A Qualitative Inquiry Exploring Resiliency in Six Women in the Process of Transformation in Their Lives

By

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
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A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY EXPLORING RESILIENCY IN SIX WOMEN IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION IN THEIR LIVES

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ABSTRACT

The present research is a qualitative analysis of the life histories of six women undergoing life transition. Research questions explored participants' inner characteristics and supports around them contributing to resiliency, through reflection and articulating personal narratives. Questions also asked participants to reflect on the process of talking about resiliency and whether that changed their perceptions, and to reflect on what they believe constituted their own personal resiliency.

Results revealed that there are a wide range of inner characteristics and supports in place for women who are resilient. The findings of this research are the influence of one key person, the ability to self-reflect, articulate experiences and as a result move to another level of development. Other commonalities are an independent spirit, and previously overcoming stress or conflict in an earlier age.

The women in this study described resilience as “bouncing back.” The literature reviewed for this research focussed on life change as well as adaptation to major life crises such as war, as well as other risk factors associated with trauma, mental illness or major socio-economic changes. It is questionable whether resilience literature dealing with severe trauma reflect the experience of women in this study.
Dedication

For Caroline
Guide, teacher, mentor, encourager
And most of all Friend.
And for "Lilith"
The Womanspirit in us all.

_Do not go where this path may lead,
Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail._
_—Emerson._
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...Thank You God! ...."Foxes have holes, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lie down and rest. He said to another man, ’Follow me.’" (Luke 9:58-59) and "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the Kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

...and to Andrew Van Maurik for holding my hand.
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PROLOGUE

From the time I was little I have wanted to be a writer. During Christmas gift exchange in Mrs. Lindsay's grade three class, classmate Brad Smith gave me a hardcover copy of "Alice in Wonderland." All the other girls got Barbie make-up sets, and I tried to trade. Brad gave me such a hurtful look that I couldn't go through with it. So I went home and read Lewis Carroll's book, cover to cover. I was transported, I found escape. I was hooked. I spent my Saturdays at the library quickly devouring the Nancy Drew books on the shelves, moving through the limited "young adult" fiction, then just reading whatever I could lay my hands on. From then on, I've always had my nose in a book.

My writing naturally evolved out of my reading. My desk drawer became stuffed with poetry, stories and rejection letters. Some of my work was published in church and library magazines. In a writing assignment for public speaking, I handed in two stories and asked the teacher to tell me which one was best. I came in third in a composition contest for Centennial Year, 1967. I was 12. I wrote a regular column for a regional newspaper circulated to all area high schools. Grade 10 English class I approached the teacher and asked her what should I do if I had already read the book we were studying, Nathaniel Hawthorne's Scarlet Letter. By grade 11 I had decided to become a writer. The guidance counselor suggested journalism.

This was the early seventies. We were on the verge of a feminist wave. Laura Sabia spoke at our high school, and I left the auditorium feeling strange--feeling great! My first recollection of "empowerment." Home was not a happy place, and in a moment of rage my mother burned all my art and writing. I can write that sentence now and not feel much-just a big hollow space. That's what twenty-five years and lots of therapy can do. While my stepbrother was allowed to have part-time jobs so he could save to go to university, my option was to go to community college so I could leave home and get to work and become self-supporting. I covered the "women's beat" for our student newspaper, writing about women's issues and the first International Women's Year. I met Doris Anderson. My first job was editor-reporter for a community newspaper. I began to read Michele Landsberg in the Toronto Star. I recall saying to my new husband in our
new little bungalow, "I want to write about women's stories." I thought maybe I could get a Canada Council grant or something like that.

Our publisher owned six newspapers and they all produced a "progress edition" each September, with advertising and stories highlighting local business and industry. I thought it pretty "dry" reading, and as editor, changed the format of ours, focusing instead on people. I did feature articles on individuals in various businesses: the man who had worked in the flourmill for 20 years, the local letter carrier, volunteers. I invited submissions from politicians at the municipal, provincial and federal level and got responses from the offices of then Premier Bill Davis and Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. Other newspapers followed our format. Five years later I won an award from the Canadian Community Newspaper Association as editor of a special commemorative edition.

Ten years went by. My husband and I had moved: another town, bigger house, swimming pool, fireplaces, two cars...the middle class dream. I was turning 30 and finishing my B.A. Once while having trouble with a course, my husband comforted me and I told him, "I want to write a book of women's stories." A few months later my marriage had ended and I was on my way to the faculty of education at Western in London, Ontario.

For fifteen years now I have put my journalistic training aside, put my personal writing goals aside, squashed my hope of "writing women's stories." I was in survival mode, training to be an English teacher, immersed in intensive therapy, getting established in teaching, then on to graduate work in special education at OISE/UT.

Now, I work privately teaching and consulting learning disabled students, and teach developmental English classes and classes in reading and writing prose at the college level. My creativity flourishes with fabric art and painting. I have long ago traded my middle class interest in acquiring such items as fancy living room furniture, for a life that now includes a 21 speed hybrid bike, a state-of-the art computer, a drafting table and a loom.

And now, 25 years later...I am writing women's stories.
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know that place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot
CHAPTER ONE
RESILIENCY

This study explores the topic of resiliency in an exploratory qualitative analysis of six adult women in the midst of life transition. I focused on external factors that combined to encourage and promote resiliency in the individual, along with intrinsic factors that may already be present as part of the individual's personality that led her to be more resilient in the face of life's setbacks. Through a course of personal interviews I watched for emerging commonalities in the personalities, life circumstances and coping strategies of these individuals. There were several key research questions that I held in mind. Is resiliency the result of several factors acting in concert rather than a single factor? If it is one factor, what single characteristic do those exhibiting resiliency have in common? Do factors combine in a protective and compensatory system, or develop when faced with adversity? To what extent do external and internal factors influence an individual's resiliency?

Definition of Resiliency

Fonagy, Steele, Steele, Higgit & Target (1994) define resilience as "normal development under difficult conditions. Resilience cannot be seen as anything other than a set of social and intra-psychic processes that take place across time given felicitous combinations of child attributes, family, social, and cultural environments." The Random House Dictionary (1973) calls it "the power or ability to return to the original form, position etc. after being bent, compressed, or stretched; elasticity. The ability to recover readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like." A synonym would be "buoyancy." When discussing my thesis with co-researchers or people in social situations, the question inevitably came up, "What do you mean by resilience?" And we called it "bouncing back."

Discussing resilience in a broader sense, Werner (1994) writes "the rediscovery of the healing powers of hope in the stories of individual lives may be the most precious harvest of those who venture forth into research on risk, resilience, and human development."
And Robert Louis Stevenson said that life is not a matter of holding good cards, but of playing a poor hand well.

**A Positive Focus: What Works?**

A review of the literature on resiliency indicates there has been a positive shift away from a deficit model of what has gone wrong, toward asking the question of "What works?" Some researchers have gone so far as to challenge the validity of the use of the term "at risk," originally meant in a preventative manner, declaring it a racist label (Benard, 1993). Indeed, it has been pointed out in discussions by Goldberg (as cited in Robins, John, Caspi, Moffitt & Loeber-Stoughhamer, 1996) that the English language includes many more trait adjectives referring to the neurotic than to the emotionally stable pole. The focus is moving toward trying to identify factors that work in combination—the protective and compensatory strategies individuals develop when faced with adversity (Fergusson & Lynskey, 1996). Some studies are concerned with whether these strategies can be taught or at least encouraged in individuals (Benard, 1993; Finley, 1994; Miller, 1996; Skerker & McDonough, 1993).

Garmezy (1985) discusses how the literature is divided in terms of looking for positive outcomes of those facing adversity as opposed to those who succumb to pressures and become ill. Garmezy's states that in his writings he emphasizes the language of children's success, of their overcoming adversity, of their potential for adaptation and self-sufficiency. He states the applicable construct to such behavioral phenomena has gained little or no attention. Many of those in the mental health professions are more concerned with psychopathology than to well-being, with those children who fail rather than to those who succeed, to children who capitulate to stress rather than to those who resist its debilitating effects.

Garmezy asks:

Which view shall we heed? The literature of stress, the adaptive potential of children, their resilience, which is patterned, in part, out of personal disposition, the nature of their families, and the 'community of people of strengths and similarities' that provide support for them...there is little to be gained by those
who cry havoc while failing to heed the recurrent findings of our research literature on the ability of children to meet and conquer adversity. (p. 228)

A key factor which must be taken into account is that some characteristics of resiliency are elements that are intrinsic to the individual (Benishek & Morrow, 1995; Block, 1993; Brooks, 1994; Burns, 1994; Klohnen, 1996; Miller, 1996; Westernberg & Block, 1993), while others are open to a theory of resiliency as a by-product of environmental stimulus (Bradley, Whiteside, Mundfrom, Casey, Kelleher & Pope, 1994; Werner, 1994; Werner, 1993). Of course, there is also the question of why some can overcome and thrive in the face of challenge, and others buckle and crumble faced with a similar set of circumstances. Also of interest are those who have overcome trials above and beyond the normal scope of everyday challenges such as sexual abuse, war, racism, physical or mental illness and Holocaust survivors.

For some time now researchers have seemed dissatisfied with the "one key person" as the explanation as to why some individuals would survive and even thrive in the face of incredibly negative circumstances. This theory is basically that we all need one key attachment figure in our lives to give unconditional love and support. It is best if it is the mother, but other substitutes would do, as long as the caring was consistent and held the individual in positive regard (Anthony & Cohler, 1987; McNamee, 1994). This literature does not usually use the specific terms "love" or "caring," but again there is recent research specifically on those topics.

Other research examines attachment theory as a key factor in promoting resiliency and that intergenerational transmission of maladaptive relationship patterns are a threat to development (Fonagy et al., 1994). Some individuals are resilient to such a threat with one explanation being that individuals who are at risk of transmitting insecurity, but who do not do so, may be distinguished in terms of the complexity of their internal working model of relationship patterns. During the first 18 months of life the child is able to differentiate between the influence of independent parental relationships. This insulation of the internal working models allows for the creation of a secure internal working model alongside one or more highly insecure ones. This may explain the case for the resilient maltreated child and is a critical part of an attachment theory account of why the presence
of even a relatively remote, but stable and responsive figure in the child's early life can be so important. That person can be a protective factor, foster a secure internal working model of relationships and contribute to the child's resilience to hardship (Fonagy, 1994).

Emmy Werner and E. Timothy Burns venture into a relatively new area of academic research when they discuss the importance of positive self-concept, hope, faith and spirituality as key factors in resiliency. These areas are difficult to research. How can you prove hope? What evidence does one have for faith in God or a higher being? Can we prove the power of prayer? Can I compare my definition of happiness as a quality of life with yours? The healing powers of hope in the stories of individual lives may be the most precious harvest of those who pursue research on risk, resiliency and human development (Werner, 1994). There is increased support of the importance of this factor, but there is also increased recognition of the interconnected role of the home, school and community as all having an impact on the resiliency of the individual (Brooks, 1994).

E. Timothy Burns (1994) examines the importance of positive self-concept as the key to resiliency, drawing on research by Bonnie Benard and Nancy Phillips to endorse this view. He says the broadest context of psychological hardiness and resilience is a purposive life and the purpose of our lives is threefold: finding our way to God, healing our wounds, and expressing our gifts, and that these three things will serve as a blueprint for a meaningful life.

Researchers may also use other terms to describe resilience including hardiness (Benishek & Morrow, 1995) and invulnerability (Anthony & Cohler, 1987). It also encompasses survival of the human spirit or regaining of hope, all terms and concepts difficult to define, describe and capture. Some researchers, such as Emmy Werner (1993) refer to it as a "second chance" in life (as cited in Skerker & McDonough, 1993).

There are three important longitudinal studies on resiliency that are referred to consistently in the literature, a group led by Emmy Werner in Hawaii, Jack Block in California and David Fergusson in New Zealand. All three studies have yielded rich data and observations, have been written about extensively by the authors over the years as they followed participants, and are cited frequently.
The Hawaii Studies: A Message of Hope

Emmy E. Werner's longitudinal study has covered a span of over 40 years, following a group from birth to adulthood. Her study took place in Hawaii, starting with a group of 698 high risk individuals. Compiling her findings from questionnaires and personal interviews spanning over more than thirty years, her research on "at risk" children is based on asking "What is right with these children?" and by implication, "How can we help others to become less vulnerable in the face of adversity?" According to Werner's work, resiliency is used to describe three types of phenomenon in children: 1) good outcomes despite high-risk status, 2) sustained competence under stress and 3) recovery from trauma. Her findings can be summarized that negative biological factors can be overcome if there are strong enough environmental and social factors to compensate. Longitudinal studies of children exposed to both biological and psychosocial risk factors that extend from infancy to adulthood are rare. The study so far has noted two trends: 1) the impact of reproductive stress diminished with time and 2) the developmental outcome of virtually every biological risk condition was dependent on the quality of the rearing environment. Overall rearing conditions were more powerful determinants of outcome than perinatal trauma.

Personal competence and determination, support from a spouse or mate, and reliance on faith and prayer were the shared qualities that characterized the resilient children in their mid-30's; however, there was a persistent need for detachment from parents and siblings whose emotional problems still threatened to engulf them. Werner identified several clusters of protective factors of children who had successfully adapted as adults including individual competencies, degree of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and temperamental dispositions. Many resilient high-risk youths left the adverse conditions of their childhood homes (and their community) after high school and sought environments they found more compatible. In short, they picked their own niches.

Factors that were in the favor of the 'resilients' were the following: better relationships with parents who were less frequently absent from the home, the family milieu was marked by parental support, family closeness, rule setting, discipline and a respect for individuality, better health histories, recuperated from illness more quickly, were rated in infancy and in childhood as more 'active,' 'socially responsive,'
'autonomous,' and given to more 'positive social orientation.' Girls had fewer teen marriages, less teen-age pregnancies and fewer accidents. Resilient individuals had a positive personal disposition and family milieu, but beyond that was skill in identifying and selecting resilient models and sources of support in peers, older friends, ministers, and teachers to whom they could turn when needed.

The most precious lesson researchers can learn from the study was hope (Werner, 1994). This was reinforced by reports from a handful of other long-term studies into adulthood which have identified similar protective buffers and mechanisms that operated in the lives of vulnerable children and youths who had succeeded against the odds. There is a need to examine the price exacted from such children and youth, for some protective attributes may promote positive adaptation in one context and have negative effects in another. The individuals in this study who overcame the odds and grew into competent, caring adults had a special need for detachment. When they told their life stories, it was usually without rancor, but with a sense of compassion, optimism and hopefulness.

Werner mentions the importance of learning to read as a key ingredient, that by age 10 or grade 4 the child should be competent in readings. Failure to master reading skills is one indicator of the potential for serious problems, and learning to read is among one of the most potent predictors of successful adult adaptation among high-risk children.

Werner's (1995) most recent work, Pioneer Children on the Journey West, investigates journals and records of early settlers between 1841 to 1865 who participated in overland journeys from the banks of the Missouri to the Pacific shores. Others joined them in the Gila Trail, travelling north from Texas to southern California. By examining children's diaries, letters to relatives and reminiscences of young emigrants who are still alive, the narratives of children have survived and been published. "A competent mother emerges as one of the major sources of emotional support in studies of contemporary children who have overcome great odds. That was true for the pioneer children on the overland trails as well." Strong, independent women, who pooled their resources and never stopped thinking about how best to protect the lives of their children, headed families that survived. A belief in some kind of higher power also accounted for the survival of some. An ability to attract people to them as well as an optimistic, positive disposition also accounted for survival. An individual's basic temperament would be one
of being defeatist or from a position of resourcefulness. Journal entries give accounts of families boiling and eating buffalo hides to survive; of a little boy who was separated from his father and when taken in by another camp and fed, given warmth, caring and shelter, just seemed to curl up and die. He had given up hope. Families and individuals who exhibited positive traits were among the few who did not experience a death in their family, and did not resort to cannibalism to survive (Werner, 1995). Of the few survivors alive today, their basic temperament has not changed, but reports say they were always people with a sunny, positive disposition, or cheerful and optimistic in spite of setbacks.

Both Emmy Werner's journal articles and her books on her research in Hawaii and the pioneer settlers in the 1880's seem to follow Garvey's logic of accentuating the positive. Her writings indicate a tone of gentleness and caring with her research participants. She wants to find the good, of what they have done right in the face of setbacks. She reports that even individuals overcoming serious setbacks in their lives show very little "rancor" or ill-will, but an acceptance. This too may be a key factor in resiliency. Werner's findings also indicate that resilient individuals have characteristics of personal competence and determination, and a reliance on faith and prayer, along with a certain element of detachment from their families of origin.

**The New Zealand Study: The Role of Childhood Adversity**

Another significant longitudinal study has been undertaken by David M. Fergusson and Michael T. Lynskey (1996) in New Zealand following 940 individuals from birth in mid-1977 to age 16. His theories that several characteristics, both inner and outer, seem to work in harmony to promote resiliency in the individual, resonate with the stories of the women I interviewed. It was a combination of inner characteristics and outer supports that contributed to their resilience over time. His theory is that we cannot isolate one factor alone that is responsible for whether an individual has or lacks resiliency. He supports the theory that childhood adversity may lead to the development of protective and compensatory strategies that combine to create the characteristic of resiliency in later life. His research examined factors associated with adolescent resiliency and childhood adversity. Resilient teenagers were defined by: a) high exposure to family adversity during childhood and b) an absence of a wide range of externalizing
problems during adolescence including substance abuse, juvenile offending and school problems. Resilient teenagers were characterized by significantly higher IQ, lower novelty seeking, and lower affiliations with delinquent peers, with these factors acting cumulatively to influence the probability of resilience to externalizing problems. The findings of the study indicated that: a) females were no more resilient than males; b) children who showed an absence of early disruptive behaviors, early anxious/withdrawn behaviors or high self-esteem were no more resilient than other children when due allowance was made for IQ, novelty seeking and peer affiliations; c) external activities and relationships were not related to resilience when due allowance was made for IQ, novelty seeking and peer affiliations; d) measures of parental bonding and attachment were not related to resilience when due allowance was made for IQ, novelty seeking and peer affiliations (Fergusson and Lynsky, 1996).

Fergusson concludes by stating that resilience is likely to be an outcome of several factors acting in concert rather than a single factor. These pose a number of difficulties for analysis, which seek to distinguish between compensatory and protective factors since, typically, these analyses have focused on the effects of single factors in isolation. What this analysis suggests is the need for studies of resilience to examine the ways in which combinations of factors, some of which may be protective and others compensatory, may act to influence the resilience of teenagers to high-risk childhood environments. In general, the findings of this study suggest that teenagers from high risk family backgrounds who show resilience to the development of externalizing behaviors were characterized by a combination of at least average intelligence, low tendencies to novelty seeking and an avoidance of affiliations with delinquent peers in adolescence. In contrast, teenagers from high-risk backgrounds who were susceptible to developing externalizing behaviors are those characterized by a general absence of these features (Fergusson and Lynskey, 1996).

**The California Study: What Contributes to Ego Resiliency?**

Block's theories about resiliency seem contradictory to other research by Werner and Fergusson. He claims that ego resilient children have parents who are competent, loving, compatible, patient, integrated, and have shared values; ego brittle children come
from homes marked by discord and conflict. Research by Garmezy, Emmy Werner and David M. Fergusson seem to indicate that resilient adults have experienced conflict or stress in the home environment, and have found ways to successfully adapt. It is through this learning to adapt—pulling on outside resources and adapting inner ones—that the characteristics of resiliency are formed.

The longitudinal study undertaken by Jack and Jean Block focussed on the development of ego resilience from the pre-school years to late adolescence. They noted the antecedence of resilience are likely to be found in genetic and constitutional factors as observed in the way the infant responds to environmental change, can be comforted, equilibrates physiological responses, and modifies sleep-wakefulness states. A second group of factors lies in the nature of the families. Jack Block reported that ego resilient children have parents who are competent, loving, compatible, patient, integrated, and have shared values; ego brittle children come from homes marked by discord and conflict (Block, 1971). Initiated in 1968, their study involved 130 children who had been assessed at age three, four, five, seven, and most recently 11. Each child was administered a battery of testing. Researchers also developed extensive assessment data on the parents of these children on parent-child interaction styles. Their focus was on the identification and measure of ego-resiliency and key characteristics of individuals who have it.

Block defines ego control as the degree and kind of control individuals exert over their impulses, and ego resiliency as individuals' ability to modify their characteristic level of ego-control. An ego-resilient person tends to be resourceful and adaptive when confronted by new situations. An individual who is not ego-resilient tends to become inflexible when confronted with new situations, and is slow to recoup after stress. The study assessed individuals' ego control and resiliency when the subjects were three, five, seven, 11, 14, and 23 years old by means of experimental measures, interactional procedures, self-evaluations, creativity tests, and clinical interviews. Results indicated a consistency in ego resilience across time for boys and a consistency in ego resilience during early childhood and adolescence, as well as consistency in ego control for both boys and girls.

In a more recent examination of the data from the study Jack Block and Adam Kremen (1996) have examined the constructs of intelligence and ego-resilience. The
personality implications of "pure intelligence" and "pure ego-resilience" were identified. Intelligence (IQ) was indexed by the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised and ego-resilience by an inventory scale. Residual scores measuring "pure intelligence" and "pure ego-resilience" were correlated in the items of the observer-based California Q-sort, used to describe participants. Persons relatively high on ego resilience tend to be more competent and comfortable in the "fuzzier" interpersonal world; persons defined primarily by raw IQ tend to be effective in the "clearer" world of structured work but tend also to be uneasy with affect and less able to realize satisfying human connections. Gender differences exist in relations of ego-resilience and intelligence and in their adaptive relevance.

**Evaluation of Resiliency: Peer and Self-Reports and Issues of Subjectivity**

Other related research has been conducted by Oliver John and Richard Robins (1993) regarding agreement in testing on personality traits making up resiliency, and comparison of peer and self-evaluations of those traits. They examined several determinants of interjudge agreement on personality traits. The findings, which were cross-validated in two samples, suggest that agreement is a function of four factors: which Big Five content domain the trait represents, how observable relevant behaviors are, how evaluative the trait is, and whether the self is one of the judges. Agreement was highest for traits related to extraversion and lowest for traits related to agreeableness. More observable and less evaluative traits elicited higher interjudge agreement. On average, self-peer agreement was lower than peer-peer agreement; however, this effect was limited to evaluative traits; for neutral traits, self-peer agreement was as high as peer-peer agreement. These findings suggest that self-and peer perceptions proceed through similar processes for neutral traits but not for highly evaluative traits, raising the possibility that self-perceptions become distorted when the trait is affectively charged.

Regarding the reference to the Big Five dimensions, Norman and Goldberg (as cited in John & Robins, 1993) found interjudge agreement was higher for some content domains than for others. They examined interjudge agreement on the Big Five dimensions measured by 20 bipolar scales. In two samples, they found the highest agreement for Extraversion (talkative vs. silent) and the lowest agreement for Emotional
Stability (calm vs. anxious) and Agreeableness (good-natured vs. irritable); Conscientiousness (responsible vs. undependable) and Intellect (intellectual vs. unreflective, narrow) fell in between. Several studies have since replicated these findings. Along with these studies, there is specific research emerging from the study of coping strategies of different groups who have experienced significant trauma or life events. This ranges from changes due to career shifts (London, 1991), or aging (Brandstadter, Wentura & Greve, 1993), to the effects of sexual abuse (Benishek & Morrow, 1995), growing up with a psychotic mother (Dunn, 1993) and war (Casella & Motta, 1990; Krell, 1993; McNamee, 1994). In support of the "one key person" theory, research into the effects of war on children in Northern Ireland revealed that separation from the mother or key careprovider was more devastating to children than threat of death, scare of bombs, or the very idea of war. Children of a certain age do not have a broad enough understanding or awareness of what a bomb means, or what war entails. But they do know when mother or grandmother has been away for too long, and this perceived abandonment has been found to have more devastating effects than war. Research comparing characteristics of Vietnam veterans with and without Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) provides evidence that those who did not develop the disorder despite high exposure to combat stress are individuals with exceptional strength and resilience.

**Identifying the Nature of Protective Influences**

Garmezy (1985) discusses the expansion of research with children who are presumed to be at risk for future psychopathology. Risk factors have included family background, parental maladaptation, individual personality dispositions, potential hereditary influences, deprived ecological settings, and societal-institutional indices. In examining who gets better and who stays sick in schizophrenic children returning home, researchers found those who relapsed had homes characterized by excessive criticism and emotional overinvolvement (Leff, 1976; Vaughn & Leff, 1976a; Vaughn & Leff, 1976b). Garmezy's theory is that "predisposition and potentiation" have always played central roles in psychopathologists' orientation to etiology and symptomatology in the major mental disorders. He states conversely that protective factors, what he calls the inhibitors
of pathogenic processes, have played a negligible role either in theory construction or in the empirical researches of psychiatric investigators. He suggests that the next decade will witness a growth of interest in the study of resiliency and stress-resistant components of persons presumed to be at risk for later disorder—and that such investigations will be of importance whatever the theoretical model used to explain the origins of mental disorder.

Michael Rutter (1979) also took a similar position:

There is a regrettable tendency to focus gloomily on the ills of mankind and on all that can and does go wrong. It is equally unusual to consider the factors or circumstances that provide support, protection or amelioration for the children reared in deprivation... Would our results be better if we could identify the nature of protective influences? I do not know, but I think they would. The potential for prevention surely lies in increasing our knowledge and understanding of the reasons why some children are not damaged by deprivation. (p. 49).

He later states:

Many children do not succumb to deprivation and it is important that we determine why this is so and what it is that protects them from the hazards they face. The scanty evidence so far available suggests that when the findings are all in, the explanation will probably include patterning of stresses, individual differences caused by both constitutional and experiential factors, compensating experiences outside the home, the development of self-esteem, the scope and range of available opportunities, an appropriate degree of environmental structure and control, the availability of personal bonds and intimate relationships, and the acquisition of coping skills. (p. 70)

Garmezy (1985) states the correlates of an adaptive behavior includes personality dispositions, parental attributes, situational and cultural contexts, family milieu, significant supportive figures and institutions. In a three-stage theory of examining these attributes he says stage three would involve: the systematic search for the processes and mechanisms that underlie the manifestations of stress-resistant behavior in children.

Rutter's (1979) Isle of Wright study looked at family variables that led to heightened prevalence of psychiatric disorders, and conversely asked the question, "What
is resilience and stress-resistance?" In attempting to answer that question they identified a number of risk reducers including the following: positive temperament factors, gender (girls proved to be less vulnerable than boys); the presence, even in a home marked by parental strife, of a parent whose relationship to the child was marked by warmth, affection and the absence of severe criticism, and supportiveness; and the socializing influence of a positive school environment that had as its ethos teacher/administrator concern for the growth and well-being of the child (Rutter, 1979). This research suggests three broad categories of variables: personality dispositions of the child, a supportive family milieu, and an external support system that encourages and reinforces a child's coping efforts and strengthens them by inculcating positive values.

Nuechterlein (1970) and Garmezy (1981) reported on their studies of Black children reared in poverty in America's inner city ghettos (as cited in Garmezy, 1985). Those who exhibited resilience had the following in their favor: socially responsive, active, sensitive, lacking in sullenness and restlessness, intelligent and cooperative, enjoying a positive view of self and evident self-esteem. Family intactness was not a factor, but in single parent homes mother was active, concerned for the child's competency, assisted with homework and recognized and reinforced her child's interests, goals and striving for self-direction. Physically the family household was neat, with a lack of clutter and the presence of books. There was at least one adequate, significant adult who was able to serve as an identification figure. The achieving youngsters seemed to hold a more positive attitude toward adults and authority figures in general.

Children of divorce were studied by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) and the following positive elements were present in those with more resilience: family relations, social surroundings, reacting on the resources or frailties of the particular child at a particular time. Other factors were the extent to which the parents were able to resolve and reduce their conflict and anger; the course of the custodial parent's treatment of the child and the resumption of good parenting in the home; the extent to which the child did not feel rejected by the non-custodial parent and maintenance of that regular relationship over time; the range of personality assets and deficits which the child brought to the divorce including the child's history within the pre-divorce family and the capacity to make use of his or her resources within the present, particularly intelligence, the capacity
for fantasy, social maturity, and ability to turn to peers and adults; the availability to the child of a supportive human network; the absence of anger and depression in the child; the sex and age of the child.

Various survival strategies have been used by those with high resilience. Adult children of the Holocaust found that telling their stories was the key factor to integrating their life events and moving forward. Telling their stories, and resulting self-reflection led to a higher level of functioning. Another survival strategy was to "hide" behind work, such as a talent or ability they were good at, in order to remain emotionally distant or aloof but very successful in many areas (Krell, 1993).

In the home environment, research with children growing up with mothers experiencing mental illness reveals the development of different coping strategies (Dunn, 1993). The trend is to search for substitute parenting or a sense of family outside of the home, eventually leaving their family of origin and finding their own niche. Problems arise when these people actively move toward getting their needs met, through the process of separation, career and relationship success. There is a tendency to suffer from survival guilt and loyalty conflicts. Therapy reportedly helps these individuals verbalize their feelings. It is interesting to note that half of children in adverse family situations do not repeat those patterns.

**Vreni: A Case History-The Concept of Required Helpfulness**

Manfred Bleuler reported the results of a 20 year longitudinal study of 208 schizophrenic probands (as cited in Garmezy, 1985) and published in English under the title *The Schizophrenic Disorders: Long-term Patient and Family Studies*. In the case of his study 104 of Bleuler's patients married and had 169 offspring, with 16 born outside of marriage. Of these 185 children only 10 were diagnosed as schizophrenic and five of these recovered before the research was concluded. Three-quarters of the children were mentally sound in adulthood, 120 were found to be working in jobs exceeding the expectations based on training and education, and all but 10 exceeded paternal occupational level. Eighty-four per cent who had married had happy and successful marriages. Bleuler reported the accomplishments of these children were remarkable when one considers their handicaps - the emotional suffering, social ostracism, and economic
disadvantages to which their parents' psychoses subjected them. Garmezy (1985) quotes Blueler:

In studying a number of the family histories, one is even left with the impression that pain and suffering has a steeling-a hardening-effect on the personalities of some children, making them capable of mastering their lives with all its obstacles, in defiance of all their disadvantages. (p. 400)

Garmezy's agreed with Blueler, and Garmezy wrote:

Those who have had the opportunity to observe at length the positive adaptations of stressed children were likely to be able to provide hypotheses related to resilience that would be needed for future research on stress-resistant children. (p. 223)

In correspondence to Garmezy, Bleuler reported the case history of "Vreni":

In brief, Vreni presents an almost classical picture of a child exposed to chronic adversity. Her mother was addicted to drugs, the father an emotionally unstable alcoholic. To Vreni, at age 14, fell the task of caring for a 13-year-old brother, a 12-year-old sister, 6-year-old twins and a mentally and physically ill father. So distressed was Professor Bleuler with these adverse circumstances that he dispatched a welfare worker to the home who returned to report that 'the household was kept in perfect order by Vreni, the smaller children were well, happy, well fed, well dressed, went regularly to school and their teachers had no complaints as regards their behavior.

At the same time Vreni visited her mother regularly in the hospital, brought her fresh clothes, accompanied her on walks near the Clinic. She had hoped to be a nurse and Dr. Bleuler arranged for her to be tutored to make up for her educational deficiencies. After she had been accepted into a nursing school and with her goal close to reality, she returned to Bleuler in tears with the realization that she could not study and simultaneously care for her younger siblings and sick father.

Vreni at age 22 married a kind-hearted man who devotes 'all of his free time to the family.' There are now two healthy children and the family circle is a happy one. Bleuler reports that he has maintained touch with her and her family.
Her household is well cared for, she sees to it that her children are well educated and she and her husband maintain 'a cordial and warm atmosphere in the home.

(p. 223-224)

Garmezy (1985) reports that Bleuler's purpose was not to provide drama but insight through the elaboration of a researchable hypothesis:

It is not speculation but a fact that these children who have developed well had found-like Vreni-living conditions in which they could apply their gifts and interests in an active way that corresponded with their personality.

Why has Vreni become a very healthy and very happy wife and mother, in spite of a childhood, which became so threatening soon after babyhood? Or should the question be asked the other way around? Is she healthy and happy on account of a threatening childhood?

To point to an (in-born personality) disposition in this connection is far from satisfactory. She is certainly not a 'superkid.' Her IQ is average...From anecdotal experience we are tempted to say: Life gave her a rare chance in her childhood: The chance to do what she liked to do and was able to do. It seems that stressful, difficult childhood conditions are not felt as too stressful and as too difficult if they offer the opportunity to the child to fulfill a great task which the child likes and is able to fulfill. (p. 224)

Professor Bleuler's theory of learned helpfulness is opposite to Seligman's experiments and writings (1975) on learned helplessness (as cited in Garmezy, 1985). In 1978 Rachman (as cited in Garmezy, 1985) published a volume titled "Fear and Courage" in which he described a theory he called required helpfulness and a subsequent article published in 1979 described the process:

People who are required to carry out dangerous/difficult tasks that are social desirable, often manage to do so effectively and without strain...required helpfulness refers to dangerous/difficult acts that are performed in response to social requirements-in order to reduce or prevent other people from experiencing serious discomfort. Under the incentive of high social demands, helpers often act more effectively and more persistently than at other times. The execution of
successful acts of required helpfulness may lead to enduring changes in the helper himself. (p.1)

According to Garmezy (1985), there is therapy through helping others:

Its consequences include increased competence in the helper, markedly heightened morale and a marked increment in motivation and persistence, a heightened probability of successful accomplishment of one's tasks, a greater tolerance of discomfort evoked by its performance, and the acquisition of new skills that lifts the level of performance past its previous asymptote.

Rachman explains that it is possible that the execution of required tasks followed by appropriate feedback will lead to the growth of new coping skills.

**Renegotiating Goals Through Life Stages**

Research into the aging process reveals growing old does not automatically mean loss of control or resiliency and some report these factors are even higher among older adults (Brandstader, Wentura & Greve, 1993). The determining factor for avoiding long-time depression seems to be letting go of unattainable goals, and whether environmental opportunities converge with individual motivations. For those individuals, resiliency will be high throughout, despite the inevitable compromises the aging process entails. Most participants in this research study did not see themselves as particularly brave or unusual. Most described themselves as doing what was in front of them, putting one foot in front of the other, or just doing what they had to do under the circumstances. Only on reflecting back and telling their stories did they gain perspective on their inner resources and outer supports which helped them overcome, survive, and even thrive as a result of their circumstances.

Specific research has led to different findings of what does or does not constitute resilience. While high self-esteem is a strong indicator of resiliency, level of self-care and expressive playfulness are not indicators (Westenberg and Block, 1993). Those with an internal locus of control seem to have a higher rate of resiliency. Another key point in the research is that there seems to be a trade off or a price to pay for the attainment of resiliency in the face of adversity (Werner, 1994).
The case of Vreni and other research points to the idea of "required helpfulness." Educators have found individuals can and do rise to expectations of those around them, that somehow it helps us to "get outside of ourselves," reinforcing the internal locus of control. We have an innate ability to muster the inner strength to meet challenges put in front of us, as evidenced by Werner's accounts of pioneer children, and Bleuler's study of Vreni.

**Intergenerational Transmission: Can Resilient Behaviour Be Passed On?**

Finally, a question emerging from the literature is whether maladaptive behavior patterns are passed on to succeeding generations. This idea reframed in a positive way would be whether positive behaviors encouraging resiliency could be passed on as well? There are opposing views on this theory. One view by Grossman, Frommer-Bombik, Rudolph & Eichberg (as cited in Fonagy et al., 1994) is that there is an accumulating body of data confirming that there is an intergenerational transmission of insecurity and according to Benoit (as cited in Fonagy et al., 1994) that this risk may be assessed before the birth of a child. The parent's internal working models of relationships influences or at least pre-figures the child's security attachment; to unequivocally demonstrate its transmission a direct relationship between the child's and parents' internal working models needs to be established. In order for secure attachment to be considered as a part rather than as a correlate of certain resilience processes it is important to show that the transmission of infant security is caregiver-specific, not the artifact of constitutional factors, temperament, assortative mating or the spreading of security from one caregiver to the other.

Other research supports the notion that we do inherit the patterns of closeness and wellness, but that does not determine the outcome. We can learn different ways of being. The importance of self-reflection is a key finding of research led by Peter Fonagy (1994). His research supports the idea that the coherence of autobiographical narrative depends on the adequacy of reflective process. He reports that research data are consistent in the view that a superior reflective-self may explain the greater interpersonal awareness may explain the greater interpersonal awareness and empathy observed in self-reflective children. It serves as a "ballast, or a self-righting capacity." It is an important therapeutic
construct to create internal working models of themselves and others as thinking and feeling. According to research led by Fonagy (1994) reflective-self function is a protective process:

All attempts, regardless of theoretical framework, at focusing on the working of the mental life of an individual have clear therapeutic effects. There is something unique about the therapeutic process that takes place between two individuals, where one person takes an interest in the mental life of another. The patient's thinking is facilitated and he or she can conceive of his or her world in new, more resilient and sometimes sadder and perhaps happier ways. (p. 251)

Research evidence in support of intergenerational continuity is weak. "Evidence of discontinuities in certain families is also strongly evident (Fonagy et al., 1994). The authors report that half of the children living under conditions of disadvantage do not repeat that pattern in their own adult lives. Conversely, others born under more provident circumstances do move downward into poverty in their adulthood. Studies over three generations further weaken the case for intergenerational continuity. While there exists a partial literature supporting continuity, generalizations of a pattern of constance require caution.

In the United States, Long and Vaillant (as cited by Garnezy, 1985) conducted a follow-up study drawn as controls for the Glueck and Glueck investigations of delinquency. They traced the mid-life outcomes of 456 inner-city men who had been reared as children in families marked by extreme poverty and a chaotic family life. On the basis of early ratings, when the men were children, a four-fold categorization of their families was made: a) chronically dependent, b) a multiproblem group, c) a nondependent, nonproblem group and d) a social class V group that was both nondependent and nonproblem, despite their location in the lowermost category of the socioeconomic ladder.

Whereas the early delinquent group on follow-up was clearly on a downgrade and had remained so for the most part, the control group of children, not known to the police during childhood, had in adulthood taken its place in middle-class America. Group members' employment and family lives were stable. Viewed prospectively, many children reared in poverty had escaped the confines of their parents' low socioeconomic
status. Thus the inevitability of the transmission of a parental chaotic life-style was found wanting as either a necessary of sufficient condition for predicting later negative life status.

Garmezy goes on to discuss the commonly held belief that children placed in foster care will not do as well as mainstream children. Research by Festinger (1983) examined 277 men who had been placed in foster care, years later when they were young adults and compared them nationally to similar aged and same sexed family-reared controls. It was found that the foster group showed lower scholastic achievements, the employment rates were similar for the two groups of White respondents, and somewhat lower for Black respondents. However, in terms of health and symptom status, the groups were similar, as were their self-evaluation of their future hopes and feelings and their "sense of happiness."

Festinger was led to conclude that the assumptions and dreaded expectations for foster-reared children were inappropriate. Further, there was no evidence of a generational repetition of foster care placement, nor was there an excessive dependence by the group on welfare or public support. The foster-reared adults were generous contributors to the study, exhibiting a willingness and openness to discussing their lives in the hope that others might benefit from their experiences.

**Conclusion**

Festinger's (1983) conclusion is a valuable one. She asks, "Why such a singular emphasis on vulnerability? Is there so little confidence in young people's capacities to come to grips with the reality that no one's world is perfect? Is there so little faith in the strength and resilience of children"? (p. 253)

We have an innate ability to muster the inner strength to meet challenges put in front of us. Most individuals do not see themselves as particularly brave or unusual. Most of us are busy "living life" and doing what is in front of us, putting one foot in front of the other, or just doing what we have to do under the circumstances. Only on reflecting back and telling our stories do we gain perspective on inner resources and outer supports which help us to overcome, survive, and even thrive as a result of individual circumstances.
The importance of self-reflection is a key finding of research led by Peter Fonagy (1994). His research supports the theory that the coherence of autobiographical narrative depends on the adequacy of the reflective process. He reports that research data by Cowan, Wyman, Work and Parker in 1990 and Pelligrini in 1981 (as cited in Fonagy et al., 1994) are consistent in the view that a superior reflective-self may explain the greater interpersonal awareness and empathy observed in self-reflective children. It serves as a "ballast, or a self-righting capacity. It is an important therapeutic construct to create internal working models of themselves and others as thinking and feeling," (Fonagy et al., 1994, p. 250) and the reflective-self function is a protective process:

All attempts, regardless of theoretical framework, at focusing on the working of the mental life of an individual have clear therapeutic effects. There is something unique about the therapeutic process that takes place between two individuals, where one person takes an interest in the mental life of another. The patient's thinking is facilitated and he or she can conceive of his or her world in new, more resilient and sometimes sadder and perhaps happier ways. Reflective-self function is a protective process. (p. 251)

For the purposes of this study, I am defining resiliency in terms of a mental and psychological state of being as opposed to physical wellness. It must be kept in mind, however, that we are body, mind and spirit, and only when these work in concert do we experience optimum living. Resilience is the ability to bounce back after a setback. It is facing life's challenges and doing what is required under the circumstances. It is "learned helpfulness" or getting outside of oneself for the higher good. It is maintaining an attitude of hopefulness in the face of obstacles. It includes attracting and getting the needed supports to meet our needs and reach our potential. An innate contributing factor seems to be having an independent, somewhat "rebellious" spirit and experiencing conflict in younger, developmental years.

External contributing factors to resiliency include having unconditional positive support from a key person who could be the primary careprovider or a teacher, older friend, or minister. This presumes healthy attachment to a careprovider within the first two years of life, and acquiring the innate learning that different adults have different levels of functioning. This affects the adults' level of availability to provide supportive
and nurturing responses. Individuals may be distinguished in terms of the complexity of their internal working model of relationship patterns. This model is formed during the first 18 months of life when the child differentiates between the influence of independent parental relationships. This insulation of the internal working models allows for the creating of a secure internal working model alongside one or more highly insecure ones. This Attachment Theory accounts for why the presence of even a relatively remote, but stable and responsive figure in the child’s early life can be a protective factor, foster a secure internal working model of relationships and contribute to the child’s resistance to hardship. Conversely, resiliency is seen in individuals who have experienced a measure of failure that was not completely devastating, that would provide a learning experience from which to transfer life skills to enable the individual to go on to a higher level of functioning than previously experienced. Other factors contributing to resiliency include the support of a caring school and community, a high level of self-reflection and articulation to move to another level of development, detachment from unhealthy influences and creating a niche, and finding meaningful work.

The literature reviewed in preparation for this research focussed on examination of the longitudinal studies dealing with life changes. Other research focussed on the adaptation to major crises such as war as well as other risk factors associated with trauma, mental illness or major socio-economic changes. For example, the kind of resilience demonstrated by the individual survivor of war may differ from the kind of resilience demonstrated by the individual surviving life changes; there would also be common elements that would run through the range of experiences as well. Again, there is subjectivity in the awareness, reporting and interpretation of our own life experience that needs to be kept in mind in understanding the research findings here. One may conceive of resiliency as occurring when one faces different levels of challenge.
CHAPTER TWO
TELL ME YOUR LIFE STORY

Introduction

For the past four years I have been co-editor at OISE/UT of a manuscript project on the topic of creativity and wellness, along with my thesis supervisor. The book is an edited anthology of individual accounts of overcoming adversity or life changes using creativity—either everyday activities or through the arts. The topic led to the examination of the concept of hope and survival of the human spirit. In 1996 Dr. Solveiga Miezitis developed an OISE/UT course on Creativity and Wellness: Learning to Thrive. As a class assignment students were requested to write a personal experience narrative about overcoming adversity. On the basis of these narratives, we approached 12 students who had demonstrated factors of resiliency while undergoing life transition, and had completed the course.

Six women volunteered to take part in this exploratory qualitative analysis, a narrative inquiry for the purpose of writing their life stories. My intention was to interview them individually over the course of several months and from their life stories look for common characteristics of resiliency. After I had completed the writing, the women would be consulted and collaborate with me on the final draft version. Writing their life stories, I would be an active participant in the research: I would be interviewed and write my own story as well.

My focus was on gaining a life story through the filter of resiliency. I used semi-structured, open-ended methods, meeting with each woman three times over the course of several months. I joined in the dialogue during the taped interviews, making notations while transcribing, of issues that resonated with my own. Because of my own long personal experience with therapy, I did not find it difficult to disclose my own issues when appropriate. This created a dialogue of mutual exchange that I believe added to the climate of trust, enabling the women to be open and honest about their issues.

My research goals were to explore the topic of resiliency within the framework of existing research in the area, particularly the "one key person" theory, and examine internal and external protective factors and compensatory strategies that have been utilized and have influenced the co-researchers. With that informing my stance as
qualitative researcher, I endeavored to further explore the topic with the co-researchers to see what new reality might emerge. My focus, therefore, was on providing a vehicle for their stories to be expressed, and to hold them up to the existing body of literature, while listening for broader themes and connections that might arise.

Description of Participants

Participants in this research are six women ranging in age from mid-thirties to 84. Each woman is in a different age cohort, thus in a different stage of life development, which informed our perceptions, decisions and future plans. All participants are white, middle class, and university educated, with the majority with graduate university degrees. The sample, therefore was relatively homogeneous and selective.

In addition, four of the six women who volunteered for this study were among graduate students who participated in the course on Creativity and Wellness: Learning to Thrive. The course involved extensive self-reflection and journaling as part of the examination of personal adversity. Five of the women had undergone personal therapy, hence the participants in this study may have been particularly inclined to use strategies of self-reflection in attaining a higher level of resilience.

Selection and Initial Contact

My initial contact was with Laura whom I had known for some time on a personal level. I had lived in a student residence with her and for a number of years had been tutoring her grandson for reading disabilities. I was very intrigued by this woman in her 80's who seemed so vital and vibrant, taking courses and living in a student residence! She had been very encouraging and had taken a special interest in my topic, and the idea came to me that she should be included. So, on a Thanksgiving Sunday we rode the Toronto Island Ferry to the Rectory Cafe overlooking Lake Ontario. Over mugs of herbal tea I asked Laura if she would be a research participant in my thesis. Without hesitation she said, "Yes." It was the affirmation I needed to begin. By way of introduction to her personal issues, I read a paper she had written for a creative writing class on "ageism."

The other participants had taken the course "Creativity and Wellness" with Professor Miezitis and had completed "Personal Projects" and reflection papers. Some of
the students were approached about their potential interest in volunteering for this study. Out of a list of a possible ten or twelve women, a few seemed to have a genuine interest in exploring the issues further and the flexibility to accommodate an interview schedule. I spoke to each woman individually over the phone, introducing myself, explaining in more detail the scope of the project, and asking for a meeting just to talk more about it. At this stage initial impressions were important, as I tried to gauge interest level, rapport and the possibility of working closely together in what, for me, was a very important undertaking. I met individually with each woman, either at her home or at a lounge area at OISE/UT. From there we arranged a meeting time and place for our first session, with the plan then of having the participants read and sign the release form. The atmosphere of openness and trust in that course would lay a foundation for the explorations the participants were to go through with me. So the cycle began where I worked with two women at a time, meeting them, beginning the interviews, and immersing myself in their issues and literature they were currently reading or studying.

**Initial Meeting**

My main goal at the initial meeting was to set a common ground of understanding as to what was to happen between us, to get a sense of the person and establish rapport. During the initial meeting we just talked. I consider myself an experienced interviewer because of my journalism training, my work with Children's Aid and most recently individual tutoring-consulting for students with learning disabilities. I tried not to have an agenda and do more listening than talking, although the thesis research was the area of commonality between us, and most women asked many questions. It was very important that I perceived a sense of energy and genuine interest from the participants. I cannot stress enough the importance of their energy and interest, as in every sense of the word they were co-researchers and participants. Their energy was vital to the success of the project.

Issues that came up were confidentiality, the content of the release forms, the range of questions, the time commitment expected, and the types of questions I would be asking. Most asked about my research results to date, which I spoke about in a general way. I conveyed that my research was exploratory, that I had a few initial hunches of
where the research was going, but that my purpose for the interviews was to see what would emerge through the process.

The first interview, after the initial meeting, was usually comfortable while being quite intense. I attribute that partly to the effect of the dynamic of the one-to-one relationship that was beginning, as well as the powerful impact of having a tape recorder placed between us. There is power and affirmation in "being listened to" and knowing our words are being recorded and transcribed adds another important dimension to that. It was true that in all cases I had no concern with having insufficient material. All women were very articulate, expressed themselves very clearly, and were very conscientious about giving me references, readings, and adding and expanding on points for clarification. Their commitment to clarity and integrity in self-expression was truly vital and amazing.

**Data Collection**

Early on, the power of the spoken words became very apparent to me along with the level of commitment of each participant in getting at her own personal "truth." My notes at one point have the word "gold." I had a true sense of an emerging essence of each woman. I found most interview sessions physically and emotionally exhausting. I would have to "decompress" and have "down time" alone for a few hours afterward. That was an important part of the process, and I would have to plan for it as part of the research agenda. I could not go from an interview onto another activity. I always needed this time alone to reflect, deal with my emotions, sort through my thoughts, make notes, sip tea and get back into the present. Likewise, if a core issue resonated with my own I would be in tears or totally immersed in the "other's" story for a few hours afterward, maybe even while going to sleep. Sometimes it took a day or so to feel fully grounded in my own reality again. A personal observation was to affirm my role in life as "teacher," and not therapist. It is a fine line sometimes, but it is an important distinguishing characteristic for me. I do not have the training, expertise and personal stance to be a therapist. In my professional life I am a teacher, which I think involves a bit more detachment, although equal caring, with a clear purpose and end goal. Holding those
differences and fine points was important to me, and being aware that I approach my work from the stance of "teacher" and "writer."

I quickly predicted a pattern following each interview and tried to prepare myself psychologically for it. Afterward I read books and materials in which each person was currently immersed, such as psychosynthesis, Kegan's life stages and meaning making, Gestalt therapy and shamanic studies. Cycles began to emerge in the interview process. Firstly, psychologically I could only meet with two women at a time, and I also began to notice a cycle within the interviews themselves. There was a changing energy from the first interview, the second and the third. The first were usually taken up with telling their story and background in a general way. The second was more intense, with participants telling more of a narrative and personal accounts of experiences. The third interview I experienced as more of an "intellectual" exercise, where participants more or less listed the traits they thought made up their own resiliency, and the supports around them they felt contributed to their personal resiliency. They were also in a sense going through a sort of "closure" knowing that this was the end to the formal interview sessions. In transcribing the tapes later, I was surprised to find a "different voice" in the third interviews, especially compared to the middle interview or when participants told personal narratives. Voice changes on the tape were quite revealing and they were the first things I noticed during transcription: a hollow voice when speaking about a spouse they had separated from, distant when speaking about an emotionally bleak time, little girl voice when speaking of a traumatic time in childhood. Likewise the voice would shift when moving into the present, recounting happy times, and intellectually listing observations or ideas, as was the case for the most part in the final interview.

**Interviews: The Research Relationship**

We met in different locations: their home, office, and at OISE/UT with the goal of seeing participants in different settings. This was important to my understanding of the person, to background I would observe in their surroundings, and the shift in personality as participants moved from professional persona to relaxed at home. It was fun to meet and be greeted at the door by Sarah in fuzzy slippers and bathrobe while reading the morning papers. She quickly changed into jog pants and sweatshirt to sit at her kitchen
table to talk with me. Later, talking in her office I noticed a picture of her son, met her co-workers and absorbed the milieu of her work environment. Laura and I often met at her home, over a Friday evening fish dinner, and after dinner I would sit at the kitchen table with the tape recorder between us. Leila appeared at the door having just gotten out of the hot tub in robe and hair up in a turban-style towel, a few minutes later returning with "how's that for a quick change?" Leith and I met at her office where she is establishing a practice as a Gestalt therapist. I felt included when she shared with a co-worker and me that her new ad had been placed in a local magazine. She explained later the sense of legitimatization it meant for her.

In some cases, logistically, it was not possible to meet other than in an office at OISE/UT. That was fine too. Meeting places were always mutually negotiated and kept as simple as possible for both parties. Mugs of peppermint tea and comfortable surroundings usually made the interview process seem comfortable. But I was aware of the different effect of various settings, that different settings would elicit a different tone, sense of safety and level of sharing.

The heart of qualitative research is the relationship with researchers. Guba and Lincoln (1989) state the observer should not be disentangled from the observed in the activity of inquiring into constructions. According to Eisener (1991) there is no "pristine, unmediated grasp of the world as it is" (p. 46) and, further, that "no sharp distinction can be drawn between knower and known, between accounts of the world and those doing the accounting" (p. 248). David Hunt (1992) discusses the research relationship as one where the researcher must first accept their own personhood and their co-operation with those they hope to understand. Personal intentions, along with the related perceptions and actions which flow from them, are our most powerful and sensitive means for recording and interpreting our research (Hunt, 1992). In the role as researcher, we need an awareness of any personal intentions, perceptions, and actions, but attempting to eliminate them as 'experimenter bias' is to cut oneself off from perceptual antennae and our capacity to make meaning. According to Hunt, the ideal of eliminating personal bias is a misguided illusion.

I felt honoured and affirmed both personally and professionally by the level of trust afforded to me by the co-participants in this study. This is a vital core of qualitative
research. Where traditional verifiability rests on a rational proof built upon literal intended meaning, a critical qualitative perspective involves a less certain approach characterized by participant reaction and emotional involvement. Instead of validity, we speak of trustworthiness, of authenticity and integrity as defining characteristics. How does the knowing subject come to know the "other?" How can researchers respect the perspective of the "other" and invite the "other" to speak? The central issue here is trustworthiness. According to Kincheloe and McLaren (1998):

Truth is a matter of the best informed and most sophisticated construction on which there is consensus at a given time. Truth is internally related to meaning in a pragmatic way through normative referenced claims, intersubjective referenced claims, subjective referenced claims, and the way we deictically ground or anchor meaning in our daily lives. (p. 262)

Even though sessions were therapeutic, I kept in the forefront of my mind that I am not a therapist. It was not unusual for participants to comment at the close of our talks that they "felt good" or "felt better." Sarah was going through separation at the time, and commented, "I'm going to be talking to someone about this, it might as well be you."

