

THE UNENCUMBERED MOMENT AND LIFE CHANGE

by

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Supervisor: Dr. Sibylle Artz

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an initial examination of the experience of what is termed here the “unencumbered moment” of nine research participants (four males and five females). The unencumbered moment was initially defined as a life changing moment of clarity when one’s foundational beliefs about self and world shift completely and one commits to take actions to change one’s life in order to save it. The action taken to change one’s life is profound, positive, and irreversible and brings a reprioritizing of how the self and the world are perceived (second-order change). In order to investigate the unencumbered moment, the literature that speaks to insight, discovery, problems solving and second order change was reviewed and a qualitative approach was used to uncover the process that leads to the unencumbered moment and its aftermath.

This study revealed that the unencumbered moment is not one moment in time, but an emergent process. It appears that the final foundational shift in one’s beliefs and in one’s self perceptions is perhaps the last step in a process that begins in the participant’s persisting in pursuing a way out of the pain and chaos that they were in. While the participants in this study persisted in seeking solutions to their problems, paradoxically, they also resisted changing their approaches to dealing with their problems and ignored what could have been helpful advice from others. It was only when the participants hit bottom, that is, reached a level of emotional pain that they could not endure, that they found clarity and the will to change.

In that moment of clarity -- an unencumbered moment -- the participants all made immediate changes in their lives that made them feel emotionally stronger. But this does

not appear to be a once and for all experience as was expected. Although each participant did make enormous changes after the first unencumbered moment, they were not yet completely unencumbered in how they went on to live the next phase of their lives. Other than the youngest of the nine participants, the participants describe themselves as continuing on in new ways, only to encounter further obstacles, which they persisted in trying to deal with only to find themselves again hitting bottom, then experiencing another unencumbered moment, and regaining clarity, making further changes and so forth. This process repeats and with each change comes a renewed strength and hope until an unencumbered moment is reached when the foundational shift that began with the first unencumbered moment appears to be complete. It may be, that rather than there being one unencumbered moment when a major life shift is completed and changes are made all at once, people (especially people who begin their lives “encumbered” by pain, chaos, loneliness, alienation, abuse, cruelty and very little in the way of help and nurturing) go through a process of “unencumbering.” This process includes unencumbered moments that are like break away moments during which they can see their way to a different way of being and living. Over time, these moments contribute to a complete foundational shift in the way they experience themselves, others and the world, a shift that at some point feels complete but may always be open-ended.

Supervisor: Dr. Sibylle Artz, (Department of Child and Youth Care).

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Life,

the totality of your being, is progressive throughout;
and its early stages are but preparatory to its later development

(Stainton Moses, 1962, p. 198)

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Before I begin to discuss my research questions, I feel it is pertinent that I make certain personal statements to assist the reader in understanding the focus and context of this research project. In order to orient the reader to the context that prompted me to undertake this research, I will share my own story to show the connection between my story and the reasons why I undertook this research project.

From the time when I was very young, I, like most people, had to make adaptations to the events that happened and continue to happen in my life. The adaptations I made in childhood ultimately set in place a pattern of personal behavior and beliefs that made my life course and direction clear to me. When I was young, I believe these adaptations to my life events and circumstances were made strictly on an instinctual level. Eventually these adaptations and the resulting behavior and beliefs not only promoted, but, reinforced my feelings that the other members of my family of origin did not want me to be a part of the family unit. Although my perceptions of not being wanted were not challenged at that time, I could without hesitation provide to myself all the evidence I needed to rationalize not only my behavior but my core beliefs that I was not wanted, unlovable, and that I was not meant to be part of a family unit. I believed my perceptions to be my facts, proof, and justification for my deviant and innovative behavior that, I believe, started in childhood and lasted into my adult years. My beliefs were not challenged at their core until I experienced what I describe as an “unencumbered moment,” a moment that I have defined as that moment of clarity when one’s foundational beliefs about self and world shift completely and one commits to take actions to change one’s life in order to save it. For the reader to understand how I

came to this moment, the reader must first have a historical account of what my perceptions *were* of my life as a young child and the events that led me to experience my unencumbered moment.

As an adult I can look back on my life and I see my perspective is informed by my maturity and I recognize that how I see myself and my life experiences now is not the way I saw things then. When I was young, I believe my decisions were made strictly on an instinctually level specifically addressing the lack of physical safety I felt living within my family of origin. For the first years of my life I lived off and on again with a father who was a practicing alcoholic. Trying to love and understand an alcoholic is a near impossible feat for many adults and completely impossible for a young child. Because of my inability to understand how to live my life in a safe environment with an alcoholic parent, I eventually began to internalize many of the problems within our family as being my fault.

I remember thinking to myself that if only I were a better son, then maybe my father would not hate me so much, hit me so often, yell at me so loudly, and abandon me emotionally and physically whenever he became angry. I also had many good times growing up, but it seems that it is easier for me to remember those highly charged emotional and traumatic times when it felt like my life was coming to an end because of my high levels of fear and my feelings of being emotionally abandoned. It was during those times, when I experienced the high levels of fear, that I would adapt and modify my environment or change my behavior in my attempt to make sense of my world and that would allow me to feel safer in an unsafe environment. One example of my adapting to a situation follows.

When my father would come home drunk I would run upstairs and hide in my bedroom. I remember hiding under my bed or in the wardrobe that acted as a closet in my bedroom. I was out of sight from everyone but I could still hear everything that occurred in our house. The yelling and arguing between my mother and father and the resulting noises that I could not understand, led me to investigate an interaction between my mother and father one night when he came home intoxicated. When I saw what I saw and came to an understanding of what the noises were that had baffled me for so long, the time came when I no longer hid in my room when my father came home drunk. His yelling scared me tremendously and when he hit my mother I knew that I could no longer hide and that I had to protect my mother. During one such incident I attacked him, hitting and biting him on the leg. I paid a high price for my actions because my father exercised his superior physical strength and personal power by using immediate and severe corporal punishment for my transgressions against his authority.

Regardless of the amount of physical and verbal abuse I had to endure over that period of my life, I always felt better inside knowing that I did something to change my life situation and to, at least, attempt to alter my living environment. From that time to the present, I seldom have the flight response to stress or anxiety but rather I stand and prepare for the fight that I perceive is at hand. In retrospect, it is now clear to me that those moments of high fear and anxiety allowed me to adapt to my environment through what I have named instinctual survival moments. During this earlier period of my life I lacked the necessary cognitive processes to understand the events happening to me so I reacted in the only way possible, I adapted to the my life circumstances. That, in turn, helped to promote my feelings of safety and/or having some measure of self-satisfaction

that I had made my own spot in my family unit.

I was the middle child of three children and the only male. My older sister suffered from a genetic ailment that would on occasion make her so ill that she had to be taken to a hospital for treatment. During those times when she had to go to a hospital my parents would escort her and my younger sister to a hospital, while I was expected to stay home and wait for their return. I do not remember a time when I accompanied my family to a hospital when my sister was ill and needed medical treatment. My younger sister went to the hospital with my mother because she was the baby of the family and could not be left alone. My older sister went to the hospital because she was the person who was sick and who needed medical treatment. However, I remember being told that I was too old to go, or there was nothing wrong with me, or I was healthy so go outside and play and we will be back later, or there is no room for me in the car, or I would be better off staying home because there was nothing at the hospital for a young healthy boy to do.

During the day, when the rest of my family took my sister to the hospital for treatment I would go into the backyard and climb the tall maple tree that stood in the back corner of our yard. Once at the top of that maple tree I could see the hospital only a couple of blocks away. I remember sitting on the highest branches of that maple tree feeling alone and wondering why no one wanted me. I again thought that if I were a better son, a better child, then, I would be included when the family left the home. I did not know it at the time, but this was my way of staying connected to my family during these difficult times.

Because of my not being allowed to accompany the family during those trips to the hospital I adapted to my life circumstances and events so that within myself I could

make sense of why I perceived that I was not wanted and that I was being abandoned physically and emotionally. I shifted my emotions within myself, and that allowed me to come to terms with my feelings of abandonment. In my process of adapting to my life situations I came to understand that it was not okay for me to be with other people. Because of this understanding there came a time when I no longer felt the hurt and loneliness of being left behind, or the guilt and frustration of not being a better person. Instead I felt anger, and over time my anger turned to rage. In the beginning stages of my life, in those early years of my childhood, I would turn my rage inward. Unbeknownst to me, at this young age I “fixed” a family problem. In other words, I knew I was not getting what I needed physically and emotionally from my family in the way that I thought I needed it. By turning my rage inward, I allowed my family members to believe that the family unit was doing okay even though I sensed I was dying inside every time I was left behind on family outings. At that time I had no understanding of how my life had gotten this way or even that this was not the way life was meant to be. I could not have altered my situation since relying on my family was directly linked to my survival. Therefore, I could not and would not have challenged what happened to me or what I thought was happening to me because I had no understanding of how things should have been. Things within the family dynamics were constantly changing for me but this “was” my life and as a child I adapted to my feelings, my belief system and my way of being. In other words, there was no way I could have changed this adapting process because it was gradual, happening over years and it was my perception of how others thought and felt about me.

As I entered my teenage years I carried my belief system and my behavior into

how I interacted with people both inside and outside of my world. However, a major emotional and behavioral change took place for me. As stated earlier, during my younger years my rage was turned inward most of the time. I continued to gain evidence through my life experiences that I was not lovable and that I was not meant to be with others but in my teen years I tapped into the rage, and rather than sending it inward, I sent it outward toward others more often although I continued to hold onto my self-loathing.

As I understand myself today, I believe, that how I interacted with people during my childhood and teen years, especially how I interacted with adults, was based almost solely on the high degree of rage I held against virtually everything and everyone including myself. I believed adults were not and could not be trusted. The verification for this truth was based on the performance of my natural father and my immediate family members. Therefore, I learned to keep my feelings, activities, and needs hidden under a covert cloak and kept myself secret from everyone. By keeping myself detached from everyone and everything I was able to justify what I did and how I felt by rationalizing that this was the only method I had to keep myself feeling safe and that I was lovable at least by me.

Since my actions and feelings were covert it meant I was able to manage my life within a set of boundaries that I set for myself based on my needs. I did not necessarily follow the rules that govern acceptable social behavior because those rules did not always allow me to fulfill my emotional or physical need to be lovable and to belong. Although I did not understand it at the time, my purpose in life was to survive. To that end, I would go anywhere or do anything to protect my physical and/or emotional well being, regardless of the consequences to me or others. For me, it stood to reason that my

emotional states directly reflected the instability and unsafe conditions that were the state of my physical world. However, both worlds were so heavily masked in secrecy that few knew what I was doing most of the time and what I was feeling all of the time. It was imperative for my safety to keep myself hidden from the world and not let anyone know what I was feeling because I did not believe that anyone really cared about me and that no one cared enough to listen to me. I maintained the belief that adults could not be trusted. I also could not confide in my friends about how I was feeling because the showing of any emotion other than anger or the “black” emotions was linked to personal weakness within my peer group.

Showing hurt or pain meant acknowledging that there was a crack in the armour and this meant I was vulnerable, which would leave me open to attack by anyone within or outside my peer group. My personal safety demanded that I act within the norms and standards of my peer group. It was these self-destructive rationalizations and justifications that “forced” me to begin using drugs at the age of twelve years. I say “forced” because, even though I had an element of choice to first pick up the drug, prepare it, and inject it, the feelings I was experiencing inside me at that age were so hurtful, fearful, lonely, angry, and confused that I could not hope to sort them out inside my head and heart by myself. I just wanted the pain and feelings within me to stop at any cost, so when drugs were offered, I accepted based strictly on the fact that I felt I was in a no win, life or death situation. To my way of thinking, either the emotional turmoil I was feeling had to stop or I would surely die. It was during one such spiral of emotion that I experienced a moment of clarity in a drug induced stupor.

I had been drinking alcohol and taking drugs for an extended period of time and I

was so intoxicated that I could not move my physical body. I believed I was at death's door. I could think clearly despite the alcohol and the drugs and I knew in an instant that if I did not stop taking drugs and drinking alcohol that I would die. For me, there was no doubt about this fact and it became more of a matter of when I would die as opposed to whether or not I would die. I knew that the person getting so high was not me and that I had to take action to save my life before it was too late. I had to take better care of myself and stop using drugs and alcohol to numb the emotional pain I felt inside of me. But even my knowing that my death was imminent was not sufficient to deter or alter my substance misusing behavior.

My addictive substance abusing dramatic behavior allowed me to believe that my experiences of living through drugs and alcohol were promoting feelings within me of being truly alive. For most of my life I was the thrill-seeker who actively searched out or manipulated scenarios which would allow me to continuously put myself into life or death situations so I could feel the exhilaration of what I had adapted my life to be, that moment when my life could end. I would drink the most alcohol, do the most drugs, drive motorcycles and cars the fastest, and take more risks than anyone else in my group of associates to try to prove to myself and others that life only began once one was standing on the razor's edge between life and death. I lived life by the motto "*live hard, die fast.*" Because of this life philosophy, others I came into contact with believed me to be emotionally unbalanced and an extremely dangerous person to be around.

Since people believed me to be a danger to myself and others, I spent a lot of time alone creating and acting out the drama that was my life by elevating as many of my life situations as possible into scenarios where I had to make decisions in what I perceived to

be life or death situations. Being alone only furthered the feelings of hatred that allowed me to create even more perceived life or death situations, all the while fostering and giving credence to my feelings that I was a danger to myself and others. To override the feelings of hatred and loneliness, I would drink more alcohol and take more drugs. This cycle of thoughts, feelings, actions led me to the most important time of my life when I would experience an unencumbered moment that changed my life forever.

Although I knew for some time that my choice was simple, continue to drink alcohol and do drugs and die, or get straight and live, and people had been telling me that I was like my father, that I drank too much alcohol, that I was too violent, that I would never amount to anything, that I was too dangerous to be around, and that I would spend the rest of my life in jail, acting on this knowledge was something that eluded me for years. I wanted to change but I wanted to change my life on my terms and not live to the expectations of others. I wanted freedom from my emotional pain but did not know how to achieve my goal. My life experiences continued to provide me with the evidence that I was unlovable and not meant to be with others.

One night while using cocaine and drinking heavily, I arrived home to an empty house. The woman I was living with at the time had taken our children and left the home. I went to the basement where I continued to use cocaine and drink alcohol. While I was in the basement that night, I periodically heard noises coming from the upper levels of the house. In my drug and alcohol induced condition it was my belief that someone had entered the house. I made several unsuccessful attempts at communicating with the noise I believed to be a person. After one unsuccessful attempt at communication I flew into a violent rage. Feeling my safety was in jeopardy I loaded a shotgun and conducted a

search of the upper levels of the house for the person I believed was there but refusing to acknowledge me. After searching the house and finding no one, I went back to the basement where I continued my use of drugs and alcohol. A short time later, I again heard a similar noise coming from upstairs and I instantly flew into a vicious and violent rage. At one point I remember standing at the bottom of the basement staircase, pointing a loaded shotgun up the stairs, and yelling to the person that I was in the basement. Standing there I fully expected someone to come around the corner to the top of the stairs. Had someone come to the top of the basement stairs that night I have no doubt in my mind that in my condition of being drunk and high and feeling unsafe that I would have shot that person. Fortunately for me, no one came to the top of the staircase. After waiting several minutes I made the decision to return to the recreation room and continue my misuse of alcohol and drugs. Once again I heard a noise and I again flew into a violent rage. I discharged the shotgun in the basement shooting a hole in the wall, through the furnace room door and hitting a set of drums that were set up in the corner of the basement. I again went upstairs to search for the person I believed to be in the house. While upstairs I heard the grandfather clock chime announcing the time. I went back downstairs to the basement and recognized that the sounds I thought were someone in the house were the sounds of the grandfather clock chiming in the front hallway. With this knowledge I relaxed somewhat and continued to use drugs and drink alcohol late into the night.

The next morning I awoke to the sound of the front doorbell. When I opened the front door of the house I found my mother standing there. I asked her why she was at my home so early in the morning and was told that I called her at 4:30 a.m. telling her I was

suffering from an addiction to cocaine and alcohol. Because of that information she and my step-father had come to my home to get me the help I had asked for during the course of that conversation. I refused to acknowledge to myself or my mother that I had made such a telephone call. My mother entered the house and as my mother advanced toward me, I began backing away from her and thinking that I would not have done such a thing as admitting to having a substance abuse problem. The confusion in my thinking and my confusion in my feelings quickly gave way to clearer thoughts and more dangerous feelings.

For years I lived my life through the basic premise that I have no choice but to “play the cards” I have been dealt. Therefore, I used every means of violence, drug abuse, alcoholism, alienation of others and self to reinforce my position that I am right in my approach to life, regardless of the consequences. This became a type of dysfunctional game for me where I would push others away from me to ensure that I was alone so I could further reinforce my belief that I was meant not to be with others and that no one truly cared about me. The evidence that my life philosophy was true for me was in the reality that I was living my life alone. This circular type of reasoning reinforced my underlying beliefs and allowed me to maintain my repetitive behavior that I must prove to others that I am right. Over the years, people tried to connect with me and tried to get through to me on an emotional level but I had become so skilled at protecting my core belief that no one cared that it was impossible for anyone to touch the parts of me that were caring and affectionate.

As my mother began walking toward me my mind quickly filled with anger and the rage consumed my whole being. I gave serious consideration to thoughts of using

extreme violence against my mother to put an end to this interaction and force her to leave me alone. As my mother continued her advance toward me, my feelings of rage changed to guilt. I knew that if I pushed the confrontation to a physical level that I would be successful in causing the physical damage I had contemplated and I would be successful in pushing her away from me both, emotionally and physically. Then, guilt invaded my thinking and feeling because I knew that I would be fighting an opponent who would not be able to withstand the onslaught of my attack. It was at this point that I saw my mother as my mother and not as my opponent. I was able to look into her eyes and saw that this time she had no intention of letting me force her into backing away or leaving me alone like what usually happened when I used foul language or threatened violence. My guilt subsided and feelings of confusion came to me because I knew that I could not use violence to keep me safe because I did not have an opponent to fight and all my usual techniques that I used to push people away from me were not working with my mother this time. I found myself in a spot of desperation inside my mind of having to come face-to-face with the knowing that all my past strategies for keeping me safe by pushing people away were no longer effective in this circumstance. I knew that if I wanted to maintain my current lifestyle that I had the choice of pushing myself to become so violent toward others that I would leave no choice but for my parents to abandon their ideas of wanting and trying to help me. I could have made the choice to continue to be alone and miserable.

As my mother continued to advance toward me, talking to me in a soft voice and without taking her eyes off of mine, my feelings changed from thoughts of desperation to being consumed with a profound sense of sadness at being alone all my life and not being

worthy to be with others. My feelings of sadness gave way to feelings of hope as my mother extended her hand to take mine. My unencumbered moment came when I saw that the problem of my life was the self-imposed loneliness and unworthiness and that the solution to change my life was to reach out and take my mother's hand. When I dropped my defensive posturing all the emotion I had been feeling subsided until I was in a state of calm and complete inner silence, unencumbered by the usual constant barrage of negative internal messages fueled by my emotional self. It was in this moment of complete and utter silence that I allowed my mother to touch me, in that instant, I knew that I was tired of fighting, tired of being alone, tired of being lonely, and tired of trying to prove that I was worthy. In that instant, I accepted that my mother loved me, truly loved me and that I was never really alone. In that instant, I was able to connect with the anguish of being alone. I knew that I had lived my life to that moment under the false premise that I was not lovable because here was someone who loved me enough to put her physical and emotional well-being on the line in her attempt to prove that her love was true.

The anguish of living my life with the belief that no one cared for me, the pain of living my life accepting a childhood belief that adults could not be trusted and that I was meant to be alone was washed away as I allowed her hand to reach through my veil of anguish, pain, and defensiveness. In that moment, I understood for the first time that she really cared about me and that for the first time in my life I did not have to be alone. In that instant, I gave up drugs and alcohol and made positive second-order life change by accepting my mother's help, love, caring, understanding, and compassion. My parents assisted me in my efforts to get into a detoxification center and afterwards a treatment

center that dealt with substance abuse issues. To this day I have no recollection of placing that telephone call that initiated all of this change.

I call this time my “unencumbered moment” because it was at that moment, in an instant, that I re-evaluated my feelings and priorities, altered my belief system and made important, enduring and irreversible second-order life changes, that is, I literally changed how I lived, how I saw myself, my actions, and my view of my world. For me, during this moment, I hit an emotional bottom where self-preservation rose to the surface in a different way than the fight mode I had so come to rely upon.

Several years ago, I realized that my experience of my unencumbered moment changed how I see the world and how and what I know. In other words, the way I know and saw events and things was different before and after my experience of my unencumbered moment. During the times of my emotional and physical struggles prior to my unencumbered moment, my knowing seemed to be *disconnected*, in that, I allowed my life to drag me along for the ride. I was not living but surviving. I now see that I recognized my life problems and understood how that problem effected my life, but I was not yet viscerally connected to the information in such a way that it would have compelled me to change. I was an observer of my own experience, not an actor. When I was ready to act, my knowing became *connected*, that is, I knew that I had been living a life based on a misperception and that all my efforts to prove myself right did so at the cost of my own emotional and physical well-being. However, I needed to be right to justify my belief system and so I attempted to force others into believing in me. In noting the differences in how I know and act, prior and post my experience of my unencumbered moment I wonder: What are the conditions necessary that allow someone to experience

the unencumbered moment that leads to connected knowing and with it active change?”

I have come to understand that one lives life following one's beliefs until something or someone challenges those beliefs at a core level that pushes us to reconnect with the feelings associated with having to adopt those beliefs to begin with. It was during childhood that I experienced myself as having no choice but to make sense of my circumstances by adopting a belief system that verified my experience. The experience of an unencumbered moment allowed me to understand my life and redefine it in such a way that I was able to modify my environment, change my behavior, the way I think, feel, and the way I perceived my world and others around me. As a result of my experience in that unencumbered moment, I am focused on the actions I need to perform on a daily basis to ensure my survival in less destructive methods.

Because the unencumbered moment was so central to my ability to make second-order changes in my life, and because knowledge about such an experience could assist all of us who work daily with people who struggle with making such changes, I set out to learn more about the unencumbered moment. I began my inquiry by engaging in an in-depth literature search for information about previous work on unencumbered moments. I designed a qualitative study to gather information on the experiences of others who had an unencumbered moment and analyzed the stories of these people. The results of my literature search are summarized in Chapter II. The methodology is described in Chapter III. Chapters IV through XII are the life stories of the research participants. In Chapter XIII the Findings of this research project are presented. The Integration of Findings is presented in Chapter XIV. Finally, References are listed in alphabetical order and Appendixes A and B are the consent form and the research questions used for this study.

CHAPTER II-LITERATURE REVIEW

The experience of the “click” [or the “*unencumbered moment*” italics added] whether with regard to a trivial or crucial matter, is typically very sudden, occurring at the most unexpected moments. Even when the new idea is felt to be long overdue, the moment of its “coming” cannot be anticipated. It suddenly dawned upon me, I suddenly realized, or it occurred to me out of the blue, are phrases commonly used to describe such revelations or insights (Eifermann, 1989, p. 115).

Intrigued by the Mystery

The focus of my research is to explore the conditions that promote the unencumbered moment, that is, the process that leads to and includes the moment of new understanding and positive second-order life change, the moment when one is emotionally, spiritually, and physically “*open*” to experience personal learning at a deeper and clearer level of understanding. As previously stated the unencumbered moment *is the moment of clarity when one commits to change one’s life in order to save it.*

I searched the literature for an explanation of or what brings on the “unencumbered moment,” by accessing the library data bases at the University of British Columbia, University of Victoria, Simon Fraser University and the Vancouver Public Library. Psychlit, Soclit, ERIK, Social Sciences, and Humanities, and published and unpublished dissertations were the primary sources for obtaining the information I used to form my literature review. Because the keywords “unencumbered moment” led me to no previous literature, I adjusted my search to include the following keywords: aha,

eureka, epiphany, self-learning, spontaneous learning, insight, change, self-awareness, and second-order change. I also conducted an internet Goggle search using the same keywords.

Research Challenges

Several challenges came to the forefront in conducting this literature review. First and foremost, is the lack of a universal term in the English language to characterize the experience of having what appears to be an instantaneous life changing moment of clear and profound thought. The construct that comes closest to what I call the unencumbered moment is the notion of second-order change. Second-order change is characterized by deciding – or being forced – to do something significantly or fundamentally different from what we have done before (Eifermann, 1989). Second-order change is irreversible and once the second-order change process begins it is impossible to return to previous ways of acting and/or being. The existence of second-order change is acknowledged and described by, for example, Eifermann, 1989, Lyddon, 1990, Cavanaugh, 1994, and Butler, 2000, and is considered by these scholars to be paramount in the process of changing the self at a deep emotional level (as opposed to changes done through the assimilation of “*surface*,” that is, less emotion invoking information), and increasing self knowledge at a deep intimate level. What is not known or is not well documented in the literature is the mystery of the how and why second-order change occurs and an explanation of what creates the unencumbered moment leading to second-order change (Lyddon, 1990).

Definitions of the Research

The literature search revealed that many of the terms used to describe the moment that leads to second-order change are interchangeable, however, some of the terms had specific contexts. For example, epiphany is used to describe the moment of new understanding when people believe that a divine power is or was present and influenced their decision making ability or process of understanding (Miller & C' de Baca, 2001). Self-learning most often refers to a formal educational setting or having an educational component to the new understanding (Metcalf, 1986). Self-awareness and insight are psychological terms used to describe the moment of new understanding not the process of coming to that new understanding (Mahon, 2000). Further, insight most often refers to those times when a counselor or other professional is involved and a client alters his or her view of reality (as professionals working with people suffering because of mental health issues, Eidelberg, 1953).

Defining Change

When the word "change" was used as a key word for this literature search it generated hundreds of thousands of articles in various academic fields and schools of thought and study, numerous books, and accounted for several hundred thousand accessible sites on the internet. It is therefore unreasonable for me to make the claim that the current literature review will be exhaustive.

Many of the current theoretical frameworks for change focus on incremental change and do not allow for, or offer, an explanation on sudden change coming out of an unencumbered moment. Articles, books, papers, and dissertations were determined to be relevant to this study if it spoke to the experience of aha, eureka, epiphany, self-learning,

self-awareness, change, second-order change, insight, and/or if any clues were provided that led to an explanation into the process that could led one to experience what I call the unencumbered moment.

Problems with the Definition of Change

Much of the literature describing the moment of change provides a description of the experience of change itself, but does not offer a description of the process that leads one up to the moment of change (Mori, 1996, Shanker, 1995, Kroeker, 1987, Eifermann, 1989, and Butler, 2000). Before the process of change can occur it is common knowledge that one must first experience an insight that is either accommodated or assimilated that, in turn, fuels the need for second-order change (Lyddon, 1990). Therefore, I believe it is necessary to understand the meaning of “insight.” To help me with this I consulted a dictionary and found “insight” defined as:

An instance of apprehending the true nature of a thing, esp. through intuitive understanding: an insight into medieval life. 2. Penetrating mental vision or discernment: a man of great insight. Perception, intuition, understanding, grasp. (Random House College Dictionary, Revised Edition, 1984, p. 689).

The above definition of insight provides only a description of the experience itself, and does not offer a description of the process that leads up to the moment of insight or how one comes to a greater understanding of one’s experience during the moment of insight. Further, by definition, insight is insufficient in and of itself to initiate a second-order life change. I believe this to be a primary problem in describing the

subjective experience of gaining a new understanding of the factors that led to the process that leads to positive life change. Wittgenstein (1980) acknowledged a similar problem of trying to understand the subjective nature of personal experiences and wrote:

...as long as there continues to be a noun expression like 'to have a moment of insight' which functions in the same way as the expression 'to have a hunger pang' - thereby inducing us to treat 'moment of insight' as the name of an experience- then "people will keep stumbling over the same puzzling difficulties and find themselves staring at something which no explanation seems capable of clearing up" (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 582).

If we are to gain a more in-depth understanding of the process that leads to the experience of the unencumbered moment, then we must understand that words such as insight and epiphany are representative of the process that leads to the experience, not of the experience itself. For example, one can speak of having insights (characteristic of first-order change) but these insights do not automatically led to positive second-order life change. When the term insight was used for this literature search, it was my hope that the literature pertaining to insight would provide an explanation of the process of how one comes to experience an insightful moment and how that insight would promote second-order life change. However, the results of this literature search indicate, at least from a formal academic research perspective, that insight most often refers to counseling scenarios where therapists assist individuals in gaining more information about the self (Turk & Salovey, 1985; Hanish & Tolan, 2001; and Lyddon & Jones, 2001). Although this aspect of insight may be beneficial to those who have experienced such moments of

clarity and understanding there is no guarantee that these insights will lead to second-order life change. I want to explore that moment when an individual experiences an absolute internal power that forces him/her to make a positive life change because s/he knows that life cannot go on as it was (Miller & C' de Baca, 2001). At such a moment, one cannot stay where one is in life nor can one go back to the way things were before the unencumbered moment. It is the moment that initiates second-order positive life change.

Despite the limitations that I foresaw in delving into the insight literature, I chose to examine it to see if it could provide clues with respect to a better understanding of the unencumbered moment. What follows, therefore, is an examination of the literature on eureka and aha moments and insight.

The Origin of the Eureka Moment

The genesis of the "Eureka Moment" is historically assigned to the moment when Archimedes jumped out of his bath and ran into the street naked yelling, "Eureka, I have it." The "it" that Archimedes was referring to was the answer to a question put to him by King Hiero, who wanted to know how much gold was used in the royal crown. The solution moment came to Archimedes while he was in the bath. As he lowered himself into his tub of water, Archimedes noticed that water was being displaced and flowing over the rim of the tub. Upon seeing water overflow from the tub, Archimedes decided to collect the water that overflowed from the tub and weigh it believing that the weight of the water would be equal to his own. This proved to be the case. This line of thinking and problem solving led Archimedes to hypothesis that if he submerged the King's crown and weighed the water displaced by the crown that he would be able to estimate how

much gold was used in the King's crown (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1968).

Following the Archimedes example, eureka moments are those moments when a solution to a problem that could not be solved by traditional and usual means suddenly presents itself, often in or through an unrelated context. The moment of eureka in the case of Archimedes, provided a new understanding at a time when it was least expected, during a time of relaxation, a time when the problem was temporarily set aside. The moment of eureka for Archimedes was a high intensity moment (i.e., it came with a high level of emotion) and provided him with such clarity that it changed the field of physics (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1968). The moment was not however a life changing moment for Archimedes.

Moments, like the Archimedes' eureka, cannot be predicted or controlled. Brown (1996) provides an example of the unpredictability of these kinds of moments in his article describing the work of chemist Richard E. Smalley (1985) and Smalley's attempt to solve a chemistry puzzle. Smalley and his research team used a laser beam to strike a piece of carbon to force the atoms in the carbon to separate. Knowing that the atoms would cluster (come together to form a different shape than the original carbon atoms) Smalley and his research team wanted to obtain a new understanding of how this new carbon cluster would look. The research data showed that the carbon atoms reformed into clusters of 60 carbon atoms each. Smalley's problem was to show a visual representation of what this cluster looked like. After several unsuccessful attempts of trying to cut and shape pieces of paper into shapes that he thought would incorporate all 60 sides of the carbon clustered atoms, he retreated to a sofa with a beer. While sipping his beer and thinking about his problem he decided to try one more time to create a visual

representation of the 60 sided carbon cluster. Smalley began to cut paper into pentagon shapes and paste them together. A couple of hours later he had what would come to be known as a “buckyball.” This buckyball represented the 60 sided carbon atom cluster which, in turn, led Smalley and his research team to be awarded the 1996 Nobel Prize for chemistry. Smalley stated that “in one second, imperfect models and endless experiments burn off like fog. What’s left is a clear, bright idea. It’s hard to describe.....It’s a moment of pure excitement, pure emotion” (p. 1).

In discussing insight, Brown (1996) states:

... scientists hit this “Eureka!” moment while doggedly pursuing it ... the moment that light bulb clicks on is just the first step in making a worthwhile discovery. Finishing the journey ... takes the right kind of personality, hard work, and-of course-luck ...

Louis Pasteur is quoted as saying “in the field of observation, chance favors the prepared mind” (p. 2). Sulloway (1996), as cited in Brown, acknowledges that most discoverers have similar characteristics of open-mindedness, determination, and are usually later born children who are therefore more liberal and willing to take chances (p. 3). Brown, therefore, comes to the conclusion that “... discoverers rarely find something totally new. Instead, they see the ordinary in a new light” (p. 2).

Promoting Insights Through the Use of Games

In order to explore insight, Jacobs & Dominowski (1981) administered a series of seven insight problems to 28 male and 28 female college students. One group consisted of subjects who were told that the problem would be considered solved if s/he could verbalize the steps needed to manipulate the objects to meet the desired outcome. The

second group faced the same problems but was told to physically move the objects in order to reach the desired outcome. Both groups participated in both the non-manipulation and the manipulation series of insight problems.

The results showed that both groups performed better in the manipulation section of the series of insight problems. This suggests that focusing the mind on problem solving during the first series of insight problems trained the mind to think more efficiently and in effect, trained the mind to become more solution oriented during the second set of insight problems. Practicing and finding solutions in the first series gave the mind an advantage in finding solutions in the second series of insight problems. Hence, the time taken for finding the necessary solutions to the second series of insight problems decreased. This research suggests that if one is focusing on a series of problems that need solutions as one commits to the process and proceeds through the problems, solutions are apt to come more rapidly the longer one maintains the focus of his or her mind on the tasks at hand.

If what this research indicates is true, when one is faced with a problem that needs a solution, one can eventually come to an unencumbered moment through practicing problem solving strategies and focusing one's mind to stay on the task of finding a solution to the problem at hand. Thus, finding the solution to a problem can become a realistic possibility if one finds oneself doggedly focusing on and actively pursuing a solution.

Both Brown (1996) and Jacobs and Dominowski (1981) seem to suggest that insight is grounded in the pursuit of an expected outcome and in a committed focus on problem solving. So perhaps, insight linked to direct and repeated engagement, that is,

dogged pursuit of change that eventually, but not necessarily on demand, produces insight. In other words, insight, whether this involves hearing or seeing or some other sensation, happens only if the ground has been prepared, sometimes for a very long time, prior to the moment of solution. It may even be the case that people have to pursue the solutions to their problems for many years without success before insight can take place. Perhaps the mind needs to be trained toward that moment of solution, sometimes for days, weeks, months or even years in order to be able to recognize the solution moment when it comes. Another example of a moment of clarity that led someone to an insightful experience follows.

Personal Moment of Aha in a Group Setting

Butler (2000) charts the difficulties of a woman who chose to assume the anchor position in a series of adventure type team based activities. Sarah was an athletic type person who instructed others in team approaches to problem solving. In the context of an adventure training workshop Sarah, working not as a leader but as a team member, was expected with her team to climb over a wall. After 30 minutes everyone was over the wall except Sarah. The group tried different strategies to help Sarah get over the wall, but after another 30 minutes, Sarah was still unable to get over the wall. Sarah acknowledged to herself that she could not complete the given task and told the group that she could not get over the wall and that she wanted to quit trying. Given the impasse, the facilitator and team leader decided that the group needed to debrief after Sarah announced that she was unwilling to continue to attempt to complete the task at hand.

As the group debriefed how each person felt about being part of a problem in an

activity to which there was no apparent solution (i.e., getting Sarah over the wall), Sarah had several personal insights about how she imposes her expectations on the people she instructs and how her expectations might hinder the performance of others. Sarah came to the realization that she wanted to share in her clients' victories and, to that end, she would push them harder to perform well, sometimes pushing people more than they could endure. As a result of her experience of not completing the task at hand, Sarah needed to acknowledge that there are limits to what she can expect of herself and others. The facilitator also had a moment of insight when he understood that after 30 minutes of unsuccessfully trying to get Sarah over the wall that he wanted the group to move on. The facilitator came to the understanding that he was imposing his will upon the group by using his role and his power to decide when the process should end.

These examples show how the members in the group experienced moments of insight that led to personal growth and increased their understanding of themselves and how their personal needs impact others. The scenario described in Butler's (2000) research may be lending support to the notion that insight can only present itself when one doggedly pursues and expects a solution to a given problem. The moment of insight helped the team leader in understanding his effects of wanting the group to move on and making his will the group's direction. Sarah, on coming up against her own limitations, gained insight into how she has a tendency to push those she counsels too hard. Both examples underline the importance of the felt experience. Additional research that attempts to unravel the role of emotion in such experiences follows.

Moments of "Aha" as Part of an Evaluation Process

Mori (1996) writes that Gestalt psychologists believe that the moment of

heightened emotion and with it insight, comes as a result of an individual restructuring and re-centering him/herself during the problem solving process. Weisberg and Alba (1981) argue however, that the moment of aha plays no role in problem solving whatsoever, but Weisberg (1986) admits the existence of the subjective feeling of the “aha” (as cited by Mori, p. 85), and also admits the potential for an improvable situation associated with the moment of aha. However, Metcalfe (1986a) in her research on emotion and insight suggests that heightened feelings were strongest when her research participants came up with *incorrect* solutions to problems, thus suggesting that such feelings anticipated solutions rather than heralding the best solution.

To prove the point that individuals do indeed restructure and re-center the self to experience heightened emotion, insight, and success during the problem-solving process Mori (1996) designed an experiment to measure the feeling strength of the aha moment. To explore these claims, Mori designed a study where two expert but amateur *Tsume-Shogi* (a Japanese strategy game similar to chess) players were to list possible correct moves which would result in capturing their opponent’s “king.” Forty problems were designed and presented to the research participants and the board pieces were laid out in such a way as to leave only five possible correct moves to complete capturing their opponent’s king in 20 of the problems. The other 20 problems were designed and presented to the research participants with the board pieces arranged to allow only seven correct possible moves to reach the capture result. Mori thought that as the players problem solve and they come to possible solutions to capture their opponent’s king, the recorded series of moves that were closer to the end would produce a stronger, that is, a more emotional aha moment than the moves recorded at the beginning. Mori also

hypothesized that if players missed a combination of moves and had to be told those moves by the researcher, then the strength of their moment of aha would be even stronger. In other words, as the player listed the different combinations of moves that lead to the capture of the opponent's king, those combinations of moves listed last would produce the greatest strength of the aha moment because the series of moves listed first were thought to be obvious to the player. However, if the researcher had to tell the players a series of moves that led to a capture, then the information the researcher provided would produce the strongest feelings in the participant because the research participant would be anticipating being very close to capturing the opponent's king and solving the problem.

Mori (1996) found that when advanced players missed solutions, especially easy first level solutions, to the problems and had to be told those easy solutions the emotional impact of the aha moment on the players was stronger than the emotional impact of finding solutions that were more indicative of their skill level. Hence, Mori concluded that insight is not part of a creative or problem-solving process but more an aspect of an evaluation process. The expert amateur *Tsume-Shogi* players, having received all necessary information about the capture problems, began an evaluation process starting at their current skill level of their existing knowledge and strategies that would allow them to meet the expectation of capturing the opposing king. However, since there were only five possible solutions in the first 20 problems faced by the players and only seven possible solutions for the second set of 20 problems there was no allowance for the players to use their creative skills and improvise "new solutions" to the problems outlined in the research project. Therefore, the evaluative aspects of the experience effected the

strength of their moment of aha much more than the creative aspects of the experience because the solutions were all predetermined by the researcher. This suggests that for problems where only a fixed set of solutions are possible the strength of the moment of aha is associated with finding the “right” answer, whereas, for problems with open-ended solutions, the strength of the aha moment may be associated with anticipation of a solution (i.e., any solution).

Weisberg and Alba (1981) used a nine-dot puzzle (connect all the dots with four straight lines without lifting the pencil from the paper) and the six matches puzzle (make four equal size triangles through the placement of the matches) to test the role of insight in problem solving in 16 Temple University undergraduate psychology students.

Weisberg and Alba believed that when individuals experience difficulties in problem solving (i.e., not finding a solution to a problem) it is because these individuals bring with them into the problem solving process “an unwarranted assumption to the problem that is based on past experience with similar problems” (p. 169). This unwarranted assumption leads the individual to become fixated on her or his assumption about the problem and inhibits the individual’s ability to think in new unconventional ways. Hence, according to Weisberg and Alba, the fixation on preconceived assumptions during problem solving blocks one’s ability to think insightfully.

Weisberg and Alba (1981) wanted to determine the role of fixation in problem solving abilities and to determine if removing the fixation would promote the moment of aha and lead to a quick solution. In the nine-dot puzzle (three rows of three dots that form a square) researchers told the participants that the nine dots needed to be connected by four straight lines and that the pencil could not leave the paper. They also told the

participants that the lines they were to draw were to connect all the dots could extend beyond the matrix of the dots. The researchers believed that when armed with this “new” information the participants would not fixate on trying to keep the lines within the boundaries of the matrix of dots. It was thought that this new information would provide the necessary conditions for the participants to experience a moment of aha that would allow all to solve the nine-dot puzzle. The researchers disclosed similar information with regard to the six match puzzle when the subjects were asked to make four equal size triangles out of the six match sticks. When the research subjects attempted to solve the six match puzzle each participant was told that the solution was three dimensional.

According to the researchers, if the participants knew that the solution was three dimensional, then each person should have experienced a moment of aha that would successfully allow him or her to solve the match stick puzzle. However, the results showed that several of the research participants, even though they had the “new” information from the researchers about the problems were still unable to solve either puzzle. The researchers attributed the participants’ inability to solve the puzzles to the presentation of the puzzles and the subjects’ fixation on past experiences of solving similar problems. The researchers named the subjects past experiences as a “domain of solutions,” that is, all the participants’ attempts to solve a problem whether successful or not are held in the same cognitive domain (i.e., a compartmentalized way of thinking where each individual stores possible solutions to similar problems). Weisberg and Alba (1981) postulated that those subjects that did not solve the nine-dot and six-match stick puzzles failed because when the subjects searched their domains for possible solutions none were found.

Additionally, in further calling the moment of insight into question, Weisberg (1986) suggests while there may well be a feeling associated with the aha moment, but that such a feeling is not necessarily indicative of insight and may instead be an inaccurate retrospective attribution. He writes:

. . . when a scientist tries to reconstruct from memory thought processes of a complicated nature that involved emotionally arousing work on an important problem, and which may have occurred many years before, there is a good chance that the reconstruction will be incorrect. If one relies on objective evidence, rather than on subjective reports, then there is no need to postulate leaps of insight. I conclude that the creative individuals who report great leaps of thought were simply mistaken. Since most of those individuals were neither in the business of studying their own thought processes (that is, they were not professional psychologists) nor concentrating on their thought processes at the time of creation, such mistakes are not surprising (p. 106-7).

