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ONE WOMAN'S STORY:  
HOW WAYS OF KNOWING AFFECT OUR LIVES

by

SIBYLLE TALMON-GROS ARTZ  
B.A., University of Victoria, 1984

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to the required standard



Dr. Antoinette A. Oberg, Supervisor  
(Dept. of Communication & Social Foundations)



Dr. R. Vance Peavy, Member  
(Dept. of Psychological Foundations)



Dr. Frances A.S. Ricks, Member  
(School of Child and Youth Care)



Dr. Laurie Rae Baxter, External Examiner  
(Dept. of Arts in Education)

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University of Victoria

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**SUPERVISOR:** Dr. Antoinette A. Oberg

**ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores how we undergo shifts and changes in how we understand and know ourselves and our lifeworlds by telling one woman's story. The story emerges from conversations held between the researcher and Yvonne, a student from the Bridges Project, a pre-employment program for survivors of abuse--the site of the researcher's teaching practice.

The researcher draws on Carol Gilligan's (1982) work on moral development and Mary Belenky's (1986) work on the development of self, voice and mind to trace the evolution of Yvonne's changes in understanding. Questions of morality--what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad--were major guiding questions in Yvonne's life. Gilligan's distinctions between a morality of justice which concerns itself with right action based in adherence to rules and principles, and a morality of response and care which concerns itself with right action based in an ability to respond to others in their own terms and preserve relationships, helped inform an understanding of how Yvonne construed her choices. Woven into these questions about right and wrong action, and central to their unravelling were the changes Yvonne underwent in her understanding of what knowledge and knowing is.

As Yvonne told her story, the researcher heard her talk in the different voices of knowing that Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and

Tarule (1986) describe, but the shifts in voice and ways of knowing were not only epistemological shifts, they were also ontological shifts. It was not only that Yvonne "knew" things in a certain way, it was also that she "was" a certain way. In other words, it was not only a question of knowing, but also a question of being. When Yvonne spoke in a way that, according to Belenky et al., silent knowers speak, she sounded more silenced than simply silent. Silence, rather than a static position, appeared to be a choice made about a way of being in the world when other options seemed to be fraught with danger or out of reach. When she returned to school, rather than operating as a received knower, she acted as a receiver of knowledge. When she listened to her own inner voice and let her personal evaluation of a given situation guide her choices, she was not only a subjective knower, she knew subjectively. When she was able to integrate different points of view and adopt multiple perspectives, she was not simply a connected procedural knower, she engaged in knowing procedurally and in connection with others. When she reflected back on her experience and found ways to understand herself and the conditions of her life which gave rise to her self-constructs, she had not moved to a static position labelled "constructed knower," she was constructing knowledge. At each point, she was not merely exhibiting an epistemological mindset, she was doing her knowing and being a knower in certain ways.

Explicit use of the **a priori** constructs provided by Gilligan and Belenky was made to create a developmental outline of how Yvonne

underwent change. This use of pre-ordained frameworks facilitated an articulation of the steps taken in coming to terms with self-understanding, but it also raised questions for the researcher about ways of proceeding in the quest for understanding. As a result of asking these questions, the researcher also underwent a shift in understanding. Therefore, a second story emerged out of the first story. That second story is the documentation of the researcher's own shifts with regard to how to approach pedagogical research and practice. While the two stories are different--one is a life story and the other confines itself to dealing with inquiry--both stories share the theme of shifts in understanding.

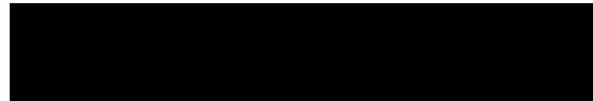
In the end, the researcher's questions with regard to her research and practice created a new starting place for further inquiry: How can one find ways to create meaning and understanding without limiting oneself to creating a fit between **a priori** constructs and experience? How does one create space for meanings to arise so that the relationship between thought and action can be generated from experience, rather than imposed by external frameworks? What is the relationship between understanding and the constructs that are made to create it? How do we create our Selves?

**EXAMINERS:**

Dr. A.A. Oberg, Supervisor  
(Dept. of Communication & Social Fndtns.)



Dr. R.V. Peavy, Member  
(Dept. of Psychological Foundations)



Dr. F.A.S. Ricks, Member  
(School of Child and Youth Care)



Dr. L.R. Baxter, External Examiner  
(Dept. of Arts in Education)

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There are four ways to write a Woman's Life: The woman herself may tell it, in what she chooses to call an autobiography; she may tell it in what she chooses to call fiction; a biographer, a woman or man, may write the woman's life in what is called a biography; or the woman may write her own life in advance of living it, unconsciously, and without recognizing or naming the process. (Heilbrun, 1989)

## PROLOGUE

"My prime need is to grasp complicated conditions and be able to talk about them." (Carl Gustav Jung, 1924)

### How I Came to Conduct This Inquiry

I undertook this inquiry because I wanted to explore how people, especially those who have experienced mental, emotional and physical trauma, undergo shifts and changes in the ways in which they understand and know themselves and their lifeworlds. When I started to look into this question, I believed that I could best gain knowledge about how people undergo these kinds of shifts and changes by asking someone who had done it how she did it. My job as a Life Skills instructor at the Bridges Project, a job-entry program for abuse survivors, put me in daily contact with women who were actively engaged in making the kinds of changes I wished to know more about. One student, Yvonne, stood out for me as a person I could explore this question with. I believed that through coming to know Yvonne's story I could learn more about how the people I teach deal with changes in how they understand themselves and their worlds and how what I teach may or may not be of value to them. What mattered to me from the outset was not so much seeking an explanation for how Yvonne came to lead her life, but what it was that influenced her to change radically how she understood and explained herself. I hoped that by making Yvonne's life problematic I could learn something that could help me work with my students in ways that were relevant and meaningful for them and for me.

Many of my students, all of them adult women, grew up in a climate of poverty, deprivation, and abuse. Some have come from conditions of severe dysfunction involving drug and alcohol addiction, hospitalization for mental illness, prostitution, criminal activities and short prison sentences. Many have had close calls with death. Yvonne lived on the edge of these possibilities until she was 42 years old, and then sought to change her life by participating in the Bridges Project. While she was at Bridges, I saw Yvonne develop new and different ways of understanding herself and her world. She also developed a desire and a willingness to articulate what had happened to her and to reconceptualize her life in ways that helped her to make sense out of her experience. That sense making is the focus of this inquiry.

**PART I: THE EVOLUTION OF AN INQUIRY****Chapter One**

"Do you consider love the strongest emotion?" he asked.

"Do you know a stronger?"

"Yes, interest." (Thomas Mann, 1979)

**How I Developed My Interest and My Approach**

My interest, that of understanding how we undergo shifts and changes in how we understand and know ourselves and our lifeworlds, has been with me for many years. It is an interest that I cannot remember being without, and it is an interest that reaches into all aspects of my life as more than an interest. It is a desire, a desire to know, not just about things, but to know knowing itself. Interest itself is perhaps not a strong enough word to do justice to the kind of involvement I am talking about, whether I am referring to Yvonne, and how she did what she did, or to the questions we explored together. I am more than curious or concerned with understanding how we make sense out of our experiences and come to terms with ourselves. I stand in the midst of these questions in every aspect of my everyday life. And while it is an interest that I hold, it is not static, unchanging in its manifestation in my life. Each time I embark on a further exploration of it, my interest continues to evolve, to deepen, to become richer. I appreciate Thomas Mann's contrast of love and interest in the above quote from *Doktor Faustus*, but I do not actually see love and interest as opposed to each other. For me, to be truly interested, deeply involved, is to love, and perhaps in a way that is more lasting than the average romantic attachment. In this inquiry,

the development of my approach and my involvement with the actual doing of this work with Yvonne is synonymous with the development of my interest. What follows then, is the story of that development.

At first, my attention was focussed on learning everything I could about Yvonne that might be relevant to forming an understanding of how she understood herself and her world. Drawing on two works by Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Moral Development (1982) and Mapping the Moral Domain: A Contribution of Women's Thinking to Psychological Theory and Education (Gilligan, Ward, Taylor, & Bardige, 1988), and guided by the research questions outlined in Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind by Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule (1986), I interviewed Yvonne. We followed the interview schedule published by Belenky et al. The course of these interviews led us into a process that become much more than a series of questions and answers.

Both Yvonne and I were deeply affected by our journey into her past. Both of us became more keenly reflective in the way we brought our present day knowledge to bear on the past. As we shifted from Yvonne telling me her story to working together to find coherence and meaning in the patterns of Yvonne's life, we began to relocate the construction of our knowledge in the experiences of both our everyday lives. For me in particular, an important transformation occurred. I changed from wanting to appropriate and master knowledge about Yvonne to working toward an understanding of her as a person not unlike myself. As our sense making became more and more concrete, and

dependent upon actual conditions of Yvonne's life, rather than upon abstractions and generalities, I moved from trying to know Yvonne and her life as an objective entity to trying to understand her as another subject, someone I was connected with in a relationship that despite our different roles, involved intimacy and equality. The way of knowing I was now practicing had changed from what Belenky and her colleagues identified as "separate knowing" to what they identify as "connected knowing." Separate knowing is premised on the belief that the relationship between knower and known is that of subject to object and that the ultimate goal of the knower is mastery of the known. Furthermore, with separate knowing, the knower avoids the idea that she can be affected by or that she may affect the known which is seen as the object. She simply seeks to accumulate information about the object which she can then possess and manipulate. Connected knowing on the other hand, is premised on the belief that the relationship between the knower and the known is that of subject to subject. Connected knowers believe that they are changed and enriched by their involvement with other subjects, and that these subjects are also in their turn affected by the connection. Connected knowers have as their goal a desire to be able to see others in their own terms (Belenky et al., 1986, pp. 101-123).

As I changed my approach from one of separate knowing to one of connected knowing, my way of proceeding changed also. Having moved away from treating Yvonne as the object of my study and having begun to engage with her as another subject, I began to respond differently to her. As well as asking questions, I reflected with her on the

meaning of her experiences in the light of my own similar experiences and she began to respond in kind to me. This change in our interaction was not one we necessarily stayed with once it had taken place, but it was important, because it added another dimension to how I conducted the study. Thus far, I had used interviewing as my method for gathering information, thereby implying that the knowledge I was seeking existed somehow ready-made, outside myself, in Yvonne and could be made accessible through the asking of questions. When I became a more active participant in the interaction, I introduced conversation into the study as a means of creating understanding and knowledge and actively implicated myself as a participant in the study and a co-creator in the knowledge I was seeking.

Sara Ruddick, who teaches philosophy and women's studies at the New School for Social Research in New York City, and who has written extensively on the subject of women and work, writes about the importance of coming to an understanding of the dynamics of what is at work in a life through concrete knowing (the kind of knowing that is grounded in the relations of everyday life), rather than through abstraction. Ruddick (1989) writes that this kind of concreteness "must be developed through disciplined attentiveness and then expanded and tested through critical conversation" (p. 98). The route that Yvonne and I had mapped out together was, with conversation as the medium, leading us more deeply into concrete as well as connected knowing. It seemed that the conversation itself needed to be highlighted as the critical methodology that allowed the kind of knowing we were engaging in to take place.

In discussing conversation and its place in the development of concrete knowing Ruddick refers to the kinds of conversations that take place between mothers and their children, but as I read her descriptions of what takes place between mothers and children, I was struck by how aptly she describes what it was like for me when I was working with Yvonne or indeed what it is like whenever I engage in focussed discussion with anyone. She suggests that:

In gossip and focussed conversations, mothers refine their capacity for concrete ways of knowing, practicing together attentive noticing and disciplined reflectiveness about what they notice. Maternal conversations are important instruments of self confidence. In their storytelling, mothers share and elaborate their observations, making a coherent, often amusing, dramatic or poignant story of their children's particularities. Individually AND collectively, they rehearse their judgments and establish continuities in their ongoing nurturing activities. Ideally a mother's stories are as beneficial to her children as they are to her. (Ruddick, 1989, p. 98)

Were I to substitute the words teacher and student or practitioner and client for the words mother and children, I believe I would be holding up Ruddick's words as a model for what happens when we form understandings and create knowledge about ourselves and our worlds in the process of relating to each other, subject to subject, in the course of our everyday lives.

Certainly I had, throughout my conversation with Yvonne, "practis(ed) attentive noticing and disciplined reflectiveness." And as I listened to her and participated with her in making sense out of her experience, presenting Yvonne's life as a coherent, dramatic, poignant and courageous story became an important focal point because the story retains an integrity that analysis may in fact obscure. In the words of Michael Novak (1978): "A 'story' ties a person's action

together in sequence. It unites past and future. It supplied patterns, themes, motifs by which a person recognizes (or someone else recognizes) the unity of his or her life" (p. 60). It is the unity of Yvonne's experience and my experience of working with Yvonne that I have strived to preserve here. This is why I present what Yvonne told me, what we created together and my understanding of it as a story.

Maxine Greene (1987) in writing about sense-making through story, discusses Jerome Bruner's (1986) ideas on the subject. Greene describes Bruner as suggesting that there are "two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality" (Greene, 1987, p. 9). According to Greene, one of Bruner's two modes "can be represented by well-formed argument; the other by a well-wrought story, dominated by what Bruner calls 'psychic reality'" (p. 9). A story therefore constructs "two landscapes: a landscape of action, whose constituents are agent, intention, situation, instrument; and a landscape of consciousness--what those involved in the action, know, think or feel (or the reverse)" (Greene, 1987, p. 9). In this inquiry I have certainly concerned myself with both action and consciousness as Bruner and Greene describe it, and thereby used Bruner's second mode of thought.

I have constructed what I have written about Yvonne as a story presented in the form of a conversation set against the backdrop of a chronology of Yvonne's life. This rendering of my inquiry replicates how the text that I present came to be produced in the first place. We began our discussion by focussing on questions of morality which Yvonne herself raised, and then worked at making sense out of Yvonne's

experience by revisiting her life as she remembered it. I introduced the chronological order after the fact. It emerged out of our conversations but it did not necessarily provide the structure for the conversations. And yet, in actuality, the events that Yvonne recalled when she illustrated a question or a theme did take place in a certain order and provided the context for the sense making in which we engaged.

It was not my intent to treat her as a research object, someone whom I tested, observed and examined in order to prod her into involuntarily and unconsciously producing information for my use. My desire was to bring forward how Yvonne created and changed her understanding of herself. Accepting Michael Novak's (1978) statement that: "The completed lives of each trace out a story whose implications reveal what they took the world in which they lived to be, who they thought they were, what in their actions they actually cared about" (p. 45), I believed that if I wished to come to an understanding of how Yvonne changed, I had to preserve her story as she and I had created it together as part of what I presented here. The meaning of Yvonne's living is located in that living and not in the abstract. In order to understand that meaning, I returned again and again to the actual conditions of her life as she described them and asked both her and myself Novak's questions: "What does she mean by that? What does she have to imagine about the world or herself in order to act like that?" (p. 3) My intent was to learn from Yvonne while preserving her presence as a subject and knower located in the actuality of her everyday world and mine. I tried to learn from Yvonne

by hearing her story in her own words, writing it in a way that retains the sound of her voice and including my own voice as I did when we worked together to understand her life.

I did, however, hear the story with the aid of the conceptual tools supplied by Gilligan and Belenky et al. and thereby I also used Bruner's first mode of thought, one that is more traditional among academic scholars. And while that helped me to stay anchored within a scholarly tradition and to explore materials that I could share with my students, it may have limited the connected knowing I was hoping to develop with Yvonne. In many ways, the use of a priori structures such as Gilligan's map of moral development and Belenky et al.'s map of cognitive development says much more about my own location than it does about Yvonne's. Much of my training is in developmental psychology. And while I have always felt free to choose with discrimination and to alter and adapt the sense-making structures offered by scholars in that field and to bring knowledge from other fields to bear upon my work, much of my thinking, and therefore my doing, is anchored in the field of psychology and psychotherapy. There is nothing accidental about the fact that I work as a Life Skills teacher in a program which concerns itself with facilitating the recovery of abuse survivors. Although I have chosen to teach rather than to counsel, my interest lies with understanding and working with what it is to be a human being trying to make one's way in the world. My research is grounded in the same interest. While I practised attentive noticing and disciplined reflectiveness as Ruddick suggests,

I stayed within the frameworks provided by Gilligan and Belenky et al. for much of what I did.

The choice to see and hear Yvonne's story through a particular set of constructs certainly facilitated the development of an articulated understanding, one that addressed itself to my original aim: that of learning how Yvonne's shifts in understanding of herself and her lifeworld came about. But it also meant that my understanding of this was formulated in a very particular way, one that is constrained by the very constructs that helped me to both appreciate and untangle, at least in part, the complexity of Yvonne's life in order to facilitate an understanding of it. Having achieved my aim, I also realized that there is more to arriving at understandings than I had bargained with in the beginning. Having heard the story and having spent a considerable amount of time fashioning it into an entity that preserved its integrity and let it speak for itself, I wondered, and still wonder whether subjecting it to the scrutiny of an analysis based on psychological constructs has limited my interpretation. This dilemma of choosing between telling the story alone, and telling the story through subjecting it to an analysis which imposed **a priori** constructs upon it, is in itself another story, that of the choices I made in the actual "doing" of the inquiry.