**Interview Protocol**

I interviewed five women over the course of two years. I worked with two women at a time and the time-span between the first and last interview for each woman was about three months. I conducted three two-hour interviews per person using prepared questions and an open-ended interviewing approach. As co-researcher I discussed in a broad sense issues of resilience in the co-researchers' lives. A starting point for discussion was the co-researchers' "Personal Reflection Paper" submitted for Solveiga Miezitis' course "Creativity and Wellness." I had broad questions prepared for this session, with the goal of avoiding value loaded questions, and attempting to keep them open-ended.

The second interview focussed on issues arising from the first session, with explorations and more direct attention to issues specific to each individual. The third interview incorporated feedback from the co-researcher, while testing my observations and clarifying any differences in perception. The co-researchers were actively involved in each stage and I welcomed their input. I was aware of the extremely sensitive nature of
this topic and memories and feelings it might arouse. I was prepared to discuss this with the co-researchers, and felt competent because of both personal experiences and professional training, to deal with the issues in a sensitive and supportive manner. I also recognized that where deeper issues might arise in co-researchers, they might choose to pursue a greater understanding of them from other resources, such as personal therapy or discussion with a trusted confidant. Of course, participants were free to withdraw at any time if they experienced undue anxiety or ambivalence about their involvement.

Solveiga Miezitis conducted my own interview with me. I chose to be last in the cycle for a number of reasons, one of which was scheduling, the second being that I wanted to be able to interview the co-researchers from a position of openness to the process. I had read the literature on resiliency. I was familiar with the "one key person" theory, the concept of internal characteristics and external conditions promoting resiliency. But I had not identified exactly what had contributed to my own personal resiliency. This is the stance from which I wanted to approach the women. David Hunt (1992) discusses the need for the researcher to be open to surprise, and include people in the study who are different from themselves and I think that I achieved that goal.
**Interview Questions**

The following are questions that were asked during the initial interview:

1. Describe experiences when you felt you bounced back from a setback in your life. Try to recall your earliest memory, right up to the present time. Provide examples.
2. Based on your experiences, what would you say were inner characteristics that enabled you to bounce back from those experiences? What were the circumstances surrounding the event that enabled you to bounce back from the event?
3. Was there a turning point, or moment in your life that you distinctly feel, on looking back, when your life took a completely different direction. Describe that time.

The following questions were asked during the second interview:

1. Has the process of talking about these events, or revisiting certain experiences changed your perception about what happened or the way that it happened?
2. Has the process of talking about the event changed your perception about your own role in the situation, or the role of others in the situation?

The following questions were asked during the third interview:

1. What sustains you during difficult times?
2. What would you say is the characteristic or characteristics that make you resilient?
3. What are the things around you in your life that you consider vital to encouraging your own resiliency?
Transcription of Taped Interviews

I used two tape recorders during interviews, one a battery powered tape recorder and another a plug-in. One served as a back up in case of battery or power failure, mangled tapes, or inaudible recording. In some instances, when transcribing, something that was missed on one tape was picked up on another. I personally found the management of the audio-equipment one of the most stressful aspects of data collection. In the actual interviewing process I felt competent, clear in what I was doing, and practiced in talking to people in this way. My main concern, however, was in having reliable equipment, a very important consideration in fieldwork.

A few weeks after the conclusion of each interview I began to transcribe them onto yellow legal pads. In total there was over 200 hours of longhand transcriptions from the audio tapes. During the transcription I was made increasingly aware of the realization that when we speak we only perceive a small percentage of what the person says. Communication is made up of so much more than what our actual words convey. It includes the words, tone of voice, inflection, pauses, pacing, laughter and choking up. We miss a lot of communication when we talk to each other. I also used the transcription time to check on the integrity of my own interview process-of whether I led a person to what I hoped they would say. I was able to confirm that in my questioning I gave broad choices, and I was reassured that the participant was following her own agenda within the framework of the topic and the questions. Many of the participants were very insistent on specific points they wanted to make, and worked hard to be sure I understood them.

Very early in this stage I noticed participants used a different voice when speaking about different times in their lives. The first two interviews largely involved anecdotes and recalling memories, while the last interview questions focussed on the person listing their characteristics of resiliency and supports around them that contributed to resiliency. The last interview led to an "intellectualization" of what the participants thought made them resilient. This was an issue to which I returned often. The different interviews and different voices became a basis of comparison for information gathered.

Transcribed notes were then typed on the computer verbatim. I am a fast typist, so this task went fairly quickly, but it was also served as another opportunity to go into the material. While transcribing longhand and during the typing I found myself starting to
make notes, underlining key quotes and finding commonalities between the participants. It was important to use large print and double spacing for coding and organization. I used the person's first initial and my initial to indicate the question and answer format, and recorded clearly at the top relevant information including name, date, where the interview took place, and whether it was interview number one, two or three. Each participant wanted a copy of the transcribed interview, making corrections, filling in sections that were inaudible on the tape, correcting spelling and place names, and clarifying dates. One participant wanted a copy on computer disk because it had references to her grandmother that she wanted to keep. I organized raw data in a binder for each participant including the signed release form, the interview protocol questions, the yellow legal pads of longhand transcribed notes, the typed transcriptions and any other materials or readings they gave me. I labeled the side of the binder with the participant's name.

**Reading and Coding**

I developed a method of coding data that was to prove invaluable in making it manageable when I was ready to begin writing. My method of data organization was to number each exchange chronologically on the left hand side of both the longhand transcribed notes and the typed transcripts. On the right hand column I summarized each paragraph by one or two key words or phrases. The key word or phrase summary became invaluable when I was writing and wanted to make a quick reference to a quote, or come back to it later. My reference then had a topic and a numerical place along with the interview number. I put a star on the top right or wrote a key word on the top right of a page if it was directly on topic and used the word "key" if it was directly relevant to characteristics of resiliency, or any other related topics that emerged within that framework. When writing I put large check marks over material I had used as a method of organization and to avoid duplication.

**The Creation of the Co-Researcher's Narrative from Transcripted Raw Data**

By this stage I had been over the materials a few times: 1) the actual interview, 2) transcription onto yellow legal pads, 3) typing, 4) reading 5) coding. It was summer and I
had the opportunity to use a friend's campsite up north for one week alone with no television, radio, computer or other reading materials. I took three women's interviews with me, including the yellow legal pads and typed transcriptions and additional readings. In that space I immersed myself in the interviews and background information of those three women. I really felt their presence there with me while I sat at the table listening to the birds, looking out at the lush August growth, steeping myself in their stories.

I am a daily jogger, so I began a daily routine of a morning run and swim and then sitting down to read and code one person's interview. While coding I would rough out an outline of the person's life story in chronological order, also marking the interview as such for easy reference, or recording the page numbers. I also recorded issues, themes or characteristics of resiliency, which began to emerge. The next day I would begin with the person's outline and start to write. This process continued until the week's end, and I had written drafts of three life stories. Because the electricity was unreliable, I wrote the life histories longhand on yellow legal pads. Once the details of their life were covered, I branched out into their particular methods of coping, their own components of resiliency, and a list of characteristics at the end. About three weeks later I began the process again with the last three interviews. This time I used a colleague's office, packing food and snacks for each day and going through the process of steeping myself in each co-research's material. It was important for me to be away from e-mail, telephone and other communication to have complete concentration for long periods of uninterrupted time.

Following completion of this stage I typed the interviews on the computer and submitted them to my professor for feedback. At the same time I contacted each participant advising them I had completed a draft of their life story, and we began to negotiate times to meet with each person individually.

One problem I experienced was how to stay on course with the topic of "resiliency" and not get sidetracked into the topic of "transition." I found myself listening to their stories, continually being amazed by the level of honesty and openness and surprised at how their issues resonated with my own. I found my own place within the framework of resiliency and mid-life transition by entering into the process with the women and hearing their stories.
CHAPTER THREE
STORIES OF RESILIENCE

Introduction

What can I say in preparation for the six women’s stories that follow? They are in many ways ordinary women. They have lived ordinary lives. Pulitzer prize winning author Carol Shields once stated, “It’s my life’s theme—either we’re all ordinary, or none or us are.” Yet, in so many ways these women have been called on to do extraordinary things.

In researching the topic of resiliency and through my dialogue with the co-researchers, I got to know them and consequently myself better. Our talks were intense, emotional, honest and insightful. The women displayed a level of integrity and commitment to the exploration of the topic of resiliency that was vital to this project. They trusted me and the research process with their level of disclosure and insight about their personal lives.

I believe synchronicity played a big part in our coming together with a combination of education, life experience, personal therapy and level of appropriate disclosure leading to meaningful and productive self-reflection. These women risked their intimate selves and the result was mutual growth and understanding and new friendships. Through their commitment and willingness to be vulnerable, our understanding of resilience has moved forward.

During our interviews, I wrote the word “gold” in my notes. For me, that describes the moment when a level of honest sharing occurs, a truth is achieved or revealed, a connection is made.

May the women’s stories be received with the attitude of respect and humility in which they are offered.
Laura

Laura's head lowers slightly, gray braids crowning her head, her eyes closed in concentration as she looks back over her 83 years. Like the velveteen rabbit in the famous children's tale, Laura has the patina of something well loved, eyes that shine from the heart, apple cheeks and fine, fine lines that crisscross her skin. She has a plethora of anecdotes to choose from when asked about resiliency. She is a role model to my friends and me, a surrogate grandmother who often responds with a heartfelt, "Yes, dear," or "Oh, my word!"

Family History

Born in 1915 on a southern Ontario farm, Laura is a third generation Canadian of Scottish and native Canadian ancestry, the product of the proper British Victorian manners of the time. She was three years old when her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. Her mother traveled to the United States for treatment, dying suddenly there. Relatives wanted to keep Laura in the States. On the advice of a lawyer a "kidnapping" was arranged to return her to the 350 acre farm with her father and grandparents. Shortly afterwards her father returned from a party in Toronto with a new wife, a stepmother to Laura, a woman trained as a governess, poor but proud with "upper crust Scottish old country correct manners." And Laura met her and just did not like her. Laura had to leave the big house and live in the small house where she was born. Now, instead of being taken into bed as before when she had nightmares, she screamed at being sent to an upstairs bedroom, afraid she'd suffocate behind the closed door. The door wasn't opened until she stopped screaming, and she recalls lying on the floor trying to get air from the crack under the door. Her stepmother was controlling, enforcing strict rules and her father, although loving, did not stand up to his new wife on Laura's behalf. A significant memory was being made to apologize to her stepmother when she didn't mean it. And when she went to an aunt with her "tale of woe" of feeling misunderstood, she was not consoled but told to deal with her stepmother and father directly. Trying to overcome a sense of isolation, she recalls being outside with the dog and experiencing her first sense of spirituality.
There was a presence there that was with me that was comforting and real...so that was a real helpmate. And it disappeared, but it never really left me, you know. It left, but I had a sense that I wasn't totally isolated.

Today she tries to make sense of the family influence, quoting Carl Jung: Nothing has a stronger influence psychologically on their environment and especially on their children than the unlivend life of the parent.

Creativity and Spirituality

She recalls continually feeling a sense of her innate creativity being squashed when practicing her piano lessons, presenting a landscape drawing, or singing off key. "It was a putdown. Plunk."

I escaped into books. Our sitting room was the library and of course, there were all these books and they were mostly from the 19th Century. So, here I was not knowing what in the world I was reading half the time, but I read anyway. I was forever escaping into books and I wasn't doing the dusting and so it got so—I have no doubt a lot of the time I was punished because of the reading, that I felt guilty about...Dad loved to read...everybody liked to read! But there was a proper time for it. Not when there were chores to do. So, older I really almost cut myself off from reading fiction because I could leave non-fiction much easier than I could leave fiction. I found a spot to hide out for reading. I'd go outside. Sometimes there were kids. The farm, whoever was working for Dad would have children and I'd play with them. They seemed to be boys rather than girls. But I was forever making cozy spots and drifts in the winter. Oh dear, and in the house in the middle of a woodpile.

As a somewhat sickly child she recalls the terrible flu that struck when she was young. The local doctor saw her need for a playmate and brought his daughter. Laura recalls the joy of having a friend to play fairies and "wands of the weeds" using thistles dipped in snow. Although she knew she was loved and cared for, with a base of security in never doubting her father's genuine affection, she nevertheless distinctly felt a lack of encouragement. Her spiritual experience was reinforced by family attendance at church, but she noted her aunts being the very grain of respectability, while her grandfather would squirm or perhaps even leave in disagreement. Her father had a genuine
spirituality but was not a regular church attender. But by osmosis a significant growth took place.

There was something that was a spiritual side of life that was very real. Sitting in church between grandparents and my aunt, I felt the influences of the generations and their time that they were from. I must have had a sense of myself that I give credit to those first formative years, and I give a lot of credit to whatever that spiritual experience was that I was given—and with my aunt and my grandmother, was Anglican. And we went to church, you know, regularly, and I'd sit beside my grandmother. I can remember my grandmother on one side and my grandfather on the other and I was in the middle there. Now, Dad rarely went to church. But he had a strong faith, regardless...and just sort of sitting in the pew and my grandfather was always fidgeting around and blowing his nose. And if he didn't agree with what was being said he would sort of fidget and might even walk out. But my grandmother, she was very, what was it, never dreamt of going against the grain of the respectful. But it was very meaningful to her, and somehow or other—just sitting there in church, Sunday after Sunday, I think I...and my aunt would be there too. That it was very significant, by sort of osmosis. That there was something. That there was a spiritual side to life that was very real. And I think I got that. And I go back, as I say, to Victorian times because I can remember the old dining room table and old walnut furniture and after breakfast my grandfather was supposed to do the reading of the morning prayers, you know, in the Anglican Book of Common Prayers. And I can remember kneeling down beside the chair and we had morning prayers around the table. So, you know, it was important. And Dad...they rarely went...special occasions...but we could not get him to be a churchgoer, but he got it over to me very plainly. I can remember talking about the miracles and he said something. 'If God can create something then he can heal a broken leg.' It was strong. I was given that basis, so I think I'm very grateful for that.

Love of Nature

Laura was shy, always hanging behind someone's skirts. But she loved the outdoors and recalls exploring nature with her dog by her side, "lying down in the grass and looking up at the clouds and making pictures." She was isolated but imaginative and
"loved to climb, hide away up in the trees eating apples." Helping her father lead the team in plowing and getting hay or driving the rake, being thanked for her help despite the "wobbly lines" led to a sense of being a part of something meaningful, of contributing. Other family values she recalls were a sense of "keep going. Don't give up. So there had to be a real earthquake under me before I gave in."

School and Community History

At school, Laura was a farm girl sent to school with the village children, and therefore felt like a "misfit," very aware of class distinctions. She loved learning but recalls the universal shame of not being asked to be on teams because she really could not throw!

I was completely...I was isolated...no fooling! Jean was my wonderful bosom friend from the village. It was in a farm community. And if they hadn't had property in the village I wouldn't have gone to school there. I could have gone to the country where at least there were farming kids around. But I went to the village...and whatever they did in the village I wouldn't be a part of. And Jean was my only contact and then her father died and they left. Must have left when I was about nine. That was devastating. So I was a misfit. Sutton was settled by educated English-Scottish people. So there's a class distinction there. And my grandmother was an early settler there. And the house she lived in was called the 'Manor House' and where I lived was called 'Ainslie Hill Farm.' So it's a throwback somehow or other. My father's people were Scottish-Hudson's Bay, and the great-grandfather retired there and he was well up in the Hudson Bay. There was a class division that I was aware of which made it hard too, for me.

I liked learning but there were all these upsetting things. I wouldn't have got the prize for popularity. I could hit a baseball but I could not throw! So nobody wanted me on a team. I've always liked to learn and I think another thing is that, from my experience, going through life, of this isolation in childhood, it just happened that's the way it was. That I've been very appreciative of people and being part of the group. I've appreciated friends, and being a part, because I didn't have it. So, that if you always have it then...whereas I appreciated it and continue to do so.
She grew up in the period following World War I when women and children had a subordinate role in society.

*Women were caregivers. The young, the old and sick in the family were the responsibility of women. Daughters sacrificed their careers to stay at home and take care of their parents. As a girl, I could aspire to becoming a teacher, nurse or work in an office until, hopefully, I got married. I was taught to be obedient, helpful and polite - to be a helpmate. I was to be a self-effacing, caring, supportive woman. In the 1920's or 1930's, social assistance came from families, religious institutions or volunteers. Those who applied only did so when desperate. Orphanages and poor houses took care of those who had no one and thus poured shame on inmates. To be kept by the government was demeaning. Should some tragedy happen, families depended on one another for support.*

**Early Adulthood**

As a young adult Laura first trained as a teacher in the Toronto Normal School. A memory stands out of reading with a circle of children surrounding her, when a supervisor spying them from the doorway told the students to return to their seats; an illustration of a different era in education. Unable to get work in that field, Laura later switched to nurses' training, and apprenticed and received payment of room and board, working to become a registered nurse at Toronto General Hospital.

*This was between 1935 and 1938 during the Depression and before antibiotics and wide use of drugs. We were taught that the person was made up of body, mind and spirit, that their physical health depended on their spiritual and mental health and to pay attention to those elements.*

Married in 1941 to a man she looked up to, who was university educated and employed by the government, they had three children and settled into a traditional married life in Nova Scotia. Laura ran the household and her husband doled out the family finances. She reluctantly accepted the situation, vaguely uneasy and questioning never having any money of her own; he thought that was "stupid." Her years as a family woman taught her "first of all to turn your life over to the care of God and then go forward unafraid. One foot before the other." She uses the analogy of camping as a way of handling change.
I never camped as a child or anything. On a farm, summer holidays were foreign, that was the busiest time of the year. But my husband loved camping and introduced me to camping. Living 12 years in the Maritimes, they would drive and camp and make it a holiday.

Again, he loved to get things organized, find out the campsites that had pools...and try and get in between three and four in the afternoon and we'd go for a swim and have dinner. I mean, the first year we did it with two tents, and three kids...But this constant camping...as we were travelling we did camp longer periods of time. Today, when her family expresses concern over changes or another move Laura is about to embark on, her response is often: Oh, it's just another campsite. Change is just another campsite. You fix it up as best you can to make it home and it's a short time or a long time and on you go to another campsite.

Paid Employment

In 1972, with one child at home and attending university, the other two not yet out of high school, after 30 years of marriage, her husband died suddenly.

Things have happened so suddenly in my life; just bingo. One day things were as usual and the next day my husband had died.

Never having had paid employment during her marriage Laura explains it was "all so sudden." She needed money, and received her Nova Scotia pension but no Canada Pension. But I needed this extra, and it never came through and it never came through. So, it gave me, again, a push up. I've got to have some more money. So I went searching for a job.

Laura had taught Sunday school at "old St. Paul's" and knew one of the kids was the daughter of a psychiatrist. So she got to know him. His wife was a diabetic and Laura saved magazines to give her to take to her work at the Nova Scotia psychiatric hospital. "So I took my magazines and I told her I wanted...needed...some work." The woman told Laura that Dr. Smith was only part-time at the hospital, but was opening an office part-time. And his current receptionist was not very satisfactory. "The next day he phoned and so there I was. That gave me tremendous satisfaction. That I managed to do it. Managed to find myself a job." And she received her Canada Pension. Knowing nothing
about the job, she made mistakes; these were pre-computer days. Laura laughs at the memory of a man from the government coming and finding mistakes on all the catalogued Nova Scotia insurance cards, "the whole pike of them. So live and learn. But it gave me great satisfaction, what I did. I could manage." Eventually the job ran out, but there were bigger challenges yet to come in the spiral of her life.

**University Studies**

Her daughter, a university student at the time, talked her into taking a non-credit university course. "*Our World. Just for women. And it was just great.*" This was 1973, when Women's Studies was not yet a discipline, and women came and joined their discussion, their children tucked away in day-care. And through that Laura got interested in taking more university courses. At 57 she took her first credit course, "Perspectives on Women" with input from all the disciplines: history, anthropology, science, and psychology. Then she had to pick a major subject.

"*We had to zero in on something, and I had nothing to zero in on! So, I could choose between religious studies and political science. And political science sounded ghastly. So I did a general B.A. Such a struggle. Anyway, I passed somehow. I kept on. And it was very satisfying. So.*" Nine years later, in 1982 at the age of 66 the local paper ran a story of Laura "finally graduating" with her BA. Her son smiles proudly today as he says, "Mom and I took a course together. We were in the same class."

**Osteoporosis**

Laura is a small woman, petite in build and fair complexioned—a prime candidate for osteoporosis. She had had bouts of severe anemia. In mid-life her severe back pain was diagnosed as sciatica, and she experienced the powerlessness of being bedridden while the household continued without her, for the first time in her life the sense that there was absolutely nothing she could do. In retrospect she now feels that was a first warning of what would later develop into osteoporosis. Doctors have since found discs in her back, which are completely fused. At that time her bones started breaking. It was a gradual thing: her baby finger, her wrist, and her arm. With her shoulder broken, her son
wrapped her up with her coat on backwards, stuffing her into the car like a rag doll so she would not miss a university class.

Again she talks about "the speed with which things happen." Her son Tom had just returned from a conference in Europe and he had a cold. While he rested on the couch she went out back for a walk with the dog. She describes the setting as "Nova Scotia woods. Rough. Real woods-not like Ontario woods." She walked along a path, up into an area called the barrens, and climbed a hill. The sun was setting. She looked down over Bedford and the basin beyond, throwing sticks for the dog. Underfoot the Nova Scotia granite had a light covering of gravel, and she lost her balance and fell.

And there I was. I tried to raise this leg. Hurt like fury. Wouldn't move. I knew. You know. Once you've broken a bone you know...it was up in my hip. And there was nothing I could do. Not a darn thing.

It got colder and still she couldn't move. "Beautiful sunset. I've never seen such a sunset. I was on top of the world." She knew her son would come eventually, but when? She waited about an hour, totally helpless.

Because there's nothing you can do. Absolutely nothing you can do. It's getting cold and it's getting dark and there you are. So I kept on saying the prayer from Norman Vincent Peale: 'God is always with me. He loves me. I can trust Him. I'll do my best to not be afraid' and trying to...kept turning away from my fear. Physically I could do absolutely nothing. I got my body straightened out, so that lessened the pain. And Tom was there. Every time when I've been faced with extremes, help has always come. The biggy is not to get swallowed up by the fear. And that's where I say 'let go and let God.'

Her son found her, ran back for an ambulance, and the vehicle, of course, couldn't get in with all the trees. So there was a stretcher and lights strung everywhere. An hour's wait at the hospital. Broke her hip. Surgery. Surgeons had to do a hip replacement. Now Laura adds "mobility" to her list of things she appreciates in life. "I was not mobile. Plunk."

She remembers her sense of vulnerability of being an old woman in the hospital, of having to assert herself. When they were wheeling her up with the intent of x-raying on her right knee, how the nurse wouldn't listen when Laura insisted there was nothing wrong with her knee, the injury had been to her left hip.
On an emotional level, she talks about osteoporosis as being bent double with other people's issues. She remembers times of going to her aunt for solace. "When I told her all my complaints, she said, 'Don't come to me, go to your parents.' That was very devastating to me because that says that I couldn't go to anybody else. I had to keep it all to myself and I think that carried an awful lot of weight." When she has the feeling of not being her "authentic self," it triggers childhood memories of having to apologize to her stepmother, and her father would beg her to apologize when she didn't really mean it.

That was part of the way of agreeing. Cause I'd hold out and hold out and then Dad would come to me and say, 'She feels so badly, just go up and say you're sorry.' This was always the thing she wanted me to say. And so I'd give in to him. But it's not being the authentic self. And so it went that way. And then being very much a part of the...brought up in a culture where women were to serve; we were the second class citizens. Although, that's not fair exactly in a farming community, because there was great respect, but there were separate roles. Still and all the men had the power. So I continued to be conditioned...then training of course, the doctors were 'lords of creation.' You got up on your feet when they came in and you held the doors open when they left. We were very drilled in hierarchy. And the head nurses were the priority, and you were the lowest of the low and stood back for everybody. So, all along the way...and then when I was married, again, the same thing. My husband was under the same thing where the man was the...yet, he wasn't autocratic and so forth...but he's still of the school...Still I was conforming, conforming, conforming, and ah...that fine line...and I can't say I've found it yet. But how to be authentic and be compassionate of others but don't take their burdens on my back. How to distinguish, because everything told me that's just what I did...what I should do...

Family Conflict

At 78 Laura and her son had lived together for some time in Gloucester, outside of Ottawa, sharing household expenses and chores, a comfortable partnership that worked for them both. Laura had given psychological support while Tom finished his master's degree, and now he had a responsible job.
We jointly owned the house. We had a joint bank account, and he had a new job. A responsible job for the first time after many years of being a student with bartending and garage and all the rest of it, to fill in. And then we shared the upkeep. I had osteoporosis and broke my hip in '85 I think it was, in Bedford, and had to have an artificial hip, after four breaks before that. So, Tom was always concerned that I would fall again. And I had the only car but we shared it. Well, then he got involved with a married woman who had left her marriage... a mother of two children, and I think one was four, the little girl was four I think at the time, and the boy was nine. She couldn't support herself and left the marriage very suddenly and had no place to go and was frightened of being alone and so I agreed to her coming in—it seemed only right... what was she going to do? But that produced a situation that I could not live with. She took over and she had written me beforehand, and when she was using 'we' she meant Tom and she, that I was to come to them if things weren't going right. I blew up more or less. So I went and spoke to her. Not blowing up, but told her that this would not work. That the only way it would work would be if somehow—three of us, as three adults and two children—could work out how we were going to manage.

She talks about "turning points" and the "moment of decision" as the key to the unfolding of this ongoing story. With tension in the household and Laura feeling displaced, her son suggested they all see a well-recommended family systems therapist. Laura acknowledged the differences among the generations, the difficulty with having to do things differently from the way they'd always been done. She felt that as a family they should try to negotiate, accommodate, and manage as best they could. She remembers her feelings.

What's the use. Nobody understands. I just have to put up with the situation. I also became aware that I had felt this way before. Where did it come from? After puzzling and praying I remembered my childhood, my ongoing battles with my stepmother, my father coaxing me until finally I conformed, saying I was sorry when I did not feel it, just for the sake of peace.

During the therapy session Laura, feeling "an implication that my life was one of dependency," expressed her views that the therapist was ageist and sexist, her anger finally fueling her uncharacteristic outspokenness. "I cannot remember a time in my life
when I have been so angry. I found my voice." She was furious enough to make plans to leave. "So, to get me to move it seemed you had to get me really mad."

I had a sense of myself that wasn't squished. That was a key point. That made me decide 'I have to do something.' I know too that I can't afford to get too uptight and upset. The first thing you know I'll fall and I'll break bones. That's sort of a basic. I know I can't afford it.

**Turning Point**

Doors opened and by a series of synchronous steps she ended up in Toronto. Her life changed in unimaginable ways: living in her own apartment, doing volunteer hospital work, taking courses, riding the subway, joining groups, meeting new friends of all ages. Tension with Liz continues. She says if she had not had the exposure to university, with feminist studies, the whole episode with Liz would have snowed her under. She tries to see beyond, "older women need to have that." She knows there is something unfinished there—the learning spiral. Significantly, another conflict erupted after one of our interviews. Laura knows she's handling the situation better because she's focussing more on her own reactions. "It's not what the other person does. It's how I react to it. And I can't let go until I become conscious of what I do. And I'm getting clearer." She is beginning to lose interest in the struggle. "I'm tired. It's boring. Yes, I've lost interest. Well, when I've lost interest, I've surely moved." In relationship systems theory, when one person moves, the other will predictably react with a countermove. The last time Laura visited Ottawa, Liz had left a friendly note for her, a sign of movement on her part as well. Laura recalls a symbolically significant dream with an image of a snake shedding it's skin. Using writings of Jungian psychoanalyst Marion Woodman (1985) she interpreted it as a message that "emotion is the carrier of consciousness." In the dream she was the grandmother, which she interpreted as standing for "birth, growth, death and resurrection" according to her studies of psychosynthesis by Robert Assagioli (1965). Laura says she had to get in touch with her shadow side, accepting "the ugliness of friction and the grief of loss to a movement toward regeneration and self-actualization."
Recurring Themes-The Spiral

Laura's recurring issues center round being part of a culture where women were second class citizens. In farming communities where she grew up, older women were respected and loved, the younger women looking after them. While men held the power, women had a place in the community. They were survivors and had stories to tell of their struggles.

It saddens me. So much lived experience is buried with the old women. Today, I believe our voices need to be heard. We have lived through incredible changes and we have survived. We need to pass on our strengths and weaknesses.

The spiral continues as a current event may trigger something from the past to resurface: her childhood home with its ghosts and echoes, her feeling of displacement when her stepmother arrived, all repeated, seventy years later with Liz.

I always have the feeling, 'Oh good. Now I'm through with that. No more.' And then, bingo. There you go again. I can see it's constantly being aware of my own reactions and then I can see whether it's helpful or a great hindrance. It's usually a great hindrance.

Aging

Laura's study of Robert Kegan's (1994) life stages theory has given her a renewed appreciation of being old, that she is still growing and changing with a need to live in the present.

Who I am has no age. Everybody, I think, is at different stages. You go through stages, phases, whatever, and I'm at a stage of being old. I'm not middle aged, and I've gone beyond that...because...being over 80. I don't look at things the same way that I did, and I think that is a key thing.

She now has a more realistic view of her late husband, though a university graduate with a good job he didn't know it all-and the danger of evaluating yourself against another's standards. "I think I'm finally learning. They're on their journey. I'm on mine. I've moved. It's a waste of time. Just a plain waste of time." Asked how do you know you've moved, Laura answers, "To me it's like putting on another pair of glasses."
Laura likes the image of the phoenix rising from the ashes that she found in a Jungian dream dictionary. Today she takes pride in her new way of life, in managing little day-to-day things: doing the dishes, managing her money, getting lost on the subway— all relative to the phase you're in. She acknowledges not having the energy she used to, praising spiritual teacher Ram Das (1980) for validating less guilt around that issue. So she prioritizes, while managing her guilt about not doing more, comparing herself to some who push too hard and then have no energy left for themselves. "I think there's different challenges at different stages. When we're old it's a going inward to find more meaning and share it. You have to reach a balance between being involved and having time for yourself." She prizes her mobility and independence, constantly doing something to optimize it: exercise, acupuncture, sacro-cranial message, and positive attitude. "We're body, mind and spirit and boy one of them falls by the wayside and you go down." She has a new awareness and ability to choose which she credits to the result of Jesus' teachings and prayer defined as "loving intentionality." She would never have these insights if she did not work at it continually, "day by day by day by day in whatever way, trying to let go and let God, and reading and meditation and so forth."

**Personal Meaning**

It is an important contention of Laura's that we need meaning in our lives. "And that's very basic to resiliency, because if there's no meaning then we give up." She feels meaning has come for her from growing up with Christian values, her enjoyment of reading, that she is philosophical with a need to search for deeper meanings. The key for her is seeing life as a gift, to become conscious of the divine and not get caught up in the competitive, materialistic world, to become conscious of a different ethic and live out of that. "For whatever reason, I've known I had to search for the spiritual. It's sort of a part of me. That's basic to me. Why and wherefore I don't know. Nature is part of the spiral. If you take the awe out of nature you're left with nothing but the materialistic world." Her childhood lessons caused what she interprets as an inward rebellion. She now strives for authenticity and forgiveness.
Forgiveness

I don't know why, what's behind the other person that's projecting all these things, these misdemeanors on me. I don't know why they're dumping all this. I can think of various triggers, but forgiveness to me means that I...well Jesus was the epitome, 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do.' It's no help to them, no help to me, even if I don't say anything, to battle mentally with them. I can just as soon try and become aware of whatever I've contributed.

Forgive myself for getting in this state and then go forward to do whatever seems to be important, and the underlying belief that I have to let go. The higher self that I have tried to connect with God will guide me and whatever I'm doing will be positive, not negative.

Before I let go I have to know what I've contributed and acknowledge it. And it's becoming conscious of my interaction, but taking responsibility for mine, and letting go and let them take responsibility for theirs, and somehow doing so with compassion, that they are on their path. If they don't solve it now they're going to go around and struggle with it.

That comes from the second step of AA, 'Turn your will and your life over to the care of God as you understood Him.' First step; recognize you're powerless. And recognizing I'm powerless fits in with recognizing that I'm in the grip of fear, and then praying as best I can, which is turning my back on fear mentally. So when I turn my back on fear I'm letting go of the fear. And that to me is forgiveness.

Laura illustrates with a quote from The Creation of Health by Norman Shealy and Caroline Myss (1988), among her wide range of current reading. "Depression is an overwhelming reaction to fear in which we allow ourselves to feel unworthy or so afraid that we give in to what Freud called the 'death wish.'"

Teaching and Learning

Laura has tremendous respect for teaching and the value of learning, feeling it is the basis of her spirituality. "It gives me great pleasure if I find something meaningful and I'm able to share it with somebody else and then sort of see a brightening of their eyes. You know, 'Oh.' That sort of interaction that means that they got the idea. I enjoy
that. And I think that gives me resiliency." She gains strength from affirmations she's learned and repeats, such as the Bible quote, "We are not born of the spirit, for God did not give us the spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self-control. (2 Timothy 1:7)" or Norman Vincent Peale's (1987) "God is always with me. He loves me. I can trust him. I'll do my best to not be afraid."

I'm in contact with people whose problems have been so severe. So in endeavoring to be of assistance, and trying to stay open, in giving I've received an awful lot. But just asking the other person to give to me hasn't been easy and still isn't. But it's in trying to give I get back far more than I ever gave, and it will come back to me. To get I have to give; that's abundance. You first have to give before you can get. It's the principle of universal love, to love God and your neighbor as yourself will move you beyond isolation. And somehow after the comeback's made and so forth, I can have fun with the silliness of things. They seem so awful and when you look at them more carefully they can be ridiculous at the time.

Laura's childhood experience of going to her aunt for help and being turned down has stayed with her. It made it difficult for her to reach out and be a part of the group.

So I learned, unfortunately, that I wasn't to ask for help. I had to do it myself. In various groups I've been in, we had the give and take and in that way I overcame this old prohibition that I wasn't to ask for help. That's one reason I found groups so great, because I could say where I was coming from and I could ask for help when I heard how other people responded. And we could laugh at ourselves...but it had to be in a group session somehow or other for me to overcome the old taboo. I'd sooner not ask because to ask for help and have somebody trivialize my request or say they didn't understand, or give me the feeling that I was taking up their time, and they were busy or something. I'd sooner not risk that. Sort of the skin is tender from the pain of that in childhood.

Meditation

"I'm learning more about meditation and that is tremendously helpful. I have to quiet myself, my fears." The last three years she has participated in a week long workshop on psychosynthesis, gaining energy and empowerment from being part of a group, and the learning that combines spirituality and becoming consciously aware.
Taking Action

I have to take responsibility before I can take action. If you had to stop and think which foot to put before the other, you'd never get any distance. I chuckled away over that one and thought 'That's sound.' When you recognize what you're in is a blue funk, and then you pray as best you can at the moment, then you have to put one foot before the other. Do something. And it may not be anything more spectacular than getting the dishes done, or the shopping which you've put off, or making that phone call, or writing that letter, or paying some bills, or something. You have to do something. And keep on doing something. And pretty soon you find you've moved.

Volunteer Work

Laura volunteers at Toronto General Hospital, where she trained so many years ago as a nurse—another curve on the spiral. Visiting under the auspices of the United Church chaplaincy, she tells patients she's "an old nurse" in an effort to put them at their ease. Trying to go two days a week, she observes changes in health care from the days when she was in nursing. She was trained to take time to care, by valuing the individual, listening to their stories, and giving messages.

There was a sense that the person was more than just the body, and that has to do with resiliency. There was a different sense of the person. We had prayers in the morning. This was God's work, to care for people. We helped people recover by trying to care for their body, mind and spirit.

Today she finds Toronto Hospital full of lonely people, far from home for world class treatment, with families unable to afford the journey. Nurses clip in and out, with computers taking over where human warmth is needed. Why does she do it? She knows what it's like to be hurt and immobilized, dependant, alone, lonely...and she laughingly tells of the specter of her "old director of nursing who got the Order of the British Empire and knew...or met Florence Nightingale looming in my mind. And I am mentally saying,' I don't think I can face them in the next world if I don't go forward!'" Day to day she has a sense of just doing the best she can, the enormous burden of it, of being all alone. But Laura's eyes sparkle when she describes what it's like on the rare, special days when she
has a sense she's reached someone, to hear someone say, "It's just wonderful you've come in."

Life is a journey. We're here to learn and the lessons keep coming. My lesson is how to take criticisms and putdowns, to take responsibility but don't assume it all and emerge without fermenting massive resentment, anger, and fear inside me.

A Prayer
God is my help in this my need.
God does my every hunger feed.
God dwells within me, guides my way
Through every moment night and day.
God is my health, I can't be sick
God is my strength, unfailing, quick.
God is my all; I know no fear,
Since God and love and truth are here.
I now am wise. I now am true,
Patient kind and loving too.
All things I am can do and be,
Through Christ the truth that is in me.

(Anonymous)
Leila

Leila has it all: education, good career, a solid, loving marriage, close family ties, a nice home and seemingly the ability to achieve anything she puts her mind to. It is early November and I am in Leila's family room in a home filled with photos of her and Rob in-line skating, at a wedding, holding the kids, the dog. Leila is blond, petite and articulate. I sense her mind racing ahead as she expresses herself with emotional intensity, prefacing important points with, "You know what?" She is struck by her own clear memory of key points in her life. While her two daughters are napping she fills our mugs from a big pot of herbal tea and talks about "the really black time" that was infertility.

**Family History**

Leila is from Calgary, Alberta, the middle child of three girls, her father a United Church minister. Her mother is a social worker and daughter of a minister. Leila recalls a home where she felt very loved, a very warm family, "they absolutely adored us kids" but at the same time being affected by the expectations that went with having a high profile in the community. Her parents' energy, in addition to the family, was focussed on other people and large world and community issues.

As a youngster Leila had an independent spirit and says she "always felt like my own person" and would do her own thing, maybe feeling she couldn't live up to an older sister who was a leader and model student. Leila describes her relationship to her mother during those years as "conflictual" and perhaps loving too much. She recalls blowups in her early years that were, for her, significant crises with fears of "is she still going to love me?" She would go to her room to write these notes and float them down from the stairs "I love you. I'm sorry, " and later the physical sensation of learning to control her temper. "I realized that I could stop myself from having one of these blowups."

A neighbor mom, Susie, offered time and unconditional acceptance, and Leila remembers her "just sitting rocking me in the living room because I just needed a hug." "Mumsie." as Leila called her, would become a significant mentor to her, who would
raise a child who was adopted and named after Leila. But as a teenager Leila had significant self-esteem issues, and rocked the family with her adolescent rebellion, "wrong crowd, drugs, drinking," and lack of commitment to school. Looking back at this time in the late 1970's, she realizes her parents had their own mid-life issues, that some of it was normal teenage experimentation, but in her middle class home it loomed larger. She describes her feelings as "struggling to be heard and to be understood, and I didn't feel like anybody was really listening."

She acknowledges the solid home she was testing. "Both Mom and Dad were determined not to give up on me. But I was most confrontational with my Mom. I remember screaming at her, 'Fuck you! I hate your guts!' And she'd say, 'Well, I love you and I'm never going to stop loving you,' when we were in one of our confrontations."

Leila was drifting through grade 11 and hating it, with plans to change schools against her parents' wishes. That summer her older sister was getting ready to go away to university. It had a powerful impact on Leila to see her Mom come alive in her plans and support, shopping trips, the trunk in the living room where she secretly added packages for Cassandra's life in residence. Leila chokes up today with the memory. On a drive one day with her sister she said, "You're so lucky. I'll never be able to do what you're doing." Her sister stopped the car and confronted her. "You are so smart. You are letting this...your pride or whatever get in your way. You're taking this too far. You're just as smart as me. You should be doing it for yourself, you know. Think about yourself. What do you want to do? If you want to go away to university you can do it. It's not too late."

Leila recalls the turning point. She switched to academic courses for grade 12, having to ask every teacher for special entry, although they were reluctant given her reputation. She announced her plans for university at the dinner table while her parents quietly ate their dinners, hoping not to interrupt the welcome change of plans. She got a schedule, never missed classes, sat at the front, cut back her time with her friends and ended up with honors, the top of her class. She renewed her church involvement, running the youth group and going to confirmation. It had been a major stand when she had not been confirmed with her sisters a few years earlier. She genuinely felt good. She had renewed respect and was an inspiration and role model for her peers. But she recognizes now that part of the motivation was that her concept of "self" was tied up with deeds or
what one did—who you are as opposed to what you do defining you as a person—an issue that would rear up later in life around her infertility.

**Young Adulthood**

At university she made a fresh start, different friends and met the man who would be her husband six years later. The family tradition continued: Leila attended the same faculty as her mother and where her parents met years ago.

_I had a real sense of doing the right thing now. I felt as if I'd spent most of my life not doing the right thing and finally I'd made some big decisions and I had a sense of self-confidence I'd never felt in my life before, basically. And I really felt I'd done it on my own. I made the decisions when I was ready. I sort of proved to everybody that the "bad seed" minister's daughter...rebellious...who wasn't going to live up to anybody's expectations really...had the ability to, as a 17 or 18 year old, make decisions and turn my life around._

She describes her own internal movement prior to her sister's confrontation—that she really was at a crossroads.

_I think I was building up to it. I started to think, 'Am I going to be sitting around Sue's...can't even remember her last name...basement in ten years? Is this where I want to be for the rest of my life?' I think I really was brought up with a really broad vision of the world. We always had visitors and it was a really interesting family life. So my model had always been that we were so privileged to be in this family that had so many opportunities, a very broad perspective on life and interesting people and places. I was starting to feel like...wow...just living for the moment and the next party, is that really what it's all about? But...once you get yourself into that mode, how do you get yourself out? Because you start to become defined by that..._ 

She also describes her parents' pulling back and giving her space as further impetus to make her own decisions.

At university, Leila's life turned around. She utilized the overcoming of her adolescent crisis as a theme, filtering and interpreting her studies at university back to this triumph. "I had this naïve perception that, well, 'You've gone through one bad thing in your life and you've come through it. You're just going to sail through.'"
Infertility

A consistent thread running through Leila's life was her love of children. She always loved kids, felt especially gifted in working with them and it was always an area of natural ability and self-confidence for her. "And Rob was a very family oriented person and I was going to become and teacher and, you know, this was going to be great. So we got married."

Teaching jobs were scarce, but by knocking on 96 principals' doors Leila landed a job while Rob started his MBA. "Which was absolutely incredible. But again this whole theme of, you're on top of the world. If you just work hard enough no matter what, you can succeed and get what you want, and help people along the way—it was interactive—and life would be wonderful." After moving to Toronto and starting to get established, Rob approached her with his pencilled time-line of when they would start a family. But the first year Leila went off of the pill was a cycle of ups and downs, charting, recording her temperature. "My life got very 'me' focussed all of a sudden." Medical interventions and more tests, a diagnosis of a hormone imbalance, drugs to regulate hormones... "it was just this incredible cycle of hope and disappointment." At 27 Leila had exploratory surgery revealing endometriosis. The disease does not always lead to total infertility. For Leila it did.

*I was really young for the infertility world.*

Leila wrote about her experiences. "Over the next couple of years I mustered all the optimism I could to face what seemed like endless operations, fertility treatments, and monthly cycles of incredible hope followed by devastating disappointment. The personal, hidden nature of the losses associated with infertility made this time extremely difficult to endure. As a passage from my journal at that time describes 'the infertility takes over and is central to my thoughts. I can't make other things genuinely important.'"

Over the course of the next two or three years it became an increasingly real crisis in her life. She didn't know how to cope. She didn't know who to talk to. "I felt vulnerable. I felt like a failure. I didn't want anybody to know that I was so incompetent, that I couldn't do this thing that everybody else could do naturally. Because it was so important to me I was increasingly... my whole sense of who I was was just falling apart."
I didn’t have any model. The model in my family was, ‘You buck up and you carry on.’ And so that’s what I tried to do.”

Leila questioned the traditional Christian work ethic. "If I was such a good person, and so competent and such a hard worker, I was supposed to get whatever I wanted in life. Why wasn’t it working for me?" She describes this as a "really black time for me."

“I absolutely couldn’t cope anymore. I remember seeing myself in this black pit, like way down in the bottom and there was no way out. I just felt complete despair." Yet she kept up the façade at the infertility clinic of 'Miss Competent,' 'The Cheerful One,' learning all the nurses' names, ever the optimist. She had so much in her life, her childhood tapes told her to be grateful, but the feelings of despair persisted. She feels things more intensely than the average person with a need to process on a deep level. At this time she was teaching young children, unable to cope with parents' day-to-day worries about seemingly little things, wanting to scream at them, "But you've got kids."

Turning Point

Again a crossroads, a turning point, a moment of decision. Arriving home from teaching, she filled the bathtub, beside herself sobbing with grief that was almost out of control. A phone call to her mother who suggested perhaps Leila should talk to someone "outside the family." It was the third such suggestion, the first from an older woman friend she'd met at a board of education workshop, the second from her younger sister.

"I literally couldn’t cope. It took me so much energy to get through the day, that I’d come and I would literally fall apart." She had been to Infertility Awareness Association of Canada (IAAC) meetings and as a coping mechanism had become a member of this or that committee, keeping up the 'perky, I can handle this' image at all costs. But the group process was working. By listening to others' stories she was working through some of her own issues and she had read the literature. That’s where she got a referral for therapy; that made all the difference for her.

That phone call and the subsequent process of grieving and healing changed the course of my life and, perhaps more importantly, changed the way I view myself and the way I interact with the world around me. I'm a completely different person now than
prior to that. The infertility was the thing that drew me into therapy, but it really got me dealing with a lot of the issues that were really leftover issues from the whole rest of my life.

Leila felt she was facing a crossroads in her marriage until one day in the car, she apologized to Rob for her inability to conceive and suggested that he should have married someone else, someone with whom he could have children. His reply was, "If we can't have kids then it's our problem, it's not your problem. I don't want to have kids with someone else." He continued to struggle with the situation in his own way, being supportive, joining the IAAC group, but questioned Leila's need for and the high cost of her intensive therapy. Leila replied that although she did not need him to take part, "You know what? I'm feeling better about this and I'm working through my feelings and if this is what I need, then you need to support me one hundred per cent. You don't have to get on board with the jargon and all the talk with me. I don't need that. But I need you to know that this is helping me to be able to live my life."

Over time they each came to terms with what their loss meant. "It's a chronic loss. It's a loss that we will live with our whole lives. And yet, it's a loss that if you come to terms with it, then you do live with it." In writing about the issue she quoted Patricia's Johnson's "Adopting After Infertility" (1992).

Infertility is an experience which involves multiple losses, each with its own degree of significance. These include: control over many aspects of life, individual genetic continuity linking past and future, the joint conception of a child with one's life partner, the physical satisfaction of pregnancy and birth, the emotional gratification of pregnancy and birth, and the opportunity to parent.

In working through these issues individually and with her husband over a period of time it became increasingly evident that the most significant loss for them was the loss of the opportunity to parent.

It didn't really bother me that I couldn't produce, pass on my genes, or the joint creation of a baby. That wasn't it. It wasn't that. I really wanted to be a' mom.' I really wanted to live in a family life kind of way.

Leila had had three invitro-fertilization (IVF) attempts. By the last one, while being wheeled into recovery, she was ready to concede, telling her husband, "You know
what? This is the end of the road. I'm not going to do this anymore." They agreed to start the adoption process. Then, travelling to visit her sister over Christmas she was greeted with the news they were expecting their first child. "I wanted the floor to open up and fall back to Toronto. I felt it was the hugest injustice of all time. They hadn't been married as long, they hadn't been trying as long." Leila appreciates their sensitivity in how they told her, and the fact that they could all cry together. When her nephew was born she toasted him with wine at her younger sister's house, making calls together with well wishes from "Aunt Samantha and Aunt Leila." Then, less than a week later Leila and Rob received a call that they'd been chosen by a birth mother. Natalia was born two days later. The two cousins are nine days apart. Leila wrote about her feelings of getting Natalia when she was five days old.

On July 23, 1994 the words, 'You have been chosen by a birth mother' symbolized the end of one long journey and the beginning of another. From the moment I saw our newborn daughter I knew that we were all meant to be together. I lived for a long time (and still do to a certain extent) in a state of complete disbelief that our life could be so wonderful, so blessed, so full of feeling. And then sixteen months later, the joy of being chosen by another set of birth parents—a sister for Natalia and a completed family for us. The poignant experience of meeting the birth parents, of sharing tears and dreams and laughter. The afternoon when they brought 'our' (all of our) baby to us. The moment when Maria handed me our new daughter and said, 'Here you are, Mom.' The recognition that my world and my soul will never be the same. She described the first year as one of complete bliss.

Today Leila says, "It had to happen the way it happened. I don't think it would have happened if I hadn't worked through it and been ready."

I say to her, "And now you're a family." She softly answers, "Yes."

Therapy

Leila describes going into therapy as "absolutely huge for me. Having somebody completely outside of my world that only knew me in that situation that was there for me. That was incredible. That was such a big move for me." And "I'm a completely different person because of that experience. I think I did the work, but I think she was the right
person to ask the right questions and to support me through the personal change. For me, therapy was really like a safe testing ground and now I have more self-confidence." At first Leila felt a personal stigma against therapy that had to do with seeing herself as the healer of others. It was a failure, a sense of "Oh, I can't cope with my life, and I'm supposed to be this competent person who can always be here for others and that kind of thing. And I think that there was also a real message that I had to not dwell on your problems, that you should be there for others. So don't dwell on your problems."

Leila talks about the turning point of making a decision, recognizing that there had been a process that moved her along so there was no other choice. "And there was also a moment when I first started going to see the therapist that I realized, 'I'm going to go for this. I am going to really tell the truth and I'm going to be vulnerable.' And that was the huge turning point for me. I still remember how I was sitting, I remember the day, and I remember saying in my mind, 'You know what? I gotta do this. It's a survival thing.' But I also would have known how to go in and give the right answers and maintain control and not tell the truth in how I was feeling inside. I could have done that, and I chose not to. I'm glad I chose not to."

Issues she's faced in therapy included absolutes-dichotomous thinking of right-wrong and good-bad, being a caretaker, selflessness, issues of control, and role expectations, "the kind of person I was supposed to be versus what I was feeling, the correct way to live your life is to be selfless. You don't wallow. If you can't get pregnant you don't wallow in it. You just carry on."

The ability to challenge these things about myself in therapy that didn't work for me, but I was doing them because I felt that to be a good person meant that's what I had to do. And it took so much energy to face those things.

Giving myself permission to let some of these roles and expectations go. It changes the way I perceive my life, my world. It's freeing. It's exciting to me. I've opened my heart and mind and the direction of my life in a way that I think is going to be this really enriching journey. Instead of feeling like I'm constrained by how I'm supposed to be, and making other people happy, and in allowing myself to feel some of these things, it's freeing.
She recalls answering her therapist's questions of why she felt she had to do certain things and what would happen if she stopped the "shoulds."

But if I don't do all these things, then who am I going to be? It was a shift from being a compilation of all the roles that you are. If you busy yourself with these roles, and doing good and being there for other people, and being competent and making your lists, and being the leader of this group or the organizer of that group, if I give all that up, then who am I? And it was the most scary feeling in the world. Who am I going to be? And the answer is, 'You know what? You don't know, but you've gotta go down that path in order to find out.'

Family Issues

She talks about change and how it affects the "dance" with other people, when "we're not willing to play the game anymore." Most importantly, Leila has recognized the need to feel comfortable in the process of renegotiating the boundaries of a relationship with someone she loves so much. Leila shared her sense of vulnerability in moving outside the confines of therapy to talk with me about her family of origin, the need for authenticity and truth. We discussed the subjective reality within families and her entitlement to her own truth. Liela's goal is "to be confident with 'who I am' as separate from my family value system." Increasingly, she sees her adolescent rebellion as part of a family systems dynamic, that she was acting out some role within that structure, while her parents coped with their own mid-life stresses.

In some ways this issue is more difficult for her than infertility. It's scary for her to break the rules and talk about these things in therapy, let alone in this context. Along with therapy she's keenly immersed in Kegan's theories of life stages and the need for conscious awareness. She's committed to being authentic, getting at her own truth, to being aware, to having integrity.

Leila feels she would not have been a good parent if she had not been pushed to work through some of these things, but would have continued old patterns. Now, instead of knowing something in her head, she says she's really starting to know in her heart that unless you're there for yourself, you can't be there for other people in a genuine way. She's more selective of friendships, prioritizing a few people with whom she can be
herself, with strengths and vulnerability. As a family they prioritize how they spend time together. Her support network today includes her husband, described as "a huge, stable force...we're very different in a lot of ways but I need the balance," her therapist, her parents, her two sisters and friends. "I need people."

**Faith**

Leila discussed her faith journey, firstly in the context of growing up as a minister's daughter, and secondly in dealing within infertility. She rebelled against religion and faith in God in adolescence. She made a huge statement in not being confirmed along with her sisters. She ran her church youth group with a real sense of mission to reach the young people in the congregation. That was a time for her of a real sense of connection with God and spirituality. In her marriage she attended church, joined committees but again found her faith tested during her infertility crisis describing that time as feeling "completely alone."

*I felt completely abandoned by God. That is exactly how I felt. I felt like that poem where it says, 'The footprints in the sand, and when there's only one set I'm carrying you.' I just thought that was the biggest bunch of bullshit in the world. That's what I thought. How dare anybody have the nerve to have brought me up with this idea about God and faith and love and forgiveness and holding and being there, and it's not true. That's how I felt. I felt completely alone on a lot of levels. I felt that I'd been set up to be this good Christian which then left me more alone because I didn't even have people in the world to support me, let alone God.

