2010

Autobiography as self-defense in the works of Agnes Newton-Keith and Michelle Kennedy

Robin Heim

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS SELF-DEFENSE IN THE WORKS OF
AGNES NEWTON-KIEHT AND MICHELLE KENNEDY

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition:
English Literature

by
Robin Heim
September 2010
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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

As recently as March 2010, with the broadcast of HBO's, *The Pacific*, graphic documentaries and novels on World War II have often overlooked the existence of American, civilian, female Prisoners of War who were incarcerated with their children in concentration camps on islands located in the Pacific Theater. And while the plight of the poor is often reported and written about in times of both national economic abundance or decline, information on downward mobility pertaining to American, white, middle class females (with children) who eventually end up living in poverty are nearly non-existent.

This thesis examines the captivity narrative, *Three Came Home*, written in 1947 by Agnes Newton-Keith, and the poverty narrative, *Without a Net: Middle Class and Homeless (with Kids) in America: My Story*, written in 2005 by Michelle Kennedy. When examined together through the lens of Trauma Theory, these narratives provide evidence of how similar the survival skills and strategies are between the American female POW's and American females experiencing downward mobility. This thesis will also show how language uncovers and decodes the presence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder not often associated with women living in poverty.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my Graduate Committee chair and advisor, Dr. David Carlson, whose guidance was integral to the completion of this thesis. His patience and support were instrumental in warding off discontent and discouragement with the often overwhelming task of applying an enormous array of psychological and sociological research to literature.

I would also like to thank Dr. Julie Paegle for her continued enthusiasm throughout the writing process and English Department ASC, Dorothea Cartwright, who answered a multitude of questions and offered assistance in tackling various academic obstacles.

Thanks to all of my close friends and confidants: Pat Mazurek, Sandy Guerrero, Vicki Harlander-Taylor, Nancy Cristler and Norma Pantenburg for never losing faith in my ability to accomplish great things; for their emotional support when life in the mother-hood threatened my sanity; and for periodically dragging me out of my cave for social intervention. Thanks also to my colleague, Jan Hudson, for always supplying just the right amount of sarcasm and witiness, with a spiritual chaser, that I needed after long hours of thesis-based activities.

Above all, I want to thank God because it is only through Him that all things, including the writing of this thesis, are and were possible.
DEDICATION

To my beloved, Ernest Emil Heim Jr., without whose love and humor it would not have been possible for me to continue my academic journey.

To my daughters: Tamantha, Veronica, Elizabeth and Kristina who are all living proof that goodness and beauty do exist in this world.

To my grandchildren: Isaiah, Trent, Jaden, Brenden, Sophia, Logan, Alexis, Elijah, Joshua, Raven, Elizabeth Louise and Scarlett who exemplify the reason why family trees are planted and their gardeners work so diligently to preserve them.

To all the American women who suffered through and / or survived internment, alone or with their children, by the Japanese in the Pacific Theatre of World War II – and American middle class women, especially, who continue to struggle through, and / or who have survived, with humility and grace the fall into poverty.

In memory of my father, Albert Gene Keahn, who taught me more about honesty, integrity, strength of character and perseverance in the fourteen years I had with him, than most people learn in a lifetime, and who passed on his love of reading, learning, and crossword puzzles. And in memory of my mother-in-love, Elizabeth Louise “Bette Lou” Heim, who shared with me a love of writing letters and showed by example what a mother ought to be with her unfailing support in all that I tried to accomplish.
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CHAPTER ONE
THE RHETORIC OF TRAUMA IN LITERATURE

In our nature, however, there is a provision, alike marvelous and merciful, that the sufferer should never know the intensity of what he endures by its present torture, but chiefly by the pang that rankles after it. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlett Letter*

One woman sleeps on the rotting floor of a shack near the sea, another woman slumbers in a car along the beach. One woman feeds her children a daily course of rice; the other serves her children a nightly diet of Ramen noodles. One showers in an open stall surrounded by Japanese soldiers, the other bathes at a pay shower at the local truck stop. The first is a prisoner of war held captive on the island of Borneo, in the South Pacific, in 1942. The second is a prisoner of poverty living in her car, near the Atlantic Ocean, in 2005. Both women are in trauma; members of the walking wounded who struggle to survive physically, mentally, and emotionally in the face of adversity through altered mobility.

As those of American women who survived in concentration camps during World War II, the voices of American women who have survived degradation and humiliation in their fall from the middle-class are often silenced or misconstrued. Therefore, the focus of my thesis is to show how the effects of trauma, now recognized in narratives based on wartime captivity, can be textually located within American poverty narratives in conjunction with sociopolitical, cultural, and psychological causes surrounding downward mobility. In determining how
middle-class women respond to a systematic plunge into poverty, trauma theory, as applied to this emerging genre, recognizes the significant role of psychological defenses instantiated in narrative in the absence of adequate financial and emotional preparation.

This chapter will suggest how the narratives of downwardly mobile American women, like the narratives of American female civilians during wartime, particularly invite analysis using trauma theory discourse. The onset of post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, in both narratives, ironically, becomes a catalyst for both Agnes Newton-Keith and Michelle Kennedy to concentrate on what they need to do in order to ensure their survival, as well as that of their children, during the continuing traumatic experience. In the aftermath of the traumatic event, however, the symptom of denial, associated with PTSD, initially separates two otherwise similar genres. Both the writer and the reader can not deny that World War II, the existence of concentration camps, and the horrors inflicted on human beings occurred in connection with Newton-Keith's captivity narrative; therefore, the presence of the trauma-induced symptom of denial does not lessen the credibility of her experience. Conversely, Kennedy's experience offers no proven historical or social event as the foundation of her traumatic descent; thereby, obscuring the cause of her trauma and the presence of PTSD symptoms.

Specifically, I will explore how poverty narratives are rhetorically composed and how that act enables them to function as defense mechanisms
against the trauma induced by a gradual descent into poverty, which buffers the transitions between the financially inconsistent past, stable present and uncertain future. I will suggest that poverty narratives, which may to some extent assist in the progress from a victim identity to a survivor identity, can also impede said progress by allowing an initial denial of downward mobility. While such denial can, in effect, encourage survival, it also risks perpetuating the larger victimhood and misconstruing of identity of American women who have experienced, or are currently experiencing, this financial phenomenon. Ultimately, then, I hope to explore how poverty narratives risk perpetuating the very silencing and misinterpreting of subjectivity and identity they ideally serve to overcome, and how the implementation of trauma discourse may help us better recognize such vocal suppression and misreading within poverty narrative. Nonetheless, poverty narratives potentially enable narrator and reader alike to acknowledge, recognize and participate in the enigmatic reconstruction of the self, from "victim" to "survivor."

Toward this end, the chapter begins with a brief review of the origin and evolution of trauma theory, highlighting, specifically, its focus on two distinct modes of subjectivity: that of the victim (associated with the less familiar Acute Stress Disorder: resistance / exhaustion) and that of the survivor (associated with the familiar Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: denial, repression, and avoidance). I consider past application of trauma to World War II, in particular, and Vietnam narratives, as commonly applied to soldiers, as well as more recently applied to
American female civilians who have been sexually and / or physically abused. I then take into account the narrative of Agnes Newton-Keith, who, as a civilian American wife of a British civil servant working in North Borneo, was separated from her husband and held captive with her toddler son in a Japanese concentration camp, during the Pacific invasion of WWII. I then introduce the narrative of Michelle Kennedy, who, as a middle-class wife and mother in the first decade of the twenty-first century, found herself embedded in a socio-economic quagmire. Gesturing toward my subsequent comparative analysis, I will substantiate the salient similarities between her poverty narrative and the war narrative of Newton-Keith. The chapter concludes by focusing, in particular, on the mutually dependent identities of each as a woman, wife, mother, and captive in both Newton-Keith's and Kennedy's use of narrative, in identifying trauma and its various defense mechanisms that both contribute to their victimhood and facilitate their ultimate survival.

What is Trauma Theory?

Trauma theory originated in the field of psychology where it has long been employed in the decoding of certain psychological behaviors. The theory has evolved significantly from its first articulations, in the 19th-century by physician Pierre Janet, who defined trauma as a "dissociation" or "disconnection of normally associated ideas," as well as from Sigmund Freud's postulation that trauma and sexuality were consistently connected (Waites 5). (Freud's "theory of
hysteria," implied that women who displayed extreme reactive or non-reactive behavior were suffering from symptoms associated with childhood sexual abuse.) A model of psychobiological changes that occurred when subjects attempted to respond and adapt to continuous stressors, or violence, "that disrupt the normal balance of life," was identified in the early 20th-century by Hans Selye, a Canadian endocrinologist (Hamilton 2). The model, which he called General Adaption Syndrome (GAS), is "both organ specific and cognitive in nature" (Wikipedia 1) and evolves through three phases: "an alarm reaction, which energizes the body for action; a stage of resistance, which is in many respects the opposite of the alarm reaction and may represent an attempt to reinstate homeostasis; and a state of exhaustion, the end point when energy reserves are depleted and breakdown occurs," which in turn can "develop into a pathological state from the ongoing, unrelieved stress" (Waites 24, Wikipedia 1). These phases can be split into two physiological components as well: Acute Stress Disorder (ASD), which is characterized by the development of severe anxiety, dissociative disorder, and other symptoms that occur within one month after exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which normally develops over an extended period of time following the traumatic experience. Acute Stress Disorder, perhaps, can be more closely associated with the victims' rising resistance, and subsequent exhaustion, during and immediately following the initial incident, while Post-Traumatic Stress
Disorder is more commonly that which develops in the survivor during recovery, such as repression and avoidance.

Selye noticed patterns of behavior that were not gender specific, or necessarily induced by sexual violence; patterns that emerged when a person was subjected to continual physical and mental pressure from an outside source. This stress, over time, places a person in a "hypnoid" state, or "splitting of consciousness," that "converts the external stimuli into a surrealistic setting, a subconsciousness shift that overrides the occurring stressful situation with an imagined position that places the victim in control" – and enables them to function through the ongoing trauma. Eventually, it was recognized that these patterns of behavior would resurface periodically in the aftermath of the traumatic event, when the cause of the trauma no longer existed or posed a threat, in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Why then, in the later half of the 20th-century and beginning of the 21st-century, should trauma theory attract the attention of disciplines other than psychology and become a pivotal subject connecting them? Why has it taken so long, in general, "to recognize, elaborate, and apply the three suggestions for traumatic theory put forward by Freud: in Studies in Hysteria, concerning the dynamics of trauma, repression, and symptom formation; in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, a work which originated in his treatment of World War I combat veterans who suffered from repeated nightmares and other symptoms of their wartime experiences; and in Moses and Monotheism, his attempt to construct a
theory of trauma that would account for the historical development of entire cultures" to the autobiographies or memoirs of women caught in the conflicts of war or on the edge of poverty (Berger 569 - 70).

Historically, trauma theory and the recognition of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms have been connected to "social emergencies" such as war, specifically in regard to male soldiers, because "the stresses of war have provided some of the most dramatic examples of what happens when human beings are pushed beyond their adaptive limits" (Waites 36). Our understanding of trauma, in regard to both medical and psychiatric fields, is a fairly recent phenomenon. The "nineteenth century was well acquainted with symptoms of hysteria, a disease whose etiology had been allied mysteriously with the female gender" and only "when the manifestation of similar symptoms in males fighting on the front during World War I became recognizable were physicians impelled to diagnose the devastating effects" (Henke xi). Hysteria and war go together. Often similar symptoms, identified by different parties, appear to be different things and are, therefore, given various names or labels. "Military physicians were loath to label their men with an illness that had always been associated with women. How could fighting men be hysterics?" (Hustvedt 75). Much of what is known, even today, about trauma comes out of the Veteran's Administration hospitals. Although this information has been extremely valuable, "researchers have recognized that although there is some overlap, trauma models based on men's experiences do not completely describe the experiences of women"
A growing interest in the value of trauma theory, as it is applied to various disciplines, has focused on two different and distinct modes of subjectivity in connection with trauma studies. The first approach centers on the victim who suffers from Acute Stress Disorder (ASD), in which physical and mental characteristic symptoms of stress-induced trauma are developed. While the second method concentrates on the survivor who suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), in which many of those characteristic symptoms of stress-induced trauma are sustained through denial, repression, and emotional avoidance years after the traumatic event.

Recent research indicates that men and women respond somewhat differently to stress with the "centrality of relationships as sources of stress and trauma [being] one way that women's experiences can be vastly different from those of men." Beyond traumatic historical or natural events, women "appear to be more vulnerable to PTSD after continuous exposure to [seemingly] mundane stressors such as childcare and economic challenges." "Survival mode" patterns have been found to vary considerably between the genders; women are more likely to utilize what is referred to as the "tend and befriend" response, choosing to stay to protect and nurture their children or others in their care when under threat, as opposed to the classically identified "fight or flight" pattern generally exhibited by men (Kendall-Tackett 3). Therefore, the significance of trauma theory that has surfaced among literary and cultural theorists, such as Cathy Caruth and Leigh Gilmore, primarily in connection to narratives of female
physical and sexual abuse, has become pivotal in "critiquing oppressive forces and questioning the effectiveness" of the survival tactics "victims employ" (Vickroy xiii).

Studies on battle fatigue, shell shock, and night terrors from World War II and Vietnam were first utilized by academic scholars to deconstruct texts written by men who fought on the frontlines, such as E. B. Sledge's, *With the Old Breed*, and *Dear Mom: A Sniper's Story* by Joseph T. Ward. In recent years war novels like *Slaughter-House Five* by Kurt Vonnegut have been reexamined through the lens of trauma theory, prompting scholars to research and reconsider the effects of PTSD on female military nurses and soldiers. It should be noted, however, that war-time nurses and soldiers of both genders are not the sole inheritors of PTSD. Close readings of texts written by American female captives of war, from the Indian wars to the current war on terrorism, also reveal evidence of PTSD behaviors.

Texts written by American female captives of war, from the Indian Wars to the current war in Iraq, such as Mary Rowlandson's, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, and *I am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story* by Jessica Lynch, as told to Rick Bragg, upon close examination also reveal evidence of PTSD. Therefore, it is reasonable to presume that the application of trauma theory to narratives written by female civilian war captives will expose how, when faced with situations and events that pose a threat to their survival, these women
have exhibited behaviors and participated in actions that they would not have
done under normal circumstances. Stripped of their accustomed lifestyles and
forced to tread on unfamiliar ground, the imposition of unforeseen loss and fear
uncovers an intricate capacity to overcome emotional and physical strain through
intrinsic and strategic approaches to life-threatening situations, generally not
expected of nor associated with civilian women. This clearly suggests how
"trauma theory can be of great value in the study of [poverty] narratives [...] as
the verbal representation of temporality [and allow] for an interpretation of cultural
symptoms" that underscore the fall through downward mobility towards poverty
(Berger 573). When applied to poverty narratives, especially those written by
middle-class women who have experienced tremendous loss through downward
mobility, and faced similar fears of survival, trauma theory renders an interesting
similarity with war memoirs produced by civilian women.

Canadian scholar Roxanne Rimstead has studied the genre of poverty
narratives and how they interrogate the Western myth of the highly individuated
subject and their ability to deal with events leading to financial and material loss.
"By considering the identities of poor subjects in relation to nation, gender, and
class," writes Rimstead, "and by making poverty central rather than a backdrop
to our interpretation of textual culture" or "by concluding that the subaltern cannot
speak, cultural critics should allow the possibility that poor subjects have special
knowledge [as] cultural subjects in ways that academic criticism has somehow
been overlooking or devaluing" (5-6). The survivor [of war or poverty] is, as
James Berger states in his review of "Trauma and Literary Theory," a kind of "black box," a source of knowledge and authority (571). But where Rimstead gives voice to those Canadians mired in generational poverty, I seek to enlighten the reader on the phenomenon of America's new poor, or "nouveau poor" as they have been called — single, middle-class, American women with children and their struggle to retain normalcy against societal odds (Sidel 28).

