RITUAL AND RITES OF PASSAGE: A GENTLE ENFOLDING OF SELF

by

Michele Evans

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

This paper explores the transition from adolescence into adulthood. Key questions concerning life's meaning and one's place in the world fuel the need to experience authentic connection with Self. The writer examines prevailing attitudes towards teens which tend to exclude them from the greater community, forcing them to find their own way without the interaction of mentors or elders. Traditionally, it is the role of the community to become involved in this stage of life when children need to explore the world beyond family. Without the community's involvement, this passage tends to remain in a holding pattern. Peer groups replace mentoring, inner wisdom stays locked in uncharted regions. Many adults do not feel grown up. The author suggests that the incorporation of a passage structure which helps facilitate self-knowledge will help today's youth. The consideration of non-rational education, and ritual as a tool for imprinting new understanding is also examined.
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Introduction

In my mid-thirties I found myself pondering many of the same questions I struggled with as an adolescent. Maybe I never answered them for myself, instead being carried along by society's dictates and an unwitting belief in a destiny laid out by the ancestors before me. Marriage, children, and then? -- single parenting. I followed the rules, but ended up outside the picture I had envisioned. Something was amiss. Who painted the picture? Why was I missing? Did I choose someone else's vision for my life? How do I paint my own picture?

In my adolescence I was deeply concerned about the meaning of my life. I had no idea of who I was and what I could really do. I was hungry for answers but did not know how to find them. I don't believe my experience was that different from others'. I know many people of my age with similar questions. I hope to look at reasons for why so many of us have reached adulthood without finding these answers and to see if there might be ways to facilitate engendering more self-knowledge. Beyond the actual findings it is my intention to explore the attitudes towards and the value of, different ways of knowing. Why do we limit our perceptions to rational ideals? Why are some tendencies more highly regarded than others? What are some of the challenges we face in fostering teenagers into adulthood? Using the path of my life as an exploration I will engage with these and other questions as they arise.

In this narrative approach to my study of rites of passage, I intend to write myself into being. To create my own passage into my own life. My journey has followed many paths, some leading me closer to myself, others leading me away
from myself. But what I have discovered is that even the wrong turns eventually serve to help me find my place. My task is to reconstruct my efforts in a way that helps me speak my name internally and externally. To hear from within and listen to this voice. To let it help me to know and to be known.

Traditionally, women have reigned within the boundaries of the home. Research pertaining to actual rites of passage generally focuses on men and male conduct. Historically it appears that initiation into new lifeways centre around roles within the community. The actual initiation ritual process itself engenders three aspects, separation, liminality, and reintegration into the community. Often the initiate would learn a skill to provide for his collective; hunting, fighting, healing, etc. Since women had the role of maintaining the household, it was not considered necessary to prepare them for the larger world. For women, menstruation, marriage and child bearing became the initiation into her new lifeway, which traditionally did not go beyond concerns of home and family.

The influence of these trends is still evident today, although more disguised. Even though women have now entered the work-force, the domain of home and family still falls largely to her. The normative dictate to marry and have children is strong in our society. In our schools boys participate more freely than girls. Our governments are still largely comprised of men. Religious organisations usually position women in roles of support rather than as leaders. Those qualified for positions of power must prove their abilities to rule, or take over. Most of the passage work taking place now falls back to the old principles of "warrior"
preparation. The less aggressive states are still not recognised as having any power. The only kind of power generally recognised as worthwhile is power over.

As long as we continue to engender these old rules it will be difficult for women to find their place in the world. Rather than bring feminine qualities into the world at large, women generally have to put on the persona of “man” to gain entry and must maintain this level of functioning in order to remain there. The separation of mind and body is often reflected in gender polarisation. The domain of mind and spirit traditionally falls to men, while the domain of body and physical falls to women. Centuries of this classification have served to cut us off from becoming all we can be. By allocating qualities of nurturing and heart to women, men are denied access to the richness of embodied spirituality. Women are denied access to a world which requires transcendence of the body to achieve nirvana. Possibly, in using the body as a place of discord, where preparation for the adult world requires pain and hardship, causes us to find salvation in escaping the confines of the flesh. But what would happen if the passage from childhood into adulthood helped one to find the beauty and joy the body provides? Learning to respond to the wisdom of the body rather than denying the guidance it provides would create a very different life experience.

My intention is to divine a threshold into a world where these more "feminine" qualities have voice and value. Creating a passage to gain entry into this unacknowledged realm will provide a place for these qualities to grow and thrive. As long as girls mature into womanhood disconnected from their strengths they will find it difficult to engage in life authentically. Inscribed virtues require the
abandonment of self, whereas the development of genuine integrity engages the power of Self to both guide and create who we are. (Self with a capital S being what some might call the "Higher Self"). The questions I pondered in my adolescence had everything to do with who I was, and what I was here to do. Rather than find the answers inside myself, I looked to the world to provide direction. I was lead astray. Gradually, I came to find my way, following inner promptings. Now it is time to take what I found within into the world around me -- this time, surfacing intact. My known searching to be known. To find the meaning of my experience.

**Methodology**

I have chosen to work with a narrative form of scholarship partially as a result of an undergraduate focus in women's studies, where I began to understand the implications of the feminist decree, "The personal is political". The rhetoric finally moved from cliché to truth when I saw a film on spousal abuse. As long as these *incidents* were perceived as private family matters, little was being done to alleviate the suffering. Once we moved these circumstances from the domain of the home into the community, steps were taken to address this violence. My own life story took on meaning when I joined healing groups that helped me to understand the troubling aspects of my childhood as inappropriate. My internal detector had long since ceased to function properly. First it took the perspective of others to help me connect with my real truth before I could identify
it within myself. An odd paradox given my opening statement about others painting my life picture for me. But there is a distinct difference between someone telling you who your are and people helping you to recognise yourself. My hope is that others who read this will identify aspects of themselves in my work and begin to understand their own life experience as pedagogical. I feel that using a narrative approach enables me to be more accessible to more people who may be interested in the same kind of work - either for personal awareness, or as a stepping stone into their own involvement in rites of passage work. If others can translate their personal experience into the realm of expert, we might not have so many adolescents who are lost and without meaningful adult interaction.

Personally, I held back from becoming involved outside of the family because I didn't think I was qualified to work with teens. Yet I jumped for joy when a friend announced she was going to lead a meditation group for teens. Both my daughters looked forward to attending. She had no more experience than I did, but she still had something vital to offer our searching youth. Maybe other parents would have the same response I did. For most teenagers, the most important qualification necessary is an ability to listen. Many women and men have this to offer. The scholarship of narrative gives value to lived experience. In recapitulating my life story I hope to shed light on the qualities I have not yet realised.

A further reason for a narrative methodology is that it allows for the emergent qualities of intuition to provide a "road map" to follow. In John Miller's book, *The Holistic Curriculum*, intuition is described as a direct knowing (p.88). I
was fortunate to find teachers who taught me how to recognise my own intuition or *communications from the Self* - Self being "the deepest part of being which at the same time is connected to the highest principle of the universe - God, or the Tao." (Miller, 1996, p.34). This Self is a combination of the internal and external worlds, comprised of personal and transpersonal experience. Arnold Mindell talks about a dreambody as being a conveyor of these two realities in his book, *Working with the Dreambody*. He says, "The dreambody, then, is a multi-channeled information sender asking you to receive its message in many ways and noticing how its information appears over and over again in dreams [imagery] and body symptoms." (1985, p.8). I understand the dreambody to be a kind of intermediary between the Self and the self. (self being the adaptive self). In a later book, *The Shaman's Body*, Mindell describes dreambody work as "A matter of sensing your body sensations and allowing them to direct the way in which you live." (1993, p.23). I have come to recognise this as a place in me where I resonate with the truth of who I am, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. I was introduced to this kind of work in 1991, where my method of entry was through the body. Later I was able to approach it from a theoretical point of view. My body responded to the cues directly, my intellect required more preparation by studying Jungian psychology and Taoism.

When I came upon Miller's articulation of intuition I felt as if I knew what he was describing. Intuition is transmitted in many ways. Referring to the work of Frances Vaughan (1979), Miller speaks about four levels of intuition - physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual (1996, p.88). Through my experience of
Mindell's work, I learned that my body doesn't lie. While working with a process-oriented therapist, I noticed my head wanted to move from side to side. She encouraged me to amplify the sensation - go with it, let it guide me, make it more. This contrary response to my usual behaviour opened the door to a new, more authentic way of connecting with my Self. Soon words followed my head and I found myself shouting NO! NO! NO! This was a huge shift from my inclination to bury or submerge anything negative or painful. But in moving with the impulse of my body I discovered a new voice. And this voice felt so alive and real. My body taught me something and helped me to feel myself. Miller's explication of physical intuition resonated within when I read the words; “Vaughan argues that we should learn to trust the responses of our body.” (1996, p.88). I had a clear manifestation of this theory.

*Emotional* intuition comes through feelings. I often feel I don't relate well on this level, but when I think of it in terms as *vibrations* we pick up from people (Miller, 1996, p.89) I have a sense of what this means. Not so much registered as a bodily response, I notice these *knowings* as subtle inclinations. I feel uneasy in one situation but comfortable in another. Memories of having to kiss family friends and not wanting to comes close to describing this sensation. Like many others who grew up in North America in the fifties, I did not have the authority to refuse repugnant civilities from my parent's acquaintances. Years of over-riding these impulses diminished my response to them. Buried so deeply, I tend to notice them after the fact, but the time frame is moving closer to the present moment.
Included within the area of emotional intuition is artistic expression (Miller, 1996, p.89). Sometimes it is difficult for me to pay attention to these nuances, but I have discovered a direct connection between my emotional nature and expressive art. All my life I felt untalented in the artistic world. My brother was the artist, my sister the writer, and my other sister the actress and singer. I did aspire to dancing and trained until I was twenty, but never felt I was a dancer. I enjoyed dancing, and got into the flow experience, but perceived it as fooling around. It wasn’t real. The industrialisation of the arts, where the professionals are the ones who do art, created a chasm between my artistic feelings and my lived reality. What was the use of pursuing an activity only professionals benefited from? At least that was how I was thinking then. It wasn’t until I became involved in an undergraduate course on connecting with the creative imagination that I reconciled this belief. Since then I have learned how to do collages, write poetry, sing, and dance from my heart. Not as an expert, but as someone who thrives on artistic activity — as an expression of who I am. The expression of who I am leads to further knowledge of who I am. So I have discovered it is possible to develop emotional intuition.

Another form of intuition takes place on a mental level. Flashes of insight and meaningful images are examples of this form of intuition (Miller, 1996, p.90). These ways of knowing are imbued with a quality of revelation. A certain correctness or rightness accompanies these awareness’. Vaughan refers to the “aha” experience as an indicator of mental intuition (Miller, 1996, p.90). I know I am often surprised with sudden solutions to perplexing circumstances. These
answers mostly appear after I have left the problem behind. A concept to grasp, or a clarification to some query surfaces out of the blue when I put my mind on something else. I can often get only so far using my intellect alone. I feel the perceptual knot in my forehead tightening up after too much time spent trying to get something in my head. I know I am at the point of shutdown, so I stop what I am doing. While involved in something else, the “aha” appears. This is how I know it is my intuition speaking. A “nose to the grindstone” approach leaves little room for much else to enter.

The final type of intuition is spiritual intuition. According to Vaughan this level of intuition moves beyond duality into experiencing oneness with the universe (Miller, 1996, pp.90-1). Meditation is one way to achieve this awareness. Other transpersonal states can create an atmosphere conducive to this sensation. Guided imagery, shamanic activity, ritual, and even dreams can awaken this spiritual wisdom.Personally I have had spiritual intuitions as a result of meditating, rituals, dreams, a car accident, walks in nature, dancing, drumming, and even from rebirthing (breathwork). Many come from stress-related processes, but it is not essential to experience adversity to enter into this state of awareness. I will write more about this later.

I feel an intuitive/narrative methodology resonates with my focus on a more “feminine-friendly” approach to passage work. Included in this approach is an inside-out kind of academe. Although I will be including “professional” voices to reiterate my discoveries, I am attempting to allow my inner processes to speak as “expert” in this paper. Rather than determining a proscribed outcome I will hold an
intention of synthesising my life, my discoveries and the theory I have read to form my passage into adept. My use of the words “masculine” and “feminine” are not reflective of gender difference, but are incorporated to delineate an understanding of qualities which have historically been channelled into these two categories. Both males and females embody these characteristics. It is my hope to recover a reverence towards the fostering of the feminine.

**Breaking Ground**

The following is a story I wrote in March of 1998. It was just after I realised my interest in passage work for adolescent girls. At the time I was considering my childhood relationship with truth; seeing or speaking it. I always seemed to get into trouble for speaking the obvious. Something like the child who disclosed that the Emperor was wearing no clothes. My recollections inspired me to take a pen in hand. This story emerged without any prompting. Just as I was finishing I turned to look at a painting I recently picked-up in a second hand store. It is a glorious image of a thriving, beautiful, thistle. At the time I could not understand my compulsion to buy it. It was out of character for me, but my body-response was so strong I decided to trust what it was trying to tell me. It was only after writing this story that the purpose was made known to me. Body wisdom is not always rational.

**Thistle Wisdom**
She, like everything else, came from the earth. It was not an easy journey to the surface. Life on top of the surface was even more difficult. She was a weed. Something to be plucked and gotten rid of. As soon as she made contact with the above-ground world people tried to cut her down, or uproot her. Their actions caused all her energy to return to her roots. This power directed to her roots impelled them to grow deeper and deeper, becoming stronger and stronger. This did not show in the above ground world. The above ground world would only chop her down again when ever she made an appearance. Some even tried to pull her roots right out of the ground, but by then her refusal to be annihilated only gave her more strength. She was too powerful to be destroyed.

