VISUAL AND VERBAL NARRATIVES OF WOMEN WHO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS LIFELONG LEARNERS

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
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Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

My inquiry, involving participant-observation and self-study, explores the stories of four older women through verbal and visual narratives. Showing how two specific types of visual narratives—sandpictures and collages—stimulate experiential story-telling and promote understanding about life experiences, I also illustrate how engagement with images extends learning and meaning-making. Effective in carrying life stories and integrating experience, the visual narratives also reveal archetypal imagery that is sustained and sustaining. Considering how visual narratives may be understood independently, I describe multiple strategies that worked for me for entering deeply into the images. I also elaborate on the relationship of visual narratives to accompanying verbal narratives, describing how tacit knowing may evolve. Through this process, I offer a framework for a curricular approach to visual narratives that involves feeling and seeing aesthetically and associatively and that provides a space for learners to express their individual stories and make meaning of significant life events.

Salient narrative themes include confrontation with life-death issues, the experience of “creating a new life,” an avid early interest in books and learning, and a vital connection to the natural world. New professions after mid-life, creative expression, and volunteerism provide fulfillment and challenge as life changes promote attempts to marry relationships with self and others to work and service.
My therapy practice room was the setting for five sessions, including an introduction, three experiential sandplay sessions, and a conclusion. Data derive from transcripts from free-flowing conversations, written narratives, photographs of sandpictures, and field notes written throughout the various phases of my doctoral process.

This study of older women, with its emphasis on lifelong learning, visual narratives, and development of tacit knowing, will contribute to the field of narrative inquiry already strongly grounded in verbal narrative and teacher education/development. It may also promote in-depth investigations of male learners at a life stage of making meaning of, and integrating, their life experiences. New inquirers may note what I did and how it worked for me, and find their unique ways of extending the study of visual narratives while venturing into the broad field of diverse narrative forms.
Acknowledgements

I rejoice.

My parents, Geneva and Homer (Hank) Tripp gave me life out of the creative spark of their love, wanted a girl when I was born, and passed along the value of education to me.

My recently deceased husband, Richard Weinberg, helped me learn that sustaining love for another is often a challenge and that it is essential to living a graceful life.

My daughter, Abbie Weinberg MacPherson, has been the golden thread in my life tapestry since her birth. Her husband, Grant MacPherson, and son, Nathaniel John MacPherson, are the new golden threads.

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Professor Carola Conle, in the Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning Department at the Ontario Institute for Studies and Education, University of Toronto, has deepened my
understanding of narrative inquiry with her body of work. As my supervisor, she has known exactly what word to say when I needed to hear it.

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Dedication

For the creative spark of new life
now manifested through my first grandchild,

Nathaniel John MacPherson.
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Prologue

Through this prologue I intend to provide a personal historical context for my inquiry so that we, writer and readers, share a common ground as I begin to narrate the stories I live and tell (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Despite the common ground we may stand on at any one point, I expect that resonance with the stories I tell will shape and re-shape our subsequent remembered stories and understandings. My prologue also provides an elaboration of certain terms that I frequently use and references to the theoretical framework that emerges from my stories.

Relevant to these terms and theory is the fact that academically I moved from psychology at the master’s level to education at the doctoral level, that I worked contemporaneously as a teacher and psychotherapist before my formal retirement, and that I continue to work as a teacher of Sandplay Therapy in Canada and Korea and a psychotherapist in private practice. As well as personal life stories, my doctoral process (including the research component with my co-participants), and this particular document that I begin with this prologue, constitute my narrative inquiry. I hope to show along the way how my narrative constitutes inquiry, as Conle (2000) explored in her paper. There is a paradox in presenting this historical context in that retelling my stories transforms me as I proceed with the writing of my doctoral document, because it/I evolve(s) as I write. I desire and intend that this document reflects that dynamism clearly through its recursive action, and hope that the process continues for me and others even after the text is bound or sealed within a protected file. This dynamism results in a document that is not always linear, although I make attempts at that in order to present an organized text for the reader. At times, my writing depicts the spiral nature of my life experience in which I repeatedly circle back to issues and situations at a deeper level.
My desire and intention for dynamism rely strongly on the process of “resonance.” Although resonance is implicated methodologically and so mentioned in the relevant section, I clarify the term here because I use it explicitly and often throughout this text. As educator, psychotherapist, researcher, and human being, I have been aware of this dynamic as a phenomenon in my personal and professional life for many years as an aspect of embodied knowing. I have also become familiar with resonance in the inquiry process through my readings in attachment and educational research. For me, “resonance” is more than an academic or psychological construct.

**Resonance as a Significant Process in Human Experience and Learning**

Primarily, resonance is a bodybrain (i.e., physiological/emotional/cognitive) and relational phenomenon dependent upon resonance circuitry hypothesized to include the superior temporal cortex, the insula, regions of the middle prefrontal cortex and the mirror neuron system (Siegel, 2007a). I use the term “bodybrain” to emphasize that the brain is part of the nervous system that extends throughout the body and that it both informs and is informed by the body. I refer to resonance as relational because, from the beginning, our brain develops within an interpersonal context (Siegel, 1999).

As one who always wants to know how “things” work, especially human phenomena, and as one who wishes to understand from the perspectives of researcher, educator, psychotherapist, and human being, I acknowledge Siegel (2007a) as a guide in my exploration at a deep level to understand how resonance works within an individual and within social relationships. A significant link between Siegel’s thinking and mine is that we consider that human experience involves the mind, the bodybrain, and relationships with other people, things
and events in our world, and oneself, although Siegel (2007b) simplifies this triad into brain, mind, and human relationships.

Daniel Siegel (2007a), scientist, educator, researcher, and psychiatrist, writes about the interactive development of mind and brain within an interpersonal context. Siegel differentiates attunement and resonance, linking them by connecting human internal and external systems at a neurological level, with resonance being a “functional outcome” of attunement (p. 167). He grounds personal attunement within early infant attachment experiences in which a child’s development of neural integration is facilitated by a good enough “parent’s integrated, mindful state” (p. 206). He suggests that self-reflection and internal attunement lead to one’s resonance with one’s personal states of being and, subsequently, to attunement and resonance with others beyond the primary attachment figure. Siegel refers to scientific research, especially the work of Italian scientists, Iacoboni et al (2005), who discovered the properties of mirror neurons and their relationship to one’s ability to imagine what occurs in others’ minds and hence to the development of empathy. Siegel (2007a) emphasizes that emotional resonance is basic to relationships and to “feeling felt” by others, that is, to having a “relational sense” (p. 123) that allows us to feel a part of a larger whole. [For a personal story about feeling felt, see Weinberg, 2007.]

In the case of educational inquiry, in writing about her work with preservice teachers, Conle (1996) has highlighted resonance as an important basic process at work in narrative inquiry. Conle acknowledges the influences of Frye (1982) in literary theory and Gadamer (1960/1975) in philosophy in her identification of this concept in preservice teacher inquiry. She has described resonance as both a “common everyday occurrence” (p. 300) and an “educational act” (p. 308). Conle suggests that learning through the process of resonance occurs
when a remembered story meets another being told, linked to it by emotion and cognition, and understood differently because of its new context. These connected stories of “experiential knowledge” (p. 301) that evoke fleeting images may be only one’s own narratives that lead to experiences of resonance, or one’s own and another person’s narrated stories. According to Conle, resonance provokes a “me too” or “not me” response (2006, p. 12), and relates to “development of self through interaction with others at an intimate level” (1996, p. 299). In my mind, Conle’s conceptualization about resonance and development of self and her inclusion of emotion and cognition in the process link her exploration of resonance with the work of Daniel Siegel (2007a).

**Embodied Knowing**

On page 1, I referred to “embodied knowing,” a term I wish to clarify here. Conscious knowing is an experience which, as described above, involves bodybrain, mind, and relationships. My experience as an educator and a psychotherapist has informed me that sometimes children and adults do not know that they know, what they know, or how they know (see, for example, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). This seems especially true when, in psychotherapy, I ask people to tell me what they feel in their bodies. Often, people say that they cannot feel anything or do not know what they feel in their bodies. This happens even when certain bodily responses (e.g., frowning, rubbing the stomach, or tapping a finger) are apparent. Sometimes, systematic training is necessary before people can connect sensations in their bodies to emotions or feelings that they may have already labeled (e.g., anxiety or fear).

Knowing may be wordless or tacit. Damasio (1999) suggests that inarticulate knowing is the simplest form of knowing that emerges as a mental phenomenon when a person engaged in processing an “object” feels something (p. 26). He also suggests that inferences and
interpretations occur only subsequent to that feeling. Because development of knowing is entwined with language (Polanyi, 1958), it is important that people learn to communicate about tacit knowing. In their specialized roles, professionals such as psychotherapists and educators are dependent upon their own feelings to inform them about their clients’/students’ and their own issues. They also must learn to read and communicate about others’ non-verbal behaviours to be effective in their roles. In my Sandplay Therapy teaching programme, I spend considerable time teaching students to look inward and outward, to focus on, and to develop their awareness about bodily sensations, feelings, associations, memories, thoughts, gestures, and facial expressions. This skill is essential for psychotherapists learning how to understand their clients and helping them to understand themselves. Having experienced an emphasis on extroversion and social skills in the public education system and western culture generally, I feel self-reflection and self-understanding are of benefit in life and so implore educators and curriculum specialists to find ways to introduce such skills to students of all ages.

I have read somewhere that our knowing often reveals itself when the “right” question is asked. I have seen examples of this when teaching/training people in Sandplay Therapy. After engaging in experiential activities, my adult students often do not know what or how much they know; however, the extent of their knowing frequently emerges when I ask the right questions. Dewey (1988), who apparently wished to learn about the intersection and integration of body and mind, has written that learning, or the gaining of new knowledge, emerges through experience in an interpersonal context with a complex environment that demands decision-making and problem-solving. I think he would have been delighted, as I am, to read of advances in the field of brain-mind development and psychobioneurology as reported and understood by researchers like Daniel Siegel.
In the educational system globally, even in early childhood, the body is “disappearing” on many dimensions (e.g., as play is rejected by teachers and parents in favour of academics, as rough-and-tumble play is inhibited because of fear of loss of control, and as affectionate and reassuring touch by teachers is prohibited in case of accusations of inappropriate behaviour) (Tobin, 2004).

Over the years, as I have wondered about people’s conceptualizations of embodied knowing, I have been frustrated to read dry articles and books on the topic, theoretical writings that do not evoke a passion to learn or that do not address the specifics of authors’ experiences of body in relation to their knowing. It often seems to me that they have forgotten the part of the body below the head. Perhaps the reason is, as Conle (2000) suggests, that “the academic tradition has tended to keep emotion and intellect apart” (p. 190), and that critics consider research that includes emotion as deficient in rigor. A quick etymological search of “rigor” suggests numbness, stiffness, and rigidity, terms that do not suggest to me comprehensive knowing and, thus, do not present a value to be cherished.

Mindful of a statement I made at the beginning of this discussion of embodied knowing, *that conscious knowing is experience*, and of my understanding of experience as a triad of bodybrain, the mind, and relationship, I was interested in Bowman’s (2004) conceptualization that human cognition includes agency and action (which assumes that “sensory and motor processes, perception and action, are fundamentally inseparable”) (Thompson, 1996, p. 128). Here, Bowman concurs with Dewey’s understanding of learning and gaining new knowledge that I mentioned earlier. Bowman (2004) also asserts that “all cognition” or knowing is a consequence of perceptual-motor capabilities and achievements that are “embedded in and constituted by their biological, psychological, and sociocultural contexts” (p. 37, citing
Thompson, 1996, p. 128). This conceptualization does not focus on intellectualism at the expense of emotion. It acknowledges that all knowing is active, intentional, relational, and embodied through mind-bodybrain integration. Knowing, experience, and resonance are intertwined.

**Understanding as an Interpretive Process that Leads to Action**

Through a process of resonance, you and I may continue our active participation in my creative work intended for my doctoral process. Making meaning personally, both you and I may manifest future related actions through our oral and written stories, our artwork, and perhaps even our dreams. This possibility depends upon our assumption that (self-) understanding (however fluid) and learning (both formal and informal) are interpretive in nature (Conle, Jia, Chang, & Boone, 2006). In his work that analyzes the relationship between learning experiences and interpretation, Gallagher (1992) describes understanding as a dynamic process that is “a questioning, opening up, and transcendence of” oneself (p. 167). While Gallagher is referring to the specific traditional bodies of knowledge of hermeneutics and education, I take some liberties here and apply his concept to my personal doctoral process and evolvement of self. I hope I will justify my appropriation in the long term, partly by answering my emergent question that links the personal and the collective: *What do my personal stories have to do with educational research and society-at-large?*

**Dream Interpretation and Personal Action**

The roots of my exploration process that I call “my doctoral journey” originated in a dream. At least it seemed so that early morning about two years before I applied to the doctoral programme at OISE/UT. Awakening from an auditory dream, I recalled that a strong voice had posed a question: *If you could do anything in the world, what would you do?* With no
hesitation, and in a voice as equally strong and assertive as the one asking the question, I answered: *Finish my Ph.D.* In my answer there was an implicit reference to prior incomplete doctoral studies in psychology at a local university. In the dream I knew, in that way we have of knowing in dreams—that “in-the-bones-knowing”—that I would not return to studies at that university but, if possible, would finish my doctorate at “a school of integrative studies.” At the time I had no idea where that might be, or what it might mean.

This dream was contextualized by certain practical knowledge: I would, by necessity at that time (although no longer so), retire from teaching in two years because of the Toronto District School Board’s age limitations for employees; and I would continue with my then “secondary” profession as a psychotherapist/Sandplay therapist in private practice. Both of these realities precluded thoughts about pursuing doctoral studies for the purposes of professional ambition or externally demanded accreditation. I had sufficient training and expertise to continue practising psychotherapy and teaching/training/supervising Sandplay Therapy interns as authorized through my national and international professional organizations. I knew that these endeavours, which engaged me with a passion, would challenge me to continue learning through non-degree forms of relevant study, and assure me of ongoing professional participation in the world after my formal retirement from the education system.

**Learning and Understanding as Soul Work**

However, that the return to doctoral studies dream had caught me, showed itself in my frequent reflection upon it and a question that recurred several times: *What does my soul want of me in sending me this dream about returning to doctoral studies?* My use of the word “soul” was not an expression of a sectarian religious attitude. Rather, it was a term I used comfortably to represent an essential and functional attitude or viewpoint, idiosyncratic and yet related to
something more than the personal, or to some Other beyond us as individuals, an energy experienced and expressed in inner and outer realms, in the manner that June Singer (1998) refers to it:

The soul as I understand it, functions to balance us, to urge us into the fullness of our being, to guide us toward realizing our potential and making our gifts available to others and, most of all to finding the inner peace that comes only from congruity between who we are and what we do. (p. xii)

I asked the question about my soul and dream as a person who believes that the purpose of life is to learn all that we can in order to be all that we can be, who suggests to friends and associates that the diversity of events and circumstances of our lives are opportunities for learning, even when they are difficult, and who considers a spiritual attitude as a dimension of a “whole” person.

Looking back, I realize that my experiences at the university where I began my doctoral work did not measure up to my more recent expectations of a school of integrative studies. Neither did they cultivate a feeling of “congruity between who we are and what we do” (p. xii) in Singer’s (1990/1998) words. They did not satisfy my quest to make connections amongst my soul’s yearnings, my body, my ways of knowing, my creativity, my relationships, and my sense of wellness, and their manifestations in my personal, social, and professional life experiences.

**Remembered Experiences of Learning and Teaching**

In my 2002 Statement of Intent that was part of my application to OISE/UT, I identified myself as a lifelong learner. Reflecting now upon my choice of words, I realize that I have spent almost 65 years in and out of formal education environments, have engaged in a multitude of
informal educational offerings, and have committed myself throughout life to a pursuit of
learning through self-study. For as long, I have relished the role of teacher.

As I write these words, I wonder about my lifelong interweaving of threads of learning
and teaching with the strands of my personal and professional practical experience and my
identity. For the past few years, writing about my early education experiences for OISE/UT
doctoral level courses, I realized that my passion for learning first revealed itself in my childhood
through some favorite activities.

From my early childhood experiences, I had developed a concept of “what I would like to
be when I grow up” around the age of four or five when I played teacher and librarian at my
blonde roll-top wooden desk. Its cubby-holes stored handmade library cards for my books and
assignments for my doll “students” who sat around the desk. Collecting books with titles like
*The Golden Book of Knowledge*, I delighted in sharing information with others around me.
When I was seven or eight, a favorite Christmas present was a crude feedback machine that
tested me on miscellaneous facts that I had acquired. This game had batteries, sheets of
questions and answers, and two wires. I plugged one wire into a hole beside a question, and the
other into a hole beside my choice for “right answer.” Accurate responses activated a buzzer, a
sound I loved to hear.

When I was eleven, I experienced my first special education challenge when I tutored my
young cousin in exchange for using his family’s piano. My cousin, a very active little boy who
“had trouble listening,” was experiencing difficulties in grade one. His mother who tried to help
him after a long day of work had little patience and could not cope with his distractibility.
“Donnie” and I played store which helped him learn math skills. We also role-played characters
who stepped out of the pages of my beloved books, checking out our speaking parts by reading and re-reading the stories.

My memory about teaching Donnie recalls a more gracious personal attitude than I seemed to display in a couple of incidents of “teaching” my mother. As I remember it, one occurred when I was seven years old. My mother had enthusiastically helped me plan and orchestrate a Hallowe’en party. When she asked me a question about placement of decorations, I indignantly corrected her, saying “MOTHER, it’s pump-kin, not punkin!” I remember feeling quite abashed that my mother had not known this. About 40 years later, when she came to a dream interpretation group that I attended, she had a dream in which I was stuffing an apple down her throat, choking her. Reflecting on this vivid image and interpreting the dream according to a Jungian symbolic approach, I concluded that I was trying indelicately to push knowledge about dream interpretation and Jungian psychology down her throat. At the time, I thought, “Perhaps she could ‘eat it’ if allowed to bite off what she could chew or if she received small pieces. Perhaps she can’t ingest it at all and, if this is the case, I have to accept that she can’t take in everything that interests and excites me.” I eased off. This is an example of my honouring the dream-world, an attitude that I adopted more than 30 years ago. Of course, I or others might interpret this dream differently at another time or in other circumstances. At the time, my interpretation shaped my action in a particular way.

Despite a general pattern of allowing my dreams to inform my decisions, I don’t always pay attention. More than a decade ago, while working at a treatment centre with children and adults, I had dreams over the course of a year that suggested it was time for me to leave that place of employment because I felt my values and contributions were not being considered in certain programming decisions affecting students. Responding to my dreams, I acknowledged
that I had to leave at some point, but deferred my decision to do so because I wanted to maintain continuity in therapy for the students with whom I was working. One day, I was supervising lunch with a group of adolescents. A boy with autism, six feet tall and very strong, was standing next to me when he opened his lunch that had been provided by his group home. Not liking what he saw, he turned to me and hit me on the top of my head with his fist. His group home had neglected to tell us that he hadn’t taken his medication for aggression that day. In order to recover from the neck injury I suffered, I had to take a year’s sabbatical. This was an example of literally “getting hit over the head” before I followed the guidance of my dreams. Subsequently, I left that centre to work in one that served smaller, less aggressive children, and one in which my values and contributions were heard and considered.

My passion for knowledge gathering, knowledge construction, and knowledge sharing has revealed itself through many dreams throughout my lifetime. I didn’t realize this until I started recalling my significant educational experiences in order to write stories for my doctoral courses. A profound example occurred in my early forties when I had a dream in which a beautiful, dark-haired woman took me into a large, round building situated in a heavily treed, green, natural setting. Through floor-to-ceiling windows, sunlight streamed in, creating dancing shadows on the floor and walls and tickling my aesthetic sense. The woman identified the site as “The World Library,” pointing out a multitude of volumes of “knowledge” on the shelves. Taking me down a winding staircase to the lower floor where a small, round, glass-walled room held blueprints and plans, she gave me a key to access this room and its treasures. In the dream, I had a sense of getting a glimpse of prototypes for the world’s “business”: events, processes, patterns, challenges, and objects. I felt in awe of the opportunity to see these plans and responsible to honour their possibilities in whatever way I could. Looking back now, I see that
the context for knowledge gathering and knowledge construction was a natural setting that
infiltrated the human-made creations, not the least of which were books which have been
beloved and influential throughout my life. Looking back now, I see that I could interpret this
dream as my being given a glimpse into the collective unconscious level that Jung (1961) writes
about, that layer of psychic substrate below the personal unconscious that he believed houses
universal archetypal energy patterns or blueprints for all of humanity.

This dream about the World Library occurred around the time in mid-life that I had
completed undergraduate courses and decided to proceed with master’s level studies in
psychology at a local university. Although my experiences in that academic institution were pale
in relation to those in my childhood memories and dream-world, I completed my M.A. and
began doctoral studies. For several reasons, including feeling financial pressures and a need for
immersion in practice, and experiencing an inner incongruence between my studies and practice,
I withdrew from the programme. My action was preceded by a dream which illustrated
graphically that I had to take a zig-zag, rather than direct, path to actualizing my educational
aspirations. Subsequently, that path involved working for the local board of education in a (then-
called) section 19 school/day treatment programme. This assignment took me back to
employment with the school board that I had left in the 1960s to do educational research with the
National Film Board. Now, in 1991, once again engaged directly with students as learners and
newly (for me) as clients in therapy, I felt deep satisfaction with the practical professional
experience in which I was engaged, and a sense of relief at receiving adequate remuneration for
my work. My informal education continued through professional development, personal interest
courses, and self-inquiry about a vast array of subjects, including autism, developmental delays,
sensory-motor integration, dream study, autobiographical writing, astrology, Jungian
psychology, and Sandplay which I read about and studied through personal process and certificate-oriented training.

**Sandplay: A New Vocation**

Almost a decade after I resumed university studies, in the summer of 1993 I spent three weeks in Switzerland. There I engaged in a three-week seminar series with the son of the Swiss woman, Dora Kalff, who developed Sandplay as a therapeutic discipline in the 1980s. This approach involved placing miniature figurines in small trays of wet or dry sand to create a “world.” (See Appendix B for more details about Sandplay Therapy.) Although I had completed my required hours of training in Canada to become an internationally certified Sandplay therapist, I had decided to do further training at “the source” or “well-spring,” as I called the Kalff home. While there, I had a visual dream that excited and energized me when I awoke. Even now, I feel stirrings in my heart when I remember it.

In my dream, I was standing in the exact centre of a bridge that spanned the road between the Kalff home [for me, a site for work and learning] and the little natural park across the road [a site for relaxation and play]. The bridge had been constructed because of a large, circular excavation in the road. As I stood there, I looked down into the underground “world” exposed by the excavation. I saw many men and women wearing safety hats and construction clothes. I knew also that there were dozens and dozens of other people I couldn’t see who were also working underground to repair and install new energy and communication lines, not just for the little Swiss town of Zollikon, but for the whole world. As I stood on that bridge, I became aware that I held in my hand a golfball-sized ruby. Within my symbolic framework, I interpreted the ruby to be a spiritually precious stone, my birthstone, a symbol of my Self.
This dream is typical of a genre of dreams that I have in which I “know” in the dream without any doubt. I considered the dream to be a validation of the therapeutic work that I had chosen to do and specifically the studies in Sandplay that I had undertaken. Six years later in Vancouver at a Canadian-sponsored international Sandplay Therapy conference, my body tingled with excitement as I experienced a realization of this dream. Here I was, speaking to an audience of 130 Sandplay therapists from around the world. During our few days together, we talked about revitalizing experiences of our clients and ourselves. We spoke about ways of communicating our experiences and ideas to each other, and understanding what our clients were communicating to us. Our gathering was replete with Sandplay images and stories of clients’ transformative and healing processes and discussions about professional development that might help us improve our future interventions and clarify the grounding of theory in practice. Our interest in and excitement about our work revitalized us. In actuality, we were working on lines of communication and energy restoration around the world, as my dream of six years earlier had suggested. I sensed a merging of past, present, and future, and felt a comfort with my dream-world as a source or site of knowing.

Various doctoral courses have required that I write about my teaching and learning experiences. This practice has allowed me to connect consciously with my passion, reverence, and excitement about the work that I do as a psychotherapist, as an informal and a formal learner and researcher, and as a teacher/trainer/supervisor of Sandplay Therapy interns. I have learned through my experience to depend upon my inner stirrings as important indicators in learning and knowing.

Shortly after commencing doctoral studies, I planned and facilitated an intensive Sandplay workshop for nine advanced Sandplay students. This experience evoked powerful
feelings of passion, reverence, and excitement in me and in most of the workshop participants, according to their reports. As well, participants’ implicit and explicit responses to experiential activities helped me clarify questions and methodology for my doctoral inquiry, both of which I will address later in this text.

In the workshop, experiential activities were focused on creating, seeing, and making meaning of images in Sandplay. The initial experiential activities included the creation of a sandpicture by a sandplayer, and the documented witnessing by two other members of the group regarding personal internal sensations, what happened in the sandtray (i.e., moulding the sand and placement of figurines and objects), and the sandplayer’s verbal and non-verbal behaviours. Then, all three members of each small group engaged in a narrative activity in which the sandpicture creator and the two witnesses alternately wrote stories about each of their sandpictures, shared them orally, and conversed about the sense these stories made in their lives.

The women’s stories frequently had roots in the past and suggestions of future possibilities. As well, they were contextualized within the theme of the workshop, Seeing Sandpictures through Two Eyes: The Eyes of Eros and Logos. This is a theme that I developed intentionally to explore aspects of seeing and meaning-making that involved subjective, relational, and objective ways of knowing: perceptions of internal bodily responses; free associations; memories; intuition; observations of verbal and non-verbal behaviours of sandpicture creators; prior knowledge about participants and about symbols and symbolic process; collaboration, emotions, cognitions, and a systematic framework for analyzing sandpictures. Considering what is involved in ways of knowing as conceptualized above, we can understand that The Eyes of Eros and Logos is really a metaphor for an energetic process whereby information flows from the outer world through the senses and the inner world through neural
pathways to the brain, to be transformed into neural messages that are decoded by the brain and projected onto the screen of the mind’s eye (Sullivan, 2005).

Revisiting what I have written here, I now feel that I must identify some important components that no doubt were left embedded in what I wrote above and that demand articulation: soul; imagination; and numinosity or mystery. Perhaps these are elements of “aesthetic perception” (p. 1), a term that is used by McConeghey (2003) to define “the speech of soul” and that requires perception through “a new eye” that can access the deep unconscious. It is here that we connect with the imagery of mythology, cultural diversity, and fantastic happenings that often appear in our dreams and sandpictures. It is through our imaginations that we can act out and practise archetypal patterns without needing to confront their repercussions in our outer lives. It is through our imaginative play that we can encounter the numinosity and mystery of energies beyond us that can enrich our lives and help us make meaning.

In the Seeing Sandpictures through Two Eyes workshop that I facilitated for Sandplay students, through sandpictures and written stories (in other words, visual and verbal narratives) the nine women addressed many existential issues. Included were the following: anger and sadness resulting from life circumstances and other people’s judgments; concerns for children; disability; enchainment; experiences of the significance of artistic expression in one’s life; feelings of alienation; imaginative freedom and restraints upon it; loss of hopes and dreams; nurturance and protection; parental absence and other effects of war; parental harshness, rigidity, and abuse; personal illness, and illness and impending death of family members; relationships with other women; and separation from loved ones because of professional commitments. I resonated with their stories and remembered my own. What struck me was the “awful beauty”
of their stories and mine, a phenomenon that evokes the words of Heidegger (1968, cited by McConeghey, 2003, p. 6):

> Beauty is a fateful gift of the essence of truth, and here truth means the disclosure of what keeps itself concealed. The beautiful is not what pleases, but what falls within that fateful gift of truth which comes to be when that which is eternally nonapparent and therefore invisible attains its most radiantly apparent appearance. (p. 68)

It is that beauty that at times spontaneously causes me to catch my breath, to flush as the heat in my heart radiates upwards, and to tear up when looking at some sandpictures. When meeting it, I feel a sense of awe that always surprises me. Recently I experienced it while sitting with a 38-year-old man who sat looking at his sandpicture that was an expanse of sand divided in two by “a river” formed by a splash of water dumped into the tray. On the far shore, stood a lone aboriginal man, a simple three-inch plastic figure, looking across the river to imagined mountains off in the distance. As the sandpicture creator sat transfixed, nodding his head affirmatively, I felt that he had found his essence deep within, that flame of life that would fuel his courage and lead him on a quest that would change his life. Pointing to the little plastic figure, he expressed verbally that this man was in touch with his courage. I knew the journey would be one of awful beauty, with something invisible pulling him from within and causing him to set priorities and make sacrifices that had, to this point, stopped him from beginning that quest. This is the power of the image, whether held in the imagination, manifested through art or Sandplay, or encountered through life experience, especially in Nature, that I have learned to take seriously.

Hillman (1989) suggests that images must be understood metaphorically, rather than literally. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), this means understanding “one domain of experience in terms of another” (p. 117). Hillman (1989) also suggests that images arrive with
“a solid moral grounding” (p. 50). Recalling a period of great personal suffering, Jung (1961) writes about the importance of responding to images as they appear in dreams:

I took great care to try to understand every single image, every item of my psychic inventory, and to classify them scientifically—so far as this was possible—and, above all, to realize them in actual life. That is what we usually neglect to do. We allow the images to rise up, and maybe we wonder about them, but that is all. We do not take the trouble to understand them, let alone draw ethical conclusions from them. This stopping short conjures up the negative effects of the unconscious. It is equally a grave mistake to think that it is enough to gain some understanding of the images and that knowledge can here make a halt. Insight into them must be converted into an ethical obligation. Not to do so is to fall prey to the power principle, and this produces dangerous effects which are destructive not only to others but even to the knower. The images of the unconscious place a great responsibility upon a man. Failure to understand them, or a shirking of ethical responsibility, deprivest him of his wholeness and imposes a painful fragmentariness on his life. (pp. 192-193)

Knowing I will be referring to images frequently in this document as I explore the concept of visual narratives, I want to sharpen my understanding about “images,” a word I often use with little thought, although when looking at sandpictures, I sometimes wonder about the relationship of those “pictures” with images. Is a sandpicture comprised of many images, or is the picture as a whole “an image”? When we manifest an image outwardly as in Sandplay or art, can we still refer to it as an image? What imbues an image with power to move viewers emotionally?

What follows illustrates my process when contemplating such questions. A quick etymological search fails to satisfy my questions: rooted in an 11th century Latin word, *imagen*, image refers to “a copy, statue, picture, idea, appearance, imitation, likeness of something” (Ayto, 1990, p. 294). I turn to familiar books. Susanne Langer (1953) suggests that “a picture [visual art] . . . is an image, created for the first time out of things that are not imaginal, but quite realistic, canvas or paper, and paints or carbon or ink” (p. 46). She describes an image as distinct from an object; it has a virtual or illusory reality, existing as a visible visual form, without
actualization in a local or physical setting or context, and without other sensory realities. Langer also emphasizes that the saliency of an image, “which may be as vivid as any reality” (p. 49), derives from its existence as “an abstraction, a symbol, the bearer of an idea” (p. 47). As symbol, the image is a manifestation of interrelated archetypal energies organized into a “significant” (p. 24) form that embodies feeling and elicits the viewer’s response. But is an image only a symbol, or a symbol an image?

Hillman (1977) asserts that images and symbols can be clearly distinguished. Now a student of narrative inquiry, I resonate with what Hillman says. I feel my response in my heart and bones and nodding head. A symbol may become an image when it is “particularized by a specific context, mood, and scene” [ital. mine]. We may ask: How does this symbol appear, in terms of its particularity and uniqueness? To consider the “how” addresses the symbol “imagistically” (p. 64). Hillman suggests that symbols appear abstractly as elements in images. Hillman posits that a symbolic approach leads to a deconstruction of an image and an analysis of each symbol within the image, whereas an imagistic approach leads to consideration of the “intra-related” and “co-temporaneous” (p. 69) elements of an image.

Relevant to dream images, Hillman (1989) states that “it is image that is experienced” (p. 15) and that this experience takes us beyond ego to profound self-knowledge when we allow the images to speak. Although the image itself does not have a basis in physical reality, Hillman emphasizes that we must attend to the detail and context which the image presents. By connecting with image directly, and exploring it through analogy (asking “what is it like” and thus making unlimited connections to the image) rather than interpretation (stating “it means this” and thus reducing the number of possibilities), we are able to attribute value to our lives.
By experiencing my images, I connect with my soul which, by its nature, implies both fluidity and depth (Hillman, 1989).

**Dancer: A Sustained and Sustaining Metaphor First Expressed Through Collage**

Sometimes images appear and reappear in the imagination, dreams, artistic renderings, and Sandplay. In what follows, I take a metaphoric approach in my response to the image of a dancer that first appeared in an artistic “moment” sixteen years ago. This event marked the beginning (or so I thought) of a particularly strong and recurring theme in both my writings and my life for many years. In a gathering of women who came together to make and collage life-size body tracings, I physically positioned myself on a large sheet of paper on the floor so that a partner could trace around me. Spontaneously, I placed my right arm in the air with palm facing upwards, my left arm extended with palm facing downwards, my right leg bent at the knee, and left leg stretched as if balancing on toe tips. Without being conscious of it, I had assumed the pose of a classical dancer. Later, with this outline tacked to the wall, I spent several weeks selecting and cutting out images from National Geographic magazines, gluing down fragments, and painting in additional details. Through a sense of tacit knowing rather than visual analysis, I chose the images and their locations on the body tracing. When she was “fleshed out,” I called her Dancer (Figure 1), and considered her as “one of my selves.”

I didn’t know what “Dancer” meant in my life. Had I simply looked up the word in a symbol dictionary, I would have learned that various meanings for “dancing girl” were “carnal devotion, fascination, festivity, grace, revelry, [and] sexual appetite” (Jobes, 1961, p. 413) and, extrapolating from “dance”, one connected to cosmic creative energy, magic and secret knowledge, the linking of opposites such as masculine and feminine and heaven and earth, liberation, aging, and death (Cooper, 1978). My inclination did not lead me in this direction.
Many months later, I felt compelled to respond to the image and engaged in an activity called “active imagination,” an individual “inward gaze” form of imaginal play developed by Jung (Hannah, 1981). This technique involves a process of consciously relating to inner events and contents that emerge from the unconscious through written dialogues, painting, sculpting, or dance. In this specific case, I am referring to a written dialogue between Dancer and me wherein I used my dominant hand to record “my” voice and my non-dominant hand “her” voice. Dancer “told” me that her hand positions reflected a union of Spirit and Matter, Spirit and Nature.

Shortly after creating the collage, I had a dream in which I found on a shelf in a closet a long-forgotten box that contained the body parts of a woman. Had I for too long neglected my body? In the dream, I took the box outside and propelled it upwards, tossing the body parts into the air. As they descended to the ground, they reassembled themselves in “a new way,” according to the dream. At the time, I didn’t have a mental image to clarify the dream’s words. In the dream, I felt a little shocked at my equanimity in tossing the body parts, in fact, at my overall, matter-of-fact response to rediscovering this rather grisly container. In my active imagination experiences with Dancer, I learned that, just as we construct and reconstruct our verbal stories according to our contexts, we dis-member and re-member elements of our existence, including our stories, our identities, and images of them in our transformative processes. The reassembly of the dream body parts may also have been suggesting a need to experience my body in new or different ways from what I been used to doing. My knowledge about that reality has deepened since then as I experience more pain, more rigidity of movement, more weight than what I was familiar with in my younger years. Concomitantly, my pre-occupation with the rigors of the doctoral process and my work as an educator/psychotherapist in Sandplay Therapy leave me with little time for routine exercise beyond my twice daily walks in
the woods and ravine with the dog. She, through her prolonged sniffing, perking and turning of her ears, and silent vigilance reminds me always of the importance of an erotic encounter with Nature that, for me, has a spiritual essence.

My musings on Nature and Spirit bring me back to my body tracing collage of Dancer, who, through her form, connects those two dimensions. When I was engaged in my final two doctoral courses, I reconnected with Dancer whom I had left rolled up in a closet for a decade and a half. I wrote:

*I wonder how Dancer will re-member herself if I give her a chance to tell her story anew. I recall the journey she took me on when, two years after the dismemberment dream, I began to investigate her emergence by writing about her for a symbol paper required for my Sandplay Therapy certification process. Only then did I remember and understand a previous dream I had recorded two years prior to Dancer’s appearance through the collaged body-tracing.*

**My Inner Artist Archetype: Lost and Recovered**

In my dream of 18 years ago, I was compelled to return to the small town where I lived until I was 13 years old. I had gone to Main Street to reclaim something that I intended to “bring home.” I was also given some money that was “unlawfully” mine. When I awoke, I recalled an actual incident from my eighth year when I had entered a poster contest in my hometown.

My poster announcing a Kiwanis Club winter carnival had won first prize and had been displayed in a shop window on Main Street. I had won $25.00, a monumental sum for an eight-year-old in the late 1940s. Instead of giving me pleasure and satisfaction at my achievement, this victory created a trauma not resolved for many years. The problem was that the clowns I had drawn on the poster weren’t “good enough” in my mother’s eyes, and my mother (a good artist) had “corrected” them before I submitted my poster for judging. This painting had become my mother’s, and the victory that followed, therefore, became my mother’s victory. As I learned
through my journaling after the dream, the competition win was a traumatic experience for me: at the age of eight, I lost my inner artist, attained a strong inner critic about my capability for artful representation, and experienced a sense of fraudulence and inauthenticity. Subsequently, my inner critic’s harsh voice strengthened when I, an otherwise high-performing student in elementary school, received grades of “C” in art because of my ineptitude for reproducing exactly the flowers in vases and other objects upon which we were instructed to gaze. I was in my mid-forties before I engaged in the process of art-making for pleasure, self-expression, and self-knowledge.

**Knowing through Body and Art**

In active imagination writings, Dancer revealed herself to me as my *Inner Artist*, an archetypal energy form (Jung, 1959), or “blueprint” behind various forms of creative expression (e.g., drawing/painting, dance, music, gardening, cooking, and life generally). She gave me confidence to continue my participation in collaborative art processes with other women, and generated an excitement about doing so. I soon learned that through “doing art” collectively, I entered a “different” or extra-ordinary state of mind that linked me through visual images and verbal texts with my inner authority, my inner truth, and a renewed sense of self. I also realized that, through a dialectical approach with myself, manifested in the form of imaginative written dialogues, I was able to facilitate some healing from my unfortunate childhood experience and some transformation of previously inhibiting attitudes and energies around artistic representation. In the art-making process, as in my dreams and, later in Sandplay, my out-of-the-ordinary state of mind was characterized by a narrowed vision, a sense of timelessness, inattention to bodily demands, and a loss of sense of self. These characteristics, according to
Nachmanovitch (1990), suggest “lila,” a Sanskrit word for “sacred play” (p. 11), a notion I adopted readily.

I continued my sacred play through collaborative art processes with other women. These experiences radiated sacredness and an honouring of the work we did together. They also continued to inform me. For example, in a drawing exercise in which we sketched roughly a few favorite objects, we repeated a process of “zooming in” on a shape or an aspect of an object that had appeared in the previous sketch. We elaborated on and refined our shapes, doing our final renderings on “good” paper (Figure 2). After I finished the drawing/painting, I spontaneously wrote beside it: *The seeds of our knowing are in our flesh. Let us bring viriditis* [Hildegarde of Bingen’s (1985) reference to the healing power of green] *so that they may flourish.* As with Dancer, body and art were emphasized as places of knowing and healing.

*The arts themselves are . . . virtual places* (Tuan, 2004, p. 20) that have the power to open one’s eyes to the new (p. 23) and to disturb or exalt (p. 44), rather than to be simply a soporific cocoon of comforts and habits (p. 23). When I read these words in the spring of 2005 in a course with Dr. Suzanne Thomas (*AEC 3176H, Exploration of Sense of Place in Natural and Professional Contexts*), I felt a resonance. My writings for that course had exposed tensions, wounds, ambiguities, and ethical issues having to do with my relationships with family, friends, and the natural world. They also prompted further explorations of connections amongst my Self, relationships with others, my art, my body, my multiple roles, the natural world, and a significant geographical place, my family farm. These written narratives prompted me to write further about a painting (Figure 3) done in the company of women friends around the same time. Slipping back into an old pattern, before putting paint to paper, I noted: *I don’t know what to paint. I can’t paint well enough. It won’t measure up.* Having expressed these inhibiting
thoughts, I then allowed myself to play with the paint, confident that my friends would accept and honour what I had done, not because of “it,” but because of “me.” Later, writing about the painting, I expressed further my tension, anxiety, and ambivalence:

Inside Eye Peering Out
   Am I ready to see?
   Is it safe to come out?
   What if I die?
   What if I don’t die
to old habits
   and attitudes
   and ways?
Tensions, wounds, ambiguities,
   Rightness of place—
   Am I ready to see?

Reflecting on my image and written words, I was again reminded of my collaged dancer who had “identified herself” as my Inner Artist many years ago. I recalled that in a course on arts-informed research methods with Dr. Ardra Cole in the fall of 2004, I had facilitated a collage-making experience and had used images of Dancer in a follow-up presentation on collage to the class. Once again, using the active imagination technique, I learned that she was ready literally to come out of that closet where she had been stored for several years. She let me know that she wanted to enlarge her perspective from a two-dimensional one, and to become contextualized. A couple of months later, she emerged into the foreground when I began to explore my ecological identity in my Sense of Place course.

**Reconnections: Nature and My Nature**

My new focus on the collaged images allowed me to see that all of Dancer’s glued-on fragments are images of the natural world. As with my dream of the World Library (p. 12), Nature and (my) human-made creation were connected. A process of gazing with what I call “soft eyes” at the rediscovered collaged images allowed some insights to emerge. I became
aware that Nature’s inscriptions on my bodymind had their roots in my early childhood years at 
“the farm” where my paternal grandmother and grandfather, and great-grandmother had lived. 
The farm is both the geographical and relational place where my connection with Nature was 
established. Those connections with Nature and the farm are entangled with my early memories 
of my father.

My father, a quiet man, held a space in which I could sense the world of which we were a 
part. With him, I could hear the murmurings of voices of “others” in that world. Glancing back, 
I remember wandering the woods at the farm together. The silence was broken only by birdcalls, 
the sound of cicadas, and the rustling of the last fall’s dried leaves underfoot as we hunted for 
partridge nests in the spring, and mentally counted olive eggs from a distance. I remember 
turning over rocks to see what lived beneath them, looking in hollow trees, and watching hawks 
soar and circle overhead. Griffin (1995) describes the intimacy with which a child knows 
Nature:

*It is as a child that one has a different experience of what it is to know the world, Eros 
not yet restricted to a game of dominance. Flowers, animals, hummingbirds, and 
dragonflies that still speak. . . . A wave crashing on the shore, leaves falling one by one 
in a forest, the sun rising up over the crest of a hill, all this is magic and portentous with 
meaning.* (p. 141)

I connect my childhood experiences of Eros metaphorically with my adult life, imagining 
turning over rocks, looking in hollow trees, and glancing upwards as I try to peer into the dark 
recesses of the soul and unconscious and engage in meaning-making personally and with my 
therapy clients. Investigating the seemingly silent inner spaces, I track my bodily sensations, 
internal energy flows, and bodily symptoms, the small, furry, prehuman “creatureness” of my 
intuition, instincts, and bodily knowing through listening to their murmurings.
In order to hear the murmurings, I have to slow down and attend on many levels. As Mazis (2002) writes:

*We have . . . learned from myriad voices of the earth—from flowers, rocks, and birds. We can at any moment slow down, attend to nuances, and to the layers and webs of meaning. Then we would start listening to what Bachelard called “the murmuring among things.”* (p. 19)

Through listening to the murmurings, I am able to amplify the Eros I feel, accentuating my learning in and longing for Nature, my feelings of deep connection, and my gratitude that my father was a quiet man who expanded my world to include comfort with the stillness of human voices and attraction to sometimes barely perceptible events:

*We can also choose not to hear any of these voices: then the world is just made up of physical masses in motion that collide with each other in certain generalizable ways. To hear these voices requires a different sort of ear than the ones we have cultivated by thinking that we humans are exclusively the “speaking animals.”* (p. 19)

Connecting my early childhood experiences with the collaged images of Nature on Dancer, I understand that it is this “different sort of ear” that enriches my experience when I am in Nature, attuned to those other voices and the pauses between their murmurings. I believe it is this different sort of ear that enables my work as a psychotherapist listening to the voices of others who speak in familiar and unfamiliar tongues arising from their diverse experiences within family and cultural traditions. Those I attend professionally open my heart to their experiences through, not only their utterings, but also the silences enveloping their words and the rhythms connecting them. I try to know them through their words and their silences, which “act in a reciprocal fashion in the construction of knowledge” (Kalamaras, 1994, p. 8). Attending to the silences and pauses in people’s oral stories, as well as their words, is similar to paying attention to the empty spaces in sandpictures (which I will address in more detail later), and the
sites populated by miniature figurines and objects. In verbal and visual narratives, the juxtaposition of opposites—such as silences/words, empty/populated and hidden/visible—informs my knowing. In my work, I hear the silences and voices as unique and energizing, and see the empty spaces and populated sites of sandpictures as invigorating and pregnant with potential.

Checking in with my body now, I am aware of tension in my chest and realize I am holding my breath. Sitting with the tension, an issue emerges: In therapy, once a trusting therapeutic relationship is established, the confidentiality of the situation protects clients when they relate their personally significant stories. I wonder: What will be the effect of the research situation on participants’ willingness to communicate meaningful stories? Does education research provide a place for challenging stories, those that are difficult because they threaten personal privacy, evoke distressing memories, or risk a breach of confidentiality for others we include as characters in our stories?

As a psychotherapist, I know that by allowing a place for silences and spaces, I provide a place for clients to touch on significant issues that might be avoided through constant talking, explicit questioning, and attempts at interpretation. As a researcher, I anticipate that I must also dare to accommodate silences and spaces and not fill them up with unnecessary talk and attempts to make meaning too early. I know that, by my attitude, I must invite and welcome stories of silences and spaces and those evoked by silences and spaces. Looking ahead momentarily, I wonder what stories my research participants and I will let burst forth, clambering for a hearing or a sighting, and what stories we will muffle. I wonder what energies—scary, amusing, provocative, or other—will appear from the silences and empty places when I take the time to listen not only with my ears, but with my heart and the rest of my body? I can feel my
excitement building and the promise of discovery energizing me as I imagine that my inquiry will emulate my childhood pastime of turning over rocks, looking in hollow trees, and glancing upwards.

My imaginings about earth and sky bring me gently back to Dancer whose pose connects with the two realms of Spirit and Nature, and the body in-between. I wonder what spaces she will inhabit during the research process. I wonder what story she will tell after her long period of silence. I wonder what her many years of silence might have meant. I wonder what will be the significance of Dancer’s continuing presence in my life experience. This wondering, from a place of unknowing, is similar to the silent questioning I do as a Sandplay therapist when I recognize that miniature figurines are reappearing in people’s sandpictures across time.

**Nature, Embodied Spirit, and Art**

My wondering about Dancer elicits a memory about a passage from my original dialogue with her (Weinberg, 1993), in which Dancer explicated for me:

*A dancer moves through space and time, daring to express herself. As she does so, she changes her form. Her expression is not always grounded in the mundane. She often takes flight from that reality to move through space. This flight through space represents freedom of the Spirit. She dares to express this Spirit.*

*The image you have represented [as the collaged dancer] is like a movement frozen in time. This particular “snap-shot” (theoretically taken from a sequence of movements) best represents the spirit of the Inner Artist archetype.*

*When you consider form, also consider the movement that is involved in creating that form or expressing through that form. The movement will reflect how the energy has become materialized within the body. Before image-ination occurs, what “matters” is in the body. Realization in the body may be felt as emotions, sensations, postures or, when blocked, symptoms. These may then be imagined or projected outwardly through artistic process. Sometimes, an image comes first and may “drop” into body awareness.*

*It is important to develop bodily awareness about this process. One way is to try to locate in the body the energy centre from which the artistic expression originates. Being aware of the body and of movements during creative expression is necessary for development of consciousness about one’s personal process.*
Focusing again on this passage, after a long period of time, I realize that I have, in fact, paid attention to the message. When I am writing or painting or otherwise engaging in intensive “work,” my attention alternates rapidly between my inner and outer worlds. By inquiring into the tension or by acknowledging and staying with it, I—it moves, as I notice now. Writing these last few sentences, I have felt a fluttering sensation, a flow of energy from my abdomen through my chest to my throat, and an intensification of heat in my upper arms and torso. An image of printed text appears behind my eyes, a thought: in the past, I have sometimes identified this type of bodily-felt tension as tension between inertia and action. I realize that thinking about it in terms of a pull between past, the familiar, and future, the new, opens up possibilities for inquiry, and suggests less disparagement than “inertia,” a term that constellates images of lethargy, disinterest, and indolence. This example illustrates the fluid nature of personal meaning and of stories of life experiences. As well, its dynamic quality is apparent in the process of moving backwards to pick up threads of historical data and forwards to weave threads into an unfolding future. The example also juxtaposes implicit and explicit ways of knowing which inform the process and product of my self-inquiry that provides a foundation for my doctoral research. Delighting in the mystery of inquiry into life’s experiences, I stumble over another realization: that Dancer has informed me even in her silence.

Her dancing spirit, collaged with images of Nature, is inextricably interwoven with my art-making in collaboration with other women and my bodily knowing, as one of my pre-proposal stories illustrates:

*I remember my physical effort almost a decade ago when, along with eight other women, I canoed and portaged in Algonquin Park for the first time, all for the explicit purpose of making masks and telling stories in the woods. Recalling the sounds of howling wolves and the murmuring voices and laughter resounding from our tents the first night during a downpour, I still smile after nine years. Inhaling deeply as if I were there now, I re-
experience the smell of the dank earth soaked by the torrent inundating us that first night and the rich aroma of coffee as we sat around in a circle in the morning. I have a vivid image in my mind of the steam rising from our tin cups as we told and laughed about our experiences of the previous night. I remember the silence and the focused attention with which we made gauze-bandage masks on the small wooded island where we camped for several days, and the emotions we evoked as we named our masks and found ways to reflect their essences through our presentations of them.

_Brendan of the Bog (Figure 4), my dark masculine side at home in Nature, was reborn on that trip. His countenance reminded me of a part of my essential nature that I had long neglected, the part that requires a deep, consistent connection with the earth, the water, the wind, the sky._... 

Reflecting on the photo I took of Brendan that day in Algonquin Park, I recall the delicious smell of the dank earth and sensation of squishing mud as I penetrated the woods to find a setting in which “he” might feel at home. I realize that I wanted something that would seem to venerate “him,” in actuality, that part of my existence that he represented. Finding the decaying log on which I could place the mask gave me satisfaction as I mulled over the symbolism of “the new” emerging from “the old.” I relished the diverse textures and patterns and smells and sounds. This place nourished my senses and, in doing so, seemed to clear my head. I was not preoccupied with thoughts of future or past, lacks or excesses, successes or failures. I was purely in the moment, experiencing life as I was living it, feeling “one of” amidst rock strata compressed through millennia, century-old trees, and days-old caterpillars, feeling whole. I felt connection with the world in the reality of my being. I felt reverent.

I recall that when I placed the Brendan of the Bog mask atop the decaying tree stump surrounded by green foliage, I thought of “The Green Man” archetype familiar to me through my Jungian symbolic studies. This figure, found on numerous gothic churches and castles in Europe, is a traditional form of a masculine head surrounded by foliage. It is reputed to be an homage to trees and a symbol of irrepressible life, cyclical death and rebirth, and a merging of
humanity and Nature (www.stonecarver.com). Thinking of my Brendan as representative of a grounded, embodied spirituality that informs my daily life and relationships to myself, others, and the world (in contrast to a spirituality focused on the heavens and a disembodied god), I saw him as a masculine counterpart to Dancer. He also held the notion of green as a colour representative of healing, resonating with Hildegard of Bingen’s concept of viriditis (previously mentioned on p. 25). I used this theme of viriditis in a photograph (Figure 5) for cards for my women friends. What appealed to me about this photo were the self-reflection apparent in the globe and the windowed outlook—inner and outer landscapes—that are suggested by the image and that were my reality when I concretely manifested Brendan of the Bog.

The interweaving of the themes of Spirit and Nature in my daily practical experience, including university assignments, continued its reverberations as the following example shows. In my Sense of Place course previously mentioned, for part of my final assignment, Dancer generated a new artistic representation: a line of eight dancers, Woodsdancers (Figure 6a-6c). Their forms, all reflecting Dancer’s union of Spirit and Matter pose, are collaged with photos of the farm and my family who had a history there, and some personal photos of Nature and of relevant pieces of art. After finishing the collage process, I planned to take the dancers to a nearby wood to photograph them. I saw this intention as a symbolic gesture concretizing Dancer’s coming out of the closet into Nature. Although the collaged paper dancers were not suited structurally for a trip outside on a windy March day, I felt compelled to expose them and, in a sense, risk their integrity to explore the Spirit-Nature connection. That night, I had an auditory dream in which a voice introduced me to a group as “a descendent of the ancient line of Snowber.”
Inquiry as Soulful Work

When I awoke with these words ringing in my ears, I thought I recognized the name “Snowber” as a researcher. However, I couldn’t remember from which course I had a reference to her work because I hadn’t yet read any of it. Later in the day, I found two articles by Celeste Snowber, dancer, researcher, and educator. As I read one of the articles (Snowber, 2002), I noticed that my heart rate quickened and my breathing became shallow and interrupted. I felt tension in my shoulders as words in the article resonated for me. I leaned forward slightly as I anticipated more resonance. The cells in my body held and amplified my longing for understanding about the dream that led me to Snowber’s work, for an explanation of my long-time focus on the dancer as metaphor, for confirmation that my artful representations had been guiding me for years, and for an answer to my question about what my soul wanted of me by sending me a dream about resuming doctoral studies. I felt excited when I read these passages of Snowber:

The arts in inquiry allows us to access the crevices of our souls and bring the fullness of our humanity to the process of being, living, knowing, and teaching. The data of the body can be a place where the soul can sing and the bones can dance. (p. 20)

As I read on, I felt a familiar tingling in my solar plexus and heat in my heart area. These sensations often presage my discovery of a treasure when reading: inquiry as a place of spiritual formation . . . a journey into ourselves . . . [into] body and soul (p. 21), an opening to transformation. Reading a research article by a dancer about the dancer metaphor and imagining “dancing the data” (Bagley & Cancienne, 2002) resonated deeply.

I marveled at the sequence of events: finishing the group of collaged dancers, planning to take them out to the woods, having a dream that introduced me to Snowber, and reading about
her work. She writes about integrating performance through dance and movement with “the art of autobiographical narrative” and identifies the theme of multiplicity of “lives, roles, responsibilities, and . . . ways of knowing” in the stories of her research participants (Snowber, 2002, p. 20). Movement and talk. Images and words. The juxtaposition of the two dimensions, visual and verbal, in dynamic relationship caught my attention and stirred me deeply. I recalled an imaginal dialogue with aspects of Dancer from 1993. In the first quote, she emphasizes

> how important it is to give voice to . . . [my] images through words. It is by moving from image to words to image to words that . . . [I] will develop . . . [my] Inner Artist. (Weinberg, 1993, p. 29)

In the second passage, Dancer stresses that

> through our consciousness in materializing . . . [archetypal energy], we are able to transform . . . [it]. To do so, we must express the energy in as many ways as possible—through images, yes, and also through words, through movement, through music, through play, through work and through life. All of this we must do in relationship with our art and with other people. It is through them—our art and other people—that we see our reflections. It is through our play with them that we create something new. It is through life in all its forms that we express Inner Artist archetypal energy. (pp. 30-31)

I realize at this point that my intention to keep alive my doctoral process even as I write this document insists on a state of flux as I think I am completing my “write-up.” What I wrote several days ago now becomes “field notes” as I update my experience, as my writings from five days ago show:

> As I sit again with Dancer’s words and connect them to those of Snowber, I feel tingling in my heart area because I have just learned that Celeste Snowber will offer a workshop or seminar at OISE next week (October 29, 2007). I am always delighted by acts of synchronicity, a term used by Jung [1972] to denote the occurrence in time of two separate events that have no cause-effect relationship. For me, synchronicity is a meaning-making concept in life. With Snowber’s visit to Toronto, I will have an opportunity to experience this dancer/educator/researcher in person. I will be able to carry an image of her based on her physical appearance, her dynamic expressive and gestural being, as she shares her research. I will hear the pitch and timbre of her voice, perhaps even sniff a scent of her essence, as I look into her eyes, windows to her soul.
My imagination engages me in an erotic encounter in the broadest sense of eroticism. As Snowber (2006) writes: “[It] is the eros, the love, the desire, the passion to grow and learn which propels many of us in our adult life (p. 80).” My daring to express myself in terms that evoke intimacy and longing is provoked by Snowber’s own (e.g., 2006; 1999) writings about Eros as curriculum. Perhaps some of the sensations I imagine will inform me about what I carry as her and her forebears’ “descendent,” as I was introduced in my dream.

Now reflecting on my experience of Celeste Snowber at the Centre for Arts-Informed Research at OISE/UT, I feel a sense of gratitude for life’s mysterious workings that led to my meeting with her. Reading again the quotation in the previous paragraph, I realize that a deeply rooted “passion to grow and learn” has propelled me in my lifelong learning. Arriving early for her seminar, I had a brief moment to share my dream of her with her, in a sense sharing my wondering about it with her. In a one-time meeting of one-and-a-half hours, I witnessed Celeste’s passionate energy as an educator and joined her and the group in movement. We engaged in a transformational educational event in which she dared and supported us, her short-term students, to be in our bodies and push our own boundaries of inhibition despite space and time constraints. I experienced the contrasts of sharp and muted movements and stillness, vocalizations and silence, as we worked individually and in relationship. Working with five words/phrases (drought, air, imagination, research and brain storm) contributed by the students participating in her mini-workshop, Celeste interwove the words, which began as fragments, poetically with a personal experiential story and body movements. She created an innovative performance piece that demonstrated how she integrates various dimensions within her body and how she lives inquiry by realizing that each experiential moment is like a snapshot in time that can open a doorway to future knowings. My personal experience of her involved bodybrain, mind, and multifaceted relationships. It led me to understand my dream of her and to assume,
consciously and with humility, a mantle shared by all those who came before as passionate, daring, inquiring teachers, learners, and researchers who participate mindfully in life’s dance.

Sensations and perceptions. Movement and talk. Words and images. As I reconsider what I wrote above, I also feel a familiar tension in my chest and notice an absence of breathing. I recall what I have felt myself and heard from several friends and psychotherapy clients: that we are often compelled to muffle our passion and extroverted energy because, beginning with our families, others often cannot tolerate it in us. I have heard women’s remembered stories that include words like “You’re too much for me.” “You tire me out.” “Your passion makes me uncomfortable.” I wonder if the energy of those who make others uncomfortable offers up too stark a contrast to their own inertia. I wonder if they have not yet touched on their own longing and passion for learning and knowing. I wonder what anxieties get in the way. Staying with the tension and absence of breath, I realize that consideration of a connection between my Dancer and Snowber (even in my mind) constellates both a feeling of congruence (suggesting by my nodding head) and anxiety (signaled by the tension in my chest and my breathlessness). Staying with the feeling, a new mental image emerges: the juxtaposition of Dancer with my painting, “Inside Eye Peering Out” (juxtaposed literally in Figure 7). The tension in my chest dissipates when I acknowledge that I/she have/has some trepidation with the “coming out” business. Perhaps my cells still hold a memory of that early experience of putting my artistic representation out there in public in an evaluative setting. As I type these words, another thought tumbles out: Perhaps the insertion of Dancer and other artistic works into my academic process risks, not only exposure and transformation, but harsh criticism. I am conscious that this particular incident is a metaphor that still carries weight in my life and inhabits my psyche’s fractures.
I re-read the words of Snowber quoted above (p. 34):

_The arts in inquiry allows us to access the crevices of our souls and bring the fullness of our humanity to the process of being, living, knowing, and teaching._

From the beginning, with my _What does my soul want of me?_ question, I framed my doctoral process as soul work. I had a chance to explore what that means for me by daring to allow the arts into my inquiry, to explore the crevices of my soul through metaphorically turning over the rocks, peering into the hollow trees, and looking upwards. Like my dreams, my bodily knowing, my collaborative creative relationships with women, and my experiences in Nature, my artistic representations have informed me, manifested my learnings, and provoked my quests in a significant way. I knew through my exploration that I had to include the arts in my doctoral inquiry. My decision presented me with tensions in the form of bodily manifestations. I inquired through my writings:

_What is it about my decision to include the arts in my doctoral research that provokes this physical manifestation? What more is there besides the risk of exposure and fear of harsh criticism? As I gaze out the window, watching two black squirrels frolicking across wires and branches of the hedge at the end of my iced-over backyard, I look at my watch. How much time do I have? Ah, yes. How much time do I have before my 95-year-old mother returns from her seniors’ day programme? Before she repeatedly asks her list of questions because of her stroke-impaired memory: Is today bath day? Will I wear the same clothes tomorrow? Doesn’t it get dark early? Do I have to tell anybody anything or give anybody anything? Before my husband returns from the park with the dog to give me an account of all the dogs and their personalities? Before TV is clicked on? Before we discuss my husband’s walking regime designed to try to revitalize his poorly functioning vascular system? Before the dinner menu and car needs become the focus of my attention? How much time do I have before answering emails about Sandplay training, an upcoming conference, a book I am editing, and an anticipated trip to Korea to teach Sandplay, and phone calls about the use of my therapy room by a student and concerns about clients by interns whom I supervise?_

_I realize that my multiple roles and responsibilities, which sometimes crowd my psychological and physical space, cause me concern about committing to “do art” for my doctoral research. I feel tension between the actuality of my life, embedded as it is in relationships, roles, responsibilities, and shared environments, and my need for privacy, psychological and physical space, and independence in order to create._
Creative Work and Multiple Roles and Responsibilities

I realized that commitment to long-term art-making that would unfold as part of my doctoral research process and that, in turn, would generate further exploration, posed a challenge and exposed a persistent, although not total, impediment to my creative expression. This challenge included my reading, writing, and understanding of complex academic material. At the time, I had never really thought about hermeneutics and its all-encompassing nature (Conle, 2006); however I had an implicit understanding that, even at a basic perceptual level, our knowing is a complex process that involves interactions with different aspects of our internal and external worlds and interpretation of that information. My writings in response to an assignment for my doctoral course, Narrative and Story in Research and Professional Practice, CTL 4801, with Dr. Carola Conle, elaborate on this topic:

My assignment was to document how we read and try to understand, or understand, a dense article, using Gadamer’s “The Principle of Effective History.” Maybe this exercise of looking at how I read and understand will give me some clues about getting into another project facing me. I wonder if this is just another example of how I procrastinate until I have locked myself into tight time boundaries for getting a project done. I am aware of the part of me that says, “Why are you worrying? You always get done what you have to do.”

I look at the clock, knowing that Val will probably call in 15 minutes to tell me whether she feels well enough to go to the opera. I am aware of tension in my chest, the tension that I always feel when I have made arrangements to go out with a friend or to attend some event or other: this tension between my extroverted side and my introverted side, the tension between the part of me that feels having a balanced life is important and the part that wants to isolate myself and focus only on my course work. Life—my life—pulling at me sometimes feels as though a giant hand has stretched cobwebs across my mind. I imagine myself poking my finger in, wiggling it back and forth, making a hole, then using two hands to pull apart the densely-woven cobweb. Clarity. The tension in my chest has decreased. I read the title again: The Principle of Effective History. I love the feeling of knowing I’m on the brink of being able to start what I set out to do.

I read the title and wonder if by “effective history” Gadamer is talking about history on a personal or cultural level. Is it about autobiography, one’s life history? Or is it about the history of a culture, including significant events, with names, dates, and places? I
glance at the title of the article, The Historicity of Understanding, and wonder, “What is the difference between “history” and “historicity?” I go to my computer’s dictionary and look up “historicity”: Oh, this is a combination of two words, “historical” and “authenticity”—the state or fact of being historically authentic. So, is this article about the veridicality of understanding, about epistemological truth? I recall the readings and discussions I’ve been having recently about multiple truths, contextualized truth, and wonder what Gadamer will have to say.

I attempt to read and understand Gadamer’s first sentence. As I move from line to line, my eyes widen as I see no period in sight. In my imagination, I take a deep breath, think “A sentence shouldn’t be more than four lines.” and go back to the beginning to read the sentence again. Then I try it out loud. After reading it aloud, I realize I still have little understanding of what the author is trying to say. I realize that I’ve been put off by his use of the word “problematic”—could he have used “problem” instead?—and by his reference to “Herrmann Grimm’s Raffael to Gundolf and beyond”—did he need to refer to these works which are obscure, at least to me and, I hypothesize, to most of my classmates? I realize that I am already irritated and that I will not be able to understand what he is writing about if I stay with the emotion. OK. I’ll just drop the parts that I’m stuck on and try to figure this out, sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase. First, it’s about the interest of the historian, an historical phenomenon, and a tradition of writing. Secondarily, it’s about “their” effect in history, “their” being the interest of the historian, an historical phenomenon (epistemology??), a tradition of writing (specifically, the history of research), and valuable insights.

Hi! How was your walk? Did Augie play with her puppy buddies at the park? Did she run and play today? How was her mood? Did she get ornery? Oh, you got some avocados. Thanks. Yeah, my class was good this morning. Yes, leave the avocados out to soften. No, thanks. Not yet. Of course Augie likes chicken liver paté. Why wouldn’t she? Yeah, I eat it with dill pickles too. No, I don’t mind if you put TV on. (That continuous crunching of those crackers drives me nuts!

Reading the above paragraph again, probably more than six months after I incorporated it into this document, leaves me feeling sad. A few months ago my husband had a heart attack which greatly diminished his mobility and potential for independent activity. This event cut short my last trip to Korea where I teach Sandplay Therapy. After two bouts of pneumonia, a severe allergic reaction to medication, and kidney failure, my husband is now unable to drive, walk the dog, shop for groceries, prepare meals, and engage in many other pursuits and pleasures. His life has changed dramatically. Each morning when I awaken, I live with a sense of unknowing and foreboding as I wonder if he has survived the night. Each time I leave home
for even short periods, I wonder if he will be OK. Planning my impending trip to Korea in the
new year has been fraught with anxiety and a sense of being in limbo. Should I go? Should I
stay? I can enumerate reasons why I should stay. Deep within, I know I must go, I must
continue to live a singular life. I must continue with the work and the foci that help me remain
centered, connected to others in the outer world, and sane, as I say elsewhere in this document
(see p. 46). I have booked my flight, prepared my schedule, put into place care-givers, dog-
walkers, cleaners, grocers, plans for emergency situations. . . . I am aware that by attending to
my current emotions of sadness, enduring anxiety, guilt at intending to lead as much as possible
my own life, and frustration because I haven’t been able to keep to my “doing dissertation
timeline,” I lose my attunement with my Gadamer passage. I feel my horizon of interest has
narrowed. Although I felt my response to Gadamer was important to include at one point, now
I’m not really interested in it. I feel it has an intellectually indulgent quality to it that does not
interest me at the moment, although it was an example of the complexity of my life and its
interactions with my multiple roles and responsibilities, and of an ongoing questioning about the
relevancy of certain academic tasks. (Field notes, November 25, 2008)

I read: “To this extent, effective history is not new. Does “effective” mean authentic?
What designates an “effective-historical approach”?

The smell of chicken liver paté and dill pickle permeates my nasal passages. I might as
well eat lunch now. (I take a short break to get lunch.)

What is this new demand that “proceeds inevitably from the analysis of historical
consciousness”? “Led from the twilight region between tradition and history”? I’ll read
on. Maybe it will begin to make sense. Maybe I’m getting stuck on words and not getting
the overall meaning. Why do people have to write in such an opaque way? Do most
people who read these types of articles really understand what they’re reading? Perhaps
the problem is with the translation. I read on. “The requirement—ah, the demand—is of
a more theoretical kind. I don’t think I need to know “than what.” I’ll keep going.
“There is also contained . . . this other element.” “We miss the whole truth of the
[historical] phenomenon when we take its immediate appearance as the whole truth.”
This sentence is clear. There is more to it that I passed over. I’ll go back to pick it up.
Oh, yeah, you’ve mentioned the chef, Tyler Florence, before. What’s he cooking? Mmm. It does look good.

Effective-history predetermines what seems worthy of our inquiry and what will become the focus of our investigation. This is not the whole thing. In a sense, it is selected by “effective-history.” These sentences are five and six lines long! By the time I get to the end of the sentence, I’ve lost track of what Gadamer was saying at the beginning. I’ll keep reading. Maybe I’ll come to something that lifts the veil, like poking my finger through the cobwebs in my mind. Ah, yes. I come to it in the next paragraph. “We should learn to understand ourselves better and recognize that in all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the power of this effective-history is at work.” Our understanding of understanding can be deviant if we think that what we think worthy of our attention and what we inquire about is objective, not influenced by the past within the tradition of our discipline.

Yeah, have a good nap. No, I don’t want TV on. See you later. Hmmm. I wonder why Val hasn’t called. Maybe she won’t feel like going to the opera. I won’t be disappointed if she can’t make it. I’ll consider it a gift from the universe that I can stay in and keep reading and writing and trying to understand. (Ring) Hi, Val. How are you feeling? Oh, I’m sorry that you’re still feeling so awful. That’s OK. Don’t feel bad. I’m a bit relieved because I have so much work to do. Well, I’d like to have seen you and done this together because we’ve talked about it for so long. Let’s plan something for mid-April when I’m finished. No, No. You need to stay in and take care of yourself. You’re right. I can’t afford to get sick now. No. I consider it a gift from the universe. Yes. I’m relieved, even though I’m sorry you’re sick. Yes. Yes. Let’s talk when you’re feeling better. Bye.

Now, where was I? Oh, yeah. Thinking about the influence of the past within a tradition. Oh, I like how he puts this: “Statistics . . . are such an excellent means of propaganda because they let facts [which are presented as truths!] speak and hence simulate an objectivity that in reality depends on the legitimacy of the questions asked.” Propaganda: “party line,” “half truths,” “misinformation pretending an objectivity. Hmmm. The legitimacy, the authenticity of the questions asked. And Gadamer says that the saliency of effective-history doesn’t depend upon one’s consciousness of it. The power of history supercedes “finite human consciousness.” He says that although the scientific world with its claim to absolute truth and objectivity presses us to become conscious of the history and its effects, we cannot attain absolute consciousness of it. Effective historical consciousness is an element in the act of understanding itself, manifested in the choice of the right question to ask. This seems a bit circular. I need to understand it better. I’ll read on.

OK. I understand about being within a situation when we have an awareness of one, and so not being able to have “objective knowledge” about it. It’s the same as with a relationship, or an inquiry or, as Gadamer says, “the hermeneutic situation, i.e. the situation in which we find ourselves with regard to the tradition that we are trying to understand.” So, totally understanding the situation—“effective-historical reflection”—
is never completely possible because we exist historically. Now, what does “exist historically” mean? I’m reading the words in the next few sentences, but can’t quite grasp the meaning. Gadamer writes about discovering “in all that is subjective the substantiability that determines it.” The substantiability, Hegel’s “substance,” is “the basis of all subjective meaning and attitude and hence both prescribes and limits every possibility of understanding any tradition . . . in terms of its unique historical quality. I am still seeking for an understanding of this “substance.” I will read ahead until something makes sense. Gadamer writes: “so that what we are seeking to understand can be seen in its true dimensions.” By this, he means and says, “not in terms of our contemporary criteria”—not from my own narrow perspective that includes what I can see right around me and what I can exclude through my own biases, my own selective processes—but “within its own historical horizon” which demands that I see beyond my own horizon.

Oh, a quarter to four. Mom will be coming in soon. Then, I’ll have to move. I’m sitting where she always sits. This is my favourite place to sit. But I give it up to her when she’s in the living room because it’s the best vantage point for her to watch TV. And there’s a table next to the seat for her juice. I can move to Dick’s desk because he is still napping. When he’s up, he will be taking the dog for her evening walk. Then I can move to that end of the couch where she’s now sleeping.

Now, where was I? Oh, hi, Mom. How was your day? That’s good. Yes, it is a beautiful day. The sun is getting stronger. Yeah, he’s having his nap. Uh-huh. The dog’s having a good nap too. She had a big play with the other dogs at the park today. No, she’s not sick. She’s just had a big play. Yes, it is a beautiful day. OK. Remember to flush.

Again, as I re-read this section, I feel overcome by sadness. A year-and-a-half ago I had to place my mother in a retirement home because her personal care became too much for me to handle. I confess to feeling relief that I no longer had the hands-on, moment-to-moment care of my mom that I had had for almost nine years, from the time of her stroke. I had felt that my mother, the second eldest of ten children, who took care of children her whole life, deserved to be taken care of near the end of her life. My husband had been kind enough to offer our home to my mother, knowing it was important to me. Recently, she had a brief stint in hospital where I sat with her daily, then a two-day return to the retirement home, and finally a trip by ambulance to emergency again. She died at dinner time of that day, the day I also took Dick to the emergency room of a different hospital because of shortness of breath and a diagnosis of pneumonia. (Field notes, November 25, 2008)
Where was I? Horizon. Within its own historical horizon. Within the historical horizon of our tradition. Horizon: prospect; possibility; perspective; sphere; scope. The substantiality, the substance, that determines it. Trying to understand the hermeneutic situation. The claim of historical consciousness to see the past in terms of its own being. Acquiring the particular historical horizon. Oh. The same is true of a conversation that we have with someone simply in order to get to know him, i.e. to discover his standpoint and his horizon. This is not a true conversation, in the sense that we are not seeking agreement concerning an object, but the specific contents of the conversation are only a means to get to know the horizon of the other person.

In a “true” conversation, do we simply seek agreement concerning an object? And, if we have “conversations” with, or say we have conversations with, our research participants, what is it we are having? Do we only want to know about their standpoints and their horizons? Does that mean we are not interested in the content of what they say? (Aware of rough nail. File nail. Aware of tension in chest. Yawn a couple of times. Feel tired. Would like to shut down computer. Determined to keep at it for a while. Another three pages to read.)

I feel as though I’ve completely lost connection with where I was. (Yawning a few times. An eye on the news which I put on for Mom so she wouldn’t talk to me.) I pick up my reading again. We have . . . withdrawn from the situation of trying to reach agreement. (I go to the washroom as I become aware of Crossfire music coming on. As I walked across the living room and up the stairs, I was aware of the tension in my chest again. After acknowledging that, I realized that I was not being pulled by TV when I came back down.)

Gadamer writes about including the other person’s standpoint: if we include his, we are making our own “safely unattainable.” “This acknowledgement of the otherness of the other, which makes him the object of objective knowledge, involves the fundamental suspension of his claim to truth.” I feel myself getting irritated again. There must be a clearer way to articulate what he means. I read on, hoping to catch some clarity.

“Are there . . . two different horizons here, the horizon in which the person seeking to understand lives [that’s me, trying to understand this article!], and the particular horizon within which he places himself [Does that mean me trying to place myself within a horizon of Gadamer’s understanding?] Am I trying to reach a point where Gadamer, as representative of the hermeneutic tradition, and I can agree, i.e. have a “true” conversation? If so, does this attempt preclude my attaining my own standpoint? I really don’t know if I’m on the right or the wrong track here. Does what I have written in this paragraph exemplify Gadamer’s question: Is it a correct description of the art of historical understanding to say that we are learning to place ourselves within alien horizons?

As I read on, not knowing whether or not I understand what I am reading, I come to something that seems clear: The horizon is . . . something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the
past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion. It is not historical consciousness that first sets the surrounding horizon in motion. I understand to this point, then lose the drift with the next sentence: But in it this motion becomes aware of itself. How does “motion” become aware of itself, or “historical consciousness” become aware of itself (p. 268)? The anthropomorphizing jars!

No, I heard from Val and we’re not going to the opera. Yes, we can eat at whatever time you want. Yeah. What are you making for dinner? OK. It’ll be fine to put it on when you come back from your walk with Augie. She’s been sleeping since you went up. She seems a bit stiff. Did she run a lot when you were at the park? OK. See you later. Bye Augie. Take Gramps for a good walk.

I have read a page and can’t remember what I read. I know I haven’t read it with understanding. I’ll go back to the beginning of the passage and read it again. This time I’ll articulate the words in my mind, not simply let my eyes pass over the words. When our-historical-consciousness-places-itself-within-historical-horizons,-this-does-not-entail-passing-into-alien-worlds-. . . . I think that means that historical consciousness is not outside us. Its horizon, and our own personal horizon, are within. There is a potential within us to understand more of the past and expand towards the future. Our very action in focusing on understanding and deciding to understand opens up horizons. The more we understand, the further out our horizons move. It is a dynamic process. When we place ourselves “within a situation,” we are who we are in that situation. In understanding the situation, we must start with our own experience and, understanding that, we can experience what seems “other.” Not holding on too tightly to a position or perspective, but allowing ourselves to take a step, metaphorically, to one side or the other, can allow us to see from another perspective, in a sense including what was our perspective and what was the other’s perspective. Through this process, our horizon expands. We don’t lose what previously was our perspective, and thus we don’t lose what was our historical perspective. The way Gadamer writes, e.g. “a truly historical consciousness always sees its own present in such a way that it sees itself, as it sees the historically other,” anthropomorphizing, is confusing. It implies that the consciousness is separate from us. As I understand it, the consciousness is within us, not “owned” by an individual, but a human potential that is developed by an individual within a culture, whether that culture is an academic discipline or a broader cultural context. Is this my own prejudice making itself known through me as I try to understand and inadvertently construct a close, rather than far, horizon?

Looking back now from the perspective of writing my dissertation and attending to the work of Celeste Snowber, I think I might have fared better in understanding what I was reading if I had engaged in some brisk body movement in lieu of such intense mental effort. However, not picking up on several body cues at the time (e.g., thoughts of food, yawning, distracted
attention), I didn’t think of it or engage in anything more vigorous than consciously breathing into the knot in my stomach that was constellating. I did however recall those times I have managed to overcome mundane obstructions to my creative manifestations. I recalled that this often happens when my creative endeavours involve collaborative process with other women and when I am engaged in an intentional quest to discover meaningful connections. At those times, lack of private space, demands of other responsibilities and roles, and need to pack up materials at the end of each day, do not prevent my “work” from proceeding. In fact, they often seem to facilitate it. As I wrote in my field notes (February 15, 2006):

I realize that my “work” keeps me sane. By work, I mean my profession as a Sandplay therapist and teacher/supervisor/mentor of students in Sandplay, and my “research” into my life experience and meaning-making about life that includes my working on my doctoral studies. Without this, I think I might crumble. This—the work that I do in my inquiry, my relationships, my sacred play through art and Sandplay, and meaning-making about my dreams—is the “soul” work that keeps me in balance. This is a fact I might not have recognized had I not engaged in pulling together stories and images, inquiring about them, and trying to integrate them for this academic purpose.

As I re-member, re-read, and re-type these words, I feel again a tension between my roles, responsibilities, and relationships with others and what I call my “creative work.” This work I do mostly in silence, although words fall over each other in my head and pour out faster than my fingers can type. This is who I am and where I live as I proceed to tell the story of my doctoral process that grew out of my dream.

As I made clear at the beginning of this prologue, I felt it was important to provide a personal historical context that would provide a common ground for me, the writer, and you, the reader, to depart on a mutual journey during which our processes of resonance, remembrance, and reconstruction of our life stories may lead to new self-knowledge and further learning. By including the passage above related to Gadamer’s (1979) *The Problem of Historical Consciousness*, I have also introduced the idea of an historical context broader than my own and
implicit in my own: cultural traditions that include the academic environment. This conception is planted in my psyche like a seed. What these traditions are and how they inform my experience, my self-understanding and my learning will unfold with some degree of consciousness (Gallagher, 1992) within the text I am creating.

Like the question about soul that I posed near the beginning of this prologue (p. 8), as an older woman, I also ask where my life experience and narratives about it fit into the academic field of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at this point in my life. In her exploration of interpretation in teaching and learning situations, Conle (2006) suggests that merging curriculum theory with practical situations is a challenging endeavour. Doing so in my situation at my stage of life seems to me even more complex. Now that I have begun, I feel a certain comfort in “venturing into the unknown” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 182) and “responding to the call of the question” (p. 163) that any inquiry presents. I feel the challenge of trying to determine what transposes my narratives into inquiry (Conle, 2000).
Chapter 1: 
Moving Towards Inquiry

Attending to Dancer again after her long period of invisibility, I became aware of the saliency of a sustained and sustaining metaphor in making sense of life’s experiences. This particular image awakened my consciousness of how I link Spirit and Nature in life, and rely on embodied knowing to understand and make meaning of my experiences.

Through her ERIC literature search on metaphors, Conle (1996, p. 322) discovered that some education theorists suggest that “root metaphors in our subconscious . . . shape our views of the world” (Conle, citing Welker, 1991; Pepper, 1942; Schön, 1979; and Sarbin, 1986). Other articles emphasized the value to pre-service teachers and researchers of developing awareness about particular metaphors that are significant in people’s thinking or in policy statements (e.g., Theory in Practice, 1990, Vol. 29(2); and Cinnamond, 1987).

In my recent writings, I have seen how spontaneously and easily my stories about Dancer and her significance in my life have evolved from my explorations of learning across my lifespan. They are interwoven with my selected stories of diverse ways of knowing, embodiment, creativity, sacred play, connections with Nature, multiple roles, and collaborative relationships with other women. A later version of Dancer (Figure 8) resonated for a friend in my women’s art process group. I painted this image following a dream whose words still resound for me: And the dream called them the “Light Loaders”—Dancers of Light. For me, these words symbolize an awakening or expanding consciousness about the Dancer metaphor. This dream came at a time when I was contemplating an art piece for a collective project with three women who had been involved in the original body-tracing project. My friend, who gave
permission for her words and artistic response to be included in my Sense of Place project, wrote about her resonance with my painting:

Looking at these figures dancing and literally emerging from their dark background, two facing each other and looking away or outward, in celebration? Attached, carrying their shadow figures behind them—for comfort, for protection, attempting to shed them—which?

Then the colour struck me. The three primaries, containing the All, but going from dark to light as the eye was directed upward. Suddenly this became very personal for me. I had been having severe problems with circulation in my legs and hands and they were often very blue. I had taken to dancing to music to try and increase the circulation and eventually they would become very red before they stabilized. These figures tended to represent all these stages: blue legs, one blue hand, then pink or red, and then reaching sunlight which visualization and meditation led me towards. I have always been fascinated by this process and it has helped enormously in my own healing and the response to focused will.

Since childhood, I have always loved the story of the Firebird (phoenix). Each culture has its own version of this myth. Mine started with a Russian version coming from this background and then in discovering it again in Egyptian studies. To me, the phoenix represents . . . [a constant] ability to rise above any given situation and not be consumed by it.

These dancing figures represent to me aspects of the self surfacing out of the darkness in jubilation of discovery and reaching up into the light of self-knowledge.

I chose to use watercolour for my responsive painting to Brenda’s work as it is so immediate and spontaneous. I can quickly put colour on the page to get the energytempo I want to signify this Magical Mystical Bird rising out of the fire and emerging anew as it rises to meet the Sun and Rebirth once more!

According to her written narrative, my art had a profound effect of resonance on a friend who continued to make her own connections between art, body, and Nature, and communicate them. I became curious about exploring further how (or if) Dancer would continue to weave her way through the fabric of my personal, social and professional life experiences, and to generate new stories and artful images in me and in others.

Reflection on Dancer and the themes of my stories brings to mind again symbolic representations through sandpictures and existential themes of the women who participated in
my intensive Sandplay workshop. I also recall those of my Sandplay Therapy clients and students. My mind is full of images: The Fisherman; Ganesh, Remover of Obstacles; Water; the Tree of Life; the Secret Garden . . . .

**From Stories to Questions and a Topic**

I became immersed in stories—verbal and visual—for my final doctoral course, Narrative and Story in Research and Professional Practice, CTL 4801, with Dr. Carola Conle. Feeling pressure to find a topic and a methodology for my proposal and comprehensive examination that would soon follow, I often felt anxious and frustrated. I had learned that in narrative inquiry a topic and research questions would naturally emerge from the narrated stories that formed our data. And yet, I was being expected to articulate what they were before my formal data-gathering began. An in-class experiential activity on the interpretive process in teaching and learning, and a course assignment allowed me to explore my feelings and thoughts about this issue.

I developed a mini-research project that provided an opportunity for me to use a familiar modality (Sandplay) in an untypical way (as an expressive arts form, rather than therapy) that would facilitate my learning of an unfamiliar (to me) educational theory/philosophical framework (hermeneutics). A classmate accepted my invitation to participate in the project that involved using my Sandplay equipment (small trays, sand, water, and figurines) in my therapy room. We each made a sandpicture (for mine, see Figure 9), told stories about them, recorded our observations about non-verbal behaviours in which we engaged, and answered some predetermined questions. I responded to the following question: *What was going on in your mind when you were creating your sandpicture?*
I was thinking about my academic journey from the time I had the dream of coming back to school. I was hoping that the sandpicture I made today would help to lead me to articulating a topic that I can stick with and that I know is the right one. . . . As I was working the sand, which I really like to do, I thought about making a question mark because I had this big question about “What’s my research going to be?” and a certain amount of panic about it. I couldn’t make the question mark with my hands, and so I made this spiral instead. I know I’ve been on many spiral journeys and this is one at another level, at a deeper level. I think that with every journey we go on, we get deeper and deeper, and encompass more and more of our total lives.

I wrote about my multiple selves or self-aspects that appeared in the sandpicture:

[These are] all aspects of myself . . . that are manifesting in me at this time. . . . As you look along the spiral, you see that one is more prominent than another at a particular time, or at different times yet, paradoxically, they’re all there at the same time and some of them are even hidden. There are spaces where there are others that I can’t even see at this point.

One representation is the goddess of the arts in the figure of the Hindu Saraswati (Figure 10) who may be a different cultural version of Dancer and, apparently, involved in my decision to return to academic studies:

Starting from here with the dreamer who precipitated this particular journey, or thought she did, in fact this figure, the Indian woman, I think she’s . . . Saraswati], she’s riding a goose and she’s playing a musical instrument, and she’s a goddess of the arts. I think she had a hand in it. And I happened to be lying under her tree when she happened to be playing that particular tune; so again, there’s something about the fates here.

In this sandpicture, I also connected with Spirit and Matter, with something bigger than my own personal being, juxtaposed with more aspects of myself:

I have the moon and the sun (Figure 11). This journey is providential. The moon and the sun are both there. And partly . . . it comes from something bigger than me. At the same time, I am the one who must manifest it in life on this human plane that we are on. For me, this whole journey is not simply an academic journey, particular at this time of my life when I have retired from teaching. It’s really a spiritual journey and I’ve known that from the beginning. The fact that I’ve put water and I’ve also marked out a path on the land suggest to me that it’s also an emotional journey as represented by the water [a Jungian symbolic connection] and it’s also a physical material journey that’s also grounded at the same time, grounded in everyday reality. It’s not simply a spiritual journey that’s up somewhere in the clouds. Going along this particular pathway, I see this woman (Figure 12) as a kind of meditative woman. Her eyes kind of look closed and she has her hands on her belly. She’s not really equipped for walking around very much.
She’s the meditative woman who wonders how to get this whole thing going and what to do and so on. And in order to do that, she sits and meditates.

The goose (Figure 12) is one of my companions in life. I see Canada geese a lot. They are sometimes in my dreams as well. The Canada goose is connected to my shaman healer self. When I first started my psychotherapy practice, I had dreams about the goose and about a shamanic way of working as a therapist. It’s confirming that this is a spiritual journey.

And the little Buddha baby (Figure 13) is there. This little fellow is on his spiritual journey. And he’s trying to pull that carrot out of the ground and it’s such hard work to get the food that he needs out of the ground. I certainly experience that, not just at one point on this journey. He pops up quite frequently with his little carrot. I think about the carrot and the stick and that whole tension between the past and the future and the teleological pull, so maybe that’s the carrot, too, that I can’t quite articulate yet and I know I can’t rush articulating it, but geez, I wish I could do it right away. Then, beside him and watching him, having a good laugh, is the laughing Buddha with the drum (Figure 13) and little frog. The frog goes through stages of metamorphosis, as I do, and is one of my kin on this earth. It can go in the water, so it can go into the emotional realm or on land, the material realm and is a companion to this one [the laughing Buddha] who is able to say, “Hey, be able to laugh at yourself. Don’t take yourself so seriously. Enjoy this journey.”

There are two women (Figure 13) there. They represent my relationships with women and all that women have given me to get me this far and continue to give me in terms of support and insight and companionship. And Nature’s important all along this route. Then [at the rear of the tray, see Figure 9] there’s a stretch where there aren’t any figures and this is where there are hidden energies, hidden resources, hidden obstacles, and some bare patches.

And, of course, the story-teller (Figure 14) is there too, telling stories to the children. And this whole thing, as I see it, both in Sandplay, a [medium for] visual narratives, and in what we’re studying in Carola’s class, the written or the oral narrative, and one of the things I really want to do, from the perspective of a Sandplay therapist, is . . . figure out how to integrate the verbal with the visual without interfering with the client’s process. The little gnome (Figure 13), we’ve got lots of underground resources that are there, mining for us, doing all kinds of things. We don’t even know that they’re working most of the time, but there’s lots of energy there on the unconscious level.

[pointing to the little boy in blue (Figure 15)] A reminder that it’s OK to relax, and it’s OK to be playful, to let my little kid out to play sometimes.

[pointing to the aboriginal woman with the bowl of corn (Figure 15)] As I said before, I’m constantly nurtured by the feminine and in this I mean in a really broad sense in terms of relationship and passion and regard and responding and being responded to.
And there we are at the centre with this reflection of Self (Figures 9, 15) and a union of these energies within, sometimes we call it the masculine and feminine energies, but it’s about relationship and about Eros and Logos, and whatever this research project turns out to be, that’s what it’s all about for me, being related to myself, being related to other people, being related to my work, and being able to speak about that in a [. . .] confident way and a knowing way and, hopefully, in a way that can be instrumental in guiding other people.

Well, I’ve told a lot of that story. I know where I want to go and I need to go. I know I’m not there yet. I know what resources I have. And I feel a tension that’s still there around this whole thing.

Despite still feeling tension at the end of this verbal narrative about my sandpicture, I experienced that the activity of creating the visual narrative in a concrete form through Sandplay, articulating the story in words, and interpreting the types and placements of little figurines had an effect of moving my energy from a kind of “stuckness.” Now, as I ponder this story again, I see how many of my previous narratives have been incorporated into my “new” story. I acknowledge these narratives as central features of my life story that I told in one way or another repeatedly. After this project, I decided to engage in a narrative inquiry to complete my doctoral process. My inquiry took on more shape as I prepared for my comprehensive examination. What I wrote for my comp exam seemed to summarize my movement towards my research framework, articulating in essence the “why” of my inquiry from which my “what” in the form of a research question emerged:

Several doctoral level courses required that I remember life experiences and write stories about them. Some stories were represented visually through art and Sandplay (a technique using miniature figures in small trays of wet or dry sand). Through my stories of waking and dreaming experiences, I became aware of the emergence of a major theme—lifelong learning—and its interconnection with other focal strands, including creativity, spirituality, the body and embodied knowing, collaboration with other women, and diverse ways of knowing. I also reconnected to an artistically represented enduring metaphor created years earlier, a collaged dancer identified as my “inner artist archetype.”

My stories resonated with those I heard from other women in professional and social situations. Our stories provoked questions in me: What sustains us in enduring losses,
illnesses, fears, anxieties, caring for others, disappointments, constraints, pain, and burdens? How do we understand these experiences and learn to endure them? How do we talk about and represent our experiences of the commonplace, and the tribulations and triumphs of our lives? How do we resolve tensions exposed through our stories? How do we find places and spaces for our imaginations to soar and our creative energies to manifest? How do we integrate the facts and fantasies of our lives? How does sharing our stories transform us?

As I pondered over our experiences and the questions they evoked, I remembered a question I frequently asked myself and others: What did you learn from this? I realized that this question was an articulation of a core component of my personal sense of life purpose. I wondered what other women would say about their lifelong learning and their sense of a life purpose, especially those women who, like me, were at a transitional age between mid-life and old age. My wondering generated more questions:

- What are the stories that “want to be told” by older women for whom lifelong learning is important?
- How are they represented verbally and visually?
- What sustained and sustaining metaphors appear in older women’s stories?
- What are the commonalities and differences amongst older women’s stories?
- How does the sharing of older women’s stories affect the women and their subsequent stories?

My wonderings, stories, dreams, and personal experiences with art and Sandplay led me to envision a prospective study that extended beyond verbal narratives (typically used in narrative inquiry) to include visual narratives: VISUAL AND VERBAL NARRATIVES OF OLDER WOMEN WHO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS LIFELONG LEARNERS, and my primary research question:

How do older women incorporate lifelong learning experiences into their visual and verbal narratives, and integrate their stories with past experiences and future visions to make meaning of their lives?

Articulating my research questions and recalling how rich I have found my professional and personal collaborations with other women to be, I decided at this point to include other older women who were lifelong learners in my inquiry. The painting (Figure 8) I did of four dancers came to mind, along with the resonance that occurred for my friend whose response I have included (see p. 52 of this text). At this point I decided to invite three other older women to participate in my study. Further details about participants are in Chapter 5.
Chapter 2: Justification for My Study within a Curriculum Studies Framework

Life is never simple for me. As the following example illustrates, I dwell in complexity as I live and learn, expanding the horizons of my consciousness (to refer again to Gadamer). Although I felt pleased that I had finally arrived at a topic and research question, I was anxious about how relevant they might be within the field of curriculum studies. According to my typical manner of acting in life and learning situations, I felt a need to justify how a curriculum framework could accommodate my proposed study. I was fairly certain that the topic of curriculum would not be an explicit part of conversation between my co-participants (who are not academics) and me, I decided that I would review my personal self-development in this area and refer to certain core ideas that I had explored for my comprehensive examination. These include the following: defining curriculum; making meaning; lifelong learning; older women; and narrative inquiry. Beginning with an exploration of the concept of curriculum, I move on to the issue of making meaning and outlining my epistemological stance. Then, I consider how curriculum studies incorporate lifelong learning. Next, I demonstrate my understanding of curriculum as gender/age text. Finally, I describe my attempt to understand curriculum as research text.

Loosening the Definition of Curriculum

About ten years ago, in consultation with a colleague, I developed the first course of studies in Canada for teaching Sandplay to prospective and practising therapists. At the time, based on my experience as a teacher in the public school education system, I thought that curriculum involved a relevant knowledge base and statement of objectives to be attained. Since
then, my practice as a Sandplay therapist/educator has changed from a “transmission of knowledge” orientation to one that is predominantly experiential and self-reflective for the students, although it includes a knowledge base. Before my admission to OISE/UT, I didn’t connect the term “curriculum” with my evolving practice.

I began exploring the curriculum literature with Philip Jackson’s (1992) review of curriculum conceptualizations, and noted his reference to “a course of studies” as a “too narrow” view of curriculum. Reading about Dewey’s assertion that a teacher’s role is to bridge the gap between a course of studies and a child’s experience, I understood why my practice had changed in relation to what I had considered “required subject matter.” My questions guiding my Sandplay students’ experiential activities, my competency with the knowledge base defined in the literature, and my trust in the process of discovery within a safe environment with adequate materials allowed me to bridge the potential knowledge-experience dichotomy in our teaching-learning situations. My understanding of curriculum had expanded to include experiential context and teacher’s role. I considered differences between beginning and advanced students in their understanding and ability to reflect on experiences and act on self-reflections. I shifted my emphases to accommodate differences. Later, reading about Schwab’s (1983) commonplaces (student, teacher, subject matter, and teaching-learning “milieu”) in his conceptualization of curriculum, I understood that different categories had prominence at different times and that curriculum had a fluid nature. I saw how these “commonplaces” would enter into my doctoral research situation as the categories of researcher, participants, experience/narratives, and research context would shift in prominence.

My practical knowledge as a Sandplay therapist/educator had led me to an embodied understanding of curriculum theory. That understanding of curriculum began to expand when
my learning activities, including reading, gave me a language and tradition that linked “curriculum” and “experience.” I connected to Dewey’s (1966) notion of learning as dynamic energy, as “reconstruction or reorganization of experience” (p. 76) and understood that this concept expands the meaning of that experience and increases its potential to guide future experience.

The notion of “out-of-school experiences” and distinctions between “directed and undirected experience” introduced by Bobbitt (1972) historically opened up a space for consideration of school-based “undirected educative experiences” and later for acknowledgement that learning, planned and unplanned, occurs in a multiplicity of social environments (Jackson, 1992, pp. 7-9). This concept of learning has been described as “life-wide” by Pamphilon (2005).

“Life as curriculum” is a concept considered by various researchers (e.g., Cremin, 1976, and Schubert, 1986, cited by Jackson, 1992, p. 8). Particularly relevant to my study is the related definition developed by Connelly and Clandinin (1988) in the context of teachers’ stories, practice, and development: one’s life course of action, meaning the paths we have followed and the paths we intend to follow (p. 1).

Conle (2003b) observes commonalities between practices in the areas of narrative curricula in teacher education and professional development and of narrative activity in art, moral, and environmental education. She emphasizes that curriculum conceptualizations must extend beyond explicit, formal learning to include practical and tacit learning and reach beyond the intellectual realm to include practical, imaginative, and moral dimensions.

The curriculum frameworks defined by Connelly and Clandinin (1988) and Conle (2003b) in their academic contexts provide a theoretical space for my study. However,
considering that most of older people’s learning occurs in informal learning situations, I am mindful of Jackson’s (1992) statement that “a curriculum that has nothing to do with schools and schooling was and remains more a metaphor than a term to be taken literally” (p. 8). My felt tension was heightened by NALL’s definition of curriculum: a course of studies “taken from a pre-established body of knowledge” and “intentionally organized” within a formal education setting (Livingstone, 2001, p. 3). This recent definition does not even acknowledge concepts of curriculum established early in the 20th century!

**Making Meaning as an Epistemological Stance**

Life experience and making meaning. Learning from experience and transforming it by reconstructing and reorganizing past experiences through re-storying (Dewey, 1966). These phenomena are at the heart of my study and my personal relationship to knowing. Through my ongoing learning in developmental psychology, therapy, and education, I understand that interpretation, at its most basic level, rests on perception of sensory data. Processes of interpretation, which operate in multiple dimensions (e.g., cognitive, emotional, social, kinesthetic, etc.), become increasingly complex through interactions between an individual’s inner and outer worlds, “localizing” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 9) or contextualizing understanding of self and other (people, things, and events) temporally, spatially, and relationally. I embrace Gallagher’s statement that “understanding, even if in the form of sudden insight, does not develop from out of nowhere, without basis; its ground is always prepared in a past which we carry around with us” (pp. 90-91). Aligning myself with Gallagher’s assertion which reflects Dewey’s notion of continuity, and acknowledging Gallagher’s comprehensive analysis of education and hermeneutics, I situate myself clearly in the tradition of hermeneutics. In doing so, I reject the Cartesian framework which explicitly (but naively) proposes a method of doubt to
disavow preconceptions and biases as influences on truth and truth-making, and to promote scientific rationalism. I expect to demonstrate implicitly in my study how my co-participants and I “live” interpretation as we reconstruct and share our experiential stories, make meaning of our experiences, and expand our understandings. This dynamic process will most likely involve both “fore-conceptions” (p. 75) that we bring to our interpretations and either an expansion or a closure to our learning (i.e., hermeneutic) circles. Certain that my study implicitly invites references to hermeneutical concepts and significant people in the field, I am comfortable in allowing the data to evoke them, rather than presenting them here in a form that may seem disembodied from data.