There is an intangible space occupied by civilian female prisoners of war and females in poverty, where trauma has been largely unacknowledged. This space, situated between the onset of the trauma and the end result of the continuous adaptation following the traumatic event, is where the victim "accepts that life probably won't ever return to the way it used to be" and the survivor begins to take shape as the victim let's go, adapts, and embraces the "new normal" (Sherwood 18). This space is where the "Domino Effect" resides; the downward spiral as one loss leads to another. The lack of acknowledgement of this space is perhaps due to the deferred nature of traumatic experience and the difficulty of finding words to adequately describe "the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (Caruth 7).

Uncovering the Space Where Trauma Resides

Narratives and novels of captivity attempt to fill this intangible space by demonstrating that "crossing borders, of culture or class, exposes the captive to
physical hardship and psychological trauma"; in addition, they reveal how this exposure builds and, subsequently, "reinforces an innate desire to prevail over fear and harsh conditions" (Burham 3). This realization, in part, sparked the Feminist movement to begin searching for captivity narratives written by women who had been engaged in war (if not in actual battle, then on the sidelines, of the battlefronts).

During the 1980s, "considerable research began accumulating on PTSD as observed in veterans of the Vietnam War. Within the same period, clinicians working with female victims of rape and battering began to develop paradigms for understanding and treating women, and there was a revival in the interest in the dissociative disorders" (Waites 37-38). Since then, numerous narratives and memoirs have emerged uncovering female victims of childhood sexual abuse, as well as adult females victimized through rape and other forms of physical violence. What has been less discernable, and more difficult to locate, are narratives of poverty that demonstrate that it is not necessary to "[cross] transcultural borders," to be addicted to drugs or alcohol, to be abused, or to be born into poverty in order to be "[exposed to the captive-like] physical hardship and psychological trauma" which Burnham discusses. And while it is understood that being poor in America is not the same as being poor elsewhere in the world, it should be emphasized that a person does not have to be born into a third-world country to enter into a life of poverty.
Like Cathy Caruth’s argument that “trauma as it first occurs is incomprehensible and that it is only later, after a period of latency, that it can be placed in a narrative,” Elizabeth A. Waites, *Trauma and Survival: Post-Traumatic and Dissociative Disorders in Women*, states, “where negative effects are not immediately obvious, they may eventually become obvious”; therefore, “the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located” (Berger 577, Waites 31, Caruth 8). Waites observation is significant, because both captive and poverty narratives reveal that when faced with the pending invasion of the enemy, or with the pending loss of a spouse, most women believe that they will be physically, mentally, and financially safe despite their own intuition and doubts concerning their safety and the safety of their families, in the light of obvious risk. As Agnes Newton-Keith acknowledges, *Three Came Home*, her decision to stay on Borneo, which seemed reasonable at the time “as she had [both] a job and a husband [on the island]” was proven idealistic and unrealistic in retrospect, because “in wartime,” or in times of severe emotional stress, “the [civilian] individual is not in a position” to properly assess their situation and to prepare defense tactics for survival (23). While War poses an unusually dramatic situation, Waites emphasizes that: “The fact that a traumatic event is commonplace does not necessarily preclude the longstanding autonomic effects which contribute to the kinds of pathology described as typical PTSD” (39). Newton-Keith’s decision to stay on Borneo and Michelle Kennedy’s decision to leave her husband placed both women on a traumatic downward
journey that resulted in one woman struggling to survive with her son in a
Japanese concentration camp for three years and the other woman sinking into
homelessness with her three children. Their decisions, made decades apart,
under varying measures of duress, bring forth discourses that are compellingly
similar. The nearly identical methods of survival exercised and expressed by
both Newton-Keith and Kennedy, in their respective situations, lends evidence as
to how external social, economical, and political systems can create and
perpetuate trauma in connection with poverty, in much the same ways as foreign
invasion does in times of warfare.

Trauma, Narrative and Identity

What is the relationship between survival and narrative, and how does the
discourse expose the element of trauma permeating this relationship? The
presence of trauma does not simply involve the existence of physical, mental,
and emotional deconstruction within a "victim" but also, fundamentally, the
enigmatic reconstruction of a "survivor." What does it mean to survive? What
happens to the mind, body, and soul in the space between the "before" and the
"after" of a traumatic experience? We gain access to this space through the
stories of those who have triumphed over their circumstances and are willing to
share their experience. Refusing to be a victim "changes the questions that are
asked, both of your external and internal world and by changing the questions
that are asked, identity may be formatted in a new way" (Tannen 181).
Psychoanalysis has forgotten that its founder "cured" his own hysteria not through talking but through writing. "Freud first linked a trauma with a symptom in the form of linguistic expression, which entailed the idea that a cure could be found through the use of language" (Mitchell 126 & 131). A great deal of evidence now suggests that the formulation of narrative cohesion can reconfigure the individual's obsessive mental processing of embedded traumatic scripts. By "transforming the emotions associated with the memories into words and transferring them from the mind to paper, relief of many of the major symptoms of PTSD can apparently be reversed and, therefore, the act of writing becomes a ritual of healing" (Henke 181 & 183).

Memoir and autobiography "are characterized by particular acts of interpretation: lived experience is shaped, revised, constrained, and transformed by representation. In telling the story of the self, the writer imposes order where there is chaos, structural coherence where there is memory and chronology, [and] voice where there is silence" (Gilmore 85). Cathy Caruth reminds us that "trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival" (58). "Trauma narratives," adds Vickroy, "immerse us in individual experiences of terror, arbitrary rules, and psychic breakdown so that we might begin to appreciate these situations" (34).

Fairly current in the field of narratology, according to Suzette Henke, is the term "narrative recovery," a term that pivots on "a double entendre meant to evoke both the recovery of past experience through narrative articulation and the
psychological reintegration of a traumatically shattered subject." It is, states Henke, "healing made possible through the public inscription of personal testimony" (xxii). Therefore, suggestion has been made "that testimony is the literary -- or discursive -- mode par excellence of our times, and that our era can precisely be defined as the age of testimony" (Felman & Laub 5).

Acknowledging the "Other" Victim of Poverty by Exposing the "Other" Victim of War

As a former WWII POW later wrote when recounting Japanese invasion of the Philippines: "I felt as if the foundation of our life were being suddenly removed, that we were suspended over an abyss" (Kaminski 28). Kaminski expresses the suspended feeling, or detachment, associated with a form of the Cartesian Split between the mind and the body that seems to occur from the moment a traumatic event is subconsciously, if not consciously, accepted. This split generally occurs when the body is subjected to physical or sexual abuse; the victim shields her mind from directly acknowledging the pain by suppressing her emotions and forcing conscious thought to focus on a real or imagined subject, time, or place. Examples of the Cartesian Split occurring in literature can be found in fictional accounts of rape, such as the repetitive string-of-consciousness depicted at the beginning of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and the dreamlike sequences of Precious Jones in *Push* by Sapphire. Subconsciously though, the human subject, according to Chris Weeden, is always split and divided, constantly being reconstructed in discourse each time we think or speak. Therefore, a similar Cartesian Split occurs within "the writer between the 'I now"
who tells the story and the 'I then' textually constructed as their non-fictional narrative unfolds" (Henke 148). This detachment, expected to be found in memoirs of war or abuse, is also expressed in poverty narratives where middle-class women find themselves eking out an existence barely above those persons identified as the generationally poor. It is not uncommon for these women to separate or dissociate themselves from physical or financial ruin to avoid emotional pain; hence, "the same phenomenon of splitting off from one's body or awareness that can reduce the victim's immediate sense of helplessness and bolster their endurance to overcome and survive the initial traumatic situation, also occurs when the subject attempts to recall the event and construct narrative testimony" (Vickroy 13).

The split of body and mind is, perhaps, the most vital coping mechanism available to human beings. "Traumatic experience generates inevitable psychic fragmentation," according to Suzette Henke. It is what allows those in captivity to think beyond the horror, or fear, of the moment, such as when Newton-Keith is cornered by a "Nipponese" soldier, "The guard...bent over me, ran his two hands roughly down my breasts, over my thighs, and forced them violently up between my legs. The gesture so astounded me that I was paralyzed. I could think of nothing" (141). Even though the rape was aborted when another soldier happened upon the scene, Newton-Keith confesses that, "Many times in my mind, since imprisonment, I have lived through such scenes vicariously [...] the surprise and shock are great. [Rape or the possibility of being raped] is the sort
of thing which occurs to other people, but not to [me]" (149). So, "by isolating
certain memories...the individual can defend herself against the intolerable
awareness that 'The trauma happened to ME. It HAPPENED. I could not control
it'" (Waites 32). The process of "[delivering] the goods from the 'out there' of [the
event or experience] to the 'in here' of the text," the "reexternalization of the
event can occur and take place only when one can articulate and transmit the
story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again,
inside" (Gilmore 74, Felman & Laub 69). This representation of "the 'other' within
the self that retains the memory of the 'unwitting' traumatic events of one's past,"
perhaps, is most evident by the rapid exchange between past and present tenses
by the authors within each text. This "listening to the voice of the 'other' within"
reflects the juggling of the split-self as the "trauma [is] written not only about but
in the midst of [the ongoing] trauma" as the writer works to heal the victim that
resides within the survivor (Caruth 8).

When an individual is experiencing downward mobility, poverty is not just
a possibility, in most cases it is inevitable; a similar dualism occurs when both
stigma and reality collide. After months of living in her car, Kennedy writes: "I
cheerfully walk into the Job Center -- doing my best to put on an air of the kind of
person who is 'just down on my luck -- not a perpetual welfare case. I do not want
to be associated with the really poor people. I am not really poor. I just don't have
a house" (93). Kennedy's attempt to rationalize her situation before entering the
Job Center demonstrates the tandem affect between dissociation and denial,
which reflects the "depersonalization" and "derealization" trauma victims rely on to navigate through unwelcome or unfamiliar experiences.

By reflecting on the fact that she escaped being raped by her captors, even though she remained in an inescapable position as a captive within the concentration camp, Newton-Keith reinforces her perception that she survived the war physically and emotionally intact. In much the same way, Kennedy indirectly identifies with her past as a member of the middle-class in an effort to reinforce her perception that she is not poor, even though she is financially broke and homeless.

Through narration, the writer works through the circumstances before, during, and after the traumatic experience, a process that allows them to gain the power that they did not have at the time the events were happening, by controlling how their story is presented to the reader. "The story of the trauma then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality -- the escape from a death, or from a similar referential force -- attests to the event's endless impact on a life" (Caruth 7). By careful attention given to the order of the events, and the possible causes that triggered their behavior and actions, the narrators bring some form of sense to the profoundly enigmatic experiences each endured. "If traumatic experience is an experience that is not fully assimilated as it occurs, then these texts ask what it means to transmit and to theorize around a crisis that is marked, not by a simple knowledge, but by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands the reader's witness" (Caruth 5).
Though Newton-Keith lost the security of her husband by force and Kennedy relinquished any security from her spouse by choice, both women took on full responsibility for themselves and their children in light of an uncertain future. With trauma, “the outside has gone inside without any mediation,” therefore, "The effect of a traumatic event is not a simple function of the event itself -- but a complex function of the individual's control over what happens" (Caruth 59, Waites 20). Perhaps, more importantly, it is the simultaneous lack of control to provide basic necessities or security for themselves and their children, coupled with the continual loss of self and material items, that exacerbates the effects of trauma.

When initially taken to the concentration camps, the women "expected release to come, the war to end, or ourselves to be dead, quite quickly" (53), so when the war did not end and release did not come as anticipated, Newton-Keith shares, "I [began] speaking to [my son] George with a hysterical violence which I hated, but could not control. I did not have the food to give him when he asked for it; if I did I was so hungry I could not sit with him when he ate it. Daily I saw myself becoming hard, bitter, and mean" (149). Likewise, Kennedy confesses, "It's been several weeks since I began this 'plan' [of surviving without my husband] and it's beginning to take a toll on me, both mentally and physically [...] I try not to eat too much when I'm with [the children]. I'd rather they eat everything we have. I yell [to no one in particular] because it's the only thing I can do, because I feel powerless. I want someone else to be responsible for this
mess I'm in" (78-80). This, according to Vickroy, "displays [part] of the considerable focus in [such] texts on changes to the self [while] undergoing trauma and learning to survive, even if in a marginal way" (20).

Perhaps the greatest attribute of women POWs who survived untold horrors and immeasurable deprivation was their determination to guard their children, not only from what they were capable of seeing, but also from the unseen — the fear their mothers harbored but refused to exhibit. "The realization [of my son's] complete dependence on me for mental and emotional stability in his future life, as much as for physical health, forced me to make tremendous effort to accept difficulties and dangers," states Newton-Keith, "if not calmly, at least without hysteria or tears. Weak though I knew myself to be, I wanted him to believe me all-powerful, ready to cope with all emergencies" (43). Kennedy echoes similar concerns:

Fear. My life has become about fear. Feeling it. Living it. Abating it. I am afraid of the dark. Of what can happen to me and the children in the dark. Of having no money. I am afraid of being a bad mother. Of my car breaking down for good. Of being alone...forever. I live with a stomach constantly in knots. My life has become a tunnel, and I am focused on getting through it, but I am afraid of what I will find on the other side [...] I want to rant. I want to rave. But I don't. I don't want the kids to think that anything is really wrong. (95, 109 - 110)
Traumatic context is radically different from that in which we expect to find ethical standards and notions of choice; it gives the reader pause so that he / she may begin to understand the complexities surrounding events and how lives are forever altered as a result of the means needed to survive (Waites 24). Being held captive, like Newton-Keith, by an enemy who is flesh and bone like the victim, however, may be easier to contend with than an intangible oppressor. For Kennedy, and women who must stand up to a "system," the enemy is ambiguous and indirect. Trauma can be a "powerful indicator of oppressive cultural institutions and practices [...] Psychological conflicts illustrate the social contexts and causes that reinforce trauma" (Vickroy 4). Trauma is underresearched compared to other disorders and trauma theory is still not applied to works of literature as broadly as it could be. Repression, dissociation, and denial are phenomena of social as well as individual consciousness. Like Newton-Keith, Kennedy is a captive; but where Netwon-Keith's captivity is defined in terms of physical boundaries, Kennedy is confined within boundaries created by the red tape of state and federal policy. Ignorance about traumatic responses can not only lead to misinterpretation of the text by the critic or reader, but can also prohibit a deeper examination of the text as it relates to the human condition (Vickroy 18-19, Herman 9).