She was never allowed to grow up though. Her inclinations did not fit in with her environment. Freedom for thistles was not recognised. Only certain varieties of plant life were encouraged. Sweet smelling flowers, like smiles, became the currency of life. Her prickles were disturbing. They reminded everyone that the world was not free of pain. People did not want to be reminded of this. She began to question her existence. Was it only to bring pain? Maybe she should try to grow into something else. She tried to be a daisy and a sunflower. But she never felt at home in disguise and grew tired of living a lie.

She stopped trying to be a flower just to have a chance to see the world. Unless she could participate in the world as she was, there was no point in living there. She decided to go back to her roots and live underground. But down below the surface she found a sense of recognition. Without the distraction of fighting for survival or the depletion of living a lie, she was able to discover what it was like to be herself. Understand that this only happened blindly. It was dark down there and no one was around to reflect what she was discovering back to her. No one but the quiet voice that called to her deepest stirrings.
Eventually she came to trust this voice, which was always present if she listened carefully enough. Her roots flourished surrounded by this dark, accepting world. She began to feel strong enough to venture above ground again. This time she encountered some beings who didn't seem to mind her presence among them. They recognised her life-force without judging her. The ants crawled over her -- they tickled -- and the four-legged creatures accepted her. It was the two-leggeds she had trouble with. It seemed that the more she ventured out, the larger she got; bringing attention to herself. Some of the two-leggeds passed by barely noticing her, but ultimately, someone who didn't like weeds would come upon her and cut her down.

This went on for years and years, until finally the voice she heard and the power of the Earth made her roots so strong that she began to speak with that same strength in her voice. The more she spoke her own truth, the more of her own underground wisdom surfaced in her words. She began to feel the need to communicate with her strong voice. She discovered that it did not matter how many two-leggeds wanted to chop her down or uproot her. She would rather die than speak in a hushed voice or in a voice that wasn't her own.

She spoke through her body. Most did not hear her sounds but many could see her. This was okay because she knew she was not limited to words to communicate. She was too strong now. Her voice sounded without sound. Her beingness spoke louder than words. As she began to trust her power more and more, she became even more powerful. She grew taller and taller above the ground, but this time she was not harmed. She did not stop to question why; she did not want to direct any of her power away from her progress in the surface world. At least not now, while she was establishing herself so vigorously.

People did not seem to notice her. She was still mostly alone, but she remembered her roots and drew strength from
them. They also wanted to see her succeed in the world above. Their hope and strength and love for her sustained her. When her loneliness lead to doubt, she let the gentler voices of life speak to her. She found encouragement from the other plants, birds, and animals, who also lived true to their natures. Some might say this approach was silly or whimsical, but these sentiments of others were much like those who tried to destroy her. She was now learning who to trust. She trusted these authentic beings who lived as they were meant to be. Their countenance was more beautiful than that of the other beings.

One day she noticed that many more two-leggeds were stopping to look at her. They spoke of her beauty and strength. They were in awe of her power to thrive as she did. She spoke to them in her own way, hoping they would understand her different language. It felt like they were relating. She understood them and they seemed to appreciate her and story. She realised that she had made it in the outer world intact. Not only had she survived, she was flourishing. She was living who she was from her roots to the tips of her edges, reaching out fully in the world. Once she had released the fear in her life and took over her own body, her essence bloomed. She had risked all and won everything in return.

Many people still walked by her without a second glance. But it did not matter as long as she could still sing her own song. Those who could hear would stop or at least acknowledge her presence. She was happy knowing she could live out her life being who she was. Why, just earlier today, somebody spent the whole morning painting her. Now she would be able to speak to others she didn't even meet. All because she grew to love who she was.

THE END
An interesting thing happened during the writing of this story. As I put the words onto the paper, images flooded into my being. It was as if I was doing the journeying imaginably as I wrote. I have not experienced this before or since. It was as if I was creating a passage at the same time as writing about one. The ending of the story is one I hope for in my own life — to be out in the world expressing who I feel myself to be. In a sense this is what often happens in passage rituals. Once over the threshold something new is discovered and brought back into everyday consciousness. It has not yet been embodied, but the seed has been planted so to speak. Thistle Wisdom did this for me.

Carl Jung, an early transpersonal psychologist, would describe the circumstance of my purchasing the thistle painting as a synchronistic event. Synchronicities, or “meaningful coincidences” occur as a result of a person’s inclination towards wholeness. This undertaking includes not only the individual, but the world surrounding the individual. This natural propensity towards wholeness occurs within the internal and external realms. This concept is articulated in this quotation by Edward Whitmont,

Outer events quite beyond our conscious control seem to correspond to and give form to various fundamental unconscious trends that are striving toward expression. A psychological problem that is taking shape within may concurrently find its enactment symbolically or directly through corresponding external events. These correspondences are not always exactly coincidental in time... (1991, 219).

In my example the exterior surfaced before I was aware of the internal implications. I was compelled to purchase an image I had no logical reason for. The rationale came later. In trusting my response to the print (or in trusting my
intuition) I allowed for a more conscious connection to form between myself and
the transpersonal or dreambody. Attention directed towards synchronistic events
facilitates more interaction on this level.

I feel that my previous experience in these kind of events allowed me the
confidence to follow the inner promptings attracting me toward this image.
Logically there was no motive for interest. I observed myself pondering the
significance of this symbol which was not yet imbued with conscious meaning. My
practical nature does not allow for extraneous purchases. But beneath this
discourse of pragmatics I heard a different voice. I stepped out of the known into
the unknown, trusting the quiet whispers my mind was unable to perceive.

Later, as I was finishing my Thistle Story, and looked across to the picture
hanging on my kitchen wall, I was overwhelmed by the assimilation of meaning.
The recognition engaged my whole body. It wasn’t a jogging in the brain, but a
stirring within every cell of my being. Yet, this instance could easily have gone
unrecognised in earlier times. It is only recently that I have learned how to read
myself/mybody. Maybe these impulses have been here forever, but I am only now
beginning to feel and acknowledge them. Remnants of growing up in a world that
paints these ways invisible. The kind of knowing elicited by these responses
requires a reciprocal state of awareness. First, in the second-hand shop I had to
trust my resonance with the image of the thistle even though I didn’t understand
it. Then, upon completing the story, I could not interfere with my response to the
connection between the image hanging on my wall and the image in my story.
Any struggle or force to hear this way and the words are elusive... invisible... non-
existent. The language I was taught in my youth lacked this vital vocabulary. It was through a gentle kind of hearing that I awakened this wisdom. The ability to acknowledge the invisible or unknown gives life to the not-yet-known or the Buddhist “unborn”. My awareness had to reach into this realm before the physical reality manifested.

Using the thistle story I can explain what the not-yet-known is. If the above ground world is perceived as reality, what lies beneath the surface is the unborn. It exists already, it is just not brought forth into surface reality. At one time Jung referred to this state as the collective unconscious, a source of knowledge of all life including unconscious elements of personal and transpersonal material. He later came to call it the objective psyche, denoting “a dimension of the unconscious psyche that is of an a priori, general human character, rather than merely the precipitate of personal repressed material.” (Edward Whitmont, 1991, p.41). His definition expanded the world of the unconscious to include archetypes, which are culturally specific energy patterns influencing us personally and collectively. Another way of describing archetypes is as “instinctual patterns of behaviour” (Anthony Storr, 1983, p.65). To help further understand the dynamics of archetypal energy I quote from Jung in one of his later writings;

The archetypes, which are pre-existent to consciousness and condition it, appear in the part they actually play in reality: as a priori structural forms of the stuff of consciousness. They do not in any sense represent things as they are in themselves, but rather the forms in which things can be perceived and conceived. Naturally, it is not merely the archetypes that govern the particular nature of perceptions. They account only for the collective component of a perception. As an attribute of instinct they partake of its dynamic nature, and consequently possess a specific energy which causes or compels definite modes of behavior or impulses... (1989, p.347).
In the thistle story an archetype at work would be the image of the weed as being offensive. A collective impression that weeds are bad, caused the individual weed to personally feel badly about being a weed. Moving into the unconscious realm underground helped the thistle to know itself without the negative archetypal influence directing its course. This unseen world offered a different viewpoint. It is in this world of the unconscious that we are able to go beyond personal awareness to access new knowledge. To the conscious mind or to the surface world the entry to this altered state of awareness seems like a death. The chopping down of a weed could look like a death to someone or another weed on the surface -- especially if there is no awareness of life underground. The rational part of the mind finds it difficult to give over to this unknown reality. In Anatomy of the Psyche, Edward Edinger describes this process in the following quotation;

It is as though the psyche cannot come into existence as a separate entity until the death of the literal, the concrete, and the physical. The collective unconscious is equivalent to the land of the dead or the afterlife, and a descent into the collective unconscious is called nekyia because an encounter with the autonomous psyche is felt as a death of this world. (Edinger, 1985, p.169.)

A journey into the unknown is like a death to the mind. A simple example of this is how hard it can be to quiet the mind in meditation. We know we are not dying, but the thinking mind does not find it easy to surrender to this receptive or non-active state. Silence, inaction, reflectivity are perceived as negative ways of being -- especially in the fast-paced, driven lifestyle dominating Western culture. Antero
Afli addresses the difficulties in trying to describe and experience no-form this way.

The limitless void is, as a rule, pointless to talk, think, or write about. Its actuality is not subject to categorization by ideas, images or for that matter anything conceptual mind is capable of creating to describe it. Yet, there are ways to refer to it and invite its effects. In everyday terms, it is perhaps the degree of comfort felt with not having to be anything or anybody... for being nothing; nobody. Our contemporary void-ignorant culture places little value on the No-Form state.... The majority of western society, however, has been well conditioned to avoid the void like the plague. After all, there are no security, status, symbolic or social rewards given out for being nothing. Who wants to be a ‘nobody’? (1999, p.4).

This western attitude works its way into so many aspects of our lives. It is even apparent in our educational settings. I was always curious about why teachers gave “participation” marks for extroverted classroom interaction, with no attention towards the introverted contributions. A real listener can do much to change the learning environment.

I learned how to listen when I joined a self-help group for adult children of alcoholics (ACOA). Within our circle of sharing, one person would speak at a time, and no one would comment on what this person said (this was called “no crosstalk”). I discovered that I tended to spend much of my “listening” time articulating what I was going to say in response. Throughout my involvement with this group, I witnessed myself release my agenda to respond in words and instead develop a feel for listening. Soon this feel became like a mode of communication. I was communicating (in my listening) that what the other person was saying had value, therefore, they, as a person, had value. The power of this interaction was very tangible, but invisible, and unknown to me until I experienced
it. Over ten years later I encountered the theory behind my "intuitive learning" when I read *The Confirmation of Otherness* by Maurice Friedman. Here is a quotation which illustrates my case history,

> What really matters in genuine dialogue is my acceptance of the "otherness" of the other person, my willingness to listen to her and respond to her address. In monologue, in contrast, I only allow the other to exist as a content of my experience. (Friedman, 1993, p.27).

Although this description includes a response by the listener, the sense of really listening is touched upon. It is as if the genuineness of hearing somebody imbues the discourse with vitality or spirit. This is what I felt when I learned to listen. Carl Rogers, in *A Way of Being*, describes the power of being heard,

> I find, both in therapeutic interviews and in the intensive group experiences which have meant a great deal to me, that hearing has consequences. When I truly hear a person and the meanings that are important to him in that moment, hearing not simply his words, but him, and when I let him know that I have heard his own private personal meanings, many things happen. (Rogers, 1980, p.10).

My own experience and the encounters Rogers depicts, convey a sense of moving beyond normal or typical parameters of communication. My *deep listening* requires that I move from an "on-call" position to one closer to no-thingness. I could even go as far as to say that in this kind of exchange I become a nobody; the very thing Alli says no one wants to be. Yet in reality, my receptive state allows someone else the freedom to be who they are. In a culture such as ours, where we are trained to be influential, this kind of (in)action feels wrong. We do not reward this behaviour. A slight shift in perception can alter our attitudes.
tremendously. Allowing for inactivity as a valid state of being can open doors to
the inner world of self and others.

The Puzzle of Opposites

Earlier I spoke of the valuing of "feminine" qualities. Receptivity is high on
the list of feminine characteristics. Within the Taoist philosophy of yin and yang,
yin qualities are quiescent, nurturing and responsive (feminine); yang qualities are
active, bright and dynamic (masculine) (Kaptchuk, 1986, p.19). If we lay this
template of polarity on top of western culture we can see that the yang is more
valued than the yin. A tendency to rank difference rather than assimilate contrast
not only diminishes one in the eyes of the other, it also initiates a sense of
opposition. Opposition creates a tension which can lead to conflict. I once took a
course in the Japanese Tea Ceremony where the Sensei (teacher) remarked that
westerners seemed to have great difficulty with contradictions, whereas in
Japanese culture contradiction held no problem. I remember his words cycled
through my body for many months to come. This whole notion of containing the
opposites allowed me a different way to perceive difference. In looking back to
the Taoist image of yin and yang; the original interpretation of yin is the shady
slope of the hill, and yang is the sunny slope of the hill (Kaptchuk, 1983, p.8).
Over the course of a day this changes, one becomes the other. Yin and yang are
constantly changing. When we try to make one right and the other one wrong the
movement becomes unbalanced, weighting one against the other. Change
becomes difficult. Movement happens when the tension of the opposites becomes so extreme something has to give. Ideally, equal energy must be applied to each. As I was discussing this idea with a friend, she remarked that it reminded her of playing on a teeter-totter when she was young. My recollection of playing on one reminds me how much more enjoyable it was to play with someone of more or less equal weight. If one of us was too heavy, there was no activity. This soon became boring.