Physicist Evelyn Fox Keller (Keller & Grontkowski, 1983), tracing the metaphorical uses of vision in the history of Western intellectual thought argues that such analogies lead to a favoured model for truth and the quest for mind. Visual metaphors, such as "the mind's eye," suggest a camera passively recording static reality and promote the illusion that disengagement is central to the construction of knowledge. Visual metaphors encourage standing at a distance to get a proper view, removing--it is believed--subject and object from a sphere of possible intercourse. Unlike the eye, the ear operates by registering subtle change. Unlike the eye, the ear requires closeness between subject and object. Unlike seeing, speaking and listening suggest dialogue and interaction. (p. 18)

Belenky et al. draw attention to the importance of talking and listening to the development of knowing and creating understanding. And while I might wish to argue with Fox Keller that the eye is also capable of registering subtle change, I find myself agreeing with her that unlike seeing or more accurately, looking, which allows me to remain at a distance from my subject, speaking and listening require me to interact.

Having made the choice to speak and to listen rather than to look, I then made choices as to how I would speak and listen. Following Gilligan's and Belenky et al.'s examples, I began my inquiry by interviewing Yvonne. Interviewing has a long and honourable history as an acceptable methodology in the social sciences. It is used extensively in psychology, sociology, anthropology, education and history. It has spawned numerous manuals and texts which outline both what an interview is, how interviews should be conducted and what the advantages and drawbacks of interviewing are. As well, interviewing as a strategy has been refined and reworked to such a degree, that it qualifies everywhere as a bona fide way of gathering information. Interviewing has stood the test of time and has earned the label of

"research instrument" (Brenner, Brown, & Canter, 1985, p. 5). But what is it exactly? What follows is a selection of definitions of interviewing provided by scholars in the field of research interviewing which acts by way of an introduction to my own struggle with interviewing as a strategy for research.

Schatzmann and Strauss (1973) describe it as a form of questioning and answering in which the research can effectively control the flow of information. Michael Brenner (1985) suggests that "interviewing means quite literally to develop a view of something between (inter) people" (p. 148). His emphasis, like that of his co-editors, and the contributors to his book, The Research Interview: Uses and Approaches, is on finding ways to use the interview as a research tool which, while it allows both interviewer and interviewee to explore the meanings of the questions and answers involved, still centers the control of the flow of the interaction and the interpretation of the information that is gathered in the hands of either the interviewer or those of the analyst who imposes his or her constructs and/or categories upon the "raw data," the answers that the interviewee has provided.

Elliot Mishler (1986) in his discussion of current views and practices of interviewing in the social and behavioural sciences, suggests that in the mainstream tradition, interviewing is regarded as a behaviour in which questions and answers are seen as analagous to stimuli and responses rather than forms of speech. He goes on to say that this approach has led to massive efforts to standardize questions and interviewer behaviour and that therefore a kind of fiction has

been perpetrated which attempts to turn the interviewing process into something other than the face to face speaking to each other of two people. The attempt that has been made is to turn this interaction into a technology which edits out the personal and social in an effort to make interviewing objective and value free, and therefore in the classic sense, scientific.

For Mishler, this is precisely what is wrong with interviewing as it is presently constructed. For him, current views and practices reflect a restricted conception of the interview process. By attempting to obscure that the interview is an occasion of two people speaking with each other, current practices deny that interviewing is a form of discourse. For Mishler, it is important to recognize that interviews are discourse:

Namely that it is discourse shaped and organized by asking and answering questions. An interview is a joint product of what interviewees and interviewer talk about together and how they talk with each other. The record of the interview that we researchers make and then use in our analysis and interpretation is a representation of that talk. How we make that representation and the analytic procedures we apply to it reveal our theoretical assumptions and presuppositions. (Mishler, 1986, p. vii)

Mishler's struggle with mainstream approaches to interviewing reflect in a very broad sense the struggle I encountered as I began to talk with Yvonne. While I remained in "interview mode" I found myself holding back my own responses, and restricting the course that our interaction could take. As long as I did that I maintained a fiction that I could remain detached from the experience, passively looking in on it, creating a "view" as Brenner put it, and recording its meaning from the outside.

For me, it was important to acknowledge that my actions were artificial and not actually in keeping with the spirit of what I had undertaken. I shifted my method from interviewing to conversation. I recognize now that Mishler's work might have let me stay within the interviewing tradition, but for me it was more important to state clearly that I was involved in the making of knowledge through conversation rather than through the process of interviewing. What I was attempting to do in talking with Yvonne was to participate with her in disclosing her world through discourse. If I had stayed with a predetermined interview schedule, and I had restricted myself to a preordained list of topics and questions, I could very easily have imposed so much structure on what Yvonne said that I might have prevented her from telling her story. What I wanted to preserve between us was an openness that allowed us both to be led by the questions that were raised for us as we proceeded, and not only by those I had set for us in advance. I therefore chose to shift from conducting an interview in which I controlled the agenda, to creating a conversation with Yvonne in which both of us as participants could be "conducted by a sense of openness in the direction (in which) the question lay" (Carson, 1984, p. III-115). As Gadamer says, "To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the object to which the partners in conversation are directed" (in Carson, 1984, p. III-15). Conversation is different from interviewing because it "recognizes the mutual participation of the partners in dialogue in a commonly held world but it does not return to the methodological demands for an external validation outside of the participants"

(Carson, 1984, p. III-16). Interviewing, as a research tool, is for the most part still used as a data gathering strategy which is meant to keep the interviewer neutral so that s/he may produce information that is uncontaminated by her or his presence in order that it can be reshaped into generalizable, externally verifiable truths. For me, that was the telling point. What Yvonne and I said to each other was not meant to be regarded as something that was externally verifiable against an abstract, universal standard. I was not attempting to excavate the "truth" about Yvonne. I was attempting along with Yvonne to "turn the chaos of detail into sense" (Sullivan, 1991, p. 332). We did this by engaging each other as participants in conversation, not as interviewer and interviewee.

The next choice I faced was that of what to do with all that came from creating the conversation that Yvonne and I made together, as well as with what happened before we talked and after we finished. At this juncture, I made the choice to present not only our conversation, but also the making of this inquiry in narrative form as a story. Earlier in this paper, I explained why I chose to treat what Yvonne told me as a story. But I am not only telling Yvonne's story here, I am also telling the story of how this inquiry evolved and within that story, the story of my own shifts in understanding, as a teacher, a learner, a human being.

Narrative is described in Webster (1988, p. 665), as "an orderly description of events," but it is not restricted to a particular order or a particular format. It is a strategy for giving an account that we all recognize, and yet, as Maxine Greene (1987) points out in Sense

Making Through Story: An Autobiographical Inquiry, while there are multiple efforts to comprehend and define what stories actually are, there is no final definition, no definitive form to which all must conform. It is a construction wrought by each narrator out of the materials of his or her experience and that of others. We make stories so that we can name, articulate and communicate to ourselves and others something that is in some way meaningful. To present the experience that was the making of this inquiry, I required a structure that allowed me to weave together Yvonne's story, my own, and the construction of this study in a way that also allowed me to speak in my own voice, provided the space for Yvonne to speak in hers, while connecting myself to the voices of other scholars who were occupied with the same questions that she and I were pursuing. Narrative, because it is both universally recognizable and not limited in its definition, opened up the possibility for me to bring together the different interactions I engaged in order to fashion a cohesive whole. Narrative thus provides the overall organizing structure for this inquiry.

### Chapter Three

The "I" is never alone in its experience.... The meeting with others is not a contingent, ancilliary attribute of subjectivity; it is an essential, integral element in the reciprocal realizations of being and world.  
(George Steiner, 1978)

#### How I Developed a Relationship With Yvonne, and

#### What Conceptual Constructs I Brought to That Relationship

Before Yvonne and I began this study, we had known each other for just over three months and had worked together in the Life Skills classes which I teach. We had not had much contact outside class time because I was not her student advisor. But on one occasion, near the beginning of her time at Bridges, I had supported Yvonne in settling a business dispute. We didn't spend a lot of time talking to each other or seeking each other out, but over time, Yvonne participated more and more in class. Gradually, Yvonne, who had been very quiet to begin with, began to speak more openly and more frequently. In this Life Skills class we often concerned ourselves with understanding ourselves and others in terms that preserved each individual's integrity, avoided judgment and conclusion jumping as much as possible, and turned inquiry into others' behaviour back also into inquiry into our own. As a result, it was not uncommon for us to have conversations, both in and out of class, that looked into the meaning of the things that we had experienced. One day, Yvonne and I had such a conversation during coffee break. At the time we were talking about how she had made the decision to break away from the underworld of bikers, drugs, and violent crime in which she had spent most of her life.

I had just read works by Carol Gilligan and Mary Belenky and her co-authors that I refer to in the introduction, and was struck by the fact that Yvonne was wrestling with the same kinds of questions that Gilligan and Belenky et al. had worked at sorting out in their studies. Carol Gilligan had studied "the relation between judgment and action in a situation of moral conflict and choice" and had identified her interest as lying in "the interaction of experience and thought, in different voices and the dialogues to which they give rise, in the way we listen to ourselves and to others, in the stories we tell about our lives" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 1). Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) "describe the ways of knowing that women have cultivated and learned to value ... (and) the multitude of obstacles women must overcome in developing the power of their minds" (p. ix).

These kinds of questions, concerning ethics and the understanding of understanding and knowing itself were constantly being raised in the classroom and in individual counselling sessions. Most of the students at Bridges have been victimized not once, but many times in their lives and are understandably preoccupied with wanting to know how to live in ways that will keep them from becoming reinvolved with abusers. They want to know how to live in the "right" way. They come to Bridges mostly because they perceive it as a place where they can learn from the teachers how to handle difficult life situations in ways that will preempt all further difficulty. Many of the students have had little opportunity to build a self as a centre from which to act, and believe that "experts" (like Life Skills instructors, for example) know in advance of any given situation what "doing the right

thing" would be. To begin with, at least, they expect that in my classes I will know what the right thing and the right answer is and that I will teach it to them much in the same way as a math teacher might teach formulae for solving equations.

This is not my orientation to ethics and knowledge, nor to teaching. Having figured out at the age of eight that there was more than one way to do a cross-stitch, even if my mother said there was only one, I have long been wary of the one and only right answer.

There were other experiences in my early life that contributed to my mistrust for right answers and "one and only way" to do things. When I was five, my family and I emigrated to Canada from Germany, and I had to learn a new language. I don't remember "learning" English. It seemed natural enough to me at the time that there could be a number of ways to say the names of things, so adding the English way of talking about things to the German way was something I accepted with equanimity. What I do remember as remarkable was that when I changed languages in reference to something, my experience and perception of the thing I was talking about also changed. The shift which occurred for me when I changed languages alerted me early in life to the power of words. For roses spoken of in English were different from roses spoken of in German. They had a different history, a different look, a different smell, and most of all, they evoked different feelings and meanings. All it took to call up those differences was to speak of them in a different language. That discovery struck me as being quite important. So did another discovery I made around that time.

I remember lying on my bed on a late summer's evening and wondering: Is the dream dreaming me, or am I dreaming the dream? I liked to ponder the possibilities in my game of "Who Am I, the Dreamer or the Dreamed?" For if I was the dreamer, then it seemed straightforward enough to me at the time: There was a real world to which I could refer outside my imagination, and inside my head there lay a capacity to make up imaginary things called dreams. But, if I was the dreamed, then there must be other realities in which I existed as a dream person in someone else's mind. In who's mind was I the imaginary creature, and why was the "owner" of that mind dreaming me?

These things that I remember, the cross-stitch, the roses and the dream game alerted me to some important possibilities: They showed me that I could figure out ways of doing things that worked even if someone more powerful than I told me they wouldn't, and they introduced me to the notion of perception shifts. Changing languages meant I could call up different lifeworlds. Being the dreamer or the dreamed meant that how I understood myself could change depending upon where I placed myself in relation to other. I felt at home early in life with multiple and changing perspectives and bristled easily when I came up against what I thought might be a dogmatic pronouncement.

Academically, I am drawn toward those theories about ourselves and our world which leave room for the individual to grow, change, develop, and to both affect and be affected by the world in which she or he lives. Before I learned about the work of Gilligan, Belenky et al., Ruddick and others who have and are working with them, I relied on theoretical constructs and understanding of human behaviour offered

by Freud (1923, 1940, 1965), Jung (1958, 1965, 1971), Erikson (1963, 1964, 1968), Maslow (1968), Piaget (1950, 1952, 1970), Kohlberg (1967, 1969, 1973), Alice Miller (1981, 1983, 1984), Margaret Mahler (1968, 1975) and other scholars who have written about, and continued to develop, their work in psychodynamic and developmental psychology. I take from these theorists those aspects or constructs that help me by providing language and descriptions of human experience which make it possible for me to delve more deeply into that experience both in my own life and that of my students.

The psychosocial stages offered by Erikson help me to orient myself to the life task or life crisis questions my students might be facing and alert me to behaviours that might point to which task or crisis they might need to work through. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs serves a similar purpose and helps me to understand the needs my students might be acting out. Margaret Mahler's work on object relations and the individuation process help me to amplify my understanding of the formation of identity, as do Freud and Jung's earlier work on the unconscious and the structure of the psyche. Mahler's work on the borderline personality is continually helpful to me in dealing with my students because a number of Bridges students suffer from this disorder and therefore require a particularly sensitive teaching intervention. Alice Miller's work on the stifling of children's feelings and experiences and her debate with Freudian orthodoxy with regard to infantile sexuality and the actuality of childhood sexual abuse is particularly significant for Bridges students because almost all of them are survivors of such abuse.

Piaget's, and to some extent Kohlberg's, work on cognitive development helps me to pay attention to the qualitative shifts and changes that reasoning undergoes as the individual matures and develops and becomes capable of increasingly more complex functioning. This helps me to meet my students at that level of complexity which is meaningful to them before I introduce a new and more demanding level. But, with regard to cognitive development, I find Carl Jung's work on knowing most helpful of all. While Piaget and Kohlberg gave primacy to thinking as the highest human function and the only one that can be relied upon as a measure of cognitive development, Jung did not do this. He gave equal validity to the four psychological functions which he identified as sensing, feeling, intuiting and thinking. For him, each of these functions plays an equally important part in cognition; each in themselves offers us ways of knowing and ways of making sense out of our experience. This has become increasingly more significant to me as I have worked with clients who have not developed the thinking function to any great degree, but who have become highly sophisticated users of the other functions. Faced with students who could learn and construct knowledge competently when feeling, intuition and sensing were made an equal part of the learning process, I based my entire curriculum and my teaching strategy on the validation and incorporation of these ways of knowing into the educational experience at Bridges. The Bridges curriculum, whether in Life Skills or in other components of the program, is built upon a sensitivity to different ways of knowing and of making sense. Primacy is not given to one form of creating knowledge over another.

One of my main aims as a teacher is to bring material to bear on my work which will help to free my students from the rigid constructions that many of them have used to define their lives. With this in mind, I take the questions they raise about right and wrong and good and bad very seriously, and look for theories, constructs and strategies that could fit a Life Skills curriculum that would allow both theoretical and experiential acquaintance with a move away from black and white, either/or thinking. This is why I found much that is useful in Gilligan and Belenky et al.'s work, much that I could use to expand the work I was doing.

In my conversation with Yvonne that day, she spoke again and again about learning to do things the "right" way. She questioned herself and examined her life in terms of right and wrong and described herself as having moved out of the "bad" into the "good." This suggested to me that there may be much that I might learn from her about how she and perhaps others among my students understood their choices. Yvonne had made major changes in her life under life-threatening conditions and had been working for a number of years to understand who she was and how she could break free from the things that kept her trapped in a lifeworld that could only lead to her destruction. She grappled with understanding her own understanding and had struggled for years to find ways to get beyond what was imposed on her by her world. I was deeply moved by her story and asked her on the spot if I might hear more about her life so that I could learn from her something about how she had gone about making the changes that had brought her to the Bridges project and beyond.

I told her briefly about Gilligan's and Belenky et al.'s interest in how women make sense of how they know things and out of their moral choices and explained that I wanted to ask her some of the same questions they had asked the women with whom they had done their studies. After giving it some thought, she agreed to work with me, worked with me intensely for some months and became so much a part of this study that she wanted me to use her real name.