Metcalf (1986), a researcher also interested in the emotions that may or may not be associated with insight or the moment of aha, believes that when people are faced with a problem, they become intellectually occupied with how difficult the problem is and with the likelihood or not of finding a solution. Metcalfe asserts it is at this point in the problem solving process that people might generate a feeling that they will ultimately come to know the solution to the problem. People generate these feelings because they know “something about the topic in question, a partial label, some image, or some dimensions of the target but not enough to give the answer” (p. 288), and this belief keeps

them going until they in fact come up with a solution. To test her assumptions, Metcalfe tested 136 Indiana University first year psychology students. Metcalfe gave each of the research subjects a piece of paper and asked them to clearly record their answer to the following problem:

. . . a stranger approached a museum curator and offered him an ancient bronze coin. The coin had an authentic appearance and was marked with the date 544 B.C. The curator had happily made acquisitions from suspicious sources before, but this time he promptly called the police and had the stranger arrested. Why? (p. 624).

Simultaneously, there was a tape running in the room that presented a click sound in ten second intervals. Metcalfe (1986) asked the subjects to record a number from zero to ten at the sound of the click- zero representing cold, ten representing warm- whether they were experiencing a feeling that they knew the answer to the problem.

The correct answer to the problem was the date could not have been stamped on the coin 544 years before Christ was born, therefore, the coin could not be genuine. The results showed that those subjects who recorded an incorrect answer to the problem recorded the highest numbers on the scale indicating that they had a warm feeling because the participants thought they knew the correct answer. The results showed that warm feelings were not necessarily correlated to correct answers, just to the participant's expectation of having a correct answer. Metcalfe (1986) was surprised with this finding and conducted a survey of third year psychology students at University of British Columbia to see if the students' expectations of warm feelings in relation to successful problem solving were consistent with her original findings. The results of this survey

showed that the majority of third year students believed that feelings of warmth would increase as one came closer to the successful solution to a problem, but again these feelings of warmth had nothing to do with the right solution to the problem. Metcalfe notes: "The reasons for this increase in warmth are not yet known" (p. 633) and confirms that correct answers are not at all related to the emotional strength of anticipation of correct answers. This may suggest that something other than a feeling may be at work in the movement toward insight.

Aha Moments as Part of the Problem Solving Process

Wallas (1926, as cited in Sapp, 1992) developed a four stage model to capture the process involved in idea development and in scientific discovery. Wallas postulated that thought "develops through four primary stages: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification" (p. 21). In the preparation stage, the problem is explored from various angles and/or approaches. In the incubation stage, conscious work is stopped and unconscious energy takes a primary role in the problem solving process. According to Wallas, it is during this stage of incubation that the moment of aha occurs. The solution to the problem is then brought into the illumination phase and back into the conscious thought processes. Finally, in the verification stage the new idea is tested to determine if it is sound or has merit as a possible solution to the problem.

Kneller (1965) revised the Wallas (1926) four stage model into a five stage model. Kneller suggested that prior to Wallas' preparation stage, one needed "first insight," where an individual "has no inspiration but merely the notion of something to be done," and believed that "the original, raw idea or composition is initially apprehended prior to preparation stage," (p. 22). According to Kneller, the "raw idea" comes first, and

then the individual continues to follow the remaining stages of the Wallas model: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification to bring an idea to fruition.

In addition to the process outlined by Wallas (1926) and Kneller (1965), May (1975) maintains that the idea inception is a point in time where people, such as artists, “become absorbed in the beginnings of a composition with notable intensity” (p. 23). As a result of this intensity and heightened awareness individuals often experience physiological symptoms such as higher blood pressure, lack of appetite, or constriction of vision. Rogers (1961; as cited in Sapp, 1992) “calls this extensionality or an openness to experience . . . [where there is a] lack of rigidity and permeability of boundaries in concepts, beliefs, perceptions, and hypotheses. It means a tolerance for ambiguity . . .” (p. 23).

In the Wallas (1926) model of idea development and scientific discovery and the Kneller (1965) adaptation of that same model, and in May’s (1975) work, it is presupposed that individuals gain insight and formulate new ideas through a linear progression. What is highlighted in these models is that the solution to the problem comes on in a flash of insight but only after extended periods of hard work, numerous false starts, some stopping, plenty of frustration, and some relaxation or time away from the problem.

Sapp (1992) took Kneller’s (1965) five stage model for problem solving and revised that model further. He postulated that there are only four stages: Denial, Rationalization, Acceptance of Stagnation, and New Growth, and three moments in time: Point of Initial Idea Inception, Point of Creative Frustration, and Point of Illumination which assist in allowing one to make change. For Sapp, change occurs when people

reach a point of creative frustration because old strategies for problem solving have been unsuccessful and people are “at the limit of their knowledge” (p. 24). This moment of the creative process is perhaps the “most significant and is a very conscious and specific point in time rather than an extended stage of unconscious processing” (p. 25). It is this kind of moment that leads to the first stage in Sapp’s model.

In the denial stage one “abandons the current problem because the point of creative frustration appears too overwhelming” (p. 25). While in this stage one hits the frustration point then goes back to the beginning of one’s problem solving process and goes through the process again only to ultimately end back at the point of creative frustration. This problem solving process continues again and again for an undetermined length of time or until one settles for a lesser solution to the immediate problem. In the rationalization stage “frustration is avoided when the individual settles for a product which is less than adequate, which is not a product of notable growth and which is not characterized by significant creative qualities” (p. 25). However, one believes the new solution is truly a product of one’s creativity and can present reasons to support that claim. In the moment of time that Sapp (1992) calls the acceptance of stagnation “the individual is resigned to stagnation without attempting to deny or justify the work produced thus far” (p. 25). The motivation to problem solve is so low that one becomes bored with the problem solving process and is willing to accept resignation and let the situation stand as is. In the new growth stage there is a renewed commitment to the problem solving process. In this stage an individual “is usually more motivated and may be able to taste or visualize the reward of continued work” (p. 26). In the point of illumination, one experiences the specific insight necessary to break through the

boundaries of old problem solving process limitations and new knowledge has been added to one's repertoire. In the final stage one verifies and tests the new knowledge. It is in this phase that one comes to believe in one's creative and problem solving abilities. Further, it is in this stage that "additional alternatives happen with fluidity and a naturalness" (p. 27).

Hence, according to Sapp (1992), "an artist, writer, or scientist does not produce a significant painting, poem, or theorem in only a flash of insight; his or her creative product is cultivated over time" (p. 21). Poincare (1914) and Herholtz (1891), a French mathematician and a German physicist, respectively, claimed that many of their "successes" came to them as they were engaged in activities other than their work and they just had "to verify the idea" (p. 21). When these people were not focused on their work, the solution to problems or new ideas just sprang into their minds. According to Sapp, it is this commitment to continue to work that drives points of illumination or insight of new ideas. The incremental stage model to explain problem solving appears to be the preferred method for explaining the process that leads one to find a solution to a problem. Whatever the differences between and among the various scholars who have worked hard to explain insight in problem solving, and who like Wallas (1926), Kneller (1965), and Sapp (1992) offer stage models to explain this process, none of these explanations are sufficient in explaining life changing behavior.

This literature suggests that insight is not necessarily an instantaneous moment of learning such as depicted in the tale of Archimedes' eureka. It is not just a moment when someone says, "This idea just came to me. This idea came out of nowhere. The idea just sprang into my head. I was just sitting here thinking and nothing was coming and then all

of a sudden this idea was just there like a bolt of lightening hitting me in the head.”

Instead the literature seems to show that there are a number of important contributing factors at work that eventually leads one to insight. This literature focuses on insight and it does appear as if solutions (either problem based or behavior change based) only appear when one doggedly pursues a solution to a problem, sometimes for years, as in the case of Brown (1996), who thought that people rarely find something new but see old familiar things in a new light. Jacobs and Dominowski (1981) think that insight was more likely to occur if one stays focused and on task. Butler (2000) believes that insight occurs when one doggedly pursues a solution and expects to reach that solution. Mori (1996) believes that the moment of insight is part of the evaluation process and that emotion accompanies insight. Weisberg and Alba (1981) disagree that insight plays a role in the evaluation process but agree there is an emotional connection with insight. Weisberg and Alba attributed the participants’ inability to solve presented puzzles to the subjects’ fixation on past experiences of solving similar problems, that is, to their “domains of solutions.” They named the subjects’ past experiences as promoting a “domain of thinking.” Therefore, Weisberg and Alba attributed that possible reasons to the participants’ inability to successfully solve the presented puzzles could be the enormous size of the participants’ cognitive domains. This suggests that the participants did not have sufficient time to conduct an exhaustive search of their cognitive domains before the test time elapsed. Further, they believed that even if the subjects had finished the searches of one domain without a solution to the problem the subjects may not have been aware that other cognitive domain exist that may have held the answers for which the participants were searching. Lastly, Weisberg and Alba postulated that new domains

may be so large that the subjects may not have been able to complete their search of these new domains if there is a time limit in the problem solving process. Thus, they concluded that insight does not play a role in problem solving because even when given partial solution information, all the subjects were not able to solve the presented puzzles. Instead, it is suggested by Weisberg and Alba that problem solving may be in some way hindered by too much experience with successful problem solving and that some people may become hampered by their successful past experiences from trying new and different problem solving strategies.

Metcalf (1986) tested the hypothesis that as people get closer to the point of experiencing a moment of insight, they experience heightened emotion and feelings of warmth. However, her research showed that people in fact reported heightened emotion and feelings of warmth when they had an incorrect solution to a problem but believed they had the correct answer to the problem. While heightened emotion may or may not play a role in getting closer to the right answer, the research does indicate there is an emotional response for people prior to the moment of insight. According to the research, this emotional response comes prior to the moment of insight and varies from frustration, guilt, tiredness, stagnation, lack of commitment, and confusion. May (1975) believes there is a physiological response to insight and that people may experience increased blood pressure, lack of appetite, or constriction of vision. Eifermann (1989) acknowledges that one may experience guilt, self-loathing, and an overall feeling of stupidity for not arriving at the solution more quickly. He also recognizes that some people boast about their revelations and long to share their insights with others even though there is a chance that they would open themselves up to "ridicule, scorn, anger, or

being totally ignored” (p. 117). According to Eifermann (1989),

... the insight is experienced as catching us by surprise precisely because it occurs while we are making no such concerted effort. Typically the moment of aha or insight arrives while we doze or take a shower, or while engaged in some other task which is “unrelated” to the unresolved issue. . . .
(p. 115).

When discussing problem solving Sapp (1992) believes this moment is part of a creative problem solving process and not an evaluation process. Sapp refers to his model and the models of Wallas (1926) and Kneller (1965) to show that insight comes as a result of creative frustration. Overall, whether emotion is present or not, whether one subscribes to the model representations of Wallas (1926) and Kneller (1965) or not, whether there are feelings of warmth as one believes they have the correct answer to a problem or not, what is apparent in the research is that in order for one to experience insight, one must have a prepared mind. Still to be considered, however, are models that speak more directly to behavior change. An analysis of these change models follows.

Theoretical Frameworks Focusing on Behavior Change

Few theoretical frameworks describe or explain the process leading to an experience of an unencumbered moment or a life altering second-order change. Some theories, (e.g., addiction and personality theory), account for the way counselors assist their clients in changing many aspect of the client self. Here counselors tend to focus on the incremental linear steps needed to slowly alter the way people view their internal and external world, their morals, beliefs, and behavior rather than addressing the in-the-moment experience of change (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1992; and Kroeker, 1987).

Developmental psychological theories such as those of Erikson (1968) and Piaget (1968), and Freud's (1910) psychodynamic theory trace the stages of development from birth to adulthood to death using similar linear stages with critical periods and challenges to hallmark each particular, and what is thought to be, universal stages that are experienced in sequence and cannot be reversed once negotiated.

Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross' (1992) well-known *Transtheoretical Model for Stages of Change* maps out five qualitatively different stages involved in changing particular addictive behavior. In Stage I, the Precontemplative stage, people do not see a problem as a problem. Others may point out the problem but the issue is seen as being someone else's problem. In Stage II, the Contemplative stage, people begin a process of evaluating the pros and cons of their behavior and whether or not that behavior should be changed. If they believe that the cost of change outweighs the benefit of change, then change is unlikely to occur. However, if benefits outweigh costs, change is then considered. In Stage III, the Preparation stage, people accept responsibility for their problem and begin to think of the steps needed to change their behavior. However, no effort has yet been made to act differently. In Stage IV, the Action stage, people make the commitment to change their behavior and even modify their environment if need be, in order to promote and support the changes they have made. In Stage V, the Maintenance stage, people establish a new way of being and have successfully dealt with the temptations of relapsing into old patterns of behavior. While this model appears to accurately describe the qualitative differences that are the hallmarks of change in each stage, this model does not offer an explanation for how people experience that moment of clarity, the unencumbered moment, that leads to the next stage in the model nor does the

model provide an explanation for what eventually leads people to institute a positive and irreversible second-order life change. To summarize the literature thus far, change is promoted by people dealing primarily with issue based problem solving. In other words, the focus in this literature is on how particular problems and challenges were overcome, not on profound enduring global change. What are described in the literature are moments of aha and eureka, that is, moments of insight and realization. For other examples of how people change I look at the research of Mahoney (1991) and his thoughts on the impact of psychotherapy on the clients involved in the psychoanalytic process.

Mahoney (1991), in discussing patterns of human change rather than cognitive problem solving, suggests that human change can be assigned to four categories: “personal organization of experience, resistance to change, oscillative processes in change, and changing relationships with self and others” (p. 322). In the organization of the change process people’s “experience of change cannot be separated from the experience of experience” (p. 323). Mahoney contends that change only occurs when the change is embodied, personal, constructive or when change falls within the contextual components of culture and society (p. 323). Once one begins to change Mahoney admits that the processes involved in that change are abstract and currently beyond scientific comprehension. Mahoney also notes that most people experience one of several types of resistance to change prior to any change taking place.

According to Mahoney (1991), the resistance to change is broken down into five distinct categories: motivated avoidance, motivational deficit, ambivalent choice, reactance, and self-protection. Motivated avoidance is a Freudian term used in

psychotherapy to explain how the “. . . repressed instinctual impulses fueled such avoidance, and that . . . client[s] had to live through or work through discoveries of those impulses” (p. 326). Motivational deficit is defined as being insufficient drive for an individual to change because of the lack of rewards linked directly to the change. In other words, if there is no reason or no reward for an individual to change there is no motivation to change. Ambivalent choice is best explained through the terms of immediate versus delayed gratification. For example, if an individual continues to over eat, then becomes over weight, that could lead to heart problems, which could lead to death. The ambivalent choice is to continue to over eat because of the immediate gratification of the feelings brought on by overeating without giving any thoughts to the harm this behavior will have in the long term. Reactance is defined in terms of holding on to old patterns of behavior or thinking when challenged with a new way of behaving or thinking. Reactance is experienced when an individual loses or perceives the loss of the right of freedom to think and behave as one chooses. Self-protection is defined as an “. . . individuals’ healthy caution about embarking upon or embracing experiences that challenge their integrity, coherence, or (felt) viability as a living system” (p. 329).

With the resistance to change also comes what Mahoney characterizes as the oscillative processes in change. According to Mahoney (1991), oscillative processes in change are the tensions and relaxations one feels in daily living before a change process begins. The terms Mahoney uses to explain these tensions and relaxations of emotional states are expansions and contractions. Expansions are those times when one feels safe, grounded, and more in touch with the happenings in one’s world. Contractions are those times when one feels less connected to one’s world and the things around oneself but

remain more in touch with the negative side of their emotional states. Mahoney's contention is that everyone lives life in a moment-to-moment fashion and that we all search for, find, and move through courses of stabilizing patterns that inevitably brings us to experience the tensions and relaxations or the expansions and contractions (p. 333).

According to Mahoney (1991), change brings new meanings and perceptions to one who has experienced the change processes. Through these new meanings and perceptions one comes to experience a new relationship not only with the self but also with others. Because of the change process, there is insight that allows one to function at a higher level of self-awareness. This new level of self-awareness could be responsible for an individual redefining personal meaning to words such as, intimacy, control, power, life, or independence which in turn redefines the relationship to self and others. It is assumed that the redefining of these meanings impacts one in a positive way. Mahoney (1988) takes the explanation of first-order and second-order change further by putting first-order and second-order changes in the context of rationalist and constructivist cognitive therapy and psychotherapy counseling styles.

Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy

According to Robb (2003), rational emotive therapy is a four part program that helps clients to better understand themselves. In the first step the therapist assists the client in identifying dysfunctional beliefs and behaviors that are blocking the client from manifesting her or his desires. The second step is assisting the client in seeing how s/he have made these negative associations that drive belief and behavior that stop the client from fulfilling his or her deepest desires. The third step is to get the client to reduce the controlling aspect of these associations on the client's behavior. Finally, the fourth step

is to help the client adopt a less dysfunctional association that will allow for a change in behavior and allow for a more fulfilled and happy life (Ellis, 1992; and Robb, 2003). Accordingly, when a client's negative view of an event or thing can be changed to a more positive view, the rational emotive therapist can then assist the client to successful second-order change (Still & Dryden, 2003). In other words, rational emotive therapists believe that feelings and actions follow thoughts and that behavior change begins with thought change. The expansion of this action-follows-thought approach to understanding change is found in constructivism which also places cognitive processes at the center of change.

Constructivist Cognitive Therapy

Some researchers, for example, Mahoney (1991) and Lyddon (1990), who work from a cognitive behavioral approach, look at the importance of rational thinking and then address with their clients their issues from a constructivist perspective that takes into account meaning making that forms the basis of the constructivist approaches to counseling. Lyddon acknowledges that the constructivist approach to counseling:

. . . tend[s] to conceptualize problems as discrepancies between current developmental challenges and clients' current capacities. Rather than being viewed as deficits to be remedied, problems are thought to provide clients with powerful opportunities for the emergence of high-order patterns and cognitive structures (Mahoney and Lyddon, 1988, as cited in Lyddon, 1990, p. 124). The constructivist view of problems as being both indicative of certain developmental life challenges and crucial to personal transformational change suggests a second order approach to problem

conceptualization (Lyddon, 1990, p.124).

Despite endorsing a constructivist approach Carlsen (1988), Guidano (1987), Lyddon (1990), and Mahoney (1988), agree that one of the difficulties with the constructivist cognitive approach to therapy is both the unpredictable process of problem-solving and the unpredictable timeline it takes one to come to the resolution of a given problem, the integration or accommodation of the knowledge that promotes a new cognitive structure, and to initiate a irreversible second-order life change. According to Lyddon, although client markers and/or situational factors that may be associated with second-order change are not well understood . . . potential indicators may include: (a) the presence of a perceived developmental life crisis accompanied by significant emotional disequilibrium; (b) the need for core personality change and/or fundamental changes in one's assumptions about self, world, or reality; (c) openness to exploring, experiencing, and expressing feelings; (d) unsuccessful attempts to resolve the conflict through first-order change strategies; and (e) prior experience with second-order, or transformational change. Dowd and Pace (1989) concur with Lyddon that the process of second-order change is often initiated as a result of unsuccessful attempts to resolve a problem or regain a balance through the use of first-order change strategies. The example that Dowd and Pace put forth is that if one is having difficulty falling asleep, then it is not a sound strategy to concentrate harder on trying to fall asleep. By focusing more on the problem the solution is less likely to present itself and the likelihood that one will fall asleep is decreased further. As Dowd and Pace state:

. . . by shifting the meaning of the symptom, second-order change fosters a shift in the rules of reality or the assumptive world (Frank, 1973) that the

individual uses to organize and punctuate the ongoing stream of experience (p. 220).

According to Dowd and Pace (1989), people do not readily change their core concepts and organizational rules for understanding experiences easily. Therefore, the processes involved in second-order change are, for most people, a confusing and unsettling time in their lives. However, when individuals do experience “core cognitive changes . . . they are more likely to be associated with profound and enduring changes in thoughts, behavior, and emotion” (Mahoney, 1980, as cited in Dowd and Pace, 1989, p. 221).

Piaget (1970) in his theory of equilibration makes a distinction between assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is equated to first-order change while second-order change is accommodation. As a person experiences events, new meanings are formed and assimilated into current and existing cognitive structures. However, when one experiences difficulty in understanding reality through current cognitive structures it causes a state of disequilibrium. Therefore, one must increase one’s knowledge about the cause of the disequilibrium and assimilate more information in an attempt to bring balance between the understanding of reality and one’s cognitive structures. If the assimilation process of the new information is inadequate, then the newly assimilated information is insufficient for restoring balance between the understanding of a new event and the assigned meaning of that event and the existing cognitive structures. When this imbalance is not resolved one must accommodate or expand the cognitive structure to allow for and establish a new balance point between understanding the sense of reality and one’s cognitive structures. This new balance allows one to function at a higher

developmental level (Piaget, 1981). For further explanation of the human change process I refer to Seita and Brendtro (2002).

Seita and Brendtro (2002) summarized the human change process into a four stage process: Challenge, Contemplating, Coping, and ending with the Comfortable stage. When one has one's values, thinking, or acting challenged one must initiate a solution oriented problem solving process. The events that bring on this evaluation process that ultimately leads one to change could be based in many forms of stress (psychological, emotional, developmental, or physical), could be an uplifting event such as becoming a new parent, or something with a negative connotation such as being arrested for drunk driving or car theft. Only when these events supercede one's ability to cope does the challenge stage of the change process begin.

The Contemplating phase is activated when one knows there is a problem and begins the search to find a solution. Without a distraction one will, on occasion, worry for extended periods of time until a viable solution is found and accommodated into a new way of thinking or behavior. It is also at this stage of the problem solving process that one tends to look outward for opinion and information sources, that is, other people that can provide a different perspective to the problem and therefore provide alternative possible solutions.

Coping comes to the forefront when one tries new ways of thinking and acting. It is only through the perseverance and faith that the new ways will work that leads one to eventually experience the successes that come with new ways of being. Once one experiences successes one become more competent and more confident that the new way is beneficial and will provide long lasting measures of success.

The Comfortable phase is achieved when there is personal acknowledgement that the new lifestyle or way of being works. With the new lifestyle usually comes new peer group associations, that is, living life in sobriety usually means that one chooses to associate with others who are also living life in sobriety. In this way one begins to feel more comfortable in the new parameters that have been set in one's life.

These four stages leading to change as listed by Seita and Brendtro (2002) are similar to the five stage incremental change process of the *Transtheoretical Model of the Stages of Change* by Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross (1992), in that, each model describes a phase in which change is not yet on the horizon (Challenge and Precontemplative respectively). In both models the second stage is called by a similar name, Contemplating and Contemplative, and is characterized by the acknowledgement that a problem behavior is present and that one begins to look to outside sources for more information that could possibly provide a solution to one's problem. As well, each model describes a phase (the Coping and Action phases respectively) which shows that one takes the necessary steps to change one's behavior. The final phase in both models (the Comfortable and Maintenance stages respectively) has one acknowledging that one's actions have brought a new way of life and that one is adjusting to the new lifestyle. In the Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross model the third stage, Preparation, is when responsibility is taken for one's actions and one sees that change is needed, but do not yet act differently. This suggests that second-order change does not happen all at once and can be tracked through identifiable stages that are characterized by certain orientations and behavior.

Second-Order Change

Second-order change is that moment when one experiences an absolute internal power that forces one to make a positive life change because s/he knows that life cannot go on as it was (Miller and C' de Baca, 2001). At such a moment, one cannot stay where one is in life nor can one go back to the way things were before one's unencumbered moment. It is this moment that initiates second-order positive life change. To date, the best description I found of first and second-order change comes from Lyddon (1990) as he quotes from Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch (1974) who state:

... first-order change is essentially 'change without change'- or any change in a system that does not produce a change in the structure of the system. In contrast, second-order change is 'change of change'- a type of change whose occurrence alters the fundamental structure of the system (p. 122).

"Hitting Bottom"

The Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) movement began in the mid 1930's. Bill W. and Dr. Bob are the individuals attributed with starting a movement that continues today and is one of the primary sources of support for those suffering from addiction issues. While in a state of drunkenness Bill W. received a home visit from a friend, who after years of drinking alcohol to excess, was sober. When asked how he beat his addiction, Bill W. was told that God relieved this man's addiction to alcohol. In July, 1950, Bill W. wrote a letter to what was then the *New York State Journal of Medicine* explaining his emotional process of "hitting bottom" and how he needed to believe in something other than himself if he were to become sober and maintain his sobriety. In his

acknowledgement of that emotional place within him, Bill W. stated:

. . . although I drank on for a time, I couldn't get that conversation out of my mind. I still gagged on his God concept, but finally realized I had better try the formula. I knew I had "hit bottom," I knew I had an insane obsession to drink that had killed off many a better man than I. All else had failed; this was my only hope.

It is believed that Bill W. introduced the phrase "hitting bottom" to describe the desperation, frustration, and helplessness he felt as he unsuccessfully tried to stop drinking alcohol without the guidance of others, including God. Tiebout (1953) began visiting the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous in 1939, in his attempt to understand how and why some alcoholics were able to become sober while others continued to suffer with their obsession to alcohol. During his initial visit to the halls of A.A., Dr. Tiebout heard the phrase "hitting bottom" and came to understand that those individuals who remained "stiff necked" continued to drink alcohol, while those who had "hit bottom" were able to feel, act, and show humility and were able to get sobriety. That basic concept of hitting bottom has spread to all types of 12 Step programs that help people overcome addictions, including addiction to drugs. As stated in the Narcotics Anonymous book:

. . . we had to reach our bottom, before we were willing to stop. We were finally motivated to seek help in the latter stage of our addiction. Then it was easier for us to see the destruction, disaster, and delusion of our using. It was harder to deny our addiction when problems were staring us in the face, (*Narcotics Anonymous*, 1988, p. 7).

The premise of "hitting bottom" is the mainstay of the 12 Step program to recovery and a

primary indicator of whether one will successfully be relieved of one's addiction.

"Hitting bottom" is the term most commonly used to describe, in any situation, that emotional place when all efforts to change something in one's life have failed and the person feels the frustration, desperation, helplessness, and powerlessness of living a life that is out of control. The process that leads to change, as stated by Seita and Brendtro (2001), is similar to the concept of "bottoming out" as the precursor to the process of change and while hitting bottom resembles the Challenge stage identified by Seita and Brendtro, hitting bottom and the 12 Step Program do not in fact explain behavior change. The 12 Step Program simply prescribes what one must do next after hitting bottom.

Quantum Change

Miller and C' de Baca (2001) in their book *Quantum Change: When Epiphanies and Sudden Insights Transform Ordinary Lives* acknowledge that through their research they have found that there are two specific moments in time that promote change in a person, that is, two types of quantum changes. A type I quantum change is a gradual change occurring over time such as in an educational setting. As an analogy Miller and C' de Baca equate this type of change to "you shift or drift a little bit at a time and, as with growing children, the changes may be most apparent to those who haven't seen you for a while" (p. 12). However, the type II quantum change is much more pronounced and is equated with Divine intervention and emotionally "hitting bottom," that is, "the drama tends to unfold within the person" (p. 12). The analogy used by Miller and C' de Baca for a type II quantum change is "*more like hitting the rapids. You are drifting along, and all of a sudden, before you know what has happened, you're moving fast and find yourself in a very different place* [Italics added]" (p. 12). The focus of their book is the

type II quantum change.

According to Miller and C' de Baca (2001), type II quantum change transforms people "through an identifiable, often dramatic, and usually quite memorable event" (p. 13). This type of change has a distinct beginning but has no end because once change occurs the individual cannot go back to how life was prior to one's quantum change. Because one cannot go back to the way life was prior to their quantum change, one continues to grow emotionally and make life long changes based on the information received during one's quantum change. Overall, Miller and C' de Baca appear to most closely describe the experience that I call the unencumbered moment.

I have defined the unencumbered moment as the moment when one commits to change one's life in order to save it and this distinguishes the unencumbered moment from moments of insight or clarity because one need not necessarily change one's life through a moment of clarity/insight in order to save it. One of the difficulties in conducting the literature review was the lack of a term that describes the process that leads one to experience an unencumbered moment or a moment of clarity/insight. The closest description to what I have defined as the unencumbered moment is Miller and C' de Baca's (2001) description of "finding yourself in a different place." Also helpful with respect to the unencumbered moment is the literature on second-order change because it clearly focuses on the kind of change involved in the unencumbered moment and what brings it on.

Mahoney (1991) acknowledges that the processes to change are abstract and that change happens only through changing the self and how one relates to others. This type of change occurs in a counseling format where a therapist helps a client to alter the view

of one's reality. There is no timeline as to when the client will see the information presented in a new light nor is there any guarantee that the client will continue the change process and make second-order changes.

The Seita and Brendtro (2002) and Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross (1992) models for change have very specific hallmarks to indicate where an individual is in the process of behavior change. These models give a clear indication of the linear progression of change and speak to the stages one must go through to change one's behavior or way of being in relation to their world. However, what all these models lack are a clear indication of the internal process that allows an individual to progress to the next stage in their models. In other words, these models define the event of change but not the internal process that helps one to change.

Hitting bottom is a term that comes through the halls of Alcoholics Anonymous and is the measuring stick that ensures change for those actively pursuing their addictive behavior. According to Bill W., one of the founding fathers of A.A., without hitting bottom there can be no personal change. Rogers (1961) also suggests that a person must be "open" in some way to the experience of having an unencumbered moment.

Miller and C' de Baca (2001) assert that insight and making change is like hitting a set of rapids and that one is moving fast only to find oneself in a different place. The change has a beginning but no end because the change continues life long. Miller and C' de Baca believe that "[t]he experience is frequently accompanied by a great emotional release and a deep sense of relief. Then, with time, the person integrates the experience through language and symbols, and new patterns of thought and action emerge" (p. 7).

What is clear in the research is that there is not a theoretical framework that

clearly indicates the process of change. The models clearly indicate the event of change but lack the necessary in-depth explanation of how one continues the process of change that leads to second-order life change. What is still needed is a systematic framework for understanding the unencumbered moment, a framework that can be deliberately applied in order to help create or promote such a moment.

In examining all the ways in which both moments of insight and change have been studied, I believe the literature presented could be interpreted as saying that the unencumbered moment is borne sometimes of years of going over the same ground, and must include an orientation that is solution focused, engaged and committed to building a prepared mind. This orientation can be coupled on occasion with helpful interventions, such as, being reminded of previous problem solving experiences and offered additional information that supports access to the internal resources. This suggests that there are behavioral and experiential aspects that substantially contribute to the creation of an unencumbered moment that can be examined. This possibility supported my desire to explore these questions further with my research participants.

Further, it does not seem to matter whether one deems the problem at hand to be trivial, technical, spiritual, philosophical, crucial to one's emotional health or well being, or one of personal safety, the change moment arrives when one least expects it. As noted in the research above, there appears to be a general consensus that in order for one to experience a moment leading to second-order change, whether that concern is problem solving or life change, one must have a "trained or prepared" mind. The trained mind can, for example, also be interpreted as the mind that has for many years heard the same message regarding the use of alcohol or drugs, refraining from the use of violence, or

some other destructive course of action that one has deemed as problematic in their daily living regimes. The mind that has heard these messages repeatedly without changing the attendant behaviors have none-the-less still heard the message. Then one day a message seeps in and is “heard” or grasped in some way that promotes second-order change process that leads to an irreversible life change. Without years of work or repeated exposure to similar problems it is questionable whether the mind would be sufficiently “trained” to take on the task of problem solving that leads to moments of insight and life altering second-order change.

It is also suggested in the above articles that certain personal characteristics, such as, an individual’s ability to remain focused to finding a solution to a problem, the ability to think “outside of the proverbial box,” belief that there is a solution, the self-confidence to stay engaged in solution oriented processes over potentially long periods of time, understanding that preparing the mind through previous problem solving could be paramount to finding solutions to current problems, and having the ability to access more cognitive domains when searching for solutions are all inherent in the problem solving process.

What I am still searching for and what I set out to discover in my research was a more in-depth description and account of that moment I have defined as the unencumbered moment.

CHAPTER III - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Albert Bandura suggested that it is also important to understand the private logic that an individual gives events. This understanding requires an insider view. If we do not listen and empathize we may miss half of the data (Seita and Brendtro, 2002, p. 84).

Formulating the Research Questions

For this study, I formulated the research questions through introspective and retrospective processes where I used as my starting point my experience of my own unencumbered moment. In my mind, I repeatedly explored the circumstances of my life prior to my experience of my unencumbered moment. As part of my process, I performed a critical analysis of my actions, my beliefs, my emotional states, how I viewed myself in relation to others, and how I viewed myself in relation to me. Then, I looked at the same things after my experience of the unencumbered moment. After acknowledging to myself that I am a different person now because of my unencumbered moment and having others acknowledge to me that I am a different person in sobriety than the person they knew who took drugs, drank alcohol, and used violence to gain personal safety, I realized that I must complete an in-depth examination of the time frame between these two perceptions of myself. Having completed the critical analysis of my life during that time and the experience that led to my unencumbered moment I was able to formulate four research questions that provide the foundation on which this study is built.

The first question - Given the nature and goals of the research project, as given in

the consent form, you recently had something happen to you that allowed you to make a positive life change. Can you tell in as much detail as possible about the change and the things that led up to you making such a change?- makes a specific request for information regarding the experience of the unencumbered moment, and makes a general request for any relevant background information the participant believes was crucial to having the experience of the unencumbered moment. The second research question -What were some of the feelings you experienced before you made this decision to change your life? Further, what was your thinking focused on just prior to your making this positive life change? - was formulated to delve deeper into the feelings associated with the life events, relationships, and life circumstances of the research participant. The third research question - Did you make the decision to change your life in a split-second decision or was it something you thought about for a period of time? If it was a split-second decision what if anything did you hear, see, smell, think, or feel that promoted you making the decision at that time? - dealt more specifically with the unencumbered moment and whether the research participant believed the acquisition of new knowledge came to him or her in a split-second or over a long period of time. The fourth research question - If you thought about making a life change for a longer period of time but found that you could not make that life change, what were the kinds of things that prevented you from making the desired change? - asked very specifically for the opinion of the research participant on what were thought to be the barriers that did not allow for a life change before the experience of the unencumbered moment. These four basic research questions allowed me to work with each research participant to discover with them the experience of the unencumbered moment.

Research Participants

Originally this study was designed to interview youth. However, there were too many barriers to overcome to allow the youth to participate in this project. For the most part, the youth were willing to participate in this study. However, the youth's parents would not sign the necessary consent forms stating that they did not want others to know about the inner workings of that youth's family. For the youth in the foster care system who were willing to participate, their social workers, who act as the guardians, were reluctant to sign the consent forms because of their fear of acting outside their employment parameters of breaking the confidentiality of the children in their care. Because of these issues, this project was redesigned to interview adults who were willing to articulate their experiences through introspective and retrospective processes.

However, the recruiting of individuals to participate in this study was quite difficult. I approached a number of colleagues and asked if they would participate in this study. I was turned down several times because of the rules governing their employment. Many refused to participate in this project because of fear of reprisals from their supervisors. I reaffirmed that the participants in this project would be anonymous, but was told that there would be sufficient information obtained through the interview process that there was, as they saw it at least, a potential for others to know who they were.

I designed a one page flyer and distributed it throughout some office buildings in South-West British Columbia. I received no replies from people showing interest in participating in this project. I then contacted friends and colleagues to elicit their help.

Further, I asked my friends to contact some of the people they knew who might be interested in participating in this project. In this way I was able to attract 15 individuals who were willing to participate in this project as potential research participants.

A very basic question – Have you experienced a moment in time when you were able to make a decision that completely changed your life in a positive way? - was used to establish an individual's eligibility in becoming a research participant, in that, if an individual described him or herself as having experienced what I have termed an unencumbered moment that led to second-order positive life change, then the person was asked to be a research participant. In total ten individuals, four males and six females, ranging in ages from 19 years to 58 years, were eligible and consented, when asked, to be research participants for this study. These people provided descriptions of their life changing moment and their life experiences leading up to that moment. Their descriptions of their life experiences are the research data for this study. In selecting the research participants for this study, I also looked for individuals who were interested in learning more about how they came to experience their unencumbered moment. Further, I looked for people who were willing to talk about what their life experiences meant to them. In other words, people who could articulate clearly what had happened to them.

Five of the individuals that participated in this study are people I know. However, in some cases, individuals agreed to participate in this study as a result of a secondary relationship, that is, someone I know recruited people to participate in this study based on their relationship with that individual, that is, a friend asked a friend to participate in this study.

Once qualified, the participants were given two copies of the consent form to

read, sign, with the understanding that I would retain one of those copies. The other copy of the consent form was theirs to keep and do with as they willed (see Appendix A for details re: the consent form).

I was very fortunate in my selection of individuals for this study. I interviewed six female participants from various walks of life, from several different provinces of Canada, and indeed from different countries. I also interviewed four male participants from varying family backgrounds, with extreme social histories, and from several different provinces of Canada.

One participant had to be dropped from the study because more information was needed to fill in gaps in the data gathered during the long interview. Several attempts were made to contact this participant to elicit more information from her, but she refused to respond to any of my attempts at communication. Because of her unwillingness to engage in the further interviews, I believed that she had withdrawn her consent to be in the study. All the information that I had gathered before she no longer responded was dropped from the study and destroyed and her signaled withdrawal was fully respected. As a result of this exclusion there are nine research participants providing the data for this study, four males and five females. The long interviews with the research participants generated a total of 180 pages of transcribed raw data to be analyzed.

The Collection of Data

Although guided always by my research questions (see Appendix B), through the interview process I remained flexible. I did not force the interviews in any given direction and allowed the participants to discuss their life experiences in their own words. In this way, I was able to spontaneously formulate questions specific to each person's

experience and draw out the research participants and encourage them to disclose more about their own lives and the processes that lead them to experience the unencumbered moment. Through this process I was able to gather thick, deep, and rich descriptions of each participant's life experiences. As each participant talked about his or her life and experiences, each memory experienced seemed to trigger another memory and provided more information to enlarge upon the description of the happenings in her or his life. Each participant seemed to go through a similar process that appeared to be like "*removing layers of an onion*" that eventually leads one to the core, an understanding of the meaning each participant assigned to the life experiences that lead to the unencumbered moment.

Theoretical Underpinnings of my Research Approach

My investigative approach to my questions about the unencumbered moment is informed by what Janesick (1994) terms a "naturalistic research approach" (p. 212). Researchers conducting studies from this approach focus on how individuals interpret the events and occurrences in their daily lives and attempt to understand the many meanings encased in daily living. The researcher seeks an understanding in qualitative and holistic terms without manipulating variables, predicting outcomes or prior hypothesizing about the phenomenon being studied. Instead, understanding or knowledge is gained through conversations and direct contact with research participants. In this way, the researcher can be assured of "*getting the real goods*," because the meanings assigned to the event being investigated come directly from those who experienced the phenomenon. Only through direct conversation with the research participant does the researcher learn how the participant makes sense of the event and how the individual either assimilates or

accommodates the information obtained as a result of the event or experience.

As a researcher, I worked hard at being present to my participants without giving personal or professional advice or opinions, making judgments either personal or professional, for or against those participating in the study, giving life direction, or making assumptions about the research data. The descriptions of the unencumbered moment and the context in which the moment took place were provided strictly by the participants. The quality of the research data, that is, “the rich thick description (Sechrest & Sidani, 1995),” is in direct relation to the quality of the relationships I established prior to and during the interview process. As previously stated, I have personal relationships with five of the participants. My interactions with these individuals over the years have, in some cases, evolved into friendships while some interactions remain strictly on a professional level. For those people I did not have a relationship with, I believe, I promoted feelings of safety and comfort by conducting the research interviews in the home environments of some of the research participants. In this way these people had a familiar setting and, I believe, allowed them to be more open in their dialogue of the events and feelings that led to the unencumbered moment. For others, I conducted the research interviews in the home of a friend. By conducting the remainder of the interviews in this home, I was able to offer the participants tea or coffee and a chance to sit and engage in small talk prior to the commencement of the research interview. This small talk and open discussion helped to put the research participants at ease within the new surroundings. Because of these conditions the participants were, I believe, more willing to look deeper into themselves and tried hard to provide the clearest in-depth descriptions of the feelings, events, and thoughts that led to their experiencing an

unencumbered moment. It is my belief that without these conditions this study would not have generated the depth of information that it did regarding the contributing factors and the processes each individual went through to experience an unencumbered moment. An expanded explication of my research assumptions is provided below.

Research Assumptions

I agree with Creswell (1998) that “qualitative researchers approach their studies with a certain paradigm or worldview, a basic set of beliefs or assumptions that guide their inquiries” (p. 74). These “basic set of beliefs or assumptions” allows the qualitative researcher to commence a qualitative study with “general questions and refines them as the study proceeds” (p. 78). In other words, through following this basic set of beliefs the qualitative researcher allows the information gathered from the research participants during the course of the study to, not only, answer the researcher’s general questions but also allows the researcher to generate more specific research questions. The five categories of assumption are: ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological. An explanation of these assumptions follows.

The Ontological Assumption

As Creswell (1998) states:

... [T]he ontological issue addresses the nature of reality for the qualitative researcher; reality is constructed by individuals involved in the research situation. Thus, multiple realities exist, such as the realities of the researcher, those of individuals being investigated, and those of the reader or audience interpreting a study. The qualitative researcher needs to report these realities, rely on voices and interpretations of informants

through extensive quotes, present themes that reflect words used by the informants, and advance evidence of different perspectives on each theme. Thus, for example, in a phenomenological study, one reports multiple statements representing the diverse perspectives on the phenomenon being explored (Moustakas, 1994, as cited in Creswell, 1994, p. 76).

Thus, for Creswell (1998) the ontological assumption speaks to ways of being and the existence of multiple felt realities. If how I experience the world and how I act differs from the way that the research participant experience and act in the world, then it becomes imperative that I, as the researcher, acknowledge these differences. In other words, since there are multiple ways of being and interacting in life, it seemed to me that I needed to stay open to the possibility that the research participants would have multiple ways of living their lives and multiple interpretations of how life can be lived.

In this study, I looked for specific words that the research participants commonly used as they described how they came to know what kind of person they were while coping with the events of their lives prior to their experience of the unencumbered moment. These common themes were then taken and broken down to a one or two word description of the research participants' description of their experiences. For example, one common theme in the data is a description of how each individual hit a low point in their life where they did not want to continue living. This theme was broken down further and is defined in Chapter XIII – Findings as “hitting bottom.”

Hence, the research participants were asked to give an account of how they lived their lives. What they did and how they did it. In the disclosing of their life stories each research participant told me how they coped with the events in their lives. With regard to

the unencumbered moment, especially, I asked them to describe in detail what that moment was like, how it felt, and how they recognized it as such a moment. Further, I looked for statements that spoke to their philosophy of life as I had spoken to my philosophy of life with, for example, “live hard, die fast” and the underlying rule to fight rather than take flight.

I looked for commonalities in how the research participants described the behaviors they used to cope with life and for commonalities in how the research participants defined or described themselves during their moments of coping. These commonalities were then used to title the sections used and further described in Chapter XIV- Integration of Findings.

The Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption speaks to the relationship between researchers and that which is being studied. As Creswell (1998) explains that with regard to:

... the relationship of the researcher to that being researched, qualitative researchers interact with those they study, whether this interaction assumes the form of living with or observing informants over a prolonged period of time or actual collaboration. In short, the researcher tries to minimize the “distance” or “objective separateness” (Guba & Lincoln, 1988, p. 94) between himself or herself and those being researched. . . (p. 76).

