A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO COUNSELLOR EDUCATION: TWO LIVES IN EVOLUTION

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Abstract

This thesis is a personal journey: in these pages I speak about my life, and question how my past experience informs my work as a counsellor. This thesis is also about my participant's life and his parallel but different journey to become a counsellor. My purpose is to inquire into how counsellors know, understand and empathize with others, and to look at how personal lived experience impacts on counselling practice.

My methodology is narrative. I believe that social science is the study of human experience which is recovered and embodied in narrative form. My method is to gather autobiographical material on my participant and myself, and to reconsider these reconstructed experiences in the present. I gathered my participant's life story in a series of open-ended, conversational, taped interviews; and I wrote my own stories of lived experience. This material became the data for my inquiry.

This thesis is the story of how two counsellors make sense of their lived experience and how they translate that experience into an ability to work with people. For me, the sharing of our stories is a celebration of our dialogue, interaction, and connection. The insights for other counsellors are found in the stories.

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Chapter 1

A Journey to Voice

> The study of the human mind is so difficult, so caught in the dilemma of being both the object and the agent of its own study, that it cannot limit its inquiries to ways of thinking that grew out of yesterday's physics. Rather the task is so compellingly important that it deserves all the rich variety of insight that we can bring to the understanding of what man makes of his world, of his fellow beings, and of himself. That is the spirit in which we should proceed. (Bruner, 1990, p. xiii)

I have come to this thesis work and this inquiry about counsellor education in a circular way. In considering my own becoming, the person and counsellor I am today, I have a sense of an amazing journey: of the decisions made, the paths taken or not taken, the paths taken but later abandoned, and perhaps more important the experiences involved in the joining of my path with the path of another person, so that they become significant to my life and work.

In 1996 I once again became a fulltime student. This time I entered a graduate program in Education and Counselling at Acadia University. I was faced with the decision of whether or not I would complete a thesis. I had no clear sense of direction for my counselling studies and no burning subject matter in mind. And I had no illusions about the amount of time, work and agony that writing a thesis could involve. I surveyed my life as a mother, partner and family provider, and determined that there was no place for a thesis, and no real practical reason for doing one. What I had not foreseen was that I

would fall in love with narrative inquiry, and that I would find an inspiring teacher/mentor to encourage me and to show me the way.

During my first term I enrolled in a readings course on narrative theory and method with Dr. Carmen Shields. Slowly, as I began to read Connelly and Clandinin (1988), Heshusius (1994), Fine (1994), and Oakley (1984, 1992) I felt a new world opening before me. I saw that there were stories to tell and examine which could change the way I see and act. By the end of the term I knew how I could approach the question that I had been turning over in my mind. I was on a path which ended in professional counselling status, but what made me a counsellor? Would this program of study and my practicum placement turn me into a counsellor? Was there some essential quality that I would acquire, or was I just moving through a series of courses which would give me techniques and theoretical knowledge about counselling?

I had already worked as a youth counsellor for many years and I knew that theory and practice do not always connect in real life experience. During my academic year I was working as an intern employment and transition counsellor, and I wondered what I was bringing to my counselling sessions. I was using techniques that I had learned in my career counselling course, and beyond that, I felt that I did have some ability to connect with my clients, to listen and understand. This connection with my clients was hard to describe and it did not lend itself to theoretical explanation. I believed I was drawing on my own past lived experience, and that I was using an intuitive sense to connect with my clients.

I knew that the practice of counselling could be informed by intellectual learning, but I also believed counselling was an intuitive and spiritual practice, a practice of

merging, a practice of understanding at the deepest level, of calling on all the experiences we have to join with others whose pain and experience may be very different from our own. In thinking about how I connect with others at a deep level, I am influenced by Heshusius (1994) who questions our western scientific belief that in order to know we need to distance and separate ourselves from the subject. In "Freeing Ourselves From Objectivity: Managing Subjectivity or Turning Towards a Participatory Mode of Consciousness?" (1994), Heshusius reports that this separation of the knower and the known has been described as "alienated consciousness" and as the "disenchantment of knowing" (p.16). She suggests an older, pre-scientific approach based in participatory consciousness, which "is the awareness of a deeper level of kinship between the knower and the known" (p.16). Heshusius is talking about connecting at a deep level, and being totally present for the other person.

This ability to understand and connect with another person at a deep level, that Heshusius is writing about, is often referred to as empathy and described as "putting oneself in the shoes of another" and "seeing through the eyes of another" (Gazda et all, 1995, p. 14). Carkhuff (1969) suggests that empathy appears to be the most important dimension in the helping process (p. 202, quoted in Gazda, p.14). Sarason (1988) also suggests that this is a crucial question.

> How do you get inside of someone else's world? I was learning and I am continuing to learn, that that may be the most important question in the training of any professional, who, for clinical research purposes, has to understand others - not to "study" others but to understand others . . . (p.149)

If this was the case, I wanted to inquire into what made me or any counsellor able to make the connection, to listen and understand, and to share the pain of another. I felt that narrative was a methodology that could open the door to a deep understanding of myself as a person and as a counsellor. Following Connelly and Clandinin (1988) who define curriculum as "one's life course of action", I believed I had been learning about empathy and connection to others for a long time.

I was also inspired by Ann Oakley (1984) and Donna Williams (1992) to believe that I could write about my own life. These two women each wrote about their very different personal lives, each writer touched my soul and gave me new insights into what it means to be female and live in the second half of the twentieth century within a Western patriarchal cultural tradition. Writing about my own life was a rather frightening prospect, but in the end it was also a compelling project. I was at a point in my life where I felt the need to tell stories. In forty-six years of lived experience I had gathered events, drama, pain and joy. I wanted to speak about my life, to share it, to make sense of it, to see how it informed the work that I did as a counsellor.

I also found that reading biographical and autobiographical work (Eldridge (1996), Lau (1989), Maracle (1993), Oakley (1984), Sarason (1988), Shields (1997), Vallieres (1971), Williams (1992)), was a powerful way to broaden my understanding of many issues confronting people today. In reading Williams's book Nobody Nowhere - The Extraordinary Autobiography of an Autistic (1992), I not only learned about autism but felt something of her inner struggle. Evelyn Lau, in writing about her own life in Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid (1988), helped me to understand young women who run away to work as prostitutes on city streets. Van Manen (1990) says: "We gather other

people's experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves" (p.62). Connelly and Clandinin (1988) suggest that our stories can have a powerful effect on others. Through reading these accounts of lived experience, I have come to believe that telling our stories can help create a more humane and compassionate world.

I am drawn to narrative research because it fits with the way I think about the world, and I believe it can inform my practice of living and counselling. As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest, "we are attracted to and shape research problems that match our personal view of seeing and understanding the world" (p. 9). I do not see narrative inquiry as a new approach to knowledge, but rather as a revival and an accepting of another way of knowing (Belenky et all, 1986; Highwater, 1981). It is my understanding that since the dawn of language, humans have engaged in storytelling as a way of communicating knowledge, and that tribal cultures are rich in narrative tradition. As Estes (1997) writes: "Story is far older than the art and science of psychology, and will always be the elder in the equation no matter how much time passes" (p.20).

In this thesis my methodology is narrative. The theoretical framework is based on the writings of Connelly and Clandinin (1994).

> The social sciences are concerned with humans and their relations with themselves and their environments and, as such, the social sciences are founded on the study of experience. Experience, is therefore, the starting point and key term for all social science inquiry. (p. 414)

They also suggest that " . . . stories are the closest we come to experience as we and others tell of our experience" (p.415). Following Dewey (1938), I define lived experience as a personal passage connected to others through time and place. Experience is personal because individuals stamp lived experience with their own personal interpretation of the

moment. Experience is also about time and location, as we are all connected to the ongoing human experience that is social history. My own life story is connected to, and part of, the social political history of the time and place in which I find myself. I believe, as does Erikson (1975), that personal life stories are interwoven with history.

In planning this inquiry into counsellor education I felt the need to include one or two other counsellors. I wanted to see my own lived experience and counselling curriculum in the light of another counsellor's journey. I felt that this would help me find the essential components in my own story, the elements in my story that relate to the development of myself as a counsellor. My own time constraints made me realize I could only do justice to my own story and one other. I considered acquaintances or colleagues that I might approach with this bold request to be a participant in my research. In the end I selected a participant who I hoped would reflect a reality quite different than my own, someone who was male, fifteen years younger, living in a committed gay relationship, and working as a counsellor. I also believed that it was important to select a participant that would be comfortable working and sharing on a deep level with myself as author. Patrick was a participant who, I felt, would willingly embark with me on this journey of inquiry into the lived experience of counsellors.

In order to frame my thesis I rely on "personal experience methods" as described by Clandinin and Connelly (1994). This involves the gathering and recovery of personal autobiographical material on myself and my participant and the reconstruction of our experiences in the present. In gathering this data, I follow Connelly and Clandinin in focusing in "four directions: inward and outward, backward and forward" (p.417). As Barone (1997) explains:

> . . . the complex process of re-storying one's life rarely evidences a perfectly rounded seamless structure. Instead there are erratic meanderings, jarring interruptions, chronological juxtapositionings, and so on. (p. 223)

I make sense of my own lived experience and the lived experience of my participant by examining and interrogating our temporal and storied experience. Using Pinar's approach: "I take myself and my existential experience as a data source" (1994, p. 20). I follow Clandinin and Connelly (1994) in defining narrative:

> . . . narrative is both phenomenon and method. Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the pattern of inquiry for its study. (p.416)

As Oakley (1992) suggests: "We make up our lives as we go along, and then go back and turn them into coherent stories. That is called history." (p. xxiii)

In considering how I might work with my participant, I listened to Michelle Fine's (1994) caution about speaking for the "Other". In research, we sometimes speak about the other as if we know more about them and their experiences than they do themselves. This can be a dangerous practice, because when we speak about the other we can all too easily co-opt their voices, rather than let them be heard. Then, we are not there as participants, but rather as "colonizer". Fine writes:

> When we construct texts collaboratively, self-consciously examining our relations with/for/despite those who have been contained as others, we move against, we enable resistance to, Othering. (p. 74)

I felt the need to respect and protect the voice of my participant. And from the outset we agreed that Patrick would have the right to review and suggest changes to any references about his life and experience. I wanted to work collaboratively with him because I

believed that in working together, we would gain greater insight into how our lived experience informed our counselling practice.

I gathered Patrick's life story in a series of eight open-ended, conversational, taped interviews. We started in June and ended in October 1997. These interviews were inquiries where each of us shared stories and asked questions. Each session lasted approximately two hours. These interviews were conducted as equals in a friendly atmosphere. This follows a feminist model of interviewing which is designed to validate the subjective experience of the participant (Oakley, 1981; Brown and Gilligan, 1992). We moved slowly through the process to allow for the recovery of meaning. This pace also allowed Patrick to read through some of the journals that he had kept since high school. The research was facilitated by Patrick's willingness to be open about his life.

During our meetings we moved back and forth between telling our stories and speaking about the meanings we made from these stories. This was an enriching process which initially focused on his story, but then gradually included bits and pieces of my story. Speaking about my own stories with him, was a way of giving back, and building a safe place of sharing for both of us (Connelly and Clandinin, 1993, p. 51). When the final interview was over we had both been moved by the experience of sharing our stories, and believed it had been truly an educative experience (Dewey, 1938).

In writing my own stories of lived experience I used the method of "annals" or "chronicles" suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p.419). The chronicle represents the lived experience of an individual and consists of a long list of dates, events, memories, education, important mentors or people, changes and locations. Once the chronicle was as complete as possible, I then returned to the list to fill in the stories,

writing them in narrative form and probing for details from memory. Where possible I referred to notes and journals that I had written during times of struggle and questioning. Writing my own stories was a painful process. On several occasions I found myself crying as I typed. I was surprised to find how much emotion was still locked up with the stories inside of me. It was exhausting work. And often I wondered about my resolve to write this narrative thesis. However, I knew I had chosen this particular thesis path because it promised to be an experience of personal learning and transformation.

Once I had gathered our stories and felt ready to begin piecing them together to make a coherent whole, I considered how best to weave them together. In my search for a way to proceed with this, I was struck by Connelly and Clandinin's suggestion that education can be thought of "in terms of cultivation, awakening and transformation" (1993, p.16).

> Cultivation is mainly found in the intentional hard work of schooling and in the unintentional lessons of play and other forms of daily life; awakening is found in the romance of becoming aware of the possibility of seeing oneself and the world in a new way; and transformation is found in the process and outcome of falling into living new ways of seeing. Transformation returns a person to cultivation though in a different place. (p.16)

I saw how some of our stories were predominantly about cultivation. They were stories of how we were shaped by our culture, gender, and religion. They were stories of our families and our beginnings. Other stories were about our awakening and our coming to terms with who we were, and with all that we had been told and experienced of the world. They were about making sense of the difficulties and struggles we went through. And there were also transformation stories that spoke about changing how we perceived

ourselves and how we lived. These stories were often about re-building ourselves after we had been shaken to our very core by our life experiences. But I also believe that there is no end to the spiralling stories of our lives. We continually have the possibility of awakening and transforming again and again. I use these concepts of cultivation, awakening and transformation to help me frame these two personal narratives of counsellor education.

In working with my participant's life story I have changed his name and certain identifying characteristics to protect his identity. I have also edited his story for clarity, and occasionally pulled together pieces of the same story which were told to me in different interviews. Despite my changes I believe his voice and experiences shine through. As we had agreed, Patrick reviewed and accepted all the material in this thesis which refers to his life and experience.

This inquiry then is the story of how two counsellors make sense of their lived experience and how they have translated that experience into an ability to work with people in a caring and understanding way. This thesis is about the world as we experienced it, and made meaning of it. The stories included in this thesis are only pieces taken from very complex lives. I agree with Connelly and Clandinin (1993) that "the answers are in the stories, indeed, the answers are the stories" (p.11).

Chapter 2

Cultivation and the Divided Self

> A child is asleep. Her private life unwinds inside her skin and skull: only as she sheds childhood, first one decade and then another, can she locate the actual historical stream, see the setting of her dreaming private life - the nation, the city, the neighborhood, the house where the family lives - as an actual project underway, a project living people willed, and made well or failed, and are still making, herself among them. I breathed the air of history all unaware, and walked oblivious through its littered layers. (Dillard, 1990, p. 346)

In this chapter I present and discuss the cultural world my participant and I were brought into as children. We were both born into relatively stable and supportive environments. We are Caucasian, and grew up in families that were lower middle class. We had parents who loved and cared for us then, and who still love and support us now. And yet even as young children we faced dilemmas which left us divided in ourselves. We both suffered because of who we were and who we were not. We did not fit the gender roles assigned to us by our culture. And we both felt that we were placed in the position of being the other, the one who is seen by the dominant patriarchal culture as being different and less. At times we have chosen to tell difficult and uncomfortable stories, because these are stories that have affected us profoundly as people and as counsellors.

I was surprised to discover in the first interview that we had both grown up in the Province of Quebec, and been raised as Roman Catholics. I believe as does Sarason

(1988) that religion, whether we practice it or not, can be an important part of our psyche (p.127). The fifteen years that separated our arrival into the world were crucial years in the social and political history of Quebec. From 1950 to 1965 Quebec moved from being a society still dominated by the Catholic Church to becoming a more secular society (Hamelin and Provenchal, 1981; Quinn, 1979). The "Quiet Revolution" of Jean Lesage (Hamelin and Provenchal, 1981; Quinn, 1979) together with the social movements sweeping across North America in the 1960's had changed Quebec quite radically. And yet, there are many parallels in our life stories. Our Catholic upbringing gave us a first experience of a spiritual world, but it also filled us with shame and guilt and helped to create the deep divisions we experienced within ourselves. Stories of cultivation as defined by Clandinin and Connelly (1995) reflect what was passed on to us by our families and our culture:

> We also understand the process of cultivation as occurring when an individual, a group of individuals, an institution, or a culture acts on a person. Cultivation is one of the main educational processes by which one's moral horizons are constructed. (p.158)

My participant and I have pieced together our own stories of cultivation based on family anecdotes, photographs, and our own memories. They are our stories in the present about the culture we were born into and how we experienced that world. These reconstructed stories are also coloured by our present knowledge and understanding of the world.

Ruth's story

This is not a unitary tale of a central experience. This is a collection of fragmented stories of conflicting influences leading to a fragmented and multiple subjectivity. I believe, like DuPlessis (1985), Stewart (1994), and Bloom (1996), that it is important to make central the internal conflicts experienced by women living in a patriarchal society.

> . . . DuPlessis advises that women make the conflicts that emerge from their marginalized status and their rebellions against marginalization central to their stories. The narrative thus becomes a site where "subtexts and repressed discourses can throw up one last flare of meaning" (DuPlessis, 1985, p.3). (Bloom, 1996, p.183)

My own life story is like a piece of fabric with threads moving in different directions: There is the ongoing thread of a struggle to escape the proscriptions given to me by my society based on my gender. And yet, at the same time I see the thread of a struggle to accept myself as female moving in a different direction. There is a tension and conflict which is woven into the fabric of my story.

Background

I was born at a hospital in Montreal. My mother was given a painkiller, so that later, she could never really tell me about giving birth. My father was in the waiting room, and then across the street for a supper on the run. He missed the moment of my birth at 6:15 p.m. My father said

that I was the first of his children that he had seen slimy, red-faced and squalling, not very attractive at all. I was a healthy third child with a healthy mother, who could not breastfeed, as she later told me because the doctor had said her nipples were not right. It was old-fashioned in the 1950s to breastfeed your children, and it was not hard for the male doctor to convince my mother that it was better for her and her children that she bottle feed them.

I was a girl. My mother later confided that she had hoped for twins, a boy and a girl, to complete her family. There was my sister, 5 years older, a gregarious out-going child, and my brother, 2 years older, and the boy. I became convinced over time that my father would have preferred another boy. He liked me well enough, but if I had been a boy it would have been that much better. I would have been able to carry on the family name among other things.

It was the 1950s and a woman's role in Canadian middle-class life was clearly defined. The Second World War was over, and women were to stay home and allow men to have the jobs again. They were to stay home and raise the children, take their husband's names, and cook three meals a day forever. Spinsters and maiden aunts worked as nurses and teachers, but in our family this was seen as a lesser life, an unfulfilled life. It was not a real life path, not something you would want for your daughter. There were married women without children, but they were pitied and whispered about. They had some problem.

I was a sensitive and introspective child, and I listened and watched. I had a special connection to my brother because he was an introvert like myself. At some point I realized that boys were better. I decided I would be one. I became a tomboy. This was acceptable because my mother said she had been one too. And like her I was physically energetic and athletic. My best friend was Joey, and we played army and explorers. I could be both a boy and a girl. I spent hours playing with dolls sending them off on wild adventures. On Sundays I would happily put on the cotton smocked dress, white ankle socks and patent shoes to go to visit my maternal grandparents.

They lived in a gracious rambling old wooden house. It was brown with white trim and had two balconies off the second floor. It had a veranda which wrapped around two sides of the house. The house sat on a large property and had once been a country home as it was located close to lake St. Louis. There was an old tennis court, now in disrepair. My mother said a lot of tennis was played there when she was a girl. I loved the house with its dark interior and amazing Indian carpets, which ran on down long hallways and up stairs with wood banisters. There were pictures of my mother as a child with her sisters all in white dresses and patin shoes. My grandfather owned a small company in Montreal. He made ship and railway lamps. He had inherited the company from his father, and his son, my uncle, now worked with him. My mother and her two sisters all married and had children. Two worked as secretaries or

clerks until they got married. The other sister who was "the smart one", went to university and upon graduation got married to a young American diplomat. Much later my mother supported my wish to go to university, and I think she secretly hoped I too would marry a man with a future. My father did not believe that women needed to go to university as they would only get married and raise children anyway. It was a waste of money.