It was in therapy that Leila had the space and security to question her beliefs and find her own identity. "That's why I had to go through that dark time, and that questioning time. Because if I hadn't I wouldn't be where I am now. Which is a better place." She believes in God or a "Higher Power" and is questioning the social construction of how that works in organized religion. She maintains that even in her bleakest moments of the infertility crisis she did not lose all hope, still maintaining an ability, albeit faint, to reach out and not giving up, knowing somehow there had to be a way through. She recalls her relief reading, "Dear Barbara, Dear Lynne" a correspondence between two women going through infertility (Shulgold & Siporia,
1992), her identification, feeling that she wasn't alone, that she wasn't crazy, that her feelings were appropriate. And although she felt abandoned by God, church and religion, unconsciously she must have felt some hope and "that we are not alone. Those kinds of ideals had to have been within me, even if they weren't conscious, because I remember...it never occurred to me to give up. That was not the issue. It was, 'What am I going to do?' Not, 'I'm not going to do anything.' It was more that I needed to hit bottom to be able to say, 'You know what? Okay, I can't cope anymore. I need some help. I need to reach out.'"

Now Leila attends church with her children but is questioning once again. "And doing this kind of reading and thinking and working through is almost a more profoundly spiritual experience for me right now, than the experience of thinking about God and Jesus Christ." She describes an "up-down" faith. "When I look back on my experience...I believe in God. I mean I believe that this journey that I'm on is bigger than me. There's an untouchable quality about the process and the journey that I'm gaining this real sense that everything happens for a reason."

"So, I'm in transition I think is what I'm saying. I'm sort of trying to reassess how my faith affects how I am. Because I really turned away from God and the church and faith during my infertility crisis-big time. I really questioned it in a huge way." She describes seeing Garth Brooks on TV in concert in New York's Central Park singing, "Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers." She was struck by so many diverse people connecting in a spiritual moment. "The meaning of God is becoming way bigger and way more important to me but I'm kind of questioning the avenues to get there."

**Adoption**

Infertility for Leila is about loss and grieving that loss. Being an adoptive parent means living in the midst of extremes of joy and sorrow, gain and loss. Both adoptions were private and one is open. In both cases they were chosen by the birth parents. Their oldest daughter's birth mother has been unable to cope with meeting them but has written a letter and Leila has sent photos. A new birth mother has met them. Her younger sister was pregnant and considering Rob and Leila as adoptive parents at the time of our last
interview. It had come as a surprise. Leila felt that her family was complete, and was faced with new information, and more hard decisions. The new birth mother has requested more visitations. Leila's first response is to close in to protect her family, and that "this will change the dynamic." In a letter to them, one of the birth mothers had written, "Adoption is not all win-win, but pain and joy intertwined. We need to recognize that and be honest each step of the way." Leila talks about how she and Rob have to process and discuss issues that arise as they progress on this journey together. "I was thinking about resiliency and the process that we went through, and thinking about my approach and how I owned my own issues around it. I found the information I needed, worked through it in a way that a few years ago I never would have been able to do." Contrary to closed adoptions where parents go home "and pretend this baby's yours," she says the reality is that her children have two sets of parents. She feels by encouraging openness, it frees the children to love and be part of their adoptive family while honoring the other part of themselves. She quotes from "Adoption, The Lifelong Search for Self": "The gift you give your children by honoring their birth family is to help them to genuinely belong in both places. One of the biggest challenges is dealing with the very real fact that no matter how loving the adoption plan is for them, someone "gave them up" and no one except the child can know how that feels."

"In our society there is perception that the bond of blood and biological connection is stronger than other kinds of love." Leila says adoptive children take it for granted they belong in their adoptive families. "The challenge as they grow up is realizing that someone else made this decision for them and it's about real loss and you need to be able to enter into that pain with your child and recognize your loss and pain in the midst of that. To be comfortable with it, I need to have a pretty good handle on where I'm at with my feelings." And be able to deal with it at the appropriate time.

" Adoption is another route to parenting. There are still losses involved. And I still have to deal with those losses that my kids are going to have. It's about gain but loss is a huge part of it. From the birth mother's point of view, there's gain for her because she's gaining the life for her child that she couldn't provide. But there's obviously real losses and grieving for the birth parent. So everybody in the triangle is experiencing losses and gains and it's very extreme. You're talking about the most extreme loss of the
most intimate relationship for the child separating from the birth mother and the birth parent separating from the child. And then it overlaps with the adoptive parents' infertility. They keep revisiting their loss, in a sense, because of the importance of maintaining the connection with the birth parents for their child and for themselves. I mean, there's a lot of entitlement issues. There's a lot of permission to be parents that we get from our connection with Maria as well. So it's a very complex process.

Leila feels her whole life has been a struggle with the black and white issues: good-bad, competent-not competent, success-failure. In adoption there is a gray area where the issue of loss and gain is something that cannot be resolved. "We have to live with that reality."

They have been on the phone to Texas with an adoption counselor. They have questions and they are working through some of their concerns. Leila has strong views and, understandably, an emotional investment in the issue. "I'm not sure if I made this point yet...did I say that? The biggest gift adoptive parents can give their children is in allowing them to explore this other side of themselves and what ends up happening is they end up feeling more connected. I've learned that in reality supporting your child finding out those other parts of themselves, in fact, strengthens the bond. Because they feel heard, they feel listened to, they feel understood." These are things Leila places a high value on.

Today Leila is learning to live with ambiguity and uncertainty. She's no longer afraid of conflict. She needs to gather information and process, to come to conclusions and move forward on issues, to keep the doors open to possibilities.

She has changed. "There's a spirituality. There's a sense of connectedness with the universe and people in the world. As I live more of my life, then analyze it against this ever-broadening horizon, it's really exciting. As I keep having these experiences I have this deeper faith and belief that things are okay and things happen for a reason and everything that's given to us is given for a reason. It's an opportunity to grow and to change and not necessarily that you know the outcome. Things come sideways, not necessarily in a direct relationship."

It's not just an intellectual exercise. It feels like reality to her. "It's not just having these theories but really internalizing them. I'm starting to be able to not only see things
in retrospect when I'm faced with bad things, even little crises in my life, I'm able to kind of...not always, but increasingly, stop and think. Okay. You know what? Let's just think about this from another angle. Step back from it. Things will work out. Maybe not the way you think they're going to work out, but there's a reason. You need to keep your sense of self and your sense of peace about your life even in the midst of tragedy! There's no one right way of doing it. Things just aren't that black and white."

**Today-Resilience**

Leila wrote about the changes she had undergone.

"I am a different person than when I started this quest for parenthood. I am a little more self-assured, a little less critical of myself. I am a lot more aware, and a lot more at peace about the person I am becoming.

I am very clear about the need to continue the search for self. I am very clear about my priorities in life, very clear about the importance of my family. Without the pain and loss of infertility I may never have had the opportunity, or rather the impetus, to really look at who I am and how I deal with personal crises.

You can learn to sidestep crisis, you can learn coping mechanisms to take on roles that will take you right around that tunnel and proceed with your life right past the tunnel without ever going through it, and I'm really glad I didn't do that. I have a sense of peace about my life that I never had before. It's a gift that I may never have been able to receive if I hadn't experienced infertility.

I've always had a 'fighting spirit' and being comfortable being that way. My Mom recognized it when I was six months old. I just wasn't the same as other kids. There was a certain spunk or individuality. I'm becoming more self-confident, and honoring that part of me.

I get a lot of energy from discussions and from ideas. And that's huge for me. People around me who think the way I think, that can connect with how I'm thinking, that care about me enough to work through things on the level that I need to work things through. There's sort of resiliency around a 'stoic' kind of resiliency where you 'put things into perspective' and 'you realize there are so many people out there worse off than you,'
and 'you appreciate what you have.' The Christian ethic of 'be grateful and sort of carry on,' I think that for me that came to mean a repressing of the real feelings.

Adoption is a different way of being in a family and a recognition, honoring the needs to go along with that of the birth families that are connected to our family. It's like a widening of the circle of love in your family.

I'm overly analytical in decision making, so it's very labor intensive, but in relating it to resiliency, once the process is gone through, things are really dealt with and they're really worked through, and there isn't the same kind of lingering "stuff" that I carry with me.

And it's like the resiliency builds on itself almost. And once there's that recognition that you have it in yourself to do this and get through hard times and it doesn't mean that the hard times aren't there.

I can be vulnerable and recognize they are just as important as the strong parts. There's strength in vulnerability, isn't there? That's something new to me, to not be afraid to show vulnerability and being more comfortable with who you are. That you recognize the resilient, strong parts of you are just as important as the vulnerable, insecure parts. You don't need to have a defensive mode where 'Everything's just fine and I'm totally competent and I can handle everything.'

There's a depth that I take things to. I want to peel back the layers and understand things. I just don't take things at face value, sort of getting at the 'why.' It took a lot of work to relate that quality about myself to infertility, but then once I started looking, it really did have an effect on how I deal with the rest of my life.

It isn't just about getting through hard times. It is really the way you do it. Maybe what you get at the end of the hard time, maybe there's a qualitative difference if you get to it in an authentic way that's sort of true to yourself, versus a means to an end.
Sarah

Sarah is sitting with me in the kitchen of her new home while her son sleeps upstairs, home on Christmas vacation from his first term at university. The two cats come by to investigate the morning visitor. Sarah is low voiced and reflective as she sits with her legs tucked under her on the chair. She is newly separated and somewhat numb as she waits to regain her bearings after so many changes at once. Along with this recent ending of a 13-year relationship, her son has left home for the first time to go away to school. She had successfully navigated a major career change seven years ago that was the biggest risk she has ever taken. Now it's time to draw on the wisdom and experience of those past years as she navigates this mid-life transition. She is in the "neutral zone" while she develops a new personal vision.

Family History

Sarah is among the many whom now identify their family of origin as dysfunctional. The middle child along with an older brother that she still remains closest to, Sarah has an older sister and a younger sister, the family constellation centering round a mentally ill sister and a physically disabled father. Sarah was close to her late mother and describes her as strong, very warm, very, very loving and supportive. "She tried to be there as much as she could. She was great. We had a very warm, loving, close in all kinds of ways... you know, physical closeness and everything else...kind of relationship." Her parents' prevailing messages were that she "could do anything. You need an education. It's important to look ahead and plan for the future." Sarah felt a bit of pressure living up to those messages, but the spiral continues as she passes them on to her son, and she lives out those values in her role as a community college instructor in career counseling. Her life goal is helping people attain their own personal vision.

Early Childhood

Sarah's brother was older by three years, and being both middle children they naturally played together. It was a privilege as a girl that she was "allowed" to play with
the group of older boys. As a teenager he always included her and both being good
dancers, they would go dancing together. "We were very close on a lot of levels in terms
of shared values. I think part of it was his openness, and I matured faster than my age.
We're still very supportive of each other. I've become best friends with his first wife. And
I was "best man" at his wedding! So we're really quite close in terms of shared values,
the work that we do, that sort of thing."

From about age four, Sarah remembers she loved to read and would "just devour
novels. I remember my parents had just tons of books and I would literally, in the summer
holidays, just go through the shelves, and I'd work my way from one end to the other and
I'd just read. I'd read them all." Today she still reads constantly, a book a day, one every
few days if work is busy. "I'm forever reading, even if it's not great literature. I mean, it's
just a novel I pick up at a garage sale. But the character will speak of something and it'll
go whew, right here, that's exactly what I'm feeling right now. That they articulate in
some way that perhaps I'm unable to articulate it for myself. I buy all these books I
should read. There's literally a pile of them in my bedroom and I don't read them because
I just read novels instead." Today Sarah also loves movies, going by herself and "when
the lights go down, it's just me right there in the movie."

Sarah describes herself as introspective, a leader and an introvert. She remembers
from the age of 10 developing strategies to cope with her family, the norm that people
didn't talk about these things outside the family. "This was shameful stuff, so I don't think
I would have shared this with my friends." During one of what Sarah calls "peaks of
craziness" the bouncing back for her would be in the support of her family. "My mother
was very supportive and no matter what was happening tried to be sure the rest of us
were okay. My brother and I were very close and sort of helped each other through that. I
certainly didn't want to be like my sister, so I think I tried to make my own way in that I
would define myself more clearly. That's probably where I got this whole thing about,
'Who am I? Where am I going?' Sort of thing. I just tried to be centered in myself, clearer
in myself and then the support and love around me."

She stresses her brother and mother were the two most important people around
her. She had good friends that she enjoyed being with, but was always more of a leader
both culturally and personality wise. "Culturally, you know, British stiff-upper-lip, don't
share your business with others. By nature I'm an introvert and therefore a very private person. So, I would by nature just keep things to myself. So I think those two things combined with me not really seeking outside too much, mainly going inside."

Sarah finds escape and solace in nature, just as she did as a child. When there would be a family disturbance around her sister's behavior, being the "harmonizer" she just couldn't bear it. Saying, "I just have to get out of the house" she would run into the back fields and stay there for hours.

"It would just soothe my soul. I use it a lot in my imagery-it's so soothing to me. I always liked to be close to nature. In the summer we'd swim and canoe and all that stuff. I think one of my real images, a clear strong image of childhood and what I would do in times of stress would be to go and walk in my back fields. For me, a connection to nature has always been a very nurturing thing. I mean, I can remember I would lie in the fields and watch the clouds and smell the smells and hear the sounds and I would feel connected to something and it would make me feel better. And one of the best things in the world for me is we used to always go up to this special place in Georgian Bay. Just being there...and I often use that in my imagery, like when I need to be calm...I use that place in my mind when I do my guided imagery. It's the water, the trees, the wind, the space around me. That's a consistent image from youth to now, a way I feel a deeper connection.

Social Work

A memory that stands out clearly for Sarah is first articulating in front of her grade eight class what she wanted to do when she grew up. She told them she had changed her mind about being a pediatrician, deciding she didn't like science and blood very much! She vividly remembers saying, "I want to work with people and I want to help other people." She was raised in a Christian household, her mother in particular "practicing her faith by living out her Anglican-Christian values with the whole notion of service always at the forefront." So, although she knew she wanted to help others, she wasn't clear on exactly how that would be. Her undergraduate work was in sociology, anthropology and psychology-studying people. She had a clear, steady vision of wanting
to do social work, getting her first job as a welfare worker. But not until age 27 did she find her niche in the area of career and employment counseling.

So I had a vision about helping. I didn't have a clear picture of what that would look like, but that developed in my late twenties and has just continued to evolve a lot so that I still see myself in this field.

Her first work with people on welfare gave Sarah an increasing awareness of what happens when people live in negative space "who saw themselves poorly and catastrophe after catastrophe. I had to start thinking." She believes we call different energies to us. "If I were in a completely negative space and saw everything bad in the world, I'm sure bad things would start to happen to me. I just happen to believe that." From a sociological point of view she says she understood "the hand they were dealt," they saw themselves in certain ways.

They had expectations of certain things, and lo and behold doesn't it happen. So that was in 1970 that I first started seeing that in action, seeing sociology in action. And I think ever since then I've just been aware of when you work with clients and people in distress, in transition, you really get a chance to see a lot of what happens. And why do some people make it and some don't?

Views on Resiliency

I think a lot of it is around self-image, self-esteem, energy, vision. Why does one child from Regent Park make it out and ten of his classmates don't. Maybe there was a role model. Maybe there was somebody-a role model to me is just a vision embodied, you know. 'If I had a role model it would be...I could be like that.' And that person believes that I could be like that. The role model or mentor, is one who also believes that I could be like that. Well, that person may be there for all of those other people. Let's take the teacher who is a role model and a mentor. The same teacher is in front of all that class-maybe one or two of those kids access it. How do they access it? What's in their being that allows them to access it? And I don't know the answer to that. But I do think people are optimistic or pessimistic. I think we have personality traits-innate personality traits that...that you fight against. I've seen a lot of people with pessimistic attitudes fight against their pessimism.
Career Transition

In Sarah's next job she worked for 13 years for a large federal government department as a trainer of counselors and a consultant to management on client delivery systems. She had enjoyed the increasing challenges as the job evolved. However, she was becoming aware that the type of service provided to clients was not meeting their needs in a rapidly changing labor market. A new vision of service was evolving in her thoughts. This vision incorporated more career counseling to help prepare clients for the changes they were experiencing in their work lives. She shared this vision with her supervisors and her colleagues and while they thought it interesting there was no commitment to change.

I just saw so clearly that as things were changing, and this was about 1989, that we needed to change what we were doing. And of course, that's exactly what happened. That is the shift that's happened because of the changes in the labor market because of the recession. So, I've always been able to see a few years ahead. I've always been able to see just a little bit ahead in order to prepare myself, whether it's acquisition of skills, or confidences, or whatever, to be able to move into new directions. Yes, that's been there a long time. I think I'm by nature a reflective person—certainly in high school I would say I did that a lot. Where am I? What do I want to do? So, I've certainly done that most of my life.

At this same time Sarah had been working on a policy paper for about a year on a policy in which she did not believe. And it was a vision around where her organization was going. "This was causing me such distress, because I couldn't accept it." She did her best with it, and after returning home from a week's holiday found the government had decided something new.

Everything—the principles that would have made it palatable like collaboration, partnership with stakeholders, all that stuff, was just thrown out the window. And I thought, 'I can't do this anymore.' And right away I started looking for another job. So I think there were big things outside of me, completely out of my control, like politics, which pushed me. But I also think it was also being able to confront my own inner fears. Those two things happening almost at the same time, allowing me to make that change. It was the belief that I could do something else, that there was something waiting for me. I
had had a vision of going to work at the college for about three years before that and I had been working toward it by doing part-time work.

Sarah feels it was a formative time for her professionally, realizing that her values were no longer in synch with the organization for which she worked. She had to make a choice of whether to stay there or go. She would lose seniority, she would lose security, and as a sole supporting single parent, she worried about finances. "But to stay would have meant certain death." It took a long time to make the decision.

Sarah recalls the events that interacted around pushing her to make a change. She wrote about her feelings at the time.

The year was a turbulent time for me. I was caught up in a negative spiral of assumptions. I assumed that I would not have marketable skills in the labor market as I was coming from the public sector. I also assumed that the only avenue available to me was self-employment. These mental models, described by Senge as being "deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting (Senge, 1990) were holding me back from creating a personal vision.

One day I worked with a friend who happened to be in town, and he went through a little exercise with me around what was blocking me, what was preventing me from making the decision to leave my job. And that was very useful because he was coming in from outside, he wasn't in any way enmeshed in my situation. So he was able to be quite objective and help me work through a process which actually gave me some insight. I consider that one of the pivotal things that happened.

When I realized how much discomfort I was in there, I started to think about it. But I had this mental model that "nobody will hire a public servant," the corollary being, "if no one will hire an ex-public servant because there's no respect for us, then the only thing I can do is be an entrepreneur. And then, of course, what kicked in was, 'I'm a single parent. I'm feeling responsible for this other person financially. I can't risk that.' So it was only in starting to challenge that set of mental models that I was able to move. And what happened was a friend worked with me and he just did a little diagram. And I think I'm quite a visual person. He did this little diagram with this little road and here I am walking down this road and then there's this big chasm and then the road goes on the other side. And so he took me up to the edge of the chasm and he said, 'What is in the
chasm?' And I said, 'Financial insecurity.' That's what it was...that's what was holding me back! It was about my responsibility as a parent. So, once I realized that, then I said to myself, 'Well, being an entrepreneur is not the only thing I can do. What is it I have to market?' And then I went through a whole series of looking at myself and looking at the skills and interests and experience. And how does that translate? Trying to find the transferable stuff to other venues, other than the government. And that was really a precipitating moment for me because it was facing what my fear was that allowed me to reframe other things." So I had been working towards that vision but it was just taking the leap that I found difficult. I would say it was inner preparation, external things that happened that just cinched it. There's just no way I could have stayed there. There's just no way.

Ideas that emerged were trainer, consultant or counselor and she developed resumes for all three to get started marketing herself. She took a transitional job as a counselor, continuing to work part-time at a community college that eventually hired her to develop a new program—totally in keeping with her vision and her values.

In the end, what's happened, it has been, not bouncing back, even...it's like bouncing forward. Because I was able to, in the process of change, crystallize more clearly what it was that I was looking for—for myself. And in so doing was able to sort of set my goals and move towards those and I really haven't looked back since then. So what in some ways I perceived to be a setback at the time, and in the process of trying to make a decision to give something up, in fact worked out to be, in the present, really good for me. Because it forced me to be clear, it forced me to stretch, to take risks that I normally wouldn't have taken.

Sarah used the energy around this career change to push for a move forward in her relationship at the time. They had been together for five years, but in two separate households. She was willing to sell her home so they could settle somewhere neutral, wanting a true partnership.

So it really was about seeing that I had different possibilities, that I had options, instead of keeping myself (closed)—that is all that I can do, this is all that I am. And it was really that transferability of all the skills and qualities that I had to new circumstances.
and validating them and honoring them. But the thing that got me going to that point was facing my fear. And I guess that’s where I am right now is facing my fear...

**Family Transitions**

Sarah keeps her life transitions in perspective, "I mean, like everybody, I've had lots of setbacks-personal and professional." But this year she has had to draw on her reserves, faced with two major changes: her 19-year-old son left for university, and her 13-year relationship ended. Her first marriage ended after 15 years, and he's the father of her son. The transition with her son has been relatively smooth; Sarah says she's been preparing for this practically since he was born. She's always encouraged him to "keep his options open" and get an education at whatever level he chooses, she read to him as a youngster and she's proud, and seems pleasantly surprised by the fact that he's studying creative writing. His photo sits on her shelf in her office, short blond hair and a nice smile.

I really examined my values around, 'Why do we raise children-to be independent of us, to be self-sufficient, healthy beings out there. And I realized I'd done my job-that I'd done my job well. So I was able to let him go. I miss him. I don't like it if he hasn't called for a few weeks. I've been able to view it as certainly necessary for me too. It was so clear that this was the right decision. And I think it was right for me too because now with all the other changes-you know, selling the house, buying the new house, separation, everything else, I really need this time for myself.'

She knows her son is happy with his roommates and new friends. She did her grief work and letting go ahead of time and suffered no real pangs of the predicted "empty nest syndrome." Instead, for the first time, she has time to be alone. "I'm making a nest for myself where I can feel at home while alone from both my partner and my son." She moved from the old neighborhood, to a cozy street in a two-story house that she's newly redecorated just the way she wants it-white kitchen, upstairs carpet and chintz covered furniture. Walking up the street neighbors nod as they walk their dogs and the smell of their fireplaces fills the air. She has a front porch and is planning the back garden-a hobby she "adores." It feels cheerful and homey. It will be okay.
This time, with the end of her marriage she's promised herself she's going to take time, not seek solace with another relationship right away, which she would have done before. "This time it just feels too important." For some reason this transition is harder for her. It's not one she wanted. She feels out of control without a personal vision of what will come next, and that's scary. She's in what Bridges, (1980) calls "the neutral zone." The successful navigation of this transition is where her energy is directed right now.

The spiral continues as Sarah takes time for reflection on some of her core issues, which lead her to new ones.

Who am I? How do I want to live the second half of my life? What kind, if any, of relationship do I want with a man? And I'm just trying to do that reflection right now. So, it's easier for me to do that without any distractions. You know, when I come home from work it's just me and the cats.

Sarah talked about feeling anchorless with all the changes, a new house and a new neighborhood, of being alone for the first time in 48 years. It felt for her like one wave after the other or one chapter after the other turning. She's not sure what's coming up, and what's always helped in the past was having a vision. What she has found most difficult is that this was not her choice, so not having control has been difficult "because I really like to be in control of my own destiny." While stressing she does not consider herself a victim, she did not have a chance to develop a vision for what she wanted before it was over. She thinks that has made a huge difference in terms of her own resiliency. She had a vision around how she hoped the relationship would be, but that did not come about. They had been seeing a counselor together and Sarah thought things were getting better, that they were working toward the same goals. The therapist told her husband to make a decision to stay or go. "I've been resilient around job things, I've been resilient around my son's changing state in my life, but this one—because I don't have a vision for it, is much more difficult for me to do the bouncing back."

It's like a death. It's like your parent dies and you know they're going to die and everyone says, 'Oh, well, it's good you had a chance to prepare yourself.' But you're never prepared for the death of relationship. It's like a death of everything that I held as what I wanted in my life. And so I just feel like I'm going through the mourning
of...of...death. And no matter how cognitively I've been aware that this was certainly one of the options, emotionally it's been like death. Sarah is looking carefully at the issue of, "Why is it difficult to let go? You know, I can let go of my son; I can let go of my neighborhood; I've let go of jobs. Why is this one more difficult for me to let go? I don't know the answer to that yet. But I think when I have a clearer picture of that then it will make it easier. Because I certainly have let go of things before."

You know Bridges talks about the neutral zone, and I am stuck right plop in the neutral zone. I do get glimpses of the new beginnings, of where I could be going... But I haven't been able to get any energy into it yet, other than, of course I've got a new home and I've set it up the way I want it and that sort of thing. But emotionally, having new beginnings, I haven't...haven't seen that yet for myself. So, I would say I'm just stuck right there in the neutral zone. And I just find that difficult sometimes, because I'm an action oriented person. Although I am very reflective, I'm still very action oriented, and to not be taking action, to just be sitting in the neutral zone and trying to be patient with that is...is difficult for me sometimes. In the neutral zone—I have not let go nor have I moved forward. There's a part of me that doesn't want to. Because I think in letting go, then that means it's over. But also I'm worried about what will be left when I let it go, you know, will I just sort of be this empty shell, with nothing much inside? What I need to be doing is finding my own place within myself, and I've got all my internal anchor points. All of the external things are fine, other than I'm not in a relationship. But the only way that I'm going to be able to move forward is to really feel solid inside myself and feel complete inside myself. And I guess that's my biggest fear at the moment, is, if I do let go of what that relationship was, and how it defined me and all that kind of thing, what will I find in there, you know?

Supports

Today Sarah sees her career as an anchor, the one constant, holding her in place while everything around her is changing. She loves her work and "throws herself" into it. We had one interview at her office, after an ice storm, the city street ankle deep in gray slush. Sarah was late that day, slowed down because of stomach flu. If she missed
teaching that day, she said, it would be her first time. Because of her separation, she's found concentration on marking hard sometimes. A friend pointed out that even if she is not working at her peak, it's what the average person would do at one hundred percent. Her friend encouraged her to use the analogy of physical illness, that if she had pneumonia, she would have to heal. "I have this wound. I have a psychic wound. The body is coming back. I had lost a ton of weight and now I'm eating and sleeping, but it feels like a wound to the soul." She's taking anti-depressants for the first time. "I'm on anti-depressants—just to get rid of the troughs" and help with concentration. "I finally understand what I have known cognitively about depression, just that I had never experienced it before." She has given herself permission to take the time and not be perfect, a really important component of her healing. She won a teaching award of excellence within her faculty and another for the college as well. She enjoyed the recognition, especially at this time, and noted her picture and a write up appeared in the school newspaper. She talks about the honest relationship she has with her colleagues, the relief of not having to be "superwoman." When a project didn't get finished as soon as she'd hoped, she let her co-workers know she was affected by depression. To her surprise a few of them shared they were experiencing similar difficulties. But Sarah stresses that she loves her job. "I can always work."

She has good friends who have been supportive, with moral support when she asks for it. She's clear with them whether she wants listening or advice. Her best friend lives across the street; they work together and share office space. Sarah says it's nice to have someone just ask how things are, that's enough. She often doesn't want to talk about it, because that's "boring." Her sister has helped with "doing things." Sarah's had the support of a very good counselor. Lastly, she adds how important it was to have a good real estate agent at a time when she was vulnerable. She found someone who worked with her and made sure her needs were met in finding a new home, and a fair price when her other house was sold. The move has allowed more financial freedom as well, enabling her to help her son with university expenses. And for the first time his father is contributing as well. "I don't need financial pressures right now."

Letting go has been difficult because she perceives that in some way as a failure. During a class exercise she was teamed with a partner, and shared with him her sense of
disappointment that two significant relationships have ended in her adult life. The person across from her had never been in a long-term relationship and pointed out to her "some people never have what you've had." She's tucking that away for some future time when it will be useful to put things into perspective.

Sarah talks about herself as essentially an optimistic person. She has faith.

By that I mean faith in myself, faith in the universe, faith in others, faith that things will evolve, and I think coupled with that is faith in optimism. Up until this time in my life, I've always been a very optimistic person. If things would go wrong I would be distraught for a little while, but I'd very quickly bounce into optimism to try to see how to reframe it in a sense, to be able to see it in a different light. I just think that I'm really quite a special person, you know, in my own little way and somehow that's linked to my optimism. They're sort of one and the same in a sense—the things that will be good for me. I am a flexible person able to make change. I do welcome change, have good coping strategies, a good support system. Just having knowledge helps a lot in resiliency, having a context within which to put things. A cognitive thing and a heart thing and a spiritual belief that things can be good, things will change, that I can do whatever I can do. I guess a part of welcoming change is being able to 'see.'

She has faith in love, of her family, friends, her cats—that as she gives love she will get it back. She is making elaborate plans for a garden in the back, and will take a course in the summer. With the analogy of gardening she sees herself in the image of a "corm," or plant that goes through a dormant phase under the ground until it is ready to grow. A corm is like a bulb for plants such as irises.

So there I am under the earth in a corm state, but I know that if that corm is nurtured, if it's watered and fed through the soil and it doesn't get frozen too much, that it's going to come back. And so, I've been trying to use that image for myself right now, to just be okay being a corm in the earth, but knowing that I need to nurture that corm if it's going to sprout again. There's this whole notion or regeneration, rebirth, and enrichment of the elements.
Personal Vision

Sarah did not consciously and purposefully start using creative visualization until she was an adult and one of her mentors did a lot of training and teaching around it. This was in the 80's, and since then she uses it a lot. She purposely chose not to use visualization around her relationship feeling that if she had influenced him to stay and he really wanted to go, it wouldn't have been any good.

So purposefully I did not do that. It's a very powerful vehicle for change. I really believe very strongly when I don't have vision that I flounder around. But when I've got vision, it's such... it's a place to put your energy, it's a place to see yourself moving towards. For me it's very powerful. You have to be sure it's what you want. And some people don't want vision. They'd rather just let things happen. I'm just such a self-directed person that I really need to know where I'm going. I need to have vision. It's the not having vision that scares me. One of the things that's held me up was that I couldn't see a vision for myself in terms of my personal stuff, so therefore the fear was, 'Well, if I let go, and I don't have a vision, where will I be?' And then I realized that I actually do have a vision, it's just not my usual kind of vision. The vision is that I just want to be healthy in myself. So, it's not the more usual 'action' oriented vision, which is probably more what mine usually are, but it's more of just trying to be okay. Then I realized, 'well this is a vision.' So I try to get a vision, try to create something to work towards, being an action kind of person, I like to have something to work towards.

Having a personal vision is the core of Sarah's beliefs. In a recent paper she wrote:

Without a vision one is stumbling in the dark. I have carried this belief into my work as a counselor and a teacher. I try to instill in my clients and students the understanding of what having a personal vision can do. The tension one feels between one's personal vision and current reality can provide the energy to change. Senge says, "It's not what the vision is, it's what the vision does. In my case it gave me the courage and confidence to take a step toward my vision. This view of the role of vision is important to people in transitions. It is easy to get discouraged if the exact vision is not achieved. Recognizing that the vision gives energy and movement helps one to keep the motivation to change.
As a teacher of career counselors she tells her students they must believe in people's ability to make change. They must have a personal vision. They are the facilitators of their clients' visions, and if they do not develop their own vision they will be of no use to their clients.

You can help them access information. You can be nice to them. But what they need from you is facilitation of their vision. So first of all you've got to be able to vision for yourself and then you can facilitate others. The two-year college program is designed in a way that will enable them to constantly be moving toward vision. The end of the first year we revisit their vision they set in September. It is designed in a way that allows them to create a vision for themselves and then to facilitate that vision. The orientation course is our best one, I have to say. The course consists of group process, Meyers-Briggs, True Colors, learning styles, conflict resolution, diversity, shared vision with goals, norms and values of how they want to work with each other.

Sarah stresses the need for congruence with inner values and outer reality, and that she describes the feelings of dissonance she experienced in her job before she chose to leave. "My values were changing, or my values had always been the same but there are times I put them a bit on the back burner and they were becoming more and more into prominence for me and causing me more and more discomfort." It is a belief she carries over into her teaching today. "I teach it and have lived it both professionally and personally. I think that when that tension becomes too strong... say it is an elastic. So here's your vision and here's your current reality and it's getting really taut. Well, if you let go of this it moves the elastic forward towards your vision. And I think that's what Senge talks about a lot, is this moving forward toward vision. And that's exactly what it was for me, was by letting go....isn't that interesting..." Sarah pauses to absorb her own words as they hit home for her—that's exactly the point she's at in her relationship.

One of my greatest lessons from this experience is that personal vision keeps evolving. As my current reality shifts so does my vision. The changes may be subtle or just refinements but they demonstrate that personal vision is dynamic, always in motion. Since setting my personal vision six years ago, it all came true. When this happened I asked myself, 'Now what?' I have readjusted the vision. I entered the masters program at
OISE with a vision to moving on to performing career development in a large, preferably learning organization.

Sarah recently wrote about her broad career involvement at the college, undergraduate university and provincial and national level.

On a large scale I am involved in a number of initiatives to bring more vision to the field of career development. I am on the steering committee of a new professional organization for career development practitioners in the province. I was part of a sub-committee that developed a generic competencies model for the field. I am on a national group establishing national standards for career counseling. I am also involved in developing an articulation agreement between our community college and OISE/UT that will create an undergraduate program in career development. All of these initiatives are part of my personal vision for myself and for my profession. I am sure that as these visions are achieved new ones will be emerging to capture my creative energy.

Having a personal vision has had a profound influence on my life. Without it I was floundering. With it I have a sense of purpose and renewed energy. I feel that my passion is engaged in what I do. That passion then rubs off on the other areas of my life. Personal vision is one strategy for an individual to have creativity in one's life. It also provides a base of resiliency as the vision evolves. It gives a sense of control and power over events in one's life that previously may have felt outside of one's control.

To me to be open to synchronicities is to know oneself very well. If you don't then you're not going to see them when they're happening. So to me it comes back to intuition as well. I think I know myself pretty well. I get to know myself better all the time. As long as I'm open to myself, that's a good starting point. Part of that openness is openness to possibilities, which is vision. And if you have those two things then when the possibility occurs you're ready for it. Otherwise they could just slip right by you. To me to be open to self and open to the future, open to possibility means you're open to synchronicities.

I'm not saying that you make things happen. Sometimes we make things happen for ourselves. And other times we do in the sense that we have prepared ourselves to be ready for different options and when they come, there you are. It's sort of a mixture of individualistic thinking and more cosmic type of thinking. But I think it's a combination of both. I don't think things just happen in life. I mean, they do happen. Why do some people
get all this bad energy around them? I mean, why do they call that to them? Why do some people call good energy to them? Well, to me it's about what you're doing inside yourself at the same time as events outside ourselves do whatever they do, and then it's just the alignment of those two things, the inner and the outer work.

It's like the Serenity Prayer. What are the things I can change, what are the things I can't, and the wisdom to know the difference? I think knowing what one has control over, our thoughts, our reactions, our actions. And that's where serendipity comes in, is that if I'm at a place where I'm clear about myself, who I am, what I want, where I'd like to go, where I've been, then my eyes can be open to the things that are all out there. You know people say to me about relationships, 'Well one day you'll just open your eyes and there the person will be.' And that is always how it happens. But that opening of the eyes is all about the state of readiness and the state of readiness is the knowledge, the comfort with self. And to me that is what one has control over, what I have control over. The more out of touch a person is with themselves the less likely they're going to see what happens and they're going to just rush into things or whatever. I think the more open you are to yourself the more open then one can be to events outside of oneself. Because the world is going on—we're not the center of the universe, even though we think we are. We're the center of our own universe but that's about it.

When I think about my own career at the college, there's so much serendipity there, but yet a lot of it was my own doing. I mean, I chose to do things so that I would be known there, so that I would be valued, so that when the time came they'd...that's who they would think of would be me. And that's exactly what happened.

She stresses the importance of networking and building up acquaintanceships.

I help people, somebody comes to me for an information interview I give them my time. Who knows? Five years down the road I may need them for something. So I put a lot of energy into maintaining a strong professional network and a strong friendship network, so that I know that will come back to me. And it has come back to me. Like this summer, with being so depressed, my friends have been fabulous. There has to be a win-win, otherwise why bother doing it. The win may be way down the road. But it needs to be a win-win in order for it to be a valuable networking experience. So, I do work on that a lot. And that takes energy, but it's worth it in the long run.
She is right in the midst of change but sees it as part of the overall continuum of her life as opposed to a major turning point.

*I don't know what is going to happen, whether this in fact will result in a very different way that I live my life because I'm not there yet. I've always been pretty clear. I've had little detours, doubled back on myself, but I would not say there have been any major turning points in my life.*

Sarah trusts her intuition and personal visioning, finding it a place to put her energy, to put her in a state of readiness when opportunity arises. This leads to synchronicity, the alignment of the inner and the outer work.

*Probably the major thing for me is the alignment of the inner work and the external supports. The two seem to be very necessary for me to be able to be resilient, emotionally resilient within.*

**Personal Faith**

Sarah was raised Anglican, but today she finds that while she's moved by the music she is questioning organized religion with everyone in their separate buildings, convinced that theirs is the right path to whatever they're looking for. "To me it's so much bigger than that." She recognizes that the same wisdom runs through all religions and has faith in love: love for self, nature and love of the planet. She has faith in humanity and conscious life. "I think I probably live a very Christian life if you take the tenets of the Christian religion, but I just don't profess to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. I do have faith in us as people." She has what she calls an individualistic philosophy. "The only thing I can really work on is myself and by doing that make small changes in the world, and make a difference, combined with the way I was raised around a life of service and giving to others and respect and caring for others."

She has appreciation for life and the sense that "everything is connected." She has strong intuition, and having that ability feeds on her sense of vision. "We do live in the realm in possibilities."

*The process of talking about these things shines a clearer light on it. In the day to day it's easy to just bury all this stuff. What's happened is it's just put a really strong spotlight on so that I'm seeing things much clearer. I don't think the actual perception of*
what happened in my mind has changed. Because I spent well over a year prior to even separating examining myself, the relationship. And now since that's been finished, that's what I've been doing non-stop. It's changed in that it's a sharper focus for me, awareness of my dependency, over-responsibility, over-compensation, his role...it's right there in front of me.

Reading this stuff was good, very good to read. You can see the insights jumping off the page. It gave me a focus and it was clear that one of my problems was that I was not able to articulate my vision and I could see what was holding me back from that, but it was also that not having the vision was keeping me stuck in a kind of limbo, so that was helpful.
Leith

Leith is a Gestalt Therapist, writer of poetry, student of native spirituality, and recently finished a Masters Degree in Adult Education. With her richly colored woven vests and interesting earrings, she looks years younger than 58. Perhaps it's attitude, because in mid-life Leith underwent a rebirth, a transformation. She used to be a high powered vice president of pharmaceutical marketing before she was terminated without notice, escorted out the door just years prior to full retirement benefits. In her lifetime she's also experienced depression, divorce, the death of her oldest son from leukemia and a bout with breast cancer. Now she's busy building her private practice, risking reading her poetry to colleagues and family, and learning the Sweet Medicine Sundance teachings in shamanic studies. She's excited about possibilities, an integration of new learning and her past history as she navigates the second half of her life. In the words of one of her poems, "I've found the magic that turns adversity into adventure."

Childhood History

Leith does not, however, recall experiencing a lot of adversity as a child. Strong family influences were academics and medicine. Her father was a professor of pharmacology at a major Canadian university, her mother juggled expenses by making clothes and buying second hand as a stay-at-home mom of four children. Leith has two brothers, one older, one younger, and a younger sister with a Ph.D. in biochemistry. A family standard was emotions or feelings were not displayed or encouraged. "As a child the creative, intuitive, imaginative, even "magical" part of me was not encouraged. The scholarly, academic, practical, organized, logical side of me was encouraged." As the oldest granddaughter, her relationship with her grandfather was significant, "like father-daughter once displaced."

Her grandfather was the positive influence in her life for many years. He was the adult who I turned to for love, for appreciation, and I felt...now I can use the word...he was my source of unconditional love and approval, much more than either of my parents. He was a medical doctor in the good old 'family doctor style,' who I
felt always approved of everything I did. I've realized that he was really a source of
approval that I turned to in the family.

Childhood memories include the ritual of Sunday visits, staying over at her
grandparents' house, that she could always run to Grandpa and jump on his knee, and
accompanying him to the hospital while he went on his rounds. His office was in his
home and Leith recalls her childhood imagination being intrigued by the "Dingbat
calendars" behind his door, with cartoon depictions of giant ants in medical settings
rendered in heightened detail. She imagined they "were really alive and really doing all
their stuff, and I'd try sneak in and catch them moving around, but the minute I came
around the corner, they froze." When Leith played dolls it was always "hospital dolls."
her desire and determination to one day be a nurse fueled by her relationship with her
grandfather and the "Cherry Ames" image of the supportive professional popular at the
time. She comments today on her lack of self-esteem and confidence that prevented her
from seriously considering going into medicine, although recent career assessments
indicated an aptitude in that area. Her father had a strong bias against women in medical
school, believing that they took classroom seats away from men and then did not practice.
She did, however, go on to get a nursing degree.

Speaking again of her grandfather, she recalls, "He always took my sister and I to
the hospital nurses' graduation ceremonies. He was chief of staff of a hospital for many
years. And I just grew up with this notion that I was going to be a nurse. And it was
partly the connection with my grandfather's image. Now, it never occurred to me...I was
too scared to be a doctor."

Her grandfather died just after Leith's first son was born. She was 21. She
remembers the respect he had professionally. "He was just a very kind person, that
showed up in all his life. He had patients who refused to change doctors even though he
was in his eighties. He was still seeing some of these patients because they wouldn't go
anywhere else." He was also a very formal man, and Leith does not recall her
grandparents ever referring to each other by first name. Instead he called her "Mrs.
Wallace."

Leith's father is a doctor too, "but a very different kind of doctor. He's very shy
and very reserved and unemotional. He's probably been one of the strongest influences in
my life, and that's had both positive and negative effects for me." After working as a professor he became general manager of a university-affiliated laboratory. Leith talks about "the academic atmosphere around us, and just that expectation that we'd all go to university." Her father did not want her to be a nurse. Leith compromised by doing a four-year nursing degree program at university, getting married at the end of her second year. Her marriage was partly a way of getting away from family influences, "because I thought I could never live up to my father's expectations." It is a defining theme in Leith's life and an issue she still struggles with.

   I had felt that somehow I would never be able to meet my father's expectations, so I would just leave the arena. I was afraid that he would think that I was stupid, silly or whatever. I've done a lot of work on things I learned from him and the things I've struggled with in my own self-worth. I grew up with a feeling of having very low self-esteem. My recollections are that he said I was too fat. I was a chunky kid...I don't look it now, but he was critical of that within my hearing. I grew up with the belief that I was too fat and fat is ugly and nobody will love a person who's too fat. That translated into a lot of areas—nobody will love someone who's stupid, and I'll never do it right, and I'll never be quite good enough. I'll always have to try harder...that kind of thing.

First Marriage

Her first husband was not academically educated, and from a different social class. His family was Scottish background, big-hearted, earthy, open, generous, loving, and welcomed Leith with big hugs.

   They didn't have much. They were not well off but you couldn't go to their house and not sit down to a meal. It wouldn't matter what time of the day or night it was. They were old country Scottish. His mother had grown up in a stone cottage with a dirt floor. They always had a big pot of soup on the back of the stove and there was always enough to share with family and neighbors.

   Leith basked in the unconditional love and acceptance of her new family. "They thought I was just wonderful. I had never experienced anything like this before." Her own parents were not happy about her choice in marriage, but went along with it. Her first son was born while she was in her third year of nursing, and she took a year off.
My mother was very instrumental in getting me to go back and finish my fourth year of nursing. If she had not, who knows where I'd be today? But it was really, really important to her and probably the single biggest thing that she's done for me, it's that she encouraged me was to encourage me to do that.

Living on the third floor of her parents' home, she finished school while her mother looked after her son while she finished school. Leith also sees that time as the "beginning of the end of my marriage with my first husband. He was a technical school graduate and I think secretly quite happy when I left university. He wasn't particularly keen on my going back. He didn't stand in my way, but he wasn't happy about it." Leith had a second son at age 23. By her early thirties her depression began, feeling quite hopeless that things weren't going to work out with her husband. He wanted her to be something she wasn't, a stay-at-home mom. She wanted something for herself. At first she did general duty relief shift work to accommodate her family, then worked part-time for a general practitioner in his practice.

"I got extremely depressed for the better part of a year. I lost a lot of weight. I was feeling completely hopeless. I saw no way out. And then I finally came out of it enough to say, 'Okay. I've got to do something for myself. I'm going to get a job. I don't care what he says. I'm going to do it.'" She had the realization that sooner or later she and her husband would have to split up. "He wouldn't let me-couldn't let me be what I needed to be. He was too threatened by my having an identity outside the family."

She was not willing to take the first step toward separation, instead waiting until he came to the realization, going into what she laughingly calls "passive-aggressive mode." She tried to be as neutral as she could until he came to the realization—it took two years. It was the 70's and mortgage money was tight. They parted on amicable terms, their explicit goal to cause the boys the least amount of stress possible under the circumstances. When they couldn't sell it, her husband stayed in the house keeping the boys, aged 11 and 13, with him. It was a non-traditional decision for a woman to make 20 years ago, and not an easy one. Her career started blossoming. Leaving the "G.P.'s" office to work in pharmaceutical sales, Leith began a 20 year climb up the corporate ladder from sales representative, clinical research associate, marketing manager, marketing director, manager of a sales team and finally vice-president of marketing. It was an
avenue where she would express both the logical and creative parts of her personality. But when her oldest son died of leukemia about seven years after the break-up, she had guilt that it was partly the stress of her leaving that may have caused his cancer. She believes that we can't cause cancer in others, but we can cause the stress that leads to it. She also questions if she'd chosen another route whether there might have been even more stress at home. "But then you get all caught up in these stories about being selfish. I really believed it was better for everybody all around if we separated...that was in my good moments."

Kendrew's Death

From about age 16 her son had developed serious behavioral problems, used alcohol and experimented with drugs. Leith worried that he would seem to "disappear" under stress. When he developed mononucleosis and had no strength left even to walk up a flight of stairs, a doctor diagnosed leukemia. With chemotherapy treatment he had one remission. A bone marrow transplant wasn't possible because mother and son were not a perfect match, and he did not want a lot of interventions. Leith says when he was first diagnosed she knew he was going to die of it, then felt guilty about this insight. Her medical training helped-she did some research and had a professional understanding of what was going on, and feels he received very good care. Her son would never talk about death. "He didn't want to talk about dying. Only once he said, 'I don't want to die, Mom.' And I said, 'What's it about?' And he said, 'Well, I don't want people to cry about me.' I said, 'Well, people will cry, because they'll miss you, and they love you and it's okay.' But that was the only time he said, 'Well, I don't want you to cry.'" Leith still has sadness that her firstborn son died alone, and that it was the day after Mother's Day.

During the time of her son's death she coped by using her analytical side, intellectualizing, researching, finding out as much as she could about leukemia, trying to read and understand. As a member of the medical profession she respected the care he received. She credits her facility to see both sides of a question that helped her get through that phase. And for ten years she buried herself in her work. Leith had remarried about three years before her son's death and now speaks of her husband as her "best friend. A wonderful support." She had long since come to realize that she had to learn to
be okay with herself as a single person on her own, before she had anything to offer anybody in a relationship. For ten years she coped by being very busy, her work was engrossing and she continued to stuff her feelings, just as she had done for years. The family pattern had been set. It was easy to hide her feelings until they became too strong. Then she'd break down and couldn't get control again.

While on a business trip to California, she somehow ended up at a Gestalt workshop at Esalen, devoted to the study and advancement of human potential. It was her first exposure to Gestalt, a fortuitous moment for her. During typical Gestalt "hot seat, or two chair work" she found she had never done any work around her son's death, never properly grieved it." About that time she was introduced to the writings of spiritual teacher Ram Das and his ideas on death. "Nobody dies a minute too soon or a minute too late. I don't know what your son was here to do, but he did it, and it was time for him to go. The manner of leaving is not the point, the point is that when it's your time you will go." Leith ponders the idea that maybe, in some way, her son led her to Gestalt.

_In the fifty-eight years I have been in this body_
_My path has taken a great many turns_
_And twists and gyrations_
_Like a snake on the ground_
_Or a dolphin at play in the heaving seas._

_Goodness me,_
_How often I've fallen_
_From heights into valleys,_
_From sunlight to fog,_
_From joy and fulfillment-_
_Such feelings so fleeting-_
_To the depths of depression_
_Bleak, hopeless and raw_
_Always to climb up again._
Spiritual Journey-Synchronicity

She realized she was attracted to the Gestalt method (Yontef, 1993) so began to study at the Gestalt Institute in Toronto and pursued it from there. "I can see now how much synchronicity has played a role for me in my life, especially in the last 10 to 20 years. And now I'm much more aware of it. Look for it."

It's like I heard about the book The Artist's Way, from three, maybe four different people...so, now I don't have to be hit over the head as many times. And there is a difference for me between doing things, and doing things in awareness. You can do things, and there are habits. But habits aren't 'awareness.' It's when you become aware of the habit and then acknowledge, 'Oh, this is what I do,' then something happens. In Gestalt there's something called 'Paradoxical Theory of Change,' which basically says 'change happens when you get where you're at.' In other words, if you get into the present moment and get fully into where you're at and how you are...right now, rather than focussing your attention on how you want to be,' then change can happen. But change won't happen-can't happen, as long as you're focussing on where you want to go rather than getting to where you're at. In Gestalt we often do what we call 'exaggerate things,' to fully acknowledge where you're at now. For me that's been a really important realization. 'Okay, this is me now. This is what I do. This is how I do it. I do feel this way. Once you've acknowledged that you are or have something then you can let it go. But as long as you're denying that it's you, which is what we're usually trying to do when we're trying to be something else, you can't let go what you haven't grasped. Many of us spend our time in the past and the future. Most of us spend the bulk of our time in the past and in the future. And not in the moment.

The first resources she drew on for personal growth were Maxwell Malt's writing on psychocybernetics with his message that you are what you think you are. Until you value yourself you have nothing to give other people. She loved Jonathan Livingstone Seagull with the message that "you have no idea what you can be. You just have to keep going and keep trying to be better than you are. Keep working at it. I still believe that. There's no end to my potential if I have the guts to go where it's scary. And to face and to get into those situations that cause me anxiety and fear, that I can come through the other
"When Leith met her new husband, one of the things they had in common was the Jonathan Livingstone Seagull book (Bach, 1970).

Leith had traveled twice to India for studies in meditation and began to study the writings of spiritual teachers, significantly Ram Das (1980) during that time.

He talks about going into the fire to come out in the water. And if you always try to stay in the water, you're going to come out in the fire. Go where the anxiety is. Go where there's something difficult about it for you. If you always stay where it's easy, you're never going to go anywhere. Change doesn't happen when we're comfortable and happy. It just doesn't. The only way change happens is when you're uncomfortable enough to want to do something different, to be willing to experiment with something different. I'm much more aware if I get this clenched in my gut when somebody suggests something, I'd better take a look at it.

**Determination**

*I once heard it said*

*That without the valleys*

*There couldn't be mountains*

*And the times that you fall*

*Need not be counted*

*As long as you don't end it there.*

*Just get up, brush off (say what you must)*

*And resume your climb*

*One more time.*

'I can do it myself' is kind of a theme song for me. And if I can't do it myself, I may opt for something that I can. I am pragmatic. If one way doesn't work, then I'll try another way. I can get really hung up about what should and shouldn't be in the world, and I am also a very practical person. I'll put a lot more energy into something practical, hands on, that affects me, than I will into philosophy and a statement of values, or morals or whatever. I do need to be able to feel a sense of personal involvement and commitment. I guess. So, it's like, 'Keep going.' And I guess that's what I've always done. Just keep
going. The worst time was that nine months to a year of depression, when I didn't ever go and get help with it, but I knew I was depressed. But even there, it was like, 'Well, I've got to keep going.' So, I dragged myself out of bed in the morning and... and just had to keep going. I guess that's always been a theme for me. 'You gotta keep going.'

I guess one of the themes that has come up for me in my Gestalt work is that I've grown up with an idea that I'm never good enough. And what I do is never good enough. It could be better. You've got to try harder. And the 'keep going' is very consistent with that, but I have actually never verbalized it in that way. 'Just keep going.' And I am very much like that. Just keep going. Just keep trying. Don't give up. If one way doesn't work you'll find another. Or maybe you'll have to change your direction a bit. And certainly looking back, I can say that what I've done, what I've been through, I probably had to do it all that way. And it's all contributed to who I am and how I am today.

Leith was studying meditation and spirituality. The Gestalt Institute has become a very important community to her. Since then, in spiritual learning and practices, she has moved on from the eastern focus to Native studies and the group she's studying with is very much a community. It's also been important to her that her husband has come into both of these with her.

**Career Change**

After 20 years in the pharmaceutical industry, Leith had a vague feeling of wanting a change—did not envision becoming president of marketing and did not want to stay on as a vice president of marketing indefinitely. A corporate reorganization had resulted in her working with someone who used to be a rival. She had mentally mapped out a tentative plan of working about five more years while pursuing her studies in Gestalt on a part-time basis. Knowing she wanted to make a change, and aware of increasing signs around her saying, "it's time to go," she did not yet have the courage to take that step by choice. The decision would be made for her. Her termination without notice has been the most difficult transition of her life. Called into a meeting ostensibly to discuss the structure of her department, she was shocked to find the meeting was about her. She was declared redundant and escorted out of the building. She received a severance package of a drastically reduced pension and a referral to an "out-placement
counselor." She says she's become increasingly aware of "not fitting into that culture." Her game plan had been to get Gestalt training, stay at her job for a few years while developing a practice and then take early retirement. "And this just speeded up the process. It was a whole change in direction. It was like, 'Now the decks are cleared. Now I have no excuse. I can get moving in a new direction."