Incorporating “Lifelong Learning” into Curriculum

A core idea in my study is “lifelong learning.” I have partially addressed the relationship of that concept to curriculum in the definition section above through my explicit inclusion of the contributions of Dewey, Bobbitt, Pamphilon, Cremin and Schubert, Connelly and Clandinin, and Conle. When participants tell their experiential stories from across their life spans, they may connect with all types of learning (e.g., formal, non-formal, informal, practical, tacit, etc.) in different contexts at different times, initiated and guided by themselves or others. As demonstrated later in this text, a significant part of my analysis and interpretation of data reveals the deep meanings of our experiences and the implicit tensions that our stories reveal, in a sense freeing up traditional conceptions of learning.

Conle’s recommendation to extend curriculum conceptions is in line with a new focus in the scholarly literature on lifelong learning (addressed in detail below), especially informal learning and one sub-category, tacit learning which is described as “under-researched”
(Livingstone, 2000). Other topics within the lifelong learning literature discussed below include the following: Fisher’s (2003) study of seniors’ who lived their learning; Schugurensky’s (2000) taxonomy for informal learning based on intention and consciousness; and exploration of older learners’ degree pursuits (Jensen, 1999). My research addresses older women’s diverse types of learning as they are included in their reconstructed stories that are temporally situated and contextualized spatially and relationally.

**Understanding Curriculum as Gender/Age Text**

The “older women” component of my study necessitates consideration of “curriculum as gender/age text.” First I will address “curriculum as age text.” Age is implied in curriculum generally according to learning levels (elementary, secondary, university/college, and work-related) in formal and non-formal learning situations. Exceptions include older people returning to school and special education cases. Research on theory and practice has focused on curriculum in the above areas. As the literature on lifelong learning discussed shows, informal and tacit learning have been largely ignored and under-researched (Livingstone, 2000). However, an emerging interest in lifelong learning research with older people and a new focus on informal learning, especially practical and tacit knowing, are apparent. This influence may emanate from the fact that increased life expectancies and demands by burgeoning older populations are affecting social policy and action regarding learning opportunities. I anticipate that my study will contribute to this field.

Since the 1970s, there has been a reconceptualization of curriculum theory and practice in the curriculum/gender area (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004). In that decade, women academics felt disadvantaged because of a valuing of “hard” scientific research over
“soft” relational, collaborative, experiential research, and a privileging of research over teaching. Interestingly, the way this differential is described in the literature, suggests that “hard” means “good” and “soft” means “bad.” These tensions propelled feminist discourse and activism and, eventually, development of women’s studies programmes. Courses and research possibilities focused on gender issues; topics significant to women became available. Research methodology and theoretical conceptualizations were affected. I cite only a few examples: Wallenstein (1979) introduced the concept of “method in curriculum theory” (a concept that involves critical reflection, analysis, and subsequent social action, according to Cole & Knowles, 2000); Greene (1978; 1995) promoted understanding about multiple realities, knowledge landscapes, and the importance of imagination; Noddings (1984) contributed concepts about holistic, ethical and relational modes of knowing; Grumet (1980; 1988) pioneered autobiography and intersubjectivity as acceptable inquiry methods; and Pagano (1988; 1992) introduced the art of conversation, affiliation, and speaking of women’s experience in women’s voices. These themes are embedded in my existing stories and appear in stories generated during my research process. Considering these contributions, I wonder if themes emerging from my data will provoke questions, such as the following: What merits our reflection? How do our reflections propel action? What are our multiple roles and responsibilities? What do we learn from them? In what ways do we sacrifice for, and benefit from, them? In what voices do we speak? When? What parts of ourselves are we denying, or compromising? How willing are we as co-participants to descend to deep and sometimes dark places and share our stories about that descent? What does our affiliation mean to us? How will our work together inform and reform us? Without the pioneering work of these committed academic women such a study would not be possible.
Understanding Curriculum as Research Text

Many people in teacher education now write theses as personal narratives and “understand their work as narrative inquiry” (Conle, 2000b, p. 189). Reflecting on and narrating her personal thesis process, Conle attempts to clarify how personal experiential stories constitute an inquiry. She states that neither a topic for narrative inquiry is arbitrarily selected at the outset, nor a pre-determined truth found at the end. Rather, the topic emerges from the process of trying to find it (as I have demonstrated through the self-study data presented already). It is puzzling to me that, even in narrative inquiry, doctoral students are required to identify a topic, research questions, literature reviews, and methodology for the comprehensive examination and proposal before any formal data-gathering occurs. However, this situation also exemplifies for me how we create our stories within a context that we choose or one that is imposed on us.

In her area of expertise, as educator, researcher, and narrativologist, Conle (2000b) asserts that it is the “open-ended quest” propelling data generation that provides the research component for narrative inquiry (p. 198). In Conle’s thesis project, stories about personal interests and their histories constituted autobiographical data. Following Dewey (1934), she trusted her “felt ideas” (p. 195), writing stories not randomly but guided by “a tacitly felt end-in-view,” an inexplicit “telos” (p. 198) in dynamic relationship with tensions anchored in the past. She “narrativized” her stories, writing evocatively (Van Manen, 1990) by “adding contexts and feelings, agents and histories, to facts, events, ideas and people” (p. 198).

I am mindful of Conle’s caveat that prospective thesis writers refrain from adopting her conceptualizations as their methodology. I am also aware that some of them “work” for me. In my study, as in my experiential stories written for doctoral courses, I continue to write autobiographical stories that interest me and tweak my emotions and intellect. They cover the
range of my personal, professional, and academic lives. In the writing and living in the present, I know that they embody historical tensions and unarticulated future goals. They speak of my inner and outer worlds, my solitariness and my relations with co-participants and others. I do not approach the dynamics of reflection, reflexivity, and transformation that occur within the study as a therapeutic endeavour (a weakness in existing so-called narrative inquiry projects, according to Conle, 2000); throughout I search for ways to support my intention to present my self-narrative process as inquiry.
Chapter 3:  
Grounding My Inquiry in the Academic Literature

My identified inquiry topic and major research question led me to review the academic literature on a number of topics. Again, I experienced tension when I considered how to present the literature component of my narrative thesis. I recognize this tension as one familiar to graduate students and pioneers writing on narrative inquiry (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Conle, 2000). Of course, by the time I began to write this document, I had been immersed in academic literature, especially that on narrative inquiry. I was aware of narrative inquirers’ recommendations to “weave the literature” into participants' stories in order to “create a seamless link between the theory and practice” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41). Mullen (1990) wrote about “a literature review which works subtly rather than conspicuously” (p. 14). I knew that my topic and questions had emerged from an exploration of my experiential life stories, rather than from an analysis of what the literature “needed” or what gaps existed in the academic literature. Despite “knowing” all of this, I felt anxious that I would not be adhering to the “rules” of narrative inquiry if I devoted a chapter to “the literature,” even though I had identified certain general themes as significant through my writing and reflecting on my personal stories. I wasn’t certain that, otherwise, relevant theory would “seamlessly” appear along with the narratives, for example, theory relating to narrative inquiry encompassing verbal and visual narratives, lifelong learning, and older women. Perhaps the reason for this was that my inquiry was not part of an established body of research, as in the area of teacher education. I felt I was at an exploratory stage with my topic, in a sense wandering blind while, paradoxically, very tuned in to my own experience. I had no idea if I was asking the “right” questions, if indeed there were any, and was aware that few other narrative researchers have inquired in this area. I wondered if
my uncertainty about theory appearing in a seamless way was related to the fact that my participants are not academics or teachers with a particular interest in curriculum or pedagogy. I felt propelled at this point to present an academic cultural context for my work. I therefore used course materials and searched on ERIC and other data bases for literature relating to the main themes I had identified. I knew I had to risk going beyond the boundaries of acceptable narrative inquiry, albeit not free of tension.

**Narrative Inquiry**

I have written personal experiential stories for over three decades and listened to clients’ stories in my psychotherapy practice for fifteen years. A year ago, I was formally introduced to narrative inquiry in Carola Conle’s course, *CTL 4807, Narrative and Story in Research and Professional Practice*. At the time, I read two narrative theses (Li, 1991; Mullen, 1990), with, among other appealing characteristics, “thick” descriptions of personal experience, references to dreams as research texts, and the value of mythic quests in research. I was surprised that research reports could intrigue me as these did. Writing and sharing stories, and reading literature on narrative inquiry stimulated a strong interest. My personal proclivity, my understanding that people like to tell their stories (Fisher, 2003) and use them to make meaning of their lives, and a well-established tradition in education research led me to select narrative inquiry as my primary research method. Although it was not a major motivating factor, I also thought that my proposed study would help to extend narrative inquiry to elder education research, especially in the areas of lifelong learning, formal learning for older people, informal learning, and tacit learning.

While there are multiple examples of “narrative inquiry” (Chase, 2005), I opted to follow in the tradition of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), and Conle (2000b) (above, p. 62) for whom
Dewey (1966) is basic. Dewey’s notions of “continuity” and “interaction” are incorporated into Clandinin’s and Connelly’s (2000) conceptualization of a three-dimensional inquiry space: personal/social interaction, temporal continuum (remembered past, present moment, and envisioned future), and spatiality (situational/locational). These dimensions are included in Clandinin’s and Connelly’s methods for studying personal experience through the concepts of “inner,” “outer,” “backward,” and “forward.” Inner experiences may include remembered stories (waking and dreaming), reflections, attitudes, and feelings (e.g., frustration, confusion, shame, uncertainty, etc.). Outer experiences may include relationships with others, including participants (all with our “narrative histories”), external research and life environments, and actions manifested outwardly. The backward and forward focus addresses the temporal continuum of experience.

**Verbal Narratives**

Clandinin and Connelly (2000), pioneers in narrative inquiry, emphasize some key interrelated concepts for narrative researchers to consider throughout their inquiries. They assert that researchers are always in the phenomena, that is, in “the midst of” (p. 63) their own and participants’ stories being lived, told, retold and relived. This has been my experience. There has not been a day since I decided on a research topic that I have not thought, read, or written about it, whether indoors or out, whether alone or in company, whether at work or relaxing. As Clandinin and Connelly make clear, living the stories in this way makes the inquiry more than a method used in inquiry. It becomes a way of life that is self-revelatory for researchers and participants and that involves directional dynamics (looking inward and outward, and backward and forward). Attempting to understand experiences, researchers are confronted by uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity about an event’s meaning because of their own and others’
interpretative mediation of their experiences and the representation of them. Meaning-making involves contextualization within Clandinin’s and Connelly’s multi-dimensional inquiry space. Engaged in a collaborative relationship, researchers and participants are both likely to engage in self-reflection and action that lead to and imply change and growth.

Conle (1996) emphasizes the presence of an “educational process” or “development of self through interaction with others at an intimate level” (p. 299) in experiential story-telling. As stated earlier (p. 3 of this document), she termed this process “resonance,” suggesting that it allowed teachers to engage with, and even act on or “shape indirectly” their tacit knowledge (p. 299) (called “personal and practical knowledge” by Connelly and Clandinin, 1988, p. 59). As Conle (1996) sees it, it is the meeting and interaction of stories or fragments of stories (or images or feelings), and “the set of corresponding narrative elements” (p. 304) between them, that leads to development. Conle emphasized that the elements are not necessarily identical to each other, but rather can serve as metaphors for each other or are related to each other. Conle (2000), following Elbow (1986), identified “the impetus of the third term” (p. 204) as a metaphoric function that underlies the resonance of various stories or elements of stories. Essential to the bridging of differences and elucidation of similarities of the stories or fragments is the sharing of experiential stories in which both emotion and cognition are integral, and images and stories are concrete in their representation. In essence, Conle (1996) suggests, a complex metaphoric process involving emotional interaction drives the sharing of stories, their influence on tacit knowledge, and subsequent shaping and reshaping of practice related to an expanding awareness of available choices. As such, the overall process of resonance can be deemed “an educational act” (p. 308).
While Conle arrived at her conclusions within a formal academic environment with pre-service teachers, my study has taken place within a similarly non-judgmental and non-obtrusive, but informal research setting, with participants who articulated an interest in developing insights about their personal creative processes. My inquiry, as acknowledged by co-participants, was an opportunity to continue their processes of lifelong learning. As MacIntyre (1981/1984, cited by Conle, 2000b, p. 189) suggests, “A quest is always an education both as to the character of that which is sought and in self-knowledge” (p. 219). Conle explicates how a quest, such as that engaged in through the telling of experiential stories, can move beyond “a quest for knowledge about one’s own life” (p. 191) and constitute a successful academic research inquiry and artistic endeavour. Following Dewey (1934), she asserts that a feeling of emotional discomfort is the manifestation of disharmony between a person and his/her environment. Taking what I would describe as an erotic perspective, Dewey suggests that desire, or a deep longing, for harmony transforms emotion into interest in “something” that may lead to the goal. In Conle’s case, the something was the contents of her personal narratives that were very meaningful for her. She describes a dialectical process between tensions with a history [tacitly] pushing for resolution” (Conle, 2000b, p. 196) and an unknown “telos” or “unspecified goal” (p. 195). Emotional discomfort. Desire. Interest. Stories. Unresolved tensions. Tacit telos. These are the keys that Conle suggests transform personal narratives into inquiry.

Traditionally, “narrative” implies oral and written stories that are “elicited or heard during fieldwork, an interview, or a naturally occurring conversation” (Chase, 2005, p. 652). This definition suggests distinctions in terminology between “narrative” and “story.” For consistency with existing literature in narrative inquiry and for the purpose of clarification, I will follow Conle (2003) who differentiates the following terms for narrative curricular purposes:
narrative, story, and narrating. I will further distinguish between verbal narratives, which may be written or oral, and visual narratives, which may be expressed through various arts-based forms (in my case, primarily through collage and Sandplay). Here, I follow Conle and Genette (1980, p. 25): narrative is the verbal or visual statement of an event or sequence of events; story is the sequence of events or content told about in the narrative statement; and narrating is “the act of telling” (Conle, 2003, p. 6) verbally and, in my case, visually.

The existing literature identifies some salient features to be considered in any analysis of narrative (Connelly & Clandinin 1990; Conle, 2000a):

- temporality (indicators of past, present, and future identified through remembered/reconstructed events, existing tensions, tensions with an historical past, and teleology—i.e., an unarticulated end-in-view);
- open-endedness that allows for multiple voices and reconstructed events;
- plot (fluid plots that emerge out of particular contexts);
- characters (especially revealed through first-person narration); and
- context (temporal/spatial, and personal/social).

**Visual Narratives**

Once again, I intend to provide an historical context for my exploration of visual narratives as I explore how older women make meaning of their stories and integrate them with past experiences and future visions. By doing so, I show that visual narratives are a viable vehicle for experiential life stories and meaning-making of them. In the academic literature, studies integrating multi-modal narratives are lacking. Through my inquiry, I provide an example of diversity in the “languages” of narrative inquiry.

The features mentioned above relative to verbal narratives can also be a starting point when considering visual narratives. My Section 19 teaching/therapy experience heightened my awareness about the special abilities of some students with autism to think in pictures, a fact that
promoted the use of picture-symbol/word cards to teach language and an abundance of other visual material when teaching lessons. As well, published accounts by high-functioning people with autism (e.g., Temple Grandin who wrote *Thinking in Pictures and Other Reports from My Life with Autism*), emphasize the need for educators and others to understand that people with autism usually have difficulty with auditory processing and a facility with visual processing. My personal art process, dreams, and experiences in Sandplay Therapy (as a sandpicture creator, a witness/companion to other sandpicture creators, and teacher/supervisor of Sandplay) have also emphasized the value of attending to visual narratives and learning to “read” them. The pictures or images in Sandplay sometimes stand alone as unique expressive and interpretive statements of experience by their creators, and sometimes they are accompanied by simple or complex verbal narratives.

Like verbal narratives, visual narratives can be complex representations of people’s life experiences (encompassing remembered, reconstructed, or imagined events, future goals, and present concerns). They aid people in making sense of their life experiences. These representations are multi-layered, involving cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and/or material dimensions, all contextualized temporally, spatially, relationally, and historically (personally, socially, and culturally). Visual narratives are not simply representations. They implicitly relate to visual thinking and knowing.

The following section includes references to research on philosophical and methodological issues related to visual narratives. As Gallas (1994) emphasizes: *Children’s narratives, if uncovered and honored in the context of the classroom, can become powerful vehicles for thinking and learning* (p. xiv). Gallas suggests that our definitions of narrative must be expanded beyond verbal (written and spoken) dimensions to include a multiplicity of learned
“languages” that may be expressed through the visual arts, drama, movement/dance, and song.

Educator, Elliot Eisner (2002), asserts that provision of a diversity of forms for making, revising, sharing, and discovering meanings about life experience enhances personal growth and development, and celebrates diversity. Maxine Greene (1995), educator and philosopher, suggests that releasing the imagination can awaken people to ethical concerns and move them out of “social paralysis” (p. 35). She states that the first step is to develop awareness about issues of concern and foster an ethic of care.

In her recent doctoral thesis exploring experiential storytelling themes with elementary school students, Michelle Boone (2005) found that these storytelling opportunities revealed issues of “immediate and critical concern” (p. 254). Her participating students, who subsequently understood that those concerns had value, resonated with the experiences of others as expressed through verbal (written and oral) and visual narratives. Reading Boone’s thesis raised questions for me:

- How are visual narratives analyzed and hence understood when they stand alone and when they are accompanied by verbal texts?
- How congruent are people’s visual and verbal narratives?
- What different types of verbal narratives accompany visual narratives (e.g., simple naming of elements, explicit identification of the narrator with elements of the story, and complexity of temporal and spatial dimensions, etc.)?

My questions about visual narratives push me to consider how they might be analyzed. As suggested by Langer (1953), images expressed in symbolic forms are “non-discursive expressions of feeling” that may advance understanding and insight regarding previously unknown ideas or tacit knowledge. These images must be experienced as a whole first: “the understanding of a work of art [or sandpicture or dream] begins with an intuition of the whole presented feeling” (p. 378). Initial meaning is “grasped [through the feeling dimension] in one
act of vision” (Langer, 1963, p. 93), rather than unfolding over time. Based on my experience in Sandplay, I suggest that this rapid perception of feeling is quickly followed by a similarly rapid “tuning in” to the quality of the image. For example, if my initial feeling is “disturbance,” another brief glance might make me aware of chaos, incongruence, a clash of opposites, or representation of much dynamic action in the sandpicture. Similarly, if my initial feeling is “contentment,” another look might inform me of the order, balance, and simplicity apparent in the sandpicture. A comprehensive analysis will follow the initial checks for predominant feeling and representational tone.

In narrative inquiry, experiential stories are analyzed for “meaning and social significance” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 130), according to fundamental dynamics that emerge from the process and content of a particular inquiry. In essence, the stories determine how the data are analyzed. As suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and by Conle (2000b), researchers can peruse the data of self and other, asking questions such as the following: What links my stories or her stories together? What links my stories with her stories? What clusters of images, feelings, and ideas emerge? What tensions, confusions, boundaries, and ambiguities do I feel? Do I/my participants keep repeating the same stories in different contexts? What temporal and spatial dimensions are revealed in our stories? What tensions do I feel amongst past, present, and future in my stories, and in my participants’ stories? Where am I in my stories? Where are they in their stories? What are my emotional/intellectual responses to these places? Do I feel as though I live wholly or only partially in this place? Who populates our stories? Who am I in relation to this (these) person(s)? What happens between us on an interpersonal level? What plot unfolds in our stories?
In my analysis, I began on this level of perusing the data in both verbal and visual narratives to see what meanings would emerge. I also considered other ways of looking at the data provided by visual narratives. As my stories already presented have indicated, my broad-ranging interest in deepening my understanding of visual narratives has been intensified by a professional need to understand the sandpictures of therapy clients. In order to expand my own knowledge base and to assist others in expanding their understanding, I have structured teaching/learning situations to probe this dimension of Sandplay (see p. 17), directing attention to various elements:

- initial feeling;
- quality of sandpicture (e.g., chaos/order; crowded/empty);
- topography/structure (e.g., sculpting of sand to create mounds/lakes, burying objects, sprinkling sand on figures);
- use of space (e.g., edges, centre, complete or partial sandtray, above or outside the tray);
- types of figures used, and their relationships to each other;
- symbolism (with reference to universal meanings of symbols);
- temporality (figures/situations that relate to past, present, and future events or use of clocks/hourglasses);
- emotionality (through expressive figurines);
- culture (use of specifically cultural items, such as Buddhas or Russian folk dolls);
- delineation of opposites (through contrasting figurines or separators like fences); and
- containment/unboundedness (use of multiple containers or fences/strings of beads around the edge/spilling over the tray edges).

As I have acknowledged implicitly through my work in Sandplay, I feel that we must develop a sense-making, critical capacity for “reading” images, just as we develop our ability to “hear” stories. When we have access to both, we can likely benefit from holding them in juxtaposition to each other. (When teaching Sandplay to therapists and prospective therapists, I include elements that also have a psychological and therapeutic orientation that I have omitted here.)
As emphasized by Johnson (2004), dual representational channels—visual and verbal—provide a potential for detecting multiple viewpoints and voices and for disturbing the stability of (divergence), or tendency towards (convergence), a unified resolution of teachers’ self-stories. Johnson used Cortazzi’s (1993) method for narrative analysis of the verbal text based on the assumption of a linear approach to storytelling. The analysis begins with uncovering information about the identity of the narrator that is embedded in the text. Then, a focus on the plot allows for the identification of a problematic event. Detection of a resolution ensues, followed by identification of a coda that provides a moral relevant to coping with this particular “local” (p. 427) (i.e., personal or individual) problem. A second “reading” focuses on the images, with special attention to compositional and textual elements, including size, colour, gaze within and outside the frame, proximity, and use of vectors (elements forming a strong oblique line and representing “tensions or dynamic forces” (p. 430). An intentional effort is made to identify divergence from, or convergence with, the narrative text.

In a study that explored adolescents’ drawings for insight about their perceptions of their life experiences, Chula (1998) first examined students’ responses to develop a coding taxonomy. The main categories were actors (self, family members, friends, and teachers), activities (play, and work), social systems (school, home, and community), and behaviors (playing, working, learning, and self-reflection) (p. 23). Chula found that her interpretive ability was limited or enhanced by the descriptive and explanatory nature of the visual symbols, and that ambiguous drawings required that she consult written descriptions (picture titles and stories about the drawings) and interview data.

In a paper about teaching students to read a flow of images, Werner (2004) addressed the issue of “intertextuality,” a reference to a process of interpreting one image in the context of
others, rather than in isolation, within an overall physical and/or social context. The interpretive process took account of each image itself, the relationship of one image to others, and the relationship of images to verbal text. Attention was paid especially to intertextual devices:

- the juxtaposition of two contrasting events, ideas, values or conditions (points of tension);
- “themes, symbols, or compositional elements borrowed from famous images” (p. 67);
- pairing of two images to accentuate differences and similarities;
- sequencing of images to emphasize temporal relationships and to invoke a storyline about “linear change, progress, fulfillment, or causation” (p. 68);
- clustering whereby one image is influenced by the surrounding visual field, in terms of proximity, size, or colour contrasts;
- scattering to provide a subtle cumulative effect;
- juxtaposition of word and image to provide a convergent or divergent perspective, or to anchor the image or frame the word; and
- intentional dissonance to evoke a critical attitude.

In my research process, I consider various ways to determine the meanings of images, working on the assumption that there is no one “right” meaning. While holding in mind the “golden rule” about narrative (Boone, 2005, p. 64, citing Conle) to “let the data speak for itself,” I also recognize the value of considering a diversity of approaches for focusing my attention on the data. In order to see if they made sense in the context of my data, I considered Johnson’s (2004) observation of an image’s divergence from, or convergence with, its accompanying verbal text, and Werner’s (2004) suggestion to look at one image in the context of multiple images. I also considered processes in which I have typically engaged. These include Jung’s “active imagination” (Franz, 1993), which is a “method . . . [relating to] the image-producing function of the psyche, . . . the imagination” (Chodorow, 1997, p. 5). I have dialogued with images in order to glean meanings. In the manner that our stories about our life experiences change, these dialogues and explicit and implicit meanings also change over time.
When working with images, I also use another aspect of a Jungian perspective, focusing on interpretation according to universal symbolism (e.g., the ruby in my Swiss dream as a symbol of the Self) (Jung, 1959). As well, as is apparent in my writing to this point, I typically use another significant approach when working with images, written texts, and dreams. That involves reliance on attending to bodily responses that lead me to ask questions and open myself to new knowledge and deep meanings. This approach is dealt with in detail by Gendlin (1996) who provides a way of working with tacit knowledge by bringing attention to “a felt sense” within that “something” requires attention, a “physical felt shift” in energy as attention is paid, and “a breakthrough” of new knowledge and meanings (p. 1). “Felt sense” and “felt shift” are likely components of Langer’s (1963) experiencing an image as a whole through the feeling function (above, p. 72), Polanyi’s (1958/1962) “dwelling in” (below, p.873), and Connelly’s & Clandinin’s (1988) “sweetening one’s personal practical knowledge” (below, p. 87).

**Dream Narratives**

Image-making through artistic representation embodies an intentionality that is not usually present in the “creation” of dream imagery. An exception to this occurs in “lucid dreaming,” a systematized approach to promoting, controlling the content of, and interpreting dreams ([www.lucidity.com](http://www.lucidity.com)). I do not follow this particular system which focuses on “controlling dreams” because I believe in the Jungian notion of an innate ego-Self relationship that is expressed in one of the “eight basic [Jungian] concepts” identified by Weinrib (1983, pp. 19-20) as essential to Sandplay Therapy:

*The psyche consists of consciousness and the unconscious and the interaction between them, and is a teleologically oriented self-regulatory system. It contains a drive toward wholeness and has a tendency to balance itself through the compensatory function of the unconscious. The drive to realization and wholeness (the Self) suggests that the psyche,*
As I understand the dynamics of this process, that compensatory function of the unconscious is sometimes expressed through dreams [and images, including those manifested in Sandplay therapy]. For me, “controlling dreams” implies too much involvement at an ego level, without a relativized relationship between the ego as centre of consciousness and the Self as centre of the psyche that includes the unconscious and consciousness (Weinrib, 1991). My personal experience (as indicated in some of my stories above) has been that dreams are capable of surprising me and leading to my own growth and development, without control by the ego. I believe that too much ego involvement could inhibit the breakthrough of the new.

Considering meaning-making in relation to dreams, I see a similarity with other forms of visual narrative (i.e., artistic representation and sandpictures) as I work with them in my research: the initial overall feeling tone of the image or series of images. As recounted above, I have identified my dreams as sites of knowing about my personal practical experience. This includes the content and value of my experience (as in the underground world of repair and renewal/golfball-sized ruby dream which spoke to the meaning of my experience as a Sandplay therapist). My dreams also suggest past and future action (as in the “return to my hometown where I ‘won’ a poster contest” and the “returning to finish my Ph.D.” dreams). The visual and verbal dream stories recounted earlier in this paper illustrate, both implicitly and explicitly, aspects of narrative that reflect my waking life stories. These include the following: temporality (past, present, and future); plot (e.g., restoration of energy and communication lines, and relation to my Self); characters (e.g., underground workers and my dream ego-self); context (e.g., lifelong learning, as in “a school of integrative studies,” and “the World Library”); and
unresolved historical tension and a tacit telos (e.g., the dream of receiving money that was unlawfully mine and consideration of using arts in my inquiry). They also represent parts of my whole life experience that includes both dream and waking life experience. As asserted by Clandinin and Connelly (1994), “The two are so intimately linked that a reader has to watch closely for the transition from dream to waking life; indeed, both stories are part of the participant’s life experience” (p. 414).

I agree with Mullen (1994) that the dream, “told” in writing or shared orally, is a dream reconstruction which may restory the dream’s meaning according to one’s life context. Mullen used her dreams and dream journals as “autobiographical tools of reflection” that assisted her in attending to “the rhythms of her own voice” and in hearing how one voice could evolve in, and be shaped by, inquiry. By doing so, she was able to situate the dream as “an educative experience” (p. 51) in the research process. She organized “key” dreams according to central motifs (p. 4). This act allowed her to comprehend the complexity of the images’ roles in her stories. By assembling accumulated dreams into a “dream poem,” Mullen was also able to arrive at new meanings for previously interpreted dreams, and thus expand the notion of her dreams from “data gathered” to a significant tool facilitating her own transformation. This ongoing interaction of product and process exemplifies consideration of “narrative” as phenomenon and method (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), that is, as a dialectical dynamic between the stories told and the manner in which they are gathered, analyzed, interpreted, and made sense of in the context of a life lived.

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) begin their book chapter with a dream text that suggests a collaborative process between them, recognition of a distance between them in communicating about the dream, and an attempt to do something about bridging the gap. They assert that
meaning-making on the part of the reader depends upon an author’s reason(s) for including the passage and decision to clarify or leave ambiguous the context, the players in the text, and relationships amongst the players within the dream text and the research text. Clandinin’s and Connelly’s writings led me into a multi-layered dimension of dream text and research text, provoking questions as I pondered over how to handle my dreams in my inquiry: What is the function of the dream text in the research text? Whose voice is speaking? What is the relationship between or behind the voices? What story(ies) is(are) being told within the dream text? How does that story relate to the dreamer’s life experience? What is the relationship of the dreamer and the dream to the researcher? How can the inclusion of dream texts inform the study of experience of an individual and a broader research level? Consideration of dream narratives on this broad research level awakened my awareness of tension in my chest about the steep learning curve that lay ahead as I was setting out to live my research process over the next year or two.

**Lifelong Learning**

Generally, the literature on lifelong learning revealed a dearth of information and a lack of clarity about terms, meanings, theories, values, practice, and policy development, especially about forms of learning that are not sanctioned by governments (Livingstone, 2001). However, the scholarly literature also identified personal benefits of lifelong learning. Some researchers suggest that education across the life span relates to a “highly skilled workforce [, a] better democracy and a more rewarding life” (Aspin & Chapman, 2000, p. 16). Harvard psychiatrist, George Vaillant (2002), conducted a 50-year plus longitudinal developmental study of 824 men and women on aging well. His participants were disenfranchised inner-city men, Harvard professors, and highly intelligent women whom he followed from teenage years to old age.
Vaillant concludes that the pursuit of lifelong learning, creativity, play, and happiness were connected to adaptability in life, political and social action, a sense of well-being, a resilient nature, optimism, and a generative approach to life. Lifelong learning is also seen as a compensation for aging (Schneider, 2003), an aid to maintenance of a sense of personal well-being and autonomy (McClusky, 1970), an instrument for maintaining a sense of continuity in life (Jensen, 1999), and “a valuable tool for living,” even a life purpose (Titmus, 1989, p. 350).

The views of lifelong learning as leading to a more rewarding life, assisting in the sustaining of a personal sense of well-being and personal authority, and serving as an essential component of living, are congruent with my belief that the purpose of life is to learn all that we can in order to be all that we can be. As I have demonstrated from my earlier narratives, this belief and related actions have strongly influenced my particular formal and informal learning patterns across my life span.

Discourses on lifelong learning typically refer to contextualization within settings where paid work and adaptable workforces are involved. In an attempt to extend the concept beyond the workplace to one that embraces a diversity of learning settings, such as family, home, and community, some researchers have begun to use the term “life-wide learning” (Pamphilon, 2005). This term does not include personal learning sites, such as the dreamworld, artistic representations, and the body, sites that have emerged as significant in my personal writings. Nor are such personal places of learning addressed in the SSHRC-funded, OISE-based National Research Network on New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL), which sought to investigate adults’ learning activities, including formal and further (continuing) education, and informal learning.
At the commencement of the NALL project, researchers clarified conceptions of informal learning and related terms, along with issues and constraints associated with informal learning definitions. They distinguished between formal education, non-formal education or further (continuing) education, informal education or informal training, and self-directed or collective informal learning (Livingstone, 2001). Researchers differentiated between categories of learning on the basis of teacher/learner authority, internally/externally-organized curricula, and explicit/tacit learning outcomes. In this study, references to curriculum indicate a course of studies “taken from a pre-established body of knowledge,” rather than a “curriculum text . . . [as] personal experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 96). In addition to clarifying conceptions of learning, researchers engaged in an extensive review of informal learning.

During the years 1996 to 2001, NALL gathered empirical qualitative and quantitative data on the relationship between informal and formal/nonformal education. This research included an extensive Canadian survey conducted in 1998 that indicated that most Canadians are involved in significant learning activities related to employment, volunteerism, household tasks, and general interest areas (Livingstone, 2002). Research also showed that, as increasing numbers of people engage in repeated transitions between schooling, paid employment, and part-time education/employment combinations, distinctions between the categories of schooling and further education become blurred. Other findings revealed that “people who have more schooling . . . get more adult education” (Livingstone, 2000, p. 2), and that six-and-a-half times as many younger adults (under 24 years of age) than older adults (over 65) participate in continuing education courses or workshops. This study also showed that, although a majority of adults engages in informal learning, most adults over the age of 45 years of age prefer independent learning options to course participation.
Schugurensky (2000) suggests that informal learning has been ignored historically by formal education institutions and the workplace, and thus “disregarded” and “under-researched” (p. 3). Clarifying this area of learning, he developed categorical distinctions based on intentionality and awareness at the time of the learning experience: self-directed learning (intentional and conscious); incidental learning (unintentional and conscious); and socialization (i.e., tacit learning, unintentional and unconscious, although awareness may develop later through “retrospective recognition”) (pp. 3-6). Schugurensky recommends further research to clarify distinctions between self-directed learning, incidental learning, and tacit learning, types of intentions (knowledge interests) and motivations (personal/social), implications for social control or change, and implications for research and policy.

Acknowledging that knowledge domains (e.g., scientific/rational and practical) frequently overlap, NALL researchers suggest that teasing them apart is difficult because practical knowledge is often tacit and thus not available for symbolic (verbal) description (Livingstone, 2001). Inability to recall or articulate knowledge presents a challenge for inquirers into practical knowledge and other experiential learning, perhaps explaining why the area of tacit adult learning has been largely unexplored and “underestimate[d]” (p. 5). Clarifying definitions and categorizing types of learning are important for framing conceptualizations and developing a consistent language for lifelong learning research. However, emotional interest and intellectual curiosity (Conle, 2000b) are whetted by the possibility of exploring tensions, questions, ambiguities, and confusions implicit in older women’s learning experiences as they make meaning of their lives. I suggest also that an in-depth study such as that in which I am engaged will provide information about how a person’s awareness of tacit learning might reveal itself and lead to transformation into a more conscious form of learning.
Atypically, some older adults do engage in formal education. Jensen (1999) conducted a “narrative inquiry” to explore the topic of “pursuing a degree as an older adult.” She concluded that her participants benefited from formal learning on personal and social dimensions: self-esteem, well-being/concern for social issues, mental effects of aging, review of personal pasts, and contribution towards the next generation and the community. Jensen calls for further research to increase understanding about the deep meaning of pursuing a degree in order to assist older people in “justifying” (p. 302) their lives and changing their perspectives. She also recommends exploration of the transformational nature of the learning process.

Unlike my study, Jensen’s study had no autobiographical component, and participants’ narratives were elicited by semi-structured interviews that focused on personal growth issues, apparently defined before the study began. Following Conle (2000b, citing MacIntyre, 1984), I will attempt to understand the nature of what I am seeking from the emerging data itself. Jensen’s analyses were guided by a thematic analysis, with findings related to current theories, as in conventional life history research (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Perhaps a preconception about where the research would go, plus Jensen’s manner of analysis, elicited my perception that the researcher’s and theorists’ voices dominated the tone of the thesis. In my study, I strive to maintain the voices of my co-participants without silencing mine. One way that I do that is to recognize our multiple voices and perspectives, as analysis of the data shows.

Older people have a life perspective that allows them and others to identify them(selves) as “lifelong learners.” In contrast to Jensen’s formal learning study, Fisher (2003) of OISE/UT conducted an “experience survey” on seniors’ informal learning with older people no longer in the workplace, and thus no longer motivated by work reasons. Fifty-one participants (23 males and 28 females) from 58 to 95 years were selected as a “purposive sample” (p. 2) which met
criteria of being able to formulate and communicate their ideas and insights about their learning experiences. These independent and group experiences, occurring during the previous year and earlier in their lives, included diverse personal and social themes (e.g., self-knowledge, health, relationships, social/political/judicial/historical issues, family history, spirituality, the arts, technology, etc.).

Participants identified the following as learning resources: print media (44 people), other people (32), computers (14), TV/videos (17), radio (5), preparation for giving a talk (3), courses/lectures (3), journaling (1), travel (1), music (1), archives (1), music camp (1), house concerts (1), and exams (1).

More than a third of the participants “couldn’t imagine life without learning” and described it as a joyous and enriching process that was “vital to their survival” (p. 3) and to continuous growth and development. Several people communicated that they felt like “better informed citizens” (p. 4) who were more independent and socially respected because of their learning. According to Fisher, few people spoke about their failing physical conditions, some identified their learning as a benefit to their health, and most of them expressed acceptance of challenges imposed by aging.

Fisher (2003) noted that the older people in her inquiry saw learning as a process that was interwoven with their daily life situations and relationships, and a benefit to themselves, their families, and friends. These “seniors” demonstrated little patience for what they considered the “irrelevance and meaningless-ness” (p. 7) of researchers’ quests for quantitative data. They wanted to tell their stories, share their insights, adapt others’ ideas so that they could call them their own, and feel empowered as knowledge builders as well as knowledge gatherers.
In Fisher’s report, I looked for an indication of in-depth exploration of personal sites of learning that might reveal how participants built their knowledge or knew that they knew, of what experiences they had of owning or embodying ideas they adapted from others, and of how they made meaning of their learning by integrating it with past experiences and future visions. Just as they wanted to tell their stories, I wanted to hear them: how their learning transformed them, helped them resolve existential tensions, integrate their actions with their beliefs and assertions, and promote a dynamic relationship between their inner and outer worlds. I wanted to understand how a life of learning made them better citizens and maximized their creative potential. I wanted to learn how they overcame obstacles to their learning and if, when they accessed what they were seeking, they experienced a sense of “the good life.”

As I reflect on my yearnings to hear about older people’s stories of their learning, I am aware of an embodied tension. I pause as I consider older people’s lifelong learning and application of it, and momentarily touch on felt tensions between past and future. Is their learning, and consideration of it, constrained by personal and social implications of their age, and thus focused on history, rather than on visions and development of potential in the continuance of fostering a “good life”?

Personally motivated by the question of what my soul wanted of me by sending me a dream about returning to doctoral studies as an older learner, I am most interested in, and passionate about, how learning serves “practical” wisdom. However, I also welcome opportunities to learn about theories and methodological concepts, and to refine research and writing skills that prepare me to conduct and communicate about my inquiry. These areas of personal learning encompass those distinguished by Aristotle as phronesis, a “moral-ethical, practical knowledge,” techne, technical skill, and theoria, theoretical knowledge (Henderson,
Contemporary theorists and researchers in the field of lifelong learning also distinguish between areas of learning on similar dimensions.

In her article on lifelong learning and continued education of older people, Ardelt (2000) addresses the themes of knowledge and knowing in terms of “intellectual and wisdom-related knowledge.” She asserts that although both are involved with a quest for “truth,” they differ in several domains, including their relationship to aging. Ardelt suggests that while “intellectual knowledge enables the elderly to stay involved in worldly affairs, wisdom-related knowledge helps them to prepare for physical and social decline and ultimately their own death” (p. 773). She also states that intellectual knowledge is descriptive and involved with quantity and complexity of information, while wisdom-related knowledge focuses on a reflective mode of thinking, a contemplative attitude towards life-meaning, reconciliation of one’s past in light of one’s approaching mortality, and satisfaction of self-fulfillment and spiritual development. She draws a clear distinction between one’s inner and outer worlds, and suggests that intellectual knowledge is impersonal and implies a separation of subject and object (including knower and knowledge), while wisdom-related knowledge is personal, relational, and experiential. She also asserts that intellectual knowledge is individualistic and subject to historical, political, and cultural contextualization, whereas wisdom-related knowledge is holistic, relational, and immune to scientific, cultural, political, and historic contexts. While Ardelt’s distinctions seem to be simplistic, reductionistic, and even misleading (as in her assertion that wisdom-related knowledge is independent of context), she introduces concepts related to one’s inner world, resolution of tensions related to past and future, contextualization, spirituality, and life-meaning.

The NALL project distinguishes between two knowledge traditions—rational/scientific and practical—described in the following terms: “a rational or scientific cognitive knowledge
which emphasizes recordable theories and articulated descriptions as cumulative bases for increased understanding, and a practical knowledge tradition which stresses direct experience in various situated spheres” (Livingstone, 2001, p. 3). NALL researchers also acknowledge that the two knowledge domains frequently overlap. Teasing them apart would seem to be a challenge because, as Livingstone suggests, practical knowledge is often tacit and not available for symbolic description (i.e., description or explanation through words). The characteristics of “unable to be recalled” or “unable to be articulated” present a challenge for inquirers into learning within the context of life experience.

Eraut (1999) writes specifically about workplace learning. His notion of “thick” and “thin” versions of tacit knowing may be relevant for a diversity of learning sites in which exploration of tensions between the two versions may dissolve limitations to making that knowledge consciously intentional:

“Thick” tacit versions of personal knowledge co-exist with “thin” intentional versions: the thick version is used in practice, the thin version for describing and justifying that practice. . . . [The] limitations to making tacit knowledge intentional are formidable, and much of the discussion about it in the literature is ill-informed if not naive. (pp. 36, 40)

Referring to Polanyi’s (1958/1962) notion of “dwelling in” (p. 195), Connelly and Clandinin (1988) write about the integration of theory and practice in their discussion of personal practical knowledge:

It often happens that for the things most important to us, we do not pay . . . detailed analytic attention. Instead, what we do is “work the idea into us.” We gnaw it around. We think about what it means in things that we do. We relate it to our private life. We drum up examples. We play with the idea. We may say that such ideas are beginning to dwell in us and us in them. . . . Just as sugar sweetens the tea but is lost from view, so a new idea may “sweeten” our personal practical knowledge and yet be lost from view and be unable to be recalled. (p. 90)

Preparing my proposal more than a year ago, I wrote:
As my personal dream example noted above (p. 7) suggests, my soul’s yearnings, invisible to my analytic intentions, infuse my personal practical knowledge dimension as I proceed with “getting my Ed.D.” Like sugar dissolved in hot water, these yearnings are invisible and thus cannot be described or explained. And yet I can “taste” them as I go on with what I have decided to do with what was initiated by my dream. Perhaps at some later point, through some transformative process, I will distill the elements of my personal practical knowledge “tea,” and catch a glimpse of the unique multi-dimensional structure of my yearnings. It is the taste, as well as the elements, that I want to learn about in my collaboration with other older women lifelong learners—knowledge gatherers and knowledge builders—and our exploration of our stories of life experiences. It is the deep meaning, the “thick, tacit versions of personal knowledge” in which I am interested, the deep meaning ascribed so by the story-tellers themselves. How do I learn about these tacit versions of personal knowledge when they are, to a large extent, indecipherable? What learning sites do they occupy? How do I explore these sites? I can begin with my intention to invite stories from older women.

Carola’s guiding words, “start with the stories” and “start with the personal” immediately came to mind in response to my questions: my stories; their stories; my personal; their personal. And so, in my collaboration with other women involved in my research, we started with stories as they were revealed through verbal and visual narratives. It is the deep meaning, the “thick, tacit versions of personal knowledge” in which I am interested and which I feel will contribute most to other people’s understandings, deep meaning ascribed so by the story-tellers themselves.

Older Women

What does the scholarly literature reveal about older women story-tellers who identify themselves as lifelong learners? Narrative is now well-established in the areas of teacher education/development and moral education, and is newly accepted as a curricular activity for planned and informal learning experiences (Conle, 2003). Few studies (gendered or not) embrace both narrative and lifelong learning. One exception is a study by Pamphilon (2005) with nine “active, engaged, and engaging” older women who had limited formal education, “knew their place,” and made “the best of life” (p. 298). Constructing meaning of their learning experiences, especially formal schooling and mothering, they engaged in a dynamic process of
rediscovering and redeeming their past. Although they esteemed formal education, they reported that home-centered informal learning gave them a greater feeling of success than formal learning. The women’s narratives illustrated that cultural contexts often determined whether their learning was “speakable” or “muted,” a critical dynamic to investigate in learning and life experience (p. 297).

This issue evoked my concern about “public” and “private” domains and participants’ willingness to share stories or discuss topics that they may consider “too personal” or “too self-deprecat ing.” Pamphilon’s (2005) participants constructed “a powerful and enabling fiction” and narrated their experiences to show “the greatest individual gain” (p. 298). Pamphilon posits that this process constitutes one way of “understanding learning.” Reading the participants’ narratives in her article, I saw no indication of anything too personal or too self-deprecat ing. I wondered if that was because the women in the study chose not to contribute such material, or if the researcher was biased in what she presented in order to support their mutual conception of “the best of life.” I wondered if such censorship (if it is) is, in fact, an adaptable strategy that affords people a sense of well-being, and if my data would clarify how older women make choices about making public or keeping private experiential life stories.

In a field bereft of literature on older women’s narratives of their life experiences, a sub-category of aging has emerged: narrative gerontology which intends to clarify the aging process and methods to investigate it by exploring the metaphor “life as story” (Kenyon & Randall, 1999, p. 1). This endeavour potentially answers Gullette’s (2003) proposition that creation of a “new genre of life storytelling”—age autobiography—is warranted to address the fact that aging is a cultural construction and that self-identity involves “an embodied psyche” contextualized culturally and temporally. Also acknowledging a research gap, Clarke (2001) asserts that her
study on older women’s bodies and the self contributes to the body-image academic literature that has failed to solicit older women’s experiences and viewpoints. Again, I wondered if my study would explore my and my co-participants’ experiences in a way that could “crack open” the rich substance of our lives and the dynamics of our “dwelling in” the thick, tacit versions of personal knowing and meaning-making.

The scholarly literature reveals that themes of aging, the body, feminist gerontology, and development/transformation of self-identity are often interwoven. Laz (2003) observes that, when people talk about age, they usually talk about their bodies. A theoretical dichotomy between body as a material basis for personal and social development, and body as a socio-cultural construction, is being bridged by an acceptance that biological reality also has an “experiential dimension that is subject to interpretation” according to cultural values (Calasanti, 2005, p. 9). I have already indicated my hermeneutical stance in relation to my inquiry. I wonder if my data analysis will provide information about the personal and social through my attention to participants’ inner and outer worlds (including spatial/temporal contexts), to diverse ways of knowing (including the body, artistic representation, and the dreamworld), and to relational dimensions. However, I am mindful of the importance of not imposing these research perspectives on my data and thus diminishing the importance of my co-participants’ voices in their narratives.

In the aging literature, body is not acknowledged as a significant site of knowing, a topic consistent with my personal stories. Rather, the focus is on the body’s signs of aging. These are reputed to physically mark people for culturally prescribed stereotyping and stigmatization that manifest in exclusion and loss of power, especially in white middle-class women (Calasanti, 2005). These markers do not meet youth-based standards. They are often masked cosmically
and surgically (Ensler, 2004) or referenced as indicators of a separation of body (“the outside me”) and self (“the inside me”) (Clarke, 2001).

As women age, some resolve negative feelings about their bodies and perceived loss of attractiveness by adopting a focus on good health, body functionality, and independence (Hurd, 2000). At an extreme, becoming old is viewed as “pathological” and associated with decline, disease, and a lack of personal agency (Calasanti, 2005), social status and value (Hurd, 2000). As emphasized by Clarke (2001), incongruence between older women’s perceived identities and their physical appearances suggests internalization of their culture’s devaluation of aging women.

Paradoxically, the literature also focuses on age as an accomplishment or performance and thus socially meaningful (Laz, 2003). When aging is deemed “successful” (Fisher & Specht, 1999) or “productive” (Burr, Caro, & Moorhead, 2002) bodies are viewed as utilitarian resources “made and remade, used, altered, and disciplined” (p. 507) within and by culture. Adaptability, flexibility, and coping are viewed as important constituents of successful aging (Fisher & Specht, 1999).

Again I wonder, this time about whether or not my older women co-participants and I will be able to contribute to and expand others’ understanding of deep personal meanings about learning and its interaction with experiences of aging, body, resourcefulness, ways of knowing, and creative living. How my topic of inquiry fits into an academic framework within the Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning division of academia continues to be a nagging question despite the fact of providing some justification above (p. 59).
Chapter 4: 
Awakening Awareness of 
Tensions Raised by Potential Methodological Issues

While preparing my proposal, I became aware of several other areas of tension related to methodological issues. In one sense, I perceived that my feeling tension in these areas indicated that I was living my inquiry, although I was feeling a lack of clarity about what the relationship of my tension with my end goal was and how it would serve me as I proceeded. Trying now to understand more, I place my awakened awareness within a context described by Carola Conle and mentioned briefly on page 62 of this document.

In Conle’s (2000b) account of the narrative thesis process, she identifies a dynamic between “lived tensions and subconscious question[s]” emanating from an individual’s past and a tacit teleological “end” which offers a “lived resolution” to the tensions and questions in the future (p. 103). She asserts that this “tension-telos” dialectic is the driving force for the inquiry, and that it reveals itself through the narrative researcher’s writing and lived experience. As a personal example of a tacit teleological dynamic, I refer to my “returning to Ph.D. studies” dream. I have no doubt that its unknown end, towards which I am moving, and which is more than the doctoral degree, will become clear through my research process.

At one point in her own doctoral narrative inquiry process, Conle (2000) felt a renewed vitality and congruency between her life and her work that had been missing for some time. Subsequently, she was able to consciously experience and identify the detriments of previously living her life “in a state of ‘forgetfulness of being’” (p. 206), Seinsvergessenheit (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Writing the final chapter of her thesis, she was able to understand on a new level the significance of this personal phenomenon as a sociocultural concern, one that had been
previously written about by Heidegger and Gadamer. Conle’s fresh emotional and intellectual understanding, in turn, influenced the manner in which she took care of herself and her practice as an educator. Reflecting on Conle’s discussion of forgetfulness of being, I am reminded of what I wrote about my Brendan of the Bog mask (p. 32) in my inquiry into the artful representation I had created:

*Brendan of the Bog (Figure 4), my dark masculine side at home in Nature, was reborn on that trip. His countenance reminded me of a part of my essential nature that I had long neglected, the part that requires a deep, consistent connection with the earth, the water, the wind, the sky. . . .*

During the various phases of my doctoral process, the framed photo of Brendan that I have in my daily living space and our dog’s biological clock reminded me to schedule in sufficient time “in Nature” to nourish my soul and to relish it. I honoured my personal sense of knowing that comes through my artistic representations. For example, I recalled Dancer’s assertion to expand her presence from two-dimensions to a multidimensional perspective, and to become contextualized (see p. 23). Staying with that assertion, I became aware of a feeling of excitement between my heart and stomach. Staying with the feeling, I realized I was anticipating the emergence of new personal insights that would be revealed through the research experience. Pondering on what I would learn, I also wondered how the insights would connect with areas of social and cultural concern. By wondering so, I realized that I had planted a seed whose growth would be part of the research process. My intention was to accommodate Dancer’s challenge to expand her dimensionality and provide some contextualization. That led me to methodological issues, such as keeping sociopolitical implications in mind as I proceeded with gathering and representing data. How would I make my research accessible to more people than might typically read a doctoral level thesis? I trusted that the answer would emerge as the research process unfolded.

In time, I had a dream:
I am upstairs in a gallery on King or Queen Street where an artist friend had had an exhibition several years ago. The second floor is now like a balcony overlooking the main floor where craft items and art are sold. There is a railing around this balcony. I am waiting for a friend to arrive. As I lean on the railing, I see that a very large sandtray is suspended from the ceiling. Its dimensions are the same ratio as my trays in my Sandplay Therapy practice, but the overall size is at least ten times larger. The tray has sand and water in it. The water is cloudy, not because it is polluted but because it has some sand residue in it. I realize that if I move my arm gently in a kind of sweeping motion from my body outwards, the water clears and I can see archetypal forms (e.g., spirals, circles, pyramids, etc.) created with the sand in the tray. After a few minutes, the water becomes cloudy again and the shapes are obscured. However, whenever I wish, I can simply sweep my arm outwards and clear it again. I feel really amazed at the presence of this larger-than-life version of a sandtray containing the natural elements of sand and water. These are components of my psychotherapy work, present in my dream as part of an installation in a gallery setting. I am also in awe at the ease with which I can act to make visible diverse archetypal forms that may seem to be invisible or obscured.

When I awoke I felt that the dream was pointing me towards creation of an installation in which my data would be exhibited. It is only now as I include this dream in my thesis document that I make a connection with a question that I had had from the beginning of my doctoral process at OISE/UT: Dare I call Sandplay an artform? I had forgotten that I had written about it in my Statement of Intent required for admission and for a paper for my first course there (Could I Call It Art?, Course CTL 1111H F0101, Creative Arts Special Subject, with Professor David Booth). In my Statement, I wrote about my general commitment:

- to investigate connections amongst rendering visible the soul’s yearnings, creativity, embodiment of knowledge, and wellness, and to consider how educators might operationalize opportunities for expression of these qualities in learning and healing environments.

In the Creative Arts paper, besides expressing my feeling that I could address “the arts in education” from a lifelong learning perspective (something I had forgotten I had written), I also described my particular quest as two-fold:
to use Sandplay as an artform to try to answer the question implicitly posed by the
dream, “What does my soul want of me?” and, in answering that question, to attempt to
discover in what ways I can make that gift of knowledge available to others in my
continuing work as educator and therapist.

What I realized when I was writing my paper for David Booth’s course was that my stated
“quest,” to use Sandplay as an artform, was uninformed in terms of art theory. By the end of
that paper I had arrived at a sense of congruency between Sandplay and art that would allow me
to use Sandplay in this untypical manner. My resolution was based on the following elements:

- origins in ritual and play;
- involvement of the senses;
- emotions and cognition;
- symbolic representation;
- saliency;
- authentic expression;
- conscious and unconscious processes;
- intentionality; and
- meaning for the creator.

I also realized that I had placed myself within a cultural environment at OISE/UT where I
could feel confidence that I would be supported and encouraged to use sandplay in artful inquiry,
if I chose to do so. At the time, I expressed my comfort with living with “the shadow of not
knowing the final outcome.” Obviously, I was living the “tension-telos dialectic” described by
Conle (2000b), although I wasn’t familiar with her language. This is an example of one of the
great joys that I experience through reading and that I know in my heart: authors often provide
me with a language to express what I experience and with a connection to others in the world so
that I know I am part of a larger whole, something I didn’t know as an eight-year-old. Authors
help my tacit knowing evolve. I wonder to what extent, without them, I would have been left in
a cloud of unknowing. Realizing this connection between authors and me and how they have
affected my knowing helps me move beyond the personal into a social dimension.
Jones (2005) writes about making “the personal political” in an article on autoethnography, as does Finley (2005) in her chapter on arts-based inquiry. I mention these two approaches to inquiry here because of the self-study and artistic representations that are prevalent in my writings up to this point (i.e., before I introduce my co-participant data). I say more about self-study and arts-based research later (see pp. 105, 97 respectively). Jones (2005, p. 763) cites Minnie Bruce Pratt (1995): *We cannot move theory into action unless we can find it in the eccentric and wandering ways of our daily life. . . . [Stories] give theory flesh and breath* (p. 22).

Jones emphasizes that her chapter in a handbook on qualitative inquiry is intended not only as a text to be read independently and individually, but as a performance piece meant for public display. She cites a frequently recited line from a dramatic piece (p. 766): *How much does a scholar know, how does she know it, and what can she do with this knowledge in the world?*

Jones (2005) asserts that expanding the personal into the political depends upon the provision of a critical space for dialogue amongst researchers and between researchers and their co-participants and community. She says that a dialectical approach is likely to disturb the status quo by accentuating tensions between notions of difference and commonalities. These aspects may appear in stories as complex, multiple perspectives of how things are and should be, and shared intentions to expose certain “oppressive” social systems and to envision something different from or beyond the existing system. I don’t yet know what this means in practical terms for my inquiry. After presenting data gathered from meetings with my co-participants, I may have a better sense of its place and how our shared stories give the theory flesh and breath.

This example provides me with a profound experience of theory standing alone and the sense of unknowing that may come with it. At the same time, the example presents me with a theoretical notion that I might not have thought of in relation to my inquiry. I might have missed
something in my data analysis because of gaps in my learning on this particular topic. Isn’t development of a knowledge base part of what education is all about? Doesn’t this type of learning provide us with a language which we can use to communicate “knowingly” with others in the field? What boundaries are necessary and what blurring is permissible amongst becoming aware of an historical context, avoiding the taboo of theory driving data in narrative inquiry, protecting the authority of research participants’ voices, and creating a rigorous enough research methodology and text?

A methodological issue also raised by Johnson (2004) involves criticism that narrative inquiry is uncritical and confessional in tone, and therefore vulnerable to dismissal as a significant research method. She advocates the use of visual and verbal narratives as a method of critical reflection in education research. She suggests that dual representational channels—visual and verbal—provide a potential for detecting multiple viewpoints and voices and for disturbing the stability of, or tendency towards, a unified resolution of teachers’ self-stories. According to Johnson, her perspective is different from that expressed in previous studies that suggest visual modes have a potential to reinforce the presented verbal tenor and maintain the status quo. Her conclusions emphasize the notions of a critical and reflexive method of inquiry that leads to social action. My understanding of “reflexive” here is that it is an ongoing, cyclic process of critical reflection, analysis, and active response (Cole & Knowles, 2000), an apt description of contemporary qualitative research, including narrative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Social activism is also an explicit goal of arts-based inquiry (Finley, 2005). Presenting arts-based research as a radical and ethical pursuit, Finley identifies two primary issues to consider within the context of an activist social science: the relationship between researchers
and their participants; and a “crisis of representation” (p. 682). She describes the relationship between arts-based researchers and participants as one of collaboration and co-research in which the co-researchers are in it together, involved through an ethic of care for each other.

Interestingly, “ethic of care” became a standard of quality for a new social science research paradigm (Lincoln & Reason, 1996) that also promoted the development of criteria for arts-based research: competence in the areas of social interaction, politics, emotions, and ethics; creativity; intellectual openness; and a spiritual sensitivity (Lincoln & Reason, 1996); imagination, perception, interpretation, and artistic representation (Eisner, 1991/1998); and a broad narrative range that allows for “flexibility” in time, space, and voice (Tierney, 1999). Although Finley cautions that “quality control efforts force a singular way of knowing and shut off the possibilities for diverse voices and expressions” (p. 693), I feel a resonance with the areas she has identified and perceive them as broad-ranging. They have emerged through my personal stories as themes or structural threads in my stories (see page 48, for example), rather than resulting from a theoretical imposition. By attending to them and to where they lead me and to the tensions they arouse, I trust that they will allow for the emergence of a multiplicity of voices. My intention to hear my own and my co-participants’ multiple voices, and to let those voices “sing out,” has been clear throughout my inquiry process.

The gathered stories I present have enabled me to glean a way to represent the data in a way that I feel honours our voices. I hope my participants feel this way, too. This issue is addressed by Finley (2005) who emphasizes the need for researchers to maintain respect for the unique voices of their research partners, to ensure that co-researchers’ voices are not silenced, and to make their shared work available and accessible on a broad scale within relevant communities. I feel that tension about protecting the voices of my co-researchers while
assuming interpretive responsibility for my authored text, my thesis. The resolution of the
tension evolves from the process, although my intention is to provide a space for multiple voices:
my voices, my co-researchers’ multiple voices, their voices amidst mine, and even the audience’s
voices. The form it takes will be discussed in detail later.

In her exploration of dialogues across differences in a heterogeneous society, Conle
(1997) also emphasizes the value of protecting multiplicity and ambiguity. Her methods are a
guide. While recognizing the importance of developing student teachers’ interpretive
competence, she also attempts to lead them to an understanding about the benefits of withholding
early foreclosures on “self-evident ‘truths’, social ‘facts’ and ‘given’ identities” (p. 56). By
requiring her students to contextualize observations and assumptions within temporal, physical,
historical and relational contexts, she develops their understanding of allowing for different
voices in multi-cultural environments. Demonstrating a reflexive critical attitude towards her
chosen field of narrative inquiry, Conle (2000a) works consciously to confront charges and
vulnerabilities, such as rejection of reason and conflation through “fictional narrative” (p. 56).
Following Habermas (1984) who addressed the issue of mutual understanding in everyday
communications, Conle (2001a) proposes that narrative inquiry is a rational “communicative
action” (p. 24) that assumes truthful representations of feelings, intentions, and content,
social/ethical appropriateness of stories, and clarity/comprehensibility of language. She asserts
that, when such assumptions are held, they can be challenged by critics who detect incongruence
in the telling and re-telling of stories, manipulative efforts for dramatic effect, or self-deception
on the part of the narrator. Conle asserts that tension between a claim by narrative inquirers and
a challenge by other researchers is critical in protecting the rational nature of narrative inquiry.
She also proposes that, in educational inquiry, contextualized narrative forms of expression lie
“in a realm between fact and fiction” (Conle, 1997, pp. 199-200) and that stories may be clarified, confirmed for congruence, and elaborated on through more stories.

Before I began my data collection with co-participants, I wrote the following:

My eye returns to the words just typed: a realm between fact and fiction. Aware of tightness in my chest and interrupted breathing, I walk myself through my understanding of narrative inquiry. In narrative inquiry a person’s experiences are studied through the “remembered” and reconstructed stories s/he tells. There is no expectation that the narrator’s stories be identical to other persons’ remembrances of the same events or to the narrator’s various remembrances of the same events because the events are not the topic of study. Assuming that the narrator intends to tell the truth, and hence engage in a rational transaction, the contextualized stories are assumed to be true and contingent upon the context. If the assumptions are held by the narrator, determination of fact or fiction is the prerogative of the audience. What then produces my felt tension at this moment? As I sit with the question, the issue of “cover stories” (Crites, 1978) looms large. If they are created intentionally, they counter the notion of rationality described by Conle (2001a) and threaten the integrity of the research project. If they are unconsciousness, and lead to deception of self and others, implicitly they also affect the integrity of the project. How will I as a researcher know if cover stories are being told? Are there particular elements in research that contribute to the creation of cover stories?

One factor that may be experienced is tension between “keeping private” and “making public.” Mullen (1994) devotes a chapter of her thesis to dealing with her experienced tension between “honest narrative” and “disclosure,” elements that she claims led to experiences of growth during her thesis process. She views “the ideal movement. . . [as] from the first [honest narrative] to the second [disclosure]” (p. 8). She cites Connelly & Clandinin (1988) in elucidating the notion of “personal” as something “worthy of being shared in public discourse” and, rather than something owned by and secret to an individual, “knowledge which can be discovered in both the actions of the person and under some circumstances by discourse or conversation” (pp. 134-148). These concepts of consciously holding a “sense of worthiness of the personal” and “capacity to know through observing actions along with attending to conversations [and observing images]” are guiding principles that I found useful during my
research process. I was also conscious that participants’ attitudes about their tensions between “keeping private” and “making public” may not always be articulated.

In a report on her study on lifelong learning with nine “aged” (i.e., 70+ years) Australian women, Pamphilon (2005) wrote:

As the women explained how and where they were knowers, they shed light on how certain discourses enabled certain learning to be “speakable” and made other learning muted. It is, therefore, crucial to acknowledge the constant dynamic whenever we consider learning from life. (p. 297)

In her study, Pamphilon acknowledged the importance of “collaborative personal learning” (p. 297) that occurs in women’s groups, and suggested that the particular discourses within those groups could promote or inhibit women’s expressions about their learning. Pamphilon emphasized that women’s identities are likely to be modified according to historical and cultural context and to be reconstructed across the life span, factors which complicate the adult learning-life experience relationship. She reminded me of the need for an explicit multi-dimensional contextualization of stories, and acknowledgement of the fluid nature of narratives of life experiences.

Introducing the concept of consideration of audience as context, Kehily (1995) suggests that “narrative and self-narration . . . is [sic] more than the product of the individual writer or speaker; it is a highly constructed performance, drawing on a range of linguistic, literary and cultural repertoires, specially selected for a particular audience” (p. 28). Kehily admits to an intention to shape her presentation of her narratives to her group by framing past events within a framework of present concerns. To do so, in this particular case, she assumed the role of victim while also

refusing to dwell on the pain and infusing the narratives with a sense of humour and irony. In this way . . . [I was] able to make the stories simultaneously vulnerable and
“safe” for the telling; reconstructing past events by providing points of audience recognition and participation through humour. (p. 27)

Kehily (1995) identifies stories as “social acts, points of public negotiation between self and others” (p. 28), and as attempts to create an individual identity that resonates with one’s perception of the collective identity of the research group. Pondering Kehily’s statement before I began to gather data, I felt tension between the concepts of “collective” and “individual.” I acknowledged the collective identity of my research group because of my selection criteria:

older women who are lifelong learners. I was also mindful of the fact that we must contextualize individual’s stories and refrain from generalizing data. During the data collection phase of my inquiry, I was open to hearing multiple voices. However, I wondered to what extent my criteria for selection “shaped” the stories that I and my participants told, and my reporting of them. I wondered if the criteria kept them within a particular narrative range. I felt a tension around keeping an open mind about themes revealed through the narrative data and what I read in Kehily (1995). She describes her narrative act as “performance” and memory as “gatekeeper” in her reliance on a “stock of ready narratives” (p.28). She cites Bruner (1986) who asserts that the narrative mode functions according to “the vicissitudes of human intention: (p. 30) to [re]construct reality according to desires and intentions. Kehily’s perspective reminded me of the fact-fiction realm to which Conle (1997) referred. Kehily (1995) identified her social and cultural context as one congruent with feminist issues, involving “anti-oppressive politics, . . . dependency, exploitation and body image” (p. 27). Women in her research group concluded that “gender was, and had been, an overwhelming [italics in original] factor shaping . . . life histories and subjective experiences” (p. 24). Later in this document, I will explore what gender issues emerged from my research with older women.
Defining a cultural context and framing past events within a context of present concerns, Kehily connects with a future audience in determining how her presentation would unfold to make a social impact. Kehily’s admission reminds me of Crites’ (1978) references to “aesthetic devices” used in “high art” (p. 124) and the “artful” (p. 122) storyteller shaping “facts” to suit his/her intentions. Surprisingly, reading Kehily’s admission provoked in me a feeling of disdain, although I consciously and enthusiastically supported the notion of making room for multiple voices in research. This feeling evoked some personal questions: Do I feel Kehily has been too manipulative of her audience to call herself a researcher rather than an artist? What is a palatable line for me in distinguishing between research and art, and hence between the researcher and the artist? What will I do if I suspect a co-researcher of “shaping the facts,” intentionally or unconsciously? To what extent do we researchers, in fact, shape all the data gathered? Will I allow personal knowledge about this issue to be revealed in my story-telling, or will I create a cover story? What is my personal limit or boundary for shaping my research to make a social impact? Again I feel a tension about the possibility of breaking the rules of narrative inquiry. I wonder where I will draw the line between a narrative inquiry focus and an arts-based focus. As I recall, Conle (2006) differentiated in curricular terms between the two types of research, by suggesting that, in narrative inquiry, the inquirers and co-participants determine what is important to convey, whereas in arts-based research the focus is on presenting material in a way that impacts the audience most effectively. I realize that I have posed these questions before I present and analyze my data. However, at the same time I acknowledge they have emerged through my exploration in the self-study part of my inquiry that takes into account my whole life experience. What will I do? I will see later.
Social Implications Arising from Tensions

At the proposal and comprehensive examination stages of my doctoral process, I was required to contemplate a social impact of my inquiry in the future. This was another example of feeling tension because I was forced to use my imagination, in a sense “making it up,” rather than letting the data speak through their flesh and breath. For me, the tension seemed to be between writing narratively and writing about narrative.

At the time, I wrote the following:

*I can imagine that a systematic practice of telling and reflecting on experiential stories can lead to a resolution of conflict, an experience of harmony, and an integration of life experiences for the story-tellers, for us older women participants. I can fantasize that these influences in turn can facilitate a continued interest and activity in world affairs and defer physical, psychological, and social decline. I can leap to a social level and imagine that our personal stories, told powerfully, may resound for each other and our audience (those who have access to my completed dissertation), triggering memories and eliciting further stories and retellings that lead to transformation in professional and personal ways of being and doing (Conle, 2000b). I can hope that, as participants, we will discover deep meanings about our age, gender, resourcefulness, and lifelong education that will inform our knowing, learning, and practice in formal and informal educational environments. I can extrapolate that these discovered deep meanings will also influence our relationships, and carry over to influence others. I can suggest that experiencing powerful personal stories leads to embodied, not simply intellectual, understanding that may empower us or other individuals within social and professional groups. I can theorize that others’ resonance with our stories may promote an increase in empathy and ethical concern for older women and their issues. This, in turn, may lead to increased awareness about tacit knowledge issues of older women and relevant, constructive, social and political action. I can imagine that we research collaborators, as well as other women with access to the research, may experience an increased sense of value evoked through resonance with the stories and through our contribution to the scholarly literature on older women who are lifelong learners. I can consider the likelihood that our contribution to the literature will also inform researchers and theoreticians about the use of visual narratives in narrative inquiry. Again, this is theory without flesh and breath.*
Chapter 5:  
How Did I Go About Fleshing Out and 
Breathing Life into My “Narrative as Inquiry”? 

Self-Study

Determined to flesh out and breathe life into my inquiry, I began to design and weave my research tapestry. As I have demonstrated through my more than 100 pages of writings to date, my narrative inquiry was proceeding through self-study that I knew would continue to inform my understandings and expressions of knowledge as a researcher, educator, therapist, and liver of life. I knew also that this study would help me integrate life experiences and reconcile tensions in a meaningful way. Although my intent was not to generalize about older women’s lifelong learning and aging, I sensed that personally significant, deep meanings would nevertheless inform the academic literature on women’s aging and learning landscapes. The self-study portion of my inquiry would continue to include verbal and visual narratives constructed during the course of my inquiry which was already embedded within my life experience generally. Whatever I engaged in, I held the possibility that “it” would become part of my research experience.

This phenomenon resembles what happens when one is a psychotherapist sitting with a client. There is always that witness or watcher sitting on the therapist’s shoulder, paying attention to occurrences in the inner and outer world. As I write this sentence, I recall something I wrote after my Eyes of Eros and Logos workshop when the women participants presented me with a figurine, a small black Watcher wearing a tall hat. The figure was carved by an artist from the Haida aboriginal tribe in British Columbia:
I feel touched that these courageous and honest women honoured me by presenting me with The Watcher. They told me that The Watcher is protective of the home and village. Always wanting to know more, I checked on the web and found out that three Watchers are often carved at the top of Haida totem poles (www.haidadesigns.com). The middle Watcher looks out towards the ocean, monitoring canoes of strangers that might be approaching. The other two Watchers look inwards towards their village, to alert the Chief of any disturbances. This reminds me of that aspect of psychotherapists that pays attention to outer and inner events when sitting with a client. I had my students practise that a lot during the workshop. When I think of the function of The Watcher in the Haida culture, I also relate it to the theme of my workshop that focused on the Eros and Logos eye: relationship/emotion and the word/spirit. This is a complex process, not simply one eye looking out and the other looking in but, rather, each eye looking in and looking out.

I learned that carvings from the Haida tribe are often made of black slate from the Queen Charlotte Islands. Originally, it is a dull grey colour; after carving, it transforms to a shiny black stone. This reminds me of the expression “polishing the Self” that I often use when talking with clients or writing about the individuation process in Sandplay. In therapy, the client and therapist work together to help the client connect with that inner guiding force, a personal centre that facilitates a sense of self-worth. This happens in relationship, just as it does in the development of the attachment bond between infant and mother and, literally, the development of mind and brain. As one of my students wrote, “The polishing of the Self does not occur on its own. We have to provide the conditions by which the Self can sparkle” (Beyers, 2007, p. 76). Like the psychotherapist, the good teacher also watches for opportunities to help students bridge the known and the unknown.

I feel that The Watcher is at work also during my doctoral process when I am in the role of researcher, looking inwards and outwards, backward and forward, “sitting on the shore,” the space connecting land and water, the liminal space between consciousness and the unconscious. Described so, The Watcher has become for me a symbol of “the three-dimensional [narrative] inquiry space” described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 63) and a metaphor for an aspect of me in my diverse roles. I wonder if The Watcher is an example of the “third term” described by Conle (2000, p. 204, citing Elbow, 1986) (see p. 67 of this dissertation).

Beyond the personal significance of self-study (Clandinin and Connelly, 2004), I also see potential in it to reveal knowledge about women’s lifelong learning and aging landscapes, especially through the inclusion of a participant-observation component with three other women. Positioning myself at the centre of my research, alongside my participants, I became “invested” in a personal and profound way (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 13).
Participant-Observation

I placed myself as a full-participant on the observation-participation spectrum (Glesne, 1999), and engaged equally with two of my three women co-participants in separate dyads. Please see the following “Participants” section for details of the third situation. The women who agreed to participate in my inquiry were people I had known previously and knew to be lifelong learners. When they heard what I was contemplating for my research, they all expressed interest in learning more about it and felt that they could learn something new about themselves by participating in it.

Within each dyad, my co-participant and I generated data through unstructured conversations and by creating sandpictures, writing about those pictures, and sharing orally our stories. I also explored my own experience of my relationship with participants in this research context, storying them from my unique position just as they may have storied me (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and our process together in their journals. Because their journals were for their personal use, with no obligation to share what they entered there, mostly I do not know how they were used.

Participants

The three other older women and I (from 60 to 72-years-old), as research co-participants, identified ourselves as lifelong learners. We are aware of bodily and social implications related to our age, that is, we have “embodied age consciousness.” As I know my co-participants, they are women who readily access inner and outer resources, and who display a social conscience, routinely finding ways to make a social contribution. All except Maria have adult children. At the time of data-gathering, I was 68-years-old and married, living with my husband and 96-year-old mother. One participant, Bell, was 69-years-old, recently widowed, living alone for part of
the data-collection until an adult daughter moved in temporarily. She was a longtime friend with whom I have met regularly for over 15 years to celebrate seasonal rituals and engage in art-making.

The third and fourth participants were acquaintances that I have met professionally, or in workshops and women’s gatherings over the course of a few years. After hearing about the evolution of my thesis topic, they spontaneously expressed an interest in participating in the study. The third participant, Eve, was 72-years-old, divorced for several years after a 40-year-marriage, now living alone, with frequent contact with her adult children.

The fourth participant, Maria, was 60 years old, single (never married), without biological children, living alone. She was self-employed in an alternative health care business. When we were about to begin data collection, she had a health crisis and was scheduled for surgery within a couple of months. In the meantime she was on pain medication, often suffering from pain and inhibited mobility. She was firm about continuing with her participation in the study because she thought she could learn something about herself and her physical challenges during the process. Concerned with the discomfort she felt from her physical problem and her short-term endurance due to related sleep disturbances, I adapted our sessions together to accommodate her. This meant that she did only two sandpictures instead of three and wrote only one story. Her attention during our sessions was very self-focused. I found myself slipping into my therapist role in terms of containing and taking care of her psychologically. Also, I shortened our sessions so that she did not become over-tired; consequently, I did no sandpictures in our sessions together. Her keen interest to participate to the greatest extent possible and my feeling that her communications about her health challenge would be meaningful to her, as well as to my
research, led me to dismiss thoughts of eliminating her from the study and to determine to take as much care as I could while we shared her stories.

Data-gathering Specifics

Data were gathered in the following forms: written narratives and journals; miscellaneous papers and computer files; my evolving computerized thesis chapters; personal pre-thesis writings and artistic representations in the form of academic papers, journals, art books and portfolios; audio-taped oral narratives and conversations; and visual narratives (sandpictures and artistic representations in the form of collage).

Written narratives and journals

Throughout the research process, I intended to record experiences of my life (waking and dreaming) and inquiry process in large 9” x 12” journals. I found I was unable to stick to a systematic approach and ended up writing in such journals, on scraps of paper, on my computer in clearly identified files and, most comfortably, directly into the evolving text of my thesis. This documentation included experiences of relationship with my participants, those related to my artistic activity and, especially, those of living life. Previous personal logs and journals were also a source of data.

I gave each participant a journal in which they could record reflections on their experiences within our experiential sessions, along with elaborations of their stories after sharing. These journals remained in the hands of participants, with oral sharing of contents being optional. Only one co-participant chose to share orally some of her journal writings which are included in tape-recorded data.
My participants and I created sandpictures, wrote and shared stories about the sandpictures, and engaged in conversations about topics as they arose. Positioning myself so, and enacting an attitude of equality, respect, appreciation of my co-participants’ stories, and openness towards expanding my own hermeneutical circles, I attempted to facilitate a milieu promoting freedom to tell stories of deep personal significance and an openness to new levels of understanding. I will try to evaluate my success at doing so as I analyze my data. Through reconstructing and sharing our storied histories, I hope to move towards and understand those personally and socially significant ends that entice me teleologically. Details will be revealed in Chapters 10 and 11.

**Oral narratives/casual conversation**

Oral narratives and casual conversations were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed by me. Collection of oral data in this manner allowed for the gathering of silences and words, which “act in a reciprocal fashion in the construction of knowledge” (Kalamaras, 1994, p. 8).

Tapes and transcriptions also documented episodes of laughter. There were many of these during the conversations between my co-participants and me and again, while I solitary transcribed the tapes and reconnected with my research participants. Oral and written narratives were analyzed for meaning and social significance.

**Visual narratives: sandpictures and artistic representations**

In experiential sessions, I photographed sandpictures with a digital camera and stored images in password-protected files in my personal computer for subsequent analysis. I also photographed artistic representations in the form of collages that I created as part of my research process. Sharing of participants’ art during the research process was optional. Only one
participant shared one or two drawings during our sessions. Reserved for the participant’s own purposes, they were not photographed and therefore not included in data addressed in this document.

In an earlier section of this dissertation (see pp. 69-76), I have addressed how visual images may be used in narrative inquiry specifically as visual narratives. Even when contextualizing visual images within narrative inquiry, an arts-based methodological perspective must also be considered. In the following sections, I will provide an historical context for collage and Sandplay, and show how these two image-making processes can be considered as both representational forms and processes in arts-based inquiry.
Chapter 6:
Collage as a Method for Arts-based Research

Introduction

In the following section I will contextualize collage within arts-based inquiry generally and articulate some tensions related to expressive arts and inquiry. I will also explore how collage has evolved culturally to become a method for arts-based research within the academy, and how it is involved in my own self-development in life generally and as researcher/artist/teacher/lifelong learner. Subsequently, I will focus on collage and show that, like other art forms used in arts-based inquiry, it has a dual function: as motivation for inquiry and as a means to represent data (Conle, 2003). I created collages at will that I then used as a basis for inquiry within the self-study portion of my research (see Figures 27-49). In some cases, these collages reveal themselves also as representations of data that emerged in my writings or dreams over a period of time. As I discovered, the two functions (process and representation) are tightly interwoven.

In my explorations, various techniques and strategies for creating, analyzing, and interpreting collage as an art form and a visual narrative are revealed implicitly and explicitly. My verbal text includes narratives about eight collages that reveal themselves as nodes or paths of learning experiences that I followed as part of my narrative process. These paths are also examples of curricular and pedagogical possibilities that collage presents for students, teachers, and researchers within formal academic contexts. The stories related to my paths of learning, as I narrate them visually and verbally, may also resonate for people involved in personal explorations of self-identity and reflexive action, and for people engaged in group process.
As Conle (2003) points out, arts-based researchers usually rely on narratives to express meaning about their representations and to interweave these representations with inquiry processes. Expressing that meaning otherwise is difficult because most of us have not been adequately trained to “read” images and we have not developed a language to speak about them other than to narrate our stories about them. By doing so, we sometimes project personal meanings onto others’ visual representations. Some researchers and theorists go so far as to suggest that images may be “contaminated by language” (Mitchell, 1987, p. 43). Considering this issue from a perspective different from one assuming contamination, one may accept that verbal and visual narratives can diverge, as well as converge, in meaning (Johnson, 2004). The need for researchers to develop skills in addressing this possibility and meeting the challenge it poses for meaning-making is obvious. Such a curricular aim is underscored by one of my research questions stated earlier on page 76 of this document: How are visual narratives analyzed and hence understood when they are not accompanied by verbal texts?

As I emphasize with my Sandplay Therapy students, when learning to read images, we must first look at them to see what is there before we attempt to analyze and interpret the images. However, in doing so, we must remember that, even at a basic perceptual level, interpretation is involved at both conscious and unconscious levels. I have found it helpful to consider different levels of representation. Once again, I acknowledge Daniel Siegel as a guide in helping me understand these different types of representations and how they are involved at different levels of meaning-making. Following is an excerpt from my chapter in a book recently published (Weinberg, 2007). I include it here because of my deep feeling that we must understand what happens in the bodybrain and mind, and their interactions with multiple dimensions (e.g., social relationships and events in the external environment) when discussing educational inquiries
involving our experience, stories, and image-making. The representations discussed in the
citation refer to mental representations.

Representations are coded in the brain through neuronal firing, with differences in their
forms being consequences of unique patterns of firing, and inhibition and activation of
different neuronal circuits. Siegel (1999) identifies four types of representations. Sensory
representations contain external sensory data acquired through sensory receptors that
transmit information to the brain where it is processed first by the thalamus and then by
the sensory cortex. Other sensory representations convey information about the body,
such as temperature, intensity of arousal, movement, and muscular tension. These
sensations are recorded in the somatosensory cortical areas, especially in the right brain
where they are highly integrated. Sensory representations, prelinguistic in nature,
cannot be named, described in words, or categorized.

Perceptual representations are more complex than sensory representations. In the
sensory cortices, incoming information in the form of sensations is analyzed and
compared with memories and generalizations derived from previous experiences.
Perceptual representations, like sensory representations, are prelinguistic. They are
examples of mental constructions of inner reality through the brain’s interactions with
the current environment, memories of the past, and expectations for the future.
Perceptual representations integrate past and future in the present time of an individual
and, thus, are idiosyncratic. Sensory and perceptual representations are described as
“attempts to symbolize the physical world” (Siegel, 1999, p. 167).

Representations in the third category, named conceptual or categorical, symbolize the
“mind’s creation of ideas and . . . [creation] of the mind itself” (Siegel, 1999, p. 167).
They have no direct physical correlation in the material world. For example, a reptile
represents a category, but not a specific type of reptile. Conceptual or categorical
representations are created through high-level mental processing of emotional and
cognitive memories and associations, within the context of the world and social
relationships. They represent complex conceptions of one’s self, others, relationships,
and abstract conceptualizations, such as liberty or responsibility. These, too, are
described as prelinguistic, without specific “three-dimensional correlates in the external
world” (Siegel, 1999, p. 167), although artists may try to represent them.

Linguistic representations contain information about all of the preceding elements—
sensations, perceptions, concepts, and categories—within “socially shared packets called
words” (Siegel, 1999, p. 168). Siegel suggests that resonance amongst sensory,
perceptual, and conceptual processes might indicate a “primary consciousness” or
“remembered present” (p. 169) that manifests internally as a sense of awareness or
familiarity with something that cannot yet be named or referenced in terms of past or
future. We might call this “tacit knowing.” Representations can be generated,
processed, and projected without conscious awareness. Even when unconscious, such
representations can influence important decisions and actions, such as adapting life-long
patterns and changing significant relationships.
As I understand it, artistic representations add another layer to the complex phenomenon of mental representations. From the artist’s perspective, they include intention to manifest something in the outer world with a particular purpose in mind, skill to manifest them concretely (e.g., in words, in images, through movement, through music, etc.), desire to communicate to others, and characteristics of the medium chosen for the representations. From the “audience’s” perspective, making sense of artistic representations is even more complex. When verbal narratives do not accompany visual narratives, we must rely initially on our interpretation of the artist’s “non-discursive expressions of feeling” (Langer, 1953) and the representational tone that we perceive. Taking note of the above passage (Weinberg, 2007), we see how implicated in our sense-making are the elements to which Siegel refers: sensory data; emotions; cognitions; associations; memories of the past; expectations of the future; mental constructions; integration of experiences; inner and outer worlds; social relationships; and language. Interwoven with all of these factors are personal, cultural, and universal histories that influence our meaning-making frameworks both consciously and unconsciously. The complexity of the process increases when additional layers are introduced at the curriculum, pedagogical, and research levels. I feel strongly that, although visual inquiry (as a visual narrative and arts-based methodology) is accepted within academia as a suitable research form and phenomenon, it has not been adequately addressed in curricular and pedagogical terms. My dissertation is not the place to do so completely; however, I feel I have an opportunity here to provoke thought on the issue and to sketch out a contemporary context for further investigation at a later point.

Some researchers point out a gap in the public educational system regarding visual images. An example is Boone (2007) who realized through her research with children that a drawing is . . . difficult to interpret and sometimes is not considered to be real work, perhaps
because it is difficult to evaluate and measure, like oral communication, in terms of standards and norms (p. 86).

In his reflections on “images, visual culture, and educational research” (p. 28), Fischman (2001), as I have done above, argues that understanding imagery requires a conscious awareness that perception is a complex process beyond passive seeing and that connections between words and images are dynamic and beyond simple or obvious meanings. He also emphasizes the existence of a relationship of cultural, social, and economic aspects of visuality, as well as “verbal, auditory, emotional, physical, intellectual, spatial, and historical” elements (p. 29, citing Rogoff, 1989).

Exploring interpretation of artistic images, Soep and Cotner (1999) conducted research with graduate students with no extensive education in the visual arts. Through analysis of transcripts of tape-recorded discourses about an unfamiliar artist’s lithograph, the researchers identified four linguistic strategies and their relevance to arts education: participants’ awareness of contrast within the painting that suggested mutual exclusion or contradiction while, paradoxically, indicating multiple layers of meaning; participants’ use of a statement of negation to eliminate possibilities when positive descriptive language was not readily available to them (e.g., It’s not a calm painting); participants’ use of speculation (i.e., imaging what the artist might have wanted) that demonstrated the dynamic quality of perception and interpretation; and participants’ narrativizing about imagined forces or represented figures in the artistic image. The researchers concluded that “visual realities” (p. 367) were entwined with the responders’ thinking and speaking about personal experiences, intentions, and meanings. On the one hand, without confirmation through creators’ verbal narratives, we could say that we must be cautious when constructing our meanings about the images produced by others. On the other hand, we
can accept that images represent multiple meanings, with one meaning as legitimate as another. As well, in order to expand our knowledge about self-created images, we can benefit from expanding our skill in relation to images that may have unconscious components. By doing so, we will show that for us, as individuals, images may have multiple meanings depending upon temporal, spatial, and relational contexts.

In her discussion of narrative curricula practices in schools and in teacher education, Conle (2003) briefly addresses arts-based inquiry along with narrative inquiry. Initially distinguishing amongst various narrative curricula practices in which the curricular aim varies, Conle uses Schwab’s (1977) four commonplaces (student, teacher, subject matter, and milieu) as an analytical framework to look at narrative functions and determine curricular effects. Putting arts-based inquiry within the same frame, she suggests that the primary curriculum function of arts-based research is directed towards changing audience members through the experience of artistic data in any of its forms. Considering the complexity of the representation process, I wonder how or to what extent we can identify with any degree of certainty what it is that “impact[s] on the audience,” a concept that Conle (2003) suggests is “what counts” in determining the curricular significance of arts-based inquiry (p. 10). I also wonder: *To what extent can we identify “what counts”? Is “what counts” a matter of resonance? Wondering.*

Inquiring. Learning. As I write these words, I realize that this situation is typical of the way I live my life: wondering, asking questions, and beginning a quest to find out more. In my role as teacher of Sandplay Therapy I have done a little experiment that relates to the “what counts” phenomenon. Before showing projected images of sandpictures to trainees, I ask them to draw a small rectangle on their page to represent a sandtray and, immediately upon looking at the projected sandpicture, to mark an X on their drawn sandtray to indicate what section of the
picture caught their eye before they had time to analyze the picture to a greater extent. I have found there is great divergence in what catches people’s attention “at first glance.” My tendency to wonder, ask questions explicitly, and seek generally, facilitates my passion for learning and makes me comfortable in my role as researcher. I am less comfortable in my role as artist, still wondering if I can call what I do “art” and if my artistic representations legitimately fit into the field of arts-based inquiry.

I wonder what makes educational research “arts-based.” Barone and Eisner (1997) identify seven aesthetic elements that relate to various types of literary art forms in arts-based research: capacity to draw the audience into an alternate or “virtual” reality; ambiguity that requires the audience to fill in gaps; metaphoric expression that allows the audience to transcend literal meanings; contextualization of descriptions of human phenomena in expressive, common, non-theoretical language; cultivation of empathy; multiple versions of reality as presented by the author and perceived by the audience; and an aesthetic form that provides a space for challenges to existing values and for the construction of new meanings and perspectives. Barone and Eisner intended that their aesthetic criteria inform knowing about word-based art forms. I wonder if these criteria are also relevant for image-based art forms. At first glance, I think they are; however, I know I have to engage in further exploration before I can decide with any certitude.

Recently a friend referred me to a new book by Sullivan (2005) who takes a cognitive approach in his presentation of a framework for visual arts research which may be artist-centered (with artist as subject) or artist-based (with artist presenting a perspective from within his or her practice). Rather than searching for the site of art knowledge in a simplistic manner that includes the process of art-making, the product itself, or the viewer’s mind, Sullivan suggests an integration of these three perspectives that he calls “transcognition.” As he represents it, this
modality of visual arts knowing includes practical and theoretical dimensions, creative practice, artistic context, and the artist self as a site of knowing (p. 129). Sullivan asserts that this type of integrated approach embeds artistic knowing within an historical interdisciplinary tradition, acknowledges the centrality of an artist’s practice that includes and allows for diverse voices (the artist’s and others’) as multiple meanings are co-constructed and reconstructed. He presents a non-linear dynamic visual arts research model in which “the proximity or sequence of the components” [perspectives, including artist, artwork, and others, and practices, including question, interpretation, and explanation] “can be changed to suit different questions or situations” (p. 145). Sullivan argues that, through his rigorous and systematic model of inquiry, he “privileges the role imagination and intellect plays in constructing knowledge that is not only new but has the capacity to transform human understanding” (xii). From this perspective, he suggests that artists pursuing the practice of creative and critical explorations are engaged in research in the visual arts. Sullivan visualizes his model as a tree-like hanging mobile structure in which elements may change their positions in relation to each other. Sullivan’s model seems to be a more complex version of Schwab’s four commonplaces, one that emphasizes multi-dimensionality and flexibility, one that accommodates research in the arts and about the arts, and one that elaborates on the notion of what counts in arts-based inquiry and its curricular significance. Although not obvious in this multi-dimensional model as outlined above, Sullivan emphasizes the role of critical theory on changing individuals and societies by exposing “structural and systemic problems that deny voice, access, power, and privilege” (p. 56). Constructing new knowledge and transforming human understanding through arts-based inquiry implies a radical process, a point accentuated in Ulmer’s (1983) reference to collage.
Collage as “Revolutionary”

“Collage is the single most revolutionary formal innovation in artistic representation to occur in . . . [the 20th] century” (Ulmer, 1983, p. 84, cited by Garoian, 2004). When I read these words a few weeks ago, I didn’t think about proving or disproving them. I accepted them as one (or more than one) person’s point of view and embraced the statement as something that could help me learn more about collage and myself. What popped out for me was the word “revolutionary.” I wondered how collage is “revolutionary” culturally, especially within the academy where collage is used as a form of representation and also as a process for generating data. The sentence challenges me also to explore personally the history and evolution of the use of collage in arts-based research and the role of that history in my own reflections on, and understandings about, collage as I use it as an example of visual narrative in my doctoral research. Today I remember Ulmer’s statement again as I peruse a recently purchased book, a/r/tography: Rendering Self through Arts-Based Living Inquiry (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004), noticing the prevalence of illustrations of collage and assemblage scattered throughout the authors’/artists’ verbal texts. I wonder why collage has evolved as it did in the 20th century and how or if it has pushed boundaries, both those we meet in academic contexts and those we confront in explorations of self. My focus narrowed temporarily to the personal: Just as I use my hands to create collages, how has collage had a hand in creating me?

As I have written earlier in this thesis, creating the collage, Dancer, was transformative for me because during the process I reconnected to my Inner Artist Archetype. I didn’t realize that until two years later when I began to write about that collage as a representation and collage-making as a process. This collage and its accompanying verbal text continued to work their transformative power over me after I began doctoral studies in 2003 at OISE/UT. The first
occasion was in relation to an assignment for an arts-informed research methodology course (AEC3177H) with Dr. Ardra Cole. Required to make a presentation and write a course paper, without deliberation, I chose to focus on collage as my art-form. At that time, I remembered that Dancer had been rolled up in a closet for 14 years. I had forgotten her and my intention to frame her and place her on a wall. I took her from the closet, unrolled her and, looking at her, had a dialogue in writing with her in which I asked Dancer what she wanted from me. She responded by saying that she wanted “to come out of the closet, literally,” and to be contextualized socially and historically. I agreed to her that I would do that, but I wasn’t sure how at that point. One aspect of my presentation for AEC3177H was to guide my classmates in making a collage. Prior to facilitating this process with them, I engaged in collage-making with a colleague who led me through a “vision quest” process (Cowan, 2007; 2006). Below is what I wrote about this work, *Dreaming into Being* (Figure 16), immediately following creation of the collage.

Collage as a Quest

In preparation for my introduction of collage to our class, Regina (dear friend/nurse/educator/therapist/artist/researcher) facilitated my experience of the “vision quest” (i.e., to hear the call, to find a guide or guides, to go into the shadows, to be tested and transformed, and to return and find a way to share the gift received through the quest) (Cowan, 2007; 2006). She also guided me in the selection of pictures and directed the collage assembly, emphasizing that I should shape the picture collage “to the punctum.” By this, she meant that I should determine the point at which I would enter the picture and arrange other elements of the collage in relation to it. Within a relational context of generosity and reverence . . . she presented the art-making process as an opportunity to explore a dimension of implicate or enfolded order: a deep, “inward order out of which the manifest form of things can emerge creatively” (Bohm & Peat, p. 151); and an order that has a potentiality to go beyond the individual content and involve the whole, common cultural experience” (p. 172). As I reflect on my narrative, written in response to the visual text of the collage, I sense that the personal is indeed connected to communal cultural experience.

Before presenting the text of my narrative, I ask that you, dear reader, spend a few moments “reading” the collage. Although there is no form for it here, I would be interested in knowing of your experience of the elements I chose, and of the arrangement of them into what is for me, a unified whole. Where do you enter the picture? Is this the
dimension through which you enter or understand life? In what direction(s) does that
entry point lead you, in the collage? In life? Does my collage suggest a story for you, or
does it make a statement that resonates with yours? What is the meaning that you make
when you open yourself to the archetypal energies represented by these symbols that may
then be transformed into personally significant metaphors? Are you able to complement
this imaged script with your textual self-narrative? Do any of my represented voices
resound for you?

My analysis of my collage will follow Regina’s lead demonstrated when we met after my
completion of it. She first noted that I had positioned by background paper with the
longer sides on the horizontal plane. Based on her experience as an art therapist, she
has determined that a collage assembled from this perspective tells a story, while one
positioned with the shorter sides on the horizontal plane makes a statement. Although I
have done no research on this phenomenon, I felt that, in this particular case, Regina’s
appraisal was accurate: I had indeed told a story. I will recount that story through
direct reference to Regina’s initial instructions, first identifying the punctum from which
my story proceeds.

Entering the Picture

When beginning to assemble the elements of my collage and, again, when beginning to
consider the tale that it told, my threshold was the image of the feminine face with eyes
closed and REM inscribed on her forehead (Figure 17); this leg of my life journey began
with my dream to re-enter graduate school. Regina was the person who introduced me to
the arts-informed component of OISE, a factor influential in my decision to apply
ultimately to OISE.

Hearing the Call

In my meditation on the instruction to hear the call, I heard the voice that I had heard
before, the voice that urged me to return to doctoral studies and subsequently to search
for an answer to my question: What does my soul want of me by sending me this dream
at a time when I am retiring from the teaching profession and am already doing the kind
of work as a psychotherapist that I find fulfilling? I turn to the words of June Singer

The soul as I understand it, functions to balance us, to urge us into the fullness of our
being, to guide us toward realizing our potential and making our gifts available to others
and, most of all to finding the inner peace that comes only from congruity between who
we are and what we do. (p. xii)

Singer’s words provoke further questions: What is the fullness of my being? What would
represent fulfillment of my potential? What are my gifts? How might I make those gifts
available to others in a way that I am not already doing as a therapist and an educator of
therapists? How do I maintain congruity between being and doing, maintaining internal
and external consistency? What manner of inquiry will engage me on a soulful level?
Through the imagery of my collage, I explicitly connect to my “Dream Poet,” a metaphor used by Jones (1980) who suggests that educational endeavours may benefit from dream reflection (rather than analysis), a perspective of viewing dreams as products of play (rather than work) analogous to artistic visions (rather than neurotic symptoms), and investment of authority in the subjective expertise of the dreamers themselves (rather than in the objective expertise of various analytic methods) (p. 36). In “Dreaming into Being,” my dream poet (Figure 17) hovers over the sleeping, dreaming me, sprinkling her golden grains of inquiry, revelation, beautification, curiosity, resourcefulness, meaning, and more. The call reverberates.

Finding (a) Guide(s)

As I pointed out in my letter to Regina, the picture selection process through which she led me evoked in me a feeling of being tended and accompanied in an atmosphere of generosity. I felt safe to call on as many guides as I wanted. In the collage, my guides (Figure 18) surround the dreamer’s face. My voice denotes their meaning. There is the Dream Poet/Creatrix scattering her seeds of all possibilities: the potential for union of masculine and feminine energies; the potential for safe and appropriate containment for the golden egg, transpersonal values, the “nest egg” of resources; the potential for unfoldment of the lotus-like Self, the Self that grows out of life’s muck; the potential for removal of obstacles, in the form of the Hindu god, Ganésa; the potential for mediation between my world’s spiritual and material dimensions, in the forms of the geese and their shamanic healer riders; the potential for giving and receiving compassion and mercy as represented by the goddess, Kwan Yin; the potential for strength and softness, for sacrifice on behalf of the sacred, in the form of the stag, mediator between consciousness and the unconscious; and potential for authentic, embodied knowing connected to a grounded reality, as represented by the nude body and the soles of the feet.

Going into the Shadows

With the support of all the guides and, especially, the stag who is sure-footed in the forest, I met my shadow aspects (Figure 19): the woman self and Woman who is disregarded, the woman self and Woman who finds her authority usurped, the woman self and Woman who is silenced, and the woman self and Woman who struggles to give rise to spirit while feeling bound by matter, by what else matters in her life, by who else matters in her life. Synchronistically, the week I worked on my collage, I also experienced two salient incidents of silencing, one in my personal life and one in the academy. That week, I was also reading the thesis of Kathy Mantis (2004) who investigated the paradox of the educated woman who experiences silencing and lack of regard.

Being Tested and Transformed

For this element, I selected an image with a regal-looking woman centered and surrounded by small pictures of people suffering various forms of inhumanity towards one’s human kin, such as being tied to, and turned on, a wheel, being flogged, and being burned at the stake (Figure 20). I wondered what I might encounter metaphorically on
my quest that could approach these acts of bodily torture (perhaps stretched thin or beyond one’s limits, lashed out at, screwed, enflamed?).

