The Theater of Narration

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Many moons ago when my mom left this earth, one of the thoughts that most haunted me was that I felt too few people knew her brilliance. Where was the state service? Where were the flags at half-mast? Where was the declaration of a national holiday in her memory? It was a feeling that distills the ways in which the private world can overshadow the shared public one. When I discovered the theater of narration only a year or two later, it reaffirmed for me what I had begun to realize then: everyone’s individual stories hold monumental weight, electricity, and potential even if they never reach beyond a select body of listeners. Initially I thought the theater of narration was about the many lives of stories, but actually it is about the many people whose lives are connected by their private stories, personal stories that bind the public histories so many of us share. The first person I wish to acknowledge is the person with whom my story began, a beginning that was already more than halfway through her own story. Her loving memory is written in these pages.

As the theater of narration has also taught me, what might appear the ending to a story is sometimes a new beginning. I understood this to be true when I met my partner, Josh, to whom I dedicate this work. In walking with each other down one path that was coming to an end, we found ourselves on an entirely new course. Our shared experiences and life together have been the happiest days I have known, and I am humbled by his generosity, intellect, and, well, he makes me laugh too. In the many stages of this study all those qualities continually manifested as we discussed my ideas, challenges, and goals. Our Livia, independent and joyous, and our Raffaella, achingly sweet and surprisingly stubborn, distract me from my work and will me into their wondrous present and remind me that the two are connected. I dedicate this study to them as well. The other member of our immediate family needs acknowledgment too. Augustus Stellan, or Gus (“Gas” in Italy), has sat at our feet patiently on many long flights, accompanied me to a number of libraries, archives, and interviews in Italy, and proves the aphorism that when you rescue an animal, the animal rescues you. The family bridging the one to whom I was born with the one that I helped create are my two best friends, Frances Sullivan and Elissa Crum. We have been together for all Dickensian time, and they are pillars of my world. Paul Levesque has cheered for me since high school soccer games through my professional life, and I thank him for his steady encouragement and love.
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Our lives seem small, and in many ways they are. There is nothing like writing the acknowledgments to your first book to make you realize, with awe and humility, that there are so many chance encounters, fortuitous circumstances, and people whose lives intersect with yours and nudge along new experiences and perceptions. Together our narratives tell their own history. May we remember to listen.

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