In the chapters to follow, I will explore the profound similarities between Newton-Keith's war captivity narrative, Three Came Home, and Kennedy's
poverty narrative, *Without a Net: Middle Class and Homeless (with Kids) in America: My Story*. I will attempt to show how, when examined together, the language of these two narrative genres utilizes the formulation of trauma as theory by focusing on the "peculiar incomprehensibility" of women to endure tremendous loss, as an important tool to bring both literary critics and readers "closer to the victim's position of uncertainty" and validate the "healing properties of narrative" as a way to recover "a sense of self and agency in the face of devastating losses" (Caruth 58, Vickroy 9). Reading these two texts through the lens of trauma theory, I will demonstrate how each narrative functions to facilitate each author's "dissociation" from her traumatic experience while also allowing her to establish retroactively some degree of control over an otherwise disorderly experience. These two narrative processes, it seems to me, are central to the shift from victim identity to survivor identity common to all "trauma" texts. But in the end, the commonality should lead us to other, more complex, reflections on the ways in which poverty is framed in American society in particular.
CHAPTER TWO
THE CAPTIVE VOICE

It takes two to speak the truth – one to speak, and another to hear.
Henry David Thoreau, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

"All of this happened, more or less," is the opening line of Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five (1). The novel is a fictional account of one soldier's experience during World War II; it is also a fairly comprehensive overview of the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder on an individual struggling to survive and make sense out of the past and how it affects the everyday events around him. The fact that Vonnegut chose to recall his own war experiences in a fictional setting, with an omniscient narrator, reveals the difficulty many soldiers encountered when attempting to recall the horrors and disappointments they endured. As Diane Ackerman states, we are "Born fictioneers [....] we quest for causes and explanations, and if they don't come readily to hand, we make them up, because a wrong answer is better than no answer" (15). Yet it is one thing to create a fictional novel, drawn loosely from disjointed memories of an experience, into a coherent recollection of a war, it is another to write a memoir, pieced together from notes written in real time on fragments of paper, into an orderly understanding of what, exactly, happened to you during the war.

"Conversations of interest I tried to record as soon as possible, for I wanted facts, not conclusions," states Agnes Newton-Keith, recognizing that
even with the best intentions, victims of extreme trauma often misconstrue events and misplace time in their recollections (118). Unlike a majority of war narratives preceding and following World War II, told by persons who stood on the periphery of, or a great distance from, the battle zone, Agnes Newton-Keith's, *Three Came Home*, reconstructs what it is to live within the confines of warfare through the experience of a woman who must unravel the paradox of being a civilian prisoner of war - struggling to adapt the values and mores of an affluent, middle-class life to the daily degradation and gradual deprivation of living in a concentration camp. "In keeping my record of imprisonment," Newton-Keith says, "I always tried to write my notes secretly, sometimes after dark at night, by starlight, moonlight, or no light at all, just by the sense of feel" (117). She admits that by the time of her liberation, malnutrition had affected her eyesight and other senses. She confesses that, "There were many things I did not dare to put on paper, even for myself," because of the fear of being placed in a cell for months, away from her son, or of being executed (118). A journalist prior to her life in Borneo, Agnes Newton-Keith, used notes she managed to hide and preserve during her incarceration by the Japanese, to write a memoir focusing on that period. In doing so, she created a narrative that not only enabled her to process the experience of her war captivity, but also extend our understanding of the scope of war trauma.

In spite of the long history of the condition, failure to equate post-traumatic stress as a disorder affecting the general population, perhaps, was due to the
initial appellations given to the diagnosis that linked it specifically to military events. And, according to Dr. Charles R. Figley in his study, _Trauma and Its Wake_, labeling the symptoms as war-related, such as "Post-Vietnam syndrome," may have detracted "from forming an appropriate concept of a wider variety of disorders, such as withdrawal, depression, depersonalization and anxiety, which are seen in response to stress" (13).

"Incorporating one's experience as a victim involves reworking one's assumptions about oneself and the world so that they 'fit' with one's new personal data," according to Dr. Figley (23). As in Vonnegut's fictional novel, reworking her war experience through the process of writing is the tool Newton-Keith uses in an attempt to recognize, identify, and bridge the void between the person she was prior to the war and the person she is after the war ends. Little has been researched on the affects of war on civilian women and the tropes that cast men as "Just Warriors" and women as non-violent "Beautiful Souls," offering "succor and compassion," such binaries do not denote who women really are in time of war, but function instead to re-create and secure their position as the weaker sex, incapable of participating in, or being affected by, traumatic events (Elshtain 4). The near "absence of women's self-representational war texts from the critical histories that authorize autobiography indicates the extent to which the genre that functions as the closest textual version of the political ideology of individualism is gendered as 'male'" (Gilmore 2). Therefore, one reason a text like Newton-Keith's is so important is that it participates in a slow extension of our
understanding of the scope of war trauma moving from male soldiers to other categories of war victims.

**War and Trauma**

Between WWI and WWII, psychologists had identified symptoms and labeled them under terms such as "soldier's heart," "shell shock," and "combat fatigue." The years following the Korean and Vietnam wars brought to the surface a series of situational disorders that contained elements of the same or similar symptoms displayed by male soldiers engaged in active battle, such as loss of identity, dissociation, and memory manipulation exhibited in soldiers who were not exposed to rapid fire or exploding missiles. Historically, novels and narratives based on the horrors of war have been, for the most part, written by men and centered on the male soldier, or patriot. War, in general, has always been a masculine domain with an emphasis on the brave soldier facing the firing line; the battlefront has not been readily identified as a place where the male psyche becomes permanently altered, or where women are normally found engaging with the enemy. While the omission of the effects brought on by the heinous events of war on the human condition has preserved the belief that fear belongs to the weak, has no redeeming value, and makes no contribution to survival, the sparseness of documentation regarding women's roles in mobilization, resistance, demobilization, and recovery in war have preserved the
beliefs that war is exclusively masculine. Therefore, women who did attempt to write and share their experiences of war, particularly those who were captives, often found their credibility questioned. "As active narrators of their own war histories, women defy traditional masculine authority and authorship in defining the strategies and skills needed to survive" (Fitzpatrick 5). However, close analysis of works produced by women around the middle of the twentieth century who were prisoners of war, has produced evidence that combat alone is not the total sum of war and that the cost to women, direct or indirect, has yet to be comprehensively calculated.

Female Civilian War Captives

According to Kathryn Derounian-Stodola, in Women's Indian Captivity Narratives, the narrative record of captivity usually differs in style and story according to the captive's gender. "Men are socially constructed as active subjects with an emphasis on their physical strength, endurance and intelligence, while women are cast as passive objects, physically frail and emotional, especially when families are destroyed or dispersed" (xx - xxi). "The non-combatant female," writes Jean Bethke Elshtain, author of War and Women, "becomes history's Beautiful Soul, a collective being embodying values and virtues at odds with war's destructiveness, representing home and hearth and the humble verities of everyday life" (xiii). In Three Came Home, Agnes Newton-Keith "presents an alternative to the teleological structure of traditional war stories with their foreordained movement from brave and fearful beginnings to
triumphant or tragic endings" by quashing stereotypes and theories that have built the primary foundations for most wartime narratives (Elshtain xii). Newton-Keith was living in North Borneo when the Japanese invaded the island in January of 1942. Forcefully separated from her husband, Harry, a British civil servant, and placed in a separate concentration camp for women with her two-year-old son, George, Newton-Keith did not emerge from captivity until September of 1945. Her narrative is rich with "suppressed personal [history]" and the "consequences of traumatic events," which Laurie Vickroy cites, "challenge cultural myths about traumatic experience," especially when the reader is given the theoretical tools to "incorporate the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of trauma within the consciousness and structures of these works" (xiii - xiv).

Few women who experienced the brutal events of war have ventured to write about it, or to acknowledge any trauma associated with the circumstances and situations they had to endure as prisoners of war -- particularly, white, middleclass, American female captives who, along with their young children, survived the concentration camps of World War II on islands located in the Pacific. Only recently have disciplines outside of psychology recognized that "traumatic symptoms are not only somatic, nonlinguistic phenomena; they also occur in language" (Berger 574).

Often the language is simultaneously intimate and distant. "One day," writes Agnes Newton-Keith, "the soldiers came when I was in bed with an attack
of malaria [...] They became angry with me [...] They shouted at me, and when I stood up they pushed me roughly down and struck me again and again. Then they left." Following this episode, Newton-Keith continues, "I was pregnant at the time. That afternoon I had a miscarriage." After disclosing such an intimate loss, Newton-Keith gives no further account of it. The lack of any emotional reference to her pregnancy and subsequent miscarriage does not only reflect distance in terms of the time that has passed since the incident's occurrence and when she is writing about it, it also dehumanizes both the attackers and the baby she lost, as if to say; "That which attacked me was not human; that which I lost was not human," therefore, I was not seriously hurt and I suffered no real loss. Her manner of recall is just as direct and matter-of-fact as she recounts, "We lived liked this for four months. You do not die when such things happen. They are not killing matters. In warfare, they aren't even serious ones" (33). Newton-Keith's four lines here, like Vonnegut's repetitive "So it goes," found throughout his Slaughter-House Five, (274), denote an acceptance of what is brought on by continued exposure to brutality and a lack of any viable means to escape it. This, according to Vickroy, is what becomes the normal response to "overwhelmingly intense" events as trauma begins to "impair normal emotional or cognitive responses," resulting in "lasting psychological disruption" for the survivor (xi). By decreasing the brutality of her attackers to a mere misdemeanor of warfare, Newton-Keith simultaneously dismisses her miscarriage as nothing more than a casualty of war. Here is where the reader witnesses the splitting of self that must
occur in order for Newton-Keith "victim / wife / mother" to inform the reader of what is, in reality, an extremely personal, horrific ordeal for any woman to endure both physically and emotionally, and Newton-Keith "survivor / woman / journalist" who must focus on creating an objective summation on what occurred and why it happened. "Trauma," according to Juliet Mitchell, "Trauma, Recognition, and the place of Language," "makes a breach that empties the person out, probably after the gasp of emptiness, there is a rage or hatred -- an identification with the violence of the shock. This state cannot be lived with; quite often it is evacuated, and then a phony or pseudostate will be resorted to, as the victim enters the state of survival" (129). "New conditions," sites Terrence Des Pres, The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps, "become 'normal conditions'' and a choice is made; either succumb as a victim, or adapt as a survivor (7). A huge part of adapting to the extreme situation is to acknowledge that what is happening is more than just "an event," or a mere "period of crisis," with a "proper beginning, middle and end." It is, and will continue to be, "a state of existence which persists beyond the ability of men [or women] to alter or end it" (Des Pres 8).

Victim to Survivor Shift

Newton-Keith's narrative account of receiving news of the Japanese takeover of the neighboring Philippines and the impending invasion of Borneo, provide an early example of her, perhaps unconscious, shift from a victim identity
to a survivor identity. Upon learning that the Japanese had actually landed on the island, Newton-Keith states that she:

[D]id the smartest thing I ever did. I ordered from Singapore at great expense a concentrated form of Haliver oil, especially suited to infant feeding, and contained in very small vials. One small vial was a month's supply, one drop being the daily dose...I also purchased three hundred calcium tablets. (18)

In a passage like this we get a sense of the way in which retrospective narration transforms initial experience. Newton-Keith's comment that she "did the smartest thing she ever did" recasts an action that may have been psychobiological into something intentional. At the time, Keith's ordering of large quantities of Haliver oil and calcium tablets was probably an example of a General Adaption Syndrome. Keith's "alarm reaction" in ordering copious amounts of medical supplies would have represented an early start of this pattern, and a beginning to her experience of victimhood at the hands of the Japanese. In translating the biographical experience into autobiographical narrative, though, Newton-Keith transforms the psychobiological instinct into a kind of rational intent. Moves like these, made throughout Three Came Home exemplify how the production of a trauma narrative about her war experience helped Newton-Keith in her transition from victim to survivor.

Whether deliberately or not Newton-Keith's decision to recount the steps taken in her capture sans emotional references is an example of creating order
from chaos. "They became angry with me for sitting down [...] They shouted, and
struck me, and when I stood up they pushed me down and struck me again and
again. Then they left," writes Newton-Keith. "I went upstairs to bed, shaking" (33).
Newton-Keith's use of short, direct language, "They shouted," "[they] struck,"
"they pushed," "they left," mirrors the intense and severe verbal and physical
abuse inflicted by the Japanese soldiers. Her subsequent retreat "upstairs" to go
to "bed" reflects both the "overwhelming" and "wearing away" of "shock and
disbelief" that manifests as the victim is caught up in the continuing pattern of
abuse and again in the survivor who must encounter the enemy as a self-witness
to the event (Erikson 457). Testimonial narratives reveal the tensions, conflicts,
and dialogism implicit in retelling and re-experiencing traumatic events, where
the [survivor of the present] tries to maintain a 'balance' [with the victim of the
past] (Vickroy 20).

Newton-Keith's dialogue reflects a crucial transition from victim to survivor,
the need to detach quickly from one's past life and to deny any regret for doing
so. She creates a stark visual that, perhaps unknowingly, sets the reader up for
the systematic loss to follow, "We were permitted to take one suitcase each"
(35). As a journalist, Newton-Keith is careful to state the facts of what occur in
the heady days leading up to her imprisonment. However, statements such as,
"There is no place in our luggage for sentiment" (37), exhibit a tendency of
Newton-Keith to objectively report her experience, as opposed to writing about it
using intimate, more personal, language. Her attempt to relate factual
information reflects her need to be viewed as a reliable narrator; a rhetorical
move based on ethos in an effort to uphold her journalistic reputation throughout
the experience.

The single suitcase metaphorically becomes the carrier of the trauma that
the victim must keep repressed and the catalyst the survivor needs to move
forward into the unknown. "The men would be imprisoned separately from the
women," Newton Keith writes. "It was one step further along the road to the end" (35). As the Japanese accelerated their takeover of the island they systematically
began to separate the men from the women and children. "The general chaos of
the internment process," writes Theresa Kaminski, "caused most women enough
exhaustion that they simply did not have the energy to react to separation" (50).
Within a few lines, Newton-Keith quickly sheds the cover of her previous life once
filled with husband, family, and home to expose the starkness of a life in extreme
transition; "one suitcase," one woman, single mother. In an effort "intending to
represent life, the autobiographer maps loss," states Leigh Gilmore,
*Autobiographies: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (73). The
exhaustion was far more than physical; it was inclusive of both mental and
emotional draining. "Mothers," according to Kaminski, "had to take on the full
responsibility for themselves and their children in this new chaotic environment";
for the first time the woman is placed in a situation where her child(ren) and
others depend on her and her actions make a real difference to the outcome of a
group effort (51, Elshtain 11). Elizabeth Waites emphasizes how this change in the family dynamic, with husbands being removed [via separation, divorce, or death] as the wives' sole provider and protector, affects women who are suddenly thrust into these roles as mothers, "A main effect of trauma is disorganization, a physical and / or mental disorganization that may be circumscribed or widespread [....] The shock of an initial trauma is, to a great extent, a function of its novelty and unexpectedness; the unprepared victim has had no chance to strengthen her defenses"(22). The "tension between psychic repression and unconscious anxiety remains acute," contends Julia Kristeva, "Julia Kristeva and the Haunting of the Soul." The telling of narratives "fractures as much as it unifies identity"; "language is, crucially, an emotional holding operation against the disruptive impact of repressed pasts, displaced selves" (Elliott 126 & 130). Hence, we as readers can interpret Newton-Keith's memoir as a re-presentation, a structuring of events, motives, and so on as part of a "concerted effort by the survivor to authorize the victim's autobiography" (Gilmore 122). In this way, the process of writing works as a coping mechanism that authenticates the raw reality of how quickly her identity was stripped away, by suppressing any intense feelings associated with the event that may render her testimony as being too subjective.