Jung, who studied Taoism, discovered there was tremendous potential in the awareness of opposites. Edward Edinger illustrates Jung’s theory this way, “By the law of opposites, an intense awareness of one side constellates its contrary. Out of darkness is born the light.” (1998, pp. 149-50). So rather than favouring one over the other, an attentiveness towards both can create a space for something new to exist. Edinger further elaborates,

To the extent that the opposites remain unconscious and unseparated, one lives in a state of participation mystique, which means that one identifies with one side of a pair of opposites and projects its contrary as the enemy. Space for consciousness to exist appears between the opposites, which means that one becomes conscious as one is able to contain and endure the opposites within. (1998, p 187).

According to Edinger, the evolution of western consciousness of opposition was discovered by the pre-Socratic philosophers. In separating qualities into opposites a whole new space in between was created where growth could take place (1998, p.187). I interpret this as moving from a state of being into a state of becoming, which in turn moves back into a new state of being. Neither state is
static. Just as in the teeter-totter example, a balanced participation yields a more generative result.

Studies of Neolithic consciousness, by G. Rachel Levy, suggest a unified perception, which moved into a consciousness of duality as a by-product of a "mental revolution" initiated by the awareness of the cyclical nature of life. With the evolution of agriculture and the domestication of animals, people were able to develop an awareness of the movement in time. With this consciousness came the understanding of positive (birth) and negative (death) events (in Rich, 1986, pp. 115-6). The sun symbolised the light while the moon represented the dark (much like the Taoist symbols of yin and yang). Somehow the worship of the sun began to overpower the influence of the moon. Judgements about the value of one over the other created an imbalance. But it has not always been this way.

Adrienne Rich, in Of Woman Born offers more insight;

Why the sun should have come to embody a split consciousness, while the worship of the moon allowed for coexistent opposites, a holistic process, is an interesting question. The fact that the moon is itself continually changing, and is visible in so many forms, while the sun presents itself in one, single, unvarying form, may account for the kinds of human perceptions which would be powerfully drawn to one or the other. (1986, p. 125).

We have focused too much on the static sun and not enough on the fluidic moon. It is time to move into understanding the relationship of the two. If, in fact, human awareness evolved into this discovery from unity into duality, my sense is that it happened this way to enable further growth. It is not enough to remain in the tug of war, but to move beyond the struggle into the next stage. The key is to find a way into this place of in between without being caught up in the dichotomy.
Douglas Rushkoff, in *Playing the Future*, addresses the concept of opposition this way.

The maintenance of an 'us and them' model of society draws artificial delineations between people. The distinctions between guilty and innocent, have nots, oppressors and oppressed, and even, arguably, blacks and whites are not organic but invented. While most of us would prefer to erase these distinctions, the methods we use to do so perpetuate the problem. (1996, p.196).

We need to find a way out of this biased polarisation. When the *have* provide for the *have not* the differences are further highlighted. A power dynamic takes the place of a reciprocal relationship. The one with, gives, the one without receives. In a dualistic framework this is how the exchange operates. Soon we come to believe the world is made up of givers and takers. But there are other ways to exchange energy and resources.

I am reminded of how I felt when I breast fed my babies. The boundaries between giving and receiving were blurred. The cycling of give and take were not linear. Beyond the strong physiological responses, I felt deep emotional currents I could not *claim* as only my own. Each moment was a combination of the two frequencies dancing together. Although I cannot speak for my babies, I participated in something which was more than a feedback loop. The giving and receiving simultaneously created a wholeness embodying both elements. As these *opposites* (giver and receiver) interacted together a new reality was created in containing both - or letting it all flow freely through the body/ies. The container emptying and filling at the same time. I don't think it is necessary to experience breastfeeding to have a sense of this. I recall similar feelings when giving a bottle
to my baby sister. I always felt as if I was getting something back. Much is written now about the benefit of having pets and even plants to care for. It is a similar kind of relationship. If I am unaware of this potentiality to engender more than a dualistic, oppositional frequency, I diminish my capacity to experience this fuller reality.

**Beyond Duality**

Arnold Van Gennep, who first identified the common structure of rites of passage, noticed three specific phases in the ceremonies he studied: separation, transition, and incorporation (1960, p.11). As I write these words I notice how similar this transitional rite is to the process I just described above. Both begin with separation (or an awareness of otherness), move into the space in between, and finish with an amalgamation of something new. The journey of adolescence appears to follow the same course; separation from family, experimentalism to find oneself, and finally an integration into adulthood. These indications suggest that transitional states are fundamental to human development. Yet we don’t provide much attention toward states of becoming or to the place of in-between.

The focus is on the polarisation, one or the other, the feminine/yin or masculine/yang, with little attention given to the third thing created out of their relationship. This *third thing* has been a source of interest to me for most of my life. I say this in retrospect. As a youngster I had recurring dreams which would take on nightmarish proportions. It was always about two forces - chaos and
harmony. The images came mostly in feeling tones. Panic, discord, jaggedness, - then images of peace, harmony, smoothness. I would languish in the calm, only to have the other infiltrate. Soon I would be hyperventilating, terrorised by being stuck in this place. The constant back and forth wreaked havoc on my psyche. Eventually the dreams dropped off. I don’t remember if I was ever able to reconcile the differences then, but I have come to do this in my adult years through imagery work.

Imagery work, or as Jung called it, active imagination, is a process which begins with relaxation, followed by an inner journey. Once the mind has relaxed, ordinary consciousness gives way to a more creative, freeflowing awareness. Even daydreaming is a form of imagery work. Robin Robertson describes it this way, “Active imagination is designed to bring unconscious elements to the surface so that they can be integrated into conscious awareness.” (1998, p.45). In active imagination, the controlling aspects of the mind step down and allow the creative responses the freedom to explore uncharted terrain. New information surfaces to work with. Austin Clarkson calls this "primary carrier of information" the imaginal intelligence. He elucidates, "What I would like to call imaginal intelligence can be defined as the ability to create, apprehend, and interpret imagery and systems of symbols in various sense modalities." (1993, p.36).

Images appear in many forms beyond the visual. Personally, I experience feeling tones more readily than visual impressions. As long as I am sensitive to whatever impressions present themselves, and trust these inclinations, I find I can move into a different way of perceiving myself and my situation.
A fascinating thing about imaginal work is that it tends to fine tune itself to the person as an individual. Even when someone is leading an exercise, if instructions include the freedom to follow your own inclinations, a personally meaningful image usually surfaces. Often one image provides a multi-layered source for self-discovery. Clarkson further describes the power in imaginal intelligence,

The creative imagination condenses the conscious and unconscious situation of the moment into a single picture, story, song, or movement that is rich in meanings and values for the individual and invokes a sense of beauty, awe, and fulfilment. Activating the imaginal intelligence develops a dialogue between the inner and outer selves that becomes a conduit for transforming powerful instinctual energies into meaningful utterances that validate the individual's sense of authenticity and integrity. (1993, p.36).

I would like to offer my own story as a way to further understand how this can work. I was invited to attend an imaginal exploration to take place in an art gallery. After looking around we were invited to choose a place in the room we were drawn to. On the floor was a cast of a body without a head. A few feet away, on a bench were the “twins”. The twins were the conjoined heads of two people. Initially I felt as if I was a bridge between the twins and the body on the floor. But once introduced to the “seeing” exercises I shifted my attention from being a bridge between the twins and the body to the twins alone. [The seeing exercises started with relaxation, moving into various ways of sensing the environment]. Immediately after the exercise I wrote this,

I'm aware of being twins. At first the idea of duality seems overwhelming - lots of things to disagree about - but this is a forever thing as we are joined, so it is no longer overwhelming - it is twice the awareness - a sharing of combined experience. We play at
being individual - one sensing, then the other and we play at both sensing at the same time. It's easy to feel two things at the same time. It's fun to sing a song together; one stopping where ever and the other picking up - when we think we collide a lot, when we are free with it, it flows beautifully and harmonically. We share the same ears as we each have our own of everything else. It somehow seems easier to share a body than I thought it would be.

I particularly remember the frustration of having two people in one body/head. I placed my attention on one, but then the other popped in. The more I focused on one, the more the other felt neglected. A battle between them ensued. One moment I was here and the next moment I was there. This back and forth thing was exhausting. I realised that this would continue forever unless something changed. A question surfaced; How could I make this workable? An answer emerged from somewhere once I figured I could not solve it rationally with one or the other. Suddenly a new awareness came in which I was able to embody both these two realities. My perspective of impossibility transformed into a delightful exchange of enhanced ability. The union of opposites happened inside of me during that imaginal journey. I was able to bring the awareness I found there into my every-day world. In essence I returned from a non-ordinary space with a "new program installed". I was not yet proficient in accessing it, but it had now been added to my repertoire.

I found a resolution to the disturbing dreams of my youth. In essence, I recreated the passage rite in my imaginal journey. Separation from everyday thinking, followed by crossing the threshold into a new way of knowing, followed by an incorporation of the knowledge into the 'everyday' world. In retrospect, it
was once I moved from ordinary consciousness that I was able to find a solution to the dilemma I was experiencing. How was I able to move from ordinary thinking? Was it because the tension of holding the two opposites (personalities) was too much for ordinary consciousness? I am now reminded of a passage I read by Caroline Myss on ordinary thinking. She wrote: "The fact is that every person's life is being touched, somehow, by a crisis that is unsolvable through 'ordinary thinking', meaning the use of a previous effective solution applied to new problems." (1993, p.368). In my struggle to apply a this or that kind of reasoning to my predicament, I got nowhere but in-between the problem. Logic had to give way to something else in order to access new information. Again, another quote to explain the shortcomings of a linear perspective, "Our thinking processes, steeped in familiar and well-worn patterns of reasoning, have become exhausted and obsolete." (Myss, 1993, pp. 368-9). New approaches are needed in order to co-create new ways of solving problems. Logic cannot provide an answer to an irrational condition. Accessing the imaginal intelligence in this particular exercise led me into a fundamental issue I had been struggling with most of my life. I not only connected with it but also found a resolution. In, *Journeying: Where Shamanism and Psychology Meet*, Jeanette Gagan describes a similar process. She says,

Here we receive healing information, cross the bridge to our inner selves, forge new relationships with lost parts of our souls, and transform fragmentation into wholeness. As we return to ordinary reality, we bring forth our unity, and in so doing we augment the whole of society. (Gagan, 1998, p.136).
My imaginal work did bring me the sensation of wholeness she depicts. Although I was not aware of how this would affect the world around me, I did feel a substantial difference inside myself. I could not really explain what happened to me, but something changed.

Within our culture of logic (commonly associated with the male principle), it is considered undesirable to give way to unreasonable tendencies. It is as if we are trying to weed them out of our being. Women’s fluctuations of temperament (quite natural given her cyclical constitution), are not accessed, but instead, suppressed. The wisdom of the body is denied a voice. But it is not just women who suffer as a result – it is all of us who have inclinations towards freedom from these restraints. Imposing restrictions such as rationality on the human psyche, cause us to deny aspects of our beingness. Jean Liedloff, in *The Continuum Concept*, makes this observation, "I had never questioned my society’s unwritten law that sane members of the community inhibit their odd or ‘irrational’ impulses in order to avoid being feared or mistrusted." (1985, pp.143-4). Most would acknowledge we are more than our rational selves. But what do we do with the turbulent part of us that craves recognition? What happens when we do not safely give voice to these impulses? Gagan addresses the consequences here; “A society in which individuals are barred from giving authentic expression to their innermost feelings prohibits instinctual, archetypal energy from moving into consciousness.” (1998, p.131). The unsavoury elements are denied and forced underground. The suppression of this energy does not eliminate it – it only forces it to come out in unpredictable ways. When we enter this state of "senselessness"
we are at a loss as to how to handle it. Considerable effort is put into improving our rational abilities, but little is done to develop non-rational aptitudes. Yet the nature of life places us in situations where reason alone will not ensure well-being. I think teenagers, in particular, remind us of this part of life we tend to ignore. In turn, teenagers themselves, are largely ignored.

**Separation: A World of Their Own**

Many researchers of adolescents indicate a need for meaningful adult/teen relationships to help with the transition from child to young adult. In *A Tribe Apart*, Patricia Hersch writes, “The most stunning change for adolescents today is their aloneness. The adolescents of the nineties are more isolated and more unsupervised than any other generations.” (1998, p.19). Years ago teenagers wanted space. Our lifestyle now provides our youth with so much space, a new territory has evolved, displaying “DANGER: ENTER AT OWN PERIL” signs at the junctures. Adults have collectively abdicated the territory ruled by teenagers. Rushkoff offers the following; “The kids are creating tribes bound together by new sets of values that, because they are necessarily disconnected from the values of their elders, unfortunately often lack some of the tempered wisdom of an older civilization.” (1996, p.218). Not only are the elders abandoning the youth, the distance is creating a lack of appreciation for the “unknown element” on both sides. Generally, there is low respect for the opinions of young people. Adults appear to be intimidated by younger people (Bibby, 1992, p.187). A climate of
profanity surrounds teenagers. I recently saw a television show about Elvis Presley. According to this program, Elvis's massive appeal to teenagers, but disapproval by their parents, created what came to be called a generation gap.

Until this time the rift between parents and teens was minimal. When I look at old photos of teenagers before this era they look like younger versions of their parents. Suddenly, with post-war productivity and affluence, kids had their own money and marketers began to target their buying power. A whole new youth culture grew out of this time period. The archetype of the turbulent teens was substantiated and adults began to distance themselves from the chaotic activity. Teenage years became something to be endured rather than enjoyed (Bibby, 1992, p.190). Without the influence of elders, adolescents have to find their way on their own. Patricia Hersch raises important questions as a consequence of teenagers having to go it alone.

How can kids imitate and learn from adults if they never talk to them? How can they form the connections to trust adult wisdom if there is inadequate contact? How can they decide what to accept and reject from the previous generation when exposure is limited? (1998, p.20).