My father was a Catholic Canadian of German and Irish ancestry. There are pictures of him as a boy wearing a white sailor suit, and my mother used to tease him saying he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Catholics married Catholics. I knew this because my parents had a "mixed" marriage, and my mother had to promise the priest and my father to raise us all as Catholics.

My father's own plans to study engineering had been interrupted by the Great Depression and family tragedy. My grandfather had disappeared one day. His furniture company had failed. No one wanted furniture in the Depression. My grandmother was partly to blame, my mother seemed to think. She had been a proud woman who was always trying to keep up with high society. After seven years my paternal grandfather was declared dead. My father said nothing about this. He did not talk about feelings and family secrets. He had been in his last year of high school when his father disappeared, and he left school and went to work in a bank. His mother went to work in a dress shop.

We were the poor people my father said in his ironic way. The house I grew up in as a child was purchased with a loan from my maternal grandfather just before the birth of my sister in 1945. It was a small house, and the walls in the bedrooms upstairs sloped inward to the peak of the roof. At first it was heated with coal, and as young children we were forbidden to go down into the dirty cellar. My parents did not own a car and travelled by bicycle, bus or train. There are pictures of my parents with my sister and later my brother riding in the baskets of their bicycles.

When I was born in 1950, it became necessary to buy a car to transport the family safely. This was my father's pride and joy, a dark green Austin with a tan leather interior and an arm rest which came down in the middle of the back seat. I remember sitting on the arm rest between my brother and sister. I was proud because I was the reason, my father said, that we had this car. We were a package, the Austin and I, and we made my father happy. Several years later my father smashed the Austin on an icy night after a few too many drinks. There were other cars, but none the same.

My mother's family was of Scottish and English origins and they lived within the English culture of Montreal. When she was sixteen her own mother died, and her father soon married again. He married his wife's sister. This woman had a broad spreading bosom under her flowered dresses. She was a gardener, and so was my mother. I remember tagging along with my mother who was helping this

grandmother weeding her endless flower beds outside the gracious brown house with the white trim. In the fall we came to help rake the leaves because they had so many. We made huge piles of fragrant leaves, and we were allowed to run and jump in them under the majestic trees. Here there was a life less ordinary and plebeian as my father said. We had a yard and trees at home, but not so big and not so many.

Lost

I was playing by the shore of the lake with my sister and brother. It was a perfect day and there were lots and lots of people on this big beach. It seemed to stretch for miles and miles. I watched the bubbles in the waves. I looked down at my toes in the water and felt the coolness. I looked up and my brother and sister were gone. I saw my mother in her white bathing suit. She was slowly walking along the beach. I followed her. She just kept walking. When she stopped and sat down on a blanket, I saw that it was not my mother. I was confused. Where had she gone. Who was this stranger in the white bathing suit? I felt disconnected. The world was strange. These were strange people. They spoke to me in kind voices but I said nothing. I was two years old. I stayed by this woman in the white bathing suit waiting for my world to return.

Eventually my mother came down the beach asking people if they had seen a little girl. She found me sitting with the woman in the white bathing suit. I refused to leave with my mother. I was scared and crying.

I was disconnected from my mother and no longer knew my family. They took me back and it took several hours for me to calm down.

This story was told to me long after the event, and this is a fictionalized account of my experience. Recently I asked my mother, now in her mid-seventies, about this story. She said she did not remember. Later I asked my older sister about this family story. She said it had happened near Plattsburg, New York, where our family had gone with friends to Lake Champlain. She said after they found me, they had to hold me down for a long time and that I was crying hysterically (Phone conversation, Dec. 18, 1997). I believe this story is echoed through my life. On several occasions I have become lost, and each time it has a profound effect. It evokes fear, panic and disconnection.

Being the Other

At six years of age I followed my sister and brother into the French Catholic schools of Quebec. We were English speaking children whose parents did not speak French. My father wished to have his children educated in the Catholic faith. This was not a whim, but something connected to a deep sense of duty and obligation. My father in a prophetic way said that if we learned to speak French we would have a better future in Quebec.

It was a quirk of fate that the year I should have attended the French Primary, it was cancelled. I arrived abruptly in grade one without knowing the language. Wearing a white blouse and the blue tunic my

sister had worn before me, I entered the Ecole Joubert where I was to spend a good portion of the next eight years of my life.

Geographically the school was part of a religious triangle. At the head was a large impressive stone church with a spire in the classic Quebec style. At the base forming one part of the triangle was the girls' school. Across the street was the convent of the Catholic order of teaching sisters. The sisters all wore a gray habit with a white bib, and a starched white cap that appeared to have wings. My classroom had small wooden desks and chairs bolted to the hard wood floor, in five straight rows, five seats deep. The teacher's desk was elevated on a small platform at the front of the room. There were large blackboards covering three walls. White chalk and erasers were at the ready. A bank of large windows filled the top half of the wall facing the street.

I was necessarily a keen but quiet observer of this new world. My teacher, Madame LeBlanc, was very patient with me, but as time went on she insisted that I speak French. One day near the beginning of the year I needed to use the washroom. I was shy and I did not want to ask to leave the room, and so I waited. Eventually I could wait no longer. I summoned all the courage I had and went to the front of the room, and mounted the step to the teacher's desk. I asked Madame LeBlanc to please allow me to go to the washroom. I asked in English and she understood me, but insisted in a kind but firm way that I ask in French. Under the stress of the situation I could not think and my mind was a great blank. I said I did

not know, but she insisted I try to say it in French. I was desperate, my mind refused to cooperate. I stood there, until I could feel the hot liquid running down my legs and I began to cry. She then understood and allowed me to go. Madame LeBlanc kept a cupboard full of cotton underwear and stockings for such occasions, and in her kind way helped me through this most shameful experience.

As time went on I slowly began to grasp the spoken French language. I loved arithmetic. It presented itself clearly and I excelled at it. We were all equals in this subject. Reading was more difficult. While I could now read one syllable words in French, two syllable words were impossible. My mother helped me with my reading homework at night. I cried, and she persisted and encouraged. The sentence lay on the page "Bébé a bobo" like a great wall that I needed to scale. I knew I could not, and I cried. I was afraid of what, I did not know, of trying and failing perhaps, of making a terrible mistake, of shaming myself. But somehow with my mother's help, I scaled this wall and learned to read in French. It was something at six and a half, to look back in amazement at having conquered this reading of another language, which I had thought unattainable only months before. There was some lesson here that I would not forget, etched as it was in pain. It was about the struggle, the getting through, and the looking back. It was about the mystery of the transformation, and the crossing to the other side where all is revealed.

One day when Madame LeBlanc was ill, we were placed in the other Grade One with the tiny Sister Louise who was strict and vindictive. I do not remember why, but she was annoyed with me, believing I was "effrontée", which I later learned meant cheeky and challenging. She sent me out of the classroom to stand in the hallway. After this one incident she always seemed to be on the look-out to find me in some misbehaviour. I learned to watch for her. My very presence offended her, my height, my Englishness.

Taking our pattern from the military we marched around two by two, always with the smallest children at the front, and the tall girls at the back. I was one of these. We marched to recess, to lunch, sometimes to church and back. I had recurrent nightmares during these early school years. Something was looking for me in the marching line of children. It was a dinosaur skeleton who sought me out where I tried to fade into the mass of uniforms. Sometimes the dinosaur skeleton would chase me up the staircase at home as I tried to run away and hide.

I do not remember having a close friend that first year, but I got along with the other girls, and I excelled at sports and games. I do remember feeling great empathy for a thin frail girl, Jocelyn, who sat in front of me. She seemed to be barely alive. She was often absent and had no energy. Eventually she did not return. Her family had moved or something. This girl had astounded me one day by reporting that she had

only had a half a cup of coffee for breakfast. There was a sense that she lived another strange existence very different from my own.

Religious studies were an important part of each day. We were required to memorize the answers to questions in our catechism. The crowning event of the year was to be the first communion and confirmation ceremonies held in the spring. These events symbolized the entry of the child into the full life of the Catholic church. As the time approached much emphasis was placed on the proper spiritual attitude that needed to be cultivated. When praying the student needed to turn her eyes inward and commune with Jesus.

One day my mother explained that I was passing my year, but that the school believed it would be better for me to repeat Grade One, and because of this I would not have my first communion with the other girls. She made it sound okay, but I was not sure that it was. I would be a "repeater". I felt I was not good enough, and I felt excluded. The excitement of the preparation for the coming first communion ceremonies continued as students reported that their mothers had bought them new white dresses with veils. One girl in a fit of exuberance brought her new white dress to school to show the teacher and her friends. I was not part of this heady preparation and expectation. I felt small and invisible, and very sad.

My mother was not a Catholic and had no real use for this ceremony with all its trappings, but she understood that her daughter was

dying inside. She eventually lobbied on my behalf and at the last minute it was agreed that I would make my first communion with the other students. A photograph my father took shows a child dressed in white, with bowed head and closed eyes, hands held together in prayerful piety.

I was held back and repeated Grade One. I did quite well that next year and found good friends. Three other students who spoke English were now in my class. They were the children of "mixed" marriages, often French Catholics and English Protestants, a growing trend in a more secular Quebec. I continued up through the grades learning about culture, learning that there was more than one way to be in the world, more than one set of beliefs, more than one view of history, and leaning, despite the years of Catechism, towards my mother's more human and broad-minded perspective.

I believe as do others, Highwater (1981), Wiseman (1987), and MacLennan (1945), that the experience of living in a different language alters you in a fundamental way. At a young age I feel I engaged in a participatory study of another culture and, because I was very young, I took this culture into the centre of my being. I was left with a deep understanding of what a culture was, and how it could get underneath your skin. I believe that this experience helped me to see my own culture from the outside and see how it shaped me. Because of this experience, I feel I shifted out of a dualistic way of knowing and into a multiple/subjective view of knowledge and reality (Belenky et all, 1986, p.62). When you participate in two different cultures as MacLennan (1945) says:

". . . it makes it difficult to be enthusiastic about the prejudices of either of them, and that can be uncomfortable sometimes" (p. 362).

As I continued through my life, I adhered to no belief system, and took knowledge where I found it, in anything that spoke to my own experience, in Literature, in Christianity, in Buddhism, in the "I Ching" (Wilhelm, 1967). I listened to those who were social activists and saw the world as a socialist. I experienced the world as a woman and saw it as a feminist. My own position is postmodern; I believe I have held this position for a long time without knowing it by name.

> The core of postmodernism is the *doubt* that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the "right" or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism *suspects* all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural, and political struggles. But postmodernism does not automatically reject conventional methods of knowing and telling as false or archaic. (Richardson, 1994, p.517)

In this view, we can access knowledge without claiming to have an all encompassing theory. As Richardson (1994) says: "Having a partial, local, historical, knowledge is still knowing" (p.518).

I believe that this lived experience of two cultures also gave me a sensitivity towards people who live in another culture, or who find themselves divided between two cultures. It allows me to try and take a position of profound receptivity and respect - to try to enter their world in order to understand the difficulties they face. I believe that my own lived experience of two cultures helps to inform my past and present work as a counsellor.

Sunday After Church - an isolated incident remembered

I sat alone at the dining room table looking at the fried eggs I hated. My father was angry, and yelling, and hitting my older brother and sister in the adjoining room. My mother in a panicky voice was saying not to hit them around the head. They had been chasing each other and hit a table which slammed into a wall causing damage to our new house. I sat quiet as a mouse at the table, and forced myself to eat all of the fried eggs I hated.

This was a rare incident in a generally peaceful household. And yet it served as the backdrop to my father's authoritarian approach to parenting. I was only seven or eight when these events happened, and as I grew up I never stopped believing in my father's potential to become violent towards me. I watched, and tried to please. I never openly challenged his authority. I was a good girl. I learned to be sneaky and to project a false self into the world. Whitfield (1987) suggests that this creation of the false self is part of co-dependent behaviour: "Our false self is a cover-up. It is inhibited, contracting and fearful" (p.11).

From a feminist perspective, this co-dependent behaviour can be seen to result from growing up in a patriarchal culture whose messages about womens' position of inferiority are re-enforced by acts of violence against women and children. Co-dependence can then be viewed as a survival mechanism for the child.

A Birthday promise

At ten I had a passion for horses. When my mother asked me what I wanted for my birthday, I said I would like to go to the horse races. It was decided that my father would take me. I was excited at the idea of the two of us going to the races. It would be a special day. But he was busy and I had to wait a while, he said. I waited patiently, and I mentioned it a few times. He was still always busy and the outing would have to be later.

After a while I still thought about the birthday promise but I said nothing. I could not bring myself to ask again. Instead I felt a deep hurt inside. I felt very unimportant and almost invisible. We never did go to the racetrack. The special day I had imagined with my father never happened. Instead a feeling of hurt and loss lay close to my heart for many years. I did not say anything about it. My father was busy.

As I write this my eyes fill with tears and my throat tightens. I still feel the pain of that little girl. I wonder now if my father was going through a difficult time, or if he was under financial strain and pressure. Even today I do not feel able to ask what happened. Why was the connection with his daughter so unimportant to him that he could not remember? This story is a symbol for our lack of connectedness and our inability to speak to one another at a deep level. I feel we have always cared for one another, but never really understood each other.

Friendship

In my second year in grade one in the French Catholic girls' school, I met Michelle. We became best friends. It was not surprising because there were only four girls who spoke English in this class. Michelle was one of them and she only lived two blocks away in our suburban neighbourhood. She was bilingual: her father was French, and her mother was English. Michelle and I inhabited the same two worlds, French Catholic Quebec and English Canada.

We spent much of our time together: recess, lunch, after school, and Saturdays. Together we discovered the still wild areas of our neighbourhood. Imagining we were in the circus, we performed daring acts of balancing and swinging on trees. We built forts and caught frogs in swampy ponds behind the boys' school. We stole apples from the priests' orchard behind their large residence which was beside the tall steepled stone church. Later we confessed our small sins to these same priests in quiet curtained cubicles. We read books and carried loads of them home from the public library every couple of weeks. Once I had learned French, we both excelled in school. We felt this gave us the right to defy the nuns and their silly old-fashioned rules. In winter we liked to shock them with mock wrestling matches in the soft snowy playground.

I had other good friends while growing up, but Michelle was a friend from grade one to grade eleven. In grade eight we both switched to

the new Catholic high school. We would now be studying in English. It was 1964 and the Beatles came to Montreal that fall.

Together we agreed to avoid our parents' and our two societies' visions of what young women should be. We would be different, but we would be safe in that difference because there were two of us. We would smoke small cigars and become writers. We would not be like our mothers. At that time I felt my mother's life was shallow and limited, and that she had given up too much. We loved our mothers who cared for us faithfully, but we wanted more than they had. We would read real literature, not the Harlequin romances that I was offered. Michelle led the way into serious literature. She had a most amazing library: from the Nancy Drew's of our early days, to David Copperfield, to Gide, to Sartre and De Beauvoir, and many others. This excursion into literature and our ability to succeed in school set us apart, and we thought of ourselves as above our peers, as having a future. In high school we went out with a few boys here and there, but these friendships were no match for our own emotional and intellectual bond.

One day Michelle was raped. Her family took her to a psychologist. She said he seemed to feel she was not normal. That summer she went to Europe with her family. I worked as a waitress at the fast food take-out in the Shopping Centre several blocks from my home to save money to go to university. It was one night that summer when my parents where away for the weekend that I decided at sixteen that my

virginity was a burden, and deliberately set out to be rid of this thing that seemed to matter so much to others. I took the bus into the centre of Montreal, where the streets were full of people. I met a young man and went to the disco bar, later we went to an apartment which was his for the weekend, and attempted to have sex. It was a failure: my body was not receptive, my mind was numb, and my body bled. I thought to myself, it was no use, and unpleasant. This young man accepted my decision that it was now over. Feeling cold and empty, I set out walking alone towards the main bus station.

As time went on Michelle and I changed. One snowy New Year's eve we made love for the first time as the quiet mysterious flakes fell. We floated on a sea of gentleness as we slowly left our childhood behind us. We did not know then, but this was to be the beginning of the end of this important friendship in our lives. We would soon move on, each following our own different paths. This was the end of our journey together, a bitter sweet end, with tears and loneliness to follow.

I feel now that this special friendship with Michelle allowed me to feel secure, to hold on to who I was, and to believe in my future as I travelled through my early adolescence, a time when young females may loose their power to a mind-numbing barrage of cultural messages of their inferiority and worthlessness. (Brown and Gilligan, 1992, p.2). Because we had already set ourselves above the fray we could happily ignore

many of the messages about who we were supposed to become, and so save ourselves for a short time.

However, the reality of our femaleness and our otherness eventually overtook us as we journeyed into later adolescence. I remember how betrayed I felt when my body began to change, so that workmen on the street would whistle when I walked by. I did not want to be a woman and become an object to others. When my friend was raped, I felt some of her pain, but I also felt she had been separated from me. I believe now that I may have symbolically gone out to lose my virginity in an attempt to join and connect with my friend.

Later, the dilemma that I faced over my own sexual orientation was confused with the co-dependent aspects of my relationship with Michelle. Somewhere in the last years of our friendship I had let go of my separate identity and merged into her identity. I no longer knew who I was. In "Cartography of a Lost Time: Women, Girls and Relationships (1992-1993), Gilligan et all write:

> At the edge in development when late childhood falls into adolescence, we found ourselves entering a dark continent in the psychology of women. There we have witnessed the beginnings of some of the more puzzling aspects of women's psychology: the tendency for women to become selfless or voiceless in relationships . . . to cover over their own feelings and thoughts, and begin not to know what they want and know. (p.1)

Once our friendship became a sexual relationship, I became confused and insecure. I lost my voice, I felt inadequate, and I felt objectified even within this special friendship. I now believe there were multiple layers of deep socialization at work. I

abdicated my power until I no longer knew who I was. The following journal notes from high school speak about my confusion and voicelessness.

> *If I stand back the world seems clearer, but then maybe I'm just pushing things aside and ignoring them. Mr. Howard, I would like to talk to you. Somehow you might see things a lot clearer. But then I always start crying when I am with you because I feel you see everything that I try so hard to keep boxed up inside of me. And the dam breaks as soon as I step inside your office. It is as if I was stripped of all my defences. It is terrifying. I must be the original coward. I love Michelle I know that, but everything is always so complicated. If we sleep together we can't talk. I wish I could understand why? The trouble is that it becomes too real. I make complexities by doubting our love, love in general, our relationship. The real problem is not that we are two women. It is not man or woman, but who you love. But it doesn't make things any easier. Living in some kind of pretense all the time isn't easy. The trouble is I don't know who I am, or where I am going. I feel sometimes that I am losing myself in Michelle, just sinking in and fading away. I think that is dangerous. (Personal Journal, 1967)*

After grade eleven I went away to university, where I began a searching and questioning of my female soul and sexuality. I felt that I had lost my way somehow, and that I no longer knew who I was. On the surface I did fine, and managed to make good friends. But I had moments of despair, where I felt out of place in the world, and wished to escape.