Throughout her memoir, Newton-Keith constantly shifts tenses between the past, "we arrived," and the present, "we have." Here again readers are witness to the "splitting of consciousness" as writing, being a "particular instance
of traumatic representation that acts out and works through the trauma,"
becomes a "mode of therapeutic reenactment" (Berger 577, Henke xii). "Finally
we arrived [...] carrying children and dragging suitcases," writes Newton-Keith.
"We have no food or drinking water, for we are afraid to use unboiled water from
the tank outside," writes Newton-Keith. "We have no fire, beds, baths, or lights
[....] with rats and cockroaches beside me, George and I lay down together on
the floor" (38-39). The struggle to remember what happened in the past without
breaching the emotions of the present and the attempt to record in the present
those traumatic events without misconstruing the facts of the past, becomes the
foundation beneath the paradoxical paradigm on which the author, suffering from
post-traumatic stress disorder, constructs his or her testimony. The author's
identity can not "become part of the past which it is, because it is being used as
the present which would otherwise be lost without it. But this past-used-as-
present is a concretization of the erasure of the self as victim," though, it is only
through a sense of "victimhood" that "[the event] can be actualized" (Mitchell
131).

Victim / Survivor: Dual Consciousness of Identity

Having experienced relentless physical strain and brutal attacks, including
rape, while in the concentration camp, Newton-Keith must dissociate from what
Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart*, recalls as "the dreadful and degrading
experiences [that] were somehow not happening to 'me' as a subject, but only to
'me' as an object" (Des Pres 127). "Many times in my mind, since imprisonment,"
states Newton-Keith, "I have lived through such scenes vicariously [...] still the surprise and the shock are great. [I]t is the sort of thing which occurs to other people, but not to oneself" (149). Newton-Keith "vicariously" lives through herself as victim, viewing the "scenes" of her traumatic past and must tell her story through a combination of first person and limited omniscient point of view. "The camps were unreal," according to Des Pres; therefore, in order "to survive the impact of what is perceived as a surreal existence, the mind must create a separate identity to navigate the body through its new environment" (83). This trauma induced division between mind and body works much like a backup generator, overriding the mind and propelling the body into action. Therefore, the splitting of consciousness in regard to the victim (mind and body) and the survivor (past and present) assist both entities in working through and with trauma.

Survivor Identity -- Persona and Image

Scared and living on the edge of uncertainty, women in the camps had to create and maintain a persona of fearlessness and control for both their children and other POWs. "The realization then of [George's] complete dependence on me for mental and emotional stability in his future life, as much as for physical health," writes Newton-Keith, "forced me to make a tremendous effort to accept difficulties and dangers... without hysteria or tears" (43). This act of not being totally one's self, of role playing, is essential for the trauma victim to transition into a survivor; it is a "necessary mechanism of self-defense" (Des Pres 82).
In an effort to mask their internal upheaval, the women concentrated on creating an outward appearance of confidence and courage. "It was more necessary than ever in our circumstances," writes Newton-Keith, "to make an effort to look attractive, for the sake of our morale" (113). This is a statement echoed in other studies about women WWII POWs published decades after Three Came Home. In Prisoners in Paradise, Elizabeth Vaughn also recalls that, during her internment in Santo Tomas in the Philippines, the rigors of interment took hold of women's self-esteem via their physical appearance. If a woman "feels herself to be unattractive in the eyes of another woman," she said, "she cannot help but act unattractively" (Kaminski 115).

Perhaps these passages show more clearly the depth to which the Beautiful Soul, referred to by Jean Bethke Elshtain in her study of Women and War, saturated the psyche of American women prior to the Vietnam War and the Feminist movement of the 60s and 70s. "Beneath her overalls," states Elshtain, "Rosie was still 'wearing an apron' in the expectation that demobilization would restore the status quo ante" (7). Kaminski cites that keeping up their appearance gave the women a 'mental lift' and as the year of internment wore on and starvation and illness took their toll, women continued to sustain their morale by dressing up (118).

It can be argued though that the women's need to appear attractive had more to do with their identity than their spirit. As Juliet Mitchell states, "'Who am I?' is not a question of a self-sufficient identity, but rather a positioning" (124).
Who is Newton-Keith in relation to the "Other," "the enemy," or the "war"? Who is she now in relation to American, middle-class women who are not living in Japanese internment camps; who have no involvement in the war beyond their local newspaper and radio broadcasts? Who is Newton-Keith POW in relation to Newton-Keith civilian? "I put on my neatest dress and make-up," she writes. She was "Dressed for slaughter, hair carefully combed and braided, lipstick on colorless lips, rouge on malaria-yellowed cheeks, in neatest white dress, good sharkskin, once very smart -- this is how the Well-Dressed Internee will dress to be beaten up" (154). Newton-Keith's mock "Dress-for-Success" fashion rundown displays the irony of her situation through the use of the "dark humor" that Gaven De Becker, *The Gift of Fear: Survival Signals That Protects Us from Violence*, states "is a common way to communicate true concern without the risk of feeling silly afterward, and without overtly showing fear" (41). The victim's preoccupation with her appearance seems superficial in light of the circumstances and yet it is in the shallowness of the thought itself where the survivor emerges ready to face an uncertain future.

The outward act of resisting the urge to let the environment of the concentration camp dictate the victim's appearance denies the reality of the fall from middle-class grace that Newton-Keith has begun into the purgatory of war and is "necessary...in the larger structure of survival," while her short treatise on what the "Well-Dressed Internee" wears allows the survivor to recall her experience of facing possible death at the hands of the enemy (Des Pres 64).
Later, Newton-Keith, ordered to the Colonel's office to "make pictures" of how well the Japanese are treating their prisoners, demonstrates the complex dual nature of the victim / survivor's mind and how the two identities often work in tandem, as she writes:

I put on my "office dress." This was not my best white sharkskin, which was only used for the Japanese when I was under orders to be "neat and clean" [or preparing to die] -- and they had forgotten the order today [...]. I put on the "office dress," a very hole-y, very shrunken, blouse and skirt which looked as an internee should look, worn and thin. It was better propaganda than wearing my best.

(188)

Here, Newton-Keith has made a distinction not only between the "Well-Dressed" and the "office" internee's attire, but in doing so displays a level of strategy on par with that of the military (male); the survivor dresses in her best for death because, in doing so, she is representing her country (patriotism, integrity, dignity) at war's horrific rite-of-passage, while the victim dresses to represent the "world of the warrior...untamed by the virtues of the Beautiful Soul [leading] humanity to certain ruin" (Elshtain 5-6). In doing so, Newton-Keith offers a rare glimpse of how intricate the intrusion of dissociation is. As Suzette Henke explains, "The tenuous subject-in-process, the Lacanian moi contingent on the production of meaningful testimony, is valorized and reflected back in the implicit gaze of a reader who stands in for the (m)other of the early mirror stage" (xvi);
therefore, lest the reader get confused, she wants him/ her to know the internee's intent behind dressing well for the gaze of the enemy and dressing down for the gaze of the world.

Rules of Survivor Engagement: Dissociation, Denial, and Detachment

Most of the women who were taken captive, like Agnes Newton-Keith, did not expect to be POWs for very long, so when forced to pack for internment they chose to take clothing, jewelry, and toiletries in lieu of food, medicine, or medical supplies. "On the contents of [my] trunk and a little jewelry [...] I sold and traded [my] way through captivity, living on the proceeds of my weakness for nice clothes" (114). Newton-Keith's choice of the words "sold" and "traded" give the impression that she utilized free choice in making the decision to barter personal goods for items necessary for the survival of her and her son. "In time," continues Newton-Keith, "all material possessions came to mean three things to me: (1) food and drugs for [my son], (2) food and tobacco and one presentable dress for me, (3) tobacco [to smuggle to my husband]" (114). Newton-Keith turns the participation of trading and smuggling in a "black market with local Chinese merchants," and with the Japanese guards, into a normal economical endeavor within a community, as opposed to self-demoralizing or criminal acts routinely conducted within the confines of an enemy camp. Noting their ability to use what they had, or utilize a skill, without jeopardizing their virtue or marital vows, to obtain what they needed appears to be a key movement in the writing of female
captives as far back as Mary Rowlandson, when she "made a shirt" or "knit a pair of stockins" for her Indian captors in exchange for a "piece of bear [meat]" or a "knife" (Derounian-Stodola 25-26). "We [smuggled because] getting more food was vital for our children and worth taking the chance" (58). If necessity is considered the mother of invention then survival is the catalyst for the entrepreneurial spirit that manages such a commercial undertaking with little regard for the risks or consequences. As Vickroy explains, "Traumatic contexts are radically different from those in which we expect ethical standards and notions of choice" (33-34). As a coping mechanism, dissociation with previous values, morals, norms, and mores makes overwhelming and seemingly inescapable stresses escapable; because dissociation as a form of problem solving takes place in an altered state of consciousness, [separating] normal consciousness by an amnesic barrier. Therefore, according to Kaminski, the women were able, for the most part, to remain unaware, as well as untroubled by inconsistencies, even though others observing [or later reading about] their behavior might have been puzzled by it (44).

At some point following their capture and incarceration on Borneo, the women were transferred to the island of Berhala, where a leper colony was located. "The hungrier we got the less we worried over the fact that [some of the smuggled food] came through the lepers," writes Newton-Keith (60). The victim, undernourished and starving, begins to detach from her inherited and culturally influenced ideas regarding cleanliness and food preparation, as the survivor
takes control and rationalizes that to supply the body with food, clean or dirty, is a necessary step towards sustaining her life and the life of her child(ren). In time, Newton-Keith writes, "Our attitude towards the waste products of [the] living had changed," the women no longer "held [their] noses and asked to have the excrement removed" from their camp area. Instead, "we hoarded over it, and rationed it, per capita," to begin gardens as the nuns had been doing since their imprisonment. "Dysentery and doctor's orders did not stop us. Fertilization makes vegetation and hunger outruns hygiene" (215). Her confession on accepting food from those who were considered unclean, "lepers," and growing food by nourishing the soil with what was considered unclean, human "excrement," allows the survivor to assert control over the horrific experience of eating as a means of sustaining life while in captivity and offers redemption to the victim for engaging in cultural taboos that they would have shunned under different conditions.

Likewise, Newton-Keith's word choice reflects an attempt to reinstate a sense of order and cleanliness to messy and filth-infested memories. "Food fastidiousness had disappeared. Prisoners pushed flowers, grass, weeds, dogs, cats, rats, snakes, grasshoppers, and snails down their gullets, where desperation plus force of gravity carried it onto the intestines, which hurried it onto the next place" (Newton-Keith 215). Words such as "fastidious," "gullets," and "intestines" express an almost clinical and, therefore, sanitary element in which rodents, bugs, and plants are eaten and digested. It is as though Newton-
Keith, having returned to her middle-class existence, reverts once again into Elshtain's "Beautiful Soul," whose image is once again "reconstructed by [a woman] and reinforced by men" (4). With this comes what Elshtain refers to as "a slippery slide toward forgetting [the war experience], on one end, toward remembering in nostalgic and sentimental ways, on the other end." As the female captive who is both prisoner and mother is "similarly immersed in worlds revolving around stomachs, bodily harm or well-being" and a "Physicality [that] defines [her life] she refrains from "expressions of [such] physical concreteness [because it] shocks or dismay others" and "it isn't the way [she wants] to think about things" (223). As the victim secretly frowns at stealing "banana skins" from "Japanese refuse barrels" to "boil into soup," or at stealing "eggs from the chickens kept by the guards," the survivor joins "a group of volunteers to pick insects out of the camp's daily rice allotment" (Newton-Keith 229, Kaminski 85-86). Both Newton-Keith, and Kaminski's interviewee, by using common or general designations such as "dogs," "snakes," "flowers," and "insects," dissociate their memories from, and soften the readers' image of, the animalistic nature in which the female POWs randomly chose and ravenously ate their prey, or disregarded and discarded maggots, in behavior that Darwin would coin as survival of the fittest.

According to Anthony Elliot, "Julia Kristeva and the Haunting of the Soul," psychoanalyst and linguist, Julia Kristeva, noticed that subjects, in order "to deal with anxieties [would turn] them into words, propositions, [and] conjectures"
because, unlike the human being, "language cannot go mad" (126, 130-131).
"We ate frantically all the time we were working," writes Newton-Keith, as she
describes how the women were sent out into the fields to harvest cassava roots
(tapioca) for their captors. Though guarded and warned not to eat the raw root,
"We dug it up with our hands, digging madly with bare fingertips...huddling
secretively down," she continues. "We ate it raw. It was said to be poisonous, it
was manured with excrement, we were forbidden to dig it; but we were hungry,
and we ate it" (234). Newton-Keith's use of words like "frantically," "madly," and
"secretly" are descriptions often associated with behavior that exhibits mental
deterioration. The survivor as writer in describing the act of this "harvesting" and
its bounty, exposes the starkness of the experience as "raw" and "poisonous," as
she has succumbed to that which is "forbidden" not only by her captors, but also
by the standards held by her middle-class, American peers. "[A]utobiography
represents the real...through metonymy, that is, through the claims of contiguity
wherein the person who writes is the same as the self in the writing; one extends
the other, puts her in another place and, in doing so, emerges as a special case
in the definition of subjectivity because it interiorizes the specular play between
the producer / producing and the produced" (Gilmore 67 & 71). Cites Vickroy,
"Individual's actions under extreme oppression, whether in a domestic or war
situation, cannot be understood by applying normalized values or moral systems"
(34); therefore, in an attempt to protect the victim from being branded from the
stigma of captive behavior and ostracized from the survivor's community of
socioeconomic equals Newton-Keith, consciously or unconsciously, juxtapositions through language the insanity of the experience with the mundane task of reaping the crop.

**Writing About and Through the Physicality of Trauma**

Having already disclosed that the women, with their children in tow, had been separated from the men into different camps, and often on different islands, Newton-Keith's admission that "sex got in our way" seems at odds with the limits of her captivity. "Once a month, sex got in our way," writes Newton-Keith. "Having been limited by the [Japanese] to one suitcase each, we [failed to] bring in much sanitary goods, and by the end of the first year, rags and cloths were at a premium" (105). Here she reverts to the image of the "one suitcase" and its failure to contain that which was necessary to remain clean, "sanitary goods," for a routine monthly occurrence the women should have been prepared for. The survivor of the present reveals her frustration with the victim of her past -- "How could 'we' have been so naive as to deny the possibility that we would not be incarcerated beyond one menstrual cycle?" It's one thing to be unprepared for an uncertain future and another to be unprepared for a situation the victim knows is inevitable; however, the implementation of "we" not only allows the survivor to acknowledge that she, along with the other captives, failed as a collective unit as a result of the chaos surrounding the event of their capture, but also creates distance between "I" of the past who personally experienced the physical changes and the "I" of the present who cannot fully face the assault against who
own womanhood. "By the end of the second year we requested the Japanese to supply towels for menstruation," she continues. "The Japanese... supplied one towel for every three persons [taking] measurements, [dictating] the specifications [and] requirements [of each woman]" (105). What would be easy for the reader to overlook here is the admission by Newton-Keith that it took "two years" of transitioning mentally and emotionally from victim to survivor before the women could assert any demands to lessen the anxiety of coping with their monthly menstrual cycle. Her use of words like "measurements," "specifications," and "requirements," that were taken and dictated by the Japanese countered the survivors' attempt to control their situation by methodically addressing their needs in a regulated manner. "By the end of the third year," she admits, "nature solved our problems, and most women ceased to menstruate as a result of malnutrition" (105). It is interesting to note here how the survivor exercises latent control over the extended, and very personal, experience of premature menstrual cessation as a result of slow, forced starvation by her captors. This rhetorical move to draw the reader into the experience gradually, before confronting them with the realization of how the trauma ultimately consumes the body, also allows the survivor to begin, systematically, to comprehend the full extent of their oppression. Like her "one suitcase," now empty after years of bartering away her goods, Newton-Keith's womb has been forcefully emptied of the baby it once held as well as the capability to create new life, and the descent from the life to
the death of the womb mirrors her earlier account of her pregnancy and miscarriage with its passionless, emotionless prose.