The result is a community of peers who look to each other for the answers to these questions. Hersch continues,

Their dependence on each other fulfills the universal human longing for community, and inadvertently cements the notion of a tribe apart. More than a group of peers, it becomes in isolation a society with its own values, ethics, rules, worldview, rites of passage, worries, joys, and momentum. It becomes teacher, advisor, entertainer, challenger, nurturer, insiprer, and sometimes destroyer. (1996, p.21).
I was travelling on a local bus last year and encountered a situation which exemplifies the prevailing attitude of the *terrible teens*. Here is an excerpt from my journal:

**Wed. Jan. 8 '98**

I had an interesting experience on the local bus. As I was waiting for it there were two teenage boys across from me (about 13 years old) who were using a lot of profanity in their conversation. I initiated eye contact with the boy facing me and he remarked to his friend to watch his mouth. I was relieved to have a rest from these words that can be so depressing. Once on the bus however, they both began to converse this way again. Besides the bus driver, them and me, there were four other people (adults) riding together. I wondered if the driver was going to say anything, but he didn't. I wondered if the man in front of me would say anything to them. I soon realised that every one was blocking them out to the best of their ability. It occurred to me that I, as a human being, had a responsibility to these boys who were disruptive and ignored at the same time. I turned around to look at them and caught the eye of the one who I originally connected with. I remarked on the fact that even though he had previously spoken to his friend about his language, he was now acting in the same manner as his friend had been. Their conversation took a different course and the rest of the trip was much more comfortable. This difference in the air was tangible. When I got off at my stop I turned to them and thanked them for being respectful.
towards us. They seemed to be genuinely grateful for this recognition. I am glad I moved beyond my fear to participate in life this way.

This incident still stands out as a strong reminder of how important my involvement in community life is. It did not require anything more from me than to relate with these kids on a humane level. In retrospect, I can see how easy it is to disengage in the same way the other bus riders did. There was no sense of community on this local bus, and anyway, who was I to step in and become involved? It was almost as if I could sense the archetypal energetic influence, cautioning me to withdraw, to become invisible or to render the boys invisible. It was as if I had to go beyond a programming, to allow the more authentic responses to surface. I witnessed myself and the other bus riders respond by ignoring their presence. Nobody wanted to engage with the trouble makers. Our (in)actions tell these kids they are not worth our attention. Here is another passage by Hersch;

A clear picture of adolescents, of even our own children, eludes us - not necessarily because they are rebelling, or avoiding, or evading us. It is because we aren't there. Not just parents, but any adults. American society has left its children behind as the cost of progress in the workplace. (1996, p.19).

I think back to my own teenage years. Who was there for me? Who did I listen too? Who listened to me? I had a couple of good teachers in high school, but by then access was limited to a class once a day for a semester. Not enough time for much to develop. I left girl guides behind in my pre-teen years -- I was not interested in learning what they wanted me to learn. My most cherished moments
of adult connection occurred over a kitchen table. Once in a while, when my mother's friends came over, I was allowed to sit down with them over a cup of tea. It was great to hear them tell their stories of everyday life, or of adventures from their youth. Sometimes I would have wonderful discussions with my boyfriend's parents. Not only did I discover more about these adults as people, I also learned how they were or how they reacted in various situations. This is the stuff of "expert" knowledge. Their stories provided me with insights about how to be in the world. Rushkoff elaborates:

Our cave-dwelling ancestors gathered around the fire each evening and told stories to one another. From what we can surmise today, these were not elaborate mythical or moral tales, but simple stories relating real-life hunting adventures, battles against the elements, and the true migrations of their own ancestors. (1996, p. 221).

Most of my adult interaction involved people telling me what to do; so rather than hear about various situations and how to handle them — weigh the responses in my own mind and come to my own understandings — I would come away from these discussions feeling lectured to, causing me to mostly discount what I heard. It was a different experience sitting at the kitchen table. Beyond the knowledge I gained from these interactions, is the feeling I walked away with. These occasions were precious times of feeling accepted — of being visible. In my recollection, acceptance by adults felt so much more nourishing than the comradeship of friends. As important as my friends were to me in establishing my identity, I harboured a strong and even underground need to become a person in the greater community. It was no longer enough to be the daughter of my parents. My family became something to pull away from.
Family Values

I hear a huge outcry for the return of *family values*. So many “experts” point the blaming finger at changing family mores. As a single mother I find the responsibility overwhelming. For too many years I allowed this judgement to immobilise me. Not on the home front, but within the community. Earlier I spoke of the feminist rhetoric, “The personal is the political”. As long as I feel I, alone, am responsible for the upbringing of my children, I will not anticipate help from anywhere else. And I will not obligate myself to become involved in other *private family situations*. But just as the nature of opposition is a construction, so is the *family unit*. Recently I went to the Toronto Archives to view a display on “development” or urban sprawl. I was drawn to the section on the growth of subdivisions, which began in earnest after the second world war. Images of happy families, with mom at home anxiously awaiting father’s arrival from work, covered the walls. Organic communities were replaced with planned communities, built upon the ideal of a mass-marketed reality. This was the picture I bought into in planning my own life. This quotation illustrates my rationale;

> The suburban house, the sensitive mother, the clean, healthy and nurtured children - this scene is often presented to us as a snapshot on other people’s mantelpieces. The desire to take up our place in that family portrait is fuelled by the many ‘photographers’ who construct the picture. (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989, p.118)
I tried to create this scene but was not successful. I struggled alone wondering why I was the only one to fail so miserably at real life. But in the real world my scenario is a natural response to the constructed family. Jean Liedloff offers her view of family life,

Families should be in close contact with other families, and everyone, during his or her working life, ought to have the opportunity for companionship and co-operation. A woman left alone every day with her children is deprived of social stimulation and needs emotional and intellectual support they cannot give. The result is bad for mother, child, family, and society. (1985, pp. 139-40).

It was not until I moved beyond the parameters of family to realise I was not alone. Contact with the outside world helped me understand my problem as a larger one -- one I shared with many others (the personal is the political). Once I admitted my failure I found myself reaching out for something more authentic. But my movement into this new pursuit required I forgo the foundation I built my life upon.

After my trip to the archives the sense of family values became a quest of sorts. I soon came upon this passage by Rushkoff which helped me to further understand the construct of family.

What we have lost is a sense of community values, and the family is being asked to pick up the slack. Urban planning, housing projects, purgatorial suburbs, and poor communication combined to dissolve the natural bonds of community within a nation of immigrants. We became family units, cut off from our one another, each as sad and unfulfilled as our neighbours, but afraid to tell the truth.

Family values were really just a marketing concept, designed to sell the highest volume of products to the richest people in the history of the world. How do we get every single family on the block to buy a
product - like a bbq grill - when just one nice one would do for all of them, - probably be more fun? Instil a sense of competition among families Be the first on your block. Woefully, this was done at the direct expense of community values. To keep up with the Joneses, you have to see them as the enemy. (1996, p.216).

This was the first piece of theory I came across which reinforced my intuition about the influence of the family. This discovery did not come easily to me. Over the last few months, my sensitivity towards family values caused me to re-evaluate a long friendship with someone who is firmly entrenched within a strong family unit. I believe that in feeling the intense isolation of being an outsider to this family system helped me to come to the awareness I have now reached. It is a difficult concept to grasp, especially in light of deathbed declarations of not spending enough time with family. But I have come to understand that for me, it is equally important to extend my sense of family out into the community, human and non-human.

A big “aha” came for me when I realised I could not provide my teenage daughters with everything they needed. I watched them thirst for interactions with female elders. I spoke earlier of their elation to the news of a meditation group for teens. It was hard for me to fully come to grips with the fact that they did not want me to be involved. I am not so much talking about a feeling of rejection, as a feeling of having to abandon them to a world which seems so unresponsive to their needs. It is hard to let go when you know they are journeying into a world so hostile towards their generation. The very nature of their age requires a focus beyond home and family. As I began to research the transition from child to young
adult I began to feel more comfortable with my intuitive sense that I could not initiate my daughters by myself. I had only my own experience to draw upon, which told me I could not expect them to take from me what I refused to take from my own mother. But again, I needed reassurance from outside (the experts) that my inner wisdom was rooted in a sound theory. I discovered that my instincts were based upon centuries of tradition throughout many cultures all over the world.

**The Case for Passage Work**

"The history of traditional rites of passage would suggest that this time of life around puberty and early adolescence is opportune for major learning, a situation not yet adequately appreciated or understood by our culture." (Mahdi, 1996, p.xiv). I remember my initial response to "rites of passage". Somehow in my mind I entertained images of "primitive" cultures doing "nasty" things to their bodies – archaic belief systems enacted in response to superstition. I am embarrassed to write these words now, especially after I have come to respect some of the ancient traditions I once dismissed as irrational. But I must be honest. I have not always felt the way I do now. I was one of those of this culture who did not understand. It was only after my own personal participation in a rites of passage program, that I was able to release my judgements. And, prior to my involvement in this program, I prepared the way towards understanding by opening my mind enough to actually study ritual. Ritual was another "loaded"
word in my vocabulary. I have been fortunate to find my way into undergraduate and graduate studies that have encouraged me to broaden my horizons in these areas. But given the current climate in our western culture, I wonder how others who have not been introduced to this work can ever come to understand the value of these missing elements.

I grew up in a non-religious family, but was forced to attend Sunday School and three years of confirmation classes within the Lutheran Church. Once my official induction into the church was completed I never crossed that threshold again. My pastor had no faith in the Bible stories, "Let's be reasonable, afterall". As far as what I learned at home, faith is for the weak or deficient. Maybe if I had grown up in different circumstances I would not have been so embarrassed or arrogant about ritual. My exposure to meaningful ritual has been limited. My initiation into Brownies was always a puzzle to me. When I was spun around and told to look into the mirror that symbolised a pond I was told to answer the question, "Who do you see?" with "I see myself." I remember we would dance in a circle around a big papier-mâché mushroom and have groups called fairies or pixies. But all of the symbolism was lost on me. I don't believe this is entirely due to my lack of imagination, but is reflective of the leaders' inability to connect with the Spirit of the symbology. It is funny how I've always wondered why I was supposed to respond with that answer. I always had a feeling I was missing something about the whole ritual, but could never put my finger on it. I just thought I wasn't smart enough. But I was just too rational! -- at such a tender age. Without an awareness of life beyond our obvious senses, it is difficult to
introduce the need to access this territory. And this is the territory passage work thrives in. Teens hunger for acknowledgement of this space in between the lines. But most adults have not explored this region for themselves so how can they help the youth navigate this unknown region?

We seem to accept the mid-life crisis as a crisis of identity, and many, like myself, are finding answers to our quest in activities which take place out of the mainstream. But I can't help but wonder if this search is directly linked to missing the successful passage during the teen years. I remember seeing the cover of New Age Journal a number of years ago. It said, “Are We Raising a Nation of Cry Babies?” This particular issue focused on the Inner Child Movement. Within this paradigm is the understanding that we are adults on the outside, but still children on the inside. I can only imagine how it must feel to children looking to elders for answers, only to find the elders still don’t know. Hersch offers this observation:

Today’s teens have grown up in the midst of enormous social changes that have shaped, reshaped, distorted, and sometimes decimated the basic parameters for healthy development. They have grown up with parents who are still seeking answers to what it means to be an adult man or woman. They have lived in families that seldom coincide with the old ideal, and in a culture where the traditional wisdom of how to raise children has been replaced by a kind of daily improvisation as parents try to fit child rearing into their busy lives. (1996, p.18)

My previous work in a New Age Centre has enabled me to meet many people searching for answers to the meanings of their lives. Their intense craving often renders them incapable of reaching out to others. I do not feel this is due to selfishness, but to a lack of confidence in themselves as elders. In this
environment full of spiritual teachers, there is a perpetuation of long-term initiates. My observations are supported by this quotation, "In traditional societies of the past, the elders knew what they had to do to teach their young. Our elders today are often going through passages themselves, which may be one reason why there are so few elders, parents, and mentors, available to help our young people." (Mahdi, 1996. p.xv). I have met many qualified people who have the skills to do passage work, but without some kind of authoritative voice to help people realise their accomplishments, they remain underground. And I am not talking about a degree in child psychology or teaching. I am referring to the qualification of maturity. In our climate of experts, it becomes difficult to substantiate experience. We are reluctant to recognise our transition to adulthood when we are constantly looking for answers outside of ourselves. Douglas Rushkoff comments on "Adult Children": "Rather than being an adult-child who wanders through life on faith [expecting divine intervention], be a child-adult - a child of chaos - who surfs through life accepting the responsibility of self-determinism and the grace of non-linear experience." (1996, p.105). Here he refers to the reality of a world which encompasses the unknown, and the felt spirituality, rather than dogma and simplistic linear forms of existence. If we could legitimise our experienced knowledge, we would provide role models for our youth. Our own confidence in our personal wisdom, would provide a template for them to authenticate their own.

Even within our institutions of education, we mark the achievements with a ceremony. We provide a diploma, or a degree. Often there is a celebration. If we
collectively agree the teenage years are tough, why do we not applaud its successful passage? The transition from childhood into adulthood should also include training and be recognised with some kind of observance. Michael Ventura has this to say about the lack of passage rites,

Because our culture denies the craving we can’t possibly meet the need - so most of us never truly feel grown-up or feel, in our hearts, adult.... For tribal people, the initiatory moment was by far the most intense period of life, lasting no more than weeks, at most about a year. For us it now lasts decades.” (in Mahdi, 1996, p.54).

With our inclination to deny the importance of non-familial involvement, the lack of passage confirmation, and the exclusion of adolescents into our world, we add to the perpetuation of eternal puberty.