The woman in the picture evoked in me compassion and admiration as I contemplated her awareness, and perhaps experience, of inhumanity. Later, I found out that this was a representation of the Empress, Theodora, a Byzantium woman of the 6th century who, despite her lowly beginnings, became an equal partner to, and co-ruler with, her husband, Justinian I. I wondered: Is she a manifestation of the potential for an inner union of masculine and feminine energies that was represented in the collage by Chagall’s wedding couple (Figure 20)? Theodora, who reputedly strove for egalitarian rights for women, is also described as a courageous woman who adopted a spiritual life and whose intelligence helped advance the Byzantine empire (www.edwardsly.com/theodor.htm.)

In the collage, I unconsciously juxtaposed the image of Theodora with that of the handmaiden (Figure 21) in her religious habit. Superimposed over a part of the Theodora element and the habit is a lantern, symbol of enlightenment and transformation. The lantern also partly overlays the grinning, Margaret-Atwood-snakes-in-the-hair-Medusa (Figure 22), reading “The Taming of the Shrew,” perhaps suggesting the discriminate use of shrewish behaviour in the face of silencing. Shakespeare’s work addresses the issues of men’s and women’s social roles and the paradox of the spirited, intelligent woman forced to conform to social customs [or academic traditions] that have implications of domination/control and inhibition of self-expression.

The Medusa theme in this collage is a repetition of the snakes-in-the-hair image that I painted in the Dancer collage. A golden grain dropped by a classmate in AEC3177H after I shared the collage with the group led me to “The Laugh of the Medusa” by Cixous (2003). The author urges women to resist silencing, and to write and speak about, and out of, their bodies, to write and speak to and for other women, to write and speak “a feminine text” (p. 282).

Returning Home and Sharing the Gifts

In “Dreaming into Being,” an Indian woman (Figure 23), accompanied by a young man and several dogs and goats, returns home. The woman and man carrying containers on their heads bear gifts of sustenance and vital waters. The meaning of these gifts for me, in terms of knowing, truth, reality, teaching, learning, and development, will unfold in time. The position and size of the man suggest that he serves the woman. For Every Woman, the inner masculine’s service to the feminine protects her from becoming “anima-driven,” driven only by reason, ambition, competition, and objectivity. This woman has a presence that, to me, suggests wisdom and self-assurance.

The woman’s bare feet, as well as the goats and dogs, emphasize the importance of the instinctual dimension on journeys such as these. As Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1992, p. 29) writes about La Loba, the Old Wise Woman: “She is the feeder root to an entire instinctual system,” La Loba is also known as “La Que Sabé, the One Who Knows,” the
one who “created women from a wrinkle on the sole of her divine foot,” making them creatures who know. When I am at home, I live in my bare feet. Even when I am not, I aspire to the sentience that has “the ring of truth.”

Studying my collage, I realize that I have positioned images of relationship and the dance above the Medusa image (Figure 22). Relationship with other women is an integral part of my art-making processes. The role of the dancer, and her continuing presence, has been articulated in depth.

I am aware that the image in the bottom right corner of the collage is a self-portrait of Charlotte Salomon (Figure 24), a young Jewish woman born in Berlin and killed at Auschwitz. She recorded her twenty-six-year-old life in a series of 765 gouache paintings and a narrative completed over the course of a year. Charlotte’s burden of carrying a female family pattern of suicide and direct knowledge of the horrors of Nazi Germany led her to use her artistic training and vast knowledge of the arts to give meaning to an otherwise meaningless existence (Rosenthal, 1998). When she passed on her “Life? Or Theatre?” to a friend before her death, she said, “Take good care of it. It’s my life.” These words amplify the final image in my collage. Connecting the silenced woman, Medusa-Margaret (the reader-writer) and Charlotte (the painter-writer-musician) is a pair of hands tenderly holding a delicate two-branched plant at the mouth of a beautifully shaped vase (Figure 25). My associations to the image are embodiment, containment within aesthetics, nurturing of the feminine/masculine voices and self/other, empathy, strength and vulnerability, and viriditis (the moist, illuminating, soulful, healing power of wisdom, as described by Hildegard of Bingen, 1985). Charlotte’s words remind me to honour my work and my re-searching selves through artful exploration. It’s my life.

Collage and a Sense of Place

As well as an experiential component, my presentation in course AEC3177H included a discussion about different methods to facilitate collage-making and diverse ways to analyze and interpret data. I will elaborate on these methods further on in this document. My course discussion also included a comparison with the product and process of the Dancer collage. This comparison brought Dancer out of the closet, as she had requested, and formally into the academic environment. This introduction was followed in 2005 with another foray into a class, AEC 3176H, Explorations in Sense of Place in Natural and Professional Contexts, with Dr. Suzanne Thomas. In my final project for the course, I explored the body as place in Who Am I? Where Do I Belong? An Inquiry on Ecological Identity and Sense of Place. Dancer’s form
became a surface for verbal fragments derived from an ecopsychological, critical aesthetics, and inquiry perspective (Figure 26). Additionally, the original Dancer collage was the prototype for a smaller version that was replicated into eight Woodsdancers (Figures 6a to 6c) and collaged with fragments from prior artistic works I had done and from photographs of my family farm which has been a significant place in my history.

The collages presented in this chapter do not focus on the Dancer, although she (in a different form) is present as a fragment in the upper right corner of Dreaming into Being (Figures 16 and 22). The reflections and interpretation of the images of Dreaming into Being that I have included above in the section in italics emanated from my personal and professional experience in multiple roles. As a psychotherapist I became familiar with Jungian psychology that includes knowledge about archetypes, symbols, symbolic process, different psychic elements including the relevance of the personal and collective unconscious to conscious life, and the significance of dreams to knowledge- and meaning-making. In a very broad sense, I have learned to live my life within a symbolic and metaphorical framework, paying attention and following a thread when a snake crosses my path on walks in the local ravine, or when an interview or news item in the background resonates with something I am reading or writing or pondering, or when a dream message prods me to action. This is my life.

As a therapist and a friend/colleague in a collaborative relationship (e.g., as with Regina), through reciprocity I have increased my learning and practised the value of care and concern, trust, honour, and reverence, with a respect for generosity of spirit and openness to an internal creative order.

As a researcher/teacher/learner, I have expanded my hermeneutic circles to include the concepts of multiple voices, my own and those of others, and of diverse worlds whose revelation
of cultural images allows the entry of, and even appropriation by, outsiders who, even temporarily, abandon their sense of difference. I have also learned the value of place as a site of learning. It is a “place of experience” (Knowles, 2001, pp. 95, 97) whether it is geographical (as with The Farm) or artistic (as in collage) or corporeal (as in the stomach or chest or breath).

Looking back as an artist, I see that my sense of aesthetics in childhood was anchored strongly in sentient experiences in Nature. Tuan (1993) describes this type of aesthetic impulse as “the senses come to life,” an impulse that “directs attention to its roots in nature” (p. 7). I recall nestling on russet needles in a silent pine glade, watching the filtered sunlight glinting through the outstretched limbs of the trees, shadows dancing around me as I intentionally explored the feel of a sharp prick of a pine-needle. I chuckle again when I remember my laughter as I tried to emulate the flight pattern of the red-tailed hawk gliding overhead as I ran in circles and tried to keep my balance on the slope of the hillside. Squishing through the mud at the side of the creekbed, my grandmother and I peered under broken branches and moved aside trailing vines to find the lord and lady of the fen, jack-in-the-pulpit and lady’s slipper. Joining my father for the summer in Moncton, New Brunswick, where he was posted during the latter years of World War II, my mom, dad, and I would lie on the damp grass at night and search the panoramic black sky above for the human and animal forms I read about in my Golden books. These experiences have remained as significant for me now as then. Nature is the root of my sense of beauty, balance, clashing opposites, and spirituality.

**Collage in the Academy**

As I have indicated above, prior to preparing my dissertation proposal, my interest was piqued to engage further with the collage-making process and to try to develop within me an art of seeing with new perceptual powers. It also encouraged me to use arts-based research
language when interrogating my own collage efforts as I immerse myself in my visual narrative data and attempt to make connections between me as a lifetime learner and the curriculum/pedagogy context.

I have experienced tension about starting this chapter with a literature review of collage as a method for arts-based inquiry because it is not the way “it” is done in arts-based research circles these days. Although I feel ambiguity in citing the “authority” below, I decide I must do so because his words help to expose what has become a dictum and a boundary that I choose to break in order to contextualize my stories which tell of my experiences and focus my reflections. I feel I cannot deny or disregard what has brought me to this point in my understanding. My experience of academic tradition through the reading, analysis, and critique of diverse works by other researchers, educators, philosophers and critics, and discourse about them, is part of me, whether or not I am being politically correct in citing them. And so, I present the words of one of the experts who speaks explicitly:

*I’m tempted to look for quotes and I peruse the pages looking for marginalia and underlines. I hesitate. It’s all too easy to quote the apparent experts. I thumb some more. All too easy to defer, to lose my voice. Academe overflows with minds unwilling to venture forth without the power of authority invested from others and I remind myself of this fact and of the primacy of experience. “Let the experience flow over you first,” I hear myself say to graduate students and teachers “before anything else, make sense of the context-phenomenon, event, circumstance-first through the power of your analysis of experience.”* (Knowles, 2001, p. 99)

I have done my reflections through more than one visitation to the images and without any intention to use a systematic or carefully thought out theoretical approach when analyzing the collages. Later in this document, I will put my observations, resonances, and meanderings into a broader framework of arts-based inquiry. After writing the previous few sentences, I close my eyes and let my body rotate. It moves in a counter-clockwise direction, going back so to speak, unwinding. I also feel myself swaying side to side and back and forth, and then rotating
in a clockwise direction. My body traces out the non-linear path I follow in my dissertation process. No doubt, as I continue to write and find a satisfying, relevant way for further representations of my visual data, I will continue to revisit them and add to my narratives. With these facts in mind, I present below an historical context for bringing my collages into the academy, mindful of the fact of the hermeneutical nature of my verbal narratives in relation to the visual narratives. As pointed out by Conle, Jia, Chang, & Boone (2006), interpretations may change or expand as hermeneutic circles enlarge to include the expertise of those discussing the relationship of collage to art and arts-based research. My experience in collage-making and interpretation of the visual data has already been changed from what it was when I made Dancer. These changes have occurred because of my personal and professional experience gained from diverse activities: reading; attending formal academic classes in methodology; participating in women’s art process groups; making collages by myself; practising as a teacher and therapist; reflecting on my experiences; and traveling to work in a foreign country where I have had access to different cultural practices and histories, and images I might otherwise not have collected.

Throughout this dissertation, I will refer often to the hermeneutical aspect of my work and the manner in which my hermeneutic circles continue to expand through my various lifelong learning opportunities. Commencing this chapter with an attitude of inclusion, I summarize what each of these “experts” has to say. In the long run, in relation to my personal experience and interpretation of that experience, I may reject or ignore all or some of what they say. I also acknowledge that I have selected authorities and the points they make, patching them together into a kind of curricular/pedagogical collage within which I insert myself in my own way. I begin my literature review with collage as an art form, although I continue to question whether or not my collages constitute art. Some may. Some may not. I will explore that issue later.
An Historical Context for Collage as a Method for Arts-based Research

Thomas Brockelman (2001) writes about collage in the art world. In his philosophical work focusing on collage and the postmodern, he writes: “Collage intends to represent the intersection of multiple discourses” (p. 2). He suggests that it is this intention in the art world that separated cubist collage, initiated by Braque and Picasso in 1912, from traditional folk art that preceded it in many different cultures (e.g., in Japan, Africa, Persia, Turkey, and Germany) as far back as the twelfth century (Brommer, 1994).

Brockelman (2001) avers that the work of the cubists, such as Picasso, Braque, and Gris, lacked a “presence” because of their “playful and ironic” qualities (p. 2). Nevertheless, in the 1920s and 1930s, collage became a major artistic medium for avant-garde and surrealist artists. Brockelman locates the origins of collage and postmodernism firmly within the late 19th century in social and philosophical responses to “industrialization [which made mechanical reproduction possible] and urbanization” (p. 6), social phenomena which imply a “fragmentation and multiplicity of worlds” (p. 10). The postmodern period cast doubt on existing structures of authenticity and authority in the art world, as well as in other areas. Historically, the advent of collage coincides with a rejection of works of art that imitated the meaningful or visible world, reproduced reality, and mirrored nature. This changing paradigm, Brockelman says, resulted in the perception of visual arts as a script through which elements of the picture became “signs” or “emblems” (p. 4) of the world, and in the acknowledgment of viewers as constructors of their own realities.

Brockelman (2001) views the collage process of gathering together materials from diverse worlds and assembling them into a united composition as paradoxical in nature. Consideration of the juxtaposition of heterogeneous elements within a bounded, unifying surface
or field prompts Brockelman to identify collage as a metaphor for the postmodern paradigm that held no hope for a sense of universality of divergent viewpoints. As such, he suggests that collage “promises” a new relationship between two aspects of “worldhood” (p. 9) or meaningful historical-cultural context that influences people’s experiences. These two aspects of worldhood, as Brockelman sees it, are: a fragmentation of worlds that leads to acknowledgement of multiple worlds and thus to diverse, rather than universal, meaning systems; and a unification of elements within a limited field or surface to which the fragments are attached, with the result that an ideology of difference is resisted.

Collage, and art-making in general, are elements of arts-based inquiry, a form of qualitative research that has emerged in postcolonial, postmodern contexts across diverse academic communities since the late 1960s/early 1970s. In a recent edited book on qualitative inquiry, Finley (2005) notes that the hyphen in “arts-based” implies art as a basis for something other than art and begins her chapter with a sentence that identifies political activism as the goal of arts-based inquiry approaches. She situates the emergence of the arts as a research methodology within three historical events included under an umbrella of “radical aesthetic inquiry” (p. 682): a reflexive or activist turn in the social sciences; the emergence of “activist arts”; and a surfacing of “revolutionary pedagogy,” in particular, a theoretical and methodological arts-based research genre that includes radicalism, ethics, and revolutionary arts. Concomitantly with the development of the arts as a research methodology, changes were occurring or brewing at various levels of discourse concerning several issues. These included the following: ethics related to the researcher/participant relationship, including an ethics of care; presentation of research results, especially regarding access by a local community and protection of the voices of research participants; and identification of skills necessary to new
research paradigms, including a broader narrative range than had been previously permissible (pp. 682-3).

Especially, Eisner (1991/1998) was a significant contributor to the emergence of arts-based research. He conceptualized seven organizing principals for this new form of inquiry:

- that different people (including artists and scientists) know the world in different ways;
- that knowledge is constructed from experience and, as such, it reflects mind and nature;
- that how people represent their worlds determines what they can say about it;
- that forms of knowing and representing the world require intelligence;
- that representation of the world through particular forms influences not only what people say about the world, but also what they experience about the world;
- that complete and informative descriptions, interpretations, and evaluations of the world demand a wide range of research methods and forms; and
- that acceptance of specific forms of representation is political, as well as epistemological, and that new forms of representation require the development of new proficiencies.

Charles Garoian (2004) describes the *collage narrative* as “radical” and “disjunctive” (p. 25), with meanings or understandings being “apprehended” rather than “comprehended” (p. 25). His descriptions pull me to engage in a brief etymological Google search which reveals, for example, that the word “radical” embodies juxtaposed heterogeneous images. This word suggests a rooted and extensive essentialism that can be extreme and uncompromising, unconventional, and at the limits of control, that is, on the edge or at the boundaries.

“Disjunctive” as “divisive” and “contrasting,” implies “an opposition to joining.” While “apprehended” and “comprehended” both include the concept of “mentally grasping the importance or meaning of something,” “apprehended” suggests a contravention of the law, while “comprehended” implies understanding through including something as part of something else. With these connotations in mind, we can understand why Garoian refers to “a fugitive epistemological process” (p. 25) that involves collage-makers in an uncertain or indeterminate, multi-faceted creative experience which does not provide for an historical and social synthesis,
and thus opens up a space for challenging cultural assumptions. Characterizing the narrative of collage “as a resource for curriculum and pedagogy” (p. 26), in his terms, the what and how of teaching (p. 27), Garoian suggests that the relationship between curriculum (structure) and pedagogy (process) is dialectical, rather than oppositional.

Garoian (2004) describes the spaces in-between the disjunctive elements of collage as sites where “creative and political intervention and production” (p. 26) may occur. He notes that these places of dialectic tension that are sometimes called the “third,” the “void,” or a space of silence, enable a critical attitude towards cultural beliefs and values, a creative interaction with meanings and symbols, and a possibility of multiplicity of interpretations and voices. Garoian’s concept of the third fits into a Jungian framework for psychological growth. By holding the tension of the opposites with patience and consciousness about what one is doing, one may experience “the transcendent” that emerges as a form of resolution of conflict. It manifests as a new perspective, not something that one would have anticipated or planned, because it includes unconscious elements as well as conscious perceptions (Jung, 1957/1960, p. 69).

Several other arts-based researchers have used collage to explore experiences of identity, pedagogical theory and practice, and aesthetic knowledge. Susan Finley (2001) describes “An Educated Woman,” her multimedia assemblage mannequin, as her “most deliberately autobiographical collage work” (p. 13). This artistic rendering facilitated her inquiry into her personal developmental process as a researcher and an artist, and the interdependence of these two identifying categories. Finley found that the particular art form of collage also permitted her to represent generally the relationship of women’s self-identities as women and knowledge-gatherers to educational, social, and cultural factors and definitions. Through a blurring of boundaries between individual and communal identities within a context of belonging and care,
Finley explored the possibility of a “feminist” (p. 22) epistemological perspective as a complementary to traditional masculine research paradigms.

Finley (2002) also used collage (and painting) in educational research to create life history representations of teachers and teacher educators in order to explore the relationship of mythological feminine images in popular culture to pedagogical practice and the reification of gender stereotypes. These visual texts, which documented how cultural metaphors are inscribed in/on women’s bodies, provided a focus for teachers’ narratives about their professional identities and practices. Subsequently, analysis of the educators’ stories and metaphors informed understandings about women’s roles in educational settings and promoted reflexive practice amongst the educators. Finley concluded that arts-based research provides a context for nurturing, rather than alienating, critical pedagogical projects.

In a 1999 study, McDermott (2002) used the collage-making process with pre-service teachers as a method of self-reflection on pedagogical practices and professional identity embedded within racial, gender, class, and cultural contexts. In the study, she also explored how artistic methods, including collage, might be applied to curriculum development and application, teacher development, and analysis and representation of research data. Analyzing data through an aesthetic lens of relationality, emergence, and transformation, McDermott observed that collage disrupted epistemological dichotomies (such as “knower/known,” p. 9) and blurred boundaries between relational elements (such as self/other, inner/outer, and personal/professional).

Compton (2002) used collage (and painting) to explore and clarify a personal experience of boundary violations in the academy and subsequent silencing about the issues. Her
investigation evoked archetypal images that allowed the researcher to reframe a disruptive experience and “restore a sense of personal integrity” (p. 65).

Child (2002), an adult educator and mentor working with disaffected and marginalized young adults in a rural school board programme, used a diversity of representational techniques, including collage, to concretize creative selves and embodied knowledge of joy within the mentees. She used the representations as visual affirmations to reinforce mental images evoked through meditation and guided visualizations.

Latta (2001) used collage to investigate the nature, possibilities, and power of the aesthetic experience, and the relationship between the artist and the material in a teaching/learning/researching context. She found that the collage layering experience became a “determining ground” (p. 8, citing Kant, 1953, p. 71) for compositional possibilities, for various aspects of her pedagogical practice, and for the eventual form of her inquiry. Through her inquiry, Latta identified three underlying patterns in the collage-making process that reflect Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) notion of embodied knowledge (i.e., knowledge grounded in the knower’s integrated perception of the world): a basic, relational involvement of all fragments or elements; an ongoing dialogue between past and present that contextualizes “knowing, seeing, and acting in the world” (p. 91); and a situation-specific reciprocity between self and other.

Why Is Collage a “Form that Fits” in Arts-based Research?

What is it about collage that makes it “a form that fits” in arts-based research? Some of the previously mentioned researchers have been explicit about the characteristics of collage that contribute to its appropriateness for arts-based inquiry. Finley (2001), for example, suggests that access to a continuum of media fragments for collage elements permits the contextualization of life-events within “cultural currents” (p. 17). This quality supports her argument that, rather than
being “foundational,” knowledge is a construction of “one’s experiences of the world, in community (and difference) with others who share similar cultural discourse traditions” (p. 17). Finley also notes that the basic structural quality of collage allows for the re-presentation of polyphonic personal and cultural voices, tones, chronologies, and themes, within an integrated whole. According to Finley, collage exemplifies “working knowledge” as the mind and hand are married “in solving practical problems” (p. 19, citing Harper, 1987, pp. 117-118). This occurs, Finley says, through the artist’s relationship to materials and “other” elements in the world, and her own imaginative, intuitive processes. This synthesis or holding of potentially dichotomous elements (such as self/other, internal/external, thought/feeling, and individual/collective) provides a space for, and honours, multiple truths and ways of knowing. Finley further suggests that collage’s use of symbolic forms (such as metaphor and allegory) engages reader-viewers in dialogue, thus promoting construction of knowledge, a diversity of non-definitive interpretations, and individual/collective associations. Such processes serve to depose researchers from positions of sole authority and proffer alternatives to traditional modes of discourse, epistemological and ideological perspectives, and research paradigms.

McDermott (2002) promotes Carey’s (1998, p. 303) assertion that “aesthetic knowledge (is) dangerous knowledge . . . [because both] open the knowledge process to the subjective qualities of lived experiences . . . [and] rupture oppressive thinking that expands beyond art worlds into life worlds” (McDermott, 2002, p. 53). She identifies collage as dangerous because of its potential to transform “through relational and emergent forms of meaning-making” (p. 53). As I understand McDermott’s use of the word “dangerous,” its effect is on the continuity of one’s self-identity that, in turn, reverberates in one’s social roles, relationships, and actions in and on the world, and understandings about the world. McDermott illustrates how collage, in
practice and metaphor, contributes to the amplification of arts-based principles through several means:

- overlapping textual elements to create multidimensional, thick layers of meaning;
- juxtaposing and contextualizing appropriated, previously unrelated images;
- revealing, disrupting, reordering and reconstituting connections between dominant and marginalized voices, meanings, experiences, attitudes, perspectives, actions, [and] cultures;
- alternating foregrounding/backgrounding of images and themes;
- inviting multiple entry points and interpretations;
- providing for non-linear, non-hierarchical unfoldment of emergent forms; and
- transforming, explicitly and implicitly, inner and outer socio-political landscapes.

Artists and art historians contribute to our understanding of the relevancy of collage for arts-based research. Barry Kite, a collage artist who refers to his work as “aberrant,” questions and even scoffs at historical, mythological, and cultural icons (Bisbort, 1997). Juxtaposing incongruent images of these icons, he attempts to divert viewers from established perspectives. Although he professes clarity about the intent and meaning of each of his works, he invites multiple personalized interpretations from his viewers. Kite’s work is provocative. He uses three major strategies to evoke his viewers’ engagement: by creating a tension between the visual stimulus and the narrative text of the caption, he evokes emotional-intellectual responses; by selecting and juxtaposing familiar iconographic images, he relies on the synthesis of cultural and personal associations to elicit diverse interpretations of his artistic representations; and by attending to various dimensions, such as the aesthetic, humorous, and symbolic, he first deconstructs, and then reconstructs, images that call attention to themselves as works of art that obscure truth and cross-pollinate cultures.
“Seeing” Collage with a New Eye

Collage in arts-based research is an exploration of multiple ways of knowing, of a diversity of views of truth and reality, of representations of the multiple voices of one’s selves and those of others, and of aesthetic expression. Recognition of the profound potential of collage as an agent of epistemological revolution as envisioned by Brockelman (2001) may depend upon “new powers of the eye” (Rodari, 1988, p. 47). New powers require that artist-researchers develop an art of seeing that encourages them to interrogate images or elements according to the visual qualities inherent in the collage form, as well as attend to the narrative content that evolves from the collage. These qualities might include the following: images of active disorder; interpenetrating and overlapping planes; temporal and spatial discontinuities; semantic ambiguities; paradoxical feeling tones and realities; colour; polarities; interrupted and continuous lines; harmonization of opposites; visual non sequitors; impressions of movement or stasis; tension resulting from contradictory elements; sensual invitations; and logical distortions (Rodari, 1988).

Collage as a Visual Narrative

In the following section, I go into considerable detail about each of the collages because they represent different strategies and techniques that may be informative for educators using this art form with students and for anyone researching narrative process as a phenomenon and an inquiry method, as well as using an arts-based approach. Additionally, they illustrate how collage may be used in informal contexts to promote self-development and reflexive action. My life learning manifests as a zig-zag course which takes me in one direction or another and that
could just as easily have veered off in a different direction. The sites of learning that I identify in
what follows are like close-up photographs, snapshots in time, in my life course. Because I am
interested in documenting the process of my learning and the learning paths I follow, I present
what has occurred although they may appear to the reader as interruptions or deviations from the
topic at hand.
Chapter 7:  
Self-inquiry Through Collage  

Visual Data  

The following collages are part of the self-study portion of my inquiry. Although my research participants were invited, but not expected, to contribute collages or other forms of artwork to the study, no one volunteered to do so. As a result, their visual narratives appear in this thesis only in the form of sandpictures completed in our joint sessions (see Chapter 8). The images that I present here and in the chapter on Sandplay are neither factual documentations of events, nor simply mimetic depictions. The images represent “lived-in landscapes” that have become places of inner-outer exploration (Lippard, 1997). They are evocations of energies and deep connections amongst my Self, my art, and my place (Tuan, 2004). In my work, I cited multiple sources from the academic literature on arts-based inquiry generally and collage specifically. Because I try to let the data lead me before I begin theorizing, I did not intentionally or consciously weave that theory into my narratives. At the same time, I acknowledge the presence of theory in my mind at various levels of consciousness because I had experienced the literature on collage and arts-based research and responded to it for a prior doctoral course. My exception to this practice of letting the data lead, as is obvious in my narratives about the images, involves my initial quick feeling responses and qualitative consideration. I model this manner of looking at pictures because the approach is holistic rather than reductive and it speaks from a subjective rather than an objective position. By doing so, I try to encourage viewers to relate to the work in a deep way. Once researchers open to the visual narratives without imposing preconceived theories, they may be led by the data into a landscape
of expanded meaning and significance, in the process sharpening their seeing skills and perhaps seeing differently from me.

**Collage 1: Dreaming into Being**

My attention returns to *Dreaming into Being* previously presented on pages 130 to 134. As I re-read this collage, I am drawn into it by the woman in the navy blue burqa with her child (Figure 19). Mother and child appear to be imprisoned in a room with barred windows. For me, the woman represents the *punctum* of this picture, a different one from the one I identified when I wrote my first narrative relating to the collage. I recall Regina’s direction then to shape the picture collage “to the punctum,” a request for me to determine the point at which I would enter the picture and arrange other elements of the collage in relation to it. This time I am in the role of researcher, rather than creator. When I was making the collage I was using only partially creative logic to arrange and juxtapose the collage fragments. Although I was guided somewhat by Regina’s conceptual framework, such as choosing the dreaming woman as my place to start, visual impressions were also salient in my selection, placement, and repositioning of elements of the collage.

Recalling that Barthes (1981) wrote about the punctum in relation to photographs, I turn to his *Camera Lucida* to try to determine if I am using the word correctly when I refer to the image of the veiled woman as “the punctum.” According to Barthes, I must consider two aspects: the first is that the detail to which I am referring “shoots out . . . like an arrow, and pierces me” (pp. 26-27), changing my reading of the picture. The second aspect is that this detail is an accident, i.e., it does not represent an intention of the picture’s creator [or photographer, in Barthes’ terms]. Contemplating Barthes’ criteria for consideration of a picture’s detail as the
punctum, I decide that at this time I can use this word to identify my veiled woman in the centre front area of my collage, *Dreaming into Being*.

I let the images surrounding the veiled woman wash over me for a few minutes as I sit with soft eyes. I notice that she is in stark contrast to the nude woman immediately behind her whose head and shoulders are at the centre of the picture. The overlapping of the pictures allows the veiled woman to be foregrounded in relation to the nude woman. Her placement, along with the lotus, partly covers the nude woman who might otherwise be totally exposed. She, in her burqa, performs an act of modesty on behalf of the naked reclining figure. But the revealed body seems to vie for attention with the modest one through the position of another nude woman, a full-bodied, winged sculptured figure. She seems to be trying to escape the constraints of her concreteness and the matter of her life, perhaps the metaphorical weight of life’s burdens she carries that, for many women, translate into body weight. In my usual manner of trying to connect the physical and the psychological (Weinberg, 2007), I momentarily think of the relationship of stress to the release of cortisol that results in the accumulation of fat in the abdominal area. I stroke my stomach knowingly. I acknowledge the tension I feel between exposing and covering up my body because of my weight and age, as well as my hesitation in broaching this subject in my thesis. I divert myself from this issue at this time and allow my attention to return to the collage images.

The veiled woman is in close proximity to the woman in religious garb with her lips stitched shut with gold threads anchored by pearls (Figure 21). The woman in repose daring to bare her body, along with Theodora, a woman of authority, and Atwood, a woman who writes her mind (Figure 22), seem to be in stark contrast to the silenced woman, in the collage and in me.
Collage 2: Woman in a Hat

Having re-read *Dreaming into Being*, I move on to revisit another collage, *Woman in a Hat* (Figure 27). The title image is from a postcard I purchased at the National Museum in Seoul during my first trip to Korea. I was told that the woman of the postcard, depicted in traditional Korean dress, works in a bar, serving men. Her hat is a symbol of her independence and inner authority. I did part of this collage work with my women’s art process group after I returned from Korea. In that group, prior to making our collages, I shared the details of Regina’s “vision quest” process of collage-making (Cowan, 2007; 2006) with my friends, and only had time to guide them through picture selection. Subsequently I selected my own pictures. Using these selected images, we separately assembled our collages and shared the products and experiences at our next gathering.

The composition of *Woman in a Hat* has an unsettling effect on me. Although there is some overlapping of images, for me there is a greater sense of fragmentation than in *Dreaming into Being* created earlier. In this case, the underlying surface or field does not seem to integrate the images of various “worlds.” Part of the reason may be that with the first collage there was a strong containment by the facilitator over a long period of time (five hours with Regina) and the narrative structure imposed by the vision quest framework and boundaries set by the facilitator of the first process was tight. When I assembled my collage fragments, I did not remind myself of this framework. Another possibility is that the collage is a reflection of my psychic state in life generally at this point: too busy, feelings of disconnection, unable to grab onto what I wanted my central focus to be (my thesis work), boxed in, and overwhelmed.
Despite my feeling about the overall composition of *Woman in a Hat* not satisfying me, I realize that I am very interested in small sections where I have layered and re-layered individual images within the larger picture. One such area is the left front corner area (Figure 28). When creating the collage, I began with the sky image which I had found in a Korean art magazine (Figure 29, right rear of photo). I imagined that being in a gallery where this art project was exhibited would provide me with a salient invitation to ascend to the heavens to walk through the clouds. I began to wonder if I could use a similar form to represent some of the visual data for my thesis. Because the magazine commentary accompanying this image was in Korean, I couldn’t understand the text. So I have assumed that the panels on which the white fluffy clouds and blue sky were printed were made of glass or acrylic. Acknowledging the cost and difficulty of transporting and storing large glass or lucite panels, I began to think of different ways to achieve a similar effect, such as using a translucent paper or gauzy fabric. (I elaborate on further details of representation of data in this form later.)

Another group of pictures I had selected comprised the Mexican Day of the Dead performers (Figure 29): female singer, male hornblower, and drummer, all skeletal figures. In contrast to the unbounded clouds, the tile-like concentric coloured circles seemed to create a solid base for the female singer (Figure 29), perhaps reflecting the solid cultural/religious foundation in Mexico for annual festivities related to All Souls Day, where people joyously remember their ancestors. I recall bringing home from Korea a pair of gold miniature ancestor statues, a little like totem poles. Traditionally in Korea large carved ancestor figures are placed by doorways to protect the family home and to honour the ancestors. I added miniature replicas to my Sandplay collection and actually used them in a sandpicture (Figure 55) I created in a research session with one of my participants. I will discuss that picture in the Sandplay section.
of my thesis. My mind wanders to the task that my daughter and I had last spring to clear out my mother’s house at the farm so that we could lease it out for income to help with my mother’s care in a retirement home. I recall how difficult it was for me to totally clear the house because, as well as my mother’s belongings, there were many pieces of furniture and other household items that had belonged to my paternal ancestors. With the exception of the house structure itself and the gardens surrounding it, all remnants of their existence in that place are now gone.

For me, there are so many memories, so many layers of meaning connected to that place, beginning with John McCrory whose satisfaction at arriving there in the late 1860s from upper New York state, was coupled with the death of his brother, Will, in the Civil War. John’s son, Harry (my grandmother’s brother) froze to death there one harsh winter. My great-grandmother, Na, who lived to be 103, used to sit on the grass in the front yard, cutting it by hand with a pair of scissors. My grandmother throttled, with her tiny hands, a weasel that was stealing chickens from the chicken coop. My father, while tearing down an old shed, found one of soldier Will’s leather boots buried in the rubble under the floor boards, obviously brought to Canada by John who made the trip alone after his brother’s death. My mother filled the kitchen with pungent aromas as she stewed and bottled chili sauce and green tomato relish. Last spring, disposing in various ways of what the place had held for so many years left me feeling sad and guilty, as though I had dishonoured my ancestors. Simultaneously, I knew I couldn’t continue to carry the burden of responsibility and so had to let go. I felt the tension deeply and can still feel the ache in my heart and tears stinging my eyes.

Focusing again on the collage, sacrilegiously I wonder about the skeletal drummer, “Is this a barebones reflection of God creating a rhythm to which individuals and cultures are expected to walk, and one of which people and cultures are reminded through their annual
religious festivals?” Asking these questions, I realize I am assuming a masculine God imposing principles from the top down, not a view I often hold. Looking now at the total collage, I see that I positioned a female drummer to the right of the male drummer (Figure 30). I picked this figure, concealed by wrapping paper, at a give-away programmed into a Sandplay workshop I offered. Synchronistically, I received it just prior to an event I was preparing for: a “drum birthing” in honour of a drum constructed for me by a colleague. I think of a time long ago when “the drummers were women” who honoured body, mind, and spirit and who were honoured as goddesses, healers, shamans, and protectors in ancient cultures, especially those of Crete, Greece, Egypt, and early Rome (Redmond, 1997). My drum birthing was an occasion when I created an invitation based on a drawing I did, in this case a deer’s head and moon/drum surface (Figure 31). This was a situation in which I had to face my own tension about the role that Deer has played in my life and their potential killing for sport by a family member. I began to explore it in my pre-proposal writing when I remembered a childhood experience:

Waking early and creeping into the kitchen to avoid rousing anyone, I saw Na, my great-grandmother, sitting in her rocking chair beside the little black pot-bellied woodstove. Looking out the window towards the hill, she didn’t immediately hear me. As I approached her, she raised her 87-year-old, wrinkled and scrawny hand slowly and pointed towards the window. “Don’t move quickly,” she whispered. “Look between the two pine trees far beyond the garden.” I looked. We stayed silent, unmoving, for what seemed like several minutes, looking at the brown statue. “Is it a deer?” I asked, feeling a surge of excitement in my chest. She gave a barely perceptible nod. This was the moment I always anticipated when I came to The Farm. A deer sighting was like a blessing in whose warm glow I could bask for the rest of my stay. I was always a little anxious until I received it, and saddened when I didn’t accomplish it. In my nine-year-old body, I knew that they—the deer—were always there at dawn and dusk. I felt I had to make them visible to our human eyes. When I didn’t see them, I had failed to materialize them. Na, and Granny and Grandpa knew how I felt about this, so their vigilance increased when I arrived. We all drew silent breaths of relief after our first sighting. Any further viewings were bonuses.

That was 60 years ago. Na, and Granny and Grandpa have been deceased for several decades. Even now, when I arrive at The Farm, the first thing I do as I drive along the lane from the county roadway to the house is check out the edge of the woods at the base
of the hill and the south edge of the swamp. From the moment I turn into the lane, I feel anxious until I make my first sighting. When I receive it, I silently express my gratitude for the benediction.

The deer issue is complex. To explain, I need to set the scene by giving an historical perspective to the property. And then I need to tell about my relationship with the place itself.

Relph’s (1976) words are a wonderful description of this place for me:

[Private places] are defined by special and particular significances for us, and may be remembered rather than immediately present. In particular the places of childhood constitute vital reference points for many individuals. They may be special locations and settings which serve to recall particular personal experiences, though the setting itself may be no part of that experience: thus Rene Dubos writes (1972, p. 87): “I remember the mood of places better than their precise features because places evoke for me life situations rather than geographical sites.” Or there may be personal places which in themselves are the source of some “peak experience” ... an ecstatic experience of pure individuality and identity that stems from some encounter with place. (p. 37)

My identity is bound up with this place where my father took me walking in the woods to investigate paths, nests, holes in stumps, the earth beneath rocks, and the sky overhead, and my grandmother took me squishing through the mud of the swamp in discovery of jack-in-the-pulpits and wild orchids, and picking my way through her overblown garden to cut flowers for the table.

The Farm came into my father’s family in 1869 when his grandfather, John McCrory, took possession through an Act for Quieting Titles to Real Estate in Upper Canada. In time, I will tell the story about my great-grandfather, John, and his brother, Will, who was to be his partner in Upper Canada, but who died too soon from mortal wounds received in the Civil War.

Through John, and then his son, Harry, The Farm passed to Harry’s sister, my grandmother, in 1942 when I was three years old. She intended to leave this property to one of her three sons, my father; however, my father predeceased his mother by three weeks. In a typical act of generosity towards my mother and in reverence to my father, my father’s brother recommended to my grandmother that she bequeath The Farm to my mother, “because that is what Hank [my father] would have wanted.” She did so. In 1964, my mother took possession of the 150-acre farm. Shortly after, she gifted 40 acres to my brother who had dreams of becoming a farmer like his grandfather. A few years later, my mother gave two acres to her brother whom she and my father had raised as a son when he was orphaned at five-years-old. At the time of the transfer of property, I urged my 75-year-old mother to retain the rest of the property in her name so that she
could secure her physical and economic independence for as long as possible. She did, except for a few acres she sold for money to buy a new car.

Living on minimal pensions, she retained the property and resided there for another ten years until a stroke terminated her independence. Since then, she has lived with my husband and me. Now 94, she still holds title to The Farm which her brother and I manage. Our management is a source of conflict for other kin.

In her will written before her stroke, my mother stipulated that, upon her death, I will receive my share of The Farm, 51% of the remaining property. Her brother, my uncle, will receive his final share of 49%. Current zoning laws prevent any further severances, so my 51% can never be solely in my name. I will be the first in the family line to be barred from having a clear title in her or his name. Although I have known this for almost ten years, it is the first time that I have written it. It is the first time that I have considered it in the context of my family history of My Place, a place that has shaped my ecological identity. As I write, tears roll down my cheeks. The wound is still raw.

Shortly after my mother inherited The Farm, she gave my brother permission to hunt deer on the property despite the fact that she and I had talked about the farm in terms of a wildlife sanctuary, and despite the fact that she knew how I felt about the deer there. When I asked her about granting permission for hunting on the property, she tried to minimize the issue by saying that my brother probably wouldn’t be able to kill any deer because he was going to hunt them with a crossbow and arrows from a lookout he built in a tree.

Since then, I have only heard accounts of unsuccessful hunting attempts, although I saw a deer skull drying under a bush once. As I reflect on this situation, I am aware that I eat meat and wear leather shoes. I wish that my brother would shoot with a camera instead of a gun. And yet I realize the complexity of the situation.

My brother grew up in a family in which the men have traditionally hunted: our grandfather, our uncles, and our father. There were always shotguns and rifles in the house when we were growing up. We had family dinners of wild duck, partridge and pheasant. Two of my favorite family photographs are of my grandfather with a gun (Figure 32), duck-hunting from a blind, and of my mom and dad, my uncle, my brother, and me sitting on the side of the hill at The Farm, with my dad and my young adult uncle holding guns (Figure 33). No doubt, they were hunting for something—perhaps partridge or pheasant—while we were walking through the woods at The Farm. I don’t remember any shooting while I was with them.

I remember the silence broken only by birdcalls and the sound of crickets, and hunting for partridge nests in the spring, counting speckled eggs from a distance. I remember turning over rocks to see what lived beneath them, looking in hollow trees, and watching the hawks soar and circle overhead. When, through inheritance, I hold a joint title to The Farm with my uncle, I won’t permit hunting there. It would be easy to end the story here, but it would not be honest or complete.
I have a deerskin shirt which I made from a couple of hides ten or fifteen years ago. I also have a new drum with a deer hide for its drumming surface. I had a choice of deer or goat and chose deer because I consider the deer a talisman. Audrey, the drum-maker, already had the deer hide. Recently, I planned a drum birthing to honour the making of the drum, the awakening of the drum through resonance with other drums played by my friends, and to honour the deer whose life was sacrificed for its flesh and its hide. Despite the intended sacred ceremonious nature of this gathering, I decided that I could not invite my vegan friend whose sense of ethics I thought would have prevented her from accepting my invitation. [Now I think I should have left the decision to her.]

For me, Deer is a symbol of strength and gentleness. Its attitude of vigilance is protective as it moves between the dark forest and open landscape. In the Woman in a Hat collage, Deer is represented by the caribou in the bottom right corner (Figure 34) and by the deerskin on which is painted an image of The Storyteller in the upper centre area in front of the large bear (Figure 35, top right corner). Just as the caribou eats delicacies from the bottom of the onion sea, our instincts are nourished by the unconscious. When creating the collage, I unconsciously placed him in front of a target sun, although here he is not the target of a hunter’s bullet or a predator’s appetite. Nevertheless, the image bears the tension of life and death as do the deer in my imagination as they move silently between the opposing worlds of sanctuary and slaughter with no link to sacred sacrifice. One branch of the collage deer’s antlers connects the sun to the underworld riches, consciousness to the unconscious. The other branch brackets the onions, their many layers ripe to be peeled back, and the five-rayed starfish, a symbol of wholeness on a human level. The upper ends of the antlers also embrace the swimmer who navigates the liminal space between consciousness and the unconscious. This image supports my understanding that our conscious lives are fed and fuelled by personal and collective unconscious contents, and that natural elements of the world are vehicles or channels for meaning.

In Woman in a Hat, there are images from many different cultural traditions, among them First Nations, Mexican, Korean, Muslim, Buddhist, Egyptian, and yogic, all of which I
acknowledge I have incorporated into my own sense-making/meaning framework (Figure 27). They are like teleological forces that beckon me ahead as I explore life’s dark caves and serpentine or labyrinthine paths (Figure 36). They also pull me into a zone of discomfort as I wonder, “Am I insensitively appropriating the cultural images of others who might take offense if they see this work?” “Do I have a right to use images of others, such as artists, as elements of my own collages?” Am I “borrowing” or “appropriating” the images of others? Is there a difference?

My initial response is that I have purchased magazines from which I snip these images whose creators have probably been paid by the magazine for their use. Because I do not intend to sell my collages, I will make no money from that particular work of others, although I will benefit as I use them for academic purposes. This purpose should not decrease the value of the others’ work in any way. The fact that each image occupies only a small space in most collages, plus the fact that the original artist’s or photographer’s name is not presented, my use of the images also won’t benefit the others whose work is included in mine. I have come to a place where I consider my creative work sacred and of value, whether or not others would call it art or see it from the same perspective. In terms of images of other cultures, I use them respectfully, not degrading them in any way, although the meanings I attribute to images may sometimes question the values of other groups as I perceive them, as with the veiled women in my collages (see below). Use of these images also provokes me to question my personal understandings and values. At this point, I feel that my attitude, my limited use, my payment for the source of the images, and my expanded awareness is sufficient to allow me to use cultural images of others as long as I maintain consciousness about how I use them. Additionally, any reproduction of the
original copy of the collage is only for personal use for committee members, not for profit by making the images available to the public.

Wanting to explore opinions of other researchers regarding the issue of appropriation of others’ images, I search ERIC and Scholars’ Portal. I find no published articles. Googling the topic, I find three references. The first is for *Vue Weekly*, an Edmonton news and entertainment publication. Here, Agnieszka Matejko (n.d.) feels a burden as she weighs up the artist’s freedom of expression against sensitivity to the spiritual sensibilities of people from “other” cultures. Specifically regarding a sculptor’s nude representation of an important Hindu god, Genesha, a priest who was interviewed felt that the representation mocked the religion and hurt the feelings of Hindu devotees because the sculpture significantly deviated from the context and purpose intended by the original culture that developed the spiritual image. The journalist found no resolution to her dilemma.

I found a second article by Thomas Heyd (2003) in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Although Heyd is writing about “rock art,” (i.e., marks on rocks that have been inscribed in some way throughout history by various cultures), his conclusions can be generalized to some extent. He defines “appropriation” as “an illegitimate borrowing or taking of a valued item” (p. 37). He argues that when appropriation involves a monetary loss for the original group, it is a moral problem that is similar to usurpation of resources and land by colonial powers. A second moral problem that Heyd identifies is appropriation that results in changes that lead to a perception of inauthenticity that may devalue the original cultural experience. He further suggests that the identity of distinctive cultural groups may be threatened in such a way as to diminish their power. Heyd also suggests that appropriation may be beneficial, as in revitalizing or re-popularizing an art form. He concludes that, while cross-
cultural appreciation of diverse aesthetic perspectives may be challenging, an attitude of care, respect, and consideration of cultural origins may alleviate concerns about harmful effects.

My third reference is from a law school working paper. Assuming an economic perspective, the focus of William Landes (2001) is on copyrighted material for which, he says, artists have no special privileges. He presents a diversity of cases that involve “appropriation art” (p. 13) and copyright law. I will comment only on the one which applies to the use by an artist of existing magazine images in subsequent collage-making, with no further reproduction of the image for profit or wide distribution. In terms of copyright law, in this instance he argues that a “socially efficient outcome” (p. 14) based on economics and common sense would likely prevail, although literally even minor unauthorized derivations could be subject to copyright infringement claims. Landes also disputes the claim of the artistic community that the application of existing copyright law during most of the 20th century would have interfered with the evolution of modern art.

Not entirely comfortably, I give myself permission to proceed with my collages and, once again, my attention returns to the collage. Surprising to me is the realization that near the centre, in the location where the veiled woman of the other collage is situated, is a woman in a red chador (Figure 37). In this case, the veiled woman in red has a birdcage holding two birds on her head. Spontaneously, I think of Maya Angelou’s (1969) book, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, a title originating with an African-American poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar. (I will return to the association with Angelou a little further on.)

**Collage 3: Dwelling In**

Another surprise occurred while I worked on my next collage (Figure 38), Dwelling In, after returning from Korea in February 2007. A large chador-like red shape fills the left third of
the matboard. On top of this shape are two small figures of veiled women with two large black ibises appearing to approach them or at least look at them and a red ibis approaching from the far right side (Figures 39, 40). I selected these images and the others on the remaining two-thirds of the board from pictures cut from 17 art magazines purchased in Korea. Photographs included with this document are blurry. I tried several times to take photos in which my hand didn’t move. I couldn’t do it. Dora Kalff, founder of Sandplay Therapy, once said that the genie resides in the camera. In the case of these blurry photos, I am attributing that fact to the genie that represented the motion of the ibises flying into the scene.

The concept of the veiled woman began to preoccupy me, perhaps because my ongoing experiences as a teacher of therapists in Korea included hearing stories about the still powerful social value carried by many families there that sons are worth more and loved more than daughters. I recalled that, in *Dreaming into Being*, I connected the woman in the navy blue burqa with disregard, appropriation of authority, and silencing. And yet I have heard on TV and read in newspapers that many educated Muslim women repudiate this connection, saying that women choose to wear the veil as a social act or as a fashion statement, or to express their spirituality.

I tried to gain further understanding of the situation by seeking out articles that could inform me. An example follows: Authors Farzana Hassan, president of the Muslim Canadian Congress, and Tarek Fatah, founder of the Muslim Canadian Congress, have written a commentary for *The Globe and Mail* newspaper (Wednesday, April 18, 2007) in which they try both to normalize women’s covering of the hair and/or face as an action related to particular climates and weather, and to contextualize the action politically and spiritually. These authors suggest that Muslim fundamentalists have adopted the covering of women’s heads and faces as a
political tool, by pushing it as a defining Islamic symbol of piety. They assert that this action has had a consequence of “Islamophobia” and has led to debates about religious freedom and civil liberties, as for example when wearing the hijab is prohibited in school, sports, jobs, and society generally. They state that the Koran includes no requirement for Muslim women to conceal their hair and face, although in one passage it directs believers to embrace modesty by obscuring their breast area with the hijab (the Muslim headscarf). Situating the issue historically, Hassan and Fatah connect the hijab to an earlier social custom of wearing the “khimar,” a type of headscarf that covered the hair but left women’s upper bodies partly revealed. They emphasize that the wearing of the headscarf is rooted in a hierarchical class system, rather than religion, and suggest that Islamists learn its history rather than using it as a tool for a political agenda.

Not knowing personally any women who wear the veil or a burqa, my own associations are fuelled by TV documentaries that show images of women who tell stories about their life experiences which include wearing the veil. For example, a recent CNN special investigations documentary with a Muslim woman as investigative journalist and narrator echoes our dominant cultural narrative on veiled women that we identify as “other.” Although the veil is not imposed by law in Afghanistan, many husbands and families insist that the burqa be worn by the women in their families. Some men insist that their wives wear chadors so that other men cannot see anything of them when they are on the street: “They would be too seductive to other men.” These women, who are often beaten and disparaged and whose voices in the justice system are literally worth only half of what men’s voices are worth, are sometimes so despairing that they kill themselves or attempt to do so by setting themselves ablaze. Those who survive bear the burn scars for life. Recognizing a tension between the propaganda and factual information ends of the spectrum, these images and stories nevertheless lead me to ask, “Where does ‘the truth’ lie
about this issue?” I realize that there is no simple answer to this complex issue. There are multiple voices that speak to this phenomenon. I also wonder: “Is it unethical for me to use images of women in burqas to represent my own experience when I am “only” speaking about someone’s not having enough time or interest to hear what I have to say?” “Am I appropriating images from another culture that lead me to develop, or reinforce, biased or stereotypical attitudes?” “Why do I ask this question about images of veiled Muslim women, and not about others, such as Buddhists in robes, aboriginal people in deerskin, or Christian nuns in habits?” I consider these questions, and others that will be provoked and articulated in the future, as stimuli for my on-going learning.

A recent academic publication on the body, personal and cultural, and on embodied knowledge, provided more information (Springgay & Freedman, 2007). In her article, *Disrupting Mass Media as Curriculum: Opening to Stories of Veiling*, Diane Watt (2007) describes the inclination of many people to consider Muslim women as “fixed and homogenous,” “inferior,” backward, and linked with “religious fundamentalism, male oppression, and terrorism” (p. 147). She suggests that curriculum must be involved in encouraging exploration of the self in order to expand views of others, to minimize the perception of difference between others and self, and to diminish views of homogeneity towards others.

My attention returns to *Dwelling In*. Scanning the picture, I pause on the black-and-white stripes suggesting zebras partly hidden by a red field of foliage (Figure 41). The black-and-white of it. A binary system. Polarities: either/or, self/other, same/different, light/dark. Watt (2007, p. 151, citing Boler and Zembylas, 2003, p. 121) asserts that, with such a reductionist system, “there is an absence of space for contradiction and ambiguity, which makes resistance to dominant meanings very difficult.” My eyes move forward; I notice the expanse of red field
which seems to extend the red of the chador in the left third of the collage. Red: a colour connected to passion and blood, stuff of the body. Multiple female (?) figures appear to rise up out of the dark water in the foreground, perhaps undergoing a self-transformative process from the dark unknown, the unconscious. A yellow head suggests the infiltration of light, consciousness. Behind, stand self and shadow. An erect, multi-coloured figure with a predominance of red seems to emerge into the foreground from the dark shadow, through a whitened version, suggesting the alchemical stages of black, white, and red (Figures 42). Fish swimming near the surface of the water symbolize little bits of consciousness coming to the surface (Jung, 1959). My consciousness develops about the relationship of self to other, myself to the veiled women, consciousness that allows me to break down boundaries between them and me, within me. My experience with Jungian psychology and Sandplay leads me to see the colourfully garbed figure and horse as Self and ego in relationship on an instinctive level, not simply personal but archetypal patterns for Self and ego. Ibises, dynamic in form, seem to mediate between worlds, perhaps the worlds of self and other. The black birds are looking intently at the veiled women. The red one flying in suggests there is something beyond what we see. I have a sense of further evolvement, a continuing process, as I let these images speak to me.

Watt (2007) writes:

Kristeva believes that in order to live with others, we have to learn to see ourselves as other. Difference is not the gap between one individual or group and another, but is a relation. The stranger is in us; it is in the unconscious. Just as it is difficult to come to terms with what is foreign and unknown within ourselves, when we come face-to-face with the stranger we are uneasy because he/she resists definition. We need to come to terms with the stranger, to see him/her as an integral part of our own culture. Kristeva also argues that whenever we encounter other cultures we can never leave our own culture behind; we read the other through the eyes of our own culture. (p. 155)
Dwelling in the in-between space allows me to linger with the veiled woman in me, consider her, hear her, see her, and speak with her in multiple voices. I look back at the woman in the red chador with the birdcage on her head. I think again of my association of the image to Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, part of Angelou’s personal story. I wonder what in me is caged. Writing about Angelou in *Gendered Resistance*, Valerie Baisnée (1997) refers to “the metaphor of the poet in prison” and “creativity always threatened by oppression” (p. 54). As I read these words I feel a profound recognition in my belly. A childhood expression comes to mind: the bottom dropped out of my stomach. I imagine that sensation to be what one would feel after leaping off a cliff into an abyss. For a couple of seconds I am aware that I have stopped breathing and feel as though I have ice water in my veins. A “freeze” response? I think of Levine’s (1997) work: “an altered consciousness shared by all mammals when death appears imminent . . . a surrender of the spirit” (pp. 15-16). Nodding as I articulate it for myself I know, at least in this moment, the meaning of the veiled woman in my collages: what I do much of the time is imprison my creativity and oppress my artistic expression, mostly unconsciously.

Relating personally to the image of the veiled woman, and acknowledging her in me, enables me to surrender my old way of being and knowing in which I unconsciously silence my creativity, to surrender my old spirit. I can no longer be naive about the veiled woman’s presence in my life. She lives there as one of my many aspects, touching me, just as her image moves beyond me to enliven others touched by this pattern of archetypal functioning that has emerged from the deep unconscious.

**Collage 4: Ibis Woman**

As I learned with Dancer, collage may open up vistas for people to explore their complex identities and their relationship to knowledge and knowing. I created my next collage, *Ibis*
Woman (Figure 43), while participating in a “soul card” collage workshop led by a professional acquaintance. Rita’s technique, fashioned on that of Seena Frost (2001), involved engaging participants in a guided meditative process during which we focused on chakra centres in our bodies and attended to images that arose. The concept of chakras, or energy centres, is based in the eastern philosophy of yoga which suggests that energy moving up and down the spinal column is concentrated in seven areas between the base of the spine and the crown of the head. Although I was aware of sensations in my body throughout the process, my only image came when we were focusing on the crown chakra. This image was actually comprised of two elements: a large white bird standing absolutely still in a very contained position, with wings at the sides of the body; and a similar white bird that had powerful wings outstretched and full of tension, as if ready to lift off. In the meditation, I “knew” these birds were ibises, although at the time I didn’t know anything about the appearance or habits of an ibis. Nor did I have any personal relationship with the ibis or its symbolic meaning.

In Rita’s workshop, the next step involved looking for magazine pictures with which we would create collages that incorporated the image generated during the meditation. A few minutes into this phase, Rita brought me an image of two large white birds engaged in a “dance” and asked me if it would be a suitable representation of my imagined ibis. Although her cut-out was an image of two birds with outstretched wings engaged in a relationship, and although I didn’t know at that point what ibises looked like, I said, “Yes” and continued to look for a bird in the still, contained position. Looking through my banker’s box of torn-out pictures, I was surprised to find a bird in the correct position. (Later, I found out that indeed the birds illustrated were not ibises; however, I could imagine that they were and keep the integrity of the collage. In further writing about this collage, I will refer to them as “ibises.”) Further scrutiny of my
collected images provided me with an art photo from a Korean magazine that attracted me especially because the white around the woman’s head suggested to me a large hat of white feathers that linked her with the birds. Serendipitously, I also came across a few images of white-winged women in different positions. The completed collage held a numinous quality for me. It satisfied my aesthetic perception and felt whole or complete, although I had no idea what she, Ibis Woman, meant in my life.

In the workshop, we invited in the meaning of our collage images through three standard questions that are asked in Frost’s (2001, pp. 100-101) technique: Who are you and what do you have to give to me? What do you want from me? How will I remember? Interestingly to me at this point, I have misplaced that question and answer sheet and so am left only with the original Ibis Woman collage. My experience is that accidental happenings often give us what we need and so, in my typical manner, I ask myself: What am I to learn from this? Immediately I know that I must stay with the image which is unique, before moving into those prescribed questions which are imposed upon the process.

Looking now with a fresh eye, I am surprised that what pulls me in or “pierces” me is the void just right of the exact centre of the picture (determined by superimposing a transparent frame with diagonal, horizontal, and vertical lines running through the centre and dividing the collage into halved segments according to each axis). Garoian (2004) suggests that the void may be seen as a place of dialectical tension which enables a critical attitude towards cultural beliefs and values, a creative interaction with meanings and symbols, and a possibility of multiplicity of interpretations and voices. Dwelling in that place for a few minutes, I feel my gaze being enticed along the light mauve pathway into the darkness. I have never seen this part of the image as a pathway before, although I’ve lingered over the collage many times. It seems like an invitation
for a journey into the darkness, the unknown, the unconscious. This path is a horizontal one, in sharp contrast to the vertical dimension represented by the tree-like forms at the right side of the collage and the relationship between the upper and lower images of the birds. I consider the horizontal path to be movement in the plane of everyday reality, whereas a vertical dimension suggests to me a connection with the spiritual and unconscious, as well as practical reality.

Seen from an archetypal perspective, The Tree of Life is an example of a representation of archetypal energy flowing along a vertical continuum from the underworld to the sky, with its roots in the underground (the unconscious), its trunk above ground where it intersects with the everyday material life (consciousness), and its branches which extend upwards into the sky realm (the spiritual),

In the area to the left of the pathway is the Ibis Woman. With Korean features, she looks towards the left. To the past? To the unconscious? To the west? Her hands are placed on her cheeks. I wonder: Is she resting her head in her hands? Is she shocked at what she sees? Is she feeling the temperature of her facial skin? Her face is impassive. She looks more weary than shocked.

I notice that there are white dotted lines on her head, on her black skirt just below the waist, at the top of the collage and at the bottom on what appears to be a carpet on which the blue woman sits. A magic carpet perhaps, complementing the purple magician’s hat on her head. The dotted lines remind me of stitching, quilting, putting together fragments. This reinforces the concept of collage and suggests to me that, through our narratives, we stitch ourselves together (i.e., our self-identities, the images of ourselves that we and others have) in the telling of our stories of our life experiences.
In front of Ibis Woman is a butterfly followed by a dotted black line connecting it to the woman’s throat area. Does it suggest transformation in the woman’s voice? I think of what I have heard in Korea from my women students, many in their early 20s, and others in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, and present below a composite of those discussions:

*Throughout history we have been invaded and ruled by powerful nations (China and Japan) who have distorted our history, destroyed our ancient beautiful culture, stolen our cultural treasures, and changed our geographical boundaries. Since the Korean War in the 1950s, we have been “occupied” by the United States. Now we are more afraid of George Bush than Kim Jong Il.*

*In the past, women have carried the burden of relationship and total care of the home and children. They still do, despite the fact that most women currently work outside the home. Women do not want to be poor and powerless like their mothers who have had very hard lives. Many women are choosing not to have children because taking care of them and educating them is too hard and too expensive. For this reason, Korea has the lowest birth-rate in the world. [I have not checked the accuracy of this statement or others. I am simply re-telling stories that my Korean Sandplay students shared.]*

*In many cases, male children are still favored and valued over female children. When the sex of an unborn child is known, and when the child is identified as female, some women are encouraged by their mothers-in-law to have abortions.*

*With all of this, Korean women historically have put their heads down and endured their suffering. They do what they have to do. [Interestingly, two of my four male students referred to their mothers as “Wonder Woman.”]*

While preparing to teach Sandplay Therapy in Korea, I explored Korean mythology in relation to the mother, the father, and the child archetypes. A creation myth tells of two animals, a bear and a tiger, who wished to become human. Every day the animals prayed to Hwanung, the son of the emperor-god of Heaven and Earth, Hwanin, who had allowed his son to descend to Earth. Hwanung provided the bear and tiger with a challenge: to remain in a dark cave for one hundred days and to eat only mugwort (a bitter-tasting plant) and garlic. The tiger was too impatient to pass the test; only the bear persevered and transformed into a beautiful woman whom Hwanung married. Bear Woman became known as Ungyo who, along with her husband,
Hwanung, had a son, Tangun who later became the founder of the first Korean kingdom and thus became an historical figure. This creation myth blurs boundaries between mythology, history, and sociology, with endurance being recognized as a characteristic of Korean women.

I consciously bring my attention back to the collage and ask, “Who is Ibis Woman in me? This question evokes resonance with the suggestion I made above that “she” may be fatigued and yet enduring and uncomplaining of her many roles and responsibilities. As I write this, I recall often describing my mother as “never complaining” despite her heavy responsibilities as she raised my brother and me, along with her four youngest siblings who had been orphaned, while my father’s work took him away from home during the week and allowed him home only on weekends. She also found time and energy for political involvement at a municipal and provincial level, and pursuit of drawing and painting in classes she organized because they were previously not available in the small town where we lived. I recognize her as a model of strength, endurance, and commitment to pursue her social and creative interests. Although she never complained about her responsibilities, she did say on numerous occasions, “I’m so tired, I think I might die.” Her statement scared me when I was a child and led to a conscious decision not to repeat such a statement. Perhaps it had an effect on my enduring silently, which sometimes takes a toll as I describe in my field notes.

As doctoral student and researcher, during the past six or seven months I have been reflecting on my past, gathering data from co-participants, writing reflective pieces for the participant-observer portion of my research, and gathering research data on behalf of my supervisor. As therapist and supervisor/teacher of Sandplay, I have been seeing clients, editing and re-editing a book on Sandplay, preparing to present two different sessions worth a day-and-a-half at a conference, and training and supervising Sandplay interns in Canada and in Korea (requiring a lengthy flight and almost seven weeks away from home twice a year). As wife, mother of an adult daughter, and friend, I have been trying to maintain healthy relationships with family and friends. As daughter and caregiver, I have been tending my 96-year-old mother who has lived with my husband and me for ten years. Especially during the past year, my mother has become less capable of attending to her personal care, a fact that I deal with less energetically and
with more irritation. My husband, who has serious cardiovascular problems, also is becoming more fatigued and frustrated with the situation of helping me care for her. I am beginning to consider the possibility of arranging permanent residency for her in a local seniors’ home where she stays when I travel to Korea. However, her limited pension causes me to feel concerned about whether or not we can afford the monthly fee. Synchronistically, I have received a request to rent out my mother’s farm property to a family that we have known for many years. The request seems to answer my needs; however, it also brings with it an overwhelming challenge: to clear out my mother’s home which holds a lifetime of belongings to which she had been very attached before her stroke 10 years ago, but which she no longer remembers. However, renting out the farm seems appropriate in terms of security of the property. The night before my previous trip to Korea, near midnight, I received a telephone call from the security system firm monitoring my mother’s farm property to say that the alarm was sounding. The local person who normally would receive such a call was unavailable that night. Fortunately the provincial police checked out the place and found it was a false alarm. I experienced immediate relief but knew I could not, and did not want to, continue with that responsibility. The thought of dispatching my mom to a home and emptying out her things evokes pangs of guilt and sadness. I feel torn but know I cannot continue on in this way because I feel so depleted (see Figure 65, p. 254 and related narrative data).

Recognizing and accepting my vulnerability is difficult because I have always “made do” with my circumstances, requested or demanded little, and carried on. Everyone in the family refers to me as “the strong one.” Because I do not complain, ask for help, or talk about ailments, no one (in my family) knows of my exhaustion. My rationalization is that everyone has personal challenges with which to contend and I don’t know what anyone could do, beyond what they are already doing. Of late, I have been asking the universe for help. Feeling so stretched in all directions, I have been unproductive with my thesis. I don’t seem to have a clear mental space to focus.

By the time I arrived in Korea for my latest training and supervision period, my body was in a constant state of protest which I felt through unrelenting pain throughout, especially in my leg and sciatic nerve area. I wondered if I would ever be able to walk around pain-free again. I did feel hopeful, though, because I know how rejuvenating my work in Korea is for me, although I often work six days a week. Living quietly, solitarily, and simply in a small, sparse but comfortable apartment that my Korean colleagues had rented for me, I worked, read and wrote for my thesis, and found an extraordinary massage therapist and her husband who began to attend to my body. One of the first things “Ruby” said to me was, “What has life done to your body?” As well as allowing myself to be cared for through a variety of healing therapies
performed by Ruby and her husband, I also began again to meditate and engage in conscious
regulated breathing according to a specific ritual in order to calm my nervous system. While
there, I had this dream:

*I was driving along a country road in a car with Dick. We had to stop the car to let
Augie, our “grand-dog” out to pee. She took off to explore the natural setting to the
right side of the road, sniffing around trees, shrubs, long patches of grass, following her
nose in joyful abandon. I was worried about cars that might come along the road, so I
chased her to grab hold of her collar because I couldn’t find her leash. I managed to
catch and restrain her and we walked across to the left side of the road and through a
gateway where the ground behind the gate was elevated slightly.

The setting generally resembled the entrance to my mother’s farm, except that in a small
area the earth seemed arid and bare of any foliage. Standing there, I was shocked to see
that there were two shallow graves in which lay two dead black bears, on their backs,
their intact bodies exposed to the elements. The bears appear to have been very
malnourished before their death, bones visible under sagging furred skin. A small white
cross marked the area of the graves. As I looked at them in amazement, a large honey
golden bear, a bit like a grizzly but I’m not sure it was a grizzly, suddenly appeared at my
side, nipping at me and trying to get at Augie. I was afraid it would harm Augie whom I
was holding by the collar and trying to keep off to the side so I could protect her.
Although Dick and another male person (I have no image of the face) were standing
there, they were completely impassive, making no efforts to help me or defend Augie or
me from the large bear. This bear, like the two in the graves, was very emaciated
looking, as though it had had nothing to eat for months.

My knowledge about symbols that I have derived from Sandplay and Jungian
psychology, as well as from the mythologies of different cultures, has led me to associate Bear
with the archetype of the Great Mother. Because I had this dream in Korea at a time when my
teaching partner and I were presenting material on archetypes and mythology, I related my
dream bear to the story of Ungyo, Bear Woman, who endured. My experience also leads me to
associate dogs (especially those that are family pets) with protection of, and loyalty to, the family
unit. Freeing this energy in me, for example, by placing my mother in a seniors’ residence and
traveling alone to Korea to explore, to “follow my nose,” so to speak, parallels letting Augie out
of the car in the dream. I know that my decision to place my mother in care after taking care of
her personally for the past ten years and even from the time I was a young girl, (see my Sandplay narrative, pp. 254-6), evoked unconscious feelings of guilt, fear, and even a sense of neglect in me. The dream compensated for those feelings by presenting me with a salient image of the bears (symbols of the mother image) which had been starved prior to their death. If I keep this interpretation within the Ungyo context, it suggests that my own capacity for endurance of multiple roles and responsibilities, including being “mother” to my mother and my clients, had been seriously depleted to the point that it had turned on me, inflicting pain on, and the risk of serious harm to, my body. The dream had the effect on me of underscoring that I must take action consciously to restore myself and assuage the pain I was feeling. By the time I returned from Korea, I felt a renewal of energy and gratitude to Ruby and her husband whom I feel saved my life.

I return my attention to the collage which I had created before going on that trip to Korea. Looking at the images, I feel a tension between Ibis Woman who endures in her depletion and the winged woman in the foreground who bows her head, perhaps too exhausted to soar with her strong white wings, or perhaps praying for relief and support. Another possibility is that she is seeking guidance and companionship for the journey ahead on the pathway that I identified as the punctum. Perhaps one of the keys to rejuvenation lies in the image of the blue winged woman who has assumed the still, contained posture of the ibis.

While I know that the birds in the collage are not ibises (they were the only white bird images available at the time I made the collage), I have continued to think of them as ibises in my work with the collage. Not knowing exactly what ibises looked like, or anything else about them, I began a search for pictures and information about them. I present here only a few
associations to illustrate how such an exploration can lead me into adventures as I explore personal elements and their broader implications.

I learned that ibises are long-legged wading birds with long, downward curved bills that enable them to obtain food from the muck at the bottom of a body of water. I think of spirituality (birds as spiritual symbols) that is fed by the unconscious, both personal and collective. I also imagine the lotus, a symbol of the Self in Jungian psychology and Sandplay, the Self that grows out of life’s muck where rejected and unacknowledged parts of us are abandoned. I learned that ibises may be white or red or black. These birds, like the multi-coloured figure in *Dwelling In*, remind me of the colours of alchemy that are representative of Jung’s (1953) stages of psychological process: the albedo, the rubedo, and the nigredo. Jung connected these cyclic phases to the individuation process (i.e., a person’s cyclical psychological journey to health and wholeness). The stages are: “massa confusa” (blackening) in which a person may manifest signs of confusion, despair, sadness, or depression, while admitting that a specific problem exists; “purifactio” (whitening) in which a person stays with and “purifies” the problem, consciously and patiently holding the tension of opposites between what is being rejected or felt as loss and what is desired; and “fulminatio” (reddening) in which a person experiences a release from, or transcendence over, the opposites, for example, as in a sense of union of Self and Other, or in habitual ways of being and acting in the world. Without intending to reduce or exploit the issue of the veiled woman that has emerged from my collages, I contextualize it here as an example of my own alchemical process and know that my process of exploration around it will continue to plunge me into dimensions of nigredo, albedo, and rubedo, in ever-widening hermeneutic circles.
In ancient Egypt, the ibis was considered sacred and was used for sacrificial purposes as indicated in the fact that a million and a half ibis mummies were found in the archeological ruins of an ancient temple at Saqqara, the world’s oldest pyramid and ancient Egypt’s royal funerary site (Fleming & Lothian, 1997). Spirituality anchored in instinct. Sacrifice. I also ponder over the ibis-headed Egyptian god of wisdom, Thoth, who is credited with the creation of many disciplines, the alphabet, and esoteric texts, and is reputed to have written down his expansive knowledge. In my imagination, I play with the relationship of Sandplay and the “Thoth” tarot deck, both of which use images from diverse cultures because they have meaning for people on a personal and collective level. I think, “Oh, someday I must explore that relationship, using actual sandpictures and a tarot deck.”

In Egyptian cosmology, Thoth, in the form of an ibis, was reputed to lay a golden egg which gave birth to several important gods. Amused, I think of the golden egg in the nest in my collage, *Dreaming into Being* (Figure 17), as a creative spark for learning and personal development, and the transmutation of base material into gold, which is the goal of alchemy, Jungian psychology, and life in terms of the manifestation of dreams and aspirations. For me, these types of experiences — doing and exploring artistic images, telling stories, seeking in books and on-line texts, and working and playing in my various roles, are like a trail of breadcrumbs that leads me in one direction or another, sometimes retracing and expanding on my steps, in an exciting adventure.

These adventures often have broad implications for my life, as did my dream about returning to doctoral studies. Another such exploration began with a series of dreams and ended in a collage. During the period between my first and second trips to Korea (July/August 2006 and January/February 2007), I was collecting data from my research participants, supervising
Canadian and Korean Sandplay students who were writing requisite papers to partially satisfy certification criteria, occasionally seeing therapy clients, trying to generate data for the self-study portion of my thesis, revising training materials for Korea, and attending to everyday family and household routines. Four times in four weeks, I wakened up screaming and recorded details of the precipitating dreams, as I could remember them. Waking up screaming was an unusual phenomenon, one I had experienced only once before, as I recall. I linked the prior dream to the 9/11 event, an event salient enough to precipitate such an extreme unconscious response from me. This time, I recorded the first of these four dreams as follows:

*I was in my mother’s farmhouse with Uncle Don and some thugs outside were dropping rocks from the hill into a slight depression in the ground and turning over my ancestors’ gravestones. I tried to phone 911 but the wires were cut. Then suddenly the thugs were in the house. I tried to scream and after some attempts to get the sound out of my mouth, I succeeded.*

This dream stayed with me for a week or two and showed up in a sandpicture I did with one of my participants (see Sandplay, Figure 55). I didn’t remember details of the second and third dreams. The fourth I remember as follows:

*I was in a hospital room, lying in bed with an intravenous line and monitors hooked up. I was not there because I was sick or had had an operation. Exhausted, I was getting rejuvenated. As I lay there, wanting to be quiet and to rest, two young boys stood beside the bed. They were slightly ghostly in their appearance, seemed joined at the hip, and had long bony hands and fingers which they kept poking me with and wiggling in my face. I could feel myself getting really annoyed and, stimulated by their phantom-like forms which were faceless, as though they were embodying something quite amorphous. Having had enough of their irritating behaviour, I shouted out at them, “Boo!” and they disappeared. In this instance, my loud verbalization was a “boo” instead of a scream.*

**Collage 5: Dream Screams**

I decided to explore my scream phenomenon to try to find out what was provoking my screams. Starting with a collage (Figure 44), *Dream Screams*, I first downloaded Munch’s *The Scream* from the web and printed it out in a few sizes so I could play around with the images.
The Scream is a familiar cultural image of terror, instability, and existential angst. It was painted in 1893 a few years after the volcanic eruption of Mt. Krakatoa, an event that reddened the sky across the world for several months. Using iconographic images is a technique used by artists, for example, Barry Kite, who creates “aberrant images” that make strong visual statements, disrupt prevailing cultural attitudes, and provoke multiple interpretations (Bisbort, 1997). I was only interested in the screaming figure, so I cut the figure out of its context, not knowing what else I needed for the collage. I went through my box of magazine cut-outs, but couldn’t find any that appealed to me. Then I took the dog for a walk in our local woods.

Walking in the woods is usually a meditative experience for me. Allowing the dog to lead with her nose, I follow along attending to what is on our path and around us. I look down for snakes, off into the distance for rabbits and chipmunks, into the treetops for birds, and up to the sky for cloud patterns. That day, while walking on dank, decaying, brown leaves, still moist from an early morning rain and shimmering in the golden October sunlight, I was intrigued by bark patterns on the trees and moved by sharp contrasts between them, accentuated because the bark had absorbed moisture during the rainfall. I decided to return later in the day to photograph them. Afterwards, I loaded the digital images into my computer and printed them out in various sizes. The following day, in the weekend newspaper, a picture accompanied an article on an original version of a 19th or early 20th century children’s book. Bony fingers that surrounded the picture reminded me of the fingers of the apparitions in my dream. I snipped them out. Creating Dream Screams was a playful activity that engrossed me for a day or two.

While printing and cutting, positioning and repositioning images, I listened to a running news commentary in the background. One day, I heard an interview with Richard Davidson, a professor of psychology and a psychiatry director at the University of Wisconsin. He was
talking about meetings he had had with a group of colleagues and the Dalai Lama on
neuroplasticity of the brain, especially regarding happiness, meditation, and the learning of skills
to regulate emotions. Detailing research that had been done with long-term proficient
meditators, he explained how people could be trained to transform negative emotions and
increase compassionate feelings. As a therapist dealing with self-regulation difficulties in many
of my clients, and author of a book chapter on connections between neuropsychobiology and
Sandplay (see Weinberg, 2007), this interview motivated me to search Davidson and his study on
the web. After reading the article, I began to think of my dream scream experience.

What popped into my mind as I recalled the specific incidents of the four dreams was the
frequency of my feelings of irritation of late and my responses. I railed to myself about the
stupidity and thoughtlessness of people who scoop their dogs’ excrement into plastic bags, tie
them neatly, and leave the bags by the trees in the woods. I regretted a disagreement with an
extended family member, yet felt annoyed about her and her husband’s removal of trees and
boulders from my mother’s farm without checking with me. I felt outraged when a woman from
our neighbourhood let her dog go leash-free on the sidewalk near our home. This small dog,
which is obsessively ferocious when he sees our dog, ran across the road and got hit by a car.
Miraculously, he seemed to sustain no injuries. The experience left me with nausea. I
remembered “biting my tongue” on multiple occasions when my mother forgot to put on her
Depends which I had put out for her, with the result that she soiled the bedsheets which I then
had to change and launder. My irritation was fuelled by such trivial matters as my husband
claiming to be “in control” of the TV remote, but neglecting to turn down the increased volume
of commercials. I realized that a myriad of daily experiences of varying intensities made me
want to scream. Reactive irritation was becoming a habit which I disliked about myself and
thought was unhealthy. Engaging in an exploratory process after my scream dreams led me to
greater awareness of when I felt like screaming, but didn’t, and why my unconscious was
compensating by allowing my screams to escape when I was in REM state. My awareness and
understanding guided me to engage in conscious breathing and assume a meditative attitude
when feeling my anger rising, and to think lovingly of those who had irritated me, especially
when it involved my family. For my health’s sake, I intentionally changed my attitude, with my
collage as an amusing and informative reminder. I knew I also had to examine the multiple roles
and responsibilities I had assumed, some because I was following my dream, some because I had
met an interesting challenge, some because I needed to continue to have an income, some out of
love, and some because I was being dutiful. The stress was affecting my health generally, and
especially my nervous system. I felt it was my ethical obligation, to use Jung’s words, to take
some action after having my scream dreams.

Turning to the collage, I look now at the structure of the picture to inform me about its
meaning (McConeghey, 2003). The two large trees in the foreground, leaning in opposite
directions, evoke a feeling of instability that is reinforced by the tree on the left side which seems
to be in danger of becoming uprooted. This image reminds me of Jung’s statement that we
sometimes lose our way by “training our will” and find ourselves compensating through a one-
sided consciousness which uproots us from our instincts and our essential principles (Jung &
Kerényi, 1963). Symptoms of this compensation, sometimes interpreted as regressive, include
inertia, fault-finding and pettiness. I had thought I could “do it all” because I have been strong
and enduring in the past. I have felt proud of my reputation held by others as strong and good
and “amazing to be doing all this at the age of 68.” Trying to maintain a continuity of Self and,
perhaps, find a balance between Self and Other, I had simply extended myself (too far, it
seems!), rather than engaging in a conscious attunement to a new order that might have involved giving up something.

Now, attending again to the structure of the collage, I focus on the heads, one in each quadrant. This scattering and isolation of figures leads to a sense of fragmentation, with the heads on the right side seeming to pull away from the centre. (I was experiencing being pulled off my centre.) The bony hands are much larger proportionally than the screaming fearful figures, and appear to be disembodied threats, floating around like disconnected tree branches. They remind me of “fractals,” those underlying patterns that allow us to find order in chaos and that, in turn, enable us to hold tensions while we engage in creative expression (Weinberg, 2007). The energy of the bony hands on the right side moves towards the left side, while the two heads in the same quadrants seem to counterbalance it through their right-leaning positions. Some of the power of the threat of the large hand entering the scene from the left front corner seems to be diverted from the figure left of centre by the screaming head in the rear right quadrant that is on the same diagonal as the hand. The screaming figures, attached to partial torsos with no feet or groundedness, suggest that their fear is disembodied, or it makes them disembodied, like the threatening hands. The figures seem to be hemmed in by the trees and the bony hands. And yet there is an inverted V opening or “silent space” on the left side between the two leaning trees. In this space, a young green-leafed tree grows, symbolic of something new and evocative of healing energy as in Hildegarde of Bingen’s (1985) *viriditis*. The hands on the sides of the heads remind me of the Korean Ibis Woman who endures, rather than screaming out. As I realize that they scream for her, I think of the custom that Korean women demonstrate regarding their mouths: when they smile or eat or speak out, they put their hands up in front of their mouths as a form of modesty. The figures in *Dream Screams* are in stark contrast to
Korean women. This collage holds the tension of the opposites, as I had to do while waiting for a resolution in my daily life. It also holds the promise of healing energy in the form of something new.

The something new that refers to the resolution of my overburdened life I will refer to later. Now, in order to discuss my next collage, I will refer to the something new which became a part of my life after I had written my thesis proposal. This odyssey began with a telephone call from a Korean man in Vancouver. He asked if I was interested in teaching Sandplay to a group of Korean therapists, early childhood educators, and graduate students training to be therapists. Without further information I said “yes.” He then asked if I would be willing to do so in Vancouver. Again, I immediately said “yes,” already thinking about enlisting a Vancouver colleague to be my teaching partner for the intensive training being requested. “Mr. Kim” asked me to submit a proposal and schedule for training, including a budget. After several calls to clarify and amend details, and to negotiate rental fees for space and equipment, I submitted what was requested. Acceptance of my proposal led to six days of teaching Sandplay in Vancouver and the prospect of developing a continuing training/supervision programme in South Korea scheduled for July/August that year and January/February of the following year. While this new project was unexpected when I wrote my proposal and was not considered in my time-line for completing my doctoral work, I never considered rejecting the opportunity to continue teaching intensively in a way that I could integrate teaching and therapy. Not only did this opportunity promise an intellectual challenge and opportunity to help establish a Sandplay Therapy community in another part of the world; it provided assurance of a regular income at a time when finances were strained as my husband and I tried to adjust to living on retirement pensions. Ironically, the teaching assignment in Korea redefined my role as teacher, a role that I had felt
was diminishing because of my recent retirement from the Board of Education, and an area of perplexity for me as a doctoral student in Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning. At the time of my application to OISE, I had thought that I no longer needed a doctorate professionally. Now, I have been invited to teach Sandplay part-time at a South Korean university when I complete my doctoral studies.

As well as teaching and supervising Sandplay Therapy in Korea, I have learned much about Sandplay through intensive supervision sessions when therapists present their clinical case work. These presentations involve looking at and analyzing seven hours of sandpictures daily, with pictures contextualized within the complete series of sandpictures representing that therapeutic process and within the historical details, assessment details, verbal narratives of the clients, and parental and school reports (in the case of children). I have also learned about some relevant social issues. Having heard about the extreme value of academic achievement for the Korean people, and its effects on children that I learned of in the clinical case material presented by practising therapists at a child and family therapy clinic, I was especially moved by one symbol that appeared frequently in children’s sandpictures: the Pokemon centre, a place where Pokemon characters can be treated and healed (Lee, 2008). Originating with a Japanese game, these little characters became extremely popular through TV cartoons, movies, and toys. These little pet-like animal “monsters” are raised by Pokemon owners who feed and train them well so that they can engage in competitions effectively against each other and win “the first prize.” The owners of winning Pokemons acquire those who have been defeated; they subsequently feed and train them so that they might evolve into winners. Success in competitions is often linked to the Pokemon’s devotion to their masters and desire to please them. I felt that the children I was hearing about were identifying with these little pet-like monsters. The children spent all day at
school and several hours in the evening in academic tutoring settings, cut off from friends, their own instincts, and opportunities to play informally. Many of them expressed that they felt unloved by their parents and resistant to their mothers’ (because the mother usually is the parent directly responsible for their care, education, and treatment) perceived minute-by-minute control over their lives.

Collage 6: A Crack in the Family Tree

Hearing the stories the therapists told about their sessions with the children and mothers, I often felt a familiar bodily sensation, heat in my heart area, or sometimes weight on my chest. To relieve my tension I engaged in conscious breathing, walked in the fresh air, and thought about creative expression. One day I felt compelled to make a collage. Selecting pictures from those I had torn out of Korean art magazines, I created “a collage” that evolved as a triptych (Figure 45), A Crack in the Family Tree.

The scene in the foreground of the left panel (Figure 46) of the collaged triptych seems to me to be an antithesis of what I heard in the supervision sessions. The children appear to be playing with each other, joyfully communicating with each other while being tended by parents who, together, are setting out food for them. The parents themselves appear child-like and happy. The family rests on a secure base. The fluffy white cloud-like form at the rear of the platform appears to be smoke escaping from a traditional oven as the father pulls out a skewer of meat. Several of the children seem to be blocking out a penetrating noise by covering their ears. [They remind me of my dream screams.] This unidentified noise and the gaze of some of the dogs take the viewer beyond the picture to the external world. The baby on the mother’s back,
like the howling dog behind her, pulls our eye upwards. The baby appears to be acknowledging
the spirits, perhaps in gratitude for the food.

The dogs, like the family, have solid bases on which they sit and stand. I think of the
dogs as symbols of protection and family loyalty. Some of them demonstrate their protective
attitude through their vigilance, looking at the family and outside the frame. However, the image
of the pack of black dogs also introduces a contrasting element, that of wild dogs which could
threaten the family, both literally and through depression. I feel the tension of that threat. I also
think of the black dog’s connection with death through the Egyptian symbol of Anubis, the dog-
headed psychopomp. Tension is also apparent between the lower half of the picture which is
dynamic, and the contrasting upper half which is static. The rear-facing dog just to the right of
centre interrupts the forward thrust of energy that originates at the centre of the picture, adding
ambiguity to the scene.

Although the background illustrates Nature through the mountainous peninsula and sea
that constitute Korea geographically, the pedestals on which the dogs and family sit promote a
cultural setting, such as an art exhibition, a gallery, a museum, and/or performance. This type of
presentation introduces the notion of an “ideal” rather than “actual” traditional family, or a
sociological artifact that no longer exists.

Focusing on the centre panel (Figure 47) which presents a surreal landscape, I feel a
strong tension between the powerful horned tree figure and the little non-human alien form
seeming to seek comfort in the arms of Mother Earth as represented by the rocky crevice which
permits little, if any, autonomous movement. This stone structure is not natural but is part of a
Korean artist’s installation as are the other components of this collage (except for the broken tree
and blue sky which come from paintings). For me, the little alien is a representation of the
Pokemon-like character that was a symbol of identification for many of the children being treated at the clinic where I was supervising Sandplay students/therapists. With pronounced eye holes and barely defined mouth, this little figure is forced to use his/her powers of inner sight while having little potential to speak explicitly or protest about what he/she sees and feels. The white tree figure, which seems to be an imposing force from above, a rather deformed ruling principle, invites the viewer to follow his gaze to the other tree with its broken branch, as I see it, “the family tree.” The large size of the horned figure suggests inflation of that masculine principle. This panel and the next show the separation of child from parents that I see reflected in Korean society through the clinical work I have supervised and the stories I have heard from my students.

In the right panel (Figure 48), the inflation of the masculine principle is reinforced through the phallic forms of skyscraper office buildings and tower. Like the celestial forms spinning in space, the Wonder Woman mother and Everyman father seem to spin in their own orbits. Like the little alien child, the mother (with eyes covered) and father (with eyes closed) do not seem to see outwardly what is happening with their children on an academic and social level. Interestingly, Wonder Woman’s mouth is covered by a black mask which brings to my mind the social convention I have witnessed of women covering their mouths when they display emotion (among other behaviours), and their restraint against speaking out against many injustices. Although I understand how history, subjugation by foreign powers, war, and poverty have influenced their goals and actions, I urge my sensitive and committed students, in their roles of therapists and educators, to write about what they witness in the children with whom they work.

I must also place myself in these scenes. I too learned early that I got attention and value from “being first” academically. Even now, like many other mature students, I feel I haven’t
quite done enough when I have received an “A” and not an “A+”. Since childhood, I have
sought solace through Nature’s embrace. Pursuing my own dreams and fulfilling responsibilities
in my various roles, I sometimes feel I am spinning in my own circle with not enough time or
energy for family, friends, leisure, and Nature.

Several weeks after I wrote the above paragraph, I learned through a colleague/ friend
about a South Korean woman therapist working in Toronto with Korean students who are
billeted with Canadian families. This therapist was feeling very stressed because of her
challenging work with the young Korean students who were suffering from depression, anxiety,
and thoughts of suicide because of the separation from their families and academic pressures.
She felt especially overburdened because she couldn’t meet all the requests for therapy sessions
or even hold therapeutically all the distressed children she was seeing. For me, it felt like the
other side of the same coin I had become familiar with in Korea. Spontaneously, I began
thinking about how I might become involved with my Korean colleague in research that might
inform educators, parents, and school administrators regarding the relationship of the high
cultural expectations and resulting social realities. Of course, mindful of not taking on too much,
this pursuit could only follow completion of my dissertation.

**Collage 7: Death or Treasure?**

I created the collage, *Death or Treasure?* (Figure 49), about a year after my previous
collage and verbal response to it. I had thought I was finished with this section. However, I felt
compelled to include Collage 7 which was my creative response to a medical diagnosis I
received after unexpected surgery.

More than a year after my data collection was completed, during the writing phase of my
dissertation, and following a “total laparoscopic hysterectomy and salpingo-oopherectomy”
(removal of the uterus, ovaries and fallopian tubes) as an intervention for multiple large fibroids in the uterus, I learned that I had myometrial cancer, “adenocarcinoma.” My gynecologist called it “a well-behaved cancer,” in an early stage that was complicated by the fact that it had invaded more than 50% of the uterine wall. The good news was that it was still contained within the body of the uterus and hadn’t spread to surrounding lymph nodes or reached other tissue in close proximity. While waiting for an appointment with a radiation specialist with whom I would discuss whether or not to proceed with further treatment, I felt compelled to make a collage. *Death or Treasure?* is the outcome.

At that particular point in time, the cancer was the ground of my experience as I contemplated my future, which is where I was focused. I had survived the surgery and felt well cared for immediately following the surgery when certain precautions were taken to decrease the chances of an embolism developing. I felt well generally, experiencing no pain from the surgery and only a little fatigue which I attributed to the anesthetic and pain-killers that I had absorbed into my body. I had withstood the tension after receiving a phone call from the doctor’s office to “come in because the doctor wants to discuss the pathology results.” That type of message is never good news. After receiving the news of cancer from the doctor and responding stoically while scheduling an appointment with a radiation specialist within the next two weeks, I had cried when telling my family the news. I admitted my fear of being incapacitated by treatment and even of dying long before I was ready. Left with the information from my gynecologist that I was in a grey area regarding further treatment, I had determined to find out as much as possible about the type of cancer and recommended treatments. I searched the web, noting all that seemed relevant so that I could meet the radiation specialist armed with questions: What was the chance of recurrence of the cancer with no further treatment? What were my risk factors? What
types of treatment beyond surgery were recommended? Were both internal and external radiation sources recommended? What lifestyle changes could I make to diminish the potential of a recurrence of the cancer? What side effects could I expect if I agreed to radiation treatment? I had talked with friends with professional and personal experience.

On the web I found a microscopic view of the adenocarcinoma, stained to show the differentiation of healthy and malignant cells. Using it as the ground of my collage seemed appropriate. Looking through my boxes of magazine pictures, I quickly found a photograph of a diamond-encrusted skull cast by the artist, Damien Hirst. For me, this skull is a powerful representation of both death and immortality. In the collage, it is central. Working on this collage, I marveled at how a confrontation with death sharpens one’s focus and decision-making about how to proceed, what to maintain, and what to give up.

When selecting the other images, I chose about twenty that appealed to me in their own right, not because I had any plan in mind beyond the ground of cancer cells and the diamond death skull. As I gaze now at the finished collage, its sense of ambiguity overwhelms me. I feel tension in my chest and am aware that I am not breathing. Questions tumble out: Is the baby, that new life form, being born or devoured? Is the zebra-striped hand plucking out or implanting a heart-shaped eye? Is the scrawny claw planting or plucking roses? The hands extending out-of-frame imply a larger context that is shown through this collage.

Present, yet uninvolved in the action, is the woman with eyes and mouth closed. Is she Asian? Does she represent my Korean spirit? I scrutinize her face, trying to determine whether she looks meditative or sad. She seems to connect with spiritual forces in the form of the birds. Two of them at her shoulders appear to nuzzle her, as if to comfort her or reassure her. Symbolizing a potential for wisdom and strength and known as Athena’s bird, the owl stands
guard atop her head. Athena, although a goddess of war, was known principally to stay out of the fray. Despite “standing by,” Athena was known as the “goddess of nearness,” committed to support heroes in their challenges and maidens as they prepared for marriage (Deacey, 2008). I had this sense of “standing by” myself. I learned all I could about my cancer, made my decisions, and then felt that I had done all I could besides trying to take care of myself wisely and consistently. Hearing that I was in the grey zone between needing no further treatment and needing radiation to prevent a recurrence of the cancer, I spontaneously leaned towards no radiation. I was reassured when my radiation specialist supported my decision to forego further treatment at this time, stating that a recurrence would be apparent through its symptom of vaginal bleeding and would be effectively treatable at that point. I felt my decision was informed and not irresponsible. I also felt that any battle between life and death was out of my hands, at least for the time being. I felt comfort in that.

Returning to the collage image, I note that the woman’s head is covered in a cap. My association to this cap is to women who have lost their hair as a result of chemotherapy, an intervention not recommended for the type of myometrial cancer that I had. Another association with the cap is that it conceals and protects one’s hair, symbol of spiritual power. The word “humility” comes to mind. I have been told that I have cancer and have subsequently had it cut out of me. No longer can I feel that I am a special one who has somehow been protected from the dreaded disease. I can feel my smallness in the face of it, not knowing what the future holds and yet certain that I will go on living my small life, playing my part in the best way I can as daughter, wife, mother, friend, teacher, therapist, artist, and lifelong learner.

As I have demonstrated through these lengthy discussions of particular collages, interrogating collage images leads us on journeys of personal story-telling about self-identity and
multiple worlds, confrontations with multiple aspects of ourselves and others, existing tensions, biases, and ambiguities, resources and burdens in life, a questioning and exploration of values, histories, futures, connections and disconnections, behaviour patterns, myth and metaphor, and ethical principals. Re-visiting these collages could lead in new directions and provoke new questions, for example: How do reflections on the emotional, cognitive, and moral dimensions of life experience change our decisions and actions about ecological, social, and ethical issues? What changes will I personally make? What factors or combination of factors influence us in drawing an ethical line? What makes the difference: the intention; the act; the consequences; the attitude; the social or cultural relevancy or context; a personal code of ethics; the law; the numbers? How do we resolve conflict between personal and social values? Developing awareness by opening a window through collage about the fact that there is no singular answer to most of these questions reinforces the notion of collage as an exciting curriculum and pedagogical modality that promises, as Brockelman (2001) writes, “a new sense of truth and experience” that has a potential to revolutionize “epistemology and aesthetics” (p. 11). Whether used in academic contexts or in life generally, for people of any age, collage-making introduces unlimited possibilities for exploration and discovery.
Chapter 8:  
Narrative Inquiry through Sandplay

Working with Co-Participants’ Visual Narratives

The following sandpictures are part of the self-study and participant-observation portions of my inquiry. In this section I refer to this visual data as “sandpictures,” and “visual narratives.” My research co-participants and I each agreed to create three sandpictures prior to commencement of data collection. With one of the co-participants (Maria), amendments were made to this plan during the data collection phase because of a health crisis (as detailed in Chapter 5).

In this chapter, which presents the sandpictures of my research participants and me, I will explicate details about form and content, as well as articulate my current responses as I gaze at the sandpictures. Initially, no reference will be made to verbal stories shared by the co-participants. My intention here is to examine at a later point what differences and commonalities in meaning exist between visual and verbal narratives when the creator’s verbal contribution is distanced (or theoretically absent) from descriptions of form of the visual narratives. My responses in this section were formulated more than a year after meetings with my research participants, so my memory of what they may have said about specific pictures back then is vague as I write this and therefore of little influence on my current responses. Following my distanced responses, I will present the verbal stories of my co-participants and me that were written and shared in the experiential sessions.

Because my co-participants and I created sandpictures only in self-contained dyads, data are presented here according to the co-participant category (i.e., Bell’s research sessions, Eve’s research sessions, and Maria’s research sessions).
Research Sessions with Bell

Bell’s Sandpicture #1

Bell’s first sandpicture (Figure 50) is the only one in the research that contains no figures. Gazing at the picture with no particular focus, I feel tension in my chest. Staying with it for a few seconds, I then feel my attention moving to the near and rear portions of the tray and sense ambivalence. Although both sections suggest dynamism, the near half, with its almost symmetrical spiraling forms in the left and right sides, suggests to me a greater activity level than the rear half. These formations, created by Bell’s fingers, are curved lines that increase in length as they extended backwards. Imagining them in three-dimension, I perceive them as conical forms that increase in circumference as they emanate from the left and right near corners and meet at the centre of the tray. They have the effect of drawing the viewer’s eye towards the centre of the tray, to the slight vee-point of the bottom of two curved blue lines.

These lines were formed in the rear half of the tray when Bell exposed some of the blue bottom of the tray by drawing, with two fingers, long open Vs extending horizontally across approximately two-thirds of the tray. Bell bracketed each of these V-formations with short curved lines, as if containing and holding them, perhaps suspending them in time and place. Containment or holding of energies is also emphasized by the continuous straight line just inside the four edges of the tray.

A contrast in dynamic energy is expressed, with the front half of the image suggesting a powerful current such as that experienced in a tornado touching down, and the rear half of the image suggesting the calm after the storm, a peaceful gliding on a burst of air. The focal point for me is that area in the centre where the blue vee hovers above the white vee. I feel a little excited, as though something will burst forth from that point. As I gaze at the image, I recall
reading some years ago about William Yeats’s “gyres,” a text that was accompanied by an illustration of opposing vertical spirals attached at the tips of the two cones. Although I can only imagine that these cones are attached at their tips and wrapped around so that their side ends touch, I resonate with the impression of energy moving inwards and outwards, upwards and downwards, forwards and backwards, meeting and separating. My imagination plays. I feel that the centre where the cones meet will be the point of resolution of the tension between these opposites.

The blue vees remind me of birds with their wings extended to their fullest. This structural characteristic suggests the precise moment when their activity level in flight is at a minimum as they float or glide on a burst of air, before lifting or lowering their wings to propel themselves forwards. Birds given this form in drawings are schematic representations of all birds. The positioning of the birds, at the centre where the conical forms meet, suggest that still place or point of potential where something new can emerge from the cyclic forces represented by the cones. Sensing a differentiation of opposites into sky and earth, I detect this still place as the point where the transcendent can emerge.

Bell’s Story about her Sandpicture #1

The sand was cool, sparkly and dry. I didn’t really want figures in the image because I didn’t have a plan for the picture. I liked the raised sand look—like a Japanese Zen garden and just stayed with that. The fact that it was just sand seemed very simple, clear, and unspoiled. The lower part had a winged feel to it that I left. I wanted to reveal the blue underneath and . . . [the blue lines] reminded me of . . . [my grand-daughter’s] birds—the [typical representation] of seagulls. So the image now seems to be about flight. It reminds me of a dream I had a long time ago of a bird sitting on the window sill of a very high silo looking over the countryside. The bird could fly but was afraid to leave the safety of the window ledge. . . .

As I look at it I think of the way sand is sculpted by the wind into beautifully formed sand dunes.
Brenda’s Story about Bell’s Sandpicture #1:

Bell had talked about her metal work and about making three-dimensional “drawings” on metal – “chasing” by imprinting lines on the front side and then “répousséing” – pushing out from the back and engaging in this process first on one side and then on the other. Her work in the sand reminded me of this.