## Chapter Four

This (work), then is about interpretations, about places where we rework what has already happened to give current events meaning. (Carolyn Steedman, 1987)

### How I Conducted the Inquiry and Constructed Yvonne's Story

Yvonne and I met eight times over a period of three months to talk about her life. Between us we produced nine hours of taped material as well as a number of pages of notes. We spent a considerable amount of time going over Yvonne's history, and wove Belenky and her co-workers' questions about self-description, gender, relationships, real life moral dilemmas, education and ways of knowing, into the telling of Yvonne's story.

I have told the story in two parts, which taken together form a whole. Yvonne's history, the events of her life, what Bruner calls the "landscape of action" is the first part which is given here as a chronology. The events of Yvonne's life are placed in time as they occurred, although she did not always tell me about them in the exact order in which they occurred because, quite often, one memory triggered another which related thematically, but not necessarily chronologically. I arranged the events in the order in which they took place and present them in that way because they contextualize Yvonne's life and provide the conditions which gave rise to her questions and to her formulation of her understandings. Although I recount the events of Yvonne's life here as she told them to me, I did not follow this with an analysis of Yvonne that reduces her to a summation of her history. It was not my objective to understand Yvonne as simply an

outcome of the world into which she had been cast at birth, as a product of the conditions of her life. Believing that we all can and do play a part in making and remaking our selves, I have made the chronological history the background and have chosen the conversations, the words we said to each other about what happened as the foreground.

The conversation forms the second part of the story. It is the "landscape of consciousness" which Yvonne and I explored together out of which I formed my understanding of Yvonne. In the conversation one finds the things she said about herself, her reflections, what she and we together know, think and feel. The conversation that I reproduce here is not given in its entirety because the transcripts of our actual conversations run to hundreds of pages. I have woven together excerpts from our conversations which illustrate how Yvonne made sense of her own experience and how she shifted and changed in her understanding of herself and her world. The parts of the conversation that were selected reveal what it is that is being studied: the shifts and changes in understanding of her self and her world that Yvonne underwent, both in her previous life, and in the conversation itself. Both Yvonne and I wanted to learn more about this, and it is here that our interests intersect. In creating the conversation I present here, I worked to keep intact the complexity of the conversation that actually took place, and chose those parts of it that served to highlight the interest which shaped and framed our discussion.

In privileging myself as editor I follow the examples set by Belenky et al., Gilligan, Ruddick and numerous other scholars who,

while editing and interpreting the words of those with whom they speak in their own quest for understanding, take care to preserve these voices. I changed very little of what Yvonne or I said in what I have written here. Any changes I have made are minor and largely grammatical. Both in the actual conversation with Yvonne and in the edited conversation that follows, I let my questions and comments be guided by what Yvonne said. I sought to listen attentively and reflectively. In selecting her responses for the purposes of this script I culled the transcripts carefully so that I did not omit pertinent responses to a particular theme. In making my selections, my aim was to produce an account of our conversations that accurately reflected the quality, substance and form of what transpired between us. At certain points in my discussion of our conversations, I also drew on parts of the transcript that are not included in our edited conversation in order to round out a particular observation.

## PART II: MAKING MEANINGS

### Chapter Five

The selection of some events and the exclusion of others, the repudiation of some feelings and the acknowledgement of others reminds us that these accounts can never exactly coincide with our experience. (Madeline Grumet, 1981)

#### Chronology of Yvonne's Life

1947 Yvonne was born in Calgary where her parents lived on skid row. She had two sisters and a brother, all older.

1953 Yvonne's father left the family. He was violently abusive to Yvonne's mother.

Some time after her father's departure, Yvonne was cared for by her grandmother, who came to help out bringing the grandfather with her. The grandfather abused Yvonne sexually over a period of time. Yvonne is not able to remember very much of her childhood between the ages of two and eight.

Around this time Yvonne's stepfather Dave joined the family and a little while later a male infant cousin was taken in by the family because his teen-age mother wanted to "party" instead of looking after him. David is described by Yvonne as a gentle, caring person who made her feel safe and valued.

Yvonne's mother led what Yvonne describes as "a life of double standards." She drank heavily and after the break-up of her marriage to Dave, moved from man to man. At the same time, she always worked to support her children, and cautioned them against living the kind of life she was leading.

1959 From the age of 12 onward, Yvonne gravitated more and more to the street life of Calgary and began her long involvement with bikers.

1963 At the age of 16, Yvonne gave birth prematurely to a daughter who died when she was two days old. At the time, Yvonne was being forced by her mother to sign papers which would have allowed her daughter to be adopted. This was something that Yvonne emphatically opposed. Yvonne identifies this experience as a major turning point in her life. She told me during our talks that she believes that if her daughter had lived, she would never have gravitated to the kind of life she led for so many years because she would have had to create a safe and stable home for her daughter.

Shortly after the death of her daughter, Yvonne met Lloyd, her first husband. Lloyd's mother was a prostitute, and Lloyd was a pimp. When Lloyd proposed to Yvonne he decided to go "straight."

- 1965 Yvonne and Lloyd got married. Lloyd got a job in a restaurant and supported Yvonne. They left skid row, moved into an apartment, sought out a new community and new friends. Lloyd had very definite ideas about family life. He required Yvonne to wear dresses and forbade casual behaviour like lounging around in pyjamas. He also forbade Yvonne to work.
- 1966 Yvonne had her second child, a boy, Lloyd Jr., who lived. Lloyd Sr. insisted that Yvonne stay home to look after their son. He continued to work in the restaurant where he eventually became manager. Yvonne played tennis in her spare time, cooked and baked, looked after Lloyd Jr., and later somewhat against Lloyd Sr.'s wishes joined the P.T.A. For nearly nine years Yvonne lived like this. She describes herself as living in a picture show. During most of her time with Lloyd, Yvonne felt desperately unhappy and at times suicidal. She felt she had little or no control over the life she was leading. Mostly she played the role that Lloyd scripted for her.
- 1973 Yvonne's marriage to Lloyd broke down, and she took her son back to Calgary where she moved in with her mother and her sister and re-connected with her old life. Very quickly, she became involved with the street drug scene so prevalent at that time (pot and chemicals like LSD and MDA). Within a short time she met and married her second husband Allen and decided to have another child. Both she and Allen stopped using drugs for a time so that Yvonne could get pregnant.
- 1974 Terry, Yvonne's second son was born. She, the baby, Lloyd Jr. and Allen moved to the Vancouver area. Allen became reinvolved with drugs and alcohol, and eventually became violent with Yvonne.
- 1979 Yvonne, with her brother's help, left Allen and returned to Calgary where she again stayed with her sister and became involved with the street and biker gangland scene. She became involved with a series of powerful gang leaders and at the same time sought to change her situation by going to school.

For two years, Yvonne attended Alberta Vocational College in Calgary. She describes her time at school in glowing terms. It was a time when she was able to discover that she could use her mind, that she could learn. Yvonne began at a grade 8 level and graduated two years later with grade 12. Of all the subjects she took, she enjoyed math and sciences the most. Being able to handle these subjects gave her some confidence in her cognitive

abilities. However, nothing she studied in school invited her to question the conditions of her life, or suggested alternatives to her about how she might live her life differently. She believed things just were the way they were, and that she must come to grips with them as best she could.

1981 Yvonne remained in Calgary. After graduating from Alberta Vocational College she went back to work, supported her sons and continued to live with a series of bikers who made their living by dealing drugs. Two of the men she was involved with were extremely violent. When she tried to initiate separations, she was given to understand that she was their property and only they could decide to end the relationship. If she decided to go, she might be killed. In one case it took her a year and a half to gradually distance herself from one of these men. They finally parted when she did not stand in the way of his taking up with other women and he eventually found another one he preferred. For many years she existed in the middle of the underworld and kept herself from being directly involved in criminal acts. By not participating herself, by keeping herself and her children from having any direct contact with crime, by not looking and not knowing, she believed that she was holding herself aloof from what was going on around her. Strongly attracted to powerful men whom she saw as a challenge, she continued to stay involved. She moved through a series of relationships which required her to maintain a precarious balance of competing demands arising out of her ethic of care which required that she both maintain her relationships and not hurt anyone. The roles assigned to women in her social group were carefully laid out, and while not often explicitly stated, "everyone knew" that the women supported the men in "doing business" which involved the sale and distribution of drugs and the enforcement of the sales agreements. Enforcement often meant intimidation, violence and sometimes the maiming and killing of those on the other side. The kind of support Yvonne's relationships demanded also required her to violate her most deeply held belief that she should not hurt anyone. She managed for years to skirt the issue of her involvement in the activities that could place her in the position of hurting others, and she managed to maintain her relationships, but at great cost. In 1985-86 a war broke out between rival "colours" or gangs. Yvonne continued to live her life in the midst of all this, telling herself that if she didn't really know, if she didn't really see, if these things did not actually take place in her presence and in her home, she was not really implicated. All that changed one day in 1988 when she was present at the murder trial of three men she knew. She saw them laughing when pictures of the murder victim were being entered as evidence. At that moment she realized that she could no longer live the way she was living, associating with whom she was associating. She believed then that it was no longer enough for her

not to participate, but that she must actively remove herself from any contact with the underworld, or she would be condoning the actions of the people she knew with her presence. Shortly afterwards, Yvonne left Calgary and came to Victoria.

- 1989 Yvonne moved to Victoria with her son Terry. Lloyd Jr., who had left home by that time, remained in Calgary. An Employment Rehabilitation Officer from the Ministry of Social Services and Housing referred Yvonne to the Bridges Project. She began her work at Bridges in April of 1989.
- 1991 After graduating from Bridges, Yvonne took a further seven months training program in computer training. She also participated in a group therapy program offered through the Women's Sexual Assault Centre. Right after graduating from her training program Yvonne was hired by the Ministry of Forests where she is now a full-time employee. She has received several raises and has been promoted. She and Terry are living comfortably together. She describes herself as being happier than she has ever been in her life.

## Chapter Six

Words and language are not wrappings in which things are packed for the commerce of those who write and speak. It is in words and language that things first come into being and are. (George Steiner, 1978)

### The Conversations

We began our conversations by focussing on a topic that Yvonne raised as soon as we began our discussion, the question: What is morality? How do we distinguish between right and wrong action? Interestingly enough, I did not even have the chance to ask a particular question to start us off in this direction. This direction came from Yvonne herself. We greeted each other, I set up the tape recorder, turned it on and she began with the exact words that follow:

**Yvonne:** I don't know where to start; I'm going to start by talking about morals. I think morals begin with your parents, people that are around you the most, sisters and brothers, mom and dad, a few relatives and your teachers. From them you know that when you do this or that, you know that it isn't OK if it doesn't feel good.

**Sibylle:** Are our morals feelings that help us tell the difference between good and bad?

**Yvonne:** I'm not sure, it must have something to do with love, because you learn about good and bad through your connection with people you love, usually your parents. Somebody has to set the standards. They influence your values because you're living close to them. It starts pretty young, you see it in things they do and how they ask you to do things....

**Sibylle:** Can you tell me some things about your parents?

**Yvonne:** Sort of, because I was abused there are big gaps in my memories, especially from when I was young. My real dad I didn't really know. There are some pictures and I have a memory in which I see him dragging my mom downstairs by the hair. Those are the only images I have of him. He left when my sister was four and I was two years younger. My stepfather was really kind. He would look after us and take us places. He'd make lunches for us and after school I'd go over to his shop and sit around. Basically he was my dad. His name is Dave and after my mother and he split up, we stayed in contact and we still do.

**Sibylle:** What kinds of messages did you get from him?

**Yvonne:** Actually, I was thinking about that because there's this thing about going back and forth a lot in my life between good and bad ways of being, like the people around me--like my grandmother who was my favourite person in all the world, who loved me and cared for me and right beside her, my grandfather who abused me, and my real dad and my stepdad. My real dad was a real asshole. I don't know if he abused anybody sexually, but I wouldn't put it past him, he was a really rotten person. Then there's my stepdad. He's really soft-spoken, but he doesn't let people push him too far, he's firm, but he's really gentle. He'd give you the shirt off his back, but he wouldn't let people be abusive. He's compassionate, a good guy, he just has trouble with booze.

**Sibylle:** What things do you remember about your stepfather? What things did he stand for?

**Yvonne:** He was a good role model. He didn't swear and he didn't fight with people or hurt them physically.

**Sibylle:** If you were to say what he values, what would you say?

**Yvonne:** He values honesty, people's rights to what they believe in. If he doesn't believe in something, he's not going to cut you up because you do. He accepts people for what they are. My mother was a very different person.

**Sibylle:** What was she like?

**Yvonne:** She struggled with a lot of things. She was abused as a child.

**Sibylle:** Who abused her?

**Yvonne:** She was abused by a priest in a convent school, a residential school. She was also physically abused at home by her sisters. I don't know the whole story. She struggled with a lot of things. She'd do things that were not right, yet she'd tell me they weren't right and that I shouldn't do them.

**Sibylle:** What kinds of things?

**Yvonne:** Well, she was living with guys and drinking. I did it myself. I had this double standard. She thought these things were wrong, but she didn't know how to live what she thought. She lived recklessly. She died of a heart attack in 1977. I've got to say that I've lived the same kind of life that she lived.

**Sibylle:** Do you still live that kind of live?

**Yvonne:** No. Last night, knowing I was going to talk to you today, I was thinking about it. I lay there thinking: How could I have gone through all the things I've gone through? I was really actually scared

last night when I thought about the places I've been and the things I have done... I've been places I shouldn't have been... and I thought about being in places where things were happening and making sure I wasn't seeing them, staying behind the door or in the other room...

**Sibylle:** How did you deal with that?

**Yvonne:** I was tough. I shut it off, desensitized, probably the same thing I learned to do when I was little. It was just like that. You know the position you're in, you know what's happening in your mind, you realize what it is, but you shut it off, you know you have to escape, but you shut it off and say it's their business.

**Sibylle:** Did you make yourself purposely not know all of it, is that what you had to do?

**Yvonne:** I guess so, I guess you have to do that. That's how I survived that. It was a certain kind of control. It took me a long time to realize that by shutting my mind off I was actually using a kind of control and that I was making decisions... I wouldn't let myself be in the room... looking at somebody getting hurt is like saying it's OK or participating in it.

**Sibylle:** So you wrestled with this quite a bit?

**Yvonne:** A lot of times. It actually made me sick sometimes, sick to my stomach, and really nervous wondering what I was going to do, knowing that it was expected of me, being someone's old lady, it was my place to be at his side and have the strength to do what he needed me to do and knowing at the same time I could only go so far and that I wouldn't be able to hurt anybody. I thought I could never go any further.

**Sibylle:** Did you ever go further?

**Yvonne:** One time I thought I probably could have gone further. It happened with one of the men I lived with. It was the only time it ever came to that point. I was beyond caring and I was beyond anger and saying I can't take any more, and I was going to shoot him. I will never know whether I would have pulled the trigger or not. I was putting the bullets in the gun and trying to close it when he hit me. My friends saw it as a turning point that I hadn't pulled the trigger, but it might have just been the opposite. I don't know. I might have had to start all over again from not knowing what's right and wrong. It took me a lot longer than it should have to figure all this out.

**Sibylle:** I'm not at all sure about that. I think that the fact that you're bothered by that is really something, is really worth looking at, and really worth valuing. To me, it's important that you knew something was going on, that you were questioning. I think that many people would probably just get dragged under by the pull of what you were up against. Do you see what I mean?

**Yvonne:** Yeah, I do know that. I think I know that somehow I maintained the good part of me even through the garbage, even though I'm not exactly sure how.

**Sibylle:** Yeah, I agree, and that part interests me a lot, because I think that if I were to articulate for myself: "Why am I asking her this question?", it's because I want to know more about that part, that part that kept you going. I'm wondering what it was that kept you from getting pulled under by all the things that were going on around

you, that kept you aware that there were limits to what you could and would allow?

**Yvonne:** I don't know, I can't figure it out for myself. I think it was partly fear, and partly my stepfather as a role model. I feel very strongly about him. I think that's where it came from, the knowledge that I've got to move forward, I've got to find something right and something good. I often hated the people I was with, but I couldn't ever speak out, couldn't walk away. I knew I would get hurt if I did. I wanted a place of safety. I wanted my home to be my safe spot for my kids and for me. I had to work my way towards it bit by bit. Through those years I had these shifts with right and wrong, back and forth, back and forth.

**Sibylle:** It seems to me this struggle, this understanding of right and wrong living has occupied a major part of your thinking.

**Yvonne:** Yes. At times it's almost like having someone following me like in a cartoon with a little angel on one side and a little devil on the other saying do this, do that. The little angel is the good conscience, and I have that in the background and because of it I can only go so far and then it stops me. I did meet a guy once, he was the president of one of the motorcycle clubs and he shocked me.