Just as there are multiple ways of being in the world there are also multiple ways of knowing. I paid close attention to how the participants approached making sense of

their lives, how they described their approach to reflecting - or not - on their life circumstances. For example, one of my participants spoke of being a woman, having a white skin, experiencing racism, and the passion and love she has for her native country even after she endured the extreme conditions of her life and her country. Being raped at a young age, Jill walked past the perpetrators house every day going to and from school. Jill spoke of being frozen by her fear, yet lying in bed at night not being able to sleep because of the adrenalin rushes her fear produced. The impacts of these events remain with her to this day and have helped to forge a woman who is willing to fight rather than take to flight. Although Jill eventually left her native country because of the civil unrest and extreme violence, there remains a piece of her heart that is South African. Another participant, Lynn spoke of being out of control at a young age. Refusing to comply with family rules, she was asked to leave the family home. Another participant, Lynn admits that during the early adult period of her life she had no conscience, no life goals except for getting high on drugs and alcohol, and doing high risk behaviors that promoted her belief that she would not live to old age. Despite the acts of violence, Lynn was able to reflect on her life and believed that if she continued her actions she would die. Lynn sought out the help she needed to change her life. For most of her life, Lynn identified herself through the eyes of others. Being told she was adopted, being asked to leave the family home, and bouncing from one relationship to another in the hopes of finding love only hardened Lynn's belief that she was unworthy and that she should not expect to be loved by anyone, including herself. Through her unencumbered moment, Lynn chose to commit to take action in her life in order to save it. Further examples are explained in the chapters that follow.

The Axiological Assumption

The axiological assumption addresses the importance of researchers acknowledging the roles of their personal values and biases. Creswell (1998) explains this as:

. . . [T]his role and the close distance between the researcher and the participants have implications for the axiological assumption, the role of values in a study. In a qualitative study, the investigator admits the value-laden nature of the study and actively reports his or her values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field. . . (p. 76-77).

In the initial stages of this study, it was my belief that the unencumbered moment was a split-second flash of insight. I believed, before the unencumbered moment occurred in my life, that new ways of understanding myself were not available to me, and somehow, almost as if by magic, an answer to a problem just appeared. I had to put this notion aside and focus on really hearing what my research participants had to say about their own unencumbered moment and let go of my “by magic” notions. Initially, I also found myself making judgments about the validity of the life experiences that led my participants to experience the unencumbered moment. I controlled this bias by letting the experiences of the research participants stand on their own merit. As I allowed the information to emerge from the research data my understanding of the different circumstances that led each individual to experience the unencumbered moment increased and although my comparisons to my own experiences continued, I did so

without the judgment that my way is the only way.

Another bias that I had to acknowledge was my ability to empathize with the experiences of the research participants. Because I know the intimate details of my own life, I found myself empathizing with the personal life experiences of the research participants. I had to overcome my desire to put their experiences into my own words, to finish their sentences, or to finish their thoughts so that their experiences would more closely match my own somehow making my experiences “*more legitimate*” in some way. My solution to this problem was that I had to allow the research participants to clarify the meaning of their experiences, to finish their own thoughts, and to not finish their sentences but to allow those meanings to emerge on their own out of the research data. This solution, though relatively simple to state, is not easy to perform.

The Rhetorical Assumption

The rhetorical assumption addresses the parameters regarding the use of language to explain that which has been studied. This assumption speaks to using the words of the participant wherever possible. Creswell (1998) states that:

. . . basing research on the rhetorical assumption means that the qualitative investigator uses specific terms and a personal and literary narrative in the study. . . . Words such as understanding, discover, and meaning form the glossary of emerging qualitative terms and are important rhetorical markers in writing purpose statements and research questions. . . . Moreover, the language of qualitative studies becomes personal, literary, and based on definitions that evolve during a study rather than being defined by the researcher at the beginning of a study. . . .(p. 77).

In the current study, as a starting point, I deconstructed the interviews and grouped together pieces where the participants used similar language to describe their life events. Whenever possible, I use quotes from the raw data in supporting these groupings. The analysis of the data and the writing phase of this project are focused on including the language used to describe the categories and patterns of meaning that emerged from the participants' stories and the exact terms are specific to their understandings. I paid close attention to how their words were used to describe that event and stayed true to their language in formulating the findings section of this dissertation.

The Methodological Assumption

As Creswell (1998) explains:

. . . from these distinctions about reality, the relationship between the researcher and that being researched, the roles of values, and the rhetoric of the study emerges the methodological assumption, how one conceptualizes the entire research process. . . [T]he qualitative researcher works inductively, such as when he or she develops categories from informants rather than specifying them in advance of the research . . . (p. 77).

Therefore, I looked directly to my own grasp of the focus of my study and that of my participants to conceptualize what form the study would take. What I found was that I did not have a framework that I could impose, but rather I searched for a framework or frameworks within my data. The data did indeed provide me with categories from ideas, language, and concepts put forth by the research participants that will be discussed in detail in Chapter XIII – Findings. I knew that I wanted to conduct social qualitative

research that focused on the experiences of others, using their language, ideas, concepts, and the descriptions of their experiences.

Conducting Research within the Qualitative Paradigm

Creswell (1994) outlines many of the character attributes needed by researchers who are entertaining the notion of conducting social research from the qualitative paradigm. First and foremost, Creswell (1998) acknowledges that a qualitative researcher must be comfortable with and have a clear understanding of the five assumptions (listed above) of the qualitative research paradigm. Secondly, the qualitative researcher must hone his or her writing skills because, according to Zwicky (1992), as cited in Scott (2003), “the process of writing/re-writing becomes a layering up in search of a shape that will emerge” (p. 12). Further, in writing “we learn to admit, and must teach, that what emerges in our writing is somehow connected to our interest and depends on our connection to it” (p. 12). Therefore, a qualitative researcher, I must keep in the forefront of my mind that:

. . . writing has a larger role to play, however than simply recording observations, reflections, questions and connections. Writing is crucial for making sense of experiences . . . writing isn't a mopping-up operation, an onerous add-on. It is an integral aspect of the inquiry process. As such it's a critical vehicle of creating meaning; it's at the very heart of any action research enterprise. The writing act itself is party of the process of discovery: a process in which the discovery/the research is on-going through the writing. This is to acknowledge that all research is construct and that the act of writing the research is an act of interpretation, selection,

formulation. Writing involves choices and stance, and inevitably voice.

Someone is writing. It is located. The work, both process and emerging text, are going on (p. 17).

One must also increase one's comfort level and ability to use a computer, sharpen one's data analysis skills, and finally become more familiar with the inner workings of a library. Thirdly, the researcher must become comfortable with the knowledge that qualitative research will follow no set pattern of rules or procedures (outside of the five assumptions mentioned earlier), the research data will be, as a general rule, highly ambiguous in nature, and that conducting the research will take a significant amount of time (Creswell, 1994). Fourthly, the very nature of qualitative research is exploratory and the researcher will have little or no inkling what the research variables will be over the course of the research project. The researcher must be aware that if the nature of the inquiry is exploratory the information generated as a result of the research methods is context dependent. Lastly, the researcher must be sensitive to the audience that will eventually read the findings of the study, that is, use language that is simple, concise, and clear, understand that the writing component of a qualitative project is a story of peoples' experience and should read as such (Creswell, 1994, p. 9).

Research Challenges

My goal was from the beginning to allow the participants ideas about the unencumbered moment to emerge. In order to make that possible I had to strive to set aside any preconceptions I might have about the unencumbered moment. Sechrest and Sidani (1995) acknowledge that there are two problems in qualitative research. Firstly, it can be asked what is being observed and by whom? Secondly, who and how judges the

trustworthiness of the work being represented by the qualitative researcher. Sechrest and Sidani emphasize that qualitative and quantitative research are “at bottom, empirical, that is, depending on observation (of what, if not “reality?” p. 79), and acknowledge that there are different ways of knowing and that in research, qualitative or quantitative, the primary function of a researcher is to “observe, ask, [and] experiment” (p. 79). Sechrest and Sidani stress the point that in qualitative research there is a danger of the researcher “going native” (Sandelowski, 1986) and/or changing the criteria of what is being observed and by whom through long term exposure. Given my own experience with the unencumbered moment I had to treat each participant as though s/he was the first interviewee. In this way I was able to stay engaged in the interview process with each participant and allow the focus of the interview to remain on their experiences that led them to an unencumbered moment. Because of this level of focus on their experiences no raw data from any interview was shared with any other participant. I had to be careful to avoid what Shaffer (1989) calls habituation and describes as “a decrease in one’s response to a stimulus that has become familiar through repetition” (p. 193). Because this is a study of exploration of how several people came to experience a similar moment in time, that is, the unencumbered moment, habituation was not a major concern for me in this project. Although each participant experienced an unencumbered moment, their life stories were so diverse that it was not difficult to treat each story and each participant as separate. I allowed the participants to tell their stories in their words, while providing as little direction as possible, while still remaining within the structure that was the interview process.

In this study I asked questions directly associated to and focusing on the

descriptions of the life experiences of the research participants as they remembered those events. In my search for the meanings these individuals assigned to their life experiences and how those life events, feelings, and perceptions lead each individual to experience their unencumbered moment, I asked numerous specific questions about their life experiences and their process of how they made sense of those events based on the information they provided through the interview process. Through this process the research participants were able to discuss in depth their perceptions, feelings, the meanings they assigned to their life events, and how those meaning impacted their personal issues such as, feelings of self-esteem or self-worth. As a result of the research participants' willingness to disclose these intimate details of their lives, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the processes they went through that allowed each participant to experience the unencumbered moment.

Janesick (1994) equates qualitative social research with that of a dancer. Just as a dancer goes through a warm up routine before the actual dance, a qualitative researcher goes through a warm up routine before the commencement of social research. The qualitative researcher begins to think about what it is that wants to be learned as a result of the study. The researcher formulates a research question that will be instrumental in choosing a research methodology. After having chosen a research methodology the researcher accepts the philosophical assumptions that will guide the actual research within those philosophical assumptions. Having warmed up properly the dancer is now in the physical condition to perform the right and left turns and bends of the dance. To continue the analogy the researcher is now ready to conduct the aspects needed to collect the research data and to make the design decisions needed to answer the research

question and to be flexible in the study while keeping the research question foremost in mind. Once the dance is over the dancer then takes the time to cool down. In social research the investigator now takes the time to write up findings and results and to put the finishing touches on the project. Further, the researcher must make decisions about how to leave the research field setting and minimizing the emotional impact for the researcher and the participants.

The Janesick (1994) analogy of the dancer preparing to perform a dance is actually quite similar to the actual process followed to conduct the interviews in this study. For example, in the initial stages of the interview process there was a time where I engaged the research participant in casual dialogue. We talked about anything they wanted to talk about. As the time approached for the interview to commence, the research participants became more focused and directed in the conversations wanting to know more about how their information was going to be used, what did I expect to accomplish doing this study, would their information be helpful to the study, and how would they know it would be helpful. Once the interview began I used my skills as an interviewer to assist them in providing me with the richest, in-depth descriptions of their life events, feelings, and perceptions that eventually led to each of these individuals experiencing their unencumbered moment based on the information they provided in answering the secondary research questions. At the conclusion of the interview I asked each participant specifically if they had anything to add to their interviews, if they had any comments on the interview process, and if they could give any suggestions that would improve the interview process. I also told each interviewee that if they thought of any new information that they would be able to add that to their interviews when I made

contact with them the second time.

Confirmation and Verification

Confirmation and verification of the research data still relies heavily on the interpretations of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). However, if a researcher wants further confirmation on research data, the data can be reviewed by an external researcher who would analyze the data in the hopes that the external would find identical or similar themes and patterns as the original researcher (Dukes, 1984, as cited in Creswell, 1998). Another sound method of confirming the research is to have someone read the research and see if the themes and patterns that have been developed in the research data are consistent with the experiences of the external reader. Creswell (1998) also mentions that if one wants to further verify the current research data one can use logic to see if the patterns and themes that emerge from the analysis of data fit together logically and “whether the same elements could be arranged to constitute an entirely different pattern” (p. 207). Finally, does the data reveal information that is strictly relevant to the phenomenon being investigated or can the findings also be substituted as findings for a different phenomenon. Creswell gives the example of grief and how the findings of a study on grief also give insight into “similar experiences such as separation and divorce” (p. 207).

In this study, verification and confirmation of the research data consisted of more than using only my own interpretations as suggested by Moustakas (1994). I did not use what Creswell (1998) and Dukes (1984) refer to as an external reader, but used the research participants themselves to provide the verification and confirmation of the research data. Once the interviews were transcribed I used the electronic mail system to

send a copy of each transcribed interview to the individual who provided the information. I requested that each research participant read the transcription of their interview and asked them to comment on the content and context of the information each provided. For interview statements that I deemed to be ambiguous, I contacted the research participant and asked them to provide additional information specifically addressing the ambiguity. This back and forth process of defining the meanings of the interview statements continued until each research participant was satisfied that the information provided was consistent with each participant's intended meaning. In other words, the process continued until each participant was satisfied with the content and context of the information provided in the interview. Not only did this process verify and confirm the research data through "the absence of insight" (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 15), but also provided this study with what Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe as internal validity or the "isomorphism of findings with reality" (p. 114).

Analyzing the Data

Creswell (1998) suggests a six step process for analyzing data that speaks to qualitative descriptions of personal experiences. When analyzing the data for this study I followed these six steps. According to Creswell (1998), the first step in the analysis process is my writing a full description of my own experience of the unencumbered moment by way of articulating my personal view of the experience. That view is given in the introduction.

The second step is finding statements in the data that describe how the participants experienced the phenomenon under study. In order to perform this process of horizontalization, I read the accounts of the research participants' experiences and I

looked for and extracted what I thought to be significant statements that spoke to a feeling, an emotion, a thought, an insight, or a statement of clarity that pertained to the conditions the participant experienced prior to experiencing their unencumbered moment.

Once I recognized and grouped these statements I defined a meaning to these statements, either by myself or together with the participants. For example, when the statement meaning was self-explanatory such as the participant saying things like, “I felt high levels of anxiety,” “This was not me,” or “I felt really alone,” I accepted that statement at face value and proceeded to the next step in the data analysis process. When I found the meaning of the statement to be ambiguous, that is, when the participant said things like, “It felt crazy to be in that spot,” “I knew I had something to do,” or “Life was not going to be the same,” I met with the participant a second or even a third time to get clarification as to what s/he meant. Once the meaning of the “ambiguous” statement was defined I felt justified to continue to the next step in the data analysis process.

In the third step, the creation of categories of meanings, I took words with similar meanings and explanatory statements as generated by the participants and put those explanatory statements into groups using the language of the participants to describe these commonalities in their experiences. Once a clear meaning was established for the participants’ statements, I grouped similar statements that defined aspects of their experiences surrounding their unencumbered moment and labeled these as common to all experiences or specific to one. Within these groups of statements, I looked for explanations that addressed the participants’ behaviors, thoughts, feelings, events, and life situations prior to their experiencing their unencumbered moment.

In the fourth step, I looked at the experiences of the unencumbered moment by

looking for multiple ways of describing the phenomenon under study and multiple descriptions to make sure I had not overlooked any possibilities. Further, I looked for statements of differences, that is, statements about personal emotional states that were specific to one participant's experience of the unencumbered moment, but not to others. Once these steps were completed I began writing the narratives of the experiences of the unencumbered moments.

In the fifth step, providing an overview, I formulated what I thought was an overview of the essence of the experience of the unencumbered moment based on the information given by the research participants.

Strengths of Qualitative Research

The most obvious strength of qualitative research is the verification of the "account made through extensive time spent in the field, the detailed thick description, and the closeness to participants in the study all add to the value of a study" (Creswell, 1998, p. 201). Secondly, the philosophical assumptions that guide the qualitative researcher and the research promote life as something not to be feared but to be explored and understood, rather than life as a problem that one needs to find a solution (Creswell, 1994). Third, qualitative research is not introspective but retrospective. According to van Manen (1992), "[A] person cannot reflect on lived experience while living through the experience. For example, van Manen believes that if one "tries to reflect on one's anger while being angry, one finds that the anger has already changed or dissipated" (p. 10). The ability to be retrospective means that people who have experienced an unencumbered moment have the ability to look back at their experience and have accommodated new information that led them change themselves or their life conditions

for the better in some way. Through the conducting of qualitative research projects research participants will be afforded the opportunity to learn more about themselves and how they make sense of their world. This type of research goes in search of what it means to be a human being, given our complexities in the context of daily living.

Drawbacks in Qualitative Research

The most obvious drawback to this type of social science is the abstract nature, that is, we are looking at the meaning of an event in the life of several individuals. For many there is nothing concrete to examine, to pull apart and see why it works the way it does for any given individual, and there are too many variables that cannot be accounted for when conducting research in this manner. Second, is the use of language to try to describe something that is at best difficult to describe. I believe that although language is one of our main styles of communication something is lost in the action/reaction of having experienced an event such as the unencumbered moment that changes one's life at such a deep and intimate level. Third, according to van Manen (1992), qualitative studies are not designed to be a problem solving tool. We as social researchers are after the meaning of the lived experience of others about a given phenomenon and are not trying to find a solution to any given thing. Fourth, it may not be possible to make a universal statement about the phenomenon being investigated because qualitative research looks for the meaning and lived experience of individuals. I accept this notion and do not believe that it is possible to say that the way the individuals in this study experienced their unencumbered moment is how everyone experiences similar moments, I do however believe that I have learned a great deal about the unencumbered moment from this process.

CHAPTER IV-CHRIS' STORY

Introduction to Chris

Chris is a male in his early thirties. He works in a local doctor's office as the office coordinator and manager. Over the years of going to see this doctor Chris and I established a professional relationship that is often mixed with conversations of personal philosophy and current events. Chris agreed to participate in this study because he wants others to know his own life journey and hopes that in his story there may be information that will help others.

Chris' Story

Chris lived with his brother and parents in one of the Prairie Provinces during his childhood years. One of Chris' early childhood memories is of his:

... mom sitting at the kitchen table and all of a sudden she'd be just so....she'd be totally blank. There would be nothing there and you could rub your hand in front of her. I can remember we would giggle as a family, the three of us at her because she was zoned out so far ...

Chris remembers "there was a whole bunch of confusion surrounding that because we never knew what was the matter with her." It was not until much later that Chris and his family found out that his mother was being diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). It eventually became clear to Chris that when his mother would have her blank outs because of the MS there was little to no chance that Chris would be able to communicate with her as a family member.

When Chris was 8 or 9 years of age he was completely caught off guard when a

“raspberry jam jar came across by his head and hit the wall.” Chris had a moment of understanding that mother’s behavior was inappropriate when he remembers thinking: “Gosh! That was wrong.” In Chris’ family there was a lot of “anger and stuff being emotionally thrown back and forth with them.” Chris acknowledges the volatility in the anger although he believes there never was any “hitting or anything like that, but there was a lot of yelling and a lot of my mom not being able to communicate with my dad and vice versa.” Chris remembers “constantly struggling to find out where I fit into the family. I was always in conflict, trying to figure out where I fit here. How do I fit in?” Because of the volatility of his mother’s anger, the lack of communication within the family unit, and Chris’ desire to live in peace, quiet, and calmness, Chris decided that the only way to achieve his goals was for him to become a middle man of sorts and try to ease the emotional pains of anger from his mother and father in an attempt to bring a level of calmness to his own world.

In his role as middleman he would “allow them to work him into whatever they needed at the time.” Chris would “mould myself into whoever I needed to be at the time.” As Chris says, I was,

... always, always the middle guy. I wanted to have peace in my house and the only way that I figured out how to do it was if I was the middle guy and I would talk to each of them or I would buffer them. If there was a big fight I would distract them somehow and buffer each side ...

In the beginning, Chris was somewhat successful at keeping his personal environment in a state of calmness that provided him with some of the peace and quiet he wanted. However, as Chris aged into his teen years, his mother’s MS progressed and

became more debilitating and the demands placed on him by his mother also increased. Chris remembers one day that he “was washing the dishes and my mom stopped arguing with my father and she turned to me and said, ‘You’re not washing those dishes properly. You’re supposed to be rubbing the plate this way.’” No longer able to control his anger at the situation Chris screamed at his mother,

... what the f--k is the matter with you? It’s not about this f--king plate and whatever it is get it off your chest. Tell us, what is it? What the f—k is your problem? Like this is not about the dishes, how I am washing the dishes because my mother was angry with my father but her anger came out directed at me because I was washing the dishes in a left to right motion instead of a right to left motion. Well who cares? This is going to get washed anyway, so if you’re angered at someone, direct it to that person. This is not about the f—king dishes, so deal with it!

Chris became so angered that he found himself in the middle of yet another one of his parents arguments that he “snapped, taking the plate and smashed it down on the counter.” He ran out of the door and jumped into his car and drove all day, then turned around and drove most of the night to get back home. Chris used this driving time to gather himself emotionally and to help prepare him for the next time there was a violent emotional outburst between his mother and father. Chris knew that he still had a role to play within his family unit and he was not ready to give up that role at that time.

Throughout the years while Chris struggled in his family, he always looked to the relationship with his grandmother for his emotional support because Chris knew where he fit in with her. As Chris states:

. . . it was great cause I always had my grandmother because she was sort of a really level-headed woman who never...she never questioned anything, never had any expectations of you or demands. It was always whatever you presented to her. It just kind of...we worked through it or we went with it. She never questioned anything you did unless it brought her harm. But she was very level-headed, a great lady. I liked her. So it was good that I had that sort of level-headedness around me. I was always dear to my grandmother. I was always hanging out with her as much as I possibly could. So that was always sort of a good sense . . .

Chris in his role of middleman adopted several strategies that he found would assist him in keeping the emotional levels of his parents in a more balanced position. One such strategy was bringing his grandmother to his home for Sunday dinners. Chris hoped that the presence of his grandmother would help to settle and balance the emotions and moods of his parents. The presence of the grandmother in the home on Sundays worked a dual purpose for Chris. First his grandmother did have the calming effect that Chris was looking for and attempting to establish within his family unit and he got to spend more time with his grandmother and to feel her love and support in an environment that was generally so full of emotional chaos.

In the midst of yet another parental argument, Chris realized at a deep emotional and personal level that he could no longer play the role of middle man in his family. He understood that his parents would continue to argue no matter what he did or how he did it. Chris knew that all his efforts at trying to keep the relationship between his parents calm were just him wasting his energy on them. When asked about this moment, Chris

describes it as:

. . . an inner voice that said to me 'I'm not going to take this anymore. I can remember feeling just like a rumbling in my stomach of all the pain and the anger and chaos that ensued from all the times that these two people yelled at each other and the meanness and the mean-spiritedness of the two battling and I just thought I can't take this anymore . . .

Shortly after Chris' realization he moved from the prairies to a city in south western British Columbia specifically to get away from his parents emotional chaos. As Chris puts it "I had to be away from my family and I didn't quite know how to do that, but I moved to southern British Columbia to break out on my own and figure out who I was in that sense."

Chris moved to British Columbia and found a job that seemed to involve very little stress, but he soon wanted both more of a challenge and more income. Through a friend he found work in a printing company owned by two men- one who took charge of the day-to-day operations and one who played a less visible role and took charge of the finances.

From the beginning Chris had concerns about the second man. Then "a year or two into the business the first owner absconded with a whole lot of money and used me as a pawn to do it. It gave me kind of a bad feeling." Because the first owner was now gone and had taken a lot of the business' operating capital, the second owner now assumed a management position and took over the duties that included the responsibilities of the day-to-day operations. Chris was flooded with his original emotions of not liking this person and not wanting to be around this person and certainly

not wanting to work with this person on a daily basis. Chris realized that he was in a familiar emotional place of trying and succeeding in convincing himself that even though he does not like this person that “it will be alright, we will get through this, and things will be okay.” Chris’ was aware that his self-esteem and self-worth were very low back then and he remembers that he had just broken up with a life partner. Chris thought “where else am I going to go for a job at this point in time? I did not think I had enough...I just didn’t think I could offer anything to anybody at the time. I just didn’t think I could go anywhere.” A trap of convenience also presented itself to Chris. “It was a place to go where not a great deal of things were asked from me and where I could go in and do my job and go home. I also thought at the time that there was little to no pressure involved in my job.

According to Chris, the second owner was the type of “guy that kind of webbed his way into the business, of course, because he had to and he was a person that could only do everything on his own. He wouldn’t let anybody else help him. We constantly had to wait for him.” Because of the attitude and behaviors of his new manager, Chris found himself in the familiar spot of playing the middle man again. However, this time he was the middle person and liaison between the new manager and customers and the new manager and other employees. Very quickly Chris realized that he was saying “yes” to all requests coming from every direction including, management, customers, and employees. Chris realized that his role in this printing company had become no different than the role he played in his family. Chris started to give serious thought and consideration to changing careers or at least place of employment. Chris remembers “it was just kind of like my parents being...growing up with my parents where I just waited

to do what they needed to do when they wanted to do it and I would just say yes, yes, yes. I would just, you know, wait and wait.”

The new manager would never say no to a customer, regardless of how busy the staff was with other printing tasks. Because of this Chris would find himself in the position of having to deal with irate customers who would come into the print shop to pick up their orders only to find not only were their orders not complete many times there were no work orders for the jobs and that their orders were not even started. Chris recalls that the manager would “promise the job and then when the customer came to pick it up, of course, the jobs weren’t done and nine out of ten times the manager wasn’t around. He would be off somewhere else, probably purposefully knowing that someone was going to come and pick the job up. Unfortunately, I would be the one that was stuck with the customer yelling at me because their work was not finished.” This kind of working environment was too much for some of the other employees and one person in particular had had enough and terminated his employment. The manager came to Chris and asked him if he would take on more responsibility within the company. Chris staying true to his form said “yes” and became responsible for the laminating section within the printing company.

With Chris’ new level of responsibility came a leadership role as well as a middle management position. Chris was not only the bookkeeper but now he had three employees under his direction and supervision. Working at the printing company was not all bad times and Chris remembers his employees were a “great group of ladies. We had so much...it was lots of fun. It was the only thing that made going to the job everyday worthwhile.” As with all businesses there comes a time when there is a shift in the

economic times and downsizing and layoffs have to occur in order to maintain a viable business. Such was this case where two of the three women under his supervision had to take a layoff due to a shortage of work.

For Chris his frustration level continued to rise and he knew what it was doing to him. Economic times began to pick up with more orders coming into the printing company. However, the manager refused to hire back those people he had previously laid off. This meant that the workload for the remaining staff increased dramatically. Printing orders were continuing to be processed but the paperwork, that is, the invoices for payment were not being completed by the manager. Chris remembers “people kept calling looking for their billings and I would have to say to the manager that these people were calling. I would have to continually ask and ask and ask for him to complete the paperwork so I could do my bookkeeping duties. However, he would put me off and put me off.” Even through the high levels of frustration and anxiety Chris would “wake up every day and go back for more. I could not figure out why, but everyday I made a choice. I’d get up in the morning and I’d go back to this place of work.” Things “progressively got a little more difficult, a little bit more difficult and I would just, for some unknown reason, I just stayed there. I also tried to figure out why I stayed and one of the things was for me that I started smoking a lot of pot.” The introduction of drugs into the situation allowed Chris “to be numbed and he knew that was what he was doing it for.” Chris remembers that he really liked smoking pot because it allowed him to retreat into his own world. Smoking pot also provided him with a social aspect as he would go to a friend’s house to smoke with her. Chris remembers that smoking pot “was part of a creative process for him where he would giggle and have a few laughs with his

friend and then go to work in the garden.” Chris believed that smoking pot was not a problem for him because it allowed him to numb out and not feel those feelings he was experiencing when in his place of employment. Chris acknowledges that the pot smoking became abusive when the pot no longer numbed him from the feelings of being “abused all day long at work mentally and verbally and accept it.” Chris would “just take it every day and then would go home and light up a joint and complain about the entire day to whoever would listen.”

The people that cared about Chris would offer suggestions of things for him to try to get him to alter this thinking about his current employment and life situations. As people offered these suggestions, Chris refused to acknowledge that the problem was within him but that he was a victim of his circumstances never thinking that if he changed his circumstances he would ultimately change his life. Chris remembers not

. . . wanting to hear that I had to change my train of thought. I just try to do the best that I could so that I could get patted on the back somehow by getting a raise, or I’d get you know, someone coming in to say that I was doing a great job. I longed for that. Instead what I got was I would go home at night and I’d light up a joint and I’d sit myself down on my couch and just . . . that is where I would be for the night . . .

Chris continued to be asked if he would accept and handle more responsibilities at work and again staying true to his form he answered in the positive. The printing industry was doing better as a whole and this company benefited from an increase in their business. More employees were hired except now with a manager that was not as interested in details as the first owner the quality of staff sharply declined. Chris

remembers “people were [using] crack . . . I saw crack and stuff I had never been a part of that so I never knew anything about it. But there were certain things that started happening again around the office and people just . . . I was like, what the heck is going on here. Progressively the place just got worse and worse and worse.” Throughout this period one of the major reinforcements that kept Chris coming back to his job everyday was the relationship he had formed with some of the other employees there. One such relationship was with a woman named Helen (not her real name) that Chris really enjoyed working with. Helen became pregnant and had to leave the printing company. With her leaving Chris not only lost a friend and close working companion but also an emotional anchor in the sea of emotional chaos that was his workplace. Yet again, with the leaving of Helen, Chris was asked to take on more responsibilities at his workplace. Keeping true to his form Chris said that he would indeed take on the responsibility of doing Helen’s job, another job, the laminating position, and his original bookkeeping position. As Chris remembers “so there I was with the whole world on my shoulders yet again, I allowed it to happen just like I did at my family’s house.”

Chris was slipping into a depressive state with his moods becoming blacker and blacker. Because of his awareness of his emotional states, Chris decided that one of the things that he could do to help himself out of what he thought was an oncoming depression was to get himself out of his basement apartment and into a living arrangement that was above ground which would provide him with more light and a perhaps a view of the mountains. However, before Chris could begin the apartment hunting process he was at work lifting some boxes and injured his back so severely that he needed to have surgery to repair the damage. For months Chris lived in his basement

apartment in constant pain from his back injury until he was able to have back surgery. The doctors had told Chris that there was a chance that the side effects of the pain medication could bring on a mild depression. Chris remembers, "I went head over heels ass backward right into it and went really, really low. I felt imprisoned and I was imprisoned by the depression, by the horribleness of his manager, his work routine, and his work environment. I just felt that I could never get out." Chris was off work for a total of four months. By the end of the four month period Chris had made some decisions about his life and what he was going to do to change his life circumstances. He decided to move out of his basement apartment and he found a new apartment with a view of the water and mountains with lots of windows and plenty of sunlight. As Chris recalls:

I found this beautiful place, which I am still at to this day, but I still could not get a new job because I didn't think anybody would want me. . . . I ended up being placed on anti-depressants and these took me to places I never thought I would go. One of them was an even deeper depression, another was migraine headaches, and one of them was where I slept for four days straight, never got out of bed, except to go to the bathroom and then back to bed and pull the covers over my head. I never left my apartment either.

After being on the antidepressants for a short time, Chris needed to go to Calgary to see his sister-in-law. After arriving at his sister-in-law's home, Chris found himself sitting on the patio. Chris remembers:

. . . my sister-in-law came up to me and called my name twice. She said, what the f—k is the matter with you? I've sat here and watched you for

two and one half hours and you have remained motionless staring at nothing. What the f—k is the matter with you?

He told his sister-in-law that the doctor had put him on anti-depressants. Her response was abrupt and direct, “if this is supposed to make you feel better then you better get yourself examined. Get your head examined, like snap out of it! Do something!” Chris realized that his sister-in-law was right. If he did not change and take action that he would probably die. Armed with this knowledge it allowed Chris to go back to his doctor and tell the doctor that no more medications would be needed. Chris remembers going into the doctor’s office and saying, “if this is what you’re idea of making me better is, I don’t ant to have anything to do with it. I’m going to go off of this, whatever it takes, and I have to get off the medication today. I can’t do this anymore. This is not for me.” Still in a state of emotional weakness, Chris made the decision to return to work at the printing company.

Chris remembers, “I went back to the printing company with a renewed vigor because I was out of pain and I thought that I could make things better for myself.” But nothing had changed for the positive in the working environment at the printing plant during the four months Chris was away. In fact:

... slowly but surely the process began wearing me down with him allowing things to happen or me allowing things to happen. I was right back in the same old routine. Nothing had changed. As a matter of fact, things had gotten progressively worse. I was now doing everything in the printing plant. It was too much for me to bear.

Again Chris attempted to voice his concerns with his manager by telling him that the

customers were yelling at him because their printing jobs were not completed on time, the other employees were yelling at Chris because he was their immediate supervisor, and the manager was yelling at Chris after the customers complained to the manager that their work was not ready by the specified or promised time. For Chris “nothing was resolved but day after day I’d go back to work and there I’d be.” To compensate for his feelings of being in a difficult work situation, Chris “started gaining tons of weight.” Things continued in this pattern for quite some time in his place of employment and the dynamics of the workplace forced Chris to the point that he “began to write things down and to write messages to himself.” Unbeknownst to him, Chris was about to meet a special person that would not only befriend him but this gentleman would also become a teacher to Chris. Chris remembers:

. . . right around the time I started to write to myself I also met a lovely man. This man was crazy, crazy. He is still a crazy, crazy gentleman who unbeknownst to me was trying to teach me how to change my patterns, my way of thinking, helping me to come to a place of inner harmony.

As Chris and his new friend spent time together, Chris began understanding that he needed to change his way of thinking and his perception of his self-worth. Chris’ new friend was a jovial person, always thinking, always happy with his life and his life conditions. Chris remembers, “I would tell him, you are not like my mother, even though he and my mother were the same age. What I remember most about this man is that he was the first person that would ever talk to me, talk with me, help me work things through, and ask questions of me.” Chris and his friend talked about a wide variety of subjects, but the subject that was of most interest to Chris was when they discussed *The*

Sermon on the Mount by Emmet Fox. Through the reading of this book and their talks together, Chris went “through a process of understanding that, yes, there is change and that I am the one that has to make the change.”

Chris remembers, “I need to create some beauty in my life, but what do I do?” Chris still had the belief that he was “not worthy of creating beauty.” Chris went to his new friend for advice on how to create beauty and his friend told him the story of how he created his own place to live. Chris remembers:

... I had many, many, many, many discussions with my friend about how he created where he lived and how he created his garden. He lived in a penthouse, and I remember one time hearing him talk about creating a garden. All of a sudden, poof, there was his garden. It was amazing to me. It was like his garden popped out of his mind. It was one of the first times I ever remember thinking, man, somebody’s put something into his head and then he’s created it.

Chris’ friend gave him the ideas Chris needed to begin the creative process that would eventually led to him designing, implementing, and growing his own garden. Chris remembers:

... he gave me a visualization of it that was really quite simple. He wanted one thousand petunias in his garden and told me how he surrounded himself with the people that could make that a reality for him. That’s what I started to notice. He needed planters and he would ask and by the next day the planters were in the garden. Then he needed holders and he would ask someone to make them and the next day the holders

were there. He wanted the holders painted, so he asked someone to paint them and they got painted. I just thought that this was astounding. How does he do this? How does this happen? In my family things never...as there never was communication there was never...I never saw the start of something or project, or the process of it. I never saw those linear type things. But with my friend, he would just say something and then he would put it into motion. I learned from my friend that if I needed to have it I had to go and do it. I had to think about what I wanted.

Because of this experience of Chris' friend sharing how he designed his garden. Chris began to change his way of thinking that actually led him to begin the process of building a new identity for him. Chris began watching shows like the Oprah Show and Rosie O'Donnell show because at the beginnings of these types of shows the hostesses would talk to the audience and they would always include a personal disclosure component in their talks with the audience. These hostesses would begin to tell the audience a story and they would start at the beginning and continue the story until the story had some kind of conclusion so that the story made sense to the audience. Chris began to write down more of his ideas, thoughts, wants, and feelings on the direction of Oprah Winfrey. He began to read more books. He wanted to be a person that was happy to be alive and alive just to be happy. Chris also wanted "to tell people this is what I'm going to do and finish it." He wanted to have a new identity and he was willing to take all the information he had been given and put that information into an action plan that would allow me to meet his goal of transforming himself into a stronger, more happy, and helpful to himself and others.

In the beginning stages of his writing things down Chris remembers:

. . . I would always start out my writing with a negative tone to it and I would say things like I can't do this or that. However, as I continued to write the words and messages on the page would make a slight swing from negative, to not quite so negative, to more neutral, to more positive. I'd always find a way somehow in my writing to turn it around and end up on a positive note, each and every time.

As the words hit the paper and were re-read at a later date it sounded like "whining" to Chris. As he read his writings he would become impatient with himself and say to himself "change, if you're going to do it, then change." Through this process Chris was able to focus more on the people in his life that were positive influences for him and less on the dynamics of his workplace. He now had his own garden and there was something of beauty in his life. Chris had also found that he had a real passion for his garden and in response to that passion Chris named this private spot his "Garden of Eden." For Chris his garden is something that he made strictly for him. Chris remembers, "I took my visual image, what I had in my head and I presented it to me. The best part about this is that when my friends come over to my apartment they would come in and compliment me on my work. I finally got my pat on the back."

Because of his writing practices Chris began to change his identity from someone who just said "yes" to everyone and everything, who accepted the abuse of others, a person with low self-esteem and self-worth, from a person who was willing and able to mould himself into whatever was needed in any given situation, and from a person who believed he had nothing to offer to anyone, to a person who was becoming more focused

on his wants, desires, goals, feelings, and moods. Chris realized that change comes in increments when he read a book called *Ordinary Miracles* by Stephanie S. Tolan and he fashioned his behavior from the messages he received in that book. He came to believe that change comes “in baby steps” and that he if going to make changes in his life he would be a “change that comes on tip toes type of a guy.” So Chris continued to work at the printing company knowing full well that he needed to find and secure different employment. He put his request for a new employment opportunity down on paper and said it aloud to himself and to some of his friends. Chris continued to think about new employment every time he went to work and saw “this horrible, miserable man that would promise things to people and then I’d get hell from the people. People would call me a f—king asshole, a f—king idiot, and a useless piece of shit when I had nothing to do with their stuff, but I went back to work everyday.” Chris’ work routine continued everyday until a fateful Thursday morning.

Chris boarded the rapid transit system as usual that morning and thought “what a miserable, rainy day. I can’t believe I have to do this. I was so low, so down. I can’t believe I have to go there today. I can’t do this. I can’t go back there. What am I going to do?” Then something happened to Chris that had never happened before and has not happened to him since. Chris remembers:

. . . a weird thing happened, I came to my stop and I couldn’t get up. My legs were like cement. I couldn’t get up. This is weird. What’s going on? Like, I just couldn’t get up so I just sat there. At the next stop I could get up. I thought this is telling me that I don’t need to go to that place today and I’m not going. So I went back home and called my employer to tell

him I was not coming into work. The manager went up one side of me and down the other with statements like how could I do this to him and didn't I know that he had a business to operate.

The next day Chris was able to return to work at his regular time. However, things were different for Chris and how he reacted to the dynamics in his workplace was different this time. Although Chris still did not understand his purpose in staying in his current position he does recall thinking "this is so stupid. I do not know what I'm here for." A customer came into the company to drop off a printing job and this customer was promised that the work would be completed by 5:00 p.m. that day. Two employees were high on crack downstairs and the manager came in at 12:30 p.m. "looking like death warmed over." Chris explained to his manager that there was at "least seven hours work on a project that needed to be completed in just over four hours. Chris remembers he told his manager that "the job needs to be die cut and it needs to be glued. Yet the job just sat there with no one working on it. Okay. Whatever, I'm not going to be here at five o'clock, so, you know, do whatever you need to do." At 4:45 p.m. Chris prepared to leave his place of employment. He was asked if he would work on the weekend and told his manager that he would not that he had made plans. However, Chris did change his position and agreed to work on Sunday if his manager would come and pick him up first thing in the morning. It was agreed and Chris left the printing shop for the day.

On the Sunday 9:00 a.m. pick up time came and went with Chris being ready to go to work but the manager did not arrive at the agreed time. Chris remembers:

... my manager phoned me and told me he would not be there for another hour or so. I said that was not the agreed time and that I was taking a cab

to work and he was paying for it. When I got to the printing company I started doing the job and quickly figured out that it was a two person job. Since I was there alone I had to figure out how to do this job by myself. When I did figure it out I thought, look at me. Look at what I can do. I can do it on my own. The moment I see this guy I'm out of here. That is when the moment of aha came to me. Yes, I can do it. It didn't matter that I had \$34.70 in my bank account. It didn't matter that I feel like a piece of shit at this moment in time. It didn't matter. This man cannot take me any lower that I am today. I can do it.

When the manager finally came into the printing company the first words out of Chris' mouth were "I quit. I am out of here."

After sitting at home for two days the telephone rang. It was a doctor friend of Chris' and he asked Chris if they could meet and have a talk. Chris went to this meeting still not knowing what he was going to do for new employment. His doctor friend, during their meeting, told Chris that he was rearranging how his office operated and offered a position to Chris. He saw the people come into the office smiling and happy and leaving the office grateful because the services provided eased their pain or made them feel better physically and emotionally. Chris acknowledged to the doctor the joy he felt inside was not being expressed on his outside. Chris remembers telling the doctor, "I understand this joy and I know that it doesn't reflect on my face, it doesn't reflect on my physical being. I feel bloated, overweight, and ugly."

As Chris spoke to the doctor he noticed that the doctor's eyes are ice blue in colour and the "whites of his eyes are clear, clear, clear." Chris made a commitment that

he would not judge himself about his weight. Every person that came to the doctor for help had their own story, their own lives, their own problems, and things that each individual had to deal with through the course of their daily living. Chris took the position of sitting behind the reception desk and listening to the patients as they talked about how their lives were going and how they were struggling in different aspects of their lives. He never judged what the patients told him, he just listened and tried to understand where they were coming from physically and emotionally as they talked about their issues. Chris came to realize that he was judging himself and criticizing his own body image. When he stopped the self-judging Chris began to lose weight and the joy he feels inside is now being expressed on the outside.

CHAPTER V – PAUL’S STORY

Introduction to Paul

I first met Paul and his family when I was in private practice doing contract work as a child and youth care worker/therapist. At the time I worked with Paul, he was approximately 15 years old. Although our paths did not directly cross for a number of years I did eventually do a follow up with his mother to see how Paul was doing. She informed me of all the good things that Paul had accomplished and I asked for his telephone number. I called Paul and asked him if he would like to participate in this study. He is now 20 years old and looking forward to his life. Paul agreed to participate because of his desire to help others. If any information about Paul’s life could or would help another youth then he wanted to do all he could to help that person whoever it may be.

Paul’s Story

Paul is the middle child between an older brother and a younger sister. I worked with him on a private contract basis assisting him with some issues around peer group social pressure, family dynamics, drugs and alcohol, and the value of a good education. After approximately a five month period, Paul went to his parents and stated that he felt he no longer needed to talk with me and my association with him ended on a good note with closure and respect. Subsequent follow up unveiled changes in Paul’s life that I never expected to see.