"This is not your death knell,

But a chance for life. Now you're free to go on
As you knew you must, but hadn't the guts
To do for yourself!"

"Than-you Spirit, I know it had to be this way
For me to turn in a new direction.
My courage and trust were not enough
To clear my life by conscious choice.
But did you have to be so rough?"

Today she describes being terminated at work as the most significant turning point in her life.

That's the one that really comes to mind; the rest of them were more gradual. But in the moment, I remember the vice-president's words. You're sitting there and the VP of human resources, and I was VP of marketing, and my new boss was corporate vice-president of sales and marketing. And he said, 'I've been giving a lot of thought to your department structure.' And I said, 'Fine. I think that's good.' And he says, 'And I've decided we have no place for you. We don't need another vice-president.' Gasp. And I don't know what he said after that. But...going through my mind was, 'Wow! Now things are really...hit the fan and now things have really cleared away.' And the VP of human resources said to me, 'Well. Do you have anything to say?' I just looked at her and said, 'Not that you're going to hear.' I would never have ever said anything like that to her before. But I knew in that moment that things were going to change, that all of a sudden I was on an accelerated change path. And I probably also knew in that moment, although I had to revisit it and revisit it, that I wasn't going to go back to corporate life. I wasn't
going to go and try and find another job in the industry, and all of that. But I think...that was the strongest moment that I had.

"While I was over in India just a few months earlier I had realized things were going to change somehow. I had no idea how." Career assessments revealed an aptitude for medical school, but it would take 10 years. She was encouraged to do a Masters in Adult Education and pursue further studies in Gestalt.

It was a big adjustment financially. Her husband had recently taken early retirement and although he had wanted to leave the work environment he had been in, was finding the loss of work identity difficult. They had to sit down and work out a financial plan and found they would be okay if they did not buy things without thought. Leith says she's surprised how well they can manage, that they're really happier today on less and she has enough of a financial base to be able to keep her therapy sessions accessible, and not charge top fees.

What was really important to me in doing all those things was an internal sense that this was really a big opportunity to do what I would be happier doing, what maybe was more in line with what my real mission could be. My husband was very supportive, I got support from the out-placement people, the Gestalt Institute provided me with another community that was supportive and helpful.

**Breast Cancer**

A year later brought another shock. A routine mammogram detected a small invasive tumor that a biopsy revealed to be breast cancer. After surgery and radiation, Leith's risk factor is minimal. "I have every expectation that I'm probably not going to die of breast cancer. It'll be something else."

Leith experienced a brief sense of shock, but in retrospect says, "it's hardly tripped me up at all." For a few weeks she had feelings of, "Oh, my God! This doesn't happen to me, and going through all the horror stories in your head. But I already had a new direction and sense of purpose." But she acknowledges breast cancer has changed her perspective.

The mind once stretched by new ideas never reverts to its former shape. So, once you know you've had cancer, you know it could happen again. Until you've had cancer,
it's like a remote possibility. And you know it could happen intellectually, but once you've had it, it's real. I do volunteer work at Willow, which is a breast cancer resource and information center, which came out of that, because you have to be a breast cancer survivor to be a peer support counselor there. And one day the phrase came up 'loss of innocence.' It is. It's a loss of innocence. And so it does change your perspective a bit.

**Today-A Life Mission**

Today Leith is setting up a private psychotherapy practice, particularly with a focus on working with people who are making life transitions.

They are dealing with change or making change in all of the various arenas that can make an impact, be it career, relationships or health. And I've had personal experience in virtually all of those arenas. So I think that I see it as--it may be my mission. It sounds a bit pretentious to say that. It feels pretentious to me to say, 'I think I've finally found my purpose and mission.' And yet what I realize is that the more that I learn about myself and how I have...how I am and what I am, the more I have to offer, and want to offer to other people.

I've got to learn more about myself, 'discover,' and 're-cover' more of myself in order to explore my potential and then it's about making that available to other people. It's about sharing it.

Change for Leith has been a "series of small building blocks that have continued and things have fallen into place. I'd say that also if I look at things that have happened in what seemed to me to be synchronous ways, they've always moved me farther along in this direction."

I do feel that everything that I have done has contributed to who and where and why I am now. And that if I had missed any piece of it...you know, people do say, 'Well, what if you had it to do over again, would you do it differently?' And part of me wants to say, 'Well, of course I would.' And another part of me says, 'Don't be silly. You had to do what you had to do. You know that.' I mean, I had to marry who I had to marry first and do what I had to do there and have children.

She now experiences more of an integration of her creative and logical sides, being able to move between the two. While she used creativity as a corporate person, she
felt more comfortable using logical, analytical skills. Writing poetry has been exciting and scary, reading it to colleagues even more so. But the biggest challenge was expressing this part of herself to her family.

Something I did about two months ago, which I certainly wouldn't have done a few years ago, was take some of my poetry and read it to my family. Like my father and my two brothers and my sister, sister-in-law, and was very gratified by their response. And you know, you kind of wonder, what did I think they would do? Laugh at me, probably. Or poke fun or...I don't know. What is it that we fear in letting people see who we are? Or something that's very important, close to us, personal to us? And I certainly would never have done that, but then I think if I hadn't been in Gestalt I wouldn't even be into my poetic side, I don't think. That would be buried.

She was fearful of her father's judgement of her Gestalt studies, even as an adult in her fifties.

It took me a while before I even told my father what I was doing. Now, here we are like, fifty years later and I still have enough concern about getting a negative reaction or a derogatory reaction from my father, which may be entirely unfounded, but nevertheless, that was the fear that I had, that I wouldn't tell him. And it took me a long time to tell him what I was doing and I didn't talk to him too much. Then I found much to my surprise he was very interested and he wanted to borrow textbooks. I had a very mixed image of him, obviously from my upbringing, and he's a much more complex man than I ever gave him credit for.

Trust

Leith credits the teachings of Ram Das and Gestalt to increasing her ability to be more vulnerable, in learning to "let go."

Safety is being completely vulnerable. In trying to keep myself safe I was keeping myself isolated and I felt, lonely, depressed. The only way to be safe is basically to have nothing to hide-to have nothing you're trying to protect. People build up walls to protect their material accumulation, and that creates separation and fear. If you're not attached to any of it, you are able to move. It is about movement instead of rigidity. The theme of rigidity versus flexibility comes up in Gestalt, how we lock ourselves in trying to protect
ourselves, trying to deal with our fears by tightening up and becoming really rigid. It appears in native teachings about health and wellness and spirituality, and it's about movement. In native teachings there are four cardinal directions in the Medicine Wheel relate to different aspects of humanness: south for emotion and the place of the child, west is about the physical body, north is about the mind, and east is the spirit. In the south, the place of emotions, 'e-motion,' is about energy in motion. In the west, we are meant to use our physical bodies as containers and channels. Not locked in boxes, but as channels for our energy. What usually happens is that as humans we 'hold' with our emotions and 'give' with our bodies. You know, we work ourselves to death physically, but we hold back our emotions.

For me it's about being able to be in the centered place and be able to move out to the edge, in awareness, when you need to, and then be able to get back to your center.

Leith feels she has learned to allow things to happen in life, at the same time not being afraid to push for change when the time is right.

With this perspective, I've found the magic
To transform adversity into adventure.
Anxiety shifts to unleash excitement
That if I can stay long enough,

--Yes, it's tough
In the place of 'not knowing'
And no, I don't have to stay there alone--
I'll find a new piece, another dimension
That gives me some courage to take the next step.

I don't have to do everything immediately. Part of it is an issue of trust, self-trust, self-confidence, that even though I think I know, I'm not sure. I don't trust myself sometimes to make a decision and step out and implement it. And certainly that was the case in my marriage, and that was certainly the case in my corporate life, is that I didn't tend to say to myself, 'Okay, well, this is what's gotta happen, so I'm going to make it happen. I would gradually become more and more strongly aware and I would still be
waiting, maybe, for something to feel right about it. Now, that's an 'after the fact' thought that's kind of coming to me right now. There's something about allowing things to emerge until I have a feeling that it's right to move, rather than push it. And, now what? What I want to say I've also done some really risky things on the spur of the moment, and some of them turned out just fine. So, it's not to say that I can't, and I don't know what the difference is. Unless, it's when I do the risky things it's because I'm operating from a sense of knowing and confidence that I haven't possessed through here. (points to head)

If you believe some of the spiritual teachings, and I like the idea in shamanic studies that we are souls, we are energy and we have chosen this body, the circumstances, the parents, whatever. We've chosen obstacles we will face in order to learn and evolve, and the spirit can only evolve in human form. In spirit form we chose it all, and when we come into the human body, we tend to lose the knowledge of why we come, what we're here for. But somewhere it's there. So, you know, when you say the 'what if,' somewhere it was there but you couldn't give voice to it at that point.

**Transition**

I think the hardest part of making decisions is staying in what Bridges calls 'the neutral zone.' Only for many people it's not very neutral because it is a place of loss of control. You've let go...and you haven't got anything else to hang on to. And it comes up again and again in different contexts. In Gestalt we speak about staying at the impasse to get to the point of creative indifference. In The Artist's Way she says, 'You have to let go with both hands and when you do, the safety net will appear.' That's the essence...as long as you're hanging on with one hand you're not going to be able to get beyond a certain distance and you may not be able to see your safety net. You've got to wait until you can let go. And it's a big thing about trust. And certainly for me, when I was younger, certainly in my first marriage and even in corporate life, I did not have enough trust in myself to push things along, because I was afraid I wouldn't be able to handle what would emerge, or not emerge. Now I have moved into, I think, more of a space of 'I can wait without knowing because I can trust.' So it's a total flip from 'I had to wait without knowing because I didn't trust myself, and now I am much more consciously aware of choosing to wait because I do trust that when things are right I will get both the impetus,
the motivation, and the opportunities to move. And then I have to struggle with what I consider the fine line between doing too little...

Leith talks about recognizing the validity of "the resting place." She explains practicing Gestalt is being present in the "here and now."

I am also including myself in the exchange-the interaction. How do you know when you're doing that? I start getting excitement and some anxiety in my gut. I know when I'm putting myself on the edge. That's the place where the life is. However, you can't be out there all the time. So there's a resting-place. When does the resting-place become a 'rotting place?' When you are indulging yourself to the point of beginning to rot, rather than just resting, renewing...I'm thinking of the image of a seed germinating, but if the seed stays in the ground too long and gets too much water and heat and moisture, it'll start to rot, and then it won't sprout and come forth. So, the fine line for me is knowing, being able to move back and forth between the edge and the resting place, and not let myself slip into the rotting place.

Leith talked about needing a sense of closure with her graduate studies. Contemplating pursuing a Ph.D., she weighed her enjoyment of being a part of the academic community with her need to identify new life goals. She described the discomfort of the time of waiting for clarity for what would come next.

We talk about getting to an impasse and then staying in that impasse, in that place of great discomfort, knowing you are not going to go back. Refusing to go back to your old neuroses, and not knowing and being afraid to do something different. Just waiting until some new figure forms and you say, 'Aha, I can do that.'

For Leith, the physical awareness comes first, followed by psychological movement.

It had to be physical before my mind could start thinking. When you get to the end process, you're still looking at it, you're still looking at it, you're still watching it and you're backing away from it, and then at some point you can turn around and start looking forward, looking out. But I had to do these physical things, get them done in order to stop my focus, in order to change my focus.

That's the hardest part of the neutral zone or the impasse...I'll use the analogy of doors. You know, when you're closing one door behind you, if you can see that there's
three doors here in front of you and you could try any one of those, then you're not so inclined to be gazing at the one you just shut behind you. But if you've just shut one behind you, and there's nothing there, that's the impasse. That's when it's really hard not to go back.

And I also have come to know that my body knows, there's an intuitive...I have an intuitive sense about what's the right time for something, and then when I find myself procrastinating or...not doing something that my head is saying, 'Well, come on. You should get on with this.' Well, there's something...there's something not right about this so, I think I'll just allow myself to procrastinate a little longer and when the time is right, I will know. I will feel it and I will have the energy and I will move. I will do what needs to be done.

Leith illustrates with the fact that she advertised for her private practice, and that taking physical action legitimated her new role in some way.

**Body Image**

Leith speaks about taking better care of herself physically today than she ever has, eating healthfully, becoming vegetarian a few years ago, caring for her skin with special facial creams, walking more since she moved downtown.

For so many years in growing up I learned to not be in my body. I didn't like my body. I got lots of messages that it wasn't a good body. It was too fat; it was...you know things like that. And so, I learned, as many, many people do in Western society, to be in my head and discount what's going on in my body. And that's kind of one of the things that brings me full back to Gestalt. I was starting to become aware, that I could pay attention, and give credence to a 'gut' feeling, that it would be valid, that it would be the wise course of action, even if it was running counter to what my logical brain said.

**Re-storying**

So why tell our stories, unless we can change
Something about them
That leads to new sight.
Can we make ourselves heroes
Instead of the victims?
Discover new meaning in the pain that we felt
—and survived
We did what we had to do at the time.
That was then, this is now
We can change the perspective on old hurtful scenes
Those places we've been
And passed through.
They're still with us it's true
Their images last, nurtured and vivid,
Until we let go and step to a new viewing place.
Maybe higher, or farther,
Or only a short pace
Away.

In shamanic studies Leith has learned to reframe stories from the past, to create empowering images. She talked about the internal messages we send ourselves. "We tell our stories, using them for mythology and entertainment and we keep ourselves in a certain place by the way we entertain ourselves with these stories." Leith has been able to change her interpretation of a significant childhood story. She was four and got into trouble for walking alone with her older brother to school. The words "selfish" and "inconsiderate" are what she recalls. In telling the story now she sees the behavior as not only realistic for a four-year-old, but that she was "spunky" and "brave" to venture forth the way she did. And after carrying that around for years, she now holds it "as a power story instead of a poor me story."

So I change my perspective, my view of the scene,
From some kind of disaster that overtook me
To something to learn from, a personal teacher,
Something I chose (at some level of knowing)
As the means to stretch me and help me grow.
Renewal

Leith has declared herself an apprentice of shamanic studies, a step that means a commitment to learn the teachings and perform the ceremonies and use it as a way to continue to change her life. The mission statement for Black Lightening Lodge is that it "dances the Sweet Medicine Sundance teachings in beauty, excellence, and with pleasure-in order to co-empower all the people in their growth through providing opportunities for healing, learning and ceremony."

"You work your way all around the medicine wheel and there are lessons in each place and as you master each position you move on." Using the image of a spiral, she explains that you never finish but as you reach a different level you keep returning to things but at a different level of awareness. There are gateways, and each gateway consists of a number of ceremonies, experiences and learnings. Leith is at the Red Lodge, the first gateway. As you progress, the challenges increase to match the new energy level that comes with increased awareness. Leith has a sense of joy in opening herself up to new learning at an older age.

As an older adult, to be able to say, 'I don't know anything about this...come on, let's just see. There's excitement about new possibilities! And integrating it in a way or coming to it in a way that's different from a child coming to it. So it is...it's a different place to be but...excitement in learning but bringing with it all my past history.

Leith passed on some literature to me on shamanic studies for background. "What is Black Lightning? Physically 'black lightening' is the charred part of a tree that has been recently hit by lightening. The power created from it is a deep, rich, black color with sparkles that shine in the light. Energetically, it carries the force of magma, molten rock material that allows anything to take on the power of life. It is the life force of the mineral world. Within this energy is contained the Dream of our lives. It is how we experience our lives and make visions happen. Black Lightening symbolizes the potential of living life in the form we choose, and the potential for the growth and expansion of our spirit towards the light. This is the energetic that Black Lightening Lodge holds for the earth-based shamanic teachings of the Sweet Medicine SunDance Path."

The image is well suited to Leith. And she simply says, "I'm in a process that seems to be moving along."
**Mentoring**

Making a contribution is really important to Leith today and she continues to define what that means for her. During a workshop, participants were asked to create mission statements. The process for Leith was a revelation.

*I am a seeker. I have to find out more about myself. I'm self-centered and I guess I think about that in a derogatory sense, but what I realize is there's a corollary to that and it's about exploring so I can help other people come along. So, I've got to do the exploring and then I will be able to help other people. My grandfather was a positive influence in my life for many years. I would like to make sure that my grandchildren have someone like that in their lives as well.*

She has also experienced a role reversal of sorts with her father, and feels pride when she gains his approval over something she's written, or he asks for texts on Gestalt studies.

**Resiliency**

Leith sums up the life lessons she has learned, "*It's okay to be selfish. It's okay to ask for help. Stay in the present moment. Take action.*"

*The resiliency part of it is I always try harder. I always want to try and do better than I've done it. It's like a paradox or a polarity. I'm always trying to do it better because I know I'll never be 'good enough.' So, I have to keep trying to do better. And of course there's stress to that. And there's low self-esteem to that. And it made me a strong person; it made me a determined person. It made me kind of a 'gorilla.' I don't go out front and lead the charge. But I'll stay in there and keep slugging. I don't give up easily.*

*I'm beginning to trust and allow my purpose
To reveal itself and come into form,
To attend to coincidence,
Meetings that happen
In seemingly random, 'just luck' fashion.
Beauty, simplicity, hallmarks of 'magic'
I've come to believe in,"
Is this synchronicity?
The way of the universe is not laborious
Simple things are often most glorious.
And sometimes very frightening too
Until we can learn to shift our view.
Castaneda learned to 'see without looking,'
To 'hear without listening,' and trust in his knowing
Without the need of material proof.

Paradox plays with her magic ball.
My life's an adventure or nothing at all.
Samantha radiates serene beauty as she describes her alternative lifestyle in Muskoka. Her days are filled with the routine of yoga and meditation, jogging, Qi Gong, journalling, painting and clay work. She grows her own mesclun salad greens, watches what she eats, drinks mostly water. She's recently quit her job as a public school teacher and spends weekdays in the city pursuing graduate studies, wondering how to reconcile a commitment to writing her doctoral thesis with her decision to have a child. Artemis, "the wild woman" has long been her archetypal goddess, but lately she finds an affinity resounding with Demeter, earth mother. Samantha, or "Nan" has amazingly thick brownish blond hair past her shoulders. She's fond of bulky sweaters and flowing skirts, funky flowered tights and sweatshirts. She grew up here, but her spiritual home is Switzerland, the heart of Europe. She speaks in flowing metaphors and often answers questions with, "You bet." She talks about the treasure that lies below the surface of pain and illness. She talks about being diagnosed, almost 19 years ago now, with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) and how she's learned to transform the disease into something useful. She's learned through the years to trust her "gut instinct."

Family History

Nan's grandmother is 95; she's one of Nan's role models. As a young girl, Nan's grandmother had "this incredible love affair with Switzerland. And this incredible love affair with her husband, and had a very exciting life." Her grandmother has spoken of two men and the conscious choice between being a housewife in Oshawa, or "do I want adventure?" She chose adventure. Working in Muskoka as a maid she met a chef-in-training, the youngest son of a wealthy Swiss family who owned a hotel in Zurich. They fell in love and there followed a trip to Zurich, "trial-by-fire" in language school to learn German before the mother-in-law would permit marriage, and later struggles to break free of the matriarchal influence of "Gross Mama." Returning to Canada during the depression, at first they had money. Later the Porsche and family home changed to a lifestyle of taking in boarders to pay the mortgage. Nan had a "wonderful connecting"
between herself and her grandmother. She recalls thoughtful little gifts at birthdays and Christmas with special wrapping. She remembers taking her lunch to visit her grandmother at work at the Elsa Harvey Doll Haven near the Colonnade, and at displays at the Canadian National Exhibition Better Living Building. "She drew me into that part of her life." She remembers going to her house only two blocks away for an after school snack and game of Snakes and Ladders or Crazy Eights. "It was just a wonderful, sort of solid, connected place to be."

More importantly, Nan showed a keen interest in her grandmother's Swiss pictures and stories, and the two spent lots of time fantasizing. When Nan turned 12 she got to take three weeks away from school, using her paper route money to visit Switzerland for the first time with her grandmother. They visited the hotel in Zurich, places her grandmother used to live, where she had her first job...Nan describes her grandmother as "worldly" and a very strong influence. "She brought the Swissness out, or I've always felt an affinity there. On some level I always knew I was going to marry someone who was German or Swiss. She had an incredible love for the country."

Nan describes growing up in Etobicoke. "I was an Adler, logical consequences child from way back." Her parents were professionals, her father an educational administrator, her mother a nurse. The tone of the household was set by the tension between their differences, something Nan still struggles with. They separated five years ago. She describes her mother as a "good nurse, very dedicated and well schooled in her medical perspective."

My Mom was an interesting person. She always told us that we were special, that we had incredible talents, that we could do anything we wanted to do. You're okay. You're great now. My Mom, I think, gave us an awareness of what "home" is. You know that feeling when you're "home" and close to yourself and your core. My Mom in her work was definitely fulfilling her life's purpose. Her work is her life, and she's amazing at it and loves it and does it with complete giving of herself. She's a martyr and just draws on this well of love for wanting to help other people. So she gave us that. She gave us a true sense of what that feels like to receive.

Mom did an amazing job of giving this core self, because she was so genuine in who she was and so solid in who she was. We always criticized her for not being broad
enough, but she just was so developed in who she was that she gave us that sense, as little kids, you could kind of draw on home.

Nan describes her mother as representing the inside, conservative element, while her father was the outside, alternative influence. He started out to be an actor, but through what Nan sees as a failure of nerve, stifled his creativity to work through the ranks to become an educational administrator. Her father's struggle with freeing his own creativity is the major theme Nan has internalized in her own attempt to reconcile her creative and logical sides, something she has become increasingly aware of throughout the course of our interviews.

For me, my Dad was very, very creative. He was an actor before he was a teacher and I think he was a lot happier. He'd make papier-mâché things in the basement, and he was into gardening, that kind of thing. My Mom was very-not creative, so we had these weird, you know, feminine-masculine role models in a sense. My mother had totally shut down her creativity and it's an issue now for her and her three daughters, because her daughters say, you know, 'You gotta stop the work stuff.' She's past the retirement age, but work is all there is, and she's really got some kind of block, some kind of barrier to finding another way of being for her and that was something that was always in my consciousness.

My Dad was an educator and very much believed that the discovery approach, and sort of creating your own reality as a child was the way it should be. "Her father's message was, "You have to work harder to be as good as you think you can be. There's a drive there to always get just a bit closer. I have that drive to shave a little bit closer to find out a little bit more, to get closer to home."

She says the combined messages from her mother and father gave her a drive to "always get closer to that feeling of being totally centered and totally happy and flexible and feeling like you're doing what you should be doing-your life's purpose."

Nan says her father showed her how you can navigate the path. He freely entered into new space, rejecting the old, but separated himself in this way. In the 60's he was one of the leading reformers of the educational system. So he brought home ideas, things to read, saying, "There's a different way. There's a better way." Nan says that's where she got her natural world connection, "So there's a ballast there, but there's also a good
strong wind. But it's a torture test too, because the down side of the ballast is that sometimes you don't want to go out there." Sometimes Nan sees the world as a scary place to protect herself from, other times she's so far out in the world she loses her sense of home. "So I dance between those two a lot." She thinks that's part of her split lifestyle between Huntsville and Toronto, where she's in the outside world struggling to keep the core happening.

Nan shudders now thinking of growing up in the suburbs, but talks about childhood memories of times with her two younger sisters. They made up all kinds of plays and had musical bands, and Nan would pretend she was a teacher.

We used to ride all over the place on our bikes, and riverwalk. So I had this real burgeoning creativity. I was in this world of 'inside out.' There was no line. I was always just dancing to this tune.

Her best friend from grade one was Linda, and they have what she describes today as a life connection. Nan was drawn to Linda's earthy intelligence, they played chess together, and when Linda moved away to a farm, they rode horses and riverwalked together. They promised each other they would travel to Europe together during their summer breaks. Their friendship briefly interrupted after high school, they later discovered they were both in Europe at the same time at age 21, Linda in Nantes, France while Nan was in Geneva, Switzerland.

Nan recalls Linda as the smallest child in the class with cute barrettes and matching dress and stockings. One day while the class played outside Linda waved to them from inside and suddenly put her head through the plate window thinking it was open. Nan had never seen her cry before but this time she did. The teacher asked everyone to be kind to Linda because she had had a shock. Part of Nan's school routine was walking back and forth together with Linda, the two girls making up fanciful stories about kids in the trees and places around the school that had significance.

**Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)**

Between ages 13 and 14 Nan was prescribed antibiotics, tetracycline, by a dermatologist, a drug she took for almost five years. At the time it was considered a major breakthrough-adolescent girls and boys no longer had to suffer the psychological
hardships of having acne. But medical science had not determined that long-term antibiotic use disrupts the stomach's natural balance of healthy bacteria. Nan's first IBS symptoms began around age 19.

She wrote about her experience.

At the age of 19, after a year of gastro-intestinal distress marked by alternating constipation and explosive diarrhea, I was referred by my general practitioner to a specialist. After much palpitating and internal viewing I was given the news. I was one of the many millions of North American young women unlucky enough to be suffering from Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). Many books and articles later I had obtained information. Many substances were to be avoided: caffeinated beverages and foods (chocolate), alcohol, yeast containing foods (breads), fats, refined sugars and many dairy products (cheeses, creams). Also, I was to avoid stress, because that was likely to upset my gut. Although all tests demonstrated that there was nothing physically wrong with the structure of my intestinal tract, it was possible that long-term antibiotic use prescribed for acne as a teenager may have permanently disrupted the flora in my organs.

Therefore, acidophilus and bifidum bacteria were recommended. I lived with this regimen off and on for the next ten years with varying degrees of success. Some months went smoothly with few symptoms; others were like riding a roller coaster of emotions and physical discomfort. Radically modifying my diet often helped a great deal. Occasionally it seemed to make no difference what I ate. It wasn't until I was introduced by my childhood friend Linda to an alternative paradigm, that I began my journey to understanding my illness in a whole new light.

Nan talked about possible contributing factors towards her IBS. At home she was increasingly squashing her creativity in favor of pursuing sciences in high school and university. Another key factor was the effect on the family atmosphere of her father's strong ego needs. She describes family dinners where her father would prepare gourmet meals with rich creams and heavy desserts, the obligation to eat to shore up his ego, usually followed by an episode of IBS.
Family Tension

The conflict with her father is a defining theme for Nan, an awareness that heightened during the course of our interviews, and she began recording her impressions in life history writing for a course in graduate school. She has an evolving awareness of his perspective and the choices he made. She reflected on her father's decision to go into teaching and her own decision to become a teacher as well. In his university student days, as an actor and an artist, her father performed at Hart House Theatre. But his career choice was to become a teacher.

He made a decision to teach as a useful way to channel a certain amount of creative energy and do something worthwhile. He had a strong social conscience about what he thought he should be doing. But I think it was a big mistake. I think the acting was a very risky thing and he didn't go with that risk. As the years progressed he became a teacher and eventually moved up to being an administrator, he become progressively and progressively more detached from his work and from his family. So when he came home he was very irritable; he was very closed. He was very demanding, very critical, sometimes he got physical if he was very angry, and if we sort of pushed his buttons far enough.

Nan recalled an incident that occurred at the family cottage when she was about 16. It was a defining moment for her. As the oldest of three girls she would call in her sisters and mother for family "pow wows" to try to get through to her mother not to accept his putdowns and behavior, and indirectly to get through to their father with these messages. She felt she couldn't talk to him directly because he just couldn't hear her. One day he got very angry.

He physically tried to take me to put me in my room. And instead of resisting him, fighting him, I just totally let go and let him 'manhandle' me like a piece of furniture. So I had no resistance. This sense of 'you can put me wherever you want to, but there's an essence that you can't touch.' And that has been a powerful memory for me about feeling that, 'there's something there that you can try to squash, that you can try to kill, that can try to move away, but you can't do it.' And it was an incredible feeling of power, self-power, just containment, and I think that's the first conscious awareness of that.
Her father's response was at first dissipation of energy, then to become really, really angry and really abusive. Her mother's response, using the yardstick of her nursing experiences, was, "Dad's behavior was not really a big thing. So in her sense of the world in terms of a barometer, having loved ones die or be terminally ill, or be very, very ill for a long period of time, chronically ill, having natural catastrophes in my midst, living in a war zone, experiencing famine, or poverty...you know what I'm getting at?"

So I was brought up in very much...this is my mother's nursing stuff and what's important. She's working with people who are probably going to remain quadriplegics for the rest of their lives. It's big, right? So for us to say, 'What's Dad freaked out about? Why is he always so irritable and so difficult to talk to, and why is it you always protect him? And she said, 'It's not really that big a deal, is it?' So in my world in some respects that's the way I framed it. 'It's not really that big a deal.' But as I peel the layers of it back, it is. It's a fundamental big deal, right? It's a 'who you are as a person big deal,' right?

Nan says home was always a place she felt welcomed, that her mother put energy into that. But there were parallel lives going on with separate meal times and play space for the kids. Her father did try to reach out with the latest books from school, making skating rinks in the back yard. "I think if there was any lack of safety in my home growing up, it was a lack of safety I think a lot of women feel in terms of having a respected, valued feminine voice or female voice. And feeling nurtured and safe in being that...right? From this experience Nan has internalized a sense of invulnerability—of resiliency.

I do have a sense that no one can really hurt me. There's nothing really that anybody...I mean somebody could kill me, but there's nothing really that somebody can do that's really going to hurt me, that's really going to stop me. So it gives me a sense of, 'Well, take a chance. What's the worst thing that can happen?' So I have a very strong inner voice that gives that message. It reminds me, 'Just go do it.' What's going to happen? What's the worst case scenario...what's the worst case scenario? So that allows me to take risks sometimes. It calms my inner critic.

Nan talks about the process of reigning in her creativity, becoming a hardcore science student, schooled in an objective, rigorous, problem-solving mode. "I developed
my masculine, knowing, analytical voice, which is great. It has stood me in good stead and will continue to, but I need to dig deep to pull out the other knowing and the other voice, in order to have some kind of balance and integration." There wasn't enough time or space in school to explore and develop creatively, and no support for it-being considered waste of time. She describes that time as playacting, or fulfilling a role. Not until she took a break from studies at University of Toronto to travel on her own in Europe did she make the decisions that would change the direction of her life course. Her father insisted the girls work their way through university, which Nan sees today was a hardship but also very formative. She came back from Europe and dropped organic chemistry, that hallowed gateway to medical school, and began studying psychology, working at The Hospital for Sick Children, The Addiction Research Foundation and the Queen Street Mental Health Center. Today she sees that these decisions changed the course of her life. Investigating the possibilities for work, she found a job at 'Sick Kids' and "honed in on it." Nan worked with a supervisor who was from Switzerland, later spending time over there when her supervisor went back. It was also through this connection that she met her husband, and as she had envisioned, he's Swiss. "It fit quite nicely with the stuff I was doing in psychology and seemed interesting. It was clear. I just knew that that was where I needed to be. Everything has followed from there...I knew that that was my job and that's where I had to go. And there was no tension about it at all."

"It was the beginning of finding out what it is that I really wanted to do, and how to realize that." She became more physically active with aerobics, weights and swimming but not yet in a way that connected to the body. Her goal was to look good. The integration would come later.

"I think that part of my journey has been journeying back to myself and that part of myself that is in nature and is much more creative and loves that kind of life. I find I'm trying to integrate the scientific-objective area of the very rational side with the side that's much more holistic, more sensual. That's my masculine-feminine stuff. Going down the road of science was cutting off my earthy-feminine." She was conscious back then of looking like a girl in a "Barbie doll" kind of way, but felt a split. She was play-acting. It was a persona, a role. She felt a need to get back to something more grounded. "To not
look outside for connections and meaning but to look inside. And you need to clean out in order to be able to look inside. So that's an ongoing thing, checking in."

Nan moved from a stance of feeling she had to perform and be really good and play the game, that other people can influence her life to, "I'm the captain of this ship. I can take it where I want to go." Her thesis work now is on the "landscape-mindscape connection. So there's this incredible sense of freedom and choice, when I realized I could choose and trust my choice, and enjoy the outcome of that choice, and feel this incredible exhilaration that there's an infinite number of choices. That permeated my understanding of myself: That there's many things I can choose here-and I'm a competent chooser."

**Family Scripts**

Nan is aware of the strong professional role modeling from home, as well as scripting as the oldest child. She chose to become an educator. "Education is my lifeblood. Definitely. If there was a scripting, it would be around me being the oldest child and being the son that wasn't and therefore following father. I can see that." She describes teaching as significant for her on many levels: as a creative outlet, her love of children, contributing to the family income, summers off, gaining professional credibility, buying some time, and it was something she knew she could do. But the reality of being in a portable classroom of grade six students was "a journey of adversity." It helped her define "resiliency," and develop inner resources. She learned to call on other teachers for feedback instead of letting it get bottled up, to share her experiences with others to determine if it was real or not, to look for answers, persevere-to not give up, to reframe things, to continually try new things. And finally, the willingness to say, "I can't do this."

Nan had several years of successful teaching when she experienced the letting go, the breakthrough to a flow of synchronicity where creativity and genuine learning flourished. She chose to leave at that point, feeling it can't get much better than that. "It was my aftersong."

So, knowing when to quit is an option. Not assuming that that's not an option. And having the sense of when there's too much of yourself going into something to the point
where you're not...the balance is off. I think that's part of my decision to leave as well. The balance is off somewhere there.

On some level Nan felt teaching was a role. "I had myself believing I could do that role really well." She was scared to find out that wasn't the case, because she didn't know what other answers there were. But the toll was too big to keep on acting a role. She also felt her decision to get into teaching in the first place was a logical, "heady" choice. Again, the awareness emerged for her through our interviews that teaching was a cognitive, above the shoulder decision that was very practical.

It was really neat in our interview to hear myself talking about it that way because it allowed me to kind of...let that go. I don't think it's finished, but I think I'm letting it go and not beating myself up about the idea...I'm leaving something as opposed to going for something else. Hearing myself talk about it being such a 'heady' decision brought it home."That's what was missing. I could do it but I couldn't be true to myself. It wasn't drawing on the best strengths that I have. It took an incredible amount of energy to maintain that role. It was amazing to make that connection. It fit certain understandings of myself, as I always had as a child. There's a part of me that's that person. But that's a really small part and for some reason to break out of the part was messy at that time. It meant I was going to have to do more exploring. It meant I was going to have to maybe do more school work. It meant I was going to have to go into uncharted territory, which meant all kinds of practical inconveniences." For a while, Nan bargained she could be true to herself in her time off, but the cost became too high and started to spill over into other areas of her life, not unlike her father.

The insight about teaching and how that was a practical 'heady' decision, and also the writing that came out around my Dad and the similarities in the process that my Dad went through was a big insight. He made a practical choice in teaching and it destroyed him in a lot of ways.

Nan recalls the moment she decided to apply for her doctorate, where she was sitting, the time of year, and the teaching colleague whose enthusiasm and encouragement was pivotal to making the decision. He said, "You have to because the opportunity's there. You have to go. You have to continue. You're meant to touch more
people than the people in the classroom. You're not leaving the kids in the classroom. It's just supposed to be different. If it's not meant to be, they'll refuse you."

**Alternative Lifestyle**

Nan and her husband now live in Huntsville where Nan is developing her community life, gardening, learning to engage in groups of people with very different viewpoints and understandings. Through a similar chain of events Nan's husband was able to leave a Bay Street job where he had prioritized a steady income and pension above the flexibility and uncertainty of being an entrepreneur, developing his own computer software business. It's a big change, but Nan saw the cost in energy and felt all the things she loved about him and that originally attracted her to him were being squashed. "One of my priorities is to have time to think and to read, to create, to have a nice, natural place to live. And to not have RSP's, you know. That may come back to haunt us, I don't know."

Nan's childhood friend Linda came to visit one summer a few years ago after having completed Touch for Health courses.

*She was fresh with enthusiasm and armed with a whole new way of working with the body. She explained that the scientific method limits itself by seeing the body as simply a collection of physical organs and organic systems. In fact, there is an understanding, based on eastern medicine that describes the body in terms of energy pathways. Further, our bodies are not separate from our minds. Rather, all intellectual and emotional processes are embodied and can be assessed at the body level. She went on to demonstrate where emotion has been stored in the body and how to clear it. She explained that meridians are energy pathways that need to be in balance in order for the body to be functioning at its best. This brief introduction opened a door of new understanding for me that was to change my life.*

During that same holiday with Linda, they were invited to attend a dream analysis workshop held in the neighborhood. A visiting Jungian analyst, Emy Alvera, who wished to share her insights with a small informal group of women was hosting it. She invited participants to bring a dream to share. At that time Nan was on summer holidays from teaching, working on her Masters of Education in Global Transformative studies. In the
coursework she had been journalling her thoughts and experiences. As a part of that process she had begun to jot down interesting dreams.

**I had never before attended a dream analysis workshop and although I had always enjoyed sharing dreams, I had not linked my dream world with other aspects of my life. My visit with Emy Alvera that summer evening changed all that. I presented a dream that she interpreted to be both collective and very instructive for me personally. Its basic message outlined how I was on a different ship, that I was challenged by the 'natives' to disembark and be like them, but that I refused, captured one of them, dragged him on board and brought him through customs (where he turned into a little blond boy). Finally I brought him home to the dock. Without knowing it at the time, this dream was to come true for me in the next two years.**

The experiences with Linda and Emy Alvera sent me down a new path. I was primed for a deeper understanding of the mind body connection and felt as though I had two new tools: Touch for Health muscle testing and dream dialogue. My brief encounter with Touch for Health gave me a sense of profound respect for the wisdom of my body. My contact with Emy connected me to the intriguing world of the archetypal symbol. It allowed me to begin a serious dialogue with my unconscious. I purchased the book *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols* by J.C. Cooper (1978) and began to use it regularly.

She describes her master's graduate work at this time as nourishing but also distressing. Global issues convinced her of the need to "become part of the solution to some of the more intractable problems facing the planet." She felt frustration at her perception of being "one person in a tide of many." As her gut churned she took the signal to mean "too much stress."

That summer Nan explored organic gardening. She began to grow her own organic greens and educated herself in the health benefits of homegrown produce. "I felt nourished when eating my own greens and found a newfound sense of connection to the earth."

Continuing to explore dreamwork and using Touch for Health helped alleviate the stress of that difficult year. "I found it very fascinating to be using my body to solidify and gain commitment for things that I would have in the past relegated to the sole domain of"
my head. The year proved to be a tough one." Her husband was running his computer software business from Huntsville, while Nan commuted to Toronto for work and school.

I lived in my childhood bedroom during the week, under the stuffed animals and beside the white flowered baby furniture. On the weekends I dragged my scrambled brain and bus addled body back to Mary Lake. I tried to run off the gastric distress, but I needed big blocks of free time to loosen my bowel constriction or some kind of new tool.

Nan incorporated yoga into her preventative regimen.

I loved two aspects of yoga immediately. I loved the slow, mindful movements that pushed me to my limits but didn’t make me feel like I was in competition with anyone else. I also loved the twenty-minute relaxation at the end. It was my first window into meditation and it affirmed for me the benefits of guided imagery for enhancing health and well being.

Nan found that things began to change. She used yoga to keep her back supple and to stimulate bowel functioning. She also began to feel the energy of her body.

During relaxation my hands would pulse and during some postures I’d feel rushes of energy coursing through my body. I was happier, had more energy and began to internalize the term ‘centered.’ I never knew how off center I had been until I had experienced centeredness.

Nan’s regimen encompassed jogging, watching her diet, eating homegrown food and doing yoga and meditation regularly. She also continued journalling her experiences and recording her dreams.

Despite this, I went into a deep anomie. As I sat up in the beautiful surroundings of Muskoka my head began to churn with many questions. Who was I? What was I doing with my life? My friends sounded busy and engaged with their lives. There was a whole world out there that seemed to be passing me by. At my darkest times I felt that I was a wastrel, an uncontributing member of society. I was a person with nothing interesting to say, nothing new to contribute, no new news and long days to fill. Despite assurances from friends and family, I felt as though I had leaped off of the ship and was now drowning in a vast pool of emptiness. I was an unmissed nobody with no profession and therefore no identity. My gut spit and churned, ached and complained.
Creativity

Nan worked through The Artist's Way doing her "morning pages," doing battle with the proverbial "inner critic."

I began to understand the immense power that the inner critic can have over our lives. I began to recognize her voice. I learned to heed her warnings when it was necessary or prudent to do so. I also learned to quietly put her complaints or warnings aside when they interfered with my need to express my creative self. Most importantly, I experienced directly the concept of flow. I began to experience what putting your raft in the river of the creative life force meant. I recognized when I was in that state and when I was grounded on the rocky shore. I began to see myself as a conduit for creative energy and I began to see my daily practices as a way to keep my pipes clean and in good repair so that I might conduct the creative energy efficiently. I addition to writing free associative poetry, I began to experiment with clay and taught myself how to draw using Betty Edwards' Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain.

I want out of the vice that squeezes my brain
The prickly lesion that gives me such pain
The voices that tell me that I'm no good
The voice that spills hatred, the voice that says "should."
When will relief come through my door?

Nan feels a split between her thinking and feeling capacities. A "meaning map" introduced by David Hunt (1989) revealed to her the concept of "letting go" was located in her gut. "Hardly surprising, given the eliminatory function of my GI tract, but affirming nonetheless." After having this awareness she was given the poem "Letting Go."
Letting Go

To "let go" does not mean to stop caring
It means I can't do it for someone else
To "let go" is not to cut myself off
It's the realization that I can't control another
To "let go" is not to enable
But to allow learning from natural consequences
To "let go" is to admit powerlessness
Which means the outcome is not in my hands
To "let go" is not to try to change or blame another
It's to make the most of myself
To "let go" is not to care for
But to care "about"
To "let go" is not to fix
But to be supportive
To "let go" is not to judge
But to allow another to be a human being
To "let go" is not to be in the middle arranging all the outcomes
But to allow others to affect their destinies
To "let go" is not to be protective
It's to permit another to face reality
To "let go" is not to deny
But to accept
To "let go" is not to nag, scold or argue
But instead to search out my own shortcomings and correct them
To "let go" is not to adjust everything to my desires
But to take each day as it comes, and cherish myself in it
To "let go" is not to criticize and regulate anybody
But to try to become what I dream I can be
To "let go" is to not regret the past
But to grow and live for the future
To "let go" is to fear less
And to love more

(Author Unknown)

Nan feels fear was stopping her from letting go of all that churned in her abdomen. "A feeling of wellness can only be maintained through an active participation in life."

For me it's really about letting go. It's just letting go of the need to control and anticipate the outcome. Letting go of even thinking there's going to be an outcome and just trusting that, doing what I need to be doing and what's going to come to me comes. And I can get into this tailspin where I don't and I try and anticipate and try and map out
pathways, and get freaked if things take too long, you know, that kind of thing. But letting go of that... it's great if you can do it... it's great.

She began to experiment with painting, using free association paying attention to energy shifts to choose the colors. She continued to paint until she felt she was done. Then she wrote about her feelings that day and wrote a free associative poem if appropriate.

Nov. 21, 1997
Feel the blue
Let go the green
And go to places you've never been
Jump on yellow
And hold on tight
Its energy swallows and fills with fright
That part of you not in control
That part so new, that part not full
Take heed of red, give it space to roam
But commit to blue, make it your home
Fill up your space
Swallow your pride
Come out in full, no longer hide
Behind the walls, behind the doors
With your true self there’s so much more
To life, to love, to your higher purpose
So do it now, take hold, resurface.

Her painting has increasingly taken on new meaning and energy for her.

It's amazing. Wonderful! I use it as a way to understand what's going on. It's affected my relationship to the outside world in that sense that I see color differently. I 'feel' color. I feel that because this has been framed around where I am at today, and when I get into this cosmic stuff, then 'I am the cosmos.' I am part of the cosmos. So, it's
given me this incredible sense of connection that I hadn't really had before. It's made me passionate in a way that I had never been before.

Nan has a sense of needing to commune with others and also go inward and pull out perspective to give her meaning and new understanding - a process vital to her creativity.

That's a new piece. That's the most powerful piece in some respects because that's the one that seems to be providing the core, the root to core security. And then I'm really able to accept the gifts from the world around me. I feel okay developing my voice and knowing that there's no real voice I can model myself after. That I have to feel safe enough in what I'm doing and saying that it's authentically me. That I can stand up tall, you know, and say, like it or not it's authentically me.

Alternative Healing

Nan also started one hour weekly Qi Gong (pronounced Chee Kung), an ancient Chinese practice of "exercising the breath." Qi is the atmosphere or vital energy that surrounds us. By breathing mindfully we can circulate the energy in the body. It is the practice of disciplined breathing that acts as a way of controlling the body and mind.

Qi Gong increased my awareness. Although I had experienced some energy flow during yoga, never before had I actively channeled that flow to different parts of my body. I directed the Qi to my cramping uterus when I was menstruating, with much success and I used it to maintain regular elimination from my large intestine. I also reveled in their connection to nature. My soul leaped at the chance to be an eagle in flight or to be the first green growth of a newly sprouting seed. Never before had I experienced such beautiful centering postures that connected me to the planet and centered my being.

Nan continued her exploration of healing with the investigation of Traditional Chinese Medicine with the insight that "the energy will not flow until the seams between the polar opposites of my life are sewn up."

Finally Nan explored the works of Deepak Chopra (1990) and Caroline Myss (Shealy & Myss, 1988) and the concept of chakras, energy centers connecting our nerves, hormones and emotions. Knowledge of the seven chakras can be instructive for healing
mind-body connections because each chakra is associated with a different organ and emotional state-specific fears and emotions target specific organs in the body.

Nan's process of exploration connected to the loving energy and potential of her uterus and a decision to have a child.

This energy is earth, feminine and very powerful. Up until recently I had dismissed any thoughts of having children. I loved other people's children and those in my classes, but I couldn't get past the disruption I pictured them causing in my own already happy life. However, an unexpected side effect of clearing space in my sacral chakra has been the joy-filled desire to engage in the ultimate creative process of having a child.

She describes an African tribal tradition that has a belief in the connection between music and life, and the music and the cosmos, and so when a woman wants to have a child she goes into the forest and hears the song of the child. Then when she and her partner are making love they sing that song and then when the child is born they sing the song. Nan has a lilt in her voice as she describes it.

It was gorgeous. I want to go write the song. I'll write the words, my husband can write the music, and that can be the beginning of a real connection to...to our child. And to me...to think that a thesis is more important than that...or that somehow a thesis wouldn't be incredibly enriched by that kind of experience or relationship...

When I'm totally connected, feeling very centered, very much at home with myself, with people around me... love my life, feel I'm doing the right thing, doing the only thing I can be doing... it all falls into place...having a child is the most wonderful thing we could do. Why did we wait so long? All that. And there's more and more and more of that as time goes on.

The ultimate optimistic act is to have a child. So, if I'm having trouble with the idea of having a child, then I'm really a pessimist. Interesting.

**Today-A Balance**

Today Nan sees her life as a process-an ongoing dance between events and responses, that she's lead a fairly serene kind of life. She doesn't suffer from IBS the same way she used to, but it still comes back. It has meaning for her. *"It's like a siren that goes*
off that says, 'Okay, it's time to look at what you're doing and see whether or not there's something you need to be changing. New information coming in.' She looks at her symptoms from the point of view of a long-term relationship with her creativity, childhood issues, and "the way I internalized things and held them. It's a signal that, 'Okay. Enough. That's as far as you're going on this track. You're going to have to go somewhere else."

Nan no longer feels separated from her body, the need to exercise until it hurts, to push harder. Now there's more of a connection, "the body can talk, can tell you what's going on. A light went on." She continues to work on the inward stuff, despite an "inner critic that says it's not a useful way to spend your time; you're supposed to be out there doing things. 'The Artist's Way' gave me that concept-you're a conduit for energy and we block ourselves in some respects with the concept of talent, that some people are 'gifted.' I read that poetry is the voice of the soul and this type of painting or this type of artwork is spontaneous and it is just a tool to express the soul."

**Resiliency**

The importance of a sense of home is interwoven throughout Nan's story. "I have some very strong sensors for 'home.' I just feel like-safe, secure, loved. When I don't I feel I have a fairly descent track record of recognizing it and doing something. I seem to be able to garner enough energy to move out of it."

I really like connecting with other people, and sort of doing things with a kind of communal group feeling. Not necessarily always doing physical things with people, but by going through something or experiencing something in my life through the eyes of many people. I talk to a lot of people and try and read all about people and try to gather what there is. I think that's really important.

Nan talks about her thesis work and how she sees that as part of her own resilience.

*In many respects I'm not an isolated little being, typing away. I am one voice that is an important voice, but I am also part of many voices. In many respects I'm more powerful the more I'm able to embody that voice...take those messages. Because I'm taking my little piece and moving that up. And people realize that. And they're taking*
their little piece and moving it up. So that's cool and I think that's big. It's really big for me.

Nan continues to engage in almost daily practices of running, yoga, meditation, Qi Gong, journalling, painting and clay work.

It sounds like these activities could fill a full day in and of themselves. It's true, that sometimes they do. More often than not they are done quickly and joyfully and seem to blend in with the flow of my life. They are not my entire life but without them my life would be much less meaningful.

This journey continues to spellbind me. What started as an innocent search for understanding and control over my intestinal tract has inadvertently led me to a new home, new skills, new friends, new courses, new knowledge and new dreams for the future. My relationship with IBS continues to provide me with the push I need at times to keep moving.

The connections that can be made by simply entering into a dialogue with your own inner wisdom is intriguing. Ultimately these connections bind me to the fabric of universal cosmological existence. I now know and experience a power higher than myself on most good days. On not so good days I can engage myself in the task of meaning making. I can enter the territory by letting go, opening up and accessing the channels. Then I can map the nature of the territory by accessing the symbols, opening up my own understandings and relating them to those of established knowledge systems. Finally, I can discover the hidden treasures that will lead me to new doors, new understandings and new lives to lead in the future.

This process with you and talking about the way I saw my resilience, by talking about it, it's really brought me along in being able to understand where I've come from and where I'm at and how that informs what I need to be doing in my thesis stuff. It's just wonderful to be able to engage in that kind of process. To have someone ask the questions and being able to talk it through has led to much richer connections and insights. The act of sharing it in dialogue helps give it form. Physicist David Boom talks about the idea that we need to shift our world to fit with our misunderstanding of the continents and to do that is to dialogue, and that's David Hunt's sharing as co-creation. So, I do my piece of creation with the universe, and then I share to create a piece and
there's very much this envelope that's also transformed. So there's been that kind of process. It's been very neat. Yeah, it's been good.
Victoria

Faced with the task of telling my own story in the context of 'resiliency,' I feel conflicting pulls and loyalties: how to be objective about my own story if that were even possible, how to retell it from a non-blaming stance, the awe and humility I feel in light of the stories that have gone before me here, and how to identify my place in my life today and get clarity on the meaning that has for me now.

I have drawn energy from these women's stories, for my own mid-life transition. At the age of 45 as I near the end of my academic career, I am in peak physical condition thanks to 15 years of faithful jogging and healthful living—this summer I swam across a lake and back. I now wear my hair short and the golden brown now has silver highlights. I am a teacher who loves to teach and use my creative resources to open up avenues to learning. I have a balance in life, loving winter cross-country ski holidays or evenings at the ballet. Since I was little my goal was to be a writer. More than anything I love to read good fiction. I have many friends, although real intimacy with family and a significant life partner continues to elude me. My life has not turned out the way I expected—it has been far, far richer than I ever dreamed it could be.

Family History

I came from a matriarchal family of overfunctioning, strong women. Our British heritage and the norms of the time dictated that feelings were kept in check and one did not talk about their family business to "outsiders." My maternal grandfather was about seven when he arrived in Montreal by boat from England with his mother—curiously, I never heard mention of a grandfather. Both my mother and I inherited my grandfather's Eastern European olive skin and high cheekbones. My grandmother was four when my grandfather went off to Europe to serve in World War II, returning five years later with tales of eating rabbit meat in Holland. My WASP family lived in "The Main," the Jewish-Italian ghetto made famous by Mordecai Richeler. Peddlers called out to sharpen scissors or make deliveries for the oil drums and iceboxes. My aunt was born shortly after
Grandpa went away to war; when he returned she thought he was the coal man, an incident that became a staple topic in my family’s folklore.

After the war Grandpa drove a truck for the army for 25 years. I grew up with stories of his drinking at the ‘tavern’ but only ever saw him drunk once. I loved watching his ritual of rolling his own cigarettes with papers and Export ‘A’ tobacco he kept in a leather pouch in his breast pocket, one handedly lighting the wooden match with the flick of his thumb. He'd rub his stubby chin across my cheek and I'd squeal with laughter. He was a willing accomplice to pranks played on him, feigning innocence. He had a lung removed and died of cancer five years later at age 75, the age he wanted to live to be. He was my favorite relative.

My mother was fourteen when she became best friends with the boy down the street. He was just a bit older, but had a reputation as being wild—he rode a motorcycle. At seventeen and pregnant with me she was whisked away to Ottawa to marry and camouflage the disgrace. It was 1955. I was the first grandchild. Returning to Montreal, my mother went to work while my grandparents took care of me. My father worked in a garage, the lights of his powder blue Pontiac shining in the front window when he worked the late shift. I was a spunky, outgoing child given to singing at the top stairs of our balcony or on top of the counter at the corner grocer. During my father’s training as a machinist, a way to better himself and earn a higher salary, my mother grew restless at home with two children. They both have their own versions of what happened, she saying he was unfaithful, he saying she wanted a better life. He still says she was always the love of his life. But I think they both needed to grow up and mature themselves, before they could nurture and raise children. The arguments had begun to escalate, my father pulling the phone out of the wall during my mother’s long telephone talks. They separated. I recall going to my mother as she cried on the bed, ‘Don’t worry. I’ll always take care of you,’ setting up my own caretaker role it would take years of therapy to overcome. My sister and I lived with an aunt and uncle in Ottawa for almost a year, attending school there. It was there that I learned to ride my blue bike without the training wheels. It was there I lied and stole and acted out physically, behavior problems I only understood later as a cry for help, because I was afraid to tell the truth, and because I was angry with the adults around me who offered so little protection. We returned to Montreal
to live with my mother in a new apartment building with a swimming pool in a better part
of the city. My mother had a last meeting with my father to set the terms of their divorce-
he would not pay child support, but could not visit us either. It was the last time I saw my
father for 20 years.