**Sibylle:** How did he shock you?

**Yvonne:** Well, because he actually understood about right and wrong, and we could have a conversation about the rightness and wrongness of things and actions and thoughts.... Just talking about it now makes me want to feel my way back and find out little points, little points that make up an actual decision... and something else too. When you're

younger, things are so mixed up.... You're not really making conscious decisions, you're back and forth so quickly, it's all sort of mixed up and you don't really know... the older you get, the more defined the areas around good and bad become... and now I've chosen the good side and I'm staying in it a whole lot longer than I ever have before. Have you ever experienced that thing of going back and forth, back and forth in your life?

**Sibylle:** Yes. I look at my life, and I go back to many of the same incidents that had a powerful affect on me, but I come at them from a different point of view all the time because....

**Yvonne:** Because you've got more resources?

**Sibylle:** More resources, more information, more ways of looking and more and more.

**Yvonne:** Is there something that you noticed about what you were doing over and over that made you think differently about how you were living?

**Sibylle:** I noticed that with all the things that I was doing, I was stuck in a kind of ritual of caring. I was concerned with being a good person and I got a lot of pleasure out of caring. I cared in my relationships, I cared in my work, and it was important to me to do that, but somehow I was leaving myself out of all that caring. Somewhere along the line I got introduced to the notion of including myself in those that were being cared for and I began to see that an important part of value in my life. And when I started to do that, it changed how I looked at things. I began to see that including myself meant speaking up for myself and being willing to risk conflict and

not being liked and accepted as an understanding person. It was hard at first, and it took a while. I remember someone saying to me that I needed to love myself and my telling him I couldn't do that, that it seemed like a hollow, empty thing to do.

**Yvonne:** So when you started to do that, did you feel different?

**Sibylle:** Well, when I began to include myself and to allow myself to feel how much I really hated being mistreated, I wasn't so willing to be only understanding and forgiving anymore. I was also willing to take action on my own behalf.

**Yvonne:** Sounds fair to me. It's hard to get from point A to point B though, where you're really being the selfish type doing things like caring for yourself.

**Sibylle:** Yeah, it's difficult.

**Yvonne:** Um hum, because obviously I didn't care for myself for an awfully long time, or I had some transitional points in my life where I did care for myself but I fell back into not caring again, kind of letting people walk on me, that sort of thing. I get sort of confused about all this because I think that if you are good to people, and you're doing that because you want to, aren't you also doing that because partly you're expecting to get treated well in return?

**Sibylle:** Well, sure, but if my premise is that if I treat someone well they'll treat me well in return and I have the belief that in order to be treated well I have to be good, then I could very quickly believe that if someone treated me badly it must have been because I wasn't "good" enough. I might start interpreting other people's

mistreatment of me as a message that there is something wrong with me. Do you see what I mean?

**Yvonne:** Oh yeah, yeah, that makes sense.

**Sibylle:** That could be the start of a lot of self doubt. If I stayed with my premise that I have to treat other people well, or better yet, in just the "right" way in order for me to be treated well, I might take abuse as a message about my own inadequacy and really believe that what is happening to me is happening because there's something wrong with me. If I believe that I'm somehow a "bad" person, given all the abuse I'm experiencing, then caring for myself becomes even harder. It looks selfish, and that's not good either, so I might carry on by trying harder to be good as a way of preventing abuse and the whole thing keeps going because I'm trying to be good, caring and unselfish.

**Yvonne:** Well, I accept that I can be a bit selfish now.

**Sibylle:** Wonderful. Me too.

**Yvonne:** You know, something in what you were just saying touched on something I heard you say before, in class, about power and what we'll do to get some, like we'll even take the blame for things because that at least puts us in a position of being able to take power by changing ourselves. Well, I was interested in power in all those relationships I had. All the guys I was with had power. I was only attracted to men who had power because that meant that I got some of that power too. But at the same time, I was being treated like shit and explaining it to myself by looking at what was wrong with me. I was comparing myself to the other women that were around and telling myself that they were

better looking, younger, smarter, putting all the problems back onto myself because I wasn't good enough. But then I started to look around and I noticed that lots of other men wanted to date me and that I must be all right, I must be intelligent and pretty and all those things, and I got tired of being abused and started to think about getting out. It happened step by step, going from one relationship to the next, still getting into bad relationships, but it was shorter each time.

**Sibylle:** Was there an improvement in your view of yourself each time?

**Yvonne:** Oh yes, definitely! It was like I said, stay in the good longer, go back, but I'd stay out of the bad a lot longer each time, sit back and look at it for a while, wait... It went that way till I came here. This is living in the good.

**Sibylle:** How did you get from your life in Calgary to here, to living in the "good"?

**Yvonne:** I'm not sure, I always say being scared got me out, but I think I always had the feeling that I wanted to get out. I was getting really tired in my body and in my mind... there was no safe place anymore... I wanted to keep it out of my home, but I couldn't trust the people I knew to keep it out of my home... I didn't want to settle for being in the trash anymore... There were moments when I could step outside myself and look at what was going on around me, moments when I craved form more, when I made pictures in my mind of things I wanted, but I didn't know how to make them happen, what they were really supposed to feel like, what they really related to, and what kind of satisfaction you were supposed to get... To rise out of what you know,

what's familiar and goes back so far that it just snowballs in your life, I think you have to be really, really conscious. I think you have to have something to shock you out of it... With me, I was considering that it was too late for a while, that this was my life... the thing that kept me there was a feeling that there was nothing else for me and that I fitted where I was...

**Sibylle:** What made you go?

**Yvonne:** I think the decision was made at the murder trial when I was watching Herb's face. I just couldn't believe that he and the other two were standing there laughing about somebody being killed, about pictures of a body that they had probably shot up themselves... I sat there and considered: Would I ever go to that extent, would I if I didn't make the break?... I still don't know up to this point if I had let myself go in that direction if that would have meant that I would have let go of any kind of hope for anything else... I couldn't laugh... when you see it like that, actually in front of you, people laughing because they're going to get away with having killed someone, and these guys are standing there like it was stealing bubblegum from a store... That was the turning point. I told myself, this is not me. I couldn't see myself condoning this. Doc, the man I was living with, was Herb's friend, and I couldn't see myself living with someone who could turn into that, who might already be like that... I couldn't be there. If I stayed, I was saying it was OK... It was not OK.

**Sibylle:** How long was it before you were able to leave?

**Yvonne:** I was in Victoria within six months. It took me a while longer to get my things, Doc still has some of them.

**Sibylle:** Earlier, you described your life here as living in the "good." Were there other times in your life that you would describe as good?

**Yvonne:** Yes, there have been times--in school. I have to say that when I was in school, that was a happy time and I'd like to go back to that point... It was good, it was great. I had a lot of fun learning because there was so much to find out about. This made learning a good time. I'm not really a fast learner. I have to put a lot of effort into it because learning comes really hard for me, but I even enjoy that part of it. I enjoyed hanging around the library and the resource centre... I even enjoyed finding out new twists and ways to do things that I thought I already knew... I met a lot of good people there, nice people, one friend that I'm still in contact with, but I was mixed up with the wrong kinds of people in my private life... I wonder now if it was an addiction to that strange kind of excitement that I still feel every once in a while even though I enjoy what I do now... I enjoy reading. I enjoy sitting at my table and drawing and having nobody around to tell me what to do. It's peaceful and quiet and I can make choices. But every now and again, I just have a sense of adrenalin, a need for an adrenalin rush. I don't know what it is, but it's also got to do with learning, a different kind of learning that comes from watching how those people that I knew worked. Those kinds of people are really interesting to watch.

**Sibylle:** So, there's some kind of draw there?

**Yvonne:** I don't know what it is, but you can watch those people, and I've been in interesting situations. I guess it would be just as

interesting to sit in an institute for the insane and watch that.

**Sibylle:** Just as interesting, and just as draining and just as personally precarious.

**Yvonne:** What do you mean, I'm not sure I understand you?

**Sibylle:** Well, I spent quite a lot of time with a client who was sometimes psychotic. It involved a certain amount of danger, a certain amount of skating on thin ice. I had to be fully aware all the time. When I was with her, I kept an eye on everything that went on, because sometimes, quite suddenly, she would turn on people and become violent.

**Yvonne:** Well yes, in conditions like that, you always have to be really sensitive to everything that is around you, everything, even conversations at the next table.

**Sibylle:** I used to ask myself what it was about that kind of work that attracted me. I wondered what I was doing there.

**Yvonne:** But you learn so much! Some people can be so very interesting because of the way they do things. I don't know what I learned from it. I learned that they were all fairly close to being insane, a lot of them.

**Sibylle:** It's like another world isn't it?

**Yvonne:** It's a world that brings up a kind of curiosity in me.

**Sibylle:** Curiosity? That curiosity is interesting to me.

**Yvonne:** It must be curiosity more than anything. My not having an education is not going to let me go to some of the place where I could learn more about this, so when I want to know about this, I can walk into a bar or club where the people I want to know more about are and

I can fit right in because of my having been brought up in that world. If I had an education, or I was a psychiatrist or something, studying criminal psychology or something, I could go and see these people behind bars and they could tell me about their violence and why they relate to people this way or that way. But I don't have an education, so that kind of curiosity is channelled a different way or something.

**Sibylle:** But you do have that kind of curiosity.

**Yvonne:** I do have that curiosity, sure. I like to know how those people operate and why they do the things they do. I think a lot of people have that kind of curiosity.

**Sibylle:** I have that kind of desire to know. I want to understand what moves people, why people act altruistically or not, why people act violently. It comes right down to wanting to understand myself. I think it also leads back to things that are in myself. I have to be willing to face myself honestly when I deal with other people, because the more I deal with other people, the more I end up having to deal with myself.

**Yvonne:** I think so, yes. And it does relate directly to me. The things I want to know about, like violence, were always around my home. At home, I saw violence, but I couldn't contend with it at the time, so when I started to try to understand it, the only way I could understand it was to be involved with it. I guess I was working it out that way because I guess I asked a lot of questions while I was being around people in that way. I asked questions that weren't supposed to be allowed to be asked, but I asked them because I had to know and I asked them because I challenged the right to know.

**Sibylle:** Who did you ask?

**Yvonne:** Whoever I felt like asking.

**Sibylle:** And what kinds of questions did you ask them?

**Yvonne:** Centering questions. And I know now that that is a totally different world. I found a poem which I brought with me to show you in case we talked about this because it really describes what I saw.

**Sibylle:** I'd love to hear it and record it.

**Yvonne:** OK. It's called "Leather Jacket":

In the silence that prolongs the span  
Growling of music when the record ends,  
The red-haired boy who drove in weekday overalls  
But like his friends wore cycle boots and jacket here  
To suit the Sunday hangout he was in,  
Heard as he stretched back from his beer  
Leather creak softly around his neck and chin.

Before him on a cold, black sleeve  
Remote exertion had lined, scratched and burned insignia  
That didn't provide the heroic role for which he burned.  
All the other drinkers bent together concocting selves  
from their impervious kit.  
He saw that it was no more than leather  
Which taut across the shoulders grown to it  
Sent through the dimness a sudden anonymous hint of light,  
As those that shipping give that are now flickers in the bay,  
Now lost in the night.

He stretched out like a cat and rolled the bitterish taste  
of beer across his tongue  
And listened to a joke being told.  
The present was a thing he stayed among.

It's just funny, that's just exactly what it's about...

**Sibylle:** They just make themselves up?

**Yvonne:** Oh yeah!

**Sibylle:** "He saw that it was no more than leather which taut across the shoulders grown to it sent through the dimness a sudden and anonymous hint of light as those that shipping give, that are now

flickers in the bay, now lost in the night." So it's a kind of self that's just a brief and fleeting signal from a lighthouse or from a ship in the night?

**Yvonne:** I suppose so. They live for today.

**Sibylle:** Why?

**Yvonne:** Because that's the way it is. That's exactly the way it is, because that's what they want. They want happiness now, they don't want to wait for it. They don't want to set goals. If they set any kind of goal, it's money now. What can they do to get money now? What kind of shit down the road can they do to get money today?

**Sibylle:** I wonder if that's got anything to do with having a past they don't want?

**Yvonne:** What do you mean?

**Sibylle:** Well, if I don't make plans for the future and only live for now, what that says to me is that past and future aren't an option for me. If I'm comfortable with the future, it's because I have a sense of continuity with the past. I have a sense of being embedded or grounded in something from which I can draw an identity. But if I don't like my past, I might not be able to entertain anything else except this moment.

**Yvonne:** But what you're doing is giving them a conscience. They don't have a conscience. I don't see any conscience in that bunch at all.

**Sibylle:** Why isn't there?

**Yvonne:** I don't know, it's just that way. It's a lifestyle, and that's just the way you walk into it. You know they don't have a

conscience because they don't care who they step on to get to where they are going. It's just all for me, and all for today.

**Sibylle:** What would someone have to be like in order to act like that? How would someone get to that place?

**Yvonne:** I think it was the way they were brought up... And I think that that's probably where I walked in. I have this little twisted thing inside me that takes me back there, but that feels like it isn't really a part of me.

**Sibylle:** When you were there, did you feel real, or did you feel like you were playing a part?

**Yvonne:** That's a good question you know, because now I know that I was there mostly because it was what I was used to. It was a very familiar world, and I knew what to do there... But sometimes I felt myself stepping outside it.

**Sibylle:** How did you do that?

**Yvonne:** I began to see that what I wanted wasn't what I was getting. A part of me liked the excitement--that was fulfilling in a way--but there was still another part of me that wasn't feeling satisfied. That's when I sort of stepped outside it. I began to wonder, things were not right... I still stayed with it for a long time. It was a kind of stepwise thing... It began as moments when I craved for something more and I learned little bits.

**Sibylle:** Was there anything else that might have been there for you?

**Yvonne:** It was like--I didn't really know at the time what it was--I couldn't really put the things I did into words. It was more feelings, but when you and I talked about it once, when we talked about power,

it was a power trip. For me, there was a lot going on around being involved with really powerful men. They had this "kiss my ass" attitude, and they were the conqueror type. That was a kind of power for me, to have that guy and beat out all the other girls for him. I knew how to play the game, so I played.

**Sibylle:** And you won it.

**Yvonne:** Yeah. I kind of knew that I would.

**Sibylle:** How does the game work?

**Yvonne:** Well, you just set your mind to it, and it gets done. You know the words to say, the places to go, how to look at him and how not to look at him, just those things, you know.

**Sibylle:** Where did you learn it?

**Yvonne:** I have no idea. I don't know.

**Sibylle:** To me, that is really interesting. You know how to do that so very well. How did you learn it?

**Yvonne:** I don't know. Maybe it's setting your mind to doing something and then saying to yourself that is going to happen and that's all. With those kinds of guys, if you treat them back the way they treat you, they have a tendency to look a second time at you.

**Sibylle:** Is that like creating common ground?

**Yvonne:** Could be. Yes, that's it. It's pacing, pacing them. Isn't that far out? Yeah, I like that idea, that's quite interesting. When you can take it apart like that, and yeah, it is what I did. I'd go to the bar and I'd stand where he'd see me, but not obviously, and I know that I don't have such a bad figure and I'm not bad looking, so I'd stand where he could see me. If he came by and stood there and stared

at me, I'd walk away and talk with somebody else--that kind of game. I was just playing the game. And I was really, really bold you know. I didn't let people push me around. I didn't care who they were.

**Sibylle:** So that is pacing him, because he was bold too wasn't he?

**Yvonne:** Yes, I guess so, I guess that was basically it.

**Sibylle:** Well, that's interesting

**Yvonne:** Interesting? Very interesting!

**Sibylle:** So, you know how to do this?

**Yvonne:** I kind of think that that's your subconscious at work. I think it just sort of comes naturally with everybody doesn't it?

**Sibylle:** I'm not so sure about that. I don't think everybody would know about how to stand and when to walk away. Not everybody is that good at pacing.

**Yvonne:** Yeah, when you think about it, I wonder where it came from, where exactly. From watching maybe.

**Sibylle:** So you know how it works, could you do it in another context?

**Yvonne:** You mean, could I do it consciously?

**Sibylle:** Yes, in another context. Could you do that with getting a job, or with getting an education?

**Yvonne:** Put it to practical use? Well I'd have to think about that.

**Sibylle:** Well, you already know how.

**Yvonne:** I'm not sure. You boggle me! You've made me stumble!

**Sibylle:** I did? What did I make you stumble on?

**Yvonne:** I'm not sure. It's putting what I do into a form, a pattern I can use.

**Sibylle:** OK, say you wanted to get a job in a certain field.

**Yvonne:** I want a job in the government, maybe in an education or a science department.

**Sibylle:** With a ministry, have you got any ideas what you'd like to do there?

**Yvonne:** I could work in the library, maybe in a science area.

**Sibylle:** So how would you do that?

**Yvonne:** I could go to school...

**Sibylle:** What else could you do? You know how to pace, and it strikes me that there's some value in that. You're the one who got the guy they all wanted.

**Yvonne:** I think that that's more confidence than planning. I have no words to say exactly how it went, exactly how I did those things. I just made the contact. I wanted that to happen and that's how it happened.

