these stories to sport management journals? What or who is responsible for getting you to this point in your life, and when was the last time that you thanked the sources of your information, inspiration and imagination? Ultimately, in my eyes, sport is all about the acknowledgement of past idols and present day heroes (i.e., the legacy-makers). The most memorable athletes, and the most magical of sporting fixtures, are those who evoke an emotional reaction. This is what separates sport from the arts.

Back in 2007, I saw evocative autoethnographers as the stage performers and thespians of the academy. Looking back, I was no doubt influenced by Mike's involvement in amateur drama. Right now, I see autoethnographers as having more in common with the elite athletes of the world. Like us, they seek to evoke a reaction, and stimulate the imagination of their

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target audience. Like us, they wish to put on an unforgettable performance that gets people talking, thinking, and thanking those around them. Clearly, the sporting arena and the academy have long been connected and share many similarities. Both are competitive. Both can be painful, and both involve a certain degree of trial and error. Both require practice, patience, perseverance, and, most importantly of all, passion. Both involve collaboration and learning from others. Many top teachers are also sports coaches and athletes; whilst many top coaches and athletes go on to make excellent teachers. I am not alone (I cannot be). I have heard of many elite athletes who hate watching replays of their past performances. I cannot be the only author afraid to revisit stories produced in the past. Tell me I am wrong.

Autoethnography is about looking in the mirror. Creative non-fiction is about being completely honest, and true to yourself. Those asking themselves "so what?" as they struggle to assess the value, validity, or viability of my contribution to this special edition, may find the final extract of particular use. Its value to this story was initially questioned by both my blind reviewers, making me revisit, reconsider and revise where it fits within the story. Rather than remove it, I have opted to relocate it to the very end of the paper. In doing so, I am allowing two of my best friends to have the final say in this piece of creative non-fiction, much like I let them have the final say in my thesis. I say "best friends" with my tongue firmly placed against the inside of my cheek. Truth be told, we have never met, and I would be surprised if they even knew that I existed. I doubt that they have downloaded my doctoral thesis or recommended it to any of their postgraduate students (clearly, I would love to be wrong). I have come close to forwarding it to them on several occasions, along with a brief introduction and acknowledgement of their contribution, but have always been too afraid to hit the send button. I am afraid that they'd hate it, or that I would come across as an obsessed fan or, worse still, a groupie. Maybe our paths will cross at some point in the future, in which case I would happily walk over and say hello.

To Carolyn Ellis (who created them) and Andrew Sparkes (who shared them), the following 12 factors represent the key things that should be evident in evocative autoethnography. Following their lead, like many others have done over the past decade, they became the same assessment criteria that I applied to my thesis. From November 2008 to June 2009, I had a copy of the 12 ingredients pinned up in my office. I used them to self-assess the stories written during this time, typically the evening before I was due to pass my work over to Mike and Rich for feedback. While not all applied to my thesis, and not all are applicable to this piece of creative non-fiction, I hope that you can see where I have tried to include them into this personal narrative. The list offers advice to anyone thinking about producing an autoethnography. The list represents the rules of engagement. The list is my parting gift to you.

1. The use of systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall;
2. The inclusion of the researcher's vulnerable selves, emotions, body, and spirit;
3. The production of evocative stories that create the effect of reality;
4. The celebration of concrete experience and intimate detail;
5. The examination of how human experience is endowed with meaning;
6. A concern with moral, ethical, and political consequences;
7. An encouragement of compassion and empathy;
8. A focus on helping us know how to live and cope;
9. The featuring of multiple voices and the repositioning of readers and "subjects" as co-participants in dialogue;
10. The seeking of a fusion between social science and literature;
11. The connecting of the practices of social science with the living of life;
12. The representation of lived experience using a variety of genres – short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. (Ellis, 2000, pp. 273–277)

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