**Prolonged Childhood**

An article I read in my local newspaper offers a glimpse into current attitudes concerning teen violence. "Lack of parental guidance contributes to violence" reads the headline. "Parents must play a greater role in teaching traditional values to their children.... Why do kids go to gangs or belong to alternative groups? ... 'Every child wants to be supported, listened to. Don’t leave it up to the school system to be the parent,' Auty said." (Brown, 1999, p.4). I am not denying the important role parents have in raising children, but when I see the words traditional values I begin to wonder about what we are not providing for our youth. In another related article the closing sentence reads, "Parents should be accountable." (Brown, 1999, p.3). How will our children ever grow up if they
are not held accountable? How can we teach them to discover their own
strengths and limits? Controlling our youth is not a substitute for preparing them
for adulthood - it only postpones the transition. No wonder it takes so long to grow
up. I wrote the following letter which was printed in the newspaper a week later;

To the Editor of the Richmond Hill Liberal

Are we sending teenagers the wrong message?

I am writing in response to Jennifer Brown's articles concerning teen
violence. I agree we have a problem with teen violence but I do not feel the
answer is to hold the parents accountable for the behaviour of our youth. I am not
denying they have an important role in bringing up their children, but when we talk
about traditional values it is important to remember that traditionally, the
adolescent years are a time of differentiation from the family. Hopefully, by now,
the children can communicate with their parents and know their parents' take on
life. Now is the time to discover and develop their own sense of self-governing.

It is the role of the community to step in and provide guidance here - at
least, this is how it has been done traditionally. Unfortunately, many people
perceive teenagers (and teenage-hood) as negative. Maybe teens are only
responding to our signals. We, as their community, generally try to stay out of
their way. The problem will not be solved in one letter, but it might be eye-opening
to notice your own inclination upon seeing a group of kids hanging out at the
corner store. Notice how you feel and what your body is registering. Do you
inwardly react the same way upon viewing a group of toddlers frolicking in a
park? A small shift in your own perception can do much to change the climate
teens inhabit.

As adults it is our responsibility to foster an inclusive attitude towards
adolescents even if they act like they don't want to be included. The more we
distance them from our world the less they will care about participating in it. When
we expect teens to be accountable for their actions we are affirming their place
within the community.

It was important for me to express what my studies were leading me to discover.

Gradually, the passage that began with the writing of this paper, started to reach
beyond the words I put onto the page. I found I could not continue until I put some
of my thoughts out into my community. Once I wrote the letter I was able to return to my work, but with a deeper sense I what I wanted to sort through.

**Fostering Inner Guidance**

Often we do not teach our children how to work things out for themselves. As a parent it is difficult for me to step back and watch my children make the mistakes essential for learning. Bibby remarks on how teens respond to their parents' impulse to curtail exploration; "When most parents are putting limits in place, they are motivated by a desire to protect the people they love. But the message teens receive is not on the 'protect' or 'love' frequency. The message they hear is, 'I want to control you'." (Bibby, 1992, p.213). I dealt with this myself as a teenager. The inclination I spoke of earlier, where the adolescent is differentiating from the family, is also a difficult transition for the parents. As a child moves from responding to outer authority to developing an inner authority, the conversion is basically an invisible one. In our culture it is difficult to trust the unseen. How do we know our children will make the right choices? Especially if we have been making them for them until now.

When I was nineteen I went to a Montessori Training College in London, England, where I was fortunate to be instructed by two women who trained with Maria Montessori herself. My favourite lectures were the ones where we heard actual stories involving her personally. Some of the best wisdom came from these little anecdotes. One account I remember in particular was about children playing
in a school yard. My elderly instructor mentioned she was terrified of hazardous physical activity. When she saw children climbing high trees she wanted to rush over and save them. Dr. Montessori took her aside and explained to her that if a child was inclined to climb a tree, you let her. If it was troublesome to watch, then look somewhere else. She also told her not to put a child in a tree if it was requested. Getting up there in the first place helped to figure out how to get down (a much trickier feat).

I believe this was the first time I had ever heard of such a thing — allowing a child to do something dangerous and looking away at the same time. In my strong desire to protect, I was limiting the experience of my students or my own children. Now I have come to understand that if I climbed the tree myself I could provide even more support than by looking away. Just holding an attitude of success can do much to provide invisible support. One of the best ways to acquire an encouraging approach is to have experience in what you are supporting. Or even experience in struggling through an unfamiliar task. The more I faced new experiences, the more I was equipped to handle the unexpected. My skills are transferable — "If I can do it, you can do it". But coming from an environment that promotes safety, it is difficult to know when to step back and allow experience to be the teacher. We want to care for our children, but in doing too much for them, we provide a limited capacity for problem-solving. Liedloff provides an observation about the high accident rate among American middle-class youths, "It is no coincidence that those Americans are perhaps the most carefully protected children in history as regards external safeguards, and
are therefore the least expected to know how to look after themselves." (1985, p.101). In our desire to safeguard our children we are not encouraging the development of many necessary skills. By stepping aside from time to time (or turning your head when your child is climbing a tree), you are not abdicating parental responsibility, but instead helping the child learn to manoeuvre life situations. The following quotation by Rushkoff corresponds with some of the feelings I have about the transition into self-directed responsibility:

The good child unquestioningly obeys until he is old enough to determine for himself whether the stove is turned on or not. His later, adult decision to use the senses at his disposal to judge for himself the extent of the stove's threat is not a flagrant rejection of his mother's love or an attack on the genuineness with which she exercised her authority. It's just growing up. (1996, p.252).

This passage highlights the conflicting feelings involved in the parent/child separation and the threat of learning from experience. As a parent it is hard for me to watch my child approach a hot stove and not say anything. How do I know when she knows it is hot? I will likely keep repeating it until she demonstrates her awareness of the danger. But at some point she has to identify the danger with her own senses -- not just take my word for it. I may observe her make the painful discovery or not. I witnessed my eldest daughter learn for herself the importance of keeping a safe distance from the wood stove we used to heat our home. As she bent over to put her socks on she brushed against the hot surface and was burned. My repeated admonishments suddenly made corporal sense to her. She never needed reminding again. It was a painful situation for both of us. I felt guilty for not getting to her soon enough. But where does my responsibility end? Once
she discovered for herself the danger of the hot stove, she took it upon herself to not move so close to the comforting warmth. This situation could be viewed from two perspectives; one, I was negligent in the care of my six year old, or two, she learned to trust her own senses. Fortunately it was not a severe burn, just enough to impress upon her the reality of hot. But this example provides an insight into the difficulties of teaching right action. At some point the knowledge must become an embodied knowledge and if we as parents curtail experimentation, we will forever be required to intervene for our children.

I recall an article written by David Suzuki about a school playground where teachers and students had planted a garden. It was decided that the garden be paved over due to the severe bee allergy of a student. Rather than prepare the child for the “real” world, officials instead altered the terrain to make it safer for the child at risk. But in my mind, in choosing to destroy the natural world in favour of possibly protecting a child from a life threatening bee sting, we have failed to prepare the child for life. Wouldn’t it serve the child better if s/he was taught how to manage this allergy rather than expect the world to adapt to her/his needs? This fosters an attitude of remoteness. How will the child explore direct experience with life if others mediate? Their concern gets in the way of learning. But as parents, how can we step back and watch our children get burned or stung by bees? It hurts too much.

Ideally, the child needs the freedom to safely explore life beyond the boundaries of family. This is not as easy as it might sound. Often children internalise their parents, so separation is not so easy to achieve. Maintaining
physical distance is not enough. There is a need to psychically separate also. As a teenager I interpreted this to mean a negation of family rather than differentiation. For me, my big struggle was to separate from my mother. She seemed to be right inside me all the time and I didn’t know how to get away (thinking that getting away was the answer to finding myself). The following is a chronicle of some of my struggles.

**Mother Daughter Separation**

In my own life, *not her* (mother), became who I was. Most of my responses were in relation to who I didn’t want to be. I searched for myself by negating her. As I trace my mind back to that time, I realise she was central to my existence; not because she gave me life, or provided half of my genetic material, or even because she was the person I interacted with the most. It was as if everything I did was in some way related to her and I was tired of her being in my space all the time - literally, inside my cells or something. I guess I thought the best way to get her out of there was to throw her out. Every time she made an appearance (thought, word, or deed), I would renounce her; mentally, emotionally, and physically. There was no room for both of us inside of me.

How to make room for myself when she looms so large and omnipotent?

“Vacate the premises Mom, I’m kicking you out. You don’t belong in here.” Funny that this was the only way I knew. It took me many years to move beyond *not her* into ‘this is me’. If other teen daughters feel this way, it is imperative that
someone teaches them how to navigate a new inner terrain. In my many talks with women about their transitions through adolescence, even the ones who were close to their mothers, a theme of privacy emerged. There were many things they did not want to share with their parents or family. Not that they were all bad things, just that a separate part of themselves needed to grow. The search for a new inner landscape may require movement away from the known into the unknown, but isn’t it more empowering to have a destination beyond ‘not here’?

How about setting a course for ‘that’s who I am’?

I remember how much I enjoyed being a Brownie when I was a little girl. Being part of a community where I learned new things and, as I got older, becoming responsible for those who were new to the group. By the time I reached Guides I struggled with staying. I was no longer willing to do what everyone told me to do. There was little room for individual pursuits or decision-making - the only decision I was able to make was to leave the group or stay. I chose to leave. It was a sad choice, but I felt there was no room for me to find myself there. The skills I could learn there were geared towards homemaking and other practical applications. My soul was longing for something more expressive. I quit and joined majorettes instead. At least with a baton in my hand I could channel some creativity in a physical way.

When I moved away from Guides, I moved away from a community including elders into a community of peers. It was not that I didn’t like to interact with older people, it was just that they didn’t seem to be involved in any of the things I was interested in. I had no one to teach me how to know my own
responses or inclinations. There was no space for this anywhere. Teaching was about transmission of knowledge, not the development of indigenous knowledge. My choices were limited to acceptance or rejection. My sense of finding my own identity moved from an impulse of opposition -- so that my sense of individuality required I establish myself only in relation to my mother. It was a constant struggle to not be her. This formula lead me even further away from myself. A negation of my mother included a negation of the qualities I inherited from her.

I realise that not all daughters define themselves in opposition to their mothers, but as this is my experience it is what I know best. As someone who will be helping other women make the passage from mother’s daughter to individuated self, I had to understand what separation entailed for me -- both from my mother and from my daughters. Rather than quote from books I read, I am including journal entries I wrote while I was immersed in this process. My journalling and meditations provided a deeper inquiry than I was able to access in books.

Journal Entry Saturday November 21 '98

I so often find myself mirrored in my daughter's lives and it causes me to freeze-up or something. I don't quite know how to respond because I remember myself in similar situations -- and I think "Who am I to give advice when I screwed up in the same way?" -- or I resonate so strongly to their situation that my own reaction is their reaction... These conflicting viewpoints stop me in my tracks. Maybe my mother/daughter dilemma -- my inability to SEPARATE my experience from their
experience, constellates so that their situations and my past situations come together in some kind of way that unites into a complex or something — So that what was initially my own experience, is replayed in their similar experience and my identification with it turns it into something else — something that moves beyond I/thou and becomes we — hence the blurred boundaries.... Whew it is hard to explain these ramblings, but I FEEL (in my body) that they are leading somewhere...

Energetically, my resonance with my daughters' similar situations causes me to join their camp so-to-speak. Now this often occurs with — and is the basis of — close friendship, but when it happens in the mother/daughter relationship something different happens. I remember the first time my eldest daughter ever fell over and bumped her head. Her pain went right through me. Maybe because we once shared a body this connection is not severed by birth. It is a psychic or energetic link as tangible as any touch I have ever experienced. This is aKIN to how it feels when my daughters have pain now. That same flood of pain/jubilation/anger... that happens inside of their bodies flows into mine as well. [talk about boundary issues!] But it is not about some kind of emotional confluence or a matter of will or body invasion — although it can feel like an invasion. It all takes place energetically and is as natural as a mother responding to her baby’s cry. (At least this is what I am getting about it now). So although this is crucial for the survival of an infant it becomes invasive as the person grows into self-sufficiency. Yet how do we learn to sever a bond that is psychically invisible? Both culturally and physically? How does one sever that bond that recognises
similar DNA? Cells of the same make-up but contained within different boundaries of skin. I am reminded of experiments where blood samples of ill people (with cancer I think) were tested after treatment was done on the patients. Even though the blood was outside of the body, miles away in test tubes on a lab shelf, the signs of the treatment performed on the person registered in these distant blood samples. So if this occurs within the physicality of glass containers, what about the physicality of human containers? The only difference is that the human container holds two strands of DNA. Twice as much to respond to. How is there a difference between the father's genetic material and the mother's? What is the influence of sharing the same body? No wonder there is so much written about "the mother". But until now I have approached it more as a psychological matter. I see now that this approach cannot come close to understanding it and dealing with it. It is a phenomena that reaches beyond the limited scope I have been viewing it with. I wonder if it is even possible to separate these invisible strands. Maybe they are not meant to be severed (it is energetically impossible — against universal laws...) An approach to dealing with this might better be found in understanding these "laws". If I can "see" this energetic strand at work in my relationship with my daughters, then I can choose to acknowledge the link but not feel ownership of the connection. What am I trying to get at? Because I only notice the connection, I feel responsible for these impulses. They sympathetically vibrate in my body so I feel it is my responsibility to absorb and deal with them. If I can instead, allow the resonances to vibrate, not claim ownership (not hold on to them), but allow them to flow without crystallising them then I am allowing the
agency of “other” to flow back into them. I no longer “rob” them of their reality and experience. I let it flow in its natural way (and it feels so natural or like mine because the genetic code is a part of me) but do not try to dam it up or re-route it. [Images of man Vs nature surface in my mind]... So maybe this whole paradigm of separation/severing is a little off — impossible. Better to rework the image to include the connectedness of life. If trees send energy from their roots to ailing trees why would we humans be that much different. The key is in ownership or responsibility for energy that circulates outside of the body...