**Sibylle:** You made the commitment.

**Yvonne:** That's it! I made the commitment. Yes. I have a little thing on the wall that says "Make the Commitment."

**Sibylle:** You made the commitment, and you paced, and you know how to do that so well that you got what everybody else wanted. You actually know how to do this stuff.

**Yvonne:** Yeah, I think so, and you know, what's really bizarre, I also know how to create an opening, how to plant myself in the right places. Don't you think that everybody just sort of naturally has some idea how to do this?

**Sibylle:** Well, not everybody. A lot of people are just sort of letting themselves be passively pushed while other people are making the commitment. They're sort of along for the ride. A lot of people just sort of accompany other people without really choosing to and find it really valuable to discover that they don't really have to go along. Some people know about making commitments or choices, but don't always choose in their own best interest. I was wondering if you had any thoughts about this?

**Yvonne:** I don't know, I think that I'm able to do it now, but I was scared for a long time to make a commitment to another direction because I wasn't sure what normal is and I didn't know how to go beyond familiar places and familiar things.

**Sibylle:** How would you describe yourself now?

**Yvonne:** I am a mom, a teacher, a caretaker. I am a woman. Sometimes I don't really know who I am. I get confused about what I am and about my success at whatever it is that I think I am. Sometimes I know exactly who I am and where I am going. I know it has a lot to do with self-esteem and with getting better emotionally and mentally.

**Sibylle:** Is the way you see yourself now different from the way you saw yourself in the past?

**Yvonne:** Yes. I've become more self-aware, not just aware of what others are doing around me. I'm actually able to put my needs and wants into words, and I can express them more freely. That happened at Bridges. I started to understand why I respond the way I do in certain conditions and I began to notice that a lot of the negative stuff was connected to familiar ways of doing things. That made it possible for

me to hold back and avoid old pitfalls such as those I found myself in with men. At Alberta Vocational College I began to believe that I was able to learn academic things. At Bridges I started to get insight into myself. I had a very narrow view of people. I had everything categorized into "bags." I thought things were the way that they were, that I couldn't change, and that I was just "stuck" being the kind of person I was. I believed that it was because I was poor and that all poor people were stuck with our roles and ways of thinking.

**Sibylle:** What made the difference?

**Yvonne:** When I was in Bridges, I related to other people, and I heard you talk about the questions that you asked yourself about yourself and your own life. I saw then that other people, teachers, were not immune and also had the same problems of abuse and thinking about how to come to terms with it. I used to think that every time poor people get up, they'll get slapped down. But now I see that it can get easier as you learn about yourself. And another really important part of this was acceptance, acceptance of myself and other people.

**Sibylle:** How did that happen?

**Yvonne:** I'm not sure, I can't put my finger on it exactly, I'd have to think about it for awhile, but it's just knowing that I'm not the only one that this has happened to, that has these kinds of feelings, that even if I am unique, there are some circumstances that are the same. It helped to work together with people who came from different life styles. I found it beneficial to be around people who could tell me all sorts of things about their lives and what they had been

through. Through Life Skills I learned to put things into words and through being able to put into words what was true for me I started to find it easier to look more and listen more and to understand more how I deal with things. Before that, I was stuck in action-reaction. I never questioned people outside my own world, or people in authority like teachers. I assumed that people were outlined by their role, that they were outlined by their position. I had them "framed." I was really scared of authority figures. I didn't have enough words. I still don't have, but I have more. I can sort out right and wrong for myself now. I can sort it out in my head. People in authority can be wrong, at least for me.

**Sibylle:** How do you see yourself changing in the future?

**Yvonne:** I see myself being more confident because of the things that I have learned. I know that I am capable of more. I really had thought at times that I was incapable of comprehending and holding knowledge. Now I see myself as gaining more knowledge, both personal and academic. I see this as solving my personal problems as well. It seems that during my time in grade school and before, women were not expected to be intellectuals, so our need for knowledge was ignored. This was especially bad for me because I was poor and poorly cared for and put down by my classmates as well. Now I can see that it is really important that I have high expectations of myself, but they need to be realistic.

**Sibylle:** What does being a woman mean to you?

**Yvonne:** Men seem to need approval from women, so being a woman used to mean having a man and being with a man and giving him what he

needed. For me, men were a kind of challenge, and the kind of challenge they presented was also somehow connected to the kind of life I was leading. There was a connection there with men and sex and power. Getting involved with them felt like winning a kind of power game. I was proving something to myself. I'd pick a big time guy and say to myself that I could bring him to his knees by making him want to be with me. It was a strange game because it seems to me that I was also losing something along the line. Winning always involved being second, because after you "won," you had to stand by and support them completely in what they wanted. Any power was second-hand, and most of the time, being involved with those men meant trouble, trouble for me and my kids. It seems very strange to me now that I did that for so long, that how I saw myself as a woman was so tied to being with those men... I wonder now if I wasn't driven by a kind of hate for men, but I haven't worked that out yet... Now I see that I do have special needs and wants, that I do have special abilities, that I can live very well and like who I am and what I do without being with a man. I don't see myself as a second-class citizen as some men see women. I am as capable as a man of doing the same work as he does, except lifting heavy things.

**Sibylle:** Now, when you think about what to do, what do you consider?

**Yvonne:** I consider clearing things out of my life and my mind that are unnecessary bulk, things like men that have nothing to say that would advance my intellectual state, and insincere people (women too). I've been seeing fewer people, fewer people with whom I have to spend time talking about their problems. Right now I want to make some money

so that I can have some things in place for Terry and me--a vehicle so we can camp and fish and spend time in the outdoors and relax. I could even take my books with me and learn. Sometimes I wonder whether I'm capable, but those are the down times. Those are the times I'm burdened with negative self-talk. Those times are getting shorter. I'm stopping all that social nonsense so that I can have space and get used to working with myself. Sometimes I feel like Robin Williams talking to himself, jumping back and forth and acting out both voices. I'm hard on myself now. I make myself make good decisions. I discipline myself. I want to keep learning.

**Sibylle:** What do you consider to be your best choices?

**Yvonne:** The choices I made to learn. Learning can't be bad. I don't think anybody can learn too much. Whatever I do, I don't think I'll ever want to stop learning. It hasn't always been like that. I was so "dead" for so long. The further along I get, the more I am able to rethink the past. It seems so strange now to have spent those years doing nothing after I left Alberta Vocational College. But it also feels strange to have maybe hurt some people by leaving them behind. It feels uncomfortable sometimes to be doing this all for myself. But I'm doing it the best way that I know how.

**Sibylle:** What have you learned from making the move and coming here?

**Yvonne:** I learned how to structure decision making and found that it doesn't hurt that much. It isn't as painful as I thought it would be, this personal disciplining. It feels good to me, this quiet, this relaxing and having a good night's sleep. I sort of get scared sometimes about not having anybody to keep busy with, but really, I

don't miss it. One of the most important things I learned here, I learned at Bridges. I learned to communicate with myself, not just other people. I don't mean that I just learned positive ways to talk to myself, I mean I learned ways to get inside myself and to take actual steps to face the stuff I had to face. That's how I learned to have confidence in myself. When we worked together at Bridges, we had a part in our own learning. Things were open, information and alternatives were offered but never imposed. We learned by talking with each other, and each one of us could choose for herself.

## Chapter Seven

Meaning is not the object of understanding, what is understood by understanding, but more exactly, the organizing component in what is understood, that upon which the understanding depends, around which it is organized and maintained. (George Steiner, 1978)

### Understanding the Shifts Which Emerged From the Conversation

#### (1) Mapping the moral domain

Yvonne began our conversations by saying "I don't know where to start, I'm going to start by talking about morals." She then drew out a relationship between morals and feelings and learning about good and bad through love, through being connected with people. The theme of choosing between good and bad, of not only knowing the difference but being able to act out of that knowledge was one that occupied a major part of Yvonne's thinking and focussed much of Yvonne's action. This theme is revisited many times in our discussion. Coming to grips with right action, with understanding and being able to live in the "good," and with choosing what is the right thing to do has been and continues to be Yvonne's quest.

Yvonne's morality is grounded in her connections, in her desire to act in ways that will maintain her relationships to others. In this she exhibits an inclination common more to women than to men; something that has been taken for granted for many years. This observation was not lost on major developmental theorists like Freud, Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg. They premised their theories of moral development on the assumption that moral maturity meant achieving the ability to formulate abstract ethical principles and adhering to them impartially. Those who could make judgments about self and others in

conformity with these principles no matter what the relationship between judge and judged were seen as evidencing the desired moral maturity. Studying only males, they created systems which traced the path to moral maturity as a progression which led to the valuing of separateness over attachment, competition over cooperation, and independence over interdependence. They noticed that often females placed a greater emphasis on relatedness and care and concern for others than males did and that more males than females achieved a morality based on the impartial application of ethical principles. In every day terms, this means that in general, females will sacrifice a rule or a principle to preserve a relationship, while males will sacrifice a relationship to preserve a rule or a principle. This observed difference in behaviour was interpreted as an indicator that for the most part, females don't achieve the same levels of maturity that males do. Females' capacities for intimacy, relatedness and caring were considered instinctual and seen as a function of their biological destiny. Females' abilities to care and respond were seen as innate capacities, not learned skills like the ability to judge impartially, and were therefore not valued as knowledge or considered as assessable in terms of development. (For a more in-depth discussion of these points, see Gilligan, 1982, pp. 5-23.)

Carol Gilligan, after working for many years with Lawrence Kohlberg on his inquiry into moral development, began to hear and see things differently:

Over the past ten years, I have been listening to people talking about morality and about themselves. Halfway through that time, I began to hear a distinction in these voices, two ways about speaking about moral problems, two modes of describing the relationship between other and self. Differences represented in the psychological literature as steps in a developmental progression suddenly appeared instead as a contrapuntal theme, woven into the cycle of life and recurring in varying forms in people's judgments, fantasies and thoughts. The occasion for this observation was the selection of a sample of women for a study on the relation between judgment and action in a situation of moral conflict and choice. Against the background of the psychological descriptions of identity and moral development which I had read and taught for a number of years, the women's voices sounded distinct. It was then that I began to notice the recurrent problems in interpreting women's development and to connect these problems to the repeated exclusion of women from the critical theory-building studies of psychological research. (Gilligan, 1982, p. 1)

What Gilligan was able to attune to was a different understanding of moral development than the one that has been dominant for so long. Instead of hearing women's concerns with relatedness as evidence of their immaturity because it signalled an inability to separate and individuate, she heard them as describing an orientation that valued relatedness and connection over separateness and autonomy. Instead of one perspective into which women fit only inadequately, Gilligan found two distinct perspectives of morality, each centered upon different concerns and each with different criteria for what constitutes maturity. In her first book on this subject, In a Different Voice, she says:

The different voice I describe is characterized not by gender but by theme. [emphasis added] Its association with women is an empirical observation, and it is primarily through women's voices that I trace its development. But this association is not absolute, and the contrasts between male and female voices are presented here to highlight a distinction between two modes of thought and to focus a problem of interpretation rather than to represent a generalization about either sex. (Gilligan, 1982, p. 2)

Together with others (Gilligan, Ward, Taylor & Bardige, 1988; Gilligan, Lyons & Hanmer, 1990), Gilligan has continued to elaborate her findings and to articulate the two perspectives of morality that she found.

Nona Plessner Lyons (1988) offers the following analysis of the two perspectives: One is a "morality of justice" and concerns itself with right action based in adherence to rules and principles. The other is a "morality of response and care" and concerns itself with right action based in an ability to respond in ways which care for and do not hurt other people (pp. 21-45). Individuals grounded in a morality of justice would judge themselves and others according to their ability to act fairly, without bias and in accordance with their principles. The underlying assumption is that the "good" is to be found in abstract ethical principles which transcend personal connections. Individuals grounded in a morality of response and care would judge themselves and others in terms of their ability to care for others and maintain relationships. The underlying assumption is that the "good" is to be found in relatedness and is measured according to how successfully relatedness is maintained.

These two perspectives differ considerably in how they define the individual in relation to others, how they outline or "set up" moral problems and how moral choices are considered and evaluated. A morality of justice is premised on the belief that human beings are ultimately separate and autonomous in relation to each other and that relationships work best if they are reciprocal and if moral choices are mediated by rules that are fair, the same for all and held in

place by adherence to the duties, obligations and commitments outlined by the roles which we take up. From this perspective, moral problems arise because of competing rights or from the violation of rights, and are resolved by invoking impartial rules, principles or standards and by considering: (1) one's role-related obligations, duty, or commitments and (2) the accepted rules, standards and principles for self, others and society. The golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" serves to guide action. Moral decisions are evaluated by considering: (1) how the decisions were thought about and justified, i.e., how rational the decision was, and (2) how the invoked values, principles, or standards (especially those of reciprocity and fairness) were and are being maintained as a result of the decisions taken (Lyons, 1988, p. 35). Moral maturity is demonstrated by the ability to subordinate relationships to rules and rules to universal principles or human rights under the condition of blind impartiality (Gilligan, 1982).

A morality of response and care is premised on the belief that human beings are ultimately interdependent and connected to each other and that relationships work best if they are grounded in the act of caring for and about one another, and if moral choices are mediated by understanding and the acceptance of one's responsibilities in a way that promotes the greatest good for all concerned. From this perspective, moral problems are construed as issues of relationship or response and the concern is how to respond to others in their terms. The statement, "Do unto others as they would have you do unto them," serves to guide action. What is considered when action is taken is how

to maintain the connections between the interdependent individuals involved, and how to promote their welfare by preventing them from being harmed and/or relieving them of their burdens, hurt or suffering (Lyons, 1988, p. 35). The success or failure of one's intervention is evaluated by considering how things worked out and whether relationships were maintained or restored and responsibilities were acted upon. Moral maturity is demonstrated through the ability to maintain a complex network of human relationships, the acceptance of responsibility for others with the understanding that one must also include oneself as one of those one must care for and that others are ultimately responsible for their own destiny (Gilligan, 1982).

As I listened to Yvonne, I heard a strong emphasis on the morality of response and care ringing through in what she said. When I asked her at one point how she would describe herself, she replied: "I am a mom, a teacher, a caretaker." Her self is "known in the experience of connection and defined not by reflection (i.e., 'mirrored' in others' recognition) but by interaction, the responsiveness of human engagement" (Gilligan, 1988, p. 7). When she herself introduced moral development as a topic, she grounded it in the relational. She said: "You learn about good and bad through your connection with people you love, usually your parents." When asked about the people she was with in the underworld and how they might have become what they were, she said: "I think it was probably the way they were brought up." She described her own struggle with moral choice as "this thing about going back and forth... between good and bad ways of being, like the people around me," indicating that she

understood her own choices as bound up in her connections to those with whom she lived most closely. Father and grandfather stood for the bad. Stepfather and grandmother stood for the good. Mother stood in the middle, living destructively, but warning Yvonne not to follow in her footsteps. When asked what kept her from going under in the bad, she singled out her stepfather as the role model who provided her with the knowledge that she needed to move forward into the good. He was able to maintain his ability to respond to and care for people in the midst of skid road. He looked after the kids and took them places. He made lunches for them and he talked to them. He didn't fight or hurt people physically. He still stays in contact with Yvonne. Here the "Different Voice," the voice of care and response predominates. Yvonne constructs her identity, her approach to moral decision making and her ideals out of her connection to others. She compares her own struggle with good and bad to the struggle she witnessed in her mother. She describes her mother as doing things that weren't right, yet telling her that doing these things wasn't right and warning her not to do them. Yvonne's mother "didn't know how to live what she thought" and Yvonne described herself wrestling with the same difficulty. "It actually made me sick sometimes and really nervous, wondering what I was going to do, knowing what was expected of me, knowing I could only go so far and that I wouldn't be able to hurt anybody." What she thought was clearly that she shouldn't and wouldn't hurt anyone. I hear this as a strong indication of an ethic of care. The moral choice that sometimes actually made Yvonne sick at times was a conflict of competing responsibilities both arising out of her ethic of care and

response: (1) her responsibility to support her partner and do what was expected in that relationship, which required that she be there to support him by doing whatever was necessary for him to get what he wanted from the person he was threatening; and (2) her larger responsibility to all humans which demands that even while maintaining her network of relationships, that she not hurt anyone. According to her ethic, she must both maintain the relationship with her male partner, and find ways not to engage in behaviour that hurts others. This is what Yvonne does, and she does it for many years. The ground for Yvonne's struggle with the "bad" and the "good" is the battle between the two demands inherent in her ethic of care and response: (1) to maintain her relationships and remain a member of her social network which included a connection to the underworld of motorcycle gangs and crime as well as her mother, sister and her stepfather Dave, and (2) not to hurt anyone. It is ironic and sad that in attempting to live up to deeply held values and conceptions of self and the world, which at first glance are highly laudable, Yvonne became trapped in a life which in many ways she did not want, but couldn't see her way out of.