Paul was having difficulty in school and believed the problem stemmed from peer pressure to participate in smoking pot and drinking alcohol. He believed that if he could get away from their influence, then he would have the opportunity he needed to reclaim

his life and get back to a spot that he would consider to be normal, that is, he would start to exhibit age appropriate behaviors and feelings. To that end, Paul refused to attend mainstream school but did make the choice to be home schooled. The logic for his decision was that he would still be able to get an education but would not interact with his peers. Although they associated with each other, many of his peers were not really friends, but Paul still had a difficult time saying “no” to members of his peer group. He did not want to establish an identity that would label him as a coward, sissy, weak, or unwilling to participate in the peer group activities, so rather than say “no” to these people, Paul chose to avoid them altogether. If the doorbell rang, Paul would instruct his mother to tell the youth that he was not home. He would screen his telephone calls, only accepting the telephone calls only when he felt comfortable. He desperately tried to limit his contact with his friends because he truly believed that interacting with them and participating in the activities of the group were the main reason why Paul was physically and emotionally depressed. Paul remembers his family did everything they could to help him through these difficult times, to get him back into school, and to help him experience some successes. However, no one was really aware of the true nature of Paul’s emotional issues because he was not openly discussing them with anyone. He worked only what his helpers identified as “surface issues.”

Paul recalls:

... not going to school too much. I had not gone for a couple of weeks. I was smoking a lot of weed, drinking a lot of booze, and was generally doing nothing. I was apathetic. I had no direction. I had nothing to look forward to. I was depressed. I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I was

feeling pretty shitty about myself and I didn't think I had anything to look forward to.

When asked about how he found himself in a depressive state Paul was quick to acknowledge that his "self-confidence was low because of my weed and booze consumption and I was doing poorly in school. I hated the way I looked. I thought that I was fat." This poor self image Paul had of himself led him to stay home from school and spend his time sleeping. Paul attributed this behavior to a cycle that involved using substances, and the more he smoked pot and drank alcohol the less he wanted to do the things that he expected of himself and the things that others expected of him. Paul felt that he was caught in a vicious circle where the things he was doing led him further away from where he wanted to be but he could not stop doing those things that were leading him astray. So in the midst of his depressive state Paul's parents asked him if he wanted to do something about his life situation.

Paul remembers, "my parents asked me, because I had no direction in my life, if I'd like to go see a motivational speaker, John de Martinii, who was speaking at a two day seminar about the purpose of life basically." At this point in his life Paul could not see the purpose in why he should attend school, stop using drugs, drinking alcohol, and why he should try to become a better person. Paul remembers:

... I saw no point. Why do I have to learn this stuff? How will this stuff help me? I had no understanding and I had nothing to do. Now, if I had a purpose of doing things, if I had an understanding, a goal, then I would have the motivation to do some of things that others expected me to do.

Paul accepted his parents' invitation to attend the seminar.

While at this seminar Paul committed to complete a writing assignment called “collapse.” A collapse is a process where one selects a person in one’s life that one does not like or views in a negative light. Paul remembers:

... I really didn’t like my father too much at that point. I took everything I hated about him and I wrote all that down like why I didn’t like him. Then I was told to write down all the positive things that came out of all those negative things. I saw that they balanced out.

This was one of the first times that Paul openly talked about what was truly bothering him. With the issue about his hatred for his father openly being discussed, and with the help of the motivational speaker, Paul was able to come to terms with his feelings around his father and to view his feelings for his father in a different way.

Paul had excellent role models for establishing work ethics in his own home. His parents owned and operated a successful computer business from their home. Paul was able to witness first hand the level of dedication, discipline, honesty, integrity, and perseverance needed to provide a very specific type of computer service to a world-wide client base. At one point in his life, Paul actually thought about going into this computer business but realized that this was not what he wanted to do with his life. Although he did not know what he wanted to do with his life he was sure that being home all the time working on a computer was not for him.

Paul remembers when John de Martinni asked him, “What I would like to do if money was no object, that I’d get no criticism from peers, or from family? What would I truly be passionate about doing to make a living? I do not know why, but, I said I would like to act, write, direct, and produce films and make a career out of that.” Paul believes

that because of the “collapse” writing process he saw his life in a different light and was able to begin building a new life and identity. His level of self-esteem began to rise. He understood about delayed gratification and what the purpose of pursuing learning was for him. He started to become more involved in his own life again.

Paul’s personal philosophy of life changed. He started to think more and began formulating opinions on the meaning of his life and what it means for him to be spiritual.

Paul explains:

. . . when I hear a gun shot, I jump and say what that was? However my brain knew what the sound was before I could voice what it was. That is the wisdom every human has. They need to get in touch with that wisdom. When I shut my brain off and I listen to myself when I have a question in mind, the answer will come to me.

Because of the process of building a new identity, Paul has come to a point in his life where he refuses to actively explore and search out answers for the questions he has regarding his life. Instead he believes “I have questions right now and I don’t try to find the answers because they will just come to me.” When asked when the answers will come to him, Paul states clearly “when the time is right.” Paul is uncertain of the cognitive or emotional factors that are present that make the moment right for one to receive an answer.

Paul believes that he must continue to prepare his mind to be ready to accept the answers when they arrive. He sees that this preparation stage is done largely in the unconscious mind. Paul remembers:

. . . I can look through my whole life and see that I was always very

extroverted and very artistic. I love to draw, write, and I was always cracking jokes and entertaining my family. This was not a role that was assigned to me. I never trained nor was I ever pushed into that area. I just am the way I am. It led up to a point where I needed more in my life. I needed a direction to put that energy. This is when I started taking classes and stuff. It was very natural. It was not effortless but it was just easy. It came easy to me.

The first time Paul was in a scene, reading lines from a script, he knew that this is what he wanted to do with his life. As Paul remembers:

... I stepped into a scene class and got up there and I read the script with my partner and while I was in there, nothing else mattered in my life. It was all about the person in front of me. Afterward I had this feeling of elation. It was wonderful. I just got bitten by the acting bug and that's when I knew this is what I want to do.

Paul knew that acting was what he wanted to do with his life. As Paul explains "I felt comfortable. It is like when I come to crossroads in my life where I can take a right turn and feel antsy and anxious or I can turn left and feel comfortable. Acting was a left turn for me. So I turned left at the crossroads."

Paul describes the comfortable feeling as:

... a feeling I felt in my gut. It is like a warm, tingling feeling. It is like when I want something so bad I can taste it and I just know it is right. I still have all these doubts in my mind that tell me I will never make money at this, that I am going to be a bum for a long time, not literally a bum, but

that I am going to have nothing and yet there is something in the comfortableness that continues to drive me on. It has something to do with the wisdom in the uncertainty.

The wisdom in the uncertainty for Paul is the knowledge “that there are a million options buried within the wisdom. When I give myself over to that comfortableness things just come easy. I just feel comfortable.” Feelings of fear, anxiety, frustration, anger, disappointment, and love are also components of this chosen road which feels comfortable. “I always have those feelings but they are created by my mind, they are not really real. I mean I feel those feelings but they don’t really matter because I know in my gut that this is the right way to go.”

Paul believes that at the heart of all his learning is an emotion or state of being that he labels as pure love. Love is “like a feeling of me missing out on something when I do not have it. It can be either a person or an object or a thing that I do.” Paul makes the distinction between how love helps him continue to learn as an actor and the potential to make money as an actor. Paul says “I know I can make a lot of money at it.” Some of the other benefits that Paul sees as potentially coming out of his efforts in becoming an actor is when he becomes a big star there will be “lots of women, a lot of sex, cars, houses, respect from my peers, making a political statement, sending a message, and lots of other material reasons for me to continue to become a good actor.” Paul voices that there are other more personal reasons for his wanting to become a successful actor who makes a lot of money. Paul has a brother who is in the education field. His brother would like to set up schools in under-developed countries and Paul would like to be the person that funds these projects. As Paul says, “this is a real personal motivational factor

and it is one of those things that keep me on the path. It keeps me focused on what I need to do to become successful rather than focusing on the things that might deter me from reaching my goal of becoming a successful actor.”

Paul has built and continues to build an identity that defines him both as a student of the arts and as a successful actor. According to Paul what defines him is:

... my willingness to become an actor. That is my identity. I know that I will never achieve...if I made a movie and I got \$500,000.00 from it that would be nothing, because there is a lot more to be done so I will be constantly unsatisfied with my success. This is something that I am sure of and because of this the element of dissatisfaction helps to keep me motivated and helps to establish my sense of identity.

As Paul remembers:

... my life has completely changed since I went to see the motivational speaker. I now have a purpose in my life. I now have a purpose to continue to climb the road that leads to the top of the mountain. At the top of the mountain is my being a successful actor. As for my purpose in life, maybe it is to get the things I mentioned earlier, maybe it is to talk to a kid that I can spark his brain, maybe it is to write a movie that spreads democracy throughout the world, something like that. I just do not know what my true purpose is. I know through acting, writing, and producing is the avenue in which I am to express my purpose in my life. I am still the same guy as I was when I was young, except I understand that I have a job to do and I understand how I am to express myself. I still want to have fun

and go play basketball with my buddies, smoke weed once in awhile and do that kind of thing. What has changed is I have something to look forward to, something that is always going to be there. Even if I am dead broke and I have nothing I can always say I have some talent. I have an ability to do something with my life.

Just as Paul now has a better understanding of his life and his reason for living and being, he also understands that the universe and everything in it has a perfect balance. Paul came to this understanding through his collapse writing experience where the end result for Paul was that he understood that all the negatives and positives in his life balance out. Paul understands that he must be emotionally open enough in his approach to life to see and accept the positives that come out of his negative perceptions of people, places, things, events, and actions. As Paul explains:

. . . you take all the positives and the negatives and see that they all balance out so that the hate and the fear I had about something is a fallacy because it all balances out in the end. For example, if I punch you in the face you could say that is terrible, but if from that you take a karate lesson and learn to defend yourself better, then that would be a positive thing. The universe is perfectly balanced. There is always balance in my life. I can say there is chaos in the world but I can also see the positive in the world. I really do not have to have fear because that is an assumption that there will be more pain than pleasure in the future, and that is really not true because there will always be the same amount of pain and pleasure in the future no matter what I do. Everything balances out.

As Paul acknowledges that everything has a balance he also acknowledges that once he finds this state of balance, he finds himself in a state of grace. Grace is defined by Paul “as that moment when I know with certainty that what I am doing is the right thing for me.” Paul explains that “once I wrote all that stuff down about being an actor, I know that it is right. This is what I should do.” Paul offers examples of proof of how well his new life philosophy is working for him. For example:

... I started taking these acting classes and the teacher in that class saw something in me and he told me to sign up for a talent search for this big agency in Vancouver. He told me that he would sign me up all I would have to do is attend. I did attend and there were hundreds of people auditioning for 15 spots. I was selected for one of the 15 spots. Then once I was in the class I met a girl who knew about an acting school in New York State. She did my application and I went and did the audition and got accepted to the school. There was another school that I auditioned for and I got accepted to that school. It's weird how when I set my mind to something or through the power of writing something down and putting the idea of something in my head that the universe supports me and puts me in that chair or on that train and just sends me on my way.

Paul's life is still riddled with self-doubt and for as many times “as I can kick myself for saying that I suck or whatever, there is always somebody who'll lift me right back again.” In order to get the forces of the universe working on his side Paul does meditations that he learned from a book titled, *The Seven Spiritual Laws to Success: A Practical Guide to the Fulfillment of Your Dreams*, by Deepak Chopra. The meditation

consists of sitting in silence with a question in mind that one would like to have answered. Through the process of waiting for the answer to come to him Paul is able to use this waiting process as a focusing agent to assist him for staying on track with the goals that he has set out for himself. Paul admits that he does not know if he is doing the meditations properly but he does acknowledge that the outcomes and the answers he has received thus far provide him with hope, life direction, and a focus to continue to strive for success as an actor.

Currently, Paul is in the southern British Columbia area doing auditions for a number of different filming projects, such as, commercials, pilots for sitcoms, a role in several currently airing serials, and some independent films. To date Paul has been offered the lead role in an independent film, has been offered a role in a television series, and a commercial. Paul continues to go to auditions and plans to go back to school in September to learn more about the acting trade.

CHAPTER VI – BILL’S STORY

Introduction to Bill

Bill is a male in his mid fifties. I first met Bill in the capacity of my duties as a community professional. Bill played a multifaceted role in my professional career for a number of years. He was a liaison for me to access several government run systems. He also acted as a clinical supervisor for me and we reviewed my caseload on a regular basis. I asked Bill to participate in this study because of the nature of our relationship that formed over the number of years we worked together. Bill agreed to participate because sharing is part of his life philosophy. Bill believes that by sharing of himself he continues to grow as a human being.

Bill’s Story

Bill was the second oldest of five children with an older brother, two younger brothers, and a younger sister. The family residence was a farm in a rural area of one of the prairie provinces of Canada. Living conditions were very harsh, especially in the winter on the prairies. Because of the many stressors of living life on the farm Bill remembers, “at a very, very early age I was subjected to extreme cruelty by my parents.” From a very young age Bill attempted to escape the cruelty of his family by running away, regardless of the time of year. “I would run away from home even during the winter. In the prairies it is very, very cold and my father would get in his truck and start chasing me across the fields because he did not want people in town to know what was happening at home.”

Many times Bill had to endure punishments that were both embarrassing and humiliating. For example, at the slightest transgression Bill would be told that he would

not be eating dinner with the family. However, there was still an expectation that he come downstairs to meet family dinner guests. When he refused his mother “would take the strap from the kitchen and start to beat me. After I’d said hello to the guests, then I’d be sent back to my room.” Bill also remembers:

... a friend of mine and I had gone, had been taken to, a Saturday matinee in my hometown. This friend’s mother had taken us there, and we were, in those days we used to have commercials before the movie, and in this movie there was a commercial about bras. I joked with my friend about it. Well, his mother told my mother and my mother made me wear a brassiere at home. People would come into the house and I would have to be dressed like that. I had to respond to remarks from friends, from people who came over to visit and my mother would beat me in front of them until I said hello and that sort of thing.

Despite the abuse he suffered, Bill would think for himself, stand up to his parents, endure the punishment, and keep his will to succeed intact. Bill remembers:

... I was treated differently. My parents used to beat me if I didn’t do what I was supposed to do. Some of the things were humiliating and I would rebel. I would tell my parent that I would not do certain things when they wanted me to do them. I would be very, very rude to my mother particularly because she would issue commands as though she was a general. I was picked on to do these things because I wouldn’t do it and she had a need to ... it seemed to me that she was disturbed. She would make me eat food that I didn’t like. I would tell her that I did not want

that particular food and she would insist that I eat it. Sometimes I would be at the table with this food sitting in front of me for hours. She would come and tell me that if I did not eat it I would be beaten. My brothers would obey because they were afraid of my parents and afraid of getting a beating, I was not and I would not comply.

Because of the treatment Bill received at the hands of his parents, he thought and felt that he did not belong in his family. The feeling of not fitting into his family started for Bill at a very young age. Bill recalls how some people would talk nicely to him while his parents would not. As Bill remembers:

... deep inside I'd say, well I just could not reconcile these two opposites. How come and how come this? Then it suddenly came to me that they don't like me. Maybe I am not their child. I'd see all of the kids with their families in town and how they'd be talking about their kids and saying or relating stories about some of the bad stuff that they'd gotten into but always with a kid will be kid kind of demeanor in how the adults described stuff. I felt, I felt shame being seen like that. I would try to distance myself even when I was walking with my family. I was ashamed of my parents.

While at school the nuns would talk to Bill about becoming a priest and give him free piano lessons because of their desires to see him become a holy man. Because of his attitude toward life, Bill's teachers in school would tell his parents that Bill had potential to do something with his life. Bill found interacting with the nuns to be a positive experience that made him feel good about himself. He also had good feelings for the

nuns giving him the piano lessons and felt good about attending school in general. There was only one time that came to Bill's mind when he was not treated with respect from the nuns at his school. As Bill recalls:

... it was the first of September of that school year and one of the nuns, in front of all the students, asked me my name. I didn't like my name. I had such a terrible speech impediment that made me stammer. I was so embarrassed about my speech impediment, so humiliated having to say my name because it would present so many terribly painful things for me. I'd say I don't have a name. Of course, everybody would laugh and the nun thought I was being oppositional. She kept after me until I gave my right name.

Bill desperately wanted his world to be a world that contained only positive reinforcements and acknowledgements, but:

... my parents used to make me go to school dressed in rags, in clothes that were too big for me just to humiliate me. They had lots of money so it wasn't like they couldn't afford it. There was a college in my hometown and a convent and for two years I used to rob these institutions to buy clothes. I got caught because I became careless. I stored the new clothes with a friend of mine who also attended the same school as I did. There were no problems with this arrangement because my friend's mother really liked me. So I would buy new clothes and keep my school clothes at his house. I would change clothes before going to school, then change again before boarding the bus to go home after school.

Bill had a lot of feelings about having to steal to get clothes so he could look like the other children at his school. As Bill states:

. . . I never felt guilty because the embarrassment of having to wear clothes that were too big for me or torn and so forth, the humiliation of and the memory of the humiliation of how the kids would jeer at me when they saw me dressed in these rags and I wasn't getting what I was entitled too. All the other kids were dressed properly and I was being deprived of that. I needed to feel okay and it didn't feel okay for me to be dressed that way and so I felt I had a right to be like the other kids at school. It is not 100 per cent accurate to say that I did not feel guilt for stealing from the nuns and priests. I had met some of these priests and I liked them. So I guess maybe I didn't allow myself to feel guilty.

Planning robberies at the monastery or convent was an easy thing to do for Bill, even at his young age. Bill remembers:

. . . I would wait until lunch time when the priests would be out of their offices and I would go to one particular room always with a paper and pencil so that if I was caught in a room I'd be writing a note to the priest that I wanted to see him. I did that for a long, long time and one day I got really bold. I walked into this one room at 12:15 p.m. and I went to the desk and opened the drawer. There was a wallet with all these 20's in it. I pocketed all that money and I saw out of the corner of my eye that this priest was fast asleep on his couch. I just walked quietly out of the room and away I went. Then I would stay away from the school for a period of

time. Then I would go to the convent and rob the nuns. I would alternate. One day I went back to the school and took the church collection on a Monday. It was in a priest's room. They hadn't taken the money out of the envelopes yet. I opened all the envelopes and pocketed all the money. I was very excited doing this. I did not think it was wrong. I was surviving.

After two years of Bill committing these thefts and robberies the R.C.M.P. came to his room at school. The police said they had found his fingerprints in some of the rooms where the robberies were committed and that they had set a trap for whoever was stealing from school staff. All the evidence led to Bill and as a result he was told to leave the school and not return.

In order to compensate for his feelings of powerlessness against the cruelty and abuse Bill was facing at home, he decided he needed to take action that would lead to a higher level of self-protection. Bill remembers:

... getting into trouble with the police in my hometown. The local priest felt sorry for me and would give me odd jobs to make some extra money. I was in the building that housed the priest and the bishop and one day when the bishop was out, I rifled through his room. I found a revolver. I carried this revolver on me the whole time. Because it was a small town of only about 2000 people, it was not long before everyone in town knew that I was carrying a revolver. They were very scared of me and I felt that I had a certain amount of power and nobody was going to hurt me anymore because I could defend myself. Everyone knew that I had stolen

the revolver and when the police got involved I lost my jobs. The police told my parents that I would have to stay on the farm but I knew that if I stayed on the farm I would eventually die because the cruelty was just getting worse and worse and worse.

From the very young age of eight years, Bill focused his efforts to get away from his family and the cruelty his parents were inflicting upon him. At times Bill would take a flight from reality to fantasy, especially when Bill had to break into the family home because he was hungry and his parents locked him out of the house when they went to town, and he would go to an abandoned house three miles from his family home where he felt safe to engage in his fantasy. He remembers:

. . . in this whole process I was in a kingdom. I was the king and no one was going to hurt me anymore. I had magical things. This old broken house, it was my castle. I would imagine what it was like and that would feel so good and I'd feel so powerful. I'd stay away from home and I'd cook for myself and think about a name that would be appropriate for me to call myself. If I am a king then what should I call myself? I would toy with different names to see if I could come up with a name that would benefit a king. I would think of a name and then I would have fantasy relationships with that name. Then I would get bored with that name and start the process again. This whole process was constantly moving me away from my parents and I was trying to create a new identity for myself. I would even do things different from my brothers and from my parents just to widen the gap between me and them.

Bill no longer did the random runaways because his father would find him and would take him back to the family home and punish him. In his depressive emotional states, Bill began to explore leaving his family on a more permanent basis through suicide attempts. Bill remembers:

. . . I had taken, because my mother was on all kinds of pills for various things, I had no idea what they were for, but I figured that if I took a whole bunch of them I would die. I did that and, of course, I was unsuccessful. One day I had to go into the hospital in my home town for surgery. I had a bandage on my arm when I went home and I was so depressed. The people in the hospital had been so nice to me and I wanted to go back to be with them, so I went into the shed, pulled off my bandage and started putting dirt into the wound. My older brother caught me and told my parents. Naturally the wound became infected but my parents got me something to get rid of the infection. You know there were so many instances where I had wanted and tried to be and get out of my home. I was trying every method that came to mind to leave.

By age 13 years Bill began to formulate intricate plans that he believed would get him out of the family home permanently. Bill remembers the first plan that he hoped would get him removed from his family.

. . . I thought okay, my mother thinks I'm crazy so why not act like I'm crazy. I will do all types of crazy things so that they will think that I have lost it and I'll see a psychiatrist. My plan worked and I got to see a psychiatrist in a nearby city. I did not have a full concept of what it meant

to be mad. So I started chain smoking in the psychiatrist's office hoping that he would think that this is a clear indication of being insane and I'd be taken away from my home, but that didn't happen. Instead my parents were told to keep me home and not to let me smoke because it was going to hurt my health. Once I was at home things got worse and worse. I continued to act out and eventually my parents found me another psychiatrist to see. I was interviewed separate from my parents and I told this doctor about the violence and abuse in my home. I told her about being beaten and tied to chairs and being threatened with blow torches and all that stuff. She decided to put me into a hospital but there were no vacancies at that time. So, I had to go back home until she called my parents to tell them that there was a bed for me. Two or three days later the doctor called telling my parents that there was a bed open in the hospital for me.

When Bill woke up the next morning he could hardly contain his excitement because he was finally going to be removed from his home. All he could think about was how his life was about to change for the positive. He would finally be free of the abuse and cruelty. Bill thought that this would be his time to begin to build the life that he always envisioned in his mind. However, when he looked outside that morning he saw the beginnings of a prairie snowstorm. Bill's greatest fear as he remembers it was:

. . . becoming extremely anxious that maybe the weather would prevent me from, prevent my father from taking me to the city. We started our journey to the city anyway and I distracted him so he would not

concentrate on the weather conditions. We arrived in the city approximately two hours later and I was admitted into the hospital. My father took me up to the ward and I said good-bye to him, wished him luck, and told him that I would never see him again.

Bill remained in the hospital for approximately two weeks and went through a complete series of tests measuring his emotional and physical health. Once the doctors made the decision that Bill could not return to the family home, one doctor took a special interest in him. This doctor felt that he needed to be in school. This doctor made phone calls on Bill's behalf to find him a school where he could attend. The doctor actually modeled to Bill that not all adults were abusive and that he was a child worth advocating for. The doctor arranged for Bill to attend a college run by the Catholic Church. Bill was discharged from the hospital and started at this private college in mid-April. Upon his discharge from the hospital Bill's mother sent him a suitcase with a couple of blankets and a couple of pairs of pants in it. His family did not give nor send Bill any money from that point on.

Bill remembers his first day at the college when:

. . . the priest told me that if I got my grade nine in the two remaining months of school he would send me to a place in southern British Columbia with the air cadets for two whole weeks. I always loved the water and the thought of going to this place, a place I had never been before but had seen pictures of, filled me with all kinds of fantasies about the ocean and so forth. I worked real hard and past my grade nine in the two months and went with the air cadets. The city was beautiful. I got to

go on a ferry to another city in southern British Columbia and be on the ocean. It was then that I decided that when I finished school I would live the rest of my life in southern British Columbia.

At the end of the air cadet outing in southern British Columbia, Bill went back to the prairies to continue his education. Bill remembers:

. . . the first summer after I returned from the air cadets the population of the town where the college was located shrunk to about 200 people with the students on summer break. I remember when I came back I had such a wonderful time in BC and I returned to this college and had to live in one of the school buildings. It was hot and dry and mosquitoes were flying through the building. I burst into tears. I was so upset and depressed. I had so much fun while in British Columbia and here I was, no one else around and it was still a couple of months before the students would return for the September session of the college. I was in need of human company and contact so I decided that I would hitchhike from city to city. During the early hours of the morning I heard footsteps in the gravel and I was really frightened so I went back to the college. About a week later I met a priest that had heard about me and he set me up with a job working on a farm for the rest of the summer. I made enough money working on that farm for the summer to buy the clothes I would need for the upcoming school year.

Bill had virtually no contact with his family once he enrolled at the college. At the age of 13 years Bill was expected to generate sufficient amounts of money to live on

and to pay for his own educational needs. Sometimes his uncles who would send an occasional five dollar bill, but this financial support stopped. Bill believed his uncles were afraid of being found out by his parents. The only other financial assistance Bill received was from the psychiatrist that arranged for Bill to attend the college. "During the school year the doctor that arranged for me to attend this college would send me money for clothes and that sort of thing." Bill remembers:

. . . I had to do it pretty well on my own. It was tough. It was very, very tough. But when I look at it now the toughness of it, at least people were good to me in many ways. They encouraged me in my studies and I would help the nuns on laundry day to dump out their water and they'd give me snacks, that kind of stuff. And because I wasn't having my way paid for at college I felt that I had to contribute in some ways. So, in the summer I'd scrub out the high school and did whatever jobs I could to try to make my way and to endear myself I suppose, so the staff would not think that I was just sitting back and doing nothing. I hoped that they would think that I was trying to pay my own way through college.

Bill remembers that the living conditions at the college were well below what would be considered adequate living standards. Bill remembers:

. . . It was really a difficult place to be because we didn't have running water. Most of the kids had the luxury of sending their laundry home every week on the train and receiving fresh, clean laundry back with home cooked baking goods and money. I had nothing like that.

The water for the college had to be hauled in from the town ten miles away. Bill

learned how to wash his clothes in five gallon buckets. Having solved the problem of how to wash his clothes Bill still faced the problem of how to dry his clothes. Then,

. . . one day I was walking down the street and passed this hardware store and heard this noise upstairs. I looked up there and there was an old guy hanging his clothes on his clothesline. There was a long set of stairs leading down to street level and to the man's well. I introduced myself to this gentleman and made a deal with him. I told him that I would haul his water from the well up the stairs once a week in exchange for him allowing me to hang my laundry on his clothesline. The gentleman accepted the offer and he and I became good friends and best of buddies.

Bill faced his problems head on and this forced him to focus all of his attention to come up with solutions to make his life easier and assist in his survival. Bill recalls that:

. . . despite the conditions at the college being so harsh I had a sense that I had to be there. It was the right place for me. It reaffirmed that I was different from any of my brothers. I felt that I didn't belong in my family and I knew that I did not have to tolerate the abuse I was facing while living at home. I knew I was being driven by something within that kept telling me I don't need to put up with the harshness at home. I am doing well in school. I am on my way to a better life. I felt good about being at the college.

Bill acknowledges that he had a different attitude toward life and family than the rest of his siblings. The brothers never made it past grade eight in school, and then dropped out to work on the family farm, thus fulfilling their parent's dream of

having their children become farmers. Bill remembers:

. . . my father and mother used to say that we were all going to be farmers and I hated the idea of being a farmer at that time because of the association with my parents and how they treated me and I wanted to have absolutely nothing to do with anything that they liked. Also my father and my mother never went beyond grade 9 and I knew that I was bright. I knew I had a future ahead of me.

Even at a young age Bill received good marks for his work in school. Bill also liked to write songs and have them put to music. Bill remembers reading in one of the local newspapers an ad that read, *Five Stars Music Masters, Boston Massachusetts, Lou Tobin for a small fee will take poetry and put it to music.* Bill remembers:

I thought that I was going to be famous. The first song I wrote was called *Love Fit for a King*. I wrote this song and then I stole money from the nuns to have it published. I was caught with having stolen the money. They set up a plan to catch me but it didn't matter because my parents weren't giving me any money and I wanted to be famous. Within a month I got my song back with a music sheet. Now I was much better than anybody in my family because I played the piano and the guitar and now I had a song to sing. I knew I could write more poems and songs and now I had a way to get them published. I had a sense that I was much, much more advanced than any of them were and I was not going to be controlled. I was not going to be made to be a farmer. Everything that my parents said that I would be, I completely resisted.

There came a time in his life when Bill understood that his stealing must end.

That moment came as a result of a humiliating moment of survival. Bill remembers:

. . . I was hungry and I went to one of the homes where I had befriended a woman. On this day she was not at home. I went into her house and went to the fridge and took a quart of ice cream. In those days the ice cream quarts were cylindrical and I went and ate the ice cream on her back step in full view of all her neighbours, who then phoned the priest at the college to complain that this new kid walked into a house to steal and eat this woman's food. The priest called me into his office and told me that the town was up in arms against me. He asked me what I had done this time and I told him the truth. The priest told me that I was a great kid and that I didn't need to do those types of things. I felt so guilty and I never, from that day onward, did I ever steal one red cent from anyone.

Bill progressed through his education and studies at the college, working when he could to make the money he needed to support himself. The thought of moving to British Columbia was a motivating factor that helped him to get through school and was the place that he had decided to live after graduation. Eventually the day came when it was time for him to leave the college and start to build a life of his own. Bill never forgot the time he spent in British Columbia with the cadets. The time had come for Bill to make a decision of where he wanted to live. Bill remembers:

. . . it was a cold night in February on the prairies and I was walking down a snow covered street with a crunch, crunch, crunch coming with each step. I hated that sound and I hated this place. I made the decision that I

was leaving tomorrow. I just did not want to be here anymore. I decided that I was leaving the next day. I had just \$20.00 to my name and I connected with some people who were going to southern British Columbia the next day. They agreed to drive me if I gave them \$15.00 for gas. I knew no one in British Columbia. The only other time I had been to southern British Columbia was with the air cadets when I was in college. I should have been fearful of what was going to happen in British Columbia, such a large city, but I had absolutely no fear. I did not have a place to stay, little money, no job and no one to support me but I had a very profound feeling that I must go to southern British Columbia because my life was about to change. That feeling was translated into I am going to begin a new life with all possibilities and with everything that I want.

With his decision to leave the prairies, Bill felt confident that his life was about to change. A level of excitement grew inside of him as he met the people who were providing him a car ride to British Columbia. Almost without realizing Bill found that:

... I was in this car driving to the coast, all night, only stopping for gas and food. Within 24 hours we were in southern British Columbia. That is how fast we drove. In that whole process of getting to British Columbia I was thinking what jobs I am going to do, where I am going to live, and I want to go to university. I just remember thinking that I want to do this, that, and the other thing and during this whole time I did not experience any anxiety or fear that I would not accomplish any of these goals.

Everything would be okay. My life was about to begin anew. I was

opening a new chapter in my life.

Bill remembers severing all ties to anyone that lived on the prairies. With his leaving his hometown, Bill understood that his life on the prairies had ended and that things would be different for him. He swore to himself “that he would never go back” to his hometown or to the prairies. Bill acknowledged that a sense of freedom flooded over him and that he knew “that I was no longer connected to the past.” Bill acknowledged to himself that he would never see his parents again and that they would never know what happened to him brought Bill a sense of security. No longer would he be controlled by another. Bill felt a “relaxed feeling about letting go of this stuff. It was a sense of I’m free.”

Bill arrived in southern British Columbia on a Friday night. The weather was very warm at the time and Bill was overwhelmed with feelings of excitement. He parted company with the people that drove him to British Columbia and went to a hotel. He paid the man at the desk five dollars and told him that if he would allow him to stay at the hotel Bill would immediately begin looking for employment. The man at the desk accepted Bill’s proposal. Bill remembers:

... I went to my room and looked out the window and listened to the traffic and watched the people walk by. I had a bath and went to bed. I woke up in the morning with the realization that it was a brand new day, I had a whole new future and then in a flash of understanding I thought of a new name to call myself.

Bill chose as his first name the middle name of the priest that accepted him into the college. This priest went on to be awarded the Order of Canada, the highest order

that Canada can bestow upon one of its citizens. The accepting of the priest middle name as his first name was Bill's way of acknowledging how much he appreciated the priest accepting him into the college, offering to accept the responsibility of educating a youth who had no visible means of support, and accepting a youth who was at a low point in his life. Bill kept his middle name because it was the name his grandmother had picked for him. As a last name Bill decided that his name should have both a religious connotation and be a name that is associated with royalty. The name he chose is defined as:

. . . a prince of the church and it also signifies, it comes from the Latin word meaning hinge. The gates of heaven do not open unless they are hinged. So I thought this name had an elevated connotation. When I put these names together it brought images into my mind of the Jews leaving Egypt and how much this exodus reminded me of my own struggle to become free. Also I had been brought up in the Catholic religion and my new name reminded me of a lot of rich symbols and narratives. I changed my name and like taking on a new suit of clothes to begin the journey I became a new person. The name was so rich. I had no money in my pockets but I had an identity.

A couple of years after Bill arrived in British Columbia he went through an emotional crisis. Bill continued to hear the messages that his parents had instilled in him when he was a child. The messages that Bill could still hear in his head told him that he was dumb, that he would never amount to anything, and that he was stupid. Those messages became so ingrained into Bill personality and subconscious that he began to live the self-fulfilling prophecy that would reinforce the messages he received from his

parents. For Bill this meant that the:

... thought of going to university was riddled with the notion that I didn't have the ability to do it. I went through various school programs but I always had a fear of school and if anything was difficult I would interpret that to mean that I would not be able to reach the goal of graduating. My hands would perspire and I'd stammer, this, that, and the other thing until it reached the point where I was so nervous that I believed I could not finish what I started because I was stupid, dumb, and I would never amount to anything.

Bill recalled the time he thought it would be interesting to become a doctor. He liked working in hospitals but realized that he did not have the money to become a doctor, even though scholarships were an option. Further, he was deterred by the time frame. It would take him a long time to become a doctor. So, as an alternative Bill decided that he would enter a three year nursing program at a local hospital. According to Bill:

... I had all kinds of problems there. I was the only male and at the time there were all kinds of stereotypical comments about males who entered the predominately female profession. I didn't do well. Some of the instructors graded my papers and it wasn't an academic program. They graded me however they wanted to. Through another instructor I was shown my papers that received a failing grade and I knew that I was not wanted in the program.

Consequently, Bill was asked to resign from the nursing program. During his

time in the nursing program, Bill met several people whom he could now call friend. One such person was aware of the emotional turmoil Bill was going through and was watching with concern to see what would happen next. While this friend was at work Bill “rifled through his medicine cabinet and swallowed whatever he had in there” in an attempt to ease his emotional pain. Bill felt the pain of the rejection by the instructors in the nursing program as the same kind of rejection and injustice that he received while he lived with his parents. It was this rejection that Bill thought he could not stand to bear again. Bill thought he needed to take action and that this action needed to be immediate and harsh. According to Bill:

... I became very, very depressed. I knew my drugs very well. So, I went on a two day suicidal binge. I was going to end my life. I had reached a point where I had reviewed my entire life and I realized that all of the problems that I had at home which I thought were in my past were now in my present. I hadn't really dealt with any of these problems at any profound level.

As Bill states:

... I had a new identity and so forth but it wasn't a strong identity at the time. So I attempted suicide. I went on a drinking binge and I got a whole bunch, 32 tablets, of 10 mg Valium. I had an imaginary conversation with God. I told God that I have gone through my life and it has been a tough road and I've struggled. Now the cards are stacked against me again and I am going to take control of my life and decide whether I will live or die. Then I told God that I was going to destroy myself.

So for two days Bill wandered the streets in a drug induced stupor. When Bill thought about his life he went deeper and deeper into a depressive state. At an emotionally low point Bill made the decision that he would kill himself. In his drug induced state Bill thought that he would do a thorough job of cleaning himself first, then all the people that found him would have to do is put him in a casket and bury him. As Bill recalls "tomorrow I am going to be dead but I am going to be clean. I had a shower, I shaved, I did my teeth, and then I took all the pills I had and swallowed them down with whiskey and brandy. It was about midnight when I went to bed."

Bill got out of bed at 2:00 a.m. and went for a walk in a drug induced state that "was like walking through a fog." Bill remembers:

. . . walking past a drug store that was open and I went in there and told the pharmacist that I was having sleeping problems. I bought some drugs and went outside the store and took them. I still wanted to kill myself. I collapsed and I woke up a week later in an intensive care unit. The first thing the doctor told me when I regained consciousness was that what I did was illegal. I told him that next time I would do it right. I had gone into respiratory arrest and they worked long and hard to revive me. I still marvel that I managed to survive without sustaining a brain injury of any kind.

As Bill lay in a hospital bed he thought about everything that had happened to him in the previous couple of days. Bill thought that he had taken control of his life and attempted to destroy it by committing suicide. The more Bill thought about this the more he thought that it was weird that one could take so many drugs and drink so much alcohol

yet still be alive to talk about the experience. Bill began to think once again that God had the ultimate power to control his life and death, so there must be something in store for Bill that he was not aware of at that time. The strength to endure years of abuse at the hands of his parents, not fitting into his family, struggling to get out of his family, criminal acts, moving to southern British Columbia with no job, no place to stay, and no friends in the city must count for something, but Bill did not understand what was expected of him.

While attending school Bill befriended an elderly woman who worked through the Salvation Army. When this woman heard that Bill had attempted suicide she came to the hospital to visit him. As Bill recalls:

. . . this woman really liked me and she was very concerned about me. She helped me out immensely by having hours and hours of discussions with me about various topics. She only had a grade 6 education but she possessed incredible wisdom. She saw things in me that I didn't know were there. She saw in me someone who had gifts. She thought I had gifts of the heart and that I was very intelligent. She painted a picture of me which in words which I thought she was just saying because she likes me and that is why she thinks I have all these abilities. She was so insightful that she could relate incidences to support her statements about me. I was saying things like, oh really, and you saw that. I could not believe the things she was telling me. Then I thought can that be true? Can I really be what you say that I am? So I began to sort of put aside my own self-criticism and allow some time to try on these new clothes so to

speak. She had nothing to gain from what she said to me and so I began to trust her. Then I began trusting her when we were apart and I would think of the things that she said.

Through these discussions and the time spent with this woman, Bill came to understand that the “feelings of impotence” he was experiencing were really what he had internalized from the messages he had received from his parents. The understanding that people struggle in classrooms only means they have to try harder in some areas of their lives. Bill eventually was released from the hospital but the messages he gained through the discussions with his lady friend remain with Bill to this day.

Bill went on to meet a woman and marry. His wife convinced Bill that it was time for him to attend university. Through the messages he remembered from his discussions in the hospital and the messages he was now receiving from his wife, Bill discovered that he had more ability than he ever thought he had. To date, Bill has two university degrees, one at a graduate level.

Bill began having visions and dreams, dreams that he thought were mystical. An old monk would appear to Bill “bent over carrying a big book.” According to Bill:

... the old monk would look at me with a kind of a knowing grin and the book symbolized all the things that I am and all the things that were possible for me to become if I would only read the book. Then I began having other dreams. The same monk would appear to me on the side of a mountain and I remember being scared in my dream. I would become frozen on the side of the mountain unable to take another step. After I reached a certain place on the mountain I would hope that this would be

my final stop, but the monk would appear to me and point to a higher region on the mountain. I would awake and know that I have to continue to climb the mountain regardless of my fear. I knew that my life was a perilous journey but I also knew that there was more to come.

As Bill continues with his life journey he attributes some of his strength of conviction to what he was taught and what he learned in the discussions he had while in the hospital with his elderly female friend. Bill believes that he is at heart a scientist so he continues to test the theory that he is strong enough to live his life his way. Bill continues to this day to:

. . . test to see if everything that she said was true. I take a risk to see what will happen. If I begin to struggle during the course of the action I have taken, I redouble my efforts and put more focus so I try harder in that part of my life. I have success and one success leads to another. In fact, in all the years of university I have never missed a class and have never been late for a class. This was what I needed to do in order to get into graduate school. I understand now that this is me and that there is no way I can't succeed.

According to Bill, his life experiences have hardened his resolve to succeed and to help others. He knows that there are plenty of people struggling to make lifestyle changes and that he would like to help them to grow in some capacity. Bill believes that "we all have the ability to go forward and to fulfill our potential whatever that might be. The only thing that hinders us is our own thoughts of deficiencies that we have internalized from out there."

As Bill talks of his life he has a great understanding of who he is, where he came from, what he wants to do with his life, and where he is going. Through a retrospective process Bill came to an understanding that explains who he is now. Bill explains:

Because in subsequent years when I reviewed how I had gone through all of that, I really feel guilty. These people had befriended me and I had stolen from them. So my way, and I believe I have to make up for the errors that I made, so I give money to organizations. I help people who, I would find ways of repaying the money that I had stolen. So, in a sense I am recycling. When I look back on all the money that I have given to try and make up for the things I have done, I still feel that I haven't made it all up. I always look for opportunities to either give my time or give my money. It's like as a kid when I killed a bird with a slingshot, I've never forgot that. It was a terrible thing when I look back on it. Now I go beyond to try and help animals. The memory of that bird being shot and then I realized that there were little babies in the nest. I was overcome with terrible feelings that I had done something terribly wrong. I know now that the person that stole from the priests and the nuns is not who I am. So I continue to find ways that allow me to repay the debts I believe I owe. In this way, it allows me an easier way to forgive myself for some of the things that I have done and it helps me to become a better person.

CHAPTER VII – JOHN’S STORY

Introduction to John

I met John through a friend. He is a tall man in his late thirties. Because I was interested in the services John was providing to the public, I eventually became a client of John’s. Through the course of our working relationship we formed a bond of friendship. Because of this bond I asked John if he would participate in this study. He said he would gladly help if it was going to shed light on how youth process their difficult issues. I could not say for sure that would happen but that it was one of the hopes I had for the research. On the strength of my statement, John agreed to participate.

John’s Story

In the early stages of his life, John had the feeling that no one really loved him in his family. John remembers “my mother not having anything to do with me really and my dad was not proud of me. I was a total disappointment to them and I did not know why.” As evidence to his claim John recalls how his family members were busy doing their own things “like getting divorces and shifting, that is, doing their own thing and that they had no time to spend with me.”

The exception to this rule was the connection John had with his grandfather. John believed that his grandfather was his higher power and that his grandfather looked out for John and protected him in death just as he did in life. John believes that the death of his grandfather was the turning point for his life. Prior to the death of his grandfather, John was emotionally connected to his grandfather and his grandfather to him. John remembers:

... I had a higher power or someone I called my higher power. It was my

grandfather. He was the only person in my family that truly loved me. It was my grandfather that provided me with hugs when I needed them. He would take me downtown to his office and he would take me around to all his customers' offices and introduce me to them. I would be shaking peoples' hands and he was proud of me. I was so proud to be with him. I was only ten years old at the time but I felt like I was a really important person in his life. I could always phone him. I was always phoning him and dropping by. He was a good man, a good guy. He had a lot of friends and when he died it was like my life's blood and source of my being died with him.