For the female POW in World War II, having already been repositioned as the protector and provider of her child(ren), the continued decline of both civility and chivalry by the enemy is comparable to the progressive attack of disease on both the body and spirit. "Nothing in the war," notes Newton-Keith, "could be so hideous as having to do everything before people -- having to eat, sleep, bathe, dress, function physically and emotionally in public; having one's private sentiments washed in the public bathhouse, and hung up to dry on latrine walls" (152). Newton-Keith's statement gives the reader reason to pause as it begs the question, "What of the brutality of death in war?" The POW becomes little more than a zombie; the victim rising to the survivor's will, the living dead. "Nudity and public exposure lost their novelty and passed unnoticed," states Des Pres; life, like sex, "made little difference now," writes Newton-Keith, "misery, danger, and death had neutralized us" (105, 168). The women refashioned ideals and practices to fit the reality of internment and, although their conditions were far from exemplary and nothing was really the same, "the women learned to adapt and improvise," and "they altered colonial, middle-class notions of their roles in order to survive" (Kaminski 110 & 146).

Fear of Writing in Captivity

Knowledge of Newton-Keith as a journalist made the Japanese suspicious of her every move, they often searched her barracks for diaries or journals,
"constantly looking for my papers, written-on or otherwise, documentary or personal," she states. She kept her "most incriminating evidence" in "empty tins which [she] wrapped in soldier's waterproofing" and "buried under [her] barracks" (118). Constant fear of not being thorough enough, cunning enough, or swift enough to outsmart her captors, made Newton-Keith doubt herself; therefore, she found herself frequently "shifting the hiding place of [her] articles," getting up "in the middle of the night on a hunch" to dig new holes to bury [the] tins [in, or to] move them in the dark" (118). There is a strong sense of agency in Newton-Keith's account of the pains she went through to record and preserve the "truth" of her experience. "I had a horror of being caught through carelessness. As well as filling George's toys with notes, I rolled them inside a half-roll of toilet paper, and I stuffed them into a medicine bottle covered with labels, and I sewed them between the layers of his grass sleeping mat. George had a false-bottom stool, made by Harry for the purpose, which I filled with notes, and then nailed up" (118). This process of "writing out and writing through traumatic experience," referred to by Suzette Henke as "scriptotherapy," "in the mode of therapeutic reenactment," is common to survivor discourse and women's autobiography [or memoir] in the twentieth-century. For traumatic memory to lose its power as a fragment and symptom and be integrated into memory, "a process of constructing a narrative, or reconstructing a history and essentially of reexternalizing the even has to be set in motion" (Vickroy 20 & 174, Felman and Laub 69). Newton-Keith's recall of how she "buried" her notes, "shifting" her
hiding places and digging holes "in the dark" makes her sound more like a criminal than a survivor. This blurring of identity in the language of captivity narratives, suggests Vickroy, shows how "Women struggle to formulate cohesive life narratives out of identities and thinking that have become fragmented and chaotic" (24). Writing becomes the mechanism by which the traumatized victim works through fragmented and chaotic memories of the past, towards a comprehensible order of the experience that is "more coherent, linear, and plausible" and that "can actually produce a change in the abnormal processing of traumatic memory...[offering] relief of many of the major symptoms of PTSD" (Gilmore 79, Vickroy 20). "By taking on the role of an 'observer' I could at least for a few moments detach myself from what was going on," states Alfred Kantor, who drew pictures to document his imprisonment and attempt to construct a sense of order to the experience (Des Pres 46). This ability to disconnect momentarily from the traumatic experience that stems from "the part of the brain that can regulate fear...[keep] order and [allow] a person to talk, think, stay calm, despite fear," also temporarily frees them emotionally and mentally to record the event in writing, or through drawings (Hustvedt 115).

**Traumatic Memory: Visual Language**

The victim needs "to root the event somewhere in order [for the survivor] to retain it. [Memories] require a visual home or [they can] float away unanchored," writes Hustvedt (100). The incorporation of sketches, or photographs, into captivity narratives, such as the woodcuts included in *The
Captivity of Mary Rowlandson, works much like an authorial intrusion to show that the author was there -- "That was I. That was me. That was the author of this book" (Vonnegut 160), as validation of the authors' experience and allowing them to attach a "verbal scenario" to the memory (Hustvedt 103). "One time," writes Newton-Keith, "[the Japanese] proclaimed that all pictures, photographs, snapshots, illustrations must be stamped with a Japanese censorship stamp...or they would be confiscated" (119). Like Alfred Kantor, Agnes Newton-Keith also sketched scenes she witnessed in the concentration camps, including some self-portraits. These sketches worked much like photographs as a way to remember what might otherwise be forgotten through the ongoing traumatic experience. The brain has a way though of "[providing] its own traumatic memory softeners," according to Diane Ackerman. "Survival depends on regaining stability, readjusting, forgetting, welcoming the new, and relearning" (109). As Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote in his Tractatus Logical - philosophicaus: "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest [...] What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (Hustvedt 143, 151). For some survivors, implementing some sort of visual record of their victimhood into their memoirs is a way of unconsciously warding off what Elizabeth Waites refers to as traumatic amnesia, when "the memory of a traumatic event is obliterated by amnesia, and the affected individual develops a hole in her accessible memory; a hole that can encompass a few seconds, a few months, or even years. According to Siri Hustvedt, The Shaking Woman, "Trauma memory [often] has no
narration," it becomes a form of "speechlessness that is located in an ongoing present [where] victims live 'outside of time'"; it is "nonverbal," "involuntary," and "not in the past" (43 & 57). Therefore, these sketches play an important part in the reconstruction of one's identity as they fill in gaps in the survivor's narrative, until the right words can be found to express the experience. As Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull stated, *The Brain and the Inner World*, "For someone to reflect consciously on visual experience, he or she has to recode the visual experiences into words"; however, according to Hustvedt, while "Language appears to be vital to self-reflective awareness [and] the ability to say, 'I saw [something]...it is not necessary for registering images and responding to them" (82, 53). What language cannot abstract from visual memory, it extracts from the visual image, "and, in time, often replaces [the sketch or photograph] by creating a fixed narrative that can be repeated again and again" (Hustvedt 102).

An unusual phenomenon associated with sketches or photographs of trauma victims, often occurs when the survivor attempts to piece together memories of their life prior to the traumatic experience. When presented with pictures taken during their lives before the event survivors often do not recognize themselves. This could be a long-term affect resulting from the "splitting of consciousness" that occurs as trauma develops; the self that existed prior to the traumatic event is separated from the self experiencing the trauma, and eventually is unrecognizable to the self that survives.
Captor or Fellow Victim

In her book, *Captivity and Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682 - 1861*, Michelle Burnham, writes that, "There is nothing to indicate an awareness of the dissonance between her portrayal of the Indians as savage and cruel and her descriptions of individual Indians who are kind and sympathetic" (17). Likewise, there is no specific instance provided by Newton-Keith, or in-depth reason, to indicate why she frames some of her Japanese captors as complex pawns of war:

After George was in bed I sat down to drink coffee, and Nishi, the young guard from Formosa, came in. I asked him to have a cup of coffee with me...he had always been good to the children. He had brought them sweets when he came to camp...He had always been kind to the men's working parties in camp, and never struck or bullied anyone. [In light of the war ending] I wrote him a letter on a piece of Red Cross paper, addressed to whoever might come. I said that he had been kind to his prisoners, that he had saved a child from drowning, and helped us when he could. I asked that he be given merciful treatment, because he had earned it [....] tears were rolling down his cheeks...Then he straightened quickly, bowed, and was gone. I went to bed. As I lay beside my own son that night I asked myself: Why must all young men throughout this world make the choice, to either kill, or be killed?" (264-65).
What occurs in the gap between seeing captors as "savage" and then seeing them as self? Cathy Caruth states that, "Precisely when the text appears most human, it is most mechanical" (82). It is as if the female survivor, regardless of all the pain and suffering she has experienced as a victim, continues to seek what Elshtain refers to as, "The cultivation of socially sanctioned innocence about the world's ways" (4); she insist on preserving society's image of the Beautiful Soul by exorcising the demons from her captors and showing them in a state of grace. Perhaps, in this way, the author works toward vanquishing her own bitterness and hatred, as a means of mental survival, in what Henke describes as a move toward "psychological catharsis" (xix). In this way, the very process of articulating painful experiences, especially in written form, can prove therapeutic and begin to move the survivor beyond the trauma (Henke 193).

An Appeal to Patriotism, Belief, and Domestic Nobility

As Juliet Mitchell states, for writing to be reflective, the possibility that the other person to whom it is addressed is not there must be acknowledged, along with the hope that the imaginary receiver of one's written communication will recognize the writer and be moved in some way by his / her message (131-32).

"I know now the value of freedom," writes Newton-Keith:

In all of my life before I had existed as a free woman, and didn't know it. This is what freedom means to me. The right to live with...my husband and my children. The right to look about me
without fear of seeing people beaten. The capacity to work for ourseffs and our children. (299)

Like, Mary Rowlandson's written account, it appears that Newton-Keith's captivity narrative's "instructive value is signified by its reader's involuntary need to cry for the suffering captive" (Burnham 39). When Newton-Keith speaks about her new understanding of freedom, she utilizes pathos and becomes the harbinger warning citizens to take heed and listen. This becomes evident in the shift of focus from herself, "I" "my" and "me," to the reader, "ourseffs" and "our."

Newton-Keith continues, "The freedom of my eyes to scan the face of earth, the mountains, trees, fields, and sea, without barbed wire across my vision" (300). Here is the "civic rhetoric" that Elshtain refers to, "Because our own identities are so entangled with those of the nation-state, the tendency...is for our spines to stiffen collectively and our voices to speak as one" (120). Who better then to pose a lesson on patriotism and remind citizens of their inalienable right to freedom than the civilian POW? And who better than Elshtain's Beautiful Soul to garner sentiment from the individual:

From out of war, from out of death, we three came home [....] Once more we were warmed with the sweetness and virtue of life in its seasons...The last embrace at night, the first cup of coffee in the morning, the fresh taste of toothpaste in your mouth, the cigarette before breakfast, the clean smell of the morning air, the newspaper to open and someone to laugh with you...and the knowledge that you are not alone...We lived again, and took heart. (300)
Newton-Keith's grandeur language on the beauty of liberation and home, enables her to dissociate from the overwhelming feeling she experienced in captivity of being lost forever to both her nation and herself. When it comes to writing through the trauma, Caruth's quoting of Freud is insightful: "I am not aware, however," states Freud, "that patients suffering from traumatic neurosis are much occupied in their waking lives with memories of the [event]. Perhaps they are more concerned with not thinking of it" (61).

Although she herself was not particularly religious, Newton-Keith's visual description of America's physical richness and the beauty of everyday ordinariness, alludes to a feeling of amazing grace of her once being lost and now she is found. It is not unusual for someone in the midst of a traumatic experience to struggle on some form of spiritual level; hence the adage, "There are no atheists in foxholes." "I couldn't be Roman Catholic [like the nuns that were in captivity with her] because I ask Why too frequently. I can't be anything, but sometimes I'd like to be. It is so restful to give up the struggle and relax in belief in The Word," writes Newton-Keith. Here, again, Newton-Keith begins to oscillate between tenses, as well as progressively shifting her focus from herself to a more collective audience. "[I]t isn't any particular sect or religion that gives one strength. It is putting your mind on something outside of yourself, that you believe in good," she continues. "We wives had put our minds and our hearts on our husbands, which is what a good marriage is, and we now were without them, and lost. The Sisters had put their minds and hearts on God only, and hey had
Him, and they were whole" (98). However, Newton-Keith teeters on the edge of being religiously didactic in her choice of words like, "give up the struggle" and "relax in belief," as well as indirectly preaching on the virtue of placing God above "husbands" to avoid being "lost" spiritually. "Into this square today we come to give thanks to God for freedom," writes Newton-Keith. "Both those who believe and those who do not believe; we have all learned to say our prayers" (274). In this respect, her captivity narrative, becomes a catalyst, like Mary Rowlandson's, that "without changing a word...[advertises] a story neither about God nor about an exemplary figure of piety"; thereby, offering herself as a "figure that readers would come to not only identify as a virtuous type but to identify with in a relation of sympathy" (Burnham 39).

This volley in thought pattern between the appeal to patriotism and belief, is one more example of the internal struggle survivors work through, as they attempt to write and make sense of their traumatic experience. "Meaning is something we find and make," states Siri Hustvedt. "It is never complete. There are always holes...[Therefore] We all extrapolate from our own lives in order to understand the world" and our experiences in it (131 & 138).

The Evolution of Self

Burnham states, in regard to Mary Rowlandson's story that "the narrative's language of recall and its record of linguistic exchange reveal that Rowlandson's immersion in Amerindian culture places her in a cultural liminal subject position that is no longer commensurable with, though by no means alien to, the Puritan
and English subjectivity with which she entered captivity" 924). In much the same way, Newton-Keith's narrative chronicles the evolution of a new self, notably in how her own grammar occasionally changes in the course of the book: "So Editor and I sit silent [...] I ask Interpreter to ask Editor if I am correct...Again conversation languishes" (187). Based on the notes she managed to write and smuggle out of the concentration camps, the reader can follow how her voice, at the beginning of her internment, is distinctly American. As her narrative progresses, the influence of her Japanese captors and their speech patterns are lifted from her notes and transferred, albeit, perhaps, unknowingly to her text. There is a subtle, yet noticeable, dropping of articles in the middle of Newton-Keith's narrative and then it returns to a more Americanized voice as the narrative comes to an end. Her voice reflects the affects of language immersion, while at the same time confirming how deeply trauma resides as it transforms the self.

There comes a distinctive moment when a captive acknowledges that their struggle to survive, which may ultimately lead to death regardless of their efforts, must be shared with others outside of the experience:

In keeping my record of imprisonment in Kuching I always tried to write my notes secretly, sometimes after dark at night, by starlight, moonlight, or not light at all, just by sense of feel. I did not write daily, but every few weeks, looking back and trying to judge what was important. Conversations of interest I tried to record as soon as
possible, for I wanted facts, not conclusion. Everything was written in the smallest possible form, because of lack of paper, and limited hiding space.

There were many things I did not dare to put on paper, even for myself. Diaries had been discovered in the men's camp and the authors -- and others involved -- spent months in the cells, or were executed, on the guilt proved therein. If my notes had been uncovered, the Japanese could have shot me and others on the strength of them [...] They were constantly looking for my papers, written-on or otherwise, documentary or personal. Often the person who searched could not read English, and read my papers upside down. Bit by bit I fed them various documents to placate them, letting them uncover something with every search. (117-18)

Having been a journalist for the San Francisco Examiner prior to marrying and relocating to Borneo, Agnes Newton-Keith's attention to details and her innate ability to not let her emotions shadow her experience, allowed her to focus and discern how the war affected the personal behavior of women captives and the Japanese soldiers. It may also have inadvertently deflected the impact the war had on her and other women with its matter-of-fact tone, which, in turn, may have been why so few women came forward to share their experiences — fearing they would be labeled hysterical and, therefore, their experiences not credible.
However, Newton-Keith did not, indeed could not, avoid the toll, or long-term affects, of the trauma she also suffered from. Estimation of the ultimate cost of captivity to the survivor is difficult, if not impossible. Carl Mydans, LIFE photographer-journalist, wrote in his introduction to Newton-Keith's book, *Three Came Home*, "[Mrs. Newton-Keith] was still suffering from the effects of starvation, of long-separation from [her husband, Harry], from the psychological strain of raising a small son in the public squalor of a prison camp, and of physical damage" when she began to write about her experience" (xx & xxii).