My sister and I were playing in snow bank. My father walked along up to the
apartment and I remember thinking, 'Oh, there's Daddy.' And he didn't acknowledge us.
He might have said 'Hi' or something, but walked on by us and then up to the apartment.
And then came out later and that was it. Today my feelings are 'How can anyone leave
their child?' It's harder to maintain a relationship when you only see them in little bits
and pieces. So I can understand the pain of that. But my feeling is, 'How dare he? How
dare he? How dare he not think that I'm important enough to stand up to my mother and
her rules, to insist on seeing your child? No terms and no arrangements are fair trade for
not getting to see your own child. And fight for what you love. Stand up for what you
love.'

My mother remarried and it was a happy time for me.

I was taken out of school for about six months, which was amazing and wonderful
because we went to Florida and St. Louis and traveled around. And I went on my first
plane ride. I was very chatty and outgoing, going up and down the aisles of the plane,
putting the lights on for everybody, and visiting and mingling and telling everyone where
we were going to Florida so Mommy and Daddy could get married.

I remember warm summer nights on my stepfather's lap, his smells of Old Spice
and cigar smoke, while he read to me the children's tale "Chicken Little," with its
message about bravery against the admonition that "the sky was falling." I learned to
swim there; my stepfather holding onto the back of my bathing suit while I dog paddled
furiously in the pool.

I just remember it as being an amazing thing. I was seven or eight years old and I
got to be in a warm place where it was summer and all my friends were back home in
winter.

It was also the time I was first punished for "telling our family business." We
were a "real family" and this was my "real father" and I should remember that "from now
on."
We returned to become a blended family of my stepfather's two children, an older brother who displaced me, and a sister. While writing my last name in the sand one day my stepbrother approached me, "That's not your last name, you know." My mother told me that was true. I was puzzled. My stepfather's family were French Canadian Catholic, and I recall a confusing time of not being able to communicate with new relatives, drawing pictures in my catechism book at Catholic school and watching people holding beads and the sweet incense smells at church.

We moved to Ontario to a beach community with the 1960's middle-class promise of the good life. My stepfather was well off financially so we were able to have our own home in the best part of town with a huge back yard and garden, the latest toys and household gadgets. I continued my pattern of excelling at school and escaping in books, spending hours at the local library or writing poetry and drawing pictures at my desk.

_White Winter_

_White winter is a wonderland_
_Of many beautiful things._
_The trees of spring and summer_
_Know what the white snow brings._

_For when the cold wind calls them_
_The leaves dance to the ground_
_And trees and shrubs are naked_
_Until the buds are found._

"Reading was always a thing to do. To be able to lose myself in a book and read was major. To escape. That has always been and is still a major escape for me." While I was always a good student I exhibited behavioral problems at home, much to my mother's mystification. Somewhere along the line I had realized I could not please her or live up to her high demands and expectations. I noticed things were different at my friends' houses-they talked openly about things that were deep dark secrets at my house.
My mother's behavior veered between isolation and episodes of rage, her method of control to not speak to me for days or threaten reform school, or the ultimate, "and don't think you're going to your father because he doesn't want you." I coped by being the "brave one" often veering into the role of family scapegoat as a way of easing family tensions. I always "led with my chin," a stance that was not always wise, I would later learn. I recall sitting at the top of the gray wooden stairs leading down to our recreation room, crying because no one would play Monopoly with me. I distinctly recall making a decision that in future I would not be prevented from doing things, just because no one wanted to go along.

**Early Adulthood**

I couldn't wait to get away from home. Instead of grade 13, I opted for community college after grade 12, calculating I could be out working with a one-year investment. I studied journalism and got my first job as a newspaper reporter on a weekly community newspaper, getting sidetracked from my writing goals by the glamour, travel as well as the thrill of having my own by-line. I loved writing feature stories about people. I loved the variety of always learning something new, the long hours into the early morning sitting at my typewriter with a coffee and a cigarette. The freedom of working on my own, the excitement the day the paper came out with my stories in print. It was an exciting first job: politics, banquets, celebrities and travel. It was a family business, part of a chain of newspapers and a job printing company. I soon married the boss' son and the lines between my personal life and "the business" began to blur.

**The Thirties: Letting Go of Mythology**

Around age 27 I made some very significant changes, probably in anticipation of my 30's passage. I began therapy, began taking courses toward a BA and took steps to try and find my birth father. By a series of letters I found him listed in the Montreal phone book. We had some excited meetings, tentative dinners and visits, exchanges of gifts. But it's not like you see on television, a "Roots" happily-ever-after. I'm glad I did it; it took an enormous amount of courage not the least of which was going against my mother's dictates. But I realized you couldn't overcome 20 years. I feel displaced that he has a
daughter who now has the nurturing and love I had for my first seven years, that she's got the wall full of ribbons for horseback riding lessons, encouragement to go to nursing school and summers at their retirement farm. Contrary to my mother's message all these years, he is just an average family man, married to the same woman and working for the same company for over 25 years. I think he's a good person.

In my mind...and I know I was quite clear in thinking this... that in my mind I wanted to be able to go him as an adult with some kind of life in place, not asking for anything. To be able to say to him, you know, "I just wanted to meet you. I don't need...I don't need to sort of 'get' anything from you. I just want to... And wrote that in a letter to him. I mean, it gets worse as we delve into this because I... I mean he has a daughter who's had everything. You know, he's put her through nursing school and... horseback riding lessons, you know and...

He remarried. He's been successful. He has worked in the same job for 25 years, married to the same woman for 25-30 years, has been stable, raised a wonderful daughter who I've met. She's great. I don't have a relationship with any of them, but I've met them a few times. Corresponded, exchanged gifts and stuff. But it never... never... I think it was mostly my choice, but I never had the sense... as an adult, he would come and see me if he had something else going on. He would never still make me a priority and set time aside and say, 'Okay, this is what I'm going to do with you. I want to be with you. I'm coming on purpose to see you. That still wasn't happening. You can't cover up a lifetime... you can't...

At 30 my marriage ended, with my husband and me separating a week before my birthday, just months before graduating with my BA. While we had all we could want materially, neither one of us gave the marriage top priority and after 10 years we parted. Or, more likely the wounds and ghosts from our past got in the way of us being truly intimate partners. I went straight from my BA in English to a Bachelor of Education, partly using the structure to cope with my divorce, but I also loved it and excelled, getting Dean's Honors and a tremendous boost in my self-confidence. After successfully teaching for a few years I felt that I had managed well-bought myself a house, a new car, saved some bonds, taken a holiday to Barbados, and continued in therapy. The therapist was a source of unconditional positive regard, the first I could remember, ever! He encouraged
me in my teaching goals, but also to pursue admission to law school, a tentative goal I had mentioned to him in passing. I wrote the six hour entrance exams twice, finding that in itself an amazing accomplishment. I received a late acceptance at the University of Windsor, and within three weeks had resigned my teaching job, cashed my bonds, left a promising relationship that had just begun, sold my house and embarked on this new venture.

"Failure"

And it was hell on earth. It was the wrong decision. It was the wrong place for me. I felt myself disappearing. I was flat broke to the point where I had no food, no heat. I don't know what I was doing. I honestly don't know what I was doing.

I ended up failing first year and the school readmitted me on an appeal. I failed a second time, this time different courses. On some level law school made sense-I was logical, verbal, intelligent. Was it the male domain, professor's attitudes, old boys' network, or just the wrong fit? As one professor pointed out, "It's like you wanted to fail. You kept doubling back on your information." In the meantime I had been working for Children's Aid, supply teaching with contract and summer school teaching. I had a new commitment to the profession. I had to sell my jewelry for gas money to go out to one of my teaching contract jobs, to tide me over before my cheque came in. The jewelry store was next to the bus depot, and filling out a police report was standard procedure as protection in case of stolen property. I rationalized that it was good use of some of these pieces from my marriage that no longer held meaning. The store gave me $50.

Recommitment to Teaching

From there I applied to do a masters degree in special education at Windsor and OISE in Toronto. Windsor offered me $8,000, OISE nothing. Again I held my breath, sold more of my furniture and moved to Toronto with a 'we'll see' attitude of reserve, afraid to risk again. By Christmas OISE gave me an $800 award and I bought my first computer. I started to breathe again. Around that time Supreme Court Justice Bertha Wilson had retired and chaired a commission investigating discrimination of women in the Law Society, faculties and firms. Her findings made the front page of The Toronto
Star, and as I read them tears fell softly down my cheeks. Little by little I grieved and healed and got answers. But it took a long, long time. I did not bounce back. It took years and was a long, slow process. But the end result was freedom.

I had never failed at anything academically. In all my years, in all my life, I had never failed at anything academically. I had always used doing well at school; I would sit by the door and answer the door and be the neat printer and get the part in the class play. I was one of the top three girls in our class, and always had confidence in my academics. It was one of the first times in my life I hadn't achieved a goal that I set out to achieve. This was the first time when everything I put into place did not work. Everything I put in place did not work.

I recommitted to teaching, realizing that that's where I draw energy, that is what makes my eyes shine. I lost my fear, felt freer somehow that's hard to define.

I've realized now, what else can happen? The fear of being a pleaser and trying to seek approval and trying to do everything right. I read somewhere, 'it's only the good rider who has fallen off his horse.' The loss is in not trying and not giving your best effort and not sticking your neck out. But it's not worth the risk to go so close to the edge. After you haven't had any food in the fridge, who cares. What can they do?

There's a whole different freedom for me now in teaching. It made me commit and it confirmed for me more than anything to use my talents and abilities.

It took a long time. Talking about resiliency here, this idea of 'bouncing back.' It took a long time. It took three or four years. It took a long time.

Other lessons: the maturity to take responsibility for my own decisions, to trust my gut instinct and intuition, that I know my inner wisdom, inner knowing is best, no matter what a therapist or significant others may say. I now know what it feels like to fail and that insight helps in my awareness as a special education teacher in learning disabilities and behavioral problems. I've considered many possible reasons for what happened; it's very multi-layered. One issue is my own compliance with 'mother' and my transference around that, law school may have been a missed goal for the therapist, and that the suggestion was made to me while I was in a regressed state in therapy. I have to factor in my own determination, stubbornness, pride, and inability to let go. The paradox is that somehow failing is the only way I could break out of the mold of living someone
else's goal, of being compliant. It was a way of getting out, another example of my own true self-asserting itself. Failing law school was a way out when I couldn't muster quitting. It was taking a stand for me.

The childhood stuff...how did I bounce back? I mean, years of therapy, years of journal writing, years of anger, grieving, rage, everything...the whole gamut.

Moving On
I've lived in every kind of circumstance and arrangement and things I never thought I would do. Living in a Christian community residence in my thirties and early forties with students from all over the world. I thought I was going to die the first month or two there. Coming to Toronto and living with all these people after seven years of living alone, in a huge house all by myself in a little town. And I just thought I was going to die! I mean, every nerve ending in my body would be screaming for solitude and peace and quiet. And I then got to the point where I'd be in the kitchen eating, and people would walk in and I'd just say 'Hi' and keep on eating. Worked on meeting people and interest in other people. Interest in different ways of life.

Forties Transition
In my forties transition I finally learned to risk in a love relationship. I began to internalize a sense that "no matter what, it will be okay."

Even if I did get hurt, even if it didn't work out, no amount of hurt could be that bad anymore that it would...that I couldn't handle it. It would be okay.

There's a process of sitting back and seeing what happens. Which is the scary part. Which is the unknown. Which is the lack of control. Which is the living life. And we don't plan the outcome. And we're out there vulnerable. And for me it's quite wonderful. It's been very good actually. It's been terrifying. I have an awareness that it's really not that important what the person's response is. It's by taking the risk and throwing myself out there that I am really, fully living.
Going Home

I have been able to stand up and ask for what I want when it's something no one can take away from me. When it's something that's within my control such as education, good job...I'm very good at getting my needs met that way. But I'm not so good at getting my needs met when it involves something that can be taken away—long term relationships, being in love with someone, having a family, having a home.

A significant experience was visiting my childhood home in Montreal where had I lived until age seven just before my father left. I rode my bike along the inner city trails to get there, first finding the place where I was christened, St. Alban's Parish at 706 St. Zotique Street East, then my old neighborhood, then my old corner. Every fiber of my being was alive and tuned in to recollections, sights and sounds. I had a camera and had to keep stopping to buy more film. Then my old doorway. I stood outside for a long time. The numbers 6624 in royal blue and white enamel above the door. The apartment was being renovated so I was let in. I found myself standing in my parent's bedroom window, seven years old, waiting for the lights of my father's powder blue Pontiac. There was my old bedroom, there was the place where my blue chair with the brass upholstery tacks sat, there was that funny octagonal shaped area for the bathroom, there was the kitchen, and the outside balcony looking out over the tops of buildings where I would sing songs and show off my dance routine. I saw the back lane I used to play in. Back inside there was wood and plaster everywhere from the renovations. I saw layers of wallpaper from generations back. Layers probably going back to when I was there as a child. I picked up pieces of wood and plaster and put them in my pocket. I was transported. Back at the front door I looked out at the garage across the street. I used to play there too. It was all as I remembered it, the placing, the main buildings, the signs, although some details had changed. It was all as I remembered it. It was all there.

I'm not afraid any more. It went away. It went away over the summer and I think it connected to going back and seeing my home in the summertime. Getting on my bike and going in and seeing this place had some kind of connection for me. A ghost was put to rest or something. It was just a culmination of things.

Going to Montreal, renting a bike, I was by myself, biked for the whole day. Happened on this apartment. It was hard to get to. I kept having to ask for directions.
because it was on this dead end street. Not dead end but streets in Montreal are all kind of mixed up because of train tracks that have been taken out and stuff like that. The streets stop and start. I remembered a 7-Up sign, and the 7-UP sign was where I remembered it. So there was some kind of answer by going there and looking at that and confronting it. I actually had a map with me that I had marked out like a year previous...So step-by-step-by-step I've been doing something to put these pieces together. All my life. I mean all my life. That's no mystery to me. But the fact that I had this map with me, and low and behold the bike trail kind of connected to this little dot on the map that marked Esplanade Street. So, there's a freedom with that. There's also a grieving that goes with it. I don't know, change or leaving some youth...dreams and the possibilities of youth...leaving those behind. Leaving some of the mythology behind. What could be possible and what's going to happen? But also with leaving go of that is a new determination in my own life to get what I want and get what I need.

**Work in Special Education**

On my wall are two important signs. One says, "Do it! Delegate it! Or Dump it!" I use that to deal with the day-to-day clutter of paper, phone calls, marking, and just the business of "getting things done." I heard it on a tape once, and it works for me. It feels good, affirming, when people say about me, "You're a real doer." That's the kind of person I want to be.

My other sign says, "Encourage. Empower. Motivate. Inspire." Those are my personal goals. Those are my teaching goals.

*I never understood why I was drawn to students and children who had problems-who had learning disabilities and behavioral problems. When I was little, of course, I grew up in a family that wasn't that stable and lack of support at home. Two of my coping methods as I was growing up were to lie and steal. I don't think it was above and beyond what a kid normally does. But I was made to feel that this was just really awful. I was made to feel...in fact, growing up my mother would say, 'I'm going to send you to a girls' home or 'juvenile delinquent' place...or who knows the term she used. But she was always threatening to send me to these places. So, I remember being severely punished...everything I've ever done that I tried to break the rules I got caught. I
remember having these phases of thinking, 'I'm going to be good.' And at some point I realized there was no pleasing my mother no matter what I did. And whatever I did I was going to get caught, so I might as well play by the rules. Just to be honest. It's easier. You don't have to remember what you told anybody. You don't have that guilt. You know, those lessons you learn as you grow up. But as an adult, I started volunteer work in Children's Aid, started working in education, and I started to realize some of the reasons why I was doing the things I was doing. So I don't have this guilt thing, that I was this bad kid. I was really resourceful in getting my needs met. I did it.

Now I recognize it as my spirit just kind of getting what it needed and grabbing after...grabbing hold of something. I was afraid to tell my mother the truth. But a therapist said to me, 'There was a turning point for you where you decided...' Now there's a little core in me that says, 'I will not go any further than this.'

So little by little I've been getting answers, studying child psychology, education. Getting answers for myself, of course, but I've had teachers ask me, 'What do you do?' When I'm working with a behavioral kid or working with someone with learning disabilities. 'What do you do?' And there is something else. I mean, it's not just what you learn in school in the programs. There is something else, a respect that I have, a knowing, and an awareness.

I worked with a teacher who approached me asking, 'What do you feel you want to do? What's the best thing for you right now? How are you going to approach this to make a difference to the students?' There's a higher goal, and that is what I respond to, that's how I work best.

I grew up in a household where, through no fault of theirs, a lot of reading was going on, but there was not a lot of encouragement for the girls to pursue academics. I have made that my mission, to get children interested in reading and knowledge and learning. It's a major thing for me. The work that I do, I go into their homes, so I'm part of their lives. Very deliberately. I see the dynamic at home, so I'm always picking up clues. And the work that I've been able to do is amazing. It's more than what I've learned. There's a gift part of it, an intuitive part. I don't know exactly what I'm doing. It just happens. It's an amazing process but...I put the groundwork there, get all the supplies, do
everything, but there's an energy that I have that goes on, that I'm not exactly sure what that is.

I tune into what the parents are doing, what the home environment is like. With one little guy, he brings his special little toys and we set them around us, and the toys take turns reading. I had chocolates, I had toys, I had stickers, I had smelly markers. You name it! It took him a year to read one line from 'Hop on Pop' by Dr. Seuss, 'No Pat No.' And I called his mother and said, 'You've got a reader on your hands.' And the other day his mother told me, 'He read a story to me last night.'

So to know when to push and when to pull back, it's very challenging. There's energy I get from my students and the satisfaction that I see, the trust that I have, I'm good at it and I can help them. That's very energizing, very affirming for me.

I use everything. I use everything that the kid's into. It's where they're at, so I use it. I've had enough successes so I've learned to trust that.

My students. It doesn't matter what the age group is, from the little kids I get the warm fuzzies and the older people I get spurred on... it challenges me to do more and learn more and stay on my toes. But it's definitely nourishing for me. It's not me giving, giving, giving. It's definitely something that comes back to me in energy. It's definitely something that comes back to me. It comes back to me in the life cycle.

Mentors

I have become more aware of strong female mentors and role models that I have sought out throughout all my transitions. My boyfriend's mother as a teenager was a feisty, irreverent Scottish woman, about four foot something, and a real dynamo. During my divorce, a woman at church, Doris, who befriended me. Somewhat eccentric, in her eighties and journal writing and practicing tai chi, she was a positive source of encouragement for me in pursing my B.Ed. Laura, who slowly earned my trust and encouraged me when I was going through the "law school experience" at one point saying to me, "Maybe you learned something else more valuable here." My friendship with Caroline, in her eighties, vibrant, inspiring, and always challenging those around her to think.
Caroline, who's 82, has talked about the spiral, about issues coming up over and over again, and eventually there isn't a whole lot of energy around them. It's a spiral where our stuff keeps revisiting, we keep repeating our lessons and we keep going through them. And when someone of 82 years old tells me that, I know that there's going to be some truth to it and to pay attention. That my stuff is not a 'done deal,' and put it on the shelf and it's finished once and for all. That's not the case.

And another role model has been my supervisor, Solveiga who interviewed me for this piece.

I do want to acknowledge my supervisor. Over the five years we've worked together, it's always changing. I took a course with you, then worked on a book, and now supervising and interviewing me for the thesis. There's always this changing role. I appreciate the assistance and 'mentoring' that's gone on between us. That will make the difference. You've been instrumental in helping to spur me along. So I need to acknowledge that. It hasn't been a structured thing, but just evolved over time, and felt very integrated for me. It's been very positive for me. I need to acknowledge that role.

I was struck how often I repeated the refrain that I wanted to break out of the "introspective therapeutic process." I'm not sure what I was getting at, except I felt the need for some physical movement on a different level in my life, but in reality it is all integrated. Perhaps I had a sense of needing growth in another area to maintain a sense of balance and equilibrium. I am always amazed, in hindsight, in looking over old letters, journals and writings, the level of awareness that is there. We know. We have an innate wisdom that is unfailing if we would only heed it...if I would only pay attention.

I have gone through this introspection process and the transition process I'm in is to 'get out of my head' and just get on with living. To move on and get to a 'doing' phase. I really sense that in myself and I'm not sure where that will lead. What job it will lead to, finishing my thesis, moving forward.

Enough. I am as healed as I'm ever going to be and I have to go out there, in the condition I'm in, with all the baggage and the flaws and scar tissue and whatever and say, 'Okay. Life moves forward from now on. Okay, I'm moving forward in life. I've got to move forward, because if I'm spinning my wheels, stagnating, in a rut...I've got to have
some kind of movement forward in many areas. That's the internal stuff, more than what's going on around me.

I don't want to run for therapy and all that. I've internalized a lot of stuff that's useful and that helps me. I don't get sent into a tailspin so much with things that trigger me. I'm very aware of the fact that I've come to this place where I've said, 'I'm maybe not going to do this too much more.' You know? I want to get on with the present and move on with life. But talking about it opens it up. Definitely. It opens it up and it does move it forward a little bit more.

To just let go and go with the flow. I'm very aware of the times when I'm not so driven, when I'm not so structured and controlled, and have that loose kind of 'being in the moment.' And it happens more and more, but I'm very aware of how good that feels. Being playful and getting in touch with the child-like part of me that for a long time wasn't there. I feel that that's getting expression now.

I'm in a mid-life stage where I'm feeling some kind of internal pressure... time is moving a little differently for me now. Time's going faster and I have a sense of 'get some completion here and move into something else' because I'm approaching a mid-life stage. In some ways it makes me very tired, because I don't have a new vision, or I'm just getting a new vision of what's coming next. I don't have it yet...

Symptoms of Inner Peace

1. Tendency to think and act spontaneously rather than from fears based on past experiences.
2. An unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment.
3. Loss of interest in judging self.
4. Loss of interest in judging other people.
5. Loss of interest in conflict.
6. Loss of interest in interpreting actions of others.
7. Loss of ability to worry (this is a very serious symptom).
8. Frequent, overwhelming episodes of appreciation.
9. Contented feelings of connectedness with others and nature.
10. Frequent attacks of smiling through the eyes of the heart.
11. Increasing susceptibility to love extended by others as well as the uncontrollable urge to extend it.
12. Increasing tendency to let things happen rather than to make them happen.

If you have all or even most of the above symptoms, please be advised that your condition of PEACE may be so far advanced as to not be treatable (Siegel, 1989).
CHAPTER FOUR
INTERPRETING LIFE STORIES: METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Almost a year had gone by since the final interviews with the co-researchers, two years since our first meeting. I had been in touch with most of them over the summer to give them an update as to how the work was progressing.

The Feedback Session

I contacted participants and arranged to get them a draft copy of their life story to read, to offer feedback and revisions. We arranged for the drop off of the interviews. Some were sent by e-mail because of time and distance constraints. I asked them to complete a number of tasks at this point: 1) to pick a pseudonym; 2) to look for things that did not ring true to the essence of what they wanted to say; 3) to correct any inaccuracies in details, dates, and information; 4) and to delete anything that would be potentially embarrassing or cause any discomfort to themselves or others. I was interested to see the pseudonyms people chose, and we laughed that these could be a psychological study all their own.

I met with Laura first to go over her life history. She asked if I would read it aloud to her and tears welled in her eyes as I read the introduction. Her initial comment was, "I can't believe how you've put it all together. It's all there." As I read, she made corrections and clarifications of inaccuracies and asked for deletions of some material. Samantha said she had never been written about in this way before and thought the process was amazing. She requested more of an integration of a section describing her illness. I had commented during our last interview that I was concerned we had not given her physical issue enough time and space. My intuition at that time proved to be true. There was very little discussion of it during our session. I'm not sure of the reason, perhaps my own discomfort and inability to relate sufficiently to the topic. In writing her story, I used quotes and analysis from a paper that she had written. Leila had an amusing story about her husband finding her biography on the computer. I had e-mailed a copy so she could read and edit it during a plane trip to B.C. to visit family over Christmas. While she was
away she spoke with her husband over the phone. He said he had found something about her on the computer. Leila reminded him of the project she was involved in, and he seemed to recall her meeting with me. Then he commented, "But it's all there...all about you. It's really well written, but it's all there..." Her own observations were that the work was integrated, and said "I like that part" when we read a sensitive section. Leila had issues about her grammar usage, and use of language. I tried to reassure her, saying people do not, as a rule, speak in grammatically correct sentences. At one part she changed a word that was really my own interpretation and did not really capture her own meaning. She also eliminated areas that wouldn't have been comfortable for her to disclose in this context. She hugged me after our meeting. Leith wanted a copy of the biography for her own use. Since her story still had quite a bit of work left, we discussed the direction it would go in future. Sarah and I talked about how she had been right in the "middle of transition" when I interviewed her. I thanked her for her trust in being so open with me. She said she was still in transition to some extent but things were getting better. She agreed she was able to talk fairly openly with me because we are both divorced, and have both had that common experience.

Some participants were uncomfortable with how their speech transferred to a transcribed hardcopy. They generally wanted to fix up the grammar, or were surprised at some of their speech patterns. I offered assurance that no one speaks in grammatically perfect sentences, that it was important to retain the essence of how we really present ourselves over perfection.

**Methodology: Watch, Listen, Ask, Record, Examine, Interpret.**

For over five years of my doctoral studies I had been sitting comfortably on the sidelines of the "quantitative/qualitative" debate, really wondering what all the fuss was about. Having no interest whatsoever in promoting one methodology over the other, I would usually answer something to the effect that there are merits to both, or isn't there room for both? Of course my work, as artist, teacher and writer, is informed by my background, my politics, my faith, my education. And not unlike most people, I am resistant to being labeled and categorized. Although my academic and career route may seem like part of a grand design, like most it has been more a matter of being steered in
one direction or another, doors opening at the right time, opportunities presenting themselves...or not, as the case may be. This study has given me an opportunity to closely examine the tenets of qualitative research in order speak from a more informed position. And I have returned to the place where I began. I believe there is room for both. I believe the choice of methodology is informed by the unique fit of the personality of the researcher, the question and the formation of the research project.

Looking back over the last five years in academia, I realize a number of experiences have had an impact and informed my presentation of this work. My Master's of Education research was a quantitative study comparing teachers' impressions of language skills of students with attention deficit disorder with hyperactivity and those with attention deficit disorder without hyperactivity. My research was conducted at the Child Development Clinic at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto using existing data in confidential files. I gathered information on IQ and parent and teacher observations of attention and language problems. I loved "doing research," both at the level of reviewing literature and collecting data. I learned various statistical analysis packages until, after long hours, sheer panic and bursts of tears waiting for appointments with statisticians, I came upon the right one that worked for me. I had the somewhat typical affliction of girls from my generation - math anxiety. When I successfully analyzed my data, I presented the results proudly to my professor, waved the computer printouts in front of friends, and put a sign on the wall at home, "I'm a teckie."

A few months later, during coursework for my doctoral studies I took a course on adults with learning disabilities. As part of the coursework we were asked to spend a day undergoing a psychoeducational assessment to see what it felt like, to give us empathy toward students we would work with in future. I had no problem with that, feeling comfortable with my intellectual abilities. I was, however, very uncomfortable with a "color test" that seemed to tap into something else-emotions and family background. We were told in class we would be given our results, but the professor was mildly evasive each time I asked. So, after a time, I forgot about it and moved on to other things.

Five years later by a very curious chain of events I ended up working with that same professor helping to co-ordinate the database. Learning new computer skills and hearing the results of some of the research was interesting, but in the back of my mind
was a nagging question about "my file." Subconsciously I was watching the level of
caring and confidentiality afforded to the data, and people being tested in the clinic. Then
one day the results of data from the "color test" were presented to the research team. As I
understand it, one component of the test is that it will indicate a wide gap between
"actual" ability and perception of ability if a person has a learning disability or something
unusual in their background. Knowing the rationale behind the testing didn't help, but in
fact just raised my anxiety further. I knew I was one of those black dots on the overhead
projector screen.

Then, while working late into the evening in the office alone, collating
demographic data from the files, I specifically went into my own file. The test scorer had
recorded my results in red pen - an abnormal score. I spent some time figuring out the
numbering system used in the test and the correlation of the choice of color to specific
moods and characteristics. The color I had chosen for "war" corresponded to the same
color I had chosen for family. Time sort of stopped. I felt familiar waves of feelings -
violated, unsafe, minimized, deceived and very, very tired.

Later, on examining data from other files, I saw that it was not uncommon for
"subjects" to have similar correlations, and I used that to rationalize and reassure myself.
I spoke of this to no one. But my professor's original goal of experiencing "what it felt
like" to be a subject in a study had been successful. The research relationship is
important. Participants in a study are "people," first and foremost. The credibility and
integrity of the research is vital and must be maintained no matter how difficult or time
consuming. This is what informs my choice of methodology in writing the life histories
of these six women, seen through the lens of "resiliency."

We are constantly in the process of interpreting the world around us, through the
filter of who we are and what we know. According to Wolcott (as cited in Guba and
Lincoln, 1998) when doing research, matters of knowing and being should be the
principle concern and choice of methodology secondary. Wolcott states:

Not only are methods the most unremarkable aspect of interpretive work, but a
focus on methods (techniques for gathering and analyzing data) often masks a full
understanding of the relationship between method and inquiry purpose. The aim
of attending carefully to details, complexity, and situated meanings of the
everyday life world can be achieved through a variety of methods. Although we may feel professionally compelled to use a special language for these procedures (e.g. participant observation, informant interviewing, archival research) at base, all interpretive inquirers watch, listen, ask, record and examine. How those activities might best be defined and employed depends on the inquirer's purpose for doing the inquiry. Purpose, in turn, is shaped by epistemological and methodological commitments. (p. 222)

What marks constructivist or interpretivist work as a unique form of human inquiry is a set of theoretical commitments and philosophical assumptions about the way that the world must be in order that we can know it. Qualitative research should be carried out in ways that are sensitive to the nature of human and cultural social contexts, and remain loyal or true to what is being studied, rather than a particular methodology (Altheide & Johnson, 1998). The "constructivist paradigm" according to Guba and Lincoln (1998) is a wide-ranging eclectic framework which once fell under the heading of naturalistic inquiry. The term "constructivism" has recently gained use to characterize their methodology, although they acknowledge that constructivist, interpretive, naturalistic, and hermeneutical are all similar notions.

The concept of researchers as co-participants is an important one. According to Geertz (as cited in Guba & Lincoln, 1998) the future of interpretivist and constructivist research rests on dissolving long-standing dichotomies such as subject/object, knower/known, fact/value. Individuals need to become comfortable with the blurring of the lines between the science and art of interpretation, the social scientific and the literary account. Yet the lived experience of the inquirer is also a vital piece of the research.

**Interpreting Life stories**

Lives, like stories, are the way we fashion ourselves: encountering and temporarily surmounting the projected demons that would diminish us. This is what a narrative perspective allows us to notice: not only the way we talk, but also about the way we live (Ochberg, 1994, p. 143).
Six women took part in this narrative inquiry, telling their life stories with a focus on the topic of resiliency. As a narrative production, interpretive writing is like fiction in that it is created out of the facts of experience and it follows a recognized literary format of plot with rising suspense, climax and denouement (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998; Ochberg, 1994; Richardson, 1998). The protagonist in these stories is the hero, and the situation is frequently conceptualized as a struggle that locates the subject’s experiences in the contexts of work, family, kinship, and marriage. Narrative is the structured quality of the experience and the patterns of inquiry, while the end result is the life story. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1998):

Thus we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe their lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience. (p. 155)

If the postmodern world can be read as a giant text, an understanding of the world requires the use of narrative methods. It is an important time in the development of personal experience methods of research, because of a willingness to experiment with narrative form (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). Researchers use the analogy of painters copying technique as a means of developing their own style, with experimentation needed to develop an individual research signature in the narrative form. They state that in the process of adaptation and the creation of a signature, we are advised to “listen to the remnants of narrative form handed down to us by our own personal narrative histories.” Richardson (1998) describes writing as narrative of the self where the writer constructs a sequence of events, a “plot,” holding back on interpretation, asking the reader to “relive” events emotionally with the writer:

Narratives of the self do not read like traditional ethnography because they use the writing techniques of fiction. They are specific stories of specific events.

Accuracy is not the issue; rather narratives of the self seek to meet literary criteria of coherence, verisimilitude, and interest. (p. 365)

Ochberg (1994) asks whether our stories are idealized versions of our lives. If a story is an internal argument between what is said aloud and what is on the verge of being said, can we see behind the public image? It is the relationship between what is said and not said, and the writer/researcher feels the tension between an officially avowed and
unofficially repudiated version. What is the 'true' story? What is important is the way it is an argument between possible versions. Without an understanding that we live out one version of our lives in order to evoke and overcome the negative alternative, we cannot appreciate the effort that goes into maintaining a positive self-image (Ochberg, 1994).

According to research by Manning and Cullum-Swan (1998) some medically trained writers have argued for the healing use of narrative analysis, arguing that stories reflect human feelings and lived experience, and that healing necessarily involves the telling, hearing and unravelling of these stories. Each participant presents a unique, appealing, aesthetic, and humanistic rationale for his or her approach that is woven into his or her story. Narrative analysis is rather loosely formulated, almost intuitive, using terms defined by the analyst and takes the perspective of the teller.

Identities are formed by the public telling of stories (Ochberg, 1994) although the public venue is often not available to the average person. We do not all have the opportunity that these women had here, to tell their stories to a specialized audience. There was some concern with issues of audience, with co-researchers asking, “Who’s going to be reading this?” I answered honestly that it would first be myself as researcher, then probably members of their family who would read it, and then the academic community as it went through various stages toward completion of my doctoral research. After that, as published material, it could and would be read by anyone interested. Most of the women, as educated, professional people, were aware of the broader implications of this—what they had said in their life stories would impact others, it would reflect on themselves, or as one woman asked aloud, “What if my mother reads it?” In fact, the women here were able to use a pseudonym for some measure of anonymity and protection. They can choose with whom they disclose their real identities. I chose to use my real name, after careful consideration of the implications of disclosing details of my life in professional writing within the academic community, while working as a teaching professional. For the sake of authenticity and my own personal integrity, I decided it was worth it, but it was not without some serious consideration and pangs of anxiety that I arrived at that decision. It was not until some time had passed that I achieved a level of detachment. However, each time a new person reads it and comments I again have anxiety over my own vulnerability of how my story will be received.
There has been an important shift in qualitative interpretation from what is told to the process of telling life stories (Ochberg, 1994). How do we present our lives to others—what phrases do we use, what larger structure organizes our accounts, and what purposes do these choices serve? Ochberg compares the structure of sequences of lived action to the structure of a traditional plot, organizing an event with rising tension that reaches its peak in a climax and resolves into a denouement. We address these sequences to various audiences, and the identity of the protagonist/performer depends on the audience’s response. In this sense a life lived as story is part of an individual’s public record. According to Ochberg, depending on how the plot turns out and how the audience responds, life performances justify the idealized images that narrators hold of themselves. There is a connection between living a life and telling, or performing, a story. A life is a kind of argument. It is a way of claiming that one construction of experience should be privileged and that some other, negative alternative should be dismissed (Ochberg, 1994). The important goal is the work accomplished by both the story and the life. Our self-idealized identities depend on our success in meeting and overcoming the possibility of our being undone. Few of us go around telling our stories to each other, but all of us are continually living out sequences of purposeful action. If identity depends on the way others see us, then to affect identity, a life story must be part of the individual’s public record. Telling one’s story to an interviewer or to oneself is not enough; the story must in some way be told to a community of significant witnesses. However, such public-narration is not usually commonplace. Therefore it seems useful to see whether the psychological work supposedly accomplished by life stories may be accomplished by the lives that individuals perform. Action and narration may share at least these qualities—like a story, action may have a structure of plot; like a story, action may be addressed to an audience. The protagonist/performer may experience the success of the plot and the audience’s response as vindication for one preferred version of the life, rather than a less palatable alternative. In this sense, a life, once again like a story, presents an argument (Ochberg, 1994).

These similarities between lives and stories are psychologically significant because of the work that each accomplishes. To anticipate: stories and lives focus on latent danger of their own negotiation in order to see how the protagonist will emerge.
This focus is what makes literary stories compelling to readers and makes lives compelling to us who live them—we put our lives on public display—who are the audiences in our lives? Do they matter? All of us recruit our friends, families, or even casual acquaintances to be our witnesses (Ochberg, 1994).

**Reflexivity and Accountability**

Awareness of reflexivity makes researchers more accountable, thereby sharing experience and insights more fully, and locating inquiry within the process and context of actual human experience. Researchers should accept the inevitability that all statements are reflexive and that research is a social act. That is the essential rationale for research approaches grounded in the contexts of experience of the people who are actually involved in their settings and arenas (Altheide & Johnson, 1998). According to Guba and Lincoln (1998):

> The act of inquiry begins with issues and/or concerns of participants and unfolds through a "dialectic" of iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration, reanalysis and so on that leads eventually to a joint (among inquirer and respondents) construction of a case (i.e. findings or outcomes). The joint constructions that issue from the activity of inquiry can be evaluated for their "fit" with the data and information they encompass; the extent which they "work," that is, provide a credible level of understanding; and the extent to which they have "relevance" and are "modifiable." (p. 179)

David Hunt (1992) says the term reflexivity is from George Kelly's *Reflexivity Principle* published in 1955 and describes it as an "inside-out" progress where the person with a goal of facilitating change must first begin with themselves. In qualitative research the tension between claiming that knowledge is the property of individual minds and the view that knowledge can be publicly shared is evident. Einstein and Heisenberg (as cited in Kincheloe and McLaren, 1998) claimed that what we see is not what we see but what we perceive and what we call information always involves an act of human judgement. According to Kincheloe and McLaren (1998):

> To engage in critical postmodern research is to take part in a process of critical world making, guided by the shadowed outline of a dream of a world less
conditioned by misery, suffering and the politics of deceit. It is, in short, a pragmatics of hope in an age of cynical reason. (p.293)

**Life stories: Appealing to An Audience**

Within a qualitative framework I as researcher needed to recognize the inherent power differential between the co-researchers and myself. Richardson (1998) calls for the researcher to engage in self-reflexive analysis of social categories to which they belong including race, social class, gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion etc. since these enter into and shape what constitutes “knowledge” in any project and the subsequent interpretation. Cole (1991) suggests that researcher-as-author needs to indicate his or her positioning in relation to the research process. If relationship is central to the research process, I had to keep in mind that it takes a long time to develop a "relationship." I also had to have an intuitive sense of the kind of relationship I had with co-researchers in this context. It was one of professional caring with respect for the individual, recognition of their contribution and awareness of the level of trust. Another task I had as the interpreter of their life history was to move beyond the representation of experiences to place them in a broader socio-historical context.

As co-researcher I reminded myself that I was not a therapist, although there are similarities in the dynamic, and I needed to keep appropriate boundaries in mind. The process is more important than getting answers, and it is egotistical for me to think that I have a clearer vision of life stages, levels of denial or use of defense mechanisms than the co-researcher. I have faith that the processes of self-reflection, articulation and getting feedback should serve as a catalyst for change in and of themselves. The researcher does not need to take action in relation to pointing out inconsistencies or levels of awareness in the participants' narrative. According to Acker, the first criterion of adequacy in this approach is that the active voice of the subject should be heard in the account (as cited in Sparkes, 1994).

I think the researcher may develop a friendship with participants. This merely heightens the need for truthfulness, authenticity, and integrity in reporting. There is nothing more affirming than getting a hug from a co-researcher after collaborating on the writing of a life history. Delamont states that he responsibilities of the researcher towards
the subject become even more intense should they become friends (as cited in Sparkes, 1994). It is important to hold the person in high regard, but there will be levels within that framework. There are some people we feel closer to than others; some we develop rapprochement with and some we do not.

As the writer of women's stories I found that they validated themselves in the process of telling their stories, an act that is potentially empowering in itself. Hopefully, those reading it will respond at an individual level to the collective story as suggested by Richardson (as cited in Sparkes, 1994) with the feeling that it’s their story, they are not alone. That is an important reason for making our story available to others. The collective story overcomes some of the isolation and alienation of contemporary life. It provides a sociological community, the linking of separate individuals into a shared consciousness. Once linked, the possibility for social action on behalf of the collective is present, the possibility of societal transformation (Clandinin & Connelley as cited in Sparkes, 1994). Stories then can provide powerful insights into the lived experiences of others in ways that can inform, awaken, and disturb readers by illustrating their involvement in social processes about which they may not be consciously aware. Once aware, individuals may find the consequences of their involvement unacceptable and seek to change the situation. In such circumstances, the potential for individual and collective restorying is enhanced.

The issue of "relationship" is central. These intensive relationships require serious consideration of who we are as researchers in the stories of participants, for when we become characters in their stories, we change their stories. Stories of a life told by one person to another are joint productions; they are in a real sense 'co-authored.' According to Measor and Sikes (as cited in Sparkes, 1994) the researcher's position in relation to the stories of participants ought to be acknowledged, examined, and explicited.

A life lived is what actually happens. A life as experienced consists of images, feelings, sentiments, desires, thoughts, and meanings known to the person whose life it is. Balancing the voices in telling the women's stories is a sensitive task. I am writing from the perspective of the social and historical context that I have come from and am now a part. That is the framework, and the issue of resiliency is the lens. But my concern was always that the women's voices take priority. I am the vehicle to collect and convey the information. Then, after considerable immersion, I provide a synthesis to reach a new
level of understanding. The life stories need to come first. The best we can do is listen to what someone says about their lives. There is so much to learn from the stories and lives of others. Even if we are limited to scratching the surface, the work itself may be the best methodological therapy. It provides the best way to break through to the next level of understanding.

**Data Analysis**

During transcriptions of the tapes I noticed a different voice in the last interview. I account for that on a number of levels. There were stages and shifting energies as each interview progressed to the next, and the next. The first interview was primarily focussed on getting information about background and an overview of the person's life—a description of the plot. There was also the dynamic of continuing to establish rapport and the energy that goes with the novelty of beginning a new project. The second interview was usually more intensive leading to personal disclosure, tapping into issues through narrative and, in a sense, appealing to a perceived audience through myself as interviewer. During the last interview, there was a sense of clarifying issues from previous interviews, revisiting ideas and getting closure.

The phrasing of the questions in the last interview tapped into an unexpected change in responses and tone of voice. This was an interesting connection in the analysis of the topic of resiliency. The first two interviews led to recounting childhood experiences, and narratives of adult experiences that had had an impact on the person. The third interview questions asked the person to state characteristics that made them resilient, and things around them that had contributed to their resiliency. The shift led to a perceived change to an intellectual level of recounting characteristics they "thought" made them resilient, and things around them that encouraged their resiliency over time. I sensed the shift during the actual interview, and in transcribing the tapes it actually became more apparent. These observations, while at first puzzling to me, later proved to be enlightening. They confirmed the integrity of the narrative accounts, where the person spoke from a voice that resonated with the recounting of the details of the experience that was pivotal for them. Often it was like they were transported back to the actual event, and when the story was told, reemerged into "real" time. Also, in recounting the stories,
participants often said something to the effect that they did not think they were doing anything out of the ordinary, but what was required of them in the circumstances. There was no ego investment, but actually the opposite, in speaking from a place of deep knowing. In contrast, during the last interview, the voice was different, and the listing and recounting of characteristics and supports did seem to have more "ego" investment, saying "this is what I think makes me resilient." At this stage, it was as if they were speaking to an audience, recounting their belief system of what had been said about them by others over years—how they were perceived by others, as opposed to their own views. It was their final argument in support of their life stories.

Although I was careful not to "find what I was looking for," I was aware of asking questions with the expectation that each person would mention a key figure, role model, or significant person who had made a real impact on them as a child. No one related to the term "role model." In most cases the "key person" was intrinsic to their life, as if they took that person's presence in their life for granted. I filtered this information through my knowledge of attachment theory.

Instead what emerged as an area of commonality was a sense of an independent spirit among all the women. Later I reasoned that they all had different characteristics and external factors contributing to resiliency. It was after revisiting the research literature that I arrived at the understanding that their ability to self-reflect and articulate was what the women most had in common. The literature supports that these two combine to move one to a heightened level of functioning. Therefore, by the process of our involvement in this project, we have collectively moved forward. At every stage of research, collaboration and writing, my first instinct has been reinforced, that the connections would emerge through the process of "being with" the women and the materials.

Writing up the results of this research, I worked holistically. I created an outline on the computer, positioning the pieces I had already written, such as the life histories, literature review, and interview protocol. I integrated and recorded field notes and observations, and revisited the literature, refining my focus to two or three authors whose theories seemed to more accurately resonate with my work. By this time the process of analysis had begun, and I found myself jotting down information on scraps of paper while on the subway, thoughts coming to me while jogging, and getting up from bed to
write down a connection. I began to leave a notepad and pen beside the bed, just in case. The point of writing this is that the connections started to happen, with commonalities and meta-analysis emerging from my immersion and being steeped in the information over time. Also important at this stage was making reference to a thesis that I considered exemplary which I used as a guideline for formatting and language. On a practical level, I had to make a chart of the women’s names and their new names, their pseudonyms, placing that in front of me at the computer. My own thesis writing informed my teaching English at a community college as I shared my awareness and struggles with my class. It kept me realistic in my expectations of them, made my teaching more real, and in turn the energy from my classes began to circle back into my writing. Auditing a course on methodology also energized me. Participants were at a different stage with their thesis work. My awareness at the time was of being very protective of being "in the writing stage" and not wanting anything to dissipate that energy or adversely affect the flow. The class was very respectful and understanding of this stance, and I came away from these sessions affirmed and energized.

**Conclusion**

It is important to locate myself within the research paradigm by restating the subjective nature of the study, and my own expectations regarding some of the constructs explored which may have created tensions within the participants. When I began interviewing the women in this study, each asked what I meant by the term resiliency, and we usually called it “bouncing back.” Bouncing back from personal life crisis could be considered different in degree and quality from the experiences of war, mental illness or other trauma described in the literature on resiliency. It is difficult to compare levels of individual pain and courage, but it is important to keep in mind the notion of a range of severity of experiences and effects representing different levels of life challenges and resulting levels of resiliency.

Regarding the issue of my exploration around the importance of one key person who affected an individual’s resilience, I was informed by the literature indicating that this is an essential component of personal resiliency. There was a lack of immediate acknowledgement of some of the participants of the role of the “key person” in their
resilience. It is possible that there may be several key people throughout our lives that appear at pivotal moments when we need support in a particular area. Again, the subjectivity of this “connection” should be considered, because the individual must be open and attractive to the support that is being offered. Synchronicity plays a big part—resilient people may have the ability to draw to them what they need at the time they need it.
Identities are formed by the telling of life stories. As a plot, a story exposes the protagonist to the possibility of defeat, as a performance a story risks disbelief or disinterest in its audience, and as argument the story risks being supplanted by an invidious nature (Ochberg, 1994). My own story continues to weave in and out of the research experience.

A few years ago I went on a pilgrimage. Returning to my childhood home in an old section of downtown Montreal, I dared to face the ghostly memories and haunted corners of 6624 Esplanade Street, the old apartment where I last saw my father and where my life changed forever. It was an arduous journey, first by train, then by bicycle, following my crumpled map, stopping at corners for directions, hitting dead ends and continuing on. I hesitated for a long moment at the corner of my old street. Then I climbed the stairs where I used to live. The place is gutted for renovations after a recent fire. There's my parents' bedroom with the front window where I watched for the headlights of my father's powder blue Pontiac to return home from work. There's my old bedroom; that's the spot where my blue vinyl chair with the brass upholstery tacks sat. There's that weird octagonal shaped bathroom, the oblong kitchen, the balcony facing the other rooftops with the steel gray sheet metal siding, and the back stairs leading down to the lane where I played. I emerged dazed after snapping several rolls of film, clutching plaster and scraps of wood in my hand. I emerged to step squarely into the second half of my life.

Over these past few years I have been privileged to work with resilient women— the women whose stories have been told here. Their collective courage, wisdom and strength of spirit have influenced, inspired and changed me in immeasurable ways, ways that I am just beginning to appreciate more and more as time passes, as is the case with all deep knowledge and learning.
Laura’s Themes: Loneliness and Father Issues

Two themes run through Laura’s life story. One is the fact that she was an only child, needing companionship and playmates, seeking solace in an appreciation of nature and an early awareness of God.

There was a presence there that was with me that was comforting and real...so that was a real helpmate. And it disappeared, but it never really left me, you know. It left, but I had a sense that I wasn’t totally isolated.

I was completely...I was isolated...no fooling! Jean was my wonderful bosom friend from the village. It was in a farm community. And if they hadn’t had property in the village I wouldn’t have gone to school there. I could have gone to the country where at least there were farming kids around. But I went to the village...and whatever they did in the village I wouldn’t be a part of. And Jean was my only contact and then her father died and they left. Must have left when I was about nine. That was devastating. So I was a misfit...going through life...this isolation in childhood, it just happened that’s the way it was. That I’ve been very appreciative of people and being part of the group. I’ve appreciated friends, and being a part, because I didn’t have it. So, that if you always have it then...whereas I appreciated it and continue to do so.

The second theme is her displacement for her father’s affection by the arrival of a stepmother upon the death of her mother of cancer when Laura was three. This issue would repeat itself years later when Laura lived with her son and he met a woman who would become his life partner. Laura relived her old anxieties, and faced the life spiral of issues reappearing until there is some kind of resolution. Laura talked about the chain of events that happened when she was 78 years old, and she would no longer be living with her son.

We jointly owned the house. We had a joint bank account, and he had a new job. A responsible job for the first time after many years of being a student with bartending and garage and all the rest of it, to fill in. And then we shared the upkeep. I had osteoporosis and broke my hip in ’85 I think it was, in Bedford, and had to have an artificial hip, after four breaks before that. So, Tom was always concerned that I would fall again. And I had the only car but we shared it. Well, then he got involved with a married woman who had left her marriage...a mother of two children, and I think one
was four, the little girl was four I think at the time, and the boy was nine. She couldn’t support herself and left the marriage very suddenly and had no place to go and was frightened of being alone and so I agreed to her coming in—it seemed only right...what was she going to do? But that produced a situation that I could not live with. She took over and she had written to me beforehand, and when she was using ‘we’ she meant Tom and she, that I was to come to them if things weren’t going right. I blew up more or less. So I went and spoke to her. Not blowing up, but told her that this would not work. That the only way it would work would be if somehow—three of us, as three adults and two children—could work out how we were going to manage.

Laura was aware of having been in this kind of situation before. Sessions with a family therapist did not seem to help.

What’s the use. Nobody understands. I just have to put up with the situation. I also became aware that I had felt this way before. Where did it come from? After puzzling and praying I remembered my childhood, my ongoing battles with my stepmother, my father coaxing me until finally I conformed, saying I was sorry when I did not feel it, just for the sake of peace.

Laura describes the feeling of anger, especially at her perceived ageism of the therapist, and her feelings of powerlessness in the situation that finally enabled her to find her voice.

I cannot remember a time in my life when I have been so angry. I found my voice. So, to get me to move it seemed you had to get me really mad. I had a sense of myself that wasn’t squished. That was a key point. That made me decide, ‘I have to do something.’ I know too that I can’t afford to get too uptight and upset. The first thing you know I’ll fall and I’ll break bones. That’s sort of a basic. I know I can’t afford it.

Being an only child, Laura’s sense of isolation was there as long as she could remember. Today, she places premium value on being a part of the group, and her mobility which is her assurance of being able to be with others.

So I learned, unfortunately, that I wasn’t to ask for help. I had to do it myself. In various groups I’ve been in, we had to give and take and in that way I overcame this old prohibition that I wasn’t to ask for help. That’s one reason I found groups so great, because I could say where I was coming from and I could ask for help when I heard how
other people responded. And we could laugh at ourselves... but it had to be in a group session somehow or other for me to overcome the old taboo. I'd sooner not ask because to ask for help and have somebody trivialize my request or say they didn't understand, or give me the feeling that I was taking up their time, and they were busy or something. I'd sooner not risk that. Sort of the skin is tender from the pain of that in childhood.

Having osteoporosis somehow weaves the themes of her life together—strengthening her faith, being more careful of personal boundaries and trying not to take on other people's burdens, maintaining her independence and mobility so she will not be isolated and can keep her group connections. On a fundamental level, she has to manage personal stress, because that is when she is most susceptible to falls and the inherent danger of breaking bones. She recognizes that on a psychic level osteoporosis is taking on the weight of others' problems. Her goal is for a balance in body, mind and spirit. She described an incident when she fell while walking in the woods, and had to wait for her son to come and help her.

_Because there's nothing you can do. Absolutely nothing you can do. It's getting cold and it's getting dark and there you are. So I kept on saying the prayer from Norman Vincent Peale: 'God is always with me. He loves me. I can trust Him. I'll do my best to not be afraid' and trying to... kept turning away from my fear. Physically I could do absolutely nothing. I got my body straightened out, so that lessened the pain. And Tom was there. Every time when I've been faced with extremes, help has always come. The biggy is not to get swallowed up by the fear. And that's where I say, 'Let go and let God.'_

Laura remembers the feeling of going to her aunt for help and being turned away.