Looking for a Counsellor

One dark night walking in the rain I contemplated how easy it would be to step out in front of a speeding car, as I watched their

headlights moving swiftly by in the night. I needed to talk to someone about not knowing who I was. I went to the Dean of the residence, a young woman, but it was late, and the conversation went nowhere. She reassured me that many new students felt out of place and soon I would make new friends. She did not know or understand me and I could not tell her about the questions that were pressing in on me. She would think I was not normal. My own question about my sexuality could not be talked about.

As I reflect on my own stories of cultivation, I realize that the sacred and condoned stories of my culture had a powerful, limiting and constricting effect on me. Even today it is difficult to share my stories, because I am, as always, aware of the potential judgement of others: others who have taken these sacred and condoned stories as reality; others who hold powerful positions and have the possibility of influencing my life in negative ways; and others who feel challenged by the alternative reality my stories express.

These cultivation stories also illustrate the deep divisions I experienced within myself as I was growing up. Early in my life, I identified that it was a mistake to have been born female. I began to disdain qualities that I associate with women and femininity. I tried to cultivate the qualities I associated with masculinity. I decide that I should not cry, or show any emotion or weakness. At the age of eight I vowed to myself that I would never be a wife and mother.

I went to the French Catholic school where I experienced what it was to be different, to be a member of a minority. And where I learned over time that there was no agreed upon right or truth in the world. I learned about the rigid Catholic doctrine of my father, and I understood and appreciated the more liberal and accepting views of my mother. I lived between the French and English cultures, not belonging to either.

I found a soul mate who, like me, lived between society's definition of masculinity and femininity, and between the English and French cultures. Once I reached my mid-teens I again found that I was split and divided within myself. Was I straight or gay? I didn't know. I was living a secret life that my upbringing in the Catholic church soundly condemned. I could speak to no one because my sexual behaviour was considered abnormal and shameful. The one teacher/counsellor I considered approaching was living in an alternative gay relationship. However even with him I found no voice and would sit silent unable to speak. I was left trapped and closed off behind a wall. I was isolated and disconnected.

I feel now that my experience as a girl in a patriarchal culture, my experience in the French school, and my own questioning of my sexual orientation has helped shaped me as a counsellor. I understand first hand some of the pain of those who do not fit in, who have been shamed, and left to feel inadequate. I have come to understand at a deep level the power of our history and culture to effect the way we act in the world. I know how difficult it is to escape the messages of our cultivation stories. I believe that my own lived experience has shaped me as a person and as counsellor.

Patrick's story

This is a story of growing up faced with the challenge of homophobia and family alcoholism. The story is set against the backdrop of political change and tension in Quebec. However Patrick does not see this as a story about victims; rather Patrick sees himself and his family as embodying the qualities of resilience, humour, love, hard work and survival.

Background

Patrick's mother grew up in an English Catholic family in a small town in Quebec. His mother's family has a long history of problem drinking, and his maternal grandfather occasionally physically abused his grandmother. At eighteen, Patrick's mother was convinced by her family to marry a man she did not love because he would provide her with economic security.

> *I hear this story over and over again. My mother didn't finish her grade eleven in Quebec, so that she could work, so that she could buy her own wedding dress. She went to work in a local textile factory. She raised money and bought her wedding dress, and was married. And I'm told I was a honeymoon baby. I was conceived on their honeymoon in the Laurentians. So I was born in 1965 and we lived up North for about two years. And I have only seen the hospital once, I think . . . I can recall*

driving past it. We used to always, when we moved out of the area, every fall we would take a family trip up to see the leaves. And it was always with my [maternal] grandparents. And I remember once driving past and my mother saying that's the hospital you were born in, and I was lucky to be born in a hospital because my mother and father didn't have a car. And when she went into labour, I was a month early. So they weren't expecting me, so I was almost born in the taxi there. I have a younger brother who is just 14 or 15 months younger than myself. So that was always troublesome, in that there was always a power struggle between us. He was always physically bigger than me. But because I was the oldest . . . there was always, I think, a power struggle between us, in that regard. I also have twin sisters . . . who are nine years younger than myself. (Interview, June 16, 1997)

Patrick related that his father is an introvert who grew up in a Catholic and bilingual home. His paternal grandfather was French, and an older man who made very little connection with his son or his grandson. Patrick's grandmother was from an English speaking background but was bilingual. Patrick characterizes his father as a *"sweet man, he is so gentle, he is not typically male"*, and as *"kind of the academic one, kind of the thinker, the rational one" (Interview, June 16, 1997).* Patrick's father's first teaching contract was in the Laurentians in a French community. This was difficult for his young wife who had never lived away from her parents, who spoke English, and immediately found herself pregnant at eighteen. *"She has told me that the first few years*

of her married life were very depressing . . . very lonely, and very frightening for her" (Interview, June 16, 1997).

The family soon returned to the Eastern Townships and lived close to Patrick's maternal grandparents. It was at this time that his mother began to participate in the problem drinking pattern of the family. Patrick grew up both loving and hating these grandparents and this is reflected in his stories.

Escape to Grandma's

And then I have another memory that my grandmother tells over, and over, and over again. She was really quite sick at one time. I don't know what it was, a flu or something. And she lived, I'd say, a good two or three kilometres from our house across the bridge. She lived across the bridge, like you walked out of our subdivision, and down towards downtown, across a bridge, over two very very busy intersections, and then another half a kilometre to her house. And she had a two story home and was upstairs in her bed. She tells this story all the time, that she was sick, just flu, I'm not sure, but she was in her bed. And she tells this story of how her Doctor was by her bedside. I guess that's when doctors did visits. And she could hear this pitter patter, pitter patter, pitter patter. So here I was, I had run away from home to visit my sick grandmother. I had to have been probably three, and she thought . . . She said: "Well where is your mother?" And I had come by myself . . . So she was amazed

that I could get myself there . . . by myself and crossing two very busy intersections. So she called my mother. And my mother came to get me, and my mother was furious. There was something humorous about it . . . but there was something frightening, that she had lost her child and this is where her child had made himself go . . . I guess . . . Well it gets funnier because my mother took me home, and I remember her putting up one of those little wooden gates in the porch outside. There was an open air porch, kind of . . . The moment she was out of sight, off I went again right back to Grandma's. I went twice and . . . my grandmother just couldn't believe my insistence and my determination that I wanted to be by her bedside and take care of her.

And . . . I mean, I guess maybe, I hadn't thought of it this way, when you first approached me about this, I was thinking what has led me to be a counsellor? Where does . . . where did it all start? And maybe, that sense of caring and that sense of wanting to help or assist, happened as early as that experience for me, wanting to be with her . . . Whatever drew me there twice, and drew me there twice against my mother's orders. (Interview, June 16, 1997)

This story highlights a child's devotion to his grandmother and suggests a deep bond between the two. This is confirmed by their close relationship in the present. Patrick spoke about how much he loves his grandmother and enjoys her company. For him she is *"the mentor of vitality, of age, and of enjoyment" (Interview, June 16, 1997).*

She has accepted him as a gay man, and embraces his current relationship. He openly worried about how he would react to her approaching death. But there is another side to the story of their relationship.

Trapped at Grandma's

I remember spending endless, endless hours in my grandmother and grandfather's kitchen while the three of them drank. With country music going in the background and smoke everywhere, and just feeling really resentful that this is where I had to be, and that I was being subjected to this, and that they were the culprits, they were the . . . They would come over and get my Mom in the middle of an afternoon, and my Mom would cart my brother and I over to my Grandmother's and they would just get drunk. And then my father would come over and that was not pleasant. It would always be . . . I remember one memory . . . I was very young, I remember, we lived near the United States . . . Alcohol is cheaper in the United States. And I remember we used to drive down there, my grandparents used to pick up my Mom, me and my brother. And we would drive down, do a little bit of shopping at one of these strip malls where there was a liquor store. And . . . oh God, this always upsets me when I talk about stuff like this. They would go into the liquor store and get a bottle, two bottles of hard liquor. And they would just sit in the car and drink. And my brother and I would just sit there. And the radio would be going, and Mom and . . . not Mom she wouldn't smoke, but my

grandparents would smoke. I remember one particular day, it was rainy, and . . . we were all in the car, and my only refuge was that I could see outside, but on this particular day the windows were steamed up. So I remember constantly wiping off the condensation on the windows so that I could see out. Because of course I wanted to escape what was happening inside the car. (Interview, June 16, 1997)

His mother's pattern of drinking and socializing with her parents caused problems in the marriage, and meant that sometimes the children's emotional and physical needs were not met. Patrick reported that: *"In many ways I felt that I was neglected" (Interview, June 16, 1997).* As he grew up Patrick's love for his grandparents, turned into loathing: *"Years of . . . disgust, hate, for both my grandparents, her husband too, and that was because I had felt they had influenced my Mom as far as drinking and alcoholism, because they drank quite heavily" (Interview, June 16, 1997).*

And that [the drinking] became what I perceived to be a big problem between my mom and I, between my Mom and my Dad. Because my Dad is not challenged with alcohol. He would come home, and the house would be empty, and he would know where we were. And so he'd come over, and he'd put his time in, and then when he was fed-up he would say: "It's time to go". He would tolerate it, and he would . . . I don't know . . . I have a lot of regret . . . I have a lot of regret about all my loathing. I wish I didn't waste all those years loathing, but it was the only

thing I knew, it was the only reaction I knew, and it was a gut reaction, this is gross, this is disgusting. (Interview, June 16, 1997)

. . . they fought over finances. I remember one night, I remember two major fights, I remember one night my mother threw a bowl of peas across the table at my Dad. And I remember just retreating into the hall closet and I stayed there for the longest time. And then I remember one other night it was one of these episodes where my father came to my Grandmother's, and hauled us all back home and said: "Get out of the car". And we all got out of the car. And he took off, which was unlike my father. And I remember my mother sitting my twin sisters up in high chairs, in front of the TV in the kitchen, black and white TV, and feeding them a bowl of Alphaghetti, and giving them a bowl each, and then going into the living room and crying. And I remember going in and just sitting with her, and she's saying: "I don't know what's going to happen, I don't know if he is ever going to come back". And just feeling terrible, absolutely terrible, that, oh my God this couldn't happen to us. What would it be like without a father. (Interview June 16, 1997)

His family's alcohol problems lasted for many years and peaked during his adolescence, but Patrick was also facing other difficult issues. He had a speech impediment as a child and his mother took him once a month to see a Speech Therapist in Montreal. Patrick went to an English Catholic school which was strict, but he was not

taught by Catholic Sisters or Brothers. He remembers being streamed in grade two, into the non-accelerated class. *"And I always felt, I think even from that very early age, I've always, that's the beginning of where I've always felt inferior as far as my academic, as far as learning goes" (Interview, June 16, 1997).* Patrick also recalls being *"hauled out of that school between grade four and grade five" (Interview, June 16, 1997).* He believes it was because of his gayness. Patrick explained that he had been labelled by other children as gay from a very early age. The older boys in the school were often verbally abusive to him. He suggested that there were times when he felt *"fearful for my life".*

> *My classmates labelled it. The grade sixers would call me fag, fairy, the whole bit, but most of my school friends were girls, and I'd skip with them at recess and lunch hour. I did have male friends, I had two or three I remember. Anyway . . . that's going way back. But the majority of my time I spent with girls. And I think it was a conspiracy, that the Principal called my parents and said: "If you don't haul your son out of this school and put him into another school, make him make new boy friends he is going to end up being a homosexual". This is my take on it. So I was hauled out. And I was sent to the Protestant school and the first day in grade five, I was hauled down to the Principal's office and they said : "If anybody asks you, you are Protestant" . . . I'm like, "Okay". The rationale that I was given at the time, and believed until maybe even just two years ago, was that my parents hauled me out because the*

Principal was a poor Principal. But they left my brother in that school. They never hauled my brother out, my brother went all the way through to grade six, in that elementary school. I thought: "Wait a minute here". I think they would tell me now. And I really believe that my suspicions are true. The most interesting thing is that it wasn't until I went to the new school that I had what I believe to be the beginning of my sexual activity. In grade five, I was very young, I met two boys and they invited me over to their house, one of their houses. And they were like talking and snickering, and saying: "Do you think he should be part of our club, maybe he will want to be part of our club". Well, the main activity of the club was sex. (Interview, June 16, 1997)

Patrick lived in a state of anxiety for many years about his sexual behaviour. He was left feeling: *"Other than, less than, always less than, always" (Interview, June 16, 1997).* He was left divided within himself. He said that *"Catholicism played very heavy on my heart, very heavy on my mind".*

Guilt as far as this sexual . . . discovery. Because it was like an addiction that I had no control over. And after every sexual episode, I would get on my bike, cry all the way home, and shower as soon as I got home. And I would pray to God that this would end. Please let this end, please let this end. And I think that's a similar feeling that people have about masturbating. But, it wasn't just masturbation, I was having sex

with other boys. And it wasn't just the odd thing here and there. Like we were regular sexual partners for five and a half solid years. And all the while I was trying to have relationships . . . girlfriends. Part of it was exploration: I mean I remember feeling very excited sexually with females. So I was, I spent a good part of my life . . . really kind of living two lives, and balancing that, and managing that, and integrating that, and feeling very disconnected. It's only been probably the last five years, that I feel so much more connected, so much more integrated, and . . . feeling healthy about my sexuality.

My mother would always say, because next door to us in our little neighbourhood my two best friends were girls, and she'd always say: "You need to find some boys to play with, go on downtown and play with Paul". And he was one of the two that I had sex with. So she was throwing me right into . . . So finally one day, I remember sitting on the steps putting my shoes on, and I turned to her and said: "Don't you ever ask me to go to Paul's again", I said: "when I go there I do things I don't like to do". And I walked out of the house, and she never asked me to go there again.

There is always . . . if you are looking for a theme, probably a theme of always doing what other people think I should do, versus what I'm doing, or want to do. There is a theme there about always being torn between the expectations of others . . . and my lived experience, my true experience . . . This is what's happening to me . . . Don't do it, it's bad if

you do it, you ought to do this, and it's like . . .Where is the validation of who I really am, and what I'm really actually doing. (Interview, June 16, 1997)

Patrick explains that his parents tried hard to socialize him as a male. He was put into baseball and hockey along with his brother. He described this as traumatic. And he said the traumatic part was *"you are a boy and this is what boys are suppose to do, and we are going to try every damn sport [banging on the couch], until you can figure it out [banging again], until you can be a boy" (Interview, Sept 17, 1997).* He feels that his mother was behind this effort to make him into a "real" boy, and that she put pressure on his father: *"You're the father, come on, you don't want a little sissy, do you? Come on coach the team, and he will join the team" (Interview, Sept 17, 1997).* Patrick was left to feel inadequate, a failure at living up to his society's views of masculinity. Sarason (1988) and Kaufman (1987) explain in different ways how North American masculinity is traditionally defined.

> . . . outward going, assertive (if not fearless), tolerant of pain, courageous, attractive to girls, unanxious, and capable of standing up for his rights even if that meant fighting. It was all right if a girl was a tomboy; it was shameful if a boy was a sissy. (p. 73)
>
> The traditional definition of masculinity is not just surplus aggression. It is also exclusive heterosexuality, for the maintenance of masculinity requires the repression of homosexuality. (p.19)

In 1977, at the age of 12, Patrick was enrolled in a new French Immersion program. He recalls that this decision brought out a French/English tension between his parents. His mother felt that an immersion program was not necessary, and his father

believed that it was important. The French/English tensions had been building in Quebec since the October Crisis of 1970 and the election of the Parti Quebecois in 1976 (Hamelin and Provencher, 1981). Patrick recalls that: *"I wanted to go because going meant I was smart, because the smart kids went"*. This was a turning point and marked the beginning of his academic success.

A few years later during the first Referendum in Quebec, Patrick watched the students and communities divide between the "oui" and the "non". Following the Referendum in 1980 (Hamelin and Provencher, 1981) the tension remained high, and some English families began to move out of the province of Quebec.

> *I remember the first Referendum in 1979, I think. And all I really recall is "Oui", "Non" buttons. And we were all in high school, and we were all, we all took positions. And there was a group who were bused in from Valleyfield, which was significantly French, and they were basically French coming to English School, and they were all "Ouis". (Interview, Sept 2, 1997)*

> *I remember I lost one of my best friends. There was a great exodus of English families . . . that went mostly to Ontario, and I lost my best friend, . . . and other people lost their friends. And it's like . . . why aren't we going? (Interview, Sept 2, 1997)*

These cultivation stories illustrate the influences and the divisions Patrick experienced within himself. His gayness and society's homophobia created deep inner anxiety and tension. The Catholic elements in his education and culture only served to exacerbate the issue for him. He was surprised to read in his high school journals of his self-hate, loathing, and moments of deep despair, because he had not consciously remembered such intense feelings. He reports living a divided life, and waging an internal battle against the "demon" of his own sexuality.

> *I think fundamentally my gayness and my struggle with that has shaped me as counsellor. Fundamentally, like I remember, when I was doing my fellowship with the school of Education. And one day my boss sat there and he looked across at me and he said: "Where do you get your empathy from?" And I didn't have to think a split second, and I had not come out to him, not verbally, I said: "It's because I'm gay", and it was that clear to me. It was like . . . understanding of pain. I understand the struggle through it, and . . . the hope, and the . . . mentors that sometimes people need in their lives to get . . . and there have been significant mentors in my life. (Interview, June 16, 1997)*
>
> *I had earlier mentioned that I felt . . . my gayness has shaped me as a counsellor, but that was kind of vague for me. Like I know that that's the case but . . . So in the last three weeks I have been reading more of my journal and came across a whole section that speaks to that, that speaks to my confusion, my self-loathing, my desperation over my gayness. Because*

I always talk almost theoretically about the struggles adolescents have being gay, and it is from all my reading. But it is also from my personal experience, but I couldn't recollect that until I read some of this stuff. So what I was hoping to do was read you a little bit of it. This is February 12th, 1983, and I wrote:

> *I am so scared of that, I am so scared of this, I am so scared of you, I am so scared of me. Me, how vicious am I? What makes those thoughts surface? A desire to act upon those thoughts lingers on, crowding every other decent thought. Leave damn it, go and plague someone else. Leave me alone. I don't need you corrupting my world and my mind. I will fight you, damn it, right to the end of you or me. I can't go on with you in my mind. Having fun aren't you? Well damn it the party is over. Because if it goes on any longer I am going to go crazy, crazy, crazy. I know you are bad for me, you always have been, and you always will be, you rot my mind and you're lousy. Damn it, go to some other ignorant mind and leave me alone with a pure and decent mind. I don't need you, maybe someone else doesn't mind having you around. But I can't take it any longer, you have haunted me for many a year and it is time to give up this silly game of yours. You won when I was small, and you are ready for another win. But I am putting up a fight this time. A damn bloody war you want, eh, with lots of tears, well fuck right off. Leave me alone. Leave me alone. Leave me alone. (Patrick's Journal, February 12, 1983)*

I am writing about gayness as if it is an enemy that's rotting me and battling me. Temptation, and . . . this is shocking stuff to read, to go back to be in that state. And there are other journal entries that talk about being suicidal, and religion was a really big part of it, really big part of it. I had no idea. (Interview, October 9, 1997)

Patrick also experienced a disconnection from his family. His father was quiet and remote. Patrick's feelings towards his mother were confused. And he had come to hate his maternal grandparents during his adolescent years. In any case he felt he could not talk to any of them about his own experience of the world. He was forced to make sense of his experience of the world in isolation. Patrick concluded that he needed to become heterosexual. He appears to have resolved his deep conflict for a time by denying part of himself.