Yvonne never had any trouble knowing the bottom line. She was clear from the beginning that she would not hurt anyone. Her ethics were clearly grounded, but her attachments, especially those she formed with men to whom she looked for power and position kept drawing her into places where she found herself very nearly going over to the "bad" which was to be involved with hurting people. She tried for years to keep her relationships by resorting to shutting down, by

staying behind closed doors, by purposely not knowing. What she couldn't reconcile was living among people who might one day demand that she go against one of the cornerstones of her ethic of care while she served the other cornerstone. An individual who is grounded in this ethic, must maintain relationships while promoting the welfare of others, preventing their harm, and relieving their burdens, hurt or suffering, physical or psychological (Lyons, 1988, p. 35). Dealing with the thought that she might actually have hurt or killed her former lover by choice still haunts her. If she actually had done that she says: "I might have had to start all over again from not knowing what's right and wrong." Like her mother, she knew what she thought, but didn't know how to live it.

She describes herself as having to work her way towards living right bit by bit: "Through those years I had these shifts with right and wrong, back and forth, back and forth." Even after the decision was made to leave Calgary, to make the break and leave the bad behind, the ethic of care, grounded in connectedness to others and demanding that they not be hurt surfaces again. Yvonne, upon reflecting on the decision and assessing it as a good one, says, "it also feels strange to have maybe hurt some people by leaving them behind. It feels uncomfortable sometimes doing this all for myself." The notion that it is acceptable, even desirable, in an ethic of care to include oneself in the caring was still a foreign one. Even after we discuss it in our conversation, and I describe my own struggle with this question, she still terms taking action on one's own behalf as selfish and therefore perhaps not caring after all. The question that still dominates is

that of deciding what is morally right under the circumstances of choosing self over other. From the perspective of a morality of care and response, in which self is known through connection and the "right" and the "good" are defined as acting responsively in relationships, it becomes difficult to permit oneself to engage in actions which can result in the disengagement from relationships and the withdrawing of responsiveness.

### (2) Ways of Knowing

Questions of morality--what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad--are major guiding questions in Yvonne's life. Woven into those questions and central to their unravelling is Yvonne's quest to know. Knowing is integral to the whole question of right and wrong and being able to imagine different ways of living. Yvonne's mother didn't know how to live what she thought. Yvonne, in contrast actively searched for ways to find out how to tie her knowing to her living. For her, knowing and learning are things she can turn to, to help her with staying in the good. When I ask her to describe times in her life that were good, she says: "When I was in school, that was a happy time and I'd like to go back to that point.... It was good, it was great." In answer to my question: "What do you consider to be your best choices?" Yvonne says: "The choices I made to learn. Learning can't be bad. I don't think anybody can learn too much. Whatever I do, I don't think I'll ever want to stop learning." When we discuss each of our attractions to situations which involve our being around people who behave in ways that could be described as precarious, Yvonne says: "But you learn so much!" The tension between

knowing and not knowing created the tightrope upon which Yvonne balanced her existence in Calgary. There is no question that Yvonne values knowledge and learning very highly, no question that she purposely sought out learning both formally at Alberta Vocational College and informally in the dangerous context of her social life. But, she also practiced active ignorance. She also chose not to know at times. Her quest for knowledge and understanding was not a simple, linear progression proceeding gradually and incrementally stage by stage toward greater understanding. Sudden qualitative shifts were also involved. Circumstance and choice played a vital part. To articulate my own understanding of Yvonne's ways of knowing, I turned to the work of Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule (1986).

In their book, Women's Ways of Knowing, they offer five stages or categories to describe the sequence of intellectual development that they believe women go through. At a recent workshop, Belenky provided the following summation of the stages:

The Silent Knower: Feels stupid, inarticulate and powerless. She believes that she is mindless and voiceless with no capacity for knowing. The silent knower often describes herself being unable to learn. In her relationships, she is dependent, passive, subdued and subordinate and given to stereotypical behaviour. She doesn't use words as a means of creating understandings because she experiences words as weapons which underline her stupidity and/or get her into trouble. She believes that she must remain distant and guarded in her use of words because they could be used against her. In parenting her children, she believes that she must use raw power to keep the child in line because words have no teaching or learning function. She therefore neither listens or explains. Feelings are not understood and viewed as unimportant, disruptive and dangerous. The silent knower experiences herself as having no voice.

The Received Knower: Feels able to receive, store and transmit information without modifying it. She construes learning as memorization and recitation and learns by listening to authorities who know the truth which is absolute, concrete and factual. She doesn't believe that she can create knowledge herself, and doesn't recognize that authorities create knowledge. She experiences them as simply "having" it and believes knowledge exists independently of those who seek it. As a parent she believes that children learn by listening to their elders and therefore should be seen and not heard. Feelings are acknowledged as existing but not considered important. Children (and adults) are taught through lectures. The emphasis is on right and wrong and punishment and reward. The received knower hears first and foremost the voices of others.

The Subjective Knower: Believes that knowledge is based in intuition and personal experience. Therefore, one can create one's own knowledge and truth which comes from within. She distrusts external authorities, values individuality, believes in multiple but separate truths which are not generalizable. As a parent she believes that each child is unique, delights in her children's spontaneity, lets them speak for themselves, values feelings and intuition very highly and has a laissez-faire, nonjudgmental attitude. The subjective knower hears and expresses her inner voice.

The Procedural Knower: Perceives knowledge as something objective that can be understood through the deliberate and systematic use of reason. She strives to articulate and understand thoughts and feelings and recognizes the possibility of multiple interpretations which are dependent on perspective. She therefore values the sharing and understanding of different points of view which she evaluates with the help of procedures which guide her thinking. The procedural knower hears and expresses the voice of reason. Procedural knowers have two distinct approaches; Separate Knowing and Connected Knowing.

A separate procedural knower focusses on evaluating and judging different points of view or arguments with the help of objective and impersonal standards. She believes when it comes to deciding between competing arguments that feelings cloud thought. Her goal is to prove, disprove and convince. (A separate procedural knower sounds similar to an individual who forms her identity and approach from a basis in Gilligan's morality of justice.)

A connected procedural knower focusses on trying to understand and experience, to some degree, another's reality as well as her own. She believes that others can be understood through adopting their perspectives. In contrast to the separate knower, she believes that feelings illuminate thought. Her goal is to construct meaning, to understand and be understood. (A connected procedural knower sounds similar to an individual who forms her identity and approach from a basis in Gilligan's morality of care and response.)

As a parent, the procedural knower asks for and provides reasoning and explanations and encourages the sharing of the processes behind her child's and her own thinking. The procedural knower speaks with and hears the voice of reason.

The Constructed Knower: Believes she can collaborate in the construction of knowledge through dialogue with her Self and others. She understands knowledge as constructed and sees the knower as shaping the known. Her goal is to create a new synthesis, not merely to uncover information. She seeks to integrate separate and connected modes of discourse and to understand the contexts out of which ideas arise by taking responsibility for examining, evaluating and developing systems of thought. As a parent, she draws out her child's thoughts and feelings, asks questions, provides feedback, and shares and talks through points of view. The constructed knower experiences and participates in the integrating of voices.<sub>1</sub>

### Yvonne's Ways of Knowing

As I listened to Yvonne tell her story, I heard her talk in the different voices that Belenky et al. describe, and I heard more than that. The shifts in voice and ways of knowing were not only epistemological shifts, they were also ontological shifts. It was not only that Yvonne "knew" things in certain ways that could be distinguished if I paid attention to the language she used to describe her experience, it was also that she "was" a certain way. In other words, it was not only a question of knowing, but also a question of being and of knowing how to live what she knew. When Yvonne spoke in

the way which according to Belenky et al. silent knowers speak, she sounded more silenced than simply silent. Silence, rather than a static position with regard to knowing, sounded to me like a choice made about a way of being in the world when other options seemed either fraught with danger or out of reach. When she made the move to return to school to learn more, she became a receiver of knowledge. Rather than calling her a received knower, I would call what she did knowing receptively. When she listened to her inner voice and let her personal evaluation of the situation in the courtroom in Calgary guide her, she was not only a subjective knower, she knew subjectively. Later, at Bridges, when she was able to integrate different points of view and adopt multiple perspectives, she was not simply a connected procedural knower, she engaged in knowing procedurally and in connection with others. When she reflects back on her experience and finds ways to understand herself and the conditions of her life which gave rise to her self-constructs, she is not in a static position labelled "constructed knower," she is constructing knowledge. At each point, she is not merely exhibiting an epistemo-logical mindset, she is doing her knowing and being a knower in certain ways.

In our conversations, Yvonne's first reflection on her approaches to knowing comes in her statement about her mother and herself: "She'd do things that were not right, yet she'd tell me they weren't right and that I shouldn't do them... she didn't know how to live what she thought... I've got to say that I've lived the same kind of life." (emphasis added) This statement outlines where Yvonne began in the

evolution of her ways of knowing, and it lets us know also what her task was. Yvonne worked for many years to achieve what her mother could not do, which was to learn to live what she thought.

She began by living very much like her mother did. What she did to get through it all was to be tough: "I shut it off, desensitized, probably the same thing I learned to do when I was little." She did this to survive, and for a long time it was an automatic response, one that she fled to in childhood whenever her grandfather sexually abused her, one that arose spontaneously as a defense mechanism whenever knowing would have meant psychological and/or physical annihilation. For many years, Yvonne simply went into a state of dissociation whenever she found herself in threatening circumstances. Such circumstances were so familiar to her that she took them for granted. For her, "It was a very familiar world, and I knew what to do there." Only much later was she able to say, "To rise out of what you know, what's familiar and goes back so far that it just snowballs in your life, I think you have to be really, really conscious." At the time, that was not an option. Along with not being able to live what she knew and shutting down in order to survive, Yvonne did not see giving voice to her feelings as something she could risk doing: "I often hated the people I was with, but I couldn't ever speak out, couldn't walk away. I knew I would get hurt if I did." Belenky et al. say, "The silent women worried that they would be punished just for using words" (1986, p. 24). Yvonne describes herself like her mother before her, as being alienated from her own values, alienated from her own mind and silenced by fear. In her outer voicelessness and her inability to

follow through on what her inner voice was saying to her, Yvonne, especially in her youth and in her young adult years, did resemble the women Belenky et al. describe as silent knowers, but the operative word here is resembled. Like other silent knowers, she was dependent and subordinate in her relationships and believed that she was stupid. She said: "I really had thought at times that I was incapable of comprehending and holding knowledge." And like other silent knowers whom Belenky et al. describe as giving "unquestioned submission to the immediate commands of authorities, not to the directives of their own inner voices" (1986, p. 28), Yvonne acquiesced to those around her, especially men, who had positions of authority by virtue of their sex, and role.

In her first marriage, her husband Lloyd made all the decisions including what Yvonne should wear, how she should raise their child, and what kinds of social contacts Yvonne should have. Wordless submission to the dictates or requirements of men was something Yvonne took for granted until she left Calgary. Although she always drew the line at physical abuse of herself, did what she could to protect her children from her partners, and never stayed in a relationship after her partner hit her, she took for granted until quite recently, stereotypical notions that her role as a woman was to be with and meet the needs of men. I asked her at one point why she had to be present with her partner when things were taking place that she was actually strongly opposed to, and her reply was: "I had to stay there, I was his old lady, and my place was at his side." When I asked how she knew she had to do this, she replied: "It's an unspoken agreement, you just

did it. If I didn't I'd be letting him down and not showing him that I have the strength to do all the things that are expected of me in that circle." Authority was vested in the male partner to whom wordless allegiance was owed. Any power she had was derived from the men she was able to win as partners. To get power, Yvonne deliberately targeted powerful gang leaders as partners. But Yvonne knew for many years that this system wasn't working for her, and it is here that her resemblance with silent knowers ends.

Unlike most silent knowers, Yvonne probed, questioned, set certain limits and had a sense that she could get access to power of a sort. Her relationship to her children was always one of connection rather than disconnection, and she allowed neither herself or others to use raw power to interact with them. There were things that Yvonne would not do no matter what. She would not allow drugs into her home (and the home was always hers). She would not let her home be used for parties and drinking. She would not be present if she knew that physical violence could occur and somehow she managed to communicate this to her partners in ways that gave them to understand that she meant it. If and when violence did occur Yvonne left the partnership. She also never lost sight of the fact that her silence was a strategy for survival. Eventually she began to understand that: "By shutting my mind off like that I was actually using a kind of control and... I was making decisions." She also describes another kind of awareness: "There were moments when I could step outside myself and look at what was going on around me, moments when I made pictures in my mind of things I wanted, but I didn't know how to make them happen, what they

were really supposed to feel like, what they were related to, and what kind of satisfaction you were supposed to get." Although she was certainly still placing authority outside herself, she was by no means accepting the authority of those around her as the only possibility. By setting limits of her own, by questioning, by recognizing that she was exercising choice of a kind, by finding ways to take power within a context that in many ways acted to silence her and all women who lived within it, and by looking for better sources of authority, Yvonne signalled the presence of other ways of knowing that from the start took her beyond silence. Most noticeable is that despite her practice of dissociation in the presence of threat, Yvonne never lost touch completely with what her values were, and what she would say if she could speak. Rather than being a silent knower, Yvonne was a silenced knower. The processes involved in the growth of self-consciousness were never completely shut down, nor was the subjective inner voice. On the outside, Yvonne was silent, but on the inside, knowing was going on. Her stance was not only a way of knowing, it was also a way of being. She did her knowing silently largely because that was what was open to her. What was missing in her world was the "how to," the practical and realistic alternative to the way of life in which she was embedded. To find these alternatives, Yvonne began to look outside her world for knowledge. She decided to enroll in a school program where she believed she could and would receive knowledge.

Received knowers, while still listening to the voices of others and placing sources of knowlege and authority outside themselves,

experience themselves as being capable of comprehending and holding knowledge. This is something that Yvonne actively claims for herself for the first time when she returns to school at Alberta Vocational College in 1979. It is at that time that Yvonne reassesses her way of being a knower. Instead of describing herself as being unable to understand and retain knowledge, she describes herself as being able to learn and enjoying it: "I had a lot of fun learning because there was so much to find out about. This made learning a good time. I'm not really a fast learner. I have to put a lot of effort into it because learning really comes hard for me, but I even enjoy that part of it. I enjoyed hanging around the library and the resource centre... I even enjoyed finding out new twists and ways to do things that I thought I already knew." Of great interest to me is what prompted Yvonne to return to school and to make visible (or public) the epistemological and ontological shift from knowing silently to receiving knowledge.

Belenky et al. point to parenthood as the life experience that most often promotes this change (1986, p. 35). For Yvonne that was ~~not~~ the case. Yvonne made her move only after leaving her second husband. By that time she had given birth to three children, had lost one at birth and was raising two sons. Belenky et al. may however be pointing to something very important with their claim that parenthood effects a change in epistemological position, because it certainly changes who one is. Yvonne did not tell me about the birth and death of her daughter until after we had recorded all the things she remembered about her history. We were in fact having one of our last conversations together and had gotten to know each other. We were

meeting at Yvonne's house instead of the Bridges offices by that time, and sharing a meal when we met. We were wrapping up by reflecting back on what we had talked about, when I asked her what stood out for her in her life over the past few years. This is what she told me.

**Yvonne:** The first thing that comes to mind is that if my daughter had lived, I believe, I don't know for sure, but I say to myself really strongly that things would have turned out really different. (She goes on to elaborate.) I think that a responsibility like that so early in my life (she was 16 years old at the time) would probably have made things a lot different, especially with having a girl. I don't know why, who knows why, maybe I'm just making things up.

**Sibylle:** I think you would know. I think we know things about ourselves quite clearly sometimes. What do you think might have happened?

**Yvonne:** I might have stopped. I might have just had one child. I might have led a gentler life because I would have had her to look after, and I would have taken good care of her.

**Sibylle:** Do you think that losing her and grieving for her somehow contributed to what happened after?

**Yvonne:** It might have, I know it's been a real sore point, a point of pain in my life.

At this point Yvonne asked me to change the subject and talk about something else. She had not mentioned the loss of her daughter to anyone outside her family until that day and did not yet feel ready

to say anything more about it. I respected her request. I spent a great deal of time thinking about what she had been able to say and I wondered how her life might have been different had her daughter lived.

It is entirely possible that Yvonne would have assumed responsibility for herself and her daughter and in so doing moved from being subordinate to taking charge of her life much earlier. To take charge of her daughter's life, Yvonne would have had to take a stand against her mother, the authority figure that dominated her at that time. Yvonne's mother wanted Yvonne to give her daughter up for adoption and was putting immense pressure on Yvonne to sign the papers, but Yvonne believes that she would not have given her daughter up. If she could have followed through on this and found the ability to say no to her mother, her life may indeed have been different. Through learning to look after her daughter, Yvonne, like the women Belenky et al. describe, might also have discovered her ability to make choices for herself and become conscious of her ability to learn. Until she makes the move away from passive submission to the conditions of her life, Yvonne stays locked into a cycle of abuse, and the repeated back and forth pattern of good and bad in her life.