The "possession of a door, and a key with which to lock it. Moments of silence. A place in which to weep, with no one to see me doing so," these, according to Agnes Newton-Keith, are the desires that ride on the haunches of trauma (299). In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder have only begun to be identified with Vonnegut's main character, Billy Pilgrim, and as an extension of the author's wartime experience. Vonnegut exposes the very symptoms of an illness that society wants to deny exists in the minds of soldiers / veterans who display no outward scars of battle, "Nobody else suspected [Billy] was going crazy. Everybody else thought he looked fine and was acting fine...They didn't think it had anything to do with the war" (127). This delay in recognizing PTSD in such a widely read novel confirms the difficulty in diagnosing its effects not only on soldiers who did not engage in fighting on the battlefronts, but also on civilians who were embedded in the war zone and suffered extreme cruelties at the hands of the enemy. Narratives like Agnes
Newton-Keith's, from their first frantic scenes to their rather orderly and routine conclusions (Burnham 11), are not only sociologically significant in widening our understanding of war trauma, but also work as catalysts for recognizing other strata, such as middle-class, American women who, in current times, have exhibited similar symptoms of PTSD as they have experienced downward mobility.
Experience has shown, and a true philosophy will always show, that a vast, perhaps the larger portion of the truth arises from the seemingly irrelevant. Edgar Allan Poe, *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*

Around the same time that psychologists had identified a series of "post-war" symptoms in association with soldiers, Workman Compensation laws were being passed in America. Civilian employees who filed claims, citing similar symptoms following work-related injuries, found their cases being dismissed on the grounds of malingering for monetary compensation (Figley 11). In addition, the years following the Korean and Vietnam wars brought to the surface a series of situational disorders, exhibited by male soldiers, that contained elements of the same or similar symptoms, even if though they had not been exposed to rapid fire or exploding missiles. Indentified as stemming from "post-Vietnam syndrome," these symptoms included: loss of identity, dissociation, detachment, repression, and memory manipulation. Then, between 1966 and 1976, a series of natural disasters became the subject of medical studies, as the "phenomenon of 'nervous shock' [was] frequently seen in those who [were] involved in and [survived these] major disasters, where compensation [was] not an issue" (Figley 12).
With the onset of the women's movement in the mid-1970s, as explanations of female abuse complaints increased and became more complicated, scientists and health care workers began to reevaluate the effects of sexism, and sex role stereotypes, on women's mental health. Though psychological theories increased, many of the theories still held on to primitive and bias-based myths regarding gender, continuing to view women's physical or neurological symptoms as being psychosomatic, symptoms of "penis envy," or masochistic (Waites 158). Eventually, a growing recognition of the prevalence of violence in the lives of females, as well as evolving clinical understanding of post-traumatic syndromes, began to modify traditional psychiatric perspectives by asking how and why women are perceived differently from men in the mental health system. The extent to which events could impact a person's mental and physical behavior, years beyond the initial experience, wasn't adequately defined as a distinct diagnosis, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, until the 1980s when increased sensitivity and a growing appreciation of how repeated or continued physical, sexual, mental, or emotional abuse resulted in diagnosis and treatment of trauma-related symptoms for women who reported abuse and sought help (Waites 159).

The Fall

The women's movement of the mid-1970s and the recession that hit America in the early 1980s resulted in an escalation of divorces as well as an
increase in single-mother households. According to Elizabeth Warren and Amelia Warren Tyagi, *The Two-Income Trap: Why Middle-Class Mothers & Fathers Are Going Broke*, "Most mothers tumbled down the economic ladder after they [divorced and] the drop [was] hardest for women in the middle and upper classes, since they [had] farther to fall" (99). Similarly, in her study of downward mobility in the age of affluence, *Falling from Grace*, Katherine Newman states that:

Divorce is a primary cause for downward mobility for millions of American [women]...When divorced women are the sole or main source of family support, downward mobility usually follows simply because [most] ex-wives cannot match the earning capacity of their ex-husbands...Losses are particularly steep for middle class women because they have more to lose than their poorer sisters.

(13, 39 & 202)

And, as studies like this move forward to understand how certain situations affect the downward mobility of upper and middle class women with children, parallel studies are being conducted in both Britain and Canada on the affect of this fall on the emotional, mental, and physical well-being of the women caught in this financial vortex. These women often find themselves in what Ruby K. Payne, the leading U.S. expert on the mindsets of poverty and middle class, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, calls "situational poverty" (when financial resources are altered due to a particular event, such as death, chronic illness, or divorce)
The women are then faced with learning how to navigate through a systematic downfall that ends with them and their children living on the edge of poverty. And as David K. Shipler asserts in his book, *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*, these women ultimately find out that "being poor in a rich country [is] more difficult to endure than being poor in a poor country, for the skills of surviving in poverty have largely been lost in America" (9).

**Poverty and Trauma**

"Trauma," states Laurie Vickroy, "is the ultimate consequence of the invalidation of self and self-knowledge" which "circumstances such as poverty [enhance]" and manifest "in restrictive defenses like repression, silence, and dissociation" (47 - 49). In the United States where the dominant myth is that an American, especially a white, middle- to upper-class citizen, should be able to pick themselves up by their bootstraps and rise above adversity, the shame most women harbor as they experience downward mobility following the death of a spouse, divorce, or job loss not only exacerbates this trauma, but prolongs it by creating a refusal to seek recognition through the sharing of their experiences through narrative. As, Roxanne Rimstead, author of *Remnants of Nation: on poverty narratives by women*, states:

The exclusion of testimonies and standpoints based on ordinary lived experiences of poverty leaves us with a partial, top-down, largely negative view of [these women], grounded in popular beliefs rather than heterogeneous subjectives. In *Women and Poverty*, 65
Mary Daly identifies as popular social fictions such widely held beliefs as the following: that ‘there is no real poverty...today compared with the 1930s and 40s, [that] no one needs to be poor now with social welfare, and [that] people are poor through some fault or failing of their own.’ (52 - 53)

Rimstead cites how, in her own life, she experienced firsthand these popular beliefs, mired in "selective memory" that may eventually result in "organized forgetting" on a cultural level, when she asked her mother about her family's own situational poverty. The poverty she lived through in her childhood was caused by her father's illness, which disabled him and undercut their working-class socioeconomic status. Rimstead was shocked when her mother responded with the question, "Were we poor?" and then rationalized her own failure to identify with poverty by the fact that [Rimstead's family] "didn't stand in line or anything [to collect food or charity]" (78). Continued downward mobilization then affects the daily changes in a family's lifestyle so subtly that the descent can seem familiar and predictable, until the victim hits the bottom of the fall and realizes that they've lost everything. What is interesting to note is that, even with "[A]n increase in public awareness of trauma and trauma theory [working as a catalyst causing] narratives about trauma [to flourish] in the 1980s and 1990s" (Vickroy xii-xiii), as well as an increase in the number of individuals and their families caught in the economic downfalls generated by the last three decades, studies on the effects of downward mobility-induced trauma are virtually non-existent.
For this reason, Michelle Kennedy’s book, *Without a Net: Middle Class and Homeless (with Kids) in America: My Story*, may be one of the few memoirs to date that chronicles the fall into situational poverty as experienced by an American woman who was not born into poverty and is not of color. Nor was it, as Kennedy asserts, due to "drug use, alcoholism, or any other of the things we, as a society, so often attribute to such a downward spiral" (3). Kennedy’s book not only bears witness to the everyday battle these women must engage in within their communities and with governing systems, it also reveals how many of the skills needed to survive the descent from middle-class into poverty are similar to those employed by female POWs captured and incarcerated in the Pacific Theatre in World War II. According to Laurie Vickroy, author of *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, as more narratives begin to surface written by women who have experienced physical, emotional, or economical crises, literary theorists will have to turn to a more "psychological, humanistic and cultural / sociohistorical interpretation of the texts," since the literature focuses on "socially induced and perpetuated" traumas (xii - xiii). Therefore, Kennedy’s use of the same narrative strategies as Newton-Keith’s solicits reading her story through the same lens of trauma theory as a means to explore the implications that, while it is evident that the fall into poverty is traumatic, her poverty narrative, like Newton-Keith’s, may often blunt the force of that realization.

**Denial of the Fittest**

The concept that an event can only be deemed traumatic if it occurs
outside the range of usual human experiences is limiting. Accidents at work, or following a car accident, are common and well within the range of usual human experience, yet the symptoms produced may be identical, and the subsequent morbidity as substantial as those that have been attributed to soldiers post-war (Figley 12 - 13). Therefore, the parallel between the circumstances connected with, and the survival skills implemented by, the female POWs during WWII and those of many middle-class American women experiencing downward mobility, and the correlation to PTSD, begs examination.

While Keith's choice to stay on Borneo with threats of war pending ("It was the only thing for me to do [...] I was determined to stay...I had a good job [and] a husband" (19)), differed from Kennedy's decision to leave her marriage ("After nearly six years as a housewife, I was ready for a change. My life was not terrible...But it lacked something...and I was determined to fill the void" (4)), their subsequent means of survival, following their respective falls from grace, are very much the same. In both memoirs, the onset of trauma begins with: (1) failure to comprehend the long-term impact of their initial decision in regard to the event and (2) denial of the severity of their particular situation or circumstance following the event. "Denial," according to Gavin De Becker, The Gift of Fear: Survival Signals that Protect Us from Violence, "is a save-now-pay-later scheme, a contract written entirely in small print, for in the long run, the denying person knows the truth on some level, and it causes constant anxiety [which] keeps
them from taking action that could reduce the risks" that may stem from their
decisions (10).

Kennedy admits that she had no idea that, by choosing to leave her
spouse, she would enter a gradual spiral downwards toward poverty. "Making the
leap from given-every-opportunity...middle-class child to boring, middle-class
housewife, and eventually to homeless, single mother should be harder than it is.
In reality, it doesn't take much more than a series of bad judgment calls and
wrong decisions that, at the time, appear to be perfectly reasonable and in most
cases for the better" (2). Kennedy's story covers a time period of three months in
the summer when she and her children volleyed between the beach and the local
campground living out of their car. Stating that becoming homeless should be
"harder than it is" would indicate that her fall happened quickly and easily. This is
one of the effects of denial, it condenses time, glosses over excruciating details
of the fall and buries what it can not easily explain. Unlike Newton-Keith, whose
capture, incarceration, and liberation can be measured on a historical timeline
("What I did not know, or even dream of [when I made the decision to stay with
my husband on Borneo during the Japanese invasion], was that the Nips would
be in possession of Borneo for three and two-thirds years") (20)), Kennedy's fall
has no marked beginning, only a definitive ending -- when she finds her
homeless and living out of her car. Denial leaps over what is, in truth, a slow and
steady decline into the unknown. Denial is everything the writer can not confront
as she tries to work through the trauma: what the "bad judgment calls" were,
what "wrong decisions" were made, and why they "appear[ed] to be perfectly reasonable [or] better" at the time. "Trauma," states Elizabeth A. Waites, author of *Trauma and Survival: Post-Traumatic and Dissociative Disorders in Women*, "impacts on learning and memory, affecting exposure to or avoidance of information as well as the encoding, storage, and retrieval mechanisms," and signals "the failure to recognize one's own emotional and ideological investments in the event and its representation" (26, LaCapra 596).

While Kennedy's statement may be true, it also discloses the writer's attempts to distance herself from the reality of her situation, by placing it opposite a more altruistic view. "There are far bigger problems in this world than us living in a car," states Kennedy. "We have lived in the car for a month now, but we are healthy, we are strong" (79). While Kennedy states that "there are far bigger problems in [the] world," she fails to actually cite any of them, because, in truth, while a mother living with and raising her children out of her car may not be considered a universal issue of importance, it still qualifies as a substantial problem on two distinct levels: (1) for the individual citizen experiencing it and (2) for the nation where it's occurring.

It is important to note that Kennedy is not deliberately withholding detailed information connected with her descent into homelessness, but that she is in the process of writing through the traumatic experience; a process that is reflective of her fragmented recollections. "Fundamental to traumatic experience," according to Laurie Vickroy, "is that the past lingers unresolved, not remembered in a
conventional sense, because it is not processed like everyday information, either cognitively or emotionally" (12). Therefore, the importance of Kennedy's narrative is not so much in the attention to the particular reasons for her downfall, as it is in her willingness to begin the painful process of reconciling her past and sharing the process with the reader.

Dissociation and Displacement: Denial's Traumatic Siblings

If situational poverty is built upon a series of fateful choices and unfortunate events, then dissociation is the cornerstone of its traumatic foundation. "I cheerfully walk into the Job Center -- doing my best to put on an air of the kind of person who is 'just down on my luck -- not a perpetual welfare case.' I don't want to be associated with the really poor people. I am not really poor. I just don't have a house," Kennedy writes (93). For Kennedy it is more than just not having a house, it is what the house represents: physical security and privacy, a refrigerator for preserving food, an oven for preparing meals, and beds to rest on -- normalcy. "Downwardly mobile [women]," cites Newman, "and their families have to overhaul their identities as they seek new footing at a lower standard of living" (247). While denial stems from the fear of having to accept what has actually been lost, dissociation rises from the need to gain some sort of control over circumstances that are both chaotic and confusing. Kennedy's attempt to distinguish herself and her situation by defining her degree of poverty as, "just down on my luck," enables her to dissociate from her current surroundings, the welfare office, and her immediate needs, shelter and
sustenance. She is detaching herself through false reasoning and this kind of "dissociation," states Vickroy, "as a means of living with painful events, [can] lead to provisional identity rather than a fully feeling and functioning one"; akin to acting out a role (202). This may be one reason why, as Laura S. Brown asserts, that limited (i.e., white, middle-class) therapeutic parameters have tended to minimize the effects of constant stress and humiliation associated with being a person of low socioeconomic status (Vickroy 14).

What constitutes normal is, to a large extent, influenced by society and its cultural dicta. "We walk around town...We go to the library, the ocean, the Laundromat. People smile at us. They don't know how poor we are. They don't know we live in our car. We look normal walking around town. We feel normal" (96). Therefore, having freshly laundered clothing, visiting the library, enjoying a day at the beach, and smiling — translates as "I care about myself and my family," "I am smart and seek to educate my children," "I can afford the luxury of time spent in a leisurely activity," "I am happy." As Katherine S. Newman states, "Downward mobility means a great deal to people who live in a society that so closely connects occupation [or class] to self-worth" (19). The importance of appearing as an average, middle-class citizen is evident in Kennedy's writing. The desire to be viewed as an equal in a society where class distinction often defines who you are to others creates fertile ground for traumatic symptoms to develop. "It is critical," according to Ricki Stefanie Tannen, author of The Female Trickster: The Mask that reveals: Post-Jungian & Postmodern Psychological
Perspectives on Women in Contemporary Culture, "that women and other marginalized 'others' -- whatever their color, ethnicity, religion or socio-economic status -- have the capacity and ability to communicate their desires if they are to refuse victim status because if one cannot portray or communicate who one truly is, then it makes even the desire to not be a victim, too dangerous to be [written] about" (181). Therefore, if some aspects of reality are denied by the woman, but many are pragmatically accepted by the community, a woman may appear to others as quite normal. If she is clean, takes care of her children, and speaks politely to her neighbors, for example, the fact that she and her family are living out of their car may pass unnoticed (Waines 42).