Chapter 3

Stories of Awakening

> Often it is at our lowest points in life that we learn the most. We say, 'God, this is too much. Life has disappointed me beyond all belief.' . . . Those low moments are the magical moments. They are the beginning stages of our journey. (Beattie, 1995, p. 185)

In this chapter I will present and discuss lived experiences that made both my participant and me awaken and reconsider how we envisioned ourselves. These stories of awakening are about finding strength and self-worth, about mentors who allowed us to believe in ourselves, and about facing the harsh realities of our world. In each case, we came to see ourselves and our experience of the world in a new light, and opened the door to the possibility of change.

Patrick's story

The Car Wash

The earliest activity that I was involved in, that I volunteered myself for, that I actually organized as a young teenager like 13 or 14 years old, five of us in our neighbourhood organized a car wash for Muscular Dystrophy. No parents, nobody, we did it, we raised over $500.00. There was a social consciousness there at such a young age.

This was in the summer, we had no [school] influences because we always did it for the Labour Day Jerry Lewis telethon. I don't know if they even have it anymore, maybe they do. But this was the dead of summer: "We are going to do this, and we're going to raise money". And so . . . I was in grade seven when I created this car wash. Yeah, and we raised $500.00, and we went on television. And we were so proud, like "Yes, here is our cheque for $500.00".

Doing for others, and part of that could have been driven by . . . I am worthless, I am having sex with men, I am shit, I am worthless, maybe people will like me if I do for others. Maybe this is my redemption, maybe that's what was happening unconsciously, I don't know . . . Suffering, maybe . . . just an unconscious understanding, an empathy for suffering. I have no idea. (Interview, June 23, 1997)

In this story Patrick describes awakening to his value as a person. He feels proud. He discovers his power to act in the world, to join with others and create change. He also suggests that social action may have been a way to gain the social acceptance and attention that had eluded him in other parts of his life. However, he also acknowledges that he may have had "*an unconscious understanding, an empathy for suffering*".

Unconditional love and acceptance

In grade nine I had a mentor who was a friend of mine. I was 16 and he was 19. He wasn't in school. He was Swiss-German, and ran his

father's farm. He was good-looking, and he was a swimmer, and he was straight. And I really wanted to be straight, that's when the shift happened for me. He became my older brother that I never had. He was like an icon. It was the first time - there was Eric, and two friends Louise and Marsha, and the four of us were buddies - and it was the first time that I felt unconditionally loved and accepted. And that someone wanted my company. And that's where I made the transition between youth and . . . like instead of going over to my friend's and playing monopoly, I was getting into Eric's sports car with Louise and Marsha. And we were just riding the roads, the countryside. Something very spiritual happened that summer for me. It was a summer long love affair between the four of us. It was beautiful. (Interview, June 16, 1997)

One night I'll never forget. His sister owned a farm house beside where he lived with his parents. And his older sister had left for the week-end. And the house was free so he invited us over. And part of that change also involved alcohol, and cigarette smoking, experimental stuff. And I remember reading that . . . I didn't even need to read, it's so fresh in my mind because it was such an important evening for me, total acceptance, people wanted me, people loved me, people touched me. We had alcohol, I think we were drunk. I remember reading that one of my friends, Louise, was very drunk. We had three bottles of wine between us. And we were listening to Meat Loaf, and just music, and had a fire going in the fire place. It was the dead of summer, but it didn't matter, and we were all

hanging on to each other, dancing, and waltzing in a circle. And there was just sweat rolling from us. But it was like we were all in love and could easily have gone to bed with each other, all of us could easily have . . . There was an enormous amount of energy, wonderful energy there. And the four of us always talked about it, always reflected back on it, on how in many ways we were just in love. It is just most bizarre, and for me it was the first experience of unconditional love . . . really. It really truly was, and that is why it is so profound for me. And I'll never forget them for it. (Interview, June 23, 1997)

. . . because up until that point, I was labelled and I was verbally abused and at times my physical safety was at risk. So I never had that kind of "in" feeling. I never felt like part of any "in" group. And this was the first time that someone called me, and said "I'm coming to get yah, we're just going to go and get Louise and Marsha, and we'll just sit in a hay field and watch the stars tonight". And that's what we would do. And the four of us would just sit there and talk, and it was profound. And from that point on I changed. It was fundamental change, something . . . self-esteem, my values, who I was. Everything changed about me: I bought nice clothes, I cared about what I looked like, I got a different haircut, I combed my hair. I still had all of that history of being labelled, and being more feminine than masculine, not fitting that jock role, but I had more acceptance . . . (Interview, June 23, 1997)

Around this same time Patrick began to keep a journal for his English teacher, Ms. White. This became an important way to process his own lived experience, and to reach out to another person and share his own difficulties. He developed a close relationship with her through his journalling.

> *I found . . . in some ways maybe a counsellor in her. . . maybe . . . at least a listener. She would reflect back . . . non-judgemental, very supportive and sometimes confrontive actually, in a gentle way. I was always anxious to . . . actually I was always anxious not to pass it in because I never wanted to be without it. So she would ask for it on Fridays and take it all week-end. And I would write in my journal perhaps maybe she could take it on Thursday night and give it back on Friday, so I could have it on the week-end. And she would do that for me. And she was amazing that way. And I wrote very honestly except for about my sexuality. And the major theme so far would certainly be human relations, as opposed to nature. (Interview, June 23, 1997)*

> *It was the journalling that allowed me to bring to consciousness, begin to bring to consciousness who I was, what was important to me, and . . . it is people, and it is all about people and relationships, all of it. (Interview, September 17, 1997)*

I think particularly with gayness, your wellness and your health has to come from within first, because it is such an oppressive world. A conscious awareness of who you are, and an understanding of your abilities, not your limitations, and an internal focus as opposed to an external focus, because for the most part if you are externally focused, your going to be unwell.

. . . And I'm political about that in counselling. And I was counselling this young man and his mother. I basically said: "You know, as long as you stay focused on that mean ugly world out there and all the messages, your going to feel less than human. You have got to somehow go within yourself and start understanding yourself from a beautiful way, and a loving way, and a self loving way." I read once that it isn't, it really shouldn't be called coming out, it should be called coming in, because you come into yourself, you love yourself, you figure out who you are. (Interview, July 14, 1997)

Patrick went to university believing he could start a new life. He planned to live his life as a heterosexual and to put his past behind him.

I had spent the later part of grade nine, ten, and eleven celibate, not with men and not with women. Okay, and . . . so that was two years of what I thought of as purging and cleansing, and of course the Roman Catholicism comes in here. It's like . . . I have fought the demon . . . I

have won, and I'm off on the right track, the straight track. And I came to university. And because I didn't have any of that history behind me . . . The guys thought I was cool, and the women wanted to be with me. It was amazing.

Early on into my first year, frosh week, I met a man named Rob. It became a co-dependent relationship. I fell into a crush with him and he became my best friend. I would pick him up for breakfast, and we would go for walks at night, it was like dating. There are elements of it that don't make sense to me, that is the co-dependent part, in that, say he would get drunk during the house party, I would cry. That part doesn't make sense to me. I would be upset if he didn't answer his door and come to breakfast with me. But on the other end, he would say: "I can't believe how easy it is to talk to you, I've never been able to share this stuff with anyone before". And he would talk and talk and talk, mostly about his parents' divorce, and I opened myself up and allowed . . . that sharing. And he was very appreciative, and he then came to know my past. I shared that with him, and I said that I was doing my best to remain straight, and be straight, and live a straight life. And then at the end of the first year, I went to his home for a week, before I flew home. And we had sexual activity which he initiated. The next day it was really uncomfortable, it was really difficult. And then I flew home and came back, about a month later, on my way to camp, because I was a camp counsellor that summer. I had a month off before I was a camp counsellor. I came back, spent

another few days with him, and we had sex again. Then he ended the whole friendship.

I was devastated when he ended our friendship, because I never wanted sex from him. We had a friendship, maybe I was in love with him, or I had a crush on him, but I could have easily just continued a friendship without sexual activity. And it wasn't until two years later he met me and he said "God, I really miss our friendship". And I said: "Well, you should have thought of that, I didn't want, and I didn't need sexual activity with you, and I really loved you as a friend. And I will never let myself be hurt by you again". And so I didn't welcome that friendship again. (Interview, June 23, 1997)

Patrick's plan to start a new life and to go straight was not working out. He describes feeling confused. It seems that he was gradually awakening to the reality of his own sexual orientation and his need to find a way to integrate that divided part of himself. He reports that it took many years for him to integrate his sexuality into his life in a healthy way, and in the interim he continued to live two often separate lives.

Ruth's story

One of my stories of awakening is about the healing power of unconditional acceptance and how that acceptance enabled me to move forward in my life. Other stories are from the school of hard knocks that I lived in my twenties. I awakened very slowly and painfully to the dangers of being born female in a patriarchal society. And I awakened to my own neediness and co-dependent behaviour (Whitfield, 1987) which lead me, as Estes (1997) suggests, to keep "knocking on all the wrong doors" (p.195).

Finding unconditional acceptance.

In 1968 during my first year of university I participated in a study into the non-medical use of drugs. This was conducted by a respected member of the faculty at the university. I sat in the comfortable lazy-boy chair in his quiet office. He explained that he would be taping the interview and that the information would be confidential. He asked questions about my first experiences with marijuana. I started answering the questions. But soon I was telling him about my friendship with Michelle. I explained how we had tried marijuana together a few times. I told him that we had become lovers. I said that I was confused and didn't know if I was lesbian or not. I was amazed that I had said all of this to a man I barely knew. He listened patiently to my story and appeared to make no judgment about what I revealed. He looked at me over the edge of his reading glasses in a kind way. He suggested that it was not an

uncommon experience in adolescence. I felt accepted and respected. I felt that either way I was okay. And that my future sexual orientation was not determined by one experience I had in a relationship with another woman. I felt uncomfortable about having revealed my personal problems, and yet strangely relieved. I returned to providing the information he wanted about my drug experiences which were rather limited. He thanked me at the end of the interview and suggested that he wouldn't need to interview me again for his study. As I left his house and walked slowly back to the residence in the late afternoon darkness, I felt as if a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I was somehow changed and the future looked brighter.

This brief exchange had a powerful effect on my life. It allowed me to accept my past experience in alternative sexuality as part of normal human sexuality. I realized that I did not have to put myself on either side of some imaginary line between heterosexuality and homosexuality. I began to understand human sexuality as a continuum. The question that had been troubling me for months had suddenly evaporated. I moved away from the dualistic thinking I had become trapped in, of thinking of my behaviour in terms of good and evil, normal and abnormal. I began to see my own experience in a more holistic and connected way.

As I reflect on this encounter, I believe I understand the power of listening and the possibility for change that is created between two people in an interviewing or counselling session. As a counsellor I try to listen and be open to the client's agenda. I

recognise that as a counsellor I may never know how important my listening and unconditional acceptance may be for the client.

After two years of university I could not decide about my future academic direction. I left university and travelled to the West Coast where I worked and saved money to travel to Europe. At twenty-one I embarked on an odyssey. As I hitchhiked through Europe I felt I was floating on a sea of experience. I was on an existential quest looking for the meaning of life, taking in experiences to be examined later. I met people and I went to museums and castles. I was delighted and comforted by the goodness and generosity of many people. I was chilled and horrified at the emptiness of others. I often travelled with other young people but I also travelled alone. The following is an entry from my journal of that period.

Close call

Late summer in Sweden, it is soft and golden here in the park. I feel all golden too. I don't understand why last night didn't upset me more. It was as close to rape as I ever want to get. I kept trying to catch the humanity in his eyes, to appeal to something. They were empty like blanks. Once I saw that, I knew he could kill me, and drive on so very easily.

My mind calculating how to get out of the big truck. My shoes are on the floor sitting on my pack. It's easy enough, open the door, dump it out, and jump. There are woods out there, there is another truck behind us. He wouldn't follow me, and it is safer outside. In the meantime I am keeping his hands off my breasts. I am crouched up on the dash with my feet drawn up to shield my body. I'm still trying to reason, looking and sounding more scared and bewildered than I am inside, even managed a few tears. I am still struggling at keeping him off. I told him I am getting off here. He doesn't believe me. He says I won't get to Stockholm unless he can have a tiny little feel, his hands struggling forward. He is trying to

> *kiss my chest. I am trying to open the door and fending him off with feet and hands. The door is open, the pack lands thud, shoes out and I'm out. He is driving off, angry. To him I suppose it is all justified by the 500 kilometre drive, and supper which he insisted on. I refused money too, hard on his ego.*
>
> *I am shaking a little. Now to find a place to sleep, wandering through trees, my mind spinning round. Far away from the road I wrap up in my sleeping bag. I feel safe and am finally asleep.*
>
> *Then it's morning with the sun rising in the East, there is a mist floating in a blanket over the field of oats beside me. Later on, up and on the road and a good ride to Stockholm.*
>
> *And now it is only a dim nightmare. Only my repeated "Nein, Nein," almost shouted, echoing. [He said he was German, and I was trying to be crystal clear]. Odd details and premonitions now remembered. When he had stopped, and insisted I see the castle, insisted on buying me a postcard, and then insisted I send it to my parents, all in a most friendly way. Somewhere in the back of my mind the thought that it indicated exactly where I was. Remembering what another man had said, that if I was his daughter, he would like to be able to tell the police where to start looking. All very grim - luck has to run out sometime. (Personal Journal, Aug. 23, 1971)*

This experience and others gradually awakened my instinct for survival. I no longer believed in my own youthful invulnerability. I no longer believed in the world as a safe place. I awakened again to my position in the world as female and other. As I reflect now on this journal entry, I am struck by the lack of emotion and feeling expressed in this account. Whitfield (1987) describes psychic numbing, and quotes Cermak (1986).

> During moments of extreme stress, combat soldiers are often called upon to act regardless of how they are feeling. Their survival depends upon their ability to suspend feelings in favor of taking steps to ensure their safety. Unfortunately, the resulting "split" between oneself and one's experience does not heal easily. (quoted in Whitfield, p.57)

When I returned to Canada from Europe I worked at various waitress jobs and saved money to attend Art School. I had started sketching in Europe, and I thought that this would give me a way to record my own experience of the world. I enrolled in the first year of a Fine Arts program at a College in Vancouver. I was living with Adrian, the young man I had left behind when I went travelling. We rented a small basement apartment.

In December of that year Adrian had a brief sexual adventure with a friend of ours. It shattered the basis of trust in our fragile relationship which had already gone through many ups and downs. Ironically, within a short time of learning about these events, I discovered that I was pregnant despite having used birth control. I made the decision to have an abortion. I considered that I was 23, in an unstable relationship, and in the middle of my Fine Arts program. My doctor supported me in my decision, and made the referrals. The Gynaecologist was less supportive in his comments as I lay on the examination table. I don't remember what he said, but there was a sense that I was less than others. He would do it, and so I didn't care what he said. His signature was legally required in 1973.

Adrian who was now apologetic about his sexual digression, felt somehow that this abortion was a deep rejection of him as a man. His support was sporadic and focused on himself. Despite my Catholic

upbringing, or perhaps because of it, I remained steadfast in my decision. My parents were safely two thousand miles away. My father would have provided judgement, and my mother perhaps support. How could I know? I could not get one without the other. I had long since stopped living by their standards, and felt that I had given up my right to ask for help. I would take care of myself. A rare journal entry from that time speak of my self loathing and anger.

> *I am burning with anger, no, filled with bitter ugly hatred, hatred for this body of mine which continually drags me down, hatred for not only the physical joys of bleeding, birth control, and abortion, but for this state of being forced to work at sub-wages. I am sick of reading great writers too stupid to see that I exist and women in general. (Personal Journal, April 25, 1973)*

The aftermath of the abortion was more than I had imagined. It was not just the bleeding, weakness and anger, but a deep depression. I lost all belief in myself, I felt worthless and listless. I became silent. I walked through the motions of my life without caring. I finished my school year, but decided not to return for the second year of the program. I assessed my talent for Art and decided it was wanting. I dwelt on the negative aspects of my relationship with Adrian, but had no energy to change it, or end it. Occasionally I tried to speak of what I felt, but Adrian was annoyed or defensive. He seemed to feel some judgment of himself. My best friend, Amy, now lived across the city and seemed busy with her own life. I had little energy to leave my underground home. I did

not seek any outside help, it was not something that was done in my family.

In the late spring Adrian and I moved to a room in a co-operative house, shared by friends. The brightness of this large older Vancouver home, and the presence of friends were a welcome change. It was spring and the neighbourhood was full of flowers and shrubs. But at this house one night a young female visitor locked herself in the bathroom. She was screaming, and her friend said that she was suicidal. We did what we could, and her friend was able to convince her to come out after some time. Days or maybe weeks later, I found myself alone and banging my head against the wall of the bedroom that I shared with Adrian. It seemed to me that mental illness was catching.

Somehow gradually the crisis passed. Adrian and I had now decided we would travel to the North to find work for the summer. On arrival we spent our first few nights in a youth hostel run by a church organization in Whitehorse. I was stunned by the picture of a bloody half-term fetus on the wall leading to the girls' dorm. It was difficult, but I knew their game, having been indoctrinated to Catholic guilt and original sin. What did priests know about women's real lives, about the trap and chain of childbirth and child-rearing? I was not going to buy it, to be sucked in by it. I felt anger at these crude people with their narrow self-serving views. I felt anger rising in me.

We worked all summer in the North, at a variety of jobs, as our relationship continued to unravel. One day we had a violent fight where things went flying around the kitchen of the small cabin we rented. I was hit with something. I remember walking out behind the cabin, and lying down crying and shaking in the quiet of the trees and grass in the soft light, contemplating my first experience of physical domestic violence.

As I write this I question what kept us there in that relationship. We were creating an insane world together, preparing to enter a great darkness. We were locked in this struggle which would intensify over the next two years. I was connected and bonded to Adrian emotionally, intellectually and physically. I planned to leave the North by myself, but in the end we built a bridge over the ugliness and left together to try again.

The end began in a beautiful valley in the mountains of British Columbia where we thought we would create a sane life together. We dreamed of buying our own land, of growing our own food, and worked hard to make it all come true. But we were the most flawed pieces of our dream. "People went into the woods looking for themselves and found nothing more or less than that" (Hildebrand, 1988, p.8). *The violence increased, and alcohol became a deadening agent for Adrian, who seemed to be fighting some great demon. I finally managed to leave, boarding a train alone in the middle of the night, that would take me two thousand miles back to where I started, under my father's roof.*

I stayed with my parents saying little about what I had left behind. The plan was for me to go to Nova Scotia to find a piece of land. I still wanted to make the dream of going-back-to-the-land come true. I went to the East Coast and found a beautiful piece of land. It was a perfect miniature valley with a stream running through it. Adrian and I were still in contact by letter. And I slipped into imagining that it could all work out, the dream could come true. We bought the land together. He would work out West, and come to join me the following summer. I avoided thinking about what that reality meant. I was working picking apples, waitressing, and tree planting. I was making connections to new friends and community. And I was preoccupied with legal complications which followed the land transaction.

Once Adrian arrived it took only days for the conflict and violence to return. Our arguments focused on the complications of the land transaction. I finally saw how it would always be. We would always find some reason to begin the descent into darkness. Once we had opened the door to violence, we were unable to close it again. We were locked within our patterns together.

I made my decision to sever our connection. I borrowed money to buy Adrian's half of the land. We were staying in an isolated old farmhouse with a spectacular view of the coast. And here we began a deadly dance of dissolution. He verbally abused me in tirades. He would agree to sell one day and refuse the next. It went on for days as he

struggled with accepting the end. He pleaded, he persuaded and debated.