_That was very devastating to me because that says that I couldn't go to anybody else. I had to keep it all to myself and I think that carried an awful lot of weight._

And the cycle continues.

_Life is a journey. We're here to learn and the lessons keep coming. My lesson is how to take criticisms and putdowns, to take responsibility but don't assume it all and emerge without fermenting massive resentment, anger and fear inside me._
Leila's Themes: “I'm Different; “I'm Competent”

One theme running through Leila's life is that she is different, that she had to rebel against her family—particularly her mother, against the church and school. She had to find her own way. Later, after struggling with infertility and adopting two daughters, she still works at finding her own way to "be a family" that is different from what was modelled at home by her mother and minister father. A second theme is that along the way she has renegotiated her belief system, developed a sense of integrity, and through therapy has given up some of the need for competence, perfectionism and control.

Leila spoke of her parent's reaction to her teenage rebellion with the classical 'wrong crowd, drugs, drinking.' She describes her struggle to be heard and to be understood, and didn't feel like anybody was listening.

I've always had a 'fighting spirit' and being comfortable being that way. My Mom recognized it when I was six months old. I just wasn't the same as other kids. There was a certain spunk or individuality. I'm becoming more self-confident and honouring that part of me.

Both Mom and Dad were determined not to give up on me. But I was most confrontational with my Mom. I remember screaming at her, 'Fuck you! I hate your guts!' And she'd say, 'Well, I love you and I'm never going to stop loving you' when we were in one of our confrontations.

Leila turned her life around during her last year of high school, changing her friends, improving her marks, and making plans for university.

I had a real sense of doing the right thing now. I felt as if I'd spent most of my life not doing the right thing and finally I'd made some big decisions and I had a sense of self-confidence I'd never felt in my life before, basically. And I really felt I'd done it on my own. I made the decisions when I was ready. I sort of proved to everybody that the 'bad seed' minister's daughter...rebellious...who wasn't going to live up to anybody's expectations really...had the ability to, as a 17 or 18 year old, make decisions and turn my life around.

I had this naïve perception that, well, 'You've gone through one bad thing in your life and you've come through it. You're going to sail through.'
Following university, Leila had that sense that whatever she set her mind to, if she worked hard enough, she could achieve it. She was married and working as a teacher. Teaching jobs were scarce, but by knocking on 96 principals’ doors, Leila landed a job while her husband started his MBA.

*Which was absolutely incredible. But again this whole theme of, you’re on top of the world. If you just work hard enough no matter what, you can succeed and get what you want, and help people along the way—it was interactive—and life would be wonderful.*

Yet, when it came time to plan a family, at age 27 Leila found she was infertile, diagnosed with endometriosis.

*I felt vulnerable. I felt like a failure. I didn’t want anybody to know that I was so incompetent that I couldn’t do this thing that everybody else could do naturally. Because it was so important to me I was increasingly...my whole sense of who I was was just falling apart.*

*If I was such a good person, and so competent and such a hard worker, I was supposed to get whatever I wanted in life. Why wasn’t that working for me? This was a really black time for me. I absolutely couldn’t cope any more. I remember seeing myself in this black pit, like way down in the bottom and there was no way out. I just felt complete despair.*

Yet, throughout intensive infertility treatment and invitro-fertilization procedures, Leila kept up the facade of “the cheerful one” or coped by sitting on committees where she could feel somewhat in control.

*I literally couldn’t cope. It took so much energy to get through the day, that I’d come and I would literally fall apart.*

The turning point was allowing herself to reach out for help with a therapist, going against her inner dictates to cope and be strong.

*Oh, I can’t cope with my life, and I’m supposed to be this competent person who can always be there for others and that kind of thing. And I think that there was also a real message that I had to not dwell on your problems, that you should be there for others. So don’t dwell on your problems.*
There was a moment when I first started going to see the therapist when I realized, ‘I’m going to go for this. I am going to really tell the truth and I’m going to be vulnerable.’ And that was a huge turning point for me.

The ability to challenge these things about myself in therapy that didn’t work for me, but I was doing them because I felt that to be a good person meant that’s what I had to do. And it took so much energy to face those things.

Giving myself permission to let some of these roles and expectations go. It changes the way I perceive my life, my world. It’s freeing. It’s exciting to me. I’ve opened my heart and mind and the direction of my life in a way that I think is going to be this really enriching journey. Instead of feeling like I’m constrained by how I’m supposed to be, and making other people happy, and in allowing myself to feel some of these things, it’s freeing.

But if I don’t do all those things then who am I going to be? It was a shift from being a compilation of all the roles that you are. If you busy yourself with these roles, and doing good and being there for other people, and being competent and making your lists, and being the leader of this group or the organizer of that group, if I give all that up, then who am I? And it was the most scary feeling in the world. Who am I going to be? And the answer is, ‘You know what? You don’t know, but you’ve gotta go down that path to find out.’

Throughout this journey, Leila has had to renegotiate her faith. I felt completely abandoned by God. That is exactly how I felt. I felt like that poem where it says, ‘The footprints in the sand, and when there’s only one set I’m carrying you.’ I just thought that was the biggest bunch of bullshit in the world. That’s what I thought. How dare anybody have the nerve to have brought me up with this idea about God and faith and love and forgiveness and holding and being there, and it’s not true. That’s how I felt. I felt completely alone on a lot of levels. I felt that I’d been set up to be this good Christian which then left me more alone because I didn’t even have people in the world to support me, let alone God.

Today, Leila has developed a different sense of faith and spirituality. There’s a spirituality. There’s a sense of connectedness with the universe and people in the world. As I live more of my life, then analyze it against this ever-broadening
horizon, it's really exciting. As I keep having these experiences I have this deeper faith and belief that things are okay and things happen for a reason and everything that's given to us is given for a reason. It's an opportunity to grow and to change and not necessarily that you know the outcome. Things come sideways, not necessarily in a direct relationship.

Leila's infertility crisis has changed her. She's learned to be less perfectionistic, less concerned about control and does not always have to be “the competent one.”

I'm a very different person than when I started this quest for parenthood. I am a little more self-assured, a little less critical of myself. I am a lot more aware, and a lot more at peace about the person I am becoming.

Sarah's Themes: Breaking Family Patterns; Having a Vision

One theme resonating throughout Sarah's life story is breaking out of the family pattern, a goal she had an awareness of at a very young age. Sarah states that using today's terminology her family would have been called dysfunctional, with a physically disabled father and a mentally ill sister. She found friendship and support from an older brother, and her mother offered unconditional love and encouragement.

This was shameful stuff, so I don't think I would have shared this with friends. My mother was very supportive and no matter what was happening tried to be sure the rest of us were okay. My brother and I were very close and sort of helped each other through that. I certainly didn't want to be like my sister, so I think I tried to make my own way in that I would define myself more clearly. That's probably where I got this whole thing about, 'Who am I? Where am I going?' Sort of thing. I just tried to be centred in myself, clearer in myself and then the support and love around me.

Sarah described herself as having friends while growing up, but distancing herself somewhat because she was usually the leader.

By nature I'm an introvert and therefore a very private person. So, I would by nature just keep things to myself. So I think those two things combined with me not really seeking outside too much, but mainly going inside.
During a family disturbance around her sister, Sarah would get away where she would lose herself in the imagery of the back fields. She also uses books and movies as a way of escape and learning more about herself.

For me a connection to nature has always been a very strong, nurturing thing. I mean, I can remember I would lie in the fields and watch the clouds and smell the smells and hear the sounds and I would feel connected to something and it would make me feel better.

Sarah had undergone separation after a 13 year relationship, and her son had left home for university. For the first time in a long time she was alone. She was ready for her son to leave, feeling she had done her job of preparing him to go out into the world. But Sarah found it difficult letting go of her partner and was struggling with the reasons why. She had successfully navigated a career change years earlier, but this change had left her numb.

It's like a death. It's like your parent dies and you know they're going to die and everyone says, 'Oh, well, it's good you had a chance to prepare yourself.' But you're never prepared for the death of relationship. It's like a death of everything that I held as what I wanted in my life. And so I just feel like I'm going through the mourning of...of...death. And no matter how cognitively I've been aware that this was certainly one of the options, emotionally it's been like death.

Why is it so difficult to let go? You know, I can let go of my son; I can let go of my neighbourhood; I've let go of jobs. Why is this one more difficult for me to let go? I don't know the answer to that yet. But I think when I have a clearer picture of that then it will make it easier. Because I certainly have let go of things before.

I'm a very action oriented person and to not be taking action, to just be sitting in the neutral zone and trying to be patient with that is...is difficult for me sometimes. All of the external things are fine, other than I'm not in a relationship. But the only way that I'm going to be able to move forward is to really feel solid inside myself and feel complete inside myself. And I guess that's my biggest fear at the moment, is, if I do let go of what that relationship was, and how it defined me and all that kind of thing, what will I find in there, you know?
A second theme in Sarah’s life has been the use of visualization and imagery as a way to reach a deeper spiritual connection and find meaning in her life. From the time she was a little girl, Sarah was getting a picture of what she wanted the future to be.

And one of the best things in the world for me is we used to always go up to this special place in Georgian Bay. Just being there...and I often use that in my imagery, like when I need to be calm...I use that place in my mind when I do my guided imagery. It’s the water, the trees, the wind, the space around me. That’s a consistent image from youth to now, a way I feel a deeper connection.

Sarah knew from the eighth grade that she would work with people and had a vision of helping. She has, in fact, gone on to work in career counselling in a community college while continuing graduate studies.

I had a vision about helping. I didn’t have a clear picture of what that would look like, but that developed in my late twenties and has just continued to evolve a lot so that I still see myself in this field.

During her career change a few years ago, a pivotal experience was when a friend helped Sarah use visualization to help her take the risk.

And what happened was a friend worked with me and he just did a little diagram. And I think I’m quite a visual person. He did this little diagram with this little road and here I am walking down this road and then there’s this big chasm and then the road goes on the other side. And so he took me up to the edge of the chasm and he said, ‘What is in the chasm?’ And I said, ‘Financial insecurity.’ That’s what it was...that’s what was holding me back! It was about my responsibility as a parent. So, once I realized that, then I said to myself, ‘Well, being an entrepreneur is not the only thing I can do. What is it I have to market?’ And then I went through a whole series of looking at myself and looking at the skills and interests and experience. And how does that translate? Trying to find the transferable stuff to other venues, other than the government. And that was really a precipitating moment for me because it was facing what my fear was that allowed me to refame other things. So I had been working toward that vision but it was just taking the leap that I found difficult. I would say it was inner preparation, external things that happened that just cinched it. There’s just no way I could have stayed there. There’s just no way.
Sarah described her subsequent career change as a real move forward where she was able to sort out her goals. So, what she perceived as a setback at the time was really something that forced her to grow and stretch. So, why did she not make use of visualization to salvage her relationship?

*Purposefully I did not do that. It's a very powerful vehicle for change. I really believe very strongly when I don't have vision I flounder around. But when I've got a vision, it's such...it's a place to put your energy, it's a place to see yourself moving towards. For me it's very powerful. You have to be sure it's what you want. And some people don't want vision. They'd rather just let things happen. I'm such a self-directed person that I really need to know where I'm going.*

Sarah talks about personal vision as giving a sense of power and renewed energy. It gives a sense of power and control over events in one's life. It makes one open to synchronicities.

*I'm not saying that you make things happen. Sometimes we make things happen for ourselves. And other times we do in the sense that we have prepared ourselves to be ready for different options and when they come, there you are.*

*Probably the major thing for me is the alignment of the inner work and the external supports. The two seem to be very necessary for me to be able to be resilient, emotionally resilient within.*

**Leith's Themes: Facing Father and Heart over Intellect**

Recurring themes in Leith's life story are that of facing the challenge represented by her father and the resulting patterns of the need to be strong and independent. A second theme is giving herself permission, in the second half of her life, to lead with her creative side as opposed to her intellectual side. In fact her biggest fear was reading her poetry to her father, and when she received his approval she asked herself, "What did I think was going to happen anyway?"

Leith's grandfather was her strongest influence in her life for many years.

*He was the adult who I turned to for love, for appreciation, and I felt...now I can use the word...he was my source of unconditional love and approval, much more than either of my parents. He was a medical doctor in the good old 'family doctor style,' who I*
felt always approved of everything I did. I've realized that he was really a source of approval that I turned to in the family.

He always took my sister and I to the hospital nurses' graduation ceremonies. He was chief of staff of a hospital for many years. And I just grew up with this notion that I was going to be a nurse. And it was partly the connection with my grandfather's image. Now, it never occurred to me...I was too scared to be a doctor.

In comparison, Leith's relationship with her father was one of striving to gain his approval.

He was a doctor, but a very different kind of doctor. He's very shy and very reserved and very unemotional. He's probably been one of the strongest influences in my life, and that's had both positive and negative effects for me.

Leith was aware of an academic atmosphere surrounding her, with the expectation that they would all go to university, although her father did not want her to be a nurse. Her marriage was a way of getting away from family influences. Her first husband was not academically educated and from a different social class. She basked in their unconditional love and acceptance; they thought she was wonderful and she had never experienced that before.

I had felt that somehow I would never be able to meet my father's expectations, so I would just leave the arena. I was afraid that he would think that I was stupid, silly or whatever. I've done a lot of work on things that I learned from him and the things I've struggled with in my own self-worth. I grew up with a feeling of having very low self-esteem. My recollections are that he said I was too fat. I was a chunky kid...I don't look it now, but he was critical of that within my hearing. I grew up with the belief that I was too fat and fat is ugly and nobody will love a person who's too fat. That translated into a lot of arenas-nobody will love someone who's stupid, and I'll never do it right, and I'll never be quite good enough. I'll always have to try harder...that kind of thing.

In spite of her husband's disapproval, Leith finished nursing school and found a job. She felt her husband was threatened by this, but she had to do something to overcome her depression she felt within the marriage. She says she chose a passive-aggressive way out of the marriage, waiting until he ended things. It would take her a
while to learn to risk and confront her fears directly. She feared her father’s judgement most of all when she decided to enter Gestalt studies.

It took me a while before I even told my father what I was doing. Now, here we are like, fifty years later and I still have enough concern about getting a negative reaction or a derogatory reaction from my father, which may be entirely unfounded, but nevertheless, that was the fear that I had, that I wouldn’t tell him. And it took me a long time to tell him what I was doing and I didn’t talk to him too much. Then I found much to my surprise he was very interested and he wanted to borrow textbooks. I had a very mixed image of him, obviously from my upbringing, and he’s a much more complex man than I ever gave him credit for.

Leith talks about the illusion of safety—and the fact that she now no longer needs it. It has served its useful purpose in her life in the past, but she has learned to be alive means to risk.

Safety is being completely vulnerable. In trying to keep myself safe I was keeping myself isolated and I felt lonely, depressed. The only way to be safe is basically to have nothing to hide—to have nothing you’re trying to protect. People build up walls to protect their material accumulation, and that creates separation and fear. If you’re not attached to any of it, you are able to move. It is about movement instead of rigidity. The them of rigidity versus flexibility comes up in Gestalt, how we lock ourselves in trying to protect ourselves, trying to deal with our fears by tightening up and becoming really rigid.

Leith continues with the legacy of her relationship with her father, in always pushing herself to be better.

The resiliency part of it is I always try harder. I always want to try and do better than I’ve done it. It’s like a paradox or a polarity. I’m always trying to do it better because I know I’ll never be ‘good enough.’ So, I have to keep trying to do better. And of course, there’s stress to that. And there’s low self-esteem to that. And it made me a strong person; it made me a determined person. It made me kind of a ‘gorilla.’ I don’t go out front and lead the charge. But I’ll stay in there and keep slugging. I don’t give up easily.

Leith travelled to India for studies in meditation and spiritual teachings where she learned more about facing her fears.
Go where the anxiety is. Go where there's something difficult about it for you. If you always stay where it's easy, you're never going to go anywhere. Change doesn't happen when we're comfortable and happy. It just doesn't. The only way change happens is when you're uncomfortable enough to want to do something different, to be willing to experiment with something different. I'm much more aware if I get this clench in my gut when somebody suggests something, I'd better take a look at it.

I guess one of the themes that has come up for me in my Gestalt work is that I've grown up with the idea that I'm never good enough. And what I do is never good enough. It could be better. You've got to try harder. And the 'keep going' is very consistent with that, but I have never actually verbalized it in that way. 'Just keep going.' And I am very much like that. Just keep going. Just keep trying. Don't give up. If one way doesn't work you'll find another. Or maybe you have to change your direction a bit. And certainly looking back, I can say that what I've done, what I've been through, I probably had to do it all that way. And it's all contributed to who I am and how I am today.

Leith has faced major changes including her depression, divorce, death of her first born teenage son to cancer, her own breast cancer, and unexpected layoff from her job when she was close to retirement. The biggest challenge has been the layoff, because there was no warning, and because it challenged her use of intellect and 'head' over her creativity or 'heart.' It led to her pursuit of training as a Gestalt therapist and shamanic studies, and to writing poetry that she fearfully shared with her family. Getting in touch with her creative side is the second major theme in Leith's life story. She recalled her feelings during her layoff.

I knew in that moment that things were going to change, that all of a sudden I was on an accelerated change path. And I probably also knew in that moment, although I had to revisit it and revisit it, that I wasn't going to go back into corporate life. I wasn't going to go and try and find another job in the industry.

What was really important to me in doing all those things was an internal sense that this was really a big opportunity to do what I would be happier doing, what maybe was more in line with what my real mission could be. My husband was very supportive. I got support from the out-placement people, the Gestalt Institute provided me with another community that was supportive and helpful.
Today Leith is setting up a psychotherapy practice with a focus on helping people who are making life transitions.

*Those who are dealing with change or making change in all of the various arenas that can make an impact, be it career, relationships or health. And I've had personal experience in virtually all of those arenas. So I think that I see it as-it may be my mission. I sounds a bit pretentious to say that. It feels pretentious to me to say, 'I think I've finally found my purpose and mission.' And yet what I realize is that the more that I learn about myself and how I have...how I am and what I am, the more I have to offer, and want to offer to other people.*

One of the biggest challenges Leith has faced is reading her poetry to her family.

*Something I did about two months ago, which I certainly wouldn't have done a few years ago, was take some of my poetry and read it to my family. Like my father and my two brothers and my sister, sister-in-law, and was very gratified by their response. And you know, you kind of wonder, what did I think they would do? Laugh at me, probably. Or poke fun or...I don't know. What is it that we fear in letting people see who we are? Or something that's very important, close to us, personal to us? And I certainly would never have done that, but then I think if I hadn't been in Gestalt I wouldn't even be into my poetic side. I don't think. That would be buried.*

**Samantha’s Themes: Family Scripts; Security vs Creative Freedom**

A strong theme in Samantha’s life story is the influence of her father and his choice to be an educator and not follow his real love—acting. Growing up she keenly felt the tension from dichotomous parental models, her mother being the logical, orderly person, her father following his creative impulses. She feels he suppressed his creativity in favor of professional security and the resulting anger and frustration was acted out on the home front.

*My Mom was an interesting person. She always told us that we were special, that we had incredible talents, that we could do anything we wanted to do. You’re okay. You’re great now. My Mom, I think, gave us an awareness of what ‘home’ is. You know, that feeling when you’re ‘home’ and close to yourself and your core.*
For me, my Dad was very, very creative. He was an actor before he was a teacher and I think he was a lot happier. He’d make papier-mache things in the basement, and he was into gardening, that kind of thing. My Mom was very—not creative, so we had these weird, you know, feminine-masculine role models in a sense. My mother had totally shut down her creativity.

Seeing her father give up his dreams of acting, Nan’s message from him was to always strive to find your life’s purpose.

My Dad was an educator and very much believed that the discovery approach and sort of creating your own reality as a child was the way it should be. His message was you have to work harder to be as good as you think you can be. There’s a drive there to always get just a bit closer. I have that drive to shave a little bit closer to find out a little bit more, to get closer to home. Always get closer to that feeling of being totally centred and totally happy and flexible and feeling like you’re doing what you should be doing—your life’s purpose.

So there’s a ballast there, but there’s also a good strong wind. But it’s a torture test too, because the down side of the ballast is that sometimes you don’t want to go out there.

Nan feels her father compromised too much of himself in choosing a career in education.

His decision to teach was a useful way to channel a certain amount of creative energy and do something worthwhile. He had a strong social conscience about what he thought he should be doing. But I think it was a big mistake. I think the acting was a very risky thing and he didn’t go with that risk. As the years progressed he became a teacher and eventually moved up to being an administrator, he became progressively and progressively more detached from his work and from his family. So when he came home he was very irritable; he was very closed. He was very demanding, very critical, sometimes he got physical if he was very angry, and if we sort of pushed his buttons far enough.

Nan found a way to counter her father’s anger.

He physically tried to take me to put me in my room. And instead of resisting him, fighting him, I just totally let go and let him ‘manhandle’ me like a piece of furniture. So
I had no resistance. This sense of 'you can put me wherever you want to, but there's an essence that you can't touch.' And that has been a very powerful memory for me about feeling that, 'there's something there that you can try to squash, that you can try to kill, that you can try to move away, but you can't do it.' And it was an incredible feeling of power, self-power, just containment, and I think that's the first conscious awareness of that.

Her mother, as a professional nurse, conveyed Nan's father's behaviour was 'no big deal' with her barometer of life and death experiences. But Nan still struggles to come to terms with the issue.

But as I peel the layers of it back, it is. It's a fundamental big deal, right? It's a 'who you are as a person big deal, right? I think if there was any lack of safety in my home growing up, it was a lack of safety I think a lot of women feel in terms of having a respected, valued feminine voice or female voice. And feeling nurtured and safe in being that...right?

Nan is aware of the strong professional role modelling from home, as well as the scripting as oldest child. She chose to become an educator.

Education is my lifeblood. Definitely. If there was a scripting, it would be around me being the oldest child and being the son that wasn't and therefore following father.

But Nan's diagnosis of IBS and her need to live a less stressful life has led to an exploration of alternative methods of healing, quitting full time teaching to return to graduate school in the city while commuting to the peace of a Muskoka home. A second theme for Samantha is the tension she feels between having a sense of home and security versus being out in the world, risking and expressing herself creatively.

So, knowing when to quit is an option. Not assuming that that's not an option. And having the sense of when there's too much of yourself going into something to the point where you're not...the balance is off. I think that's part of my decision to leave as well. The balance is off somewhere there.

The insight about teaching and how that was a practical 'heady' decision, and also the writing that came out around my Dad and the similarities in the process that my Dad went through was a big insight. He made a practical choice in teaching and it destroyed him in a lot of ways.
One of my priorities is to have time to think and read, to create, to have a nice, natural place to live. And to not have RSP's, you know. That may come back to haunt us, I don’t know.

Like most people, Nan struggles with her inner critic, that voice inside saying she is wasting her time, not productive, with the ongoing tension between ‘doing’ and ‘being.’ She’s more in tune with her body, which in turn flows into her creativity.

The body can talk. It can tell you what’s going on. A light went on. Despite an inner critic that says it’s not a useful way to spend your time, you’re supposed to be out there doing things. ‘The Artist’s Way’ gave me that concept—you’re a conduit for energy and we block ourselves in some respects with the concept of talent, that some people are ‘gifted.’ I read that poetry is the voice of the soul and this type of painting or this type of artwork is spontaneous and it is just a tool to express yourself.

The journey continues to spellbind me. What started as an innocent search for understanding and control over my intestinal tract has inadvertently led me to a new home, new skills, new friends, new courses, new knowledge and new dreams for the future. My relationship with IBS continues to provide me with the push I need at times to keep moving.

**Victoria’s Themes: Parental Abandonment and ‘Head’ over ‘Heart’**

One of the recurring themes in my life story is the need to overcome my father leaving when I was around age seven, and my ongoing conflict with my mother. My response was to take on a caretaker role with movement between a message of ‘I’ll take care of you and I’ll be good’ to a rebellious stance of ‘What’s the use, I’ll never gain their approval anyway.’ The story of my life has been an attempt to be my own good parent and stop making decisions in a reactive way, but to stay true to my own inner goals. For as long as I can remember my goal has been to do whatever it would take to break the family cycle.

I recalled the moment when I last saw my father as a child.

My sister and I were playing in a snow bank. My father walked along up to the apartment and I remember thinking, ‘Oh, there’s Daddy.’ And he didn’t acknowledge us. He might have said, ‘Hi,’ or something, but walked on by us and then up to the
apartment. And then came out after and that was it. Today my feelings are, 'How can anyone leave their child?' It's harder to maintain a relationship when you only see them in little bits and pieces. So I can understand the pain of that. But my feeling is, 'How dare he? How dare he? How dare he not think that I'm important enough to stand up to my mother and her rules, to insist on seeing your child? No terms and no arrangements are fair trade for not getting to see your own child. And fight for what you love, Stand up for what you love.

Years later, when I contacted father, I was very aware of wanting to convey the message to him that I didn't want anything, but simply wanted to meet him. 

In my mind...and I know I was quite clear in thinking this...that in my mind I wanted to be able to go to him as an adult with some kind of life in place, not asking for anything. To be able to say to him, you know, 'I just wanted to meet you. I don't need...I don't need to sort of 'get' anything from you. I just want to...and I that in a letter to him.

My childhood experiences would translate to working in teaching with students with learning disabilities and behavioural problems—an area I seemed to be led to more than making a conscious choice.

I never understood why I was drawn to students and children who had problems—who had learning disabilities and behavioural problems. When I was little, of course, I grew up in a family that wasn't that stable and lack of support at home. I remember being severely punished...everything I've ever done that I tried to break the rules I got caught. I remember having these phases of thinking, 'I'm going to be good.' And at some point I realized there was no pleasing my mother no matter what I did. As an adult, I started volunteer work in Children's Aid, started working in education, and I started to realize some of the reasons why I was doing the things I was doing. So I don't have this guilt thing, that I was this bad kid. I was really resourceful in getting my needs met. I did it.

A second theme for me has been the struggle of intellect over heart, or my rational side over my creative side. In that context, failing law school somehow made sense in the context of finally learning to stay true to my own goals. I lost my fear of failure, gained a newfound sense of integrity and personal power, and recommitted myself my original goals of teaching and writing.
I had never failed at anything academically. In all my years, in all my life, I had never failed at anything academically. I had always used doing well at school; I would sit by the door and answer the door and be the neat printer and get the part in the class play. I was one of the top three girls in our class, and always had confidence in my academics. It was one of the first times in my life I hadn’t achieved a goal that I set out to achieve. This was the first time when everything I put into place did not work. Everything I put into place did not work.

I’ve realized now, what else can happen? The fear of being a pleaser and trying to seek approval and trying to do everything right. I read somewhere, ‘It’s only the good rider who has fallen off his horse.’ The loss is in not trying and not giving your best effort and not sticking your neck out. But it’s not worth the risk to go so close to the edge. After you haven’t had any food in the fridge, who cares. What can they do?

Travelling to Montreal to see the home I lived in until age seven when my father left was pivotal. I realized through that journey that I had been heading in that direction for a long, long time. It has been a lot of work and a hard struggle to put the pieces of my life together and get ‘me’ back.

Step-by-step I’ve been doing something to put these pieces together. All my life. I mean all my life. That’s no mystery to me. So, there’s a freedom with that. There’s also a grieving that goes with it. I don’t know, change or leaving some youth...dreams and the possibilities of youth...leaving those behind. Leaving some of the mythology behind. What could be possible and what’s going to happen? But also with leaving go of that is a new determination in my own life to get what I want and get what I need.

I’m not afraid any more. It went away. It went away over the summer and I think it connected to going back and seeing my home in the summertime. Getting on my bike and going in and seeing this place had some kind of connection for me. A ghost was put to rest or something. It was just a culmination of things.

In mid-life I am striving for a better balance of intellect and creativity. The law school experience has taught me that. I’m less immersed in therapy, and have finally relegated the self-help books to the back shelf, and revel in roaming the aisles of Chapters, Book City and Indigo while perusing the latest fiction. The latest books are stashed around my apartment, happily waiting for me. I am looking forward to the
culmination of my doctoral studies which will open up more time for me to do some writing and art.

*I have gone through this introspection process and the transition process I'm in is to 'get out of my head' and just get on with living. To move on and get to a 'doing' phase. I really sense that in myself and I'm not sure where that will lead.

Enough. I'm as healed as I'm ever going to be and I have to go out there, in the condition I'm in, with all the baggage and all flaws and scar tissue and whatever and say, 'Okay. Life moves forward from now on. Okay. I'm moving forward in life. I've got to move forward, because I'm spinning my wheels, stagnating, in a rut...I've got to have some kind of movement forward in many areas. That's the internal stuff, more than what's going on around me.

To just let go and go with the flow. I'm very aware of the times when I'm not so driven, when I'm not so structured and controlled, and have that loose kind of 'being in the moment.' And it happens more and more, but I'm very aware of how good that feels.

**Conclusion**

Each woman had her own issues, formed by the unique circumstances of her life. Laura was living out the repeating cycle of feeling isolated and lonely, wanting to be part of a group, and feeling displaced by her stepmother when her father remarried. Leila's issues centred around feeling different and whether she could let go of the need to be competent, instead of being vulnerable to others and having a richer life. Sarah's issues revolved around breaking the family pattern and using her visualization to move forward after the breakup of an important relationship. Leith had to face father and allow her creativity to flourish. Samantha also had to overcome family scripts and her father's modelling to find her own way to creative freedom and inner healing. My theme of parental abandonment replays itself again and again in my life, and is somehow connected to my need to intellectualize over allowing my creativity to have free expression. Although there is some overlap to these themes, they are all unique to each woman. In our own way, we are all using our past experiences toward being more resilient.
CHAPTER SIX
COMMON THEMES

There were several themes that the women had in common including reading, use of visualization and a strong faith or belief system, early family conflict, a life changing event or transition and experiencing the stages associated with that of an independent spirit and tension of intellectual ability over creative ability.

Reading

Reading was mentioned often by the women as a means of escape, method of learning, a large influence in their lives, and a way to make sense of the world.

Laura often referred to the importance of books in her life. "I escaped into books. Our sitting room was the library and of course, there were all these books and they were mostly from the 19th Century. So, here I was not knowing what in the world I was reading half the time, but I read anyway. I was forever escaping into books and I wasn't doing the dusting and so it got so—I have no doubt a lot of the time I was punished because of the reading, that I felt guilty about...Dad loved to read...everybody liked to read! But there was a proper time for it. Not when there were chores to do. So, older I really almost cut myself off from reading fiction because I could leave non-fiction much easier than I could leave fiction. I found a spot to hide out for reading. I'd go outside. Sometimes there were kids. The farm, whoever was working for Dad would have children and I'd play with them. They seemed to be boys rather than girls. But I was forever making cozy spots and drifts in the winter. Oh dear, and in the house in the middle of a woodpile."

Sarah, without hesitation, mentioned reading as one of her favorite things to do. From about age four, she remembers she loved to read and would "just devour novels. I remember my parents had just tons of books and I would literally, in the summer holidays, just go through the shelves, and I'd work my way from one end to the other and I'd just read. I'd read them all." Today she still reads constantly, a book a day, one every few days if work is busy. "I'm forever reading, even if it's not great literature. I mean, it's just a novel I pick up at a garage sale. But the character will speak of something and it'll
go whew, right here, that's exactly what I'm feeling right now. That they articulate in some way that perhaps I'm unable to articulate it for myself. I buy all these books I should read. There's literally a pile of them in my bedroom and I don't read them because I just read novels instead." Today Sarah also loves movies, going by herself and "when the lights go down, it's just me right there in the movie."

Leila mentioned reading several books that helped her come to a better understanding of her infertility. At the time of our meeting she was immersed in the work of Robert Kegan's life stage theories and excitedly suggesting titles to me. During her infertility crisis, she recalled reading a book, Dear Barbara, Dear Lynne a correspondence between two women going through infertility, her identification, feeling that she wasn't alone, that she wasn't crazy, that her feelings were appropriate. Leila describes herself as analytical and taking things to a deeper level than most, and reading is part of that process for her.

"There's a depth that I take things to. I want to peel back the layers and understand things. I just don't take things at face value, sort of getting at the 'why.' It took a lot of work to relate that quality about myself to infertility, but then once I started looking, it really did have an effect on how I deal with the rest of my life."

Leith came from a family that valued academics and studying and reading has always been a part of her life. During the time of her son's death she coped by using her analytical side, intellectualizing, researching, finding out as much as she could about leukemia, trying to read and understand. During her job transition she turned to studies at the Gestalt Institute, shamanic studies and graduate work as a way to developing a new identity and getting in touch with her creative side. She mentioned several books that were instrumental to her, including Johnathan Livingstone Seagull with the message that "you have no idea what you can be. You just have to keep trying to be better than you are. Keep working at it. I still believe that. There's no end to my potential if I have the guts to go where it's scary." She says it was one of the things she had in common with her second husband at the time they met—they both loved the story of Johnathon Livingstone Seagull.
Leith says the title, *The Artist’s Way* was mentioned to her three times before she finally picked it up. "It’s like I heard about the book from three, maybe four different people."

Samantha spoke of reading, her doctoral studies and particular books that were instrumental for her in her healing process. She worked through "The Artist’s Way" morning pages exercises as a way to get in touch with her creativity. She explored the works of Deepak Chopra and Caroline Myss to gain a better understanding of her body. She sees her doctoral thesis work as adding to the larger pool of knowledge. "In many respects I’m not an isolated little being, typing away. I am one voice that is an important voice, but I am also part of many voices."

I discovered my love of reading at a very young age—it was a safe place to be while the world seemed to slip away. My childhood pattern was to excel at school, but at home I was somehow always getting into trouble. I started spending hours at the library or writing poetry and drawing pictures at my desk.

"Reading was always a thing to do. To be able to lose myself in a book and read was major. To escape. That has always been and is still a major escape for me."

"I grew up in a household where, through no fault of theirs, a lot of reading was going on, but there was not a lot of encouragement for the girls to pursue academics. I have made that my mission, to get children interested in reading and knowledge and learning. It’s a major thing for me."

All of the co-researchers are graduate students with the exception of Laura who was something of a celebrity when she received her BA at age 66—the local papers had a feature story about her. To a certain extent we all use our intellectual abilities, reading and research skills (whether formal or informal) to gain a better understanding of our own issues and that transfers to the world around us.

**Visualization and Personal Faith**

All of the women spoke of making use of visualization and nature during difficult moments or throughout their daily life. Some women talked of the importance of synchronicity, being at the crossroads of opportunity and chance. All women found
expression through prayer or meditation and a strong personal faith. All of the women expressed a belief in a higher power or God.

Today Sarah finds escape and solace in nature, just as she did as a child. When there would be a family disturbance around her sister's behavior, being the "harmonizer" she just couldn't bear it. Saying, "I just have to get out of the house" she would run into the back fields and stay there for hours. "It would just soothe my soul. I use it a lot in my imagery—it's so soothing to me. I always liked to be close to nature. In the summer we'd swim and canoe and all that stuff. I think one of my real images, a clear strong image of childhood and what I would do in times of stress would be to go and walk in my back fields. For me, a connection to nature has always been a very nurturing thing. I mean, I can remember I would lie in the fields and watch the clouds and smell the smells and hear the sounds and I would feel connected to something and it would make me feel better. And one of the best things in the world for me is we used to always go up to this special place in Georgian Bay. Just being there...and I often use that in my imagery, like when I need to be calm...I use that place in my mind when I do my guided imagery. It's the water, the trees, the wind, the space around me. That's a consistent image from youth to now, a way I feel a deeper connection."

Connected to Sarah's love of nature is her firm belief in the power of visualization in both her personal and professional life. She has learned to be respectful of that power. "Having a personal vision has had a profound influence on my life. Without it I was floundering. With it I have a sense of purpose and renewed energy. I feel that my passion is engaged in what I do. That passion then rubs off on the other areas of my life. Personal vision is one strategy for an individual to have creativity in one's life. It also provides a base of resiliency as the vision evolves. It gives a sense of control and power over events in one's life that previously may have felt outside of one's control."

"To me to be open to synchronicities is to know oneself very well. If you don't then you're not going to see them when they're happening. So to me it comes back to intuition as well. I think I know myself pretty well. I get to know myself better all the time. As long as I'm open to myself, that's a good starting point. Part of that openness is openness to possibilities, which is vision. And if you have those two things then when the possibility
occurs you're ready for it. Otherwise they could just slip right by you. To me to be open to self and open to the future, open to possibility means you're open to synchronicities."

"I'm not saying that you make things happen. Sometimes we make things happen for ourselves. And other times we do in the sense that we have prepared ourselves to be ready for different options and when they come, there you are. It's sort of a mixture of individualistic thinking and more cosmic type of thinking. But I think it's a combination of both. I don't think things just happen in life. I mean, they do happen. Why do some people get all this bad energy around them? I mean, why do they call that to them? Why do some people call good energy to them? Well, to me it's about what you're doing inside yourself at the same time as events outside ourselves do whatever they do, and then it's just the alignment of those two things, the inner and the outer work."

Nan described her use of meditation as helpful in managing her IBS.

"To not look outside for connections and meaning but to look inside. And you need to clean out in order to be able to look inside. So that's an ongoing thing, checking in."

Later, her journey to gain better understanding and management of her IBS symptoms led her to an analysis of her dreams. "I had never before attended a dream analysis workshop and although I had always enjoyed sharing dreams, I had not linked my dream world with other aspects of my life. My visit with Emy Alvera that summer evening changed all that. I presented a dream that she interpreted to be both collective and very instructive for me personally. Its basic message outlined how I was on a different ship, that I was challenged by the 'natives' to disembark and be like them, but that I refused, captured one of them, dragged him on board and brought him through customs (where he turned into a little blond boy). Finally I brought him home to the dock. Without knowing it at the time, this dream was to come true for me in the next two years."

"The experiences with Linda and Emy Alvera sent me down a new path. I was primed for a deeper understanding of the mind body connection and felt as though I had two new tools: Touch for Health muscle testing and dream dialogue. My brief encounter with Touch for Health gave me a sense of profound respect for the wisdom of my body. My contact with Emy connected me to the intriguing world of the archetypal symbol. It
allowed me to begin a serious dialogue with my unconscious. I purchased the book *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols* by J.C. Cooper (1978) and began to use it with regularity."

Nan also began to use yoga as a tool for inner healing and a way to be centred. "I loved two aspects of yoga immediately. I loved the slow, mindful movements that pushed me to my limits but didn't make me feel like I was in competition with anyone else. I also loved the twenty-minute relaxation at the end. It was my first window into meditation and it affirmed for me the benefits of guided imagery for enhancing health and well being."

"For me it's really about letting go. It's just letting go of the need to control and anticipate the outcome. Letting go of even thinking there's going to be an outcome and just trusting that, doing what I need to be doing and what's going to come to me comes. And I can get into this tailspin where I don't and I try and anticipate and try and map out pathways, and get freaked if things take too long, you know, that kind of thing. But letting go of that...it's great if you can do it...it's great."

A deepening of personal faith and being in harmony resonates with the idea that "God" seeks us out, that it is not us seeking God. Faith requires of us only the stance of being a listener, to be silent and receptive, to let go of the clamor and busy-ness of the world, and be receptive and expectant. The truth is always inside us; our inner wisdom never fails. This deepening faith experience echoes with questions of "Who am I now? Where am I now? Where do I go from here?" In Christian teachings, the Bible quotes Jesus speaking to Nicodemus in John 3:3, "Unless a man is born again he cannot seek the kingdom of God." The yearning to know ourselves is one of the deepest and most persistent drives of human beings. From the time we are babies to adulthood, the more we know the more we want to explore ourselves and the world around us.

Leila experienced a renewal of faith through the crisis of her infertility. She now attends church with her children but is questioning once again. "And doing this kind of reading and thinking and working through is almost a more profoundly spiritual experience for me right now, than the experience of thinking about God and Jesus Christ." She describes an "up-down" faith. "When I look back on my experience...I believe in God. I mean I believe that this journey that I'm on is bigger than me. There's
an untouchable quality about the process and the journey that I'm gaining this real sense that everything happens for a reason."

"So, I'm in transition I think is what I'm saying. I'm sort of trying to reassess how my faith affects how I am. Because I really turned away from God and the church and faith during my infertility crisis-big time. I really questioned it in a huge way."

"The meaning of God is becoming way bigger and way more important to me but I'm kind of questioning the avenues to get there."

Sarah spoke of her deepened faith—something that has been with her throughout her life. She is essentially an optimistic person. She has faith. "By that I mean faith in myself, faith in the universe, faith in others, faith that things will evolve, and I think coupled with that is faith in optimism. Up until this time in my life, I've always been a very optimistic person. If things would go wrong I would be distraught for a little while, but I'd very quickly bounce into optimism to try to see how to reframe it in a sense, to be able to see it in a different light. I just think that I'm really quite a special person, you know, in my own little way and somehow that's linked to my optimism. They're sort of one and the same in a sense—the things that will be good for me. I am a flexible person able to make change. I do welcome change, have good coping strategies, a good support system. Just having knowledge helps a lot in resiliency, having a context within which to put things. A cognitive thing and a heart thing and a spiritual belief that things can be good, things will change, that I can do whatever I can do. I guess a part of welcoming change is being able to 'see.'"

Laura talks about her early spiritual experiences, and her tacit acceptance of this presence as part of her life. "There was a presence there that was with me that was comforting and real...so that was a real helpmate. And it disappeared, but it never really left me, you know. It left, but I had a sense that I wasn't totally isolated."

"There was something that was a spiritual side of life that was very real. Sitting in church between grandparents and my aunt, I felt the influences of the generations and their time that they were from. I must have had a sense of myself that I give credit to those first formative years, and I give a lot of credit to whatever that spiritual experience was that I was given—and with my aunt and my grandmother, was Anglican. And we went to church, you know, regularly, and I'd sit beside my grandmother. I can remember my
grandmother on one side and my grandfather on the other and I was in the middle there... That it was very significant, by sort of osmosis. That there was something. That there was a spiritual side to life that was very real. And I think I got that. And I go back, as I say, to Victorian times because I can remember the old dining room table and old walnut furniture and after breakfast my grandfather was supposed to do the reading of the morning prayers, you know, in the Anglican Book of Common Prayers. And I can remember kneeling down beside the chair and we had morning prayers around the table. So, you know, it was important. And Dad... they rarely went... special occasions... but we could not get him to be a churchgoer, but he got it over to me very plainly. I can remember talking about the miracles and he said something, 'If God can create something then he can heal a broken leg.' It was strong. I was given that basis, so I think I'm very grateful for that."

It is an important contention of Laura's that we need meaning in our lives. "And that's very basic to resiliency, because if there's no meaning then we give up." She feels meaning has come for her from growing up with Christian values, her enjoyment of reading, that she is philosophical with a need to search for deeper meanings. The key for her is seeing life as a gift, to become conscious of the divine and not get caught up in the competitive, materialistic world, to become conscious of a different ethic and live out of that. "For whatever reason, I've known I had to search for the spiritual. It's sort of a part of me. That's basic to me. Why and wherefore I don't know. Nature is part of the spiral. If you take the awe out of nature you're left with nothing but the materialistic world." Her childhood lessons caused what she interprets as an inward rebellion. She now strives for authenticity and forgiveness.

Leila spoke of the black time she faced in confronting her own infertility. In the aftermath, she questioned the traditional Christian work ethic. "If I was such a good person, and so competent and such a hard worker, I was supposed to get whatever I wanted in life. Why wasn't it working for me?" She describes this as a "really black time for me."

"I absolutely couldn't cope anymore. I remember seeing myself in this black pit, like way down in the bottom and there was no way out. I just felt complete despair"
"I literally couldn't cope. It took me so much energy to get through the day, that I'd come and I would literally fall apart."

Today Leila acknowledges that, although she felt abandoned by God, church and religion, unconsciously she must have felt some hope and "that we are not alone. Those kinds of ideals had to have been within me, even if they weren't conscious, because I remember... it never occurred to me to give up. That was not the issue. It was, 'What am I going to do?' Not, 'I'm not going to do anything.' It was more that I needed to hit bottom to be able to say, 'You know what? Okay, I can't cope anymore. I need some help. I need to reach out.'"

Sarah described the end of a relationship as like death. "It's like a death. It's like your parent dies and you know they're going to die and everyone says, 'Oh, well, it's good you had a chance to prepare yourself,' but you're never prepared for the death of relationship. It's like a death of everything that I held as what I wanted in my life. And so I just feel like I'm going through the mourning of... of... death. And no matter how cognitively I've been aware that this was certainly one of the options, emotionally it's been like death."

**Family Conflict**

The women all experienced early family conflict that they recalled with varying detail and sense of awareness. There was an awareness of the spiral of life where our conflicts are repeated, with issues appearing early, and the tone set by the experience of those early interactions.

When Laura's mother died suddenly of cancer and her father remarried, Laura did not like her new stepmother and remembers feeling displaced by her. When she went to her aunt seeking support, she was not consoled but told to deal with her stepmother and father directly. Laura talks about cycles repeating themselves, with this kind of conflict reappearing for her 70 years later when she was living with her son with joint ownership of a house and a sharing of responsibilities and expenses that was working out. Then he met a woman who moved in with them.

"But that produced a situation that I could not live with. She took over and she had written me beforehand, and when she was using 'we' she meant Tom and she, and I
was to come to them if things weren't going right. I blew up more or less. So I went and spoke to her. Not blowing up, but told her that this would not work. That the only way it would work would be if somehow—three of us, as adults, and two children—could work out how we were going to manage."

They visited a family systems therapist together. But Laura was aware of the repeating cycle and her feelings at the time.

"What's the use. Nobody understands. I just have to put up with the situation. I also became aware that I had felt this way before. Where did it come from? After puzzling and praying I remembered my childhood, my ongoing battles with my stepmother, my father coaxing me until finally I conformed, saying I was sorry when I did not feel it, just for the sake of peace."

"I always have the feeling, Oh, good. Now I'm through with that. No more. ' And then, bingo. There you go again. I can see it's constantly being aware of my own reactions and then I can see whether it's helpful or a great hindrance. It's usually a great hindrance."

Leila describes her relationship during her growing up years as "conflictual" and perhaps loving too much. She recalls blowups with her fears of "is she still going to love me?" She would go to her room to write these notes and float them down from the stairs, "I love you. I'm sorry," and later the physical sensation of learning to control her temper.

As a teenager, Leila had significant self-esteem issues, and rocked the family with her adolescent rebellion, "wrong crowd, drugs, drinking," and lack of commitment to school. She describes her feelings as, struggling to be heard and to be understood, and I didn't feel like anybody was listening."

"Both Mom and Dad were determined not to give up on me. But I was most confrontational with my Mom. I remember screaming at her, 'Fuck you! I hate your guts.' And she'd say, 'Well, I love you and I'm never going to stop loving you,' when we were in one of our confrontations."

Being a minister's daughter, Leila also rebelled against religion and God during her adolescence. Later, during her struggle with infertility, she would come to a sort of resolution on the issue.
Sarah described her early family life as “dysfunctional” although she did not have an awareness of it in those terms at the time. She was the middle child along with an older brother that she still remains close to. Sarah has an older sister and a younger sister, the family constellation centering around a mentally ill sister and a physically disabled father.

When there was a disturbance around her sister, Sarah would “just have to get out of the house” and she would run to the back fields and stay there for hours. “It would just soothe my soul.”

She describes her mother as a strong, very warm, very, very loving and supportive. “She was great. We had a very warm, loving, close in all kinds of ways…you know, physical closeness and everything else…kind of relationship.”

Although Leith did not recall a lot of adversity as a child, she did relay stories of fearing her father’s approval, of feeling fat and struggling with self-esteem issues around him. Her father was a medical doctor, and Leith did not try out for medical school when her father warned women should not take up seats reserved for male students. Leith decided to be a nurse instead. That decision was met with the silent disapproval of her new husband. It was her mother who provided the impetus to go ahead, and succeed.

Her marriage was partly a way of getting away from her father’s influences, “because I thought I could never live up to my father’s expectations. I felt that somehow I would never be able to meet my father’s expectations, so I would just leave the arena. I was afraid that he would think that I was stupid, silly or whatever. I grew up with a feeling of having very low self-esteem. My recollections are that he said I was too fat. I was a chunky kid…I don’t look it now, but he was critical of that within my hearing. I grew up with the belief that I was too fat and fat is ugly and nobody will love a person who’s too fat. That translated into a lot of areas-nobody will love someone who’s stupid, and I’ll never do it right, and I’ll never be quite good enough. I’ll always have to try harder…that kind of thing.”

Samantha described an awareness of family conflict from an early age, the tensions between her father’s creative needs and her mother’s need for order and control. Nan’s father started out to be an actor, but through what she sees as a failure of nerve, he stifled his creativity to work through the ranks of education to become an administrator.
Her father's struggle with freeing his creativity is the major theme Nan has internalized in her own attempt to reconcile her creativity and logical sides. Nan described her father's increasing tension at home, because of what she perceives as his dissatisfaction in his career.

A defining moment was a family meeting the girls had to try to get her mother not to accept his putdowns. The sisters were trying indirectly to get through to their father through their mother. One day he got very angry.

"He physically tried to take me to my room. And instead of resisting him, fighting him, I just totally let go and let him 'manhandle' me like a piece of furniture. There was no resistance. This sense of 'you can put me wherever you want to, but there's an essence that you can't touch.'

Today she is still trying to come to an understanding of the situation. "As I peel back the layers of it, it is. It's a fundamental big deal, right? It's a who you are as a person big deal, right?

"I think if there was any lack of safety in my home growing up, it was a lack of safety I think a lot of women feel in terms of having a respected, valued feminine voice or female voice. And feeling nurtured and safe in being that...right?"

I experienced conflict in my family early in life when my parents separated. I lived with my mother, who was controlling and manipulative, whose long spells of anger would erupt suddenly into fits of rage. I had a tendency to try to be the caretaker and "be good" while at the same time filling the family scapegoat role.

"Somewhere along the line I had realized I could not please her or live up to her high demands and expectations. I noticed things were different at my friends' houses—they talked openly about things that were deep dark secrets at my house. My mother's behaviour veered between isolation and episodes of rage, her method of control to not speak to me for days or threaten reform school or the ultimate, "and don't think you're going to your father because he doesn't want you. I always led with my chin, a stance that was not always wise, I would later learn."
Independent Spirit

All of the women described a defining moment in their childhood or early adulthood where they were aware of being independent, of having a stubborn sense of following their own will. Sometimes this led to conflict with those around them. Often it was a survival skill and a means of coping in the midst of some kind of conflict. Today, the women see these characteristics as assets, but it wasn’t always so.

Although Laura recalls as a child always hanging behind someone’s skirts because of her shyness, she had a sense of independence. She was isolated but imaginative, and “loved to climb, hide away up in the trees eating apples.” Helping her father lead the team in ploughing and getting hay or driving the rake, being thanked for her help despite the “wobbly lines” led to a sense of being part of something meaningful, of contributing. There was a sense of “keep going. Don’t give up. So there had to be a real earthquake under me before I gave in.”

Later, after her husband died, and she got her first job, she recalled the sense of accomplishment. “That gave me tremendous satisfaction. That I managed to do it. Managed to find myself a job.” She laughs today about the mistakes she made on the job. “So live and learn. But it gave me great satisfaction. I could manage.”

She described the process years later of getting her BA.

“We had to zero in on something, and I had nothing to zero in on! So, I could choose between religious studies and political science. And political science sounded ghastly. So I did a general BA. Such a struggle. Anyway, I passed somehow. I kept on. And it was very satisfying. So.”

As a young girl, Leila had an independent spirit and says, she “always felt like my own person” and would do her own thing, maybe feeling like she couldn’t live up to an older sister who was a leader and model student.

“I’ve always had a fighting spirit and being comfortable being that way. My Mom recognized it when I was six months old. I just wasn’t the same as other kids. There was a certain spunk or individuality.”

Sarah described herself as introspective, a leader and an introvert. She remembers from the age of 10 developing strategies to cope with her family, the norm being that people didn’t talk about those things outside the family.
"I certainly didn't want to be like my sister, so I think I tried to make my own way in that I would define myself more clearly. That's probably where I got this whole thing about, 'Who am I? Where am I going?' sort of thing. I just tried to be centred in myself, clearer in myself and then the support and love around me."

Leith has had to struggle with her independence, and learn to be vulnerable and allow herself to not always be strong and seek help from others.

"'I can do it myself' is kind of a theme song for me. And if I can't do it myself, I may opt for something that I can. I am pragmatic. If one way doesn't work, then I'll try another way. I can get really hung up about what should and shouldn't be in the world, and I am also a very practical person. I'll put a lot of energy into something practical, hands on, that affects me, than I will into philosophical and a statement of values, or morals or whatever. I do need to be able to feel a sense of personal involvement and commitment, I guess. So it's like, 'Keep going.' And I guess that's what I've always done. Just keep going. The worst time was that nine months to a year of depression, when I didn't ever go and get help with it, but I knew I was depressed. But even there, it was like, 'Well, you've got to keep going.' So, I dragged myself out of bed in the morning and...and just had to keep going. I guess that's always been a theme for me. 'You gotta keep going.'"

Nan's conflict with her father helped her internalize a sense of independence.

"That has been a powerful memory for me about feeling that, 'there's something there that you can try to squash, but you can try to kill, that can try to move away, but you can't do it.' And it was an incredible feeling of power, self-power, just containment, and I think that's the first conscious awareness of that."

When Nan turned 12 she got to take three weeks away from school, using money she had saved from her paper route, to travel to Switzerland with her grandmother. They visited places her grandmother used to live. She described her as very worldly and a strong influence.

Nan felt she was playacting or filling a role in her life, until she travelled on her own to Europe. She returned with a decision to drop organic chemistry and began studying psychology and part-time work that corresponded to her new career goals. Today she sees that those decisions changed the course of her life.
“It was clear. I just knew that that was where I needed to be. Everything followed from there...I knew that that was my job and that’s where I had to go. And there was no tension about it at all. It was the beginning of finding out what it is that I really wanted to do, and now I realize that.”