I am aware of a kind of “settling” of my energy in my body. I perceive in the image a kind of tension in the bottom half—the arc-like lines going out in different directions from the near centre in a fern-like or organic dynamic manner. The two lines stretching across the top, exposing the blue of the bottom of the tray, seem to bring a resolution to the tension I feel in the bottom half of the image. For me, the sandpicture has a quality of a Japanese painting—the top half inviting me, or providing a space for me, to enter to a space or place beyond what is concretely there. It has a meditative quality.

Brenda’s Sandpicture #1

Brenda added water to dry sand and worked it with both hands until it was evenly damp and could maintain a circular shape formed by patting the sand around the exposed blue bottom of the tray in the centre of the right half of the tray (Figure 51). Seen from above, the blue circle contrasts with the larger rectangular tray in which the sand is mostly covered by red and dark and light green mossy material. My eye is first pulled to the blue circular area. Consciously looking at the surrounding area to compare it with the circular area, I see that the sand is elevated slightly in the left rear and right near quadrants. While the sand is patted down around the blue circular area, it is left loose and uneven throughout most of the rest of the tray.

The blue circular area is diagonally opposite to one elevated area, the mound where Black musicians perform. This performance area is the centre of focus for many of the people who are listening and/or looking. Most strikingly, I notice the contrast in colour between the right and left sides, with the right central area dominated by the blue of the exposed bottom of the tray and the left side dominated by the green of the moss, trees, and shrubs covering the sand. Whereas the predominance of vegetative energy suggests passivity as do the many seated and
reclining figures, the singer and her backup band express dynamism. Despite the number of people on the right side, the pond provides an open space that contrasts with the foliage-covered space of the left side. Whereas the swan and her cygnets are very visible against the blue water, the other figures are somewhat obscured by the colours of the vegetation.

The areas in the left rear and right near quadrants are elevated in relation to the rest, bringing attention to the singer and band in the left rear section and the security guard with her arm around a young boy with a skateboard in the right near section. The predominant focal point for many viewers in this scene is the singer-band combo. This focus is illustrated through their eye gaze and body position. The primary focal line is accentuated through the video camera of the Asian man in the blue jacket. Through her attention on the singer and band, the swan with her cygnets seems to bridge the areas of the water on the right side and the foliage on the left side.

There are several figures whose attention is obviously focused otherwise: in the rear right quadrant: the old man is reading a newspaper; the baby is reaching and looking downward, perhaps to capture the attention of the young and old women on the bench; in the near right quadrant, the blonde woman in the pink blouse and blue jeans looks at and seems to stride towards the security guard and young boy with the skateboard; and in the left near quadrant, the male hiker is looking at the female hiker while he gestures in another direction. Besides the moss-like material, many figurines and objects were placed in the tray. Trees are positioned near the right rear and left near and rear corners and seven clumps of small red flowers are scattered throughout the tray.

Twenty human figures are in the tray. They are diverse in many ways: gender (males, females); race (5 Negroid, 13 Caucasian, 2 Asian); age (3 children, 2 elderly, 15 young to
middle-age); activity (making music, hiking, reading, eating, watching, photographing, and protecting); position (seated, standing, walking)); and degree of relationship (solitary, in pairs, and in groups). Three benches are occupied by a Black couple, a solitary man wearing a hat, coat, and scarf, and an elderly couple with a young woman and baby. A young White couple sits on a large rock. Four small bricks are placed in a stair-like fashion in front of the mound on which three Black musicians seem to play instruments for a female singer. Two groups of four seashells each are on either side of the Black woman sitting on the packed sand around the blue circle. A young blonde woman appears to be walking towards the right near corner of the tray where a woman in uniform has her arm around a young boy with a skateboard under his arm. Standing to their left is a young girl, facing in, eating an ice-cream cone. On the left side of the tray, near the front edge, a male hiker gestures while looking at a female hiker nearby.

At first gaze, I feel this sandpicture as relaxed and pleasurable. This awareness is reinforced by the picture’s sense of balance. This sense of balance can be linked to specific features in the sandpicture. One main element evoking a perception of balance is the intentionally formed circular blue shape in the centre of the right side. I find it anchors the eye, with its simplistic form in the midst of a more complex environment. As an “intentional figure” (Schaefer-Simmern, 1948, p. 10), the blue circular area has a relationship with the ground (in the figure/ground relationship) that surrounds it. The ground, with its contrasting elements of sand and mossy, shrub-like growth and people positioned on it, pulls the eye in many directions.

Above, I describe the scene as “relaxed” and “pleasurable.” Ascribing meaning to sandpictures is an act of imagination. This involves the modification of sensory input, those “discrete bits of information perceived and received by the brain,” “by emotions, feelings, and desires” (Kast, 1993, p. 11) related to our previous experiences. Maxine Greene (1995) reminds
us that meaning happens because of informed encounters with artistic works through the “release of imagination” (p. 140). This is how we are able to “look through the windows of the actual, to bring as-ifs into being in experience” (p. 140). Citing poetry by Wallace Stevens, Greene illustrates how “he creates new connections between selves and things, and . . . maps readers’ landscapes anew” (p. 141). Through our textured narratives, we can do this for ourselves and for others.

I imagine with pleasure the water, bushes, and wildlife as natural elements in a natural setting in the material world. They evoke in me a recollection of relaxation that I have experienced in the material world and that I sometimes re-experience in my imaginal meanderings that occur especially in times of excessive activity and stress.

In my imagination, I relate to these natural phenomena as if they are objects in the material world. My imagination takes me beyond the water and bushes in the sandtray and, by implication, my focal point extends below the level of the ground to the depths of the watery realm created by the image of the exposed blue bottom of the tray and to the imagined roots of the bushes entwined in the earth below. There is a depth in this image that goes beyond what we see on the surface.

The vertical dimension extends upwards as well as downwards. The dark green trees extend above the heads of the people in the tray. Other physical aspects of the sandpicture (e.g., what is produced through the molding and distribution of the sand) form elevated areas where the musicians perform and the young boy and security guard stand. This elevation of the musicians is accentuated by the stairs formed by the bricks. Even the swan’s potential flight high above to a transpersonal level extends the vertical dimension upwards. This can be seen as a contrast to the horizontal path of the swimming swans. Paradoxically, the sense of balance felt
about the picture is a consequence of a differentiation of opposites that is apparent through contrasting elements.

The pond’s blue colour has a cooling effect that contrasts with the implied heat of the day, illustrated through the clothing of the patrons and singer in this park-like setting, especially the bikini-clad woman on the sandy shore. In direct contrast is the nearby man on the bench who wears an overcoat, hat, and scarf. Moving between the details and the whole scene, one can see that, on the one hand, he presents a visual ambiguity, while, on the other hand, he seems integrated within the setting.

An attitude of relatedness predominates in this sandpicture. Most of the figures are related to one or more of the others, as is apparent through the gaze line of the figures. One figure that seems to be unrelated is the old man with the newspaper who is turned away from others. He is balanced by the male hiker who gestures towards the outside of the scene. The children (the baby on the bench and the young boy with the security guard) seem to hold a stronger attraction for the mothers than the performing musicians. So, although an attitude of relatedness is established with a primary focus, there are tensions pulling against that focus.

A sub-theme apparent in the sandpicture seems to be a resolved crisis as illustrated by the young boy with the security guard and the blonde woman striding towards them. And yet, I wonder if the young boy had wandered off, attracted by sights or sounds in another area, or bored with the activities available here in an apparently passive environment which provided no possibility for skateboarding. Was he asserting his independence from his mother, part of a requisite separation from maternal energy that can be too constricting to one’s unique development and youthful, boundless vigor?
Another area of contrast with the relaxed theme prevailing in the sandpicture is the relationship between the two hikers. The stance of the woman with her hand on her hip and the fact that her body is turned partly away from the man, plus his gesturing towards the outside of the scene, suggests some tension in their relationship. Does the male hiker, like the young boy, desire an environment that provides more potential for activity? Does the woman want to sit and listen to the jazz, to rest after the hike which brought them here?

People of diversity are gathered in a park to listen to jazz and relax in Nature. There seems to be a place for everyone, the young, the old, couples, solitary figures, well-dressed and derelict. The musicians and the hikers on the left side suggest greater dynamism than the figures on the right side who seem to be more passive, although there are exceptions. The baby appears to be trying to increase his/her activity level and escape the clasp of his mother who looks a little perturbed. The woman in the blue jeans has been stirred to action by the crisis involving the young boy, probably her son. Co-existence is apparent, even with the animals, as indicated by the dog and the swans. The Black singer and sun-bather are physically fit and confident in their bodies which they seem to expose readily, while the heavily clad man on the bench conceals himself.

**Brenda’s Story about her Sandpicture #1:**

I wanted to use that black woman who’s really “out there.” I really like jazz and thought the musicians would be good for her back-up. I’d like to have some female musicians [available for Sandplay] but haven’t ever seen any. This scene reminds me that I heard that a jazz festival in the city had just finished. As I have done so many times before, I thought about it wistfully—I’ve never gone to the jazz festivals they have here. There’s a part of me that would like to go and a part that doesn’t like the crowds, that prefers to listen to the music on the radio or on CDs at home. I remember reading in the paper a few days ago that the Montreal Bistro had closed and a few months ago the Top of the Senator had closed. I felt wistful then too because I had never gone to either although I had occasionally thought of doing so.
I like this place that is represented [in the sandtray] as a natural park-like place, lots of green growth—lush—a pond with swans, a place where people can mingle and be solitary, a place to relax, a place to be.

I am realizing how much I am working lately—on my doctoral work, on my research assistantship, on teaching/training in Sandplay, on editing a book, and how little time I am relaxing, living spontaneously, being in Nature. I relish the mornings and evenings that I walk Augie [my daughter’s dog] in the woods, but the conversation is kind of one-sided, although she communicates with her eyes and her body [laughing]. Every so often I need a reminder to attend to balancing my life so that I am living fully in my Nature.

Bell’s Story about Brenda’s Sandpicture #1:

At first I thought with the dance band that Brenda was going to do a dance scene but it turned into an image of passive listeners. The lake and the hill seemed yin and yang to me and I was surprised when the sand was nearly all covered up with bushes that seemed to keep the audience away from the musicians. The people all seemed to be in couples until the lad was placed. It seems to be an outdoor concert with everyone enjoying the summer day—a lovely relaxed scene filled with live music.

The singer is central to the whole image and is singing jazz which is a free song form adding to the general feeling of the scene. Even the swans are listening to her music—they were moved several times to “face the music.”

I sense a bucolic scene with very little tension—sheer pleasure, the red berries and dog at the end adding the final touches to the atmosphere on this sunny afternoon.

Bell’s Sandpicture #2

In the centre of the tray of dry white sand is an elevated area on which sits a large clam half-shell (Figure 52). In the shell are a mirror and a lily-pad on which sit two frogs. Bell drew some circular lines around the shell in the centre. Around the circular area in the centre are several items placed to form a partial circle: a green jade tree “growing” out of a chunk of amethyst; another chunk of amethyst, on top of which stands a pewter unicorn; an arced line with four polished stones of different colours and a polished black stone heart, a small polished, fossilized rock with a small silver ring in it, two small green turtles, and a flat fimo-clay fox; and a blue heron facing the shell in the centre. Objects are in the four corners of the tray: an ancient
Chinese man (left rear), a large pine cone (right rear), a red Japanese torii (gate) (right near), and an Asian pagoda lantern (left near). Between the torii and the arc of coloured stones is a geode with the cut surface facing inward. The curved line of stones and small animals pulls my eye towards the centre circular area and the circular clam shell.

With quiet and steady breathing and heart rate, I feel peaceful looking at Bell’s sandpicture which gives an impression of order and stability. Two characteristics are especially important in giving this impression. First, circularity is apparent in the centre of the sandpicture, created by the image of the large seashell containing a round mirror and a round lily-pad on which sit two frogs. Several features reinforce the impression of circularity: a spiral of lines around the shell; the positioning of the line of figures in front of the shell; the orange disk in the line of figures; the placement of the jeweled tree and piece of amethyst that continue the line to the right of the shell; and the rounded rock in the near right quadrant. The second characteristic is the placement of objects in the four corners of the tray: the Chinese sage in the left rear corner; the large pine cone in the right rear corner; the Torii (Japanese gate) in the right near corner; and the small pagoda lantern in the near left corner. These structural qualities of a point or circle in the centre, additional concentric circles around that circle, and four objects in the corners are characteristic of a “mandala,” a Sanskrit word for a sacred healing circle.

Although there are variations in the mandala motif, the foundation is basically “the squaring of a circle” (Jung, 1972, p. 73). Mandalas are sometimes produced spontaneously by the psyche in times of stress and chaos, often when the personality is re-arranging itself. They are also characteristic of healing traditions, especially those of Tibetan Buddhists who invite divine energies into the carefully inscribed circle to assist with healing on a personal and transpersonal level.
The line of figures in front of the shell gives an impression of dynamism because of the animals at the head of the line: a fox, followed by two turtles. Looked at logically, there is an incongruity because the figures that follow the animals are different types of polished stones which, I could say, interrupt the flow of activity. However, my impression as I look at the image is that they are moving along “in the parade” that seems to be heading towards the old Chinese man in the rear left corner. He stands behind the blue heron and seems to be watching, or perhaps directing, the heron.

As I gaze at the picture, I become aware that two parts of the sandpicture disrupt my feeling of relaxation. The blue heron stands by the shell containing the two frogs. The direction the heron looks evokes a feeling of anxiety in me. I wonder if the heron will be more interested in his reflection than in the two frogs which would make a tasty meal. Diagonally across from the heron and frogs, in the near right quadrant, a crystal cave stands in front of the red Torii. I wonder why it is there, in that position, with its back to the gate. And I wonder if the gate is an exit or an entrance. Because of the positioning of the front of the Torii, I assume it to be an exit from the tray. I wonder who is exiting and why.

My wondering and my anxiety about the heron and the frogs evoke an association as I think of Bell’s husband’s unexpected death several months ago. While metaphors such as “an exit from life’s stage” and “an abrupt snatching of a life” remind us of the finiteness of life and separation, paradoxically they can infuse us with energy to compose a new life (Bateson, 1989). I wonder how what seems like a discontinuity can connect us to ourselves and others in new ways that we could not have foreseen before. I am aware that my typical pattern of pondering over how “things” work propels me once again to wonder how improvisation and established boundaries or limits work together in a synergistic way to help us redefine ourselves. Without
knowing the what or the how, I think of Jung’s notion of the innate healing potential of the psyche that promotes the bridging of consciousness and the unconscious, and the apparent “circular” movement of the psyche.

Circularity is a dominant feature in this visual narrative and of many sandpictures. Because of the symbolic connection of the circle with wholeness, Sandplay therapists always look for circles in their clients’ sandpictures. Besides noting circularity spatially, we also attend to temporal circularity (e.g., objects and inscriptions that are circular, spiral staircases leading downwards suggesting going to the depths, round rooms; and visual and verbal references to past, present, and future, often in no particular order, and repetitive or recurring cycles, such as life, death and rebirth, or creation, destruction, and recreation). The psyche’s functioning centre is the Self (often represented through circular objects and patterns), which is surrounded by all other aspects of the personality (Jung, 1972).

McConeghey (2003) asserts that the circularity of the psyche can be seen as a process that leads “a thing or event back to its archetypal roots” (p. 13). In the psyche, these archetypal roots are lodged at the level of the collective unconscious which sends us images of mythological and divine figures, and prototypical patterns of behaviour, such as “life journey.”

The line of figures beginning with the fox indicates a journey underway. This seems to be no ordinary journey which typically follows a linear path that is the shortest distance between two points. It has taken a circular, perhaps spiral, form that is one leg on that path to wholeness that Jung writes about. Because the figures seem headed towards the old Chinese man with the bag of treasures on his back and the piece of fruit in his hands, can I assume that the journey is part of the path to spiritual knowledge that is part of our life’s journey towards wholeness?
The path of individuation as described by Jung implies that a balanced relationship develops between the Self (the centre of the psyche which includes consciousness and the unconscious) and the ego (the centre of consciousness). This relationship is sometimes depicted in the form of “squaring the circle.” In Bell’s sandpicture #2, the squaring the circle form is apparent in the sandpicture as a whole (with the circling at the centre, and the objects in the four corners) and in the small pagoda lantern as seen from the top down, with its square roof and circle atop the roof.

The ambience of this sandpicture is Eastern, as suggested by several of the figures and objects chosen: the old Chinese sage carrying the wealth bag and fruit of immortality; the Torii; and the small pagoda lantern. The Chinese ancient in this sandpicture is a representation of one of three Chinese “star gods,” a trio known as Fu Lu Shou. Shou represents the god of longevity and good health. Both the Torii and the pagoda lantern are items related to spirituality; these two objects reinforce the notion of the occurrence of a sacred journey. The theme of spirituality is accentuated by the jade Tree of Life anchored in amethyst, said to have healing properties (Finch, 1980).

As mentioned above, the line of figures in front of the central shell is interesting because of the figures involved and their formation. One intertwined aspect is that the “parade” is being led by a fox, in this case a kind of schematic representation, handmade from polymer clay. In common usage, the fox is described as “wily.” In this sandpicture, the fox seems to be looking at the temple lantern as it passes by on its way to the god of longevity and good fortune. The fox, an example of instinctive energy, connects with spirituality through its placement in the tray and its line of focus.
In the parade, two turtles follow the fox. Through their shape (rounded upper shell and square undershell), they, too, are said to represent a union of spirituality and materiality (Bradway, 2001). In creation mythology, turtles are sometimes representative of the foundation of a new world (Biedermann, 1992). Their shells function as defensive or safety features, while their overall structure may indicate vulnerability because the turtle cannot right itself when turned onto its back.

The theme of vulnerability extends through the placement of the black heart that is next in line. Although hearts of other colors were available on the shelves, a black heart was selected. Black is a colour representing death, destruction, the unknown and, sometimes, depression. In my experience as a Sandplay therapist, I have frequently been relieved to witness the placement of figures representing fire after seeing symbols of death and depression in the sandtray and witnessing a client’s depressive attitude. Fire, as suggested by the orange disk in Bell’s sandpicture, is a dynamic energy that can transform heavy and inert energies related to death. Behind the black heart and orange disk are three additional polished stones, two black and one lighter in colour. Following the line further to the rear of the tray, I note the two large chunks of amethyst, one the base for the Tree of Life and one the base for the silver unicorn. These objects, the jeweled tree and the silver unicorn, are not simply everyday objects. They have a “special” quality imbued by the semi-precious stones and metals used in their construction, their shininess and their colour. Their significance is apparent in the fact that they (that is, the Tree of Life and the unicorn) have been a focus of interest in art and literature throughout history and across cultures. Both the Tree of Life and silver unicorn are considered to be symbolic representations of archetypal energies. People connect with their value at a deep level of the unconscious; they respond to their energetic forms unconsciously. Avens (1980) avers that “the
meaning of images dwells in the images themselves as life dwells in the body” (p. 60). He cites Langer (1953): “mythical symbols do not even appear as symbols; they appear as holy objects or places or beings and their import is felt as an inherent power” (p. 388).

Returning my focus to the stones in the parade, I notice that the last one in line, the light one, has a tiny silver ring inserted into one end of it, the kind of ring that attaches to a chain to create a necklace. Gazing at the polished stones, I recall more stories related to creative mythology, ones in which human beings evolve from stones. I am aware of the contrast between the potential for creation and the energy of death discussed earlier and I ponder over what new human life form might emerge. I recall also my personal reference to polished stones as representations of the polishing of the Self that occurs in a “good enough” mother-infant and therapist-client relationship. I extend the context here to include a “good enough” relationship to one’s Self, to one’s inner and outer worlds.

Bell’s Story about her Sandpicture #2

_I have kept the great blue heron in mind since the last session and knew I wanted to start with him. He’s gazing into the pond to see himself—not interested in frogs for lunch although they were worried._

_The agate geode came next—they fascinate me and lead me into stones in general, polished stones, stones I love, have always loved. The issue of jewellery comes up with the ring in one of the stones. That’s all it takes to make a necklace. Maybe that could be a way for me to continue with my love of stones—keep the jewellery aspect very simple. The turtle, wise and slow moving. Take your time, don’t rush._

_The fox, wily, wise, but very funny here, leads the pack. Maintain our new found sense of humour about all of this—you have been serious for long enough._

_The amethyst crystals, the jade tree, the horse speak of energy and growth and the amazing natural world that I love and will explore in any art work/play I do. The four corners: Rilke’s pinecone, the Torii gate, the temple lantern, and wise old man reflect on the still quiet Zen-like way (I’d) I am living NOW, (not I’d like to live!). They speak of the treasured influences on and experiences in my life._
So the heron in a contemplative mood, the frogs know nothing of “what you don’t know you don’t know” even when they are sitting on it! Maybe we’re all sitting on a lily pad and maybe it’s OK not to know.

Brenda’s Story about Bell’s Sandpicture #2

When you put the great blue heron into the tray, I thought about your dream and drawing of the kingfisher sitting on the window sill of the “silo” you called it. I keep thinking of it as a tower. I even began to write “king” before I crossed it out to allow it to be “great blue heron.” So, I’ll let it carry on in my story as the kingfisher—great blue heron bird who has overcome his fear of leaving the window ledge.

Liberated from his fear whose roots seemed to be more in habit than threat, King Blue Heron lifted off from his familiar niche in the tower. He was surprised at the ease and comfort with which his powerful wings carried him over a changing landscape. He had no goal in mind; he was happy to experience in the moment what he met in the elements of the world.

Looking down he saw the glint of a small body of water. He felt its attraction in his bones and every fibre of his being, and so he landed. What he saw was a magical place that could be anywhere and everywhere. What was especially magical about this place were the rocks and rock-like formations: polished stones of blues and blacks and browns and greys and greens and pinks and purples, crystalline structures, jagged and smooth, the iridescence of the mother-of-pearl inner surface of the large shell, the mottled turtle shell.

Also especially profound were the archetypal forms: circles, ovals, hearts, cave, pagoda lantern with its cube, pyramid, and ball shapes, gateway, jeweled tree . . . . These forms remind me of a dream I had this summer. In the dream I was in a gallery on King or Queen Street, one where [our mutual friend] Gloria had an art exhibition a few years ago. I was upstairs which, in the dream, was loft-like with a huge opening in the centre. I could see downstairs to the store/gallery below. Suspended from the ceiling was a giant sandtray containing sand and water. The water was cloudy; what was in it or below was not visible. With a simple wave of my hand, I could clear the water. My action revealed a number of archetypal forms in the sand: spirals, circles, mound, a human form and so on. I was amazed that I could make the invisible visible with such ease. As I stood there a friend and colleague, N., arrived to join me. I knew her husband had recently died [in the dream only]. She was smiling and looked very serene. I didn’t understand completely her attitude and composure until I have heard from you, Bell, about your creating a new life since [your] husband’s death.
Brenda’s Sandpicture #2

In Brenda’s second sandpicture (Figure 53), most of the sand is mounded up in the centre of the tray, with a small amount of sand left at the left, front, and right edges of the tray. The central mound is covered with green and red mossy material and four tall fir trees. The sand near the three edges of the tray also has mossy material on top of it, with one fir tree in the left near corner and two fir trees in the right near corner. Exposure of some of the blue bottom of the tray creates a large U-formation. A sailboat is at the rear of the left arm of the U, facing in. On the central mound across from the sailboat are a male and female deer. In the right near quadrant three small stones are placed on the sandy area and three more stones in the blue section, connecting the sand in the right side to the central area.

On the sand at the right side, near the stones, are two small brown rabbits. On the central mound, near one of the stones is a mythical creature, a “jackalope,” a white rabbit with antlers. My curiosity about this charming little figure compels me to do a little research. The jackalope is an American West folkloric creature that makes its appearance in contemporary cultural forms, such as film, songs, postcards, and tourist attractions. The antlered rabbit has also appeared in drawings in European naturalists’ articles between the 16th and 18th centuries (www.lafayette.edu). The phenomenon illustrated in these drawings seems to be linked scientifically with a disease common to rabbits, the Shope papillomavirus, with its symptom of antler-like tumors which do not resemble the antlers of this little figure that I think of as a rabbit-deer hybrid.

In the sandpicture, to the left of the jackalope, concealed by the moss, is a cave-like area. Inside the cave is a basket filled with shredded, coloured paper and three white eggs that were, in actuality, laid by my friend’s love bird, Grace.
Looking at this sandpicture, and experiencing the long sigh that accompanies my focus, I can feel in my body that this scene is an imaginal place that nourishes me and allows me to rest. I can feel myself being drawn to the central island, wondering what is there. I am aware that I am leaning forward as I try to identify what is at the centre of the photograph on my screen. I say “imaginal” because I would not have the courage to go to such a place in the outer world by myself, although about ten years ago I did journey to such a place in reality with a group of women. We called it “The Isle of Women.” It is a place and experience I have written about earlier in my dissertation (see pp. 31-2) and one with which I still resonate.

As I look at the image of this sandpicture, feelings of nostalgia overwhelm me. I feel the sensation of hot tears in my eyes and remember my friend, J., who was one of the two organizers of our trip to Algonquin Park where we made masks in the woods. A few weeks ago, while in Korea teaching Sandplay, I learned of her death. There, looking at photographs of her and reading her poetry that her son had posted online in remembrance of her, I was able to mourn her passing and remember our friendship, sometimes laughing to myself as I remembered details of our adventure together. So far away from her death site and from mutual friends who would also be in mourning, I was amazed to be able to grieve her so deeply through these artifacts online.

Now, as I look at the sandpicture, I feel a sense of balance as I consider the island as inner and what is across from the island as outer. The waterway is the transitional space between the two; it creates an intentionally inscribed pathway for the sailboat that is positioned to move forward from the rear left quadrant. Observing the boat is the female deer, while her companion, the male deer, attends to the foliage in front of him.

The stones across the waterway in the near right quadrant form an obstacle on the intended journey of the sailboat. These stones lead from a sandy area near where two small
brown rabbits sit to the jackalope figure which, in itself, seems to be a transcendent figure, unifying the deer and rabbits in its form. The jackalope stands near the entrance to a cave concealed by the sand and green and red moss. Unseen without careful scrutiny from a specific perspective, is the shredded paper nest containing the three white eggs.

As with Bell’s sandpicture, circularity is a dominant form here. The roundness of the island is accentuated by the roundness of the waterway in the foreground. As before, I see the circularity as a representation of the process of the psyche in its lifelong function of bringing balance to the relationship between Self and ego.

The vegetation covering the island has a protective, comforting, and nourishing feel to it. These qualities are attributes of the Great Mother archetype (Neumann, 1963/1972). As I gaze at this picture, I think of Kalff’s (1980) animal-vegetative phase of ego consciousness in which she classifies vegetation as a more passive energy (obvious in its form) than animalistic instinctive energy which she terms more dynamic. The vegetation, along with sand, conceals the cave where the potential for new life exists. Looking at the stones across the waterway, I sense an intention to impede the journey, at least temporarily. My awareness of this obstacle prompts questions: Is it an intention that brings attention to the potential for new life? What is this new life? I think of creation myths in which the life of the world is explained as a birth from an egg. I think of the egg in the mouth area of the 700-foot Great Serpent Mound of Ohio that I used in my collage, Woman in a Hat. As I look back at that section of my dissertation (pp. 152-163), I realize that I did not write specifically about this image. Momentarily, I wonder why other images emerged into the foreground and that one stayed in the background at the time of writing about Woman in a Hat. It is the imagery of the eggs and the mound of this sandpicture that have resonated and brought the Serpent Mound into my consciousness at this time, illustrating a
movement from invisible to visible. I think about the fact that the function and origin of this prehistoric effigy mound dominates the landscape in that region of Ohio and still experts do not completely understand its meaning. Nevertheless, it imprints the body with its presence just as my little mound in the sandtray has awakened energy within me in those moments of creation of the sandpicture and even now, more than a year later, as I gaze at it again.

Of course, that potential is inherent in the three eggs in the nest in the cave. The image of these eggs shows two together and one standing apart. This configuration brings to mind the concept of “the third,” discussed earlier in this document (see especially pp. 67, 133). It may represent a new perspective based on conscious and unconscious elements. For now, I sense it as an element of the unknown and, paradoxically, as something I know deep within.

From my Jungian-based Sandplay Therapy perspective, I note that the circular island suggests Self energy, while the boat (a vehicle which can carry us along in the outer world) suggests ego energy. In the sandpicture, the female deer expresses a curiosity about the boat. She demonstrates an attitude of relatedness towards it, while the male deer feeds on what is in front of his nose, feeding himself, self-focused. For me, deer are symbols of strong, yet gentle, instinctive energy. The importance of the deer to me has been described in great detail earlier in this document (see pp. 146, 149). I identify them arbitrarily as my soul symbols.

Interestingly, the other animals in this sandpicture are rabbits. Like the deer, the rabbit is a symbol of self-identity. According to Chinese astrology, I was born in the year of the rabbit. Playfully looking for characteristics for that astrological sign on the web, I am tickled to read this: “only truly happy when engrossed in some sort of scholarly or intellectual activity” www.Wikipedia.org. Yes!
I ponder what the union of deer and rabbit means to me. I wonder if the jackalope near the entrance to the cave is a guard or a guide? Is s/he like the White Rabbit who leads Alice down the rabbit-hole to the underworld where she has a series of illogical adventures before waking up from her dream? Is my jackalope a symbol of a mediator between consciousness and the unconscious? I wonder who laid the eggs. Playfully, I associate the eggs with the Easter bunny and the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon goddess of fertility, Eostre, in whose name pagan rebirth rituals were carried out. I wonder what form the new life will take. I consider how I/my life might be changed.

Looking again at the Sandplay image, I consider that the flow of ego energy, as represented by the boat, will be forced to stop when it comes to the rocks across the waterway. In a sense, there is a forced relationship with the island. The boat cannot continue its journey as “other,” unrelated to the island, simply sailing around it. In Jungian terms, this would imply that the ego must come into relationship with the Self. The union of ego and Self will result in the birth of a new life energy, as represented by the eggs hidden in the cave. The psyche is demanding that I no longer simply “go on my merry way.” I ask myself, “Is that what I am doing? Am I not related to my Self, my inner core?”

I think of the hectic pace at which I have been living life over the past couple of years. My association to Oestra comes into my mind again. With it come the terms, “oestral cycle” and “menstrual cycle.” At 68 years of age, I have not thought of myself in terms of menses for over 25 years. However, several months ago, uterine bleeding reappeared at regular monthly cycles. My doctor stated confidently that the bleeding is not “menstruation” because that ceased long ago and asserts that this regularity is “coincidence” and “abnormal.” The word coincidence doesn’t make sense to me because for six months the bleeding has been occurring at exactly one
month intervals. As always, I want to know what is happening at an unseen level. Considering the complex system involved in the menstruation process, I wonder what has gone awry many years after its cessation: pituitary gland in the brain; ovaries; hormones; or uterine lining. My doctor’s concern and subsequent testing forced me to reschedule my latest trip to Korea. These tests had an initial effect of interrupting my life journey as it has been and forced me to consider my mortality.

A scan revealed “a large mass” in my uterus. While doctors were fairly sure that the mass was a benign fibroid, they could not be certain until they did a biopsy. Typically, fibroids do not grow after menopause. The biopsy would only follow a laparoscopic total hysterectomy and salpingo-oophorectomy, involving removal of the ovaries, fallopian tubes, and uterus. While the doctor described the removal of the ovaries as “easy,” pain as “minimal,” and recovery as “quick,” there was no doubt that this event in my life stopped me in my tracks, at least temporarily. As I write this, I think of the stones in the river of my sandpicture.

Contemplating my impending surgery, I knew the physical fact that parts of my body that had been with me since my inception would be removed. For women, these organs are part of their ingrained femininity, their actual and metaphoric elements of creation. My friends who have undergone such “operations” have told me that there is a deep psychic response to such an event. I wondered how that would affect me in terms of my self-identity. Beyond this, I had a terrible fear of surgery, especially when hearing it called both “diagnostic” and “intervening.”

In the fall of 1963, my father was experiencing intestinal problems. On December 15th of that year he underwent “diagnostic surgery” revealing that he had terminal cancer of the duodenum which was resected during the surgery. On January 31st of 1964, while still recovering from surgery, he died from an embolism. A few years later, my 68-year-old mother-
in-law underwent “minor surgery” to correct her incontinence. Following a successful surgery, she died from an embolism. I have been afraid that if I had surgery an embolism could kill me, even if no malignant tumor was revealed. No longer was I confronted with a fear of what the future might hold. This reality in the present imposed itself on me. As I contemplated life, I also was forced to contemplate death.

On a practical level, I scheduled an appointment with my lawyer to review my will and decided about the disposition of my Sandplay Therapy equipment and books in case I had no further need of them. I wondered whether or not to rip up my journals filled with many years of personal writings before I entered the hospital.

Writing now from a latter perspective, I have had surgery, a total laparoscopic hysterectomy and oomphorectomy. As well as several large fibroids and serous cysts being revealed and removed along with my reproductive organs, cancer of the myometrium was discovered. “Stage 1C endometrioid adenocarcinoma” was the diagnosis, meaning that it was early stage cancer that had infiltrated the wall of the uterus more than 50%. In my doctor’s terms, this is a “well-behaved” cancer, the best possible kind to get. Based on several factors, my gynecologist and radiation specialist confirmed that I was in a grey area between needing further intervention in the form of an internal and external course of radiation, and needing no further intervention.

I was reluctant to have radiation treatment because of the damage it often does to parts of the body exposed to the radiation beyond the targeted site. I did not want to be burned. As I considered my decision about treatment, I held in my mind the image of my sandpicture done after data collection (Figure 65). In my discussion of this picture, I speak about my long period of burn-out. I felt I had been through my burning ordeal, albeit it on a psychological level, and
did not want to re-engage with it. I discussed my preference with family and friends. After medical consultation, I decided to opt for no further intervention at this time. I had been worried about making such a decision because I didn’t want to be irresponsible regarding my prognosis. The radiation specialist supported my decision to forego further treatment at this time, saying that if the cancer reappears, it comes with the symptom of bleeding, is generally localized in the vaginal vault, and can be treated at that time effectively with radiation. I was relieved that I had her support and decided to continue on with those other things that are important to me (notwithstanding the importance of my health!) and face what I must in the future. I feel as though I have already faced one great fear, “the big C,” that I have carried for a long time and about which my mother has said, “Everyone I love dies of cancer.” For several reasons, that fear became inflated in my psyche, at times constraining me from having regular medical check-ups in case “something” should be discovered. At this time, I know that I have experienced a treatable disease. Should it recur, I will make a decision about receiving or refusing what I at this time consider an “obtrusive” intervention. My characterization may change at a later time. This recent experience led me to create a collage that is included in the “collage as visual data” section (see Figure 49). As is obvious from what I have written in this section, my sandpicture #2 prompted a verbal narrative that shifted as my life context changed. Making an association between my own abnormal “growths” revealed by my surgery and the tumors associated with the folkloric and afflicted creature, the jackalope, I smile and shake my head in amusement and awe as I wonder to what extent metaphors are materialized in our bodies.

**Brenda’s Story about her Sandpicture #2**

*Sometimes when I finish a sandpicture, I feel a release of tension. In this case, I feel heat and tension in my chest. It’s a little bit like having too much caffeine.*
When I started out, I began tossing the sand which took the form of a kind of ridge in the centre of the tray—back to front. I felt a sense of unknowing about that, but that was OK. While I had been tossing the sand, I had had an image in my mind of a little nest with three eggs in it, one my friend, R., had given me a few years ago. These unfertilized eggs had been laid by Grace, her beautiful little lovebird who has since died. I felt that the eggs in the nest of brightly coloured shredded art paper had to be protected in a cave. I began to scoop out a cave in the side of the “mountain range” and saw I needed some additional water to get the sand to hold together. Then I realized I had to insert a cave structure under the sand to keep it up so I could keep the opening for the nest. As I worked with my hands, the centre sand formation took the form of a roundish island-like structure which seemed to be connected at the rear of the tray to the mainland. I formed a river that flowed from the rear left area forward, across the front of the tray, and back to the rear right area where it widened out again.

I felt the eggs needed to be kept warm and so tried to find a bird to sit on them. I sensed the red bird I selected wasn’t big enough to pass the eggs through her body, so I returned her to the shelf. I found another bird—a bluish-brown one—and found that I had to elevate the inner cave structure so it was big enough for the bird to sit on the nest. I needed to cover the island with greenery, lichen, which I have used in my two previous sandpictures (with B. and E.). Then I needed food for the bird so I sprinkled small pine cones around. If they were there, I needed pine trees, which I had tried to put in before and removed. So, I put in trees and a sailboat entering the scene from the rear left area. Then I had to make the waterway wide enough for it to be able to pass completely through. Then I thought the bird was too big for the trees and the boat so I removed it (after putting in two deer and a turtle which was more an art-form than a representation of a real turtle). I realized I was having difficulty with the opposites of reality and imagination. That realization freed me to remove the bird and know that the eggs were fine without her. I also removed the turtle who seemed unrelated to the picture. I put in the rabbit-deer combo animal, the jackalope, and two little rabbits, all looking into or at the cave. The antlered rabbit needed some stepping stones between the near island and the mainland, so I added rocks. I realized that this would impede the journey of the sailboat and then that this was necessary. Whoever is on the journey must stop and see the cave and eggs in whatever form they are when s/he gets to that place. I realize too that in my creative work—whatever its form—I often feel a tension between my reality and the creative work. This can be on a mundane level of daily and household chores and doing whatever my “creative” work is. The sandpicture simply says, “Stop and take a look at it. It can be what you want it to be even if it seems unconventional or strange, like the white rabbit with antlers.

**Bell’s Story about Brenda’s Sandpicture #2**

Grace’s eggs and a mother bird were secluded in a cave, perhaps with the feeling that in the wild they might come to life. The cave was well-camouflaged from any intruders although a sailboat could sail past the mouth of the cave and all still could be lost. A
male and female deer approached via the mainland, the "island" not quite cut off. Perhaps they will produce viable young.

Did she sense danger from the jack rabbit looking for a place for her two babies—the stream could be crossed on the stones. Maybe she knew her babies would be stillborn and left them behind to try again somewhere else.

The area seemed so well-protected by the trees, the cave, etc. but was still vulnerable. It seems a sad story but a true one of just how fragile everything is in the natural world. Once again there is a hill in Brenda's sandpicture, once again covered to hide the sand. There is a water element in both images. The sailboat in this one is the only human element. Sailing is a way for humans to feel free in the natural world—the sailor oblivious to the drama of the cave.

If you live in the city (caged bird) do you long for the natural world?

Putting things in and removing them feels like a very tentative uncertain and exploratory approach—two steps forward, one step back.

I get the sense of the natural world threatened by the presence of man. Care was taken so that the boat could maneuver around to the mouth of the cave.

Bell’s Sandpicture #3

Feeling a sense of calmness, I look at the photograph of Bell’s carefully organized, third sandpicture (Figure 54). My eye is drawn to the large, central, circular area that is elevated above the surrounding sandy areas at the right, left, front, and back edges of the tray. In the circle (starting at 1:00 o’clock and progressing in a clockwise direction) are a fox, a tiny black cat, a large green iguana, a large pine cone, a red velvet bag, an acorn, two chestnuts, and two mushrooms, a pair of cupped white hands with palms facing upwards, a small turquoise scarab, a dark-brown-and-white sea-shell standing erect, a penguin, and a woman carrying a jug of water. In the centre is a transparent globe of the world. The luminescence of the globe attracts me. The cat, fox, and woman also seem to be focused on the globe, while the iguana appears to be looking towards the acorn, chestnuts, and mushrooms. The penguin appears to be looking towards the woman carrying the water jug.
Dora Kalff once said that the genie of Sandplay is in the camera. This picture is an example, with the flash from the camera lighting up the globe at the centre so it has a luminescence not seen in actuality. Looking at the photograph on my computer screen, I feel a sense of awe that I do not recall feeling when I saw the picture in reality. The mystery at the centre of life, at the centre of us, energizes me and fills me with hope and curiosity.

As with previous sandpictures, circularity is the predominant form. All the figures in this sandpicture are related through their positioning on the raised circle and through the central figure, the transparent globe that they all surround. These diverse energy forms appear to have assembled in a formation that reflects wholeness. As well as this circular form created through the assembly of figures, the theme of wholeness is accentuated through the globe at the centre, the raised circle on which the figures sit, and the circle inscribed in the sand around the raised circle. Within the context of the rectangular sandtray, once again there is an image of “squaring the circle,” previously discussed (p. 193). This form speaks to a balanced relationship between Self and ego, a psychological phenomenon that leads to an experience of wholeness or completeness, and balance in life.

The diverse energy forms constellating the experience of wholeness are elements from various realms, including the following: visible/invisible (as in the velvet bag); cold (penguin)/warm (gecko); human/animal/vegetative; natural (acorns, chestnuts)/human-made (globe, hands); material/spiritual; inner (chestnut)/outer (seashell); wild (fox)/domesticated (cat); dark (mushroom)/light (transparent globe); instinctive (animals)/spiritual (outstretched hands, scarab in Egyptian culture); and potential (acorns, chestnuts)/actual (mushrooms). According to Jung (1969), the Self holds all, including the opposites. As we see in the diversity represented in this picture, there are many contrasts or differentiation of opposites within the circle. The water-
bearing woman provides water for all, access to vital water from the source for the nourishment of wholeness and the potential for new life.

Bell’s Story about her Sandpicture #3

*I chose things that spoke to me about various aspects and times in my life. I couldn’t find a figure to relate to until the classical woman with a water container on her shoulder. She speaks of the timeless in life and art.*

The crystal globe was #1 placed in the centre with everything else arranged in a circle around that—all dependent on that earth for its existence. That thought only comes as I write.

All the forms are expressions of things that I love that make up my world. Humour is that fox—he makes me laugh and I should go back to the Chinese fox from last year’s painting class. I’d like him in my life. The gecko speaks of the myriad forms of life, many of which I have experienced close up and first hand. What a privilege! The pine cone is Rilke’s cone from Spain, which brings in all the authors I have loved and do love still. Last week in Chinese painting class we did the penguin as a Zen image—regardless of how tough life is you still live the life you have been given. The shell, mushrooms, and seeds represent the wonderful forms and shapes that life itself assumes. The hands bring in the human element and the issue of creativity and that we hold all these treasures in our hands and how important it is to everything in the circle what we choose to do with these hands. We/I can be constructive or destructive either intentionally or unconsciously. The tiny scarab is the Egyptian symbol for rebirth and eternity and I sense a new life for myself now at 69. The velvet bag holds a mystery. I intentionally did not look in it—I can’t know and don’t want to know what life is all about. Any answer to the question would only be a dead end without the possibility of change or of growth into new levels of existence. I love the mystery.

My world no longer has Ross physically in it but spiritually he has been with me on every step along my way in this life. It may sound trite but he is the wind/breath beneath my wings. He taught me how to love by loving. The cat speaks of my beautiful daughters, living symbols of that love.

The sand was built up around the forms to contain and protect them somehow. The wholeness of life would have had some elements that I find unpleasant or unfortunate about life but that’s not what this exercise was about.

When the love of your life dies, love itself does not die.
Brenda’s Story about Bell’s Sandpicture #3

Bell was looking for a human female that she could identify with. A transparent world. What does that mean to me? To Bell?

Bell chose a girl carrying a water jug. This seems to me like an archetypal representation of the water bearer, one who has access to an eternal spring, the source of life.

How do these figures all fit together, this transparent world around which gather a woman water bearer, a penguin, a fox and black cat, a lizard, Rilke’s pine cone and chestnuts, mushrooms and acorn, a scarab and shell, outstretched hands and a velvet bag of golden dice? They are in communion with their differences and their idiosynchronies, each as beautiful as another. [As I type these words, I notice that I hand-wrote “idiocronies” and wonder if I meant “idiocrasies.” I think that idiosynchronies is not a proper word, but as I look at the two possibilities, I prefer idiosynchronies and think it might mean something like each having its own particular time or rhythm that somehow fits together with the timing or rhythm of the others. I remember reading Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* and absolutely loving that she spoke of the two independent “voices” she identified in her moral behaviour research as “contrapunctal themes” as in a fugue. I am always really delighted when I have a chance to use that expression, “contrapunctal themes” when I am writing, so I’ve taken the liberty here. To me, this word, “contrapunctal” has a rich and resonant sound.]

Contained in a mandorla shape, the figures suggest to me the opposites revealed and concealed and the transcendent, the transparent world. I remember that Jean Gebser, in his theories about the development of consciousness, writes about transparency and a stage of consciousness that he calls “aperspectival.” Although I haven’t a good grasp on his theory, I recall that he speaks about the representation of past, present and future all together, as in one of Picasso’s periods. It is one of the attributes of Sandplay that I have found impressive, to be able to represent across a temporal dimension—past, present, and future—and I would say a spatial dimension—the underworld, the dark, the unknowing, the unconscious on a collective/archetypal and a personal level, consciousness, light, knowing, materiality/spirituality/emotional depths and peaks, instinct and spirit, Nature and technology, contained and containing, linear and spiraling, hot and cold, dry and moist. I could go on and on. The transparent world, transparency—I write it again. I feel a pull towards it. I don’t know why this pulls me today. I have no other words for it. I am in touch with tension in my lower abdomen and in my heart area. What is this about?

Revisiting what I wrote above after more than a year, my interest is piqued by two of the above references: “contrapunctal themes” (Gilligan, 1982) and Gebser’s (1949/1985) theory about transparency and his aperspectival level of development of consciousness. My
meandering like this in life is what makes it rich and interesting. In regard to Gilligan’s contrapunctal themes, I am curious about the origin of the word and whether or not it is related to “the punctum.” Looking at an etymological dictionary online, I see that contrapunctal derives from a Latin expression, “punctus contra punctum, note against note” (encyclopedia.collegefarlex.com) and think about Barthes’ (1981) reference to an arrow shooting out from a photograph and piercing the viewer, an effect that changes the reading of the picture. I think of all the voices of the represented energies in Bell’s sandpicture and the resounding nature of her multiplicity of experiences and the temporal dimensions of past, present, and future that are tied together in this image. When do we hear cacophony and when counterpoint? How is our perspective distorted by holding rigidly to one voice, rather than embracing all that is there, in terms of what is expected and what appears unpredictably, what we like and what we don’t like, what we know and what we don’t know? As I ponder these questions, I have a sense that Bell has embraced life and death, knowing and unknowing in her creation of “a new life.”

Returning to my interest in Gebser (1949/1985), I am compelled to refer again to his book, The Ever-Present Origin, because I feel there may be some connection with Bell’s spiritual attitude, as she expressed it in her sandpicture and her narrative. As well, I sense there is a connection with words in my dream that compelled me to return to doctoral studies: a school of integrative studies. Besides that, I don’t like to leave threads hanging. As I explore Gebser a little further, now with this motivation, I see that he means a stage of consciousness that transcends a dualistic system of conceptual opposites. Gebser sees this as “a process of liberation from the exclusive validity of perspectival and unperspectival” (p. 2). He writes that he is concerned about integrality and wholeness, rather than a limited perspective or a vague sense of reality that are related to worlds “grounded in Being” or “in Having” or irrationality vs.
rationality (p. 2). Gebser relates his notion of aperspectival to “transparency (diaphaneity) in the form of manifestation (epiphany) of the spiritual” (p. 6). I do not want to reduce Gebser’s conceptualizations and observations; nor do I consider my current research project the place to explore Gebser’s theory in depth. Mindful of these caveats, I do feel that my research and Sandplay generally touches on ideas expressed by Gebser. I have mentioned above and in previous chapters my experiences in life generally and with art and Sandplay that incorporate a multiplicity of temporal and spatial aspects, as well as a connection with liminal space where consciousness and the unconscious intersect and transcendence can occur. As I understand it, our mindfulness sharpens our sense of being based in our past and keeps us in a state of becoming, all told through our stories. Gebser writes:

_We are shaped and determined not only by today and yesterday, but by tomorrow as well. ... [Transparency] or diaphaneity of our existence is particularly evident during transitional periods, and it is from the experiences of man in transition, experiences which man has had with the concealed and latent aspects of his dawning future as he became aware of them, that will clarify our own experiencing of the present._ (p. 7)

**Brenda’s Sandpicture #3**

In Brenda’s third sandpicture (Figure 55), the wet sand is mounded up along the right side of the tray, with the rest of the sand fairly level. A line runs horizontally in the sand just in front of the middle of the tray, extending across about two-thirds of the tray from the left edge. At the rear of the tray a line exposes the blue bottom of the tray to the base of the elevated section. Trees of dark green, rust and yellow are positioned in the elevated section. To the left of the trees, in the right rear area, two wrestler figures stand amidst five tombstones (two upright and three over-turned) and five stones (four roundish in shape and one triangular). Just rear of the centre of the tray stands a log cabin with two brass totem-like figures (male and female) at either end of the front of the cabin. These ancestor figures, despite their smiles, have a
frightening aspect apparent in their large teeth. To the left of the cabin, stands a “scream” figure, a replica from Munch’s *The Scream* painting. As with the ancestor figures, it is the mouth which brings a distinctive character to the scream figure.

While the rear half of the tray (centre to right side) is filled with figures, the rest of the tray is empty of figures. Despite the dramatic appearance of the “scream” figure, my eye is repeatedly pulled towards the area of the overturned gravestones and the wrestlers, to the right of a log house.

The square house, with the (Korean) ancestor figures guarding the entranceway, gives an impression of stability and continuity. Next to it, the oval area comprised mainly of natural stones, round and triangular, and of those created in the form of gravestones, disrupts the sense of stability and continuity established to the left of it. The two wrestler figures, in contrast to the protective and honoured ancestors, are upsetting the gravestones, perhaps symbolic of upsetting the ancestors.

The areas where the house stands and the wrestlers’ action occurs comprise a strip running from left to right of the sandtray, taking up about half the space. This area is bordered at the front by an indentation line in front of the house and stones and, at the rear by a line created by exposing the blue bottom of the tray. The borders delimiting this action scene serve to underscore it as an area of focus. My eye seems to glide over the empty area in the foreground of the tray, deemphasizing it. As I write this sentence, I am surprised because I often see “empty spaces” in sandpictures as areas of potential where something new might grow. I do not have that visionary intuition about this empty space. However, I do note that the elevated area at the right side, with the trees stretching along the right edge from the rear of the tray to the front, seems to unite the front and rear areas, thus I cannot completely ignore the empty area. Looking
again at the Munch figure, I notice that s/he is not gazing at the disruption in the small cemetery or at the fearsome-looking ancestor figures guarding the door of the house. S/he seems to be gazing out over the barren landscape, screaming for anyone and everyone, much in the way that the figure in Munch’s painting did.

Looking at the figured part of the sandpicture, I recall a term that Rodari (1988) uses in his analysis of visual qualities: active disorder. Unlike other visual narratives created during my research, this sandpicture was precipitated by a dream which I told my research participant while creating the sandpicture. The active disorder quality of the sandpicture was certainly a reflection of the disorder in my life at the time. And there is more to the precipitation of the scream than my personal story. Bell and I had discussed the universal nature of “the scream” and Munch’s motivations for the painting. My recent trip to South Korea, which was the source of the ancestor totem figured used in this sandpicture, focused our discussion on North and South Korea, the Korean attitude towards the United States, 9/11 and the United States military assault on Iraq, war in general, its effects on nature and the planet, and feelings of hopelessness about how much one person can do to make change. In the verbal narrative that follows, I have omitted details that veer away from the visual narrative presented here.

After writing the above section, I re-read my story about sandpicture #3 that I wrote more than a year ago (see that story below). As I read the story, I could almost hear the words tumbling out of my mouth at the time I told the story. Now I think about my need at the time to get rid of some of the emotional energy connected to “the farm situation” that is broader than what the narrative below details (e.g., my agreement with my uncle about my care of my mother and his care of the farm property, the ultimate disposition of the farm property, our increasing
ages which make physical tasks a little more difficult, and lack of other family members’
attention to my mother).

Brenda’s Story about her Sandpicture #3

I had a dream in which something was happening at my mother’s farm and I was very
scared and in the dream was calling 911. . . . In reality at the farm, you drive in from the
main road down a long lane, then on the left-hand side there’s a house, the farmhouse,
and behind that there are some fields. . . . Then there’s a big hardwood hill that goes
across the whole property. . . . In the dream it wasn’t quite the way it is in reality,
although there was this hill . . . and there were some men um who, who looked like thug-
type guys who were um first of all, they dropped some big boulders, maybe about this big
[gestured], from a hill although it wasn’t exactly like the hill at the farm, and they
dropped them down. They didn’t seem to be dropping them on something, so I’m not sure
what the point was in dropping these big boulders down. And right there where they
were dropping them down there was also a family cemetery, which there isn’t in reality.
And they were toppling the gravestones of the ancestors. And then my uncle and I were
in the house and we saw this going on through the window. I was going to phone 911
and as I tried to do that, I realized that these guys had cut the telephone lines and now
they were in the house. And my uncle and I tried to communicate some sort of plan to
each other, and then I woke up.

At the farm, in actuality, there is a stream, a little stream behind the house. It is not very
deep and so I don’t want to give the impression of something deep. And it comes from a
spring in the hill. [speaking as she creates forms.] That laneway comes from the road.
I know that some of this angst around the farm is related to the actual situation because
um I was talking to my uncle this week who has come from his home up north um to
prepare the farm for the winter and also to do some work on his own house that he’s
building next to this property. My mother severed two acres there for him so he could
build a house there. Um, there are a lot of issues around the farm, ah-h-h-h. . . .
And what I’m experiencing now because I’m involved in other things that I’m very
interested in and I don’t have the time to be at the farm, simply to be there, I don’t relish
the fact of taking my mom there, my 96-year-old mom who is very healthy but I never
know from one day to the next whether when I go in to take her her breakfast whether
she’ll be alive or not. Of course, we don’t know that about anybody but. . . .

At that age. I don’t relish being out in the country by myself at this point. My uncle’s
making rumblings about needing some help with preparing it for winter, for example, so
there isn’t any insulation in the walls, so one of the things he does is put bags of leaves
around the skirting. And last year he made some noise about doing that, so Abbie and I
went and raked leaves and filled up big garbage bags and so on. But it’s not a very
satisfactory way to insulate the property from year to year but that’s the way it’s been for
years and what it really needs is some permanent sort of insulation put in but um that
takes money and time and energy in terms of figuring out how it’s all going to be done in
the best way and I don’t have that sort of time or money at the moment. And Abbie’s off in India now. It’s fall and she’s gone to India, so my uncle told me on the phone that he’d actually raked the leaves and filled the bags and put them around the skirting, but he still had to prepare the house for winter. So when I asked him what he had to do, it was really simply installing two doors made of thick styrofoam between the kitchen and then on the door of the room where the electrical pump is, to keep the heat in those areas so the pipes won’t freeze, but he made the doors last year, so all he has to do is hook them on. It’s not as though he has to make them this year. That seemed to be the only thing that he still had to do, which didn’t seem to me to be that big a job, considering the fact that I take care of mom everyday. . . .

So, there’s that irritant there, plus there’s the question of, in the long run, what am I going to do with this place. When I was young I used to have a dream of turning it into an art retreat or something, but I probably won’t do that at my age. And I don’t want to sell it because it’s been in the family for a long time and Abbie has the dream that I once had, “Oh, maybe I’ll turn it into a yoga retreat.” And whether or not she’ll do that, I have no idea. Um, so I think that that can have something to do with what uh. So, in the long run are we going to keep it or are we going to sell it? And if we sell it, does that mean kind of overturning the ancestral history? And uh it was important for me to place these two figures in, they’re from Korea, and they’re like the grandmother and grandfather, the matriarchal and patriarchal ancestors guarding the house. So,

Bell: So, in a way, you’re almost caught between a rock and a hard place.

Brenda: Oh, great, the rocks, and there’s this sort of concave area which I hesitated to call “a depression” but maybe there is that sort of angst around what I’m going to do there. At the moment, it’s really a hard place. . . .

Well, my indication is really not to move into it at this point because uh my life is so dynamic in ways that have nothing to do with that and there was a time when my mom was living there, when [my friend, D.] and I went quite often on weekends, and we would climb the hill and sit on, you know, take a picnic and sit at the top of the hill and look out over the valley and it was really a very fulfilling kind of experience in Nature and has been a fulfilling experience in Nature from the time I was a young girl and I would go through the woods with my father and really learned to appreciate Nature there. And um even now, I’m a little bit nervous about walking up the hill, because there’s a bear who lives there now that didn’t used to be there. And you know, I don’t know anything about bear behaviour, so if I’m walking up, should I take a bell and just jingle it, or what if the bear has a cub or cubs, and all of these things. I don’t know how to deal with bears. My uncle, who lives up in northern Ontario, he’s used to having bears come down his lane and so on, but I don’t know anything about bears, so I would be, in fact, even with a couple of friends, a couple of years ago at this time of year, we drove out to the farm thinking we would walk through the woods and have a picnic at the top of the hill, but just at the base of the hill we saw what I thought were bear droppings and so, we had food in our bags and so on, we decided we wouldn’t walk up the hill. We decided we would go back to the house and sit on the porch and have our picnic. So even that has
changed and part of that has to do with my knowledge that there’s a bear there. Maybe there’s been a bear there forever, but I didn’t used to worry about that. So, life changes and uh and there it is. And I don’t think in terms of putting something else in, I don’t think I can put anything else into [this sandpicture of] the ancestral home or turning it over, perhaps?

Bell’s Story about Brenda’s Sandpicture #3

The water element again and the sand looks like pastry dough. I don’t think about using it but Brenda has more experience in using it as an expressive, creative tool. More dry sand is heaped at the end, more water—local knowledge. At what point do you sense what the sandtray image is going to be? Brenda says at various times, this time she’s illustrating recent dreams which have been disturbing. At some point the sand process usually takes over the dream imagery. I have belonged to a dream art group for 15 years and find that doing the art image often crystallizes the meaning or central theme of the dream. The image reveals more than the words of the dream. The items are chosen for what they communicate to you but at some point the sand play itself has its own voice. The scream for help and achieving it in the dream. South Korea in danger brings the collective into this picture along with Iraq, and 911 when the original scream occurred. As with Munch, it seems a collective scream about the state of the world.

Research Sessions with Eve

Eve’s Sandpicture #1

The dry sand in the tray is fairly smooth, showing some finger marks from the smoothing (Figure 56). Four boats are positioned on the almost white sand in each of the four quadrants of the tray (a red-and-white rowboat with one oar in the left near, a blue-and-gold gondola with gondolier in the left rear, a green wooden canoe with two paddles in the right rear, and a small fishing boat in the right near). Five human figures are present: the gondolier who is attached to the gondola and a white pregnant woman near the prow of the gondola; an off-white plaster replica of the “Dreaming Woman of Malta” lying on a cot near the canoe; a black polished soapstone female figure placed in a recumbent position at the centre front edge; and a young, brown, Asian-looking, flute-playing boy sitting on an ox lying down near the row boat. The figures on the right side of the tray seem to form a straight diagonal line from the black figure at centre front to the rear right corner. The figures on the left side of the tray form a curved line
from the black female figure at centre front to the white pregnant woman at the rear edge. The positioning of all the figures leaves an empty space in the centre rear part of the tray that pulls my attention strongly when I look at the sandpicture.

As I look at this picture, I wonder if the boats are in water or beached. Some imprints in the sand, just left of the centre, are wavelike, suggesting that the area in the center of the tray could be water. However, that sense of ambiguity is strengthened because all boats are devoid of people except the gondola whose helmsman seems to be poling the boat along. Although the other boats are at rest, they seem to point towards something that may appear in the circular space they enclose. This sense of expectancy is reinforced by the pregnant woman at the rear left of the tray. There is a contrast in colour amongst the human figures: the pregnant and sleeping women are light, while the schematic female form at centre front is dark; the young flute-playing boy is dark, while the gondolier is golden. There is also a contrast in activity levels between the male and female figures, with the boy and gondolier overtly active, while the female figures appear outwardly passive but inwardly active (through dreaming and gestating). While the boats are common to everyday life, the human figures seem to represent archetypal energies through their images from a mythico-religious realm. As such, they invite a response on a symbolic level.

Many of the figures in this sandpicture evoke a symbolic perspective. The full-bodied dreaming woman of Malta is a replica of a goddess figure dating from about 3000 BEC. It was discovered in 1902 in an underground egg-shaped chamber called the Hypogeum of Hal Saflieni where ancient rites relating to healing dreams were practised. The armless, black soapstone goddess figure, with the triangle pointing downwards in the pubic area, is an unidentified representation of Shakti energy, the Hindu goddess of creation. The totally white woman
suggests a symbolic, rather than actual, pregnancy. White has been traditionally associated with sacredness and purity. Suggesting value, the golden gondolier and his gondola are symbolic of Venice. A male domain, the gondola culture has existed since its inception in the ancient state of Venice in the 1000s as a form of private transport for people of high status. On a practical level, the gondola has long been associated with high cost. The young Asian boy astride the ox is reminiscent of the early Taoist series of meditative “ox-herding” pictures that illustrate a spiritual journey. This image of the boy and ox “becoming one” is a metaphor for the development of a relationship between ego and Self. Only through relationship can the boy “tame” the ox and only through human spirit can music flow through the flute (Trungpa, 1972).

**Eve’s Story about her Sandpicture #1**

*Boats remind me of my childhood. I’ve always loved water, lakes, oceans, rivers, streams. Voyage toward – voyage out to a distant shore returning transformed. Different vessels represent various parts of myself – Being able to venture out on various types of boats represents for me a willingness to participate in all aspects of life. Both inner and outer. The gondola is very European and Venice surrounded by canals seems or gives me a sense of continuity with my Italian heritage. As a young girl I remember going fishing with my father and cousins and sometimes with an uncle. I still would love to fish. It seems the water and boats are still strongly in my psyche. I loved sailing with my cousin – The different types of boats could well be my progression from tugboat to the lovely gondola. Aspects of myself.*

*The boy playing the flute sitting on an ox recalls the Ox-herding pictures and the taming of baser instincts and the defeat of the ego into a relationship with the Self.*

*Water on which the vessels are moved is my unconscious. The figure of the pregnant woman are the possibilities that remain open to me.*

*The sleeping Goddess of Malta is my dreaming self paying attention to the dream images that arise. Being attentive to symbols.*

*The figure of the woman with the triangle representing the feminine is someone who needs to be listened to, lying in wait, hoping to be heard. Water—Boats—being in touch with Nature is an essential part of myself.*

*I see the boy playing the flute as a call—I’m not sure to what.*
Brenda’s Story about Eve’s Sandpicture #1

As you were creating the picture and putting in several boats at the beginning—a green canoe, a red row boat, a fishing boat, a gondola, and a blue sailboat, I thought of a “celebration of the waterways,” a coming together of people from different “worlds” in a broad sense—not only different countries, but different professions (gondoliers and fishermen) and people working and at leisure.

I remembered being in Venice in 1997 (I think.) I had gone to an international Sandplay conference in Verona and after that had traveled a little in Italy with my daughter. We had spent a day in Venice. I remember vividly the beautiful hand-blown glass sculptures hanging in trees and placed on the lawn at the Peggy Guggenheim Gallery there. I remember sitting in San Marco Square with my daughter, Abbie, listening to jazz. We had the possibility of listening to many different types of music being played in the outdoor cafes. We chose jazz. I still chuckle when I think that we paid almost $30 for two cups of coffee to have that luxury of sitting in that square with the pigeons abounding, listening to live jazz. It was a magical moment. At the same time, we didn’t take a gondola ride because we thought it was too expensive! I remember thinking that Venice looked beautiful and didn’t smell bad. It reminded me of seeing Death in Venice many years before and I felt elated that Venice did not seem to be decaying and sinking into a polluted sea. I got two Sandplay figures there, two lions, one holding a sword, one holding a book. They were the symbols of Venice that were flown on flags in times of war and times of peace.

When you placed the little boy on a water buffalo playing a flute I thought of India where my daughter goes to study yoga teacher training and thought of her telling me of the sacred cows decorated for holy days with bright colours.

When you put in the black female figure which reminds me of an ancient cultural artifact, I thought of your (i.e., Eve’s) travels to ancient goddess sites that you had told me about when we had lunch last time.

The pregnant woman figure made me think of all those women throughout the ages who have waited for their husbands and sons to return from the sea. I felt a pang in my heart. Then when you put in the dreaming woman of Malta figure—one of the most important figures for me in my collection—I thought “Oh, this woman is having a dream. The boats take her all over the world.” It reminded me of the dream that led me to OISE and the importance of dreams in my life. This woman lives beside a green canoe.

Immediately my experiences in Algonquin Park were revived—mask-making in the woods, laughter with other women, a downpour the first night as we camped on a small island, the smell of coffee and sight of rising steam from our tin cups as we sat in a circle regaling each other with tales of the night we had all spent. . . . again pangs of sadness at some fading and changed relationships.
I notice I am breathing out slowly and loudly—siphoning off a tension that has heightened since I began writing about this.

Brenda’s Sandpicture #1

After adding water to the sand and mixing it up well, Brenda pulled most of the sand to the centre of the tray. She formed a tall island-like mound surrounded by a U-shaped exposed blue section, with a small amount of sand spread along the left and right sides and front of the tray. The central mound is covered with light and dark green and red moss-like material, except for a section at the right front which has stair-like finger impressions. At the centre of the mound is a green jeweled tree with an amethyst base, and a male and female deer to the left and left-front of the tree. A large, dark green deciduous tree is in the left near corner and three dark green fir trees are in the right rear corner. Visible in front of the fir trees are two small beige rabbits. A brown dog and a red-haired woman with a yoke carrying two buckets are to the right of the deciduous tree. The woman has her back to the blue area and the central mound. A small grey bridge spans the blue area in the right near quadrant, with each end of it resting on a small flat grey pebble. By the end closest to the right near corner, a red-haired Caucasian woman carrying a baby and an Asian man with a video camera stand to the right of the bridge, facing the island in the centre.

The jeweled tree at the centre of the island and the lush green vegetation strongly attract me. They make the island as figure pop out from the background. The bridge and the stairs leading up the hill make the pinnacle of the island accessible and add to my perception that it is a special place. Like the jackalope of a previous picture, the deer could be guardians and/or guides. The river-like waterway reinforces the circular shape of the island. Previously I have associated this shape with the process of circularity engaged in by the psyche and connected to
the constellation of Self energy which is a guiding, centering force in the personality. Therefore this shape, along with the steps leading up to the pinnacle and the jeweled tree situated there, suggest that the meaning of the island goes beyond a natural setting; it has a transpersonal connection. The attitude expressed by the female deer, the two rabbits, the couple with the baby, and the woman carrying water with the dog is one of relatedness. The man and woman with the baby seem to be tourists; he carries a video camera and a book, perhaps a guide book/map or a description of a place of interest to visit. The female deer displays a curious attitude towards the visitors, as does one of the rabbits. As in a previous sandpicture, the male deer attends to the foliage in front of his nose. Only the woman with the water buckets and her dog are focused away from the island-visitor interaction. Her activity and directionality suggest that there is more than is apparent in this scene. She carries her water to a destination that is invisible to us. Similarly, the couple suggests that there is something outside this scene. They have arrived at this place somehow, either by car or by boat, neither of which are visible in the sandpicture. Even if they have hiked, because of the presence of the baby, they must have a source of supplies or vehicle within a reasonable distance.

This picture illustrates that a context is significant, even when it is invisible.

**Brenda’s Story about her Sandpicture #1**

_I began by adding water to the sand and mixing it up. Eve said it reminded her of her mother and grandmother making pasta. I recalled making whole wheat bread by hand—not in a bread-making machine—when Abbie was little.

As I was mixing the sand a diagonal form came into my mind. I tried to duplicate it in the sand but it seemed too static and rigid so I mixed up the sand.

Then I made another shape that resembled a human form, thinking of a figure with arms raised and feet spread apart._
The sand wouldn’t hold together so I added a little more water and mixed the sand and tried to create the same form again. It wouldn’t hold together so I broke it, made a circular form in the centre and added some green and red moss which looked like hair on a human head. I then added two shells as earing on what I tried to form as ears and two scarabas as eyes, trying to form eye sockets and a raised nose. The scarab eyes looked very scary—it reminded me a bit of looking at Medusa and being turned to stone. I fiddled with the face and head trying to imprint features but didn’t feel satisfied with it. It stirred up old feelings of not being able to draw well enough and I mixed up the sand and began again forming a circular island in the centre of the tray and using the moss as ground cover. Around the edges of the tray I left some sand to suggest land. Then I decided to bridge that land with the island, literally placing a bridge there and forming steps to the top of the mound island. I placed a jeweled tree there and immediately had a sense of a sacred place.

I looked for figures and didn’t want to place a spiritual figure or ritual-type figure on the island. I did place one deer, then a second one there. These are important spiritual figures for me. I write about them in relation to the farm and I dream about them. For me they embody strength and gentleness. That is their nature.

I placed a woman with a yoke carrying two buckets of water. For me a yoke means union—related to yoga. She is taking this pure water back to her home in the woods with her dog companion. I thought of August Bell, my “grand-dog,” my daughter’s dog that we take care of during the week when Abbie works long hours. Augie and I walk each morning in the woods and listen to the silences and sounds of creature voices. We see rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, snakes, sometimes Canada geese and ducks, and very occasionally a raccoon.

I wanted someone to have access to the island, an ordinary person, not one designated as a spiritual practitioner. I chose a mother with her baby on her back and felt that she represented me on my thesis journey, using narrative—a new form (hence the baby). I wanted her to have a partner. I chose the Asian man with the video camera as that part of me that is documenting for my thesis journey as well as that part of me that takes me soon to Korea to teach Sandplay and be open to new experiences.

Eve’s Story about Brenda’s Sandpicture #1

As the sand was being shaped into a diamond form, I thought of the Diamond Ranch where we went for our first reunion. It was a Dude Ranch and the beginning of our many reunions. I rode a horse for the first time in a very long time. We all mounted and went for a picnic. By the time we got back hardly any of us could walk we were so sore. That shape changed; one seemed to represent a cave and that reminded me of The Medicine Wheel Ranch where we went down a narrow steep passage into a cave at least a thousand years old where there was an altar with a bear symbol. We had flashlights but were asked to turn them off to experience a womb tomb feeling. The shape turned into a hill and I thought of Sibbery Hill in England, a sacred site.
Then the face of a woman appeared with beautiful vegetation for hair. At one point two blue stones were placed for eyes. This image came alive for me, an ancient tribal Goddess. I was sorry to see her disappear. I now see an island covered with greenery with a tall tree in the centre. There are steps up but beforehand a bridge to get to the steps.

I’m thinking of the vision quest I was on which was on an island where there wasn’t a flat piece of land. The deer on the island reminds me of being at the Medicine Wheel Ranch, and the owner, Indira, telling the story of a vision she had of a headless deer swimming across the lake. The deer said to her, “I’ve given my life for humankind and now you put me in a garage.” Indira was taking down all the trophies from the main hall which had been a hunting lodge and placed these heads in the garage. It seems that during the depression when people grew root vegetables this deer was found wandering and eating the vegetables and the person went and got a shotgun and killed the deer. This was the story Indira discovered. Now the deer’s head holds a place of honour over the fireplace. This picture also brought back to memory of going whitewater rafting with my youngest daughter, Jennifer and how we stopped for lunch at an island and Jennifer had to pull me up the embankment as I didn’t have the strength to pull myself up.

The woman with child and the man with the binoculars help me recall the camping trips we enjoyed when my children were young. Also the girl carrying water as we hauled water back to our campsite.

The tall tree in the middle of the island represents to me the process of individuation. It reminds me of a saying by Northrop Frye who said, “We’re born in the middle of a forest and it takes a lifetime to get to the edge.” [The] whole scene is one of nature, trees, stones, water.

Eve’s Sandpicture #2

In Eve’s sandpicture #2 (Figure 58), in the centre of the tray is a yellow five-rayed starfish. Closely surrounding the starfish are seven large chunks of barnacles and fossilized rocks and one small piece of fossilized rock. The largest white barnacle is just outside the circle formed by the other seven pieces and is situated on a diagonal running from the starfish centre and the left rear corner. The rest of the sandtray is empty of objects and figures. The starfish in the centre pulls my eye as I look at the sandtray.

I wonder if the starfish in Eve’s sandpicture is covered with water or beached on the sand. If beached, I know it will dehydrate. I wonder if it is contained in a protective way or
emprisoned by the rocks and barnacles. For a few seconds, I imagine the sea star arising and dancing over the rocks. This image brings a contrasting thought as I wonder if it can move when it is out of water. I think not, because its mobility occurs through a system whereby water flows into its tube feet propelling the starfish on tiny suction cups. Because of its resemblance to a human figure with head, two arms, and two legs, the starfish is also a model for human wholeness.

Again thinking of the genie in the camera that Kalff has spoken about, I note that one of the photographs (Figure 58a) accentuates the sunlight streaming in through the window blinds, giving an impression of bars, and of dark and light, the unconscious and consciousness. I think of the marvel of the sea star and its ability to regenerate itself, its ray from the rest of its body, and even its body from one ray, because it has a complete set of organs in each of its rays. Thinking of the starfish as a metaphor for human wholeness, I think of the regenerative potential that we have as human beings as long as we have a “good enough” environment, both conscious and unconscious, with mediation between the two so that one can feed the other.

As I gaze at the image, I recall the boats in Eve’s previous sandpicture and think of barnacle-encrusted hulls where these sea creatures (barnacles) may permanently attach themselves and live and grow while in the water. They need the water for their life, as we need the unconscious for our vitality.

**Eve’s Story about her Sandpicture #2**

*In my mind, there’s a sense of timelessness, an ongoing feeling of an unchanging world beneath all the hype of modern day life. Some of the pieces recall the Goddess sites I visited in Malta. I recall small fishing villages and in particular Sorrento in Italy where*
we visited with our four children and last year the fishing village of Letogana in Sicily
where I stayed for two weeks.

A love of ocean, sea, rivers—the elemental nature is what draws me to these pieces.
There is a stillness, yet tremendous energy in these pieces. Something could just come
along and sweep them away, yet they would still survive.

Brenda’s Story about Eve’s Sandpicture #2

As you were placing the sea forms—mostly barnacle-type forms—except for two small
shells, I thought of the sea and then your first sandpicture with a variety of boats. I
wondered about your personal connection to the sea. As I sat watching you replace the
large shell initially positioned in the sand with a barnacle, I noticed the strip of sunlight
coming through the window blinds onto the sand. I then thought of ancient megalithic
structures built of stone—like Stonehenge—and thought about the knowledge that ancient
people had that enabled them to erect and position structures so that they could tell time.
I felt a sense of amazement that people would have had the dedication and commitment,
focus and patience, to imagine and create structures in such a systematic way. I
wondered how they were able to develop such a relationship with the sun and earth’s
changing position so that they could make sense of something they observed. The
cosmos! A long way from the sea!

Then I noticed that you had placed the sea forms around the starfish in what seemed like
a protective arrangement around it—golden, stretched out, five-pointed, resembling a
primitive human form. Protective. I wondered if it was also imprisoning. Then I thought
of the fluid movements of the starfish and how it could crawl over and between and
around any obstacles that appeared to block its way.

I thought of the conversation we had had just prior to your creating your sandpicture, the
one in which we spoke of incidents when we knew particular people were not engaged
with us when we talked about our inner worlds and metaphors and symbols, and how
much we treasure that conversation about our inner worlds, metaphors, and symbols,
and how we feel silenced by others’ non-responsiveness and subsequently “clam up”
ourselves. This expression, “clam up,” was not a word used in our conversation but one
which I associate with your description of feeling constrained when talking with such
people. I think that it is a way that we imprison ourselves.

As I type these words, I chuckle that my reflection on your sandpicture which held no
clams should take this course!

Brenda’s Sandpicture #2

Using wet sand, Brenda exposed the blue bottom of the tray in a circular formation
stretching across approximately the middle third of the tray (Figure 59). In the centre of that
circle sits a large white sand dollar, with a blue female figure on top. The seated woman holds a moon mask in front of her face. In the blue area around the central objects, blue glass beads mostly cover the exposed blue bottom of the tray. Across the front of the tray and partly along the sides from the front are pieces of green moss, with a weeping willow tree in the near right quadrant. A female deer stands in the grove of moss in the near left quadrant and a salamander faces towards the left from the right near quadrant. In the rear left quadrant are eight dark green evergreen trees, a small grey pagoda surrounded by small multi-coloured stones, and a shiny black rock on which sits a young Asian- or aboriginal-looking boy with eyes closed, facing the pagoda. In the right rear quadrant are green shrubs, pink roses in bud and full-bloom, and a white rabbit with antlers. On all sides of the central blue circular area, there are expanses of sand on which no objects are placed. While the central blue area pulls my eye initially, repeatedly I am drawn to the boy on the rock and the grey pagoda.

Interestingly, the white sand dollar exoskeleton in the centre of this sandpicture has a five-rayed design inscribed on it, in this case a flower representation. In its natural environment, the sand dollar is similar to the starfish in that both have a water vascular system that helps them move. Water flows through tiny canals in the “feet” which help to propel it along. The sand dollar also has spines which are essential in its locomotion. Symbolically, both these sea creatures, the starfish and the sand dollar, have religious connections, the starfish with the Virgin Mary through its Stella Mare association, and the sand dollar through its relationship with Christ and the crucifixion and resurrection (de Vries, 1984). The rose is also a symbol of the Virgin Mary and the archetypal Great Goddess (de Vries, 1984).

Sticking with the image, as Hillman avers, reinforces the divine aspect suggested by taking a symbolic approach. This sandpicture has a calming effect and a spiritual quality. It
takes on a mandala-like form, with a point of interest in the centre surrounded by circles and with “objects” or anchors in the four corners. As mentioned earlier, Jung suggests that mandalas are often created as calming psychic structures when people are experiencing internal distress or psychological chaos. The sacred aspect is emphasized by the posture of the woman in the centre. She tilts her head upwards, with eyes closed, appearing to don a lunar mask or offer it to the sky. The young boy, too, has an attitude of reverence as he sits with eyes closed in front of the small pagoda encircled by tiny coloured stones. He is watched by the female deer, she by the jackalope, the antlered rabbit. As in a previous sandpicture, the deer (my soul symbol) and the jackalope appear together. The salamander, etymologically related to “fire” through its Persian roots, and a figure of mythology and popular culture, appears to have both the female and male figures in his gaze. A numinous quality is apparent in the sparkling blue stones.

The sand dollar and water pool, along with the roots of the vegetation, imply a depth below the surface seen in the sandpicture. The sand banked up behind the pool increases the impression of depth. The conical trees and the pagoda extend the dimension upwards. Again, the underworld, the material world, and the spiritual realm are represented in this image.

**Brenda’s Story about her Sandpicture #2**

Having just created my sandpicture, I have an overwhelming feeling of unknowing. So, I’ll start with what I started the picture with after wetting the sand and exposing the blue bottom of the tray in a circular form. I recalled a young boy recently telling me about his summer trip to Tobermorey and Flower Pot Island. He described going down into a cavern where the rocks shone blue in a small pool and so I added blue glass stones as my gesture to his profound experience in Nature. He also told me of swimming and the land dropping off sharply to go to unfathomable depths where the water turned from blue to black. So, as another gesture I made a high embankment on one side.

I wanted to put a female figure in the centre of the round pool and chose the woman in the blue dress who can don different masks. I wanted her to be putting on the blue moon mask and I wanted it to be obvious she was putting in on so I attached it with Tacky Wax so it didn’t have to be positioned precisely in her hands—once in a blue moon—what is this “once in a blue moon”?
I knew I had to have roses growing wild in this magical place—these roses are from Korea. My memories are sweet and beautiful (strange words for me to use!) of a time there this summer when I felt fulfilled in a strange way—whole, connected to those in my world in a profound way, healthy, energetic, nourished by my work, relationship, and my solitary time. Perhaps the little rabbit with antlers represents my white rabbitness, feeling strong, and connected—heart, mind and soul—to the Korean people I worked with there.

The white rabbit led Alice down the rabbit hole to an underground world. Contemplating this story, I remember someone’s sandpicture creation in Korea. To the left of the tray on the table on which the tray sat, this person placed a figurine depicting Alice looking at the rabbit hole. In the tray the sandplayer then placed a contemporary couple walking towards the right. In front of them were two spirals, suggesting a further descent. Further to the right were several figures and objects that suggested archetypal energy to me. Considered as a whole, I saw the configuration of miniatures as indicative of a descent to different psychic layers. The sandpicture itself and my flash of insight or realization of what it might mean were profound experiences in that moment.
The pagoda reminds me of the amazing 10-storey stone carved pagoda I saw in the national museum in Seoul. It had been stolen by Japanese conquerors. In 1915, an American and a European journalist created a furor over this incident and the Japanese returned it to the Korean people. It was a numinous, holy experience to gaze at it. In my sandpicture the little boy sits on a black stone, gazing at the pagoda. Oh, now I remember. My colleague, B., and I gave roses and a black stone to the people we trained, along with their certificates for completion of half the required training hours. My experiences in Korea permeate this picture and my psyche!

Eve’s Story about Brenda’s Sandpicture #2

Wow! A shaman sitting on a shell in what appears to be a lake. This figure holds up a mask. A mask reminds me of the actor’s mask—of both delight and sadness. A mask can be a persona and it can be a protective device that shields one from an intrusive world. It holds sacred knowledge from the profane.

The deep blue of the pebbles that surround this mask-holding shaman has a numinous quality.

There is a temple to one side. It has multi-coloured small stones around it. A girl sitting on a rock faces the temple/pagoda. Contemplative animal life in the form of a lizard, a deer and some other animals appear in the vegetation. Lots of growth in the appearance of trees. Roses sprout from one corner. There is a facing in and a facing out. The girl on the black rock faces towards the temple/pagoda and the shaman faces the other way. This brings different elements together. There is a connection.
**Eve’s Sandpicture #3**

In her third visual narrative (Figure 60), Eve used dry sand, moving it with her right hand to expose the blue bottom of the tray in a large central area. This is the first actual representation of the sea, although there were boats and sea creatures in the previous two pictures. On top of the blue area, she placed a large flat grey stone with a reddish, oval rock on top. A seal facing the right near corner lies on top of the red rock. In the left rear quadrant Eve positioned a multi-level house in the water at the edge of the sand. In the rear right quadrant is a tin, multi-coloured house, an orange-and-yellow snail, and a flat, orange, polished disc. To the left of the disc are a blue porcelain horse and a blue and crystal geode slice. They are just to the rear and right of the multi-level house. Further to the left, behind the multi-level house, is a white horse. In the rear left corner is a large red torii (a Japanese gate). Near the left edge of the tray, mid-way between the front and rear of the tray, is a black horse. To the left and right of the large flat stone in the centre are a brown tortoise and a green turtle with a design painted on its shell.

Imposing are the two large stones in the centre of the sandpicture. I think of the term “a secure base” and recall how important the establishment of a secure base (Bowlby, 1988) is in early childhood development and attachment history. This secure base for the seal is in contrast to the base for the Venetian house which is situated in the water. In actuality, Venetian houses require complex construction because of unstable soil foundations on which they are built.

The seal, an aquatic mammal that is well adapted for distance swimming and deep diving, is at the centre of this sandpicture. Symbolically, it can be seen as a mediator between consciousness and the unconscious.

The seal and the length of the red stone are oriented on the diagonal that runs from the rear left to the near right corner. Behind the stone is the red-roofed Venetian multi-leveled house.
and behind it, the red torii. This similar orientation on the diagonal suggests that there is some connection between the seal and rock, the Venetian house, and the torii, threshold to another world. The torii as threshold extends the context to beyond the landscape of the sandtray.

At either side of the torii is a horse, on the left side a black one, on the right side a white one. Similarly, on either side of the rocks with the seal is a turtle, one a sea turtle, one a land turtle, a tortoise. Like the horses, they face inwards. These are examples of a differentiation of opposites, as are the house situated in the water and the house on land, the natural black and white horses and the blue horse suggesting spirit or imagination, and the polished stones and the rough ones. There is also a contrast between the worlds of actuality and fantasy/fairytale that are represented at the rear of the tray to the left and right of the blue geode slice, respectively.

Eve’s Story about her Sandpicture #3

The sea again appears with a seal sitting on a rock. This reminds me of when I was visiting W.H.’s home at Ocean Ranch. This was one of the reunions of the California group that travelled to the goddess sites. We would walk along the cliffs and watch the seals lying on rocks.

The red Chinese gateway I’m not sure what symbol in Chinese it would represent for me. It is a doorway to an interior life.

The tall building with many doors and windows looks European and brings memories of many trips to different countries.

Thinking of Ocean Ranch and looking at the horses, I think of freedom and wildness, letting go of all the restraints society places on us. The colourful house and the red snail are fun aspects of life—imagination—go anywhere, do anything—wherever your imagination takes you.

Turtles are self-contained. They travel carrying their house with them. They never feel insecure.

I love the colour of the two discs, one blue with a design embedded and one a tangerine colour. The discs and the blue horse also are linked with imagination.

There certainly are opposites at work here.
I’m not sure why the tall house sits on the water.

I’m thinking of horses and the movie Equus comes to mind. I hold a memory of a young man riding along a sand-swept shore and afterwards a psychiatrist (Richard Burton) making a diagnosis. I guess I will have to rent the video.

**Brenda’s Story about Eve’s Sandpicture #3**

When you began clearing sand from the bottom of the tray to expose the blue bottom and create water, I thought “Oh, yes, Eve is again representing the water element. Water is important. I think of the emotional realm. Then when you put in the two large flat rocks, I thought of a solid base and wondered what or who you would place on top. When you added the Italian house, I remembered your mentioning your trip to Italy, to Sorrento, I think, with your children. And I thought of my trip to Italy with my daughter, Abbie. I was going to a Sandplay conference in Verona and I took her for a graduation present after she finished her Masters at Concordia.

One day we went to Venice. I was so pleasantly surprised after having seen Death in Venice years before. I didn’t see crumbling buildings or smell putrid water. The day was warm with a golden sun reflecting off buildings and water. We spent some time in the magical garden at the Peggy Guggenheim art museum. Hand-blown glass sculptures hung from the trees gently dancing in the breeze. We sat at a cafe in San Marco Square, drinking espresso and listening to jazz. Two tiny cups of espresso cost $28. I had no hesitation in paying that for coffee, but remembered that I balked at paying $85 for a ride in a gondola.

In your picture, Eve, the Torii stands behind the Venetian house which I had bought in Venice for my Sandplay collection. I recalled that another participant in my research had used the torii recently. Torii—gateway to another world. Now, as I look at it from my position in front of the tray, I see that there are two small horses at either side of the gateway—a black one and a white one. They are facing each other. They don’t strike me so much as guardians of the gate looking out at who might be approaching to pass through the liminal space to a world beyond. They seem to be in recognition of each other—black/white, dark/light, death/life, the opposites—energies that are a part of this world that they are currently in.

The pair of horses causes me to look at the pair of turtles—one approaching the central island from the left, one from the right. They are a sea and a land turtle. Their destination appears to be the double-layered stone base on which the seal rests. I wonder if the turtles will meet each other and the seal on the stone island or if the outcome of their journey will be to rouse the seal from basking in the sun on the rocks and prod him to return to the sea to search for a new perch. A question arises for me from this little imaginal drama—relationship or solitariness, which will it be? What is the ideal balance? How do we find it? Sometimes I crave more solitary time. Sometimes I yearn for more intimate relationship.
Basking in the sun. Diving into the ocean. Consciousness. The unconsciousness. The opposites.

Brenda’s Sandpicture #3

After adding water to the sand, Brenda worked at mixing it for a few minutes (Figure 61). After molding the sand into a few configurations, she finally made two wing-like formations on the left and right sides of the tray, and a narrow ridged area in the centre of the tray. This narrow area ran from the back to the front where she created a small rounded area in the centre and two projections of sand on the right and left sides of the rounded area. She stuck into the sand on each side of the small rounded area a small silver star on a stem. She draped a string of gold stars along the raised area running from the rear to the front of the tray. On each side of the centre formation, she created circle-like formations with small blue glass beads, subsequently creating a small circle at the centre of each in which she placed a tiny red heart. She then divided the areas between the large and small circles with four short lines of blue glass beads, forming quadrants within each of the large circle-like formations. Within these four quadrants, she placed black and golden glass beads forming rear and front golden areas and left and right black areas. The beaded area on the left of centre is longer and narrower than the area on the right.

The sandtray structurally is divided into a left and a right section, with a ridge of sand in the centre highlighted by golden stars and two little sprigs of silver wire with silver stars. The opposites! Although the patterns created in each half of the tray are not identical, they are close enough to call them a differentiation of opposites. Similarly, the colours of black (or dark grey) and gold within the circular shapes outlined and divided by blue beads can be considered to be opposites (e.g., representing consciousness and the unconscious). The designs in the left and
right sides of the tray could also be considered mandala-like, with a “point” in the centre (in this case, a small red heart), a small blue surrounding circle, division into four areas and a large surrounding circle. The shape formed by molding the sand, along with the details of the centre area, suggests a butterfly-like pattern, with designs on the wings.

Brenda’s Story about her Sandpicture #3

When I was adding water to the sand and tossing the sand to mix it with the water, a shape in the tray began to emerge. I realized that it was exactly the same shape that had emerged in a previous session with one of my other research participants. Then I had tried to form it into a woman with hands raised and then a kind of mountain range appeared, dividing the tray into two parts, into left and right sides.

This time, the association of “butterfly” came to me. I decided to go with it and created two wing-like forms in the left and right sides. I thought “two,” the opposites. The concept has been here with me today. Then I decided to fill in the wing designs with glass beads. I first used the gold beads and then picked the darker ones which happen to be silver—oh, opposites again! When I came to put antennae on the butterfly, I tried to cut some little gold wires with gold stars from an ornamental tree. I couldn’t cut the wire with my tiny scissors, so I decided to make do with silver stars on a silver wire that I didn’t have to cut. Then, to decorate the body of the butterfly, I spontaneously took a long chain of gold stars. Hmmm. Silver antennae. Gold star body decorations. Again the opposites. Silver and gold. Consciousness. The unconscious. Matriarchal and patriarchal unconscious.

As I write, I remember a dream I had last night about the farm which is in my life through my paternal line by way of my grandmother, my father’s mother. In the dream, I looked out the kitchen window to see some men causing large rocks to fall down from a hill into a slight valley. The geography is not really like this in real life. The men were also toppling gravestones from a small family cemetery that was there in the dream but is not in reality. I decided to phone 911 for help but couldn’t get through because the men had cut the line and were now in the house. My uncle Don and I tried to communicate a message to each other about a plan to escape their threats, but we couldn’t do so. Then I woke up. It’s very interesting as I type this story on November 20th from my handwritten one done on October 19th, I remember that when Don and I couldn’t communicate our plan to each other, I screamed, being lucid to some degree in the dream that at first no sound came out and, as I kept trying, sound finally emerged. That night, I actually did scream aloud, one of about four times during that month that I screamed out loud, waking myself and Dick up. I later did a collage and some work around the scream bursting through from the unconscious (to be described at a later time).

Last night before I went to bed, the night I had the dream, I had been thinking about the farm. I have no time to be there and no time or energy to maintain it while I do all that I
do and take care of my mother here in the city as well. I want to keep what will be my share of it for Abbie. I feel I will never realize what were once my dreams for it—having an artists’ retreat—because of a lack of energy and funds to do so. Perhaps she will create a yoga retreat there someday.

Butterfly. Transformation. How will it manifest?

Eve’s Story about Brenda’s Sandpicture #3

As Brenda was placing the glass beads and carefully making sure how they were all right-side up, I thought of her talking of transcribing the [tapes of the] very soft-spoken small girl and the great effort she took to try to capture her words. The same patience and determination seemed to be present, indeed was present here. Also, when trying to cut branches off a gold-coloured tree, there was a determination, only after many tries did she change direction.

When Brenda divided the sand into two separate sections, I thought of the opposites. When I saw the near completion of placing the glass beads, the game of Chinese checkers came to mind. On looking more closely, I saw the blue beads outlined the outer circumference also separated the different sections. The gold triangle. Four sections—the other two a blue grey colour with a tiny heart in the centre. This might represent the four elements, earth, fire, water, air, the quaternity, all held together by love, the loving heart. “Love makes the world go round.” The chain of gold stars that sits on the dividing mound of sand represents stars, sky, the heavens. Both sides are similar, really the same.

Gold – moon – sun
Blue – sky – water
Red heart – feelings – love – emotions
Above as below.

Research Sessions with Maria

Just before we began data collection, Maria had a health crisis and was scheduled for surgery within a couple of months. On pain medication until then, she still suffered from pain, inhibited mobility, and sleep interruptions. Nevertheless, she was adamant about continuing as a research participant because she thought she could learn something about herself and her physical challenges during the process. I felt compelled to adapt our schedule to accommodate her and so I shortened the length of our sessions and modified the process as we went along,
depending upon her comfort level. The result was that she created only two sandpictures instead of three, and wrote only two stories. Her attention during our sessions was very self-focused. Not wanting to burden her by asking her to focus outward, I decided that I would not create sandpictures in our sessions. Her keen interest to participate to the greatest extent possible and my feeling that her communications about her health challenge would be meaningful to her, as well as to my research, led me to dismiss thoughts of passing up the opportunity to have Maria participate in the study. I simply determined to take as much care as I could while we shared her stories.

**Maria’s Sandpicture #1**

In Maria’s first sandpicture, there are many figures (33) with little unused space in the tray (Figure 62). There is no clear central area in this sandpicture, so I arbitrarily delineate a section in the centre for descriptive purposes that includes a brown, polished stone, six-pointed star with a small flower in the centre, a yellow crescent moon, an octagonal mirror on top of which are a silver heart and several gold stars, a black polished stone heart, and three yellow small glass hearts. At the rear of this area is a dragon emerging from an egg. In front of the central area as defined is a pair of purple women’s shoes with pink flowers on top. In the left near quadrant are a large male lion, with a baby lion under its chin and a baby tiger closer to the front of the tray, looking at the lions. In the rear left quadrant are a golden five-rayed starfish, three small glitter stars, a rainbow, a fire-breathing green dragon, a red torii (Japanese gate) at the rear edge, and a sun standing in the rear left corner. In the right rear quadrant are a large wizard in a yellow robe and green hat holding a crystal ball in his left hand, a small pewter wizard holding a staff in his left hand and a crystal ball in his right hand, a large mushroom, a rustic stable and manger, five mushrooms along the rear right edge, and a yellow road barrier. In
the right near quadrant are a square white pagoda, a transparent globe, a crystal sailing vessel, a knight with a long spear and a sword, a small pewter fairy, and a large piece of purple amethyst with a pewter unicorn on top.

Upon first glance at the image of this sandpicture, I feel a sense of confusion. I can detect unsettling sensations of pulsing energy and heaviness in my chest area. Having experienced these sensations many times before when witnessing the creation of sandpictures and trying to make sense of them after a client has left the therapy room, I sit with my unknowing. My eye keeps returning to the central area I designated above. After a few minutes of gazing, I note the extension of this area laterally to the right with the transparent globe and to the left with the large golden starfish, the three glittery gold stars, the rainbow and the sun in the left rear corner. Although they are not celestial forms in actuality, the hearts seem to cohere with the other objects just mentioned. I imagine that the cosmos has spilled out into the sandtray. From this place in the universe there are gateways to other worlds in the form of the rainbow bridge and the torii. Just as I describe the cosmos as spilling out into the sandtray, I sense that the sandplayer has spilled out her imaginative meanderings.

The objects in this section of the tray represent archetypal forms: the globe, the five- and six-pointed stars, the heart, the crescent moon, the rayed sun, the octagon of the mirror, and the visible arc of the rainbow which we can imagine to be a circle if we include the invisible aspect. As I enumerate these forms, I recall the dream already mentioned (p. 94) of this document. The setting of the dream was an art gallery/storefront on King or Queen Street. Suspended from the ceiling of the second floor was a very large sandtray. With a simple sweep of my hand, I could manifest in the sandtray forms which a moment before had been invisible. With a simple sweep
of my hand, archetypal energies took the form of common shapes. I recall a statement of Jung that the hands can often solve a problem that the psyche has wrestled with for years.

I also recall how excited I was to read about the work of Rossi (2002) on gene expression and the effect of activity-dependent experiences on healing because it seemed to speak at least partially to the healing properties of Sandplay Therapy. Rossi suggests that gene expression is involved in healing, as well as in the initial development of a structurally and functionally sound energetic system in the individual. We know from brain research that, in the service of survival and growth and development, more synaptic systems than necessary are produced and some are subsequently eliminated through biochemical pruning or “apoptosis.” As well as being a naturally occurring phenomenon, this pruning process is sometimes triggered by trauma, stress, and disease. In his hypotheses about healing, Rossi (2002) writes about the antithesis of this process of apoptosis: neurogenesis and brain growth, and their stimulation by creative experiences, life enrichment, some alternative medicines, psychotherapy, and therapeutic hypnosis. Rossi was inspired in his work by Eric Kandel who received the 2000 Nobel Prize for physiology. Kandel wrote about the sustained effectiveness of psychotherapy in terms of learning that involves alterations in connections between nerve cells of the brain. This involves changes in gene expression that strengthen synaptic connections and alter structures. Rossi elaborates on the inter-relationship of life experiences and gene expression, protein synthesis, neurotransmitters, neurogenesis, and development of associative neural networks in building a brain that functions and adapts well. He identifies a class of genes known as “immediate early genes” as links between body, brain, and mind. He suggests that they respond to psychosocial cues and significant life events that involve novelty, numinosity, and life enrichment. These life events include creative experience in the arts, cultural rituals, spiritual practices, everyday peak
experiences, and certain forms of therapy. Because Sandplay Therapy depends upon the use of hands for its implementation, I felt inspired to learn more, much of which is possible because of technological advances in brain imaging equipment and other neurobiological assessments.

Rossi (2002) reminds us that the mind-brain space is over-sized for the hands, which are used in “novel, activity-dependent approaches to creative experience” (p. 443), including Sandplay. This means that the somatosensory cortex has a larger surface area through which to receive associations from other brain areas. Related to this area is a class of genes identified by Rossi as “experience or activity dependent genes.” These genes generate the synthesis of proteins and neurogenesis involved in new memory, learning, and behaviour.

Research in the health sciences indicates that stem cells located in the brain and the body are a mechanism for recovery from stress, trauma, and injury because they inherently carry an ability to express whatever genes are needed (Vogel, 2000). “Molecular messengers” emitted by stress, trauma, and injury activate immediate early genes within stem cells, signaling the genes to synthesize proteins that will transform or differentiate the stem cells into well-functioning tissues. These new cells replace injured or dysfunctional cells which are susceptible to death by apoptosis. Stress hormones, such as glucocorticoids, inhibit neurogenesis.

Rossi (2002) emphasizes that genes do not determine single-handedly what happens to the brain and the body. Rather, brain, body, and genome interact with social influences (conscious and unconscious) to switch human genes on and off. These are processes characteristic of the inner healing landscape referred to by Jung. They are processes involved in change, decision-making, and learning of which motivation is a significant characteristic. According to Rossi, the new learning is not transmitted genetically to subsequent generations. It is transmitted culturally.
Salient qualities, such as wonder, awe, joy, interest, excitement, and love that an infant sees reflected in his or her mother’s face may turn on a specific “immediate early gene,” called “Zif-268.” This gene generates a neural growth factor that optimizes neurogenesis and brain growth. Similarly, low or flat affect, withdrawal, hesitancy in responding, aversion to physical contact, and other rejecting or non-responsible behaviours in the mother may turn off her child’s genes that are involved in brain development. At an extreme, the mother’s negative affect and behaviours towards her child may result in the “suicide” of those genes through apoptosis. My statement may be considered by some people as “mother blaming,” while my intentions are not to blame mothers but to encourage our cultural institutions to provide adequate assistance for caregivers who are depressed, neglectful, and/or abusive and protection for children. My intention also is to explore how personal knowledge structures are inextricably intertwined with larger cultural knowledge structures. I wish also to emphasize that we cannot separate art from science and personal experience and behaviour from social policy and intervention, whether at the level of education or treatment. I wonder to what extent brain research in included within the department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning. Although I admit to only a cursory look at the CTL website, especially the “Issues That Matter” webpage, it seems that this area is not addressed.