I engaged all my will in moving as if in slow motion towards dissolution.

I have tried to reconstruct the exact events of that time of dissolution but they elude me. I seem to have emotional amnesia in that I can no longer recall what I thought or how I felt. I believe I was very divided in myself: my intellect was disconnected from my emotions. I believe that I was experiencing some degree of "psychic numbing". The closest I can come to these memories is represented in a recent journal entry.

> *Just before I fell asleep last night I heard a door slam. It was loud enough that I thought about getting up to see if someone had come into the house. But then I knew that the slamming door was inside my head. Memories of events twenty years ago came back vividly. I could feel the knot in my stomach, the tension in my body. Adrian and I are in that kitchen in the farmhouse locked in a mental, emotional, and physical battle. Shards of glass are on the floor. Words are ringing in my ears. My head is now being banged against the floor. Blood is running down from my head. The blood is shocking to both of us. In a daze I am driving away in the night to get stiches. At the hospital the Doctor is competent with the needle but not helpful to my soul. "Women's lib was a dangerous thing," he said. (Personal Journal, September 21, 1996)*

In the end Adrian agreed to let me buy him out, and he left. It was finally over. This period of my history has left me scarred, but I believe my lived experience has also educated me. I believe that we are all, men and women, caught in the web of our patriarchal culture. I experienced first hand the dark reality of many women's lives. I came to understand how my own self-hatred and self-denial lived just beneath the surface of my skin. I came to know my own explosive anger, fuelled as it was by the pain and

hurt I had swallowed. I awakened to the web I was caught in, and I awakened to my own power to change and direct my life by focusing my will. And again I awakened to my own need for a safe place (Eldridge, 1996).

Estes (1997) uses the story of the ugly duckling to explain my and others' journeys through this school of hard knocks.

> The ugly duckling goes from pillar to post trying to find a place to be at rest. While the instinct about exactly where to go may not be fully developed, the instinct to rove until one finds what one needs is well intact. Yet there is a kind of pathology sometimes in the ugly duckling syndrome. One keeps knocking at the wrong doors even when one knows better. (p.195)

She later explains that while exile is not something to desire, it does have its lessons.

> It takes out weakness by the pounding. It removes whininess, enables acute insight, heightens intuition, grants the power of keen observation and perspective that the "insider" can never achieve. (p. 199)

Through my twenties I rarely found the help I needed. I was too proud or too ashamed to seek help following my abortion. And I could not trust that I would receive help and not simply moral judgement from family or mental health professionals. Later when I needed to leave my abusive relationship there were as yet, no women's shelters in the rural areas where I was living. My only help came from speaking to close women friends. And it was in sharing my stories with other women that I realized that my experiences were not unique, and found the strength to leave. I gratefully found shelter in my parents' house but there I remained silent.

Many years later I was a volunteer board member for a women's shelter and transition house. I felt the need to do what I could to create change and support other

women. I did this because my own lived experience had allowed me to know and understand something about their pain. Later I also worked with troubled adolescents who had often experienced abuse, or who came from homes filled with violence. My heart went out to them, and I felt their pain. I believe my own difficult journey sometimes helped me to understand their loneliness and despair.

Attempted Suicide

I am near the end of my shift. The residents have gone to bed. I knock on Shelley's bedroom door. Shelley is fifteen and on a special suicide watch tonight. All is quiet. I open the door. Then I see her sitting on the floor by the bed. Blood is running down her arms. I speak to her and promise I will be back. I run for bandages and gloves. I feel guilty as I pull the gloves on, such concern for my own life in the face of her despair. Now I am sitting holding the bandages to Shelley's wrists. I ask her if I can put my arm around her. She nods. I sit holding her for a while. I am talking and comforting. And I am feeling so inadequate to reach her across the space of our separateness. She feels so lonely and alone.

As I put together my own stories of awakening, I was frustrated by their refusal to conform or to take the shape of neat and tidy tales. They are difficult stories to tell because many of them are about the tangled web of life. One story runs into another and fuels the fire that is burning out of control. These stories are about co-dependency

(Whitfield, 1987) and painful slow learning. But on further reflection I have come to believe that their value lies in their complexity. I believe that I was slowly awakening to my need to bring the separated and divided parts of myself back together. I was realizing that I needed to listen to my inner voice. I needed to create a safe and quiet place where I could again know my own thoughts and feelings, and hear that inner voice.

Chapter 4

Transformation and Rebuilding the Self

> Transformation is a changing of form, a forming over, a restructuring. When we transform, we transform our awareness or consciousness. Ultimately it is a shift from living our lives to get somewhere to living our lives as an expression of our being (Leonard, 1973; Erhard, 1984). We switch from one domain of reality and being to another. Through such change, we grow and transcend to higher, more empowering, more peaceful, and more creative levels of being. At the same time that we experience more personal power and more possibility and choice, we also begin to take more responsibility for making our lives work (Whitfield, 1985). (Whitfield, 1987, p. 107)

In this chapter I describe and discuss my participant's efforts, and my own efforts, to build new lives following our awakening. I believe that as we awaken to our dilemmas in the world, we have the possibility of moving forward, creating new patterns of living. I believe our awakening was, in fact, already the first step to change in our lives. Transformation as Connelly and Clandinin (1993) suggest "is found in the process and outcome of falling into living knew ways of seeing" (p.16). I also believe that transformation leads to further awakenings.

Ruth's story

I had survived the school of hard knocks and it was like a five year war that had finally ended. I now embarked on a period of peace and self-reliance. I would fulfill my dream but I would do it alone. I felt it was a mistake to become dependent, to rely on

another person. I returned to the ideal of my early adolescence, the strong independent woman. I spent many hours alone, and I felt peaceful, and free to do what I wanted. I read books on building, and began to design my own little house.

Ironically, at the same time that I now valued and protected my personal independence, I was beginning to value community and realize how important community was to me. I continued to work as a volunteer and then as paid staff in the Cooperative Whole Food store in the area. I met like-minded people who were also buying land and building their own houses. I attended numerous house-building or barn-raising events. And I was delighted with the cooperative spirit of friendship that I experienced there. I was hoping to learn the skills that I needed to build my own little house.

A safe place

In 1978, with the help of many friends my cabin began to take shape. The farmer I worked for helped me salvage some old barn beams. I remember how proud and excited I was to think that I could finally start my little house. I was the driving force behind this enterprise, but friends and acquaintances helped me with each and every stage. Finally the cabin was framed and the roof was on. I only needed to board in the sides of the building to be nearly weather tight. Winter was coming. It was my turn to have a building party and posters went up at the cooperative store.

I have pictures of that fine fall day. The poplar leaves are yellow. The maple leaves cover the ground in front of the cabin with its bright new

boards. Friends are everywhere. Some close friends and neighbours came early and worked all day. Others showed up later with their children and food to eat. One photograph shows me up near the peak of the roof waiting for the last few boards to be handed up. I was proud and exhausted, but I was also filled with a deep sense of community as I looked down at my friends and neighbours. I felt supported and I felt connected to them all.

This lived experience is central to my understanding of community. I believe that a supportive community is essential to the emotional and spiritual health of an individual. I believe that it is a mistake to think that we can survive in glorious isolation. And I believe that each individual needs to have a supportive network of friends and neighbours. These beliefs comes from my own lived experience of a supportive community. And as a counsellor I am interested in knowing what kind of support is available to clients in their community of family and friends. If they have little support, then I would hope to connect them with a peer network or some type of ongoing support.

As I reviewed this story I realized that there was another story intertwined with this narrative. It is a love story half formed.

I met a musician. We worked together on the harvest one fall. Shaun liked to make jokes and he made me laugh. We became friends and eventually lovers. We stayed together for four years, and lived together for part of that time in various rented houses sometimes just the two of us,

and sometimes with other friends. I was saving money to buy materials for my cabin. We were together the summer and fall that I built my little house. But it was never "our" cabin, it was always "my" cabin. I needed a safe place, a refuge, something that would always be mine. Our relationship took place entirely in the present. I was prepared to share my day to day life and my bed, but not my future. I was not prepared to become entangled in commitment and dreams of the future. We shared many good times together filled with music and friends.

We also shared some very difficult times. If Shaun made any assumptions about my role or our relationship, I responded with a heightened vigilance which carried the negative charge of my past abusive relationship. He was often hurt by this, but he was able to see and explain how I was making the transference. I saw what I was doing: if any behaviour or comment reminded me of Adrian then I would react. I continued to keep Shaun at a safe distance. We eventually ended our sexual relationship, and simply became friends. I believe we never stopped caring for each other. Shaun will still occasionally come up to share a meal, play some music, or just to talk.

As I reflect back our relationship seems like a bridge to me now. It allowed me to build up trust without risking too much. I needed to know that no matter what happened I had a safe place in the world. Elly Danica, in "Don't - A Woman's Word" (1988), writes eloquently about the need to create a safe place in which to heal from abuse.

> I find an old church. Sanctuary. A church like the one I ran to as a child. A safe place. No one will find me. No one will hurt me. My own place. A quiet place to go crazy. I think I can fill it with my dreams, hardly notice the lack of walls, or plumbing or cold. Sanctuary. At any price. (p.99)

My little house, similar to Danica's Old Church, had no plumbing and a woodstove, and yet I was delighted with it and the independence that it represented. I still have my safe valley and little cabin. I don't live there anymore. And I probably don't need it anymore. I just still have it.

I soon began to work as a group leader with Katimavik, a Canadian Federal Government youth program for 17 to 21 year olds. I lived with the group twenty-four hours a day, and managed the work and social life of the group as best I could. I was in a leadership role and I felt in control. The position demanded a knowledge of basic survival skills, and I was confident that I was well equipped to meet the challenge.

The first three-months rotation went very well. I had a group of idealistic participants and I gave all my energy to my work. The program's ideals matched my own: service to society, knowledge and understanding of the country, environmental awareness, and personal development. We grew an organic garden at the project house, and led a very conserver lifestyle. We were involved in renovating the project house. I felt confident in my abilities as I started into my second three-months rotation and prepared myself to meet a new group of participants.

But these participants were different, and they already had a different experience of the Katimavik program.

One day several participants from my second group came to me representing the group to say that they wanted a member of the group sent home. They had lived with this very arrogant and difficult individual for three months in Quebec, and they had had enough. It was the beginning of their second rotation which was in Nova Scotia, and I was their new group leader.

I had never sent anyone home. I had no clear reason to dismiss this participant as he had broken none of the rules of the program. He was unpopular and appeared to be quite an arrogant young man with the tendency to walk with a swagger, but this was not cause for dismissal. I felt out of my depth, and out of control. I felt I had no personal experience to draw on to help me negotiate these treacherous waters. I knew the potential for a bloodletting and scapegoating was high. The group was angry and it appeared to have coalesced against this person. It didn't help that he was French speaking and the majority of the group was English speaking.

I agonized about what approach to take. In desperation I went to a more experienced colleague and hoped she would tell me what to do. She smiled and commented on how previously I had always been so confident and in control when the problems where of a practical nature, this must be a new experience for me. She did not give me the solution I wanted and I felt slightly annoyed. Finally I decided to try the "Kiva", a tradition of the Hopi people, which was an ancient way of resolving disputes and

making decisions. I had been introduced to this method briefly, and it appeared to have a powerful effect. I was nervous and apprehensive as the group meeting began.

The group sat in a circle on the hand-woven carpet I had carefully set down for them, and we selected a power object for the group following a sacred tradition. The room was quiet and the process evoked an atmosphere of wisdom and calm. I was reassured as I watched the process and tradition take hold of us all. As each person spoke using the power object the group had selected, they were not interrupted. Each spoke in turn as the power object came to them following the tradition we had been given.

I didn't know why this worked, but it did, and it allowed the group to speak honestly about their anger and hurt, and things that needed to change. In the end the young man was given a chance to connect with the group again; he was given another chance. I did not feel responsible for the fact that we had reached the other shore together, but I felt great respect for this wise and democratic tradition of the Hopi which somehow allowed us to tap our own inner wisdom.

This experience helped me to built trust in myself, my participants, and the group process we were involved in. I was beginning to realize I did not always need to have all the answers. Sometimes I could enter into a situation with my participants and work things out with them. I could let us create the answers together. If they were involved in

the creation of solutions then they would be more ready to accept them. I was learning to respect my clients and their ability to move themselves along on their own path. I was learning that I did not always have to be in control.

Later that year I recall an older friend asking about what theory I was using for doing this work with youth. I responded that I did not know. As I reflected later that day, I realized that I acted intuitively and treated each participant as a friend. Whatever I was doing worked, and I generally received the support of the participants and the organization. In looking back now, I realize that I was grounding my practice in my own lived experience and occasionally referring to the alternative inspirational literature of the day. I turned to the Holy book of China, the "I Ching" (Wilhelm, trans. 1967) when I needed personal guidance, I listened to my more experienced colleagues' stories of their experiences in working with youth, and I used the Hopi "Kiva" meeting circle tradition to help resolve difficult group problems. Waters, in the Book of the Hopi (1963), defines Kiva as "an underground ceremonial chamber" (p.343). However I use "Kiva" to refer to a method of meeting and decision-making that had been passed on to me by my project coordinator.

These intense one year Katimavik contracts were interspersed with much needed recovery time. At the end of each year I would return to my safe little house in the tiny perfect valley. There I gardened and took care of my animals, and I felt renewed. I knew that this was essential to my spiritual and emotional survival.

During my second Katimavik contract I worked in a small town in Western Nova Scotia and with my colleagues ran a very successful project. This was the year I received

an award from the organization for my contribution to the program. And yet, within this story of success is another story of a moment of crisis and learning.

Anger

We were nearing the end of the rotation. We had been living in this beautiful small town for three months. The participants had worked exceeding well and hard on a new hall for the native community. As their group leader I was involved in organizing a farewell party for the participants and the community. It was considered standard practice, and the party was meant to help build connections with the local community. I had planned an open house at our apartment.

The day of the party I was taking care of last minute arrangements and trying to motivate the participants. I was feeling anxious about the farewell party. The place was disorderly and needed to be cleaned. No one seemed to be doing anything to clean up the general messiness of twelve young adults despite my suggestions. I felt no support from them. I felt they didn't care. I was in the kitchen preparing food for the party when something snapped inside of me.

I was shaking with anger. I stepped into the living area still holding a large block of cheese and threw it across the room. I shouted something about cleaning up the fucking place. The participants sat in shocked silence saying nothing. I was instantly ashamed and horrified at my own behaviour. I walked out of the apartment shaken to my core.

I went up the street to a neighbour's house were I sat crying and wondering what had come over me. He listened and gave me tea. He said he was amazed that I was able to live with so many young people in that apartment. I realized I was exhausted. He lived a quiet life with his partner making exquisite pottery. I stayed for quite a while letting the peace and calm of this house surround me. I looked at the sleek rounded shapes and smooth glazes of the pottery arranged on shelves all around me. I knew I had to go back, and so I gathered my strength to face the aftermath of my anger. I recognized this feeling and knew where all this had come from. It was connected to my own history of intimate violence.

I walked down the street and up the stairs into the apartment. The place was clean and organized, and several participants were working to prepare the food for the party. There was no sign of the block of cheese that had landed on the floor. I apologized and went into my room.

The party was a success as parties go. People came and danced and said farewell. Everyone played their part. And after several more days this group of participants left for another town across the country. I was left behind to wonder what had happened.

I believed that there was a powerful lesson for me here. It was about my personal history and how I carried it with me. My personal history did not live in the past as I would have liked, safely mothballed for protection. My past lived experiences were with me now, and they could have a powerful and dangerous effect on my behaviour.

Much later I spoke to two of those participants about these events. They had been surprised by my behaviour that day. I had always been the calm and cheerful group leader. One noted that I had given no warning of what I was feeling. I was able to hide my feelings and thoughts so well, that no one knew what I felt until I exploded in a rage. I needed to learn to communicate what I was feeling in a safe way.

As I reflect on this story I see how I ignored my feelings. I tried to stuff them down. But my anger and frustration simply ignited the powder keg of rage I carried with me. I was overly responsible and worked exceedingly hard at my job. And I was successful, but I did not take enough care of myself. I had allowed myself to become exhausted because I did not recognize or acknowledge my own needs. I also felt inadequate and hurt when I was unable to motivate the participants. Whitfield (1987) suggests that "Disowning and neglecting our own needs is intimately related to being over-responsible" (p.70).

I did not stop to talk to the participants, to discover what they were feeling about the end of their first rotation, about leaving this town, and about leaving the people they had come to care about. I did not ask about what they were feeling about moving to a new town across the country. I failed to listen to their stories, and I expected them to read my mind. I was caught up in staging the event, and had lost sight of the real meaning of connection to others and community.

During my second year with Katimavik I worked closely with a colleague who was to become my future partner. We stayed together when we could but often our work dictated that we would live in different houses or in different towns. I knew instinctively that Michael was someone I could trust, someone I could even have a child with, but I

was cautious and protected my independence. We lived together for two years sometimes at his small house and sometimes at mine. Eventually we decided to have a child and got married. I was thirty-three, and I had been feeling that I was now ready to have a child. We began to work together adding a second story to his cabin. We were enlarging it, and symbolically turning it into our house.

Motherhood

After the first few months of the pregnancy I felt healthy and strong. I worked on our house each day, mixing cement, carrying boards, pounding nails. I felt proud of myself in my fourth month of pregnancy as I crawled up the roof pounding nails into the shingles.

My son was born in June and I brought him home to my little house in the tiny perfect valley, because the bigger house was not yet finished. Motherhood was a surprise. It demanded almost more than I was able to give. I was exhausted. We had shelter but no running water or electricity. It took every moment of my day to care for this baby. He slept fitfully and cried for hours. I felt I could accomplish nothing. I sat for endless hours rocking and nursing this child of mine in my little cabin. I was as anxious and restless as the baby. I had given up my hard won independence, I was now totally dependent on my partner. Michael was supportive in every way. He spent the first few weeks at our side, and then returned to work each day on our house. I loved them both, but still felt my soul melting away. I felt I had no value. I was some useless

appendage. These were my internal thoughts, but I was supposed to be a happy new mother. My partner assured me that I was doing something, and did not need to be working on the house. I put my full energy into making the best of my situation. When my son slept for brief periods, I quickly went to get buckets of water from the stream, made the supper or did the dishes. I carried him to the garden in his basket. As my physical energy returned, I found myself striving to become independent once again.

As I reflect now I see that motherhood was a crisis for me because I had built my self identity and worth on a masculine model. At the age of eight I had decided that to be a mother and a wife was less and not worthy. And now that I had become a wife and a mother I felt I was unworthy. I believed what I had been taught as a girl. I valued building, and working in the outside world. I did not value caring and nurturing in the home. I felt a connection to my son which was like a physical pain. I cared for him beyond believing, but I was torn apart at my core. I had lost my identity, and no longer knew who I was.

When my son was eight months old I returned to work. I needed my work to provided me with an identity and value. The last Katimavik contract was shared between myself and my partner, each of us spending three days a week on project, three days a week parenting our eight month old son, and one day together as a family. This was a very difficult year for me as I felt my energies torn between my child and my project participants. I realized that previously I had dedicated myself almost exclusively to my

participants. Motherhood did not allow me to do this, and I felt guilty and anxious. I was barely able to cope with the demands I was placing on myself, and I felt I was coming apart at the seams. I felt I might crack under the pressure.