Conversations also become superficial as a means to dissociate with the reality of current circumstances, masking the presence of trauma. When approached by another woman with children on the beach [where Kennedy and her children are living out of their car], Kennedy is careful to keep the conversation to that of a "normal mom" (97). Normal mothers talk consists of discussing their children, school, illnesses, types of play, and steer clear of any expression of personal failure, loss, or suffering. As a coping mechanism, dissociation makes overwhelming and seemingly inescapable stresses escapable, allowing a victim to remain sane by eliminating the anxiety that could result in a breakdown (Waites 44). In reality, though, it only serves to prolong what may be inevitable.
According to Vickroy, "Trauma survivors" defenses often include some incorporations of the traumatic context, embracing some of what is threatening in order to exercise some control over it" (124). "I hate keeping our stuff in garbage bags because it makes me feel like the proverbial bag lady," states Kennedy (101). For Kennedy, plastic bags used to store personal items are equated with bag ladies. Bag ladies are poor. Plastic bins used to store personal items are equated with the middle class. The middle class are not poor. Kennedy uses plastic bins and not plastic bags, therefore she is not a bag lady and not poor. What is interesting here is how, to some extent, the discourse of trauma takes on the Cartesian method of logic, where "the self and its thought takes as true only that which the mind cannot find reason to doubt" (Bizzell 793). In essence, this is an example of the Cartesian Split, where Kennedy, "[splits] off from" the "part of [herself] or [her] experience" of being homeless outside of the campground which, according to Vickroy, denotes "a form of dissociation, [a] primary defense mechanism against the agonies of reexperiencing the trauma" induced by her fear of social displacement (124). Life in a campground is not threatening to those who are there for its intended use as a vacation spot; however, for those people and their families, like Kennedy, who must utilize the facility as camouflage, the fear of being exposed as a fraud is extremely threatening. And Kennedy's implementation of carefully selected details, like the "proverbial bag lady," create visual images in the mind of the reader that engages him / her into
an act of witnessing something middle class Americans aren't supposed to experience.

At one point, as Kennedy writes, "I'm sick of that car" (95), the car becomes a metaphor for her life. She cannot admit openly that she is fighting off escalating anger and anxiety in the hope of avoiding an emotional breakdown. She is not only displaced socially, but physically as well. "The minutes crawl by," Kennedy says. "God, what I wouldn't give for a television" (98). Television, the symbol of middle class normalcy, which is what Kennedy ultimately seeks. Kennedy echoes words that are expressed by many women "who grew up in middle-class comfort" only to find themselves living "along the edge of poverty."

Plunged into poverty and temporary homelessness, along with their children, as a result of divorce, the women "can't remember what it was like...before 'this."

Women who are in constant fear if the car they are using will "make it," because they haven't maintained it properly. Women who fret over how they are going to "stretch to get these bills paid" and the possibility of "one more thing" happening that will cause them to lose their children and their identity, if not their minds (Shipler 25).

**Identity: Fragmentation and Repression**

Both Kennedy and Newton-Keith reminisce over the types of mothers they perceive themselves to once be. "I spent my days being pregnant, playing with babies, and then toddlers; cleaning, cooking, walking, and watching TV [...] in pursuit of fruit juice stains [...] There were times being pregnant and having
children felt like the only thing I could do well. The only thing I was good for. And frankly, it was the only thing I wanted to do," states Kennedy (4-5). Newton-Keith uses similar terms in regard to pre-war life on the island of Borneo: "We were a simple group of [young wives and] mothers. We wheeled the kids about in prams, compared them daily, talked about prickly heat and wet pants, brought them up by the book, had formulas for their milk, boiled their dishes, fusses about their strained foods, and wanted them to have the best of everything" (12). Poverty and war have changed an integral part of who they are and it's important for them to convey to the reader that they were not always the way they are now. Kennedy's "I was good" and Newton-Keith's "[I] was simple" are in sharp contrast to the way their mothering was altered through their traumatic transitions. Kennedy began to doubt whether or not she was still a good parent, "What kind of mother would take her kids from their father and think this is a better life?" (73). For Newton-Keith, what once was simple became complex, "I wept in despair...for the gentle, loving mother that I could not be to him. [I] could only show [George] a stern woman struggling grimly to get his food" (140). Even under the best of circumstances parenting a child is difficult, however, when faced with no social support, no feasible contact with friends and family, and no viable means of securing suitable shelter or food, single-mothering can be a form of stressful caregiving (Kendall-Tackett 35).

As the mothers in the Japanese concentration camps were forced to work longer and farther away from the camps, they became physically weaker and
emotionally more nervous, and their children grew wilder, running in packs like animals. This prompted a group of Catholic nuns who were also incarcerated to set aside two hours each morning to gather the children for lessons in a makeshift school setting. "I didn't care if George learned anything or not," writes Newton-Keith, "but the idea that he would be watched over for a short time daily by the Sisters, and that for part of the time while I was working he would be out of trouble, gave me new hope" (173). Kennedy expresses similar concerns:

I don't know what to do with the kids while I'm working. I look at some of the ads for the day care centers or moms who have day care businesses in their home, but they are insanely priced. Formal day care is definitely out [....] available babysitters are few and far between. I keep looking, but the cheapest I've found is $3 per hour per kid. That's $9 an hour. Some nights I don't even make that much. So back to the car [which is parked behind the bar where I work] they go. (65 & 86)

Kennedy becomes entangled in what Elizabeth Waites identifies as the "double bind, 'damned if you, damned if you don't,' situation" that often results in denial that the dilemma exists, in order for the victim to cope. "Leaving my children in the car while I work is dangerous," but "I cannot leave my children home alone while I work," therefore, "I am choosing the lesser of two evils [and] I am making the better choice by keeping my children in the car and periodically checking on them" -- Kennedy is substituting a form of trance logic for normal logic as a
coping mechanism, thereby processing mutually incompatible messages as both true, allowing her to react simultaneously, or sequentially, without experiencing the anxiety that would ordinarily arise from a perception of inconsistency (43-44).

Even the women's movement of the 70s hasn't eradicated the inherent and unrealistic expectations women have towards motherhood. As Kathleen A. Kendall-Tackett states, the societal ideals are still there that, "Women should anticipate all their families needs" and that "Women should be able to take care of everything" (40). Finding adequate childcare is both emotionally and financially challenging. According to Newman, "a series of obstacles stand in the way of divorced mothers as they struggle to maintain a decent standard of living for their children. First and foremost, the mother must find childcare for them while she is working, which increases the cost of supporting the family" (203). "Ally is only twenty-one, not much younger than my twenty-four...I probably look years older. I certainly feel older," states Kennedy (68). Kennedy finds a coworker, Ally, to watch her children for the price of splitting her tips, but it was not the idealistic way she once envisioned caring for her children would be.

People who have lived through downward mobility are often "secretive and cloistered, or so bewildered by their fate, that they find it hard to explain to themselves, let alone others, what has befallen them" (Newman x). So, perhaps, it is what Kennedy does not disclose about caring for her children during this portion of her life that renders closer examination. As Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub explain in their book, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature*,

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Psychoanalysis, and History, traumatic "testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition" (5). Nowhere in Kennedy's narrative, specifically in regard to the children, does she mention illness or discipline. "Missing details," states Vickroy, are "of necessity repressed" because to reveal them is to admit failure. "What is not said or cannot be remembered is equally revealing of traumatic memories" (144, 146). While it is probably possible for both Kennedy and her children to have escaped any major illnesses, it seems unlikely to anyone who has ever raised a child that they did not succumb to at least the common cold, during the months that they lived out of the car. "We know very well that many who work at the edge of poverty," writes Shipler, "fall between the cracks of health insurance plans, earning too much to qualify for Medicaid and too little to buy private coverage," so they ignore a plethora of symptoms related to illnesses until the situation qualifies for emergency care (295).

It is also not feasible that her three children did not have moments of unruly or unacceptable behavior. According to Elizabeth A. Waites, "The reorganization of behavior and self-experience that follows trauma may be based in part on the compartmentalization of episodic memories" (31). To compartmentalize memories is to repress them and, in doing so, also suppresses the emotions that are connected with them. If her children became ill and she
could not afford medication, or seek professional medical help, Kennedy would have suffered another blow to her identity as a mother. Likewise, if she experienced moments, as most parents do, of anger towards misbehaving children, she would have felt immense guilt, rationalizing that if she had been a better mother the children would have no reason to misbehave. The absence of such information in her narrative can be seen as another coping mechanism, one in which Caruth claims allows the survivor to "exit into the freedom of forgetting" (32). It can also signal one of trauma's most crippling effects, silence. "Silence," states Vickroy, "is defeat" (146). For the reader, this translates into a "fuller, truer knowledge that forgetting is indeed a necessary part of understanding...the complexity of survival at the heart of human experience" (58). Autobiographical writing demonstrates that "we can never recover entirely a traumatic past, only represent it to the best of our ability" (Gilmore 85). The challenge, therefore, is not posed by what the author chooses to reveal in her narrative, but in what ultimately remains unshared, due to the long-term effects of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Desperately Seeking Normal

When Kennedy relocates her car from the beach to the campground her use of tense immediately becomes more consistent. "More often than not, [the landlords] keep looking at my kids, and I can tell they don't want a bunch of little kids in the apartment," writes Kennedy. "It's also difficult to prove that kind of discrimination, especially if I don't have all the cash up front. They can just say
that's the reason" (156-57). Like Newton-Keith ("We could not conceive of living in these conditions for years" (53)), Kennedy begins to realize that she will not find a place to live for her or her children as quickly as she initially thought she would, so she must continue to shift their "home" between the beach and the campground. "I hand my twenty-five dollars over to the nice man in the booth and we wind our way through the happy, vacationing families to our home for the evening," writes Kennedy. "[The children and I] take a walk and say hello to some of the nice people who are on vacation. We tell them that we're on vacation, too" (99). At the campground, Kennedy and her family blend in -- everyone is without their home, living out of plastic containers, going without the accoutrements of middle class life. This consistency to stay focused in the moment, and her ability to stay in the present tense, may indicate a moment within Kennedy's traumatic experience when she felt she had successfully passed as the middle class citizen and mother she identified with. At this moment their abnormal way of living is the standard:

We roast marshmallows [....] We eat. And then I put a larger log on the fire, and we go to the bathhouse to wash up. We wash our dishes with a bar of Ivory soap and a washcloth. We stack them wet and then carry them back to the car. I dry them with the beach towel I use for showering and then put them back in their Rubbermaid containers [....] We take our showers. When we are at
the campground, everyone gets one because we aren't paying per shower." (78, 99, 101)

Within the confines of the campground, Kennedy camps like everyone else with their families; she ceases to feel like the Other. "There is no changing into pajamas. There's no point. We just sleep in our clothes," continues Kennedy (100). Kennedy's use of short sentences, with a snappy rhythm, reflects an upbeat pace in both her recollection, and writing, of the experience.

Survival: Image and Sacrifice

When faced with limited funds to purchase nourishing food and no adequate way in which to preserve it, one begins to rationalize the value of those foods that are easily attainable and/or affordable. "Wandering through the store, I decide that it's more expensive to be poor that to be rich. Because I don't have a refrigerator, I can't buy concentrated juice for a dollar and make a pitcher to last for a couple of days. Instead I have to buy individual servings at a dollar apiece" (88). Without a way to freeze or preserve foods, "you can't save [money] cooking up huge lentil stews that can be frozen for the week ahead. You eat fast food," according to Barbara Ehrenreich, author of Nickel and Dimed: (On) Not Getting By In America," or the hot dogs and Styrofoam cups of soup that can be microwaved in a convenience store" (27). There is a sense of both desire and disappointment in Kennedy's statement, beginning with her realization that "it's more expensive to be poor" (88). The paradox reveals one of many mundane activities that eventually erode the psyche of the single-mother. In the absence of
the traditional hunter (male) who used to bring home the game (bigger income)
the single-mother finds that she must take on the role of the hunter, as well as
that of the gatherer who forages for staples and prepares the meals. Kennedy
has secured a job with the hope of being able to provide her family with the
basics, shelter and food. She knows, and prefers, to feed her family healthy
meals with fruits, vegetables, and whole grains; however, it is a myth of the
affluent that processed foods are more expensive than natural products or
produce. What she did not know and was not prepared to find out, directly, was
that the poor do not stay poor by choice, but by a system that thwarts their efforts
to provide for their families adequately.

Subsequently, it is the first time throughout her narrative that Kennedy has
actually identified herself with being "poor." Siri Hustvedt points out that
"memories mutate" (108); therefore, with the realization that trauma often finds its
voice years, sometimes decades, after the event, it is impossible to know
whether Kennedy's statement that "it's more expensive to be poor" is truly a
personal realization of the past "I" who is offering testimony of the experience, or
if it is actually an acknowledgement of the "I" in the present who can now discern
and define more clearly the financial and emotional status of the event. "To one
degree or another," continues Hustvedt, "we all invent our personal past" (113).

Like Newton-Keith ("Sometimes I was so hungry that I had literally to keep
my eyes off [George's] food when he was eating), Kennedy sacrifices her own
need for nourishment to ensure that her children are, if not properly, sufficiently
"I try not to eat too much when I'm with [the children]. I'd rather they eat everything we have," says Kennedy (79). Feeding one's children is the most intimate responsibility of a parent's duty. "Mothers are expected to sacrifice for their children," states Elshtain. Living up to this ideal, the mother hopes to spare her children from further trauma and distress (222). Kennedy's revelation that she can not afford to purchase and gather healthier foods for her family has resulted in her increased awareness of her own capacity as a mother for self-sacrifice -- if she can not provide a higher quality of food for her children, she will at least offer them a larger quantity of whatever is available.

Even "the most frugal mother, when she runs out of money to adequately feed her family, often will resort to self-blame in regard to financial mismanagement" (Shipler 207). "I'll make eighty or a hundred dollars on Friday and Saturday nights, so that hundred dollars will last us well into the following week, but by Tuesday or Wednesday, after a couple of loads of laundry, a few nights in the campground, gas, and food, it gets harder. I'm still learning how to budget and sometimes get so fed up that I take us out to dinner... [or] I steal" (91). Kennedy's middle class values are tested, as she attempts to "budget" and stay within her means, yet becomes frustrated at not being able to provide what her family needs, let alone wants (dinner out), so she reverts to stealing, "Yes, I do this -- sugar and sometimes the little packages of salt and pepper" (91) -- a criminal act that is often, albeit unfairly, associated with the poor. While Kennedy's inclusion of such details in her narrative suggest that she may be
trying to build a more positive feminist image by implementing the basic, economic skill of budgeting, even while living on the streets, her confession reveals the difficulty of trying to adapt middle class, domestic thinking to the reality of living in poverty.

However, the juxtaposition of "budget" and "steal" is more than just a contradiction in thinking, it can be identified as a side effect of PTSD. In reality, restaurant condiments are commonly taken by those with money as well as those without, so why does Kennedy feel the need to confess to executing this act? "The conscious or unconscious decision to...do most anything," states De Becker, "involves many mental and emotional processes, but they usually boil down to how a person perceives four fairly simple issues: justification, alternatives, consequences, and ability" (93). Therefore, could this confession to something so small be compared to the use of metonymy in literature, representing more and bigger necessities that Kennedy stole and is unable to come to terms with? "Under normal circumstances," states Des Pres, "[committing a] crime [of any degree] is condemned, if only because (and this amounts to a definition of a civilized state) there is always a margin of choice, always another way to live" (100). Des Pres continues, "Survivors act as they do because they must -- the issue is always life or death -- and at every moment the meaning and purpose of their behavior is fully known. Attempts to interpret the survivor's experience -- to see it in terms other than its own -- have done more harm that good" (157). It is easy for the middle-to-upper class reader to frown
upon the act of Kennedy's stealing, but is it reasonable to presume that as a parent she would place a higher value on the decision to not steal than the choice to feed and cloth her children? "It is a common misconception that living [on just the basics] requires very little," writes Kennedy. "In fact, I learned rather quickly that while you might aim for complete sufficiency, you have to buy a lot of stuff first" (35). Downward mobility is a bewildering experience not only because it threatens personal identity but because it leaves its victims unsure of what cultural rules to abide by in order to reverse their fall and survive (Newman 230).