Even when she turns to learning, to receiving knowledge and to a connection in the community at Alberta Vocational College that is very much outside her living conditions, things do not in fact substantially change with regard to how she lives her life. At this point she moves outside the world as she knows it and searches for something else but the locus of authority as something that resides outside her

does not change and that keeps her locked in place for some time to come.

Yvonne describes her reasons for turning to education in the following way: "I felt that I needed to learn something and I decided to go to a school because I thought that I couldn't learn what I needed from my lifestyle or from just going out and working and coming home every day." At this time and for many more years, learning and knowing meant "receiving, retaining and returning the words of [academic] authorities" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 39). She said: "I thought that I needed more knowledge and more resources, and the only place I could find them was in school, in academic things." Knowing was taking in and giving back information that came from external sources.

She attended Alberta Vocational College, began at an unclassified grade level and worked her way through to a grade 12 graduation in two years. She began with studying math and then as she gained confidence, added physics, chemistry and biology, concentrating on the sciences, but also studying English. The experience proved to be of major importance in Yvonne's life because through it she began to think of herself as a person who could know things. But in many ways, knowledge and knowing were still very narrowly defined. Knowledge was an objective sum or entity of information about mostly school based materials as defined by the college curriculum. It could be obtained from authoritative sources and returned to them in kind. Knowing meant knowing facts about things; it did not yet include the self, even as a topic, something that could be known about, nor did it include the

self as an active source and agent of knowing. At Alberta Vocational College, what was constituted as knowledge and knowing had no connection to Yvonne's every day life. It was in fact completely separate from anything to do with that. Therefore, what happened at the college did not spill over into the rest of her life and did nothing to prompt her to question her way of being a knower. At school, the authorities were much more benign and encouraging than on the street, but they were still authorities and thereby supported the belief that the knower is separate from the known, which is the province of experts who have the power to accept or reject others' knowing. From that vantage point, Yvonne was unable to make the move to leave her world behind. Because authority still rested outside herself, so did power. Academic authorities, even though they were friendly and helpful, had the power to recognize or reject what she reproduced as knowledge. Men still had the power over everything else in her life. Her experiences at Alberta Vocational College did nothing to challenge either her way of knowing or her way of being. If anything, they confirmed it. For ten more years Yvonne remained in a dependent position.

During those years and sometimes even now, she was also attracted to what she calls a "different kind of learning," a kind of learning that is accompanied by an adrenalin rush because it involves skating on the edge of dangerous situations and observing marginal people and how they function. Again she is passive in her attitude to what she is studying. She is the observer. She takes it in, but does not participate, does not include herself. The difficulty seems to have

been that nowhere in her quest for learning and understanding did Yvonne experience herself as exposed to different perspectives on learning and authority. Belenky et al. (1986) observe that "In pluralistic and intellectually changing environments this way of thinking, [received knowing], quickly disappears." They also observe that under such conditions, it is "exceedingly rare for a[n individual] to continue looking outside the self for the source of knowledge" (p. 43). Yvonne says: "I was there [and I take 'there' to mean cognitively as well as physically] because it was what I was used to. It was a very familiar world, and I knew what to do there."

Although the received knower believes she can receive, retain and return knowledge she does not believe that she herself can be a source of knowledge. Things are either right or wrong, black or white, they are what they are. Yvonne echoes this when she says: "I had a very narrow view of people. I had everything categorized into 'bags'. I thought things were the way they were, that I couldn't change, and that I was stuck being the kind of person I was. I believed that it was because I was poor and that all poor people were stuck with our roles and ways of thinking... I was stuck in action-reaction. I never questioned. I assumed people were outlined by their role, that they were outlined by their position. I had them 'framed'. I was really scared of authority figures." Without the self as an active source and agent of knowing, "living what she thought" was still out of reach for Yvonne; she still had to live what others thought.

The shift to including herself as a source of knowledge and choice came in the courtroom in the spring of 1989. When I asked her

how she got from her life in Calgary to Victoria, she said: "I always say being scared got me out, but I think I always had the feeling I wanted to get out. I was really tired in my body and in my mind... there was no safe place anymore." Faced with graphic, concrete evidence that her perceptions about her world were indeed accurate, finding herself in the midst of a visceral experience of the actual implications of living in this way, she asked herself who am I, and who am I likely to become if I continue on? Her answer to herself was: "This is not me." It wasn't only a question of knowing herself, it was also a question of being herself. When she told herself "this is not me" and she acted on that knowledge, she began to look inside herself for knowledge and she became a person who could act out of knowing subjectively, and soon afterward a person who engaged in knowing procedurally and in connection with others.

Belenky et al. describe subjective knowers as making the epistemological move very much in the way that Yvonne did. Those women that they identified as "subjectivists" had taken steps to end negative relationships. They had begun to listen to and act upon the promptings of their inner voices, acting on behalf of self rather than denying self and living for and through others. Sometimes these moves are made rather suddenly with what appears, at least to others, to be little forethought or planning, as if such possibilities had not been entertained or contemplated before (pp. 76-78). I would contend that while the actual act takes place suddenly, the internal move towards it is made very gradually, often over a very long time period.

Yvonne describes her process as one that took many years: "I had to work my way towards it bit by bit. Through those years I had these shifts with right and wrong, back and forth, back and forth." Based in a morality of care and response which demanded that she put others before herself, experiencing knowledge as information which is received from authorities outside oneself, and seeing no alternatives for acting in other ways in the midst of what she lived, to do things differently took great courage. She describes the motivation to do this as coming from shock and fear: "I always say being scared got me out... you have to have something shock you out of it." The shock and fear activated Yvonne's inner voice so that it could speak loudly enough to be heard above the other voices which placed demands upon her and were directing her life. This inner voice spoke to her about her identity and her survival: "I sat there and considered: Would I ever go to that extent [killing and laughing at the death of another person], would I if I didn't make the break?... I still don't know up to this point if I had let myself go in that direction if that would have meant letting go of hope for anything else... I told myself this is not me." Yvonne left Calgary within six months of her experience in the courtroom.

Her move involved severing many personal ties. As well as signalling a shift in her knowing, it signalled a shift in what was possible morally. Belenky et al. (1986), drawing on Carol Gilligan's work, describe this as follows:

Women are drawn to the role of caretaker and nurturer, often putting their own needs at the bottom of the list, preceded by other people, husband and children. At the position of received knowledge, using the either/or thinking so characteristic of the position, women believe that "to get something for oneself" is abhorrent and selfish because others are bound to be deprived as a result.... For people operating within a response orientation, the initiation of actions on behalf of self signifies a transition into mature moral thought, a late-occurring developmental shift in which the self is included as an equal claimant in any moral decision. (p. 77).

But what was it exactly that made it possible for these shifts to take place? Yvonne identified shock and fear as the prime ingredients which set her process in motion. I wondered about this for a long time. It seems to me, that in order for Yvonne to see herself as apart and different from Herb and the gang, she needed to be together with them in a place where what they did and what they were about stood out as a stark and undesirable contrast against the values and behaviours of others in the room with them. Most of Yvonne's experiences with the people in her world took place in surroundings which offered no alternatives for what went on. In the courtroom there were others present, lawyers, witnesses, other people who could be seen to be judging the behaviours of Yvonne's friends in ways that made clear that they were against these actions and had no wish to align themselves in any way with Herb and the gang or their world. Could this, as well as Herb's laughing at pictures of the victim's bloody body, have been what led to the shock and the fear and the realization that Yvonne in no way wanted to be seen by anyone including herself as one of them, those who laughed? Is it possible that Yvonne was moved to action by the fact that she found herself looking at herself and her world from a vantage point and in a setting that placed her

outside her world while at the same time demonstrating other ways of taking up that world? Her self asserted itself in the statement: "This is not me." Like many women who are beginning to manifest their knowing subjectively, her move is an oppositional anti-authoritarian one (Belenky et al., 1986, pp. 68-75). In making it she opposes what was authority (the men in her life and the demands they placed upon her), and thereby claims authority for herself.

The shift in knowing and being that took place in the courtroom led quickly to concrete, outward signs of change in Yvonne's life. I think however, that it is important to note that this shift was not really a sudden one, not something that happened all at once, as I said earlier in this discussion. Yvonne's inner voice was not born in that moment in the courtroom; it had been present for years. What happened in the courtroom was that her knowing and her doing became connected. The voice that Yvonne calls "the good" became the voice that directed her action, but that voice had been speaking to Yvonne for a very long time. I heard it speaking every time she questioned her own actions and wrestled with questions of right and wrong, every time she kept herself from participating in behaviours that she couldn't and wouldn't countenance, every time she felt sick about the possibility that someone might be hurt, every time she ended a relationship that turned ugly, every time she kept drugs and drinking out of her home and every time she kept her children safe. That kind of knowing was present to her even when she was silenced. It was what reached out for more knowledge when she chose to go to school. It was what motivated the "different kind of learning" which moved her into

danger at times and prompted her to put "centering questions" to people in the underworld. The desire to build knowledge for herself by studying others and searching for an understanding that made sense to her in ways that helped her also to understand herself was strong in Yvonne for many years. What she had to work her way toward bit by bit was being able to act on what she knew from inside herself in such a way that she could prevent herself from being drawn back into old and familiar ways of being and old and familiar ways of seeing herself through the eyes of others. While authority rested outside herself, and her identity was bound up in how she was perceived and treated by those around her, especially the powerful men she targeted and "won" as partners, she was vulnerable to losing touch with the "good"—her inner self, her subjectivity.

In the conversation she described what happened: "I was only attracted to men who had power because that meant I got some of that power too. But at the same time, I was being treated like shit and explaining it to myself by looking at what was wrong with me. I was comparing myself to the other women around and telling myself that they were better looking, younger, smarter, putting all the problems back onto myself because I wasn't good enough. But then I started to look around and I noticed that lots of other men wanted to date me and that I was alright, I must be intelligent and pretty and all those things, and I got tired of being abused and started to think about getting out. It happened step by step. Going from one relationship to the next, still getting into bad relationships, but it was shorter each time." When I asked her if there had been an improvement of her

view of herself over time, she answered; "Oh yes, definitely! It was like I said, stay in the good longer, go back, but I'd stay out of the bad a lot longer each time, sit back and look at it for a while, wait... It went that way till I came here. This is living in the good." What Yvonne is doing when she is living in the good, is living out of her self, giving credence to herself as a source of the kind of knowledge upon which she can act.

As well as hearing the above as evidence of Yvonne knowing subjectively, I also hear it as evidence of her laying the necessary groundwork for knowing procedurally. Belenky et al. (1986) suggest that in order to begin to know procedurally, certain processes must be in place:

Women's emphasis on beginning to hear themselves think, while gathering observations through watching and listening, is the precursor to reflective and critical thought characteristic of the other positions we will discuss. During the period of subjective knowing, women lay down procedures for systematically learning and analyzing experience. But what seem distinctive in these women is that their strategies for knowing grow out of their embeddedness in human relationships and their alertness to the details of everyday life. Subjectivist women value what they see and hear around them and begin to feel a need to understand the people with whom they live and who impinge on their lives. Though they may be emotionally or intellectually isolated from others at this point in their history, they begin to actively analyze their past and current interactions with others. Although they may not yet have taken the next step of speaking out to others about their perceptions of the world, of acquiring public voice, they engage in self-expression by talking to themselves, talking to their diaries, and even, like one woman, talking to her cats about her inner secrets. These women are "gaining a voice" and a knowledge base from which they can investigate the world. (pp. 85-86)

Yvonne, in questioning, in staying out of the bad a lot longer each time and sitting back and looking for a while, in searching her

everyday life and her relationships for clues to understanding herself and her world, was hearing herself think. She was engaging in knowing subjectively and creating the conditions for knowing procedurally, and for constructing knowledge exactly as Belenky et al. describe it above. Through all that time, Yvonne kept a journal and made drawings. The poem she brought to read to me which appears in the conversation came from that journal. The voice that she was developing during that time became public at Bridges. When I asked her what facilitated her speaking out, Yvonne described it to me this way: "When I was at Bridges, I related to other people, and I heard you talk [in class] about the questions you asked yourself about yourself and your own life. I saw then that other people, teachers, were not immune and also had the same problems of abuse and thinking about how to come to terms with it. I used to think that every time poor people get up, they'll get slapped down. But now I see that it can get easier as you learn about yourself. It helped to work together with people who came from different lifestyles. I found it beneficial to be around people who could tell me all sorts of things about their lives and what they had been through. Through Life Skills I learned to put things into words and through being able to put into words what was true for me, I started to find it easier to look more and listen more and to understand more how I deal with things.... I was really scared of authority figures [in the past]. I didn't have enough words, I still don't have, but I have more. I can sort out right and wrong for myself now. I can sort it out in my head. People of authority can be wrong, at least for me." What happened at Bridges was that she received

confirmation that she was indeed both a source of knowledge and authority in her own life and that she could live what she thought. With that in place, Yvonne began to engage actively in knowing procedurally and constructing knowledge for herself.

The above statements provide excellent evidence that Yvonne was engaging in knowing procedurally. Procedural knowers are recognized as such by their ability to use a reasoned and reflective approach deliberately and systematically and by their ability to value, share and understand multiple interpretations which are dependent on different perspectives. The procedural knower is neither dependent on authorities like the received knower nor anti-authoritarian like the subjective knower. She is capable of enlisting the help of authorities while retaining the right to make up her own mind about what fits for her. She has confidence that she can learn whatever is required to help her know how to accomplish what she sets out to do. She is more patient than the subjective knower who relies so exclusively on her intuition. She is proud of being disciplined enough to follow through purposefully. The procedural knower has found her own voice in that she can articulate her own understandings and communicate them effectively to others, not only to herself. If she is a connected procedural knower as Yvonne is, she

builds on the subjectivist's conviction that the most trustworthy knowledge comes from personal experience rather than the pronouncements of authorities... [and] develop[s] procedures for gaining access to other people's knowledge.... Connected knowers know that they can only approximate other people's experiences and so can gain only limited access to their knowledge. But insofar as possible, they must act as connected rather than separate selves, seeing the other not in their own terms but in the other's terms. (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 115)

This is what Yvonne did.

At Bridges, Yvonne showed many signs of knowing procedurally and in connection with others. She became a group leader, one of only two that have emerged in nine groups. She found her public as well as her private voice when she took on the organization and chairing of group meetings and when she fought on her own behalf for the right to be sponsored by the Ministry of Social Services and Housing to join a therapy group to work on her recovery from sexual abuse. After Bridges, she went on first to further training and then to full-time permanent employment in a responsible position with the provincial government. Several of her statements serve to demonstrate her orientation as procedural: "The further along I get, the more I am able to rethink the past... I've learned to structure decision making and found that it doesn't hurt that much. It isn't as painful as I thought it would be, this personal disciplining... I learned ways to communicate with myself, not just other people. I don't mean that I just learned positive ways to talk to myself, I mean that I learned ways to get inside myself and to take actual steps to face the stuff I have to face." Her connectedness is evidenced in the following statement: "When we worked together at Bridges, we had a part in our own learning. Things were open, information and alternatives were offered but never imposed. We learned by talking with each other, and each of us could choose for herself."

In many ways the above statements also demonstrate that Yvonne had become an active agent in constructing what she knows. Engaging in the construction of knowledge or constructed knowing as Belenky et al. (1986) call it, is described by them as:

an effort to reclaim the self by attempting to integrate knowledge that [is] felt intuitively [as] personally important with knowledge that [is] learned from others.... Rather than extricating the self in the acquisition of knowledge, these women use themselves in rising to new ways of thinking. (pp. 134-135)

A basic insight of constructivist thought is that:

all knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known.... Ultimately constructivists understand that answers to all questions vary depending on the context in which they are asked and on the frame of reference of the person doing the asking. (pp. 137-138)

Yvonne says at one point: "The further along I get, the more I am able to rethink the past." Elsewhere she says: "Talking about it now makes me want to feel my way back and find out little points, little points that make up a decision." Her sense of herself changed dramatically while she was at Bridges and afterwards. She describes herself this way: "I've become more self-aware, not just aware of the people around me. I'm actually putting my needs and wants into words, and I can express them more freely... I started to understand why I respond the way I do in certain conditions and I began to notice that a lot of negative stuff was connected to familiar ways of doing things. That (makes) it possible for me to hold back and avoid old pitfalls." Her self understanding is now grounded in the knowledge that there is nothing fixed or absolute about her self or about the way she constructs that understanding. It is something that will continue to grow and change as she and her world grow and change. She now sees herself (and others) as always actively becoming, not as chained to particular concepts, frameworks or as she put it earlier, "bags." When we talked about that, I asked her to tell me how she felt about that realization. She said: "You know, it's like when you get

your freedom if you've been in jail, like I imagine it might be if you've been in jail and now, all of a sudden you're set free. It's like getting wings. I experience that now. It's not like going back and having to find something that is me and stay with it, it's like getting wings."