Coming Unglued

I sat on the couch and fiddled with the edge of my shorts. A friend and supervisor was visiting our project house from the Katimavik Regional Office. I was nervous, I felt I was not measuring up. I had none of the confidence of other Katimavik years. There was nothing I could do. I was already stretched to the breaking point. I was coming unglued.

As I remember this moment it contrasts sharply with the story I told at the time. We were the first group leaders to job share a contract, and it was also unusual to have a young child while working as a Group Leader. We were breaking new ground. At the same time we were sharing the care and raising of our son. This was still quite innovative and I was determined to make it work. I was proud of what we were doing, and I tried to put the best light on the situation. I didn't want people to know that I was nearly sinking under the weight of it all. As I reflect on this story now I see that I was still divided within myself, and kept parts of myself hidden.

Once my last Katimavik contract was over, I returned to my little house and stayed home with my son, gardening and raising goats. I soon began to study part-time and then full-time to finish my undergraduate degree in Sociology. This began as a survival strategy, a way to escape the confines of what was for me the socially limiting

role of mother. Because I was living in a rural area I felt isolated. I felt I was dying, my brain congealing, my future narrow and dark. My studies changed those feelings and opened new possibilities for me. These studies in Sociology also fit with my own experience of the social world and its inequalities based on economic status, gender, race and ethnicity. It allowed me to see my own history in new ways, to see how my personal struggle to survive was connected to the struggle of many other women.

I wrote an undergraduate thesis based on my own experience of having one child in a society which traditionally has believed that one child is not good enough (Winterhalt, 1989). I struggled to find a methodology for this thesis. After some time, my advisor suggested I use "Grounded Theory" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I was delighted to find a methodology which fit with the way I had always come to know about the world. I could gather the data, and then construct tentative theory which would be further tested by more data. This to me was a "natural" way of conducting research into the social world of human beings. Human beings experience the world first and create theory from their experiences, which they test and alter as they live their lives. My thesis work on the "Only Child" affirmed my experience by allowing me to know that other individuals had shared some of my experiences. At the same time I acknowledged that some individuals had very different experiences.

My own stories of transformation are about my struggles to live "new ways of seeing" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1993, p. 16). I struggled to listen to my own needs, to create a safe place, and to take responsibility for moving myself along my own path. I valued the support of my friends and community. I protected myself and my

independence. I heightened my instinct to recognize those who could damage me, and those that would support me.

I started to work with youth in groups, and opened myself to the valuable lessons that the experience had to offer. I learned to trust the process of transformation. Like Assagioli (1965), I came to see each person as a traveller on their own path to transformation. I was then able to accept them unconditionally. I moved with the support of my partner into the mystery of being a mother. I confronted my denial of my own femaleness. I crossed a bridge where I made amazing discoveries about the hard work of care and nurturing. These stories are about bringing safety, community, and love into my world; and they are about finding ways to support others on their own difficult journeys to awakening and transformation. As I reflect on these stories I see that I was moving on a path which was leading me back to the more nurturing and connected practices of my mother, back to the qualities and practices traditionally identified with femininity. I was moving to create a healthier balance between the masculine and feminine aspects of my being.

Patrick's story

The summer after his first year of university Patrick worked as a Camp Counsellor. He was stretched to the limits of his ability by the work with the children, some of whom had special challenges of a physical or emotional nature. He learned to have great respect for these children.

One of the camps was an integrated camp where we had young children who were living with Cystic Fibrosis. That was an amazing experience because we had to give them physical therapy every morning and every evening. This was the second or third camp. And there were about ten of them in the entire camp. And I had four of them in my cottage. And I had such respect for these young kids.

It is a digestive disorder, and appears to be a lung disorder as well, so they would have two issues. First they would need to take certain pills before they ate fruit, or before they ate bananas. I'm not sure, there was something to do with digestion. But I think the most serious part was the lungs: for some reason mucus formed. We had to give them physical therapy [slapping his chest to demonstrate] to loosen the mucus and then they would have to cough it up. And their lungs would fill over night, and then during the day their lungs would fill again. And you would have to do it twice a day, once in the morning to get the stuff that had formed in their lungs overnight. And these kids were amazing: you'd pound them [demonstrating on himself], and they'd say "No harder", and you'd pound them [pounding harder now], "No harder, let me show you". And they would just go, because sometimes they would do it themselves. They would give themselves some physical therapy. And there were rotor machines, and they would have to lay with their heads down and their feet up. I often wonder how many of them are still alive because they have

short life spans. I remember one little boy named Robbie. He was just the sweetest little boy, and I wonder where he is now, and if he has passed on.

I also had my first experience working with . . . very difficult children, like troubled children. I had two brothers and they were rough. They were tough. And to gain their respect, to have them trust their fellow campers, and integrate, it was just a total challenge all summer. And I kept wishing . . . to leave, I kept wishing for this to be over. But the day I pulled out I cried for about five kilometres . . . because . . . I cried for all that I had learned, and I cried . . . for the growth that I actually realized I had experienced. During the camp all I could see was exhaustion, that's all I could see while I was in it. But the day I left, and pulled out, I just, it was this great realization, this great purging, and I just cried, and I shocked myself. (Interview, Sept.17,1997)

Patrick is now working counselling individuals who are challenged with disabilities.

I'm starting to get very political now about disabilities, and people with disabilities. And that is a direct result of being in a counselling position where I'm counselling those who have disabilities. And I'm a strong advocate for people with disabilities. And I will be very political, and will continue to be political on behalf of persons with disabilities, because some of them have voice, but a lot of them don't have voice. And

it is the same thing for women, and it is the same thing in the gay community. And I am not frightened to have voice. And I was frightened. I spent years being frightened to share voice. I'm willing to risk, and share, and voice in hopes that maybe just one person won't go through what I went through, or one parent won't go through what my parents went through. Or one brother won't go through what my brother went through, and one sister. Whomever I can reach, in whatever capacity . . . keeps me going. The thought that I might be reaching one person, keeps me motivated, keeps inspiring me to take the risk. (Interview, July 31, 1997)

Patrick sought out counselling help in his first year of university, and there he met a mentor/counsellor. His experience then still inspires his own counselling today.

She had incredible listening skills and . . . I learned so much from her, and I will go back now when I am counselling to those memories of how she counselled me. And part of what she did - the last five minutes she would always summarize the whole session. And I always felt so respected, it was like: "Oh my God, you listened to me", because she could reflect back and summarize everything that I had said. And it was an incredible technique, and I integrate that now into my counselling. So if you want to look at the lived experience and how that relates, that's an

incredible example from my perspective of how that lived experience has translated directly to my counselling technique. (Interview, June 23, 1997)

Patrick was taking Psychology and he began to volunteer as a peer listener. This volunteer work continued for several years while he attended university. And after university he continued as a volunteer in other organizations always working with people.

I purposely did not look for a job in the Psychology field when I graduated. I was a waiter in Halifax for a year. But I was serving people, always helping in some sort of capacity. And then I had to belong to something that was more directly helping people, so I joined the City Care Line, and I was trained for hours. I worked the City call-in phone line. (Interview, June 23, 1997)

Patrick was still wrestling with the issues connected with his sexuality. He felt he was still leading two lives. And it was around this time that he took the risk of becoming involved in a serious gay relationship. I see this as a move towards bringing the divided parts of himself together. He also describes himself as having a long term struggle with co-dependency. In reflecting back on his life he sees this pattern emerging in his early adolescence. Whitfield (1987) suggest that co-dependence is "any suffering and/or dysfunction that is associated with or results from focusing on the needs and behaviors of others" (p.28). Co-dependency is also associated with growing up in a family with alcohol problems (Wegscheider-Cruse 1985, Whitfield 1987).

I was very ready for a relationship, and was not so much lonely, but I remember saying to myself I have got my degree, I have got a job, I have got money in the bank, it would be really nice to be with someone now. And to be with someone gay, which was a big step for me. Because up until that time I was having official straight relationships, like overt, "this is my girlfriend" relationships, and I was having covert sexual relationships with men. (Interview, September 2, 1997)

It was one of the waitresses that said I should meet her friend. So I did and just really wanted to be with him. But he was so frightened, he didn't want to commit. So after six months, I went away for the week-end. I met some gay friends, and I decided over the week-end that I was going to break off the relationship. And while I was away that week-end, he decided he was prepared to commit. And when I came back, it was just such an emotional evening. I said: "Well I decided that I think this should end, I'm not happy and you are not ready to commit." And he said: "No I decided I am ready to commit". And then our relationship totally changed, I was less co-dependent. I can't believe how quickly ten years has gone. (Interview, September 2, 1997)

I was very co-dependent when I first met him. For the first six months it was pretty brutal . . . I was very co-dependent, and I worked myself out of that to a healthier love and a healthier relationship. (Interview, July 14, 1997)

Patrick also describes having his own struggle with alcohol around this time. He felt that as he began to risk living an open gay lifestyle that he needed to numb himself against the pain.

> *Numbing myself or escaping the risk I was taking. I never made that equation [until now]. I would have to say that in our first three years alcohol was near a major issue for me . . . for our relationship. Every time we went out, he would have to take care of me . . . take me home, take out my contacts, take my clothes off, rub my back while I was sick, we went through a couple of years like that.*
>
> *I guess I don't need to speak theoretically either about how gayness and alcohol abuse is connected. I can draw from my own experience when I am speaking about that. I mean alcohol abuse and substance abuse in the gay community is so prevalent. There is a greater likelihood that if you identify as gay that you will have some kind of issues with substance abuse. And I speak about that from a theoretical textbook perspective, and it's like, "No I think you have lived it, let's get real here". (Interview, October 9, 1997)*

Patrick also recalls that, after he took the risk of "coming out" to his parents about his sexual orientation, he experienced suicidal thoughts. *"And that was the first real feeling of wanting to be gone, dead, not here, take me away from the pain (Interview,*

June 23, 1997). He had also entertained suicidal thoughts as an adolescent, but did not remember these feelings until he later went back to read his journals from that period of his life.

Patrick eventually returned to work for the University that he had attended as a student. And there he became involved in working for the clerical and technical workers union. In a short time he became President of the Union. He described this as a "stressful" and "thankless" job, but as a valuable educational experience.

> *I learned a lot. I learned how to negotiate. I learned how to conflict resolve. It was a full experience. I would work day and night. Every lunch I would commit myself and I would work in the lounge. Every night I worked on Union stuff, two hours a night, and on week-ends, and every lunch hour. I opened up the first Union office on campus for staff. I canvassed for one, and the administration gave us one. And I said: "Well if we are going to have one, it has got to be open for employees to come and talk". I mean I was one of the youngest . . . I was 23 or 24. I was watching people . . . I was watching people get dismissed, fired. Ah . . . boy, when I look back on that, no wonder I was stressed out. I was really young when I did that, and I didn't do a great job of it, but I did the best job I could do. And where did all that come from? Why was it so important for me to do it? And when that was over I went straight into an Equity Committee, and worked hard, hard, on the first Equity Committee at the University. I went from doing things for other people, being a nice*

guy, to being more of a social activist, fighting for others, fighting for me, for me too and others. (Interview, June 23, 1997)

Patrick had his own experiences of discrimination while he worked for the University. He was given a special public speaking assignment, but he was asked to "keep it quiet". He was told that if the President of the University knew, he would ask the staff not to send Patrick on the assignment.

. . . "He would ask us not to send you". I was devastated . . . He honoured me by saying "We would like you to go", and the second breath was "you have got to keep it quiet". He never said the word gay, but I knew what he meant. I walked out of there and I didn't know how to feel. Should I feel proud? It wasn't a good proud feeling. I am less than. It was really hard for me to go on assignment by myself and stand up in front of groups of students. (Interview, June 23, 1997)

Later Patrick was passed up for an internal promotion, and he felt again that it was because he was gay.

. . . The excuse was: "Well if we had put you in that position, we would have had to find someone to put in your position, and that the domino effect would have been just too much to manage". I think it was the gay thing. I really do. (Interview, June 23, 1997)

This experience of discrimination and his awakening to the limited possibilities that he had within the institution, forced Patrick to reevaluate his own career plans. And it was at this point that he made the decision to go back to a Graduate program in Counselling.

> *Well it was a knee jerk reaction. I'm going to show you. I'm going to upgrade. I'm getting the hell out of here, and I'm going to make a better career for myself. Funny enough though when I sat down to write the cover letter and my resume for the program. It all just stared me right in the face: I have got a life long history of human service dedication here. This makes perfect sense, and it was just a major insight. It made perfect sense. I have years, and years of hard dedicated work to people. (Interview, June 23, 1997)*

> *I'd have to say the thing that's affected my counselling more than anything, that has driven me to counselling, or has led me naturally to counselling, is my gayness and my lifelong challenge with that, and now entering a life of politicalness and a life of celebration. Truly I would have to say that that is why I am a counsellor, that is what led me to counselling, that dictates the clientele I like to work with. It is where my passion lies as a counsellor. (Interview, July 14, 1997)*

> *. . . part of my reason for going into counselling, was to serve the gay community, and I'm only doing a little bit of that now, and I really want to do more of that, it is my calling, if you will, and it is my politics now . . . (Interview, Sept 17, 1997)*

In these stories of transformation, I believe, Patrick learns to love and accept himself, to act as a counsellor for others, and to work for change in his community. As a camp counsellor he describes learning to respect those who are challenged with disabilities, and to respect the struggles they face. While at university he finds a counsellor/mentor to help him resolve some of his own concerns and issues. At the same time he appears to discovers his own power to make a difference in other people's lives, to become a counsellor for others in need. Patrick takes the risk of allowing himself to establish an openly gay relationship. He tells of facing his own pain and the experience of discrimination. I believe that through these lived experiences, he comes to recognise and support those who are challenged and discriminated against in our society, he comes to believe in the power of voice to heal and bring change, and he finds the courage to stand up and fight for his own rights and the rights of others.

Chapter 5

Crisis and New Integration

> The biographic past exists presently, complexly contributive to the biographic present. While we say it cannot be held accountable for the present, the extent to which it is ignored is probably the extent it does account for what is present. (Pinar, 1994, p.22)

In this chapter I present stories about challenges that forced my participant and I to awaken once again, and to see our lived experience in a new light. These are stories of getting lost along the way, and the hard work of finding our way back with the help of mentors and friends. I believe these lived experiences were educative and led us to a deeper integration within ourselves. We came to examine once again some of our past experiences that have affected us so deeply.

Patrick's story

While in Graduate school, Patrick describes going through a "crisis" in his life. He left Peter, his long-term partner, and became involved in an abusive relationship with Matthew. Patrick describes Matthew as a "narcissist". This new relationship only lasted for a few months, but it left Patrick in great emotional turmoil. He then began the hard work of pulling his life back together again with the help of mentor/counsellors. He first began individual counselling, and later went with his long-term partner to couples' counselling.

Crisis

Matthew was so charming. I'm going to use the word icon again. He was really an icon for me of freedom and of a kind of gypsyness. He represented the other part of me that I had put aside, or suppressed being in my relationship with Peter, my long-term partner. In that I was not - I did not feel free, I did not feel like a gypsy, and I did not feel spiritual in some ways. I felt committed and grounded, and full of responsibility. And Matthew was instantly for me that kind of icon. I met him in September at a gay support group and instantly there was an attraction, spark, fire. I saw him literally maybe four or five times during the first term, in passing, stopping in the street to chat. And I developed an incredible crush on him. We started to exchange phone numbers, and when I was alone I would call him. We were making more excuses to be with one another, or talk to one another. And it got to a certain point were I was contemplating an affair. And I didn't want to do that, because I loved Peter, and I respected Peter. And I respected our relationship. And yet I wondered if Matthew was my next life partner.

It was really serious, in seven years, I'd only really met two people who created kind of a self doubt about my relationship. And the first one I didn't act on. I communicated very openly with my partner about my attraction, and just worked through that, and that went well. This time was more powerful and my curiosity - it was almost like a seven year itch. And so I thought the only way I can actually find out, is if I break my

relationship with Peter, as opposed to having an affair. I broke with Peter. I said: "I need to go away, I'm having feelings about Matthew, and I can't sort through them here, and I need to do some self discovery".

And so I left, and embraced a relationship with Matthew immediately. I felt uneasy about the relationship even half way through the first week. He was controlling. He was verbally abusive. And we had one incident one evening where there was physical abuse. And I retaliated as much as he gave. It was like holding each other up against the wall. And if I am not mistaken, I even started that. I was very furious. I had had enough. And it was a terrible experience because it was a cycle of abuse.

I consider myself an intellectual being and an intelligent being. And I could recognise what I was in, but I couldn't break it. I couldn't break out of it. It's like it was classic. It was a classic cycle of abuse. And I was in grad school. So I decided to do a lot of research around abuse, so that I could understand myself better, and hopefully find the key to breaking out. And it was really helpful. It was just the classic, if I do it this way he'll like me, or if I don't do this he will like me. I was changing my behaviour completely. For what gain I'm not sure . . . to get in touch with that free spirit. I ended up being totally trapped. I ended up - there was nothing free spirit about our relationship. It was good for the first week maybe and that's it. And for nine weeks I kept trying to break out of

the cycle, but I couldn't. I kept being hooked. There was certainly a fire there, or a spark there. He represented freedom.

I went through counselling to work through this relationship, and the counsellor was wonderful. And he said: "In some ways he just represents a part of you that you have let die". That was the good part of him: the free spirit, the gypsy, the spirituality. He was very into native spirituality, very connected to nature, and the earth. And I had giving that up, or I had kind of let it slide. And I had let a whole lot of other things, more mature things - or the responsible Patrick take over instead of the free child. And the counsellor said : "In some ways you used him as a vehicle to get in touch with, and start loving that part of yourself." And so that's the good thing that came out of the relationship. A true recognition of my co-dependent behaviour, because I became co-dependent instantly with Matthew. And I worked through issues on co-dependence. I went way back and looked at my first relationship that I perceive to have been co-dependent which was in grade eight.

And the good part of that abusive relationship was that I recognized my co-dependent nature. I recognized my free child. And I recognized that I have to have a healthy balance between free child and responsibility. I recognized how wonderful Peter is and how he is really one in a million. And I am very grateful that he waited, and that he was willing to work on our relationship, and for his faith and trust.

I really love him. I knew I loved him before I left. And when I left, it was a Sunday, I said: "You know this is not the beginning of the end". And I meant that, I said: "This is not the beginning of the end, just let me go away and figure this out".

And I had lots of debates and discussions with myself. So why didn't I go to counselling earlier? I can't figure that out, because the benefit of counselling, individual counselling and then relationship counselling, was amazing. And had I gone to counselling earlier, I'm convinced that I wouldn't have left, that I would not have left Peter, that I would have been able to sort it out logically. (Interview, July 14, 1997)

Through therapy I did a lot of work around my home. And my home is still very important to me, but it was, before I left, really an obsession. And it was like building a picture here . . . It represented professionalism, stability, and clean and neat. It was sort of like our relationship, our home was our relationship. And it was like our relationship is not perfect, but anyone on the outside looking in will think it is if my home is picture perfect. I kind of knew that before I left, and that's one of the things I said to Peter: "I don't know how much this means to me, all of this stuff". And I said: "I need to get away from it." And I went from a nice home, to one bedroom without any of my furniture.