I’ve always had an independent spirit coupled with a sense of determination. When I was little, my mother called it stubbornness. It would take years in therapy for me to see these characteristics as positive attributes that had probably saved me during my growing up years and conflict at home. I had a strong sense of not wanting my “spirit” to be squashed to my mother’s will. It was a constant battle between us, always below the surface and colouring all areas of my life.

“I recall sitting at the top of the gray wooden stairs leading down to our recreation room, crying because no one would play Monopoly with me. I distinctly recall making a decision that in future I would not be prevented from doing things, just because no one wanted to go along."

Later my sense of independence translated into making plans to go to school and get a job as soon as I possibly could.

“I couldn’t wait to get away from home. Instead of grade 13, I opted for community college after grade 12, calculating I could be out working with a one-year investment.”

The women had a sense of independent spirit and stubbornness that today has become a positive factor in facing challenges in their lives.

**Life Changing Events and Transition**

All of the women had experienced a personal life transition, some of which were life changing experiences or turning points. These transition times led to stages of denial and avoidance, anger, an incubation time to regain energy and perspective, followed by renewed goals and purpose in life. The women often described themselves as completely different people following the experience, but at some point stated they had to go through what they went through—and it made them the people they are today.

Laura recalled the anger she felt around a family conflict, and how it triggered memories of similar feelings as a child. She talks about "turning points" and the "moment
of decision" as the key to the unfolding of this ongoing story. She remembers her feelings.

"What's the use. Nobody understands. I just have to put up with the situation. I also became aware that I had felt this way before. Where did it come from? After puzzling and praying I remembered my childhood, my ongoing battles with my stepmother, my father coaxing me until finally I conformed, saying I was sorry when I did not feel it, just for the sake of peace."

During a therapy session Laura, feeling "an implication that my life was one of dependency," expressed her views that the therapist was ageist and sexist, her anger finally fueling her uncharacteristic outspokenness. "I cannot remember a time in my life when I have been so angry. I found my voice." She was furious enough to make plans to leave. "So, to get me to move it seemed you had to get me really mad."

"I had a sense of myself that wasn't squished. That was a key point. That made me decide 'I have to do something.' I know too that I can't afford to get too uptight and upset. The first thing you know I'll fall and I'll break bones. That's sort of a basic. I know I can't afford it."

Leila, through her ordeal with infertility, was finally able, as an adult, to admit her anger at God. In her marriage she attended church, joined committees, but again found her faith tested during her infertility crisis describing that time as feeling "completely alone."

"I felt completely abandoned by God. That is exactly how I felt. I felt like that poem where it says, 'The footprints in the sand, and when there's only one set I'm carrying you.' I just thought that was the biggest bunch of bullshit in the world. That's what I thought. How dare anybody have the nerve to have brought me up with this idea about God and faith and love and forgiveness and holding and being there, and it's not true. That's how I felt. I felt completely alone on a lot of levels. I felt that I'd been set up to be this good Christian which then left me more alone because I didn't even have people in the world to support me, let alone God."

I recalled my anger and confusion at my father the last time I saw him as a child. "My sister and I were playing in snow bank. My father walked along up to the apartment and I remember thinking, 'Oh, there's Daddy.' And he didn't acknowledge us. He might
have said 'Hi' or something, but walked on by us and then up to the apartment. And then came out later and that was it." Today my feelings are 'How can anyone leave their child?' It's harder to maintain a relationship when you only see them in little bits and pieces. So I can understand the pain of that. But my feeling is, 'How dare he? How dare he not think that I'm important enough to stand up to my mother and her rules, to insist on seeing your child? No terms and no arrangements are fair trade for not getting to see your own child. And fight for what you love. Stand up for what you love.'"

Most of the co-researchers described at one point or another entering into a "neutral zone" or incubation phase. Sarah talked about the importance of having faith in love of her family, her friends and her cats—that as she gives love she will get it back. She was making elaborate plans for a garden in the back, and planned to take a summer course. With the analogy of gardening she sees herself in the image of a "corm," or plant that goes through a dormant phase under the ground until it is ready to grow. A corm is like a bulb for plants such as irises. "So there I am under the earth in a corm state, but I know that if that corm is nurtured, if it's watered and fed through the soil and it doesn't get frozen too much, that it's going to come back. And so, I've been trying to use that image for myself right now, to just be okay being a corm in the earth, but knowing that I need to nurture that corm if it's going to sprout again. There's this whole notion or regeneration, rebirth, and enrichment of the elements."

Sarah is carefully considering the question of, "Why is it difficult to let go? You know, I can let go of my son; I can let go of my neighborhood; I've let go of jobs. Why is this one more difficult for me to let go? I don't know the answer to that yet. But I think when I have a clearer picture of that then it will make it easier. Because I certainly have let go of things before."

"You know Bridges talks about the neutral zone, and I am stuck right plop in the neutral zone. I do get glimpses of the new beginnings, of where I could be going... But I haven't been able to get any energy into it yet, other than, of course I've got a new home and I've set it up the way I want it and that sort of thing. But emotionally, having new beginnings, I haven't...haven't seen that yet for myself. So, I would say I'm just stuck right there in the neutral zone. And I just find that difficult sometimes, because I'm an action oriented person. Although I am very reflective, I'm still very action oriented, and to not
be taking action, to just be sitting in the neutral zone and trying to be patient with that is...is difficult for me sometimes. In the neutral zone—I have not let go nor have I moved forward. There's a part of me that doesn't want to. Because I think in letting go, then that means it's over. But also I'm worried about what will be left when I let it go, you know, will I just sort of be this empty shell, with nothing much inside? What I need to be doing is finding my own place within myself, and I've got all my internal anchor points. All of the external things are fine, other than I'm not in a relationship. But the only way that I'm going to be able to move forward is to really feel solid inside myself and feel complete inside myself. And I guess that's my biggest fear at the moment, is, if I do let go of what that relationship was, and how it defined me and all that kind of thing, what will I find in there. you know?"

Leith also talked of the importance of the neutral zone in handling the tough transition after her unexpected job loss when she was so close to retirement. "I think the hardest part of making decisions is staying in what Bridges calls 'the neutral zone.' Only for many people it's not very neutral because it is a place of loss of control. You've let go...and you haven't got anything else to hang on to. And it comes up again and again in different contexts."

Nan talked about complete lifestyle changes to help her cope with her IBS. "Despite this, I went into a deep anomie. As I sat up in the beautiful surroundings of Muskoka my head began to churn with many questions. Who was I? What was I doing with my life? My friends sounded busy and engaged with their lives. There was a whole world out there that seemed to be passing me by. At my darkest times I felt that I was a wastrel, an uncontributing member of society. I was a person with nothing interesting to say, nothing new to contribute, no new news and long days to fill. Despite assurances from friends and family, I felt as though I had leaped off of the ship and was now drowning in a vast pool of emptiness. I was an unmissed nobody with no profession and therefore no identity. My gut spit and churned, ached and complained."

Nan’s rebirth was precipitated by a return to school to pursue doctoral studies in education. It was significant that she clearly recalled what a colleague said to her at the time. "You have to because the opportunity's there. You have to go. You have to continue. You're meant to touch more people than the people in the classroom. You're not leaving
the kids in the classroom. It's just supposed to be different. If it's not meant to be, they'll refuse you."

Laura’s vitality and joy in living is partially sustained by her volunteer work in the hospital. Her eyes sparkle when she describes what it's like on the rare, special days when she has a sense she's reached someone, to hear someone say, "It's just wonderful you've come in."

Leila experienced her first change in high school, switching from her adolescent rebellion to the university bound A student. But it was a precursor of the changes yet to come in her adult life, triggered by her infertility crisis. "I had a real sense of doing the right thing now. I felt as if I'd spent most of my life not doing the right thing and finally I'd made some big decisions and I had a sense of self-confidence I'd never felt in my life before, basically. And I really felt I'd done it on my own. I made the decisions when I was ready. I sort of proved to everybody that the "bad seed minister's daughter... rebellious... who wasn't going to live up to anybody's expectations really... had the ability to, as a 17 or 18 year old, make decisions and turn my life around."

Her infertility triggered what could be called an identity crisis. The long road through the crisis, and toward a new freedom was facilitated by going into therapy. "That phone call and the subsequent process of grieving and healing changed the course of my life and, perhaps more importantly, changed the way I view myself and the way I interact with the world around me. I'm a completely different person now than prior to that. The infertility was the thing that drew me into therapy, but it really got me dealing with a lot of the issues that were really leftover issues from the whole rest of my life."

It was after the adoption of her first child that Leila knew she had changed forever—that there was no turning back. Today she says, "It had to happen the way it happened. I don't think it would have happened if I hadn't worked through it and been ready."

Laura, at 84, has a different perspective on her experiences, being at the other end of her life. She speaks of her concern with the untapped potential in society in older women. "It saddens me. So much lived experience is buried with the old women. Today, I believe our voices need to be heard. We have lived through incredible changes and we have survived. We need to pass on our strengths and weaknesses."
"I think there's different challenges at different stages. When we're old it's a going inward to find more meaning and share it. You have to reach a balance between being involved and having time for yourself."

"Life is a journey. We're here to learn and the lessons keep coming. My lesson is how to take criticisms and putdowns, to take responsibility but don't assume it all and emerge without fermenting massive resentment, anger, and fear inside me."

"You can learn to sidestep crisis, you can learn coping mechanisms to take on roles that will take you right around that tunnel and proceed with your life right past the tunnel without ever going through it, and I'm really glad I didn't do that. I have a sense of peace about my life that I never had before. It's a gift that I may never have been able to receive if I hadn't experienced infertility."

At mid-life Leith has lost her fear of the unknown, and is not afraid to take risks. "As an older adult, to be able to say, 'I don't know anything about this...come on, let's just see. There's excitement about new possibilities! And integrating it in a way or coming to it in a way that's different from a child coming to it. So it is...it's a different place to be but...excitement in learning but bringing with it all my past history."

Nan's alternative lifestyle and holistic healing has led to a stage of generativity and increased faith. "The connections that can be made by simply entering into a dialogue with your own inner wisdom is intriguing. Ultimately these connections bind me to the fabric of universal cosmological existence. I now know and experience a power higher than myself on most good days. On not so good days I can engage myself in the task of meaning making. I can enter the territory by letting go, opening up and accessing the channels. Then I can map the nature of the territory by accessing the symbols, opening up my own understandings and relating them to those of established knowledge systems. Finally, I can discover the hidden treasures that will lead me to new doors, new understandings and new lives to lead in the future."

I have experienced a rebirth in mid-life, mostly characterized by the absence of fear. I have taken some big risks so far, have failed and succeeded in equal measure. What can happen? "I'm in a mid-life stage where I'm feeling some kind of internal pressure...time is moving a little differently for me now. Time's going faster and I have a sense of 'get some completion here and move into something else' because I'm
approaching a mid-life stage. In some ways it makes me very tired, because I don't have a new vision, or I'm just getting a new vision of what's coming next. I don't have it yet..."

Conclusion

The women had common themes of enjoying the pursuit of intellectual stimulation through reading. This sometimes led to a struggle between intellectual abilities versus expression of the creative side, but most women talked of reading as a means of escape and gaining information and understanding. Visualization was often connected to a need for meditation and introspective time, and led to an increased sense of a higher power, an awareness of creation and nature, and sometimes a belief in God.

Family conflicts were experienced by the women who recognized the repeating cycle of life. Eventually the struggle diminishes and we lose energy around old issues. This conflict seemed to be a part of their pattern of a sense of independence and stubbornness and somehow feeling different. This was at the root of some of the family conflict, but it seemed to arise as a coping strategy to survive the tensions within the family dynamic. Qualities that were seen as liabilities while growing up, in retrospect were seen by the women as positive characteristics that got them through some difficult times. Those qualities have been modified over time, if they get in the way of healthy functioning. All of these elements combined to contribute to a sense of resiliency in the women.
E. Timothy Burns (1994) examines the importance of positive self-concept as the key to resiliency, drawing on research by Bonnie Benard and Nancy Phillips to endorse this view. He says the broadest context of psychological hardiness and resilience is a purposive life and the purpose of our lives is threefold: finding our way to God, healing our wounds, and expressing our gifts, and that these three things will serve as a blueprint for a meaningful life.

Emmy Werner talked about individual temperament and the importance of hope in her research of diaries of pioneer settlers of the American midwest. An individual's basic temperament would be one of being defeatist or resourceful. Journal entries give accounts of families boiling and eating buffalo hides to survive; a little girl with nothing more to play with than a beam of light through a window who was always happy (and was reportedly the same way as an adult many years later), children walking miles for the promise of a sugar cube, a little boy who was separated from his father and when taken in by another camp and fed, given warmth, caring and shelter, just seemed to curl up and die. He had given up hope. Families and individuals that exhibited positive traits included women joining their children together and supporting each other and praying together as a family. They were among the few who did not experience a death in their family, and did not resort to cannibalism to survive. (Werner, 1995)

Whether one possesses resiliency may be a subjective value judgement that seems to change with retrospective awareness. Without fail, in my research the people who exhibited the strongest resilience had three elements in common: self-reflection, passage of time, and the skill of articulating their process. Research by Krell (1993) found that Nazi concentration camp survivors had these things in common. Over the years after their survival, they coped by developing their expertise in a skill or a trade. They also exhibited a certain emotional detachment from others—they would seem to get only so close and people around them said they never really knew them. Most recently,
researchers have noted some survivors have been telling their stories-and that the process of self-reflection and articulation has led to a greater degree of healing (Krell, 1993).

In this research, my first two interviews with co-researchers led to a recounting childhood experiences, and narratives of adult experiences that had an impact on the person. The third interview questions asked the person to state characteristics that made them resilient, and things around them that had contributed to their resiliency. The shift led to a perceived change to an intellectual level of recounting characteristics they "thought" made them resilient, and things around them that encouraged their resiliency over time. I sensed the shift during the actual interview, and in transcribing the tapes it actually became more apparent. These observations, while at first puzzling to me, later proved to be enlightening. They confirmed the integrity of the narrative accounts, where the person spoke from a voice that resonated with the recounting of the details of the experience that was pivotal for them. Often it was like they were transported back to the actual event, and when the story was told, reemerged into "real" time. Also, in recounting the stories, participants often said something to the effect that they did not think they were doing anything out of the ordinary, but what was required of them in the circumstances. There was no ego investment, but actually the opposite, in speaking from a place of deep knowing. In contrast, during the last interview, the voice was different, and the listing and recounting of characteristics and supports did seem to have more "ego" investment, saying "this is what I think makes me resilient."

One Key Person and Attachment Theory

Researcher Emmy Werner (1994, 1995) was one of the first to study the concept of resiliency, with her focus on what some people do right. Why do some overcome seemingly insurmountable odds and emerge even stronger, while others in similar circumstances succumb? Her longitudinal study followed 698 individuals in Hawaii over a 40 year span during a period of economic and social change with sugar plantations becoming more automated, men being laid off from jobs and the resulting shifts in social positions in the home and community. Her research indicated that strong environmental supports can overcome negative heredity and that a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors combined to lead to individual resiliency. Often there was a key person who
provided unconditional positive regard. This research is supported by reports of children surviving the war in Northern Ireland, where they were scared by bombs and violence going on around them. But the most devastating event was the loss, either temporary or permanent, of the primary care provider (Anthony & Cohler, 1987, McNamee, 1994). Werner states the legacy of “hope” is the strongest message conveyed by participants in her research. Similar studies by Jack and Jean Block (1980) in California followed 130 individuals examining ego resilience, finding a need for a strong home base as a necessary component. However, this concept is opposed to David Fergusson’s (1996) New Zealand study of 940 individuals from 1977 to age 16. He found one key factor determining resiliency cannot be isolated but it is many factors working together. His theory is that childhood adversity may lead to the development of protective and compensatory strategies that combine to create resiliency. Garmezy (1991, 1985) notes that the research literature on resiliency is divided, depending on who you focus on. He stressed that we should have faith in the human ability to bounce back from setbacks. Garmezy illustrates this point with Bleuler’s case study of “Vreni.” A child of a schizophrenic mother, at a young age she was responsible for caring for her siblings. She married a man who supported her “careproviding” role and by all reports she was “happy” and “contented” in life. Bleuler’s explanation is that, although she did not excel in school she was well adjusted and adapted according to what was required of her.

When I began this research on resiliency, writing the life stories of six women going through transition in their lives, I thought I would find confirmation of the idea that they had had a key person in their lives to provide unconditional positive acceptance and encouragement. However, this concept did not immediately resonate with most women, leading me to suspect there may be an additional element to this concept. Perhaps there is a key person, but that person is so intrinsic to their lives, seemingly in synch with them and supporting them in such a seemingly unobtrusive way, that they may not notice until time and reflection take place.

Resilient individuals had a positive personal disposition and family milieu, but beyond that was skill in identifying and selecting resilient models and sources of support in peers, older friends, ministers, and teachers to whom they could turn when needed. Several women in this study mentioned the influence of a key person—some identified
them directly, others related experiences incidentally, while recounting a personal narrative.

Leila had a direct recollection of the influence of a neighbor woman who became a key person for her over the years. This neighbor mom, Susie, offered time and unconditional acceptance, and Leila remembers her "just sitting rocking me in the living room because I just needed a hug." "Mumsie," as Leila called her, would become a significant mentor to her.

Sarah was close to her late mother and describes her as strong, very warm, very, very loving and supportive. "She tried to be there as much as she could. She was great. We had a very warm, loving, close in all kinds of ways...you know, physical closeness and everything else...kind of relationship." Her parents' prevailing messages were that she "could do anything. You need an education. It's important to look ahead and plan for the future." Sarah felt a bit of pressure living up to those messages, but the spiral continues as she passes them on to her son, and she lives out those values in her role as a community college instructor in career counseling.

Sarah's brother has also become a key person for her over the years. Sarah's brother was older by three years, and being both middle children they naturally played together. It was a privilege as a girl that she was "allowed" to play with the group of older boys. As a teenager he always included her and both being good dancers, they would go dancing together. "We were very close on a lot of levels in terms of shared values. I think part of it was his openness, and I matured faster than my age. We're still very supportive of each other. I've become best friends with his first wife. And I was "best man" at his wedding! So we're really quite close in terms of shared values, the work that we do, that sort of thing."

Sarah talked about her family relationships. "My mother was very supportive and no matter what was happening tried to be sure the rest of us were okay. My brother and I were very close and sort of helped each other through that. I certainly didn't want to be like my sister, so I think I tried to make my own way in that I would define myself more clearly. That's probably where I got this whole thing about, 'Who am I? Where am I going? Sort of thing. I just tried to be centered in myself, clearer in myself and then the support and love around me."
Sarah's clearly articulated her views on attachment theory and the influence of a key person in an individual's life. "I think a lot of it is around self-image, self-esteem, energy, vision. Why does one child from Regent Park make it out and ten of his classmates don't? Maybe there was a role model. Maybe there was somebody-a role model to me is just a vision embodied, you know, 'if I had a role model it would be...I could be like that.' And that person believes that I could be like that. The role model or mentor, is one who also believes that I could be like that. Well, that person may be there for all of those other people. Let's take the teacher who is a role model and a mentor. The same teacher is in front of all that class-maybe one or two of those kids access it. How do they access it? What's in their being that allows them to access it? And I don't know the answer to that. But I do think people are optimistic or pessimistic. I think we have personality traits-innate personality traits that...that you fight against. I've seen a lot of people with pessimistic attitudes fight against their pessimism."

Nan recalled the strong influence of her grandmother-her key person in her life. "It was just a wonderful, sort of solid, connected place to be. She brought the Swissness out, or I've always felt an affinity there. On some level I always knew I was going to marry someone who was German or Swiss. She had an incredible love for the country."

I thought back to my own experiences with key people in my life. I have become more aware of strong female mentors and role models that have I have sought out throughout all my transitions. My boyfriend's mother as a teenager was a feisty, irreverent Scottish woman, about four foot something, and a real dynamo. During my divorce, a woman at church, Doris, befriended me. Somewhat eccentric, in her eighties, into journal writing and practicing tai chi, she was a positive source of encouragement for me in pursing my B.Ed. Laura, who slowly earned my trust and encouraged me when I was going through the "law school experience" at one point saying to me, "Maybe you learned something else more valuable here." My friendship with Laura, in her eighties, vibrant, inspiring, and always challenging those around her to think. I am just beginning to appreciate and feel gratitude for their input over the years.

"Laura, who's 82, has talked about the spiral, about issues coming up over and over again, and eventually there isn't a whole lot of energy around them. It's a spiral where our stuff keeps revisiting, we keep repeating our lessons and we keep going
through them. And when someone of 82 years old tells me that, I know that there's going to be some truth to it and to pay attention. That my stuff is not a 'done deal,' and put it on the shelf and it's finished once and for all. That's not the case.”

These women were able to articulate an awareness of a key person who had special meaning for them. For others the details emerged incidentally while they told the narratives and anecdotes of their personal life histories. Unconditional positive regard of a key person had undoubtedly had a positive impact on their personal resiliency.

**The Role of Self-reflection, Passage of Time and Restorying**

Self-concept is an important factor when considering resiliency. According to Werner and Smith, “It is the child who ‘works well, loves well and expects well notwithstanding profound life adversity’ (as cited in Fonagy et al., 1994). Why is it that some children arrive at adaptive outcomes despite risk? Masten states that to understand and prevent maladaptions, we will do well to understand resilience in development because they are different parts of the same story (as cited in Fonagy et al., 1994).

Fonagy examines attachment theory as a key factor in promoting resiliency, and that intergenerational transmission of maladaptive relationship patterns are a threat to development. However, some individuals are resilient to such a threat with one explanation being that individuals who are at risk of transmitting insecurity, but who do not do so, may be distinguished in terms of the complexity of their internal working model of relationship patterns. During the first 18 months of life, the child is able to differentiate between the influence of independent parental relationships. This insulation of the internal working models allows for the creation of a secure internal working model alongside one or more highly insecure ones. This may explain the case for the resilient maltreated child. This is a critical part of an Attachment Theory account of why the presence of even a relatively remote, but stable and responsive figure in the child’s early life can be a protective factor, foster a secure internal working model of relationships and contribute to the child’s resilience to hardship (eg. Braithwaite and Gordon, 1991; Brown et al., 1986; Hunter and Kilstrom, 1979; Quinton and Rutter, 1988; Werner and Smith, 1982; Werner, 1989 as cited in Fonagy et al., 1994). It appears that even the small child has the capacity to independently encode, differentiate and isolate the internal working
models of primary caregivers. The key to secure attachment is that the careprovider must have a coherent working model (Fonagy et al, 1994). Individuals with an incoherent internal working model are likely to provide an inconsistent, muddled picture for their infants, frequently giving rise to a situation when the infant's attachment needs are frustrated. The coherence of autobiographical narratives depends on the adequacy of the reflection process and researchers have developed a scale to measure this capacity. The notion of a reflective self is borrowed by William James (1890) who used the term in his description of the evolution of a self structure when the mental state of the individual becomes a subject of his own thoughts. James stated that our considering our spiritual self at all is a reflective process, it is the result of our abandoning our outward-looking point of view, and of our having become able to think of subjectivity as such, to think of ourselves as thinkers.

The enhancement of reflectiveness captures one of the essential aspects of the psychotherapeutic process (Fonagy, Moran and Traget as cited in Fonagy et al., 1994). The work of Freud, Rapaport, and Josephhe supports the present approach to thinking about relationships as the defensive coping stance or general personality trait described by ego psychologists. The term “psychological mindedness” is usually operationalized as self-awareness (Lowald, Loevinger, Vaillant & McCullough as cited in Fonagy et al., 1994). Reflective-self functioning was rated as accurate in narratives where the interviewee demonstrated a willingness as well as a clear ability to contemplate psychological states, including conscious and unconscious motivations and conflicting beliefs and desires (Fonagy et al., 1994).

There are a few things to keep in mind in a discussion of re-storying. First, our stories change with the retelling. Second, they may change over time. Third, there is a dissipation of vital energy when something is talked about “before it is time.” Fourth, the perceived response of the receiver of the story is an important link to the whole process.

Studies by Quinton, Braithwaite and Gordon support a reliable capacity to reflect upon mental states enables the child to make optimal use of the individuals available to him, both through family and informal relationships (as cited in Fonagy et al., 1994). O'Grady and Metz further state that reflective-self function is a critical component of autonomy and a coherent sense of identity (as cited in Fonagy et al., 1994). It is
reflective-self function that provides protection against the terrifying threat of fusion, passive submission and loss of identity so frequently observed in the severely maltreated child. According to Cowan and Pellegrini, superior reflective-self function may explain the greater interpersonal awareness and empathy observed in resilient children (as cited in Fonagy et al., 1994). Bowlby states the feedback aspect is of perhaps the highest importance (as cited in Fonagy et al., 1994). The opportunity of reflection upon intention allows for modification of unhelpful internal working models of relationships through encounters with new significant figures; it equips the individual with a ballast, a self-righting capacity." It is ultimately a therapeutic construct: it describes what analysts and therapists attempt to do day after day with patient whose reflective-self capacity tends to be severely curtailed. Fonagy et al. (1994 state:

All attempts, regardless of theoretical framework, at focusing on the working of the mental life of an individual have clear therapeutic effects. There is something unique about the therapeutic process that takes place between two individuals, where one person takes an interest in the mental life of another. The patient’s thinking is facilitated and he or she can conceive of his or her world in new, more resilient and sometimes sadder and perhaps happier ways. (pp. 251)

The importance of self-reflection is a key finding of research led by Peter Fonagy. The coherence of autobiographical narrative depends on the adequacy of the reflective process. He reports that research data are consistent in the view that a superior reflective-self may explain the greater interpersonal awareness and empathy (Cowen et al., 1990; Pellegrini, 1980) observed in self-reflective children. “It serves as a ballast, or a self-righting capacity. It is an important therapeutic construct to create internal working models of themselves and others as thinking and feeling. All attempts, regardless of theoretical framework, at focusing on the working of the mental life of an individual have clear therapeutic effects. There is something unique about the therapeutic process that takes place between two individuals, where one person takes an interest in the mental life of another. The patient's thinking is facilitated and he or she can conceive of his or her world in new, more resilient and sometimes sadder and perhaps happier ways. Reflective-self function is a protective process” (Fonagy et al., 1994, p. 250).
In this research, Laura’s self-reflecting led to an awareness of the weight of others’ burdens as contributing in some metaphorical way to her own osteoporosis. On an emotional level, she talks about osteoporosis as being bent double with other people's issues. She remembers times of going to her aunt for solace. "When I told her all my complaints, she said, 'Don't come to me, go to your parents.' That was very devastating to me because that says that I couldn't go to anybody else. I had to keep it all to myself and I think that carried an awful lot of weight." When she has the feeling of not being her "authentic self," it triggers childhood memories of having to apologize to her stepmother, and her father would beg her to apologize when she didn't really mean it.

"That was part of the way of agreeing. Cause I'd hold out and hold out and then Dad would come to me and say, 'She feels so badly, just go up and say you're sorry.' This was always the thing she wanted me to say. And so I'd give in to him. But it's not being the authentic self. And so it went that way. And then being very much a part of the...brought up in a culture where women were to serve; we were the second class citizens. Although, that's not fair exactly in a farming community, because there was great respect, but there were separate roles. Still and all the men had the power. So I continued to be conditioned...then training of course, the doctors were 'lords of creation.' You got up on your feet when they came in and you held the doors open when they left. We were very drilled in hierarchy. And the head nurses were the priority, and you were the lowest of the low and stood back for everybody. So, all along the way...and then when I was married, again, the same thing. My husband was under the same thing where the man was the...yet, he wasn't autocratic and so forth...but he's still of the school...Still I was conforming, conforming, conforming, and ah...that fine line...and I can't say I've found it yet. But how to be authentic and be compassionate of others but don't take their burdens on my back. How to distinguish, because everything told me that's just what I did...what I should do..."

Over time, Laura has gained some perspective on her childhood experiences. "It's not what the other person does. It's how I react to it. And I can't let go until I become conscious of what I do. And I'm getting clearer." She is beginning to lose interest in the struggle. "I'm tired. It's boring. Yes, I've lost interest. Well, when I've lost interest, I've surely moved."
Laura says she had to get in touch with her shadow side, accepting "the ugliness of friction and the grief of loss to a movement toward regeneration and self-actualization."

Leila's life turned around with her decision to set aside her adolescent rebellion and seriously pursue her academic studies at university. She utilized the overcoming of her adolescent crisis as a theme, filtering and interpreting her studies at university back to this triumph. "I had this naive perception that, well, 'You've gone through one bad thing in your life and you've come through it. You're just going to sail through.'"

Leila stressed the importance of time in changing her perspective. "But if I don't do all these things, then who am I going to be? It was a shift from being a compilation of all the roles that you are. If you busy yourself with these roles, and doing good and being there for other people, and being competent and making your lists, and being the leader of this group or the organizer of that group, if I give all that up, then who am I? And it was the most scary feeling in the world. Who am I going to be? And the answer is, 'You know what? You don't know, but you've gotta go down that path in order to find out.'"

"I was thinking about resiliency and the process that we went through, and thinking about my approach and how I owned my own issues around it. I found the information I needed, worked through it in a way that a few years ago I never would have been able to do."

Leila hopes her new found perspective will help in future adjustments that will be faced by her adopted family. "The gift you give your children by honoring their birth family is to help them to genuinely belong in both places. One of the biggest challenges is dealing with the very real fact that no matter how loving the adoption plan is for them, someone "gave them up" and no one except the child can know how that feels."

Leila talks about how her new perspective has increased her sense of spirituality. "There's a spirituality. There's a sense of connectedness with the universe and people in the world. As I live more of my life, then analyze it against this ever-broadening horizon, it's really exciting. As I keep having these experiences I have this deeper faith and belief that things are okay and things happen for a reason and everything that's given to us is given for a reason. It's an opportunity to grow and to change and not necessarily that you know the outcome. Things come sideways, not necessarily in a direct relationship."
It's not just an intellectual exercise. It feels like reality to her. "It's not just having these theories but really internalizing them. I'm starting to be able to not only see things in retrospect when I'm faced with bad things, even little crises in my life, I'm able to kind of...not always, but increasingly, stop and think, Okay. You know what? Let's just think about this from another angle. Step back from it. Things will work out. Maybe not the way you think they're going to work out, but there's a reason. You need to keep your sense of self and your sense of peace about your life even in the midst of tragedy! There's no one right way of doing it. Things just aren't that black and white."

"I get a lot of energy from discussions and from ideas. And that's huge for me. People around me who think the way I think, that can connect with how I'm thinking, that care about me enough to work through things on the level that I need to work things through.

Sarah has an unusually high level of self-awareness which she had an easier time applying to her major career change, than to her change in a long-term love relationship."I just saw so clearly that as things were changing, and this was about 1989, that we needed to change what we were doing. And of course, that's exactly what happened. That is the shift that's happened because of the changes in the labor market because of the recession. So, I've always been able to see a few years ahead. I've always been able to see just a little bit ahead in order to prepare myself, whether it's acquisition of skills, or confidences, or whatever, to be able to move into new directions. Yes, that's been there a long time. I think I'm by nature a reflective person—certainly in high school I would say I did that a lot. Where am I? What do I want to do? So, I've certainly done that most of my life."

The spiral continues as Sarah takes time for reflection on some of her core issues, which lead her to new ones. "Who am I? How do I want to live the second half of my life? What kind, if any, of relationship do I want with a man? And I'm just trying to do that reflection right now. So, it's easier for me to do that without any distractions. You know, when I come home from work it's just me and the cats."

Sarah stresses the need for congruence with inner values and outer reality, and that she describes the feelings of dissonance she experienced in her job before she chose to leave. "My values were changing, or my values had always been the same but there
are times I put them a bit on the back burner and they were becoming more and more into prominence for me and causing me more and more discomfort." It is a belief she carries over into her teaching today. "I teach it and have lived it both professionally and personally. I think that when that tension becomes too strong... say it is an elastic. So here's your vision and here's your current reality and it's getting really taut. Well, if you let go of this it moves the elastic forward towards your vision. And I think that's what Senge talks about a lot, is this moving forward toward vision. And that's exactly what it was for me, was by letting go...isn't that interesting..." Sarah paused in a moment of self-awareness.

"When I think about my own career at the college, there's so much serendipity there, but yet a lot of it was my own doing. I mean, I chose to do things so that I would be known there, so that I would be valued, so that when the time came they'd...that's who they would think of would be me. And that's exactly what happened."

She is right in the midst of change but sees it as part of the overall continuum of her life as opposed to a major turning point. "I don't know what is going to happen, whether this in fact will result in a very different way that I live my life because I'm not there yet. I've always been pretty clear. I've had little detours, doubled back on myself, but I would not say there have been any major turning points in my life."

Sarah trusts her intuition and personal visioning, finding it a place to put her energy, to put her in a state of readiness when opportunity arises. This leads to synchronicity, the alignment of the inner and the outer work. "Probably the major thing for me is the alignment of the inner work and the external supports. The two seem to be very necessary for me to be able to be resilient, emotionally resilient within."

"The process of talking about these things shines a clearer light on it. In the day to day it's easy to just bury all this stuff. What's happened is it's just put a really strong spotlight on so that I'm seeing things much clearer. I don't think the actual perception of what happened in my mind has changed. Because I spent well over a year prior to even separating examining myself, the relationship. And now since that's been finished, that's what I've been doing non-stop. It's changed in that it's a sharper focus for me, awareness of my dependency, over-responsibility, over-compensation, his role...it's right there in front of me."
"Reading this stuff was good, very good to read. You can see the insights jumping off the page. It gave me a focus and it was clear that one of my problems was that I was not able to articulate my vision and I could see what was holding me back from that, but it was also that not having the vision was keeping me stuck in a kind of limbo, so that was helpful."

Along with Sarah, Leith used the analogy of a seed germinating to describe her own movement between action and resting—between introspection and putting her ideas out in the world. "I am also including myself in the exchange—the interaction. How do you know when you're doing that? I start getting excitement and some anxiety in my gut. I know when I'm putting myself on the edge. That's the place where the life is. However, you can't be out there all the time. So there's a resting-place. When does the resting-place become a 'rotting place?' When you are indulging yourself to the point of beginning to rot, rather than just resting, renewing...I'm thinking of the image of a seed germinating, but if the seed stays in the ground too long and gets too much water and heat and moisture, it'll start to rot, and then it won't sprout and come forth. So, the fine line for me is knowing, being able to move back and forth between the edge and the resting place, and not let myself slip into the rotting place."

Leith felt she had to take care of physical needs to clear a pathway for the inner work to proceed. "It had to be physical before my mind could start thinking. When you get to the end process, you're still looking at it, you're still looking at it, you're still watching it and you're backing away from it, and then at some point you can turn around and start looking forward, looking out. But I had to do these physical things, get them done in order to stop my focus, in order to change my focus."

"That's the hardest part of the neutral zone or the impasse...I'll use the analogy of doors. You know, when you're closing one door behind you, if you can see that there's three doors here in front of you and you could try any one of those, then you're not so inclined to be gazing at the one you just shut behind you. But if you've just shut one behind you, and there's nothing there, that's the impasse. That's when it's really hard not to go back."

In shamanic studies Leith has learned to reframe stories from the past, to create empowering images. She talked about the internal messages we send ourselves. "We tell
our stories, using them for mythology and entertainment and we keep ourselves in a certain place by the way we entertain ourselves with these stories." Leith has been able to change her interpretation of a significant childhood story. She was four and got into trouble for walking alone with her older brother to school. The words "selfish" and "inconsiderate" are what she recalls. In telling the story now she sees the behavior as not only realistic for a four-year-old, but that she was "spunky" and "brave" to venture forth the way she did. And after carrying that around for years, she now holds it "as a power story instead of a poor me story."

Nan expressed her ideas around her continuing reframing of her childhood experiences of being caught between her mother and father's struggle. "So I was brought up in very much...this is my mother's nursing stuff and what's important. She's working with people who are probably going to remain quadriplegics for the rest of their lives. It's big, right? So for us to say, 'What's Dad freaked out about? Why is he always so irritable and so difficult to talk to, and why is it you always protect him? And she said, 'It's not really that big a deal, is it?' So in my world in some respects that's the way I framed it. 'It's not really that big a deal.' But as I peel the layers of it back, it is. It's a fundamental big deal, right? It's a 'who you are as a person big deal,' right?"

From this experience Nan has internalized a sense of invulnerability-of resiliency. "I do have a sense that no one can really hurt me. There's nothing really that anybody...I mean somebody could kill me, but there's nothing really that somebody can do that's really going to hurt me, that's really going to stop me. So it gives me a sense of, 'Well, take a chance. What's the worst thing that can happen?' So I have a very strong inner voice that gives that message. It reminds me, 'Just go do it.' What's going to happen? What's the worst case scenario...what's the worst case scenario? So that allows me to take risks sometimes. It calms my inner critic."

"It fit quite nicely with the stuff I was doing in psychology and seemed interesting. It was clear. I just knew that that was where I needed to be. Everything has followed from there...I knew that that was my job and that's where I had to go. And there was no tension about it at all."

"It was the beginning of finding out what it is that I really wanted to do, and how to realize that." She became more physically active with aerobics, weights and swimming
but not yet in a way that connected to the body. Her goal was to look good. The integration would come later.

"I think that part of my journey has been journeying back to myself and that part of myself that is in nature and is much more creative and loves that kind of life. I find I'm trying to integrate the scientific-objective area of the very rational side with the side that's much more holistic, more sensual. That's my masculine-feminine stuff. Going down the road of science was cutting off my earthy-feminine."

"I began to understand the immense power that the inner critic can have over our lives. I began to recognize her voice. I learned to heed her warnings when it was necessary or prudent to do so. I also learned to quietly put her complaints or warnings aside when they interfered with my need to express my creative self. Most importantly, I experienced directly the concept of flow. I began to experience what putting your raft in the river of the creative life force meant. I recognized when I was in that state and when I was grounded on the rocky shore. I began to see myself as a conduit for creative energy and I began to see my daily practices as a way to keep my pipes clean and in good repair so that I might conduct the creative energy efficiently. I addition to writing free associative poetry, I began to experiment with clay and taught myself how to draw using Betty Edwards' *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain.*

Nan has now become more aware of the strong professional role modeling from home, as well as scripting as the oldest child. She chose to become an educator.

"Education is my lifeblood. Definitely. If there was a scripting, it would be around me being the oldest child and being the son that wasn't and therefore following father. I can see that."

"So, knowing when to quit is an option. Not assuming that that's not an option. And having the sense of when there's too much of yourself going into something to the point where you're not...the balance is off. I think that's part of my decision to leave as well. The balance is off somewhere there."

She talked about an increased sense of self awareness about her decision to leave teaching, an awareness gained as a result of her co-research in this resiliency project. "It was really neat in our interview to hear myself talking about it that way because it allowed me to kind of...let that go. I don't think it's finished, but I think I'm letting it go
and not beating myself up about the idea...I'm leaving something as opposed to going for something else. Hearing myself talk about it being such a 'heady' decision brought it home. That's what was missing. I could do it but I couldn't be true to myself. It wasn't drawing on the best strengths that I have. It took an incredible amount of energy to maintain that role. It was amazing to make that connection. It fit certain understandings of myself, as I always had as a child. There's a part of me that's that person. But that's a really small part and for some reason to break out of the part was messy at that time. It meant I was going to have to do more exploring. It meant I was going to have to maybe do more school work. It meant I was going to have to go into uncharted territory, which meant all kinds of practical inconveniences."

"The insight about teaching and how that was a practical 'heady' decision, and also the writing that came out around my Dad and the similarities in the process that my Dad went through was a big insight. He made a practical choice in teaching and it destroyed him in a lot of ways."

The importance of a sense of home is interwoven throughout Nan's story. "I have some very strong sensors for 'home.' I just feel like-safe, secure, loved. When I don't I feel I have a fairly decent track record of recognizing it and doing something. I seem to be able to garner enough energy to move out of it."

"This journey continues to spellbind me. What started as an innocent search for understanding and control over my intestinal tract has inadvertently led me to a new home, new skills, new friends, new courses, new knowledge and new dreams for the future. My relationship with IBS continues to provide me with the push I need at times to keep moving."

"The connections that can be made by simply entering into a dialogue with your own inner wisdom is intriguing. Ultimately these connections bind me to the fabric of universal cosmological existence. I now know and experience a power higher than myself on most good days. On not so good days I can engage myself in the task of meaning making. I can enter the territory by letting go, opening up and accessing the channels. Then I can map the nature of the territory by accessing the symbols, opening up my own understandings and relating them to those of established knowledge systems. Finally, I
can discover the hidden treasures that will lead me to new doors, new understandings and new lives to lead in the future."

"This process with you and talking about the way I saw my resilience, by talking about it, it's really brought me along in being able to understand where I've come from and where I'm at and how that informs what I need to be doing in my thesis stuff. It's just wonderful to be able to engage in that kind of process. To have someone ask the questions and being able to talk it through has led to much richer connections and insights. The act of sharing it in dialogue helps give it form. Physicist David Boom talks about the idea that we need to shift our world to fit with our misunderstanding of the continents and to do that is to dialogue, and that's David Hunt's sharing as co-creation. So, I do my piece of creation with the universe, and then I share to create a piece and there's very much this envelope that's also transformed. So there's been that kind of process. It's been very neat. Yeah, it's been good."

In my own continuing story, I am continually “revising” the internal script of what happened to me when my father left. And although today I am largely at peace with it, coming to terms with it will likely be a continual process, intermittently, throughout my life. "In my mind...and I know I was quite clear in thinking this...that in my mind I wanted to be able to go to him as an adult with some kind of life in place, not asking for anything. To be able to say to him, you know, "I just wanted to meet you. I don't need...I don't need to sort of 'get' anything from you. I just want to...And wrote that in a letter to him. I mean, it gets worse as we delve into this because I...I mean he has a daughter who's had everything. You know, he's put her through nursing school and...horseback riding lessons, you know and..."

"He remarried. He's been successful. He has worked in the same job for 25 years, married to the same woman for 25-30 years, has been stable, raised a wonderful daughter..."

"I'm not afraid any more. It went away. It went away over the summer and I think it connected to going back and seeing my home in the summertime. Getting on my bike and going in and seeing this place had some kind of connection for me. A ghost was put to rest or something. It was just a culmination of things."
"Going to Montreal, renting a bike, I was by myself, biked for the whole day. Happened on this apartment...So step-by-step-by-step I've been doing something to put these pieces together. All my life. I mean all my life. That's no mystery to me. But the fact that I had this map with me, and low and behold the bike trail kind of connected to this little dot on the map that marked Esplanade Street. So, there's a freedom with that. There's also a grieving that goes with it. I don't know, change or leaving some youth...dreams and the possibilities of youth...leaving those behind. Leaving some of the mythology behind. What could be possible and what's going to happen? But also with leaving go of that is a new determination in my own life to get what I want and get what I need."

I have used my life knowledge in my work with learning disabled students. "I never understood why I was drawn to students and children who had problems- who had learning disabilities and behavioral problems. When I was little, of course, I grew up in a family that wasn't that stable and lack of support at home. Two of my coping methods as I was growing up were to lie and steal. I don't think it was above and beyond what a kid normally does. But I was made to feel that this was just really awful. I was made to feel...in fact, growing up my mother would say, 'I'm going to send you to a girls' home or 'juvenile delinquent' place...or who knows the term she used. But she was always threatening to send me to these places. So, I remember being severely punished...everything I've ever done that I tried to break the rules I got caught. I remember having these phases of thinking, 'I'm going to be good.' And at some point I realized there was no pleasing my mother no matter what I did. And whatever I did I was going to get caught, so I might as well play by the rules. Just to be honest. It's easier. You don't have to remember what you told anybody. You don't have that guilt. You know, those lessons you learn as you grow up. But as an adult, I started volunteer work in Children's Aid, started working in education, and I started to realize some of the reasons why I was doing the things I was doing. So I don't have this guilt thing, that I was this bad kid. I was really resourceful in getting my needs met. I did it."

"Now I recognize it as my spirit just kind of getting what it needed and grabbing after...grabbing hold of something. I was afraid to tell my mother the truth. But a
therapist said to me, 'There was a turning point for you where you decided...' Now there's a little core in me that says, 'I will not go any further than this.'"

"So little by little I've been getting answers, studying child psychology, education. Getting answers for myself, of course, but I've had teachers ask me, 'What do you do?' When I'm working with a behavioral kid or working with someone with learning disabilities, 'What do you do?' And there is something else. I mean, it's not just what you learn in school in the programs. There is something else, a respect that I have, a knowing, and an awareness."

"I worked with a teacher who approached me asking, 'What do you feel you want to do? What's the best thing for you right now? How are you going to approach this to make a difference to the students?' There's a higher goal, and that is what I respond to, that's how I work best."

"I grew up in a household where, through no fault of theirs, a lot of reading was going on, but there was not a lot of encouragement for the girls to pursue academics. I have made that my mission, to get children interested in reading and knowledge and learning. It's a major thing for me. The work that I do..."

"So to know when to push and when to pull back, it's very challenging. There's energy I get from my students and the satisfaction that I see, the trust that I have. I'm good at it and I can help them. That's very energizing, very affirming for me.""

"My students. It doesn't matter what the age group is, from the little kids I get the warm fuzzies and the older people I get spurred on...it challenges me to do more and learn more and stay on my toes. But it's definitely nourishing for me. It's not me giving, giving, giving. It's definitely something that comes back to me in energy. It's definitely something that comes back to me. It comes back to me in the life cycle."

I also have an awareness of myself in the midst of the therapeutic paradigm, and have made a conscious choice, for now, to step out of the introspective stance. I also recognize that for me, therapy came at a time when I desperately needed it, and was life-saving. "I have gone through this introspection process and the transition process I'm in is to 'get out of my head' and just get on with living. To move on and get to a 'doing' phase. I really sense that in myself and I'm not sure where that will lead. What job it will lead to, finishing my thesis, moving forward."
"Enough. I am as healed as I'm ever going to be and I have to go out there, in the condition I'm in, with all the baggage and the flaws and scar tissue and whatever and say. Okay. Life moves forward from now on. Okay, I'm moving forward in life. I've got to move forward, because if I'm spinning my wheels, stagnating, in a rut... I've got to have some kind of movement forward in many areas. That's the internal stuff, more than what's going on around me."

"I don't want to run for therapy and all that. I've internalized a lot of stuff that's useful and that helps me. I don't get sent into a tailspin so much with things that trigger me. I'm very aware of the fact that I've come to this place where I've said, 'I'm maybe not going to do this too much more.' You know? I want to get on with the present and move on with life. But talking about it opens it up. Definitely. It opens it up and it does move it forward a little bit more."

"To just let go and go with the flow. I'm very aware of the times when I'm not so driven, when I'm not so structured and controlled, and have that loose kind of 'being in the moment.' And it happens more and more, but I'm very aware of how good that feels."

"Being playful and getting in touch with the child-like part of me that for a long time wasn't there. I feel that that's getting expression now.

The key seems to be the relationship of one person attending to-helping the other, and as a by-product of that help, benefiting themselves. "All attempts, regardless of theoretical framework, at focusing on the working of the mental life of an individual have clear therapeutic effects. There is something unique about the therapeutic process that takes place between two individuals, where one person takes an interest in the mental life of another. The patient's thinking is facilitated and he or she can conceive of his or world in new, more resilient and sometimes sadder and perhaps happier ways" (Bowlby, 1980 as cited in Fonagy et al, 1994 p. 251)

So, it is important to reflect on our experiences, and with the passage of time, to talk about them to a supportive "other." The feedback aspect is perhaps of most importance in this cycle. When one person attends completely to another-to their words, their stories, their inner experience, healing begins.

Returning from my trip to Montreal a few summers ago, I had a few days to myself, waiting for the haze to lift, the past to merge with the present. Then I called a
friend. I was aware of not wanting to “let go” of the experience too soon, to go public with it until I was ready. I told my friend about my experience of “going home.” I was aware that in the telling, it was becoming something else, a transformative experience. Later, at a summer retreat another participant spoke of a similar experience of finding an old weaving shuttle on the family homestead. I watched her as if looking in a mirror reflecting my own experience. I got my photographs back and sifted through them. Some portrayed the front door of my childhood home superimposed with my reflection, again creating a whole new dimension to the experience.

This event seemed to trigger a series of changes in my life. After a period of inexplicable grieving, I seemed to experience physical unblocking, and reached another level of freedom and absence of fear. Was this my successful navigation through a mid-life passage, onto the second half of my life? It seems so. My “work” now involved continuing my doctoral thesis writing, renegotiating a rocky relationship, energizing my teaching goals and plans to move to a new apartment. But as summer moved into fall I was plagued by a strange weepiness, finding myself tearing up at the most inappropriate times—grocer store line-ups, on the subway, in waiting rooms. It was baffling, seemed to come unbidden, and very often felt out of control. I am normally a fairly composed person, enjoying a good cry over a sad movie, and not afraid of grieving when the emotions are there. But this was different. I’d find myself choking up, my eyes tearing to the strains of music I might hear while roaming the aisles of the drug store hunting for shampoo! People were respectful although somewhat wary. I became guarded, wondering what was triggering me. I felt like I was caving in; I lost weight and was totally confused as to what was happening, unable to make the connection as to this strange despondency that had settled on me.

**Inner Characteristics**

Some of the women in this study spoke of a key person in their life who provided unconditional positive reinforcement. For Liela it was the neighbor mom who she could go to for a hug when she needed it, who never seemed too busy for her. For Sarah it was her brother who included her and didn't treat her like a little kid, letting her join in the
boys' games, and later dancing with her. For Leith it was her grandfather who was a doctor, and let Leith accompany him to his office.

Most of the women in this study were sustained by a personal faith or spirituality. Although they may have referred to it by different names, they each expressed their own version of their beliefs in a power greater than themselves. Laura felt this spirituality in nature and it came to her at a very young age. Sarah spoke of having faith in love, herself, in others and the life force. Liela spoke of her belief in God and her struggle with personal meaning since she is from a "religious" family in the traditional sense. Leith has explored eastern religion and now is a student of native "shamanic" spirituality, talking about her sense of renewal and humility at being an older person at the beginning of something new.

Most spoke of their faith as being attached to a sense of creative energy, either in an artistic sense or in a wider sense of being part of nature. Sarah loves gardening, Laura and Samantha spoke of loving to be in nature, and had begun to express herself in her painting. Both Samantha and Leith had begun to express themselves through poetry.

Being the oldest of the group, both Leith and Laura talked of a sense of generativity, a sense of a life mission of passing on to others and nurturing others. They spoke from a perspective of seeing the cycles and spirals repeating themselves, and the necessity in life to keep going on, putting one foot in front of the other. Sarah spoke of the importance of a personal vision.

Most of the women described themselves as being determined either directly, or indirectly through their personal narratives. This seemed to correlate to the concept of having an independent spirit discussed earlier.

**Outer Resources**

All of the women in this study are readers, and described reading as a real love either in a pursuit of knowledge or for escape. Sarah described reading a book a day ranging from "garage sale pocket books" to serious literature. Laura spoke of finding hiding places as a child while she read her way through her family's bookshelves. Liela and I often exchanged titles and book references after our interviews for this study. Her enthusiasm resulted in my pursuit of a study of Robert Kegan's (1994) life stage theory. I
described myself as a "bookworm," something that got me into trouble as a young girl, but has never failed me as a source of information, escape and pleasure throughout my life. I tell my students I love reading more than I love chocolate, and that's saying a lot!

All of the women in this study have above average levels of education. All of us are graduate students with the exception of Laura who had the distinction of earning her BA at age 66. We all spoke of the need for intellectual stimulation and setting goals, along with being part of a culture of exchanging views and taking part in discussion.

Most of us have had some kind of therapy, or a therapeutic friendship that sustained us in time of personal crisis. Most of us are experienced in self-reflection and articulating our experiences.

**In a Different Voice: What Do You Think Makes You Resilient?**

Early in the research I noted a different voice when women spoke of personal narratives that were significant or life changing. Most did not feel they were doing anything out of the ordinary, and not really acting bravely, but just doing what had to be done. However, in the final interview, when asked to articulate the inner characteristics and things around them that contributed to their resilience, the women spoke in a more detached way, seeming to intellectualize, or coming from an "ego" point of view. This also relates to the subjectivity of the participants and the intersubjectivity of my position in the process. I have learned to hear the person, to value group process, to see beyond the externals, to hear the deep place the voice comes from when people are speaking from their soul? It also relates to Ochberg’s (1994) analogy of our life stories including a plot, an appeal to an audience and an argument. These stories were told with the view in mind that a specific audience would be reading them, through my interpretation. Life story can be seen as an argument and every story represents a particular version of event versions differ. There is a subjective truth to each. There are different ways of thinking of how we make sense of defeats and threats. According to Ochberg (1994), telling our life story is one way of excising some of these demons. This psychodynamic overcoming is what is meant by story functioning as argument.

A central element is the concept of "voice," an issue addressed by Altheide and Johnson (1998). They state that we know that many settings in modern life have many
perspectives and voices, which means that ethnographers should faithfully report this “multivocality” and, if possible, show where the author's voice is located in relation to these. A central idea here is the renewed realization that all knowledge is perspectival, so the ethical practice of ethnography demands that the author's perspective be specified. The key issue is not to capture the informant’s voice, but to elucidate the experience that is implicated by the subjects in the context of their activities as they perform them, and as they are understood by the ethnographer.

**Laura**

Laura discussed internal characteristics of resiliency and things around her she felt contributed to her sense of resiliency. Internal characteristics were: persistence, not giving up, a code of ethics, taking responsibility, trying to break out of prohibitions such as being able to draw, an appreciation of what health means, gratitude, prayer, deep breathing and learning to relax.

Things around her that have contributed to her resiliency included: music and dancing, dogs as a companion over the years, being surrounded by people who never gave up-who were Christian, the importance of group sharing, getting help in maintaining her physical health, the stimulation of university and input and opinions from many people.