Yvonne felt that she had been set free from her past when she understood that she did not need to revisit it in order to find herself there as a fixed entity. Instead, she learned that she could return to it to look more deeply into how what has been might be affecting what could be. Rather than getting caught in the trap of asking, "Who am I?" and trying to find the answer in the discovery of an essential self locked into place by past history, Yvonne began to see herself as someone who could ask the questions "Who am I becoming? Who do I want to be?" She learned that the meanings and interpretations of her experiences are not given, carved in stone and not the province of others to determine for her. Constructs developed by others can certainly facilitate her self-understanding, but ultimately, these constructs or frameworks or means for recognizing and/or organizing experience have to resonate with her inner experience so that she can live out what she chooses. "I can sort it out in my head. People of authority can be wrong, (both in what they offer and what they say) at least for me." Yvonne got her wings when she could both construct her own knowledge and understandings, her own thinking, and live what she thought.

## Chapter Eight

Experience takes place only under a subtle structuring and rendering on the part of consciousness which weaves the world into a unity of meaning. (John Caputo, 1987)

### Coming to Terms

When I began this inquiry I wanted to know more about how people actually underwent change, not from a theoretical point of view, but in "real" life. I came up against an interesting paradox as I proceeded, because I found myself continually relying upon the theoretical to make the actual come to life. As Yvonne and I worked together, and I attended to what she shared with me and listened with care to what she told me, I found myself hearing with ears that were finely tuned to pick up certain cues in how she talked about her life experiences. Because I was so steeped in the structures of my training, I heard her story in terms of the constructs offered by Gilligan and Belenky et al. The words that she spoke took shape for me according to the emphasis I had learned from these works. When she spoke about good and bad and right and wrong I heard what she said in terms of Gilligan's perspectives on morality and organized my understanding accordingly. When she spoke about learning and knowing I listened to her words with ears alerted to hearing turns of phrase which were as similar as possible to those highlighted by Belenky et al. as evidence of the ways of knowing that they had distinguished and named. Each time I listened, my training helped me to bring forward out of the ground of Yvonne's experience the figure of a particular pattern or constellation which I was able to notice in the first place because I had constructs at the ready.

I was constantly being reminded that my own experience is subordinate to the symbolic processes that form my consciousness. My intention to learn from Yvonne and the understandings I formed were "always being guided beforehand by a preparatory grasp of what is to be understood" (Caputo, 1987, p. 52). By this I do not mean that the outcome of the understanding was outlined in advance; I mean that in advance of forming my understanding, what would count as meaningful was already decided. What structured my understanding again and again were the constructs I had chosen deliberately to help me identify, distinguish, differentiate and most of all name what I could recognize in Yvonne's experience.

In this study, I chose to be conscious of Yvonne's story in terms that preordained what I would hear. While these terms served me well, and while I experienced satisfaction at being able to effect a "fit" of constructs to experience, I also felt uneasy. I began to wonder if I had attenuated what I could have become conscious of by limiting what I listened for. I asked myself questions about what I might have learned if I had bracketed out for the time being, the explicit forestructures which I brought with me to the study in order to let the inherent structures in Yvonne's story arise. Realizing that it is impossible to come to anything with a tabula rasa, and that it is always the case that certain "implicit forestructures make explicit forestructures possible" (Caputo, 1987, p. 53), I became suspicious that I might have closed down the process of meaning making by imposing the explicit before I let the implicit rise. I had no quarrel with myself with regard to the importance of naming experience and

thereby making conscious action possible, but I did begin to question the way I had done this. I decided therefore to return to Yvonne's experience to see if I could gain more insight.

Yvonne had the experience of becoming aware of naming her actions with the help of conceptual constructs and experiencing intentionality in the midst of our conversation. It happened when we were discussing playing the game of getting the most powerful man (pp. 52-55). At first she spoke about the game as if it were all of a piece, something that she just did, not something she learned, not something that could be analyzed or done with deliberate awareness. When I asked her to notice that she had actually been using some very effective communication strategies, she became very interested to discover that she generated this knowledge out of her own experience and that she could choose to do these things intentionally elsewhere for ends other than playing the game for a man. As she realized this she said to me: "You boggle me! You've made me stumble!" I asked: "What did I make you stumble on?" She replied: "It's putting what I do into a form, a pattern I can use." At that moment she made the powerful discovery that what she does could be seen to have a pattern, a form, which when grasped, was available to be used consciously in other situations. This was an important discovery for Yvonne, but her discovery had implications for me as well.

It suggested to me that by helping my students to find ways to notice their own thinking and to think about their thinking (which is what Yvonne does when she "stumbles") I could assist them to become conscious of self and "get wings." For Yvonne, this involved what she

described as living what she thought. To live what one thinks, one has to be able first of all to hear one's own voice speaking and then one has to be able to make sense out of what one hears. Making sense involves theorizing, conceptualizing and constructing one's knowing. It means becoming conscious of the forms and patterns in one's own life. This is a powerful process, the strength of which was underlined for me by Yvonne, when I met with her to talk about it while writing the last part of this study. What follows is an excerpt from that conversation in which Yvonne gives an account of coming to her own terms.

**Sibylle:** What do you think helped you to change your life in the way that you did?

**Yvonne:** Learning, learning that I had potential and could be successful in my own terms.

**Sibylle:** So it was doing things in your own terms that was most important?

**Yvonne:** Yes. I didn't know before what my own terms were. I didn't know that I could say what I know and don't know, that I could say what I wanted or didn't want in my life. At Bridges I learned to use tools which made it possible for me to say what was going on for me, to know things about myself.

**Sibylle:** When I was thinking about this earlier today, and when I wrote about you in my thesis, I was wondering if all this started in the courtroom in Calgary, when you had an opportunity to see the

people you were living with in contrast to other people and you could make a comparison.

**Yvonne:** Yes. I've thought about this many times, and that moment forms a picture in my mind that I'll never forget. And that business of making comparisons, that's a recurring thing for me now. As soon as I could make a comparison, when I was able to be around people and see how they thought, and hear the reasoning for the things that they do, more things started making sense.

**Sibylle:** So what happens when you do this?

**Yvonne:** I can speak up, I can deal with things, even painful things, things that I think are not appropriate, that in the past I would have just made the best of or let go, or thought I had to take, I can do something about them now. I have in my mind now exactly the words I want to say and I can take control of a situation in a proactive not a reactive way.

**Sibylle:** So you know how to speak out, and you know what you think and feel about things?

**Yvonne:** Yes. I think that a lot of this has been due to finding out what I could do for myself, and with changing things that were a natural part of me and using them for a good purpose.

**Sibylle:** This idea of changing those things about yourself that were a natural part of you, can you tell me a bit more about that?

**Yvonne:** Well, before Bridges, before learning about all the different ways of understanding people and what I could do with that, I just did things, I wasn't aware of things, they just happened. After learning about the ways people could learn and know and do things, I

could do what I did on purpose, when I wanted to, because I decided to.

**Sibylle:** So doing it consciously, on purpose made a difference.

**Yvonne:** Yes. It meant that I could actually shape what I was doing, shape my world. I now know that I can do things because I choose to, not just because of circumstances, and I can move my skills around and use them to reshape my world and make it even better.

**Sibylle:** What is your world like now?

**Yvonne:** I feel quite comfortable with what I'm doing. I think the decisions I make now are really well thought out. I think that sometimes I can't articulate them all that well to someone else, but I can sit back and think about things for a couple of hours and see the patterns and the reasons and take charge of my own life.

**Sibylle:** Do you think that anyone could ever control you again?

**Yvonne:** No, I don't think so.

**Sibylle:** I don't think so either. I don't think they'd have a prayer.

**Yvonne:** No. I think that I'm quite comfortable with who I am now.

For Yvonne, having the tools to make conscious her own processes and to shape her world are of great importance, and of greatest importance is that these should come into play in her own terms. The tools she refers to are the different frameworks for forming understanding and action that she learned at Bridges and beyond. These have become for her the "preparatory grasp" which "make explicit experience possible" (Caputo, 1987, p. 53). Her "own terms" come from the personal control she wields over the constructs she uses and from

the recognition that it is she who shapes her world. If in the end, doing things in one's own terms is the most powerful part of all of this, the question which arises out of this is how to foster the experience of finding one's own terms.

Up to this point in my teaching and my research, I have been accustomed to beginning with well worked out constructs. I teach my students to use these as frames or lenses to organize and appropriate their experience. That is, I teach them to understand concepts and materials about human behaviour and communication first, and then we apply these to our experience, theirs and mine, much in the same way that I worked with Yvonne's story in this study. Together we learn to understand concepts in terms of our experience, proceeding very much in theory-to-practice mode. But if the most powerful and meaningful impact comes from learning that is anchored in one's own experience, and if the greatest sense of control over one's knowing and one's life comes from being able to shape and construct knowledge out of one's experience, then that experience itself might be where we could begin. We could ask ourselves, as we recounted our stories, "What did this or that mean?", questioning ourselves as we proceeded, and letting our implicit organizing structures surface before we attempted to introduce other theoretical frameworks. Certainly we could add the useful, well-worked-out constructs provided by others as we proceeded, thus expanding our range of possibilities and connecting ourselves to a community of scholars who are also interested in the process of coming to an understanding of self and world. But in beginning with ourselves and our own experience and learning to understand it in

terms of concepts which we ourselves had a part in creating and identifying, we would take up for ourselves the powerful process of naming. Perhaps by proceeding this way we could avoid the difficulty I found myself coming up against in this study.

Despite wanting to know about the nature of Yvonne's experience from her perspective, my commitment to an already chosen set of constructs meant that I hurried past the process of letting Yvonne's meanings arise in my effort to make sense. Having engaged immediately in what Max van Manen (1991) calls "systematical reflection"--reflection involving the use of existing theories to make sense of phenomena--I precluded the possibility of engaging in what he calls the "pedagogical moment," which is what I told myself I had set out to do.

Living the pedagogical moment is a total personal response or thoughtful action in a particular situation. Thoughtful action differs from reflective action in that it is thinkingly attentive to what it does, without reflectively distancing itself from the situation.... The pedagogical moment calls for action that is both thoughtful and 'thoughtless'. (van Manen, 1991, pp. 117-118)

In other words, in refraining for the moment from analysis (i.e., in being "thought-less") one can attend in a way that leaves the structuring of the situation to the person living it. With this kind of holding back, space is created for meanings to arise which can then be reflected upon so that the relationship between thought and action can be generated from experience, rather than imposed by external frameworks. My own understanding of this possibility emerged only slowly, not because van Manen's notions were foreign to me until I had nearly finished this study, but because in so many ways, my own

grasping for meaning was until now, rather more unselfconscious and theory-laden than I realized. It was in the actual doing of this inquiry that I came up against myself in action and like Yvonne "stumbled" upon my own patterns and forms. In the end, I found myself circling back to the beginning of this inquiry and wondering what could have happened if Yvonne and I together had laid open her story in a way that had us both discover her structures and frameworks in action, before we altered her experience with the insights of others.

What might have been is an abstraction  
Remaining a perpetual possibility  
Only in a world of speculation....  
(T.S. Eliot, 1959)

## EPILOGUE

We reflect ... on the form of our theorizing, in order to come to a more self-reflective grasp of the nature of knowledge, how knowledge functions in action and how it is applied to our active understanding of our practical action.  
(Max van Manen, 1991)

### The Implications of What I Learned for My Praxis

#### as Researcher and Teacher

In this inquiry, my theorizing took the form of beginning with well-worked-out constructs and applying these to the data which Yvonne's story provided in order to construct a meaningful explanation of what had happened to her. While this way of proceeding made it possible to fashion a coherent and thoughtful explication of how Yvonne's understanding of herself and her lifeworld changed, it relied upon the imposition of external and *a priori* constructs onto Yvonne's experience in order to explain it. This left me with the questions: What was it that Yvonne herself brought to her experience? What were the "implicit and mute factors" (Caputo, 1987, p. 52) which entered into the constitution of her experience? Given that to form any understanding, I must be "guided beforehand by a preparatory grasp of what is to be understood" (p.52), and acknowledging that without such a preparatory grasp I would not be able to take hold of what I was attempting to understand, what is it possible to do as a researcher that allows understanding without pre-empting the structure that is already present in experience, by prematurely overlaying constructs external to the experience?

To get at the structure that is already present, I must be willing first of all, to uncover and bring to awareness the inherent

structures in my own preparatory grasp. If as a researcher, I approach the experience of another with a willingness to be aware of the constructions that I myself bring to the experience, it becomes possible to stand outside those constructs, that is, to bracket them, and thereby let the subject provide the meaning of what is being examined. By being continually willing to be aware of my own experience of another person's experience, I can move a long way toward preventing my own intrusion into that experience. I can then allow myself the phenomenological assumption that it is possible to describe experience and uncover its structure. Being ever vigilant of my constructs, I can then enter into a dialogue with another subject. While inquiring further into shifts in understanding of self and lifeworld, I might ask: What is at work in forming an understanding of these shifts? What is it like to experience shifts in one's understanding of oneself and one's lifeworld? What is it to "be" a researcher inquiring into such shifts? What is the meaning of attempting to come to an understanding of such things? Awareness and questions of this sort provide openings for the participants in the dialogue to reflect upon their experience. The question that remains, however, is this: If I have, as it were, excavated my own constructs in order to bring them to consciousness, and so has my subject, do our constructs now become **a priori** to a further examination, or do they contribute to our understanding of what is structuring experience? At what point does any structure, which was articulated because it arose out of a quest to lay bare the themes and essences in an experience, become **a priori** and therefore no longer admissible as a way of

constituting experience because it contributes to the structuring of what is inherent?

When engaged in this kind of research process, what one produces will not be final outcomes, but textual reflections on the lived experience one is studying. When proceeding in this way, one cuts loose from the notion that any construct, whether it is one that one brings to experience, or whether it is one that arises out of experience, is any more than a way of framing experience for the moment. Further, one sets aside, for the moment at least, the quest for a conclusion or solution in favour of questioning the being, thinking and doing of what is being experienced. This way of entering into research allows us to participate with awareness in the constant and ongoing process of theorizing experience, which, as it turns out, requires some framing in the moment.

Such an approach to inquiry can also be used by teachers with students, particularly adult students. Whether I am working with students at the Bridges Project as I was when I did this study, or I am working with university students who wish to become Child and Youth Care practitioners as I am now doing, I can expand my practice to include their participation in questioning what it means to be doing what they are doing. In my work with Yvonne, some of the most powerful moments of learning came, not when she had appropriated a particular construct to her experience, but when she reflected on her ways of being and doing in her everyday life and "stumbled" upon herself in acting and giving form and pattern to her action. That self-reflective turning back upon experience made her knowing concrete and actual in a

subjective, lived way. For example, up to the point in our conversation when she notices herself in the act of pacing, she had known the concept of "pacing" as a name one gives to the act of non-verbally creating common ground by matching one's gestures, postures, voice tone and use of language to the individual with whom one is communicating. She knew pacing as an academic term and as information she had received in class. When she experienced herself in the act of pacing, in addition to being an academic term, pacing became a way of being in the world. When she recognized that she was doing something all along that had form and pattern and could be repeated at will in any communicative condition, pacing became hers to do consciously and purposefully. In that moment a shift, a change occurred in Yvonne.

As a teacher, I am concerned with facilitating such shifts, I am involved with encouraging and fostering understanding. If I can facilitate the kind of understanding that Yvonne experienced in the course of this inquiry, by expanding my practice to engage students to research their own experience in order to come up against themselves in action, then I will have gained much from the process of doing this study.

Notes

1. This is a synthesis of material handed out at the Belenky workshop presented by Mary F. Belenky, Lynne A. Bond, Toni C. Monsey, and Jacqueline S. Weinstock, at Victoria, BC, 1991, and the ideas presented on Women's Ways of Knowing and my own understanding of this material.

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VITA

Surname: ARTZ Given Names: Sibylle Talmon-Gros

Place of Birth: Stuttgart, Germany Date of Birth: August 1949

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria 1980-1992

Degrees Awarded:

B.A. University of Victoria 1984

Honours and Awards:

President's Scholarship 1982 and 1983

Special Graduate Fellowship 1984-85

University of Victoria Fellowship 1985-86

Publications:

Echoing Words. In T.T. Aoki (Ed.), Voices of Teaching, Vol. 1 (1990), Vancouver, BC, B.C.T.R. Print Shop.

Teaching for Reflection: Being Reflective. With A.A. Oberg, in H. Mumby & T. Russell (Eds.), Teachers and Teaching: From Classroom to Reflection (in press). Kingston, Ontario: Queens University Press.

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(Signature) /

SIBYLLE TALMON-GROS ARTZ

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