Peter and I kept threatening to sell the house, put the house up for sale. And every time we threatened each other that way we got very

> *scared. So the house does represent something we built together, something we laboured over, something we've invested in, like our relationship. I think the first five years we invested in our relationship, and then came the stage of home ownership. So we put all that energy and time into the house, and forgot about the relationship. Thank God the relationship was stable enough to carry us through. (Interview, July 14, 1997)*

Patrick feels that as a result of this crisis in his own life, he can now relate more deeply to people who are in some type of personal crisis. He suggested that he could *"reflect"* or *"self disclose"* with the client. However, he was aware of the danger of transference, and cautioned against *"judging it [the client's issue] to be just like yours"*. Patrick believes that education is a really important aspect in counselling and this is partly as a result of his own experience. Reading, researching, and coming to understand the cycle of abuse were important steps for him in resolving this crisis in his life. He also recognized that many people experience much more difficult crises in their lives, and that in many ways he led a privileged existence.

Patrick considered that as the adult child of an alcoholic parent, he may have an *"instinct for chaos, as opposed to gentleness"*. He explained that he may have learned to seek out *"chaos, neglect and abuse"*. Patrick experienced a degree of neglect as a child and he feels that can be a *"state he recreates for himself now"*. (Interview, October 9, 1997)

Patrick also spoke about his need to go on a retreat once a year, and to take the time to listen to himself. It was during his own personal crisis that he realized his need for a retreat. And he suggested that it was while he was alone in a quiet place that he was able to confront his own "demons". It was during this first retreat that he made the decision to return and work on his long term partnership. Patrick also knows the benefits of counselling through his own lived experience as the client in the counselling relationship.

> *I saw the benefit of [couples counselling]. I mean I'm in a beautiful relationship. And if it wasn't for that intervention, I might not have had, been able to find the courage or the strength to return, and to continue working on the relationship. So that's why I want to be able to be available for anybody else who might need it. (Interview, July 2, 1997)*

Patrick also explained that his own experience as the client in partnership counselling was an important educational experience for him and that he carried that experience over into his own counselling.

> *I learned some things from a partnership counselling course, but really if I'm couples counselling I reflect back on my lived experience. I incorporate techniques. At the beginning of our second session, he said "So what did you do a half hour after you left here, or what did you do an hour after you left couple counselling?" And I thought that was a really*

interesting question. Because we went to dinner, and had wine. And we talked, and that was as much about our healing as our counselling was. And I did the same thing with my clients. So what was it like after you left here, what did you do? What did you talk about? How much did you see each other during the week and what was that like? And I wouldn't have thought to ask that, I don't think. I certainly was drawing on that experience to add to my practice. And our counsellor was very good at keeping the conversation balanced. So I was able to use that lesson as well in counselling this couple. Just keeping it really balanced, and one day I would start with one client, and the next day I would start with the other client. His technique allowed us to effectively listen to each other, and listen, and reflect back. What did he just say? So I would reflect it back. It was wonderful. And that's what I did in relationship counselling with this particular couple. I said: "Could you repeat back what she just said"? And another thing I learned from my experience was sometimes I would talk to the counsellor. "Well I love him, and it's because . . ." And the counsellor would say "Why don't you tell him that." So I felt kind of funny, but I would have to look at Peter and say "I love you and this is why I love you." And it is very different than talking to the counsellor, talking to your partner through the counsellor. It was very very different, the impact was crucial. So again, I learned that technique.

If I am couple counselling I am drawing from my own experience, more than from any of the other things [courses and readings]. And I

guess that is why I love doing sexual orientation counselling, because I can draw from my own experience and that is fundamental. (Interview, July 2, 1997)

Ruth's story

When I completed my degree, I looked around for a permanent job related to my degree in Sociology. To improve my chances, I completed a graduate course in assessment, part of a Master of Education (Counselling) program. Eventually I began working as a Youth Counsellor in an Adolescent Assessment Centre. I was working in a residential facility with troubled adolescents 12 to 16 years old. These were often children who could not survive in the school system; these were children who might have suffered physical or sexual abuse; these were sometimes children who were diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Disorder - ADD or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder - ADHD; these were sometimes children who had very disrupted home lives and/or a series of foster homes; these were sometimes children who had lived on the streets; and these were sometimes violent children. I learned about these conditions and traits from the children and the staff during the three and a half years that I worked with them.

At the time, as I reflected on what grounded my own practice with these troubled adolescents, once again I felt I had no clearly articulated philosophy; the organization was new and in the process of defining itself and its philosophy. I felt somehow inadequate, that I should have a theory, something that was guiding my practice. Now I understand

that again, I worked from my own lived experience: from my experience of violence in an intimate relationship, from my experience of group work, from my experience with youth in the Katimavik Program, from my experience as a parent of a very active child. Both my lived experience and my formal education in Sociology led me to see the social environmental factors that affected these children. Through my experience of living with these troubled children, I came to understand the impact of psychological and learning handicaps on the child, the family and the community. I saw how poorly equipped we sometimes are as a society to handle difference, like ADHD or Autism, and I saw how desperate and guilty parents can become. I learned that it was usually better to meet the child first and to read his or her file later. I say this because I found that each child, whether labelled or not, was unique and had individual strengths and challenges.

In practice, I tried to care for each child, to make a connection (but these children were harder to reach), to show respect for them but still demand that they respect others, and to maintain a safe environment for all. As a team, my colleagues and I were endlessly re-writing the rules of the facility, but could not seem to get them to fit our ever changing population. I learned to live with my imperfect decisions and to do a lot of silent praying, because some of these children seemed so close to the edge. At other times I simply enjoyed the fact that they were still young and they seemed to have an amazing resilience.

My stories of my lived experience as a youth counsellor are intertwined with my own need to re-evaluate my practice. There is a sense here that I had somehow lost my way within the bureaucracy of the child welfare system, and within my own society's changing views about the children with whom I worked. I believe I was working in an

environment not because of the sometimes difficult and violent children, but rather because of the surrounding culture that appeared not to value me, my safety, or the work I was doing. This was by now such familiar background to me in my work, that I did not see it at first myself. The work I was doing was about nurturing and caring for others, and I believe that it is work that has long been devalued in our Western patriarchal culture.

Out on a Limb

scene 1

It is a warm June evening and the smell of lilacs is in the air as I drive passed the houses in this suburban neighbourhood. I turn into the driveway of the Adolescent Assessment Centre where I will be working tonight with Barb, a placement student from the community college. We have been paired up together for several weeks. We work well together. But as the only paid staff on this night shift I feel responsible for the safety and welfare of us all. As I walk into the Centre I feel the weight of this responsibility settle on my shoulders.

At shift change I learn that we have two new male residents in the house. John is fifteen and quite a strong young man with the potential to be quite disruptive and violent. Eric may be more of a follower. I look over at my working partner who is athletic but barely five feet tall, and I feel some apprehension for our safety. Our new residents will be joining two very needy and often out of control eleven year-olds on the boys'

floor. Donny is a small hyperactive child who seems younger than his eleven years. He often has difficulty settling down for the night. Kevin is a street wise child who has come from a very chaotic home. At eleven he has seen a broad spectrum of x-rated films and has a vocabulary to match. He has already unnerved several female counsellors with his graphic sexist comments. He is also charming and can sometimes be very manipulative.

In the early evening Barb and I work at getting to know and establishing a rapport with the new residents. We play some ping pong and pool together. Things are going well and I'm feeling a little bit more relaxed with the situation in the house. John is friendly and the boys are getting along well together. We watch a bit of television, and make some popcorn for the evening snack. Kevin is very animated, he appears to enjoy having these older more experienced guys in the house.

At bedtime the boys go down to their rooms. This does not last long. John the oldest adolescent is soon out in the hall throwing paper balls back and forth with Kevin, who thrives on disruption of any kind. Donny is complaining about the noise in the hall. He has decided to go to bed willingly tonight. I sense that he does not feel completely safe with these older boys. I am thankful that he is staying in his room, knowing from past experience that he has the potential to go into a full blown crisis. Eric is now coming out of his room as well. Barb and I are patrolling the stairs and the hallway. We patiently and quietly explain the

rules to the new residents letting them know that we understand that it is their first night here and that they may not be familiar with the rules of the Centre. We try various approaches: good humoured requests, appeals to their sense of reason, enlisting John and Eric's support in allowing the younger residents to get some sleep. Finally we explain that if John, Kevin and Eric do not remain in their rooms they will lose privileges.

Kevin sits inside his room on the floor with his door open. He is afraid of the dark and cannot stand having his door closed. He often falls asleep on the floor by the door. We respect his fears because we know he has been traumatized in the past, but it makes our job more difficult. John stays in the hallway and continues to talk and laugh with Eric who hangs by his doorway. John is now escalating his behaviour by going in and out of the fire exit door which is located beside his room.

This has all gone on for a long time and I do not see any end in sight. I feel that the situation is out of control and unsafe. I am tired myself and I feel discouraged. I see the potential for things to deteriorate further. It is close to midnight and I reluctantly make the decision to call the Director to request backup staff. I hate to do this, it feels like some kind of defeat. We should be able to handle the situation ourselves, but I want to make the call before it gets too late. I believe that this situation is not a good start for the new residents, and that it is very bad for Kevin who has begun to stabilize in the generally consistent atmosphere of the Centre. I place the call, and the Director answers, but she does not get it.

She does not hear me. She asks me a lot of questions about what we have tried. I explain, while feeling anxious about Barb down on the boys' level. I cannot see what is going on. The Director does not give permission for another staff to be called in. Instead she suggests we humour the boys a while longer, perhaps giving them something to eat. And she says that if there is a problem that we can call her at any time, and she will come over. I feel that she is quietly judging my performance and finding it lacking. I do not insist. Instead I question my own judgement. Hanging up the phone I feel sick inside. I feel that she does not respect my judgement, she doesn't understand that I would not have called if it wasn't necessary. I have not personally called to ask for back-up staff before. I don't think giving them something to eat will help, but I am willing to try anything. I confer with Barb.

scene 2

It is 3 a.m. All four boys are up and out in the yard. Someone woke Donny up and he has joined into the party atmosphere. The boys are now refusing to come inside the Centre. I place my second call to the Director. She will be over in fifteen minutes. The boys' voices are getting louder and John is off the property. The other boys are following his lead. They appear to be having an excellent time. I am worried about Donny's safety and the disruption in this quiet neighbourhood.

As the Director's van pulls into the driveway, Eric goes quickly to his room. Donny and Kevin are ordered to their rooms and escorted when they refuse. Kevin is yelling obscenities at the Director who is now moving him downstairs. Donny is screaming, biting and kicking at Barb and I as we escort him to his room. Once inside his room he starts to kick and bang at the door. Now Barb and I are standing at their bedroom doors keeping them from coming out. John is back on the property trying to talk to Eric through his window. The Director makes it clear that she will call the police if he does not go to his room. She knows he has charges pending. John considers this briefly and complies. It takes another hour or two before things calm down and all the residents are asleep. We are all exhausted. The Director says little. She goes into her office and then home. Barb and I do up our logs for the night and write major incident reports. When this is almost finished, it is time to give our shift change to the day staff and go home. I thank Barb for her support and apologize for the crazy night.

scene 3

I drop by the Centre the next evening with the completed paper work. There are two extra staff on for the night. They are solidly built and each weighs over 200 lbs. I find it annoying and ironic. One more staff person was all I wanted or needed last night. As I drive away through the quiet neighbourhood and into the dyked farmland on my way

home. I think about money and budgets and their impact on the Director's decision last night. Last night we paid for one salary and tonight we will pay for four.

(This is a fictionalized account of my lived experience as the names and identifying characteristics of these adolescents have been changed).

As I record the events of this long and crazy night, I wonder why I have chosen to tell this story. It is an embarrassing story, a story of practice gone off the rails - a runaway night. I tell it because it still perplexes me, because it is a puzzle not yet solved. As Jerome Bruner suggests: "Stories achieve their meanings by explicating deviations from the ordinary in a comprehensible form . . . " (1990, p. 47). At the time I wondered if things would have been different if I had been more insistent and clear about my needs to the Director. Why had I waited so long to make the second call for help? Was I projecting some kind of fear and insecurity that the residents were able to sense? If there had been two experienced staff on that night, would the story have gone differently? Would the boys have reacted differently to a male counsellor? In the end I came to think of this as a story of a Director not trusting or supporting her counselling staff.

As I write, I think of this story as out of control. It refused to conform to the narrative direction I wanted. I wanted to handle the situation myself, with the help of Barb and the mythical extra counsellor. I wanted to make good, to be seen as competent, to return the situation to normal, and to win the respect of the Director. Perhaps I had not been willing to insist, to be more clear about the chaos that was building.

At the same time I believe that the Director of the Centre was also trying to prove herself to those in charge of the Agency. I believe she was trying to show that she could be dedicated, efficient, and still get the budget back in line. She needed to make good as well. She often appeared to cover her own errors by blaming her counselling staff. That night she offered no thanks to Barb and me for working through a difficult night.

As I reconstruct this narrative of youth counselling in my own mind, it seems to be a story about the false self (Whitfield, 1987), and about trying to please others. For me it was also a story about denying my own intuitive knowing. I am influenced by Estes (1997) who suggests that we need to listen to our inner voice. Intuitively I knew the situation in the house was not safe. But I rationalized the situation to make it conform to some ideal I had of myself: independent, competent, courageous and in control. These are classic qualities of professional practice and the dominant patriarchal society. As Michael Kaufman suggests in Cracking the Armour (1993): "In the eyes of men and women, masculinity means being in control, having mastery over yourself and the world around you" (p.28). I stuffed my fear. My fear was a signal, a red light. I ignored it, gave it no voice. I equated my fear with weakness. I hid my real feelings. I paid little attention to my own need for a safe environment (Eldridge, 1996).

From this reconfiguration of my story I have learned that it is crucial to examine my counselling practice, to look under the surface of my actions. I now see that I need to listen to my inner self and avoid hiding behind my professional armour of competence. I see that I need to connect with my intuitive knowing and experiencing of the moment. I am also reminded of my need to live and work in a safe environment. The difficult work

of counselling high risk youth was exacerbated by the unsafe working atmosphere that had been created at the Centre.

After several years of this very difficult work I saw that it was time to move forward on my own vocational path. My own child was now approaching adolescence, and I felt that I was moving into some type of mid-life crisis myself. I sometimes felt like a powerless cog in the impersonal world of the child welfare system. I felt that I was losing my way, and slipping into a feeling of resignation about the young people that I worked with on a daily basis. I decided that it was time for me to work with a more adult population, people whose experiences and concerns were closer to my own. I felt I needed to renew myself, and consolidate what I had learned about working and caring for others.

I applied to the Graduate program in Education (Counselling) at Acadia University, and began to take courses during the next two summers. This last story of youth counselling practice took place just before I left my position to become a full-time student once again.

Incident at the Centre

scene 1

Kim and I sit on the driveway curb by the garden. It is a bright warm spring day. We are outside the Adolescent Assessment Centre where she is staying temporarily and where I work as a youth counsellor. She is a young woman of fourteen. She has blond hair and her face is pale. Her skin has a pasty quality. I wonder if she is eating properly. Kim did not

come home last night and it appears that she is quite wasted. She is slight and her clothes are loose and rumpled. She is smoking a cigarette. I am sitting quietly trying to connect with her. I am telling her that we were worried about her last night, and saying that we are glad she has come back to the Centre. I am asking her how she is. She is answering in an almost inaudible voice with minimal words. She appears to be very low today. I like this young woman. I feel for her. I know something about her home life. Her father is up on pornography charges. She has had a series of step-mothers. Her current step-mother may be leaving the family soon. She does not say much. She does not seem to care about what happens to her. I wonder about her dangerous and self destructive behaviour. Her self-esteem appears to be so very low. I wonder if she has been sexually abused. I say nothing about this.

scene 2

It is early in the morning and I am feeling grungy. I have been working at the Adolescent Assessment Centre all night and I will be off in about 20 minutes. The residents are up and preparing for the day. Kim comes down from her bedroom and begins to head for the back door holding a pack of cigarettes. There is a new rule that smokers need to eat something before they go out for a smoke in the morning. I reluctantly go to intercept Kim by the back door. I say that she needs to have something to eat before going out for a smoke. She continues to move towards the

door. Without thinking I put my hand on her pack of cigarettes. She reacts, and she hits me on the side of the head. I am stunned. She has caught me by surprise. She is now out the door and in the backyard. I walk into the office and sit down. A staff member asks me if I am okay. I say I am fine. Another counsellor goes out to talk to Kim. I am not angry, but my feelings are hurt. I think to myself how foolish I was to put my hand on her cigarettes. I let myself cry now that I am in the office. I like Kim. I care about Kim. After a while I give my shift change and go home. I feel empty inside, and I come home to an empty house. My partner and my son have gone to work and school. I crawl into bed and curl up in a fetal position.

scene 3

I receive a note in my locker. It is in a miniature perfect script. "I am sorry I hit you. Kim" I am told by another counsellor that Kim was shocked at her own behaviour. She did not know why she hit me. I accept her apology. I care about her and her future. We don't talk much about the incident, but we get along fine.

(The name and certain identifying characteristics of this adolescent have been changed).

For a long time I have thought of this story as a story of poor practice. I have questioned my behaviour and wondered what I could have done differently on that

morning. I wondered if things would have been different if I had not been so tired. I have questioned my own need to control. I have questioned the need to have yet another rule at the Centre, this one about eating before smoking. I have thought about how cigarettes and other addictions are sometimes used by sexual abusers to control young adolescent women. I have also thought about this story as a narrative of youth violence. I wondered why I found this incident distressing when much more serious and potentially harmful situations had occurred on numerous occasions in the previous three years.

As I write this I begin to see it as a different story, a story of connectedness, a story of friendship and caring, a story of forgiveness. I felt connected to this young woman because I saw some of myself in her. I felt the weight she was carrying at this crucial time in her young female life. I felt her need to be cared for, to be loved unconditionally without strings attached. I am glad that I was able to make a connection, and that I had not stopped caring about the young people with whom I was working.

I had at first framed this incident as a story of failure and inadequacy because that has been my personal script for a very long time. Also my lack of quick reaction and control of the situation with Kim that morning was counter to a powerful patriarchal myth that I had absorbed about professional practice. Were we not supposed to be separate, independent, and in control of every situation with clients or students? When a staff member asked how I was, I said fine, and held the hurt and pain inside. I did not debrief this incident with my colleagues or my supervisor. I already felt inadequate, and did not want to show further weakness. They would think less of me. I was caught in my own patriarchal practice of dissimulation and separation. I had quickly retreated behind my armour (Kaufman, 1993). Once I had retreated I was alone with my inadequacy. If I

could change anything in this narrative I would like to give up my life script of inadequacy and separation that I learned as a little girl. I would like to be able to share my pain and hurt with my colleagues in a safe environment. I would like to have the courage to acknowledge and celebrate my caring, connection and relation to other people. I would like to celebrate those times when I put my armour down.

The decision to leave my job and return to school was part of a larger mid-life reevaluation. I was feeling uneasy about my life, and wondering if there was a new direction for me to take. I was feeling that in my work with youth I had learned a great deal from my co-workers and the adolescents themselves, but that my role within the bureaucracy was limiting and stifling. As Clandinin and Connelly explain in Teacher's Professional Knowledge Landscapes (1995): "Nothing comes through the conduit as merely theoretical knowledge to be known and understood: it always comes as an implied proscription for teacher's actions"(p.14). I felt that I was at the end of a similar conduit by which others proscribed how I should be and act with my clients. My own knowing based in my lived experience was often not respected or valued.