More Musings on the Mother/Daughter Relationship  November 24'98

I remember when I needed to heal the leftovers of early sexual abuse. I tried many times to enter this zone, but something kept holding me back. It was my mother. I don’t know whether this is because of our connection or because of her response when I first told her about my grandfather’s sexual interest in me. I finally approached her when I was thirteen, no longer able to deal with it myself. She told me to ignore him, he had been drinking. She couldn’t deal with it either. Finally, when I was thirty-five and my father stuck his tongue in my mouth when kissing me hello I knew I could no longer zone out from this reality. As I came closer to facing this experience I also noticed a part of me that couldn’t face it. I realised I felt like I was betraying my mother by looking at it. The only way to get into it was to separate from her. Symbolically I had to sever the tie in order to enter the scary terrain. To do otherwise would have kept me forever in limbo. I tried to explain, but she has never understood. How could I explain that my
reactions could only be her reactions until this temporary disconnection enabled me to source myself? I was finally able to enter the space where I could deal with my experiences from my own perspective after this severance.

But upon meeting face-to-face a few years later I realised the connection was deeper than I knew. I went to visit her and her new husband and was surprised to witness my ingrained responses surfacing. We were in the kitchen and Mom made one of her typical comments that would have sent my father into a rage. As she was speaking these dangerous words I noticed myself energetically contracting. I held my breath and waited for the blows. They never came. I could feel no tension in the air in present time. Instead, her husband looked at her with love in his eyes and laughed with her. I was stunned!

Something very new had just happened — at least for me it was new — she seemed totally familiar with the response. I guess living ten years this way has imprinted a new pattern in Mom, but I am still resonating with the one I grew up with. A part of me felt like moving down south to be with them so I could absorb this unaccustomed exchange, but I was an adult now with my own family to care for. I had to find my way to my own reactions.

I think back to last month when my sixteen year old daughter said she had to leave for a couple of days. I argued with her, I forbade her to leave, I begged her to tell me what was wrong.... Finally the sheer uselessness of discussion hit me, and I started to sob in a way I never have — at least not since being a toddler. A status reversal, or role reversal shifting the course of our exchange.

She ran into her bedroom and brought me Clara, her stuffed doggie from infancy.
I looked at her, with her new stuffed animal — a present from her boyfriend — tucked in her arm. “How could she be giving me Clara”? Clara has seen her through the many crises of her life — her fall down the well, when she was rescued by a whole team of firemen — the split-up of her parents — the arguments with friends — the death of our family cat.... My first reaction to Clara being handed to me was to push her away. “I don’t want your Clara”. In my mind and heart all I could feel was: ‘I can’t accept you are turning away from your lifelong comfort’. Yet in the same moment I saw her new teddy — a teddy that told me she was no longer the little girl I remembered, but a young woman growing into her maturity. All this happened in the pulse of a heartbeat. With the next beat of my heart I reached for Clara and brought her close to me. I looked at my daughter from a new perspective — as if she was trying to break out of an egg or something. I could not stifle this birth. Everything crystallised in that moment when she handed me Clara. I realised she needed to grow into a new direction that was not a part of me.

Maybe she was faced with a similar struggle — how to separate her own reactions from mine. But does it require severance? Or pulling away? In one of those synchonistic ways I happened to come upon a children’s book called Sara and the Foreverness of Friends of a Feather by Esther and Jerry Hicks. Something that stood out was Sara’s discovery that much of her life was spent resisting, rather than allowing. It reminds me of that repulsion/scary or attraction/harmony thing of my childhood dreams. Her teacher, an owl named Solomon says, “I am wanting you to get the idea of relaxing toward what you do
want, rather than pushing against what you do not want" (Hicks, 1998, p. 159). I had to stop and ponder on this for a while. I thought about magnets and polarisation - how easily they come together, or the way they struggle against each other. Then I recalled the process of sympathetic vibration, here described by George Leonard, "nature seeks the most efficient energy state, and it takes less energy to pulse in cooperation than in opposition." (1986, pp. 13-4). Also known as entrainment, Leonard offers these examples of how this phenomenon can be observed:

The hearts of patients lying alongside one another when being operated on start to beat in unison once the surgeon has exposed them. The brainwaves of people who understand one another — clergymen and their congregations, politicians and their audiences, and professors and their students — achieve 'resonance' remarkably quickly no matter how far apart they may initially have been. They soon oscillate together. (in Berendt, 1988, p. 127).

I began to consider how inclinations away from something were less energising than being in harmony with something. I have noticed this in relations with other people, but I had not previously contemplated my relationship with myself this way. Becoming aware of my internal tendencies provided me with a sense of how to be in sync with my own vibration. Rather than continuously notice what I didn't like, I could be attentive to what felt good or right. Solomon, the owl, continued speaking to Sarah about reducing the patterns of resistance. My mind jumped to the phrase "lowered resistance". In my life, this has a negative implication. I get sick when my resistance is low. Maybe it is some kind of archetype at work - adversarial in nature? It got me to exploring how it feels when I move in sync with
something or when I move in reaction against something. I recalled a recent experience on the Go bus on my way home from school one evening.

A man came and sat down beside me. As he settled in he began to spread out. He was not a big man, but was taking up a lot of room. The more he intruded on my space, the more I tried to compact myself. As I watched myself grow smaller and smaller, I noticed his body pushing further into my seat. How much smaller could I make myself? Then a new impulse entered my consciousness. What if I energetically enlarged myself? I began to breathe more deeply and relax into the space I was occupying, as if I belonged there. Within about thirty seconds he pulled back. His leg no longer pushed mine into the corner, his shoulders moved upright. My mind/body raced back to that moment in my mother's kitchen where I tried to make myself invisible to avoid the impending conflict. But something different happened then, and now I was trying something different here. I did not try to push the man beside me away, I only gave myself permission to be present in my seat. To feel who I was sitting in that seat. So rather than pull away from him, I moved towards myself, or embraced myself. It turned into an empowering experience.

I knew the next step in my life was to explore the value in creating a different inner language that empowered, rather than functioning in reaction against. Intuitively I knew the value of resonating with myself, or connecting with my own vibration. But to have an outer manifestation of this inner state was very
encouraging. I needed to nurture this sense of moving towards myself rather than away from what I knew wasn’t myself. There is a huge difference in this approach. I revisited my writing where I first began to question the nature of separation and realised that I was actually reformulating my understanding in the writing of those words. Not an act of will, or of deliberate focusing, but out of an earnest desire to know separation in a new way.

Journal Entry One Month Later

Last month I was walking with my dog in the hills. I had just finished a steep climb. I had been aware of my connection with everything around me. What was outside of me and what was inside of me were of the same substance. I wondered what differentiated me from everything else. I realised it was the edges of my body. That is what made the difference. The world contained within me is the same as everything else, but what gives it a special meaning is how it is contained in my body. It is hard to put into words, but the moment was numinous. I was both myself and everything. Suddenly I made a difference. I could have some influence over how the world moved through me.

Yes, it has been helpful to read the books that chronicle the state of the world today — particularly the ones about the need of mentors for adolescents. But all the books seem to be saying the same things over and over again. We realise the world we live in does not create enough room/time for optimum relationships. Short of restructuring the whole economic system, there is little hope of making any sweeping change. In the meantime things deteriorate. I
began to notice myself responding to the "problem" in a less sympathetic way. Rather than fall into the abyss of hopelessness, I noticed myself searching inwardly for another way of viewing the situation.

Later I was speaking with a friend, trying to describe the feeling of being the same as everything inside and outside, with only my skin separating me from everything. She reminded me that it also connected me with everything. That funny thing about opposites again. But what I was really trying to put into words is that strong sense of relatedness with all life. In my sympathetic resonance I was not noticing the differences that I could make. Life inside the boundaries of my body reflect life outside the boundaries, but what I add to my inner world can also be added to the outer world.

Slowly, over the months I was able to feel myself as my mother and also as myself. It was during my reading of Anatomy of the Psyche that I understood mother as prima materia, or the prime matter the alchemists use to work their magic (Edinger, 1985, p.212). Yes, my basic substance came from my mother, but it was what I did with this substance that made me myself. A shift from receiver of genetic material into creator using genetic material entered my realm of consciousness. Or in terms of narrative discourse, I was reconstructing the meaning of my experience. John Dewey's work was the first to introduce me to the idea of not only recalling past experience, but reframing it in a way which serves to educate and create the person I can become. This passage relates to the alchemical process of individuation I spoke of at the beginning of this paragraph;
Natural impulses and desires constitute in any case the starting point. But there is no intellectual growth without some reconstruction, some remaking, of impulses and desires in the form in which they first show themselves. (1938, p. 64).

It is in this area of reconstruction of experience where involvement of the community is helpful. Within our families and even our friendships we are known in a certain way, and familiarity has a tendency to (re)cognize in a limited way. We have many qualities which are often not perceived until initiated in new and non-ordinary circumstances. The teen years are a time where there is a strong impulse towards new experiences.

The Natural Inclination for “Non-ordinary” Experience

In my early teens I was fascinated with different religions, psychic phenomena, tales of the supernatural, and altered states of consciousness. This poses a serious threat to many adults. If something as basic as listening is so foreign to our culture, then the realm of the no-form holds even deeper fears. The non-rational seems like a scary place so we tend not to encourage our teenagers to go there. In my very first job as a majorette instructor and choreographer I would finish the senior classes with a guided relaxation. This was in the early seventies, and few people knew about what it was and its benefits. Many of the parents were disturbed by this activity. The girls loved it! I was told to stop or lose my job. Almost thirty years later people are still frightened by meditation and other forms of transpersonal states. (Un)fortunately, there is a strong urge in
adolescents to access this world, but we try to dismiss these impulses instead of fostering them into safe and beneficial outcomes.

In Crossroads, Michael Ventura writes about the extremism of adolescence. He uses the word “extremism” to describe what he calls “the intense psychic cacophony of adolescence.” (in Mahdi, 1996, p.53). Other researchers have noticed similar findings in their work. “Teens exhibit a high level of receptivity to matters spiritual, including meaning, purpose and life after death. There’s also an extraordinary interest in supernatural phenomena.” (Bibbey, 1992, p.247). If we deny this need in our children for access to this world, they have to find ways to experience it by themselves. Shelley Kessler writes,

Finally, I learned that the human spirit yearns for non-ordinary experience, for states of mind that are radically different from everyday waking consciousness. If we guides and mentors will not speak of such territory and give them healthy, integrated ways to reach these lands, I learned that our young people will go there any way they can and mostly in vehicles that may produce lasting damage to the body and the spirit as well.” (in Mahdi, 1996, p.196).

Drug use often begins as a result of this drive towards altered reality states. Herb Martin remarks on how the power of this craving can be channelled;

What the human psyche seems to crave at the middle-school age and into the late teens is an “other-worldly” experience. Turning to drugs, rebellion, and even suicide are all symptoms of this great need. Past cultures wisely dealt with this necessity by providing this otherworldly experience through rituals.” (in Mahdi, 1996, p.318).

I have often wondered about teenage “acting out”. The self-mutilation and anorexia in teen girls in particular, are “practices” which stand out. As I studied more about ritual I couldn’t help but connect certain similarities between this
“acting out” and past passage traditions. Often fasting and even cutting into the body were traditionally engaged in for the purposes of induction into a new life way. Could it be possible the bodies of these women are responding to an ancient call to initiation? I came across an article which offers a similar interpretation. The gist of this notion is contained here:

There is a nonordinary state of consciousness created, typically through fasting, ingestion of psychoactive drugs, and physical deprivations and mutilations, all to aid the process of passage; disintegration, transformation, and psychosocial reintegration. (Peters, 1994, p.40).

The initiate “dies” to normal reality and enters a different state where s/he will experience a spiritual connection with self, others and/or the sacred. The new state is imprinted before the participant returns to the community where further development is attained through everyday reality (Peters, 1994, pp.39-41).

These transpersonal experiences of community and oneness are, in my opinion, what borderline patients are attempting to achieve through drug use and abuse, mutilations, and other self-destructive behavior... (Peters, 1994, p.41).

Peters challenges a theory which states that one needs a strong ego before engaging in transcendence education. He argues that this kind of work actually helps to make a healthy ego (1994, p.44). I was encouraged when I read this.

There is so much fear around this territory. A transformative group I participate in initially held the view that members needed a strong ego base as a requirement of entry. One woman, who was turned down for this reason, tenaciously held on. She struggled through like the rest of us, often providing us with her astute insights. After a while it was clear to all of us that she belonged just as readily as
everyone else. We no longer have any other requirement other than a sincere
desire for accessing a deeper level of experience.

I have also noticed another activity which speaks of initiatory hunger. I see
this within the rave culture. Rushkoff provides this description of the rave;

Rave parties. where thousands of kids dance to digital music, are
planned as consciousness-altering events. The psychedelic drugs,
music, and lights are designed to put everyone into a group trance.
By the end of the evening (which means dawn) the kids hope to
experience themselves and one another as parts of a single
metaorganism. It’s both futuristic and intensely tribal, making use of
technology to promote deeply spiritual agendas. (1996, p.36).