Connecting with my “lifelong learning” energy, I am illustrating that this is the kind of route that I pursue in many areas of my life. I want to know what lies underneath the surface of behaviour, how and why “things” work as they do. I want to know how I as teacher or therapist can ignite curiosity about deep layers of our experience, understandings, and actions. I want to know more about how I can communicate what I learn from my personal experience and larger knowledge structures, how I can help make bridges between various disciplines (e.g., Sandplay
Therapy and neurobiology) and try to expand the language of those disciplines so that we can bridge them. This is what I am attempting to do with Sandplay therapy, trainees and novice therapists, and Sandplay’s critics and skeptics.

Spiraling around, back to Maria’s sandpicture and my resonance with my dream, I recall my pondering over how to represent my data in an artistic form since writing my paper for Professor David Booth’s Creative Arts course. Lately I have been distanced from that, although I had not resolved it. My focus has been on writing and wishing to finish within a tight timeline made tighter with my impending surgery, ongoing Korean Sandplay training project, and intensive Sandplay training in Toronto in May. Lately I have felt I cannot allow myself to become distracted from writing by focusing on how I might artistically display this work in a way that provokes others to express their narratives in visual and verbal form or, at the very least, to be curious about their own stories. And yet I wonder why the topic of visible/invisible comes to me now along with the resonance with the dream. Perhaps it has to do with what I could call “the illogicality” of this sandpicture that brings me back to why I am engaged in this work.

“If you could do anything in the world, what would you do?” asked the dream. “What does my soul want of me?” I asked. “The spilling out of the cosmos,” I wrote above. I recall one of the things that Dancer communicated to me at the beginning of my doctoral work: that it must be fun. I can’t say that it has been fun lately. I feel I am out of touch with a spirit I felt at the beginning. Sometimes I wonder how to get back to it. Lately I have been distracted physically and psychologically by health issues. This has been disconcerting for me because I have had a life of good health and carried a reputation for being strong. A little over a year ago, I was engaged in clearing out my mother’s farmhouse and placing her in permanent care.
Shortly after that, I participated in a Sandplay workshop held at a colleague’s home. While there, I created a sandpicture (see Figure 65) that connected me with my long-standing fatigue and, subsequently, its effect on my energy level and body pain. At the time of data collection with Maria, I was focused on her health challenges, not my own. Now, like Maria during our data collection sessions, I find it difficult to focus outward, yet feel compelled to do so to get my dissertation finished.

As my attention returns to the image of Maria’s first sandpicture, I notice that the long lance of the knight in the right near quadrant extends the celestial area that effectively divides the tray into two other sections. The knight’s lance seems to point towards the baby dragon being birthed from an egg in the rear of the tray. This dragon, along with the green, fire-breathing adult dragon, and the two wizards are figures of the imagination. They come to us through myths and fairytales that are accessible intentionally through various forms of media and spontaneously as certain contents of the collective unconscious come to consciousness through dreams and artistic expression. They remind me of a statement of Conle (2003) that “we resonate with elements of stories that are part of a larger knowledge structure” (p. 5). I also recall the importance of the dragon in Korean mythology as a symbol of transformation that occurs through conscious endurance practised for a very long time (“timeless” in mythological terms). I wonder what is being birthed in Maria’s imagination. I wonder how she has transformed through conscious endurance. I cannot separate myself from her sandpicture and what might be birthing and transforming in her. I am an integral part of her experience in this situation and must also ask, “What is being birthed in my imagination? How have I transformed through conscious (and unconscious) endurance? In contrast to the powerful imaginative elements of the dragons and wizards are the two humble abodes, with the mushrooms growing
alongside. They remind me that imaginative birth and transformation are not about grandiosity on behalf of the ego, just as my dissertation process is not about fulfilling ego energy. I hold in my mind and heart my early question, “What does my soul want of me?” I do not yet know.

Considering again Maria’s sandpicture, I note that figures of the imagination are also present in the near portion of the tray in the form of the knight, the pewter fairy, the pewter unicorn on the large piece of amethyst, and the transparent ship. The energies of the imagination that these figures represent are in contrast to the animalistic instinctive energies shown in the forms of the large male lion, the baby lion, and the baby tiger. As I ponder over the juxtaposition of the instinctive and imaginative energy forms, I recall the abundance of sandpictures I have seen during sustained periods of clinical supervision in Korea and the number of times I have observed the relationship of imaginative and instinctive energies to the development of ego energy that is effective in the material world. In simple terms, we can think of people’s visions that often first occur at an imaginal level. In order to materialize these visions, people must have a conscious intention to do so, embody the vision cognitively and emotionally so that their motivation can fuel their plans and strategies, and then act upon those plans and strategies. Without the energy of agency that comes with consciousness, people are unable to carry their visions forward into the material world. This inability is what sometimes causes anxiety and other forms of distress, and may motivate people to seek therapy.

From my conversations with Maria, I am aware of the extent to which she has actualized her visions. As I know her, she is truly a woman who walks in her own shoes, in this case, very feminine ones, purple with pink flowers on them!

Maria’s Story about her Sandpicture #1

First of all, I believe in magic even when I think I don’t. Many years had passed since I felt like being in a little rather comfortable cabin like the one in this story of mine where I
could see and touch a baby dragon if I just walked out of the cabin. Well, that seems like a long time ago—and is like yesterday.

Being all alone, far away from other humans, was never a problem for me—especially if there were cats, or other animals around that I could relate to like a simple stone. Today I have created a perfect dream place for me—a little cabin, great healthy mushrooms to grill, a couple of friends with special powers—magical powers—somebody to defend me just in case, a full moon at night, daytime sun. What else? Lions. I love the power of these amazing cat-like creatures, a full-blooded dragon to fly me anywhere, a great pair of shoes that I can go to a party—I already have the dress. Well, maybe I cannot write a story after all the way it is supposed to be.

Maybe my way out of this should be to get my sailboat that I left parked not far from my cabin, in this beautiful part of this amazing island, called Soñadora, Dreamer. It is not far from anywhere. Maybe I could go and visit somebody, or I could go walk in the Great Wall of China. Hmmm. I’m not sure.

What I want to do really: this writing makes me feel like I could like to be able to write a story better. I do not think I can really write a story the way I could say it. So! Till next time, folks.

So, saying this you have to remember that English is my second language [laughs]. Till next time. So, when I am writing I leave words out and I am self-conscious of it. But even in this language I am very laconic to write, I I write, but I can say things better than write.

Brenda’s Story about Maria’s Sandpicture #1

This is a magical land in which transformation occurs. I resonated with something Maria said as she was creating the sandpicture and putting in the dragon emerging from the egg. It was something like: “I think we experience little deaths and rebirths all the time.” I experience in this moment a dissolving of any boundaries between researcher and researched, between Self and Other, between me and her.

As I look at the sandpicture and think back to all Maria has said today, I think that the picture is a representation of a woman’s life being lived, as she and I have lived our lives as feeling thinking dynamic female beings. Our relational experiences are sometimes ones in which we are nurtured and we nurture, and sometimes ones on which we look from the outside to nurturing and being nurtured.

As I write I think of my own early childhood when my mother was very busy raising several children while my father worked away from home, only to return on weekends. I think of their over-protectiveness on one level and their emotional distancing on another. And yet they gave me a sense of being valuable, loved, capable, and responsible. They also transmitted nonverbally to me that I could endure with a strong sense of
independence, a quality which has served me well when in relationships that have both fulfilled and disappointed me.

As I look at Maria’s picture and consider the symbolic representations of the figures she has used, I experience powerful energy in my heart area, an energy of love and conflict, an energy of speaking and screaming out, an energy of journeying in the world and through life, an energy of entering into a new dimension—going under the rainbow, going through the gate or entranceway and, by doing so, being initiated into a new phase or dimension of life—and walking in my own shoes. When I am at home, I live and walk in my bare feet. It is one of my ways of connecting to the earth with no cushioning in between what is there in my grounded reality and my sole/soul. In collages, I have used bare feet as a symbol of my embodied knowing. It is only through my body and embodied mind that I can know. As I look at the purple flowered shoes, I think—if I am going to walk in someone’s shoes, they must be my own. These particular shoes suggest to me a feminine way and one characterized by Beauty. These words prescribe an attitude of relationship and a path reflected by the Navajo perspective of the Beauty Way, implying aesthetics and balance and authenticity and connection with Nature in a microcosmic and macrocosmic way.

Again, looking at Maria’s sandpicture, I connect with instinct and imagination, materiality and spirituality, humility and transcendence, lunar and solar and assertive and defensive energies. They are contained in Maria’s sandpicture and in our very beings. We come to them by living out a heartfelt and reflective existence, one which we strive to make transparent and visible.

I feel we are kindred souls, a realization that brings tears to my eyes.

**Maria’s Sandpicture #2**

Curious about the figures Maria used in this picture (Figure 63), I note a more orderly quality that I perceived with her sandpicture #1. Here, the centre area includes several items: a large round geode with a pink-and-white teapot on top; a golden spiral shell; a golden starfish with three smaller gold glitter stars on top, and two large pieces of barnacle. Running through this section from the left side to the right side of the tray is a line of five brown telephone poles. In the left near quadrant are a large piece of rock quartz, a carrousel, a blue seated female figure holding a small piece of polished pink quartz, and a large white candle. In the rear left quadrant are two blue flowered living-room chairs and footstool, a large church, and a gold bathtub. In the rear right quadrant are an exhausted-looking couple with a baby bottle, a golden sun on a
blue background, a baby dragon emerging from an egg, a yellow crescent moon, a golden, four-petalled flower, a peacock with tail feathers spread out in a fan, and a white clam shell with five brass acorns on it. In the near right quadrant are a pair of ancient Chinese men, seated, with a game between them, a laughing (Hotai) Buddha with a white sack over his shoulder, and a grey elephant. At the centre front of the tray is a small open area with no figures.

The objects in the centre seem clumped together, forming a rough circular area. Beyond that, there seems to be another circular area beginning with the fatigued parents (at 12 o’clock) and proceeding clockwise, the golden flower, the brass acorns, the two Chinese men, the elephant, the rock quartz, the carrousel, the space between the church and the golden shell, and the golden bathtub. The circle in the centre and the surrounding circle bring a mandala form to mind, with the dragon emerging from the egg in the rear right corner, the laughing Buddha in the near right corner, the meditating blue woman with the pink quartz in the near left corner, and the church in the left rear corner. These figures in the four corners have a spiritual quality. I think of Jung’s conclusion that people who are feeling internal chaos sometimes create mandala forms in art, part of the self-healing tendency of the psyche. I also note an element that seems to be incongruous to the other aspects of the sandpicture: the fatigued couple at the opposite side of the tray from where Maria stood to create the picture. In our conversation preceding her expression in the sand, Maria had talked about the severity of her pain from her sciatic nerve problem and her fatigue in trying to cope with it.

Maria’s Story about her Sandpicture #2

*Why writing is so difficult for me? That’s a question anyway.*

*Anyway, long time ago, I would love to have been a dragon. It feels so right to have that feeling, and live with the stars, moon, and nature, etc.*
Then to be a monk, maybe close to the Great Wall of China, being able to learn how to be just with nature and take long walks beside elephant. Maybe to visit other monks in need of company, or maybe just to learn something more about life in that time.

*Can this qualify to be eggs?* [pointing to brass acorns] *That what I want them to be.*

Eggs – to continue again – to be born somewhere – again starts – nature and something else – electricity – ocean – water – stones – and more stones? And then another beginning, a lovely house – candles. We use a lot of candles.

Tea time, my favourite, water cooked in a fire from wood – mother having babies all the time, father never helps with them. However, that was a great time in my life.

Carrousel – horses – good friends to me – so are dogs.

Looking at this Sandplay box, I really feel that every item that I put there is so meaningful.

*It seems to me that I have been in every century possible – or been everything that I could possibly be. If that is true, Whoa!*

**Brenda’s Story about Maria’s Sandpicture #2**

When I look at the new parents and infant I think of exhaustion – not enough sleep because of the infant’s demands/needs – and think of your exhaustion with your pain and news that you need surgery. I also think of my relief today when I knew we had an extra hour because the clocks went back from Daylight Saving to Standard time. I could literally feel relief in my body as I felt it relax. I feel as though I don’t get enough sleep these days and am conscious of not wanting to devote 8 or 9 hours a night to sleep. I tell myself, “I have too much to do.” I acknowledge that I am choosing that. I am interested in giving my attention to my several “projects,” my creative interests in their many forms, including creating my life in a particular way. I will write more about this later – older women creating a life – I feel it might have to be a chapter!

As I look at your sandpicture, I see so many resources – a bathtub, “I like baths,” you said; two chairs and a footstool, good for conversation with a friend; a large candle emphasizing light and warmth and fire in an environment and a relationship; a meditating woman with a healing pink quartz, connecting with her own inner world; also an amethyst for healing; barnacles, remnants of the sea; golden eggs and flower, along with golden stars and conch, sun and moon, the transpersonal; the mystical dragon bursting out of its egg with many golden eggs still to hatch, the new, magical, spiritual, alchemical; the elephant and Buddha, symbols of spirituality as with the church in the opposite corner (you wanted it to be a house – house of spirit, I say, which is how I see the body); a large teapot on a large beautiful hearth, another resource and connector in relationship, like the telephone poles. I wonder, “How much do we communicate “not in person,” but by email and phone, with those who are important to us. The telephone poles make me think of my Swiss dream about the workers underground repairing all the
energy and communication lines not just for Zollikon in Switzerland but for the whole world.

Maria, I think of your sciatic nerve and the cysts tightening around your spinal cord. I think of the reparative surgery you will soon have. This brings to my attention the microcosmic and the macrocosmic and the tension of the opposites – work/play, taking care of others and ourselves, the spiritual and material, the personal and transpersonal, instinctive and imaginal, subtle and gross, earth/sky, water/fire. These concepts and qualities and attributes, and material and energetic forms and processes are all important to me in my experience of life, and in your life as your sandpicture suggests.

Brenda’s Additional Sandpictures

Brenda’s Additional Sandpicture #1

In addition to my creation of sandpictures with my co-participants, Bell and Eve, I created two sandpictures following data collection with them. These two events occurred at the home of a colleague who has trained in a type of therapeutic approach using sandtrays and figurines that is different from Kalffian Sandplay. Part of our recent interactions with each other have involved our efforts to learn about each other’s practice and to determine in what ways they are the same and different. In the first case, my colleague R. was offering an introductory workshop for people interested in learning more about her approach. She invited me to participate for one of the two days. During that time, I created the sandpicture shown in Figure 64. The second event involved R. and a colleague who also trained in the same type of approach as R., and M., my colleague who was trained in Kalffian Sandplay Therapy. We met to discuss similarities and differences and to create sandpictures with each other. This document is not the place to discuss those differences, with the exception of what is obvious in the photograph of my sandpicture from that event (Figure 65).

In the first of these two sandpictures (Figure 64), the tray used is round. Such a choice is untypical for Kalffian Sandplay Therapy. Kalff used specific dimensions for a rectangular tray
(28 ½” x 18 ½” x 3”). She believed that these precise dimensions had specific benefits, such as maximizing vision of the whole picture without turning the head, and localizing tension within limited boundaries that act as a regulating and protecting factor so the client does not feel emotionally overwhelmed or too scattered in focus. As well, she felt that the rectangular shape of the sandtray allowed for a clear manifestation of psychological processes, such as the differentiation of opposites and a tendency towards centering and circularity, processes that reflect wholeness and personality integration. When these manifestations occur in a rectangular tray, they are considered to result from healing and/or psychological development experienced and manifested by the Sandplay client, rather than from the influence of the tray’s shape. Even more than a year after creating this sandpicture, I feel a strong attraction to it and have difficulty in releasing myself from its power. It has a numinous and dreamlike quality for me, imparting a sense of the sacred.

The circular form of the tray is repeated in the circular collection of translucent, egg-shaped glass stones in the centre of the tray and the circular centre area of the turtle sculpture to the left of the glass stones. Several archetypal forms are represented besides the circle: the spiral, the ovoid, the cone. The vertical plane is accentuated through the tall pine tree and the head of the aboriginal man. The horizontal plane is emphasized through the implied path of the snake, the small turtle, and the several objects and living beings resting on the ground. The turtle sculpture contains water which is also implied by the seashells scattered around. Differentiated opposites are manifested in several forms, including the aboriginal woman and sculpted head of the aboriginal man attached to the turtle container and the male and female deer. The head of the aboriginal man is disembodied, whereas the woman seems to celebrate her body by making it special through her jewelry and flowers on her dress. Near the male aboriginal
figure is a wolf, an animal of the earth, and near the female figure, hidden by the rushes, is a loon and her chicks, animals of the sky and water. Interestingly, the cries of the wolf and loons resemble each other in their mournfulness. Paralleling the adult and baby loon relationship, a small turtle beside the large turtle container suggests an adult/child relationship. The stones and shells contain light and dark colours and conical and roundish shapes. The setting of the picture is desert-like, yet an oasis-like image is projected with signs of growth and potential in the shrubs, trees, and seeds in front of the woman and in the bowl she holds, and the water and water-like glass stones. Food (in the form of the seeds) and water are there to feed the instinctive energies represented by the animals. A circular/linear contrast exists in the image of the woman who seems to be part of a semicircular formation, whereas the masculine figure is behind a line formed by the snake, the turtle sculpture, the wolf, and the deer.

From one angle, the piece of driftwood behind the woman seems to be protective or containing in that its “arms” surround her. From another angle, the arms of the driftwood seem like wings on the woman. This seems to bring in spiritual energy on the right side of the picture that balances out the spirit that I perceive in the left side of the picture through the head of the aboriginal man, the white wolf and the deer. The energy of the grounded, earthy woman can rise on wings, while that of the masculine spirit form, anchored by the turtle sculpture, can descend to earth. An attitude of relatedness is apparent, with the figures either looking across the centre at each other, relating to each other, or looking towards the centre of the tray, relating to the centre, one’s centre, one’s Self. The energy of meeting and union of the masculine and feminine also suggests a meeting of the microcosmic and macrocosmic, of Nature and Spirit, of personal and transpersonal, of personal and archetypal. While there is an atmosphere of quiet repose,
there is also a dynamism suggested in the movement of the small turtle and the snake towards the centre.

Over the past fifteen years I have created many sandpictures. More often than not I have represented myself with aboriginal figures. Feeling an affinity with them, I have never felt them as “Other” as I did initially with the veiled women who appear in my collages. Although I have no genealogical evidence as yet (and do intend at some point in my life to gather it), I suspect that I have aboriginal blood through my maternal grandmother’s bloodline.

Following creation of this sandpicture, my witnessing partner and I did not write stories about our creations. Because of that I will let one of the figures “speak” now. Feeling very connected to the aboriginal woman, I will let her tell her story.

I am a simple woman who loves this place in Nature where I am restored and feel that I, like the other beings, belong here and yet hold a vulnerable and seemingly insignificant place. I feel a sense of harmony in this world, and yet perceive that its stability is fragile. I am in awe of The Beauty of all Nature: the diversity of rocks and shells, animals and plants and humankind, and the creations of humankind.... I know there can be a terrible side to this beauteous energy that can wipe out species, cultures, individuals, clusters of cells, plots, and plans at any moment.

Like the seeds I hold in my bowl and scatter on the ground, we contain a potential for new life and growth, and are contained by something beyond us. A place for all—and more—exists, for what is visible and invisible.

Masculine imago, I wonder who you are. Spirit? Imagination? Animus? Beloved? I invite you in to “our” space because you seem to approach humbly. I see that you stay “behind the line” until you know you are welcomed to our world. My perception is that you are not barging in aggressively, intruding in direct confrontation, assuming proprietorship. Ah! I notice my contradiction. I have conditions for you, in this “place for all.” You cannot take over! Assuming your place, you must not assume mine! Instinctively I protect myself and our place.

Can you be still and silent and listen to our creature voices? Can you take care as you step around the shells and rocks so as not to crush us or crack us open? Can you open yourself to include us rather than defend against us? Can you respond to us rather than in spite of us? I recognize you easily in others. Who are you in me?
Brenda’s Additional Sandpicture #2

The second of two sandpictures created with colleagues is illustrated below (Figure 65). This sandpicture affected me powerfully when I created it, evoking tears and an unanticipated and exhausted acceptance of my truth. I have viewed and reviewed this image dozens of times in the past year and still feel its saliency. I also feel gratitude for its emergence into my consciousness because it has helped me resolve a family issue.

Black sand (available in my colleague’s Sandplay room) is not typically used in Kalffian Sandplay Therapy. The day that I created this sandpicture, it appealed strongly to me. By chance, the black sand was contained within a white tray, also untypical for Kalffian Sandplay in which trays lined with blue are usually used. In the centre, sand was brushed away to expose a blue circular area with lily pads and tiny pink flowers on top. Most of the front section of the tray is covered with rocks of various sizes. These include a large chunk of purple amethyst just left of centre. In the rear section of the tray are only a few rocks. In the left near quadrant, on top of a large rock, is a fox. In the rear left area of the tray are three black, bare trees, with a young girl sitting in from of them. The trees are suggestive of a burnt-out forest. At centre rear is a rock. In the right rear section are a bare birch tree and a red-leafed tree. In front of the trees, behind a rock is a small green snake. On a large rock at the centre of the right edge is a green and brown salamander. Diagonally from the near right corner is a rock “crone” facing towards the centre. In front of her on the black sand are nine brown milkweed seeds and a few white downy tufts. Behind her is a milkweed stem with a split pod revealing compressed white downy tufts. The rock crone and the young girl face each other, with the pond between them.

In this scene, the foreground is a rocky world. I, the young girl had arrived in this world, exhausted and vulnerable. What follows is part of an email I sent to my colleagues after we had
met to create sandpictures together, with one partner creating and one partner witnessing. This experiential activity preceded our discussion about differences between Sandplay Therapy and another form of therapy using sand in small trays and figurines.

*Hi M., R. and S.*

You have all been in my heart and my mind since we were together. Mindful of the question about "difference" that may exist between Sandtray and Sandplay, I share some of my process as I hold the question initially posed by R. and S. What I present here is an unfoldment because I haven't made a list or anything. What follows is not the shortest distance between A and B!

*I think the words of the crone of my sandpicture struck me deeply--"It's OK. You don't have to do anything. You can just be."--and gave me permission to do just that. Since we were together I have been feeling my fatigue which has been a long time accumulating, perhaps from the age of eight or nine, the age of that young girl who'd arrived at that amazing place. I have had many insights about that journey that she described as long and difficult.*

After being together, despite the beckoning of many tasks, I felt compelled to read a book that has been on my shelf unread for several years: *Coming to Age: The Croning Years and Late-Life Transformation* by Jane Pretat. She writes:

>We often experience such a descent as loss of verve in our outer lives. It's as if the energy previously available to the demands of daily living were suddenly withdrawn and invested in a growth fund in the unconscious. . . . Something happens beyond our control and we find ourselves in a state of ennui. The simplest tasks seem monumental. This may last a day or it may last much longer. In some instances the depletion of energy can last for months or even years, as the work goes on in the unconscious.

*I know that the work goes on in the unconscious, even when I don't give in to the process. In some instances I give in. In some, I don't. What has happened since we were together is that I have given in more than usual. I have gazed often at the photos of my sandpicture. I have allowed myself to stay with my emotions that surface when I sit with the images. I have given much time to acknowledging how difficult I find it to get up and move, both physically and psychologically. I really only want to move physically when it is time to take the dog for her walk because we go to the local woods and ravine where we can see raccoon climbing a tree, snake crossing our path, young squirrels chasing each other in circles up and down trees (like spiral journeying up and down the Tree of Life playfully and in relationship), woodpecker drilling a dead tree, and a pair of mallards flying low just above the stream bed. . . . And this was just yesterday morning! I don't want to go out, to socialize, to shop, to chat, to visit my mother, to take care of business, although I sometimes feel that I have to and do so. I don't want to engage in*
the many professional activities I am called on to do, although I compel myself to do some of them, as well as some other tasks that require me to meet time limits.

It is not news to me that I am at a transitional phase in my life. After all, I used it to define my focus of study for my thesis by defining "older women" as those between mid-life and old age. My sandpicture, done within the context of you three "younger" women, has been a gift and great blessing because of the imagery it has presented to me.

As I write these words, an expression comes to mind: An Inconvenient Truth, which is the title of Al Gore's work on global warming. It is certainly anything but convenient to be experiencing what I am at this moment because I have so much to do. It is also essential that I experience and acknowledge it. This is my story at this moment in time.

(May 7, 2007)

Today, one day before my surgery and two weeks plus a year after I wrote the above email, I return to this chapter, wanting to finish it so I can start my next chapter after my medical procedure. After many distractions over the past couple of weeks, my focus on this sandpicture was reawakened when a friend/colleague wished me well for my medical challenge and gave me the figure of the young girl of the sandpicture (Figure 65) because she knew how important she had been in my experience. I include part of my thank-you note to her below:

Dear M.

My young girl figure is sitting on my bedside table with the little black turtle you gave me by her side, in front of the photo of the crone who had been waiting for her in the Sandplay world. Recalling the words of the crone when I manifested their world in the sandtray, I know that the young girl can rest now: “It’s OK. You don’t have to do anything. You can just be.”

I feel the integration of the young girl and crone within me as I confront my physical challenges at this time. Through the process of releasing and casting off that will be part of my process, while holding the tension consciously, I anticipate learning more about this union and transcendence. Of course, I say this humbly knowing that the energy of transformation flows through me; it is not mine.

Having come through my surgery, my decision to forego radiation, my most recent trip to Korea, and close attendance to my husband after his recent heart attack, I revisit this sandpicture again. Especially, I gaze at the crone (Figure 66) who, although simply a black line drawing on a rock,
seems alive to me. I feel that she has been there, in that rock world forever, long before me, and that she will exist there long after me. This is possible because she is an energy that exists in the world for all to access. She is not simply a representation of a human figure. In her female crone form, she manifests something we can know about the earth in its many forms, in this case rock.

Typing these words about rock, I recall a chapter written by a colleague in a book I recently co-edited (Weinberg & Baum, 2007). My colleague, J., is a geologist who, through her study of biostratigraphy (the science of dating sedimentary rocks), came to an understanding of “deep time.” She explains this concept as “time laid down, grain for grain, fossil for fossil, in the rocks” (Beyers, 2007, p. 78). She also writes:

[I]n my imagination I would descend through eons of time. Time was a place that became familiar territory to me, its faunas and floras, its landscapes. I was (and am) fond of that huge swath of time (nearly 4 billion years) preceding the appearance of shelly organisms at the base of the Cambrian. Here I would find myself a hillock on a shelf of land surrounded by ocean, to sit in deepest silence. I felt the slow and silent rhythms of the earth, the motions of the plates beneath, the way the earth put itself together. It was the ancient aliveness of stone and I knew it as my own. (pp. 78-79)

I do not claim to have that depth of relationship with time or with rock. Nevertheless, the creation of this sandpicture has connected me with the aliveness of stones and a sense of timelessness. Only now, as I see these words on the white page in front of me, I recall a dream experience of 40 years ago that also did so. In the dream, I was standing by a large rock (approximately 2 meters cubed) that was an ornamental piece at the entrance to my friend’s apartment building. As I stood there, waiting for my friend to appear, I squinted my eyes while looking at the rock. By doing so, I was able to see the rapid movement of particles comprising the rock. When I awoke from the dream, I felt that I had been given a glimpse of the extraordinary of which our world is comprised, a sight we seldom see.
The stone crone too is my glimpse of the extraordinary, the invisible made visible through Sandplay. Who is she? What is she? She is not simply a piece of rock with black lines painted on it. Since my surgery, there is rarely a day that passes that I don’t imagine her or look at the photo of her in her rock world. She, The Crone, has permeated my being. Previously I had paid lip service to her, not because I had disbelieved in the manifestation of “crone energy” in older women, but because I hadn’t taken the time to see what that meant in me. For many years I had known about, because I had read about and hear lectures about, the virgin/mother/crone triune in feminine psychology. I had acknowledged in myself and in others the inevitable arriving at “the crone years,” thinking about it as a positive stage of life when one felt connected to inner wisdom based on experience which one had accumulated and upon which one had reflected with unfolding consciousness. As I ponder this now, I have a sense of keeping her, the crone, out there at arm’s length. After typing this, I am aware that I have stretched out my arm with my hand raised as if to say “stop.” I feel myself nodding my head, “yes,” feeling an embodied sense that this is what I have done. Was that my unconscious engagement in fending off old age or an appearance of old age? I feel that the period of the past year-and-a-half has been a transitional phase in my own development. The most recent vivid markers of this phase have included the following that I have written about in my dissertation: my extreme exhaustion at the beginning of that time, my placing my mother in permanent care, my clearing out my mother’s home, my physical condition that required surgery, my surgery that involved removal of my uterus, ovaries, and fallopian tubes, my diagnosis of cancer, and my decision to refuse radiation treatment. While in Korea on my most recent trip, I had a dream and post-dream response that I feel are connected with this phase.
Dream of July 15, early a.m. in Bundang, Korea - a couple of days after news of the birth of Angelina Jolie’s and Brad Pitt’s twins in France. My momentary interest had led me to read on CNN news on my computer about the details of the birth. What struck me were details about the laughter, wonder and awe that were said to be expressed in the delivery room by Brad and Angelina. I recalled the wonder that we felt at Abbie’s birth, and some of the details in the delivery room: the narrow table and my fleeting fear that I might fall off, the nurse preoccupied with moving around bottles just prior to my delivery, that amazing moment when the doctor delivered the baby, saying “It’s a boy, no, it’s a girl,” that overwhelming feeling of ultimate responsibility for this little soul that had chosen us as her parents. Of course, now I am connected to the exciting and scary news of Abbie’s early pregnancy and the fact that she now lives in BC and we live in Toronto. I can’t bear the thought of living so far away from her, from being able to be supportive to her, from seeing my grandchild develop. I already am wondering how I might manage it to live in BC. Trips to Korea would be a little shorter!

My dream follows:

We residents of YCC 270 learned of the temporary residency of Brad Pitt and his family in a townhouse vacated of its family. Of course, everyone in our development was interested in catching a glimpse. Unannounced, Brad appeared at my door to borrow something. I was working on my computer, trying to find a particular article to print out. I don’t know what the subject of the article was. As usual, I was scrambling around with my paperwork. Then, before we knew it, the family was gone.

Upon waking, I thought about the dream and wondered why I would be dreaming of Brad and Angelina. Then it struck me like a bolt of lightning. They temporarily had moved into a house emptied of its family. Because of the intense current focus on them by the press as “the ideal family,” they are constantly in the news. Can you imagine that the first pictures of their twins will sell for $11 to $20 million dollars? The words that came to me were: They moved into our complex temporarily into a house emptied of its family. That is my psyche, emptied of “our family,” the family archetype. As I had a deep insight about the meaning of these words to me, I began to weep, realizing that the personal and archetypal image of the family that had been the glue of meaning for so many years was changing. I recognized my tears as part of the dissolution process. Abbie is now beginning her own family. In that family, she will be mother, I will be grandmother, carrying the energy of the Great Mother. It seems like an ending to the chapter of my life as I have known it from the age of 33 years old, a wife and mother. I experience my mourning deeply.

There have been phases to my sense of loss that have been going on for several years now. I recall the loss of a young, still teenaged, daughter, leaving home for the first time as she entered university and formally announced her journey to maturity and independence by setting up her first apartment. When she first left, my husband was facing and then recovering from quadruple bypass surgery and I was finishing my MA thesis. Not until a year later did I feel my grief at the loss of that daughter who had been
my central focus for a decade and a half. I also remember the gradual loss of a vital, loving partner to disinterest, poor health, and self-adsorption.

Almost a decade later, and almost 40 years after the death of my father, I experienced another loss of nuclear family exemplified first by my mother’s stroke and role reversal as I became mother to my mother. After participating actively in that role for ten years, and after watching her psychological decline and physical decay of her home in the country, I felt a personal necessity to place my mother in a home for seniors because she required more personal care than I could provide. Her increasing needs were met by my decreasing energy and time to attend to her. Now, I view with greater distance her slide into ever-increasing detachment from social interaction and interest in the world. Although I visit her at least weekly, I mourn the loss of a sustained relationship with her. My sadness is exacerbated by images of her sitting there in a secure area, dozing off, surrounded by other dependent old women in their wheelchairs, also nodding off or sitting with their spirits silenced until family members (usually daughters) come to distract them from their physical and mental incapacities for a short time.

I have certainly been aware of the series of changes that have occurred over these past eighteen years, sometimes feeling deeply and sometimes detaching or distracting myself from my feelings. The “home emptied of its family” dream was the catalyst for me to dwell for a while in my profound experience of loss and knowledge of irreversible changes. While I am conscious of the stark fact that my family relationships were in no way “ideal,” I also know that my psyche held the archetypal image of “the family” which has been a significant focus for me for more than half my lifetime. Having this dream and reflecting upon it, led me to understand a family image in one of my collages, “Women in a Hat.” This image of mother, father, and child, at the base of the stairway to the temple (or mausoleum) to the left of and behind the woman drummer, reminded me of the early days of our family. This collage also had an image of the death of the intimate couple in the form of the Day of the Dead figures alongside the copulating couple.

This psychic material on “the home emptied of family” emerged just one day after I was working seriously on “Eve’s” verbal narratives, which brought up many of the same issues. I feel bereft. And that is the way it is. (Field notes, July 16, 2008)

Revisiting this topic again as I write and rewrite, I wonder to what extent my surgery is connected to my image of “the home emptied of its family.” Although not exclusively, the female reproductive system is a primary factor in the life stage of Mother. I think of my original collage, “Dancer,” and the fecundity that is apparent in the images on her abdomen and breasts. While metaphorically, I may be creative and fecund, such literal manifestation is impossible. Of
course, that is true for post-menopausal women, those women who are often identified with the Crone stage of development or the Crone archetype.
Chapter 9:  
Verbal Data Emanating from Conversations with Co-Participants  
in Their Own Voices

The following verbal data were gathered from free-flowing conversations over five sessions each with Bell and Eve, and four sessions with Maria who had to undergo surgery during the data-collection phase. In the interest of highlighting my co-participants’ voices, I present here excerpts from their verbal narratives only. Within their narratives, deletions indicated by ellipsis points occur when repetitions and interjections for word- and thought-finding were obvious.

Bell’s Story

A few months before data collection began, Bell’s husband died unexpectedly. In our second session together, she spoke about the suddenness of Ross’s death and its temporary disorienting function, as well as orienting changes that counterbalanced her disorientation and reflected her “new life”:

When Ross died I had absolutely no idea what my life was going to be like without him. I was the one who went away every once in a while to art schools and things like that. We were married for 45 years and then when he died I wasn’t expecting him to die. He hadn’t been sick for a long time so I . . . [didn’t have] a long time to get used to the idea that he wasn’t going to be there. He had no idea that he was going to die and neither did I and then all of a sudden he’s gone. I hadn’t thought about what was going to happen when he died or anything like that, other than wondering what I was going to do with the coi in the pond if anything happened to him. But it was an “if” not “when.” I’m very happy that things have worked out like they have worked out. That I’m living just down the street from my grand-daughter and I have a gem of a house with my art process beginning to flower for me, with the sense that I am living this new life that I was creating for myself. I’m living it now. You know, it’s not in some other time; it’s right now that I’m living it.

I realize that now, where I’m living now, is right where I would want to be, with these walkways and pathways all around me. I’m surrounded by birds and I look out my windows and all I see is evergreen trees out my windows and it’s a little gem of a house
for me. I’m feeling an awful lot lighter and happier and I was happy before, but I’m happier now because . . . I’m back in the natural world that I love so much.

I have a beautiful little garden and birds everywhere. I’ve landed in birdland. I’m thrilled about that. . . . My grand-daughter said, “It was bird heaven out there. And that means heaven is pretty good, doesn’t it?” (Field notes, July 10, 2006)

Obviously, part of Bell’s coping with the traumatic event of her husband’s death involved her strong reconnection with Nature and her intention to create a new life, with much energy going into this looking forward, as well as her consciousness about how her recent decisions fulfilled her own desires. In our several conversations, Bell spoke often about what this involved:

*I’m at an interesting time of my life right now. My husband died and my thought was that I have to create a whole new life. So, I’ve sold the house, bought a new house, and all of a sudden I have almost this completely new life to lead.* (Field notes, June 27, 2006)

This looking forward involved looking backward too:

*I knew well after Ross died that what I had to do was create a whole new life for myself ‘cause I had never lived on my own, never. First I lived with my parents. Then I lived with a bunch of girlfriends in different apartments, in different kinds of setups. Then I moved from an apartment with girlfriends to an apartment with Ross when we got married and lived that way for 45 years and the first time I ever have been on my own has been since September. It’s a very interesting thing to live on your own, you know. And I’m doing quite well at it, thank you. I’m finding there’s a lot of really interesting aspects to it, including the fact that now I have more time than ever. When you’re married, you’re cooking for your husband and you’re doing extra laundry and you’re doing things with them and you know all of that kind of stuff and it’s nice. But now, I don’t have all of that and I’ve moved into a smaller house so that I don’t have that big garden and everything and a larger house to look after. Part of the motivation for that is that I could just make more art time, but then there’s the question of “What are you going to do?” Like we always, as an artist, never stop facing the blank page.* (Field notes, June 27, 2006)

You never know what your life is gonna be like when your husband of 45 years dies, you know, ‘cause we had an absolutely beautiful and wonderful relationship for 45 years. . . . I can’t feel sorry for myself because I had all those years . . . and I can’t feel sorry for myself because who knew I would be given almost a totally new life to live. . . . It’s just a completely new ballgame for me. Every single thing that I do is different, where I put my toothbrush, where I put a package of meat I picked up in the meat counter, every single thing is different.
Everything, even the order in which I read the Globe and Mail in the morning is different. If someone is sitting across the table from you, then who gets the first page, you know? Whoever brings the newspaper in the morning takes the first page. I always sort the paper out in a particular kind of order, but he never sorted it out at all. So now my paper gets sorted out every morning. I can’t think of anything that is the same as it was. No matter, what I think about, I’m doing it differently. You know, if somebody asks me if I want to stay a little longer somewhere, a little while ago I thought, “No.” In the past, I always would have said, “No, I need to get home.” Now I don’t need to get home. There’s nobody waiting for me to arrive home and waiting for dinner at six or something like that. I could stay until tomorrow if I felt like it. And so, it’s such an interesting thing, even when I’m at home and now, in my new house . . . I drive to the train in a different route that I used to drive to the train because I’m not driving from the other house. I’m driving from the new house, so instead of turning left, I turn right.

When you’re married, you’re a married individual. You might think you are completely individualist or something. You are part of something, and you can’t just walk off into the distance and come back on Thursday. You know, you could, but you don’t. . . . You live a circumscribed life because you have your breakfast at a certain time and your lunch at a certain time and your dinner at a certain time and Ross and I had a drink at 5 o’clock, you know, every night for 45 years and so it’s interesting for me to try to keep myself from having a drink at 5 o’clock. I can tell when it’s 5 o’clock almost to the minute. (Field notes, June 27, 2006)

Narratives about her remembered relationship with her husband and her self-perceptions about her changing identity occurred through our five meetings together. She expressed that she could make decisive changes now because of the quality of relationship she had with her husband when he was alive and her sense of fulfillment in the marriage.

I don’t have any regrets about our life together . . . because we had such a loving relationship. . . . I don’t feel I should have loved him more or wished this or that or the other thing (weeping a little) . . . [because I had] the good fortune to marry someone who expected and got an equal partner. He was himself and I was myself. Each of us could do anything that we felt like doing.

There’s absolutely nothing wrong with the way I used to live and my marriage and everything. It’s probably one of the very few absolutely stunningly beautiful marriages, which may be part and parcel why I’m free to decide who I’m going to be now. I know who I was then for a very long time. But I can’t do that anymore. That is over, so I have to create this new life and I find myself talking to people more and to people I don’t know and that’s partly because I think when Ross was at home and he was at home all day every day, we would talk to each other all the time and didn’t have any particular need to talk to other people when I was out. But if you’re at home and you’re not talking to anybody, when you go out you find yourself nattering on. And you find out, you know, nothing terrible happens and the world moves on. (Field notes, September 22, 2006)
Living much of her life as a serious person, Bell seemed delighted to discover a sense of humor that was different and more extroverted than it had been before.

I find myself becoming more of an extrovert, of talking longer with people, joking with people, and I never used to joke with people, sarcastic maybe or very short, distant, sort of comprehending things out there, bringing them inside, making short statements about it to Ross or something like that. Now I find myself chatting with everybody and anybody. . . . joking with people more. I had to deal with the lawyer over the house and I’ve never seen him before in my life. I just had more jokes flowing out of me, asking about, he signs his name with three little dots, and I looked at his signature and I said, “That’s almost like sort of a sign or a symbol or whatever because it’s completely unintelligible. He said, “Well, I used to very carefully sign my name, but I have to sign my name a couple of hundred times a day so I’ve evolved this scribble with the three dots and the three dots kind of go over the three Is in his name, his signature is psht, psht, and three dots. It was just a visually interesting thing and in the past I might have noticed it but I wouldn’t have said anything. I just kept joking with him about everything. I was in his office about three quarters of an hour by the time you get through all the papers and things. We just had the best time, so I’m finding this new aspect of myself that I didn’t actually know was there, just joking. (Field notes, June 27, 2006)

I talk about being a little bit funny and not quite so serious. This is when I was still working on creating a new life as a mantra and feeling that I should do some art today. I try to do something and then I don’t know what it is I’m going to do. I’m wanting to get to the laundry room and get the laundry room sorted out today, so what does art look like today? So (showing a little drawing), here’s part of my brain saying, “You’ve got all this work piled up for you, but no, you’ve promised yourself you’re going to do some art every day. So what does art look like today?” So, I’ve put “Art” in the corner (laughs). That a little picture of Art. (Field notes, October 22, 2006)

He’s wearing a t-shirt with “Art” on it. I’ve never ever ever in my life done that, so I did a frame and I wrote “Art” at the top and put Art in the corner. For whatever reason, out of this kind of writing, I was feeling different kinds of things, sorrow and joy, at the same time. That’s how that image came out, but this is the part that is new for me, this is totally new for me.

Other people probably don’t quite realize what a change it is for me to do that. Because otherwise I would have, and even for me to do that, to say “What does Art look like today?” is a little bit of a mental switch and then what is this thing called “Art? How big is it? What is it? You know, do you walk in it, do you sit on it? What is it today? So here Art is in the corner and I just sort of love that kind of development. So I’m having a great time with this thing.
Bell talked about doing things that were “just fun to do,” instead of things that she should do, “being able to shed some shoulds.” She felt her freedom to do so came partly from an image she had drawn, an image of her inner art critic, after “she” posed the question:

“What does your critic look like?” She’s totally exhausted and she’s tried all these years and she didn’t make any dent on it and so there’s my critic on the sofa. She’s just had it. Forget it. Because I’ve actually produced that image. I’m able to keep the critic away because this is my image of her right now. Once again, the power of images is just the same kind of things as when you do images from dreams. It takes them from your unconscious into your conscious mind and the thing that is making that kind of shift is something pretty big. I mean, there are chairs and chairs. One chair is nothing. The other chair can be everything. (Field notes, September 22, 2006)

Referring to doing laundry or something else instead of art, Bell said:

You don’t realize it’s some aspect of yourself that says, “This is a waste of time. You’re not very good at doing this anyway.” All those kinds of things, but you don’t have the word “critic” in your head. You just have a feeling that’s ever so fleeting and then you don’t do the creative thing. You do one of your shoulds. Once you create an image of the critic, especially when she’s flat out and just can’t do it anymore, as soon as you have an image in your mind, she ceases to operate. She’s had it, and you’ve created this, you’ve brought her in to, I’ve brought her into a real operative person as part of my psyche. She’s not buried somewhere and lurking around in the background, tippy-toeing so she can creep right up on me from behind and hit me over the head with something before I know she’s coming. I know where she is, she’s lying on the sofa.

Talking to the reclining critic, with her words interspersed with laughter, Bell continued:

“Tuck yourself under the covers and turn the TV on if you need to do something because I’m doing something else.” Having created, having created the image or having made that image concrete, then she becomes much much more real and I know where she is, she’s on that sofa. That’s the right place for her. And that just frees you up enormously.

Bell’s narratives revealed her burgeoning experience of freedom regarding her art and life generally, as well as her developing awareness that her marriage had imposed some constraints on her that were now being released. For example, she suggests that her newfound openness to change probably affected her decision to participate in this research:

If you had asked me before Ross died to do this, I might have been resistant to doing it. Even if I did it, I would have been maybe a little bit more careful about what I did, a little more cautious, a little more concerned about revealing something, but now I find myself
becoming more and more of an extrovert and finding a certain freedom of expression that I didn’t have before.

Before I would have been a little bit cautious about what might come out from this kind of work. I would have wanted to direct it a little bit, rather than being open to wherever it might go and not having any demands on it or nor having it fit in with my expectations. I have no expectations.

There’s a way of my being open now. I wasn’t really open before. I was much more, not just introverted. I was much more private and I find myself being less private for whatever reason. If we had done this before Ross died, the conversation would undoubtedly have been different. We had our own little container that was enough for us and I didn’t . . . need other people.

It was almost self-contained, that relationship, and now I’m out of the container.

Our conversations showed that Bell’s optimism about, and satisfaction with, her new life were juxtaposed with her well-controlled fear or anxiety about the future and her sadness and sense of loss at Ross’s death. Her generalized fear became conscious to Bell through practical matters to which she had to attend and through a dream:

*I seemed to be afraid of, just vaguely afraid of things in general. It’s after Ross died and we had all of the legal stuff to do and decisions to make, and all of this kind of stuff. He had had a very complicated method of dealing with family finances and things and I’d have to sit and apply that to something that I prepared for myself and on and on and on, so there’s all of this stuff going along in the background, in the foreground, in the background. I was just a little bit afraid and I was aware of questioning what that was all about.*

Her vague fear was carried into her dream which gave it more focus. Ultimately, the dream seemed to have a balancing effect on her anxiety, while also bringing tears to her eyes:

*I’m sitting in the dining room in the Brookerton house on the water. I think I’m in the house alone and I hear footsteps in the kitchen and I feel afraid. They were male footsteps and this figure comes in holding a big bunch of flowers with cellophane wrapped all over it. I couldn’t see who it was and he put the flowers down on the table. And from that I realized that I don’t have to be afraid of anything, that everything will take care of itself.*

Our conversation showed that the image of flowers in her dream connected to flower imagery in a collage that Bell had done about 15 years ago in the women’s workshop in which I
created my Dancer collage. Both of our collages began as life-size body tracings. Like my Dancer image, Bell’s image of flowers was woven into her attitude towards life and her actual living of it. As well, it seemed to broaden her understanding of a theoretical concept, the symbol. She told of her experience:

*I decorated mine [i.e., her body tracing] full of flowers with flowers coming off the end of my fingers. I had that up in my studio for years. You know, probably when we moved 10 years ago . . . to the house that I’ve just moved from . . . that was on my studio wall all that time. It was just the way I felt about living in the world, you know, and how I wanted to live in the world. It’s interesting how you can do one image and that one image stays with you for 15 or 20 years. It never leaves you actually.

It’s in the true form of a symbol where . . . this does not equal that. The symbol just keeps on giving and giving and giving and giving. You don’t reach the end of it because you almost, as Jung says, you don’t find the answer to things, you grow into and past it . . . . I have the same kind of feeling about the image that I did that day. A wonderful, wonderful time.

I asked Bell whether her experience of that woman covered in flowers and flowers coming from her fingertips informed other pieces of art.

Not particular pieces of art, but actually doing art, being creative, because it seemed like a Mother Earth figure to me, this very generous [figure]. So many flowers within that you could spread them without, you know, not that I didn’t take them as a message to do gardening and plant flowers.

It had more to do with an artistic expression and a sharing of it and a growth process through the doing of it. Everything creative that you do and creative that you share . . . that’s how I took all the flowers at the end of my fingers, just sort of flowing off . . . . When I had that in my studio at home, my studio was a metal studio, with all the hardness and the firmness and the heat and all of that kind of thing that’s involved in doing metalwork, which is a world away from the softness of flowers . . . . I used to have it on the door on the inside of my studio. I looked at it all the time I was sitting at my bench. My bench was at sort of right angles to the door so I looked at it all the time I was in there working.

Again, while describing one thing (in this case, the flowing softness of flower imagery), Bell juxtaposed contrasting imagery involving the challenge for her of the hardness, firmness, and heat of metalwork which she had been engaged with for many years. The juxtaposition apparent
in her narrative reflected the counterbalancing that the flowering woman effected during Bell’s experience of being a metalworker.

Becoming a metalworker was not a pursuit that Bell had followed freely and independently, although it involved a long period of learning and skill development. Her becoming so was intertwined with her husband’s interests and activities and a chance meeting with another man:

_We went on this holiday down to the Maritimes and picked up a whole lot of stones on the beach. He started tumbling them and cutting them and I had been doing sculpture and taking sculpture classes so I just switched into metal because you know I went to a metal workshop and met a good friend of mine whose father had just retired from having a jewelry store on Yonge Street. He looked at what I’d done and said, “How’d you like me to teach you how to make some real jewelry?” I said, “You have no idea what you’re saying to me.” So, to make a long story short, for the next 25 years I worked with him once a week all that time doing jewelry. That’s how I got into jewelry, but in the process I essentially abandoned all the drawing I might have done, all the painting I might have got into._

Now faced with the absence of her husband and the changes his death had brought to her life, she was able to make a conscious decision about how she would spend her time. This decision had to do with pleasing herself and satisfying her own urges, rather than slipping into someone else’s interest area or meeting others’ expectations:

_I’ve decided that I don’t want anymore the difficulty of working in metal and the difficulty in making jewelry pieces to please other people or to make them happy or something. Because you think sometimes you’re making them a pair of earrings, but you’re not. Your job is to make them happy and for some people that’s very very difficult to try to do through a pair of earrings or a ring. Some people will not be made happy. What they need to do is go and work on their relationship with their husband, not go and order a piece of jewelry. So, for a whole bunch of reason, and also the fact that I have explored jewelry-making for me personally about as far as I can or want to take it, I’d like to go back and pick up on the drawing and the painting that I might have done._

Bell’s reflections on making jewelry for others and the connection with relationship between spouses contrasted with the narration about jewelry and her relationship with her husband:
He never wore a wedding ring. I never wore a wedding ring. I had one. I had it, I had a diamond engagement ring that sat in my drawer for years. I gave it to my daughter. . . . We had that kind of relationship that uh, that uh. When I left home I was never going to be married. I just was never going to. I hadn’t even had a boyfriend and was not going to relate to males period ’cause my father was such an angry man. (Field notes, June 27, 2006)

My memory of him was yelling all the time. I had no intention of getting married whatsoever. . . . I just wrote the whole male side of life off my slate. (Fieldnotes, December 7, 2006)

I just knew that I would never ever endure that. I just knew. So by the time I was 21 I met the most unbelievably nice person. I didn’t know that people like that existed. So yes, when he asked, that was that. (Field notes, June 27, 2006)

Bell continued her narrative of the rings. Engaging on an emotional level through her memories of her relationship with her husband, Bell wept while telling this story:

He didn’t want me to give him one [because of the nature of his work]. I wore mine for a little while and then I kept getting the diamond in meat, in meat balls and hamburgers and things like that and I’d be sitting there with a toothpick poking the hamburger out of it. There’s something stupid about this. I don’t even like diamonds. You know, I didn’t even want him to give me a diamond ring when we were getting engaged and he said he had to, so we went out and I said, “OK, just the simplest, plainest thing we can find is fine with me because it was either we love each other and are living together or that’s it, period. There’s no ring, there is nothing I can put around my finger or you’re going to put around your finger that actually means anything. The only thing that means anything is the love between us. I probably wore the engagement ring for, I don’t know, a year or two years and the wedding ring for a year after that and then I just took it off and stuck it in the drawer and it stayed in the drawer. I’d have to check every once in a while, about every five years, oh god, do I still have it, where is it, ’cause I would shuffle my jewelry around a little bit from one box to another and then to a bigger box and then, oh, here it is, OK, but I never wore it. I didn’t need to.

Bell’s narratives through our sessions continued to have references to her husband and their lived experience together. In our last experiential session (second last meeting together) in her verbal narrative about her sandpicture (#3), Bell’s sense of her husband’s place in her life seemed to have changed. I noted an expansiveness that allowed her to connect to him on a spiritual level and to others on a material level that could include that spiritual dimension.
My world no longer has Ross physically in it but spiritually he has been with me on every step along my way in this life. It may sound trite but he is the wind/breath beneath my wings. He taught me how to love by loving. The cat [in sandpicture #3] speaks of my beautiful daughters, living symbols of that love [weeping at this point]. E. [one daughter] has come home and brought her cat. He is so smart and he is so interactive and he is so playful and he’s almost like a dog in the way that he follows you around and plays with things with you and he has moods and he’s got favorite places around the house and places that he hides and jumps out at you and tries to scare you and he loves being in bags and boxes and things. He tips over any garbage contained you have and takes the papers out and plays with the papers. He’s such an animating creature in the household and I think he’s actually able to bridge some kind of a separation between E. and myself. And she loves this cat so much.

Here I delete some narrative to protect Bell’s family’s privacy and then continue with her narrative on the cat, which evokes several outbursts of laughter as she tells it:

This cat is more than just a cat. I’ve never been particularly fond of cats, but I love this cat. He’s not an ordinary cat. He’s a black cat and sometimes you never know where he sleeps. We’re always trying to figure out where he sleeps. Sometimes he sleeps in my bedroom on the chair. I get up about four o’clock in the morning and it’s very dark and I head off to the bathroom and I can see, he’s black but in between his toes he has white fur, so I can see little white splats of little toes lying there, so I know that’s where he was sleeping that night. So that whole thing turned into love, just all the things I loved and the reason that I loved them, and I loved life itself and life-forms and art process.

After speaking about how this relates to other life-forms in the sandpicture as representative of things she loves, she concludes with the statement:

When the love of your life dies, love itself does not die.

Experiencing in my daily life the pleasure and healing energy of pets, I resonate with what Bell says about the cat who is more than a cat. Re-reading my field notes, I wonder if narrative too has that protective and healing function. As I sit with this thought, I recall the collaged flowering woman that had sustained Bell for a decade and a half while she was engaging in creative work that she found difficult, and I remember Dancer who was instrumental in my healing from an early childhood wound. And so I posit that narrative, like art, has a containing, protective, and healing function.
My musings take me back to Bell’s sacrifice of her drawing throughout many years while she worked in metal. My memory presents images of several designs that she actualized in gold, silver, and brass. I recalled the organic designs in those jewelry pieces that I had seen, and re-read Bell’s narratives about her experiences of Nature throughout her life from the time she was a young girl, and Nature’s protective and stimulating influence on her and her artwork.

Ever since I was a child, I was a Nature nut. As a little kid I was quite solitary and I would spend all of my time in the woods. I lived in an area where there were woods all around and I knew where the white flowers grew and where the purple violets grew and where the strawberries were. I knew everything about the area of woods that I had access to. The dog and I used to just live there. That was my real world. My family home, which wasn’t particularly a happy one, was not where I lived. It’s [i.e., Nature is] in all my work. I don’t know that I ever did an abstract piece. I made a piece that was an iris and I made a rose and I made a kingfisher necklace. It was always Nature-based.

Many years later, as Bell’s narrative shows, her desire for companionship in Nature seemed thwarted by her husband’s disinterest in it. She was able to turn her frustration and angst about her sense of a disconnection with Nature into a solitary rich activity that involved both a meditative relational experience of Nature and drawing:

I realized one day, if you want to be in Nature, all you have to do is step out your front door. It’s that far away. I don’t have to have my husband to take me here or take me there or go with me. All I have to do is step outside. We lived on a lake and I had a picnic table on the boathouse down there. I had been meditating inside so I decided I would meditate outside. I guess I started in about August going out there every morning and I thought that I would . . . sit there with the horizon line of the lake, with nothing else to look at. I presumed that I would do almost the same image every single day because I would sit there and get myself in position . . . [without seeing] anything else. I never did the same thing twice. I always painted what was in front of me, always something different, different weather patterns, different wind patterns on the lake, different wave patterns, birds that would fly by, birds that you could hear off [in the distance]. . . . I got the idea of making up . . . [my] own mantra . . . You switch it anytime you feel the need to, so when I was sitting down there, I heard the white throat singing over my shoulder, so I started meditating on “I hear the white throat singing.” The white throat sparrow. It has a beautiful, beautiful song. You sit there, get yourself down there, and the white throat starts to sing. All this time, I’m in, I had been inside the house wanting to be in Nature and just for the sake of walking out my own front door, it was there. It became quite overwhelming. I sat there in August and I sat there in September. I sat there in October. It started to get a little cool. It rained some days.
Oh, what do I do about this? But I went out every day. I bought a workman’s zip-up almost a big guy’s snowsuit with a hood. I sat out there all winter until the spring. I did a whole year out there.

Bell’s narrative linked her recent and distant past as she explored her experiences in Nature through her memory and imagination. She brought those experiences to life again more than a half century after she began as she mused about her childhood connection to Nature:

There was a creek, quite a big creek, behind our house and I used to go back there and crawl down the bank, and then just sit, sit down there. I don’t know if I was hiding, hiding from something. I don’t remember that. I remember just sitting there and one day I saw a kingfisher fly by. So, of course, I then went down there all the time to see if I could see the kingfisher fly by again, and I did.

[I was] seven. About two years ago, I had a thought that the kingfisher was looking at me as much as I was looking at him and that thought just kind of blew my mind because I got my mind inside the head of the kingfisher flying along seeing this little girl. It was such an exciting moment for me, you know. Sixty-six years old and I think, “Oh, God, the kingfisher was looking at me.”

Bell’s narratives evoked laughter from both of us and vividly illustrated her deep relationship with Nature and non-human creatures that was also elicited through her dragonfly story:

When I was up in Atlin, a dragonfly was on a tree right beside where I was sitting very still, meditating. It was right there, so I looked over at it, and it had these big puffy eyes. So I did a picture of its face with its rectangular shnoz, its proboscis kind of thing. It’s not a nose. It sticks out king of flat, with these two eyes on the side. I wrote on my page, “Is there any intelligence in a face that looks like this?” The next thing that happened is that this thing flew off the tree and hit me between the eyes, smack into my head like this and flew off. And the next thing was “I wonder if he was thinking, ‘Is there any intelligence in a face that looks like this?’” And I drew my own face. I’ve often had those kinds of experiences that are just almost other worldly or they’re numinous or they’re part of the unexplained aspect or the mystery of life. You can think that everything’s accidental, except I had just written, “Is there any intelligence in a face that looks like this?” If I hadn’t had that thought or if I hadn’t drawn the picture, if it had just bumped into my head, if it had just bumped into my head. . . . (Field notes, October 22, 2006)

Again we laughed.
Forever, this little dragonfly is on the page, you know. I’ve had those kinds of experiences in Nature, over and over again.

In our second to last session, while Bell reflected aloud about her sandpicture #3, she told of another such experience she had with a gecko in Costa Rica a couple of years earlier:

There was a huge gecko, it was about this long, that used to climb up a big tree at night. He used to sleep on one of the branches. And we had a room on the fourth floor which was on the same level as this branch where the gecko used to sleep. So I’ve done some drawings and paintings of him sleeping up there. It was so interesting. It’s one thing to see one on the ground or on a tree or something. It’s another thing to see where they sleep every night. The same gecko sleeps in the same place every night and wakes up and goes down the tree to get on with his day and the same time the next night he’ll be crawling up the same tree to the same branch. It’s such a privilege to see these kinds of things. . . . Always with these kinds of experiences I am aware that I see it, but it also sees me. You always just presume that you see it. You never really think about, well, is it looking at you too. (Field notes, October 22, 2006)

Just as Bell’s recent experience with the gecko was significant for her because she drew and painted him, reflected on the quality of her experience of the event, and mused over the possible mutuality of that experience, Bell’s stories showed that her creative work had been entwined with Nature from early childhood.

We had somebody who was called “Auntie Mary” who was a dumpy little Italian lady who had been a friend of my grandmother’s and she used to take us for about a week out to her little place on the south shore of Montreal. It really was a little sort of cottagy place. There was a garden around there and I did my first drawing there. It was about touch-me-not flowers, those things you touch the seed pod and it goes pshtt like this. . . . Touch-me-not flowers are wonderful.

I used to think they were just orange, except that up in . . . [our local provincial park] I found white ones and pink ones. In Quebec where I grew up I never saw those colours. I only saw orange. . . . They grow maybe three-and-a-half feet high and have watery stems and thin little pale leaves all over the place with flowers scattered all over the plant. There were some of them growing outside Auntie Mary’s window, you know. Why I had paper and pencil to draw, I don’t even know. I don’t remember how I came to have that because I never had any art materials at home. . . . We just didn’t have that kind of thing. So, anyway, that was the first drawing that I ever did, so again, it’s a responding to Nature thing. I’m just finding that the most exquisite thing . . . . I discovered that I could actually draw.
So many years ago, the touch-me-not flowers led Bell to an important discovery.

Recently, Bell visited a “fairy art show” given by her current watercolour teacher in a “gem of a building” that Bell had not known had existed in her town. Again, the flowers played a significant role in awakening Bell to her reality and touching her deeply:

On the way back I walked past a whole pile of touch-me-nots, remember I talked about touch-me-nots, and I thought, “Is there something afoot here? Is the world trying to tell me something? Am I seeing the world the way it is, rather than the way I might have seen it before, or does . . .? Those particular things didn’t have to be there. And there was a whole mass of them just on my way back to the car. Everything just seems to be like that right now. Maybe it’s just that I’m noticing things. (Field notes, July 10, 2006)

Bell’s connection with the touch-me-not flowers had endured for more than sixty years because it had engendered her love of drawing and Nature.

Ever since that first drawing of the touch-me-not flower I’ve been in love with drawing. . . The thing that really moves me is, and this is something I’m wanting to explore, is the one-to-one relationship you have with Nature. You have that flower and I want to know that flower inside out. I want to become it. I want it to become me and I don’t have the language around all of this. It’s just I have a sense and a feeling of it. The simplest natural thing is the most amazing thing in the world to me. I can do a picture of a tulip that is old and has dropped a couple of its petals and I say that because I did it. I can get so absorbed in that that I just treasure the time in my lifetime that I spend that way. I want to spend more of my lifetime that way.

Her love of drawing and Nature were protective and stimulating for Bell from the age of seven when she experienced loneliness and a difficult family life. After hearing about Bell’s connection with Nature when she was seven, I was moved profoundly by her narratives about her relationship with her seven-year-old granddaughter with whom she now shares her love of Nature and drawing.

Corrie was going to show me the path that goes around the back of my house because I’d never been on it and she has been on it. She was leading Grandma down, along this path and on the way we came across service berries and she had never eaten service berries. There’s a big service berry tree right along the side of the road, so we picked some and then went back to the house to get a dish to get some more. As we filled the dish we had to go into the woods a little bit and once we were in there, we found a place and started
to make a little camp. She likes to claim places as her island and so we had to get a stick and jam it in the ground and we declared this “your island.” It was so interesting. She’s seven, and here I am back doing seven-year-old things and I was conscious that this was very interesting. We found . . . [some bedstraw]. I’ve talked to her about bedstraw in the past. It’s a sticky kind of weed, it sticks to each other. People used to fill mattresses with this stuff or filled pieces of fabric with it and called them mattresses. So we cleared the whole area of that. We gathered up all the sticks and they were going to be in the kitchen and we had a front door aspect where we had to leave our shoes and we had a back door with two trees sticking up. We got maple leaves and another kind to make pillows so we could lie down in this area. Then she said, “There’s just one more thing we have to do. We have to decorate our trees.” So then you know you find things and you tie them around the trees and you stick things on so you have these decorated trees. The next thing we did was go to get the teasles. She was wearing her straw hat and I was wearing my straw hat and we went and got teasles because they were all around. We broke them all off and stuck them through the holes on the rim of the hats. And we came home with our tease hats. I thought I was going to melt, literally going to melt, and she said, “I’m so glad that” (‘cause she had an option of going to be with a friend in the afternoon and the mother of the friend changed the plans and that’s why she was staying with me), “I’m so glad I stayed with you, Grandma, because otherwise I never would have done this.” Ah-h-h-h.

Being seven again isn’t always easy for aging bodies, a fact that elicited our laughter that was easier to bear than tears.

I was just so conscious of all of the subtleties and nuances of the circumstance I was in. Of course, she wanted me to lie down and put my head on a pillow. I was doing so much moving and so much lifting and so much everything that I’ve got a little bit of a sore back and one thing and another, so she had to settle for me just to sit down.

More laughter ensued when we noted the influence of mass culture that was influential in the play:

The other thing we did was write “HELP” with teasles so if anybody was flying overhead they could see us. Just imagine. Teasles, “HELP” in teasles. Help. . . . She was thinking that we were on this island and maybe we were lost and somebody could fly overhead and see where we were if we wrote “HELP” out on the ground with teasles.

Bell connected her recent experience with her young granddaughter with her new sense of freedom in life about which she spoke earlier. She also articulated an awareness of mutuality in relationship.
What I'm doing with myself these days is just allowing myself to do whatever comes along. If she says that she wants to do that, then I do it, because I have no idea what it's going to lead to and she's perfectly safe with me and so it allows her to explore Nature and discover Nature that otherwise she wouldn't actually be allowed to do. The thing is that she's old enough at seven that she will remember this. She's been with me ever since she was quite small. She used to be there two afternoons a week and I've always given her those two afternoons a week, so we have a long established relationship. In a way, I was thinking that I've been trying to do things for her and on Sunday I actually realized that she was doing something for me. It's like the difference between “Am I looking at the kingfisher?” or “Is the kingfisher looking at me?” I'm at this interesting time in my life when on any given day at any given time there's nothing that I have to do. So I can respond in the moment to anything that's there. I'm finding this very exciting because . . . I haven't felt that way since I was a kid. (Field notes, June 27, 2006)

Reflecting on her experience with her granddaughter, she told about teaching Corrie to put a seagull in a picture and draw a bird, “just that line like that.” Later, I noticed that it was this kind of line that was in Bell’s first sandpicture. Working in her new “artroom” (called that by Corrie), Bell laughingly echoed her granddaughter’s question that she asked each time she entered the room where Bell was working on her art, “Whatchya doing, Grandma?” Bell’s narrative about “the artroom,” the activities that she and Corrie shared there, and her consciousness about how this related to her creation of a new life illustrated how Bell was integrating her memories of her past experiences and new possibilities.

Once again Corrie comes into the artroom. “Whatchya doing, Grandma?” I’m doing a collage, Corrie. “What’s a collage, Grandma?” So I tell her what a collage is. “Can I do a collage?” “Sure, you can do a collage.” I said, “These are all the pictures that I didn’t use. So if you want to make, do a collage” because I didn’t have a separate bundle of pictures 'cause it was right then that it needed to be done, and she looked at them all and said, “I’ll just take the Nature pictures.” So she took all the Nature pictures, and she re-arranged them, and she put this here and that there and somewhere else and then we glued them all down and we filled the whole piece of cardboard with them, and on the back she said, “To Daddy, Love Corrie.” It was a present for her father. I don’t know if he has a heart that melts as easily as mine. She’ll get to him. She’ll get to him. Another day we had a big piece of paper and we divided it in half. I was to do one side and she was to do the other side and she did a great continuous line all over the place. In school she learned about Van Gogh and she learned about who did the drizzle paint, Jack Pollack. She knows about Jack Pollack. So this is what she was doing, like Jack Pollack. Just do this line all over the place. And she had a blue crayon and I had a red
one. So I did the jagged lines, fern-like things all over the place and then she said that this was red versus blue, how do you spell ‘versus,’ Grandma? And I thought, ‘How do you even know versus, Corrie?’ It’s an interesting word for a seven-year-old to be using, not just vaguely understanding. Anyways, so this was red versus blue and we stuck it up on the wall. She said, ‘We can cover all the walls.’ We have some artwork up there already, but I think I’m going to have to establish a couple of corkboards or something like that. I’m not going to have pieces of tape stuck all over my paint job in my artroom. That will make it a real artroom. So the process, the fact that I have created a real space, I have the time to do it, I have an inspiration to do it because I sense that I have to answer Corrie’s question everyday, ‘Whatchya doing, Grandma?’ by telling her what I’m doing and not just saying, ‘Oh, I’m just watching TV’ or something like that. I don’t think she’d be very happy with that and neither would I. So, I think she acts as a bit of a stimulus to my own art process and it gets me into really doing child-like things because I don’t know where I’m going with this and I don’t know what it is I am to do and I just keep thinking, ‘Is this what I’m supposed to be doing?’ So, I’m just letting it happen. I don’t know where it’s going so I’ll just see where it’s going as I go, which is quite different from having to make a piece of jewelry. (Field notes, July 6, 2006)

Later, Bell continued with her contrast between jewelry-making and her newfound free and freeing art process, the “versus” that her grand-daughter had introduced in her conversation:

I really did feel that my jewelry was very, very difficult for me for all sorts of reasons and now when I’m doing this easy-peasy art stuff, I know it’s not all that easy when you get into it, the child-like stuff is, but it’s just in contrast to how difficult my artwork, the metalwork, was for me. You don’t have fun doing metalwork. There’s no happy accident in metalwork. It’s planned, everything is measured, it’s precise and . . . and I think doing metalwork for all that time is what makes this stuff seem so wonderful to me now. It’s because there’s no deadlines, no soldering that has to go absolutely perfectly. It doesn’t have to be set absolutely perfectly, the stones. . . . (Field notes, July 10, 2006)

The contrast between metalwork and her current art process was becoming clear to Bell; however, paradoxically, with this clarity a complexity also arose. Her narratives seemed to lead her on a spiraling path as she recalled increased detail about her own process. This spiral path led her back to that significant age of seven when she realized she loved drawing.

What will I do with my stones because I got into doing jewelry because of the stones? And would I just give all the stones away, and when I was thinking that thought, I was thinking ‘Oh, not that one and no, that’s my favorite, and oh, no, I bought that here, you know. I realize that I probably couldn’t give my stones away, but you know some of those stones you still have the same passion for so just cool it when it comes to closing down the whole metal process. Just wait to see and when and if you go back to it, just do the
simplest, easiest things you can do. Just almost liking going back to the very beginning of metalwork in the way that I’m at the very beginning of art things, all sorts of things. You know, I’ve had my watercolours years ago in Art in the Park and sold them. I’ve done all of that before. So this is a completely new phase for me and I hadn’t actually thought that I might do my work using the stones that I love so much. I mean, doing them in just the simplest way that I can even imagine, instead of doing them in the most difficult way. I used to, if I took an agate, I would put four little faceted stones around it. That’s what made it difficult. But if I just solder a ring on the top, easy. . . . Designing for somebody else, I would never ever design the simplest possible thing that I could even imagine. I would design something that was quite complex and quite difficult to do. I don’t know if it was an ego thing or what. I just had that thought a split second ago, because I could have designed, I would usually give people four designs to choose from, and if you give them seven, they just can’t think of one, they just can’t do it, so I give them four designs to choose from. The complexity of the design would be up to me. They weren’t giving me a design. I was doing the design so I was the one who was making my life difficult by making it complex and, you know, trying to pull off wonderful technical feats or something, doing things or designing something that I didn’t even know how to do and then I would do it, learn how to do it, which you know had its own usefulness in developing my metal technique as time went on, but it’s not the kind of process that I want to be involved with now.

As she narrated the story of her metalworking, Bell began to zero in on details that made that work difficult for her. Besides the complexity of design and need to constantly learn new skills, she explained that the process she had to engage in did not appeal to her and did not match her sense of identity. It was a “wax process” because the mold that she poured the metal into was one she created of wax.

I don’t like wax. It’s ugly coloured, dark green and dark blue, a really ugly colour. . . . It doesn’t smell nice. . . . There’s nothing aesthetic about working with wax. Unless you do an awful lot of casting yourself, the actual casting process is very very difficult without having little air pits and pockets and things. You go back and have to fill them up, all these little holes and it’s really very fiddly, or you can’t and so you just have to go through the whole process and redo it again. . . . I’m a metalworker, I’m a goldsmith or a silversmith or something, but I’m not a wax worker. The metal process that I like best of all is chasing and repoussé, which is essentially three-dimensional drawing in metal. You put a design on the front and the repoussé is pushing it forward and then you turn over and you pitch again and you refine the frontal image you’re going to be seeing and then you punch it out more from the back and you go back and forth, and back and forth until you have an undulating surface of your design. So what started out as a flat piece of metal isn’t flat anymore, so it’s essentially drawing in metal. That’s the way I felt about it, but drawing on a piece of paper is a heck of a lot easier and you can do it in half an hour after you have your coffee and you can draw anything that you want. You
Bell’s memory of learning to draw at the age of seven led her to recall her experience of art in public school:

_When we were growing up . . . there wasn’t very much in the way of art in the school. The one thing I remember doing in school was following directions to make a three-dimensional daffodil out of cut out paper, you know, cut out stem, cut out leaves, and then you fold this piece of yellow in a circle and you make zig-zag edges and then you stick it onto the flat piece of paper so that the cup of the daffodil sticks forward. That’s the only thing I remember from art in public school._

Later, reading my field notes, I felt a resonance with Bell’s story and momentarily, recollected my own experiences in school when I was directed to try to duplicate flowers of different seasons stuck in bottles of various shapes and sizes. Recalling my unsuccessful attempts, I connected again with how those experiences had constrained my artistic expression and enjoyment of it over the years.

Resonance with Bell’s recollections about her early experiences with art also evoked my narrative about my experience in the poster contest and my poor showing in art classes in school. In turn, my story reminded Bell of another experience related to her art process:

_I had a problem when I was growing up with the art process because at some point you learn that what you do isn’t good enough and my mother was wanting to send me to art classes in . . . a town next to [where we lived]. I had to go by myself on the bus which is probably about a 20- or 25-minute ride on the bus. I wasn’t really sure all the time about where or when to get off so that was pretty scary for me. It was on Saturday mornings in the basement of a public school. There was a very nice man teaching, a young man, teaching the class. I didn’t know him. I didn’t know any of the other kids. There was a big sheet of paper on an easel kind of thing and some painting pots. We were told to paint anything we would like. Well, that’s an interesting problem, isn’t it, because I didn’t have any idea about what to paint? I remember saying to myself, “You have to paint something.” So I started to paint and I painted the things that kids always do, the house with the roof and the chimney with the smoke coming out, the windows on either side, the door in the middle, the path leading up to the front of the house. But I got quite_
adventurous. I did a purple mountain in the background. That was fine. Whew! I got out of there, made it out of there, and made it home. The next Saturday, “Paint anything you want.” House, door in the middle, the chimney, the smoke, the whole thing. I never painted anything else except that because I didn’t have a clue. I didn’t even have a clue about what paint was or you know it was all overloaded with this scary thing like, will I get off at the right stop, will I know anybody, and it wasn’t quite enough instruction to say, “Paint anything you want.” Maybe we could have painted circles and then triangles or maybe we could have done anything. . . . “Paint anything you want” was just too daunting, very daunting.

How different Bell’s childhood experience with making art was from the one she was providing for her granddaughter who could simply walk down the street a few houses and be in her grandmother’s artroom where her grandmother provided a model and encouragement for activities in which she might engage.

As we conversed about that little seven-year-old girl who was so enamored with drawing, and yet constrained for various reasons, Bell spoke about wondering about the source of her artistic enthusiasm and connecting it to her ancestors:

“I realized that my grandfather was a plasterer and my grandfather on the other side was a stone mason. The plasterer used to do all of those swirly ceilings and everything like that, all that fancy kind of stuff. I think that these two people were very artistic and that’s the way they could earn their living, using their artistic ability. If they had lived in another time, they might have been painters or done anything else. But that was a long time ago and even now an artist has to earn a living. . . . Back in those days, if you weren’t doing something creative like that, you could have had to be doing something really awful. I think they both had an opportunity to be doing something that they felt was an expression of their own artistry and that they would take tremendous satisfaction out of finishing the work and having the work then function in the world and be part of, the stone masonry would be part of a church or something like that or, who knows. There probably are some pretty nice stately homes in England that had and still have my grandfather’s sculpted ceiling or something to them. So he would have felt a tremendous satisfaction with having done that.

Immediately, Bell’s narrative about her ancestors connected to her present and future, and to the research that we were undertaking together:

“I would like to explore a little bit, or see if it might happen that I would gain a little bit of understanding for myself as to what art path I am to follow. Again, I can’t articulate it very well. It’s just that I don’t know the direction my art work is going to go in because it
doesn’t have a direction. There are a thousand paths and which path do you follow? Forty years ago I had forty years to play around with my direction. OK. I went in one direction for 25 years. But now, with this new life of mine, I have no idea what direction it’s going to go in. I have no need to it to go in any particular direction and so I have sort of a full head up of steam and I’m in a train. But I don’t know which track I’m going on.

Anchoring her current and future life in her early childhood experience and her understanding of her ancestors, Bell provides an example of the inexplicit teleological quest that Conle (2000) writes about:

*I really don’t know what’s going to happen with it, but I feel pulled towards something and every day I’m moving in that direction and I’m really close to it, whatever “it” is.*

Faced with a sense of not knowing about the outcome, Bell knows that a clear resolution doesn’t happen automatically. Her awareness of this fact allows contrasting images of possibility and inability to manifest to emerge, as she holds the tension between the two energies:

*With drawing, if I need to actually draw every day, and I’ve never in my whole life done that, as much as I love drawing, I haven’t drawn every day. Sometimes I haven’t drawn for a year. . . . I have everything set up now at home with my new art room upstairs, bright art room, with the window at the right side of my design table and everything, waiting for me there, but I still have to do it. And I may be full of enthusiasm for something that I imagine to take place. It may not take place and all of these fancy ideas I had will come to nothing.*

Bell demonstrates some tension about how her intention to create a new life that is focused on her art process will evolve. And yet, in various narratives, she contrasts her current attitude and actions with earlier approaches when she was not so focused, and acknowledges awareness that she is picking up where she left off. Talking about a drawing class she is currently taking, Bell referred to *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* by Betty Edwards (1979). Her reference led to my recollection of my own experience of taking a drawing class based on this book and being “absolutely thrilled” with some of my representations that captured an essence of things I was drawing, although they weren’t perfectly proportioned. Talking about
her personal experience of the Edwards’ book, Bell interweaves past and present and articulates that integration is occurring:

I’ve read Edwards’ book 25 years ago, a long time ago. In those days I wasn’t actually doing all the exercises in it. I was just reading it. Thinking it might be very nice to do that, you know, and then in some cases, just not even reading all the way through the book, reading partway through the book and then just leaving it. So it’s very nice to go back and find out that I have all of these books and I can just pick up where I left off with it.

Referring again to her current drawing class, Bell said:

And then we did perspective and again I’ve come across, I’ve read about perspective. It was 25 years ago, I had a class on perspective but this time we’re back at perspective again and this time you sort of get it, you understand it much better possibly because you’ve met it before and then if you actually do and I am doing some homework on these kinds of things then you can really start to incorporate it into your drawing instead of it still being something that you’ve read about once. You actually do it and therefore understand. And then we did light and shade in exactly the same kind of way. Yes, you put the lemon on a piece of white paper and you shine a light on it and you pick up the shadow and the reflected light and the core shadow and the this and the that and the other thing. I’ve drawn things and not been able to name the various types of coloration or shade on things. I just would observe it and do it and then the next time I would have to observe it and do it and the next time observe it and do it, but I wouldn’t know what I was actually looking for.

As we conversed, Bell articulated her dawning insight about her own process over the years and how it relates to her changing lifestyle:

I used to think that my drawings were not very important things. I would do some on holiday, that’s . . . when I used to pack my art materials and when I came home I’d put them back on the shelf, so it’s not something I incorporated into my life every day. It was only when I was free of household chores and all that kind of stuff that I was free enough and had the time to do this kind of thing. Now, having gone through the jewelry stuff for so many years, and having done some water colour and done some of this and some of that, there’s not very many things that I haven’t done and now I just want to draw. That drawing in and of itself is enough of an art form, it is the ultimate art form for me, and it’s taken me this long to discover that for myself. (Field notes, October 22, 2006)

Bell continued her narrative about her discovery that she was, in fact, now drawing every day and that her daily engagement in that process was having a significant effect on her young
granddaughter and the child’s perception of her artistic abilities. Bell also recognized that she was not the sole influence on her granddaughter’s perception of her drawing ability.

My granddaughter was quite intimidated about drawing . . . and I was quite concerned about her because I thought that one of the things I can actually do for her when I live down the street is she can have her own paper and her own crayons and her own everything and she can sit at that desk, at my desk any time she wants to, and she has her own sketchbook and everything. But she was kind of intimidated by it all. But she seems to have got over that . . . I’m not sure who told her this; it wasn’t me. I wish it was me because then I would think I was very clever, but it wasn’t me. They told her that you can never do anything as beautiful as Nature. So you can never duplicate it, so whatever you do is just what you do, and you don’t have to do it and say, “Well, it’s not as beautiful as Nature.” Because no one can do it as beautiful as Nature. So it takes all the competition away from it and all that kind of stuff and so she’s much much freer to do things.

Aware that the sense of freedom she felt seemed also to be experienced by her granddaughter, Bell continued talking about the child and their parallel drawing practices:

And I was kind of astounded when she was over at my place . . . where I was going to sit at the back door and draw the sumac that’s growing out there. I’ve been wanting to do it for ages and I thought, “No, I’m going to do it today even if I just get a quick idea down about it so that I can do it later on. So I was sitting there and she wanted to have her chair sitting at the window and she had to figure out what she was going to draw and then she said, “It will be a surprise.”

She went and got a ruler and was going to draw my bird-feeder outside that back window and I thought, “Oh, that’s an interesting thing to settle on because I think this is the first time she’s ever seen something and tried to draw that.” And to know to get a ruler to do the straight lines for the thing and then she got all the little things and then she coloured them all in. It’s the first representational drawing I think she’s ever actually done and it just happened in the moment, you know, ‘cause she’s drawn all sorts of things. . . . It’s really quite interesting to experience this as it happened. So, my own drawing is sort of expanding my world in a way that I wasn’t expecting it to do, because if I wasn’t in the habit of drawing all the time these days, then I never would have done that and it wouldn’t have happened. (Field notes, October 22, 2006)

Drawing has become a dynamic force in Bell’s daily life experience, active in her relationship with her granddaughter and active in her understanding of her own process. Just as Nature became entwined with Bell’s creative process, so has her granddaughter’s creative, relational being become interwoven.
I have half an orange every morning and I sometimes cut and zip down the sides and peel the rind off of it. A little while ago I did that and just left them on the counter and they started to dry and peel a little bit. I said, “That looks really interesting.” And I left them on my design table and then a few days later I decided, just before I threw them out, to do a quick little drawing of them. And this is the most primitive drawing in the world. The important thing around it is that Corrie came in and said, “Oh, Grandma, I thought they were real.” “Bless your little heart.” And so, anyway, I’ve written down under there, “Dear, sweet Corrie exclaimed, “Grandma, I thought they were real.”

You see, if I wasn’t drawing, these kinds of things would never happen. . . . She doesn’t need to see me doing a Rembrandt style whatever. All I need to do is sketch my orange peels and it lights up her life. So things can be very simple and very basic and you can get an enormous satisfaction out of doing it.

Bell’s experience with her granddaughter and with other people, for example, with people in her art class, seemed to feed her free and expansive attitude expressed through her drawing. Following one class, in which she had completed “a very nice drawing of a poplar branch with a couple of leaves at the end of it,” a photographer-classmate talked about enhancing the contrast (which he did with his own photography), while also stating that it was a very sensitive drawing which Bell could simply mat softly, without doing anything else. Bell was stimulated to spend additional time relating to the drawing after she returned home.

I like doing pen drawings, so I wonder what would happen if I went over the whole thing with a pen and that would bring it up. I’ve either drawn with a pen or with a pencil, but I’ve never drawn with a pencil and then gone over it with a pen. I’ve never done that before and I really quite liked that. The pen I used wasn’t water soluble and I have another pen that is. So, I did some of the cross-hatching and things like that in this other pen and then put some water with it and essentially turned it into a wash and then put some watercolour in it because it’s just an exercise for class. So, I just kept pushing it and pushing it and pushing it and took it back in and thanked this guy for his comments, because otherwise I would have just left it as a nice drawing.

Bell reflected on the fact that most of the people attending this drawing class were older people who brought much life experience to the class. Her description focused on the artist, Leonardo da Vinci, and a book on him that she’d had for many years without seriously
examining or working with it before, although she had stood in front of many of his paintings while traveling and visiting galleries.

This course is called “Drawing Like Leonardo da Vinci,” which is the thing that hooked me in there. . . . How to draw like Leonardo da Vinci, yeah, sure, somebody’s going to teach that, are they?

This comment followed a description of her attitude and understanding before and after she began her drawing class.

I never had lessons in drawing. I wouldn’t analyze the whole thing first, and do it very lightly and get it roughly in the right form and configuration. I would start right into detail. I would say, it’s up to here and down to there, and over here and over there, but that’s all, and then I would almost go into detail. What she gets us to do is rough it out, block it out, and get all your relationships correctly, and then go into the lights and get all of those kinds of things, and the lights and darks create the form and only after that at the very end do you go into detail and bring the whole thing alive with detail. But the basic structure is there, the form is already there, the lighting is already there, and then you go into the detail. And it’s much more relaxing to approach a drawing like that. It’s much more, you’re quite sure of yourself all the way along, and it just keeps developing and developing and developing all the way along until you’re finished without having your proportions all wrong and the ellipses on your coffee cups inappropriate and you’ve finished a drawing and you say, “Damn, that doesn’t really look right, does it?”

It’s too late to even fix it, you know, when you’ve got the detail loaded onto it. There’s no way of repairing the damage. You just have to start over again. But you’re sometime demoralized by poor performance like that on a very simple thing. You just didn’t sort of check on things and make sure those things were in place before you went into the finished drawing. It keeps you from doing your next drawing for a very long time, and you have kind of a bad experience with it. You know, I put two hours into that and it didn’t work out. And you’re not sure why you’re not happy. Sometimes you can see what went wrong, but you don’t realize why you actually did it wrong and, in that second stage of the drawing, you make all your corrections and really close observations and so on. Because you think what makes the drawing a really good drawing is the detail, but it isn’t.

Having not taken a beginning drawing class before, I think I may have suffered from the same thing that we all suffer from, and that’s “Oh, well, I already know how to draw.” I can draw. You know, I can put that on a page. I can draw that. Maybe I should be starting at a higher level of drawing or something. No. At some point in your life, you have to get those beginning ideas and techniques and everything under your control and then you can do anything you want. But most of us don’t want to start at the beginning. We all think we’re better or we’re smarter or we’re more talented than that. We don’t
want to be in with 18-year-olds if we’re 43, or something like that. And you think, I’ve
done a lot of drawing already, so I don’t have to start at the beginning. I’m so happy for
this class that it sort of, honestly, I was just captivated by the description of the thing,
because otherwise I might not have taken a beginning class in drawing either, thinking I
already have a little experience in drawing. I just want to refine my technique without
realizing that I didn’t even have a technique to refine.

The awareness she was developing through her drawing related not only to technique, but also to
materials that deepened her pleasure with the activity of drawing. On the way to one of our
sessions, she was reading on the train, The Art of the Pencil.”

I’m marking it all over the place with, you know, a million ideas in it, some I’ve never
thought about like “the pencil was developed in the middle ages,” and how it came about
and why it’s called a lead pencil, it’s not even lead and all these kinds of things. I’ve
always skirted on the top of drawing and I’ve always like drawing and now I can get
right into it and I have all the time in the world and I have all the books and I have all the
equipment and I have all the things I need. The instructor said to me the other day, “You
really like the pencil, don’t you?” And I said, “Yes, I do actually. I like the pen too, but I
really like the pencil.” I don’t know that I’ve every actually even appreciated that for
myself that I like the pencil and pencil drawings so much. I just had the feeling on the
train coming in that this is a whole new approach to drawing. (Field notes, October 22,
2006)

Bell’s narratives are filled with references to books, including the ones already
mentioned: Betty Edwards’ Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain, Leonardo da Vinci, and The
Art of the Pencil. Mostly, they involved “self-help,” in Bell’s case, deepening her relationship
with her creative self, disempowering her inner critic, and establishing a disciplined practice
from time to time in meditation, art-making, and writing, following Twyla Tharp, Julia Cameron,
Ira Progoff, Wayne Dyer, Allan Watts, and Lin Yu Tang. From the age of 13 when she decided
that “no man is better than I am” and that her “intention was to be a very good person,” Bell
engaged in self-structured lifelong learning through books that led her to consider many authors
her friends.

I read books and I find them very interesting and also I put marks beside things that I
really like and then I go back to them and read them again and get more out of them.
Then I do the exercises in these books and it just enriches my life so much. I keep
examining myself and my reactions and things like that and I’ve so enjoyed all of the changes that I’ve made in my life because of it. Why would I stop? I don’t know if I’m going to be some wise, old woman when I’m 80 and other people will come to listen to what I’ve absorbed from life. The absorbing of it all is more interesting than not. I haven’t felt that I needed to do a lot of academic training, I’ve been quite happy doing my own exploring and finding my own authors and teachers, or whatever you want to call these people. I feel as if I have, as if I’m a personal friend of Dyer or I really really know this person or that person, and one of my favorites along the way was a Chinese author by the name of Lin Yu Tang. He’s dead now, but he’s not dead to me and his ideas are not dead to me and if I walked out here when we’re finished today and turned the corner and Lin Yu Tang was standing there, I would say, “Hi, let’s go for coffee, let’s talk.” I feel that close to Rilke, to all of these people I’ve been reading all my life, to Krishnamurti, Ira Progoff, endless numbers of them, and a few really wonderful women as well. I feel as if they’re all personal friends, they’re just not here at the moment. They’re somewhere. And I can relate to them again just by reading a book. (Field notes, December 7, 2006)

Interestingly, Bell’s love of books and learning connected her to her father who had limited formal education, but who had a library at home that was kept locked.

My parents, especially my father, were lovers of learning. My father only went to grade four in school because his father went to the First World War and was killed and left his mother at home with five children. And he was the oldest in grade four, I think he was something like ten and he had to go out to work. And so he worked all of his life. He had a library at home, I’m sure when other people in our community did not have libraries at home. And unfortunately he would never let us use it. It used to be locked because it was his room and I think even that has made me feel that learning is really really important and books are really important to have in your life, especially if they’re right there and you’re not allowed to have them. (Field notes, December 7, 2006)

I expressed my curiosity about how her father managed to accumulate a library.

He had a couple of friends who were book people and he hung out with them. Where he met them I don’t know. But amongst the things, when he brought his paycheck home, he would give my mother half of it to look after the rest of us and he would keep half it, so he had his own money to buy his own books. We didn’t have any money to buy books. And it was a little tight paying the taxes on the house and things like that out of half of the paycheck and we didn’t always have proper winter boots and winter coats and things like that and my mother made all of our clothes. We didn’t have clothes that you bought from the store and those kinds of things, but my father always had his books, so I’m sure that he would have bought second-hand the way we do now. The library was locked. I have been in it several times as an adult, but never as a child, never as a child.

I wondered if Bell had any of her father’s books.
I probably have maybe about a half a dozen of the books and many of them are things like “The Complete Works of Bernard Shaw” and Shakespeare. My eldest daughter has flagged them, saying that she want those books. But one of the interesting things is that when my father died, my mother sent a lot of them, when she remarried I guess, she sent a lot of the books off to a second-hand bookstore. A friend of ours went to the second-hand bookstore, bought one of my father’s books, came to our house, and gave it as a present to my daughter. And it was so interesting to open the cover and see [her father’s name] written on the inside of it. Because this friend of ours didn’t know what my maiden name had been. . . . I can remember just being stunned, how things happen in the world. (Field notes, December 7, 2006)

In her narratives about books and authors, Bell mentioned doing exercises in books and examining herself and her reactions. This disciplined and reflective attitude in life came up often in our conversations, with Bell referring to her many notebooks and journals filled over many years, including the journal that I gave her for our research.

I have black covered books like this. They’re so wonderful, these books. I have books of the travels that I’ve done and I’ve got little sketches everywhere . . . and I have written about my own art process constantly. I was up in Atlin as you know, I think four times, three times, and I have done the meditative drawing. I have books on meditative drawings. I’ve done several different versions of meditative drawing, and I’ve often thought some of these might, I have thought of a year in meditation kind of thing, with a meditation every day, with an image every day. (Field notes, June 27, 2006)

As I’m writing, I keep coming up with interesting ideas and interesting thoughts, so I write with a black pen on my white page ‘cause that’s what I like best, and then I highlight these intuitions, these inspirations or whatever they are. I highlight them in green so I can find them anytime. My latest one is that I would like to do a drawing every day, just a drawing of something, just do a drawing every day, because Twyla [Tharp] talks about practising every day. If you’re a dancer, you dance every day. If you’re an artist, you do art every day. What you’re doing is practising your skills and you develop your skills so that you can then do whatever you want to do easily. That’s the only way you can get there. (Field notes, July 10, 2006)

Bell’s practice of writing and reflecting grew out of her intention at 13 years of age to be a very good person and at least as good as any man. Bell remembered something her aunt had told her that proved to be a strong motivation:

My aunt had told me that all men were better than all women and that fired me up. I thought, “OK, I’m going to figure out what this is all about. No man is better than I am.” Said she at 13, unless he’s better than I am, and he’s got his work cut out for him,
my intention was to be a very good person. At 13, I thought I had my running shoes on and I was moving on this subject. It just wasn’t going to happen, just because you’re male. So I can remember the beginning of this [i.e., examining herself and her reactions] and it’s an ongoing thing. (Field notes, December 7, 2006)

As mentioned earlier, Bell experienced her father as an angry man. She remembered her mother as wanting Bell to return home after she completed her internship in physiotherapy in Toronto, in essence to be a buffer between her father and mother. She found timely support in her grandmother’s sister, “a wise old woman” who told her that the only way Bell could truly look after her mother was to stay in Toronto and create a life for herself into which she could invite her mother. Bell’s reflections on her life led her to realize that, just as she had at 21 years of age, she was again creating a new life for herself. Bell acknowledged the importance of her grandmother’s sister in helping her say no.

She was a terribly important person in my life, as individuals are and as books are. There are all sorts of people in your life that are really crucial to your decision-making process, or supportive of your decision-making process. None of us exists on our own. There are people and ideas and there’s lots of resources in the world. Nobody does all this kind of stuff on their own. (Field notes, December 7, 2006)

Later in this session, Bell continued with this topic:

I think we all need these people in our lives and there’s some unfortunate people who don’t have these role models and mentors and wiser older people. There are some unfortunate people who don’t have them and I think that there’s an awful lot of problems in the world because people aren’t like this. Some people don’t have others around and everybody needs them.

Bell’s sense of responsibility to be a good person was reflected in her continuing remarks:

One of the things for all of us to know is to be that kind of person for anybody who comes across our path, to be that kind of person for them. Those people are around you all the time and that just makes me go back to my feeling when I was 13 that I was a good person in the world and I was going to be one in the world. And I think it took my aunt’s unbelievable remark that any man was better than any woman. Unfortunately, I think she probably felt it. It was part of her awareness at the time, and I’m sure she felt she was imparting to me one of the world’s truths, except that I had come out of the world and wasn’t born into it.
Spending so much time outside of her family and school situations in the woods, knowing where the wild strawberries and white violets grew, she felt she had been born out of the natural world that she loved so much and born through her process of reading, finding her own teachers, and assessing her situation. She came to an understanding of her essence, she says, by reading a question posed by the author, Alan Watts, who stopped her in her tracks: “Do you feel that you were born into the world or out of it?”

Elaborating on her sense of living and wanting to live an ethical life at the age of 13, Bell said:

*I knew that I would never ever harm anybody or anything. I knew that I wanted to, and would and was doing everything that occurred to me to help anybody at any time. I knew that my intentions were honorable, that even at 13, I had a certain integrity. I think it’s the integrity part that’s the “good” part for me. I was honest... I had no malice of any sort and I also think I felt captain of my own fate or something. I was going to decide how I was going to live. That life was going to be a morally appropriate life or something like that and anybody who was going to be better than I was couldn’t just be male. They would have to be awfully good people, to be better than I was. I doubted very much if there were very many people who were thinking the way I was at 13 and I really felt I had been this way for quite a long time, so if you were just going to, if you were just starting, you’ve got a long way to go to catch up and I bet you’ll give, I bet you won’t do it.*

Commenting that it sounded like mature thinking for a 13-year-old, I asked Bell what contributed to that knowing about herself. Again, she contextualized herself in the natural world and her feeling of unity with it:

*Probably solitude. I didn’t have a really good close friend when I was growing up. I didn’t belong properly in groups. I was quite a solitary child and I spent most of my free time in the woods and in Nature. I think it was probably that more than anything else, feeling really at one with Nature. That’s who I was. All of this other stuff that people did was not where it was at. So I think honestly it was Nature and it was like that because I had the opportunity of living way out in the sticks... and having the mile and a half on the street car and no money and no this and no that and no the other thing, so you were left to your own resources, you know, with a lot of time to think.* (Field notes, December 7, 2006)
Bell differentiated her notion of an ethical life from another perspective on “the good life.”

*Some people think that the good life is having a lot of expensive toys and having a lot of things in their lives. That’s never been an issue with me because I have such a rich inner life that I don’t need a rich outer life. I just don’t need it. If I have enough, then enough is enough.*

She spoke about various aspects of materiality in her life.

*I don’t really care what car I drive. . . . Turn the key and the engine goes on and then you drive it. That’s all I want from a car. I don’t want an expensive car, a fancy car. Cars are just utilitarian for me.*

*I look at my daughter’s magazines for interior decorating. People have walk-in closets and I don’t have enough clothes to put in a walk-in closet. Some of my clothes I’ve had for 35 years. I have a 35-year-old sweater and a 20-year-old this and an 18-year-old that. They fit and they go on over your head and they keep you warm. That’s all I want from those things. If I have that, I have the good life. I feel happy because I don’t owe anybody anything. I don’t need anything. I don’t think my life should be any different than it is. I don’t aspire to own anything. In a funny way, by living my life this way, I have everything I need. If I had wanted to have lots of jewelry Ross would have bought me anything I wanted. I just never wanted it. . . . We always just made dinner for each other and had a nice bottle of wine and that was the good life. That really was the good life, and it still is the good life. How did I learn to be that way? I think [it was because] I was a child of the depression.*

Also being a child of parents who married and began raising their family during the depression, I resonated with what Bell was saying. The influence on me throughout my life has been “making do” with what I have. Bell agreed:

*I’m a make-do person as well. A make-do person who’s actually had access to a fairly affluent life. But the things that happened in my formative years are still with me, you know.*

These influences from her early years were still creating tension for Bell who was trying to decide whether or not to purchase a chaise lounge for her bedroom:

*I’ve always thought it would be nice to have a chaise lounge because I read so much and it might be very nice. But then I start thinking about how much it’s going to cost to have that and I think, “No, I don’t think so. I can use the old living room chair. I had two*
chairs in the living room and now one is upstairs, so I have only one. It’s not very comfortable for reading in because you sit too bolt upright.