My own mid-life crisis awakened me once again to the landscape (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995) I had been working in. It was a competitive landscape with high mountains and deep troughs. Mistrust and conflict existed commonly among the staff. This landscape contrasted sharply with my own experience in the Katimavik Program years earlier. There, I had worked with friends who shared an alternative and non-competitive perspective. In our staff team of four, we had always shared stories, spoken openly about problems, and together found moral solutions connected to the particular situation. Each individual's ideas were a valued part of the creativity of the staff team.

As I reflect back I realize that we had together created a safe place where personal knowledge and voice could be expressed. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) describe these safe places as "educative places":

> We see these safe places as educative places. They are places for the expressing of the desires: There is storytelling, there is relationship, there is reflection. As we examine these places it becomes evident that the telling of stories in such places of relationship goes beyond the mere telling of stories to their retelling and reliving. (p.161)

Chapter 6

Counselling and Writing Beyond the Ending

> But I began then to think of time as having a shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You don't look back along time but down through it, like water. Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing. Nothing goes away. (Atwood, 1988, p. 3)

In my thesis inquiry I have focused on counsellor education in the broadest sense, because I believe as do others (Dewey, 1938; Connelly and Clandinin, 1988) that education is not simply a formal process of courses and degrees, but rather that it develops out of the lived experience of each individual. I wanted to take a look below the surface of counsellors' knowledge and practice. How is it that I, or any counsellor, knows, understands and empathizes with others? How does our lived experience shape us as people and as counsellors? My approach in this thesis inquiry has been to collect the lived experience of two counsellors in narrative form. These stories of experience represent only parts of two complex lives; each of us chose to tell certain stories and to leave other stories untold. Our stories collected on tape and in writing are the data for my inquiry. In selecting the stories which were included in this narrative inquiry into counsellor education, I tried to focus on what, I believed, was central to the development and evolution of both my participant and myself as people and as counsellors. This work is shaped by who I am and the way I perceive the world.

As I look back over this year of thesis work I wonder how I have changed, and how this process has been educative for me. I use this term educative in the sense that Dewey (1916) does; an educative experience is one which is a "reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (p.89). I made the decision to begin this thesis because it promised to help me get in touch with my own knowing based in my lived experience. I believed that I needed to understand my own journey before I could begin to counsel and help others. As suggested in Human Relations Development (Gazda et all, 1973) knowing your "*values, motives, strengths, weaknesses, feelings, purpose in life,* and *current level of functioning*" (p.7, italics in original), can make you a more effective helper. Writing a thesis was not a practical decision, rather it was a decision to follow an intuitive feeling that this was a journey that I needed to make. I needed to remember the experiences that brought me to this point. I needed to ground myself in my own experiential knowing so that I would be ready to move forward and help others find their own wisdom based on their own lived experience. And I believe that in bringing to light my own stories, I have given myself the permission and possibility of using my own stories in my counselling practice. I believe that in increasing my understanding of myself, I have increased my ability to counsel others. I also believe that my thesis work has been a step towards reuniting the divided parts of myself: the personal and the professional (Bochner, 1997).

I began this project with trepidation and some degree of fear that others may judge my work inadequate, irrelevant, or in some strange light. But I believe that there is value in the honest telling of a life for the teller and the listener. When I say honest I do not

speak of a verifiable outer reality but of an honest account of what meaning I and my participant have made of our lived experience (Bruner, 1990). I was encouraged in this endeavour by these words of Simone De Beauvoir in Force of Circumstance (1964):

> I feel no resistance to speaking frankly about my life and myself, at least in so far as I place myself within my own universe. Perhaps my image projected in a different world - that of the psychoanalysts - might disconcert or embarrass me. But so long as it is I who paint my own portrait, nothing daunts me. (p. vii)

and later by these words of Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1997):

> So do not be afraid to investigate the worst. It only guarantees increase of soul power through fresh insights and opportunities for re-visioning one's life and self anew. (p. 58)

As I look back on this year, I see that for me, one of the most enriching aspects of this thesis work has been the privilege of listening to my participant openly share his life story. It gave me the courage to tell my own story, but it also spoke volumes about how we can make the connection to others on a deep level, and how we can come to "see through the eyes of another." At times during the research process I believe I was involved in the "participatory consciousness" described by Heshusius (1994). I believe that there is an important lesson for me here about how as counsellor, I can work with others. I need to be prepared to hear my clients' narratives of their own circumstances with respect, and to enter the universe within which they live their lives. I need to avoid judging my clients from the distance of my own privileged status. I believe I need to encourage them to find and celebrate the knowing and wisdom which comes from their lived experience.

I believe that for Patrick this has been an educative experience as well. As he told his life story, he expressed amazement at the new insights and connections that he discovered in the telling. However, at times, the experience of sharing so much of his life left Patrick feeling *"exposed"*, *"feeling raw and like there is unfinished business, and thinking maybe I should work with this in counselling" (Interview, September 17, 1997).* He was also aware that his sharing of his life story and my attempts to share some of my own lived experiences with him had created something special.

> *"I am never going to want this to end, I mean I do in some ways. It is when we get into it, and we spend our two hours together, that: "Oh my God, let's keep this going". I wish that we humans could just do this and not be provoked by a thesis. (Interview, September 17, 1997)*

Patrick also commented that reading journals from his adolescence was making him realize that he would like to contact past mentors and let them know how important they had been for him.

> *My journal reading makes me feel disconnected from really important people in my life. And it is provoking me to connect with them, and say: "You were really important to me in 1982. And on March the 2nd, 1982, I really needed you, I was really glad that you were there, and I just really want to tell you that". They would think I was nuts, I'm sure. But I want to at least contact my teacher and say you provided the vehicle for*

personal honesty, and personal consciousness, and personal growth, and I want to thank you for that. (Interview, September 17, 1997)

I believe that this narrative inquiry into counsellor education has provided personal and professional insights for my participant and myself, but that it also has the possibility of providing insights for other counsellors who may read it. The sharing of our stories is a celebration of our dialogue, interaction, and connection. The sharing of our stories is a reminder that research and counselling are about relationship, and that striving for equality within that relationship and for a "participatory consciousness" can facilitate a deeper understanding of people. The sharing of our stories is a reminder that as counsellors we need to look beneath the surface of our own counselling practice, and question our assumptions and narratives about others and their lives. The sharing of our stories is a reminder to respect and listen to each person's narrative of their own experience. The sharing of our stories is a reminder of the complexity of people's lives, and the interplay between the individual, family, culture and history. I believe that when counsellors share some of their own stories with their clients, they can create a safe place, a place of sharing and learning for their clients and themselves. I believe, like Bochner (1997) and Richardson (1994), that as academics [and counsellors] we pay a price when we deliberately write [or talk] in a way that excludes our own voice and experience, while maintaining "the divided self".

As I write this I am cognizant that this is not the end, and that it is in some sense a beginning. For me, engaging in narrative research has in some measure been about the struggle to come to voice, to share my stories, and to break down my own wall of silence.

At the same time, I wonder what I have "left out of my life story" (Stewart, 1994), and I wonder if I have succeeded in making my "internal conflicts central" (Bloom, 1996; DuPlessis, 1985), and avoided the myth of "a unified self" (Stewart, 1994; Assagioli, 1961). I believe that the telling of these two life stories is not finished. The telling of a life in all its complexity does not provide a certain and objective knowledge. As Connelly and Clandinin (1995) write: "Stories are not icons to be learned but inquiries on which further inquiry takes place through their telling and through response to them" (p. 156).

Patrick's epilogue

I recently spoke to Patrick on the phone (January 21, 1998), and he reported that during a recent visit with his family he had gained new information into a childhood story. And as a result, he now had a different version of the story which contradicted the one he had told to me, and that I had included in Chapter 2. This story was about changing schools (p. 42). He no longer believed that he had been required to switch schools because of his gayness. This new information highlights Connelly and Clandinin's (1995) notion that stories are "inquiries on which further inquiry takes place" (p.156). Patrick had now revised his life story partly as a result of telling and inquiring into the story in the first place. However, the earlier version of the story was a part of the meaning that he had made of his lived experience until his recent visit with his parents.

In narrative inquiry the process of restorying and reconstructing our lived experience is ongoing. Patrick was already evolving and changing.

Ruth's epilogue

For me, writing this final chapter has been the most difficult part of my thesis. I have found myself frustrated and irritated, to the point of questioning the value of my research work. This negativity seemed to come out of my traditional belief that I needed to sum-up and list the "truths" that I had discovered, when what I had uncovered was the complex experience of two lives which did not allow itself to be reduced to a neat and tidy package, or list of proscriptions. And the more I tried to force all these stories into the small container of "findings and conclusions", the more impossible the task seemed to be. As Bochner (1997) writes: "I knew there was no getting to the bottom, no transcendental point of view, no final truth to be rendered" (p.429). Never one to give up easily, I struggled on, making little progress, and praying for illumination and inspiration to deliver me from this purgatory where I seemed to be a prisoner of expectations. But who was holding me prisoner? Certainly not my advisor, who warned against this need to tie up all the loose ends. Who then? Bochner (1997) suggests that, "perhaps the structures of power constitutive of academic socialization" are "even more difficult to resist than those of one's family" (p.423). Perhaps as the time of reckoning and judgment of my thesis inquiry approached, I was losing courage. I was feeling the need to produce

the expected conclusions and summing-up to gain others' approval, and was already forgetting to listen to my own inner voice.

Lost Again

It was Spring, and I was on my annual canoe trip. Over the last five or six years I have gone out every spring usually with my good friend Hana, and usually in early May. This year there were five of us, all women. The first night we camped on an island and watched the sun set, enjoying our freedom from children, partners, work, and the daily routines of our lives. We were in the National Park which was a familiar territory for several of us. The next morning it was misty and rain was threatening. A moderate but steady wind blew against us, as we paddled across an open stretch of water, and down a long point of land, heading to our next camp site. We paddled hard against the wind, but we were in no danger, and soon our two canoes were in the lee of an island and entering a small river. This was a favourite place of mine, and an excellent area for seeing ducks, beavers and sometimes deer. We paddled slowly up the river and reached our campsite by mid-day. I had camped here before, and it all looked familiar. The maple trees were in bud on the opposite side of the river. The tent pads were in little clearings at the edge of the river, with a low ridge rising behind them. Several picnic tables were available for our use, along with fireplace boxes with grates, and stacked firewood. Once we had set up the tents and a tarp over the picnic table, the rain started in

earnest. We hung around under our newly constructed shelter, eating, laughing, and talking about the lives we had left behind. The rain continued on and off through the afternoon and night, and in the morning it still showed no signs of letting up. The sky was a low ceiling of thick cloud and a mist was in the air. We decided to wait and break camp after lunch hoping that the weather would improve.

After breakfast I was weary of talk and decided, despite the rain, to walk up along the river. I set out alone making my way upstream towards a rockier part of the river. I walked for a while, and then suddenly I saw two young deer at the river's edge. They appeared ephemeral in the soft mist, almost as if they were not real. It was like stepping into another dimension, a dimension of animal spirits. I thought of the native people who had inhabited and hunted these lands in the past, and how their tradition spoke of animal spirits. I quietly watched the deer, and then moved on. I was following a track which seemed to run parallel to the river but was set back a little into the forest. After a while, I saw a fisherman across the river, and then another further upstream. They did not see me, and I did not call to them, but left them to their quiet meditation. I went a little further, always moving upstream, and remembered a time when Hana and I had come down through this rocky section of the river in our canoe at high water, catching on a few rocks here and there. Hana had had to wade and push us off several rocks.

I began to feel hungry and realized at the same time that my rain gear was starting to wet out, and that I was getting damp and a little cold. I changed my course and started moving back towards the camp. I was moving more quickly and I started to jog along the track to warm up my body. Periodically I glanced to my right and I could see the river. I passed the fishermen and continued silently on my way. I glance up to sight the river and saw a flash of light on water, and continued moving along the track. Suddenly as I glanced up I realized that the flash of light I now saw was not the river. It was a birch tree, a gleaming white patch of light in among the green trees and bushes. Panic seized me as I realized that the previous flash of light had not been the river. Things were not as they had seemed. In that moment I spun around and saw forest all around. I felt disoriented. I cursed myself for spinning around so quickly, because in doing so I had now lost all sense of direction. I felt physically sick and scared, and I tried to fight the panic rising in me. I tried to locate the track that I had been following. I realized that it must be an animal path. I found a maze of possible faint paths. In which direction had I been moving? I looked at the sky, and its low dense clouds gave no sign of direction, and I knew that I might not see the sun for days. I was lost.

I took stock of my situation. I seemed to be in a spruce swamp. And I needed to move in a Westerly direction to hit the river. The problem was that my compass was clipped to my life jacket back in the canoe. I could not be that far from the camp, but because I had lost my direction, I

could easily start moving farther away. I tried to sense in some intuitive way which direction to take. But my inner voice told me that I needed to stay put and wait. It was not the message I wanted to hear. I had got myself into this situation, and I wanted to get myself out of it. I was embarrassed by my own stupidity in getting lost in the first place. I thought of myself as more experienced and a kind of leader on this trip. Why had I been in such a hurry? It would have been so easy to move slowly along the river. Eventually people would start to look for me. The problem was that it was early May in Nova Scotia, and I was already wet, cold, and hungry. I was worried about hypothermia. I started to call out at intervals hoping someone would hear me. I had some matches and a Swiss army knife, and I started to try and build a fire in the soaking spruce swamp. Nothing worked, and I was losing heart as I stood in the now steady downpour, still calling periodically. I contemplated my own death. It would not be such a bad thing, I had done a lot of different things in my forty-six years on the earth. And I had lately been feeling tired of life. Maybe this is where it was going to end, alone in the forest. I felt empty inside. Then I thought of my son, and realized that, at twelve, he still needed me. I thought of my partner, and realized my death would cause pain and distress. I thought about the angels and spirits. I could use the angels' help now. I decided I needed to get out of the swamp, and find higher ground in case I had to spend the night in the woods. Since we had left the landing on our first day we had seen no Park employees. It was

too early in the season. If my friends could not locate me, they would have to go back for help, and it would take some time to mount a search.

I moved out of the swamp towards a slight hill as the rain continued to come down steadily. I busied myself with imagining how I might spend the night. Could I make a shelter of some kind using brush? I continued to call out periodically. My knife was dull and ineffective as I tried to cut some spruce bows. If only the rain would stop. I was feeling discouraged, as I called out again and again, and listened to the silent dripping of the rain in the forest all around me. The forest had lost its friendly character, and now seemed primordial. Suddenly I thought I heard something. I called again as loud as I could. I listened - nothing. My heart sank, but I held on to hope, and called again. Finally I heard a faint response. I was starting to cry, as I called out again, and heard a reply in the distance. In a short time I could hear my friends moving towards me. They were coming through the low swampy area from the other side. I had moved farther away from our camp. Hana put her arms around me and, I think, we were both crying. My friends had blankets, food and a compass.

I have learned a few things from this story, I now have a compass that hangs religiously around my neck whenever I set out on a journey. I remind myself to slow down as I move through my life. When I lose my way, I know that I can count on others, often women, to help me find my own direction. I also understand this story as a

metaphor for myself as a counsellor. As a counsellor at times I thought of myself "as more experienced and a kind of a leader", and yet I found myself encountering unexpected dilemmas where I too felt "raw" and "exposed". I needed to begin to search for my own direction, and to accept the help of others in finding my way. I have not found a clear and certain knowledge, and I no longer expect to find it, instead I have discovered a direction for my own change and evolution. As a counsellor I understand that there is no single philosophy or method which will lead me to uncover the "truth" about people's lives, instead I am left to work with the stories they tell about their lived experience, and the stories I construct from their stories. As Parry (1994) writes: "The therapeutic goal is not to offer explanations, but to awaken compassion in each towards the other and toward the self" (p.28).

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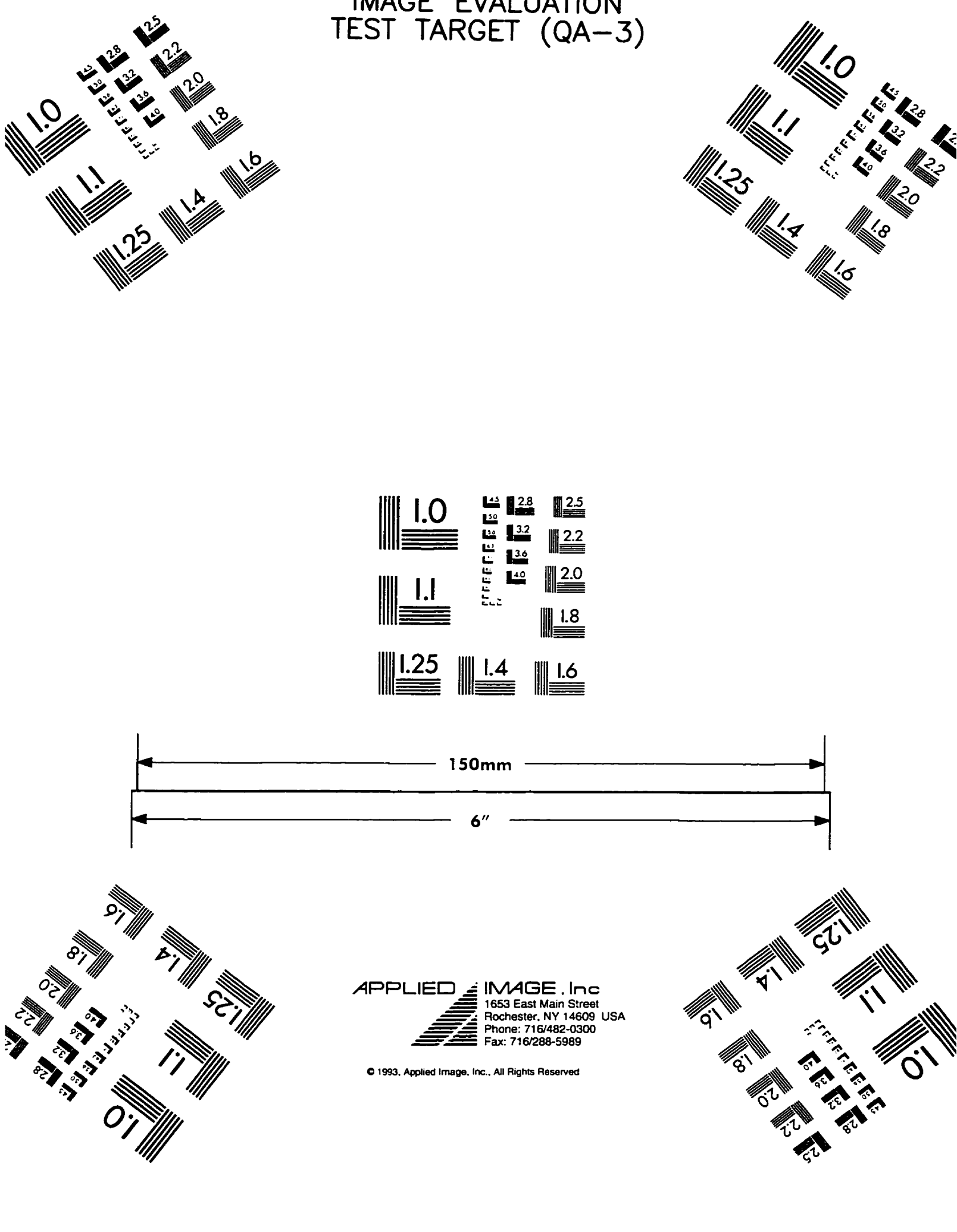
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