Until I came upon this portrayal of the rave I perceived it as something
dangerous. Personally, I find the use of psychedelic drugs problematic. The
physiological damage is a concern, but I also feel that drug induced states are
harder to incorporate back into everyday life. As for the ecstatic state achieved
through the sound, lights and dancing, I recall the blissful state I found myself in
when I used to dance. I can only imagine how amplified this experience must be
when so many others are involved. An excerpt by Peters adds an historical
dimension to the foundation of rave culture;

During rites of passage, according to Turner (1969), 'communitas,'
an existential state of oneness with others and the sacred, is
established in the novice. Communitas is ‘anti-structure,’ an ecstatic
feeling of unity beyond all categories and hierarchies. Occurring
during the transitional or threshold period, it is a relatively
undifferentiated ‘living together.’ It is the precondition of community

In both accounts there are similarities, but one major difference between the two
is that the rave community lacks the inclusion of elders. Dancers/initiates do not
return to a community which recognises the new status achieved. Without
communal recognition the passage remains underground. Another interesting facet of the rave is the incorporation of many cultures within the music. Here is another observation from Rushkoff,

The electronic music throbs at exactly 120 beats per minute, the fetal heart rate....This is a conscious manipulation of sound in order to create the effect of cultural and historic compression: the sonic rhythms from as many cultures as possible are combined so that kids can dance and trance together on many different levels at once. (1996, p.159)

The idea behind this multi-layered music is that the various sounds and rhythms activate cellular responses within the body, possibly accessing different archetypal patterns. The DJ's of these events are perceived as techno-shamans. They become the primary draw as their reputations for mixing the sounds which will ensure a profound journey become the standard for their popularity. Web-site (magazine)zines spread the word. Notions of appropriation are non-existent in this cultural mishmash.

Even beyond the music, cross-cultural images proliferate. Although it may be difficult for "targeted" cultures to understand, the use of sacred symbols by non-believers or non-natives, is a movement towards a global understanding of shared values. I recall being in a class where an East Indian woman was angry about Westerners wearing dots on their foreheads. One of the "offenders" countered with a irrational response, which was hard to give credence to in this setting. I understand now why she could not logically defend her position. Possibly she was responding to the image from an archetypal impulse which resonated with the symbology even though she could not explain it. Rushkoff
looks to this appropriation as an indication our youth are moving into a more

generous spirituality. He explains,

Instead of becoming reassured in the knowledge that we have
chosen the ‘right’ path or religious institution, we seek solace in our
ability to recognize the self-similar qualities essential to many
different spiritualities. Today, the same kid might be tattooed with
both Celtic runic and Taoist I Ching symbols, because he
recognizes the validity of both and the commonality between them.
(1996, pp. 262-3).

Intuitively I always felt the appropriation of various practices was often rooted in
resonance rather than a proclivity to apprehend. Upon reading this I discovered I
felt more comfortable with the whole notion of ritual and passage work. Because
they were not part of my coming up, I carried a certain discomfort in my approach
to using them now. I wondered if I was appropriating someone else’s way. But my
internal resonance told me otherwise. So when I think of the alternatives the
teens are creating today it seems even more crucial to offer them something they
can’t seem to find anywhere else. They are craving similar experiences that go
deeper than traditional western lifestyles allow them.

No Pain No Gain?

If there is a natural inclination to enter liminal states it is important to create
safe ways of achieving them. Drug-induced or deprivation-induced rites are not
the only ways to access this realm. The whole adversarial nature of passage
work seemed to be missing something for me. My participation in sweat lodges,
vision quests and even a ropes course all required I overcome some kind of
challenge in order to triumph. In the sweat lodge I had to endure intense heat. On the vision quest I had to fast from food and water, and spend two solo days and nights without shelter from the elements. On the ropes course I had to confront my fear of heights. The sweat lodge did in fact create the feeling of unity and comunitas which Peters spoke of in the previous passage I included. But I have experienced similar feelings in other less traumatic situations. And even though I was successful in the vision quest and the ropes course, I felt as if I was fulfilling them to satisfy the others I was with. I faced my fears and I did not let anybody down, but how did this really become a passage for me?

I recall a Jungian lecture I attended where the topic was male rites of passage. The speaker commented on the number of men who were proud of their football injuries. Many of them considered this to be the defining moment of their transition into manhood. While I cannot argue with their experience, it seems to me that there are other equally valid ways to be initiated into a new state. We have all heard the many clichés which reinforce this ideology; “no pain no gain” being one of them. There is a certain elation which comes with victory over adversity but I wonder what would happen if we gave attention to other ways of knowing? In considering the use of war metaphors within allopathic medicine, where the disease is attacked, or where the invading germs are destroyed, my mind reflects upon homeopathic medicine where like is treated with like. The use of resonance with becomes the healing force. In some situations one system works better than the other. The idea is to perceive these two opposing systems as complimentary.
If there is a strong urge in us to undergo rites of passage, it is important to create transitional processes which speak to the needs of the participants. Years ago, when vision quests were a traditional form of passage for Native Americans, people lived in very close relation to each other. It must have been difficult to have time alone. Within Western culture almost the reverse is true. We have little communal time. If the rave is an indication of what Western youth is longing for, it includes a sense of individuality within a larger unity. More programs are needed which address the needs of this generation while encompassing the patterns bequeathed to us by our ancestors. There are many benefits for those who are able to participate in the many passage programs available. Unfortunately, many occur outside of the realm of everyday life. While it is necessary to create non-ordinary circumstances in order to get beyond ordinary thinking, it is not always essential to do something big to get there. In my experience, it is often difficult to bring the new state back into regular life because it is so out-of-the-ordinary. It is kind of like going to church on Sunday to connect with Spirit, when in fact, we can do this anywhere at any time. Rather than design an experience so far removed from daily life, it might be helpful to imbue daily life with meaningful intention. Using history as a guideline, many of the rites were created to make the participants better at what they needed to do to survive day-to-day. Survival has changed over the years, so the preparation must also change (while still keeping the inherent value intact).

I recall a meaningful passage for myself where I challenged my primary beliefs and moved into a more powerful state. To many, the situation may seem
mundane, but it was a defining moment where I was crossed over the threshold from one way of being into another. Shortly after separating from my husband my vacuum cleaner broke. Usually mechanical problems fell under his domain. I always considered myself to be hopeless at fixing things. Once I realised there was no one else to turn to, I mustered some kind of impetus, which allowed me the confidence to take a look at it. I unplugged the machine and assembled my scant toolbox and owner’s manual. Step-by-step I began to dismantle the vacuum. Soon I discovered a broken belt. I took the old one and the model number to my local Sears where I managed to purchase a replacement. I went home and installed the new belt. The vacuum worked perfectly. But beyond a functioning vacuum cleaner, I managed to awaken a dormant quality in myself. To even call it a dormant quality seems like a stretch. In my whole thirty-plus years of living I never once anticipated fixing an electrical appliance. That one incident forever changed the way I saw myself. It was a meaningful rite of passage. I moved beyond the capacities of my previous beliefs and also the beliefs of my family genealogy. I didn’t have to starve or hurt myself to achieve a new status.

Maybe one of the problems with bringing passage work into this place and time is that historically these rites were gender specific. The roles of men and women were clearly defined, so therefore, the rites were designed to enable men and women to establish themselves in their perspective positions. The delineations are no longer hard and fast. As we move into a time of blurred boundaries, we need to do different things to prepare for adulthood. One of the ways I envision transitional rites, is to create atmospheres which help participants
focus on their individual processes within a communal environment. Personal meaning found within the context of a group can create a powerful shift. Often personal revelations remain dormant unless they are somehow manifested in the living world, where others offer witness to the transformation.

**Bringing Impulse into Form**

Just as the thistle in *Thistle Wisdom* had to emerge from the earth to manifest her underground reality, our inner knowings become more embodied when we are able to express them. Unfortunately the real world is sometimes as hostile as the thistle's above ground world was to her. Meaningful self-exploration needs to take place in a safe and conducive environment. Once a new understanding is discovered and embodied, it can be incorporated into the larger world. Premature manifestation can cause doubt or even pain. A dancer or musician may create a new piece, but it won’t be performed until it is ready. Rehearsals and jam sessions help the artist prepare. In the same way, initiates need a supportive climate to prepare their own repertoire.

A *journeying* or passage curriculum can include many forms of discovery. Depending on the leader's abilities, exercises in imagery, movement, expressive art, journalling, storytelling and more can all help participants connect with their inner wisdom. But beyond the curriculum is the way it is presented. Comfort level is an important aspect. I have heard a saying that “the teacher can only take the student as far as they have gone themselves”. If I am uncomfortable with the
subject matter I am introducing, chances are that I will communicate my unease rather than the material. Images of my grade nine health teacher flood into my mind. In our first sex education class, she turned red at the mention of the word sexuality. All I remember is her extreme discomfort.

My own experience with transformational process work has provided me with a sense of safety even though the journey is through uncharted territory. I don’t believe this sense of ease can be passed on if it is not felt. My involvement in a foundations of curriculum course helped me to understand the value of an approach such as this. As one of the class assignments we were asked to come up with a personal metaphor for our lives. After considerable contemplation I realised mine was “walk the talk”. To be a living example of the experiences that helped to make me who I am today and also who I hope to become. A passage from The Holistic Curriculum articulates the importance of authentic engagement within the learning environment. “The holistic curriculum has its roots in the consciousness of teachers who are authentic and caring.” (Miller, 1996, p.174). Because I come to passage work with a certain level of “expertise”, I am able to communicate the potential just by sharing who I am. Like the early gatherings around the fire, where people spoke of their life experiences, I can help others realise their own potentialities. Not by telling others how to live, but by providing an example of ways I have connected with my own inner life.

This is the starting off point. I welcome people into my room from a position of authenticity. My demeanour will hopefully model a level of engagement that others will learn to access for themselves. From my own experience I know
this is not easy. I had to learn how to drop a strong cynical stance to move into this fuller way of being. I was able to suspend my sceptical response by interacting with others who did not approach life this way. The creation of a caring community helped me to feel safe enough to drop some of my defences. In a way, this process can be compared with the ritual process of creating a sacred space for the enactment of the ritual. When I first began my study of ritual, the idea of restricting it to certain parameters was troublesome. I perceived this as incredibly confining. But in actually working with this standard I discovered the opposite happened. By delineating specific guidelines I discovered I felt more free than I ever had before. Without really understanding why, I found I did not have to police myself once these conditions were in place. Having a container for the experience allowed for a release from control. Once liberated from this responsibility, I was able to participate more authentically. There was a certain comfort in knowing I was safe or in sacred space.

A simple example of this is evident in therapy groups or in support groups, where there is an agreement to keep everything said within the room, in the room. Or in other words, “What is said in here, stays in here.” This helps to create a sense of safety. On a surface level this may seem like a sincere attempt to create respect, which it is, but deeper than this, I feel our ancestral roots are stirred in remembrance of sacred space. Once this agreement has been recognised there is a palpable feeling of specialness in the room. At least, this has been my experience in these situations. Even sitting in circles is connected with deeper levels of knowing. Beyond the ease of being able to see everybody,
there is a greater energy or archetype at work. The symbolism of the circle is explained by Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux Holy Man born in 1863.

You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and it is because everything tries to be round. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles... Even the seasons form a great circle. (in Neihardt, p.198).

In forming circles we are accessing a deeper, possibly more meaningful, relationship with life. So although we may not understand the symbolism, the custom connects us with an invisible recollection. In this way, I feel that ritual is really a part of our every day lives. In recognising the symbolic implications we are imbuing our lives with meaning. Simple actions like preparing dinner, or holding a door open for someone can become worshipful when intentions of kindness or reverence are held within the individual who is cooking or walking through a doorway. When we consciously attune ourselves to the unseen or invisible we bring it to life -- we give it form. Once we are open to moment-by-moment spiritual connection, which does not only include active prayer, but also intuitive knowing, and attention to the formless, we create a place for this to happen in our daily lives.

Ritual

My favourite definition for ritual is this one; “Ritual is the act of consciously opening ourselves to the presence of Spirit.” (Cames & Craig,
1989, p.94). This can manifest in formal or informal settings, individually or in groups. All that is required is an openness and some sort of intention. In communal situations a shared intent can help create an effective experience. The results for each participant will be as varied as the number of people who are there. It is even possible to be deeply affected by a ritual, but not be aware of any changes. Sometimes the result is immediate, at other times it make take months before it unfolds. I would like to use a personal experience to describe how this might manifest. I participated in the ritual long before I got what it was all about. It was part of an autumn celebration in 1996.

We were each given a lettuce leaf and were told to spend about twenty minutes gathering things for an offering to the Goddess of the Underworld. As I wandered around collecting shrivelled berries, dried leaves, seeds and stones, I contemplated the meaning behind my offering. What did I want my gift to symbolise? I imagined myself to be this Underworld Being. What would she long for the most? I knew in my heart she wanted love. So many feared her. I thought about how so many of us try to avoid her. So I decided my gift would be unconditional love. When the time came to launch our offerings in the stream, I bundled mine up in string and headed down to water's edge. I didn't feel particularly satisfied with my bundle, and when the time came for me to say a few words and place it in the water, I did not even feel really connected to the words I was speaking. Yet the moment I placed the lettuce leaf on top of the water I sent my intent down to the bottom - the bottom of fear, anger, mistrust,... Clear in my
desire to bestow this gift, I concentrated on the love filling her - allowing her a moment to be loved for all she represented. I was shocked when the water swallowed my offering so quickly. Everyone else’s’ followed a meandering course past a big rock about eight feet away. Mine was sucked under as if caught in a vortex. I was struck with her intensity and power, and hunger for love and recognition for her place in the world. My gift so fiercely accepted disappeared from my view, devoured by the dark water. I did not know the power of her gratitude, but I did learn about releasing my expectations - for I felt so empty.

Two Years Later

I was Christmas shopping in Upper Canada Mall with my daughter. Out of the corner of my eye I noticed a man and a woman who were together. He was looking lovingly into her eyes as she spoke. I turned my gaze towards her. She was about my age, also blonde, with hair a little longer than mine, and she was about the same height and weight as I am. As I observed her demeanour a word surfaced in me; adorable. She seemed adorable. She was not that different from me, but her countenance was more approachable than my own (or how I perceive myself to be). I was deeply moved by this sudden awareness. I turned my head back, hoping to take in a bit more, but the couple had vanished. For days I remained touched by this experience. I wondered how someone comes to know themselves as adorable or desirable. For so many years I have felt removed from this kind of sentiment. Suddenly, like a flash, the memory of the lettuce-leaf ritual flooded my consciousness. It felt like an opening of a portal into a vaster stream
of consciousness where I could access a greater reality that included more of me, helping me to broaden the restricted template I had been living from. So although I did not feel the result of the ritual until more than two years later, I have no doubt that the ceremony did initiate this transformation.