During his time at elementary school John remembers:

... taking part in a science fair or a teacher/parent meeting and all the parents are coming up and we are parking their cars. My buddies and I have stolen beer from one of our friend's dad and we were drinking beer, hiding it in the back of the lot and parking people's cars. I am waiting for my parents to show up. They didn't show up. Them not showing up to that particular science thing was to me like f—k, f—k everybody, f—k everything. It was the final straw. From that point on I didn't care about anything or anyone. I did whatever I wanted from that point on. I shut the door on the outside world and turned everything inside. I internalized and kept everything inside only releasing things through rage and all the rest of that beautiful stuff, like chaos making and acting out.

As John aged into his teen years his drinking alcohol and taking drugs progressed

to the point of daily consumption. According to John, "death was not a reality for me. I was invincible. I was going to live forever. The party was going to go on forever." As he aged, John's addiction to drugs and alcohol progressed to take him deeper into his addictive behavior. His addiction had become so ingrained into his daily living regime that he was drinking alcohol or taking drugs virtually constantly. John, while in his addiction to alcohol and drugs, thought that he had all the "right stuff" in his personality.

As evidence John remembers:

. . . I had money. I had all the right stuff and that filled any voids in my personality. So why would I have given up anything at that time in my life. To give anything up would have meant I would have to give up being the guy that everybody wanted around. I was included in pretty much everything, party wise. I always knew where the parties were because people would always be phoning me because they wanted me there. This really filled a big void in my personality, my low self-esteem. I could be this big Joe, this puffed up nothing. I could really pack it on but it was lots of smoke and mirrors, and a lot of beers come to think of it. I was a monster unto itself that just perpetuated itself so that I could not stop what I was doing because I would no longer exist.

During and throughout his addiction to drugs and alcohol, John knew that he had to have employment, a source of income that would support his drug and alcohol use. As his addiction progressed those demands for money came to the forefront of John's thinking because he needed to generate more money to maintain his current lifestyle. "I opened up small businesses. I tried different things but I couldn't function in what was

perceived to be a normal lifestyle. It just didn't work for me." Living a life without the chaos associated with addiction to alcohol and drugs and addictive thinking was not something John could fathom. As an example of the chaos that John could generate in his life, John recalls the time when he was a photographer at a wedding. "I'm a photographer at a wedding and by the time the night's out I'd had sex with the bridesmaid, sex with the woman who rented the wedding party the boat, and beaten the shit out of the bride's father. That is me loaded."

The need for money was a constant pressure in John's life. John knew that he would have to become more creative and innovative in his thinking if he was going to work for himself and still generate enough money to continue in his addictions. At the same time John continued to think that there must be a better way to live. For John, life had become so full of chaos that living day to day took real effort on his part to remain in some measure of control. Remembering days when his life was not so full of chaos, John remembers an event that starting him thinking that there had to be more to his life than the drinking, partying, taking drugs, having sex, fighting, and just not caring about anyone including himself. John remembers:

... I went to a guy's house to collect some dough. This guy was a dope fiend and was not a big, strapping guy. He was just this little dope sick, skinny guy trying to survive. I am twice his size and I terrorized his whole family over the money he owed for dope. So this dope fiend comes to pay me my money. I am sitting in a chair. He walked over to me with his hands shaking to give me the money. I told him to keep his money. I was told that life was hard enough without someone coming to his house,

kicking in his doors, and threatening his family. I took the money and as the guy walked away I felt like a total loser. Because of this event my mind started racing, thinking about ways to get out of this lifestyle. I had to get out of this lifestyle and get my life back on track on some other level. I had to stop being a prisoner of this role that I created for myself.

Because of his chosen lifestyle and his attitude that no one cared about him, John did not care about anyone. John thought for many years that he was the center of the universe and that he was the bigger picture. That thought disappeared as John remembers:

... many people told me never to call them again. Even my own parents said don't f—king phone here ever again, ever. Because of that phone call I never saw my dad for eight years. Even the people that talked to me near the end of my addiction were afraid of me but they were friendly because they knew where they stood with me. Lots of people in my life were telling me that I needed help. I thought there was something wrong with them. I heard a little voice inside of me but it was not big enough for me to take action yet. I just found someone else to hang out with which wasn't hard.

John knew that if he did not change his behavior then the lifestyle he had chosen was going to kill him. "I did not think I was going to live. It came to the point that I thought and knew that I was going to die. Death had become a reality for me." John knew that death was a reality in his chosen lifestyle because he has watched many of his friends overdose and die. "People were dying around me." John also knew that the

second alternative in his lifestyle was jail. "I had been to jail and I didn't want to go back. I certainly did not want to go to prison."

Approximately three years before he made the decision to change and live his life in sobriety, John got married to a woman that treated him nicely. John knew in his heart that he should not be with this woman but because she liked him, tolerated his behavior, treated him well, and when she wanted to get married, John agreed. But over time even she could not tolerate being impacted by the events in John's life. According to John:

... there were some events that happened. I had obligations to attend these functions as a family. It was not uncommon for me to miss these kinds of events because I would be wasted, but these events I really wanted to attend as a family. This woman gave me the ultimatum that I quit drinking or leave the family. I thought about it and chose to leave the family because I thought it made sense at the time.

John made deals with himself and bartered with God to get the help he needed to drink differently. He prayed and prayed to God for help to change the way he drank but not to guide him in the process that would lead him to quit his addictive behavior.

According to John:

... I wanted to stop the insanity of my life at the time and I thought about that a lot. I didn't want to stop using drugs. I didn't want to stop drinking. I didn't want to stop any of that stuff. I just wanted to tone it down a notch. I wanted to take it back to where the fun used to be. So I held onto that and tried to figure out ways to use successfully. So the thought of changing my life was in my head but not changing it to the point of not

using. That idea never entered into my head.

John thought that he could quit on his own and that all he needed was his willpower.

After numerous attempts at quitting, John quickly reached the conclusion that willpower and wishing his addictive behavior away was not going to be sufficient in making swiping life changes. John remembers:

. . . at the time it was that I was weak and had no self-control. It would appear I had no self-control. I was weak and had no self-control of that there was no question. All I know is that it was like voyeurism. It was like I didn't want to look, I knew it was wrong to look, but I couldn't help myself. It was like I peered through the fingers of my hand that was covering my face. Once that happened then I figured that there was no sense in holding back. I might as well stare at what I was not supposed to be looking at. Well that is the way it was for me and getting high. By the end of the day trying to battle it and fight it and not wanting to use, by the end of the day there was nothing left of me. I would be weak and I would just cave into it. All day the feelings would just be chipping away at me and by the end of the day I would just end the badness of fighting this and just surrender to it.

Through his process of trying not to use John would take the time to sit and look at a bottle of alcohol. The strength of the draw to use and get high was too much for John and he would surrender himself to being in a partnership with the alcohol. John remembers thinking that the:

. . . alcohol had a pull entity all its own. I used to stare at the alcohol and

get loaded, stare at vodka and just stare at it. I would be amazed that this clear fluid could make me feel this way. That it had all the power and I had none. All my power was in that bottle. I was just mesmerized at how much strength was in that bottle. Some mornings I would wake up and feel strong and say okay today I am not going to use, but I always would.

After a short time the woman John was with got pregnant. John remembers:

... I wanted to be a father I just did not know how to be a father. I knew that I did not want to be like my father. I got to a point where I was just like my f—king dad. It wasn't me anymore living in that house. I was just acting like he acted so I left the house when I knew what I was doing was not helping the household. I knew then that I did not have any fathering skills, so I left.

John pushed his wife away with his addiction. He would leave the house saying "I would not be back but I would eventually return home." On one of those occasions while John was out of the house, he prayed for a sign, something concrete that would tell him definitively that he should not be with this woman. Upon returning to the family home "she was having sex with another guy." John decided that sign was definitive enough for him to leave, but when the time came for John to leave something happened in his thinking. John remembers:

... she told me all about it. She was all open and even with that I was thinking about getting back together with her. I was thinking about her being so upset. I thought that it was actually my fault because I would push her away to justify what I was doing thereby clouding my issues

again. I knew I did not love her but I still had these mixed up feelings inside of me about her. I tried to figure this stuff out. I finally figured out it was my ego that was bruised.

John defended his right to party, drink alcohol, and take drugs with two psychologists he went to see about his addiction. John's personal philosophy that his drinking and drugging was not hurting anyone except himself was the mainstay of John's argument. When he met with only one of the counselors John was able to manipulate, turn things around on the counselor, and just play around with the messages being sent by the psychologist. It was after a one to one session that the counselors decided that a team approach was needed to deal with John. From that day forward John would meet weekly with two counselors. This format made it extremely difficult for John to manipulate and turn the tables on the counselors. Because of this team approach John began hearing messages that started to impact John and his thinking.

John wondered how he made it through some of his experiences alive. John would constantly and consistently put his life into physically dangerous or life threatening situations, yet he continued to conduct his life as though he had a guardian angel protecting him and keeping him safe. John came to the conclusion that it was his grandfather who was protecting him. After a suicide attempt, John tried to throw himself from a high bridge, John remembers talking to his grandfather and asking him for help. John remembers:

. . . my thoughts and feelings before this was that suicide was the only way out of this madness. I ended up trying to overdose myself on drugs and tried to jump off a bridge but I just ended up in a psychiatric ward feeling

totally defeated. I didn't have the energy, strength, or will to go on with my life. I knew that the road that I was on, well, my life would be over soon anyway. My main thoughts were that I had blown my entire life and its over. It's a done deal. The feeling I was experiencing were of being a total loser, defeated, beaten up, and hopeless. I remember thinking I can't kill myself. I couldn't bring myself to actually follow through and kill myself. All these thoughts added to me being a total loser.

John knew that his life could not continue much longer the way he was living. John came to understand that sweeping changes needed to be made in his life or that he would probably kill someone in a drug induced state, end up in prison for the rest of his life, or that he would die himself. The fear associated with this acknowledgement forced John to take the action needed to protect himself. John knew his very survival was at stake.

Armed with this knowledge that John needed to change his life or die, John got down on his knees and prayed to his grandfather to ask him for help and guidance to get out of the insanity that had become his life. John remembers:

... talking to my grandfather and asking him for help. The whole key thing is for me making the switch and asking for help rather than doing it on my own. I was fighting everyone on my own thinking I would be successful on my own. All of this was my old belief system. I am going to die if I do not get some help. I made a decision based on I don't care what people think of me. I have to put my ego aside because it is my ego that is f—king up my whole life. I knew I had to put my ego aside so that

I could move on. I needed to put my ego aside and the attitude that I can do this on my own, that I don't need anyone, and that I'm the man. As soon as I asked for help, as soon as I reached out my hand, symbolically, then my whole life changed in a second.

John picked up the telephone and called the two psychologists whom he had defended his right to use drugs and alcohol. John's attitude toward his addiction had changed since he asked for help from his grandfather. As John states:

... once I started dialing the phone I could care less at that moment what anybody thought of me. It was like I could be naked and standing in front of an audience of people and I didn't care because I needed to do something to change my life and if this is what I got to do then this is what I got to do. I don't know what the diving force is behind that, it's just getting to a point that is hitting bottom. Once I made the decision to change my life and made the telephone call the rest was totally easy.

John never attempted to use drugs again. Armed with a second chance and a new lease on life John was willing to do whatever needed to be done in order to maintain his newly acquired state of bliss. John would listen to others talk at the meetings he attended that helped him maintain his sobriety. He would hear stories of other people would continually go back and try drugs and alcohol again and again, only to eventually find themselves at the emotionally empty place again and again. John remembers thinking that:

... there was no struggle for me. Once I made the call I never physically relapsed. I never went through all of that. That's someone else's process.

It wasn't my process. People that cleaned up at the same time started relapsing. It blew me away. How the f—k could they do that. I could never understand this. They had been given a second chance just like me but they did not seem to remember where they came from and where there were when they were sober. It just doesn't compute to me.

While John was in his detoxification process he had a vision during a prayer session that calmed him to his soul. John remembers:

. . . my grandmother died when I was in recovery and while I was praying and not making any attempt to think of my grandmother in my prayer, my grandmother and grandfather were both standing together in my minds eye. I looked at both of them and it caught me by surprise that my grandmother was there. So to me their together in death and God was in there with them, too. I could see a figure that I choose to call God.

John used prayer to connect himself with his higher power. During times of meditation and prayer John would:

. . . pray to God that all I wanted to be was happy. I would never pray for a car, a million dollars, or a particular job. Instead I would pray to let God know that I was unhappy and that all I wanted was to be happy. Within a couple of days a relationship would happen, a new job opportunity would arise and my life would start falling into place. Everything I needed was placed right in front of me.

Since living his life in sobriety John has hit the same emotional lows that he did when he was using drugs and drinking alcohol. The difference between the two times for

John is that now there is a definite lack of the feelings of desperation and emptiness that were present during the times when he was abusing substances. John used an introspective and a retrospective process to examine how he was feeling when he finally hit his bottom and asked for help. John remembers:

. . . it is the same spot I get to in sobriety as when my life bottomed out and I reached out for help. When I reached out from that spot that is deep and honest, then my life became unclouded and started to get better. It's that same feeling, the same thing happened at the very beginning of being clean.

John acknowledges that if he slips back into his old ways of thinking that his life will again begin to become more and more difficult the more he tries to control the events happening in his life. To regain a balance and a sense of well being John remembers:

. . . I start thinking myself through some of the emotional turmoil and I remember who I am. I literally tell myself there is something to learn from everything and that all I need to do is to put one foot in front of the other and walk through it. Where it happens to lead me through the events is where I am supposed to be. I don't try to manipulate or push anything in any direction. This alleviates huge frustration out of life. I am no longer throwing shit through windows or banging holes in walls because things are not going my way. If it is not going my way, then it is not supposed to. I follow the course of the events now instead of trying to spearhead my way through life. I just go with the flow. This philosophy saves me arguments with people and saves arguments in my relationship.

I just surrender to it. I don't have any power over it and I don't want any.

After surrendering to his addictive behaviors and asking for help John realized that he needed to take this new found knowledge and apply it to the rest of his life. Because of the lack of drugs and alcohol, John was able to clear his thinking processes to the point of wanting to talk to others suffering in the same way that he was suffering. With careful consideration John believed one of the things he could do that would best serve his new life philosophy of helping others would be to talk with youth and to share his experiences of what it was like for him when he was taking drugs and drinking alcohol. John wanted to try to impress on the youth that there was an entire emotional side to drinking alcohol and taking drugs. As John noted earlier he liked taking drugs and drinking vodka, he just didn't like the chaos that came with living his chosen lifestyle. John remembers:

... I've spoken to kids and done speaking on a talk show format in high schools and that kind of stuff. Talking to the youth about their experiences in the experimental stages of their drug use it became clear that some youth have experimented more and are further down the road to addiction than others. I always tried to keep the feeling that all I needed to do was to alter someone's pattern of using, but I never had a clear answer as to how to do just that. The answers that did come to me were things like just plant a seed, show these youth that there is a way out, there is a different lifestyle, there are choices one can make at some point so that they do not feel locked in, and if things get out of hand here is the number of someone to call. I always walked away from these sessions feeling

powerless, totally powerless. I remember those feelings all too well because I remember that when I was drinking and taking drugs nobody could tell me to stop using. Someone just talked to me and planted a seed. That seed stayed in my head and I knew it was there. I knew there was something else and I knew that beating people up, driving the chaos, being out of control, taking drugs and drinking was not me. I guess the seed was there and it was always growing.

CHAPTER VIII – CLAIRE’S STORY

Introduction to Claire

Claire is a community professional who is about to retire. I worked with Claire when I was a community professional in the same city. Over the years of working together Claire and I formed a solid professional relationship that eventually turned into a solid friendship. Claire and I would meet to play golf, have coffee, and talk about life. Because of the strength of my relationship with Claire I asked her to participate in this study. She was apprehensive at first not knowing what she could provide to me in the way of interesting information, but when I explained the purpose of the research she was more than willing to help me. She thought that the findings of this study might help her with the individuals with whom she works.

Claire’s Story

Claire remembers being intimidated by her father in her teen years. Her struggle with a weight problem was something that seemed to be held against Claire by her father and diminished her self-image view. Because of this Claire believed that she would have to settle to be in a relationship with whoever showed an interest in her. Claire had a strong vision and desire to be like most of her friends who were either dating or married with children. Claire remembers:

. . . I was a teacher at the time. I had a reasonable good education but I was fat. I was very overweight at that time. In the midst of this there was a tall, dark, and handsome man who wanted me. Even though he was verbally abusive during the courtship and went after my best friend, I still wanted to be married. My sister was married and all my closest friends

were married and I wanted to be just like everybody else. This man was there and he was a catch at that time.

Claire had feelings of anxiety during most of her courtship with this man, but their courtship led to marriage and Claire entered the marriage with low self-esteem and a poor self-image. Claire remembers:

. . . well I don't think that I was dependent on him as much as that I didn't have a good sense of myself. Because of this lack of sense of self I was not able to attract the kind of man that I really wanted to marry. I went into this marriage with very, very, very low self-esteem, very little. I was a walking target for someone like him. However, for me it was kind of a win because there was something I got out of getting married. Plus it said that this guy would marry me so there must be some good qualities in me that he saw. That is what I thought at the time.

After her marriage, Claire's life took a turn for the worse. For example, Claire left a New Year's Eve party:

. . . at about 2:00 a.m.. Some time later I hear our car. I went downstairs to see what was going on because it was the middle of the night and there was my husband drunk. I opened the car door and there was a woman, who lived in our apartment building, perched up beside him. I lost it. I yelled, screamed and carried on, but I didn't leave.

The abuse within her relationship continued, yet Claire was unable or unwilling to leave. Claire acknowledges that when indiscretions would happen she would be:

. . . mad for a day or maybe not even a day. Then I would go into my

inadequacies and then I would tell myself that I just couldn't go. Also, I was teaching at the time. We were living in Central Canada and I had a teaching job. It was January 1st and I had to be back to school by January 4th. I'm a very responsible person and I didn't have whatever it would take to phone the school board or school district and say I'm gone and I won't be back. I'm not like that and besides I didn't know where I could go.

For Claire, being married to this man was turning into a nightmare. He was a practicing alcoholic who drank at every possible opportunity. When he was intoxicated he would make his way home and take out his frustration and anger on Claire. According to Claire, "the first physical abuse happened when I was pregnant with my first child." Because of the power this man exercised over Claire during their relationship, she was extremely afraid of her husband. Partly because of that fear, Claire's husband did many things that would not have been accepted in other marriages. Claire remembers:

... feeling tons of hurt, tons of terror, and many, many, many times being frightened out of my wits. I was very scared of him, very scared of him. I had many times to legitimately leave but I stayed. Most people would have questioned why in the world I was still in this relationship. It was something that I could not explain to them or to anyone. The abuse had gone on for so long.

This was not the first time there had been marital indiscretions or abuse, yet Claire did not want her parents to know the level of abuse she was taking in her marriage.

... If I went home I'd have to face my family and my parents and that

would be horrible. I didn't want them to know how awful this marriage was because they didn't want me to marry this man in the first place. One of the reasons I stayed in the marriage was because of the embarrassment and shame that I would have a marriage that didn't work out. I probably shouldn't have married this guy in the first place. My family would be, particularly my dad, would be very disappointed in me.

After the birth of their second child, Claire became dependent on her husband for most everything. Claire remembers:

... I did become dependent when I stopped teaching when our second child was born. I hadn't been working full time for ten years at that point. I was still a substitute teacher but I didn't have an income of my own.

Claire gave birth to a third child, and despite the abuse she was suffering felt she needed to stay in her marriage. Claire remembers thinking:

... the kids love their dad. The well being of the children and the sense of family were hugely important things to me, hugely important. We were living in a place that had been their home for nine years, nine of the fifteen years that we'd been married. We'd been in the same small town for the nine years. That is all the children had known. My eldest was five when we moved there and the boys were very young, one and three years old. I thought to myself this is all that my children have known. For me to leave meant that I would be taking the children not only away from their dad but from everything they'd ever known. It was a really good community for them. I just couldn't do it.

Claire eventually decided to end her fifteen year marriage in a split-second decision that would leave her and her three children homeless, fatherless, husbandless, and penniless. Claire faced these realities head on and was not deterred from taking the actions needed that would ultimately change her life and the lives of her children. Claire knew at a deep emotional level that her life needed to change. Claire remembers:

. . . okay, well moments before, and this is where I had been in denial a lot during the marriage, I was having fun curling with friends. Curling is something I love to do. My husband was not there and I was having a good time. The kids were being looked after, obviously. I had nothing to worry about in those moments. Then I looked upstairs in the curling rink lounge and he was looking out the window. He was hammered. I could tell by the way he was leaning sideways and by the stupid grin on his face. He was just hammered. I also knew that a woman he had had an affair with months earlier was also in the lounge. I was now watching the lounge window and my feelings changed. There was just this clutch in my gut because he was here. Everything had changed now because he is here and he is drunk. I wasn't having fun anymore. I was alert and watching. I felt very anxious and scared. I didn't know what I was going to do. I didn't know if he was going to sit with her. It had been some months since their relationship was supposedly over. I didn't know what would happen but I was very anxious. At one point I couldn't see him anymore. I backed up down the sheet of ice so I could see deeper into the lounge and he was sitting with her. That was it. I just told the people I was curling

with that I had to go. I walked into the downstairs change room and there was another lady there that I knew curled and asked her if she would take my place. I went upstairs and got the vehicle keys and that was it.

Claire describes the “clutch” feeling she felt in her gut when she saw her husband drunk with another woman as a feeling that was actually more “in my throat.” Upon further examination, Claire was able to further define this clutch feeling as being a feeling that engulfed:

... her whole torso area, but mostly in my throat. It’s like I was being strangled and my heart was pounding. My heart was really pounding and I feel sick to my stomach, like I am going to throw up. I’m shaky. I’m hot and I just feel like I do not know what I am going to do. I feel like I’m going to come unglued. That is how I felt just before I left the curling ice to get the keys.

Having left the curling rink before her husband Claire knew that he would arrive home at some point during the night. Claire also knew that he would be extremely drunk and that he would have been with the other woman. Claire had the beginnings of an exit plan formulating in her mind. Her focus for living changed from her husband to the things that she needed to do in order to leave this marriage permanently. Claire also believes that she had the support of another that gave her the strength to make her decision to leave her primary relationship. “I didn’t hear any voices or anything inside my head. However, I know I didn’t do this by myself given that I hadn’t been able to do it for all the years before and there had been some really, really horrible times.” Claire believes that she reconnected with the faith she experienced as a little child when she saw

the picture of Jesus holding his staff and tending his sheep. Claire remembers:

. . . I must have had help. I had to have gotten help. I hadn't really thought about it before. I thought about it in other instances in my life that were not as dramatic as this one. This was incredibly dramatic. There were things I had to do and I guess there must have been a force of some kind that propelled me off the ice, up the stairs, gave me the keys, and got me home. He came home absolutely hammered out of his tree and I couldn't have cared less. I slept somewhere else so I didn't have to put up with him. I went up and told him in the middle of the night that I was leaving. Of course he didn't remember any of our conversation in the morning. I told him again the next day and he didn't believe me. That was in March and I left in July. I had a plan and I carried right through with it. There must have been something or someone watching over me giving me strength because I wasn't scared of him anymore. I wasn't in the game anymore. The terror I felt and the abuse had just gone on for so long. So many times that there had to be a breaking point. Maybe a lot of people would have broken before I did I don't know. I guess this was my breaking point because it felt so positive in that moment. I mean it wasn't as though afterwards it was difficult either because there were so many things to do to get ready to make the move. It was very scary but I never turned back, not for a moment, then it was done.

Given time to come to terms with her feelings, Claire was soon able to transform the fear and anxiety she felt into a hardened resolve that her exit plan would work no

matter what obstacles she would have to face. Claire remembers:

. . . I felt absolutely, totally powerful, totally clear, powerful, not afraid, nothing. The only thought that was left was that I am out of here. I didn't care what he did. I couldn't have cared less. I wasn't scared of him any longer. There wasn't anything that he could have done. Nothing. He wouldn't have done anything anyway. He wouldn't have frigging dared. I was in control of my life. This is it. I don't care what it takes. I didn't think ahead. I didn't think what this was going to mean in terms of being a single parent, in terms of what my parents would think, in terms of me not having any money, in terms of how I was going to leave. I didn't give a shit about anything. I didn't think of anything except, I am out of here. I'm gone.

Claire moved out of the family home in July with her children. The course of her life had changed and she needed to have faith that the changes would continue to happen and be positive in nature. Doing what she could to keep the changes positive, Claire continued to maintain her high level of faith in a higher power. Claire believes:

. . . that it must be spiritual. I think it is something bigger than all of us. I believe in that really strongly. I've seen it. I don't know if I've seen it but, I have had experiences like that many times in my life where I couldn't specifically say it was God. I just know for me as an ordinary human being and some of the things that I have gone through in my life there has to be someone or something looking after me. I know there is. I don't listen a lot of the time, most of the time actually, so he or she has a

very difficult time trying to get through to me. I can be very willful, but sometimes, and I believe that this was one of those times; I was told that I did not to take this any more and I heard the message.

After spending some time on her own with her children, Claire eventually went through the process of divorcing her husband. Now a single mother of three, Claire started dating again in the hopes of finding a good man who would be willing to act as a father figure to her three children. Claire found that man and married for a second time. It was not long before Claire knew that her second marriage was in trouble and would not last long. Because of this Claire believed that her best course of action would be to go to university. A university degree would provide her with a means of support for her and her children.

To that end, Claire began applying to universities. Claire knew that she would have to take out student loans in order to fulfill her dreams of starting a career. Claire's life position as wife and mother was not much different in her second marriage than in her first. Without having employment and her own source of income meant that Claire was dependent on her second husband for her survival just as she was at the end of her first marriage. Because her second husband had total control of the household money, Claire was totally dependent on him. Claire found herself on the familiar ground of not wanting to be in the marriage because of her husband's dominating of her and her spirit. Claire remembers:

. . . I don't know how bad I wanted to go to university. I just wanted to go back to school. It had been in the back of my mind for a long time because I had been doing courses all along, well not all along. I did a

couple of courses at university in my first marriage and took two night school psychology courses in my second marriage. I love doing course work. I've always loved psychology and I wanted to do a degree in psychology.

The first time that Claire applied for her student loans she was rejected because she was still with her husband. Further, her husband had just bought a new car.

According to the student loans officer, those two things disqualified Claire for getting government help for her to go back to school. Claire was left with the decision of how she could clear the way for her to be accepted through the student loan program. Claire remembers:

... I applied for a student loan on my own and found out I couldn't get one because I was married and my second husband had a brand new car. I didn't qualify for a loan at that time. My husband and I split up anyway and I went back to apply again. I qualified for the loan this time because he was gone with his new car.

Now that Claire was accepted into the student loan program and had the funding to go to school she was accepted almost immediately into a university program.

Although Claire could not remember the exact moment she made the decision to go back to school she knew it was the right decision for her. Claire prayed to her higher power to get the guidance she needed. She also knew that there again would have to be an element of and a leap of faith that everything would unfold to be a positive life change. Claire remembers:

... I'm not sure of the exact moment that I knew that that was what I was

going to do. It was more a process and I said to a higher power if this is meant to be then I will be able to open the doors because there were all kinds of things against it. I was going to be a single parent again. I was middle aged woman with three children and basically no money. If this was going to happen it had to happen on me taking out student loans. It really didn't seem like it was going to make sense. So I just prayed in the way that I pray and asked that if this is your will then, the doors will open. If the doors don't open and I don't get the student loans I need or if the courses are not available to me I will know that I'm not supposed to be doing this. Basically the doors flew open. Literally flew open. I went to university and got my degree.

Claire works as a community professional in a city in southern British Columbia. Her children have all grown up and left home. Claire is now settled within herself and knows who and what she is and what she wants to do with her life. There is an element of happiness that permeates through Claire and through her life. When Claire thinks back about her experiences that changed her life and how those decisions came into being she is left "pondering the correlation between my spiritual guide or whatever it is that I know is looking after me when I allow it and the decisions that I have made. It's just interesting to look at that."

CHAPTER IX – LYNN’S STORY

Introduction to Lynn

Lynn is a woman in her mid to late thirties. I originally met Lynn through a close personal friend. My friend was aware of what I was trying to accomplish with my research project and knew that I was having difficulty in finding research participants. When I interviewed Lynn it was the first time that I met her. She agreed to do the interview because of her relationship with my friend. Lynn also agreed because she wanted to help anyone who might be struggling trying to get their life together. She thought that the goals of this research project might be a tool to help someone. The idea of helping to form such a tool had its appeal for Lynn.

Lynn’s Story

Lynn was the youngest of three children who lived in an emotionally fractured and emotionally compartmentalized family unit. For Lynn this meant that she did not have a sibling relationship with her brothers because they are 11 and 12 years older than she. For Lynn this wide gap in years between herself and her brothers came to mean that she considered herself to be some kind of after thought with her parents. This idea of being a last ditch effort for her parents to continue to have a small child promoted a component of emotional chaos for Lynn that drove her behavior and feelings for many years. The first real emotion that Lynn felt was fear.

Fear was an emotion that Lynn knew and still knows to this day, intimately. Her intimate relationship with fear began when she was in kindergarten when the children were instructed to sit in a circle on the floor to play a game called *Doggie, Doggie, Who Gets the Bone*. Lynn would pray to herself not to let the bone stop at her because she

would then be picked by the group to continue the next segment of the game. Her emotional experience with the game was representative of Lynn's thoughts about school.

Lynn remembers:

. . . I remember not liking school. I remember going to school on the bus. I guess it was pre-school or kindergarten. I remember just little bits of these times. I remember sitting in a circle on the floor of the classroom playing doggie, doggie, Who Gets the Bone. I remember having so much fear that they're going to pick me. And that was before age six years.

Lynn faced another moment of fear when she was six years of age. She remembers:

. . . the day, the smell of the air, and I remember what was going on when my parents told me. We went for a walk outside. The leaves were blowing and everything was good. Then they told me and I felt like I didn't fit. There was a feeling of un-wholeness and a feeling of defectiveness.

It was the day that Lynn's parents told her she was adopted. Once given the news that she was adopted, Lynn felt she had no one to turn to for the support she needed to get her through this difficult time. Lynn knew at an early age that she felt like she was the only child in her family but she also knew, because of her feelings of fear and loneliness, that she was a lonely child. From that day forward Lynn felt "that something must have been wrong with me for somebody to get rid of me. The funny thing was I actually felt like that before they told me I was adopted. I never felt like I fit with my family unless I was being obedient."

Lynn also had a fear of being alone. On several occasions when Lynn was very young she remembers “waking up in the house alone. I was crying because nobody was in the house and I was feeling alone. I remember playing alone. I stayed in my room alone a lot of the time.”

There was a birthday party for a young boy in the neighbourhood and Lynn went to the party uninvited. She pulled the boy’s pants down in her anger at not being formally invited to the party “and that caused a big hullabaloo at my house.” I was sent home and my parents put me in my room alone.” When asked how Lynn thought she came to the emotional spot of experiencing her feelings of fear and loneliness Lynn responded, “No nurturing. No feelings. No reinforcement. I was just left to my own devices.” The feelings of fear and loneliness are some of the reasons Lynn believes caused her to internalize feelings of her being defective and un-whole. Lynn recalls that:

... I wanted to excel at something. I didn’t do well in school. My brothers never got into trouble. My brothers did well in school. They always got good grades. Everything went fine for them and for me too until age nine when I got caught stealing a chocolate bar. I was with my parents at the time I did it and that was the very first experience I had of feeling really deep shame within. But by taking that chocolate bar it made me feel good because I focused on just how good it was going to taste when I got to eat that chocolate bar.

Once caught with a stolen item and labeled a thief Lynn had to face the consequences of her actions from her parents. Lynn remembers being “in the back seat curled up into a fetal position and my father telling me how ashamed he was of me. His words just

validated how I felt about myself anyway.” According to Lynn, the words she heard that day from her father in conjunction with her feelings of fear, loneliness, and shame set off what can only be called a domino effect. Lynn remembers:

... it wasn't long after that that I lit a park on fire. It just started to become a self-fulfilled kind of chain of events of getting into trouble, being brought home by the police. I really enjoyed having that kind of power with my family because nobody knew what to do with me. It gave me feelings of control and power even though I was completely putting myself in dangerous situations because I felt so alone and lost and I knew that nobody really cared about me. When I would do these things nobody talked to me about what was going on in me. I never had a heart to heart conversation with anyone so I just continued with what I was doing. For me by doing the things I was doing I was able to put up a wall so that no one knew what Lynn was going to do next. My parents living in that space of not knowing what I was going to do next gave me a feeling of control for a long time while I was at home.

It soon got to the point for Lynn that she was either not willing or not interested in monitoring her behavior. Lynn's viewpoint was one that no one cared enough about her to worry about what she was doing. As evidence to support her perception Lynn remembers:

... nobody hugged me. I don't ever remember communication. I don't remember anybody sitting down or asking me about my day. I remember getting punched by a couple of girls in the locker room of the school. I

had beaten up one of their sisters and about four or five of them kind of swarmed me. I remember crying and going home and my mother asking my, what was wrong with me? I remember saying you don't care and I just got beaten up. She laughed at me. I never felt compassion. I never felt cared about. I never felt I had a safe place to fall. I never felt I had somewhere to curl up and somebody to stroke my hair and tell me it was going to be okay. Nobody spoke to me because they could see that I was doing drugs. I'd even smoke weed in the house and they would just pretend nothing was going on. That's how they were. They were in total denial about everything so I believed that they didn't care enough to help me. They didn't care enough about me to ask where I was going. Because I believed that they didn't care about me I wanted to and took the position of, I don't need you. F—k you! I will do my own thing.

By the time Lynn was 12 years of age she was doing drugs on a daily basis. She was also drinking alcohol before going to school. The emotional pain she felt because of her feelings of fear, loneliness, being defective, un-whole, that nobody cares about her or what she does, and her feelings of worthlessness quickly became the foundation of her emotional self. By her own admission, "at age 14 years I quit school and I was totally out of control." But, Lynn had the focus she needed to succeed and excel at something.

Lynn remembers:

... I had no conscience. I had no goals in life, except one. The only goal I had was to know where the party was going to be tonight. That is how I got through my life, one party at a time. I used on a daily basis. I hurt

everyone around me all the time and I did not even have the awareness to know that I was doing it. I was actually thrown out of the house when I was 14 years old. I quit school and went to live with a boyfriend.

Life on her own with no one to really rebel against, Lynn began to rebel against herself.

Lynn remembers:

. . . when I left home I didn't get into trouble with the police that much. There were still the times I got caught for break and enter and theft and many other things I guess. I just did not look at it like I was getting into trouble with the police. It felt different to me when I wasn't living at home because I didn't have to prove anything to my family other than I was fine and f—k you, I can take care of myself and that I don't need you. Those feelings were a defensive feeling for me.

Because of her age and lack of general knowledge of what it means to be in a relationship Lynn found herself in “an abusive relationship. He beat me up and I beat him up. Since that was my first relationship, it set the tone for all my relationships for the next ten years or so. I also knew that I was lost.” Lynn acknowledges that her experience of having a core or primary relationship is based on the one she experienced while living at home.

. . . when I started seeking outside to fit in with friends and other girls and eventually guys, I didn't want to feel that I didn't fit. I always made myself more grandiose than other people. I was the person, the party girl that got invited to every party. People wanted me to be there and I didn't want to feel less than anymore.

As Lynn aged further into her teen years she started:

. . . to float around, in and out of abusive relationships. Then I went to work in the strip clubs for years. I did the biker thing and with that image I did everything I could think of that was hardcore. Anything I thought was hardcore was what I did. For me, my life became sex, drugs, and rock and roll. I never saw myself living past the age of 30 years, so I just pushed my life to the max.

As Lynn continued to age into adulthood, she continued to put herself into more and more dangerous situations with potentially lethal consequences trying to get someone to engage with her on an emotional level that would convince Lynn that someone cared about her. “These behaviors increased to a much higher level as I became more of an adult because I played more dangerous games and did more dangerous things. I pushed the envelope over and over and over in much more dangerous ways. I believe I pushed the envelope so that I would die.”

Lynn believes that she was self-destructive from a very young age. Because of her feelings that she was on a self-destructive path in life and the fact that as Lynn got older she did more and more dangerous things, Lynn remembers “finding myself in a house, armed with a loaded shotgun, stealing blow (cocaine) from them and I didn’t even care. I had this fantasy of going down in flames.” Lynn personal attitude toward life, herself, and others changed significantly as she continued to age further into adulthood. As mentioned earlier, Lynn originally performed more and more dangerous acts in the hope that someone would take an interest in her and engage her on a level that would allow her to feel that someone cared about her. At the time in Lynn’s life when she admits to walking into a house with a loaded shotgun to rob people of their drugs she no

longer knows “if I wanted anybody to engage with me. I had lots of people who did but then I would just get bored and move on.” The focus of Lynn performing the most dangerous of societal acts was to see if “I could satisfy myself when I got away with stuff.”

As the drugs took a firm and absolute control over Lynn’s thinking, thoughts of self-destruction took a back seat to the motivation of wanting to “and needing to live another day because I needed to do more drugs. I really believe drugs kept me alive on that level because I wanted to do more. Even though drugs were destroying me slowly, they kept me alive so that I could do more each day. The drugs became my focus for living.” However, the pull of drugs became too much for Lynn to handle emotionally. Lynn understood that:

... I was going to die and I wanted nothing more than not to have those feelings anymore. I truly needed help and it was humbling to ask for help. I had never asked anybody for help in my life no matter what was happening in my life. When I got evicted from my apartment, I never phoned anyone. People would come and know what was happening sometimes with me and do a few things, but I never asked for their help. For me to have to ask for help with my drug problem was huge.

Lynn’s life took a course that is common to many drug addicts and alcoholics. In the beginning Lynn took drugs to feel better and then Lynn knew that the drugs had taken her. While looking at her surroundings Lynn realized that:

... I had lost everything. I’d lost my car, apartment, and anything with any value to me. The belongings I did have were being shuffled around in

my car, but when it got towed I couldn't come up with the money to get the car out of the impound yard. I had no money. My habit was hundreds of dollars every day. I didn't eat. I wish I had cigarettes to smoke. The only clean clothes I had were the ones I wore to work. I kept those clean because they were my money. I never drank at work. At the end I didn't want to use anymore but I couldn't stop. I just couldn't. I tried and tried and I'd say to myself in the mornings and again at night before I went to work that I was coming home with my money tonight so I can get out of this shit hole and do something else. But as soon as quitting time came my heart would start to race and boom and I would be off like a shot. That became the cycle of my life for a very long time until I realized that I was going to die if something did not change. I had been stealing drugs from people and they had been warning me that something was going to happen to me if I did not stop what I was doing. I just remembering all these horrible moments in time when nothing mattered, not my life, not anybody else's life, just the stuff that I had in my hand. That was my life. That was what I was living for in the end.

As Lynn was leaving work one night she took with her a sum of money. She had formulated a clear plan in her head about what to do with the money she had taken.

Christmas was coming up soon and presents needed to be bought. Lynn remembers:

... leaving work with about \$3,000.00 cash in my pocket that I had just stolen from the club I was working at. My plan was to buy a plane ticket to go see my mother for Christmas. I'm going to pay my hotel room up

for two weeks and I'm going to buy an eight ball of cocaine. Naturally I buy the eight ball first and within 40 hours the money was gone. I realized at that moment, as I was sitting there by myself coming down that I truly needed help. I knew about drug treatment because a boyfriend of mine was getting a pile of charges and that was an out for him at the time. I knew I needed an out as well or I was going to die.

Lynn thought about using treatment as an out and asked community professionals for their help to get her into a treatment program in upper state New York. She was refused entrance into the United States of America because of her police record. The second time Lynn decided that she needed help with her drug problem she asked God for help and also looked within herself for the answers she needed to get herself into a drug treatment program in another country. "I got through the border. That is my great success. That's my savior. That's my salvation. That was my chance to change my life." Lynn knew that she needed help to get to the bus station so she made the arrangements for someone to drive her to a treatment facility in upper state New York.

Lynn remembers:

... I was living with my boyfriend in his parent's house and my boyfriend's father was going to drive me to the bus station. My boyfriend was gone and it was just me in the house. I was using drugs at the time and I heard him come down the stairs and I remember hiding the stuff but he knew. He told me that he could not take me to the bus station the next day. I remember feeling tears come. It was the first tears in a long time. The tears came because I felt like I had an obstacle to overcome on top of

all my other issues. I finished the dope I was doing at the time. I believe God helped me because it was January in central Canada and I had a long trip to get to the bus station.

Even though Lynn was high on drugs throughout the time she was implementing her plan to get into a drug rehabilitation center, she still managed to do very specific things that would assist her on her journey to recover. Lynn admits to doing things that were out of character for her and completely out of her nature. Her self-identity of being a hardcore biker woman was being mixed with a part of a new identity that was much softer than the hardcore biker image. Lynn remembers:

... I had been using all night and I just could not do any more drugs, but I was still not as high as I could have been because I still got myself on the bus. I remember I had cartons of smokes to take into rehab with me. I had actually gone out to purchase myself a couple of articles of clothing, comfy clothing, which is a very bizarre thing.

Even though Lynn did not remember many of the things she did that day she still managed to find herself on a bus heading for a drug treatment center in upper state New York. Lynn recalls:

... honestly, I don't remember buying my bus ticket and I do not remember getting on the bus. I remember sitting on the bus trying to get some sleep because I didn't want to show up at the rehab center strung out. God forbid that I arrive at a drug rehab facility high. I remember that there was an old man sitting beside me on the bus and I kept kicking him to move him over so I could sleep. It's funny now when I think of it. I

got myself over the border and I took a taxi, a seven dollar cab ride from the East side to the treatment facility. I told the cab driver where I wanted to go. I got myself there and I believe, and I always do believe that God helps people to help themselves.

Once at the drug treatment facility, Lynn began the introspective process of what is generally referred to as a fearless moral inventory. According to the guidelines of a world wide self help recovery group, whatever one finds out about oneself through this process is enough to start the process of rebuilding a new self identity. Through the fearless moral inventory Lynn accepted that she:

... felt valueless. I felt weak and I felt naked. I was terrified because I was high every day for over 12 years and now I had nothing to hide behind. I was very scared and people kept telling me to take away the mask. I remember saying to them, what the f—k are you talking about? I don't have it anymore. I felt really stripped and vulnerable. I really didn't know who I was. I started thinking of all the things I had missed out on like the high school prom. So when I was not using I became sick in treatment. I had gastritis from the stress. I ended up in the hospital for three days while in treatment. My body and mind was so yellow. I was afraid because I didn't have any power anymore. I didn't have my safety net. I didn't have my "everything" that was my only reason for living. I was lonely and I didn't know if I was going to make it.