I’ve solved the problem by just propping myself up in bed and that’s fine. And then my daughter comes along and says, “You really should have that chaise lounge, you know.” I don’t need it. I actually don’t care very much about things and I actually don’t care about cars. I remember back when Ross asked if I wanted a fur coat and I’d never thought of a fur coat. I said, “I don’t know.” And he said, “Why don’t we go into town and see what you like?” So he and I went in town and I stood in front of a mirror with this raccoon coat on and I thought it was the stupidest thing I’d ever seen. It was just unbelievable to be standing there, covered in this stuff. We obviously went out of the store without a coat and drove home. End of story. And I feel the same way about gold and diamonds and everything.

I was a goldsmith but I didn’t go around making gold things for myself and I made gold when somebody else wanted gold. I’ve handled the gold and I’ve handled diamonds and they have no meaning for me, absolutely no meaning.

Bell’s attitude about spending minimal money on material things included books.

I don’t have to own them. Like you get them second-hand. I do go to the library sales and I buy them at a dollar a pound.

I’ve always had this thing about books. My husband has known I’ve always had this thing about books so I would get five, six, seven, eight books for Christmas. I would get books for my birthday, you know for any special occasion. The kids would say, “How come Mom gets so many presents?” But they’re all books because I had my book list, so I would get a lot of my books that way. And then I found myself having to buy my own books and I decided I had to put myself on a book budget. Then the girls got upset at the fact that their mother was going to put herself on a book budget so for my birthday last year they all put money together and gave me a gift certificate to Chapter’s. Just because I said I was going to put myself on a book budget. So I’m quite conscious about how much books cost and the fact that I really like to have them, so I use the library. I get second-hand books. I get books for special occasions and then I buy some. I could probably afford to just go out and buy any book I wanted. I could probably just pay for it. I just never do things that way.

Acknowledging again that she doesn’t have to have a lot of things, and demonstrating that she considered such things within the context of her whole life, Bell stated that she’d even thought it through up to the point when she’d enter a nursing home:

What can I lose and still be OK? If I was in a single bed in a nursing home, I’d like to have a bed by the window and I’d like to have a tree outside the window. I could be reduced to that and still be OK. So I know that. I’ve already sorted that all out for
myself. So everything else is gravy. Everything else is gravy. And if that isn’t a measure of the good life, I don’t know what is.

Eve’s Story

Laughingly, I commented to Eve that I had difficulty finding ordinary audio tapes to use for the research. My comments resonated with Eve who then recalled audio taping interviews when she was getting her social work degree. Recalling this experience led Eve to reveal some discomfort with self-observation in conversation and the challenges that it brings in life:

I think I audio taped some young guy who was living in a group home and it’s always an interesting process to listen to audio tape. This poor kid was sort of floundering. Like me. I’m floundering. It’s very hard to stop being . . . self-observant. It’s hard for me not to continue to be self-observant when I’m engaged in a conversation because it’s just part of my nature. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

Reflecting that I was aware that I was not uncomfortable with self-observation which I thought was part of developing consciousness, I commented to Eve that the type of work we do requires that we become self-observant in our service to others, and that once we develop that characteristic, we don’t lose it. Eve’s ambivalence about this characteristic was apparent as she suggested that being more conscious, more self-aware, doesn’t “always lead to the happiest frame of life.” She compared herself to others she knows:

I have friends and my sister who are not self-reflective at all. . . . They all have their gifts and so on, and they seem to skim on the surface of life and they always seem to be up as very extroverted and very enthusiastic, and I think, “God, I wish I could be like that more often. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

I detected a tension expressed in Eve’s narratives between extroversion and introversion and lightness and seriousness that appeared throughout our sessions. She referred to an acting programme for seniors at a local university:

It gets the creative juices working. It’s very extro-, all the women there, the majority of women, and they’re lovely people, most of them [laughs] but it’s so extroverted. I could never leave my apartment (meaning, I think, that she would be comfortable in one sense,
if she always stayed in, maintaining her introverted attitude), but I do, but it becomes too extroverted for me and then I have to sort of back off. It becomes really crazy. Not crazy, but something I’m aware of. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

When I asked Eve to elaborate, she said:

I get irritable. . . . I just don’t want to get pulled in and involved. Then, it’s OK, I need to be with people. I have certain needs. I’m always looking for meaningful things, for certain things to do. There’s a lot of conversation that drives me, that quickly I lose interest in. So I’m struggling with that, and I’ve overcome a lot of that resistance, but I have found that there’s an aspect of that creative clown in me that I enjoy doing and finding. These things present themselves and you make use of them, which is fun. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

When Eve discussed her sister whom she perceives as quite different from her, I felt that the comparison was helping Eve explore and try to increase her understanding about herself.

My sister is extroverted and not self-reflective. We went to her place . . . [because] she wanted to show everybody her paintings. She’s a character and she doesn’t care. They were not that great but she doesn’t care. And she’s got a zillion friends. I always keep saying, at her funeral the church is going to be filled [laughs]. And she doesn’t differentiate. Even the people who really bug her or upset her, she still invites them to everything. You know, I kind of envy that, that lack of, you know, it doesn’t bother her, maybe it bothers her at some level. She’s a very intelligent woman, don’t misunderstand me. (Field notes, July 2, 2006)

Eve’s sister encouraged Eve to share a play she had written with another woman who had written several plays. Interestingly, the play was a study of contrasts between two women.

It’s sort of two sides of the same coin. One woman who’s very, you know, like “I’m special, I’m unique, just look at my antiques” and then the other “I’m ordinary, I’m average, here is my beverage”. . . . So they’re opposites, right, but the fact is they come from the same lack of inner self-confidence. (Field notes, July 2, 2006)

Eve’s inner conflict between extroversion and introversion and her search for meaning also appeared when she told about her volunteer work at a centre for women:

I also have this six years volunteering at . . . [a women’s centre], facilitating groups for women, which you know uses up, it does use up my [extroversion], I use my skills which I’ve learned over the years, which can be boring, depending on the group of women that show up.
The last group was a wonderful group. They’re just stuck with relationship problems and they’re from different cultures. It’s a real slice of life. So you might get one woman who’s dealing with a relationship crisis, and another woman, maybe all her money’s been taken from her, she fell in love with some guy who absconded with her money. . . . I move from wanting to do these groups to not wanting to do them. I’m always conflicted about it. I’d like to be able to find a theme in my life where I can get over the conflict. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

Eve contextualized her conflict about extroversion and introversion and finding meaning in life within the frame of getting older:

I think as I’ve gotten older I recognize that if I don’t engage in more extroverted activities, I can lead a very solitary life. You know, I have four children and five grandchildren and they have their own lives and certainly we do stuff together, but you do have to do things for your own meaning in the time that you have and try to engage. So it’s a very interesting process. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

In a subsequent session, Eve continued with this thread connecting the implications of aging and the need to “put oneself out” into the world, even when it’s difficult:

I’ve learned since I’ve left my marriage that if I don’t want to be isolated with a very old, aged, lonely life that I have to uh [tolerate, perhaps] everybody, which I do, but I can only do it for so long. (Field notes, July 2, 2006)

Eve’s acknowledgement of seeking relationships outside of her family, and seeking meaning in relationship became a little more defined as she spoke about her relationship with a woman who lives nearby and who also attends the acting studio:

It’s important to have a level playing field where I don’t have to be in competition with someone, where you can just engage with a friend, on a person-to-person basis with no gamesmanship, and I would like to think at a particular age it would disappear, but it hasn’t, at least I haven’t found it. With this woman . . ., there is an aspect of one-upmanship. I feel there’s an aspect of it that is toxic. But I want to avoid it, and then I don’t know if that’s to my detriment, because maybe I’d get more engaged if I didn’t see into things. . . . It’s a self-protective aspect. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

In our final session together, Eve was able to elaborate on an attitude that was in opposition to the competitive attitude she referred to in our second session. She emphasized the
importance for her of having comfortable, non-competitive relationships as she ages and her self-reflection about this attitude:

_The thing is, when you’re interacting with people who’ve done work or who are more conscious, you don’t normally run into the petty competition or the one-upmanship which, you know, is so easy to spot. I don’t want anything to do with it but, mind you, sometimes I get caught [laughs]. I try not to. So, that’s a pleasure, talking with people where there’s no competition. You don’t have to hold back or worry about saying something that’s going to be hurtful because they don’t understand what you meant. So that’s kind of nice. It’s nice to grow old like that. (Field notes, November 24, 2006)_

Throughout our conversations, Eve spoke often about self-reflection. Speaking again specifically about the acting studio, Eve expressed an awareness of the opposites within herself and her hopefulness for increased personal understanding of her inner conflict:

_You get people, like these retired doctors and professors plus the regular people who have retired and see this as developing an aspect of their life that they’ve always wanted to develop and so, it’s been interesting. One of the things that I’m hoping to explore within myself is the conflict I feel and jumping in and pulling back and standing on the sidelines. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)_

This statement led Eve to explore the concept of opposites within her family and her cultural roots:

_I just created a memory with my mother and father. They were Italian immigrants who came when my mother was sixteen and my father was eight, so they never had an accent. They came from such opposite families. My mother’s two brothers were very traditional and conservative. One lived in L. And one lived across from the . . . country club. They were very bourgeoisie, and they didn’t adhere to the conventional life. Always my aunts would go out twice a year and buy clothes for the season. They both became very financially successful and the immigrant experience where you buy one property and then you own a lot and then. . . . My father’s family was the exact opposite. They were a ragtag bunch of people who were very spontaneous, loved poker, a couple of sons were bookies, you know, in that era. . . . I think these opposites have lived with me forever, because I admired one brother, the other one was as traditional as my mother’s family. But I admired that free-flowing, always in a crisis it seemed, financial or whatever, but there were two different ways of being in the world. And yet I saw the pitfalls of both and so I don’t know, talking about opposites. I don’t go back into the past and look at my past. Maybe that’s something I should do. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)_
And yet, Eve’s interest in the cultural past did play an important role in her confrontation with extroversion and seeking meaning through relationships with other women. A particular group involved culturally diverse women who traveled together to ancient archaeological sites. Their initial trip together was to Ireland:

*Our initial quest, if you want to call it that, was to see the goddess sites in Ireland. There was a certain like-mindedness and a spirituality.* (Field notes, July 2, 2006)

Eve recalled her reunion experience with this group as she created her second sandpicture in this session (see p. 226). Throughout our meetings together, she displayed a lively energy when she spoke about recent emails she had received from members of that group. For her, these personal connections seemed to connect her with something larger, something that had universal purpose:

*It’s really fun to be connected because we get these emails asking us to send our universal energy and prayers to pray for the success of, you know, something, so the neighbours won’t cut down a tree or some damn thing.* (Field notes, September 21, 2006)  
*We also got an email from H.W. saying she was trying to get a property in, oh, god, it’s really fun to be connected. . . . And I sent an email to H. saying “Good luck.” And she actually emailed me back so I was shocked because she gets hundreds of emails.* (Field notes, September 21, 2006)

Mention of this group came up in most of our sessions, with subsequent narratives deepening Eve’s story as she articulated her thoughts. Finding words to describe the experience seemed to challenge Eve who obviously felt deeply about her experiences with these women:

*It’s always interesting to get emails from the different women and and uh to hear all our responses to each other. To hear that diverse thinking that goes beyond simply left-brain thinking, either/or, black or white, to know that synchronicity and intuition will come . . . . It’s lovely, it’s lovely. It doesn’t happen often. . . . I think of some of the things I’ve written in connection to that group because we’ve had some extraordinary trips.* (Field notes, October 19, 2006)

Eve spoke also of her trips with family to Italy, the family homeland. There she recognizes a quality of life that is connected to nature and the elements in a very basic way.
Feeling emotionally connected to that, she seems to have some difficulty in finding the words to describe her experience, but as she continues with her narrative, she comes to a realization that she needs to reconnect with that quality of experience at this time in her life.

When we were in Sorrento, we saw mounds and mounds of these shells and conch shells and then we’d walk along the beach. There’s just that element of water and then in Latagianna, there would be fishermen, they’d go out every morning. And then they’d come in with, they’d come out from fishing but there’d always be boats coming in with all of these beautiful shells that I would have thought would manufactured in a factory, they would be so beautiful. The colours of blues, they were just amazing and the fishermen are so, they have such a basic elemental quality to their lives that you know it’s just wonderful to be with them. And in Ladogana, I remember walking along the sea, I don’t remember what ocean we were walking along, and there was this guy who had a suit and a tie and a shirt and he had two fish in either hand. He had one long fish and another long fish. ‘Cause you go down to buy the fish from the fishermen. And I guess he didn’t have a bag and I just wished I had my camera because it was just so beautiful. And you’d buy the fish from the fishermen, right? So it was really, I guess it just, I don’t know, and I do get tired of all the hype of modern-day living. I mean, I love parts of it but it’s just, it just bombards your mind with things and information and and, you know, it is important and yet part of you is drawn, part of me is drawn to it. It’s very interesting. I think I need to travel to the sea. (Field notes, September 21, 2006)

Returning again to the image of the man with the fish, she continued telling about her experience in Latagianna. Her memories of her appreciation of a basic life with strong ties to nature led again to memories of inner conflict that often arise in interpersonal relationships, as she has described earlier in terms of one-upmanship and competition. In these situations, she makes a conscious effort to constrain her emotions and verbal retaliation, as she recounts in what follows:

And he was so serious walking with these two fishes. And he dropped them. They were so slippery. But it was lovely. It was an apartment on the fourth floor that my sister rented. You could look out onto the ocean and there was a terrace and we could eat out there. Sometimes we would go swimming, but it’s so funny, I looked it up on the internet and I said, you know, at Latagianna, they have, what are they that attach to the skin [leeches]? So I told my sister and her friend bought this something in Shoppers Drug Mart that will stop the sting immediately and we did that, and I said, “Well, it’s all rocky on the bottom.” and we all got these shoes at Canadian Tire, so that was great. But the waves at certain times would come in. I was there in the water and a wave came in and toppled me over and I lost my sunglasses and all I could do was get out onto the sand. So
my other friend . . . that was staying there said, “Well, you just weren’t standing properly, that’s why. You didn’t have your feet standing properly.” I must be blessed because I didn’t say anything. The next day I was standing on the little balcony there, she’s out there and she gets toppled. She loses her hat, she loses her shoe, she loses her sunglasses. Again, I didn’t say, “I told you so.” I didn’t say a word [laughs]. It takes a lot of restraint, don’t you think? [Eve laughs again.] (Field notes, September 21, 2006)

In our sessions, Eve told of several experiences in which she was with a friend at an event when the friend was critical about the person presenting the event out of disappointment that she hadn’t found something she was looking for in the experience. Eve described these relational experiences as “difficult,” eventually coming around to the point that there’s a limit to conversation that doesn’t allow expansion “into psychology or philosophy or spirituality” and that therefore feels constraining. Speaking about one family member led her to contrast that relationship with her experience with her sons and daughter-in-law:

*She becomes defensive and she’s not self-reflective at all. She’s a terrific person and enthusiastic and she’s extroverted, so I’ve learned never to go there [to a discussion about psychology, philosophy, and spirituality], which is a good thing to know. So I’m lucky I have two sons and a daughter-in-law.*

In an early session, Eve had spoken about parking her car in a particular spot, having dinner with her son near his home, sauntering through a remodeled store nearby and arriving back at her son’s home in time to move her car from where she had unintentionally parked it in front of a neighbour’s driveway. The neighbour had just called the police to have it towed. A minute after she got into the car to move it, the police car drove by. She also recounted a short story about getting on the subway and unknowingly sitting next to her ex-daughter-in-law. Eve considered these experiences as acts of synchronicity in which two related non-causal events occur at the same time. In a later session, Eve related these events to her interest in “essence,” a spiritual concept introduced in our first session together when she spoke about studying the Diamond Heart approach that is an integration of spiritual teachings from Sufism, Buddhism,
and depth psychology. The founder, A. H. Almaas has a centre where he teaches people to transform their lives through integrating spiritual and psychological insights and approaches.

Eve had attended meetings for about six months. Through the teachings, she was able to develop some self-understanding and increase her level of tolerance for others and acceptance of difference that she perceived in them. In our first session together, she had told about going to a workshop on the Enneagram, which she described as “a tool for self-knowledge.” She told about the enneagram in the context of Almaas’s Diamond Heart approach.

The Enneagram is a tool of self-knowledge. And he [Almaas] wrote a book called “Facets of Unity.” They’re called holy ideas or something, h-o-l-y. So I bought it and read and I started reading about my Enneagram type which is a five and I got insight into myself that just about knocked me over and I’d been in analysis . . . for four years and I never got this type of insight [laughs]. And uh how I keep my friends apart, which I do, which I did, I try not to now. God, just different aspects of myself I had no idea I was doing, so then I started reading the Enneagram books. There are some really good books. . . . There are nine personality types, there’s the heart type, the mind type, and I don’t know what other type. . . . There’s the healthy, what a healthy nine would do, a normal nine, or an unhealthy and how they would adapt to the world. And it’s very spiritually based, so that’s really helped me a lot in understanding, trying to understand myself. I don’t always. I know I’m blocked in many things. But also understanding my sister who’s four years older than me, three years, four years, who’s an extrovert, an enthusiast, and non-reflective, and I found out her type. You’re not supposed to do this. You choose your own type. Nobody tells you. There’s a series of questions you answer. And it just helped me to understand because I mean she just used to drive me crazy. It didn’t really drive me crazy. You know, she’d be on a trip. She’d come back from about twelve hours on an airplane and pick up her phone and find out there was some do that night, so she’d drink a big cup of black coffee and out she would go. So now it’s a lot easier. Oh, I guess what it does is not only help me to understand myself but understand others. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

In a later session, Eve talked again about reading Almaas.

I was reading this other book, re-reading it, Almaas’s “Luminous Night Journey.” It’s Almaas’s experience of essence, you know, and the things he’s experienced.

Eve’s reference to Almaas was related to her own consideration of “essence” which is a major teaching of the Diamond Heart approach and which seems to be of major interest to her at this time of life.
It’s a deepening. At least for me, it’s a deepening. . . . I’m interested in essence. I’m interested in the outside world, the exterior world, but I’m also interested in essence and I think that’s what, you know, everything is stripped away, the ambitions, all the ego, and the rest of it. It’s sort of like coming back on Friday night and going to . . . [my son’s] place and, you know, just getting there, we had sauntered through . . . [the renovated store], and just getting there, you know, the cop car coming, and to me that’s really, you’re really in touch with the cosmos, the universe is in touch with me, because it could have been I would have had to take a cab to get my car back, and just getting on that subway car and there’s an empty seat and I sit beside . . . [my ex-daughter-in-law]. You know, that’s enough for me.

After talking about a few members of her family in a personal way, Eve narrated how she had been introduced to Jungian psychology.

I was going to university and there was this professor and she used to wear these blankets and she’d worked with the Rastafarians and I was this nice little housewife who’d come from an Italian background and you know, all this shit, so she had “Man and his Symbols” by Jung. I got the book and started to read it and shortly after I saw “Boundaries of the Soul” by June Singer, so I asked my friend, M., if I could borrow it and it really touched me. Then I remembered Zena Cherry, she used to write a column in “The Globe & Mail.” She used to report different things that were going on and June Singer was appearing at the Friends’ House. The Jungian Society was sponsoring her, where they used to have their gatherings, so I decided to go. It was January. I went there and I had had a dream where there were [sic] a Bible and I had never read or studied the Bible in my life, because as Catholics we were never encouraged to read the Bible. So I get to the Friends’ House which is on Lowther Street and on the table is [sic] all these Bibles. And then June Singer walks in and she’s got this fur jacket on and is a tall woman, so afterwards you could ask questions. So I asked her, well, what is the meaning of the Bible? And she said, well, it’s a repository of world knowledge, and so I got kind of interested and then, I don’t know how I got into analysis. (Field notes, November 24, 2006)

This pull towards knowledge also led Eve to explore by enrolling in various courses and workshops, such as becoming an auditor in a course at a local university. In her narrative in an earlier session, Eve expressed her awareness that this experience [and perhaps others] was limited in some way.

I took an amazing course at Y. I audited it a couple of years ago. It was on Northrop Frye and Marshall MacLuhan. The instructor was [inaudible] who wrote a book on Trudeau. I saw an article by him in The Globe and Mail and it said he was leading a class with 3rd and 4th year English students, so I phoned up and he said, “Yeah, you could audit it.” And it really was a most wonderful experience because he’s quite brilliant, and
it was also interesting to see his respect for his students, both male and female, and how he initiated them into that other world. You could see it happening, but very gradually, having insight, a bit of insight... [the professor] because he had known Marshall MacLuhan and had worked with his son, and also Northrop Frye. That was really interesting. But you see I never did anything with it. I’ve got a notebook full of notes, but it was just for my own learning. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

I wondered aloud what was the most memorable part of that experience for Eve who then displayed her respect for a brilliant mind and an ability to integrate ideas.

Well, I think if was... [the professor] himself and he’s certainly not an egotistical person by any means. As a matter of fact, I often thought he’d been slapped somewhere along the way by the Great Mother, because he was very humble. I usually have [laughs]. I think it was his brilliance in the exposition of MacLuhan and Northrop Frye and also for me the Four Quartets, T.S. Eliot, bringing it all together. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

Eve continued her recollection of that university experience on a personal level that reflected her contextualization in age and an attitude that there is more to education than getting academic credit:

Just being in that learning environment, and talking to these young kids during break, although some avoided me like the plague. Probably I reminded them of their grandmother or something [laughs]. Yeah, just listening to them and their ambitions. Some of them are there just to get a credit and others were really sharp. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

I felt a poignancy, listening to the enthusiasm in Eve’s voice and attending to the very general comparison she made of the two groups of students. I later understood her comments when she shared that she had initially quit school in grade ten following an illness and only much later as an adult and mother was able to return to study formally at the university level.

I think back on my life and I think how fortunate I have been to grow up in a family that were immigrants, to be able to marry and have four children and then go back to university. Going to university, not back. I only went to Grade ten. But to be able to do this and to recognize my abilities of being a thinking type and develop my feeling type, thank God, and an intuitive, it’s a sphere that’s very small. Like those attributes are wonderful to have, but when I look at people who are musicians and their knowledge of music or I don’t know or painting or art, I see myself as very fortunate that I was able to develop to where I am and I can have these great conversations with my kids.
In a later session, Eve recalled early childhood experience, perhaps one of those singular moments, when she was conscious of her thinking ability.

_I remember being eight years old and going to confession and thinking this is all bull. And deciding I wasn’t going to be a Catholic at eight years old. And that’s not an unfamiliar thing. I think that capacity to think through and see beyond is there and was there._ (Field notes, November 24, 2006)

This memory led Eve to recall her first conscious encounter with books which became significant in her life. Most respectfully, I cite her narrative that reminds me of a dog sniffing around a small area and then finding the perfect spot to express itself, like a zeroing in on a territory that can be claimed. I detect that kind of mental “sniffing around” in a chronological period as she finds a significant memory that explains her interest in and ability for gathering knowledge and how it relates to her cultural tradition.

_When I was 14 and my parents had a fruit and grocery store, we lived above it. Because my uncles were very well-to-do, they would buy property. Then my mother and father decided they were ready to buy a property and they bought this house at [address concealed for confidentiality purposes]. It was an American woman who was getting a divorce which, in those days, who knew anybody that got divorced, now who doesn’t, right [laughs]? And then this woman left her furniture and everything. She just wanted to get away from the marriage and she went to the States, so my parents bought the house and then rented it to this Mr. and Mrs. C. I don’t know why I can remember this. But there were all kinds of different things, pens that now would be nothing but that had a sheath on it, and all kinds of things. And there was a box of books. And there was also a sewing machine. And I got the box of books. And in the box of books amongst a lot of sexual stuff which was great was this Lanny Bud series by Upton Sinclair. I don’t know, I guess people didn’t think he was a wonderful writer but it was “World’s End” or something. And I started reading this book and there was Delacroix. Anyways, it was another world and I was thrilled about it. I used to read Perry Mason books and Balzac and, oh, I wish I could remember that philosopher’s name. So I started going to the second-hand bookstore on St. Clair and getting all these books from the lending library. And that’s really where my journey began, with books. And I started reading Balzac. And I came from, you know, people look at immigrants as peasants, but they’re not peasants. They’ve got this knowledge. They’re earth and sky and water. I know some of the things that my mother did to, you know, they, they, there was something about that Italian heritage. And I think it’s true of every heritage, whether it’s East Indian or Chinese or Japanese that the predominant ruling culture just phoo-phooed, you know, it was that class system in England. And yet there was an enlightened way of being, like_
you followed certain rules and it gave you a value system which was really important. So, I don’t know, but to get out of that world through books, by reading Balzac, you know, I always had my nose in a book, riding the streetcar, and everybody would say, “You’re going to marry a professor.” [laughs] But that’s what happened. And then when I had the opportunity to go to Atkinson, you know, and take the roots of western culture and read Plato and Aristotle, you know all the Greeks and holy mackerel, that was the biggest thing in my life to go to university. (Field notes, November 24, 2006)

Describing what stimulated her to go to university at the precise time that she did, Eve said:

*I think it was just a thirst for knowledge. Also, I had a cousin, well, my cousin’s daughter, who was getting her university degree, and it’s just something that I thought, oh, if only, but I knew I would never be able to go to high school, to finish high school and do the math ‘cause as a kid I had asthma and I missed so much school. I just missed the real building blocks and stuff . . . I couldn’t breathe. And I just couldn’t go to school. It’s an interesting process when you look back and you make these connections. . . .* I did my undergraduate at York and then I did my degree in Social Work and then I worked and then I went to U of T, I had the most extraordinary experience at U of T, very other worldly experience, so that put me into another space altogether. It’s interesting to look at how we get to where we are. (Field notes, November 24, 2006)

Later in that session, Eve elaborated on the circumstances leading up to her school departure in grade ten and her subsequent life experience.

*I had my tonsils out for the second time. They started to hemorrhage in grade ten and then I missed all this school. I went home and they started to hemorrhage and then I just never went back to school. . . . I worked in the store. Then I took a course, a comptometer [course]. A comptometer was a thing that you could add up things without looking at them and then I took some other course and then I worked at Blue Cross. A friend of mine got me the job and she said, “Oh, there’s a position.” Well, she was leaving and I got that position. I was the first one in my family to go out and get a job. You know, we worked in the family store. And she worked for an importing company and she was leaving that, so she said “Take this job.” And I did that. So, because I was reading Balzac and philosophers and all this stuff, that’s why it really propelled me when I heard about Atkinson.*

Eve’s continuing narrative at this time interwove her son’s challenging educational experience with her own increasing confidence in her ability to enter a formal education environment again. How she got to where she did, became clearer.
[My son] was going into grade three and they were going to fail him. He was a December baby and I thought hmmm, but I didn’t want to lay a burden on him if he wasn’t ready. You know what boys are like. So they said there was a summer school that would test these kids. The principal asked me if I would be interested. So we took turns. There were about three or four families driving the kids down and picking them up. [My husband] drove the first time and he said, “You know, [our son] isn’t like these kids.” So then I drove the second time and I thought, “He’s right. [Our son] is brighter.” And then of course they tested him. He was going into grade three and he had the intelligence of a grade eight kid and there was a teacher who failed all these boys and she was disorganized. So I went to a conference about kids. It wasn’t learning disabilities. I think it was at Ryerson. And there were all these psychologists. And then I went out to lunch with them and there were all these Masters of this and psychologists and they were all talking about what this presenter had said and I thought “That’s not what he said at all.” And then I thought, Jesus, you know, maybe I’m not that stupid. So that’s really how I got going. That’s what really propelled me to go to university. And of course [our son] passed. But really, you just never know where it’s going to lead because I don’t know if I hadn’t gone to that conference and realized that and gone out to lunch with this group of women if I would have realized that I had the intelligence to go to university. (Field notes, November 24, 2006)

Eve talked about her pleasure with sharing what she has learned with others, referring to her adult children. She especially noted the pain she feels when people do not respond to or understand what she says. She also touched on her conflicted feelings about her extroverted relationships and activities that she was working on understanding.

I like to think that, when I’m with . . . [my adult children, I’m] on another level. I remember reading someplace how painful it is to share something with someone who doesn’t get it, and with my kids, they get it. And so I think at . . . [the acting studio] what happens is that, it’s not that the women are ego-centered, although of course you’re always running into that, there isn’t the depth and yet there is because it’s all part of life, there’s the drama, you know, putting stuff on stage and the creativity. I must explore that a bit. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

I resonated with what Eve was saying and spoke of my experience with these two types of relationships, the one in which someone lets me know that he or she has resonated with something that I’ve said, and the other in which the person is not really listening to what I say or responding to it. In the latter, it seems that the person is just waiting to get a word in edgewise so that he or she can tell his or her own story and to monopolize the conversation because there
is no interest in hearing my story or developing a conversation between us. Eve continued with her exploration, pin-pointing body awareness and body metaphor:

*I’m not sure if I can explore that back to what I feel. But maybe, uh, the creativity part is . . . I’m very aware of that in my own body. Actually I have a friend who was saying that her feet . . . were really hurting and she said, “Well I realize that I was hurting.” I said, “Maybe it was your standpoint too.”* (Specific details are withheld for confidentiality purposes.) (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

At that point, Eve reconnected to my talk about my Dancer image and once again contextualized her conversation in age:

*You also mentioned dancing. I know that when you go to weddings, there’s circle dancing, but I think as an older person that is one thing I really miss, to go dancing. Not that I was a great dancer, and I’d probably last about fifteen minutes. I mean, that’s a reality.* (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

I enquired about whether she was speaking about dancing with a partner, or about any kind of dancing, moving to music.

*Probably whatever, although it is lovely. I know if I went to a wedding with my sons, they don’t know how to dance, to waltz, that would be something I would have done with my ex-husband. He was a big man but he was a great dancer. You know, so these are all things that are in the process of growing older. You don’t have to miss out, you can seek out things. I’ve had friends who took ballroom dancing and had a heart attack [laughs].* (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

Aging was a topic that was interwoven through our conversations. Eve thought that going into analysis might be helpful in dealing with the aging process.

*To just keep going deeper and deeper just to probe and also to deal with the aging process because the aging process is not such an easy thing to [deal with]. There’s such a fear in society of aging. And to be able to accept it, you know, a hearing aid, and I’ve never worn glasses and now I’m having trouble with this eye, you know, and all that whole process, you know, that’s uh pretty remarkable.*

*It’s hard to combine the physical with one’s ability. I mean, so far I can still do most things. It’s just, you know, it’s just a process. And you see people like Dolly Parton who looks, she’s had countless surgeries and parts of her body must be old. I mean [laughs uproariously], I saw these really, like goddess figures, like the goddess of Willendorf, and I said, “Jeez, that’s my body.” [laughs] But it is.* (Field notes, July 2, 2006)
Again, in relation to age, Eve mentioned an incident regarding a statement she had recently received from a banking institution:

>I had this issue with [name of banking institution]. I transferred some money from an account and I got my statement . . . and I couldn’t see it. I phoned the guy and he said, “I’ll have one of the girls phone you back.” She didn’t phone back. Then she called back and I said, “Well, if they can’t find it and it’s their statement and that’s their business,” and she said, “Well, I’m trying to help you and I’m trying not to be hard.” Well, I just went “Whew!” I said, “I’d appreciate it if you didn’t treat me like a little old lady. I’ve been banking for 50 years.” I have. I have three business accounts, and she’s telling me the reason this wasn’t entered, the sum, is that it was transferred in September and I said it was transferred in October and it should be entered. But that’s a process of ageism and people respond to you as if you don’t have half a brain in your head. (Field notes, November 24, 2006)

In Eve’s narrative, age was implicated with driving as well.

>I went to court on Thursday because I’d gotten a ticket last November a year ago for driving through a stop sign which I’d never done. But I was probably in a trance. Oh, don’t ask me why, but I thought, “Oh, I’m going to court.” My problem, my worry was it was $110 but it was three points. And I assumed that your insurance goes up, so the officer didn’t show up so the charges were withdrawn, so that was nice. (Field notes, November 24, 2006)

I resonated with Eve’s story because of a few incidents that my husband had recently had while driving. Eve continued, telling me about her experience:

>I know with myself, if I can avoid driving on the highway at night, I do. You get older and all these things happen . . . . What I did, after I got that ticket for going through a stop sign last November, I don’t know, maybe there was a series of things that happened, but I lost my confidence and so I took a senior’s driving course with the Ontario Motor League. I took both the written . . . and the driving test, and that restored my confidence. And I think if that happened again, if I lost my confidence, I’d just take another driving test. It was a good thing to do because I really got anxious about getting into a car. . . . When you get older, well as I get older, your reflexes diminish. You know, that’s kind of scary. (Field notes, November 24, 2006)

Eve held the opposites in relation to age:

>This whole idea of older people who are disabled through strokes and how difficult it is for them to enter a long-term nursing facility, it’s really hard. I have a friend who is turning 90 on July 15th. She doesn’t wear a hearing aid, she does beading, and she does pilates. She went to her daughter’s on Wednesday and cooked dinner for her
grandchildren while her daughter goes to choir. I tell her, “You’ll be my role model.” (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

In a later session, she spoke again of her 90-year-old “role model” friend:

We were out the other night. We went to an art exhibit on Davenport. She drove and I walked and later we got in the car. We were going to go for dinner on Davenport and it was too early. None of the restaurants start until 5:30. I said, “Well, come down to my place and we’ll go across the street.” She gets in the car and says, “Well, my next car” she says “I’d like to have heated seats.” [laughs] She only bought this care two years ago. And we walked across to . . . [the restaurant] and they said, “It’s a private function. You can’t come in.” I said, “What kind of private function is it?” And it was a women’s forum and it was $25, everything included. Ursula Franklin was talking and this other professor from U of T on women’s history, and a women’s lawyer, and someone else. So [my friend] said, “Oh, let’s do it.” And I said, “OK.” And I thought, that’s the kind of person I’d like to be when I’m ninety [laughs]. (Field notes, October 19, 2006)

Our conversations often led to the topic of women’s relationships. Eve spoke about a valued relationship with a group of women who met together locally:

L.C. invited us to her home for an exploration of yin and yang, and watching videos, and I would sit there. I liked all the women, it was really rewarding, and I always thought that somewhere in the middle of all this heady stuff, I’d like to move into my body and get up and dance. I wanted to move and you know, that went on for years. From the second Wednesday of September until June. We did “Answer to Job” and there’s another one she wanted to do. There was N.V. who came in. She does beautiful watercolours. She paints her dreams. I know they’re all personal but I’d love to buy her art. But she’d never sell her paintings. And then there was J.Z. whose husband had interviewed Jung and tape-recorded him, but Jung would never allow it to be aired. She got a transcript from her husband on the condition that it would not be taken away. And so we read it. We read the transcript. I could see why he wouldn’t want it aired because it was very elitist. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

As Eve listed other people who came to the group, her attention returned to the founder, L. Her respect for knowledge and dismay at diminishing capacity were reflected in her words about L.:

L. has just faded into nothing. She’s not suffering from dementia or Alzheimer’s. It’s just that, all that knowledge, she just over the last few months would say, “You can go home now. I want to get dinner.” (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

She’d gone into a depression and then she went into a retirement home, not very far. But she was smart. She didn’t sell her home. But this retirement home is much too upscale
for her. You dress for lunch and for dinner. But then she moved back after about three months, not even that long. And I said to her (getting into "my Artemis mode," as Eve later described it), "You know, you really should see your doctor, and start taking uh oh, my battery is dead [in Eve’s hearing aid] and I’ll have to replace it. And she [L.C.] started taking anti-depressants. This whole idea of not taking medication! I’ve found that women hit their 80s, my son disagrees with me. I don’t know if it’s something with their neurotransmitters or what, often times they get into a depression and they can’t get out of it. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

Eve seemed to abruptly change the subject:

I always wanted to get up and dance at L.’s. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

I wondered aloud what Eve’s dancer would look like.

I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of the tarantella. It’s an Italian dance. That image just came to me. I don’t know where it came from. It’s not very ephemeral. It’s very earthy. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

As I type this section, I feel curious to know a little more about the tarantella dance, so I Google it. I read that it is a brief, graceful and elegant courtship dance usually engaged in by couples. It may also be performed solo by an agitated victim of a tarantula bite, one who may be experiencing delirium or contortions. This dance is said also to cure the symptoms of a neurotic woman, as Google presents it. This implicit element of courtship brought to mind Eve’s reference to dancing with her ex-husband (“a great dancer”). My association to the mental image that came in response to Eve’s words was that, as older women, we have minimal opportunities to dance, to feel sexually attractive to a man, and to experience intimate touch. However, for Eve, dance was a celebration of life, with freedom of movement being what she missed. In a later conversation, Eve’s cultural heritage shone through when she said: If you’d ever been to an Italian wedding and seen an Italian grandmother dance the tarantella, you’d know that embodiment comes to mind. I regretted that I had never been to an Italian wedding to see the sensual movement of an Italian grandmother performing a celebration of life on the dance floor. I thought about the degradation of this beautiful image of a freely moving woman by the words I
read on Google associating the dance with “an agitated victim of a tarantula bite.” My memories of my early years within the Presbyterian church where I attended many weddings carry no images of women dancing freely in celebration. I think Dancer leans more towards Eve’s associations and wants me to know this.

In our session together in which at one moment we were discussing dancing, Eve continued with what seemed like an incongruent statement. However, in a non-linear fashion, she returned to the topic at hand. (I have often heard women express their frustration because of criticism by others—usually men—that they don’t get right to the point. I think it’s an indication of different speech patterns of men and women, a point I’d like to explore in narratives at another time. I also think that at some deep level women make many connections and that sometimes part of these connections are left unsaid.)

I woke up at about two o’clock last night. Usually if I eat six soda biscuits I go right back to sleep. . . . I used to go and visit my mother at Riverdale Hospital. . . . And it’s so depressing. I’d always come up here and have sugar-free yogurt and a sugar-free muffin and I’d go home and I’d fall almost into this catatonic state. . . . But anyway, [last night] I turned on the television and there was a woman I didn’t know. Her last name was Battaglia. She was a photographer who was instrumental in helping to rout out the mafia for a time. And she said she was passionate about living and passionate about this and passionate about that. I don’t think I’m passionate about too many things [laughs]. I was sitting there at two o’clock watching this, and then she [Battaglia] left Palermo. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

I responded that it seemed that the dancer she had described earlier seemed to be passionate.

And I think that’s the conflict that I have. Because I think there’s that passionate nature that I have and that’s always sort of prevented me from expressing what I [feel]. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

Although she wasn’t explicit about the connection, Eve seemed to continue with details about another aspect of herself that often didn’t show itself or find a forum. Because of circumstances, the opportunities to do so have been limited.
I think there’s the aspect of comedian too that, if circumstances present themselves. . . I remember being at one of our reunions in California . . . [after our initial trip]. I went about, I don’t know how many years ago now, on a pilgrimage to Ireland to see all the goddess sites and then every 18 months we’ve had a reunion, which is interesting because that now has stopped. A couple of the women can’t afford to travel because they’re in their 50s. They have financial problems because they’re not working, and L.’s group has stopped. So there’s a loss of community in some aspect. But I remember being in California, there’s a California thing, it’s sourdough bread and crabs legs washed down with lots of wine, and I went, I remember, and that’s something they still talk about today, I went into this crazy uh, oh, it was on the sex life of North American women and it was funny [laughs]. I don’t even know where it came from. It just came out of nowhere. We were just sitting around, drinking wine and we had this discussion and they still talk about it. So I think there’s an aspect of the comedian that I enjoy, but it’s spontaneous, it just comes. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

I wondered if this was her clown. She said:

*I think it’s more. I think it has more to do with puncturing the ego, of being, of turning things around.*

I nodded: *The Fool.*

*But there is certainly, when I am thinking about aging, there is certainly a sense of loss . . . and no continuity of relationship. . . . Yeah, so I think loss is a part of my process anyway.* (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

This expression resonated for me and I spoke of my personal sense of loss regarding a specific woman who had been very involved in gathering women together at her home. She had moved away, leaving a hole in a previously very stimulating social fabric. Eve was able to connect this experience of loss to her earlier comments about having few people with whom she could converse comfortably, knowing they would understand what she was saying and respond to her.

*And they were people with whom you could talk about spirit or other worldly things and know that you’ll be understood. Yeah, so that is, it is just interesting that these two things (loss of D.’s group and the California group) came within a couple of years of each other.* (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

I expressed my understanding about the significance of these two groups for Eve, suggesting that the strong threads were spirituality and women’s experience, and then relating it
to something broader, like Jungian philosophy and the goddess dimension. These elements seem to take us out of a purely personal framework to connect with some larger dimension, with the paradox being that the larger informs the personal and the personal informs the collective. Eve circled back to speak of her work with women of diverse cultural groups who were in touch with and sustained by their spirit.

*I could always relate to them and I think I add something. I facilitated an afternoon group. It was just a dropping in, about four years ago on a Thursday afternoon at the same centre. It was the same thing. Because I had left a marriage after forty years, I could relate and this was quite amazing. It was quite surprising how many women had left marriages after 20, 25, 30 years. I was very reluctant to tell my own story. I never did, because it interferes with whatever. . . . These women, I could really relate to them, and they could relate to me on a spiritual and on a painful, on a suffering part of life. . . .* (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

Eve described the challenges of her working relationship with a co-facilitator. (I deleted details to protect confidentiality.)

*I just got to the point where I couldn’t do it with M. anymore, so after doing that for a number of years, I didn’t burn out, I just got tired of it. I did enjoy it while I was doing it. Then we started doing evening groups and now I really don’t want to do evening groups. Because it’s in a church and you go there and it’s dark.* (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

Stories about difficult and even tragic experiences of particular women (unidentified by name for confidentiality purposes) in the groups and some personal acquaintances led Eve to comment:

*I think Marion Woodman [a noted local Jungian analyst and leader of women’s groups throughout the world, especially North America] said that suffering softens the soul or something like that. It almost seems that this is true, I don’t know. But you don’t necessarily have to have that. This is the way my mind works [laughs].* (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

My agreement with Eve that I didn’t want to believe that we have to suffer to connect with soul, rather than simply being energized by beauty, joy, and creativity, led her to ask rhetorically about suffering:
Is it necessary? Is it necessary? Why do we need it to become conscious? I often have wondered that. I have thought a lot about that. Are we programmed to think in that way? And is it necessary? I don’t know. . . . It reminds me of a programme that Bill Moyers did on TV. It was a week or a weekend with all these poets. There was this one woman poet who had written a poem and she said, “And I cursed the judge.” It had something to do with her mother wanting to leave her father. And in the poem she said, “And I cursed the judge.” And Bill Moyers said, “Well, what did you curse him with? What was the curse you would have laid on him?” And she said, “Consciousness.” And that really struck me, because it’s true. I look back and I’m conscious of all the stuff I did and it hurts. It’s painful. It always comes back to me. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

In a later conversation, Eve clarified that she has always been forthright, to the point of being blunt. She regrets that she may have hurt friends and relatives with a lack of sensitivity.

In her quest for self-knowledge, Eve attended workshops in which she had mystical experiences and found ways to try to understand and tolerate her personal and others’ characteristics and differences. Her learnings involved tools like the Enneagram, the Myers-Briggs Personality Test, and the Diamond Heart approach. Resonating with her narratives, I described some of my understandings gleaned from astrological readings, dreams, art, and Sandplay that have had significant consequences for me. Eve commented:

* I think it’s wonderful that you have that meaning in your life, that life is meaningful for you. Because I find that there’s something I just read, what is it, “live time or kill time.” I find that I’m doing a lot of killing time, even though I go to the Y three or four times a week, and I have relationships with the women there, and I do this group, and what else did I say I was doing? Oh, I take these courses that I was talking about. There’s something missing. (Field notes, June 15, 2006)

I wondered aloud if the missing piece was an integrating factor, or identification of an integrating factor, which I now realize for me is my dissertation because it has propelled me to recall and organize my stories, as well as relate my stories to those of other women. This process allows me to put my small life in a larger context. As I type this, I think back to my dream that led me to OISE and the mention of “a school of integrative studies.” I chuckle, having a sense that I now know what that is for me. This awareness leads me to look up the etymology of the
word “integrative” or “integrate.” I find that integrate means “to put together elements and combine them into a whole” (www.etymonline.com). Of course, this is part of the individuation process as Jung describes it. I laugh aloud with glee.

Maria’s Story

The day of our first research session together was Maria’s 60th birthday. She spent much of this time reflecting on her past and trying to explain to me how she had gotten here, to this place, to this time in her life, to this psychological perspective. Because she knew that my research concerned “lifelong learners,” she seemed to make a deliberate attempt to refer to various aspects of her education, both formal and informal. Because both her parents had died when she was a young teenager, and because she had assumed responsibility for her younger sisters, her parents’ death and relationships with other family members were interwoven with her learning experiences. Maria recalled her curiosity and enthusiasm for learning as a young child:

I was hmm eight years old. I was probably in 4th grade or 5th or something. And she allowed me to stay after class because I asked so many questions. She said, “Stay after them. I can teach you some more.” [laughs] It was, I couldn’t stop, I didn’t want to stop learning. I wanted to read. I wanted to, and I was reading books that were forbidden for my age. I stole them. (Field notes, September 28, 2006)

Feeling devastated after the death of her father when she was not quite 13 and the death of her mother a year later, Maria didn’t lose her interest in learning. She had to resist the traditional attitudes of her grandmother who became her guardian for a while.

I just knew for some reason you need to learn, you need to learn, you need to learn, and my grandmother didn’t care if I went to school or not. She would rather me to be home taking care, cleaning and doing stuff and I refused obviously. (Field notes, September 28, 2006)

At the age of 60, Maria’s passion for learning continues:

Learning is so major for me. I will die learning. It’s a golden cord to me. Learning is something that keeps me so alive. (Field notes, December 11, 2006)
Remembering her curiosity as a child led Maria to recall her connection with “forbidden” books whose contents seemed to be the roots of her current profession.

_They were grown-up books. In the family they said, “These are not for you yet.” They didn’t worry too much because they didn’t realize how much I could read. I probably was reading by age six. I was very curious. I asked my teacher for example about sex, about physiology, something that I was always very interested in. And I remember being interested actually in how we were made, humans. Yeah. All of the things._

When she was a child, Maria’s curiosity and book learning led to conflict with her priest.

_I was reading the bible too. So I was curious about Adam and Eve and they only have males, hence I was sent away from church for first communion because I ask, “Who did they marry?” The response was, “Come with me, Adriana, come here.” And the priest asked me, “Are you having a sexual relationship with somebody?” I asked, “What is sex?” Because I wasn’t. And he said, “You must have something like that because you are asking these questions.” Oh my god, and I asked him, “What do you mean?” And I was devastated._

_They sent me out. He told me, “Your mother has to come with you. This is not logical that a child so young, you know too much about sexuality.” So I went to my father. I didn’t go to my mother. My mother was really Catholic. I think that’s the only thing that make her survive a hell of a life because what is a life when every year you are pregnant? I mean, really, so you can see the picture now why I am this way. So I told my father, “The priest say I am having a relationship with a man and it have to be with sex.” And he looked at me and said, “What?” He didn’t want me to do the first communion. So you see this is the relationship with my father. He says to me, “Let’s go back right now.” And you know my father instead of, he never questioned me, he walked to the priest and he said, “I want a doctor. You tell me that my daughter have been abused sexually and by whom?” And he was looking at the priest. {laughs} I think the priest almost peed in his pants. And he said, “I didn’t tell her.” And my father said, “No, my daughter does not lie. You told her she knows, she’s having sex with somebody. If you know that, then tell me who it is now. Let’s call the doctor. It has to be. No. No. Who is abusing my daughter?” It changed him like this. I thought, genius. He’s backed off into a corner. And my father said, “She’ll do the first communion, but I want a doctor to certify that she has not been abused.

And the priest said, “Look, it’s getting out of hand.” And he hated me. And that’s when I started questioning religion, right then. I finished. I read the bible. And my father said, “She’s reading it in the bible.” The priest said, “She’s reading it the wrong way!” And my father said, “Somebody wrote that. She didn’t.” The priest didn’t like me much. Neither did I like him, obviously. But I went through the process.
Maria’s curiosity and precocity were not only defended by her father. They seemed to be fostered by him as well, as her memory of this “marvellous” man suggests:

*My life with my father until he died was sort of marvellous. I had my own horse. . . . I picked the horses that I would be making a horse from. He told me, “What do you want? This will be the father and this will be the mother.” And he said, “Do you want to see how to make them?” That’s the first time I have seen anybody mate. I almost died. It’s very powerful. He only promised, the only thing he told me, “Don’t ever tell your mother.” And I think I cry, “My god, it’s going to be killed.” You know, because horses are amazing, hence I love horses. I had a beautiful horse.* (Field notes, September 28, 2006)

Maria’s recollections of her early schooling, her curiosity and precocity, and her relationship with her father evoked pleasure. She recalled her relationship with her mother as different. These memories also brought up contrasting feelings of loss and sacrifice because of her parents’ deaths before she was 14 years old.

*My sisters, I am six years older than the next, yeah six, so you see what happened when my mother have me, my father have six years to spoil me. And I become extremely spoiled before the next kid was born.*

I wondered why [my mother didn’t get pregnant during those six years]. They tell me they thought she never have another child. But now I believe in other things in life, or I accept theories, my theory is maybe I came to be a mother of kids that were not mine in this universe. How do you like? Because six years is a long time. Like my mother obviously at that point catered to me, but I wasn’t close to my mother so much. My father was my idol really. And I remember when my next sister was born, I saw her giving her her breast and I say I want that and I just took her breast and I drink. And breast-feeding at six from her breast and my aunt, sister of my father, said, “Don’t do that.” And my mother, I remember, because I never forgotten that, and I was probably five-and-a-half or six, and just a little, and I decided every time she breast-feded the next kid, I wanted it too. So they say, “OK, you can.” So, for a little while, she was amused and let me. And then I didn’t want to eat. I wanted the milk. And that was, I wanted it and I used to cry, and if she didn’t, she used to put something very bitter thing around her breast, and I went and get a towel and cleaned it, and they couldn’t believe it [laughs]. So, yeah, so big deal. And they laugh and I say, “No, I want it.” After that, she wouldn’t allow me. And I lost interest obviously but in the beginning I thought I will have what she have. And then, you know, when my parents died I lost the desire of going [to school] because I knew somehow I wouldn’t be able to go to university. Even though I wanted it. It was my life or my sisters’ life.
As she continued talking in our session together, Maria’s sense of loss deepened. She expressed surprise at how powerfully the past was present in the moment we shared:

_The school that I loved to go to, my favourite teachers, everything was gone. Very impressive. Isn’t it funny I’m talking about this? I’m thinking, “Wow!”_

Despite Maria’s early loss of her parents and the ancestral home in which she and all of her siblings were born, she carried with her throughout her life a desire to regain the property that her mother had lost. To acquire it was to find some justice for her mother:

_I think my poetic justice is to own the place that she lost. It’s half mine now. I’ve bought back into it. Half of it, yes. But the rest is coming._

Maria had not decided whether or not she would eventually live back there.

_Maybe or maybe not. I don’t know. It’s a sense I mostly believe. Like the other day I was thinking about that place. I would like to plant a lot of trees. If nobody lives there ever, I would like to keep it as a landmark for me. I was there. I came out of it. I would like never, nobody to own it. I would like it to be a park or something. I have to find somebody to make something that’s sort of like, I don’t know. I would want somebody to say, “There was my father, my mother, but specifically me. I was born there.” Don’t ask me. I don’t know. My ashes cannot be there. I know I’m going to be ashes because I want to be cremated. I’m not sure in . . . [my country] they would allow it. I have to think about it. But you see, I believe I have to study this, as much as I want to have a home there. I may, very simple. But also part of it [is] I want to develop it into trees like beautiful and nobody can cut it, and it’s just for a park._

_I can foresee family fighting over it, but if I do that, that will be for endless time, forever. The other thing is, everybody wants to be remembered, and I thought I don’t really care. I know I was here. And then I thought, maybe I do. I thought for me I’m very grateful, very. I think most everything I have set out to do, it has happened._

_Why did I buy that land? Even when I wanted it, I didn’t even know [why]. You know, when you wake up at night, I thought, oh my god, I can see trees. I didn’t even know what the trees are I would like to plant. And maybe make something’s that beautiful, something that I have no idea._

(Field notes, September 28, 2006)

During the course of data collection, Maria was in touch with her brother who had agreed to sell the property to her and with her sister who was acting as Maria’s agent in her native land. Maria was disappointed about the latest turn of events that seemed to be a repetition of her
mother’s story. She expressed surprise about the coldness her brother evoked in her and yet, as she told the story, her anger was obvious:

*My brother is changing his mind. He wants more money now. And you know, when I talked to him, I was deeply disappointed. I said, ”You want it back? I give it back.” So, I think I show him with the way I reacted and ’it’s OK. ’I won’t be upset with you. Don’t worry.” Because he told me he thought I would and I say, “No.” It bothered me. I didn’t realize how I reacted. It’s very cold and I went, it seems to me that it wasn’t even me talking, frankly, really. And then, I really, it really shocked me. I talked to him Thursday night. I was very, like, sacrificing, like not hopeful. I closed to that so much, I had to force myself to say it: It’s bothering you. What is he trying to do? Because I said, “Oh, god, why, how can it be, it’s like happening all over again, like my mother’s story?” I said he can’t fuck me, no way. He’s always done this forever. So I’m deciding how I will handle all that.*

*He says, listen to this, it was very nice. I thought, you bastard, you crazy . . . . This was totally my reaction. He said, “You know what, I have another offer.” I said, “You didn’t have it when I went there.” But I said, “I will think about it. Maybe even the ticket.” I was very cold and detached, but deeply he touched on the underlying thing.*

Although Maria’s brother had wanted her to give him the money for the property without going to a lawyer, Maria did actually get a signed agreement that was in the hands of the lawyer. She was still undecided about what to do:

*I may just let it go. If he gave me all back. Maybe my ticket (flight to C.A. to buy the property). I don’t know. But I dreamed that night, oh, I had a dream. My dream is this: I’m going to put trees and I’m going to put a big stone that says, “Maria was born here.” Voilà! That’s my thinking. You see, honestly, I always think of something just to, because there’s not even a plaza that is beautiful like it used to be. So I figure maybe that’s what I have to do, forget about the house. There’s always other lands, right, to have? But nobody would have that. So I have to think how am I going to deal with it because I don’t know. That’s what I have to do. I dream.* (Field notes, October 16, 2006)

Often, in our sessions together, Maria’s narrative returned to the effect her curiosity had on her education, and to the influence her life circumstances and specific people had as she grew up quickly to assume certain responsibilities. As she did so, she circled back again to her grievous experience of loss, not only of her parents, but also of her sisters from whom she was separated (discussed later in this section). Rather than seizing upon an opportunity to continue
on to university as her uncle wished, she fast-tracked through school so that she could begin to work and set up a house where her sisters could join her.

Well, I finished my grades, greatly by my curiosity. And I was good in school. It came easily. I understood well and I was in a hurry to learn in the big world. I needed to work. And it seemed I was helped along the way. In some instances, I did four years in two years. You see, the school, I was very privileged but I worked very hard, so they realized that I didn’t miss anything, so instead of sitting for an extra two years I was working. If you put your mind to it, because I wanted to have all my 12 years in my belt, and then like actually you see, I could have gone to university, by then after my parents died, I was literally adopted by my uncle, the brother of my mother. He was in the family, I would say, sort of a well-off person. So I was born in the country, country, country. He lived in . . . the capital city. To no avail, I was devastated in the beginning because they separated me from my sisters.

Maria continued with her story, clarifying how complex her life situation became after first her father’s and then her mother’s death, and how family dynamics, culture, and religion wove together her past, present, and future. She teased apart her father’s and mother’s deaths.

He died when I was almost 13. I couldn’t honestly, it was so horrible, it was like, oh my god, life wasn’t worth anything anymore without him. He was no longer there. First of all, my father was a real protector of mine. My father. He died. I knew I could do no wrong in his eyes. See, he, I realized, he loved me, he did things that my brother till now says that he never saw my father do anything so special for anyone but me. And I never forgot things like this. If I had a fever like you have when you’re young, well, once I had a fever, and he used to ask me, “What do you want?” I used to say, “I want snow.” And he sent somebody to get me snow from the mountains. How can you not . . . ? So, he ordered my existence so much even though this was, the reality was that women were servants of men in my eyes. Kept not so well, I may say. So it is tough, right, like when you see that. But I knew that. But I didn’t care how women lived. I would live in my life. I was going to enjoy it. So when he died I thought, oh my god, what about, me. I never thought about anybody but me then. I thought, oh my god, I didn’t want to live any longer.

I used to go to school and my teacher, uh, I used to run away from the school to go to the cemetery, so she they put up with a lot of that. But I studied still. I don’t know how I did it. I did it on automatic pilot really.

My father left one morning, and I saw someone coming and I knew my father was dead. How? I just knew it. It was like, I don’t know, it was horrible. The most pain I ever felt. For the longest time. (Field notes, September 28, 2006)
Maria’s father’s death precipitated the loss of the paternal ancestral home and the life she had known up till then. Maria’s half-brothers, children her father had with his first wife, took over the home less than a year after the death of Maria’s father.

*It was very strange. Because the school that I loved to go to, my favorite teachers, everything was gone. Very impressive! I was devastated.*

Maria’s half-brothers gave her mother money, household items, and animals when she left the ancestral property. Maria, her mother, four sisters and two brothers moved in with Maria’s grandmother and other family members. Maria said of her grandmother and others:

*Because my mother lived with them, they kept everything. There probably wasn’t a lot.*

Six months after moving in with Maria’s grandmother, Maria’s mother fought with her and then moved the family to another city where they lived with an aunt (E.) and uncle (N.) and their children. Maria had memories of how well this family treated her.

*My cousins, J. and T., very handsome people, because they used to come to our home where I lived with my father, for some reason they treated me very beautifully. And I used to tell them, do this for me, bring me my horse, I used to be sort of like a little bit spoiled. They allow me, obviously. So when I came to their place, I never forgot it. They said, “Don’t worry. We take care of the horse.” They treat me exactly like I was in my home. They make me feel so welcome when I come to their place and I loved them so dearly because my mother didn’t treat me so well, but they were unbelievable wonderful, my cousins. They make me feel, oh for a little while, I was in heaven, and my aunt says, “All of them are serving you.” And I said it was great.*

A year later Maria’s mother died. Maria expressed her emotions about her mother’s dying:

*I was very mad at my mother when she died. I just told her in front of everybody, how dare you die? Who the hell told you to have so many kids, and then die and leave us with these people?*

After her mother’s death, Maria and her sisters were returned to her maternal grandmother and her two brothers were returned to the paternal ancestral home to live with their half-brothers because they were male. Maria elaborated on her experience of that inequality:
I felt that I wanted to vomit. I felt that they, like I knew I would succeed in life just because. It was very motivating. No man will ever rule me. No way.

Maria’s focus on this inequality in her family led into the topic of potential sexual abuse against her sisters and herself. Maria experienced tension between her feelings of responsibility to protect her sisters and her feeling of vulnerability in relation to male relatives. Without the protection of their parents, Maria had to become vigilant for her sisters and for herself.

Growing up in a very male-dominated home with my half-brothers, they were so self-righteous about their half-sisters. They followed them. They were, like really, everybody was thinking they were going to be sexually abusive, they were going to be giving favours and all sexually.

In our last session together, Maria talked about the fact that her elder half-brother tried to marry her off to an older man who was the brother of his first wife whom he later divorced. Maria, who was just 16 years old, was spending the summer with him and his wife. Maria was curious because this older man was staying at the home over a weekend and he had brought bottles of alcohol to the home. Maria asked her young cousin why. This seven- or eight-year-old girl said, “Oh, when you get married.” When Maria asked when and to whom she would be married, the young girl said, “Him. My uncle.”

I was stunned. But I thought to myself, now I understand. This guy was bringing things to the house. I think they sold me, to be honest. This is my idea (confirmed by the friend mentioned below). (Field notes, December 11, 2006)

In the presence of this family friend whom she liked, Maria broached the topic of her impending marriage at the dinner table. In front of this friend, she forced her brother to acknowledge, “Yes, I was going to converse this week.” Maria asked him:

When is he going to ask me out and date me and sleep with me?” When am I getting married?

When the family friend asked, “You really want to marry?” Maria responded, “I just need to leave.” Recounting this story, Maria said:
Oh, I thought I would vomit. And I said to him [the friend], “I will not ever marry. I will not. I know for certain I will not.” (Field notes, December 11, 2006)

Maria never did marry, although she had some significant relationships. For Maria, the concept of marriage was entangled with the loss of her parents, her vulnerability to be sexually abused by family members and others, to be sold as chattel to a man who wanted a young woman as his wife, and to a feeling of disempowerment.

You are really something that men want, and it’s all about sex, sexuality, no matter whom. It’s also, like I believe a lot of races are incestuous, you know, and it was very hard for me to understand and I was so determined nobody will abuse me. No. My uncle . . . began very nicely. He used to go and say good night, every night. When I see now how people, they take advantage of kids. I figure they [men] wouldn’t be able if they [my sisters] learn, and if they know. Like I was very, I knew what he was doing, he came, and the first time he put his hand on my boobies, really, like nothing. I thought to myself “Wow!” By then, I have an idea about how men and women are having relationships and how kids are born. Why? Because I honestly was very curious about why my mother had so many kids. I was resentful of that. Not that I didn’t love my sisters but I felt, my god, why?

So going back to my uncle and my life after my mother died, I felt the universe was nasty. That’s the time I knew I would have to fight. So you see, you train yourself to be a warrior literally. I was in an age when I had developed, I became a woman already. I have my periods, I have boobies, I look like a woman. Young, of course, so I thought, oh God, I hated my boobies, I wanted them to disappear.

Even before my . . . [male relative, D.C.] put his hands on them, I noticed the guys at school looking at me, and I noticed the men. They touched me. I sensed it, and I knew that this is dangerous. I never wanted to be in a place that I knew I could be in danger because I realized. In that sense I was very careful. But at home I couldn’t do that because I was in bed with a pyjama. And D.C., whom before my mother and father died, he was like oh, always he was carrying me, maybe then he was enjoying doing that too and I never noticed, except when they died, and he was waiting for the moment to do damage. I know that. Every time it became more and more leaving the hand longer, so I feel like vomit now. (Field notes, September 28, 2006)

For a while, Maria had her dog as companion and protector.

I had this dog, a Dane, those big dogs. And that dog was like, imagine, if you talked to me a little loud, he’ll kill you. He was very friendly, but don’t you ever touch me, because he grew up with me. He came into my life very young and he went everywhere with me. He carried me to school. I jumped on him like a horse. So that dog and me are like, oh my god, what do I do without the dog? D.C. knew that.
It was very shocking for me that D.C. that I adored who was a lot younger than even my mother, he was a kid, if he could have, he would have raped me. But I knew that he wanted that.

D.C. came home at tea time. I was sent to serve him. And my dog followed me. So the dog knew probably more than me. He was so sensitive. He’d go gr-r-r to D.C. I’d say, “I know. I know. You don’t have to bite him.” I used to talk to my dog a lot. So I knew that I had to leave when he killed my dog.

I was devastated and I knew I had to run. Because I knew when I had the dog, oh my god, that dog would kill him. That dog would jump him. You know how I got even with him. Because this went on for maybe six months before he decided to do that. I guess he had pictures in his head about what he wanted to do with me. I used to serve him, and I let my dog eat from his dish before. That was how I got even.

My grandmother was married again to a man who also was very fresh, and I thought, oh my god, if D.C. doesn’t get me, this guy will. So can you imagine, this was between 14 and a half, fifteen, not sixteen yet, but I was so aware. I wasn’t afraid. I knew it wasn’t good, but I knew that they wouldn’t get me.

I was really good at getting even. One day I took a cup of tea to this man, a cup of hot tea. I gave him the tea and he tried to touch me. It’s the boobies. That’s why I didn’t like my boobies. And you know what I did? I dropped the tea right on him. “Eek!” he screamed. I said, “Oh, I’m sorry. I said, “You touched my boobies” and my grandmother acted like nothing. He says, “Oh, I didn’t mean to.” And I said, “But it hurt me.” I wanted to kill him and I left. I couldn’t stay there without my dog, so I run.

(Field notes, September 28, 2006)

Maria had contemplated leaving for some time, preparing her sisters for the event. She thought she might go a cousin of her mother who lived in a beautiful city that still appealed to her as a place to live.

I probably going to a cousin of my mother. They live in a city, a gorgeous city, that I think I may live there someday. Picture this. I wasn’t even 15 yet. I wrote a letter and I say, her name was Cousin G. She live in this nice little house and you could see the ocean. And it was dreamy. She have, I never forgot, she have a garden with, it was like a dollhouse for me because I thought it was so cute. She have plants, what is that, I can’t remember the name of the fruit, mangoes, a mango tree. In [my country] you have a mango tree with very little mangoes, very tasty, you want to die to eat them. So anyway, I write her and I say, “I am having such a hard time. I love to visit you. Would you allow me? I never say I am going to run away. She wrote me back. She says, “Anytime.” That the place I have got. We get every week some money. So I took all of their money.
I save it. I knew I going to be gone. Just the moment I have to go, I going to go. I didn’t want to do it, but I knew I have to.

Finally, Maria did go. Maria’s young sisters, upset at her leaving, told their grandmother who called the police to find her. They returned her to her family where her grandmother slapped her for running away. This unleashed Maria’s pent up emotions.

“You love me? I don’t love any of you. I hate you all.” My bad sister came out, oh my god. My grandmother had scratches. I beat her up in two seconds. I tell you, I was so mad. Because six months of tip-toeing. My dog, they kill it and I say, “And who killed my dog? You people kill my dog.” Oh, you’re running away because of that dog? Hell no, I’m running away for other things. And I never say sex. I knew you can’t do that. So my grandmother called all the family. They send telegrams and then they have an emergency reunion at the weekend. She can’t deal with me and my sisters. I am horrible. She have to go into the hospital because I beat her up. This is drama, big time. I am in the dog-house. I went back to school, everybody looking. “Are you going to beat me up?” I say, “Yeah, I beat everybody. I don’t care.” And I used to be like that. The warrior in me came out. I just want to kill. “If you touch my sisters, I will kill you.” I told D.C., everybody, don’t.

So everyone came together to decide to send me to a private school. They would take you young and you become a nun [laughs]. I said, “A nun! Me! No. I am not going to sleep with a priest.” They and my aunt say, “Oh, my god! How can you talk like that?” I said, “Like they don’t.” (Field notes, September 28, 2006)

A couple in Maria’s family offered a solution by taking Maria to live with them, while her sisters stayed with their grandmother for about two years until Maria brought them closer to her by putting them into “nun houses” where they could be cared for and also receive an education. Maria promised her sisters that she would work to do whatever she needed to do to get them with her after she finished school.

In our sessions together, Maria spoke about the various types of work she had done, at first to support her sisters and later to provide herself with new opportunities. Her decision at 18 years old not to go to university shocked the couple who was caring for her.
They said, “You promised us.” I said, “No, I promised my [dead] father to take care of his kids before my mother died.”

Maria’s first job while still going to school was as an assistant to a designer who was the mistress of a friend of her father. He liked Maria’s “desire to work.”

But they didn’t expect I would be so good for her. She did all the high end clothes, she have maybe 10, 15 people in a beautiful place, cutting and designing clothes. They did all the design, like somebody, a French designer. They design it and give them the design and cut it and make it there. Beautiful. Like Chanel. I was dressed fabulously. I was very good to do things for people without thinking. I just did it. She decided that she liked me a lot. She invited me, like they were talking, and . . . it was a very good life for me. They pay me very good money, not her, he did. I graduated. I finished school. I was doing her banking, and hair, and she rely on me for many things. And she invite me to live with her. I said, “For a little while because I need to have a house for my sisters.” So I connected with people that were in business and I get an offer. This was really good.

This offer led Maria to leave her designer employer who was very angry. She said, “I treated you like a daughter.” Maria responded, “And I responded to you likewise. But I don’t want to be your employee anymore.” “You’ll starve and I don’t ever want to see you again.”

Maria described their parting in this way:

She dumped me and I was devastated. But you know what, I just had to go on with life. (Field notes, September 28, 2006)

Maria’s new venture led her to go to school to learn to do hair and colours, and to be involved in running the business and hiring people. What she didn’t see was that the couple needed her because they were not citizens of that country and she was a native, with privileges they did not have. Although business was good, Maria didn’t profit from it because she hadn’t made a legal deal with them. Finally understanding the situation, and accepting that she wouldn’t make money with them, Maria quit. She understood the connection of this situation to her life:

I don’t take abuse that easily. I say, “No. (Field notes, September 28, 2006)
Returning to the salon to gather up her belongings, Maria met a man she knew who had a school of hairdressing that he wanted to sell. Although she had no money to invest, she had a contact who agreed to be a silent partner who would put up money for the business. Having learned from her past experience, Maria arranged things legally. In this new business, Maria was successful, at the expense of her previous partners who had not been honourable with her. Many of their clients chose to patronize Maria in her new salon and her previous partners were forced to close their shop. Maria demonstrated her business acumen:

_I opened at 7:15, 7:20 for the secretaries in the area. I charged half price. At nine o’clock, the price changed. You have to prove to me that you are a secretary and you make not so much money. And really, I do magic for these people. But I have other people working with me. I decided I was going to learn beautifully. It was very successful, and I learned colour, hence I do my own colour right now and I cut my own hair. But I was in love with that and out of love fast. Women are very difficult to please. I learned to work beautifully. . . . It was something I loved for a while._ (Field notes, September 28, 2006)

As she described it later, “Enjoy fully until I don’t.” In the meantime, Maria was able to live well and create a home for her sisters. She felt that her life has been really focused on survival and on doing what she wanted to do as an independent woman.

_I never dreamed for a second that somebody should pay my way. Never. I always said, “I don’t need you to pay. I don’t want you to think you own me.”_

Four years after setting up a home for her sisters, at the age of almost 23, Maria left her country to travel for a year in South America. “That’s when I decided I need to go.” “I think because I work a lot, I was getting restless.” After her year of traveling, she settled in another Caribbean country where she worked as a salesperson, “making very good money.” Her company sent her to Canada to learn English. Eventually she took up permanent residency here, working in the media business.
Within the past five years, Maria returned to a formal educational setting to become an alternative health professional. Now, speaking of her expansion of her private wellness practice, Maria said that “older women” that she met there were enacting a change in order “to feel better,” “more peaceful,” or to bring upon oneself “something better than one has.” This statement led Maria to compare how she feels about herself now and how she felt about herself when she was 29-years-old.

I now believe that I would like another 50 [years]. You would ask me maybe twenty-nine years ago, I would say maybe give me five more years to be here. I’m fed up with this. And yet . . . [now] I feel, “Oh my god, I want to do so many things. (Field notes, September 28, 2006)

Maria explained her earlier attitude towards life as an age crisis:

At 29, I had a crisis about age. I was devastated for a year about age. But I figure because I lost my parents very young . . . I thought I’m going to die at the same age of my mother. I sort of have that in my head. So maybe that has to do something with it. Because then I didn’t have a lot of time to do anything and I thought I haven’t accomplished much about me, even though I did accomplish, in hindsight, looking backward. I work all of my life until then, work hard and give it all away to my sisters and I think I was tired, sort of like, I don’t know, I don’t think I was mature and I couldn’t, I didn’t stop and smell the roses.

Part of Maria’s challenge at this period of her life was a consequence of moving, initially temporarily, from her native Central American home to Canada where she had to learn English.

When you come to Canada or to any other country where you do not speak the language, it’s so difficult to accomplish what you want, really because even then there weren’t a lot of books that I could read. English was so hard for me. Oh my god, I have to have a dictionary for the meanings of words. School was not my favourite thing to go. I didn’t think people teach English well. That’s my perception of it so I decided I will learn English myself so I started buying books that I would read, music, and I would see the TV was going all the time, radio, and books. I carry a book and I wrote. I asked the people, I learned English better than I could even say it because I felt if I know how to write, I will know what it means. That was a very good thing for me. (Field notes, September 26, 2008)
This challenge of learning English also made her realize that she was able to express aspects of her personality more easily in English than in her native tongue. This realization allowed Maria to accept the new language and to make her move to Canada permanent.

*Being Latin we take forever to say something. English for some reason clicked in my mind because it goes with my personality, well I believe. Because you can be so direct and so blunt, it’s painful. Spanish is very polite. I cannot tell you to go to Hell just like that. You have to go to the street, to the mountain, and then you tell the person [laughs] “Would you be so kind as to get the hell out of here?” And it takes forever to say it and in English you say, “Go to Hell and leave me alone.”*

When I say I like English, I don’t have to say so much to tell somebody where to be or how to do or whatever. So that’s my connection with English.

*I thought “Wow!” I like this language and I think it’s because my type of personality is to say it right [away].* (Field notes, September 28, 2006)

When I wondered aloud what contributed to her being able to be so blunt and direct, Maria responded that her self-confidence socially was related to her birth situation and, especially, to her father’s attitude towards her:

*My thinking is that I was born out of love. That is my theory. And I have the feeling that I can prove it because I have a lot of security about me. It doesn’t matter if I have money or whatever. I feel really connected to everybody, myself. I almost feel that nobody cannot like me. I mean, that I connect with most, with 99.9% of the people at some point. That’s my, honestly, that’s the best thing I can ever have but I never knew that until I got a job in . . . [the media business] because I, people would start telling me, “What did you tell that person? How could you say it?” And that person, she’s so fascinated and I was straightforward. For example, I say things as I see it, obviously I knew it. Sometimes, often, it’s not good. And I wouldn’t say it if I don’t know that you are connected to me. That’s something that I acquire since I remember.* (Field notes, September 28, 2006)

Elaborating on her intuitive abilities, Maria tried to explain:

*It’s something there instantly, it’s something I can’t explain. Obviously, there are a few people that I don’t [speak to bluntly and directly]. I know that I can’t go there. I will kill myself [if I do]. Sort of like that. You know how deep is the area of the ocean and you can jump and you know where the bottom is or not.* (Field notes, September 28, 2006)

In our sessions together, Maria reflected with surprise on her life and all that she had done:
I have sort of a different view, like another person, not me that has done all of that. I think, ‘Wow! It’s a lot!’ Because very seldom I sit here and think all that I have done.
(Field notes, September 28, 2006)

Continuing, Maria said that it was her connections with people that had been the motivating forces.

The area I think I learned a lot, I think, is doing my job in . . . [the media business]. That was the time when I learned just oceans of things because people, they have already done work with people, physical, anything that you name in that, they were doing that and I was very privileged to be able to meet and spend hours.

I met clients because they were excelling at something. So I met people who were mainly doing stuff. They were really awesome. The cream of the crop, I would say. So that gave me great great satisfaction. I learned, I picked out books, I read them, and then I have an opportunity when clients came back and they were doing even better. I think I learned the most because I learned how not to be judgmental. That’s when I decided you can’t, you have to back off, you cannot think bad thoughts about somebody, you cannot. I learned in little spaces of time, fifteen or twenty minutes, to think totally fabulous about others, even if they were like, my impression was ohmigod, this person is the biggest ass in the universe, I turn it and I say, “No, he isn’t, he is your guest, you want him to be fabulous and you’re going to make him, to make him feel,” and I change my emotion of being or my moment of saying, “Oh, I can’t stand you” to saying “You’re great.” Yes, and I meant it. It was for me, I found something in that person, first of all because he was human, but also I knew it would be very good for my company to have a very good interview with this person. I wanted him to feel what I sensed about him and I focused totally and it worked. It totally worked in the moment that I say, “You are my guest. What do you want? Just ask me anything.”

[Afterwards, this experience] served to make me realize that you have the power to change yourself. . . . The reality for me is I am trying to adjust myself as a person because I realized that I needed to change. (Field notes, October 29, 2006)

A dream about a bird that Maria had a couple of days before our first session together led her to reminisce about a pet bird she had had. Her relationship with this little animal touched her deeply. Her recollection about Pedro led her to discuss her tendency to ignore differences in relationships between animals and human beings.

It’s not a bad thing to have relationship with animals. See, I have a hard time sometime differentiating between living things, you know, I don’t want to, I don’t want to make a difference. Even with humans it’s more difficult sometimes because humans have a way
to do things to make you react more than an animal or than any other being have, maybe because humans talk [laughs] so therefore I should have a mute friend [laughs].

Even though it’s a lot of work, my bird, for example, every week I have to vacuum the cage and he was, he was so happy. I couldn’t have epsom salts bath because he jump in the water. Oh, you should see him.

Oh, he loved water. He would let, he was, and then I was laying in the bath and he would sit here. Honestly, if somebody would have taken a movie of it it would be like amazing because they’re amazing and how I decided to keep him because I didn’t want the responsibility and I didn’t love him so much in the beginning, right, I um I jump in the shower and he reach out and he miss me and he keep flying. He didn’t care of anything. I thought, ohmigod, he could get killed with this. He didn’t care. I said, “ohmigod, Pedro, what the hell?” I didn’t call him Pedro then, I said, “Go away. I really don’t want to have you.” And he I felt his sense “she’s leaving me.” Because I saw, I was thinking that weekend, these people really don’t want him anymore. That did it for me, you see, him coming in, because my bath was big, my bath was almost this size [gesturing], so I have two places, one only for showers. It was very cagey, like I mean, even I didn’t like to go there [laughs] so I figured OK what made him to come. I said, “OK. I will take you.” And I did.

So, I have to get accustomed. I go out to do research about birds, what they like, what they want. So of course I have a very fabulous relationship. I didn’t really care about, I used to come home and I really didn’t care to go out, really. I did, because obviously you have to. And he really did feel something about me that is my soul. I know that, and I don’t need to talk to anyone.

Pedro. Pedro, my baby. Yeah, he was the most uh, yeah. That’s my best relationship, I believe, even though I cry so much when he died. He was beautiful. I can’t tell you how much I loved him.

He was a love bird. He was really special, I mean, especially because he was so like, almost, he was sort of like almost, uh, it was so nice to have him. Pedro was, like he was very like, yeah, and he didn’t grow up with me. I got him about three years after the other people had him. But he was sort of in a cage and I let him out. I had him about five years. So very special. That was the last real relationship that I did with me connecting like that. (Field notes, October 16, 2006)

This little guy, he walked beside me. I tell him, Excuse me, you bird, you’re not a human being, dammit.” [laughs] Ah, OK, so what? And then when he flew, I said, “OK. I can’t fly. You don’t have to show off.” And sometimes he loved to play. I used to run after him and he love it. Oh, forget it. I’d lay on my bed on my back and he landed on my chest.

Did you realize that he died in my hands? Oh, you see me? I cry. If somebody would have pictured that, the pain, I couldn’t bear. He just passed [snapped fingers] like that. You know, that’s how birds are. They never tell you. I saved him four years earlier. And
then doctor told me, “Forget it.” I let him die with me. I took a week off from work. He never moved from here. He would take water from my mouth and stayed and stayed and recuperated. So then Pedro died. I said, “Don’t leave me, please.”

He was in my hands and I knew he was dying. And he waited. And I knew he was dying. And I said, “Pedro, Pedro, Pedro, Pedro.” And I don’t know, I just, I thought my heart was going to break. I call couple of people and I say, “Pedro’s dead.” They say, “What?” I I went instead to bed and I have Pedro on my chest for, my friend the painter, I call him and say, “Could you come. I need to go out to the cemetery?” I have to do it now. So I pick the most expensive scarf, silk, that I have and wrapped him in it and packed him in the most expensive little piece of jewelry thing that I have. So the guy, one day I went to visit him and I see, they were trying to open it, and I couldn’t get into the cemetery but very close. When I see they were trying to dig him out, I couldn’t. So I took him somewhere close by to a nature area. And I found a big tree. We opened a hole deep and put a lot of stones. Yeah, he gave me so much happiness.

For some reason, talking about her bird, Pedro, brought back memories of a young couple Maria had known for a short time. Her strong emotional connection to them brought up her belief in a dimension beyond our four-square reality and her sense of loss.

My friend, V., introduced me to this couple. They used to live in the same building I did. This was a round building. This, the wife of this man, I can’t remember the name, this was a couple between 33 and 37, full of life. She, Denise was her name, she sees you, honestly, her energy flow out of her and she would say, “Oh, Maria!” Like, such a welcoming beautiful energy. They were sort of a, like, artistic type. He designed for uh stage, staging for anything, movies, you name it. They have a child, about six. Beautiful. One weekend they went, somebody lent them a cottage, they have a canoe they like, they went to a small resort town. They went. They died in a whirlpool.

I remember when I knew, they came to tell me, I don’t know whom. They knew, I don’t know how they knew I knew them because I was on the sixth floor and they were on the fifth floor. I never was so shocked. I I, you know, when you see them, like constantly around you, you know I used to leave my job at three or four o’clock in the morning. Do you know that forever that elevator was waiting, the door open, I swear. I used to say, “Hi, Denise.” I become so believing that she, they were there, she specifically. I think I didn’t say I saw them but I felt them, I felt them. My god, I used to say, “Hi, how are you guys? Thank you.” I’m nearly crying. It’s just that we’d start crying, S. and I., over and over. Ohmigod, she didn’t live there [anymore.] right?

Recently, when Maria was traveling by train, she went through the small town where they had died. As she traveled through this place, she said,
“Oh, God, what happened to you?” Also, when I say that, my heart is big. I love them, I touch them, we knew each other not even a year-and-a-half, two years. It was a big, a special relationship. You know, when you love people and I figure, well, they’re just passing through here.

I didn’t think of it before for a long time. So, when I moved from that place, I said, “OK, guys, I won’t see you for a while. I won’t see you anymore, but you’re welcome to come and visit when I go.” So sometime when the elevator was on my floor, it was 11, I thought they were there. They came to visit. Do you believe that? It’s like very weird, but I think that. I always relate in an elevator when I’m waiting and the door is open to them. Why? I don’t know. I think they protected me always because I get up so early. They used to tell me, “It’s so early and you go alone.” And I said, “Who’s going to deal with me at that time? Are you kidding?”

Maria recalled telling the news of her friends’ deaths to a local retailer who had also served them.

So, well, these people died. He knew them too. And I walk in and I told him, “Have you heard?” And he didn’t. And I was totally unbalanced. So he says, “Let me, let me go through, I’m leaving and I’m coming back whenever.” He took me to a bar. We went to eat and he, I was drinking with him. He says, “I can’t believe it. They were so young.” And they say that thing (i.e., whirlpool) in S.F., that you know grabbed them, and he was kicking several times and came up. She never and the boy, probably she was hugging him and they died. He was fighting. What a way to die. I want to have, have you ever asked yourself how you want to die?

This tale of death brought up Maria’s own thoughts on the subject:

I have put this request. I really want to have a heart attack and just go [snapping her fingers]. I have this idea if I ever get any condition that I know is going to leave me with that time, because I know I am in the business of researching that stuff. I am never going to have, I never want to kill cells to live. I’m not going through that. I really think I have decided more or less in my life that I’m not going to do chemo. I don’t like it. It’s a killer, you see. It’s so invalid. You see, if I get it, I get it. I think I have treat myself and I think at least half of my life I have been good to myself. The other half of my life, no. But you have to live everything. So I decided you know I, that I like to live long, but healthy. Otherwise, I don’t want to. But I have requested because I talked to many doctors when I was . . . [in the media business]. I would say 99.9 [%] they say the best way to die is a heart attack right there or in bed where you lie. (Field notes, October 16, 2006)

Maria’s physical health became a preoccupation for the rest of our sessions. Between our first and second sessions, Maria had scheduled an MRI to try to get information about her long-
standing sciatic nerve pain. The MRI revealed three sinovial cysts wrapped around a nerve at the base of the spine. She had determined that she would probably have surgery to correct the problem because she could no longer stand the pain. Because she wanted to continue as a participant in my research, I tried to accommodate her interest in continuing by making it as easy as possible for her, although as our data-gathering sessions progressed, she became more distracted by her pain.

*My legs are really in trouble because they don’t have innervation. And the pain is absolutely excruciating. The pain, I honestly, honestly, don’t know how. . . .*

*It’s a really heavy duty thing for me. I have to do this [hold herself] because [breathing out heavily] uh when I do any movement, my nerves are stretching, are passing, it doesn’t have the innervation so, imagine that if I even do this, I feel it everywhere. It’s very strange, it’s very hard, if I wouldn’t know what it is I’d be like dying. So negative. I know, because that’s why I’m always telling people, you need to learn about it a little bit, or you need somebody to explain it to you the simplest way. It’s like a house, our bodies is like a house with electricity. In my case, I don’t have electricity.*

*I feel like the switch to that area is almost working, but not quite. Not the same. Electricity for me works better when I explain it because it’s electrical, it’s like an electrical cord. It’s very painful when we have it, but you don’t die from it. I couldn’t believe that pain is something very hard to live with. It’s very taxing.*

*I work mentally with this pain thing. I don’t let it bother me too much. It bother me obviously because I don’t do, I’m getting really good and not um, see, I try not to use my body to do something, so I’m saving it just to work. Even when I work, even when I finish, I think ohmigod, it’s horrible, it’s horrible pain.*

(Field notes, October 29, 2006)

After weeks of trying to cope with the pain and trying to relieve the pain through osteopathy, massage therapy, and other alternative therapies while she waited for surgery, Maria began to take pain-killers although she didn’t like to do so.

*If I don’t take it, I honestly cannot walk. And within two hours with the pain-killer, it’s [the relief is] gone. It just goes and my body, it’s something about it, you’re gone so I take 20 pain-killers.*

Unable to have lunch together because of the pain, Maria said:
I just need to get home and rest. I’ll go home and lay on my back before I do a couple of things. I can’t get places. It’s very taxing for me. When I’m sitting, I have no pain. It’s just that when something doesn’t innervate, you can’t use. You take it from there. It’s like having an outlet without electricity. I’m using with a minimal amount of innervation. And I know when I don’t have any, it’s so horrific pain. I move only with the power of life that God give me. (Field notes, November 13, 2006)

Ironically, during this time of intense pain for her in which she forced herself to continue doing her work and little else, Maria got her most challenging client. Because Maria was self-employed and was facing several weeks off work because of her impending surgery, she had to continue working and earning money during this time.

Believe me, I get more pain with her because I think there’s a connection. The way I work I go so far into like, I feel whatever the person is feeling.

Maria elaborated on her experience of pain:

I am in pain, obviously it is not the same level. But all of us think of pain so personally. We are so unique. I said, if I do this, that pain is 100% to you and you want to die. In my case, I live everyday with pain. And actually when I’m providing my health service, I don’t want to take pills.

I can’t wait for the 29th. Oh my, please get me there. I am not talking to a lot of people because when they ask me, I don’t want to say I’m in pain, which I am. I’m being like here very open with this. I am in pain yes, but when people say “Aren’t you going to be out of pain, like in two weeks, it’s teaching me how to speak about pain. I don’t really give a damn, two weeks is too long. Five second is too long when you have pain. It’s a reality. You’re going to be out of pain, yeah, in two weeks. Nineteen days, it seems to me, or something. Nineteen days is a long time.

I never had pain like this before. I had pain but they last and they go. But it’s something. It’s like floating. . . . But you see, it floors me.

This is what you need to do. You can’t get rid of pain laying on your back all the time. You need to do things. You need to tell your body, “I need to use you so get with it.” I can’t exercise. I try. And all what I do, some of the stretches, and I have to be very careful not putting my spine in the wrong way. (Field notes, November 13, 2006)

Following her surgery, Maria had only what she called, “baby pain” which she tried to tune into and accommodate:
An ache, yeah. I feel like, wow, it’s like my whole body really hurt for days. My whole body was going into shakes because my nervous system was like trying to accommodate because before it did not have proper, what would you say, innervation. When I see it like I am careful obviously but at least so sitting it’s not my preferred thing right now.

Now that her pain was decreased, Maria was able to focus on what she had done to prepare for the surgery:

*I think my major fabulous thing I did when I learned say, 25 days before my surgery, every day I thought, I literally thought of the little thing going in my spine and doing the surgery. Every day I visualized the surgery.*

*I visualized the surgeon. I have no face of him because the two surgeons, they did the surgery. One probably located. The other one, one probably is a young guy, I think he have 13 years in neurosurgery. . . . So I I I have this doctors with doctor gear in my brain, in my head, and I see them going right inside my spine and taking whatever need to be taken without ever missing a beat. Like never. Everything was perfect. Yeah. That’s what I did.*

*And I said, “When I go there [for surgery] I will give them my body as if it is your body.” I saw the MRI with him and I saw exactly where it was located. I have a picture of that, how it was before. I did the surgery a hundred times before they did it. I really prepared for it.*

*I also cleansed myself, I did my liver thing [with lemon and olive oil] and I have a good advisor in nutrition. So I believe when you going to go and have anybody giving your body you need to have your senses totally aware of it. I believe that you have to, I have a message the day before also, and I give her, I say, “This is what I want you to do. All totally related to move my fluid system.*

*Because I put my money where I do, because I pretty much, I believe in anything, like I honestly, like I think that even talking to you just through all that, it have opened a lot of new visions for me. For some reason I get in my little office, and I see this book calling me, “Please read me.” Feng Shui. I’m still in the process of learning, but I learned that a lot of the things it says, I do, but I can refine them beautifully, I think.*

*Another chapter in Maria’s lifelong learning book had opened up.*
Chapter 10:
Through Thick and Thin:
Making Meaning

Towards the Making of Meaning

I have presented my data and now wonder how to approach making sense of it. The three other women (Bell, Eve, and Maria) and I were able to narrate our stories visually (through Sandplay and, additionally for me, collage) and verbally (through free-flowing conversations and in writing). I think about moving from “field text” to “research text.” For me, “the field” has been broader than those gatherings my co-participants and I had together in my therapy room. I see the field as being my dissertation process contextualized within my life during the past five years. The lenses of “my life” have been my diverse roles: older woman graduate student researcher continuing the process of formal lifelong learning; psychotherapist; teacher and supervisor of Sandplay interns in Canada and Korea; wife of an increasingly debilitated husband suffering from congestive heart failure; mother of a 36-year-old daughter who gave birth to her first child two months ago; daughter of, and long-term caregiver for, a 97-year-old mother who died six months ago; companion and caregiver of a 13-year-old dog; friend and colleague of many caring, creative, and committed people, mostly women; lover of Nature; and aspiring artist. Stories about my life experience infuse this thesis. Within the overall framework of narrative inquiry, I have found it is not a simple matter to move from field to research text, that is, from personal to social in Clandinin’s and Connelly’s (2000) terms, because personal life experience intrudes at every step of the way, shaping and re-shaping the stories and learnings. A question emerges: Where do I start? I turn to Conle’s (2000) assertion that it is the “open-ended
quest” propelling data generation that provides the research component for narrative inquiry (p. 198). This connection leads me back to the question that followed my dream about returning to doctoral studies.

**What Did My Soul Want of Me in Sending Me This Dream at This Time?**

This question was the tension-filled impetus for my teleological quest which I know will have an outcome larger than a doctoral degree. This original tension arose out of my ethical commitment to act on images that emerge from my unconscious world through dreams, art, Sandplay, or other means. I do not yet have an answer to the question and wonder, in fact, whether or not there will be a definitive answer. As I type the word “definitive,” I smile because I know that an answer to my question is possible only within a particular context and that it will shift and unfold with future experience.

Arriving at this point in my thesis and feeling a need to draw a close to it, I decide to engage in a dialogue in writing with my soul, using my right (dominant) hand for my part of the conversation and my left hand for my soul’s part. This is a technique I often use with my students. What follows has led me to an answer to my question. I use a font that is difficult to read because it resembles my left-handed writing that elicited my soul’s message. What surprises me about the answer to my question is that it is not dramatic or larger than life. It is grounded in the reality of my daily experience.

| Me:  | *Dear Soul,*  
|      | What did you want of me in sending me the dream about returning to doctoral studies at this time in my life?  
| Soul: | I wanted you to attend to me seriously. I wanted to engage you in an image-making process to see the value of it in your life. You were at a stage of not remembering your dreams, feeling frustrated and depressed.  
| Me:  | I don’t remember that. I can’t identify a time when I would say I was “depressed.”  
| Soul: | Yes, it’s a difficult word for you to use about yourself.  
| Me:  | That’s true. What was I depressed about?  

Soul: It’s not so easy to pinpoint it. But you were coming up to retirement from your profession as a teacher/therapist, and realizing that your care of your mother was a heavier burden than you would admit, that you were feeling helpless in turning around the quality of your marriage, and that you had lost touch with your creative spark. You could have fallen into despair that could have led to serious illness and no will to live, like Pammy (a dear friend who got lung cancer and died a year or two after beginning to care 24/7 for her widowed elderly mother and experiencing a bleak outlook about her relationship with her partner of many years).

Me: Well, what you say is true, but I would have “made do,” a strategy I am good at when I can’t change things on my own.

Soul: Making do is not good enough at this time of your life. It was necessary for you to engage in what is uniquely you, to have a sense of your own life, to live your own life, not just be dutiful.

Me: Well, I have certainly lived my unique life actively and creatively during these five years, accepting the invitation and nurturing my teaching opportunity in Korea, keeping on with my doctoral process in the face of challenges with my mother, husband, and personal health issues, “juggling the balls” so to speak so I could be in my life in a dynamic way. While it has sometimes been a challenge to keep them in the air, the challenge has kept me conscious about what I value. I have learned that it has been about my creative life in the context of family, friends and colleagues, doing work for which I have a gift (according to my students), and being nourished by Nature, my personal connection to the divine, and the awful beauty of being true to myself. Thank you, dear Soul.

Reflecting on my soul’s answer, I find myself smiling and nodding affirmatively, knowing that I have listened and responded in the best way I could, and grateful for the self-healing energy of the psyche.

What Do I Do with the Data Gathered?

I wonder how to make sense of the data narratively. Clandinin’s and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimensional inquiry space model comes to mind, with its personal/social, temporal/spatial and inner/outer dimensions (p. 106). At first glance, I perceive my question about “my soul” and its response to have greater personal than social weight at this time. However, when I recollect Singer’s (1990/1998) reference to “soul” (p. xii) and the concept of “making our gifts available to others” (see page 9 of this document), and place it in the context of my various roles, I sense the possibility of movement of influence towards the social from the personal. It is through the
personal and my attempts to be true to myself, that I can be authentic in relationship, with my family, my students, my therapy clients, my colleagues and friends. It is through my commitment to my work that I can share my treasures with others who may be looking for a starting point.

**Older Women’s Stories**

Continuing to look back, I consider a second layer of questions that had to do with older women and the stories they tell in making meaning of their lives. Here the strands of age, gender, and lifelong learning are entwined. My personal and professional relationships with women prior to my dissertation research provoked questions in me:

*What are the stories that “want to be told” by older women for whom lifelong learning is important?*
*What sustains us in enduring losses, illnesses, fears, anxieties, caring for others, disappointments, constraints, pain, and burdens?*
*How do we understand these experiences and learn to endure them?*
*How do we talk about and represent our experiences of the commonplace and the tribulations and triumphs of our lives?*
*How do we resolve tensions exposed through our stories?*
*How do we find places and spaces for our imaginations to soar and our creative energies to manifest?*
*How do we integrate the facts and fantasies of our lives?*
*How are these stories represented visually and verbally?*
*What sustained and sustaining metaphors appear in older women’s stories?*
*What are the commonalities and differences amongst older women’s stories?*
*How does the sharing of older women’s stories affect the women and their subsequent stories?*

This layer of questions engages me in a dilemma as I wonder what is important: factual answers to the questions articulated above, or consideration of what makes my documentation of four women’s experiential stories an inquiry. As I perceive it, the content focus rests on the fact that there is a dearth in the literature regarding “older” women’s stories about what is meaningful for them, who and what they talk about, how they deal with challenges, and how lifelong learning has impacted their lives. As a narrative inquirer, should I care about this? Are answers
to these questions relevant beyond the personal? What could be their social relevance? I wonder if the fact of minimal research for this age group of women is related to a kind of disregard that our culture has for older women who generally are not in the work force and who often don’t match society’s ideals for pulchritude and fitness.

Meaning-Making and Verbal Narratives: Stories of Bell, Eve, and Maria

Wanting to foreground my co-participants and let them stand as individual women sharing their stories, I will begin by revisiting their verbal and visual narratives separately from each other. I will also include my visual and related verbal narratives from those sessions. I am mindful that interactions of stories and images that are evoked in emotionally-toned conversations have a potential for self-development, as Conle (1996) has shown in research with teachers. However, because of the abundance of data gathered, I will not include my personal conversational data from sessions with each of my co-participants. Perhaps I will get to those interactions at some later time.

Conversations with Bell

Just before data collection began, Bell experienced the sudden death of her husband of 45 years. Creating and living consciously a “new life” in a new house, focusing on her creative art process and her relationship with her young grand-daughter, Bell expressed a sense of happiness that was different from what she had experienced before. Part of her satisfaction had to do with her reconnection with Nature. Looking backward at her loving marriage within her previously ordered and circumscribed life, Bell surmised that she was able to make necessary changes now because of the high quality of relationship she had had with her husband in the past. In terms of self-identity, Bell recognized in herself a heightened sense of humour, a less serious attitude, and more extroverted approach than previously. Looking backward and forward, Bell was aware that
her new sense of freedom contrasted with constraints she had felt in her marriage, although she had no regrets about how she had lived for 45 years. She was able to hold sorrow and joy simultaneously as she talked about learning to love through her husband and articulated that “When the love of your life dies, love does not die.” She was able to see her three daughters as “living symbols of that love” and her daughter’s pet cat, whom she had come to love, as a bridge in their relationship and a funny, smart, playful “animating creature in the household.”

Animating her life story were specific encounters she had had with specific creatures over the years. She remembered sitting on the bank of a creek, seeing a kingfisher when she was seven, and then going there frequently to see if she could see the bird again. In this case, the past was informing her potential future. Bell told of revisiting this memory two years ago and of having the thought that the kingfisher had been looking at her as much as she had been looking at him, an insight possible at the age of 67 and not possible at the age of seven. In a similar vein, she recalled drawing a picture of a dragonfly that was sitting on a nearby tree while she attended a drawing workshop in Atlin and writing on a page, “Is there any intelligence in a face that looks like this?” At that moment, the dragonfly flew off the branch and hit her between the eyes on the forehead. She wondered if “he” too was thinking, “Is there any intelligence in a face that looks like this?” As a middle-aged adult with a lifetime of experience, this type of question was possible. She recalled a trip to Costa Rica two years earlier when a huge gecko slept every night on a branch just outside their fourth floor bedroom window. Aware that she saw it, nesting in the same place every night, she also knew that it saw her. She remembered in detail touch-me-not flowers at “aunt” Mary’s cottage where she discovered at an early age that she could draw (p. 274). Now she was introducing those flowers to her seven-year-old grand-daughter and playfully spelling out “HELP” with teasles as they played a game of lost survivors in a nearby
woods (p. 276). These types of experiences had a profound effect on Bell in terms of her relationship to Nature, leading her to say, “I can respond in the moment to anything that is there. I’m finding this very exciting because . . . I haven’t felt that way since I was a kid” (p. 276).

Without eschewing emotion about the loss of her husband, Bell suggested that she might not have participated in my research before out of fear about what she might reveal. This sense of privacy seemed to have more to do with an attitude of loyalty towards containment within her marriage to the exclusion of being open with people outside that relationship, than with any content she was reluctant to expose. Experiencing her newfound freedom of expression, Bell also connected with underlying feelings of fears and anxieties of a vague nature. However, these were mediated by an increasingly spiritual connection she felt with her deceased husband, partly coming from dreams which had been an important and clarifying element in her life for many years, as art had been.