I included this account because at the time I did not feel particularly into it the way I thought I should be. I didn’t cry like many of the others, or even feel like I knew what I was doing. But in spite of this, my sincerity and willingness to participate ushered me into a new way of living my life. It went not against my rational mind, but beyond it. The capacity of ritual, to reach further than the logical mind can go, can do so much to help us move beyond limitations which may be holding us back. Z. Budapest explains how ritual accesses different ways of knowing.

The purpose of ritual is to wake up the old mind, to put it to work. The old ones inside us, the collective unconscious, the many lives, the different eternal parts, the senses and the parts of the brain that have been ignored. Those parts do not speak English. They do not care about television. But they do understand candlelight and colors. They do understand nature. (in Carnes, 1998, p.93).

Often rituals incorporate the elements of earth, air, fire, and water. In including objects from nature we link ourselves with our ancestors before us. Candles, flowers, incense, and even music or drums, all help to create an atmosphere that stimulates the relationship between Spirit and Self.

Rituals need not be dramatic or complicated. Even an awareness of the symbology of thresholds can serve to bring more sacredness to life. Thresholds hold great significance ritually. In my own culture a bride is carried over the
threshold by her new husband. Many cultures have beliefs about what first crosses the threshold in the new year. Thresholds imply movement from one state into another. Even a simple awareness of the potential for change can influence the experience of entering a room. Most people feel differently stepping into a church, or a doctor's office. A reminder of the transitional nature of thresholds can change the way someone participates in what is on the other side of the doorway. I have experienced classes where the nature of the subject and the other people in the room have created a sacred setting. My feeling upon opening the door and going inside is always more charged than in the more traditional classroom settings. As I cross the threshold I notice an openness and excitement in anticipation of what may happen within the classroom setting. I feel that this is rooted in some archetypal resonance with transitional states. A statement endorsing this symbolic process helps prepare the way for change to happen. In bringing attention to this symbolic process, others who walk through the same doorway have the option of making the transition more meaningful.

Painting Our Own Pictures

I imagine myself walking into a room where I know I will feel safe and at ease. I have heard that it is possible to enter with a belief I can be transformed (or healed, or understood, or understanding), so I have included an anticipation for positive change in my consciousness. The next place I need to send my awareness into, is to finding that I can have agency in this process. It is not only
something that happens to me, but in association with me. I actually have some power in determining the outcome. Just getting to this point is huge. I don’t know why it was so hard for me to learn that I had some say in how my life turned out. The limited religious training I had might have steered me in this direction -- feeling that God was in control, and all I could do was to be carried along on whatever destiny “He” had in mind. My power was circumscribed to how I adapted to the situations I found myself in. It never occurred to me that I could help to create my own situations. It was either blasphemous or arrogant to think this way. Inner voices chastise, “Who do you think you are?” I did not even have the right to entertain thoughts such as these. At least, this is how it was.

I think this is a common attitude of many women. In the re-enforcement of strong opposition between masculine and feminine “qualities”, the “male” (yang) creative characteristics are not fostered in growing girls. Instead, the receptive “qualities” of “female” (yin) predominate. Women are taught to respond rather than initiate. Mary Pipher offers this observation,

Many girls are ‘empathy sick’. That is, they know more about others’ feelings than their own. Girls need to think about what kinds of relationships are in their best interest and to structure their relationships in accord with their ideas.

This is difficult for girls because they are socialized to let others do the defining. Girls are uncomfortable identifying and stating their needs, especially with boys and adults. They worry about not being nice or appearing selfish. (1994, p.257).

The transition from “giver” (nurturer) to “taker” (nurtured) is a difficult journey for most women. Even though we are moving into times of more incorporation of both male and female qualities, we are dealing with deeply held archetypes and
social structures. It is not so easy to alter many centuries of tradition. Laws may help to enforce obligatory acquiescence but they do not find their way into the hearts of men and women. This is where the change needs to occur. I knew in my thinking I was just as valued as a man, but I didn’t know it at the core of my being.

Interestingly, through my research about adolescent girls, it wasn’t until I read about teenage boys that the depth of the problem emerged. William Pollack writes, “Becoming masculine is defined as avoiding the feminine. Being a boy becomes defined in the negative: not being a girl.” (1998, p.28). I was shocked as I continued to read more and more about the humiliation boys are socialised to feel when they access their “feminine qualities”. The implication for boys is disastrous, but for girls it is devastation. If boys are shamed for acting like girls, how must it feel when girls are shamed for being girls? It’s one thing to be belittled for your behaviour, but another to be disgraced for who you are. It is for this reason that I feel it is vitally important to create “girls only” groups. My goal is not to foster more opposition, but to help girls move into a place of value, within their own hearts. Once this becomes a reality inside of them, they are ready to face the world intact. To step out into the larger world, as themselves.

I struggled against this belief in segregated groups in my own personal healing journey. Initially I participated in mixed groups — male and female — but when I began to enter the realm of sexuality and women’s menstrual cycles, I ended up in a women’s only group. Here I found a whole other dimension of sharing I had never before experienced. Beyond the shared stories of my mixed
groups, I discovered a deeper level of connection than I had ever felt before. A
certain posturing was absent and it became easier to connect with a feminine-
feeling sensitivity. Once I was able to develop a healthy relationship with this part
of myself I felt more able to explore other capacities. But this time from a place of
inner strength rather than inner doubt. A different fuel for my fire. Hopefully, as
more women become less apologetic for themselves, men will become more
willing to embrace their own “femaleness”. I believe the modelling of “positive
female energy” encourages growth in this direction for whoever is touched by it. I
can only say the same is true for me when I encounter “positive male energy”. It
makes me feel good about accessing the same qualities in myself.

As I read about how boys disconnect from their “feminine” feelings I
couldn’t help but wonder if some of these austere rites of passage were somehow
connected with the lack of development of “gentler” sensitivities. When boys are
trained to be indifferent to feelings it must take a tremendous amount of pain or
suffering to break them (of this habit). I recalled the lecture about the football
injuries when I read this passage, “When boys become hardened, they become
willing to endure emotional and physical pain — even to risk their lives if it means
winning the approval of their peers.” (Pollack, 1998, p.46). This was almost
exactly what the lecturer was getting at — how gratifying these injuries became.
Why do we harden our boys and soften our girls? The days are gone when
women were required to refrain from physical activity because it was
unbecoming. Generally, female athletes still do not raise to the ranks of their male
counterparts, but at least they now have a place in the world of sports. Female
accomplishment within “a man’s world” has grown. Now it is time to create a
niche for men in “a woman’s world”. Pollack suggests similar values in his work;

But these mythic images of solitary men no longer serve us. We live
in an interdependent world, so that even the best corporate
executives, heroic men of strong vision and action, sink or swim on
their ability to work with others. (1998, p.97).

We don’t need to be training our boys (or any other group of our
97).

Many skills required to succeed in adult relationships are those we
resist teaching to growing boys — skills of connection (empathy,
negotiation, and compromise), instead of competitiveness. (1998,
p.98).

The above quotations tell of the need for men to develop more of the traditionally
feminine “qualities”. Not so they may inhabit a “woman’s world”, but to live in a
world that is neither a man’s nor a woman’s; but one that belongs to all of us, and
one we all belong in.

Sugar and Spice and Everything Nice

In this search for connection with Self and other, an inner value of
resonance with can provide a clear indicator of being on track. “Not acting like a
girl” is doing little to help boys find themselves. In their movement away from
something, they are distancing themselves from who they are. For girls, “acting
like a girl” is just another way of moving away from their centre. My whole
childhood was mostly focused on girl behaviour. I don’t know how much was
learned and how much my own tendencies; I just know that I limited much of my
I never purposely splashed in puddles with my shoes on. My clothes were always perfect, my shoes were polished, and every day I sported freshly curled hair, painstakingly wrapped in rags the night before. Don't get me wrong, I did make mud pies, after I had changed into my play clothes. I was diligently aware of keeping the mud relegated to my fingertips. No wiping of hands on my clothes. I avoided all puddles unless I had rubber boots on - which was not often, as they did not look neat and tidy. I skipped, jumped rope, played house and dress-up. I did not climb trees or build forts. Out in nature I made hair decorations with flowers, or little miniature gardens (we called these Japanese gardens - very exotic) with pieces of moss and other odds and ends. A few years ago I asked my mom why she always dressed me so immaculately. She told me I would not go out the door unless my dress was ironed perfectly, the ribbons for my hair clean and pressed, and my shoes impeccable. I don't remember it being my idea, but I have to admit that one of the big challenges I faced in a therapy group once, was a homework assignment that required me to come to the next session in a disarray. Here is a recollection:

I fretted all week as I thought about chipped nail polish, unmatched clothing, and unstyled hair. I seriously thought about not going, but I was too serious about my well-being to let my ego stand in the way like this. It was a definite struggle. I proudly/ashamedly walked through that door as a person unrecognisable to myself. Ill-fitting and unmatched clothing, hair pointing in all directions, no make-up - I was so unput-together I thought I was going to fall apart! But the reaction
waiting for me on the other side of the threshold was life-changing! I was accepted anyway. Nothing awful happened to me. In fact, after I talked about how difficult it was for me, some of the other participants offered their two-cents worth. I thought I was the most awful looking creature on the face of the earth, and they laughed and told me how, in my own way, I even managed to make my sloppiness look good. "Why, you could have come in dirty, greasy hair, and not taken a bath, and had holes in your unmatched socks", they said. I began to laugh at myself for the first time.

I was finally able to release the standards I had been living by. This is the power inherent in having a witness to a transition. I got so much more out of the experience by taking it out into the world. The influence of a community is very strong. In my case, they helped me see myself in a whole new way.

One Plus One Equals Three

I went on something of vision quest last summer. It was different than the first one I went on, where I followed all the rules and successfully made myself miserable. (Successful, because I did gain tremendously from the experience). This time I went with an intention of engaging with the daily aspects of what I was faced with. Portaging heavy packs, canoeing, even stepping from the canoe into muddy, murky water (which may harbour leeches), in my shoes and long pants was beyond my comfortable reality. For me this was challenge enough. The first moment I stepped into the cold water to pull the canoe onto shore was
monumental to me. I negated so much previous programming about what I could do. But what is really important to me in all of this, is that I did it in an authentic environment. There was no need to invent a challenge, this was challenge enough – to be doing it because I wanted to participate with a group of people on a canoe trip. For me, this is what held the power. My fears about letting down my friends, not pulling my weight, these were the tasks I faced. Not on a level of participating in an activity, but as a matter of real life.

I recall something else about my Montessori training now. There were certain exercises called “practical life experiences”. We were to teach the children how to sweep up floors and wipe dirty tables clean. Tops of broom handles were cut off so the children could more easily use them. The sinks were low for the children to clean and squeeze out the wash-up cloths. I thought this made a lot of sense. The instructor mentioned that in some schools the children were actually told to tear up pieces of paper and strew them all about the floor, then sweep them up. We were told to never do this. It sends the wrong message. On one level this feels right to me. I don’t know if it is because I absorbed the teaching or because it is just how I approach life. But that same philosophy translates into how I am feeling about some of the passage programs provided now. Is it really necessary to generate suffering when there so much in our lives intrinsically? What about working with life’s adversity? Maybe if we moved through life in closer connection with what feels right we wouldn’t have to experience so much adversity.
Yet, if I am honest with myself, I have to admit that I cannot foresee such an idealic circumstance. I even wonder if it would be as perfect as it sounds. Just because I have found ways to incorporate adversity into my transitions of their own accord, it doesn’t mean staged ones are ineffective. As a matter of fact, creating artificial situations of adversity can provide future knowledge for real life situations. Sort of like an intensified role-playing. So just as there are everyday rituals we can observe, there are also elaborate rituals we can perform for ourselves and others. What is important is the ability to source Self and Spirit in the process. To know when you are doing it, and when you are going through the paces. It involves trusting the ritual process itself to help usher in healing, guidance, change, or whatever the intention behind it is. The purpose is not only to uncover hidden aspects of ourselves and our lives, but to enfold these newly revealed parts because they come from us, and work through us. Shedding light on them is not enough, we engender ourselves for the purpose of being what our awareness brings. We walk the talk of our lives in this way. Being and becoming walk hand in hand. A constant flux of inside and outside mediated through our bodies. There is a breath in, and a breath out, and a breather. All three combine to move through life.

**Humble Pie**

Initially a part of me set out to debunk current trends in traditional rites of passage work. I was not as forward as to say this, but if I am honest with myself I
have to admit a titch of antagonism in my heart. But just as I finished writing the previous account of my canoe trip, I wondered if I would have even considered doing it if I hadn’t gone on the rigorous Vision Quest program the year before. Through a deep soul-searching of what felt wrong, I did eventually align myself more with what feels right. A funny paradox considering this last year of work. Here I am writing about adversarial approaches as being negative, when in fact, I was taking an adversarial position in regards to adversity. Inadvertently, I set up a dichotomy between the rational and non-rational. Rather than approaching logic as a valuable part of who I am, I ‘demonised’ it instead. In retrospect, I can see that I spent most of my life in a restricted state, where I was not aware of moving beyond its limitations. This caused me to percieve logic as the jailor. The writing of this paper became a ritual itself where rational thought became the threshold into a new way of knowing. How would I have found my way without starting there? But instead of countering it, it might be best utilised by percieving it as worthy and part of the whole. Caught again in the contradictions of life. But at least I can find the humour in it, and also the virtue of moving beyond an either/or paradigm. Let’s make room for everyone.
References Cited