During her time in the treatment program Lynn heard various speakers share their experiences of using alcohol and drugs on a daily basis. The speakers would talk about

how drugs and alcohol had taken their power to choose and their freedoms away. Many of the stories focused on how these people had become prisoners to drugs and slaves to their ritualistic behavior of buying, preparing, and using drugs on a daily basis. Lynn remembers thinking that these people would “try to intimidate me. I sat in the front row during these meetings and even though I wanted to get clean and sober I remember saying to myself, whatever.” One day a woman came to speak to the group and Lynn remembers:

. . . there was one girl who spoke. She looked right at me when she was speaking and I locked eyes with her. She didn't take them off of me and I didn't take them off of her. I just listened to her and she was talking about acting tough and doing that and being that and how bullshit that was and she just kept looking at me.

During the stare between Lynn and this woman speaker, Lynn felt a very real connection with this woman. She remembers:

. . . this woman started talking about God and how beautiful her life was now. I could feel sugar going through my body at the moment when she was speaking to me. I knew that I was feeling different and I wanted to have a beautiful life too. When she finished I put my head down because I was very overwhelmed by her and what she had said in particular. I raised my head and looked at her again and there was nothing there any longer. I got up to get a key tab as an acknowledgement of my being drug free for a certain number of days while in the program. As I went up to get my key tab this black guy was clapping so loud. I remember that everything just

got blurry and all I could hear was my own heartbeat. Everything had been blurred out and I felt, as corny as this sounds, that I was surrounded by a white light as I walked to the front of the room. I knew that God was not in my life because I would ask for help to stop using everyday and my requests were not answered. But when I stood up to get my key tab, I realized that I had a presence in my life and I knew that I felt warmth. I felt like I was the only person in that room. I remember getting the key tab in my hand and thinking I'm going to f—king be okay. It was such a powerful and beautiful feeling. I felt the connection to God or to my higher power and I knew that everything was going to be okay. I felt safe and I knew this was my last stop. I had nowhere else to go. I just knew that I needed to do everything that they tell me to do.

Lynn continued to listen to the stories of the speakers in the meetings. She heard stories of why people used and she could not relate their stories to her life. Lynn remembers:

. . . I believe I didn't get much out of the program, except learning to trust some specific individuals because of their life stories. Many times I'd listen to people in these meetings tell me they used drugs because of this or that. Some of the people would say that they used drugs because their fathers were alcoholics or because their mothers used to beat them. I used to say that I used drugs because I liked to get high. I believed that for months and months. I now know that I was just protection myself from the pain of having to acknowledge my inadequacies and the feeling of not

being loved as a child.

After leaving the rehab center Lynn continued to believe that her drug use hinged upon a single premise thought that she simply liked to get high. Because of her inability to look deeper into herself to acknowledge the pain she had lived with all her life, Lynn relapsed into drug use on three occasions. Lynn remembers:

. . . I didn't continually stay clean after I left rehab. I relapsed three times. It was not good. It took me back to that gross feeling at the end of my addiction. After one hit it was like, Uh! Of course I kept using until it was all gone because that is what I do. But I knew that this person wasn't me anymore. I asked for help. I phoned another girl in the program after I came down the next day. I was just going to say that this was my life and that I can't do this anymore. It's too hard. I reached out though to the guy I was with at the time. We were getting straight together and although this is not recommended it worked for me to get me over a bump in the road of recovery. I am straight today and he is still using drugs.

Getting over some of the bumps in the road of recovery from drug addiction was difficult for Lynn but she found that her life had dramatically changed over the course of the following year. Lynn remembers:

. . . when I got my one-year medallion my life had dramatically changed because I didn't work in strip clubs anymore. I got myself out of the hotel rooms, the strip clubs, and I got myself into a safe place where I would be open and I could receive. I got myself into this place because I had a clear mind. When I got into that safe spot things really changed for me. I

became a travel agent, a corporate travel agent. I had my own apartment. I had my own car again. I had my own furnishings. I treated myself very well. When I got up to get my medallion it was not an ego thing. There were hundreds of people that came to that room because nobody who saw me when I came into the program thought that I would make it to my one year anniversary of my rebirth day. And I had changed. When I came into the program I was wearing black leather and lots of makeup. I have a picture of me at the one year celebration of me wearing a floral dress. It is just mind blowing. I remembered feeling so grateful because the guy I was with didn't make it and I did.

Lynn's identity went through a drastic transformation. Knowing that she could not longer sustain her drug addictive behavior and lifestyle, Lynn set to the task of rebuilding her identity. Lynn remembers:

. . . I can see this hardcore, crazy, asshole person blossoming into or becoming soft, just soft, as in not so defensive, ready to fight with everybody, and ready to steal from anyone who has their back turned. Just this horrible person just disappeared and a little girl emerged who doesn't know which way to go but she definitely knows that she's going to be okay. I know I am going to be okay because God is helping me. As long as I live through Him and if I keep my f—king mouth shut for ten minutes and don't think I know everything all the time then I will be okay.

Lynn came to the spot of listening more and talking less through the outcomes of her experiences. On those occasions when she would take control of a situation or try to

force an outcome in her favor things really became messed up. In the early stages of her recovery, Lynn was able, willing, and often did take control of the events in her life. Because of this Lynn and God “came to a standoff, but we are getting to know each other.” Lynn believed that God had saved her life when she was at the lowest point in her life. Through praying to God and a greater understanding of herself Lynn was able to navigate through the rough times that were her life in the first five years of her sobriety.

Lynn is now a proud mother of two children and a wife. Her family life is not without challenges but she is able to continue down her road of recovery with the guidance of those women who are in her life. “I don’t think anyone showed me what to do they just guided me. I think I put the pieces together myself.” One special person for Lynn was her sister-in-law. This woman knew Lynn from a young age and when Lynn went to the drug treatment program it was only Lynn’s sister-in-law that “called me and supported me when I was in the program. It was huge for me to have this person supporting me. She accepted me for who I was and this means a lot to me.”

Lynn acknowledges now that “doing the drugs and being hardcore was not me. I am self made and nobody can take this away from me.” The successes that Lynn feels are testimony to the hard work she has done while building a new life for herself and her children. Lynn says that “she feels pretty good about herself” and how her life has turned out regardless of the start she got in life.

CHAPTER X – TRISH’S STORY

Introduction to Trish

Trish is a female in her mid forties. I first met Trish while I was in private practice. I was asked to give a talk at a self-help group and Trish was in attendance. Many of the parents in the group were struggling with behavior issues with their teenage children. One woman in particular seemed to be emotional about some of the issues I was presenting to the group. At the end of the meeting Trish came to me and told that if this woman approached me for services that I was to bill her for any costs. I never forgot that. When I asked Trish to participate in this study, she hesitated but she agreed. Her main concern was whether she would have something to contribute to the study, but she agreed that if anything she said could help another human being then far be it from her to deny the personal growth of others.

Trish’s Story

Life can be like sitting at a stoplight in a car and getting rear-ended by another car. So one is just sitting at a stoplight and a car slams into the trunk and the person gets thrown forward. It came out of the blue and the person didn’t expect it. In that moment there are some serious injuries that can potentially happen. Perhaps the person could be paralyzed for life or perhaps some other injury that is just as debilitating. Anyway, in that brief moment in time one’s life can be altered permanently.

Trish felt a sense of comfort knowing that there was love, kindness, gentleness, and respect in her 13 year relationship. She had been with this man for a long time and they had a child together and raised two others from her previous marriage. The first two

children thought of this man as their father because he did all the things a father does like getting up early to go to hockey practice, baseball try outs, soccer signups and providing a stable male role model. Trish's daughter was still in her preteen years and had known nothing but a stable family unit with both a mother and a father. The family lived in a big house and Trish always tried to present her daughter with a novel environment that included new and exciting adventures whenever possible. So what came next for Trish was much like being rear-ended by a car while she sat in her car at a stoplight.

Trish's life changed in the time it took her spouse of 13 years to ask her if she would have sex with another woman. Trish and her family were on a road trip in central Canada when she figured out that:

. . . in that moment I wasn't dealing with somebody who was sane. In a split second my marriage went from a secure and loving relationship to complete and absolute insanity. At that point I knew that I was going to have to go to a place that would be so scary for me emotionally. I knew we were entering into some really bizarre territory.

Because of the very nature of the question she was asked, Trish knew on all levels of her being that she was about "to enter into some really bizarre territory. Although she did not know what the nature of this bizarre territory would be nor did she know what she would eventually have to go through, Trish knew that she had to venture into this unknown territory if she were to emotionally save herself and her daughter.

Trish knew that what she had been asked was outside the social norm of our society and outside the boundaries of their relationship as it had been for 13 years. As evidence of knowing she would be going into uncharted emotional territory Trish

remembers:

. . . well this had never been a part of our relationship. This was new information to process and digest. It's not culturally accepted in that sense. Most husbands don't ask their wives if they would like to have sex with their friend. I knew I had entered into another territory.

However Trish was not prepared for what happened the next morning. Trish remembers:

. . . then the following morning when the rest of the information was given to me I just could not believe what I was hearing. He wanted us all to be married, all three of us to be married to each other. He had calculated and planned for us to meet without my knowing. He wanted to assess whether or not we would make a viable bigamist relationship. I would be expected to participate sexually both with him and her. There would be twosomes and threesomes. He had it all planned out and he had used this time to assess whether or not that was viable. This was not the basis of our marriage and this had never been discussed in our marriage. So when he asked me if I would have sex with her I knew I was going to have to go into something that I was not prepared for. When that information came out I knew that I was definitely dealing with somebody who was quite insane.

Trish knew that if she was going to make some sense out of her being with this man that she would have to do some extreme things. Trish's first reaction to her situation was to say to him "that I would like to be insane myself." Trish realized almost immediately that her sense of reality was radically different from her perception of reality

of the previous day. “My reality was just too far gone in that I had my daughter in there in the room next to us. I thought no one can blame me right now if I want to just check out. I could sign myself in somewhere and not have to deal with this.” Trish knew that what was being requested of her:

. . . went completely against my values because I am neither a bigamist nor a lesbian. He set me up for this and it went against my values to be set up that way. There was such a huge sense and feeling of being betrayed by this person who was supposed to be my spouse. Yes, I spent a few hours feeling as if I would just gladly check out.

The emotional impact for Trish at being asked to change the entire foundation of her marriage to accommodate another woman, being asked to perform such sexual duties, and at being betrayed was too much for her. In her attempt to survive the moment Trish remembers “when I say I was thinking about this stuff I’m not sure that I thought of anything because I actually can’t recall those two or three hours. Those hours are sort of gone from my immediate ability to recall them.” Trish believes that she “experienced what an accident victim might experience when they go into shock in their attempt to forget the accident that hurt them.”

For Trish the feeling of shock she experienced allowed her feelings and emotions to separate from her physical body. According to Trish, “there was a certain benefit to being in shock. Because of the shock I felt really confused.” But as time passed Trish was able to regain some of her emotional composure and:

. . . then I became sort of physical, physically and emotionally unwell enough to really respond in a way that I might normally respond. My first

thoughts were to take my daughter and leave, to be worried about my safety, and to be thinking that if he is capable of this then can he hurt me.

To add to Trish's confusion her spouse continued to "say and do things about this new marriage arrangement he wanted, he was also trying to look after me at the same time." Because Trish was completely caught off guard she was unprepared to deal with him. To deepen the confusion for Trish she had no point of reference in her life experiences to guide her in dealing with this man. Trish remembers:

. . . because there had been no lead up to it I had no point of reference for it. I didn't know how to relate to him. He was still the same person I knew but he was completely the same but he was completely different at the same time. I didn't know how to protect myself. Then because of the shock I just became really physically unable to eat. I was vomiting. I was unable to sleep and unable to dress myself at least for the rest of that day.

As Trish continued to struggle with her emotions and the issues of safety for her and her daughter she quickly understood that just "checking out was not an option. I just knew that it wasn't an option." Trish admits that there were just too many issues that needed to be dealt with in order to save her sanity, protect her daughter, and to get her and her daughter home safely for Trish to check out of the situation through mental illness. Very quickly Trish knew that she needed to take control of the situation and be more present emotionally in her situation. This situation needed her undivided attention if she was to protect herself and her daughter. Trish remembers:

. . . I couldn't just check out because I'm not mentally ill, because I just couldn't go there. The same part of me looked at the situation and just

said no, no, sorry you cannot check out. You can't even use any substances. There's a tremendous amount of transformation in your life that is about to happen. I mean even at that point I was aware that I was on the edge of having to make some really big significant changes in my life. This was not going to be acceptable to me. And then there was the other aspect of it. I wasn't sure I was entirely safe and I was outside my home. I was in western Canada and I felt that I needed to have control of it to protect myself and my daughter from anything that he might do. I had a sense almost right away that there was something mentally wrong with him to be suggesting what he suggested. I thought I just have to play along with him until I figure out what to do because I'm scared of him.

Despite of the level of emotion Trish was feeling at the time and all the issues she had to deal with a very old primal instinct pushed its way to the forefront of her thinking. "I had to think of self-preservation. But what was even stronger in me than the need to self-preserve was the natural instinct of being a mother and having to protect my daughter. My only thoughts were I cannot leave my daughter with this insane person." There was no opportunity for Trish to leave her situation because she was so far away from her home and even if she could have left she wouldn't have because Trish knew "I had to stay and protect her from him."

Trish was in the middle of a heightened emotional state. This new information about her relationship was so profound that it changed her perception of her marriage, family, her abilities to problem solve, and even the way the world looked around her. Trish remembers:

. . . survival and a watchfulness and a vigilance that I'd never had before now were available to me in no short supply. I think I was running on pure adrenalin just trying to make some sense of something that I couldn't make sense of and at the same time protecting myself. I was to the point where he scared me enough that I didn't want to incite his anger until I was home, safe, and then and only then could I figure something out. I do remember a few days later while driving in the car that everything looked different. The sky was bluer, trees greener, and the world looked different. My daughter looked different to me. I looked different to me when I looked into a mirror. Something had altered so much that I would never look at the world in the same way.

The only way that Trish could try to explain why her perceptions changed so drastically was to tell a story. Trish states that:

. . . what occurred to me at the time was a love story in those first few days of dealing with this insane situation. The story was about a pilot who ran out of gas over the Atlantic Ocean. He described the experience of hitting the unthinkable and that when a person hits that place of being in the unthinkable then it happens. I can't imagine that spot happening to a pilot of a commercial jetliner who runs out of gas at 30,000 feet over the Atlantic Ocean. Neither of his engines worked. A person would kind of take a step out of their body and watch it like an observer by hovering over the situation. Then decisions have to be made. It is like I can respond to this and do what I need to do or it can take me out and I can go

under. In this case this pilot made, in a few minutes, the necessary calculations to be able to glide into an island in the middle of the Atlantic. Not only did he land on the island but he landed on the runway on that island, with no gas and all 300 passengers survived. I remember feeling that his description of what happened was close to a near death experience because it alters the way one sees the world again. You lose fear because of such an experience. My situation was not a near death experience but it felt like it in that it felt like I would lose my mind for a period of time and that felt like death. It's as if I hit some kind of really serious bottom that couldn't deter me from what I needed to do. Since I didn't go down and this situation didn't take me out and I didn't go under then I lost a lot of my fear. I lost a lot of my fear of doing what I needed to do which was to break away from the situation and protect myself. I got to the point that I became very cold and calculating.

For Trish the cold and calculating aspects manifested themselves in this situation by allowing her spouse to believe that he was still in control. Trish had already started to formulate a plan that would best serve her needs and the needs of her daughter. She only needed time to prepare and to make sure that her plan would work once she put it into motion. Trish remembers "I knew I had an end in mind. I had to get out of this relationship but I had to make him think that it was his idea. I also needed to get the things out of the situation that I needed, like my daughter and my money and that type of thing." For Trish this situation forced her to act at a new level of personal courage. Trish acknowledges "I'm ruled by fear normally, but since this happened to me I have lost my

fear of taking action. I really got a sense of empowerment out of this situation.”

The empowered position that Trish worked from during the formulation and implementation of the plan that provided her with an element of safety for her and her daughter did not come to her immediately but was a “process that took about two weeks.”

Trish remembers that:

. . . there was a lot of anxiety and fear that I wouldn't be able to take what I needed in the first two weeks of getting this information from my spouse. I even went to the spot of thinking maybe he's right. Maybe this is the way my life is supposed to be but I couldn't bear the thought of not having my life the way it was with my daughter. I was really frightened by the concept of having all these children intermixing in one family and me having to be a mother to someone else's children. I knew I couldn't f—king survive that. I thought to myself that I can't make these changes so I am going to have to go along with what he wants. Being in that spot didn't last long because I knew I couldn't do what he was asking me to do. I started to feel like I was in shock again. Then I made a decision to come back to reality. When I made that decision then I lost the fear and I went to that place of knowing everything I need.

Trish knew that “everything was going to be there for me in one form or another.”

Trish explains:

. . . I got this realization in a moment of clarity while I was standing in the kitchen. The decision to split up had already been made. He was standing across from me saying that he loved me and that he must have been crazy

to do the things that he had done. When I heard him say the words I was struck with a feeling of dread because I thought that he was actually not going to leave. I was not going to abandon the family home so that meant that I would be stuck living with him. I knew that I couldn't be with him because my values and his values were now so far apart that there was no relationship left. He crossed just about every boundary, in my estimation, that most people use as the basis of their relationships. The thought of having to stay in this relationship was too much for me and I started thinking how I could get him out of the relationship and out of the house. I knew that I would have to make it feel like it is his decision to leave. Because I had no fear left, I took control of the situation and gently but firmly helped him to make the decision that I wanted him to make and the decision I believe he wanted to make. When he finally said the words that he was leaving the feeling of dread turned to a feeling of relief. What is interesting for me though was that I didn't have to find the power or strength to do this it was just there when I needed it.

However, when she thought that he might be backing out of his decision to leave, Trish felt a surge of power. Armed with this new power, Trish began to take action. The memories of that time are still clear in her memory. Trish remembers:

. . . from that point on it was nothing but actions. It was nothing but doing all the necessary preparing and up until this point I'd not told anyone what was happening to me except for a couple of friends. I'd been hiding out basically. The time for hiding and keeping this secret was over for me. I

phoned my brother and told him what was happening. Then I phoned my sons and told them. I phoned a lot of significant people in my life and just by telling them I made it real. It didn't feel real until that point on that Saturday morning. I got a weight lifted off my shoulder that morning by telling everyone and making it real. I now knew that I would be able to do it, I would be able to walk away from this bizarre mess and start again.

Some very special friends helped Trish get through her most difficult of emotional times. Trish remembers calling these people and telling them what was happening to her when it was taking place and Trish remembers:

. . . that I am not sure that within those first couple of weeks it really helped to have somebody to talk to and I'm not sure I even heard anything they said to me. They must have thought that I was quite crazy. I know their responses to me would be for me to get the f—k out and get out of there. There was no way to know what he was going to do next. There was no way to know what he was going to do to me. I just seemed immobilized. I couldn't move until that moment in the kitchen when I thought that he wasn't going to leave. It was at that time that I had my moment of insight and knew that I had to make the break to get away from him. I knew I had to go and take my daughter and just go but up until that point in that time in the kitchen I didn't think I had the strength to do it.

Trish acknowledges that “there were many contributing factors to the feeling of power and that feeling powerful was very clear.” According to Trish, some of the other factors were:

. . . the feelings of shock I experienced, the support I got from my friends, and just everything. The need to protect my daughter, my priorities changing, my values changing, and everything else just moved me to that point but I still kept hitting this wall thinking that I couldn't do it and that I didn't have the strength to do what I needed to do. I would think of having to tell my daughter that her father and I were splitting up and I just couldn't tell her. I would think of having to tell my boys about this or my parents and I just couldn't bring myself to do it. Then with the moment in the kitchen it just all became clear that there was absolutely nothing that I couldn't do. Everything that I needed was already there for me and that all I had to do was move into action. The action came very quickly into clarity. It all became very clear to me what I needed to do and how I was going to proceed.

Trish knew she was taking the appropriate life course for her because as she:

. . . got more clarity there came more actions and with more actions came more clarity. Then with positive feedback from my group of friends there was absolutely no question that I could do this and that I was going in the right life direction for me. It was an unwavering kind of feeling where the world really does look different and continues to. I feel fearless. I feel focused. I feel bursting with purpose. I am happy.

“I have completely changed my identity.” Trish knows she is a different person today than the person that was sitting in the front seat of a car being asked to have sex with another woman. When asked, Trish acknowledges that she:

. . . has a sense of what I am capable of and what's in store for me in the future. The excitement that I feel about where my life might go and the different things that have entered my life is so refreshing. I see the opportunities that have already come into my life since then. I am actually grateful that everything has happened the way it did.

As a closing statement Trish was proud to acknowledge that her experience has been a time “of tremendous grief and a time of tremendous growth. And I’m excited about where I go from here and all the possibilities that are open to me.”

CHAPTER XI – PAM’S STORY

Introduction to Pam

Pam is in her mid forties. A mutual friend who knew about Pam’s experiences asked if she would participate in this project. She agreed based on the strength of their relationship.

Pam’s Story

When Pam was a little child of about eight years her mother took her to Mexico to live with her mother and her mother’s boyfriend. Pam’s mother had been to Mexico and met and fallen in love with a native Mexican man. According to Pam’s mother, they were going to move to Mexico, build a restaurant, and live happily ever after running this business while playing on the beaches and basking in the Mexican sun. Pam remembers “I was there about six months and my mother left me down there while she came back to central Canada to make more money to send to Mexico so the construction of the restaurant could continue. My mother and her boyfriend were building a restaurant on an island.” During one of these working leaves by her mother something happened to Pam that would change her life forever.

Late one night a tropical storm blew inland from the ocean. Pam remembers:

... it was late one night and it started to thunder and rain like nothing I had ever heard before or since. I was terrified. I ran into my parent’s bedroom and jumped into bed with my stepfather. He proceeded to molest me at that time. He continued to molest me again and again over the course of the next year. I was always terrified and afraid of him. At that time I weight about 60 pounds. I was just this tiny little girl being

molested by this Mexican man. My stomach was bad and I couldn't keep anything down because I was nervous and afraid all the time when I was with him. He was very abusive. Being Mexican meant that there was a different values system that I had to act within. As a girl I was not supposed to do anything improper and I certainly wouldn't look at a boy or anything like that. I was going to Catholic school so I was also getting all the demands from the religious side of things. I was getting feedback from my stepfather about being a good girl. Yet he would have me in bed and he would be telling me that when I turned 15 years old he was going to leave my mother and marry me. I grew up in this chaos and abuse. It was very painful and very scary for me. I was not getting good grades in school and my stepfather would become more abusive when my grades were poor. I lived my life caught in a circle of fear and abuse. I never told anyone. I was scared to tell anyone because of all the threats that my stepfather would use against me. When I was 13 years I was starting to develop physically and my mother took my back to Canada with her on one of her trips. I was getting close to being 15 years old and I did not want to marry my stepfather so I told me mother once we were back in Canada. I thought to myself that if she does not believe me I could run away and go live with my grandmother. I was out of Mexico now and I knew that I could not go back there to him.

Pam knew that she couldn't go back to Mexico because she made the determination that "I just didn't want to live that way anymore." Pam also knew that she

was buckling under the emotional pressure of having to live with an abusive stepfather because “I was suicidal as a kid. I tried to drown myself in the ocean a couple of times. Through those experiences I found out that I really wanted to live.” Pam stayed silent about her abuse because “I had really become concerned for my mother and her feelings.” Pam knew “something inside of me wanted me to survive and so that’s when I chose to tell my mother about the abuse I was receiving at the hands of my stepfather.” Pam also knew that if her mother did believe her then she would not bring Pam back to Mexico with her when she returned. Off and on, Pam had lived with her grandmother since she was two years old. Pam felt really confident that she could go back to live with her if her mother did not believe her. As it turned out, Pam remembers:

. . . my mother did believe me. It was unfortunate because my mother took the news really, really hard. My mother was a heavy drinker to start with and this information drove my mother to drink much heavier. It was a shame that her drinking got so much worse and if she chose him over me, I didn’t really care because I wanted out so badly.

Even though Pam had made her decision it was still “very difficult for me to deal with the fact that my mother was drinking more alcohol than she ever had before. I just felt such tremendous guilt.” Pam’s mother knew something was going on but she just didn’t realize what it was or how much trouble her daughter was in emotionally and physically. Pam remembers that when her mother would be drinking heavily she would say things like “you two were always talking in Spanish and I didn’t know what was going on. I saw you though.” Because her mother would be drunk when she said things like that to Pam, Pam always thought that maybe her mother blamed her for what

happened. Pam just remembers “feeling really hurt when she would say things like that to me.”

Pam went to live with her aunt and uncle. Pam remembers “that I actually had a really good year at school. I was 14 years old then and I realized that I was actually quite bright. The teacher took a special interest in me and I found that I could learn things really quite easily. As Pam continued to push to turn her life around things just kept getting better and better.” It was at this time that Pam met the boy that would eventually become her husband. Pam remembers:

. . . we loved each other. It was very sweet and innocent considering this was in the mid 1960’s. This was just before the hippy days of free love and all that stuff. It was a very innocent and wonderful loving thing. So for one year I had a very nice environment where I actually felt normal. I would get up in the morning and someone would be there to have breakfast with and then would help me get ready for school. I would then go to school and I had friends. I liked some of the teachers more than others but I would go to school and I would learn stuff. Then I would go home in the evening and somebody was there cooking dinner for me. I felt wonderful and safe. I had all of the things that other people in families had. I felt special. I felt normal. I didn’t feel normal when I lived in Mexico with my stepfather. The bad thing was that it only lasted for one year only.

The issue that brought everyone into conflict was “my aunt didn’t approve of my having a boyfriend at such a young age.” Because of this:

. . . I had an argument with my aunt over my boyfriend because she said that we would have sex and that I would be pregnant in a year. I thought this was a ludicrous statement and I didn't know where this kind of thinking was coming from in her. I found out later that that was what she did. I guess she was concerned for me but she was also adamant that I would not have a boyfriend until I was 16 years old. I wound up leaving there and going to live with my grandmother for a short time.

Although it meant the end of her relationship with her boyfriend, Pam knew that one day they would be back together again because she loved him and he loved her. Pam decided that the only thing she could do was to wait for that time. Living with her grandmother only lasted a short time and Pam's mother came to get her.

Pam remembers:

. . . my mother took me back to Mexico for the summer. I was the wildest thing there that summer. The kids I used to hang out with were still there when I got back to years later. Most of these kids were American kids whose parents owned businesses and that kind of thing. These kids were smoking pot and drinking alcohol. I was appalled at their behavior that they were doing all this stuff. But near the end of the summer vacation I was smoking dope along with everyone else. I didn't drink much just the odd little drink. I didn't really care that much for booze. I thought pot was kind of cool and so I was able to blot out while I was down there and stay away from my stepfather. I just spent his money. I would go all over town charging clothes and stuff that I wanted and charge it all to him. It

was my way of getting back at him.

The family unit started to break down near the end of that summer. Building the restaurant had turned out to be a huge financial and emotional burden on both Pam's mother and stepfather. Pam remembers:

. . . then we came back and my mother and I got a place together and that's when hell really broke loose. My mother was just totally out of control with her drinking. I guess the trip down to Mexico made it even worse because she lost everything. My mother pretty much invested all of her money in the building of the restaurant. The business did not pan out and she lost it all. She was pretty bitter and hanging out in the dumpiest of hotels, getting drunk and coming home violent.

The relationship between Pam and her mother deteriorated as her mother drank more alcohol and became progressively more violent toward Pam. Many times the anger expressed by her mother turned into physical confrontations where punches would be thrown by both Pam and her mother. Pam remembers "it was pretty bad. We fought to the point of having physical fights. Sometimes she would whop me good." Pam began looking for ways of getting out of her relationship with her mother. She loved her mother but could not live with the violence and the undertones that fed Pam's guilt about the breakdown of the family. One option for escape for Pam came in the form of:

. . . a guy, a beautiful guy. He was 19 years old and I was 15 years old. He was a hustler and a rounder. He was just what I thought was the best thing that could ever happen to me. He did a little gambling, a little dope, and he was kind of a biker type. The biker part scared me but he protected

me from them. He took a real shine to me and that was all I needed.

Within days I left home and went with to live with him.” I was 15 years old. He turned out to be very abusive, physically abusive. He gave me all kinds of venereal diseases. It was pretty nasty, but I married this guy anyway.

Pam knew that her life was no longer the safe and secure thing it was when she lived with her aunt and uncle. Her marriage, although an option to getting out of the relationship with her mother, was not turning out to be a positive experience. Pam remembers:

. . . for me it was either I get married to this man or where was I going to go? I had no where to go. I'm 15 and I don't go to school anymore. I'm scared and I don't know how to look after myself. I needed someone to take care of me and he was there. Even though he was sexually, physically, and mentally abusive he was there when I needed someone. By the time I am 16 years old I am pregnant. The following year I gave birth to a baby boy. I was malnourished. I never went anywhere. I was confined to the apartment. All I did was look after my son. Then our marriage went down the tubes because he got arrested and sent to jail for a year.

With her husband in jail Pam went from having few options of someone to look after her to none. Her new status of being a single mother meant that Pam had to fend for her baby son and herself. Pam remembers:

. . . I got a job in a factory and people were going to the pub and others

were going to bars. One night I thought I might as well join them. A funny thing happened to me that night. After a couple of drinks I wasn't scared anymore. I wasn't nervous anymore. I wasn't feeling any kind of pain or discomfort. I was happy, joyously and blissfully happy. I thought the feelings I got from drinking alcohol were great. I thought that drinking was going to make me all better. I had dabbled with other drugs like acid but I didn't really care for any of that stuff so I never anything between the ages of 16 years to 19 years. I was just a little teetotaler looking after my son. But when I started drinking booze it was really something.

Pam was still burdened with the knowledge that she was not able to truly look after herself and her baby. "It didn't take me long to realize that I need looking after, that I could not take care of myself. Here I am with this kid. I'm 19 years old, all alone, scared, and with a baby and I don't like it. I have to find someone quick to look after me." That is when Pam met the man who was about to become her second husband.

Pam remembers:

. . . this is when I met the man that was to become my second husband. I was 19 years old and so was he. He was a carefree person who had just bought himself a Harley-Davidson Sportster motorcycle. He was just a happy and carefree guy. We really got hooked up fast and he had to get rid of the motorcycle because we were living in a camp place. It was kind of like the Harley or me. I never said the words but I am sure that is what he felt. Anyway we played house and I got pregnant again. When my daughter was born I realized that I just wasn't happy. . .

Pam continued to live in the way she had. She lived through many years of abuse in order to fulfill her need to be looked after and protected. As it turns out, Pam remembers:

. . . you know it's funny, because I spent all this time wanting somebody to look after me and it turns out that I wind up looking after them. I got the job that paid the money out of the blue. I don't know how I did that. I got the job and I took care of the bills and I took care of everything, literally. My husband went to work when he wasn't laid off but other than that he didn't do much of anything.

Because Pam was now in control of the money and was looking after someone else she started to exert some of her own power. Pam remembers:

. . . getting nasty because I was asserting myself. I would go and party after work or whenever, come home plastered and he would be totally pissed at me. We got into fights and I had guilt and remorse the next day. This pattern carried on and on for finally years and years and years. Eventually it got to the point that I would take off for the weekend to go drinking because no one would bug me about what I was doing. I loved my family but I just had to get away. I would come home Sunday nights hung over, eat dinner with the family and start my week all over again.

Pam eventually took her two children and left her second husband to move in with a girlfriend who also had two children. Pam has clear recollections of that situation and describes her experience as

“what a disaster that was. We were both running away from marriages and neither one of

us had the emotional stability to cope. We could not maintain, on a daily basis, some kind of normal emotional level.” This not surprising because as Pam says:

. . . we’re partying all night then I had to get up at six in the morning to go to work. I had an accounting job that was a lot of pressure during the day. Then I would come home at night and start partying all night. It was just a pure disaster. On top of everything else I was having an affair with my girlfriend’s younger brother because I did not want to be alone but I also didn’t want him either. I was really confused and mixed up.

Pam gave an example of just how confused she was during this time of her life. The example given shows not only her confusion but the potential for confusion in others. Pam explains that:

. . . my girlfriend’s brother took me out to celebrate New Year’s Eve one year. I got totally blitzed and left the party leaving him there. I took a taxi home and went up to the door of the house and started knocking. The house was dark and nobody was answering the door. I flipped out. I knocked the door down. I was still dressed in high heels and a long gown and I just broke down this door. Once inside the house I realized that I was in the wrong house. I just kicked in the door of the next door neighbour’s house. Their house just looked like mine. After that episode I called my husband to come and get me and the children. He took us home and we just started the same circle over and over again.

Pam knew that she was having difficulty in managing her life. The behavior of an alcoholic is chaotic at the best of times and Pam’s behavior was so chaotic that she was

driving people away from her at the same time giving them the message that she wanted to have these people in her life. This “yo-yo” pattern of dealing with people only added stress in Pam’s life until she was forced to make a decision. Pam decided to “get sober and I did for a couple of months. Then I changed my drinking pattern so that I was sober for a couple of months, drink again, and then sober again for a couple of months.” During one of these sober periods Pam received a letter and a Christmas present from the boyfriend that she was forbidden to see when she was 14 years old. Pam knew that she still loved this person and she took him sending her a present to mean that he still loved her. Pam recalls:

. . . that was all it took for me to look him up. When I went there to see him I just didn’t leave. I just stayed. I left the kids with my husband and I stayed with my childhood sweetheart. I was with him for two years. We spent six months in the southern United States and nine months in eastern Canada. But I missed my children terribly. I could not believe that I left just like that.

Riddled with guilt Pam made contact with her husband in an attempt to regain custody of her children. What Pam received was not the welcome she anticipated. Pam remembers:

. . . my husband had turned brutal. He was a wonderful carefree guy when I first met him but now he had turned into a very mean, bitter, upset, and horrible person. He kept telling me that I was dirt and I deserved to be called that. The problem was that I started to believe that I was dirt. I made the decision to leave my childhood sweetheart and go back to where

my children were at the time. I was going with just one thought in my mind, to get my children back. As much as I loved my childhood sweetheart we were not happy at that time and he wanted to go to Latin America. I just could not go and leave my children, so he left without me.

Pam acknowledged that being away from her children for a two year period “actually brought on physical pain in the womb area.” The relationship with a childhood sweetheart was great and it brought lots of feeling to Pam but she just could not trade off the love she felt for him for the pain of not having her children. The pain outweighed the love. Pam also knew about the pain of abandonment. During her childhood Pam’s mother “would leave me with different relatives. Sometimes I would wake up in the middle of the night and I was some place strange. I remember those nights well and I have just abandoned my children for two years.”

Pam knew that once she was back in the same city as her children that she would have nothing but hard work in front of her if she were to meet her goal of getting her children back into her custody. As Pam recalls her first priority:

. . . was getting a job. That was first and paramount. My husband had just lost it and he moved the children into his sister home. I knew it was not going to be an easy task getting my children out of that home because my brother-in-law was a lawyer. I knew they were not just going to give my children back to me so I contacted someone and set up a plan to have my children kidnapped from them. My sister-in-law found out about my plan and telephoned me to say that she was a mother and she understood how I was feeling. She also told me that this was not the way to do it. I was told

that I would have to get it together and when I did things will happen. She told me that we would take the process one step at a time. That's basically why I knew I had to do things that way. I had to go back and get it together and I did. I got a job and I moved back in with a girlfriend of mine. She was a drinker and I was a drinker and it was the same situation as years ago only worse this time.

Pam was now in her mid-thirties and staying up all night partying meant that she was not able to go to bed late and get up at six in the morning like she did when she was in her early twenties. Pam remembers "I can't get up for work. I'm not in my twenties anymore and the hangovers are much, much worse and I know that I have to change but I can't. I'm still working but I really can't function." Again Pam knew that she was in trouble emotionally but was unsure just how to solve her dilemma. Pam remembers:

. . . something inside of me at the time wasn't strong enough. I didn't have the willpower. I didn't have that something that says I need to change or I am going to die. It was like I was powerless. I have no power over that. There wasn't something there at that point to motivate me, even though everything around me should have been motivating me. There just wasn't the one thing that was going to force me to turn things around. It's like my inability to stop drinking was based on a fear of quitting. If I stop what will happen. I don't know that if I stop drinking things will get better and that is a huge contradiction because I know that if I do not stop drinking things will definitely not get better.

The knowledge that she needed to stop her addictive behavior was offset by her total lack

of faith that things would improve if she quit drinking alcohol. The childhood sweetheart stopped to say good-bye to Pam on his way to Latin America. This was more than Pam could stand emotionally. Pam explains:

. . . I was okay for about a week after he left and then I just lost it. My girlfriend and I dressed up in lingerie, watched movies in her bedroom, and drank champagne. Her friends would come over and visit and that was fine but they had to bring hers and hers. We both had to have bottles. And these were friends and this was okay behavior for them to see. These people seemed to understand, but it was insane behavior on my part. We did this for three straight days. We even had a bath together and afterward put on more obscene lingerie. I wound up on my hands and knees crawling on the floor with the shakes. I called a friend I had met at a self help group and he came and got me and took me to his apartment. I stayed on the couch. I was a real mess. He took me to meetings to help me dry out.

Even though Pam was not drinking alcohol she was not able to function at the level she needed to be a productive member of the workforce. Pam found herself in the position of having to trust others to get her through her work day. Pam remembers:

. . . I'd sit down at my desk and I wouldn't have a clue what I was supposed to do. I totally lost it. I had a total massive breakdown. I didn't want to lose my job, yet I just couldn't do what was required of me. I don't know how I muddled through this time of my life. I didn't want to tell them at my work that I had this condition because I wanted to keep

this job and I was so ashamed of myself for being in this condition. I had a girl who worked in the office and she would tell me what to do when I just couldn't figure out what to do. I spent about two weeks in this vague emotional spot with this girl telling me what to do so I would not lose my job.

Pam took an active role in her own healing through going to self-help meetings on a regular basis. These meetings set the stage for a major internal conflict with Pam. With emotional and physical health and well-being as one of the goals for attending the self-help group meetings, Pam struggled with the feelings of not liking to go to the meetings, being shy at the meetings, not wanting to talk to anyone while at the meetings, and basically running out of the door once the meeting was over. On one such night as Pam was running out of the door someone called to her and said "where are you going? Why don't you stay and talk to us? Why are you always running away?" Pam remembers what happened next and that:

. . . a man came up to me and asked me why I wasn't staying to talk to people after the meetings. I told him that I didn't feel comfortable talking but I started to talk to him. He invited me out for coffee to continue our conversation. I went with him and within an hour I thought this is for me. I found someone to take care of me now. I'll be alright now because there is someone for me. I thought this because I thought I was in sobriety because I was not drinking alcohol.

Jumping, literally, from the frying pan into the fire Pam thought that since she was not drinking alcohol she must be in sobriety and that she would not longer

experience much of the chaos that she experienced during her bouts of heavy drinking. What was not apparent to Pam was that her thinking had not changed and that she was still doing the same things sober as she did when she was drunk. Pam remembers:

. . . I was completely gone. Physically, I have the habit of losing massive amounts of weight. At this time I was down to 112 pounds and was dwindling away to a stupid stick person. I wasn't eating much and my stomach was always tied up in knots. It was an awful feeling that reminded me of when I was a little kid actually. Being abused and abandoned felt much the same way. I moved in immediately with this man that invited me out for coffee. This was going to make everything all better. Of course it didn't. But he did help me a lot by talking to me and telling me that everything was going to be all right. He kept telling me that I was going to get through this, that I was not out of sync, and that it will all pass if I just eat and take care of myself. Basically he took control of my life and told me what I needed to do and when right down to running my bath water. Because of his caring treatment of me after about three months I started to really feel better about myself. I ended up having to quit my job because I just couldn't function well enough to perform the expected duties. Living with this man I didn't have to pay anything and I had a little bit of money so I was okay. I was making arrangements with my sister-in-law to have visits with my daughter on the weekends. Things were really starting to come together in that department. My son, by this time, he was gone off to live his own life.

Pam recalls:

. . . I eventually got my daughter back and I got a job. I worked to keep both of us, my daughter and myself. I eventually got my own apartment. My daughter eventually moved to western Canada to live with her father. I was doing really well for a long time, but I still had a relationship with the man that invited me out for coffee. I didn't want to have sex with this person. We were total opposites, so unlike each other. I didn't want to have sex with anyone, but I couldn't seem to break off this relationship. He started to see someone else and I totally lost it. That is when I realized that this is a pattern in my life and then I asked myself why do I keep doing this? Why do I keep hooking up with people? Why do I always think that I am nothing without a man? Why do I always think that my world is going to collapse because I don't have a man in my life? Why do I think that I am nothing when I am on my own? I just sat down and looked at my relationships and said here I go again. I am 35 years old and I can't go on like this for the rest of my life. That is when I went to counseling. I worked through the issues, all the issues, and patterns of why I choose abusive men. What I found out was that most of my difficulties stemmed from being sexually abused when I was a child and my therapist took my back to my childhood so I could re-parent myself. In this way I was able to have an outcome in my childhood that was more to my liking and safer for me emotionally. I spent two years with my therapist doing the most painful childhood work that involved my mother

and my stepfather. It was really painful and hard stuff to deal with, but I did it.

Pam thought for awhile “that I would never come out of the depression,” but eventually she noticed that she had moved to a different city and that she had been alone for over a year. No sex with anyone for a year was a significant milestone in the emotional healing for Pam. As Pam acknowledges:

. . . that I was living in my little apartment doing my therapy and for the first time I’m alone. It was horrible for the first couple of months but then I really got to the point where I loved being alone. I loved being by myself. I like being with me. I did actually get to the point of not having a man in my life. I got a really good job and was saving money.

Being alone was a process for Pam. As she stated it was horrible for her to be alone for the first couple of months. Pam had lots of support through this period of her life and she had conquered the fear of speaking to others. Pam remembers:

. . . I had good friends. I had solid female friendships and a few good male relationships with older men. In the beginning I was very needy with them on the phone, while having lunches and just talking with them. I was not spending my nights alone in my apartment but I was out talking to people. Eventually these people started to show me things and I just weaned myself away from them where I could spend more time alone. I had other help as well. The depression became so bad at one point that I went to the doctor and was put on anti-depressants. These really helped me as well. The drugs were able to carry me over and through some very

difficult times. The difference in me was like the difference between night and day. With the drugs I had no fear left. I was content within myself. I was able to make decisions that before I would have had to fight to make. I was really sick of living in those memories of abuse and stuff and having to deal with them. I took anti-depressants and it was like I was free.