Relating to a life-sized collaged body tracing with flowers flowing off the ends of her fingers that Bell created at the time that I created Dancer, Bell connected the power of that symbol of the feminine, with its free-flowing nature to her creative art process. She suggested that this image mounted on the door of her studio over many years had acted as a counterbalance to the challenges she endured as a metal-worker. This was an artistic process that she feels she happened into because of her husband’s interest in tumbling and cutting stones and a friend’s father’s offer to teach her jewelry-making. Bell realized as she told this story that she had sacrificed many years of drawing and painting to take up an art process she had never really enjoyed. And yet she felt tension because she loved her stones collected over many years and didn’t want to give them away. By narrating her story about her jewelry-making experience, she concluded that she didn’t have to make any hasty decisions about casting off her metalwork
equipment or stones. The act of narrating seemed to have had a clarifying effect by providing a space for her to differentiate her thoughts and feelings about challenging issues in her life.

Writing and reflecting on her stories about her process, especially related to the creative process, was an established practice in Bell’s life. These activities were part of her self-structured lifelong learning that she engaged in through books, especially through participating in prescribed exercises that she found enriching. Her narrative about her love of books and learning connected her to her father who, although uneducated formally and constrained financially, managed to accumulate a collection of books that were maintained in a locked library at home and thus inaccessible to Bell as a child. Remembering also her aunt’s words when Bell was 13 years old, that “all men were better than all women,” from that time Bell was motivated to be the best person she could be and to be a challenge to any man who thought he might be better than she (p. 289-90). Her moral obligation in life was established as a positive response to something diminishing she heard from her aunt.

Bell also remembered another influential person in her life, her grandmother’s sister, who encouraged her at the age of 21 to create a life for herself rather than to return to the family home where she would be a buffer between her mother and her angry father. Acknowledging that she had an ethical sense and integrity at the age of 13, Bell suggested that her solitary experience, “feeling at one with Nature,” and her rich inner life were essential to her development of such mature thinking. Thinking ahead to old age, when she would be unable to live independently and might have simply a single bed in a nursing home, Bell had already determined that her “bed by the window” with a view of a tree outside would be sufficient for a satisfactory life. Bell seemed to be truly “at home” in her nature, in Nature. I wonder if the image of the gecko in the tree outside her window in Costa Rica was . . . . I am searching for a word here. I tried the word
“bridge,” and wasn’t satisfied with it. I have a feeling of anticipation in my chest. I know I have something more to say here, but I haven’t the words yet.

**Conversations with Eve**

From our first session when my reference to audio tapes resonated for her and she recalled her experience of a “floundering” young man whom she interviewed while working on her social work degree (p. 294) and with whom she identified herself, Eve spoke about feeling challenged by her tendency towards, and discomfort with, self-reflection. This image of “faltering” with which Eve identified in the moment seemed to indicate a block or interruption between theory and practice in her life. Because of the value she placed on a Jungian perspective that essentially works with bridging consciousness and the unconscious, inner and outer worlds, I had a sense that Eve engaged in self-reflection quite naturally and that she regarded it as “good” theoretically; however, because she sometimes experienced dissatisfaction with herself and pain through her insights, she identified it as problematic in practical terms. Through our conversations, Eve amplified the tensions she felt, identifying them further as the contrasting psychological functions (in Jungian terms) of introversion and extroversion both within herself and in comparison with other people. She recognized that too much extroversion makes her feel irritated and often leads to trivial conversations that fail to interest her. She seemed caught between feeling constraint when conversations did not expand into psychological, philosophical, or spiritual dimensions and restraint from entering those conversational realms with particular people who might react defensively. Discomfort with the basic personal act of self-reflection was linked with a social issue when she felt she had to mute herself in order to assuage potential for outer conflict. As a result, she carried the heavy burden of inner conflict, usually not addressing it with others because she thought that doing so might jeopardize meaningful
relationships. Eve did not go into specific details when this might have happened. However, she did differentiate herself from, and even express envy about, other women who “seem[ed] to skim on the surface of life and . . . always seem[ed] to be up” (p. 294) by indicating that her self-reflective, self-observant, and serious tendencies don’t “always lead to the happiest frame of life” (p. 294) Eve’s reference to consciously holding back verbally in social situations seemed to be congruent with the overtly passive/innerly active image of The Feminine in her first sandpicture. And yet, as Eve conversed about her contrasting dynamic energy manifested through her engagement in creative and fun-filled activities in which she could express her “clown” and her unrestrained personality (as with the group of women who had traveled to ancient goddess sites together), the balancing function of the psyche (Jung, 1969) was evident.

Despite her expressed reluctance for self-reflection, Eve often engaged in activities that provided “tool[s] for self-knowledge” and revealed pathways for spiritual development, for example, her pursuit of knowledge through books, such as the Bible and Boundaries of the Soul (p. 302), her study of the Enneagram (p. 301), Almaas’s Diamond Heart approach (p. 301) and her prevailing attitude to distil experience to “deepening” and stripping away ego concerns to arrive at “essence” (p. 302). Spirituality was an important dimension in Eve’s life, despite the fact that she had developed what seems to be a healthy skepticism about formalized religious practice at the age of eight years old (p. 304).

Around the age of 14 or 15 years of age, as Eve recalled, two significant events occurred. A health issue caused her to be absent from school (grade ten) for a prolonged period after which she never returned to high school (p. 303). Working in her immigrant parents’ store for a while, she later became the first of her family to work outside of the family business. Eve recalled that, around the same age, her immigrant parents bought their first property which had been vacated
by a woman who left many things in the house, including a box of books which Eve claimed (p. 304). Here she encountered authors and artists, such as Balzac and Delacroix, and while valuing her immigrant family experience, she learned of a different world through the books she read. Her path of lifelong learning seemed to begin with that box of books. Eventually her “thirst for knowledge” (p. 305) and insight that she “had the intelligence to go to university” (p. 306) led to undergraduate and graduate degrees and continuing learning in formal and informal settings that put her “into another space altogether.” Acknowledging that she is always eager to share what she has learned, Eve spoke generally of pain that people feel when others do not respond to, or understand, what is being shared. Her implied vulnerability reiterates the tension she often feels in social relationships and in trying to understand herself and others.

Hoping to gain some understanding about her inner conflict in our conversations, Eve began to touch on opposites within her family and her cultural roots based in the immigrant experiences of her parents and their siblings. What emerged in Eve’s description of her relatives were the polarities of “conventional” or “conservative” and free-spirited. Eve seemed to display some reticence about exploring her past as indicated in her words, *There were two different ways of being in the world. . . . I saw the pitfalls of both. . . . I don’t go back into the past and look at my past. Maybe that’s something I should do* (p. 297). Her reluctance to do so was illuminated in her narrative about a TV programme covering a weekend with poets. She resonated with the words of one poet who wrote about cursing a judge involved in her parents’ separation. Pressed by the interviewer for clarity, the poet elaborated that she would curse the judge with consciousness. Eve said that when she looked backward in time, with consciousness of what she had done, she re-experienced pain. She realized that her forthrightness, even bluntness, could be painful to others who might perceive her words as insensitive.
Telling of her volunteer work with women of diverse cultural groups who were connected to and sustained by spirit, Eve suggested that she and they could relate to each other partly because of their recognition of suffering in life. However, she also questioned why and whether suffering is necessary to development of consciousness, recalling that Marion Woodman had said in one of her lectures that “suffering softens the soul” or “something like that.” Although her experience seemed to give credence to this statement, Eve still questioned its necessity.

Pain and joy were interwoven in Eve’s reference to a particular group of women she met first when traveling to an ancient goddess site in Ireland. She recalled these women as “people with whom you could talk about spirit or other worldly things and know that you’ll be understood” and spoke with animation about their experiences together that seemed to have a larger-than-personal purpose. Gatherings with these women seemed to activate Eros energy in Eve, just as telling stories about them rekindled that dynamic energy. Currently, regular reunions with the women had stopped because of decreasing finances for some of them who no longer worked. As a result, Eve experienced a sense of loss of community and continuity in relationship that she had felt regarding another group as well (p. 312).

Narratives about her trips to her family homeland, Italy, also seemed to energize Eve as she considered a different quality of life from her everyday experience. She appreciated those trips because she associated them with life in Nature, close to the sea, rich in images connected to the sea: colours of blue, shells, fish, boats, and fishermen that seemed to have “a basic elemental quality to their lives.” Her memories seemed to provoke momentarily an urge to make some changes in her way of life: Part of me is drawn to it. It’s very interesting. I think I need to travel to the sea (p. 299).
Aging was a significant element of her frame of life that was interwoven with the tensions of leading a too solitary or too extroverted life, finding comfortable, meaningful, non-competitive relationships outside the family “in the time that you have” (p. 296). Through our free-flowing conversation, Eve was eventually explicit about the sense of loss and lack of continuity of relationship that she associated with aging. Her narratives sometimes focused on the challenges of the aging process in terms of its adverse effects on hearing, eyesight, body image, driving skills, self-confidence, and other people’s assumptions about the aging person’s cognitive capabilities (p. 307). Telling her stories allowed Eve to express, in an understated way, her fear about the effects of aging, with the physical dimension being “out-of-step” with the psychological. In contrast, despite describing herself as “too serious” and not “passionate about . . . many things,” her robust laugh, her biting sense of humour, and sensuous, passionate nature often burst out as she told her stories (p. 311). As she once said: *I think that’s the conflict that I have. Because I think there’s that passionate nature that I have and that’s always sort of prevented me from expressing what I . . .*. At this point, her voice dropped off. I wondered what effects Eve would feel after bringing details about her inner conflict to consciousness.

**Conversations with Maria**

With our first session occurring on her 60th birthday, Maria spent much of our time together looking backward in an effort to explain to me how she’d gotten from her birth in her ancestral home in Central America, through the experience of early loss of her parents and parenting of her younger siblings, to this moment in time and place. As I have seen often in my supervision of Sandplay case material, Maria’s fertile imagination and strength and resourcefulness in manifesting her visions in the outer world seem to have been influential in developing her resilience. As well, in her early relationship with her father, she seemed to
develop a sense of self-worth and competence that served her well as an independent woman who could protect herself from exploitation and manifest practically what she envisioned for herself and her sisters. She even took on finding justice for her mother by attempting recently (at the time of our research sessions together) to regain the ancestral property that her mother had lost to her sons and stepsons after her husband’s death because of the right of male inheritance in her country. Although a young child when her father died, Maria seemed to have an understanding about that event’s effect on her mother and seemed to develop a determination to succeed and to avert domination by a man in her future life. Her determination was strengthened when she realized, at the age of 16, that a male relative was arranging to “sell” her to an older man who was staying at the house. Maria recalls telling a friend: *I will not ever marry. I will not. I know for certain I will not* (p. 323). Maria has continued to live life as an independent woman, never wanting a man to pay her way because she associated that with the man’s owning her.

The topic of male domination in her culture also brought up the issue of sexual abuse and her experience of and awareness about the vulnerability of young women, including her sisters. She resolved to become “a warrior” to protect herself and her sisters. As she remembers it, her protection included her big dog that she had had since childhood. She felt that this dog protected her from rape by a male relative (not the one who tried to sell her) whom she perceived as eventually killing that dog. This event precipitated her leaving her grandmother’s home and eventually being adopted by a sensitive couple in the family.

Maria recalls that she developed awareness about sexuality at an early age. Very curious and interested in learning, Maria remembers that she “stole” books that were “forbidden” for her age (Field notes, September 28, 2006). She also resisted the traditional values of her
grandmother to forsake school in favour of taking care of the home, to be a *servant of men* (Field notes, September 28, 2006). She knew that she needed to learn so that she could live her own life. She described learning as *a golden cord to me. Learning is something that keeps me alive* (p. 315). And yet she recalled losing her desire to go to school after her parents’ deaths because she felt she would have to sacrifice her dream of going to university in order to take care of her sisters. *My life or my sisters’ life* (p. 317), she said. Although Maria later spoke about a couple in the family who “adopted” her and would have supported her to go to university, as Maria narrated her story to me, her sense of loss deepened. This fact surprised her (p. 318) and led her to recall that she also felt devastated after her parents’ deaths because for a time she was separated from her sisters. Perhaps leaving school to work so that she could reclaim her sisters was the only resolution for her sense of loss that was possible at the time. Her attempt at the age of 60 to reclaim the family property also seemed to be part of that resolution of her deep sense of loss she had carried for almost half a century.

In her narratives, Maria returned often to the topic of learning and her continuation of formal and informal learning over the years. An important part of this grew from her early interest in books when, at the age of six, she began to read about physiology and sex because she wanted to know how humans are made (p. 316). She remembers stealing books because they were forbidden to a child of her age. This early preoccupation with physiology gave birth to her current profession as an alternate health provider for which she returned to a formal education environment a few years ago. To this day, Maria continues taking courses that provide more knowledge and skill for her work.

At that early age of six or seven years old, her interest in the creation of human beings also evolved from her bible reading and led to a conflict with her local priest who accused her of
being sexually active (p. 316). Maria recalls this event as the time when she began to question religion, especially Catholicism which was the faith of her family. Her curiosity and precocity were both defended and stimulated by her father whom she remembers as “marvellous” in that he loved her, protected her, believed her and in her, and “ordered” her existence (Field notes, September 28, 2006). As she narrated stories about her father, she seemed to tease apart her father’s and mother’s deaths and articulate more specifically the emotions connected to her experiences as their child and her loss of each of them.

The pain of losses of relationships was frequently a topic of our conversations. One such loss was that of Pedro, Maria’s pet bird. She described this relationship as my best, saying I can’t tell you how much I loved him (Field notes, October 16, 2006). She attributed to this little creature a high value that gave her spiritual fulfillment: He really did feel something about me that is my soul. I know that and I don’t need to talk to anyone. Telling her story about Pedro reminded Maria about her experience of the life and death of a young couple she had known for a short time but with whom she felt a special relation. Her memory of them took her to a transpersonal dimension that allowed her to continue to relate to them as her protectors in her daily life. The memory of their specific way of dying also provoked in Maria reflections about her preferred manner of dying and living.

Life for Maria at this time was filled with pain from cysts wrapped around a nerve at the base of her spine. Because of her training and continued reading about her body and the specific problem, she described working “mentally” with the problem so that she could continue her work despite the “horrible pain” (p. 334) because she had to support herself financially. She also informed herself to the greatest extent possible about the problem and about the intervention so that she could maximize her inner healing potential as she endured this ordeal. She gave
meaning to her suffering by acknowledging that her intense experience of pain was teaching her how to speak about pain to others that sought her out for treatment of their pain. It was also giving her a bodily experience of what her clients often suffered before coming to her for help. Her words resonated with me who believes there is something to learn in every experience, even those that are very challenging.

Themes of Our Stories

Not an exclusive list, I present below several themes that have emerged from the stories of my co-participants and mine from the self-study portion of my study:

Confrontation of Life and Death

A theme common to Bell, Maria, Brenda, and Eve was the confrontation of life and death. Here I speak about dealing with outer life situations and transitions due to major losses. For Bell, this manifested in her conscious process of “creating a new life” in the face of the sudden death of her husband of 45 years a few months before our data-gathering began (p. 262). After a temporary disorientation, Bell became an agent of change, selling her house and buying a new one, altering many routines, and structuring time daily to “do art.” Whereas her old life revolved around her relationship with her husband, her new life was oriented around her creative process. As her outer life changed, so too did her personality. Bell was aware that she had become more extroverted, less serious, and even funny.

Whereas Bell was at first oriented towards the future in creating her new life, Maria focused strongly on her past in the recollections of the deaths of her father and mother when she was a child. Through the sharing of her stories (pp. 315-336), Maria was able to differentiate the impact that each death had on her life as it unfolded during her teenage and adult years. She was even trying currently to regain the paternal ancestral property that had gone to her brothers and
half-brothers because of the patrilineal cultural system in her Central American homeland. Part of the motivation for this action was to bring justice to her mother who lost the property after her husband’s death because she was a woman.

Maria’s stories of death were not limited to her parents. She spoke about her deep connection to her pet bird, Pedro, and the profound effect his death had on her. Through telling Pedro’s story, a memory of the life and death of friends, a young couple and their child, resurfaced. Resonance with their horrific story of dying in a whirlpool led Maria to talk about her own mortality and how she would choose to die (pp. 333).

For the past year-and-a-half, I (Brenda) have been engaged in a daily confrontation with life and death. My aging mother’s decline and subsequent move to a nursing home preceded by several months my surgery, diagnosis of cancer, and decision to forego radiation treatment. My husband’s progressive heart disease led to a heart attack eight months ago and subsequent debilitation to the point that he can no longer walk, requires oxygen, doesn’t eat, and is wasting away. Daily, he invites Death in to relieve his suffering. My husband’s heart attack preceded my mother’s death by a little more than a month. On the day that she died, I got a call from her nursing home that she had to go to the hospital emergency because her vital signs were unstable. I was in the process of taking my husband to another emergency room because he was having shortness of breath. After dropping my husband off at the emergency room, I drove to my mother’s hospital where I stayed with her for several hours. Fifteen minutes after leaving her to go to my husband’s bedside, I got a call that she had died at the age of 97. Four months later (two months ago), we were blessed with the birth of our first grandchild, Nathaniel John, born to our only daughter, Abbie and her husband, Grant. On a recent, short visit to their home on the west coast, I felt revitalized by the energy of this new life and the love that surrounds him. I had
to cut my visit even shorter because my husband had a serious internal bleed and was in critical condition for a few hours. My husband has not yet met this little boy in person. We don’t know if he will survive until the family travels from the west coast in five weeks. We are now making arrangements for a transition to a short-term palliative care unit because doctors, after treating him aggressively for the past seven weeks, see only a decline in his general condition. In the midst of this, I am trying to conclude my doctoral process and birth my research document. I have clung to my “work” as an academic and a professional (teacher and therapist), as I hold fast to my individual life in the midst of death because of its protective and nourishing nature.

Although Eve’s confrontation with death and life was not critical in the present moment, she had been reshaping her life for several years since her divorce from her husband of 40 years. She described her challenge as finding a balance between extroversion and introversion and organizing her life so she didn’t feel isolated and lonely in her old age (p. 296).

**Aging**

As the oldest of the four of us, Eve was coping competently with aging events (eye troubles, the need for a hearing aid, and regaining confidence in her driving ability by taking a senior’s driving course) (p. 308). She described her current experience with aging issues as a difficulty in combining “the physical with one’s ability” (p. 307). She spoke in an understated way about her fear of aging, laughingly acknowledging physical changes being “out-of-step” with the psychological dimension (p. 349). Aware of “limited time” left in life, Eve also spoke about loss of community and continuity in relationships (p. 355). Eve’s reference to dancing (p. 329) was connected to her awareness of restricted movement, while my connection to dancing and the Day of the Dead figures in my collage (p. 260) suggested my sense of loss of intimate relationships. I hesitantly referred to aging and the relationship of stress/weight gain in my
reference to nude and concealed bodies in my collage (p. 142), revealing a tension in my attitudes. Tension was also apparent in my response to the presence of The Crone (pp. 254-58).

Although it was not a major topic of conversation, Bell laughingly referred to aging implications when she described her play with her granddaughter, Corrie, in terms of “getting up off the ground”:

*Of course, she wanted me to lie down and put my head on a pillow. I was doing so much moving and so much lifting and so much everything that I’ve got a little bit of a sore back and one thing and another, so she had to settle for me just to sit down* (p. 276).

For the most part, we older women were living our lives fully and richly, aware of limitations that aging imposed but rarely curtailed by them.

**Coping with Illness**

During the research and writing periods, Maria and I (Brenda) both had serious health issues, Maria with her need for surgery because of three synovial cysts wrapped around a nerve at the base of the spine, and I with my need for surgery because of fibroids and a subsequent diagnosis of early stage cancer. Both Maria and I learned as much as possible in preparation for our surgeries (pp. 333, 179) and worked with images in our decision-making and healing processes: Maria through visualization; and I through collage. For both of us, our inner focus was an expediting factor in our recovery. For Maria, her professional work was both a resource and an area of tension prior to and after her surgery. She felt her learning about pain and recovery would be helpful in guiding her healing work with her clients and, being an independent single woman with a private practice, she was concerned about sustaining her income. I too found work life-enhancing and did not want to jeopardize that resource by submitting to the debilitating effects of radiation therapy. Simultaneously, I did not want to be fool-hardy in rejecting it as an intervention, so felt relieved when my decision was supported by
the radiation specialist. In the process, I had to confront my long-held fear of cancer, underscored by my mother’s words, *Everyone I love dies of cancer*, and my father’s death from cancer. I learned in an embodied way that cancer is a treatable disease.

**Learning and our Relationship with Books**

From the outset of my study, I knew we were all conscious of our lifelong learning practice. Books were a significant factor for all of us in developing that practice. Bell told the story of her father’s library which was locked to her as a child (p. 288). Despite his lack of a formal education and limited funds to support his family, Bell’s father accumulated a book collection, of which Bell possesses half a dozen and which one daughter has claimed when Bell is finished with them. She told an intriguing story of a friend’s purchase of a second-hand book for her daughter as a child, unaware that this particular book had come from Bell’s father’s collection disposed of by her mother after his death. Throughout her life, Bell has engaged with books by using them as guides in her self-structured, self-reflective practice for many years, often receiving them as “gifts” from family members on special occasions. Although she can afford to buy whatever books she wants, she “just never does things that way” (p. 293); she demonstrates a conservative approach to acquiring material things and, limiting herself through a “book budget,” amusingly buys them by the pound at library sales.

Eve told of an accidental discovery of a box of books that had been left in a home that her parents bought as a rental property. Through reading books by Upton Sinclair and Balzac, and about the artist, Delacroix, she learned that there was “another world” beyond that of her immigrant family. She pinpoints this discovery and her claim of the box of books as “the beginning of my journey” (p. 304).
A seed of her later life as an alternate health practitioner focused on physiology was planted in Maria whose family library was “forbidden” to her, yet discovered by her, when she was a young child who had learned to read at six-years-old (p. 315). Driven to read by wanting to know how human beings were made and how they functioned, Maria also found herself in conflict with her local priest who suggested she was sexually active because of her precocious questions. Totally supported by her father in this confrontation with the priest, Maria pinpointed this event as the beginning of her questioning religion and rejection of the Catholicism of her family.

My interest in books became crystallized when I was an early reader who discovered that sources, like The Golden Book of Knowledge and my crude box of questions and answers connected by an electric current, contained new facts that I could share with others (p. 10). These were the seeds of an embodied knowledge that I could later use to make meaning of my life. At mid-life, my dream of the amazing World Library (p. 12) connected depth and beauty to Nature and the transpersonal, through “The Lady” who showed me her blueprints and plans for the entire world, thus giving me a visual image for Jung’s concept about the archetypes and collective unconscious, and a feminine spiritual source. It is this spiritual source that is also apparent in my collage, *Dreaming into Being*, as the dream poet sprinkling golden grains of inquiry, revelation, beautification, curiosity, resourcefulness, meaning, and more (Figure 17, p. 122).

**Significant Archetypal Images**

**Dancer:** Inner artist archetype.

My exploration of artistically represented images originated with my collaged Dancer whom I got to know as my Inner Artist Archetype. I engaged in this experience almost two
decades ago. Through Dancer, I connected with a childhood experience that had effectively locked up my creative expression for many years (p. 23). One of the things she “told” me in a written dialogue was to link up my images with words and my words with images (p. 35). Over the intervening years, I have done a little of this, never with such commitment as during my dissertation process. During this process, I have become increasingly aware of my conscious connection of images from the unconscious (through dreams, art, and Sandplay) to an ethical responsibility to understand them and to manifest them in life, as Jung (1961, pp. 192-3) prescribes. Although I had previously acted on such images, and of course this was the case with my return to doctoral studies dream, I had not articulated it in this way before. As I understand it from Jung’s and Hillman’s (1989) writings, images are the language of the soul. Thus, such an ethical responsibility to images implies an ethical commitment to soul. Through images I can maintain an ongoing communication with my soul.

**Dream poet.**

In my collage, *Dreaming into Being* (p. 122), I connected to my Dream Poet archetype whom I also call “Creatrix” (p. 123). As I described her function, she sprinkles seeds of all possibilities, germinating my life through *golden grains of inquiry, revelation, beautification, curiosity, resourcefulness, meaning and more* (p. 123). As I see it, there is a blurring of boundaries between the frame of the collage, the dream world, and the outer material world where I, in my active, physical form, am essential to manifesting the possibilities through my moral responsibility to the image. I believe that, to a great extent, we create our lives by making and enacting certain choices within what life hands us generally and in specific circumstances. My attitude in making and enacting those choices reflects my sense of ethics and purpose in life as described below (p. 365).
As I wrote in my original text documenting my engagement with the images in *Dreaming into Being* (p. 123), Dream Poet was intra-related with other elements as she scattered the golden grains of possibility:

_the potential for union of masculine and feminine energies; the potential for safe and appropriate containment for the golden egg, transpersonal values, the “nest egg” of resources; the potential for unfoldment of the lotus-like Self, the Self that grows out of life’s muck; the potential for removal of obstacles, in the form of the Hindu god, Ganéśa; the potential for mediation between my world’s spiritual and material dimensions, in the forms of the geese and their shamanic healer riders; the potential for giving and receiving compassion and mercy as represented by the goddess, Kwan Yin; the potential for strength and softness, for sacrifice on behalf of the sacred, in the form of the stag, mediator between consciousness and the unconscious; and potential for authentic, embodied knowing connected to a grounded reality, as represented by the nude body and the soles of the feet._

In terms of temporality, the Dream Poet/Creatrix as benefactor of possibilities obviously existed prior to the dream that precipitated my doctoral process, the creation of the collage, and manifestation of the possibilities as imaged above. However, I connected to her only after creating the collage and amplifying it through relating to the images and writing. I did this within my colleague, Regina’s linear vision quest model of collage-making beginning with “Hearing the Call” (p. 122). Within this context, Dream Poet/Creatrix came into existence after the dream and collage-making process, birthed into form through the collage and later, identified through the writing. Because she is the benefactor of possibilities, she is also present in the future manifestations of those potentialities. As this example shows, there is a blurring of temporal dimensions which I feel is common in processes of moving from image to text to image.

Archetypal energies may be manifested in diverse forms. At this point in working with the images created before and during my doctoral process, I perceive that the energies
represented through the image of Dancer, Dream Poet/Creatrix, and Saraswati are similar, although “clothed” differently.

**Saraswati.**

Saraswati, as Hindu Goddess of the Arts, combines (as symbolized by objects she holds in her hands) energies of wisdom, spiritual development, creative expression, and harmony. As a colourful wooden miniature, she appeared in my pre-doctoral process sandpicture (Figure 10) through which I expressed my frustration and anxiety about what I was going to do for my doctoral research. As described in my text about her (p. 51) I, in the guise of Dreaming Figure of Malta, was lying under her tree and surmised she had something to do with the whole process. Although I have not sustained the image of Saraswati over as many years as I have Dancer, perhaps because I did not construct her as I did Dancer, she has become a salient figure for me in relation to my creative expression and manifestation of my potentialities.

**Dreaming woman.**

Dreaming Woman, present in the collage *Dreaming into Being* (Figures 16, 17, pp. 122-3) and sandpicture (Figure 9, p. 50) expresses herself spontaneously when I remember my dreams. I carry the image of her, particularly in her form as the Dreaming Woman of Malta, which is a replica of an actual statue unearthed at an ancient archaeological site in Malta. She was found in a labyrinthine structure called the Hypogeum, considered to be a sacred, healing space where dreams were incubated.

Dreaming Woman of Malta was also significant for Eve. Although she didn’t speak about sustaining images over a long period of time or images that sustained her, she did relate to this figure in her sandpicture (Figure 56, p. 219) with a symbolic attitude, and identify with it:

*The sleeping Goddess of Malta is my dreaming self paying attention to the dream images that arise. Being attentive to symbols.*
The crone.

The symbolic representation of The Crone made her appearance in my sandpicture (Figures 65, 66, pp. 254-56). She appeared at a transitional period in my life when I felt particularly exhausted. This image of The Crone took on an eternal nature through the line drawing on a rock face in a rock world. She was in stark contrast to the young girl who had journeyed for a very long time through a burnt-out forest. Her words were heard by the young girl with relief: *It’s OK. You don’t have to do anything. You can just be* (p. 256). Meeting The Crone allowed me to release my self-imposed, long-standing psychic responsibility for my mother and prepared me for her physical death.

The appearance of The Crone in my sandpicture made the invisible visible, that is, it connected me to her presence in me and her relationship to my aging process. As I explored the influence of this image, I became conscious of the tension I held between fending her off and allowing her in (p. 258).

The veiled woman.

The Veiled Woman gained hold in me through my collages, beginning with *Dreaming into Being* (Figures 16, 19). She reappeared in *Woman in a Hat* (Figures 27, 37) and *Dwelling In* (Figures 38, 39). Contrasted with the nude women in the collage, she made me aware of tensions related to my aging body (p. 142) and issues of disregard, appropriation of authority, and silencing (p. 153). She also provoked me to seek increased understanding about Veiled Woman as “other” and “self.”

The flowering woman.

Bell was the only one of my co-participants who spoke about an archetypal image that sustained her over many years. The Flowering Woman was a collaged, life-sized, body-tracing
that Bell made in the workshop where I created Dancer. Bell spoke about the symbolic nature of the image:

*The symbol just keeps on giving and giving and giving and giving. You don’t reach the end of it because you . . . don’t find the answer to things. You grow into and past it. . . . I have the same kind of feeling about the image that I did that day. A wonderful, wonderful time.* (p. 268)

For Bell, this image of a woman covered in flowers, with flowers flowing from her fingertips, hanging on Bell’s studio door for years, had a counterbalancing effect as she worked on her metalwork:

*It had . . . to do with an artistic expression and a sharing of it and a growth process through the doing of it. Everything creative that you do and creative that you share . . . that’s how I took all the flowers at the end of my fingers, just sort of flowing off. . . . When I had that in my studio at home, my studio was a metal studio, with all the hardness and the firmness and the heat and all of that kind of thing that’s involved in doing metalwork, which is a world away from the softness of flowers. . . . I used to have it on the door on the inside of my studio. I looked at it all the time I was sitting at my bench.* (p. 268)

**Our Relationships with the World of Nature**

Nature—the world that we can touch and be a part of, and that remains beyond us—plays an important role in all our lives. Part of Bell’s creation of a new life has been a return to the natural world, a “treasured influence” (p. 213), that has protected and intrigued her from early childhood (p. 292). In her relationship with Nature and creatures of the wild (especially the kingfisher, the dragonfly, and the gecko), she has drawn it and them, and wondered about their awareness of her as a part of their world. As she has remembered her feelings of isolation from other people and, paradoxically, her connection with Nature and art from the age of seven, she has nurtured that link in her seven-year-old granddaughter, Corrie. Their relationship has revitalized the child in Bell who finds herself playing freely, engaging in an extroverted and “less serious” manner, and displaying her sense of humour in a new way.
Eve’s love of Nature, particularly water, came through in her visual and verbal narratives. In her stories, she evoked recollections of the beauty of colours and forms in Nature, as well as pleasurable childhood and adult activities in and by the water with family members (p. 299). Eve imparted a sense of longing for the containing and revitalizing attributes of the sea that perhaps is a symbol of resolution of her feelings of conflict between the pull of the modern and natural worlds and her struggle with finding an inner and outer balance between extroversion and introversion.

Maria’s connection to Nature focused on her desire to plant trees on the ancestral property that she was trying to regain and perhaps turn into a park (p. 318). She saw that trees could be a landmark for her, signifying her place of origin. She imagined them as something that could not be cut down, perhaps identifying with a sense of permanence that did not exist in her childhood when her life in that place was severed with her father’s death.

My early memories of my experiences in Nature are entwined with my relationship with my father and the ancestral farm property which I now partially own. As we also heard in Maria’s story (p. 321), tensions exist around my ancestral property because of inheritance and control issues (p. 148). Despite what the current situation is, through my childhood experiences at the farm, I developed a strong Nature-based, spiritual connection to animals, especially the deer which I see as an animal symbolic of gentleness and strength. The saliency of the deer in my psyche (pp. 146-7) are apparent in their presence in several sandpictures and collages. My sense of a symbolic connection to creatures that I meet unexpectedly in my daily wanderings in Nature with our dog evokes an air of mystery, sacredness, curiosity, and relatedness with life beyond me. My connection with the natural world sustains me in my daily life through its stillness from human voices and traffic and its unexpected images of beauty, like the dampened
bark of trees on a rainy day (p. 169). These images, which I often weave into my art as Bell does, give meaning to my life.

Not only “wild things” were subjects of our stories. Bell described the antics of her daughter’s cat that was living with her temporarily. She referred to him as “an animating creature in the household,” one who is “more than a cat,” and actually a small creature that she loves and that reminds her of how her husband taught her to love by loving, and of her daughters’ love (p. 211). Maria, who spoke in detail about her life with Pedro, her pet lovebird (pp. 330-2), also spoke of her dog, Jake, who was her protector and companion when she was a child in Central America. She became emotional when she remembered how he protected her from sexual abuse by her uncle who probably murdered him, impelling Maria to run away from home (p. 324). My (Brenda’s) stories about Augie, originally my daughter’s dog who now lives with us, began with my husband being the primary dog-walker at the beginning of my dissertation process. Now, by the end of this process, with my husband’s decline in health and change from independence to a completely dependent status, I am the primary dog-walker and Augie is my companion in Nature. We also consider her “more than” a dog. She is still a link in my relationship with my husband and a soothing presence in my home that is now “emptied of its family” (p. 259).

A Sense of Ethics and Purpose in Life

Growing up in a “not particularly happy” family, Bell had an experience at the age of 13 that shaped her life:

“My aunt had told me that all men were better than all women and that fired me up. I thought, “OK, I’m going to figure out what this is all about. No man is better than I am.” Said she at 13, unless he’s better than I am, and he’s got his work cut out for him, my intention was to be a very good person. At 13, I thought I had my running shoes on and I was moving on this subject. It just wasn’t going to happen, just because you’re
male. So I can remember the beginning of this [i.e., examining herself and her reactions] and it’s an ongoing thing. (p. 290)

She decided at that point to be the very best person in life that she could be, not to harm anyone or anything, and to lead “a morally appropriate life” (p. 291). Although she decided at a young age never to marry, as mentioned above, she met a man who loved her and taught her to love. She realizes she had “integrity” even at that young age, felt in charge of her own fate, and knew she would never let a man dominate her. She felt she came to that state of certitude because of the amount of time she spent in solitude, feeling at one with Nature.

Maria too knew as a young teenager that she would never marry (p. 323) because she did not want to be “owned” by a man. For a while, taking care of her sisters was her focus: my life or my sisters’ life (p. 317). After taking care of her young sisters for a few years when they were orphaned, she saw her path to independence and a better life in terms of learning:

Learning is a golden cord to me. Learning is something that keeps me alive. (p. 315)

She continues to learn about her art as a healthcare professional in formal learning situations and about the art and beauty of living in informal ways, keeping herself alive to what is new, empowering, and freeing.

At her stage of life, Eve is concerned about “essence” (p. 302) which involves a “deepening” and a knowing of the necessity to strip away unessential things and ego-motivated pursuits and gratification. Feeling its presence or its absence, Eve continues to explore what essence means in her daily life and sometimes grapples with a way to explain it in words.

I (Brenda) am guided in life by a two-fold purpose: to learn all that I need to learn to be all that I can be, that is, to maximize my potential, and to find ways to contribute to others in a meaningful way.
For all of us, the “good life” is far from acquiring material comforts and leading a life of leisure. Our stories have illuminated what is important to us: our families, our continual learning, spiritual development, our contact with Nature, our creative expression, and integration of our experiences so that they make meaning of how we have lived our lives.

And More . . .

What remains to be explored are the visual narratives. Looking back, I note that I have presented an abundance of visual narrative data in the form of collages (Chapter 7) and sandpictures (Chapter 8). Prior to that data gathering, I formulated several questions:

*How might visual narratives be analyzed and hence understood when they stand alone and when they are accompanied by verbal texts?*

*How congruent or convergent are people’s visual and verbal narratives or, conversely, how much do they diverge from each other?*

*What different types of verbal narratives accompany visual narratives (e.g., simple naming of elements, explicit identification of the narrator with elements of the story, and complexity of temporal and spatial dimensions, etc.)?*

*What themes, symbols, or compositional elements are borrowed from famous images?*

*Considering visual narratives only, what types of pairings of images accentuate differences and similarities, in other words, paradox, contrasts, oppositions or complementarities, and congruencies or convergences?*

*How does a sequence of images emphasize temporal or spatial relationships and invoke a storyline about “linear change, progress, fulfillment, or causation” (Werner, 2004, p. 68)?*

*What is the influence of the surrounding visual field, in terms of proximity, size, and color contrasts, on an image in a visual narrative?*

*To what extent is a subtle cumulative effect provided by a scattering of objects?*

*To what extent is intentional dissonance created in visual narratives to evoke a critical attitude?*

Again, I experience tension about answering the questions directly or discussing how I tried to make sense of the visual narratives. I opt for the latter choice, acknowledging that I am faced with, and offering up, a dense data pack that highlights what I did in the making-meaning phase.
Chapter 11:  
Visual Narratives – What Worked for Me

Start with the Image

While the study of verbal narratives is well-established in the academic world in the field of education, especially teacher training, it is my impression that the field of study of visual narratives doesn’t yet have a systematic, coherent basis. What I present here is not to be taken as a cookbook. The particular image drives the analysis and meaning-making in a way that I cannot articulate. For that reason, of prime importance in trying to understand visual narratives are two processes that are intricately entwined: looking at them, and developing a relationship with them. Readers of this document may say, “Well, of course we look at them. They’re visual.” Almost two decades ago, as a naive Sandplay student, I often had the experience of looking at sandpictures and not seeing anything that made sense to me or that helped me understand the clients who created them. I hope that I am able to crack open this process of seeing with a Logos and an Eros eye, with both eyes looking inward and outward. As I have learned over many years of trying to understand, both are needed in a holistic approach: thought and reason, accompanied by passion and psychic relatedness (Jung, 1953). We are accustomed to relying on, or valuing to a greater extent, Logos. We cannot make meaning of images without relating to them holistically and with feeling, whether the images come to us through dreams, waking visions, art, or Sandplay. I begin this section on visual narratives by exploring the collages that I created in the self-inquiry part of my study.
Collage as Visual Narrative

Brenda’s Collage 1 – *Dreaming into Being*

On pages 121-125, I described my pre-dissertation experience of creating a collage based on another person’s model (Cowan, 2007, 2006). Working in this way, I was guided and nurtured by my friend and colleague as I created the collage and as I added my verbal narrative to the visual product. With *Dreaming into Being*, my initial verbal narrative was structured using Regina’s prescribed categories: *Entering the Picture; Hearing the Call, Finding Guides; Going into the Shadows; Being Tested and Transformed; and Returning Home and Sharing Gifts*. During the self-inquiry portion of my doctoral research, I revisited *Dreaming into Being*. I recalled Regina’s dictum to shape the collage to the punctum, in her terms, to determine through what element I would enter the creative process and arrange other elements in relation to it. Just as my inner dreaming woman led me on the journey to complete my doctorate, the image of Dreaming Woman with REM imprinted on her forehead, cut from a magazine, was an externalized representation that led me through this collage process. I remember that initial creative experience as being immensely gratifying. I had a sense of aesthetic satisfaction that involved my emotions and intellect. Since then, computer software has allowed me to deconstruct the collage and to use portions of it to communicate with friends, an activity I have practised with great enjoyment for many years with paintings, photographs, and collages that I deconstruct and reconstruct as works-in-progress.

Showing this collage to a few other people, I have learned that they access the collage world through different entry points. I too have revisited the collage multiple times to gaze at the images and to explore which one pulls me on any particular day. As I recount on pages 141 to 142, a salient image was the woman in the navy blue burqa. In Barthes’ terms, she changed “my
reading of the picture.” By attending to her I became aware of contrasts between her and the reclining nude woman and full-bodied female winged sculpture and, subsequently, of personal tensions regarding exposing and concealing my own body because I do not fit valued contemporary images of a lean, toned body. The shrouded woman and the spiritual figure in red habit with lips stitched shut emphasize a tension that educated, otherwise assertive women (including me) feel regarding the socio-political phenomenon of being silenced (Mantis, 2004). The reiteration of images of veiled women in subsequent collages (i.e., Woman in a Hat, p. 143, and Dwelling In, pp. 152-7) probably seeded my focus on the woman in the navy blue burqa in Dreaming into Being and certainly led to an exploration of my right to use diverse cultural images and other artists’ images in collage. As well, the reappearance of the veiled woman in other collages led me to consider consciously who she is in me. By identifying her in me, I am encouraged to wonder about and appreciate the multiple voices of women who are ostensibly different from me and the challenges we have in common as women.

**Brenda’s Collage 2 – Woman in a Hat**

As mentioned on page 144, this collage has an unsettling effect on me. There I discussed the difference in the creative process relative to Dreaming into Being which was structured according to a friend’s model. In this second collage process, I engaged in a completely free image selection process on my own, with no externally imposed, guiding framework. As I ponder over the “unsettling” effect, I remember that I used the words, “sense of fragmentation” when discussing the collage earlier. I wonder if the fragmentation was in the collage or in me and hence in my perception of the visual narrative. That wondering gives rise to a few questions regarding the function of the underlying surface or foundational field of the collage: Is this field a rigid or semi-flexible surface provided by a sheet of bristolboard or matboard, cut into specific
sizes, or is the field the state of the creator’s psyche? What differences are noted with different sizes of background material? Different psychological states?

Initially, I worked from the image of the blue sky-white cloud high rectangular panels. That was the punctum for my creative process that was manifested through the collage. Revisiting the work, I was drawn into it through the right bottom section where the caribou eats delicacies from the bottom of the onion sea (Figure 34). The inner creative process is in perpetual motion. At the particular time that I reviewed this collage—I don’t recall my exact circumstances—that inner creative process was dealing with new experience, new associations, a new meeting of consciousness and the unconscious. Looking back to the outer creative process, I can hypothesize that there was much movement of energy between consciousness and the unconscious while assembling the collage, without a sense of integration. The swimmer was the navigator or mediator between the two. Immediately after creating the collage, I held a sense of dissatisfaction about the aesthetic quality of the collage. I no longer feel that. At this moment, I seem to have gone beneath the aesthetic dissatisfaction to something deeper emotionally, allowing another voice to speak. The caribou again brings associations with the deer, specifically in terms of memories of my experience of deer at the farm. As I recall my connection with the deer in that location, addressed in detail previously in this document (pp. 146-7), I connect with my feelings of sadness about my psychological distance from the actual farm at this time in my life (despite the fact that the title will soon be changed to the names of my uncle and me), family conflict that ensued after I put limitations on removing trees and rocks from the farm, and the loss of my mother almost six months ago. Staying with the feelings of heaviness in my chest and the stinging sensation in my wet eyes, I am aware that two other images from this collage move onto the screen in my mind: the Day of the Dead figures in the
left bottom section; and the small family image at the base of the steps in the upper section left of centre. I live daily with the reality of my incapacitated husband who suffers from a chronic, irresolvable illness and who sees no sense in living his life in the very limited way he now does. I also feel the pain of the loss of family as I knew it for more than three decades. My loss was highlighted through the “home being emptied of its family” dream discussed on page 259.

I found it difficult to write these few sentences today, feeling overcome with fatigue when I sat in front of my computer. I decided to give in to my felt sense and lie on the couch, taking along a book that had arrived today by mail from a bookstore: *The Creative Soul*, by Lawrence Staples (2009). After reading a few pages, I began to let drowsiness overtake me. Then the telephone rang and interrupted a longed-for respite. This short call was just enough to take the soporific edge off, so I began to read again. I soon came across a reference to Freud’s and Jung’s concept of “free association” (p. 14) and read the following sentence: *Words with an associative connection appear as if they were spilled upon the page* (p. 14). The words I had written about Maria’s first sandpicture (p. 256) popped into my mind: *Just as I describe the cosmos as spilling out into the sandtray, I sense that the sandplayer has spilled out her imaginative meanderings.* I refer to that sandpicture as presenting “active disorder” and “visual confusion,” for me, of course. Obviously Maria’s and my readings of the picture were different because she hadn’t indicated that that was the case for her. As I pondered over the notion of free association and its appearance in works of art such as novels, I began to think of my *Woman in a Hat* collage in the same way, *free association* of images. This thought tickled me as I realized that I had never thought of using this particular term in relation to the selection of magazine pictures for collages or figurines for sandpictures. As I let the thought sink in, I found myself nodding affirmatively and began to read further, agreeing with Staples who suggests that what
may appear as fragmented or disparate elements may have an underlying “unconscious knowingness” that “is embedded in our feelings, and is expressed as an interest in someone or something” (p. 15). He says that fragments are connected by feelings which eventually lead to integration of the elements because of an underlying field or “creative organizing principle” (p. 16). This concept brings to mind Jung’s concept of the Self, Conforti’s (1999) archetypal field, and Bohm’s “implicate order.” I recalled Regina’s guided collage-making experience I had near the beginning of my current doctoral journey and her reference to Bohm’s ideas. As I wrote earlier in this document (p. 121),

She presented the art-making process as an opportunity to explore a dimension of implicate or enfolded order: a deep, “inward order out of which the manifest form of things can emerge creatively” (Bohm & Peat, 2000, p. 151); and “an order that has a potentiality to go beyond the individual content and involve the whole, common cultural experience” (p. 172).

I wondered if “unconscious knowingness” is another name for tacit knowing? Does it imply the “tacitly felt end in view” about which Conle (2000b, p. 198) writes? Adding the concept of free association, based on an underlying field or organizing principle that energetically is Eros, the energy of relationship (Staples, 2009) amplifies these ideas for me and whets my appetite to explore further.

Reading the case report today of one of my Sandplay students, I came across a reference to Maria-Louise von Franz (1999) who writes about depression or a feeling of “nothing much happening” that is experienced when something new is about to be birthed out of energy that has been accumulating in the unconscious. I have noticed about myself that I sometimes come to a place when I am writing when I suddenly feel overcome by fatigue. It is like a cloud of fog engulfing me, not a usual weariness after a long day. When I give in to it, I often have a dream or an auditory hallucination like a telephone or doorbell ringing. It seems like a kind of wake-up
call to announce something new. This was the type of experience I had the day I began to read Staples’ book and subsequently began to think of associated images being at the base of something that may appear fragmented or disorganized on the surface.

I notice that my fatigue and sadness have dissipated as I have moved from the outer images of my collage and Maria’s sandpicture, and the words of author, Lawrence Staples (2009), to my inner world. Led initially by my feelings, I have experienced how associations, thoughts, and wonderings have transformed my feelings to excitement and curiosity about further research into the topic. Conscious of my movement between images and words expressing ideas takes me back in time and reminds me of Dancer’s words to me many years ago when I engaged in a written dialogue with her, that I must move from images to words to images to words in order to develop my inner artist (p. 35). I also think of the synchronicity of receiving in the mail today The Creative Soul.

I look again at the collage and focus on the Korean woman in the hat whose image became the title of the collage. I had previously thought that the story I had heard about the hat being a symbol of her inner authority had resonated for me because of my contemplation of, and writing about, the issue of silencing and personal authority regarding my previous collage, Dreaming into Being. Now, as I focus on her hat, I chuckle and think about the vast associative network “under her hat,” working in the secrecy of the unconscious, perhaps for years, and how that serves her inner authority and creative expression.

When constructing my verbal narrative (pp. 138-44), I meandered far from the actual visual images of the collage, although I acknowledge that different parts of my verbal narrative grew out of associations prompted by the visual images. These topics covered a wide range: my Korean experience; artistic representation of research data; clearing out my mother’s home; my
ancestors at the farm; religion/spirituality; a childhood experience of deer at the farm; tensions about hunting deer at the farm; disposition of the family property; relationship of consciousness and the unconscious; the use of multicultural images in collage and my dilemma about using others’ images for collage; continuity and disruption of the family line and of relationships; and diverse emotions provoked by all these topics. The multiplicity of these topics shows the potential of collage, a form of visual narrative, accompanied by verbal narratives, for unlocking personal stories, developing awareness about inner conflict, resolving some of those issues, and facilitating learning. I think of the underlying associative field holding the multiple images together like the backing of a patchwork quilt. Although each quilt square is directly attached to only a few others, in the end all squares are unified into “quilt” through the backing (which can be large or small) and through its function, product and process, materiality and dynamism. This brings to mind my questions asked earlier (p. 371) about the influence of the underlying field, in terms of the material, fixed matboard or imaginal, dynamic psyche, and I realize that I had already planted a seed that was watered a few days later through Staples’ book. My reference to the quilt also brings to mind an article I read during the pre-proposal stage of my dissertation: The Web and the Quilt: Alternatives to the Heroic Journey Toward Spiritual Development (Ray & McFadden, 2001). Suggesting that the quilt, as a metaphor for spirituality, reflects both diversity and interconnectedness, the authors emphasize relationality in contrast to the individual nature of the heroic quest. As I see it, even the solitary journey, which is personal, does not exclude the relational aspect in terms of other people, other things, other energies, other . . . . It is like the sweetened tea described by Connelly and Clandinin (1988, p. 90): the ideas all get worked in so that they dwell in me, perhaps later to be revealed in a quilt or a collage.
As I write about the patchwork quilt and backing in terms of an associative field, my attention also moves to a characteristic in several of my collages, instances in which a portion of a cut-out picture extends beyond the frame. In *Woman in a Hat* (Figure 27), a scene of shadowy figures at the top left side of the collage extends upwards, an image of masculine and feminine figures united as Yin/Yang at the left bottom of the collage pulls the viewer’s eye off the page, and a starfish ray extends beyond the edge in the bottom right section. In *Dwelling In* (Figure 38), the feet of a black ibis at the centre bottom and the tail of the multi-colour horse at the right bottom section both extend beyond the frame. In *A Crack in the Family Tree* (Figure 45), the horns of the imposing tree figure in the middle panel extend upwards. Generally, I think that this phenomenon is related to the fact that I often push boundaries or go beyond them (as in my completing my doctorate in my 70th year). I often find a fixed frame or fixed schedule too constraining. I want freedom to individualize whatever I am doing and thinking, freedom to move and expand. Specifically, there are likely other meanings, such as energy moving into a defined field (such as the ibis flying in to gaze at the women in chadors) or the tree figure relating to an abstract, non-relational ruling principle.

**Brenda’s Collage 3 – *Dwelling In***

Looking back again to the collage, *Dwelling In*, I smile as I recall how much I enjoyed these particular images from the moment I began selecting them from Korean art magazines. As I recall my selection process, the background for the left side, what I describe as “a large chador-like red shape” (p. 152), was actually the sleeve of an elegant red dress that clothed a radiant fashion model in a photograph. I saw the similarity to a chador and decided to start with that. Apparently, the veiled woman had been “dwelling in” me, although I was conscious of my preoccupation with her only as I wrote my description of Collage 3 (p. 152) several months ago.
Along with the veiled woman, the ibis had also been working its way into me simultaneously, since creating my *Ibis Woman* collage some months before. By the time I made Collage 3, I had actually found images of ibises and knew they could be black, white, or red. I also knew they were symbolic of wisdom. Once again I am tickled to think that they, instinctive energies that feed in the dark, water-based roots of mangrove trees, or “the unconscious” as I make my symbolic associations, may have had the wisdom to know about the importance of reflecting upon the veiled woman in me. For me, my imagined scene of their feeding habits resonates with the image of the caribou eating delicacies from the bottom of the sea.

Noting the title and what I have just written above related to Collage 2, I also smile. I remember giving Collage 3 the title of *Dwelling In* spontaneously, with no conscious justification. I wondered what motivated me to do that. I realize now that the issue of the veiled woman had been dwelling in me for a long period of time, at least since creating the *Dreaming into Being* collage a year or two before and giving the woman in the navy blue burqa a prominent position. As I reflect on the topic of women in burqas at this point, I acknowledge that, being a news and politics junkie, over the past few years I have subjected myself to endless images and words about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, religious extremists (particularly those who disempower and abuse women and girls because of their gender and children simply because they *are*), and hope and despair about the possibility of peace between the Jews and Palestinians, among other gut-wrenching global issues. In the media, much energy has focused on Islam whose veiled women are easily identifiable as “different.” I have no doubt that these mass culture images are part of my “free association” of images. Attention to my preoccupation with such images and exploration of words written about them have opened up a continuing learning path that will not end with the completion of my dissertation. My learning has to do with self-
discovery, that is, to find out more about the veiled woman aspect of me. However, I believe that the reappearance of images of the veiled woman in my collages is also an invitation from beyond me to opening to the woman who wears the burqa, to expand my hermeneutic circle so that I can understand more about her and her uniqueness that extends beyond her cultural identity.

Interestingly, as I opened my Documents file after a break to continue working on this section of my writing today, I noticed an article by Shaun McNiff (1991) that I had downloaded from the web a year-and-a-half ago. I had not yet read the article, but recall being intrigued by the title, “Ethics and the Autonomy of Images.” Reading it today, I resonated with his reference (following Socrates) to “artistic expressions as offspring” that are “related but separate from their makers” (p. 281). He notes that the word, offspring, implies “how one thing springs from another in a kinesis of eternal emanations.” McNiff views attempts to confine the creations within the ego framework of the creators as defenses against states of unknowing and threats to life’s mystery. He says that images, as representations of archetypal energy that may be activated by different people at any time, cannot be identified with, or limited to, one person, and that they may shape shift to elude the grasp of the artist or viewer who tries to own or confine them. While the artist may speak for the artistic creation, s/he must take care to see the image beyond her or his personal projections.

While I agree with McNiff that artistic representations are conduits for universal, archetypal energy and thus cannot be owned or limited to an individual, I appreciate their value in assisting individuals to unfold, just as sun and rain, although they are not exclusive to any one recipient, help an individual flower to unfold through their warmth and moisture. Although I am not prepared to give this question much attention at this point, I wonder how McNiff justifies
copyright laws, monetary profit related to diverse works of art and ideas, and attempts to prevent plagiarism.

**Brenda’s Collage 4 – *Ibis Woman***

Similar to my experience in creating Collage 1, *Dreaming into Being* emerged through a creative process structured by a guide (Regina). *Ibis Woman* had a mid-wife (Rita) to help in her birthing (see p. 158) that began with a guided meditative visualization focusing on the chakras. Using the word, “mid-wife” reminds me of a model of countertransference that I sometimes refer to in Sandplay training: the maieutic model (Stein, 1984/1992) in which the therapist participates in the psychological birthing process of the client who experiences “something deeper, fairer and more embracing” than his/her former conscious attitude (p. 80). In the company of an empathic, caring, skilled guide, the creative process can also lead to a profound, equitable, and inclusive attitude. Different from my collage-making experience with Regina, I created *Ibis Woman* in a group of about a dozen other women who connected with images that touched on personal issues deeply embedded in their psyches. In this group also the women, narrating their stories and birthing themselves, played the role of midwives for each other. That day, in the soul collage workshop, their multiple voices, born of their diverse experiences in multiple roles, added to the depth and texture of each woman’s story. Some were, as I, fatigued from their multiple responsibilities and relationships. Some had, as I, spent much of their time enduring silently, like the Korean women.

My revisitation to this visual narrative when writing Chapter 7 of my dissertation highlighted structural elements of the picture, especially the Void and the horizontal/vertical dimensions, as did certain sandpictures. I recall Garoian’s (2004) suggestion that the void may be seen as a place of dialectical tension which enables a critical attitude towards cultural beliefs.
and values, a creative interaction with meanings and symbols, and a possibility of multiplicity of interpretations and voices. What comes to mind is my elaboration on the tiger and bear story, and its connection with the endurance of the Korean people, especially the women, that I heard about during my first contact with my Korean students. During my last trip to Korea a couple of months ago, during a seminar in which we were discussing the intersection of Korean history and mythology with reference to Ungyo, the bear woman, I asked my students how relevant “bear woman” and the quality of endurance were to them. Surprisingly, they responded that they identified less with the bear and more with the fox, described as beautiful and smart, because that is what contemporary Korean men like. At the time, I wondered if Korean men would like a bear woman as mother of their children and a fox woman as a wife. Yesterday, beginning this section of my dissertation, I decided to explore what the fox means symbolically in Korean mythology. Again, I was surprised and then curious to know whether or not the young Korean women with whom I had spoken a couple of months ago knew anything about Korean mythological and folkloric connections to the fox. An interesting article on this topic was titled Fox Wives and Other Dangerous Women, by a Korean folklorist, Heinz Insu Fenkl (n.d.). He recounts several stories in which a fox, predominantly representing woman or girl, is the protagonist. Along with the notion of the fox woman as evil, even as lamia, succubus and vampire, he weaves in the cultural strand of the patrilineage system, with its importance on the responsibilities and privileges of the eldest son in Korea. Introduced through Confucianism since it became a dominant ideology in Korea in the 14th century, the male preference system has lost some prominence during the current generation of children; however, I have heard stories about mothers-in-law of women still in their child-bearing years that encourage abortions for their daughters-in-law who have learned they are carrying daughters. I have also heard firsthand
from a 50-year-old Korean woman, who was the third daughter of seven children, how her attempts to be the “first son,” in spirit and action, affected her life as she tried to gain affection and attention from her parents. After reading Fenkl’s article, I felt sad and disgusted by the fact that the male primacy cultural tradition is supported by folktales that link beautiful, smart girls and women to mythological demonesses who rob men of their vitality and creative force.

Today, as I looked back at what I wrote a couple of months ago about Collage 4, I was surprised to see a reference to quilting (p. 160), especially after what I just wrote in the Collage 2 section above (p. 370) where I was discussing the unifying nature of the associative field:

*The dotted lines remind me of stitching, quilting, putting together fragments. This reinforces the concept of collage and suggests to me that, through our narratives, we stitch ourselves together (i.e., our self-identities, the images of ourselves that we and others have) in the telling of our stories of our life experiences.*

As has been obvious throughout my dissertation, some of the fragments that I stitch together are attempts at meaning-making that include scientific knowledge or historical information linked up with symbols, as in my discussion about ibises (p. 166). With the ibises of my imagination, I paid attention to where they feed, what realms they enter, what colours they are, what archetypal images and energy may be activated as I search for meaning. I related what I learned to a Jungian theoretical framework which makes sense to me, especially because of its connection of spirituality and creativity, and its focus on wholeness rather than perfection. Jung’s psychology also attends to a lifelong developmental process that he called the individuation process, an evolution of the individual towards health and wholeness within a relational context. The Jungian archetypal/mythological framework continues to delight and amaze me as, for example, with the connection of Thoth, the ibis-headed god, and his reputation for laying golden eggs (p. 179) that I could connect to the image of the golden egg in my first
collage, *Dreaming into Being* (p. 121), and relate to the associative field discussed above (p. 373).

**Brenda’s Collage 5 – Dream Screams**

I used Munch’s *The Scream* image in the form of a downloaded picture from the web as a means to amplify a few dreams I had had in which I literally screamed. I also created a sandpicture (Figure 55) as I narrated my story to one of my research co-participants, Bell (see pp. 217-19). For the sandpicture, I also used Munch’s *The Scream*, this time in the form of a miniature figure commercially produced as a keychain. When creating the collage and sandpicture, I was emulating the artist, Barry Kite, who uses iconographic images to create what he calls “aberrant images” that, among other functions, make strong visual statements and provoke multiple interpretations (Bisbort, 1997). I have used iconographic images or a portion of them in a couple of other visual narratives: the hands of *Mona Lisa* near the centre of the collage, *Woman in a Hat*, and the familiar cultural icons of the ancestors as figures (in Brenda’s Sandpicture 3 (with Bell), Figure 55). Da Vinci used this particular hand pose to represent the figure as “a virtuous woman and a faithful wife” (Farago, 1999, p. 372). I chose the image unconsciously at the time I created the collage. Reflecting on its presence in the collage, I think my choice was associated with my well-integrated understanding of the hands’ importance in art and Sandplay and in healing in terms of Rossi’s notion of the generation of activity-dependent genes (pp. 240-2) and Jung’s premise that the hands are capable of solving a problem that the psyche has struggled for years with in vain.

To return to *Dream Screams*, I combined Munch’s familiar cultural image with newspaper cut-outs and personal photographs that I was motivated to take the day I began the collage. My motivation grew out of my strong interest in a natural phenomenon in the form of
dampened bark patterns on trees in my local woods. By chance, while working on the collage, I had on TV in the background an interview with a psychologist/psychiatrist who was researching the regulation of emotions in connection with the neuroplasticity of the brain. This topic resonated for me because of my own exploration of Sandplay and neuropsychobiology (Weinberg, 2007). My reflection on my then recent untypical habit of responding with irritation to a number of situations led to a conscious decision to change my pattern out of concern for my personal health and my love for some of those people whose demands were fuelling my irritation. I also accepted responsibility for trying to do “too much.” Through a reflexive response that included reflection and behaviour/attitude change, I gained a deep appreciation of the role that the creative process through collage and Sandplay played in developing my insight about my personal scream experience.

When trying to make sense of this collage, following McConeghy (2003) (see pp. 171-3 of this document), I attended to its aesthetic structure, and allowed myself to meander through various experiences, particularly those related to my frequent irritations and my Sandplay training project in Korea (pp. 172-4). These came in the form of free associations during the analysis of the structural aspects of the collage. Associations also led to reiterations of Jungian theory, for example, the notion of compensation for uprooting ourselves from our instincts, an unconscious attitude or behaviour that leads to psychological one-sidedness or bias in our perceptions. Structural aspects included trees leaning in opposite directions, provoking a feeling of instability; a scattering and isolation of figures that leads to a sense of fragmentation; counterbalancing by different elements; and a silent space where new potential may be manifested (p. 172). Free association while describing Collage 5 led me naturally to my discussion of Collage 6.
Brenda’s Collage 6 – A Crack in the Family Tree

Stories I heard from Korean therapists about their clients and families had a “felt sense” impact on me that directed me to meditation, walking, and artistic expression to relieve my tension. One result was a “triptych,” although I did not intend to create in this format at the beginning of my creative process. The images seemed to guide me towards it as I moved my selected art magazine pictures around before gluing them down on matboard. Now, curious about my format choice as I amplify my discussion of Collage 6 (pp. 175-8), I seek understanding by turning to the definition of “triptych” and see that it is a traditional hinged art form that usually has two smaller outer panels that close over, or “shutter” the larger inner panel. The triptych had its origins in Middle Age Christian art, used especially for altar paintings (en.wikipedia.org). Its connection with religious art and the shuttering function seems to have significance for me as I revisit the image and my discussion of it. In the case of my collage, all three panels are the same size, so there is no shuttering of the middle image. The hinging function does allow the collaged triptych to stand up, with the right and left panels appearing as arms in a containing or embracing gesture. When positioned in this way, the “ideal” family confronts the contemporary dysfunctional family, described so by the therapists in their supervision sessions. It is the little alien who is holding the contrasting images of ideal and dysfunctional together, just as the identified client in therapy is bringing attention, through his or her suffering, to the need for resolution of family attitudes and actions. Once the child is in therapy, the truth about family dynamics can no longer be concealed. It is the little alien, dwarfed by the imposing masculine ruling principle, who brings attention to the crack in the family tree.
Brenda’s Collage 7 – *Death or Treasure*?

Experiencing a personal health crisis, I engaged in creative expression through collage-making as I had done before. *Death or Treasure*? was more than an artistic product. As I learned after the material creative step, the image reflected the actuality and necessity for me to hold the possibilities of life and death while dealing with the health crisis and making decisions about further treatment. Art-making was part of the process and representation of my dealing with the diagnosis of cancer. Tapping into a medical knowledge base that included searching on the web and consulting with doctors with expertise were also important. This total process led me to question long-held beliefs and attitudes and to ultimately assume responsibility for my decision to forego radiation but to engage in continuing consultation with a medical expert. The process also allowed me to confront my long-standing, partly irrational fear about getting cancer and dying, in favour of a more realistic understanding that cancer is a treatable disease.

Although I have passed a couple of post-surgery check-ups with a positive outcome, I am aware that the cancer could recur and I would be forced to make decisions about treatment again. In the meantime, I treasure my experience and life now being lived in the liminal space where life and death meet each other. My experience in this space has been amplified by my mother’s recent death which I observed over the course of a few hours as a quiet, relatively pain-free, gradual collapse of her vascular system at the age of 97 and by my 73-year-old husband’s eight month challenge with congestive heart failure which has been painful, frustrating, and scary for him as he has become increasingly debilitated, dependent, and seemingly powerless to effect change. While I can express love, loving kindness, and empathy in my caring, I know I cannot change his life situation as he confronts death, nor can I impart meaning to his life and death.
journey. For me, a counterbalance in the liminal space has been the birth two months ago of my first grandchild.

**Looking Inward and Outward**

This particular section is not intended to be summative. Rather, it is a reminder for readers/viewers who have an opportunity to experience resonance when looking again at the sandpictures initially presented in Chapter 8. As we have seen with the collages and will also notice with the sandpictures, attention fluctuates between our outer and inner worlds as we attempt to make meaning of the images presented. With practice, it becomes a smooth, dynamic process. Although I don’t always articulate it below, the process usually begins with a quick glance outwards at the image and then a turning inward to detect feelings or bodily sensations that are stirred. Another quick glance usually elicits a cognitive appraisal regarding the general quality of the sandpicture (e.g., chaotic or orderly). Then I let the image lead by attending to what draws the eye. Subsequently, I allot considerable time for a more detailed analysis that includes amplification in various ways that will become clear below. I trust the “felt sense” (Gendlin, 1997) about which thread to follow. In my meaning-making that follows, I have tried to minimize redundancy, without eliminating it completely when I feel repetition might be helpful.

As I begin to peruse the sandpicture data, I feel tension about my capacity to articulate precisely from this abundance of data. What comes to mind are Eraut’s (1999) words about “thick” and “thin” versions of knowing in the workplace (see p. 88 of this document). He suggests that there are tensions between practice and describing and justifying that practice. Perhaps it is a similar tension that I am experiencing in trying to distil what I have learned over the past five years since I began my doctoral process, and what I have brought to that process,
when some “representations” (in Siegel’s terms, p. 115 of this document) have not yet passed from the sensory, perceptual, and conceptual levels to the linguistic level. In other words, they remain at the tacit level of knowing (Polanyi, 1958).

Sandpictures as Visual Narratives – Bell and Brenda

Bell’s Sandpicture 1

Generally, when I first look at sandpictures, I intentionally soften my outwardly focused analytical eye, in order to connect with bodily sensations and perceptions that I interpret as feelings. In this particular case when Bell made her first sandpicture (Figure 50), I did so and then looked at the whole sandtray, allowing my attention to be pulled to a particular section. My focus oscillated between the near and rear portions of the picture. This dynamism suggested to me contrasts or polarities that alternately caught my attention. In Bell’s first sandpicture, a contrast in colour was obvious in the white of the sand and the blue of the bottom of the tray. I paid attention to the structure of the picture, for example, imprints in the sand in the form of straight and curved lines, helices, and a familiar schematic representation for birds.

Intentionally, I looked for spatial discontinuities and repetitive patterns (e.g., the brackets at the left and right ends of the blue “birds”), noting how they emphasized contrasting elements, such as dynamism and stillness, turmoil and calmness. In addition to the tray itself that contains and defines the “free and protected” space within the tray, the continuous line inscribed in the sand at the four edges of the tray seemed to serve as a second boundary or limit to what was being expressed within the tray. This line, along with the short curved lines that bracket the blue “birds,” contributed to a sense of containing and holding the energies framed within it. The repetitions of the blue and white vees at the centre of the sandpicture pointed towards a space
where energy might be suspended and a Void might be assumed, with the centre point suggesting a potential for resolution of tensions and the emergence of something new, something beyond what was there concretely. Through imaginative play, I fleshed out two-dimensional shapes into three-dimensional ones, namely spiral lines into conical forms and saw the exposed blue bottom of the tray as a meeting of earth and sky, earthly turmoil and a powerful transpersonal force.

Bell’s verbal narrative about her sandpicture also emphasized the polarities or complementarities of dynamism (i.e., flight) and stillness (as in a meditative Japanese Zen garden). Her reference to a prior dream accentuated how fear prevents movement and it underscored the opposites of safety and risk, as well as an actual space on the window sill and an implied space beyond. Resonance with the bird-like forms she inscribed with her finger elicited a “set of corresponding narrative elements” (Conle, 1996, p. 304) that had been laid down in memory from Bell’s pleasurable experience of drawing birds with her grand-daughter.

In my verbal narrative about Bell’s sandpicture, I expressed my recollection of Bell’s description of her répousséing process in her metalwork, an artform technique that interestingly creates an effect on one side of the metal that results in the opposite effect on the other side of the sheet (p. 281). In other words, it is a technique that integrates the opposites. In my verbal narrative, I moved from this image of the opposites to identifying energy in my body that reflected the opposites of dynamism and a settling of energy, stillness. In my analogy of Bell’s sandpicture with a Japanese painting, I also spoke about a space beyond what was concretely there, an implied space.

I arrive at details of my analyses by looking frequently at the images and re-reading the texts repeatedly, sometimes aloud. Comparing the visual and verbal analyses of sandpicture 1 and looking inward and outward, I detected polarities that evoked a sense of tension, ambiguity,
or ambivalence, as well as a paradox of feeling tone. Visually, the contrasting nature of elements was accentuated by colour, continuous and discontinuous lines, and spaces that were outlined or emphasized by inscribed forms (e.g., the point of the vees). In addition to the differentiation of opposites or complementarities that were mentioned in the data, the verbal narratives about the picture identified specific examples of resonance that related to previous topics of the co-participants’ conversations (in this case, Bell’s relationship and activities with her granddaughter and specifics about Bell’s creative process).

Bell began her narrative as a general description of the whole picture with a focus on the sand because she did not use any figures. As Bell told her story about this picture while looking at it continuously, she first connected an inscribed pattern in the sand with her granddaughter’s drawing of bird forms, and then she recalled a dream. There was an interaction between her internal and external worlds, and between her prior dream story and her sandpicture, notably a discrepancy in the latter case (Baum, 2007, pp. 167-8). In her sandpicture the bird was in flight, whereas in the original dream the bird was afraid to fly and was bound to the window sill. In the final part of her narrative, Bell went beyond a description of the actual picture to speak about wind sculpting sand dunes generally (p. 185).

**Bell’s Sandpicture 2**

I felt calm when I first looked at Bell’s second sandpicture (Figure 51), perhaps because it had an orderly quality. I attended to its structure and noted a central mound, with circularity a dominant form that was emphasized by the shape and placement of objects used and lines inscribed in the sand. Objects in the four corners of the rectangular tray created through their presence a contrasting element to the circularity. What I saw resonated with a familiar archetypal image that I carry in my historical consciousness, a mandala, or “sacred circle” in
which spiritual and earthly energies are said to be integrated. Such integration was also suggested by the intersection of horizontal and vertical planes through the central mound, by the figure of the torii (sacred gateway), by the structure of the pagoda that combines the circle or sphere and square, and by the Chinese sage. Mandala-like images are created spontaneously by the psyche as a self-healing, balancing, and ordering function in times of stress and chaos (Jung, 1959/1972). This concept, which Jung saw manifested in drawings done by his patients with psychiatric disorders, seems to relate to Dewey’s (1934, cited by Conle, 2000b) assertion that we have a “drive” towards or “deep longing” for harmony. Another figure emphasized integration: the jeweled tree, a manifestation of the Tree of Life archetype, which symbolizes the union of heaven, earth, and the underworld (spirit, consciousness, and the unconscious). As I continued to look at Bell’s sandpicture 2, slowly taking in more details, I felt a shift in my body energy as my gaze rested on the heron and frogs in juxtaposition to each other. My prior feelings of stability and comfort were disrupted by their placement which, I realized, made me feel anxious. I wondered what would happen to the frogs. Would they be dinner for the heron? I wondered if there were other elements that reinforced my paradoxical feeling tone? My eyes lit on the placement of the torii “behind” the cave. My ambivalent feeling was further provoked, eliciting questions: Who is passing through this torii? Are you entering or leaving this world of experience? Do you speak about the past or the future? Just after uttering to myself the words “entering or leaving,” the recent sudden death of Bell’s husband came to mind. This event emphasized that prior knowledge can influence an analysis of a visual narrative.

Returning at a later time to the image of the blue heron and frogs, I followed the thread of my previous question: Would the frogs be dinner for the heron? Taking a symbolic attitude, I could connect with the frogs as symbols of transformation (Bradway, 2001) and the heron as
spiritual energy that can “eat” or integrate the energy of transformation that exists in the unconscious. Despite my anxiety about the potential of the frogs to be devoured by the bird, I could see the possibility of a positive outcome involving Bell’s transformation through integration of previously unknown inner resources.

The transformative process described in the previous paragraph helped me make sense of the structural aspect of the picture that is defined by the positioning of the figures. I saw clearly that a journey was underway. The figures followed or created a non-linear path that was arc-like, perhaps a segment of a spiral which may be seen as a spiritual journey in Jungian terms, my familiar frame. With the concept of spiritual journey came a sense of dynamism and quest. The small animals, fox and two turtles, manifestations of instinctive energies, led the parade. I wondered: Who are you, fox? Why are the turtles following you? Where are you all going? I was aware of a visual discontinuity when my eye moved to the inanimate polished stones which followed in line but which differed energetically. The visual non sequitur elicited questions emanating from my symbolic attitude: Black Heart, Orange Disk, Three Stones? Are you moving or standing still? Are you telling us about a life being lived? Or a new life being created? Black Heart, what do we not know? Are you speaking about death? Or depression? Orange disk? Tell us of your fiery nature. Are you there to combat depression, or engender flames of passion? The sandplayer’s choice of particular figures and objects always raises questions and wonderings. When I ask these types of questions in this kind of situation, I never feel that I have to answer them immediately. I set them up in front of me like hypotheses and continue on asking or making connections as I try to make meaning that both feels right and seems supported by evidence I am noting. I try to relate to the figurines with feeling, viewing their relationships to one another and to me in a way that is similar to Bell’s when she wondered
about the dragonfly (pp. 273) and gecko (p. 274): *I wonder if he was thinking, “Is there any intelligence in a face that looks like this?”* and *Always with these kinds of experiences I am aware that I see it, but it also sees me. You always just presume that you see it. You never really think about, well, is it looking at you too.*

Structural aspects are an important part of my process of gathering evidence and highlighting tensions or ambiguities. In this particular case, while the structure of the picture points towards wholeness (i.e., the circle as symbol), integration, and healing (as suggested by the mandala form), some of the specific objects raise questions regarding their symbolic significance and their relationship to other objects. My questions sometimes push me to look further into other knowledge bases, such as mythology. For example, turtles have been associated with birth, the creation of the world, rescue from drowning, and a sacred journey (Bradway & McCoard, 1997) and foxes with inner transformation and healing (Kalff, 1992). I recall vaguely that the turtle was an important dream symbol for Bell many years ago when I first knew her. I don’t know what meaning she attributed to that figure that appeared repeatedly in her dreams then, but I now wonder if it functioned as a healing symbol. Perhaps that is why she has connected with its integrating and transforming energy as she consciously attempts to adapt to her loss by creating a new life after the death of her husband. As well as tapping into another knowledge base, I have leaned on prior knowledge in my loose interpretation of this visual narrative.

While I articulated a paradoxical emotional tone in my response to Bell’s visual narrative, Bell did not. I can view this difference from an exclusive perspective that one of us is wrong, or I can accept that multiple viewpoints are possible and valid, based on the life experiences we bring to the task. I prefer the latter approach, holding the possibility that both have significance
and that witness and creator may differ in their interpretations of pictures. As a therapist, following completion of a Sandplay process, the creator and I usually share our reflections about each picture. When we speak together, even if we differ in meaning-making, we often say to each other, *Yes, I see, that makes sense. I didn’t think of that before, but it feels right.* We expand our horizons of consciousness (Gadamer, 1975/2004).

Bell’s verbal narrative about this picture accentuated a new attribute that she had cultivated as she consciously created her new life: her sense of humor which she connected to the fox. A transformation or unfoldment of her personality was apparent. She also focused on the stones, “treasured influences” in Nature that were vital to her sense of well-being and that were an intrinsic part of her practical knowledge as a goldsmith/jewelry-maker. One object, the polished stone with the little silver ring attached to it, is a simple jewelry form. It and Bell’s association with the turtle, “take your time, don’t rush,” (as in the Tortoise and the Hare fable) reminded her that she didn’t have to make an immediate decision about disposing of or keeping her jewelry-making equipment and resources. Specific objects in her sandpicture reflected the simple, contemplative “Zen-like” lifestyle she was consciously incorporating into her life since her husband’s death. Bell’s narration about her sandpicture wove together threads involving self-identity, aspects of the good life, folkloric/mythological connections, and practical wisdom.

In my verbal narratives, I often take a psychological approach (not surprisingly because of my professional background). I had known for many years about Bell’s long association with the kingfisher as a special bird in Nature and as a symbol that Bell used in meaningful ways. I unconsciously connected the great blue heron in Bell’s sandpicture to the kingfisher, recounting a story that included details related to Bell’s dream narrated in a prior conversation. This dream and Bell’s telling of it reflected tension between holding onto a safe, known place out of fear,
and liberation from that fear whose roots seemed to be more in habit than in threat. In my narrative, as in Bell’s life as told through other verbal narratives, this liberation seemed to be experienced as easy, comfortable, and happy. Bell’s stories throughout our sessions together suggested that she was holding consciously her experience of liberation and sense of playfulness, along with her profound sense of loss, making choices so that she would be able to keep her psychic balance. Bell’s verbal narrative seemed to reflect that she was consciously holding the tensions of her life situation and particular counterbalancing events, a function discussed also in relation to structural elements of Brenda’s collage, Dream Screams (pp. 171-3).

Details in my verbal narrative written in response to Bell’s sandpicture included identification of visual contrasts in colour and form that created resonance with a prior powerful dream that I had, one illustrating the diversity of archetypal forms and the paradox of visibility and invisibility that are elements of Sandplay. In working with this dream from my past, I made sense of it by putting it within the context of my doctoral research, a current activity, and my questions about how to represent my data (see p. 98 of this document). In making meaning of Bell’s sandpicture, in my typical manner, I looked towards my body for “felt” responses. When questions and wonderings arose in my narrative about Bell’s sandpicture, I relied on my prior knowledge of Jung’s principles of healing and wholeness that had saliency for me after many years of practice. It guided me in looking for evidence of a tendency towards circularity as psychic movement and expression of the Self, acceptance of the “shadow” (i.e., unknown, unacknowledged, or rejected) parts, and integration of the opposites through a symbol’s function of bridging consciousness and the unconscious. This philosophical framework, which allows for difference and ambiguity, implies a dynamic relationship with all elements of Nature (as diverse energies) and anchoring in actual life experiences. It led me to accept and understand that
attending consciously to discontinuities and paradoxes can help us redefine ourselves when our self-identity is shaken by life’s events, a narrative inquiry phenomenon described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Conle (2001b).

Bell’s Sandpicture 3

As usual, when looking at Bell’s third sandpicture (Figure 52), I noted how I felt. Turning outward, I began in a soft focus that gradually became more intentionally focused on aspects of the picture which attracted me. Initially, it was the structural aspect: a large, circular, flat area elevated in the sand in the middle of the tray. The impression of circularity that was defined by the sand formation and reinforced by the circle of figures just inside that outer circle was intensified by the crystal globe in the centre. The luminescence of the globe, created by the flash of the camera and the transparent material of the figure itself, evoked in me a sense of awe that underscored what I identify as “the mystery at the centre of life.” As I allowed myself to stay with the feeling of awe, which is a frequent occurrence when I allow Sandplay images to seep into my body, I had an embodied experience of the union of spirit and matter. Such a spiritual orientation no doubt influences conclusions about the meaning of phenomena in Sandplay.

Just as some sandpictures provoke more of a bodily response than others, or some elements of a sandpicture have a more numinous quality than others, sometimes archetypal forms or particular figures are more likely to evoke a symbolic attitude in me than others. I cannot always articulate clearly what orients me in one direction or another as I go about trying to make meaning of a picture. When a symbolic attitude is evoked, sometimes I refer to a dictionary of universal symbolism. Circles and squares, apparent in Bell’s third sandpicture, typically appear in sandpictures, sometimes in less than perfect forms. They frequently seem to be in the process
of becoming. These archetypal forms have psychological correlates. So, a symbol dictionary (e.g., Cooper, 1978) might inform us that the circle is a symbol of wholeness, meaning psychological wholeness. In Bell’s third sandpicture, the circle was contextualized within the rectangular form of the sandtray, at the centre of the rectangle. This is a precise position that suggests a relationship between the rectangle and circle. Sometimes the rectangular form is repeated through an inscription in the sand, built with bricks or fencing pieces, or placed as an object and, over time, we see it taking shape as a square. According to Jung (1953), the juxtaposition of circle and square may be seen as “squaring the circle,” a psychological concept indicating an integration of the spiritual and material levels of existence. Within a Jungian framework, this concept also suggests a balanced relationship of Self and ego which implies a balance of one’s inner and outer life, including the unconscious and consciousness. Bits and pieces of information lead me to generate hypotheses about the meaning of Bell’s sandpicture, for example, that it represents a process of integration of spirituality and materiality, which then leads to a sense of balance between inner and outer, consciousness and the unconscious.

I keep on “looking at” structural elements of the sandpicture and beyond. A typical strategy is to narrow my focus from a broad structural one that involves the manipulation of sand and positioning of figures to consideration of the types of figures used (human, animal, mineral, vegetative, etc.). For me, these figures in the sandtray (or in dreams) represent diverse energy forms that exist within the sandpicture creator (or dreamer) and her world. In Bell’s third sandpicture, I perceived a differentiation of energy forms that were integrated through the circle formation. Bell confirmed my hypothesis in her verbal narrative when she spoke about different experiences she had had at different times in her life, for example in her recent Chinese painting class, and while on trips to Egypt and Costa Rica she had taken with her husband several years
ago. This temporal perspective seemed to indicate an integration of her past life with her husband and her current life without him.

In this sandpicture, all figures were oriented towards the centre through their positioning. Looking more closely at details, such as eye gaze of the figures, I could see that some figures looked towards another figure or object (e.g., the penguin looked towards the water-bearing woman, the iguana towards the mushrooms or acorn/chestnuts). One could assume that the placement of figures in the sand is primarily unconscious or accidental; however, experience has shown me that sandplayers often intentionally turn figures slightly and that the new body orientation provides an increased sense of satisfaction for the sandpicture creator. If not confirmed verbally, such satisfaction is sometimes indicated by an affirmative nod of the head or a smile. Bell was not obvious in an intention to place figures in this way. However, sandplayers often look closely at the direction of gaze of the figures, sometimes even bending down and moving their heads slightly, to be sure that a figure is looking directly at a specific object. The positioning of particular figures may emphasize relationships that exist in the client’s imagination or in the person’s outer reality, between or among those figures or energies, or reinforce an interdependent relationship (such as provision of food and scattering of seed from that food through defecation). Positioning also invites questions about potential relationships (for example, the relationship between geckos and trees that are the source of the acorns and chestnuts included in the sandworld). Answers to our questions and amplifications may arise in stories told and retold at various times. As I looked at the gecko in the sandpicture, I recalled Bell’s story about the gecko sleeping in the tree outside her fourth floor bedroom window in Costa Rica, and that she had wondered if he noticed her as she had noticed him (p. 274). In Bell’s case, her visual narrative and related verbal narrative functioned as a retelling of her story.
that amplified what the gecko meant to her, a creature included in her circle of things that she loves and that make up her world (p. 211).

In Bell’s third sandpicture, the circle of figures was contained within the larger sand circle and orientation was towards the centre, with the circle holding figures that represented a diversity of energies (such as opposites, complementarities, and multiple energetic fields). In Jungian psychology, the Self is theorized to be the centre of the psyche and to hold “the all,” including opposites, contrasts, or paradoxes. Sometimes people deliberate over figures until they find just the “right” one. As Bell said in her verbal narrative, I couldn’t find a figure to relate to until [I found] the classical woman with a water container on her shoulder. She speaks of the timeless in life and art.

Mention of “the timeless” evoked the concept of the archetypal dimension of human existence that connects individuals throughout history to the “collective unconscious,” defined by Jung (1959) as the objective layer of the psyche. Jung used the analogy of an iceberg to promote understanding of the relationship amongst consciousness, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious. Above water, someone might see what looks like two separate icebergs (two separate people, each with a degree of consciousness about her/himself and his/her world). Just under the surface of the water, hidden from view, two separate icebergs still appear to exist (the personal unconscious of each person). At a very deep level of the water, the two peaks of the iceberg are joined; what seemed to be two separate icebergs is actually one (the collective unconscious). Jung viewed the collective unconscious as a universal knowledge base into which each person taps. This psychic layer includes patterns or blueprints in energy form for behaviour, social roles, etc. As these energies arise from the deep unconscious layer of the psyche, they get fleshed out or concretized in material form by cultural, familial, and personal
attributes. One’s belief in this concept of the collective unconscious provides credence for one’s use of universal symbol dictionaries that integrate cultural differences regarding meanings of symbols, which are the material manifestations of archetypal energy. This is a theory that makes sense to me.

As I sometimes do, I turned to a symbol dictionary to explore Bell’s woman with the water container figure. The following is written by Cooper (1978): All waters are symbolic of the Great Mother and associated with birth, the feminine principle, the universal womb, the “prima materia,” the waters of fertility and refreshment and the fountain of life (p. 188). This woman carrying the pitcher of water is an apt symbol of the archetypal energy into which Bell can tap as she creates her new life since her husband’s death. When considering symbols, it is important to consider both sides, or the opposites or complementarities implied in any symbol. So, considering the opposite of birth and nurturance as death and depletion, we may ask: What can be washed away by the water? Perhaps grief is an apt response.

The question and answer led me to recall a drawing I once did of a heart that was almost broken in two. A snake goddess was pouring water from a large urn into the wound. Without being conscious of wanting to do so, the next time I drew a heart, it was almost entirely healed, except for a few tiny scars still apparent. I thought of the tears I had shed over that period of time and associated the water to my healing of a deeply felt loss of relationship. Since then, I have thought of tears as healing, a helpful association when talking with clients who feel ashamed when shedding tears.

The meaning of figures in Sandplay can be extended, reinforced, and clarified through verbal narratives. In Bell’s verbal narrative about her third sandpicture she mentioned integrating various times and aspects of her life. She described her personal relationship to
various figures. Specifically about the hands, Bell said: *The hands bring in the human element and the issue of creativity and . . . we hold all these treasures in our hands and [realize] how important it is to everything in the circle what we choose to do with these hands. We/I can be constructive or destructive either intentionally or unconsciously.* Her words about the small white plaster hands emphasize how important creativity is to her life, a point accentuated throughout our research sessions. Her words also give voice to a moral imperative about how integral manifestation in life is to our humanity.

Generally, people creating sandpictures choose some figures consciously and some unconsciously, often saying afterwards, *I don’t know why I chose that figure.* Through the hands in her sandpicture, Bell presented an image of the human instrument of manifestation, intentionality, and expression within the context of the circle of life. While the whiteness of those hands suggests a spiritual dimension, when interpreting their meaning we must be cautious because the shelf held only those hands, of that size, gesturing in that manner. The figure itself could be more informative about meaning if it were selected from several pairs of hands in various realistic skin colours and perhaps unrealistic ones. For example, in Hinduism a blue skin colour is representative of an infinite spiritual power. If a person chose black hands instead of white ones, we would hypothesize about the choice. Considering that any gesture is intended to communicate something meaningful, we can describe this particular gesture as expressing a capacity to receive and contain, or as begging. Focusing on one attitude or aspect, we are often spontaneously provoked to consider or imagine its opposite or complementarity, such as giving/receiving and doing/undoing. In fact, when thinking about symbols in Jungian psychology and Sandplay, we implicitly consider opposites or complementarities; otherwise, we are working with only a portion of that symbol’s potential as a healing and transformative force.
For the most part, my story (with “I” as viewer of another’s visual narrative) about Bell’s sandpicture seemed to diverge considerably from both Bell’s visual and verbal narratives (p. 212). Initially focused on the figures in the circle, my attention was diverted from the actual sandpicture by a typo-like word, *idiosynchronies*, as I responded to the picture through my verbal narrative. What immediately preceded the made-up word was my reference to the image of Bell’s figures being “in communion with their differences” (p. 213). I had an emotional response to that image that generated a playful attitude (p. 213) and led to associations with prior events, my active interest in Gilligan’s (1982) use of the word *contrapunctal* and Gebser’s (1949/1985) use of the word *aperspectival*. A subsequent revisitation to Bell’s sandpicture and what I had written in response to it evoked the words *rich* and *resonant* (p. 213). Although I expressed above my sense that my story diverged from Bell’s visual and verbal narratives, I now detect a feeling that it is connected at a deep level in terms of Bell’s different voices coming through (Gilligan), and her dawning awareness of her future life, as well as her past, constructing the present (Gebser). Allowing myself to meander informed me in my understanding of Bell’s story, although that fact was not immediately obvious. This seems to be an example of Eraut’s (1999) concept of a “thick” version of learning that may be difficult to articulate because some of what is known remains at a tacit level (p. 88).

**Brenda’s Sandpicture #1**

Gazing with soft eyes for a few minutes, a contrast between right and left sides of the picture caught my attention: on the right, a circular blue water area surrounded on its right side by sand that was bordered by foliage, and on the left, an area completely covered with light green dark green, and red vegetation (Figure 53). As I sat with the concept of opposites, I considered the dynamic energy exuded by the black female singer and back-up musicians and the
passivity indicated by the predominantly seated and reclining figures on the right side. Drawing on prior knowledge of Sandplay theory that addresses the development of ego consciousness and connects vegetation with passive instinctive energy (in contrast to animals that are associated with dynamic instinctive energy (Kalff, 1980; Neumann, 1990), I viewed the expanse of foliage on the left side as a reiteration of passivity.

Contrasts and paradoxes seem to prevail in this sandpicture. Now, when I look at the picture, my eye is pulled to the blue watery area with the swan and her cygnets at the centre. The human figures within the scene seem to be focused on the opposite sides from where they are positioned: the musicians on their audience and, for the most part, the onlookers on the musicians. Similarly, I as narrator have a different focus from the “I” who was the creator. In the creation of the sandpicture I, through my hands’ actions, spontaneously elevated the female singer’s and musicians’ positions by building up the ground under them and forming steps that emphasized an ascent to their “stage.” Unconsciously, in my story about the sandpicture, I also gave the jazz festival topic a position of primacy. Narrating the story led to an admission of regret, not just about this particular type of event, but about the unbalanced state of my life because of overwork. The sandpicture, with its overall quality of relaxation, was compensatory. I wonder why my attention is now pulled by the swan and her cygnets, floating on the surface of the water. Is this too a compensatory image?

I make associations to the swan: mother/child; flying/floating/diving; spiritual/material/emotional; sky/underworld; swimming/drowning; horizontal/vertical; consciousness/unconscious. Without intending to do so, I recorded pairs of opposites and multiple dimensions. Another pair of opposites comes to mind: life/death. I have focused on their interface before, after my diagnosis of cancer. Again, I experience my daily confrontation with them as I deliberately live
my life and watch my husband slipping away from his, as I struggle to keep on with what I must
do for myself (for example, finish my dissertation within the next few weeks), and to care for
him in all the ways I feel I must. I am aware of the containing and supporting nature of my work
in keeping me afloat and free from inundation by the unconscious, as the swan and her cygnets
are able to do with their innate capabilities. Consciously, I hold the images of life and death that
are manifested outwardly through my newly born first grandchild and the depleting body and
spirit of my husband. I feel energy in my body, down the front of my torso in a vertical line,
from throat to gut. An image flashes onto the screen in my mind: two hands clenched, pulling
apart. Pulling what apart? Pulling me apart. I have a longing to do art. I have no time as I try to
complete this dissertation chapter within the next few days before making my first visit across
the country to meet my grandson. I linger as I recall my life-death confrontation a year ago. My
experience is similar; my story is different.

Brenda’s Sandpicture 2

In my close examination of details of the sandpicture, (Figure 54), I focused on the
imagined path of the sailboat traveling along the waterway and saw that it was interrupted by the
three stones placed across the river. I felt that “the traveler” in the boat would be compelled to
stop and attend. I had no details about that traveler when I first raised the issue because s/he was
an unseen passenger or navigator on the boat. I didn’t know what would demand his or her
attention, although I thought that the jackalope figure was relevant because of its position in the
sandpicture. I knew from the image that there was something hidden at the time of creation of
the picture. I didn’t know what the eggs in the basket in the cave represented. I wondered: Is it
new life? An unproductive, unfertilized life form, as were Grace’s eggs? I now can add:

Malignant growth?
My original verbal narrative was convergent with the message of *stop and attend* that the visual narrative suggests. I was forced to stop and attend to my health and sense of well-being when I had to undergo surgery that led to a diagnosis of cancer. I could no longer sail smoothly on in life *doing*, without conscious thought about all I was engaged in, perhaps at the expense of my health. I was also forced to confront my fear and cancer complex.

As I reflect on these details once again as I type them into this section, I look backward in time and ask: *Was the sandpicture predictive of a physiological and psychological challenge ahead of me?* *Was this an example of tacit knowing about something my body was carrying and growing?* Without knowing the answer to the questions, I can acknowledge that I was able to make meaning of the interruption to an intended journey apparent in the visual narrative in a way that felt right. I also wonder if knowing at the tacit level shows up in visual images that we manifest through our hands in art and Sandplay, just as it shows up as “felt sense” (Gendlin, 1996) in the body?

**Brenda’s Sandpicture #3**

Creating and looking at this sandpicture afterwards (Figure 55), even a year later, had an unsettling effect because I was conscious of connections with outer life events. Considered within my series of sandpictures created in sessions with Bell, Sandpicture 3 was unlike my other two sandpictures in that it did not have a principal circular structure. As well, unlike the others, it was precipitated by a dream from which I awoke screaming, an event represented in the sandpicture through a miniature iconic figurine modeled on the protagonist of Munch’s *The Scream*. The dream connected to actual events in my life regarding the disposition of my mother’s material effects from her farm, my sense of responsibility for, and feelings of being overburdened by, the continuing maintenance of the property, and conflict with certain family
members regarding their presumption of right to remove natural objects from the farm property. Referring again directly to the sandpicture, I feel that the image of active disorder in which the “thugs” overturn the gravestones clashes with that of the Korean totems honouring the ancestors by the door of the house. As suggested by the verbal narrative, the sandpicture clarified that I felt caught (as Bell suggested) between a rock and a hard place in the dilemma I experienced between clearing out the house and wishing to be free of the burden of maintaining the property, and honouring or, perhaps, not dishonouring my ancestors. This dilemma evoked overwhelming feelings of sadness and guilt. Elaboration on the image through my verbal narrative revealed some vulnerability on my part that manifested in a reluctance to use the word “depression” even to label a material characteristic of the ground. Perhaps I was reluctant because it would label my psychological ground. Finally acknowledging that possibility promoted further self-reflection and self-nurturing that allowed me to express my sadness and anger (not guilt), rather than avoiding these feelings.

Munch’s image was also used in my collage, *Dream Screams* (Collage 5, p. 168). The repeated use of this iconographic image suggested that there were broad emotional implications that went beyond the farm situation, as the visual and verbal narratives related to the collage indicated.

**Sandpictures as Visual Narratives – Eve and Brenda**

**Eve’s Sandpicture #1**

As I emphasize with my Sandplay interns, when trying to understand a sandpicture without benefit of the creator’s verbal narrative, I pay attention to what I feel and see as I build up layer upon layer of information. Trying to help them learn about this process, I deliberately break down the task into several components and slow it down by asking them to pay attention
inwardly and/or outwardly, to something specific, for example, what they feel when I flash a sandpicture on the screen for a few seconds. One of my instructions involves noticing “what pulls their eye” when I give them no time for a detailed analysis of the picture. What “pierced my eye” in this particular picture was the circle of boats (Figure 56). Looking further, I saw a circular “empty space” or “Void. Gathering more details as I looked longer, I saw that, of eight figures used, four were boats that all pointed towards the rear centre of the tray. My many years of experience with Sandplay leads me to anticipate that something may be born from this place or, in psychological terms, that a new attitude or behaviour pattern may emerge from the unconscious. The boat figures suggest a water theme that is concretized through wave-like finger imprints in the sand. Despite this reiteration of the concept, “water,” I feel unsettled, perhaps detecting ambiguity because all boats, except the one being poled by the gondolier, are empty. I wonder if they are beached, rather than riding the waves. I accept my inner uncertainty and let my eyes move in search of additional information. I am drawn to contrasts in colours (dark and light), contrasts in activity levels (passive and active, with overt activity suggested by the gondolier and boy playing the flute, and outwardly passive but inwardly active energy suggested by the Dreaming Woman and the pregnant woman who is gestating a new life form within the darkness of her body), contrasts in gender (feminine and masculine), and contrasts in categories of figures (everyday/mythico-religious). As I ponder over the symbolism introduced through such figures (e.g., the Dreaming Woman of Malta, the pregnant woman, the gondolier), my mind wanders to other symbols such as water as a representation of the unconscious and the relationship of boats with surface navigation of the unconscious. The figures’ positions also entice the eye along contrasting lines from centre front to the rear corners, a straight line on the right side and a curved line on the left side, elements of square and circular formations,
respectively. At centre front is the black soapstone ancient goddess figure, laid flat on the sand. In my imagination, I connect the three female figures to form a triangle with the apex pointing down. This triangular form is an ancient symbol for The Feminine, reiterated by a similar triangle in the pubic area of the black goddess. Through the structure formed by the placement of the figures, The Feminine announces her presence visually beyond the actual figure used.

Although Eve didn’t mention this specifically at the time, I imagined that the Dreaming Woman of Malta and the black goddess reminded her of her journeys to ancient European goddess sites. For Eve, this feminine figure was “someone who needs to be listened to, lying in wait, hoping to be heard” (see p. 221 of this document).

This armless black goddess was the only ancient dark goddess figure on my shelves of figurines. That may be reason enough for someone to choose this figure. Sometimes people choose figurines because they like the colour, or the shininess, or the warmth or coldness as they hold them. Sometimes there are hidden meanings.

In my typical way of wondering about why things are as they are, I wonder about the history of the reclining black goddess of creation (pp. 219-20) who is armless and what it means to be armless. What follows is my process in following this thread, not an interpretation of Eve’s choice. I consider how the presence of arms and hands allows us to manifest our creations, to express ourselves, and their absence denies that. I noted earlier that this is one representation of Shakti energy, Shakti being known as a Hindu goddess of creation. What does it mean for her to be armless in this representation? Does it speak to a particular time in her culture? Was it one which rendered the Feminine and women powerless?