Captivity: Identifying the Enemy

In war, the enemy and the effects of trauma are, by their nature, easier to recognize. For Newton-Keith, identifying who the enemy was, as well as the mental and physical harm they inflicted was easy. But what if the enemy resides both inside the victim, in the form of an inherent ideology, and outside the victim, in the form of a system of local, State, and Federal entities that undermine the very autonomy they promote? A system comprised of all the bureaucrats, agents, and clerks who serve it, the "they" to which we refer, me and women, who become the well-oiled mechanisms of the machine they service (Des Pres 18).

For Kennedy, and many middle class women who experience downward mobility, the enemy and the damage imposed is much more ambiguous and elusive; they are, quite literally, fighting City Hall. "How quickly [money] goes now," Kennedy says. "A hundred dollars could be twenty or even one. Between gas and food and a campsite -- I could make it disappear in a flash. [Then] I spot
an ad that says it takes Section 8 renters. 'What's a Section 8 renter?'" (132, 136). The fact that Kennedy is unfamiliar with the term "Section 8" is significant and exposes the first of two enemies that hold her captive: a middle class lack of knowledge regarding resources and State assistance for the poor. This, according to De Becker, can be an "interesting and insidious side effect" of denial. Born into middle class, Kennedy had no need to identify sources earmarked for the poor, and her upbringing instilled the notion that poverty couldn't happen to her as long as she worked hard, so it never occurred to her that she could seek, let alone, received assistance to obtain shelter and food.

As Kennedy returns to the campground to assemble the necessary paperwork to apply for Section 8 housing and welfare subsidy, she begins to feel undeserving and unworthy of receiving such help. "I want this to go right, but something in my gut tells me it won't. Something tells me I'll need to file a million forms and will have to wait forever for an answer" (144). Many survivors describe two coexisting realities, according to Ben Sherwood, author of The Survivor's Club: The Secrets and Science that Could Save Your Life:

They live with one foot in the regular world and one foot in an invisible realm of hardship and loneliness. Ours may be a confessional culture, but in this other sphere, most people face their struggles quietly, trying not to draw attention. [T]hey endure adversity without talking about it They don't want to burden anyone else. The don't want pity. They just want it to end. (18)
Kennedy withholds information from the social worker when she is interviewed for subsidized housing: "I don't want them to have any reason to take the kids away. I'm not sure if they would, but I don't want to give them any reason at all" (146). Kennedy does not disclose to the social worker that she is living out of her car. Her need to secure better shelter for herself and her children does not supersede the fear she has that she will lose her children in the process. Kennedy also does not share with the reader whether or not she prompted her children to remain quiet during her interview, so as not to give away information that she does not want to share when questioned about where or how they are currently living:

Fear. My life has become about fear. Feeling it. Living it. Abating it. I am afraid of the dark. Of what can happen to me and the children in the dark. Of having no money. I am afraid of being a bad mother. Of my car breaking down for good. Of being alone...forever. I live with a stomach constantly in knots. My life has become a tunnel, and I am focused on getting through it, but I am afraid of what I will find on the other side. (110)

As Sherwood states, "Survivors keep going despite opposition and setbacks. They may want to quit but they still persevere" (16). "I did not qualify for food stamps," writes Kennedy. [I]n a couple of days, I'll find out that they lost my application and I'll have to apply all over again" (136, 147). Here, a shift between tenses -- I "did not qualify," "I'll find out" -- as the author's past (the
experience occurring) and present (emotional response) meld into one episode. This, according to Juliet Mitchell, is the "effect of trauma on language," as it signifies a "site of resistance, as it engages the politics of looking back and challenges how the past and present may be known in relation to a particular version of the [survivor's] history" (126, Gilmore 80). Kennedy's writing clearly shows her frustration and belief that the system sets people up to fail, by offering them the chance to apply for assistance and then telling them that they do not qualify. "Inconsistent or contradictory messages arouse anxiety, particularly if decision making is crucial to survival," states Waites. Out of fear, Kennedy told the social worker that she was staying "with friends," instead of disclosing that she and her children were living out of her car. Even though her reasoning may have been justified, Kennedy's withholding of this information may have inadvertently allowed the system to classify her as not being desperate enough for government assistance.

An Appeal to Social Awareness

Kennedy's liberation, unlike Newton-Keith's, comes in the form of the proverbial White Knight, when she enters a relationship with a coworker, Hogan:

He is surprised to learn about my working in Washington...People always are -- they always wonder how a kid with so much potential could turn out...well, homeless and living in her car with the three kids she had when she was too young [....] I am such a cheerful
person that it often shocks people to learn of this 'darkness' in my past. (195)

Kennedy alludes to the "peculiar and perplexing experience of survival" that women who have fallen from economic grace encounter as they attempt to regain what they have lost -- the shock of having lived through the fall and the awe exhibited by others when they share their life story. "[T]here is something about being at the bottom -- at the bottom of the bottom -- that never quite leaves you...you become acutely aware of that one paycheck, which separates you from the car apartment," she writes. "I wish I had taken advantage of programs I learned about much later, like child care assistance and food pantries and security deposit assistance...no one prepares you for those things...I had no idea" (209). The "lack of preparedness," a threat that is recognized as such by the mind "too late" is the fright that causes the breach in the mind that allows trauma to take hold (Caruth 62). For consciousness then, according to Caruth, "the act of survival, as the experience of trauma, is the repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to one's own life" (62). What appears to be an important part of the confrontation of the trauma by the survivor is the appeal to the reader for change on either an individual level or national level.

Like Newton-Keith, Kennedy wants the reader to take heed, "I learn that while some people who become homeless have spiraled downward through drug
or alcohol abuse or other 'less savory' issues, some are just plain old people -- like me, or maybe even you" (208). Unlike Newton-Keith though, who did not have to identify the enemy to the reader, Kennedy feels compelled to site statistics, "More than 85 percent of homeless families are headed by single mothers, with the average homeless family comprised of a young mother and her two young children" (209) and her middle-class lack of knowledge in how the ambiguous system works:

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There is no much help available for people without homes or without food that it absolutely shocks me...I had no idea that if I had just walked my agnostic self into a church I could have received help...Since that time, I have also heard of other organizations that can help. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately), very few of these organizations are government related...It's hard to accept help when you need it. What's harder is never being offered it. (209)
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Contradiction is one of the areas where survivors of trauma often undermine their own efforts to gain empathy, especially with a poverty narrative. Within a few paragraphs Kennedy admits that she "had no idea" about the number of organizations available to help the homeless and that help was "never...offered." The middle-class victim who should have been intelligent enough to know about services that could have helped her navigate through her economic fall, is in conflict with the survivor of poverty who feels her ignorance of those potential services should have been recognized with an offer of help from the entities, non-
profit and governmental, that comprise a public system of assistance to the unfortunate.

For women, like Kennedy, who are faced with an American ideal that embraces an equality of opportunity for every person, but a minimum local wage that invisibly regulates the results of that equality; state courts that allow for divorce under "irreconcilable differences," but fail to address the financial inequalities that ultimately ensue; and federal agencies that place unrealistic limits on the cost of basic amenities needed to survive in America, it would appear that the Government system has taken on the role of the oppressor and assumed the relationship of the enemy, reflective of "white male dominance, property ownership, and the control of [women]." In this way, "knowledge of trauma and how it is expunged through the process of writing, offers the opportunity to unveil new perspectives concerning the relationship of power and its effects" (Vickroy 22,150).
CHAPTER FOUR
READING TRAUMA: GAINING PERSPECTIVE

He is now rising from affluence to poverty.
Mark Twain, Rev. Henry Beecher's Farm

When it comes to traumatic experiences, and the effect it has on its victims, silence and time are important factors. A large contributor to the silence is that, in order for their voices to be heard, women like Agnes Newton-Keith and Michelle Kennedy, and their situations, first must be acknowledged. While there is a multitude of war narratives available, few are about, or even mention, the existence of white American, female, civilian POWs who have suffered in enemy concentration camps. Similarly, while an abundance of scholarship and narratives can be found on American women-of-color born into, or living in, poverty, narratives written by, or referencing, white American middle class women who have fallen into poverty through downward mobility are scarce.

This silence not only inhibits any comprehensive study identifying trauma victims it also diminishes the sacrifices made by women caught in the crossfire of war, and reinforces ethnic and racial stereotypes associated with the poor.

As for time, three areas require further examination: (1) how long a victim must experience the trauma before behavioral symptoms associated with PTSD begin to develop and become pathological; (2) how much time must elapse, following the event, before a survivor can effectively recall the experience; and (3) to what extent can the process of writing extinguish the survivor's anxiety and
enable him/her to "remember the event without re-experiencing the fear and horror associated with it" (Hamilton 19)?

Mary Rowlandson was held captive for a period of three months, and according to Burnham, her separation from her community "produced changes in the captive's behavior, attitudes, and subjective sense of self, changes evident in her detailed record of the gradual process of transculturation [that she underwent] over the twelve weeks of her captivity" (22). Agnes Newton-Keith's captivity lasted from January 1942 to September 1945, a period of approximately three and a half years, while Michelle Kennedy's homelessness lasted for one summer season. "Caruth argues," according to Berger, "that trauma as it first occurs is incomprehensible" (577), because "the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located," it is only after a period of latency that the experience can be recalled and placed in a narrative (Caruth 8). Therefore, it is only by careful examination of the language used in their narratives that we can decipher the approximate onset of trauma, observe its effects, and recognize the healing benefits connected with the process of writing for survivors.

How long then must the trauma reside following the event before the survivor is able to comprehend and articulate in words the full impact of their experience? Unlike her male counterpart, Kurt Vonnegut, whose semi-autobiographical novel, Slaughterhouse-Five, was published 34 years following the end of World War II, Newton-Keith's captivity narrative, Three Came Home,
was published in 1947, within two years of her release. And Michelle Kennedy states that it took, "...six years after the fact," to write, *Without a Net: Middle Class and Homeless (with Kids) in America: My Story* (206).

If memory inhabits the mind like a ghost in a machine, at what point can the survivor exorcise the ghost through writing and give shape to the traumatic memories that will make them credible to the reader? According to Diane Ackerman, "The act of remembering is emblematic of the textual process itself: the impossible task of recuperating in word the fleeting experience of emotion" (135). However, "[a]s they describe a traumatic event chronologically and analytically and place it in a larger context, [survivors] experience an increased sense of perspective, reduced feelings of chaos" (Meichenbaum & Fong, 1994, qtd. in Hamilton 19). "In this way," cites Hamilton, "[The] retelling and rethinking of a traumatic event somehow provides a degree of closure so that the event does not require further rumination and preoccupation" and, in this way, "survivors develop a coherent narrative of the trauma" (19). As Juliet Mitchell states, "To speak without one to hear is 'mad'...To write knowing that one may be read is 'sanity'" (132). Perhaps, then, it is to keep the mind from going mad that both Newton-Keith and Kennedy engaged in the process of writing. "Writing," states Vickroy, "reveals the tenuous nature of survival, the haunting that continues but must be put off to some extent for life to continue in the present" (191). The lingering effects of trauma cause memories to become fragmented, "Order and disorder in human experience is an interactive process" and "the main effect of
trauma is disorganization"; therefore, "recovery involves a process of reorganization that attempts to restore wholeness to body and / or mind" for the survivor who is attempting to work through it (Mitchell 130, Waites 22). "Writing," asserts Laurie Vickroy, "[works as] a resistance to the annihilation of memory" (136); it holds off the death of a part of oneself, of a particular time. Writing for the author of the captivity or poverty narrative, "pieces together what Jacques Lacan would call the corp morcelé, or body of fragments," a puzzle the survivor must bring together while warding off the reality of Momento Mori (Henke xvi).

Hanging between two worlds is a depressing state of existence for the downwardly mobile individual who (like the war captive) must juggle two incompatible senses of personhood. For that reason, the process of writing purges the traumatic emotions associated with the event, merging the identities of victim and survivor into one whole being. When it comes to the relation between trauma, memory, and language, Paul John Eakin, author of Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention, asserts that:

If the self is itself a kind of metaphor, then we should be willing to accept metaphors of self in autobiography as consubstantial to a significant degree with the reality they presume to incarnate, a reality deeply linguistic, if not in the very texture of its being, at least in the quality of any knowledge of it that we may hope to attain. In this perspective the writing of autobiography emerges as a
symbolic analogue of the initial coming together of the individual and language that marks the origin of self-awareness. (215)

"At any age several life events can impel women toward poverty" (Zopf 79); therefore, those who study and treat trauma have begun to focus on "the similar effects of trauma on diverse populations and examine the kinds of social forces and restrictions that create it" (Vickroy 220). The experience of the downwardly middle class is one in which "they often come to rest slightly above the poverty line, but far below the affluence they enjoyed in the past." They must therefore "contend with the psychological, social, and practical consequences of their fall from grace" (Newman 8). As a member of the middle class, they weren't affluent enough to obtain everything that they wanted; now they find that they are not poor enough to get the basic necessities that they need. Downward mobility then is not merely a matter of "accepting a menial job, enduring the loss of stability, or witnessing with dismay the evaporation of one's hold on material comfort"; it is also a "broken covenant" -- between the individual working hard to attain the American Dream and the government that has promised to protect his / her welfare (Newman 230). Hence, incorporating one's traumatic experience as a victim of captivity, regardless of who the enemy is, into an autobiographical narrative involves "reworking one's assumptions about oneself and the world so that they fit with one's new personal data" (Figley 23).

Survivors are walking enigmas, "[a]s a witness the survivor is both sought and shunned; the desire to hear her truth is countered by the need to ignore her"
(Des Pres 41). For this reason, texts that present authentic and intimate experiences of the effects of downward mobility in America, "position their readers in ethical dilemmas analogous to trauma survivors, forcing them to consider the ways culture obscures and then suppresses the fall" (Vickroy 1,171).

The "emphasis on success has always made it difficult for Americans to acknowledge defeat," as a result, when life doesn't turn out as planned, "they tend to assume that the fault lies within the person experiencing the fall" and not with any outside sources (Newman 8, 9). In light of the current economic state of the nation, there should be no question as to the reality of downward mobility and the trauma it produces for individuals, especially women with children:

Nearly a quarter of the homeless actually work full-time or part-time, but there is insufficient housing available at affordable prices. Many of the homeless also are families with children whose parents are involuntarily without work, and the homeless population is by no means confined to the mentally-ill, alcoholic, or drug-abusing loners. Therefore, the poor who end up on the streets or in shelters, squatter settlements, or their cars are a diverse group which conforms poorly to prevailing stereotypes. (Zopf 96)

By showing the similarities in survival skills and strategies in the victim to survivor shift, the effects of trauma embedded in the language of both Agnes Newton-Keith's captivity and Michelle Kennedy's poverty narratives become evident. And
if, according to Cotton Mather, Mary Rowlandson "experienced conversion through captivity" (Burnham 11), then I hope by exposing these similarities and their effects of trauma on women with children who are living in poverty that other women damaged by the fall will find their voices and step up to share their experiences, and that the reading of poverty narratives will shed light on the true nature of what it is to be poor in America.
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