Through the ups and downs of daily living Pam was able to put five years of continuous sobriety together. A couple of years earlier her daughter had moved from central Canada to western Canada to live with her father and attend university. It was time for Pam's daughter's convocation and Pam came out to southern British Columbia to attend. What Pam found astonishing was the fact that there was basically no winter in southern British Columbia like there was in central Canada. Pam remembers:

. . . I grew up in Acapulco. I never really got used to the winters in Canada. Things have always been not quite right with me because of the weather. When I went to southern British Columbia I thought this is like heaven to me and was just fabulous. Because I thought the weather was perfect I moved out here. I had saved some money, I was healthy, didn't drink alcohol, I had quit smoking, and everything. I came out to southern British Columbia figuring I would be unemployed for months and would have to live on my savings, but when I arrived I was working within a very short period of time. Again there was a lot of work related stress but I had a good relationship with my daughter, I was living in paradise, everything was good, and everything was wonderful. Eventually my mother came to live with me. Over the years of my sobriety I was able to

work on the relationship with her and that relationship had developed into something special.

Being in recovery from alcoholism for over five years certain philosophies become ingrained into one's behavior and attitude around the consumption of alcohol and the places where alcohol is consumed. Pam had the basics of these understandings but allowed herself to be caught off guard. When Pam's mother came to live with her, her mother would visit the local pub to socialize on Sunday afternoons. Pam remembers:

. . . she kept asking me to come and I kept saying that I was not comfortable in bars. And I wasn't comfortable in bars. Never was comfortable around booze period, but I decided to go anyway. When I went I realized or thought that everything was good in my life. I had gone through all the therapy and I thought I understood me and was okay with me the way I am. So I thought that my alcoholism was due to the pain I endured around my childhood issues and since I had dealt with those issues I would be able to drink alcohol again because I didn't need any help to deal with the pain. I thought that I could safely drink alcohol again and that nothing would happen to me and that I would be able to have a little fun.

So Pam succumbed to her feeling that everything would be okay and that she could have some fun through the consumption of alcohol. Pam began to rationalize her behavior by telling herself that:

. . . I was definitely having more fun than I was not having fun. I was not experiencing guilt anymore because I wasn't doing it to other people. No

one was being hurt when I was drinking. I was not hurting myself I thought with my drinking. The most pain I was feeling was through the hangovers but that was about it. It was nothing to serious and not an every day sort of thing.

Even though Pam thought that she was not hurting anyone including herself, Pam's daughter had a completely different view of the situation her mother was in. Pam was able to convince her daughter that she was okay and that the drinking was under her control. "The reason I drank before was because I was really, really sick. Well, I am not sick anymore." But very quickly Pam reverted back into her old patterns of addictive behavior. She started to drink a couple of glasses of wine after work that soon turned into much more than a couple of glasses. Pam drank alcohol for one year that turned into two years which turned in four years. In her fourth year of drinking alcohol Pam bought a house in partnership with her daughter. Pam remembers she was living in the basement of the house and felt like the creature under the stairs. I wasn't socially accepted into the upper part of the house by my daughter. Four years later Pam says:

. . . the problems that my daughter had were all about my drinking during her childhood. There's no question about it. I dealt with the guilt of this when I was in therapy. I had to be the responsible as an adult for my actions. Now I found myself saying here I go again. I'd gained lots of weight and I don't buy decent clothes anymore. I hardly wear makeup and I'm just a blob that goes to work. I'm not the attractive woman that I used to be years ago. I've lost all my good looks. Now I just sit in a basement that leaks and floods sucking back the wine that I make going to work

everyday with a terrible hangover. I am sick and plodding around on my hands and knees some days and I can't stop the drinking or control my behavior. Then I realize that within four years of drinking I am right back to where I was years ago, getting drunk, crawling around on my hands and knees, and asking for help that isn't coming.

Pam knew that she had to go through the process of trying to quit drinking yet again. This time was more difficult than the other times because "the willingness to quit just was not there. Is sobriety going to be worse than this? I don't think I can live in this basement sober. I would quit for a couple of weeks then go back to drinking. I remember thinking that I don't think I can make it this time." Out of desperation and inspiration Pam called the home of her childhood sweetheart. His wife answered the telephone and told Pam that he was not happy with this life and that he was now living in the southern United States. Because Pam was a friend her childhood sweetheart's wife she never hesitated when Pam asked her to call her husband and have him telephone Pam. The next morning the phone rang and Pam got to talk to the man she loves. Within a short time Pam flew to central Canada to meet with her old love flame. Within two months Pam's childhood sweetheart moved to southern British Columbia to be near her. According to Pam,

. . . it was one big party. We were both drinking a lot and smoking weed. I was smoking dope because that was what he liked to do. Then all of a sudden my sweetheart begins having feelings of panic and fear because I put him through all kinds of hell before when I was drinking. . . He told me that he could not be with me like this. I told him that I would stop

drinking.

Pam had been waiting for something to provide her with the motivation to stop drinking alcohol again and to start taking better care of herself. Pam came to:

. . . a point in my life where I was hopeless and full of despair and the love of my life, which I had not seen for 13 years, came back into my life and within a few days told me that my drinking would drive him away as it had 13 years earlier. At that point I made a decision to immediately quit drinking and get on with my life the way I knew I could with him because I had led a wonderful life before that until I started drinking again.

Pam knew at the deepest levels of her being that she loved this man and that she needed him. The need to receive love and to have a life and to function in that life was sufficient motivation to override Pam's compulsion to drink alcohol and party. Pam knew in the core of her being that she would stop drinking to be with this man and that her life would steadily improve without alcohol. As it happens the decision to stop drinking immediately and get busy living was made on Pam's birthday. Pam's sweetheart reciprocated with the words that he would also quit drinking and taking drugs so that he could be with Pam in sobriety. The humorous aspect to the decision making process as Pam remembers was that "this decision to quit drinking and get busy living together to build a life was made when we were both drunk." Pam remembers:

. . . I believe that I will be taken care of. For years I always thought that I needed someone to take care of me but I found out I can take care of myself. I've always thought though that it was a tough God. In the moment that I made the decision to change my life and stop drinking I

experienced a calm feeling inside of me. It felt as if God was with me at that point. I felt 100 per cent pure and sure in that moment because I had something, God, as I understand it. It was just a feeling I had like a sense of peace and calmness. There was no doubt in my mind because I felt it in my heart and my soul. It wasn't like the times in the past when I would change because I felt guilt or remorse. With my childhood sweetheart sitting in front of me offering himself and a chance at a life together it felt that God was with me inside and coming out through my soul. God brought us together for a reason so let's get the show on the road. My life was in ruins but I still had a job and a mind that told me that I was given yet another chance to be with him. Things are wonderful now, absolutely wonderful. We have been together for over three years this time.

Pam and her spouse have been clean and sober from that day to this. Pam acknowledges that she is happy with her old and new love and that it took a long time for the circumstances to bring her and her lover together. However, Pam is now faced with yet another demon of her addictive behavior. Pam acknowledges that she has changed one addiction for another. Although her compulsion to drink has subsided there is a:

. . . compulsion with food now. I love pastas and sweets and stuff like that. I indulge in all that stuff and that is how I gain weight. I know that I cannot deal with these issues right now so I am allowing myself to indulge. I'm tired of fighting these things. If my health becomes an issue because of my indulgence then I guess I will look at those issues at that time. For now I am okay.

CHAPTER XII – JILL’S STORY

Introduction to Jill

Jill is in her mid to late forties. Because of the life she has lived, even though in a different culture, Jill believes that by sharing her experiences she may be able to help others in similar circumstances. Jill believes that to be the best person she can be she needs to continue to share with others. Jill sees participating in this research project as an avenue for her to talk to others.

Jill’s Story

Jill remembers many years of physical and emotional abuse in her family. She talked about her older brother having “a viciously sadistic streak in him.” It is Jill’s belief that her older brother was “seriously put out when I was born. My mother was very ill during her pregnancy so he might have felt slighted that she was in the hospital for a lot of the time.” As Jill explains, “when I was young my older brother would be babysitting my brother and me when my parents would go out of the home.” Sometime during the course of the time her parents were out of the house and her older brother was babysitting her, Jill’s older brother would:

. . . call me into my parent’s room and I knew every single time, I knew what he was going to do. But I’d go into the room and he would have the quilt on the floor. He would tell me to lie down on the quilt with my hands at my side. I would do as he said because I was young and didn’t know I could resist him. He’d roll me up in the quilt so that just my head would stick out. Then he’d pull my teeth out. I mean my teeth were loose or they weren’t and he would pull them out. I was maybe five or six years

old at the time. He'd also tickle me and I couldn't move. He would break bottles over my head. Sometimes he would chase me around the kitchen with a sort of bread knife.

Jill felt "an immense anger at her father" over the treatment she was receiving at the hands of her brother during those times when Jill's older brother was babysitting her.

. . . I would go to my father and I would tell him what happened to me during the time when he was out of the house and my father would dismiss it. Not until I nagged at my father sufficiently would I get a response from him. Because I am a very visual person I remember seeing my father turn around and ask me what I wanted him to do and if I wanted him to go and hit my brother.

What Jill wanted most was to have someone that would protect her and voice concern at what was happening to her. To have someone that was willing and able to take control of the situation and stand up for her in those times when she could not stand up for herself. Instead what Jill's father made her feel like the "invisible child" and at every cry of her outrage at the behavior she was receiving Jill was dismissed. Further, when finally nagged sufficiently to respond to Jill's outrage her father would turn the tables on Jill and make her responsible for the decision making around sibling discipline. Jill remembers "saying to my father that I didn't want my brother to be hit. What was worst though was that he gave me the power to make that decision. I should never have had that kind of pressure put on me."

Growing up in the family home Jill remembers that household discipline was consistent with the political climate of the day in South Africa. For Jill this meant:

. . . my father was extremely hard on me and my brothers. There was no sexual abuse but if I was out of line I'd get beaten with regularity and so would my brothers. That is the way children are brought up in South Africa. South Africa is an extremely passionate country. The landscape is passionate. The people are passionate and it's an extremely beautiful country and despite everything that happened to me while I lived there I feel very connected to the country.

Jill acknowledges with a sense of pride that she grew up, went to school, had friends, went to university, and graduated university all in South Africa.

. . . I can really relate to the culture. At the same time I grew up with this sense of being different because I was a white skin and I felt defensive about that and angry about that. Being a white skin meant that I lived with the fear of being attacked, beaten, hurt, or violated. It's a very real fear because it happened to me many times.

The physical and emotional abuse in Jill's life began at a very young age and continued throughout the time she spent in South Africa. Jill knows intimately the "fear of being attacked or hurt through being personally violated. It's a very real fear and it's happened to me many times." Jill remembers one of those times when she was violated by another human being. Jill remembers that:

. . . when I was very young I lived on a cul de sac in the family home. I was seven years old when I was raped by one of the neighbours. I was told that it was my fault, so I never brought any adults into the scenario or anything like that. I had to walk past this house every day when I walked

to school. I can't name it but I think that's one of the reasons of why I feel trapped because of my physically having to walk past the house where I was raped. As I would walk by that house this guy would constantly taunt me. I think from a very young age I had that sense and feeling of being threatened and frightened. I carried that energy with me for a long time and attracted that kind of shit into my life on a lot of levels.

Recovering from the emotional and physical trauma of being raped, being told it was her fault, and not being able to tell anyone what happened to her because she was too young to understand what the impact would be of what just happened and because of the shame associated with the event, Jill internalized her feelings and "shortly after that happened to me I made a conscious choice to kill myself. I threw myself off of the top of a pole of a swing and landed on the concrete. I ended up with a severe concussion."

From a very young age Jill remembers that the message to her and her brothers from her parents, especially her father:

. . . was that I needed to get well educated and that I have to get out of this country. I would zing them for this because they just couldn't let the situation be and to exist. It always had to be a projection of things to come. My father would say things like the f—king natives this or that and the future and would not deal with the issues in the here and now. That is what I needed. When I said that I really love my country, I do, and this message hurt me deeply in a way that I could not understand when I was young.

As Jill continued to mature, Jill was either assigned or took on the role within the

family as being the person who would voice the outrage and frustrations of being in such times in South Africa. Jill remembers:

. . . if I was frustrated about something or by the situation, and because of my sensitivity, I would feel the emotional situation that was going on between my parents or in the house. But nothing was ever allowed to be verbalized and I'd get to the point where I couldn't stand it and I'd provoke an argument or debate. I'd always be told to shut up because the neighbours might hear me shouting and that always pissed me off. I could never understand it. Why are the neighbours more important than me? We don't even know them. That's the kind of scenario I ended up playing, the role of emotional voice or mouth piece in the family.

Jill was "very young when I went to university." Jill had graduated school and was a freshman in university by the time she was 16 years old. Because of the message from her parents that she needed to educate herself and leave South Africa as soon as possible, Jill felt a tremendous amount of pressure to live up to the academic standards set by her father and her brothers. Jill remembers:

. . . my father is a world renowned scientist and my brothers got scholarships to study all around the world at Oxford and Cambridge and I too achieved extremely well at school. When I hit university I chose to become an architect. I found the course work really easy and I didn't have to study. In fact, I didn't really know how to study.

Once into university Jill's life started to change because of all the people she came into contact with during the course of her study classes. Jill began experimenting

with drugs while at the university partly because she found that her course work came so easily to her that she could do drugs and still keep up her marks and partly because it allowed Jill to be accepted as a student. Taking drugs, at that time, was part of my student identity. Jill remembers “that I was taking drugs during my whole time at university and things just turned into this complicated scenario because in my 20’s I was excessively abusive.” Because of the high academic standards of my family, one of the reasons I started taking drugs “was so I could rebel against my parents. I just wanted to finger all of them.” Another reason for Jill taking drugs was that:

. . . I had a boyfriend at the time that I lived with and he was dealing drugs out of the house we lived in. I should never have taken drugs because it turned a part of my brain into a marshmallow. Another boyfriend that I lived with while I was at university slept with an AK 47 assault rifle under the bed when he was home on leave from the military. There were always uniforms and guns around me while I was in university. Anyway the point is that there was always a certain amount of violence around me and then living in a country that was a police state and constantly under a state of emergency had such an emotional impact on me that I felt that I could only endure these times by using drugs.

Jill also acknowledges that her native country has a very high rate of road fatalities. People either get into car accidents or people are hit while they are walking down the roadsides. Jill remembers:

. . . I saw some of the most horrific car accidents and maybe because of my visual sense or my level of sensitivity, I can’t get rid of those images

in my mind, of seeing bits of babies and bodies on the roads and hearing people screaming, blood on the roads, and horrible shit. Drugs really helped me to cope during this time of my life.

While attending university Jill had a false sense of security because “I was always with a boyfriend or I was living with other people. Either way there were always people around me.” Jill thought for the longest time that these people actually helped her from witnessing or being a victim in the violent times that were her culture. These feelings changed after Jill left university. Jill graduated from university but did not attend the graduation ceremonies. Jill remembers the time that:

. . . I refused to go to the graduation ceremonies because it was cool at the time not to go, but my father was part of the whole academic institution. So when I refused to attend the graduation ceremonies he took it that I was saying something against him. When both of my brothers graduated they were given a certain amount of money and taken out for a big dinner. When I graduated and brought my certificate into the room to show my father he didn't even look up from his newspaper. I don't know if it was because I was a girl or because I was thought to be full of shit but my parents did not acknowledge my accomplishments to the same degree that they honoured my brothers' achievements.

Armed with her degree and the knowledge she acquired through her time at university, Jill found employment in her chosen field of architecture. After working at this particular firm for a short time, Jill remembers having to fly to another part of her native country to secure a contract that would provide her with more architectural work.

On the drive to the dinner party Jill past a horrific car accident and half way through the dinner party had to excuse herself to go to the washroom to vomit. Jill secured the contract and remembers:

. . . I was really idealistic at that point and I spent three months designing this incredible town housing unit and the architect in charge told me I could put another four units in it. I asked about the diminished view that would cause and how these four units would effect the natural light coming into the existing units. I was told that it was all about money and to do what I was told and add the extra units. I told him to f—k his money and walked out of the office. I never went back to work in my chosen field again.

After her experience in the field of architecture, Jill went into her own business in the textile industry. While in university Jill worked in the textile field part-time to help generate money to support herself. She now went into the textile business full time, renting a studio and taking in star designing and star printing jobs. “I was very involved in this field.” Jill’s drug use not only continued during this period of her life, but actually got progressively worse. Jill remembers:

. . . I have a very self-destructive part in me and a very creative part. I wasn’t eating properly and hadn’t for weeks. I existed on eating cereal, drinking soda pop, smoking cigarettes, and smoking pot. I was working too hard. I was taking too many drugs. I picked up a joint, I used to roll ten joints at a time because I knew by the time I smoked the third one I’d be too f—ked up to roll anymore but that I’d still be capable of smoking it.

The pot really helped me in the creative aspect of my business. I would put on music, smoke pot, and do my textiles for days on end. I could really feed on the chaos that came with living in that place, at that time, and in the manner I was living. I really loved doing that kind of work in that way. If I had my choice I would never have stopped doing drugs, ever. It was my body that betrayed me. I picked up a joint one day and I had a massive seizure. Going to the hospital in an ambulance scared the shit out of me and since that day I haven't taken any drugs or drank any alcohol. So it wasn't a conscious decision I made, it was my body that couldn't cope. Although the decision to stop drugs was made for me, I found that I had to make some life changes. In the midst of those changes I found I lost people who I thought were my friends. I became more isolated.

So, at age 28 years Jill's body made the decision that she would stop taking drugs. Jill knew that she needed to make changes in her life if she was to survive. Her inability to take drugs meant that she needed to find an alternative method to cope with the pressures of life and she knew that she could not longer live with a boyfriend that was a drug dealer. Jill remembers:

. . . I had a moment of absolute clarity while sitting in bed with my boyfriend. I told him that I was leaving him. It didn't sound like my voice. It sounded like someone else speaking but it was very calm. It was almost as if I was looking down at myself or that I was removed from myself but the voice I was hearing had such strong conviction. I mean I

could describe the room to you right now. When I told him that I was leaving him there really wasn't any reason for me to want to leave him but I felt absolutely sure that I needed to go. I told him I was going to buy a house and live on my own. He was shocked and horrified at what I said to him, but I did it anyway. I followed through on it and it was a very interesting experience because it didn't sound like me, but I was so sure of what I was saying and what I needed to do.

Jill started the process of looking for and buying a house into which she could move and start her new life, but as Jill explains:

. . . I was scared to live on my own. I didn't want to be on my own. I know what I am saying is a contradiction because I love being with people and since my time in university I have always been with someone but at the same time I was very convinced that this was what I had to do. I needed to be in quiet. I needed to be in calm. I needed to be by myself. Something in me realized that I had to stop trying to run away from myself. I call that part self-preservation. I needed to reconnect with myself now that I was not doing drugs. This is a very healthy part of me, I think. This was one of those moments when I connected to with what my needs were.

Living on her own was fraught with dangers that Jill could not have predicted at the time she made her decision to leave her boyfriend. Jill knew that she needed quiet and calm so she could begin the process of connecting with herself. What happened next was a series of events that Jill was not prepared for and that pushed her to the very limits

of her ability to cope. Jill remembers:

. . . I got viciously mugged in town. I'd just attract men doing things that as far as anyone is concerned are not acceptable. You know waking up in the middle of the night and some guy has broken into my house. It was a lot of repetitive things. It got the point where I thought what am I doing to attract this kind of things to me? I don't look like a mousy little girl. I kept wonder why a man would mug me in the street when there was a little petite blonde walking four paces in front of me. Then I realized it was my energy and vulnerability that was the attraction to these men. So there were a number of incidents like that layered on top of each other.

Once on her own Jill's fear levels continued to increase to the point where she was afraid to leave her house. "I would much rather have taken drugs to get over the fear but my body wouldn't allow it." Jill was forced to look at some of her fear issues and how her fear was affecting her. In her attempt to change the type of energy she carried about her, Jill went to see a therapist. Jill really liked doing the art therapy because "it was something I could relate to on a creative level." However, according to Jill the therapist she chose "was the wrong therapist." Jill explains:

. . . she was a young therapist, I mustn't say no, it wasn't wrong, but I was desperate to move on and she kept me coming to see her twice a week for three years. Maybe it was part of the process maybe not, but one day I got up and walked out of her office. I was dealing with her trying to change the energy I carried about with me but I remember feeling like I was not improving. Also I went to this therapist because I remember about a third

of the way through my drug using days I started getting severe panic attacks. Anything can trigger these panic attacks. I'm a classic panic attacker. Too many people, too much stimulation, too much noise will all put me into a state of pure, sweet panic. Put me in the middle of an airport on my own I'll have a panic attack. I am like a toddler who gets tired and over stimulated. If I don't eat properly, if I don't look after myself then I get a panic attack. I am actually glad the attacks are there because they force me to look after myself properly. If I don't I get these sort of heart palpitations and I think I am going to die.

About five years into her sobriety Jill became pregnant. She was still living on her own and the thought of parenting on her own brought on a sense of being vulnerable that was greatly enhanced through her experiences of violence while living in the South African culture. Jill explains that she became:

. . . an adrenalin junkie in the truest sense of the word. I would constantly be in the fight or flight response. Sometimes I would lie in bed and think that I was going to die of adrenalin poison. I remember an incident in my house when the alarm went off and the doors were open in the middle of the night. The police came barging in and I was nude and pregnant sitting on a chair.

The perpetrator was never caught.

Jill decided that she needed to get away from the violence for a while. Her parents had asked her to come and visit them in Canada. Jill agreed and went to Canada to see her family. Jill remembers:

. . . so I came to Canada to have a look and I sort of said to myself f—k I can't live in this place. The people in South Africa talk about Canada as being a velvet coffin. South Africans are arrogant and full of themselves and they party hard. It's a completely different lifestyle than in Canada. So after my visit I went back to South Africa.

After Jill came back to South Africa she gave birth to a baby girl. Being back in South Africa and being a sensitive person that needed calm and quiet presented Jill with exceptional living obstacles. The need for securing employment turned to needing an income. To that end Jill opened her own textile store in the business section of a major city in her native country. Being a single parent and now a business owner made life extremely hectic for Jill. Jill remembers what her daily routine was like after she had her baby. Jill would:

. . . be up and leave the house by seven in the morning. I would take the baby with me while I went to open the store. I would have the baby back by eight in the morning for the nanny. Then back to the store until five in the afternoon when I would have to be back at the house to pick up the baby from the nanny. Then take the baby back to the store until the store closed. It was just crazy. I was exhausted, really exhausted. My daughter did not sleep through the night until she was six years old. So, on top of everything else I wasn't sleeping. But the biggest thing was the isolation. I was a single parent and I would get lonely because it was just me and her. I had friends but in this social structure I could not just go out to visit people. In South Africa I couldn't get in the car and drive in the middle of

the night. It's too dangerous to be driving, especially at night. No one stops for red lights at night. Just to give you an idea of what it is like to take the baby out I had to go through steel gates, burglar alarms, more steel gates, then check up and down the road to make sure no one was coming, dash for the car, lock myself and the baby in the car, use a cell phone to call the person I want to visit, then check in with that person a couple of times during the drive so that they know where I am in case something happens on the drive. One night I was sitting at home thinking about my childhood and I remembered on Sundays when the whole family would get together and have a big meal. It was a tradition. For years I did that every Sunday and I loved it especially the food and the family. It was enjoyable. After my parents left the country there were no more Sundays and I was looking at my daughter thinking this doesn't feel right.

Jill thought about the processes that she had to go through to do simple things, things that people in other cultures and countries take for granted. Driving a car is a hobby for some and a past time for many, but for Jill it was an avenue that opened her up to be vulnerable to the rest of society. Further, Jill continued to think about her family and what was missing in her life and the life of her baby. The lack of family tradition was something that Jill thought about. Jill was forced to make changes in her life in her attempt to keep her and her baby emotionally and physically safe. Jill remembers making:

. . . the conscious decision to stop reading the newspaper. I also made the conscious decision not to go to certain parts of the city. I was in a certain

amount of denial that the conditions in my home country were as bad as they were. I missed my family but just kept telling myself that it would be okay. I also began to understand how the social conditions had attributed to me starting to take drugs as a way to cope with the stress of living in a violent society and the loneliness of missing my family.

In 1994 South Africa changed hands and became a country in political transition.

Because of the unrest of the native populations and the economic uncertainty of the times, especially during these political and cultural transition phases, Jill was often taken aback emotionally and visually by what she saw when she looked out the window of her store or when she was out in society. Jill remembers:

. . . living in this country and visually being assaulted by extreme poverty upset me immensely but I could do nothing about it. I was feeling threatened on a physical level daily and then having to try to protect a child was really overwhelming. One day a guy got murdered outside my store in the middle of town in the middle of the afternoon. Shortly after that happened the phone rang in my store and it was my girlfriend calling to tell me that my house was being robbed. I felt myself in some sort of slow-motion apologizing to her and probing to see if she was alright. She told me that they were robbing my house, I mean robbing the house. That means that the thieves were taking everything including the f—king bathtub. They took the light fixtures and even the light switches.

Everything was gone. I put the phone down and thought what all this is doing to my internal landscape. I walked out of the store and drove home.

I just couldn't deal with it anymore. I am just too overly sensitive to deal with this country. And then to add insult to injury, later on that evening, I took my daughter, who was really tiny at the time, to go for a walk in the forest. I thought that this might calm things down for me. Instead we walked straight into huge notices being put up that told people that it was not safe to walk in this area.

The accumulative affect of all the things that had happened to Jill in her lifetime began to pile up inside her head as images of violence and mayhem and Jill began to ask herself questions about her situation and her life without family. How was Jill to raise a child in a society where the mother could not protect herself? How would Jill teach her daughter what she needed to know when Jill had not learned the strategies she needed to learn to not live in fear? Jill knew what her life was like as a female in this culture. Could she actually perpetuate the cycle of victim and violence to her innocent daughter? The answer to these questions came to Jill and she explains:

. . . that there was so much anger layered over all of this and that particular day is when I thought, f—k this, I am getting out of this country. The main trigger for this decision was that I had a child now and I was being fueled with an immense sense of responsibility. I needed to stop working and take care of my daughter. I needed to sleep. I was too tired. Taking my level of sensitivity with the labouring of the external activities I probably would have collapsed. I had to move.

Jill's family, especially her brothers, started her hard with their statements to come live in Canada and telling Jill that she should really think about leaving South

Africa. Jill was not coping well with the cultural pressures of her country. The lack of coping skills and the fact that Jill knew she had to leave her country or she and her child would come to harm, Jill told her brother, a lawyer, to begin the process that would get her out of her native country. An immigration lawyer was contacted in Canada and the immigration process was put into motion, but even with the assistance of lawyers in South Africa and Canada this immigration process took three years to complete. Jill remembers that the first two years of that process “were the most frightening two years of bureaucracy that I have ever experienced in my life.”

Jill remembers the frustration she felt at trying to get everything in order so that she and her baby could leave the country. Everything took time and Jill felt the pressure that if she stayed too long that it would only be a matter of time before something horrific would happen to her or her baby. Jill reflects on the political and medical processes she endured to leave her native country and be allowed entry into Canada. She remembers:

. . . in 1994 South Africa changed hands and with it came affirmative action and with affirmative action came government ministries. I don't care what colour anyone is as long as they are efficient at their job. For me to get a long form birth certificate for my daughter took six months. I eventually had to phone a friend in the Ministry of Justice to go and threaten the woman in order for me to get it. That is partly why it took so long for me to leave the country. And then I was interviewed and the medicals and, and, and Because of my history of panic attacks I had to have two medicals and two examinations. The Canadian Consul chose who I had to go see for all these medicals and examinations. I had no

power in the process at all. Then I had to wind down my business interests in South Africa and get those dealt with, sell my house, pack up my belongings, and all that stuff. It takes a lot of time to do all of these things.

Jill endured the bureaucracy of both the South African and Canadian governments in order to get permission to leave one country to live in another. Although she kept “jumping through the hoops” as they were laid out for her by the various government ministries, Jill continued to “think that I’d go through the motions but I won’t really go.” Jill remembers:

. . . there was something in me that told me I was going to leave South Africa. When a girlfriend of mine asked me if I had to go I remember I really didn’t feel convinced but it didn’t sound like my own voice because I wasn’t connected to that feeling but obviously I am and I was then to because I told her I was leaving. I do not know what part of me that was but it was the same part of me that told my boyfriend that I was leaving him to go and live on my own. I am not connected to that part of me very well so I cannot speak or present it very well but it is a very healthy part of me. I have been so self-destructive and attracted destruction in my life that it is almost like I’m too frightened to acknowledge that there is a good part in me. I hope I can get to this part more because I think it’s a nice part of me.

As Jill continued in the process of getting her affairs in order in preparation to leave South Africa, she was hit with the feelings that come with someone being

physically and emotionally exhausted. “I was so tired by this time that I just thought leaving South Africa was a good idea.” Jill was talking with one of her brothers on a regular basis on the message from this brother was consistent, “please leave South Africa and come and see me in Canada.” Her patience was rewarded as Jill remembers:

. . . I got the letter saying that I had been accepted as a landed immigrant. I had two months in which to do all this stuff or the paperwork would expire and I would have to reapply and go through the whole process yet again. Some of my friends would ask me if I was leaving South Africa forever and I would tell them that I do not know what forever is. I have done a lot of traveling in my life and I had always returned to South Africa because that was my home. Now things feel strange to me though because it feels like I’m between homes now.

Jill successfully made the move to Canada and has been in Canada for several years. Jill had a flashback in memory to a time when she was driving her car in South Africa and having her car breakdown.

. . . I eventually got mugged by six men when my car broke down and I got the crap beaten out of me. Eventually through various processes I got home. I sat about and I screamed for four hours. My boyfriend and a girlfriend of mine, all they could do was to keep putting more hot water in the bath.

As the memory subsided Jill understood where she was and knew that if her car broke down in Canada that it would be unlikely that she would face the same result of being mugged and beaten by six men. Jill remembers:

. . . it was a pure sense of relief. It was exquisite. It was absolutely wonderful and it was an actual physical sensation. It was the first time that I felt immense sense of security. And I do feel secure here. The feeling came to me as a release of adrenalin from the stress of chaos. I know that if the car breaks down I would walk to a house in the neighbourhood and ask for help. This feeling was one that I hoped to experience and hoped to feel but until that second I had never felt it before. Now I would walk downtown now at night and it would be absolutely fine with me. I might think, Christ I'm going to have a panic attack but I don't feel that immediate sense of danger. And I think also because certain parts of me have shifted the energy coming from my core that attracts the kind of shit where I am a victim.

Jill's reaction to events has changed dramatically since moving to Canada. While in South Africa Jill believed that she carried the energy with her that allowed me to attack her and treat her in such abusive and violent ways. Since coming to Canada few things have happened to Jill to allow her to voice her new stronger opinions. However, there was one such event that when Jill thinks about it she remembers that:

. . . when I first arrived in Canada I drove on an International Drivers License. It was a real challenge for me to drive in Canada because I had to learn to drive on the other side of the road. Anyway, after about a year I went to apply for my Canadian Drivers License and had to give all my personal information, height, eye colour, address, phone number, etc... When I arrived home the instructor called me and asked me out for coffee

and all this stuff. I knew that I shifted my energy because rather than feeling like I brought this onto myself I got outraged that this person would invade my privacy like he did. That's one incident that's happened here in Canada in terms of a man intruding on my personal space. Pretty boring isn't it?

Jill acknowledges that her decision to leave South Africa, although difficult, was the best thing for her and her daughter at that time. Coming to Canada has:

. . . been a good idea. My daughter has gotten to know her grandparents, which I think is really important, and I have gotten to see my brother, whom I adore. I have been able to have the time to heal a lot of my bad relationships with my parents. This is just another chapter in my life. I am not looking to the future.

According to Jill, she has an immense respect for the human nature and human spirit and has a good sense of what people, including herself, will do to survive in situations that from the outside looking in appear to be dangerous and life threatening. Jill explains:

. . . it is unbelievably strong in people, especially me. I have witnessed such violence and I am a survivor in a lot of ways. I choose to survive rather than be the victim because that is such an unattractive word. My sense of self-preservation runs extremely deep in me and it is such a primitive response to danger.

Although the decision to leave South Africa has provided Jill and her daughter with an element of personal safety, given Jill the opportunity to reconnect with family members, to heal some of the rough spots in the relationship with her parents, and given

Jill's daughter a chance to know her grandparents, Jill believes that even though there was extreme cultural and personal violence in South Africa, both she and her daughter would have survived living in South Africa. Jill says:

. . . that I take my role as a parent very seriously and I am a big mother love. I and my baby would have survived living there through my sense of self-preservation. I know that there are so many external influences but I feel certain that I would have been able to overcome these in some way. The expenditure of emotionally energy having to deal with these external influences may have resulted in me experiencing a physical breakdown from exhaustion. Something radical had to happen to force me to give up and leave South Africa and my comfort zone.

Living in Canada has not been without difficulties for Jill. Canadian culture presents challenges to Jill in the way she lives her life and the decisions she makes as a business woman and parent. As Jill explains:

. . . I can have a quiet sort of cultural death here in Canada. Canada has been amazing though because it challenges me on very positive levels. When I left South Africa I made the conscious decision that I would meet people and make friends. I've really made myself open to new experiences and I also believe that I do not have the external pressure that I experienced when I lived in South Africa of whether or not I am going to be okay. Now at 2:00 a.m. if I hear a noise, then I don't have to snap awake and worry if I am safe and my daughter is safe. I don't have to worry about whether my store has been broken into again. Did you know

that when I was in South Africa that I had to pay money every month to have an armed response come to my store or house whenever the alarm went off. Did you also know that when the alarm did go off that nine out of ten times I was the first one on the scene with a small baby in the back seat of the car? I don't experience that kind of pressure here. So in that regard Canada is boring but then I have to look at myself and think what was so attractive in all that chaos. I know that I do thrive on chaos but the real me doesn't. I am still working on that part of myself.

Not all her time spent in South Africa was wrought with fear and the threat of violence. Jill acknowledges that:

. . . there are times in between where South Africa can be an extremely creative and passionate country. These are some of the things that come out of this discord. I love that creativity and the fact that the people are very colourful. I enjoy that side of living in South Africa. Canadians in comparison are extremely boring people but for me this is the kind of culture I need to be in. I don't think I could go back to the violence in South Africa and that's a difficult part for me because I've emotionally amputated a big part of myself when I left South Africa. I have been away from there for so long that it feels like Canada is more my home than South Africa. I feel a sense of loss because of that. When I left South Africa I left with two suitcases and told a friend that I would be back in six weeks. That healthy part of me did not allow me to return to South Africa.

Jill finds that her life in Canada is so much different than she ever thought that it

could be or would be. She is again a business owner and accessing that creative part in her. The pressure cooker that was her life is no more. In comparison her life is an open pot on simmer, heating up but in no danger of boiling over. To that end Jill has some issues that have become motivators for her to change her life. As Jill explains:

... I hit an age milestone in my life last year and I turned to my boyfriend to say that I never thought I would make it this far. All during my 20's my life philosophy was live hard, die young. But now that I have hit this age I have to get serious about things and love. I often feel that I am in a dress rehearsal and that I'm getting ready for something else. Then I tell myself to wake up. What the f—k am I waiting for? I continue to think that I have tomorrow or I think that I am still on African time. I need to address these things now while I still have time. It has been really interesting to look back on my life.

Jill says that:

... I am grateful for the things that have happened to me because they have made me who I am ... not that I am grateful that I have panic attacks but they have allowed me to look at a part of myself that maybe I would never have seen or had the courage to look at ...

Jill is grateful for the opportunity to live in Canada and is happy that she had the strength and personal fortitude to stick to her decision to leave South Africa. She loves the chance to interact with people and is “very tolerant of people at certain levels.” Because of her life experiences Jill has an appreciation for the life stories of other people regardless of their emotional or physical limitations. The prospect of having her daughter

grow up in a culture without the extreme violence is very appealing to her. The move to Canada has brought with it the opportunity for Jill to reconnect with family and to Jill nothing is more important to her than family. Her life in Canada brings new challenges and Jill is looking forward to facing these challenges in her typical creative fashion.

CHAPTER XIII-FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present my analysis of my research participants' interpretations and perceptions of how they experienced the process that leads to an unencumbered moment. Originally, I believed that the unencumbered moment was *that* moment when, in a split-second, one understood one's life in a deep emotional way that allowed one to reprioritize one's belief about self, others, and world. Further, I believed that as a result of the unencumbered moment one experienced a shift in one's foundational beliefs about life and faith.

As I studied the experiences of my research participants, I saw that the unencumbered moment is not one moment in time, but an emergent process. It appears that the foundational shift in one's beliefs and in one's self perceptions is perhaps the last step in a process that begins in the participant's persisting in pursuing a way out of the pain and chaos that they were in. While the participants persisted in seeking solutions to their problems, paradoxically, they also resisted changing their approaches to dealing with their problems and ignored what could have been helpful advice from others. It was only when the participants hit bottom, that is, reached a level of emotional pain that they could not endure, did they find clarity and the will to change.

In that moment of clarity, that I call an unencumbered moment, the participants all made immediate changes in their lives that made them feel emotionally stronger. But interestingly, this does not appear to be a once and for all experience as I expected. Although each participant did make enormous changes after the first unencumbered moment, they were not yet completely unencumbered in how they went on to live the next phase of their lives. Other than Paul, who is the youngest of the nine participants,

the participants describe themselves as continuing on in new ways, only to encounter further obstacles, which they persisted in trying to deal with only to find themselves again hitting bottom, then experiencing another unencumbered moment, and regaining clarity, making further changes and so forth. This process repeats and with each change comes a renewed strength and hope until an unencumbered moment is reached when the foundational shift that began with the first unencumbered moment appears to be complete. It may be that rather than there being one unencumbered moment when a major life shift is completed and changes are made all at once, people (especially people who begin their lives “encumbered” by pain, chaos, loneliness, alienation, abuse, cruelty and very little in the way of help and nurturing) go through a process of “unencumbering.” This process includes unencumbered moments that are like break away moments during which they can see their way to a different way of being and living, and that over time these moments contribute to a foundational shift in the way they experience themselves, others, and the world, a shift that at some point feels complete but may always be open-ended.

The unencumbering process can occur early in life, as in the case of Paul (still in his teen years) or continue for years as in the case of Pam (in her mid-forties) who may still be ongoing in the process of unencumbering. What my data does seem to suggest is that there is a flow to this process that includes a first unencumbered moment when people in deep pain and at the point of giving up find themselves suddenly able to see beyond their current ways of existing and are able to make a break. I have identified the themes common to this process in seven categories of experience shared by my participants. I use these categories as sections titles. In each section I examine the

impact that each theme had on the lives of my research participants. Wherever possible, participants are quoted to support how they perceived the impact of that particular theme in their lives.

My Experience of Doing This Research

Before I present my analysis of the research data, I want to discuss the impact on me of what I heard and read during the data gathering and analysis phases of this study. The life stories of the research participants were rich and full of intimate details that gave more than subtle glimpses into the lives of these individuals. At times, depending on the level of abuse disclosed by the participant, it was difficult for me to be strictly objective and simply regard the research participants as objects that were there to provide me with the information I needed to complete this study.

Conducting qualitative research, to me, means connecting with my research participants on a level that made them feel comfortable enough to provide me with the thick and rich descriptions of their lives. However, these descriptions had a significant emotional impact on me. As I took in my participants' stories, I was forced to personally process the impact of what I heard and what I read. Often, I found myself getting angry and wanting to take some kind of revenge on the perpetrators reported in their stories, or I found myself wanting to advocate and rescue the abused little child I could see in my mind's eye as they told their stories. On several occasions, the feelings of anger, frustration, and guilt became overwhelming for me and I needed to confer with my academic supervisor in order to find a more neutral emotional position that was more detached from the intimate details of my research data. It was only through the use of the strategies provided to me by my support team that I was able to break the data down into

smaller sections and look at each section in a more objective, professional, and emotionally neutral manner. I believe the reason I found myself in this advocacy or revenge position so frequently is that my participants' stories continually reminded me of the personal injustices I endured when I was too young to defend myself. As an adult male coming from this perspective and having to come to terms with my perspectives, I am now in the position to be able to protect myself, both physically and emotionally. I found that for me it was an easy leap to want to protect those individuals who could not protect themselves. This process was, at times, emotionally overwhelming for me because I knew that I was attempting to or wanting to challenge a ghost that was in the information I was hearing and reading. Through my desire to step into the advocacy role with my research participants, I was given the opportunity to challenge and come to terms with some of my own ghosts and, therefore, learn more about myself.

I feel very grateful for being given the opportunity to conduct this research and write the narratives. The experience of doing this research has brought me a keen awareness of my own thinking and coping processes as well as the emotional processes of my research participants. Through conducting this research I am more aware of the importance of the supportive people in my life. Without the high levels of academic and emotional support I received, I would not have been able to continue with writing the life stories of the research participants that are at the heart of this dissertation.

CATEGORIES OF EXPERIENCE

Perception of Self

Each research participant had a negative perception of self and a sense of aloneness and disconnection from family members or felt they did not fit into their

families. The negative self perception in some cases was manifest through direct contact with the disfunctionality of one or both parents, a step-parent, boyfriend, spouse, or sibling. What is a key factor to the negative perception of self is that each participant expressed, either directly or indirectly, a sense of being alone. For example, Lynn spoke directly about her sense of not fitting in with her family and how she felt alone. Paul spoke indirectly about how he felt about his father and his sense of being emotionally and/or physically abandoned. Not all of the participants were aware of their negative self-perception or why negative events continually came into their lives. Some of the participants thought that their lives were in such disarray because that is all they deserved from life and that the chaos was their fault in some way. Still others thought that it was their role in life to meet the needs of others before having their own needs fulfilled, regardless of the cost to the self. Events that in part led each participant to have a negative self-perception are outlined below.

Bill

... from an early age I sensed I was different from all my brothers ... I felt I did not belong in my family ... I was treated differently by my parents ... I felt humiliated ... I was lonely and depressed ... I was frustrated ... I felt deprived of the necessities of life ... I felt so guilty ... I felt pulled in different directions ... I hated my life ... I felt shame ... I was embarrassed to be me ... I was ashamed to say my name ... I felt like I did not have the ability to do anything ... I made a number of suicide attempts ...

John

... I am at elementary school ... there is a science fair or parent teacher meeting and all the parents are coming ... me and my buddies have stolen beer and were drinking beer, hiding it in the back and parking the cars ... I am waiting for my parents to show up and they don't show up ... that's when I turned everything inside ... I'd keep everything inside and released it in rage ... I felt all alone in the world ... I could be big John this puffed up nothing ... a lot of smoke and a lot of beers ... it filled a void in my personality ... my low self-esteem ... it was a monster unto itself ... it perpetuated itself ...

Trish

... I was virtually powerless in this relationship ... emotionally weak ... I felt shocked ... and the hurt of being betrayed ... I felt pushed to go against my values ... I felt confused ... and really scared of him ... I felt like I was going insane ... alone and scared ... I felt unsafe ... I thought I was going to lose my mind ... I felt anxious ... I thought I was going insane ... I felt like I was a prisoner ... and an emotional hostage ... I just can't do this anymore ...

Claire

... I suffered from being overweight as a child ... I didn't have a good sense of myself ... my self-esteem was very, very, low ... I felt alone ... I felt like a walking target ... I felt very anxious ... I had been intimidated by my Dad as I was growing up ... this intimidation went

from on from early childhood and into my early adult years . . .