Throughout history, mythology and fairyttales have reverberated with tales of personal and cultural disempowerment of the Feminine through bewitchment, abandonment in towers,
lengthy sleeps induced by potions, and the severing of limbs. One example is *The Handless Maiden*, a tale that resonates even in our times. One way of seeing this is as a story about the cultural wounding of the feeling function in women, when thinking has been privileged over feeling in diverse contexts outside the home and family. In my therapy practice, I have heard many women’s stories about specific times when their thinking has been valued and their feeling devalued. Robert Johnson (1993), a Jungian analyst has presented a psychological analysis that he says is especially relevant for older women who have felt challenged about what to do after their coupling and childbearing years have passed. He has explained the problem as a tyrannical masculine element (i.e., animus, in Jung’s terms) in a woman’s psychology. Whether or not Johnson is correct about its being an element in a woman’s psychology, or whether we could replace “woman’s” with “culture’s” or “men’s” here is a point for discussion for another time. In any case, something about this story resonated for me. In the story, the miller pays the price of his daughter’s (i.e., his young feminine or most vulnerable feelings) hands for a life that is practically easier and faster than his previous labour-intensive life. He has sacrificed his feeling value for practical progress or a “bargain,” “something for nothing” (pp. 59-62). Johnson suggests that this something for nothing attitude, or “inner trickery,” presents as a conflict between a spiritual life and a very practical one that depends upon mechanical or technological aids. He emphasizes that goals obtained “without direct conscious involvement of the process” (p. 70) is a process that constitutes inner trickery which, he states, is especially salient when one “grasp[s] at something psychologically without paying its price” (p. 74). The women that I know have paid a price: for being women, for being smart, for being energetic, for being successful, for being “too much,” for wanting family and career and self-knowledge. Many years ago, someone significant in my life said to me as I was leaving for a self-development
weekend workshop, “If you’d stay home where you belong . . . .” When I stayed home with my young daughter for many years, someone else said, “A mother should stay home with her children.” In another breath, she said, “You’re wasting your potential staying home.” Those words were said to me as a young woman. As an older woman, like others I have listened to, I have felt the sting of misunderstanding, devaluation, silencing, disregard, and disempowerment. I know that our experiences have led many of us to seek spiritually, especially through our collective remembrances when the Feminine was acknowledged as divine and perhaps experienced as empowered. These images often appear in our art forms and rituals. I would guess that many men, too, feel they have paid a price. Johnson’s framework is one which provokes thought and exploration. I am not sure how relevant it is for older women or men. The resonance seems to be more “not me” than “me too” (Conle, 2006, p. 12).

Allowing my meandering to take me back to Eve’s verbal narrative about her sandpicture (p. 221), I note that the images of water and boats in her sandpicture evoked specific content-filled and emotional memories of fishing with relatives in her childhood and of her Italian heritage, and of particular geographical sites she had visited. Her explicit narration about her love of water and fishing confirms the suggestion of water above in my comments about the visual narrative. In her verbal narrative, Eve has explicitly related the various types of boats used in the sandpicture to different aspects of her psyche. She alluded to her own development and individuation, and to her conscious relationship with the unconscious. It is apparent to me that Eve, who has deep knowledge of Jungian psychology, took a psychological approach in understanding elements of the sandpicture. I wonder if that psychological framework also guided her selection of figures when she created the sandpicture.
Verbally, Eve expressed the hope of her feminine to be heard. Wondering what this meant for Eve and trying to make sense of her statement, I turn to a Jungian framework which is common to both of us. Thus defined, feminine energy is Eros energy, the energy of relationship, in contrast to Logos energy, the energy of the masculine, spirit, and reason. I recall that Eve had talked in our sessions about having relationships with people when “there’s no competition” and when she experiences freedom from “hold[ing] back or worry[ing] about saying something that’s going to be hurtful because they don’t understand what you meant” (Field notes, November 25, 2006). The tension in Eve’s relationships with other people, especially women, contrasted with what seemed to be an easy personal relationship between her inner world (especially her unconscious that revealed certain contents through dreams, her urge for continued development, and her symbolic attitude), and her outer world (especially in or through Nature).

Acknowledging her personal symbolic attitude, Eve referred explicitly both to continuity with her past and transformation and future possibilities. Her use of the words “call” and “I’m not sure to what,” in the amplification of the image of the flute-playing boy on the ox, and her association of this image with the Ox-herding pictures which relate to Jung’s concept of the individuation process, suggest a “teleological quest” in Conle’s (2000) terms.

Through Eve’s connection of boats to different aspects of her psyche, Eve reminded me of something I wrote in my verbal narrative about her first sandpicture: “celebration of the waterways,” diverse elements coming together. Unlike what typically happens in a therapy session when the therapist tries consciously to stay present for the client in an empathetic manner rather than wandering imaginatively through her/his own memories, associations, emotions, and thoughts, in this research session I felt freedom to meander metaphorically. My verbal meandering in response to Eve’s visual narrative stimulated recollections and associations that
incorporated my own multiplicity of activities and roles. In addition, images in the visual narrative elicited a paradoxical feeling tone that escalated throughout the writing of the story and that included joy, amusement, wistfulness, sadness, and regret.

**Eve’s Sandpicture #2**

Looking with soft eyes again at Eve’s second sandpicture (Figure 57), I saw in the central area of the tray a clustering of sea objects: a starfish at the centre, surrounded by a circle of barnacles and fossilized rocks and one barnacle outside the circle in the left rear quadrant. This clustering of similar objects had a focusing and intensifying effect. As with Eve’s first sandpicture, I again detected in myself an uneasy feeling. I continued looking at the picture for the cause. Questions and thoughts arose in my mind: *Sea organisms. Is water present or absent? If absent, what will be the outcome? Can a starfish live out of water?* I recall vividly *jellyfish which were stranded on a sandy beach I visited in Prince Edward Island, but don’t recall seeing starfish stranded. If the starfish is stranded, does it mean certain death? Will it be rescued by an incoming tide? How long can it survive without water?* My imagination was active as I stared at the picture. As I continued to look at the starfish and surrounding barnacles and rocks, my wondering allowed me to attribute a paradoxical feeling tone to the image that elicited another question: *Do the barnacles and rocks provide protective containment or imprisonment for the starfish?* Wondering about the natural relationship of starfish and barnacle, I turned to the web for information and saw that the starfish is a natural predator of the barnacle. This information complicated the paradox. Thoughts about passivity and dynamism came to mind. I continued looking at the image. The barnacle outside the circle presented a sense of spatial incongruence, perhaps pointing towards something to appear later in the left rear quadrant. Attending to the structure of this sandpicture, I recalled Neumann’s (1990) theory that
circularity and centering are natural functions of the psyche as manifested by constellation of the Self, the centre of the psyche that includes consciousness and the unconscious. This psychological function is related to one’s sense of psychic integration and inner orientation. According to Jung (1959), the symbol bridges consciousness and the unconscious, leading to healing and transformation. I assume a symbolic attitude as I think of the starfish at the centre, surrounded by a circle.

As symbol, the starfish is a manifestation of Stella Maris or Great Sea Goddess energy (Cooper, 1978). Considering the biological potential of the starfish for regeneration, I allowed myself to assume that Great Mother energy, accessed through connection to the collective unconscious level of the deep unconscious, was available to nourish and activate Eros energy, just as trips in the outer world, such as Eve’s visits to European goddess sites, are able to do.

**Eve’s Sandpicture #3**

When I revisited this sandpicture (Figure 58) a year or so after its creation and responses through Eve’s and my verbal responses, I was surprised by my fleeting feeling of sadness. Curious, I began to look analytically. I noted the presence of water expressed through exposure of the blue bottom of the tray and found myself nodding affirmatively. Thinking back to Eve’s two previous pictures, I acknowledged changes in the images of water, from an imprint in the sand and suggestions through particular figures to a concrete manifestation in the sandtray. I hypothesized that this indicated a descent to a deeper level of the unconscious than in the previous pictures. Focusing again on the red torii in the left rear quadrant of Eve’s sandpicture, with the concept of threshold to another world emphasized by the black and white horses in front of it, an image appeared on my mental screen. I made an association with the Japanese Miyajima torii placed in the sea and checked a reference on the internet, reading that it was
erected in 592, and that it had a spiritual dimension in that it is the gateway to a Shinto shrine dedicated to three sea goddesses (www.traveladventures.org). Thus, I associated it with Great Mother energy. I also read that people can walk around and under the torii at low tide, and that boats are required for navigation at high tide when the gate appears to float in the sea. My mental image became associated with the image of the Venetian house in Eve’s sandpicture. Both the house and the torii have their foundation in the depths of the water. Reading that the torii is a gateway for boats, I thought of Eve’s boats in her first sandpicture. I also thought of the three feminine figures in that picture: the pregnant woman, the Dreaming Woman of Malta, and the ancient creation goddess. This connection seemed to link the meaning of the first sandpicture with the third.

I noted too that land was clearly differentiated from the water in form, although united in terms of animal or instinctive energies that were present. Dynamic energy in the form of the turtles moves through the water from opposite sides of the tray towards the centre where a resolution can occur. The turtle is a familiar symbol in Sandplay Therapy. It is regarded as a transcendent energy that represents a union of opposites (Bradway & McCoard, 1997). An image of the caduceus flashes on my mental screen. It is the staff around which two serpents are twined, with a bird at the top centre, sometimes recognized as a symbol for the medical profession. The bird in this image is “the third.” By experiencing the third, one may experience resolution of conflict (Jung, 1957/1960, p. 69). I wonder if the seal is the third in Eve’s sandpicture. Following along with a Jungian perspective, I saw the turtles and seal as mediators between land and water, between consciousness and the unconscious, between light and dark (as in the horses by the torii), and between spiritual and instinctive energies. One of my associations was scientifically based, the abandonment of the baby turtle by the mother while the baby is still
developing within the egg. And yet, they can find their way “home” to lay their own eggs.

Turtles are also symbols of creation. There are ancient myths which tell of creation of the world on the turtle’s back.

My attention moved to the seal at the centre of the sandpicture. She (the seal) is at home and adept in the sea, symbol of the unconscious. This figure reminded me of the Inuit tale of Sedna, the Sea Goddess who took the form of a seal. I recalled seeing an amazingly intricate whalebone Inuit carving of Sedna at the Vancouver airport on my way to Korea, and recalled reading a little about her then. As I remember it, Sedna reminds us of the riches of the unconscious and of our right to receive love, respect, and worthy treatment by others. I remembered watching a beautifully filmed movie, *The Secret of Roan Inish*, an Irish “island of the seals,” in which a young girl learns about her ancestor, a baby boy, washed out to sea in his cradle and believed to be cared for by seals. Unbidden, the story of the selkies comes to mind. They are sea creatures who sacrifice their seal-coats to become human, but who later feel a longing so great that they return to the sea. I felt a pang in my heart and returned to scan again Eve’s verbal narrative (p. 299) in which I perceived her longing for the sea through her description of the beauty of colours and shells and her attraction to the fishermen:

There would be fishermen. They’d go out every morning. And then they’d come in with, they’d come out from fishing but there’d always be boats coming in with all these beautiful shells that I would have thought would be manufactured in a factory, they would be so beautiful. The colours of blues, they were just amazing and the fishermen are so, they have such a basic elemental quality to their lives that you know it’s just wonderful to be with them. And in Ladogana, I remember walking along the sea. . . . I think I need to travel to the sea (Field notes, September 21, 2006).

A longing for the sea. . . . I wondered what it means for women in everyday life to sacrifice their “seal-coats” and long for the sea. Returning my focus to the sandpicture, I noted the double layer of rocks on which the seal sat. I also reflected on the unique foundations required for a
Venetian house and huge torii footed in water. I wondered about creating a secure base in this world through our connections of the world of the imagination to the natural world, and the deep unconscious, a topic I visit often when supervising new therapists’ case material in which people’s psyches seem to be in various states of reconstruction.

My verbal narrative about Eve’s sandpicture showed the saliency of images in provoking resonance. One figure in Eve’s sandpicture, the Venetian home, provoked in me a strong emotional, thoughtful response that generated several subsequent images (pp. 223-4). I joyfully recalled my trip to Venice in 1997 with my daughter, and had vivid sensual memories of beautiful glass sculptures blowing in the wind in the garden of the Peggy Guggenheim Gallery, and jazz, expensive coffee, laughter, and pigeons in San Marco Square. Another figure in Eve’s picture, the green canoe, had a similar effect on me. While it provoked joyful memories of my “time-out-of-time” (a name we gave our shared experience) with eight other women canoeing, camping, and mask-making in Algonquin Park more than a decade ago (pp. 31-2), a contrasting feeling tone (sadness) emerged as I experienced a sense of loss of those relationships which had been so significant in my life at the time because of our laughter, creativity, spiritual attitudes, and connection to Nature. Now as I write this, I connect my sadness with my initial feeling response when I first revisited the sandpicture a year after its creation. My emotion was embedded, at a tacit level of knowing, in the green canoe. Through the narratives, visual and verbal, it was revealed and amplified. Or was it through the act of narrating?

Brenda’s Sandpicture #1

As I have previously discussed, attending to structural aspects, including types of figures used and relevant symbolism, and positioning of figures are all important in making meaning of visual narratives. In this picture (Figure 59), the large mound in the centre of the tray drew my
eye spontaneously. After allowing that element to seep into my body, in a sense to “fill” me for a few moments, I intentionally looked for accentuation of that structure in repeated patterns, such as the circular watery area surrounding the large mound. Scanning the picture, I also noticed contrasts, such as the colour and texture of the green moss, relative to the white sand. Viewing certain structural aspects symbolically, such as the island mound, I looked for connections between physical and symbolic characteristics. For example, the island’s elevation and imprinted steps suggest an ascent to a higher realm, a transpersonal or spiritual world, a theme reiterated by the jeweled Tree of Life at its centre. When I detected a dominant focal point (in this case, the island mound) or identified theme (a sacred space), I looked for a spatial dimension that provoked questions: *Is this space accessible? Is it inviting to sojourners?* Searching for an answer often leads to the revelation of a connector, such as the bridge in this picture, or the series of stones in Brenda’s Sandpicture #2 with Bell (p. 200).

Some pictures have types of figures that emphasize particular themes. In this sandpicture, my scrutiny of types of figures showed that the theme of relationship was emphasized by multiple diverse couples: mother and baby, man and woman, two deer, two rabbits, and woman and her dog. Sometimes it is the action of figures that points towards functions or themes that can be viewed psychologically. In this picture, the man with the video camera suggests intentionality to observe and record. Psychologically, this figure suggests an observing ego in relation to the Self that is manifested by the circular mound and jeweled Tree of Life. Just as trees materially have their roots in the underground, their trunk in the material world, and their branches and leaves stretching upwards to the sky, the archetypal figure has a presence in the underworld, the material world and the spiritual world. The deer, a spiritual symbol, and the rabbits, symbols of fertility and creativity, emphasize the connection between
the realms of the unconscious, consciousness, and spirituality/creativity. In considering action and orientation which often allow obvious conclusions, I decided that the family was approaching the island and the girl was walking away from it. These particular figures introduced the notion of the outer world beyond the tray and indicated a connection between inner and outer realms. The actions and orientations of these figures also suggested a sense of agency in the creator of the sandpicture. Details of figures, such as the water buckets being carried by the girl, led to hypotheses in psychological terms: for example, the fact that the girl has drawn water suggests sustenance in the outer world (ego dimension) through a connection with her inner life (unconscious realm).

My description of the process of creating this sandpicture (pp. 224-5) suggested that “too much” ego energy was involved initially and my sense of inadequacy about artistic creation was activated when I consciously tried to manifest particular images through sculpting the sand.

As Eve’s and my verbal narratives indicate, the visual images and processes resonated for both of us, illustrating how certain life events have made impressions that reverberate long after the actual events and that reappear in subsequent stories. In my case, events included the effect of my mother’s intervention in my winning an art contest when I was eight years old, my experiences with deer at the farm since childhood, and my recent stimulating experience of teaching and supervising Sandplay in Korea. In Eve’s case, she recalled reunion experiences with women who had visited ancient European goddess sites with her and travels with her children.

**Brenda’s Sandpicture #2**

I let the image wash over me and felt tranquil and present to something sacred (Figure 59). I noted the figure in the centre with two circles surrounding it (one created by the sand
dollar on which the figure sits, and one by the small blue glass beads). I recognized this configuration as part of a mandala structure and looked to the four corners where I noted foliage in each of them. Ah, yes, a mandala form which promotes a sacred and calming, orderly quality. Entering the calmness within, and attending to my bodily feeling exclusively for a few moments, I then looked for repetitions of sacred images, especially attending to figures used. As I reflect on this process now, I am aware that I have confidence that one experience, such as feeling myself into the picture, can lead me to the next phenomenon to consider. Just as I slow down the process of making meaning for my students, I am aware that I continually slow it down for myself. I let the dynamic energy within me move me on to another possibility, a bit like looking at a Gestalt drawing in which background and foreground images alternate. I know that the picture itself does not change, but that it is a function of our brain/ocular system and that we recognize what we know from our experiences, conscious and unconscious. Our vague feelings inform us about what we do not yet know. Looking at this picture (Figure 59), I noted the central figure gesturing upward, the young Asian boy sitting in meditation by the pagoda. I recalled my experiences of seeing the pagoda in the Seoul museum and hearing the story of its capture and return, of witnessing the sacred work of Korean children and adults in supervision and training, and of presenting the black stone to my students. I felt the numinosity introduced through the blue glass stones (reflecting the story my young research participant told me about diving deep at Tobermorey and Flower Pot Island), and the white sand dollar and pink roses (reflecting a feeling of a sacred connection to my students in Korea to whom I presented pink silk roses for their Sandplay rooms). The stories I heard resonated for me and elements of them took form in my subsequent visual narrative where they came together in a new constellation. Others’ stories became my story as I interwove elements that had struck a chord for me.
Brenda’s Sandpicture #3

In my (Brenda’s) third sandpicture (Figure 60), structural aspects beckoned, revealing a clear differentiation of opposites in the two sides of the tray and within each side through the colours (black and gold, silver and gold) of glass stones used. The dark and light colours suggested differentiation of the opposites of consciousness and the unconscious. The designs on each side were unified through their circular centres and the hearts therein; the “wings” of the butterfly shape were united through the gold-starred “body” of the butterfly. The image implied elements of earth and air. The sparkly objects suggested a numinous quality and accentuated the spiritual and transformative nature of the image. The hearts suggested that it is through the feeling function, Eros, love, that we can unite opposites or differences within and between us.

My verbal narrative stimulated by this sandpicture went beyond a description of the actual sandpicture which initiated the narrative. Reference was made to a dream from the night before (p. 236), although the construction of the sandpicture had no imagery related to the dream. My verbal narrative then moved on to an actual challenge facing me in my outer life with regard to my mother’s farm and the responsibility I bear for management of the property now. This interaction between sandpicture/story/dream emphasized the psychological polarities being experienced by the sandpicture creator/narrator/dreamer. Simultaneously, the image of transformation introduced the possibility for resolution of the tension between the opposites. In this way, the visual narrative could be seen as compensatory or indicative of future potential.

Sandpictures as Visual Narratives – Maria

As mentioned earlier, because of Maria’s unexpected health issue, pain, and impending surgery, Brenda did not create sandpictures in her sessions with Maria.
Maria’s Sandpicture #1

Maria’s first sandpicture (Figure 61) seems to be an example of “active disorder” a term used by Rodari (1988). When reviewing the picture a year after its creation, it initially provoked a strong bodily response based in what I termed “visual confusion” and “unknowing.” Just as I previously described the cosmos as spilling out into the sandtray (p. 239), I sensed that the sandplayer had spilled out her imaginative meanderings. Whereas I often focus on structural aspects of the picture after noting my feelings and the general quality of the sandpicture, in this case my response (p. 239) diverged from the picture as I recounted my association to Jung’s assertion that hands can express resolutions to problems that the psyche has wrestled with for years and its relation to the work of Eugene Rossi. Perhaps I was hoping that my hands could solve the problem of my unknowing. However, what I did was switch very rapidly from a state of unknowing to one of knowing based on the work of an authority in the field. Then I returned to a state of unknowing in relation to another issue, representing my research data in an artistic form, and I finally articulated a statement about “the illogicality” of the sandpicture, as I saw it at that moment (p. 239). I wonder if my initial state of unknowing about Maria’s sandpicture was related to my own sense of fragmentation and distraction (pp. 239-45). Or was my initial state of unknowing about Maria’s sandpicture too uncomfortable for me to stay with and I sought relief in something I knew about because an authority told me? As I write this, I recall my excitement when reading Women’s Ways of Knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Tarule, & Goldberger, 1986) two decades ago when I was completing my undergraduate degree. One of their epistemological categories is “Received Knowledge: Listening to the Voices of Others.” Although my situation does not match the authors’ description of these types of knowers, I wonder if we/I sometimes resort to this type of strategy when we find ourselves in situations of not knowing when we feel
we “should” know in those situations. For example, because I am a teacher of Sandplay, shouldn’t I know how to make meaning of all sandpictures? However, I know in my teaching situations I am quick to let my students know when I can’t make sense of a picture and I suggest we look for clues as we go along.

Almost five pages later, perhaps because my anxiety about not knowing was diminished, I returned to the visual image and noticed the knight’s lance pointing towards the baby dragon hatching from the egg (p. 244). Dragon. Union of energies that are both instinctive and imaginal. The image of the dragon hatching focused me on the topic of mythology, precipitating recall of the transformation of the dragon from the serpent in Korean mythology. I wondered about what transformation was being birthed in Maria’s psyche. As accentuated in Korean dragon transformation mythology, patience, endurance and commitment were required over many years. My thoughts returned to Maria and the sense of agency that she has demonstrated in her life, in order to realize her visions.

In Maria’s verbal narrative about her first sandpicture, she elucidated images within the sandtray, as described by Baum (2007) in her category 9 (pp. 174-5). This type of narration followed Maria’s creation in which she seemed to choose figures without a preconceived idea of what the picture was going to be. In other words, the figures positioned in the tray provided a stimulus for the story. As Baum (2007, p. 175) describes, Maria’s words are “the eggs that give birth to the multifaceted and multi-layered symbolic and archetypal levels” of this sandpicture. In Maria’s narrative, her connection to the imaginative realm was strong, as indicated by her reference to seeing and touching a baby dragon just outside her cabin, and flying anywhere on a full-blooded dragon (p. 246). She seemed to recognize that saliency in her naming of her imaginary island, “Soñadora,” “Dreamer.”
After expressing her sense of empowerment through the initial part of her narrative about the dragons and loving the power of lions, Maria turned to her process of storying in writing. This focus revealed her vulnerability: *Well, maybe I cannot write a story after all the way it is supposed to be. What I want to do really, this writing makes me feel like I could like to be able to write a story better. I do not think I can really write a story the way I could say it.* She justified this by the fact that English is her second language and counterbalanced it with her opinion that she could say things better (p. 248). While much of our time together was spent in conversation, where Maria could say what and as much as she wanted to say, I had imposed the methodological requirement that my co-participants and I would “write a story” simultaneously following completion of our Sandplay. I had done so in order to compare stories written about the same sandpictures. Obviously, Maria had felt it as a restriction. I wonder if it was a factor, along with her health situation, in Maria’s decision to create only two of three sandpictures.

**Maria’s Sandpicture #2**

In contrast to Maria’s previous sandpicture, I quickly perceived this one to have a more orderly quality (Figure 62). As I lingered over it, structural aspects invited me in: the round objects (teapot and geode) near the centre and the other figures clustered around them to create a large central circular formation. I identified a repeated pattern in the larger circular ring surrounding the centre. This double circular structure brought to mind a mandala, a balanced, orderly form that compensates for inner chaos and confusion (pp. 249-50). It seemed apt considering that Maria was suffering excruciating sciatic nerve pain, was taking medication for it, and was trying to continue with her work schedule because, being a single, self-supporting woman with a private practice, she depended upon a regular income. Another feature of mandalas is a quaternity, i.e., four directions, four elements, or something in the four corners.
Knowing this, I looked to the figures in the four corners of this sandpicture and noted that they had a common theme of spirituality. Also, visually apparent in the picture were resources essential to resting, healing, and transformation, as well as images of differentiated opposites that include self-care/care of others, work/play, and the spiritual/material, instinctive/imaginal, and personal/transpersonal (pp. 247-8). Maria’s narrative elaborated on her reverence for life and relationship that infused her sandpicture with a spiritual quality and illustrated the dynamic imagination with which she lives life and manifests her dreams.

The incongruous figure of the fatigued parents disturbs the mood of balance, order, and healing, and introduces a paradoxical feeling tone that is amplified by Maria’s verbal narrative: *Eggs . . . again starts . . . and then another beginning* (p. 249) and *Mother having babies all the time, and father never helps with them, but that was a great time in my life* (p. 249). Maria’s words about the image of eggs and new life and her recollection of her parents whom she lost at an early age constellated an emotionally evocative moment. Her verbal narrative seems to be another example of story elucidating images (Baum, 2007, pp. 174-5). In the words of the author, “The narrative gives life to the sandpicture through its verbal description” (p. 175).

Maria says in her narrative: *Looking at this Sandplay box, I really feel that every item that I put there is so meaningful* (p. 249). For Maria, the figures were significant in meaning-making. Her statement suggests that the figures were selected consciously because of the associations they had for her. For me, the structure of the picture led me in my meaning-making when I had only the visual narrative as guide.
Sandpictures as Visual Narratives - Brenda

Brenda’s Pre-research Sandpicture #1 (Figure 9)

Sandpictures, like symbols, can never be completely known to us. When we look back at pictures created and interpreted months or years before, we continue to learn from them because we are seeing more and making meaning from a new perspective: a new time, a new situation, new experience. Looking back at this sandpicture (p. 50) almost three years after creating it, I now feel a strong sense of satisfaction and find myself nodding affirmatively, in contrast to the frustration and unknowing I felt when I began to create it. I recall having what was a big question then: What will I do for my doctoral research? Looking from my present perspective of being almost finished with my write-up, I feel that I have traveled that spiral path to arrive at the point where I am now, having done what I set out to do through the impetus of my dream which I took literally rather than metaphorically. I imagine that the path which my hands inscribed on the surface of the sand now spirals from a conscious dimension deep into the unconscious layer of my psyche, as if in the centre of the sandtray it continued its way deep into the sand to a limitless bottom. As I read what I wrote then about my multiple self-aspects as represented by the figures placed along the spiral path, I feel as though I had taken an objective stance, looking at them from the “outside.” Now, I feel as though I have embodied the energies they held, with a current of energy flowing within me. I have taken them in.

I review what I wrote back then, three years ago. In my verbal narrative I initially focused on my hope to discover a topic for my dissertation research through the Sandplay creation process. Initially, coming from a thinking perspective, I had in mind drawing a question mark in the sand as a manifestation of my preoccupation with my unknowing relative to my
dissertation process. However, my hands inscribed a spiral path instead, highlighting the spiritual nature of my academic journey already propelled by my dream and question about what my soul wanted. I believed that this inscription, evolving from an archetypal pattern of energy embedded in the psyche, provided the structural framework for the sandpicture and validated that my return to university to complete doctoral studies was part of my life’s teleological quest (Conle, 2000), at that point in time. How completion of the quest would manifest in my life as an older woman is still to be seen.

I identified the figures along the spiral path as aspects of myself: the Dreamer; Saraswati, Hindu Goddess of the Arts; the meditative woman; the little Buddha baby; the laughing Buddha, two women hand-in-hand; the story-teller; the gnome; the little boy in blue; and the aboriginal woman with the bowl of corn. Also present were instinctive and transpersonal energies in the form of the goose, the little frog, and the sun and the moon which reflected my sense that providence was at work in my doctoral endeavour that started with the dream. This is a providence that is very related to me and the fabric of my life, and an energy to which I must open that is beyond personification. My connection to this particular teleological force came to me through my Dreamer aspect, so I can call her “The Initiator,” knowing that archetypal energy flows through her from the collective unconscious. I believe that the blueprint for my spiritual journey came from the deep layer of the objective psyche, in Jung’s terms. Interestingly, Dreamer’s image was the “punctum” in my first collage, Dreaming into Being, marking my entry into the collage process as well as the completed collage when I first regarded it (pp. 121, 141). I understand now that she could not act alone in the actualization of the dream. She required my conscious ethical commitment to act on the images that she received (Jung, 1961, 192-3, p. 18 of this document). I have experienced a transformation of energy. I initially viewed her as an
aspect of me as she appeared in my sandpicture and my collage—lying down in the sandpicture and appearing to sleep with REM on her forehead in the collage—and thus as passively receiving and containing dream images from the unconscious. In the collage I even attributed the source of the dream to the Dream Poet/Creatrix (p. 123). Now I have a sense of Dreamer’s energy in me being dynamic because of action taken. My view of Dreamer as I look backward has altered and my sense of personal agency is enhanced.

Whereas I previously viewed the figures as separate aspects of myself, I now see them as overlapping, perhaps even integrated energies. For example, like the Dreamer who is well-connected to the inner world, the meditative and self-reflective woman actualizes in the outer world through her moral responsibility to images from the unconscious. Now I see her engaged reflexively as she stimulates me to make the personal social. I feel ethically responsible to make this link of personal/social (Finley, 2005, 682-3) as part of my connection to arts-based research. For this reason, I anticipate providing access in the community (e.g., a small gallery) for other older women to see and read the stories that we, the co-participants, have shared, and to respond in resonance through their visual and verbal narratives with materials provided.

Returning to the meditative, self-reflective woman, I see her also connected to the Buddha figures, the baby and laughing, reclining male adult drummer. Congruent with Singer’s (1990/1998, p. xii; p. 9 of this document) description of soul as a function that enables us to make our gifts available to others and that promotes inner harmony between who we are and what we do, the Buddha Gautama’s life experience led to teachings that ideally promote “a balanced and harmonious life, benefiting both individual and society” (Moeanin, 2003, p. 4). He taught also that it is only by finding “the treasure” within that we can assist others in finding their unique treasures (p. 2). It is only by getting to know ourselves that we, as teachers and
therapists, can help others to know and learn, a truth guiding practice in teacher education at OISE and in Kalffian Sandplay Therapy. Developing awareness about images that come to us facilitates that knowing and learning. I have learned that images that become apparent to us through Sandplay and art are representative of our behaviour patterns and are transformative as models. Self-reflection is necessary to determine which they are. For example, as the baby Buddha seems to show, accessing the carrot in the external world sometimes consumes our effort when we are not up to the task or when we have experiences of emotional duress or too many demands on our time and energy. In trying to finalize my doctoral process, I have often felt like that baby Buddha trying to pull the carrot from the ground. As I focus on him now, I remember the nude, full-bodied, winged sculptured woman who seemed “to be trying to escape the constraints of her concreteness and the matter of her life, perhaps the metaphorical weight of life’s burdens she carries” (pp. 142-3 of this document). At these times, remembering that Dancer said this process should be fun, I have intentionally brought to mind the image of the laughing Buddha, chuckling myself when I gaze at him. Sometimes I have recalled the infectious laugh of the current Dalai Lama and the hearty laughter of my co-participants as we shared in conversation throughout our sessions together. Also like the Buddha in the sandpicture, I have tried to rest when I feel weary and to release tension from my body when I am aware of it. While not entertaining a megalomania fantasy, I can acknowledge that Buddha-like energy flows within me and everyone else. So, like the Buddha, I experience joy and awe when meeting creatures in Nature and being witness or companion to my fellow beings (as with August Bell whom I walk every day).

Whether in Sandplay, art, stories of others, or personal experience, images of creature-human relationships resonate deeply for me. Images of the laughing Buddha with his drum and
the little frog, Bell with her kingfisher, dragonfly, and gecko, and Maria with her dog, horse, and lovebird, Julio, fill me with warmth and a sense of connection to the world. The image of Buddha and his drum stirs up memories of my deer hide drum and deer at the farm. I could let my resonance with that Sandplay image capture me and pull me deeper; however, I choose not to go there. I am aware of this moment of conscious decision. Instead, I let my attention move to Bell’s kingfisher story (p. 274). After a few minutes of “soft” attending to it, an image flashes on my mental screen and I feel my delight in emulating the red-tailed hawk soaring overhead at the farm when, as a young girl, I walked the hill with my father (p. 147). I consciously detach from the echoes of that experience, to recall Maria’s lovebird narrative (pp. 330-2). After several seconds, a spontaneous image appears on my internal screen that connects with my six-year-old animal lover and nurturer. I see the grassy side yard of the large two-storey brick house where we lived in the upstairs duplex, with its ample vegetable plot of dark earth recently raked and the giant maple in the corner near the path to the house. I see the baby robin that has fallen from its nest and subsequent images of finding a tiny box, a kleenex mattress, and a medicine dropper with which I attempted to nurture and save the baby bird. When I returned from my school concert that evening, the little bird was dead. I wonder momentarily why this image came to mind rather than something else. As I work on this section in the town of Tofino on Vancouver Island where I have come for a week’s visit with my new grandson and my daughter and her husband, I am waiting to phone my husband’s cardiologist. My husband is critically ill in hospital back in Toronto. The news is grave: a serious intestinal bleed, more heart damage, a fainting spell last night. Death is in the air, along with the new life of my grandson and his parents. I hold the tension. I make an effort to go back to what I wrote at the beginning of this paragraph, ordering my thoughts. Bell’s kingfisher story. A new memory flashes into my mind:
walking in my neighbourhood with Augie and echoing a cardinal’s call. I always wonder if his repeated song is ever in response to my attempts or if he is simply repetitively sending out his mating call until he receives a response from an interested avian partner. As I have heard from others, including my co-participants, we feel such satisfaction imagining that the creatures we meet are as interested in us as we are in them. I wonder if remembering and resonating with the image of the cardinal and his mating call at this particular time has anything to do with the fact that I am also inundated with memories of my 40-year marital relationship as I face the fact that I may not be there when my husband dies. Detaching from the emotion, I wonder what determines which personal story we connect with when we resonate with another visual or verbal narrative. Again I go back to what I wrote at the beginning of this paragraph: Maria’s story of Pedro, the little lovebird who died in her hands. Bird stories. Shifting into my symbolic attitude, I think of birds, mediating as they do between heaven and earth, as manifestations of spiritual energy, a universally recognized symbolic meaning. It is in Nature and Sandplay and art that I most often connect to the divine.

Through the image in the sandpicture I connect to goddess energy in the form of Saraswati (Figure 10, p. 51). This connection leads me into the mythological realm, the collective unconscious in Jung’s terms. It is here that archetypal energy is rooted, giving rise to behaviour patterns and symbolic representations that are culturally elaborated. In her traditional Hindu form, Saraswati is shown with four hands, one holding a book (wisdom), one holding prayer beads (spiritual development) and two holding and playing a sitar-like musical instrument (artist, creator of harmony). According to Jung (1959), the quaternity (four) is a symbol of wholeness. I consciously think of Saraswati in symbolic terms. As muse of the arts and facilitator of spiritual development, she is one of the Great Cosmic Mothers who nurtures and
supports our development (as does the sandpicture’s aboriginal woman with the bowl of corn). I believe that Saraswati’s wisdom and creative and sacred energy flow through all of us. She is not just mine, but is available to all who are attracted by her energy and activated by it. I have felt her presence during my doctoral process as I have intentionally tried to make room for her through creative expression. In words, I invite her in. In image, I express her. By embodying her energy, I have felt life in the face of death.

The concepts of holding the opposites and union also appear in the figure of the two women in red and blue in the rear right of the sandpicture (p. 50). Through this image, I feel their Eros energy in their “arm-in-arm” attitude which resonates for me as I recall my time with my co-participants whom I felt traveled arm-in-arm with me as we shared our stories with each other. The themes of opposites and union also appear in the image of the male and female couple (differentiated opposites), holding the crystal ball (a unifying factor), at the centre of the sandpicture. As in Buddhism, the goal of all its practices, is transcendence of all duality into unity.

**Brenda’s Post-research Sandpicture #2 (Figure 64)**

My goal in this Sandplay experience was to learn about my colleagues’ approach to using sand and figurines in therapy in order to compare it with Kalffian Sandplay Therapy. I did not anticipate that my experience would be as profound as it was, or that its saliency would have an effect on me even a year after I created the picture (p. 251-2). After connecting to the picture through my feeling of awe and sense of the sacred, the sandpicture’s structural aspects informed me, especially its theme of circularity and differentiated opposites apparent in the circular/linear and horizontal/vertical dimensions and selected figures (e.g., male/ female, adult/child, embodied/disembodied, and earth/sky figures). I wondered if the circularity of the tray influenced the
dominant circularity that I imposed structurally within it through selection and positioning of objects.

Creating this sandpicture, my identification was strongly with the reflective woman in Nature whose aspect I embody. My verbal narrative emphasized the containing, nurturing aspect of Nature that I often feel in life, and my sense of relatedness to creatures in Nature. Although in my outer life I have often feared snakes or have felt queasy when seeing them crawling near my feet, I have worked consciously to overcome my fear of them in the material world. A factor that has helped has been my symbolic attitude which has allowed me to see snakes, especially those that appear in my sandpictures, as symbols of healing and the sacred. Seeing snakes in this way has been expedited by my research into the healing and spiritual aspect that has been represented throughout history in multiple cultures. In this particular sandpicture (left side), I selected a serpent that incorporated a spiral design, symbol of a spiritual journey. Although not consciously chosen at the time of creation of the sandpicture, this archetypal form reiterated my belief that Sandplay has been an essential component of my spiritual development and sustenance, as highlighted in my dream of the bridge near the Kalff home (see p. 14). I see this spiral serpent figure as one link in a strand of meaning created by associated images in the diverse layers of representation within a sandpicture (Weinberg, 2007).

I was surprised by something I wrote in my verbal narrative in response to this sandpicture: my caveat to the masculine energy represented by the male aboriginal “head” figure.

*You cannot take over! Assuming your place, you must not assume mine! Instinctively I protect myself and our place.*

*Can you be still and silent and listen to our creature voices? Can you take care as you step around the shells and rocks so as not to crush us or crack us open? Can you open yourself to include us rather than defend against us? Can you respond to us rather than*
This passage suggests a divergence from the notion of unity expressed earlier in the verbal narrative. However, as I look back, I see that there were hints in what I said just prior to what I cited above: the stability of my sense of harmony is “fragile” and “a terrible side” exists (p. 253). As I study the face of the aboriginal “head” man, I now detect a sternness and judging brow that I did not perceive earlier, despite the attention I usually pay to looking and seeing. The verbal narrative alerted me to this feature, or perhaps biased me towards seeing these features. Head, disembodied, is without feeling. Eros energy is absent. Being unrelated to myself leads me to push myself too hard sometimes, despite my best intentions to lead a balanced life.

Sometimes unconscious effects are brought to consciousness through visual and verbal narratives, as the next example shows.

**Brenda’s Post-research Sandpicture #3 (Figure 65)**

As indicated in my discussion of this sandpicture, I had a powerful emotional response after I created it and repetitive salient responses when viewing the sandpicture since. From my current perspective a couple of years after creating the picture, I feel gratitude for the experience during and following its creation and awe regarding its healing power. I feel that effects during and following its creation prepared me for my mother’s death about one-and-a-half years after creation of the picture. When she actually died, I felt that I had already grieved her passing. The visual and verbal narrative had worked powerfully in advance of a major life transition.

Especially, the image of the crone as a manifestation of archetypal energy has sustained me as I have endured the final separation from my 97-year-old mother, dispersion of my mother’s material possessions, my own surgery, diagnosis of cancer, a heavy decision to reject further medical treatment, and my husband’s current critical illness. Her words are tightly
interwoven with her image (pp. 256, 258): *It's OK. You don’t have to do anything. You can just be.* I knew from her words that I had done enough. The old rock crone connects me to the transpersonal, to “deep time” in Beyers (2007) words. Again, this is an energy that I acknowledge as going beyond me personally, one that came to me in image form in Sandplay, just as the veiled woman came to me through collage.

I arrive at this point of “almost done” with a feeling of satisfaction that is coloured by my unknowing about how I am going to present my visual narrative observations in a sufficiently summative form that will resonate for readers without opening up additional emotionally charged personal responses. I ask specifically, *How did I make meaning?*

An image of Janus appears spontaneously on my mental screen. My first inclination is to investigate his mythological roots to find some interesting connections with my work. I have a sense of this energy propelling my body forward in my chair. I smile and refrain from channeling that energy into further research. I stick to the image of looking back and looking forward, and decide I will remind us of what worked for me, with my particular history in my particular life context at the time. In looking forward, I will offer what has unfolded for me as seeds for future inquirers. Not all seeds will grow nor will they constitute an absolute recipe for visual narrative research. My final chapter will bridge the past and future.
Chapter 12:
Bridging the Past and Future

Looking Back at the Literature

Older Women

The older women in Pamphilon’s (2005) study had limited formal education. The researcher writes that they “knew their place” and “made the best of life” (p. 298). She suggests that the women had “one way of understanding learning” and narrated their experiences to show “the greatest individual gain” (p. 298).

In contrast, my three co-participants have attained high levels of formal education, including university degrees (up to a master’s level), various levels of certification in the health sciences and alternative health practices, and creative skill development, as well as achieving diverse means of artistic expression. “Their place” is an expanding world of knowledge that is exciting, fulfilling, and within their reach through various types of formal and informal learning experiences, through work and service professionally and in the home, through relationships with family and friends, through the arts, leisure activities, and travel to foreign lands, and through conscious self-development. Rather than making “the best of life,” I would say that they have given their best to life as they have known that they can create and shape their lives. Their life experience has given them confidence to speak their minds, although they may impose restraints on themselves out of fear of hurting others’ feelings or feel constrained in certain situations with others. I had no sense during our meetings that they “muted” their voices in order to show themselves in the best light.

Generally, my co-participants did not focus on their bodies and age except for brief references to a lack of flexibility and slowing responses, except in the cases of serious physical
issues (Maria’s spinal cysts that caused pain and required surgery and my need for surgery for fibroids and a subsequent cancer diagnosis). Relative to these serious health issues, we both remained engaged in diverse aspects of our lives and accommodated to requirements and/or limitations imposed on us by medical intervention. We did not become defined by our illnesses or feel victimized by life. Acquiring knowledge about our conditions and possible interventions empowered us; we learned as much as we could so that we could make informed decisions when talking to medical staff.

A range of topics emerged in visual and verbal narratives, as detailed previously on pages 354 to 368. Themes identified in this work included the following: confrontation of life and death; again; coping with illness; learning and our relationship with books; significant archetypal images (Dancer: Inner Artist Archetype, Dream Poet, Saraswati, Dreaming Woman, the Crone, the Veiled Woman, the Flowering Woman); our relationship with the world of nature; and a sense of ethics and purpose in life.

**Lifelong Learning**

Revisiting Chapter 3 in which I explored the academic literature, I focus on the lifelong learning section (pp. 79-88). As mentioned on my page 81, Pamphilon (2005) who addressed “lifewide learning” did not mention what I call “personal learning sites” such as the dreamworld, artistic representations, and the body, all of which are significantly highlighted in my study. The NALL project contributed to the literature by clarifying terms about formal and further (continuing) education and informal learning (Livingstone, 2001), although references to curriculum as “a course of studies taken from a pre-existing body of knowledge” rather than a “curriculum text . . . [as] personal experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 96) seems strikingly outdated. Connelly’s and Clandinin’s conceptualization of curriculum may seem
impractical for older lifelong learners, many of whom do not engage in formal learning and thus have no reason to consider a term such as “curriculum.” Mindful that the educator, Jackson (1992), suggests that “a curriculum that has nothing to do with schools and schooling was and remains more a metaphor than a term to be taken literally (p. 8), researchers in the areas of education may be drawn to engage in research with older learners when those learners are contextualized within a “curriculum text as personal experience” framework. Doing so might change the status of informal learning research from “disregarded” and “under-researched” (Schugurensky, 2000, p. 3) to “valued” and “worth a researcher’s time.” Fisher (2003), who was part of the NALL cohort of researchers, reported that older people were not interested in numbers often valued by researchers, but that they deemed worthy the “quality” of educational opportunities available to them. My study documents how older people can access meaningful learning at different levels through diverse narrative forms, and illustrates how creative activities involving image-making can connect them to meaningful personal stories from their past and extend meanings beyond the personal to a social level where they might feel connected to, rather than different from, other people.

Schugurensky (2000) developed categorical distinctions for informal learning experiences (self-directed, incidental, and tacit) based on the dimensions of intentionality and consciousness. After completing my study, I wonder if the manner of distinguishing such categories of informal learning is too rigid. In my case, as stated earlier (p. 2), I have a fundamental underlying intention to learn from life experience whether or not I orchestrate the situation. I suspect that many other people have a similar goal, whether consciously articulated or not. In certain types of Buddhism, one path to enlightenment is through the development of wisdom (Moacanin, 2003), a guiding path for many who may be less than ardent disciples of the
formal religion. My study suggests that learning categories are, in fact, not discrete but that they are interrelated, that they overlap, and that they sometimes expand into a higher level of learning, for example, as my verbal narratives about my veiled women images show (pp. 153-6). Tacit learning may reach a level of consciousness that can be articulated; incidental learning may develop into self-directed or formal learning. For this to happen, diverse forms of learning must be acknowledged as significant, for example bodily knowing, evolution of knowing through image-making and understanding people’s strategies for making sense of those images, and opportunities to visit and revisit their diversely narrated stories. These may be forms through which “retrospective recognition” (Schugurensky, 2000, pp. 3-6) may occur.

I suggested earlier in this document that Ardelt’s (2000) description of two categories of knowledge types, wisdom-related and intellectual, seemed simplistic and even misleading (my page 87). My work illustrates that there is value in reconceptualizing knowledge types as interrelated, overlapping, and even integrated, or having a potential for integration, rather than distinguishing them as separate categories. Doing so may lead researchers into the richness of older learners’ experiences as they share their stories through verbal and visual narratives, and connect with tacit knowledge through resonance, “an educational act” (Conle, 1996, p. 308) that may promote the unfolding of deeper or more conscious levels of knowing. Experiential learning and knowing, at any age, may reveal that technical skill, an ethical commitment, and theoretical knowledge are all intertwined.

Early in my study I reported that, in my proposal in reference to “thick, tacit versions of personal knowledge,” I had written: How do I learn about these tacit versions of personal knowledge when they are, to a large extent, indecipherable? What learning sites do they occupy? (pp. 88-89). An exciting discovery for me during this period of writing my thesis has been
learning that the development of tacit knowing is a process of unfolding consciousness. Another
discovery was that I could identify different aspects of that evolution that I previously had
thought of as “indecipherable” because I attended to what I call “diverse personal learning sites.”
Because I feel that my study substantially contributes to our understanding of tacit knowing,
especially in the field of narrative inquiry, I focus on it in a section below. I include references
to the academic literature I became familiar with before starting my data collection and during
the process after data collection, as well as my observations about how my personal
understanding of tacit knowing unfolded.

**Tacit Knowing**

“We can know more than we can tell,” (Polanyi, 1967, p. 4). Wordless. Unarticulated.
A feeling. A “felt sense” of something calling out for attention (Gendlin, 1996). I believed in it.
I had experienced it. I trusted it to inform me that I knew something for which I didn’t have
words. I had felt it in my body. I used it in my work as a therapist. These words sum up what I
knew about tacit knowing before I started my research. I was surprised when I began to read
about it in the narrative and lifelong learning literature. Before arriving at OISE and CTL,
except in environments and studies related directly to therapy, my prior academic contexts had
relegated hunches, intuitions, and subjective experiences of knowing to a low rung on the
epistemological ladder. This was one reason why I felt split between what I heard “out there”
and what I felt “in here.” During my undergraduate days I felt heretical reading and deliberating
over the just published “Women’s Ways of Knowing” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule,
1986). Learning that both subjective and objective knowing were valued in some research
circles allowed me to exhale in relief.
At OISE, I was surprised to read that Dewey (1988), born in 1859, wished to learn about the intersection and integration of body and mind when elementary education in practice seems so far removed from the notion even today. I was surprised that Conle (2003b) emphasized that curriculum conceptualizations must extend beyond explicit, formal learning to include practical and tacit learning and reach beyond the intellectual realm to include practical, imaginative, and moral dimensions. I was also surprised to read that Conle (2000b) trusted her “felt ideas” when writing her narratives, that she felt guided by a “tacitly felt end-in-view” (p. 198) and that resonance allowed teachers to engage with, and even act on or “shape indirectly” their tacit knowledge (Conle, 1996, p. 299). This was the first time I had actually thought about a process occurring, rather than an instantaneous transformation from not knowing inarticulately to knowing something that could be expressed in words. Writing these words makes me smile at my naivety, especially because my Master of Arts degree was in developmental psychology!

However, as I reflect on my work over the past few years, I realize that I was writing observations of my experience that eventually led me to become aware of an evolving process. I was writing about what I felt in my body, the sensations, emotions, and shifts of energy. I was writing about my wonderings as words or images popped onto my mental screen. I was becoming aware that when I had selected my pictures for a collage, they all had to be glued down on the matboard, even if I had to change the paper size to accommodate them. When I created sandpictures in Sandplay, I chose figures slowly, usually sitting with my hands in the sand or gazing at a partially completed sandpicture until I felt compelled to move to pick up another figure. The only time I changed things was when I had an idea in mind first when molding the sand and I couldn’t create that figure to my satisfaction. I brought too much ego consciousness to the work, rather than letting the image unfold. Many times I have heard other
sandpicture creators say, “I don’t know why I chose this figure. I just know it had to be there.” As I contemplate it now, I think this is an example of tacit knowing beginning to appear at a more conscious level through the figures and images, still without words that could make conscious meaning of it. This unfolding process happened also in my collage work, as with the veiled woman, for example. Although I didn’t choose her consciously, something in me made sure she was there in three collages. Once she was there, I didn’t particularly notice her repeated presence right away. I seemed to go through a process of looking in a focused way and looking with “soft eyes,” as I called it. As I think about the contrast in looking, I think of my exploration with Logos and Eros eyes. Once I did notice that her image was present in three collages, I consciously tried to find out why. Perhaps tacit knowing first appears in the form of Hillman’s “gasp as a primary aesthetic response” or Langer’s “initial grasp” or McConeghey’s “aesthetic perception.” Once we know “something” is there, we begin to bring increased consciousness to it. Something outer has resonated with something inner. Synchronistically, just yesterday I came across a concept on the web expressed by Zhenhua Yu writing for Philosophy Today (July 1, 2008). Although I haven’t been able to access the article, I did see a mention of her (or his) understanding that tacit knowing rests on a dynamic relationship between two terms of awareness, focal awareness and subsidiary awareness. Perhaps this implies a dynamic relationship between Logos and Eros eyes. Up to this point, I have been thinking of them as two discrete forms of looking, not thinking about a dynamic relationship between them. Thank you, Yu.

In her work on narrative inquiry, Conle (1996) describes the process as a meeting of stories or fragments of stories (or images or feelings) with another “set of corresponding [not necessarily identical] narrative elements” (p. 304) that leads to development. She states that
these two sets of narrative elements are somehow related to each other, perhaps serving as metaphors for each other, and that it is their metaphoric function that underlies the resonance that may occur.

I am delighted to say that I had such a moment of resonance today that brought Conle’s hypothesis alive for me in a new way. This was another synchronistic moment for me during a day-long intensive Sandplay supervision session sandwiched in between work periods last night and tonight during which I worked on this section of my thesis. In today’s supervision, a Korean Sandplay therapist presented the case material of a 29-year-old man who had no sense of self-worth and a fragile ego that interfered with able functioning in the outer world. A lover of Nature, this man had created a sandpicture that showed an unusual wedding ceremony occurring outdoors, with a congregation of animals and people who could speak the same language. In the centre of the picture was a circle defined by the placement of a pig, a dog, and about eight tiny animation figures. They were playing the “pig game.” Not an established game, the pig game seems to be something from the sandplayer’s imagination. He said, “The pig sniffs around to find things.” I immediately heard the words in my head and announced in amazement to my students, “Oh, the pig can sniff our precious things.” Almost simultaneously, I thought and spoke excitedly of truffles in France, with pigs with a keen sense of smell sniffing out their presence as they lay buried in the underground around the roots of trees. My students said, “But we don’t know about pigs and truffles here in Korea. Koreans associate pigs with good luck, not with a keen sense of smell. Would he (the client) know about pigs sniffing out truffles from the collective unconscious?” I went on to speak about the sniffing pig as an instinctive or intuitive energy within the client who was the one who first said the pig could find things. I also spoke about the circle formed in the centre of the sandtray, the first we had seen in this man’s process,
and Jung’s concept of the circling, centering psychic energy that results in “the constellation of the Self” in a child around the age of three when the infant-mother relationship has been “good enough.” When the child’s Self constellates, s/he has a sense of self-worth and competence. This Self energy is able to nourish the developing ego so that the child develops a capacity to form relationships, a curiosity about the world and, eventually an ability to function ably in the outer world. Although the Korean students hadn’t learned about truffles in France, they had had frequent exposures to Jung’s theory and could accept that explanation.

To return to Conle’s hypothesis, for me in this situation resonance occurred when the words in my head, “the pig can sniff out precious things” met the rapidly following image of a pig sniffing out truffles in France. “Precious things” was the metaphor underlying the resonance for me today.

In her writing about the occurrence of resonance, Conle (1996) states that sharing experiential stories that carry both emotion and cognition are essential to the process. I suggest that the sharing of stories between two people constitutes a level of awareness that is reflected in the verbalization, developing consciousness about something that was tacit. As I have experienced it, resonance may occur when I and someone else share our verbal or visual narratives, or when I have a felt sense of recognition about stories I have narrated verbally or visually at two different times (almost simultaneous or more distanced in time), or when I have that same felt sense of a meaningful meeting with an author in the context of another synchronous event. An example of the first case embedded in my work pops into my mind. On page 49 I describe the resonance that occurred for my friend when I passed along to her my Light Loaders—Dancers of Light (Figure 8) painting. She wrote that the colour “struck” her and that “suddenly it became very personal.” These words “struck” and “suddenly” bring to mind
Langer’s (1963) description: *Initial meaning is grasped in one act of vision* (p. 93), rather than unfolding over time. Perhaps Hillman’s (1981) word is also apt: *gasp*, as a primary aesthetic response (p. 31). Perhaps the underlying metaphor is the death-rebirth energy carried by the phoenix and the Dancers of Light who carry light from the shadows.

The second and third cases are illustrated through the following example. It was only by revisiting my collages—in a sense, sharing them with myself—that I became aware of the repeated presence of the veiled woman. Once I knew she was there, I longed to know why. Deep feeling had been ignited. I learned through synchronistic events (when two or more events happen at the same time, without a cause/effect relationship) and through hearing stories, from seeing similar images, and from reading authors speaking about an issue that I also had to own as my own: silencing. The week I commented on my first collage, *Dreaming into Being* (Figure 8) and first met my veiled woman (Figure 19), I experienced two acts of silencing, one in the academy and one in my personal life. During that week, I was also reading the thesis of Kathy Mantiss (2004) who investigated the paradox of the educated woman who experiences silencing and lack of regard (my page 123). Sharing my collage in a presentation for an arts-based methodology course at OISE, one fellow student’s response was to point me toward “The Laugh of the Medusa” in which the author, Cixous (2003) urges women to resist silencing and to speak about and out of their bodies (my page 124). Interestingly, that collage includes an image of the author, Margaret Atwood, holding a copy of *The Taming of the Shrew*, a book by Shakespeare about men’s and women’s social roles and the paradox of spirited, intelligent women experiencing domination and inhibition of self-expression because they are women. This social phenomenon of women being silenced and disregarded simply because they were born women became a familiar story I am still hearing in Korea where the culture has supported the value of
male supremacy historically, with the result that women grow up trying to be good sons, or feeling degraded and disentitled to anything of value. Maria too told stories of the patrilineal cultural system that resulted in her mother’s loss of the ancestral home (p. 321) and Maria’s attempts to regain the title to it. It was important for me to explore the issue of silencing within myself so I would not take only the position of “other” and an attitude of difference in my work.

I didn’t know why I gave the title *Dwelling In* to my third collage (Figure 38, p. 152), even stating it verbally one day to myself, until I considered the development of tacit knowing and Polanyi’s expression “dwelling in” when ideas start to live in us as part of our personal practical knowledge (my page 88 and Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). The metaphor of the veiled woman had begun to live in me. Becoming aware of the repetition of images in different collages and similar stories being told by people in different parts of the world, and noting synchronous events that included the work of authors helped my tacit knowing evolve.

Polanyi states clearly how one’s personal experience of tacit knowing has a social dimension:

*There* is something there to be discovered. It is personal . . . but there is no trace in it of self-indulgence. The discoverer is filled with a compelling sense of responsibility for the pursuit of a hidden truth, which demands his services for revealing it. His art of knowing exercises a personal judgment in relating evidence to an external reality, an aspect of which he is seeking to apprehend (pp. 24-25).

Smith (2003) suggests that Polanyi’s approach to tacit knowing helps us understand why intuition and hunches are important in informal education practice, at the heart of which stand passionate, informed, committed actions.

As Conle (2000b) emphasizes, our personal stories often also resound for our audience, triggering memories and eliciting further stories and retellings that lead to transformation in professional and personal ways of being and doing. I feel that this notion of “retellings” is very
important in developing tacit knowing. I repeatedly revisited the visual and verbal narratives I had gathered together in my work and, although I know that it was not practical in terms of their time and energy and that they did not have the depth of commitment to the project that I had, I wish that my co-participants could have had the same experience of visiting and revisiting that I had.

Congruent with the social dimension mentioned by Polanyi above, as I mentioned on page 96, authors often provide me with a language to express what I experience and with a connection to others in the world so that I know I am part of a larger whole. Lawrence Staples’ (2009) words had just such an effect: *Words with an associative connection appear as if they were spilled upon the page*” (p. 14). I experienced resonance with what I had written about Maria’s first sandpicture (p. 239): *the cosmos as spilling out into the sandtray*, and a later commentary: *Just as I describe the cosmos as spilling out into the sandtray, I sense that the sandplayer has spilled out her imaginative meanderings* (p. 372). The resonance occurred just after I had succumbed to an overwhelming exhaustion as I tried to write. It had the effect of reenergizing me in a way that I felt powerfully in my body as I read further. Throughout my work I make reference to what I am feeling in my body. Emotions, sensations, shifts of energy all alert me to the fact that I know something although I cannot yet identify what it is.

After reading Staples words, I also recalled my *Woman in the Hat* collage (Figure 27) and began to make sense of it in terms of fragmentation and disorganization on the surface, with an underlying associative field holding the images together like the backing of a patchwork quilt. Synchronistically, I had just read a student’s paper in which she had quoted von Franz (1999) referring to a waning energy or a feeling that nothing much is happening just before something new is birthed out of the energy that has been accumulating in the unconscious.
Synchronistically, I had received Staples’ book, *The Creative Soul*, in the mail that day.

Synchronistically, when I lay on the couch to sleep, an insignificant phone call had aroused me.

I feel there is much more to understand about the development of tacit knowing from attending to the body, artistic representations, dreams, repetitions of images and stories, synchronous events, wonderings verbalized, the relationship of resonance and tacit knowing, experiences of resonance with others’ stories, including those of authors, and with one’s own visual and verbal narratives. A sustained, narrowed focus on tacit knowing in dynamic relationship with a soft eyes gaze is a project for another time.

**Dream Narratives**

Dreams were very important in the development of my personal epistemological framework, as I learned in some of my written narratives prior to my primary research. I had learned over many years that dreams could guide me, alert me to something I would experience and develop understanding about later, reflect my passion and commitment, help me integrate diverse energies or aspects, and bring to consciousness attitudes and actions I had to consider and find ways to change or protect. Especially, I was motivated to return to doctoral studies because of a dream. For all these reasons I thought they would command a greater focus throughout my research. I found that, although they attracted my attention (as in the scream dreams) and could be extremely significant (as in the home emptied of its family dream), they were not a major focus throughout my research phase. I am now aware that visual narratives in the form of sandpictures and collages and development of tacit knowing pulled more of my attention than dreams. Perhaps this was because over the years I had developed a familiarity with making meaning of my dreams, not in the sense of an absolute truth, but in the sense that what I derived from my dreams as messages from my unconscious I was able to work with and integrate into
my life. As well, I had developed an ethical commitment to do so. Before this doctoral work, I wasn’t conscious of doing so with sandpictures and collages. Only upon reflection now do I realize that I had obviously done so with my original Sandplay process which I completed in 1993 and with my collaged Dancer created more than a decade and a half ago. Although I am now aware that I had lived it, I simply had not articulated my sense of an ethical commitment towards those images.

Another factor that I think is significant in reducing my focus on dreams in this work is that the areas of development of tacit knowing and meaning-making of visual narratives came to the foreground so energetically. As I revisit the section on academic literature that I wrote earlier in my doctoral process, I am pulled by a couple of questions posed in the section on Clandinin’s and Connelly’s (1994) comments on dream narratives (my pages 77-79): Whose voice is speaking? and How can inclusion of dream text inform the study of experience of an individual and a broader research level? These and other questions about the role of dream narratives in narrative inquiry generally deserve a more complete treatment than I can give them here. However, briefly, I reflect on the various voices that spoke during my long narrative study. I think that the voice in my scream dreams was that of the dutiful daughter who had endured too long. I feel most grateful to the old stone crone’s voice that resounded from my sandpicture: It’s OK. You don’t have to do anything. You can just be. Knowing in a part of me that I had done enough, I could allow myself to place my mom in a residence where others could care for her. A year or so prior to her death at 97, this separation allowed both of us to detach from our shared experience that lasted sixty-nine years.

Towards the end of my study, while in Korea, I had the dream of “the home emptied of its family” (p. 259). This process had already begun with my mother’s death and my daughter’s
permanent move to the west coast. The dream activated my sadness and grief, a part of me knowing what my future held. Six weeks later, my husband had his heart attack from which he never recovered. Eight months later he died. His death was not a shock that catapulted me into a deep period of mourning. I had been engaged in the process for nine months, the gestation period for birthing a new me, a widow after 40 years of marriage. I feel fortunate that I am also married to my work and my inner life and developing self. This concept of “a marriage of three marriages” was presented by David Whyte (2009) who considers the notion of a work-life balance as too simplistic. (I thank Mary Beattie, one of my committee members, for introducing me to this work. It has expanded my horizons of consciousness about the interrelationship of my work, my personal development, and my relations with family and friends, all of which I cherish.) Although in the past I may have held the work-life balance as an ideal and certainly heard many women clients and friends talk about the difficulty of leading a balanced life, I never met anyone who said she actually accomplished it. So perhaps Whyte is right. We need to reconceptualize how we want to live our lives. Whyte suggests that we make vows, often secret and unspoken, to our work and self-development, just as we do more formally and overtly to our outer marital partners. Finding it impossible to “balance” different aspects of my life during these past five years, I have experienced the marriage of the three, knowing that I could not sacrifice one for the other and that each enriched the other. It has been my ethical commitment to hold all three, although it is reading and reflecting on Whyte’s words that has brought the fact to my consciousness.

Once again, here in Korea in the summer of 2009, I have lived with my deep feelings related to my husband’s death and the “home emptied of its family” dream, sometimes not quite believing that he isn’t back home where he has been over the past few years “keeping the home
fires burning” while I have lived and worked for extended periods in Korea. The title I gave to the dream reverberates in my head, bringing tears that overflow my eyes. I know “the home emptied of its family” is more than a literal fact and meander through memories of our long relationship. From the beginning, which followed by three years my early unsuccessful first marriage, I knew I must follow an independent path in the context of our highly valued family life and mutual loving focus on our daughter. We encouraged and supported each other, each carrying household and financial responsibilities at various times throughout our more than four decades together. During that time I also committed myself to a marriage with my work and opened myself to consciously strengthening my connections with my deeper Self. I found a spaciousness and freedom that could sustain the flame of my outer visible marriage, although this sometimes led to my psychological absence from my husband. He did not find such a marriage with his work or his inner world. As our mutual parenting interests and responsibilities diminished as our daughter became increasingly independent, and I became more deeply committed to my work, our conversations with each other waned. Early original family patterns seemed to re-establish themselves, monologic and contentious on one side, silent and essentially devoid of spirit on the other. His conversations became more internalized, mine became more vitally connected to women friends and colleagues. We could live with this and didn’t ask each other for more. I don’t know why he could live with it because he didn’t like to talk about such things. I could do so partly because of the strength of my marriages with work and Self, a union of inner and outer worlds, and a merger of being and doing in the world. The fact that my work holds a sense of mystery and a boundless potential for learning on multiple levels was very significant. But there was more in that marriage with my husband that was invisible, known only tacitly until now.
In the late 60s, through a series of mysterious happenings that our deeper selves recognized as the source of something special and the topic of our stories we loved to tell in the early days of our marriage, we came together. This is how I understand it today; perhaps it is a different story from the ones I would have told last year or a decade or two ago. We came together to create a new branch of family that unfolded with the birth of our daughter. The flame of that union ignited more than 40 years ago was extinguished only with my husband’s death, an event for which my dream prepared me. The dream also evoked in me an experience of utter aloneness that allowed me to mourn. A new “family flame” was ignited with the union of my daughter and her husband and unfoldment through the birth of their son, Nathaniel. I am part of that family, but no longer one of the keepers of the flame as my husband and I were for 40 years. The flame has been passed. I now understand my dream and personal experience as part of a “bigger story,” as Whyte (2009) calls it (p. 296) or, in Jung’s terms, part of a lived experience ordered by archetypal energy patterns arising from the deep psychic layers of the collective unconscious.

In our research sessions, my co-participants also shared dreams which I view as part of a bigger story. Bell, a recent widow who is sustained by thoughts of the quality of her marriage with her husband as she has created a new life, acknowledged her vague fears after his death and realized a state of reassurance when he left flowers for her in a dream (p. 267). Eve, a passionate lifelong learner, dreamed years ago about a bible. This dream, along with an early experience of finding a box of books, led to development of her awareness about “a repository of world knowledge” to which she had access (p. 302). Maria’s dream about planting a tree and erecting a commemorative plaque on her ancestral land justified her deep feeling that she had a right to claim the property, partly on behalf of her mother who had lost it because of a patrilineal cultural
system (p. 318). The knowledge we gained and continue to gain from our dreams transcends personal experience. Our dreams reverberate with existential themes.

**Visual Narratives**

As suggested by Langer (1963), I began my meaning-making of visual narratives with a feeling response, followed by a rapid qualitative assessment. I had been in the habit of doing this when I looked at clients’ sandpictures in my practice, and when I was teaching students to explore different ways of making sense of sandpictures. As well, prior to my study, in the academic literature on deciphering images I found references to various strategies (see pages 69-76 of my thesis). Johnson (2004) used visual and verbal channels for detecting multiple viewpoints and determining divergent and convergent tendencies between these two narrative forms, as well as exploring compositional elements of images and tensions and dynamic forces indicated by oblique lines in the pictures. Chula (1998) used a coding taxonomy that focused on the actors, activities, social systems, and behaviours in the images. Werner (2004) used an intertextual method in considering one image in the context of others, to determine the overall physical and/or social context for trying to make meaning of visual narratives. My own previous work had also included the use of active imagination dialogues, references to fairytales and mythology, and concepts derived from dictionaries of universal symbolism. In my current study, in trying to make sense of sandpictures and collages, I used some of the strategies mentioned above, although I did not adopt a systematic way of doing so, aside from the feeling and qualitative dimensions and, in the case of sandpictures, considering the structure. Rather, I was guided by an intuitive sense in how I approached each visual narrative. Because I feel that my work on visual narratives constitutes a major contribution to the academic literature on narrative inquiry, I dedicate a section below to a detailed description of what worked for me.
My Process of Reading Visual Narratives

As I experienced it, “making meaning” of visual narratives does not imply objectifying or isolating one image from other images within the frame or taking only an analytic stance which may deconstruct the image into something “less than.” I learned that learning how to see visual narratives is a complex process that demands a relational attitude on the part of the viewer. Relationality is the function of Eros energy, the energy of feeling. As I indicated in my analysis of sandpictures, when I tried to understand their meaning, my initial response was to look inward to see how I felt. This looking inward was not unrelated to the external world; it was extended through the outward gaze at the sandpicture. The process involved assuming a “soft” focus, that is, softening the analytic eye and letting the whole picture “seep into the body,” where I perceived it as a “felt sense” (Gendlin, 1997); I paid attention to sensations, perceptions, and feelings. This “seeping into the body” technique was suggested by my dear friend and colleague, BD, following her reading of a passage about aesthetic response in Todres’ (2007) Embodied Enquiry:

This link between heart and the organs of sense is not simple mechanical sensationalism; it is aesthetic. That is, the activity of perception or sensation in Greek is aesthesis which means at root “taking in” and “breathing in” – a gasp, that primary aesthetic response. (Hillman, 1981, p. 31)

My current understanding of this important part of the “seeing” process was extended from what I understood at the beginning of my thesis process (p. 72) that was linked to Langer’s 1963 assertion: Initial meaning is “grasped [through the feeling dimension] in one act of vision” (p. 93), rather than unfolding over time. I note the change from “grasp” to “gasp,” although I also hold to my prior observation (pp. 72-3) that the rapid perception of feeling is quickly followed
by a similarly rapid “tuning in” to the quality of the image. I felt and tuned in because I had breathed something in that, in Barthes’ terms, pierced my heart.

I speak now of my training of Sandplay therapists because the research process has helped me understand why I have done what I have done with them at an intuitive level. For example, in my training of Sandplay therapists, I deliberately slow down their process of meaning-making in order to cultivate skill and confidence in their abilities to understand sandpictures through looking at them. Projecting sandpicture images on the screen for only a few seconds, I ask them to indicate “what pulls their eye” with an X on a diagram of a sandtray. At this stage of my dissertation process, I now understand the object or configuration that they indicate as the “punctum,” the entry to a “bigger picture.” An example is the woman in the chador who, upon one of my many re-viewings, led me to a broader issue than I was aware of at the time of creation of the sandpicture (p. 142). Sometimes, my entry was a structural or topographical element imprinted on, or formed in, the sand (e.g., an inscribed line, p. 210, or a mound, p. 223, or constructed with objects, p. 210). It was sometimes a figure, such as the knight with the lance (p. 244). After attending to the punctum, I kept on looking, narrowing my focus and attending to details of the sand and the figures. I learned through the process that I used different entry points into the visual narratives at different times and that other people used different entry points from me when they looked at some of the collages and sandpictures.

Looking back at images and texts repeatedly, I imposed no limitations on how often I could view and re-view. In looking at the visual narratives, I used both an Eros and a Logos eye, with both looking inward and outward. This involved combining the “soft eyes” approach that allowed the image to become embodied (as mentioned above) and an analytical approach.
My body was my first gauge of a dynamic response: sensations, emotions, shifts in energy, urges to move or eat or eliminate or sleep, bodily movements, and spontaneously occurring images appearing on the screen in my head. Aware of tension, dissatisfaction, or inner disharmony, I stayed with the feeling and allowed my attention to move spontaneously to different elements of the visual narrative which alerted me about oppositions, contrasts, ambivalences, and paradoxes that were manifested through the images and that reflected inner tension. By making the polarities conscious, as in the Death or Treasure? collage, I was able to recognize a resolution, in this case that I could be a cancer survivor who could live a vibrant life. Especially in relation to a sudden, overwhelming feeling of fatigue, I gained insight that I sometimes need to release myself from thought and activity in order to provide a space for something new to burst forth from the unconscious.

The process of looking at pictures involved moving from my first rapid glimpses to longer observation periods as I became more analytical. Especially I analyzed the structure of visual narratives attending to details that included the following: archetypal forms, such as straight and curved lines, squares, circles, pyramids, and schematic representations like Bell’s bird; discontinuities as in the stones in the parade of animals, repetitions or reiterations as with the circles formed and inscribed; differentiation of opposites (e.g., inwards/outwards, vertical/horizontal axes); types of figures that include diversity on multiple dimensions (age, gender, race, culture, profession, activity, gestures, and emotionality), and categories, such as animals, human beings, figures of the imagination, such as dragons; divine figures, such as Saraswati; folkloric figures, such as the jackalope, historical/mythological figures, such as the Dreaming Woman of Malta, the black, armless goddess figure, and the knight, culturally significant figures, such as the Korean ancestor totems, the Korean pagoda, the Italian gondola
with gondolier and the Japanese torii; symbolic figures, such as the Tree of Life and the flute-playing boy on the ox; natural phenomena, such as ponds, rivers, and trees; human-made structures, such as bridges, boats; positioning of figures, such as upright or lying down, solitary or in relationship, diffuse or organized; and implied relationships between or amongst figures, such as the spectators and musicians.

In understanding the relevance of structural elements to meaning-making, I found it helpful to consider their functional aspects, such as containment or elevation. For example, in Bell’s first sandpicture (p. 184), the line just inside the walls of the tray was like a second border, a protective boundary, containing the tension between spiritual and material energies during a time of transition as Bell grew into her new life and became accustomed to being without her husband. In my first sandpicture with Bell (p. 186), the musicians are on an elevated “stage.” As I saw it, this structure functioned to draw the attention of the creator and viewer to a particular area of the tray, as it did for the symbolic “audience in the park” positioned in the tray.

In my first sandpicture with Eve (p. 223), the Tree of Life was at the top of the central mound. I thought of the elevation of this figure in a metaphoric way and linked it with spiritual development. I attended to bridging and mediation of diverse dimensions, considering the psychological function of connections and disconnections. The repeated presence of specific figures in the sandtray or collage led me to investigate further. Such investigation sometimes led me to appreciate a multiplicity of voices in me and others and, when I separated “other” out as different, to claim or reclaim that aspect as part of me.

When considering the significance of figures in visual narratives, I sometimes adopted a playful, curious attitude, so that my imagination could play and range freely. In one example of using my imagination liberally, I saw the sleeve of an elegant designer dress as a chador, surely
an ironic juxtaposition of images; in another, I allowed myself to see and learn from cranes as ibises. Through imagination, I could also allow my understanding and meaning-making to extend beyond what I could actually see, in essence, going beyond the frame of reality. Although I sometimes felt anxious that my meandering took me too far “off track,” I learned to trust that it also led me to understandings, as the example on pages 213-15 illustrates. As I frequently remind my Sandplay trainees, I reminded myself: *Let yourself wonder, without seizing quickly one conclusion or another. It’s OK to not know.* Previously (p. 420) I discussed a possibly defensive strategy I engaged in when an experience of not knowing infused me as I tried to make meaning of Maria’s first sandpicture. I cited authorities who had helped me make sense of underlying processes in Sandplay. Ultimately, I was led back to the sandpicture where I could see more clearly what was in the sandpicture and make sense of it more directly.

Throughout the process, I acknowledged my strong historical perspective, especially the Jungian tradition, which led me to express many assumptions that were intricately involved in my meaning-making. Experiencing how my historical framework grounded me on my doctoral journey, I learned to honour, not simply justify, it. When attempting to make meaning of my co-participants’ visual narratives without benefit of their relevant verbal narratives, I leaned on my prior knowledge about them. When possible, I looked to their and my accompanying verbal narratives for elaborations of, and convergences and divergences with, our visual narratives which I also considered within a context of other visual narratives, as in the three collages with the veiled women.

I frequently wondered, without drawing firm conclusions. Many questions arose spontaneously as I worked. Although I documented them in my text, I felt no compulsion to answer them immediately or ever. Often memories and associations surfaced. Sometimes they
prompted me to meander. The process of following my associative connections, without a harsh, critical attitude despite how far off-track they seemed, led me to new insights and more questions that I knew would lead me further, given time. I followed threads without fear of meeting a minotaur except the one in myself, not knowing, which I learned to tolerate. I expanded my understanding of “free association” to include the notion of the seemingly spontaneous and random selection of pictures for collage having an underlying meaning or organizing principle. By revisiting images and re-telling stories connected to them, I learned that, even when images seemed disconnected from each other initially and compilations seemed fragmented, they had an underlying unifying or integrating associative field of meaning. I also valued and explored images that appeared spontaneously on my mental screen, trusting them as signposts orienting me in an unfamiliar landscape or offering a new direction.

Attunement to my personal sense of aesthetic satisfaction or dissatisfaction led me to explore more deeply to discover its psychological roots. I engaged in amplification of images from dreams, art, and Sandplay through dialogues with them, and connections to other knowledge bases such as mythology, fairytales, religious teachings, history, science, and other diverse cultural practices.

Although I considered my creative work sacred, with the aid of technology in the form of camera, printer, photocopier and computer software, I allowed myself to deconstruct and reconstruct pictures in new ways that fit in with my life experience, including the sharing of certain images with friends and creating new forms of artistic expression. This practice also involved decontextualizing iconic images, such as Munch’s scream figure and Mona Lisa’s hands, to recontextualize them in newly constructed creative work. This is one example of a
broader principle of allowing myself to extend beyond the frame, literally and metaphorically, in collage, in writing up my doctoral research, and in life.

My Jungian perspective was the foundation for my symbolic attitude within which I could turn the literal into the metaphoric, the material into the psychological and spiritual, the mundane into the extraordinary. This attitude enabled me to extend my personal experience of psychological value in visual narratives to encompass an understanding that they also held educational value and presented a “dialectical tension” where I could foster a critical attitude towards cultural beliefs and values (Garoian, 2004).

And finally, harking to Dancer’s words to “have fun,” I found that research and researching can be a joyous and awesome endeavour.

**Of What Social Value is My Research?**

**Reflecting on the Women Whose Stories I Share and the Men Who Might**

I feel that my study has barely broken ground in mining diverse narrative data from older women while, at the same time, I have appreciated the rich, textured lives of the older women who engaged with me. We enjoyed sharing our stories with another who listened; sometimes we were surprised by our resourcefulness and unexpected tensions. As I listened to tapes of our sessions, I was moved by the amount of laughter that we shared. Bell, Eve, and Maria, spanning the years from 60 to 72 at the time of data-gathering, have shown that they, like me, are still active learners with strong ties to their younger lives when they expanded their worlds through books and developed strong relationships with Nature. We are all still involved with creating new lives as we age, experience losses, find ways to share our gifts, and maintain relationships while acknowledging and valuing our solitude and independence. I write this from a new perspective because my husband of 40 years died last evening, shortly after meeting our new
grandson for the first time. Amazingly, in that initial meeting, my husband was able to pull himself out of his duress for a couple of minutes to play an imitative sticking-their-tongues-out game with the baby. I have often thought, without actualizing it, of documenting my husband’s stories and those of other older men. Such a companion piece to mine would be an additional worthy contribution to the field of narrative inquiry, along with my study of older women’s stories, lifelong learning, and visual narratives. As I look back now to determine the value of my research beyond the personal and try to summarize it, I see the obvious as hinted at above: that the sharing of our stories may evoke a resonance with viewers, readers, and listeners that may encourage them to tell their experiential stories and make meaning of their lives in an integrated way.

**Extending Narrative Inquiry to Include Elder Research, Lifelong Learning, and Visual Narratives**

As I have expressed several times throughout my thesis, I have struggled to articulate an adequate “social good” to justify my research beyond expanding the area of narrative inquiry to elder research, to education considered within a framework of lifelong learning, and to visual narratives. I felt relieved when I realized that I had contributed substantially to the field of visual narratives by describing what worked for me in finding meaning in them, especially those that stood independent of verbal narratives. Even after coming to that point, I still felt some tension in my chest, as though there was something more to be said. As usual, I held the tension consciously while I worked on my previous section relating to the literature.

**Tacit Knowing**

My observations and understandings about tacit knowing came together in a way that dissolved the tension I had been feeling. I feel that this part of my research, the development or evolution of tacit knowing, places it firmly within the area of education that is related to
curriculum, teaching, and learning. My observations of strategies I used in trying to make meaning of visual narratives engaged me in a meta-cognitive approach to my own process of trying to understand something that was dense or “thick” in a way that I had started to do with the Gadamer piece out of intellectual curiosity and the fact that it was an assignment to which I had a serious commitment. However, the difference that unfolded was that I was intensely interested (both emotionally aroused and intellectually invested) throughout my doctoral process in understanding sandpictures, whereas my emotional commitment towards the Gadamer passage was gone after completing the initial assignment. Especially when my intense emotions were otherwise engaged with the loss of my husband, any effort I put into the Gadamer writing seemed superficial and silly. One of my biggest surprises was to realize that tacit knowing was not simply unknown at a verbal level one minute and available for articulation at another. There is an unfolding process whereby it becomes increasingly conscious and accessible to language. For me, the process of bringing the unconscious or preconscious to consciousness begins at the level of stirrings in the body and/or the appearance of images through dreams, waking images, and sandpictures (through which the body/hands express something). In Chapter 12, I describe various strategies that helped the unfoldment or process of revelation along.

**Incidental Learning**

While considering the importance of thinking in terms of a process, I also thought of the categories of incidental learning and formal/informal learning that had been mentioned in the NALL study of lifelong learning. These thoughts came to me while I was writing the concluding section on the stories told by the “older women” in my study. There are several examples of incidental learning being involved in shaping and establishing patterns of behaviour that guide formal and informal learning throughout life. For example, when young, Bell somehow found
herself drawing touch-me-not flowers at her Aunt Mary’s house. She had no idea how that happened, although it was a story from her childhood that she remembered and that she identified as her first drawing experience. This incidental learning experience evolved into intentional drawing experiences and art classes that promoted a lifelong interest in drawing flowers and other elements of Nature. This interest in turn expanded into developing, at least in her imagination, a relationship with creatures such as the kingfisher, the dragonfly, and the gecko. As well, she still felt excitement about those touch-me-not flowers, as when she was able to point them out recently to her grand-daughter and notice them with delight outside a small gallery in her hometown. Maria had an early interest in anatomy and how we are made. Almost half a century later, she changed careers to study formally and practise bodywork and alternative healthcare. While young, Eve discovered a box of books that opened up a new world; in later life, she travels physically to various parts of the world to explore those “new worlds” through archaeological remains of diverse cultures. She also is committed to discovering new inner worlds through her dreams and self-development studies. Brenda, who turned over rocks and looked in crevices in the natural world, is just as passionate about seeking in the dark recesses of the psyche, both personally and professionally. These stories suggest to me that incidental learning in early life may evolve into informal and formal learning experiences later in life, and that these are the stories that are remembered and retold when looking back.

**An Underlying Associative Field**

The thread that leads from early experiences of incidental learning to later informal and formal learning experiences leads me now to the topic of the underlying associative field that I discussed on pages 374-5. As Staples (2009) suggests, what may appear as fragmented or disparate elements may have an underlying “unconscious knowingness” (p. 15) that is embedded
in our feelings, and is expressed as “an interest in someone or something.” The “unconscious knowingness” seems to be another way of saying “tacit knowing.” The fragmented or disparate quality suggests seemingly unrelated incidents, as in incidental learning. However, following this thread, there may be a relatedness between early incidental learning with later formal or informal learning because underneath there is a “creative organizing principle” (Staples, 2009, p. 16).

**Reading and Re-reading, Viewing and Re-viewing as a Process in Narrative Inquiry**

A valuable part of my writing process has been reading and re-reading and responding repeatedly to my written text, as well as viewing and reviewing the visual narratives. Through this part of the process, I feel I have learned about myself and expanded my horizons of consciousness (Gadamer, 1975/2004). I feel that an opportunity for my co-participants to live over time with their stories that they have narrated visually and verbally would also be valuable for them in continuing their learning about themselves, integrating their life experiences, and making meaning of their lives. My work may provoke diverse responses that will engage them in the process. For this reason, I intend to provide them with copies of the entire work, parts of which they may read, re-read, and resonate with in the years to come.

**Diverse Forms of Narrating in Diverse Settings**

As stated by Boone (2005) and underscored by Maria’s challenge in providing written narratives (p. 248), exploration of diverse forms of narrative and links between these forms is worthy of further investigation and relevant for curricular studies. Such exploration could include a comparison of visual and other forms of non-verbal narratives (e.g., dance) that stand alone and those that are accompanied by various types of verbal narratives, both oral and written, provided by creators and witnesses. Teaching people of various ages to “read” visual and other
non-verbal forms of narrative, and learning from them how they may make meaning, merit a curricular focus.

A loose strand for me involves my intention to make my work accessible to people in the community who are unlikely to connect with it through the academy. I wish to offer artistically an opportunity for people to engage creatively about their personal experience. Earlier in this document (p. 94), I have written in terms of an installation or exhibition. Although I have a venue in mind, I have yet to inquire if it is available and feasible for my use. During these last two months, life in the form of my husband’s serious illness has intervened to prevent manifestation of my vision which includes several elements. First, using technology to project my visual narratives in the form of collages and sandpictures onto a flexible, translucent “screen” (such as a gauze-like or fine silk curtain), I would break the boundaries of the free and protected space of Sandplay, while maximizing the size of “worlds” that are usually in miniature in the sandtray, and disrupting the stability of a world left in the sandtray in favour of a flow of images as in a slide show. People would be able to walk between the projector and the screen, so that the images intermittently and unintentionally would be projected onto them and, at the same time, these images would be interrupted from their potential destination, the screen. I would make materials available for people to create visual narratives in the form of collages and sandpictures, and to write or record on audiotape their verbal narratives. They would photograph their work and attach to it a card with gender and age. They could also document their verbal narratives in response to my verbal and visual narratives. I feel that this type of project would provide a place for people of diverse learning backgrounds to “tell” their stories to someone who is eager to “hear” them. Sharing them within the context of my sharing an academic piece would let them know that their stories too have value and meaning. As my experience has
informed me, participants from the community might find healing and transformation through their visual and verbal narratives created within an informal learning environment.

By engaging in this mutual sharing within a setting where diverse voices might come together in a creative way, I feel that I would be answering my soul’s invitation to share my gifts with others and be all that I can be in that particular moment in time.

**Where To Go From Here**

As I look back over the previous few pages, I see that I have slid into talking about future research. Although I am interested in the process of doing formal research because it provides a structure, the possibility seems improbable at this point in my life. For the most part, I will leave it to the “young ‘uns” who have 40-year academic careers ahead of them, while holding onto the likelihood that I will continue to do Sandplay research independently. First of all, I will summarize the research possibilities that have infiltrated themselves into the previous few pages.

**Continuing On**

Opening up my verbal and visual narratives to a broader community than academic researchers has been a goal from the beginning. Details are offered above (pp. 465-6) for an interactive installation that I foresee implementing in the near future. My next step will be to find a suitable environment that would provide easy access to a diverse group of people who may resonate with my stories and wish to share their own verbally on audio tapes and visually through sandpictures and collage.

In my analysis and interpretation of data, I did not include my conversational data in interaction with the conversations of co-participants because of the abundance of data. This analysis would be a further step in understanding resonance evoked by the sharing of stories.
Further narrative research, using a model similar to mine in terms of gathering verbal data through informal conversations and visual data through sandpictures and collages, with a more diverse population (varying formal educational backgrounds and socio-economic status, and the inclusion of men) could be informative for the lifelong learning field.

Exploring visual narratives is an area that would benefit from further systematic research into different types of visual narratives. Through self-study and research into others’ visual narratives, individual researchers could discover what strategies work for them in their quest to make meaning and how resonance is evoked within a series of their own visual narratives and between their and others’ visual narratives.

Inquiry into meaning-making of visual narratives by a collective of several researchers working together would expand understanding about how to read visual narratives. Because I found repeated readings and viewings very helpful in unfolding understanding, I suggest that a team of researchers would have an incentive to visit and revisit visual narratives and their repeated reflections, associations, and storying over a period of time that volunteer participants are not expected to have.

Some people create sandpictures based on dreams. Research that starts with the verbally narrated dream story, followed by the visually narrated dream story, could reveal similarities and contrasts in the narratives, especially some that suggest an evolution of the story and unfolding of meaning.

A longitudinal narrative inquiry (using diverse narrative forms) with people at different life stages (e.g., childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, mid-life, elder stage, and old age) would inform researchers about continuity in stories narrated and perhaps how incidental learning develops into informal and formal learning experiences.
This is the Sandplay research that I visualize myself continuing in the near future. Dora Kalff, the founder of Sandplay Therapy, has said that the problem and possible resolution can usually be seen in the first or second sandpictures of a series. I have followed her dictum and have had success in finding, and in teaching students how to find, the problem and possible resolution. Our approach, as was what I was taught, was that these points for identification have been discrete elements. Yesterday in a day-long supervision of the clinical case material of a 17-year-old boy I saw a process unfolding that gave me a glimpse into how the development of tacit knowing might appear nonverbally through sandplay images. On the one hand, this is not surprising because Jungian psychology and Kalffian Sandplay are based on the process of making unconscious contents conscious. However, I had never before thought of this process in terms of the evolution of tacit knowing. Yesterday, in the boy’s Sandplay pictures, I saw an overall plan for what was to follow, and then I saw the whole broken down into a series of parts, like a task analysis. As though it was reflecting a meta-cognitive process about something unconscious, the unfolding process was shown through a series of six sandpictures. Five of these were preliminary to his main sandpicture which was accompanied by a verbal story. The first sandpicture seemed to be a visual plan for the series of six, the first five of which were done in silence. Images in the first five were predictive of what followed in the sixth picture which combined all the elements shown separately in the first five. It is this topic of the development of tacit knowing that interests me the most as I think of further research into visual narratives, verbal narratives, and the interaction between them as shown through Sandplay. Once again, as in the case of my dream that led me to doctoral studies, an image provokes my curiosity and activates my commitment to the work.
Many questions that I articulated remain unanswered. Partly the reason is practical: I had to bring an end to the work. That has been difficult because the work is dynamic and as such is still a rich, abundant source of unfolding data. Each time I revisit what I have written, to further reflect upon it, new understandings and expanded meanings unfold. These understandings and meanings lead me to focus on certain questions, at the expense of others. There are new entry points for my learning. Through different entry points, I focus on different questions. New priorities arise that sometimes bring new questions. New life experiences impact on the work. The work influences my actions in life. With all of this, I could say that some questions are not answered yet. Time plays a factor. It’s time to stop. There’s no more time. It’s not time yet.

However, there is more to this issue than the practical. In narrative inquiry we learn to trust that questions will emerge from the data which derive from multiple layers of our experience. Thus, questions about process and content may come from pre-research data, the midst of the research, reflections on the academic literature, and that place of wondering that denotes a new opening to “something there.” For me, wondering and questioning sometimes indicates that something new is emerging for me. In other words, they indicate the presence of tacit knowing and unfolding consciousness about what is known. Wondering and questioning are also part of my meaning-making process that allows me to avoid premature interpretive foreclosure on an issue. I have heard someone say that the answer will come when the right question is asked. I assume also a “right” temporal, spatial, and relational context.

I experience my work as a living, breathing organism that sometimes breathes me as I sometimes breathe it. To simply attend to all questions in a rational, systematic way seems to me
to be too formal, too objective, too unrelated for this work in which I have lived. So I choose to leave some questions unanswered until they entice me or some other researcher to respond.
References


Redmond, L. (1997). *When the drummers were women: A spiritual history of rhythm.* New York: Three Rivers Press.


Appendix A

Visual Narratives in the Form of Collages and Sandpictures

Figure 1: Dancer - collage
Figure 2: *Viriditis* - oil pastel
Figure 3: *Eye Looking Out* - painting
Figure 4: Brendan of the Bog - mask
Figure 5: *Looking In, Looking Out* - photograph
Figure 6a: Woodsdancers I - collage
Figure 6b: *Woodsdancers 2* - collage
Figure 6c: Woodsdancers 3 - collage
Figure 7: Dancer Juxtaposed with Inside Eye - collage and painting
Figure 8: *Light Loaders—Dancers of Light* - painting

Figure 9: Pre-research sandpicture 1 - whole
Figure 10: Pre-research sandpicture 1- detail - Saraswati

Figure 11: Pre-research sandpicture 1 - detail – sun and moon
Figure 12: Pre-research sandpicture 1 - detail – meditative woman and Canada goose

Figure 13: Pre-research sandpicture 1 - detail – Buddha baby, laughing Buddha, two women, and gnome
Figure 14: Pre-research sandpicture 1 - detail – story-teller

Figure 15: Pre-research sandpicture 1 - detail – little boy in blue and aboriginal woman with corn
Figure 16: *Dreaming into Being* - collage
Figure 17: Dreaming into Being - collage - detail – dreaming woman
Figure 18: *Dreaming into Being* - collage - detail – guides
Figure 19: Dreaming into Being – collage - detail – shadow women

Figure 20: Dreaming into Being – collage - detail – Theodora and wedding couple
Figure 21: *Dreaming into Being* - collage - detail – handmaiden
Figure 22: Dreaming into Being – collage - detail – Medusa-haired Atwood
Figure 23: *Dreaming into Being* – collage - detail – Indian woman
Figure 24: *Dreaming into Being* – collage - detail – Charlotta Saloman
Figure 25: *Dreaming into Being* - collage - detail – vase with hands
Figure 26: Dancer with verbal text – Ecological Identity as Seen through the Lenses of Ecopsychology, Critical Aesthetics, and Inquiry
Figure 27: Woman in a Hat - collage
Figure 28: Woman in a Hat - collage - detail – couples
Figure 29: *Woman in a Hat* – collage - detail – sky image
Figure 30: *Woman in a Hat* - collage - detail – woman drummer
Figure 31: *Deer Drum* – charcoal drawing
Figure 32: *Grandfather Duck-hunting* - photograph
Figure 33: Family on the Hill - photograph
Figure 34: Woman in a Hat - collage - detail – caribou eating from the bottom of the sea
Figure 35: *Woman in a Hat* - collage - detail – storyteller
Figure 36: Woman in a Hat - collage - detail - labyrinthine paths
Figure 37: *Woman in a Hat* - collage - detail – woman in red chador

Figure 38: *Dwelling In* - collage
Figure 39: *Dwelling In* - collage - detail – black ibises
Figure 40: *Dwelling In* - collage - detail - red ibis
Figure 41: *Dwelling In* - collage - detail – zebras in red field
Figure 42: *Dwelling In* - collage - detail – rising figures and multi-coloured figure
Figure 43: *Ibis Woman* - collage
Figure 44: *Dream Screams* - collage
Figure 45: A Crack in the Family Tree - collage – a triptych
Figure 46: *A Crack in the Family Tree* - collage - detail – left panel
Figure 47: A Crack in the Family Tree - collage - detail – centre panel
Figure 48: *A Crack in the Family Tree* - collage - detail – right panel
Figure 49: *Death or Treasure?* - collage
Figure 50: Bell’s sandpicture 1
Figure 51: Brenda’s sandpicture 1 (with Bell)
Figure 52: Bell’s sandpicture 2
Figure 53: Brenda’s sandpicture 2 (with Bell)
Figure 54: Bell’s sandpicture 3
Figure 55: Brenda’s sandpicture 3 (with Bell)
Figure 56: Eve’s sandpicture 1
Figure 57: Brenda’s sandpicture 1 (with Eve)
Figure 58a: Eve’s sandpicture 2 - with sunlight
Figure 59: Brenda’s sandpicture 2 (with Eve)

Figure 60: Eve’s sandpicture 3
Figure 61: Brenda’s sandpicture 3 (with Eve)
Figure 62: Maria’s sandpicture 1
Figure 63: Maria’s sandpicture 2
Figure 64: Brenda’s additional sandpicture 1
Figure 65: Brenda’s additional sandpicture 2

Figure 66: Brenda’s additional sandpicture 2 - detail – crone
Appendix B
Sandplay Equipment Used

At the time of my research, I was a practising Sandplay therapist and so could hold research sessions in my Sandplay Therapy private practice room. As such, it was equipped with materials necessary for conducting typical Kalffian Sandplay Therapy. Equipment included nine floor-to-ceiling bookcases on which were displayed hundreds of miniature figurines representing “everything” in the world, sorted into categories:

- male and female human beings of various ages, races, cultures, historical periods, occupations, and social roles;
- male and female animals of various species and ages (including prehistoric, wild, farm, and pet);
- cartoon characters;
- mythological characters;
- monsters;
- figures representing divinities, religious icons, and other spiritual representations;
- objects of Nature (trees and other forms of vegetation, nuts/seed pods and cones, dried flowers, stars, moon, sun, rocks, caves, and globes of the earth);
- various types of buildings;
- other human-made structures (e.g., bridges, towers, telephone poles, and tunnels);
- two- and three-dimensional structural forms (circles, squares, triangles, cubes, balls, pyramids, and cylinders);
- household furnishings, accessories, and food;
- precious objects (such as jewels, marbles, ornamental boxes, crystals, semi-precious stones, treasure, and treasure boxes);
- vehicles; and
- miscellaneous “interesting” objects.

Participants could select as many or as few figures as they wished, even choosing only to mould or sculpt the sand without placing figurines. They could remove figures at any time and add more, even when they thought they had finished their sandpictures. They indicated when they were finished.

The primary researcher’s therapy room contained two rectangular sandtrays with their dimensions meeting Dora Kalff’s recommendation: 28 ½” long x 18 ½” wide x 3” deep. Kalff
believed that these dimensions permitted a wholistic view of the sandpicture, rather than only a partial or fragmented view that could come with a larger tray. She also believed that these precise dimensions localized tension within limited boundaries that act as a regulating and protecting factor so that the client does not feel emotionally overwhelmed or too scattered in focus. As well, Kalff felt that the rectangular shape of the sandtray allowed for a clear manifestation of psychological processes, such as the differentiation of opposites and a tendency towards centering and circularity, processes that reflect wholeness and personality integration.

Although some practitioners using sand, trays, and figurines use square or circular trays, Kalff recommended only rectangular trays. Following Jung, she was concerned about the psychological development of a relationship between a person’s Self and ego, that is, between that person’s inner and outer worlds, between his or her unconscious and consciousness. Such a relationship is sometimes represented symbolically by a circle and square, respectively. These are symbols of psychological wholeness and four-square reality (including spatial and temporal dimensions). Jung and Kalff believed that dynamic psychic energy naturally takes a circular form and that around the age of three, if the mother-child relationship has been “good enough,” the Self constellates. This is a manifestation of a child’s inner sense of self-worth and competence that s/he has developed in interaction with people and the surrounding world.

When circles and circular formations appear in Sandplay within a rectangular tray, it is an indication of inner development, an indication that Self energy is activated. When a circular tray is provided, circles and circular formations may simply be an imitation of the outer visible form offered by the tray. In Jungian psychology, once the Self constellates in early childhood, energy of self-worth and competence is available to nourish the developing ego. A perfect relationship between Self and ego is represented symbolically by the squared circle. Jung says that such an
ideal cannot be attained by any human being. In Sandplay, inner ego development is indicated when square-like forms are constructed in various ways within the rectangular tray. Sandplay therapists can have confidence that the formation of a square is not simply an imitation of the surrounding structure of the tray. Often a series of sandpictures shows that images of various rectangular formations lead to images of squares. Because psychological development is an important issue for a Sandplay therapist and because their training is based on Jung’s principles, they are likely to use trays that meet Kalff’s criteria.

Trays are waterproofed to permit containment of actual water if the sandplayer wishes to add it from a pitcher placed nearby. As well, the interiors of the trays are painted blue to provide a symbolic representation of blue water below when sand is moved to expose the blue bottom of the tray and of surrounding blue sky that is suggested by the blue sides of the tray. One sandtray holds dry sand, while another holds wet sand, providing a choice for the sandplayer. Although imprints can easily be made in the dry sand, it has a more transitory and formless quality than the wet sand which can be moulded to a greater extent, according to the sandplayer’s intentions. Paradoxically, because water is associated with the unconscious (Jung, 1959), Sandplay therapists often think that the use of wet sand means that the sandplayer is working from a deeper level of the unconscious and a deeper emotional level than occurs with dry sand. There is great variation in how sandplayers relate to the sand, some not touching it at all when they place figures and some spending much time mixing, churning and moulding the sand. Sterile sand is recommended and can be obtained from suppliers of materials for kindergartens.

The natural elements of sand and water can merge, literally and symbolically, in the sandtray which serves as a “free and protected space” (Kalff, 1980), open to the sandplayer’s imagination, with no rules for using the sand or placing figures. It is considered a space where
the inner and outer worlds can meet, where images from the unconscious can become conscious, where dark or scary or conflictual images can be contained, and where resources and precious elements can be displayed openly or concealed or shown as guarded and protected.

While my practice as a Sandplay therapist involves using equipment that meets Kalff’s standards, other researchers may have practical concerns that curtail such efforts. Researchers without access to a fully equipped Sandplay Therapy room could provide a much smaller number of figures (100 to 200), as long as they offer diversity as suggested above. Friends and relatives love to contribute to new Sandplay collections, and garage sales are great sources of a variety of figures. Because regulation sandtrays are not readily available and are expensive to order from Sandplay suppliers, researchers could use non-regulation trays, such as plastic containers or kitty litter trays which are available in a blue colour and are waterproofed.