**Leila**

Inner characteristics included: no longer seeing things as absolute right or wrong, trusting intuition, being an emotional person, being a deep thinker, having a quick mind, constantly making connections, not just sitting and letting things happen, her mind always active working and reflecting, having a sense of drive and enthusiasm, having a real sense of hope in dealing with the cycles of life, an increased ability to deal with the ups and downs of life, stick-to-it-ness or resourcefulness, an in tune-ness with emotions and feelings, authenticity, being real, getting emotions and feelings out, thriving on intellectual stimulation, thinking and learning and personal growth, needing times just to flop out on the couch and watch TV, questioning, choosing reactions, a feeling of personal empowerment from having made decisions, being able to reach out, an ability or
openness to make connections, taking it for granted that this is who you are, a sense of balance, resourcefulness, being in touch, love of life, enthusiasm for life, the desire to really work at that feeling of peace and happiness, recognizing that it's hard work but the most important thing is wanting to do more intentional reflecting, learning that you do need to be there in a very real way for yourself in order to be there for other people and learning to deal with the stereotypes and myths around adoption in a non-defensive way.

Supports around her included: a support network, reciprocal relationships instead of feeling good by always being there for others, her husband, family, friends, therapy, adoptive parents' group and her social worker.

"There's sort of resiliency around a 'stoic' kind of resiliency where you 'put things into perspective' and 'you realize there are so many people out there worse off than you,' and 'you appreciate what you have.' The Christian ethic of 'be grateful and sort of carry on,' I think that for me that came to mean a repressing of the real feelings."

"I've always had a 'fighting spirit' and being comfortable being that way. My Mom recognized it when I was six months old. I just wasn't the same as other kids. There was a certain spunk or individuality. I'm becoming more self-confident, and honoring that part of me."

**Leith**

Inner characteristics were: having a focus, having a place to belong, having a sense of purpose in the community, learning to meditate, awareness of why we do the things we do, determination, courage, strength, independence, learning not to rely on other people, trusting her gut instinct, determination, taking risks, trusting, willing to tolerate not knowing, being interested in learning new things and exploring new things, paying attention to what "speaks" to her, patience, when she makes up her mind to do something she goes ahead with it, if one way doesn't work finding another, not being afraid to stretch and grow in trying new things, the ability to keep on going, enjoying the moment without catastrophizing about the future or having the need to plan for everything, recognition of the patterns, cycles, unity, different levels of things happening, belief in a higher power, God or spirit, a unity in everything, focus on shamanic studies,
the belief that we are energy and spirit and we take physical form to fulfill our purpose here on Earth.

Things surrounding her were: circumstances, people, community, reading including personal growth, psychology, spirituality, workshops, careful diet—she became a vegetarian four years ago, exercise—mostly walking, she has never been part of the 'in' crowd, but on the fringe, her husband, looking to leaders in the community she's admired and respected.

**Sarah**

Inner characteristics included: facing her fear and going through a career change, being able to reframe things, meditation, appreciating people’s differences, recognizing the need for clear relationship and career boundaries, professional detachment, daily affirmations, not catastrophizing things, quiet time, peacefulness, trying to relax and take it one day at a time, recognizing and acknowledging what’s really going on with herself and around her, trying to recognize and be aware of what she’s thinking and feeling instead of being numb or in denial, high expectations of herself based on knowing how much she can achieve, being an achiever, having a sense of purpose in work, a good dollop of patience even though being an action oriented person, using creative visualization, trusting intuition, strength, willpower, stubbornness and persistence.

Supports around her included: her son, journaling in a loosely structured, intuitive way, recording her dreams, walking or sitting reflectively, connections to things bigger than herself whether it’s nature or a cause, having a place in the world, recognizing that she is part of the world, not needing to be connected to a whole bunch of people and yoga.

Sarah has clear impressions of an experience while facilitating group work at school. The person across from her had never been in a long-term relationship and pointed out to her “*some people never have what you’ve had.*“ She's tucking that away for some future time when it will be useful to put things into perspective.
**Samantha**

Inner characteristics included: using visualization—that she could visualize whole paintings, day to day always taking in opportunities and taking in perspectives so that she can test that against her core to see whether it resonates or not and self-esteem to an extreme.

Supports around her included: role models including two grade school teachers who stand out for her as creative, innovative, critical thinkers, psychosynthesis with the philosophy that there is a core self that is all wise and all knowing with a tension between levels of awareness, and reading adventure autobiographies with a sense that "Yeah. You can do this. Other people do this. You can do it," and an interdependent connection.

**Victoria**

Inner characteristics contributing to resiliency are: determination, detachment, resourcefulness, a strong faith that is not wavering, belief in God, being very verbal and always talking to people, reaching out and asking for help—even from the time I was little, reading, learning to really listen and hear others, sharing 'family secrets' to get rid of a sense of shame, assertiveness, self-sufficiency, just having a sense of 'living my life,' not being in step with people my own age, a sense of 'you've done this before you can do it again,' learning to let go of control, recognizing the reciprocity of allowing someone to be there for me to help me, not blaming but expressing anger, learning to 'be with' others, learning to say no especially to authority figures, trusting my own inner voice and inner wisdom, awareness, being realistic, optimistic, trying to get away from intellectualizing as a defense mechanism, playfulness, curiosity, introspection,

Things around me that have contributed to my resiliency were: therapists, church community, teaching, working with learning disabled and students with behavioral problems, there has always been an older woman mentor that I have befriended at significant life stages, studying, keeping a dream journal, exercise, jogging when creative ideas and solutions come to me most, creativity in arts and crafts, people close to me, one or two key people to talk to, creating a substitute family around me, being single having to create a social life, synchronicity, stimulation of the city but also the tranquility of the country.
Creative Energy

My friend Laura has always maintained my thesis journey must be a creative endeavour in order to have energy and personal meaning for me. It is an issue that is close to her as she felt her creative attempts as a child were put down, when she approached her mother with a sketch, played the piano of sang off-key songs. “It was a putdown. Plonk.” Today Laura finds creative expression in seeing the light of recognition in someone’s eyes when she is explaining something to them. Or the feeling she gets when she visits chronic care patients and they greet her with a friendly, “Oh, it’s you.”

On the phone we talked about a manuscript I was co-editing along with my thesis work, the amazing energy I got from the women’s life histories. She could see I was living out the process I was writing about. I however could not yet see it; I was too close. I started to see impending mid-life changes as no accident in timing with my research work and editing the book manuscript. There were so many merging issues. I started to hear people around me saying how they clarified their ideas by articulating them, that by self-reflection they gained new insight. People spoke of the need to trust the process, a concept I have lived out for some time now-mostly out of necessity rather than choice. These ideas resonated with my own inner wisdom and authentic knowing.

When we approach life situations in a creative way, the resulting anxiety can lead to transformation. This creative stance involves personal risk. The creative process often requires an ability to endure high levels of anxiety and a relative lack of defensiveness in order to process. Anxiety is often produced through uncovering of unconscious material during the creative process itself. As difficult and painful as such attempts at resolution may be however, resolving inner chaos through creativity often leads to self-discovery and self-knowledge. The creative process can be seen as a springboard for inner transformation, and the way in which an experience acquires symbolic power becomes a turning point in a person’s life. A person shifts in a new way of finding meaning in oneself and in the surrounding world. This new perspective is then deeply felt to be a more aware way of apprehending things—a paradigm shift in the inner self.

Leila talked about her own anxiety propelled her into personal healing, and a creative use of the resources available to her in the process. “I'm overly analytical in
decision making, so it's very labor intensive, but in relating it to resiliency, once the process is gone through, things are really dealt with and they're really worked through, and there isn't the same kind of lingering "stuff" that I carry with me."

"And it's like the resiliency builds on itself almost. And once there's that recognition that you have it in yourself to do this and get through hard times and it doesn't mean that the hard times aren't there."

"I can be vulnerable and recognize they are just as important as the strong parts. There's strength in vulnerability, isn't there? That's something new to me, to not be afraid to show vulnerability and being more comfortable with who you are. That you recognize the resilient, strong parts of you are just as important as the vulnerable, insecure parts. You don't need to have a defensive mode where 'Everything's just fine and I'm totally competent and I can handle everything.'"

"There's a depth that I take things to. I want to peel back the layers and understand things. I just don't take things at face value, sort of getting at the 'why.' It took a lot of work to relate that quality about myself to infertilitiy, but then once I started looking, it really did have an effect on how I deal with the rest of my life."

"It isn't just about getting through hard times. It is really the way you do it. Maybe what you get at the end of the hard time, maybe there's a qualitative difference if you get to it in an authentic way that's sort of true to yourself, versus a means to an end."

Sarah remembers vividly her moment of awareness when she moved from anxiety to a creative way to approach a career change. "So it was only in starting to challenge that set of mental models that I was able to move. And what happened was a friend worked with me and he just did a little diagram. And I think I'm quite a visual person. He did this little diagram with this little road and here I am walking down this road and then there's this big chasm and then the road goes on the other side. And so he took me up to the edge of the chasm and he said, 'What is in the chasm?' And I said, 'Financial insecurity.' That's what it was...that's what was holding me back! It was about my responsibility as a parent. So, once I realized that, then I said to myself, 'Well, being an entrepreneur is not the only thing I can do. What is it I have to market?' And then I went through a whole series of looking at myself and looking at the skills and interests and experience. And how does that translate? Trying to find the transferable stuff to other
venues, other than the government. And that was really a precipitating moment for me because it was facing what my fear was that allowed me to reframe other things. "So I had been working towards that vision but it was just taking the leap that I found difficult. I would say it was inner preparation, external things that happened that just cinched it. There's just no way I could have stayed there. There's just no way."

"In the end, what's happened, it has been, not bouncing back, even...it's like bouncing forward. Because I was able to, in the process of change, crystallize more clearly what it was that I was looking for-for myself. And in so doing was able to sort of set my goals and move towards those and I really haven't looked back since then. So what in some ways I perceived to be a setback at the time, and in the process of trying to make a decision to give something up, in fact worked out to be, in the present, really good for me. Because it forced me to be clear, it forced me to stretch, to take risks that I normally wouldn't have taken."

"So it really was about seeing that I had different possibilities, that I had options, instead of keeping myself (closed)-that is all that I can do, this is all that I am. And it was really that transferability of all the skills and qualities that I had to new circumstances and validating them and honoring them. But the thing that got me going to that point was facing my fear. And I guess that's where I am right now is facing my fear..."

"On a large scale I am involved in a number of initiatives to bring more vision to the field of career development. I am on the steering committee of a new professional organization for career development practitioners in the province. I was part of a subcommittee that developed a generic competencies model for the field. I am on a national group establishing national standards for career counseling. I am also involved in developing an articulation agreement between our community college and OISE/UT that will create an undergraduate program in career development. All of these initiatives are part of my personal vision for myself and for my profession. I am sure that as these visions are achieved new ones will be emerging to capture my creative energy."

Nan has moved from anxiety to a position of the courage in finally being her authentic self. "That's a new piece. That's the most powerful piece in some respects because that's the one that seems to be providing the core, the root to core security. And then I'm really able to accept the gifts from the world around me. I feel okay developing
my voice and knowing that there's no real voice I can model myself after. That I have to feel safe enough in what I'm doing and saying that it's authentically me. That I can stand up tall, you know, and say, like it or not it's authentically me."

Nan talked about the possible contributing factors toward her IBS as feeling that her creativity was continually being squashed while at home growing up, in favor of pursuing sciences in high school and university. She described her father as giving up a career as an actor to pursue teaching and setting aside his creativity to go into administrative work. It was a decision Nan found resonated with her own need to quit teaching in order to stay true to her personal goals and needs for creative expression. Nan has found healing creative expression through yoga, alternative medicine, journaling and most recently art and pottery. She experiments with colour and form and shape in huge paintings that are full contrasts and movement.

Nan feels her most courageous act at this point in her life would be to have a child even though she has been ambivalent about the decision up to this point. "When I'm totally connected, feeling very centered, very much at home with myself, with people around me... love my life. feel I'm doing the right thing, doing the only thing I can be doing... it all falls into place...having a child is the most wonderful thing we could do. Why did we wait so long? All that. And there's more and more and more of that as time goes on.

"The ultimate optimistic act is to have a child. So, if I'm having trouble with the idea of having a child, then I'm really a pessimist. Interesting."

Leith felt growing up there was always a tension between expressing her intellectual, logical, analytical side over her creative self. Through her Gestalt and shamanic studies she has incorporated her creativity into her life, and risked sharing her poetry with those whose judgement she fears most—her family, particularly her father.

"As a child, the creative, intuitive, imaginative, even ‘magical’ part of me was not encouraged. The scholarly, academic, practical, organized, logical side of me was encouraged." As the oldest granddaughter, her relationship with her grandfather was significant in unconditional positive acceptance, "like father-daughter once displaced."

I have had a long struggle with my own creative expression since my mother burned my art and writing when I was a teenager. As a child I was always escaping into
writing poetry and drawing pictures at my desk. Today I find creative energy through teaching, through freeing others' creativity. And my artistic side has re-emerged stronger than ever through expressions in fabric art, collage, paintings, writing, and photography.

**Conclusion**

It is important to reflect on our experiences and with the passage of time to articulate our impressions about those experiences—whether verbally or in writing. An important component is the unconditional acceptance of the person attending to our inner experiences. The feedback aspect is one of the most important parts of this cycle. I experienced that in this research while working with the women in writing their life history. Most said they had never had the opportunity to talk in such a way, or read accounts written by others. They expressed a feeling of being affirmed and validated. Nan talked about the process moving her forward in her thesis work. Sarah found it helped in her psychic work with her separation, and that it moved her forward as well. I found it helped me make a bit of sense of my forties mid-life transition. It served as a container for the confusing time and feelings, and in some ways the women's histories combined with the work I was involved with in reflecting on them and writing about them energized my own creative movement.
CHAPTER EIGHT
DISCUSSION: CO-RESEARCHERS IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION

Introduction

My explorations into the topic of resiliency led to the findings that the literature points to the importance of one key person in life who provides unconditional positive regard, whether inside or outside of the biological family. Also explored was the significance of attachment theory, of internalizing a model of healthy adult behaviour during the developmental years. The women's life histories recorded here revealed a common theme of self-reflection and articulation as very important to their personal resiliency. All women had also experienced varying degrees of stress or conflict and tensions around their family relationships, particularly with either father or mother. For example, all women spoke of wanting to get out of the house, lose themselves in nature or the comforting lap of a neighbor "mom" when family stress ensued. Further to this, all women had experienced significant life-changing situations as adults. These included divorce, family conflict, unexpected career changes, death of a family member, cancer, academic failure, infertility, depression and physical illness. The women spoke of the cycle of conflict repeating in a life spiral until the issue was resolved. Women also made use of love of nature, visualization, reading, prayer and meditation, creativity and a belief in a higher being or God. They all had the common characteristic of having an independent spirit and being somewhat stubborn, a trait that may have led to more conflict during childhood, but was seen as an asset from an adult perspective.

The Co-researchers: In The Process of Transformation

The age of the women included mid-thirties, mid-forties, early fifties, and mid-eighties. Each woman represented a different age cohort, grew up with a different set of norms and cultural references. This informed my understanding of the women, but it did not determine their "life stage" or current perspective. Each woman was at a different stage of awareness, level of denial or acceptance of their individual reality that had no real bearing on age. Awareness was enhanced by experiences of effective therapy, broad
reading, articulation of their stories and reflecting back both verbally and in writing, along with individual educational interests. Awareness also corresponded to the current experience. Sarah was in the middle of transition when I met her-in the neutral zone-and just beginning to make sense of it. Samantha was on the verge of major life change-deciding to have a child, giving up teaching and considering career and academic possibilities. Leila was considering adopting another child, something she decided to do.

Laura stated that she was at a life stage of being old having lived for a long time, but who she is as a person has no age. The chronological details of her life were somehow the easiest to write, and the longest-she has lived the longest! She also has a vastly different vantage point from most of us by virtue of having lived for so many years. But wisdom and length of time on earth are not synonymous, and I was always open to the wisdom and learning each woman expressed from her unique vantage point.

Having read current popular literature on adult life-stage theory, I was aware of the norms and expectations at different transitions. The theories provided a good framework from which to meet and explore issues with each woman. However, my real challenge was to set aside my own judgements of where someone "should" be in the life stage, of whether they were ahead or behind or "even" with the next person. I felt that I was meeting the person at a particular time in their life and from that vantage point their observations, reflections and recollections had validity.

Kotre (1984) found the process of life review goes on at many ages, although mostly in the elderly and may be stimulated by the research interview itself or at any turning point in life. In this process, past experiences and conflicts return to consciousness to be surveyed and reintegrated. Life review was a universal phenomenon set in motion by the anticipation of death. The life review was a way to analyze the past to achieve acceptance of one's own life. The process provides integrity for the individual in the present context of his or her life. According to Kotre, when storytelling is successful, it leads to this life review process. Research has shown that our interpretation of life events is largely shaped by present circumstances.

Once again, the role of the researcher in listening to the participants is stressed as a very important component. Being flattered is not the same as being understood.
The need to be given energy by way of supporting and mentoring future generations was a goal of both Leith and Laura. Holding the role of teacher in high regard, Laura feels there is no more important role one may undertake. She often uses the analogy of teaching in conversation, and holds the role of teacher in high esteem. Leith spoke of wanting to be there for her grandchildren, to be a source of "safe" unconditional love, the way her grandfather was there for her as a child. She sees that now as one of her most important roles.

Derenowski Fleury (1991) found that as lifestyle changes are sustained over time, individuals begin to perceive that changes have been incorporated into existing life patterns. Specific health behaviors were considered by subjects to be a part of the 'new normal' within their lives. Three categories of integrating change occurred concurrently: establishing rituals, achieving harmony, and transforming change. Over time, the new behaviour eventually becomes an integral part of daily activity. "The exercise is a stabilizing factor. This is what you do now; this is part of who you are. You feel more in control than when first starting out. It's like you know that you will never be the same person again." Because possible selves are not well-anchored in social experience, they comprise the self-knowledge that is the most vulnerable and responsive to changes in the environment. Mead found that having a self implies the ability to rehearse possible courses of action depending on a reading of the other person's reactions and then being able to calibrate one's subsequent actions accordingly (as cited in Derenowski Fleury, 1991).

All of the women in this study had experienced some form of adversity during their lives. As children most had experienced family stress and conflict ranging from moderate to severe. As adults, all had experienced a life crisis such as a sudden job change, physical illness or unwanted change in a relationship. In "Flow" Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) states that adversity can simplify an individual's life. The reason tragic events are seen as positive was that they presented the victim with very clear goals while reducing contradictory and inessential choices. This resonates with Leila's words in describing how she came out of "the black time that was infertility" to a new level of awareness. Today she says she wouldn't have changed anything, and she wouldn't be the person she is if she hadn't experienced those things.
Csikszentmihalyi (1990) found the ability to take misfortune and make something good come out of it is a very rare gift. Those who possess it are called 'survivors,' and are said to have 'resilience' or 'courage.' Of all the virtues we can learn no trait is more useful, more essential for survival, and more likely to improve the quality of life than the ability to transform adversity into an enjoyable challenge. If we admire those who have that quality we will have a chance to emulate them.

Csikszentmihalyi uses the example of job transition, which echoes Leith's story of facing a career change after years as vice president of a major company just a short time before her eligibility for full pension. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) reports, Getting fired could be a godsend if one took the opportunity to find something else to do that was more in tune with one's desires. In each person's life, the chances of only good things happening are extremely slim. The likelihood that our desires will always be fulfilled is minute. Sooner or later everyone will have to confront events that contradict his goals: disappointments, severe illness, financial reversal, and eventually the inevitability of one's death. Each event of this kind is negative feedback that produces disorder in the mind. Each threatens the self and impairs its functioning. If the trauma is severe enough, a person may lose the capacity to concentrate on necessary goals. If that happens, the self is no longer in control. If the impairment is very severe, consciousness becomes random, and the person 'loses his mind' - the various symptoms of mental disease take over. In less severe cases the threatened self survives, but stops growing; cowering under attack, it retreats behind massive defenses and vegetates in a state of continuous suspicion. It is for this reason that courage, resilience, perseverance, mature defense, or transformational coping are so essential.

Why are some people weakened by stress, while others gain strength from it? Those who know how to transform a hopeless situation into a new "flow" activity that can be controlled will be able to enjoy themselves, and emerge stronger from the ordeal. There are three main steps involved in such transformations: unselfconscious self-assurance, focussing attention on the world, and the discovery of new solutions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

People who know how to transform stress into enjoyable challenge spend very little time thinking about themselves. They are not expending all their energy trying to
satisfy what they believe to be their needs, or worrying about socially conditioned desires. Instead their attention is alert, constantly processing information from their surroundings. The focus is still set by the person's goal, but it is open enough to notice and adapt to external events even if they are not directly relevant to what he wants to accomplish.

Attitude is very important. An openness to life is essential. If one operates with unselfconscious assurance, and remains open to the environment and involved in it, a solution is likely to emerge. Outside forces do not determine whether adversity will be able to be turned into enjoyment. The way a person interprets them determines whether he sees challenges as threats or as opportunities for action. A self that is self-contained reflects the idea that such an individual has relatively few goals that do not originate within the self.

Setting goals, becoming immersed in the activity, paying attention to what is happening (for interaction rather than self-interest), learning to enjoy the immediate experience, are the key to staying open according to Csikszentmihalyi (1990).

To create harmony in whatever one does is the last task that the flow theory presents to those who wish to attain optimal experience: it is a task that involves transforming the entirety of life into a single flow activity, with unified goals that provide constant purpose (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Victor Frankl's (1984) writings have emerged from his survival in a concentration camp during the Holocaust, where he visualized himself as a free man writing books and lecturing as a university professor. His visions became reality. His work stresses the importance of finding personal meaning as a way to overcome adversity and be resilient.

Frankle (1984) reported the results of a statistical survey of 7,948 students of forty-eight colleges conducted by social scientists from John Hopkins University. Their preliminary report was part of a two-year study sponsored by the National Institute for Mental Health. Asked what they considered 'very important' to them now, 16 percent of the students checked 'making a lot of money,' while 78 percent said their first goal was 'finding a purpose and meaning in my life.' He says the answer is not to have a closed system, looking inward, but being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, or that oneself--be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter.
His writings recount amazing stories of fellow prison mates who survived unbearable ordeals, only to finally succumb and seem to give up hope, signaled by smoking their last cigarette. Within hours afterward, they would die. This resonates with Werner's findings in her research of pioneer settlers in the American mid-west. There is a turning point when the individual gives up hope and death seems to inevitably follow.

Once an individual's search for meaning is successful, it not only renders him happy but also gives him the capability to cope with suffering. The priority stays with creatively changing the situation that causes us to suffer.

**Reciprocity: Listening and Finding a Voice**

What have I given back to the participants? What were they getting back? Most said they had never seen themselves written about like this before and found the experience amazing. The act of listening is so important and powerful, especially today. Being heard. Having a witness to the articulation of our self-reflection is a key to resiliency. The use of the tape recorder sets a powerful dynamic in place, one of being "recorded," of getting it on the record, of being attended to. I recognized that as an individual I represented a particular audience. My listening provided a venue for co-researchers to tell their story, their version of events in their lives with their particular plots, themes and arguments. Listening to my own voice while transcribing the tapes was an eerie feeling. I could tell where I was coming from, my agendas, fears, truths and untruths, shifts and also when I was speaking from a place of deep knowing. To a lesser extent I felt I could discern that in the participants as well. Transcribing was an important part of the research process for me. I had the realization that we miss so much in our day-to-day conversations and exchanges. To really listen, hear and distill meaning, is so important. All the stages were different. Participants' voices changed when talking about personal experiences, or significant people or even shifted from present day to long ago. When Leila talked about her rebellious childhood, when I talked about my father, and when Sarah talked about her ex-husband, we all had a shift in voice.

Words on a page are limiting. It is only a very small percentage. When people speak they also convey meaning through inflection, face, body, posture, breathe, grammar and rhythm.
The validity of the research experience was in the "therapeutic value of talking and being heard." After the interviews most participants expressed the pleasure at having a value put on their communication. Laura said she felt great, Leith said she felt good, Sarah said she felt better, Samantha came to new awarenesses, and Leila stressed that it was important to her to talk about her experiences to inform people about the issue.

David Hunt (1992) discusses the importance of listening and attending to the other and states that it is revealing about our current culture that we seldom experience someone who listens carefully to our words and feelings.

Postscript

These are stories with no endings. Life is like that. It just keeps going. Unfolding. Ongoing. Unexpected. But it's interesting to know what the women in these pages are doing today. A few years have passed since we began. We have all continued in our transformation, continued to demonstrate resiliency and a truly independent spirit in living life.

Laura has had progress in her relationship with her son's partner. Her intellectual pursuits are always a vital part of her and she's now studying "Contemporary Native Issues in Canadian Society" and moving into a new apartment.

Leila adopted another child, a boy, so now there are three children in the household and she smiles as she says, "My needs come last. Really last. And sometimes I feel the enormity of being responsible for these lives..." She's taking a course at OISE/UT and looks terrific. On reading her interview she commented on how things have changed so much since that time.

Sarah comments on how she was right in the middle of change two years ago when we first met. She says to some extent she is still in it, but things are getting better. She's looking healthy—back to her usual weight. She's as busy and involved with work as ever, stopping to tell a friend about a weekend conference she would be attending.

Leith is feeling good about her growing Gestalt therapy practice, and fields calls from people with concerns about breast cancer as a volunteer for Willow in downtown Toronto.
Samantha recently had a public showing of her art. The walls were transformed by her vibrant designs and I admired her courage in putting her work out for public display.

And me? Well, I’m finishing this writing and my doctoral degree. I’m teaching full time now at a suburban high school, students with a combination of learning disabilities, behavioural problems and physical disabilities. I love it. My students energize me when they look at me and say, “I can’t believe I studied Shakespeare,” or “You’re nice to us, Miss.” I want to start recording some of these interactions in a journal. In future I’d like to teach at the university level, to combine research with my practical experience. And I’d like to write a book, a novel, or at least some kind of short fiction. But I think I’ll rest a while...

I find a scrap of paper under a pile at my computer, “I will not waste my life in friction when it could be turned into momentum.” A suffragist quote, it seems like good advice by which to live.

A Final Note

It was an awesome task to write these women’s stories, and try to integrate it with the existing research in the field. My approach was to jump in and see what happened. The writing was a process of exploration. I have no doubt my discoveries and experiences here have increased my own personal resiliency and hope this may also be true on a broader scale.

Further Issues to Explore

How does the concept of self-reflection and articulation as a key contributor to personal resiliency relate to theories of self-actualization? How does the concept of self-reflection fit with theories of the medical model as opposed to holistic medicine where the individual’s behavior makes sense and has a logical explanation when taken in the context of the natural result of a particular experience?
CHAPTER NINE
EPILOGUE

Introduction

For five years now I have been steeped in the topic of resilience, first exploring the literature, then meeting and talking with the women, and later beginning my writing and synthesis of the topic. I have become known in my circle of colleagues and friends as "the one who's into resilience." An acquaintance rushed past me on Bloor Street the other day, grabbed my arm saying breathlessly, "I'm moving today. Boy, could I ever tell you about resilience! Talk about resilience! I'll call you as soon as I'm settled." I'm not unhappy about the association. After years of working and studying special education and learning disabilities, I found renewed energy in a topic that had a positive focus. I liked Emmy Werner's findings, supported by much of the "resilience" literature, that a legacy of hope can be passed on from the studies. I introduced this writing with that focus, and I want to end on that note. As much as possible, I wanted this to be research and writing about what works. The women's stories are intensely serious and heart-rending. Some interviews involved tears with pauses while we both collected ourselves and hunted for a tissue. Others were intellectually stimulating to the point of leaving my head spinning. Sometimes there was a connection or feeling of having met a "kindred spirit," and other times there was laughter at a shared experience either good or bad. But in spite of—or perhaps because of—the experiences these women have gone through, they all consider themselves resilient and have an essentially positive view of their lives. Many echoed similar sentiments saying that they would not be the people they are today, or where they are today if they had not had their experiences. There was no self-pity or resentment in the telling of the stories. In fact, there seemed to be a pride in the telling and a renewed perspective in telling the narratives in the context of resiliency. Most of the women felt pleased and honored to be chosen to participate. It made them think of themselves as "resilient."

In beginning the interviews I held in mind the current literature which seemed to support the "one key person" theory, along with various intrinsic and extrinsic
characteristics particular to each individual. Although I tried to frame my questions as broadly as possible, and I believe I did not lead the participants, I did ask them pointedly about role models in their past, mentors, and people who had influenced them. The response to this line of questioning was usually mixed and did not seem to follow any pattern. My realization is that older women role models and mentors have been a key part of my resiliency. Because my initial research into the literature pointed in that direction, and because it rang true in my own experience, I questioned women on key figures in their lives. I did not pursue it if they answered negatively, but I felt surprised if they said there was a lack of a significant role model. Reflecting on that I realize because I was not close to my mother and had no strong family supports, I was always "pulling in" people who would be supportive of me. Since my late teens I have always had a strong older woman mentor who has provided encouragement and unconditional positive acceptance. It has been invaluable to me. In some small measure I hope I have been able to fulfill that role for others by being a "special friend" to two girls through Children's Aid, in my teaching, in forming a women's thesis support group, and in my support and encouragement of other women.

I also noted these women recalling stories of supportive people in their lives, in an incidental way, while telling an anecdote or story that was part of their life history. This led me to conclude that perhaps their supports were so incidental, taken for granted, and an accepted part of their lives, that they did not have a conscious awareness of the effect these people had on them. Their perspective also seemed concurrent with Fonagy's "attachment theory"—that they had internalized a model of a supportive healthy adult in their early developmental years. That was one possible explanation for these women being resilient and overcoming setbacks in their adult lives. The other realization I had was that in spite of my tentative views based on my initial overview of the resiliency literature, I still allowed myself to be "open to surprise" to use David Hunt's term. Of course, openness is a prerequisite to life history research. That is in fact what makes research fascinating for me. Although my own experiences resonated greatly with a number of the women, there were also instances where I did not relate, had no middle ground of mutual experience to draw on, and could only trust my intuitive sense and remain open, nonjudgmental, and listen. The stories that were not the
same as mine served as a base of comparison, a "reality check" to test my own responses and reactions.

**Limitations of the Study**

There are several issues which should be taken into account when considering the limitations of this study: first, the selection of research participants; second, clarifying the definition of resiliency and the comparability of the sample in this study to other research samples used in the study of resiliency; and third, possible researcher bias.

First, consideration should be given to the relationship of the characteristics of the research participants in this study to the findings and conclusions of the study. The women were not representative of the average population for several reasons. Four of the five women who volunteered for the study were among graduate students who participated in the course on Creativity and Wellness: Learning to Thrive, a course which involved extensive self-reflection and journalling as part of the examination of personal adversity. It should also be kept in mind that five of the women had undergone personal therapy. One explanation could be that the kind of women who would be drawn to take this kind of course may be more resilient—by availing themselves of resources, and attracting to themselves the kind of support they need. It may also be that the skills of resilience can be learned and that by being involved in a course involving journalling and introspection, and using therapy as a means of self-reflection, a higher level of resilience may be attained in the face of personal life challenges.

Second, it is important to recognize the subjective nature of the study, and my own expectations regarding some of the constructs explored which may have created tensions within the participants. When I began interviewing the women in this study, each asked what I meant by the term resiliency, and I usually called it “bouncing back,” and we discussed what it meant for the participants. Bouncing back from personal life crisis might be different from resiliency during experiences of war, mental illness or other trauma. Again, it is difficult to compare levels of individual pain and courage, but it is important to keep in mind the notion of a range representing different levels of life challenges and resulting levels of resiliency. The kind of resilience demonstrated by the individual survivor of war may be different from the kind of resilience demonstrated by
the individual surviving life changes. It would be interesting to compare the extremes and see if a pattern of resilient behaviour would emerge. Again, there is subjectivity in the awareness and reporting of our own life experience that needs to be kept in mind in understanding the research findings here.

Third, there is a subjective bias and expectations that I bring to the study which should be acknowledged and explicitly stated. Regarding the importance of one key person who affected an individual's resilience, there was a lack of immediate acknowledgement by some of the participants of this theory. However, the findings resonated with that theory when examining anecdotal reports by the women. Other views are that there may be several key people throughout our lives that appear at pivotal moments when we need support in a particular area.

These factors may indicate that resilient individuals will seek out experiences that promote learning that leads to self-reflection and an awareness of key people in our lives, and that resilience may be a learned skill. It may also indicate that resilient people draw to them the resources that they need. This study relied primarily on the findings of longitudinal studies and their examination of ordinary people who were sometimes placed in extraordinary circumstances in life. Similarly, the six women whose life stories are presented here see themselves as ordinary people living ordinary lives. However, circumstances have led them to do extraordinary things—they have developed resiliency. Above all, the message of hope prevails; there is something that still cannot quite be explained and captured about the human spirit—the amazing potential of the ordinary person and our will to survive is what makes the exploration of this topic so extraordinary.

Self-Reflection and Articulation

Having nearly completed the writing, and while going back into literature by Werner, Garnezy, Bleuler, and especially Fonagy, something struck me. It was while jogging that the final connection came. That's always when I get my best ideas. Through their narratives, there were characteristics that emerged, even though the women thought they were simply doing what was needed under the circumstances. In the final interview, the women listed characteristics, both internal and external, that they thought on an
intellectual level, contributed to resiliency. Areas of commonality seemed to be a love of reading, talking, reflecting, being in nature, a sense of independence...all pointing to the overriding theme of self-reflection. All the women had this in common as an umbrella under which the characteristics they exhibited or talked about could be categorized. They were all very articulate and had been in therapy or talked to significant others about their issues prior to me. Most commented that the experience of sharing their thoughts-talking about them in this context-changed their perceptions or illuminated them. I also explored the concept of life stories as plot, which we tell to a specific audience as a type of argument. This would certainly have to be taken into account in the reading and interpretation of these life stories. The other characteristic the women had in common was family conflict or crisis when they were children. They also demonstrated what I would call an "independent spirit" or a sense of independence. Many said they were told as children they were feisty or independent, and that trait carried through for them, sometimes as an asset, and most laughingly agreed that it could sometimes be a liability. This was especially true for Leila.

Bennet and Sparrow (1990) refer to this independent spirit in Follow Your Bliss stating that those who were able to find meaning in life shared a belief in following our own inner guidance. Our parents would claim that we were 'headstrong and stubborn children,' for surely that must have been the impression we sometimes gave.

The women also spoke of trusting their intuition and "inner wisdom" as a key component of their personal resiliency. Bennet and Sparrow (1990) discuss the importance of integrating lessons of childhood with the lessons of adulthood and finally return to that very early trust we had once had with our inner worlds. "It took time to rediscover that what we see and smell and feel is not just 'out there,' but that it is the result of an interaction between the external environment and what we bring to it from within. We agreed that for both of us, messages of inner guidance that had the quality of 'quiet excitement,' of peace, of inner calm and confidence seemed to be the most trustworthy and the most directly beneficial" (p, 222). Bennet and Sparrow (1990) describe it the process further:

When we paid attention to these messages and acted upon them, we found ourselves closer to a life path that truly felt right for us. The messages that led us
off our paths had very different qualities. Describing those qualities isn’t easy. Sometimes they had a particular urgency, like a spoiled child pulling at our hand and crying, 'Gimme, gimme, gimme!' to satisfy those needs right now. If there was excitement in the message, it was not the quiet, peaceful, and centered feeling of excitement when we were on our path; rather it was the excitement associated with anxiety. It was the 'jangly' excitement that goes with high-adrenaline states. As often as not, when we looked very closely, we’d find fear involved: fear of something happening or fear that we would not be able to have something that for the moment we were absolutely convinced we must have. (p. 72)

I find it interesting to note that in formulating my research questions I did not have the idea in mind that self-reflection and articulation leading to higher levels of functioning would be the findings of this research. Therefore, when rereading questions I noted with interest that I asked, "Did talking about these experience change your perceptions of your role or the role of others?" This question was undoubtedly informed on a subconscious level from my initial reading of the resiliency literature. But the responses I received to that question led to findings for which I was not prepared and did not anticipate. My conclusions are that the women spoke from a different voice when recalling and talking about anecdotes from their past, and this final question, with its resulting change in voice from a more "intellectualized" stance, served to highlight the authenticity of the earlier stories. In this way I feel confident that the women's truths emerged independently and collectively in this work. By telling their stories, by reading them and collaborating with me in the final narrative, it raised our awareness to another level. This action in and of itself raised our awareness to increase our resiliency.

Early in the research I noted a different voice when women spoke of personal narratives that were significant or life changing. Most did not feel they were doing anything out of the ordinary, and not really acting bravely, but just doing what had to be done. However, in the final interview, when asked to articulate the inner characteristics and things around them that contributed to their resilience, the women spoke in a more detached way, seeming to intellectualize, or coming from an "ego" point of view. This also relates to the subjectivity of the participants and the intersubjectivity of my position in the process. I have learned to hear the person, to value group process, to see beyond
the externals, to hear the deep place the voice comes from when people are speaking from their soul. I also have experienced the collective truth and new awareness that emerges in the group process. The truth is always the truth. It doesn't change. I used to write things down before a visit to the therapist with the feeling that I had to "get it." Later I realized that the truth will always come out, it never changes, is always there. Those experiences and trust in my intuition has stood me in good stead in this research.

The Writing Process

My primary concern was to convey, in my writing, an accurate portrayal of the participants in their life story that was both honest and caring. I was aiming for a representation of the good and bad, while illuminating the issues presented. Did I accomplish this goal? I think so. And when I put the question to each co-researcher during the feedback session, most agreed that I had done that. They all commented that they had never had themselves written about in this way, and that it was "amazing that I could pull together all the various aspects." It was while I was doing the final writing that I began to realize the true enormity of this project, the scope of the undertaking, and the amount of distillation necessary from the information gathered.

I did not give the participants the questions ahead of time. Why not? I rationalized that I wanted their first response. We had discussed the topic in a general way, and the findings from the literature, again in generalities. However, my interview came from an informed stance and I realized at that time that coming from a position of being informed would change the dynamic somewhat. The other side of this issue is, if they had had the questions in advance it may have been too much information. It might have led to the participants being over-prepared to build a case proving resiliency, instead of speaking spontaneously on the topic, telling personal narratives as they arose in their mind at the time. I also felt their involvement in the Creativity and Wellness course had also served as preparation to have the mindset to contemplate the topic of resiliency. I wanted them to speak intuitively and honestly. There are many ways of approaching this and under the circumstances I think it was the right thing to do.

Another question I asked myself was why I conducted my interview at the end? I didn't want my ideas to be formulated to the extent that they would influence the
discussion. I wanted to remain open to surprise. Also, I believe my many years of personal therapy and being involved in support groups has changed me in that I am used to being heard and validating others by listening. In conducting this research and reading the literature on how valuable a commodity this is in today's world, I am reminded how fortunate I am to have people who listen and the ability to listen as constants in my life.

It was revealing the number of times insights or ideas were repeated in my notes, jotted down in different colors, on different days, forming an interconnected truth that came through. The truth doesn't change and it doesn't go away.

Depending on the different developmental stage each woman was at, they had different energy around different issues and how they articulated it. Laura, as a woman in her eighties talks of the spiral, the cycles. At her age she has seen it all so many times, but still comes at it with energy, a sense of calm and reflectivity while reviewing her life. Liela is still trying out different behaviors especially in relation to her mother, finding what works. She is intensely committed to the process of self-reflection and articulating and personal growth. Sarah is very no nonsense and very self-aware of being in the neutral zone in the middle of transition and patiently waiting to move beyond that. Leith has been through so much in life, and her pursuit of spirituality and need for generativity have given her new energy. She is very aware of her strength. Samantha speaks in a lyrical way, using stories, intellectualizing and seems on verge of change. And I am in a new phase of energy and change as I enter mid-life, want to move out of self-reflection and am more invested now completing projects, in "doing" with an increased sense of the urgency of time.

We learn so much from others. It's a privilege for me to have heard these stories. I was continually energized by their commitment, involvement and genuine interest. They are 'gold.' By having shared in small percentage of their lives, it informed my own mid-life transition. They have changed me.

So now, some years have gone by since the beginning of collecting these women's life histories, of working on my thesis research, of my journey "home" to Montreal. The experience has unblocked all kinds of creative energy and opened up new experiences. A relationship has ended, which caused me a great deal of sadness at the time. But something new and seemingly more solid has replaced it-something I never
would have expected at the time. I have a new apartment that is filled with flowers and art and joy and I play music and dance around the room swinging my arms in my own private celebration of life. I have taken on a new teaching job in special education with students with multiple exceptionalities from grade nine to twelve. I love teaching them and together we explore the writings of Langston Hughes, O Henry, Anne Frank, Charles Dickens and Shakespeare. We read short stories and Canadian novels exploring the legend of Louis Riel. I love teaching and feel renewed energy and confidence facing the challenge of the task. The high point of my day is when my grade 12 students come into English class, loudly asking, “Are you going to read us a story today, Miss?” I am in the process of self-reflection and getting some distance on the Montreal experience. I have created a collage of photographs and memorabilia of the experience. I feel I have had enough emotional distance from the experience to be able to put it into perspective. I want to honour what it meant for me to have the courage to go back and face the past, and the freedom it has given me. I continue to live the process.

The writing process was a key part of this work for me. My research here has been informed by my training as a journalist, teacher, volunteer for Children's Aid over the years. I have been trained and am respectful of issues of confidentiality, trustworthiness and integrity. My intuition and gut instincts have been proven to be good. During this writing process, I reflected back twenty years ago, when as a newspaper reporter I was trained and ethically against anyone reading drafts of my writing. This work has been a change in thinking into a stance of working from a perspective of being interpretive, collaborative, telling more than one truth. It feels different. For this project, that's the way it should be. I think I have told it the way it really is.

My journalism instructor trained us to trust our intuition during the interview process, and we were advised against using a tape recorder, but told to get good notes. He said we would remember the important-key information. I have been trained to look for the "lead," to pick out the thesis, and get to the main point of the story. I was trained to "be objective," but I always liked writing feature stories more than hard news, and never really felt "objective" about my material. My voice was always present. For my BA I took a course in anthropology where the professor encouraged us to "do ethnography in our day-to-day lives." It served to increase my awareness, and for some reason what she
said has stayed with me. Barbara Tuchman in the New York Times, February 2, 1989, stated the writer's object is...or should be...to hold the reader's attention...I want the reader to turn the page and keep on turning to the end (as cited in Denzin, 1998).

Richardson (1998) considers writing a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic...writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it and feels form and content are inseparable. That writing from ourselves should strengthen the community of qualitative researchers and the individual voices within it, because we will be more fully present in our work, more honest, more engaged. Richardson describes her disappointment that much of writing pertaining to qualitative research is boring and we have to keep in mind that the meaning is in the reading. She says qualitative researchers should ask how we can create texts that are vital and make a difference. Richardson states that one way to create those texts is to turn our attention to writing as a method of inquiry and write because one wants to find something out; write in order to learn something that one didn't know before writing it (Richardson 1998). She states the researcher-rather than the survey, the questionnaire, or the census tape-is the 'instrument.' The more honed the researcher, the greater the possibility of 'good' research.

Through the course of this research project, the person that I am in the writing process has been affirmed. According to Denzin (1998), poststructuralism suggests two important things to qualitative researchers. First, it directs us to understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular positions at specific times; and second, it frees us from trying to write a single text in which everything is said to everyone. Nurturing our own voices releases the censorious hold of 'science writing' on our consciousness, as well as the arrogance it fosters in our psyche. Writing validated is a method of knowing. Through the writing we can experience the self-reflexive and transformational process of self-creation. We find ourselves attending to feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, blurred experiences; we struggle to find a textual place for ourselves and our doubts and uncertainties.

The Other represented in the text is always a version of the researcher's self, (Denzin, 1998). Kreiger argues that when we discuss others, we are always talking about ourselves (as cited in Denzin, 1998). Our images of 'them' are images of 'us.' According to
Denzin, a vital text is not boring but builds an emergent, reflexive interpretation of the subject matter at hand:

It presumes a writer with the guts to tell it like it is, to put him-or herself on the line, so to speak. It presumes a socially situated (and isolated), unique writer who has the courage and authenticity to write a bold new text. This writer first experiences, feels and thinks. (p. 321)

Denzin describes the writer's position as expressive, interpretive, setting forth the multiple meanings of an event, object, experience or text describing writing as an act of discovery. There is a power and authority to this kind of writing. No one else but this writer could have brought this corner of the world alive in this way for the reader. He states that the field-worker must be a committed writer, but the stories that are boldly told are stories that flow from that commitment. People who have actually lived the experiences being described can be local interpreters and use their experience, concepts, words and meanings that actually operate in the worlds being studied.

My own experience of telling and most importantly writing my life history and the life histories of the co-researchers was an important part of my own self-reflection and restorying. The researchers also experienced their own restorying when taking part in the process of being interviewed, editing and giving feedback in the writing process. Interpretation is an art that cannot be formalized. In the end it is a matter of storytelling and the stories we tell each other. Denzin states:

And so the stories we tell one another will change and the criteria for reading stories will also change. And this is how it should be. The good stories are always told by those who have learned well the stories of the past, but who are unable to tell them any longer because those stories no longer speak to them, or us." (p. 340)

David Hunt(1993) describes the importance of infusing the Spirit of Renewal into our actions saying it is an instance of reflection-in-action. Specifically you will probably need a daily review period to consider your actions in light of your beliefs and to develop some guides for new actions which will be closer to the Spirit of Renewal. He advocates using a personal image, a saying which we keep in mind, and a symbol such as a pin or poster, as a powerful guide.
Kotre (1984) quotes one of his co-researchers describing what the writing process means for her, illustrating the conflicts she will face in trying to reach her goal. She describes writing as something that's lasting, something that's active, something that integrates all the gathering...and she will leave something like that behind... many somethings.

My own personal writing goal was to push my work to a level where I wrote in a style that integrated quotes with my own writing. However, in order to remain true to qualitative methodology and better represent the authenticity of each person's voice, I went back over the story and transcribed interviews to include more direct quotes. After conducting my feedback session with each participant, I changed some writing back to direct quotes, and revisited the interviews and written materials to flesh out the narrative. Again I kept an ongoing list at the end of "characteristics of resiliency." I also changed the quotes to italics for clarity of organizational style and to make the participants' voices stand out distinctly. My own personal writing goals would integrate with the accurate representation of each voice. I also shifted my professional stance from that of a journalist trained to discourage involvement of the subject in the editing process, to that of a qualitative researcher welcoming the co-participants' important role in collaborating in the research and writing process. I believe this collaboration enhanced the integrity of the work.

Throughout the research process I was looking for commonalities and emerging themes-first of all in the reading the literature, then later in interviews, while transcribing, organizing and coding, writing the results up long hand, then typing them onto the computer. A natural variation and evolution of qualitative inquiry evolved. Three levels of analysis surfaced: 1) a descriptive account of co-researchers' experiences which formed the narrative, 2) the individual collective and thematic interpretations of the narrative content, and 3) the meta-analysis of the thematic interpretations. According to Judith Magrill (1996) the reflexive and dialectical conversation between participants emerged into a higher awareness, a shared meaning and a more informed understanding of the issues.

My goals with this work, within the qualitative paradigm, were on four levels: research, writing, learning, and personal development. Of course, they are all overlapping
and interconnected. I held these goals in the forefront of all my interactions with the women, in my writing, and in my analysis and discussion of the research.

My overriding research goal, which I articulated to each woman at the conclusion of the interview sessions, was to represent what they had to say as accurately as possible, staying true to her voice and life history in both "the good and bad." For me it was an issue of personal integrity. My background as a journalist, teacher, and volunteer worker for Children's Aid agencies informed me over the years. As much as possible, on a conscious level, I wanted to convey the truth and essence of what each woman said. By working in a collaborative matter I worked to achieve that.

My writing goal was to keep my writing fluid, and retain my "voice" and the voice of the women, in order to convey the energy and vitality of the project. It was vital to my own creativity cycle to push my writing to another level. In writing the women's histories, I felt a wonderful sense of energy and accomplishment in the actual process, and once the stories were completed. This energy continued to infuse every step along the way, sustaining me through the most difficult parts of researching the methodology and completing the analysis and conclusions. There were shifts in my professional stance as I was trained as a journalist that only under very rare circumstances should the subject of the writing take part in the editing process. We were taught that this would compromise our own representation of the facts and the "truth." My goal was different as a qualitative researcher. The co-researchers participated equally in each step along the way, giving feedback about the interview process and during several editing sessions of the written work. My final impression was that this process in no way compromised the integrity of the work, and made it a truly collaborative project.

My personal learning goal was to clarify my position within the research paradigm of qualitative inquiry. I needed to be comfortable and feel confident with meanings and vocabulary. I needed to place myself within the historical framework of qualitative research, but also clarify my position in relation to the women I was writing about.

My personal goal was to satisfy academic standards within the existing bureaucratic and political background, while staying true to what I had to say. This has been one of the most difficult tasks. I formed a women's thesis support group who met for
dinner bi-monthly to encourage each other, talk on the phone, commiserate and celebrate together. It has made all the difference. So we are now part of a network of women who have completed our doctoral work. It is significant, because on a macro level we are all a part of each other's work and will carry that with us no matter where we go from here. I have not worked alone, and I am not finishing alone. I have a sense of communal achievement that is hard to describe, but it has already changed how I am in my professional relationships. It has given me confidence and a heightened awareness of the need for sharing and collegiality. Working with my supervisor Solveiga Miezitis, I had the same goals of maintaining my personal honesty and integrity while working with her in carrying out this project. Because of who she is, she has made this project possible, and has made it possible for me to stay true to my ideals and goals.

Who I am as researcher (along with co-researcher) has created this "story." It has helped me stay tuned to my participant's voice. My writing here has affirmed my own "knowing." It is true to me and expresses my passion.

**Conclusion**

I was truly honored to 'be with' each person and humbled by the trust they had in me in sharing their personal narratives. My core belief that we all have an innate wisdom in our own way of being has been confirmed. My participation in this project has changed me. I have been changed profoundly as a result of meeting the women and sitting with them, listening to them, joining in conversation with them, reading books that were relevant. It has been instrumental in pushing me on into my own mid-life transition of my forties, a passage I had been putting much energy into resisting. Now it is time to go forward. With the completion of my doctoral studies, many changes have taken place. I moved to a new apartment, almost doubled my private special education tutoring, taught English at a community college, accepted a special education teaching position at a nearby high school and will now have room to set some new goals. One goal will be to continue writing, with whatever possibilities emerge from this study, but also I want to move onto my lifelong goal of writing fiction. Whatever unfolds, I know that these women's stories will always resonate with me.
Finally, there is something about the poem 'Courage' written by pilot Amelia Earhart, who died just before age 40 in 1937 when her plane was lost over the Pacific, that captures the essence of life...

Courage is the price that life extracts for granting peace
The soul that knows it not, knows no release
From little things
Knows not the livid loneliness of fear
Nor mountain heights where bitter joy can hear
The sound of wings.

(Mullens, 1990)
References


Appendix A:
Fully-Informed Written Consent Form for Co-researchers

A Qualitative Inquiry Exploring Resiliency in Six Individuals in the Process of Transformation in their Lives

My name is Victoria Plaskett and I am a graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). I am conducting a research project in order to complete requirements for the Doctor of Education in the Special Education Department of Human Development and Applied Psychology. I would like to ask you to volunteer your time and participate in a study that explores factors that characterize and contribute to resiliency in women undergoing life change and transition.

Signed Consent:

As a participant in this research project, I, ________________________, am consenting to be a volunteer in an exploratory study which will use qualitative methods of examining personal narrative in an aim to explore factors that characterize and contribute to resilience in individuals undergoing life change and transition. I know that the purpose of the study is to gain a greater understanding of resiliency in individuals, in order to add to the existing literature focused on "what we do right," instead of the "at-risk" theory commonly concerned with what is wrong in people's lives. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that personal data will be coded to insure anonymity as well as confidentiality, and that identifying names and descriptions of individuals who participated in the study will be excluded in this research.

I understand that this project has been reviewed and approved by the Ethical Review Committed at OISE/UT as adequately safeguarding co-researchers' privacy, welfare and civil liberties. I realize that my rights and well-being will be respected both during the study and in the final report.

As a participant in this study, I will spend approximately 10 hours over a period of several months being interviewed. I understand that the interviews will be recorded by audio tape and notetaking. I understand that I am invited to be a full participant in the
research process due to my personal knowledge in the area of study. I understand that I
can help formulate the interview questions and discuss my experiences in a safe and
trusting environment. I understand that I can refrain from answering any question asked
during the interview, from participating in any part of the discussion I find unduly
uncomfortable, and I can request certain portions of the recorded documentation (written
or audio-tape) be excluded from the final analysis. I am fully aware that there are no right
or wrong answers to the questions and that the researcher is not present to judge or
evaluate, but to work with me to try to understand my experiences. In addition, I agree
that the audio-tapes or notes from the interview can be used for educational purposes.

I also understand that I will be invited to interpret and analyze the ideas I have
developed in the interviews. However, if I choose not to participate in this endeavour,
this is a choice that will be respected. I am assured that my feedback on the results will be
heard prior to the completion of the final report.

The procedures of the study have been explained to me by the researcher and I
have a satisfactory understanding of them. Any further questions about the research and
my rights as a participant will be answered by contacting the research supervisor:

Dr. Solveiga Miezitis,
Department of Applied Psychology,
252 Bloor Street, West,
Toronto, Ontario. M5S 1V6

Phone: 416-923-6641 Ext. 2573.

Ms. Victoria E. Plaskett,               New Address:
321 Bloor Street West,               27 Walmer Road,
Toronto, Ontario. M5S 125            Apt. 401,
Box 260.                               Toronto, Ontario. M5R 2W7
Phone: 416-979-7446                   Phone: 416-928-1626
Fax: 971-2241.                         Email: vplaskett@oise.utoronto.ca

I have read the material above and my questions have been answerd to my satisfaction. I
agree to participate in this research activity. I understand that I have given informed
consent.

Signature of Co-researcher _______________________________ Date __________