Jill

. . . I was raped by a neighbour at age seven . . . I lived in fear . . . of feeling like I was invisible . . . and my father was very hard on me . . . I felt like a victim . . . the sense of being threatened and frightened all the time . . . and being angry because I was a white skin . . . I felt worthless and alone . . . anxious . . . and self-destructive . . . I felt too afraid to leave the house . . . I was very disconnected to myself . . . I tried to commit suicide . . .

Lynn

. . . I was young . . . maybe six or seven years old . . . when my parents took me for a walk . . . they told me I was adopted . . . from the time they told me I had feelings that I did not fit . . . a feeling of unwholeness . . . I had no sibling relationship with my older brothers . . . something must be wrong with me . . . I just did not want to feel like I didn't fit in . . .

Pam

. . . I was about eight when my mother took me to Mexico . . . during a thunderstorm I went to my parent's bedroom . . . my step-father sexually molested me . . . it went on for a year . . . I was terrified . . . my stomach was always bad . . . I never told anyone . . . I was scared to tell because of the threats . . . I tried to drown myself several times . . . I felt guilty all the time . . . very painful . . . very scary and alone . . . I felt powerless . . . I felt like I was going to die soon . . .

Chris

... I always had to be the one to make everything okay in my family ... there was always a lot of yelling and screaming in my house ... I didn't want to hear the yelling ... so I would act as a buffer zone between them ... I wanted peace and calm ... this was the only way to achieve that goal ... I was left to my own devices ... to figure out how to make these people happy ... I never got a pat on the back ... I was the invisible son ... I would mould myself into whatever they needed ... I just never knew where I fit in ... I felt alone a lot ...

Paul

... I was depressed ... taking drugs and drinking alcohol ... I hated the way I looked ... thought I was fat ... my self-confidence and self-esteem were low ... I had no motivation ... I didn't attend school ... I had nothing to look forward to ... I was lazy ... I felt bad about myself ...

Persistence, Struggling, and Resistance

In each interview, the research participants talked about spending much time, in some cases years, in pursuing a solution against great odds without much success. This persistence came through in the participants' life stories about their struggles and their endurance of intense emotional and/or physical pressures. Through these struggles, each participant continued to seek for the solution to a life problem that had eluded them for years. Some of the research participants bartered with themselves and/or their higher power for life changes. Some planned to make life changes but were unsuccessful at instituting those changes. Others prayed to their higher power to make their life easier,

but their prayers went unheard, so they thought. Many endured the frustration, desperation, guilt, and anger of breaking the agreements they made with themselves and with their higher power. Ultimately, most of the research participants failed in their attempts to change their life circumstances, but persisted in trying to find a solution despite their being unsuccessful. Hence, their life stories are testimony to the level of persistence these individuals endured as they pursued solutions to their life struggles and their behavior issues. With each unsuccessful attempt at changing their behavior or their lives, the research participants continued to struggle with life and continued to try to find some level of happiness. In each case the research participants were told, either by their inner voice or through the words of another person, what they needed to do to change their life or their behavior. However, each participant, at some point in their life, resisted or blatantly rejected the words of advice or guidance from that source, regardless if that source were their inner voice, friends, siblings, parents, children, or spouses.

Bill

... I wanted more than anything else to leave my home ... the cruelty was just getting worse and worse ... I hated the idea of being a farmer ... I was not going to be made to be a farmer ... the things my parents told me only made me more motivated to leave the family farm ... I started acting out ... at 13 years old ... when I met the doctor ... who removed me from my home ... I'd finally found a way to get out, to leave my family ...

John

... there were some functions coming up and I wanted to do them ... but

I couldn't because I was loaded . . . I was given the ultimatum to quit using or leave . . . she told me what I needed to do . . . but I just couldn't do it . . . my parents told me what I needed to do but they were hypocrites . . . I didn't want to harm anyone . . . but couldn't help myself . . . I had feelings of emptiness, loneliness, confusion, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts . . . I tried everything to stop using . . . I realized all I was doing was what I call flexing the "f--k it" muscle . . . nothing worked . . . everything that happened to me took me to the time when I picked up the telephone to ask for help and prayed to my higher power for help . . . when I did that I found what I was looking for, a feeling of peace and contentment . . . I have never used since . . .

Trish

. . . I was coming from a complete stance of innocence . . . I wasn't prepared for it . . . and the following morning I knew that I was definitely dealing with somebody who was quite insane . . . this was another time that I was betrayed, set up, and expected to go against my values . . . I had done that several times in the past and made the choice to call it compromising . . . but now I could not and would not compromise with him or anyone else . . . I began to realize all the things that he had done in the past led me to this point . . . each option to cope with this insanity, such as, using drugs, going insane myself, or running away, I dismissed . . . I needed to come up with a better plan to deal with this insane person . . . friends told me how to deal with him, but I couldn't

follow their advice . . . I could not do what they suggested . . . I had to strategize to get out of this relationship . . . necessity drove me to think of a plan . . . I am out of that marriage and my life is better

Claire

. . . I stayed in my marriage because my father would be disappointed . . . he told me not to marry him . . . but I wanted to be like everyone else I knew, married with children . . . he was the first man to show an interest in me . . . the physical abuse happened . . . I thought that I would get over it . . . and I did until the next time . . . I was constantly afraid of this man . . . I had experienced worst times in my marriage . . . and I didn't leave . . .

Jill

. . . I lived in intense fear all the time . . . of being attacked or hurt or violated . . . it happened many times . . . I was raped at age seven and tried to take my own life . . . I would lie in bed thinking that I was going to die from adrenalin poisoning . . . the energy I carried with me into adulthood attracted violent shit into my life . . . I got viciously mugged . . . my parent told me that I needed to get educated and leave South Africa . . . but I refused to listen to them . . . when my brothers left for other parts of the world, they would call me and beg me to leave South Africa, but I flatly refused their advice and warnings . . . my anger and persistence in unsuccessfully finding a safe lifestyle led me to make the decision to leaving my native country . . . I went to take my daughter for a walk . . . I saw big signs that told me that it was not safe to walk in this area . . . I

thought “f—k it,” I’m getting out of this country . . .

Lynn

. . . I never felt I belonged in my family . . . I acted out at a young age hoping that someone would take an interest in me . . . I would do things and nobody would say anything to me . . . I knew what they expected of me, but I refused to give it to them . . . I have done the biker thing and extreme violence . . . I kept using drugs . . . I just could not stop . . . other people told me the things I needed to do to stop using, but I just couldn’t do them . . . I tried many times but it was impossible for me to quit . . . but through my persistence of trying to find a solution to my drug problem, I came to the understanding that, if I was going to change my life, then I would need to do it myself . . .

Pam

. . . during a bad storm one night my step-father assaulted me sexually and told me that when I was 15 years old he would marry me . . . I tried to commit suicide several times trying to find ways to get him to stop abusing me . . . I tried different things, but nothing worked . . . when I was 13 years old, I went to Canada with my mother and told her what my step-father was doing . . . I went to live with my aunt and uncle . . . I married a violent man, got pregnant, and gave birth . . . I left him and remarried again, got pregnant, and gave birth . . . I was young, I wanted to go out and party . . . Now I thought it was my turn to party . . . the end result was another marriage break up, losing custody of my children, and having to

deal with my alcohol issue . . .

Chris

. . . I was never really sure what to do or how to be . . . I would be what they wanted me to be . . . it was easier than trying to find out what I should be doing . . . when I found a job . . . it was me that they yelled at when their work was not ready . . . I started taking drugs and found a certain amount of peace but it was not real and I knew it . . . I was “f—king” up my life and I needed to make changes or I would die . . . the only way to get peace was to take control of my life and make the changes happen . . .

Paul

. . . I had no direction . . . wasn't going to school . . . I was smoking a lot of pot and drinking a lot of booze . . . I had nothing I was looking forward to . . . depressed most of the time . . . my self-confidence was low . . . I hated the way I looked . . . I felt there was no point to anything . . . nothing had a purpose . . . I had good role models . . . but I did not want to do what they were doing . . . I went to see and hear the motivational speaker, John de Martinii and everything in my life took on a new meaning . . . I was able to hear the message that helped me to turn my life around . . .
everything in my life prepared me to hear the message that day . . .

The participants did speak of some of the viable options they thought of or that they believed would ease the emotional pain and end their suffering. However, once unsuccessful in their attempts at problem solving, the participants went from few options to seemingly no options. It was at this point that each participant hit an emotional

bottom.

Hitting Bottom

Each participant, often after many years of struggling to find a solution that would end their pain, persisted in staying with their problem solving strategies, and resisted the guidance and advice of others, hit an emotional bottom; that is, the participants reached a point when they believed that things could not get any worse, and that the only option open to them was suicide, insanity, or death. The excerpts below describe how each participant hit an emotional bottom that led them to make a life change. For the research participants hitting this bottom was another step in becoming unencumbered.

Bill

. . . my parents told me I would never amount to anything . . . that I was dumb and stupid . . . when asked something simple my hands would perspire and I'd stammer . . . I entered into a program . . . and was asked to leave . . . I became very depressed . . . I was not wanted in the program . . . I knew my drugs . . . I went on a two day suicidal drug binge . . . started drinking alcohol and taking drugs . . . the cards are stacked against me . . . there is nothing I can do . . . I told God that I was in control and that I would take my own life . . . I collapsed on the street . . .

John

. . . I didn't think I was going to live . . . death was a reality . . . I went through a process of losing and sinking lower and lower and lower . . . my own parents said don't f--king phone here ever again . . . people that would talk to me were afraid of me . . . I wasn't a happy guy . . . the

feelings were that I was just a total loser, just defeated, beaten up, hopeless . . . suicide was the only way out of this madness . . . I tried to jump off the bridge . . . I couldn't bring myself to actually follow through . . . I can't even f--kin' kill myself, and can't do nothing right . . . so those thoughts added to me feeling like a total loser. . .

Trish

. . . I knew that I was going to have to go to a place that was going to be so scary . . . so much information to process and digest . . . I wasn't prepared for this . . . my response [was] I would like to be insane too . . . so I don't have to deal with this . . . so much betrayal . . . I was in shock . . . how do I protect myself from this . . . the easiest way would be for me to check out . . . that way I won't have to deal with...this whole thing . . .

Claire

. . . I just knew that things were not going to change . . . the abuse . . . the beatings . . . I was embarrassed and felt a lot of shame . . . I had very low self-esteem . . . I'd have to face my family . . . I was afraid of him . . . frightened out of my wits . . . feeling very anxious all the time . . . I feel sick . . . I am hot and shaky . . . I can take this anymore . . .

Jill

. . . from a very young age I felt the sense of feeling threatened and

frightened . . . I was watching the end results of a murder outside my store
. . . someone broke into my house and stole everything . . . what is this
doing to my internal landscape? . . . I am too overly sensitive to live in this
country . . . what am I doing to attract this? . . . denial on top of more
denial . . . immense stress and tiredness . . . I just can't deal with it
anymore . . .

Lynn

. . . I had no conscience . . . no goals . . . I lived just day to day . . . in a
pattern of self-destruction . . . keep the craziness going . . . I always felt
valueless . . . somebody who was weak . . . I didn't have anything left . . . I
felt naked . . . I just wanted to get high . . . it's too hard . . . I can't get out
. . . nothing left for me but a cardboard box . . . nowhere else for me to go
. . . just a shell of a person . . . I can't do this any longer . . .

Pam

. . . always the same pattern . . . day after day . . . year after year . . . he
would get mad at me . . . but it didn't matter . . . I left my kids so I could
party . . . can't believe I did that . . . I was weak inside . . . I didn't have
any will power . . . I am powerless to change my life . . . I had no
motivation . . . I realized that I was crawling on my hands and knees
across the floor . . . I have the shakes really bad . . . if I don't stop this I am
going to die . . . I wasn't eating . . . my guts always tied in a knot . . . I
can't take this anymore . . .

Chris

... my health was going further and further down ... my self-esteem was low ... I turned inward and it turned into a negative thing for me ... I feel a rumbling in my stomach of all the pain, anger, and chaos ... I smoked pot but that didn't help ... the depression did not help ... I smoke more pot ... eat all the bad things ... more anti-depressants ... sitting motionless staring into space for over two hours ... going to work my legs won't move ... I can't do this ... my head was hung so low ... all I could see was blackness ... I can't do this anymore ...

Paul

... I felt worthless ... and frustrated ... I felt sad ... and depressed ... I felt empty because there was no point in going on ... I felt alone, even though my parents were supportive ... I felt despair ... and I became very lazy ... I tried to hide from the world by sleeping all the time ... drinking a lot of booze ... I hated the way I way I looked ... I felt really shitty about myself ... and believed that I had no reason to be here ...

Unencumbered Moments

As previously defined, an unencumbered moment is a moment when one commits to take action in one's life in order to save it. Unencumbered moments appear to happen almost in the midst, but actually immediately after hitting bottom and differ from hitting an emotional bottom, in that hitting bottom is an internal process that leads one to a feeling of defeat because one believes that no matter what is attempted, one's life will not change. Whereas hitting bottom is linked with sharply painful and difficult emotions,

such as, extreme frustration coupled with feelings of despair, worthlessness, confusion, exasperation, self-criticism, anxiety, or deep sadness to name but a few, an unencumbered moment brings with it strong positive feelings. An unencumbered moment brings with it clarity of thought, in that one experiences in that moment no internal conflict about one's next steps or course of action. The participants in this study noted that while they were experiencing an unencumbered moment, they felt empowered to take the action, and talked of a knowing and a feeling of satisfaction and that they had no fear. In the unencumbered moment, they remembered feeling that they could not be held back, and that they experienced a release of all their old feelings, an absence of fear and a determination to change their lives. The participants felt a sense of calmness and a knowing that they were connected to their new life. Here is how the research participants described some of their unencumbered moments.

Bill

. . . I left with \$20.00 . . . but I was determined to make it . . . I was leaving years of frustration and abuse behind me . . . my new life lay ahead . . . first I needed a name . . . I struggled for most of my life to come up with a new name . . . I tried every combination of names, but nothing seemed right for me . . . I could not start my new life until I had a new name . . . I went to sleep and when I awoke . . . suddenly the name popped into my head . . . in an instant . . . wow, this is it . . . this name truly fits . . . there was something transcendent about it . . . I knew the name was right for me because it had such a powerful connotation to it . . . I felt really connected to me and my new life . . . now that I had my name I started to build the

rest of my life . . .

John

. . . I was sitting on the couch, dope sick . . . I surrendered to the drugs . . .
so I picked up the phone . . . I called two counselors . . . I told them I had a
problem . . . I asked for help . . . and when I said those words out loud . . .
the feelings of emptiness, loneliness, confusion, and the suicidal thoughts
. . . all those feelings were gone immediately as soon as they told me who
I had to talk to . . . I made the phone call . . . went for an interview . . .
went to a recovery house . . . and everything came into play . . . I took
back my life . . .

Trish

. . . I knew I could not stay in this relationship . . . everything became
really clear to me in an instant . . . I didn't have any fear . . . I felt so
empowered . . . it was like I went from being the passenger to being the
driver . . . I didn't have to find the power . . . it was already there . . . I
knew what I needed to do . . . I had to take control of this situation . . . I
had taken control of my life . . .

Claire

. . . I was very anxious . . . that was it . . . I have to go . . . I was done with
him and the relationship . . . I felt strong . . . I felt totally committed to
going . . . I knew I was going . . . in that moment I felt absolutely, totally
powerful, totally clear, powerful, not afraid, nothing, just I'm "outta" here
. . . I wasn't scared of him . . . he would not have done anything anyway

... he wouldn't have frigging dared ...

Jill

... I just could not take any more violence ... in a split second I came to the decision to take my daughter and leave South Africa ... I was driving along a dark road in Canada ... I had this physical release ... as I slowed the car down ... I felt this incredible feeling ... a release of adrenalin, of stress, of chaos, and I felt this immense sense of safety and security ... I knew in that instant ... that if my car broke down I could get out and safely walk to a house to ask for help ... I felt emancipated from the feelings I had when I lived in South Africa ...

Lynn

... I remember hearing a speaker in a meeting and I knew in an instant I knew that if I did what I was told to do I would be okay ... I could feel sugar running through me ... I got up to get my first keypad ... and as I got up to get it ... I swear I could hear my own heartbeat ... everything went blurry ... I felt I was surrounded by a white light as I walked up there ... I remember thinking I'm going to f—king be okay ... it was such a powerful and beautiful feeling ... and then the feeling of connection ... it just felt warm ... I knew I would take back my life ...

Pam

... I told him in a flash of insight...that I would stop drinking for good and I have up to now ... but in that moment I felt a calm ... I felt totally

100 per cent pure and sure that I would be okay . . . it was a sense of peace and a calmness . . . there was no doubt in my mind . . . I felt it in my heart and in my soul . . . I thought that my words had come from the center of my soul . . . this time was different than all the other times . . .

Chris

. . . I was mad as mad . . . for years I thought that I couldn't . . . then I experienced a moment of insight . . . that told me I needed to quit my job . . . to start the change process . . . and save my sanity . . . it was a time when I knew that I could . . . look at me . . . look what I can do . . . I felt powerful . . . confident . . . I can do it . . .

Paul

. . . I saw John de Martinii and everything changed for me . . . I can't really explain it . . . but I will try to explain it physically . . . it was like a state of grace . . . I really couldn't feel my body anymore . . . I wasn't in tune with my brain anymore . . . I was in tune with something else . . . I guess you could call it my soul . . . I was just in tune with something else . . . answers to questions just came to me . . .

Higher Power

All my research participants acknowledged that they drew strength from a higher power after they experienced their unencumbered moment. Although they were at a low emotional point in their lives they were able to draw on a new source of energy that provided them with the personal power to commit to take the actions they needed to institute second-order life changes. The participants acknowledged that their belief in a

higher power came to the forefront when they needed the strength to carry out the actions needed for second-order change. Although the definitions of higher power varied from person to person, the concept of having someone or something outside of the self to believe in and draw strength from was consistent through each story. Some participants acknowledged that the higher power was the concept of love, others named the higher power as the forces of the universe, others called the higher power Jesus, another called the higher power God, and one person believed that the higher power was a deceased grandfather who he believes is watching over him. Regardless of the definition of the higher power, the research participants remain constant and consistent in the belief that they are being watched over, cared for, and being provided emotional strength through the higher power that allowed them to maintain and/or continue to make second-order life changes.

Bill

... all my life I have been surrounded by religion ... I went to a Catholic school ... my teachers were nuns and priests ... so I have no problem in believing in God ... even in the darkest moments of my life ... I talk to God ... I believe that He is my higher power ... and I believe in him ...

John

... I have a higher power ... it is my grandfather ... he passed away a long time ago ... when I got in trouble with drugs ... I remember talking to my grandfather ... asking for help ... I always counted on my grandfather ... I also have God as a higher power ... and a friend of mine ... I see them as a team ... their faces are attached ... I see a figure I

chose to call God . . . and when my grandmother died . . . I saw her with my grandfather . . . so I have a whole team watching over me . . .

Trish

. . . I can't check out . . . can't use substances . . . there's a tremendous amount of transformation in your life that is about to happen . . . self-preservation kicked in . . . I knew I had to trust . . . that the forces in the universe . . . would provide me with everything I need . . . the balance of the universe is such that I will get everything I need . . . it may not be in the way I want it but it will all be there . . .

Claire

. . . I have a very strong faith, not religious per se . . . I like Jesus . . . I always have since I was a little kid . . . when I was a kid I saw a picture of Jesus standing with his sheep with a staff and his long hair . . . I have had a connection with that picture ever since . . . I have been able to draw strength and solace from it all my life . . .

Jill

. . . I have great faith in passion and love . . . especially a mother's love . . . I also have immense respect for the human nature and the human spirit . . . that sense of survival . . . it's unbelievably strong . . . I am a survivor in a lot of ways . . . because it's such an innate response and it's so intrinsic and it's so deep . . .

Lynn

. . . when I felt that white light . . . I felt alone it was like oh, in that room,

I realized that I had a presence in my life and I knew it felt warm . . . too many things have happened in my life for me not to believe . . . I always do believe that God helps people to help themselves . . .

Pam

. . . I also believe in God . . . I have faith in God . . . I believe that I will be taken care of now . . . I felt totally . . . that God was by my side . . . and a sense of peace and calmness . . . in my heart and soul . . . I felt that God put us together for a reason . . . it is a feeling from inside of me . . . it is like a gift from God . . .

Chris

. . . I believe in a higher power but not necessarily God . . . I believe in my power . . . that led to the discovery of what I need to ask myself . . . I believe in those things that bring me happiness and joy . . . I believe in the writing process . . . that allowed me to explore things and allowed me to find a passion in gardening . . .

Paul

. . . I believe that the body knows before the brain knows things . . . it is this wisdom that everyone has the ability to get in touch with . . . I believe in the balance of the universe . . . and that everything I need is with me in perfect balance . . . it may not be the way I want it or know it . . . it is here just the same . . . for every negative there is a positive . . . I just have to look for it . . .

Leap of Faith (includes taking Control of Life)

Making a leap of faith was a common theme in the stories of the research participants. Each participant attempted on several occasions to make life changes, but all were unsuccessful until they experienced an unencumbered moment. In that moment, when the participants made a clear decision to change the conditions of their lives, they described taking what I believe to be a leap of faith. They described not knowing what would come next in life or how they would change, but also knowing absolutely that change would occur. Further, each participant described initiating action to change their lives without knowing what the outcome of that action would be and how that outcome would effect them. They acted on the feeling that change was imminent and entered into the process of change knowing absolutely that they would be safe and secure in those changes. Participants made the transition from feeling that they had little or no personal power and living chaotic lives high in emotion to taking positive active roles in managing their lives, and making changes that drastically improved the quality of their lives.

Participant examples are to follow.

Bill

. . . with twenty dollars in my pocket and an agreement to give fifteen dollars . . . to these people that were driving to the coast . . . where I knew no one . . . I should have been fearful of what was going to happen to me next . . . but I had absolutely no fear at all . . . I had a very profound feeling that my life was about to change . . . All I had to do was get out of the Prairie Provinces . . . I took control of my own life and I left never to return . . .

John

. . . I am not the center of the universe . . . it is hard for me to believe that there is a bigger picture . . . I am part of that picture and I am here for a purpose . . . but I am not the entire picture . . . I do not fully understand why I am here . . . I do not understand the purpose for my being here . . . I know that I have a purpose . . . I am just trying to live my life in the best possible manner . . . I tell myself whatever happens is the way it is supposed to be . . . I put one foot in front of the other and walk right through life . . . my higher power guides me and gives me the strength to do the things I need to do . . .

Trish

. . . I had an end in mind . . . I had to go . . . I had to make it seem like his idea . . . I remember thinking that I can't make these changes . . . that didn't last long . . . because I knew I couldn't stay . . . morals had changed . . . I couldn't live the new lifestyle . . . I had to leave . . . I knew that everything would be provided for me . . . that there would be nothing missing . . . I made the changes I needed to make and continue to make changes to this day . . .

Claire

. . . I'm shaky . . . I'm hot . . . I don't know what I am going to do . . . I feel like I am coming unglued . . . I had to leave my marriage . . . I don't

care what it takes . . . I didn't think ahead . . . I didn't think what this was going to mean in terms of being a single parent, in terms of what my parents would think, in terms of me having no money, or in terms of how I am going to get out of here . . . I didn't think of anything . . . I don't give a shit about anything . . . I'm out of here . . . everything will be alright . . . I know it . . .

Jill

. . . I was sitting at home with this little baby . . . I looked at her . . . thought this doesn't feel right . . . I have an immense respect for the human nature, human spirit, and the sense of survival . . . I am a survivor . . . leaving my native country was difficult for me . . . I made the decision to make an effort to make friends and meet people in Canada . . . I left my native country . . . with two suitcases and a small child . . . I had to make a better life for myself and my daughter . . . this was the only way I could think of to do just that . . . I just trusted that everything would work out as long as I did my part . . .

Lynn

. . . I walked to the front of the room . . . I got my key tab . . . I knew am going to be okay . . . such a powerful feeling . . . a connection . . . I felt warmth . . . I thought to myself everything is going to be okay . . . I need to do everything they tell me to do . . . I took back control of my life that day . . . I have not lost control of my life to this day . . .

Pam

... I'm just wasting my time ... I took control of my life ... when he told me that I was driving him away with my drinking ... I made a decision to change my life and took a leap of faith that would allow me to get on with my life the way I knew I could ...

Chris

... I knew two things ... the next place I work I want to be appreciated and I want to bring joy to those I serve ... I quit my job at the printing company without knowing where I was going ... I had no idea of what I was going to do ... I went with my \$34.70 in my pocket ... I took control of my life ... quit the job ... I knew I would make it and I knew that I was never going to be treated that way again ... I still have that same sense of control over my life today ...

Paul

... the universe is perfectly balanced ... therefore there is a perfect balance in my life ... there is always a balance ... I don't have to worry about things because I know the answer will come to me when I am ready to accept the answer ... I don't know how I know ... I just know that everything will work out for me the way it is supposed to ... I don't go looking for answers anymore ... I just wait until they come to me ... because I am not out searching for answers I can save my energy and I have better control over my life and how I choose to live ... it is quite a feeling to know that I will be provided for no matter where I go or what I

do in my life . . .

The Special Person

Another common theme that emerged during my discussions with the participants was the importance to the change process of the presence of a person or group of people that the participants deemed to be special because of the way that individual or group helped them as they made the changes that followed an unencumbered moment. For some participants this special person or group of people was a part of their lives prior to their experiencing an unencumbered moment. However, in some cases, the special person or group of people came into their lives after their experience of such a moment. The role of the special person or group was to provide guidance to the participants while they set about the task of rebuilding their lives and to provide assistance in helping the participants build a new and stronger sense of self. In each case, the research participants acknowledge that without the support of this special person or group of people, it would have taken much longer to rebuild themselves and their lives. Examples that illustrate the importance of the special person or group follow.

Bill

. . . I met a woman through the Salvation Army . . . she visited me when I was in the hospital . . . she had such incredible wisdom . . . saw things in me I didn't know were there . . . it's almost like the woman provided me with the essential ingredients through her kindness, her words, her affection . . . slowly I began to build a new me . . .

John

. . . a friend of mine brought this into me . . . I just took a few steps

forward and they carried me the rest of the way, my friend and the people around me . . .

Trish

. . . I had help while I was trying to figure this out . . . a couple of friends I talked to over the telephone . . . and the support from my friends and just everything . . .

Claire

. . . it was a difficult process for me . . . but I had a real connection with Jesus . . . it was that strength that allowed me to make the changes in my life . . . and the help of my closest friends . . .

Jill

. . . I was able to count on my family . . . especially my brother . . . I really adore him . . . I needed my family . . . there needs to be family . . . they didn't go away . . .

Lynn

. . . people guided me . . . and my sister-in-law . . . that is the one person in my life . . . who helped me . . . she accepted me and supported me . . .

Pam

. . . I had good friendships . . . very solid female relationships . . . positive relationships . . . they helped me to get through it . . .

Chris

. . . I met a lovely man . . . who unbeknownst to me was trying to teach me

how to change my patterns, my way of thinking . . . with his help I changed the way I think things . . . and I changed my perceptions . . .

Paul

. . . my mom and step-dad were great . . . they were and are very supportive . . . they talk to me without pushing me in any direction . . . they really helped me to become who I am . . .

Constructing a New Identity (includes increasing self-esteem)

Once the participants began taking steps to change their lives, they acknowledged experiencing a stronger sense of self and a greater confidence with regard to what they saw themselves as being able to with their lives. The participants stated that the knowledge they gained through their experiences with unencumbered moments is still with them today and is helping them to continue to make or maintain the second-order life changes. The increase in self-esteem gained through their experiences of connecting with a higher power and with special people or groups continues to contribute to the sense that their lives are now dynamic adventures. Examples in the participants own words follow.

Bill

. . . while I was lying in the hospital bed an elderly woman came to see me and we talked . . . she was a very wise woman . . . she told me things about myself that I did not know existed . . . she was able to back up everything she said with examples . . . basically I had no choice but to believe her . . . I started to rebuild another identity with her help . . . with more information about myself and how another person saw me . . . I was able

to see that I was reliving old negative messages . . . she helped me to change those old tapes into tapes that were positive and full of energy . . . I was on my own again . . . and I would often think in times of stress what she said to me . . . and I would come through any situation with my head held high . . . The personal power I gained from those talks . . . remains with me today . . . I have never attempted suicide since that time . . .

John

. . . thinking I'm going to die if I keep doing this . . . I made the phone call and asked for help . . . when I asked my grandfather [in heaven] for help my life changed instantly . . . I realized that he was looking over me and he is now my higher power . . . I ask him for help and guidance on a regular basis . . . building a new identity was really difficult because I had to figure out a new way to live . . . through the help of friends, members of my self help group, and my higher power I was able to build a new way of living that made me a better person . . . I still have to take care of my life problems . . . but in a new way or I can find myself back into old thinking patterns that bring old familiar solutions . . . the power I have gained from changing my life has spilled into every facet of my life including work, relationship, and family . . . I am a better person now and I continue to work on me . . .

Trish

. . . I have no fear left and I know that everything is going to be provided

for me . . . nothing is missing and I am going to be fine . . . because I believe in the balance of life through the forces of the universe . . . one thing ends another begins . . . it is the nature of the universe . . . the nature of my life . . . friends really helped when I was not thinking at my best . . . between my friends and myself I have been able to rebuild my identity and I am now a much stronger person . . . I'm excited about where I go from here and all the possibilities that are opening for me . . .

Claire

. . . I like Jesus . . . I always have ever since I was a little kid . . . I actually saw a picture of Jesus standing with his sheep, his staff, and his long hair . . . I have a connection with that picture that remains with me today . . . a soft, loving, and firm but gentle spirit . . . allowed me to form a connection with . . . and I have been able to draw strength and solace from it all my life . . . as an ordinary human being . . . with the things I have gone through in my life . . . there must be something or someone looking after me . . . at my lowest point I was able to turn to Jesus and get his help to rebuild my life . . . I am a better person today because of my connection with my higher power, Jesus . . .

Jill

. . . I love my native country . . . I love my family . . . I love being creative . . . I just love creating . . . I tried everything to stay in South Africa but the violence and political climate became too much . . . I love my daughter and I could no longer guarantee her safety living in South Africa . . . I was

attacked and mugged several times . . . the love I have inside me pushed me to make the decision necessary to protect my daughter, myself, reunite my family, allow my daughter to have grandparents . . . the love inside me forced me to become a better person through the mending of damaged family bonds . . . I am a better person for having been there . . . despite the violence I endured . . . I have changed my energy . . . and I am a calmer, happier person . . . things just continue to get better for me and my daughter in Canada . . .

Lynn

. . . I felt chosen . . . like I was the only one in the room . . . I knew that God had chosen me to get free of drugs . . . because before this I had a bad God who I didn't believe in and who didn't believe in me . . . I asked him to help me stop using . . . but I continued to use . . . so I lost my faith in God . . . when I finally got straight . . . it was my turn to accept my reward for all the work I put into myself . . . I felt a connection with a higher being and felt warmth envelop me . . . I knew that God was with me . . . through the guidance I got from the people in my self help group and my sister-in-law I was able to completely turn my life around . . . these feelings of strength . . . remain with me today . . . I am still learning to be a better person . . . my belief in God and with the support of my friends and my sister-in-law I will reach whatever goals I set for myself . . .

Pam

. . . when I was young I went to a Catholic school . . . God was a big part

of my schooling and education . . . at the same time I was being sexually abused . . . how ironic, to be taught to believe in God and that God protects . . . while I was terrified because I was being abused . . . I met the man I fell in love with . . . my family was dead against me having a boyfriend . . . they did everything to break us up including moving me out of the country . . . eventually I married a couple of times, had children but my feelings of love were always with my first love . . . I thought I loved the other men but . . . not like my first love relationship . . . we finally got together . . . I would have to make drastic life changes if I wanted this relationship to endure . . . I would have to change myself and become a different person . . . the strength of my love and re-connection with my first love . . . provided me with the strength I needed to make those changes . . . I am still in this relationship today and still changing and growing . . .

Chris

. . . for years I did the bidding of others . . . I was always at their beckon call . . . whatever they needed me to be at the time . . . I suffered immensely . . . but I did not believe that I deserved any better for myself . . . when I could not take any more abuse . . . I began making decisions to better myself . . . I moved out of a basement apartment . . . I wanted to quit drugs and I did . . . I quit my job . . . I knew that I would be provided for through the forces of the universe . . . when one door closes another one opens . . . I believe this . . . I do not believe that the forces of the

universe are God . . . at least I choose not to call them God . . . the forces of the universe brought a special friend to me . . . who helped me to build a new identity . . . that allows me to have more personal boundaries, more structure in my life, and has given me permission to be happy . . . and continue to work on my life . . .

Paul

. . . I was able to attend a workshop by John de Martinii . . . and write the collapse exercise . . . I was able to address my issues around my father . . . I gained the understanding I needed and wanted to make sense of my life . . . I have been able to build an identity . . . more in line with what I want to do . . . this shift has helped me to become a better person and I continue to change . . . the forces of the universe will always be in balance and I know that if I continue to believe in those forces that my life will also be in a balance . . . I will remember the collapse process . . . and continue to change

Based on what my research participants told me, it appears that the unencumbered moments that led to second-order change relating particularly to altering very difficult patterns of behavior and to shifting a painfully negative and alienating sense of self follows a certain sequence of events. Each participant who experienced unencumbered moments and successfully negotiated change had a willingness to persist, to struggle, and even while also resisting and ignoring, sometimes for many years, helpful information and eventually hitting bottom, did exhibit a willingness to continue on. Central to this willingness to continue seems to be the unencumbered moments, when clarity, calm, and

certainty replaced pain, despair, and action for change became suddenly and unequivocally possible through the connection in those moments, to a higher power, the participants willingness to make a leap of faith and the support from a special person or group. Although almost all of the participants experienced this confluence of events more than once, each time they talked about experiencing an unencumbered moment, they also talked about the constellation of events described. I believe that understanding this cluster and sequence of events could be helpful to how we approach practice with children and youth and will, in the following chapter, discuss the practice implications of what I have found.

CHAPTER XIV – INTEGRATION OF FINDINGS

Pain and disappointment cause feelings of anxiety and guilt in the child.

My system has failed, the child's internal monitors warn from now on. As a result, the child will develop a fear of its own needs. Because experience has taught its system to expect injury, the child becomes tense as soon as it senses a need. It will develop a fear of those who care for it while simultaneously idealizing them for as long as possible as a means of self-preservation. The repetition of experiences like this will gradually transform the child. Its self-esteem, the foundation of all human activity, will be turned into self-doubt (Stettbacher, 1991, p. 34).

By exploring the events and feelings of my childhood, I gained a greater understanding of what led me to experience an unencumbered moment. I understand that as events happened within my family of origin, I tried, even when I was very young to make these events make sense. I did that by interpreting these event through the feelings that I was experiencing at the time, often feelings of fear, anxiety, rejection and hurt, and decided based on those feelings, that I was not wanted by my family members. Although I wanted to belong, because I was, at least as I saw it, being rejected, I came to believe that I was the problem, not my family, and that somehow, I was not worthy of love and belonging. In my early childhood, I did not possess a level of cognitive functioning that would explain to me why I was feeling the way felt, I just put together my feelings and my experiences in what seemed to me to be the only way that I could ensure the survival of my family unit as a whole. That meant that in order to remain within my family, I had to accept my lonely state. The experiences I had as a result of my sister's illness put me

into a situation where my basic needs were not and could not be fulfilled by those to whom I looked to fulfill them. It is my belief that the origin of the emotional chaos that plagued my teenage and adult years came from my adapting to the experiences I had as a child in my home. Eventually, I used my anger and hurt to survive and these two emotions became the stable of my core beliefs. The anger and the hurt eventually led me to drug and alcohol addictions.

Drugs and alcohol allowed me to be me without feeling the hurt. As my addiction increased, I began sabotaging personal relationships in order to confirm my assumptions about myself and how to belong. I remember thinking to myself as each relationship ended that I am alone again and that is the way it is supposed to be. But when I was alone, I increased my direct and indirect self-destructive behaviors. I could not understand my behavior patterns until I read the work of Alice Miller.

Miller (1986) introduced the phrase “repetition compulsion” to describe behavior like my successive destruction of every relationship I participated in by way of confirming my assumptions about myself, and for the first time my way of living my life made sense to me. As a child, I took it upon myself to accept that I was not a welcome member of my family so that my mother could divide her attention between her daughters. Because I could not get what I wanted and needed in the way that I thought I should receive it, the only conclusion was for my to believe that there was something wrong with me. I adapted to a situation in a way that brought on very specific feelings in me that I could not understand nor rationalize at that time. Because I could not express myself, I carried those feelings into all areas of my life. The modifications I made for myself, that is, drinking more alcohol and taking more drugs, became my coping

strategies. As my deviant behavior increased, my repetition compulsion increased in my bid to prove to everyone that how I approached my life legitimized my existence. I believe that I felt compelled to legitimize my approach in this way because at a very deep and visceral level my approach served to ensure my survival at least as far as I knew. I had become confused early on with regard to just how survival worked because I had experienced my own survival as tied to being alone and to denying my feelings of fear and loneliness. I did survive my early years and therefore very likely came to believe that loneliness, fear and rejection were key to my survival. As I grew up, I took care of my painful feelings by using drugs and alcohol and made sure that no intimate relationship that I was able to initiate survived because my own survival was threatened by any change in how I had come to make sense of belonging. Eventually, I hit emotional bottom and experienced an unencumbered moment and realized that that my life philosophy was based on a faulty premise and that someone, especially my mother, the person who I thought least cared for me, did care what happened to me. In that moment, I knew that I did not have to die in order for me to prove to others or myself that my core beliefs were right. As I thought about my life and that unencumbered moment, I began to understand how the events in the lives of my research participants led to their experiences of an unencumbered moment.

Having a background in psychology, I am well aware that people change as they receive, integrate, accommodate, or assimilate new information into their knowledge of the issues that effect their lives, the environment, our planet, or any other of the countless complex and intricate aspects of daily life. I am also aware that insight is the word most often used to describe the incorporating of new information into the knowledge already

contained within each individual. But insight alone does not necessarily lead to change, especially second-order change, and my quest in this study was to learn more about how second-order change takes hold. I wanted to learn what I could about how people become “unencumbered” of their need to carry on with destructive and painful ways of living, I wanted to be able to describe the actual moment when change takes hold and discover if there is a pattern in making change that is shared to the degree that it is recognizable and even reproducible so that as helpers, we can assist people to move through the pattern consciously and hopefully more quickly than most people do.

In the beginning stages of this study I thought that in the main it was through insight that one gains a deeper understanding or knowledge that result in change. My belief was that it was through thinking and storing information in the brain, and then accessing this new information that one made changes in one’s life, small changes and big changes, and that the inability to act on the new information came largely from fear. However, as a result of this study, I now know that insight and unencumbered moments are quite different experiences. Insight is more cerebral and cumulative and does not necessarily lead to deeply felt and all encompassing life change. Unencumbered moments always lead to such change.

What has become really clear from the information gathered in this study is that once an individual enters an unencumbered moment, all internal debates about options and choices, all internal bargaining and all resistance and vacillation are stripped away and positive, second-order life change occurs. This kind of change does not appear to come as a result of insight or reflection, but it comes out of a deep calm in the middle of

deep pain and chaos. It seems to be a fully visceral and a deeply cognitive moment, a moment when feeling, thinking and action are in harmony, and there is only one choice (and for me only one internal voice) and the way to a better life is clear, and action always follows.

At the center of all this there also appears to be a deep shift in self-perception and a strong move away from the negative self-concept that all the participants described. This shift away from negative self seems to be extremely important to the whole process of becoming unencumbered. Especially since Jones and Swain (1977), who conducted a study that looked at how individuals in different age groups viewed their self-concepts or self-images found was that even under experimental conditions when the individual had no part in the constructed social situation that was part of the experiment, people none-the-less acted in accordance to what they believed to be true about themselves and the world. According to Jones and Swain, "the self-concept or self-image of an individual remains stable from middle childhood onward" (p. 559). For example, "when a youth attending school becomes convinced that s/he cannot make it through the traditional patterns the youth does not adjust his or her assessment of his or her self-worth as much as they adjust to the new situational constructs" (p. 568). Further, "intrinsic (self-view) and extrinsic factors (health, family, physique) are involved in weighing the situation as seen in terms of the behavior of the individual and his or her evaluation of her or his behavior" (p. 566). Because of these factors one's self-esteem may vary from one situation to the next (Schafer & Keith, 1999), even though the self-worth stays consistent. Therefore, "when individuals enact and verify an identity, they simultaneously produce and reproduce the social structural arrangements that are the original source of those

meanings” (Cast & Burke, 2002, p. 1042). “An identity is a set of meanings that represent the understandings, feelings, and expectations that are applied to the self as an occupant of a social position (Burke & Tully, 1977; Stets & Burke, 2000, as cited in Cast & Burke, 2002).

Until their self-concepts shifted, the participants in my study were convinced (just as I was) from an early age that there was something fundamentally not loveable about them, and lived with pain and fear and immense feelings of loneliness and rejection. In describing themselves, they used terms that set them apart among the unwanted and not valued and recalled the bargains that they had made in order to be able to survive their environments and the self-representations they had come to accept as fixed. At the same time, they also recalled acting in often fierce and sometimes violent and dangerous ways in order to survive.

Still, despite their negative self-concepts, the people who participated in my study showed a level of persistence in searching for solutions to their life problems that is consistent with the years of struggle that scientists, engineers and other researchers regularly employ in their search for solutions to their research challenges. The participants stayed engaged in their struggles until they experienced their unencumbered moment. This is not unlike the persistence demonstrated by Richard Smalley in his search for a visual representation of the carbon atom (Brown, 1996). While Smalley eventually created the representation in one week, he actually worked in his field for many years before he had the breakthrough that made it possible to come up with the design. While Smalley took only a week to come up with the design, he had prepared his mind through working in his field for years, and would not have found his solution so

readily had he not had at hand the knowledge out of which he could construct his solution to his problem. Perhaps the struggles my participants engaged in are somewhat similar to the years of work that many scientists and other knowledge workers devote to finding solutions to their research and technical problems. Perhaps these struggles in some way help to prepare the minds of those who seek a way out of their dilemmas and their pain.

My data does not however indicate or suggest that my research participants experienced what Metcalfe (1986 and 1986a) called a warmth feeling associated with “getting the right answer” to a life problem or knowing that one will be able to come up with a solution to their problem. What does appear to be present is a sudden conviction that something must be done now or never because only self-destructive options remain. This conviction does come with a strong emotional experience that is more like fear combined with clarity than warmth. With regard to warmth, one research participant speaks of walking in a white light and a feeling of warmth but it was after her unencumbered moment, that is, this person already experienced making the necessary changes and felt the warmth as an indicator that she was on the right life path.

Although my participants spoke more about friends and helpful people and groups than about professional helpers, several did talk about receiving help from people who worked as helpers: priests, a motivational workshop leader, a doctor and a hospital visitor were among those who were mentioned as being vital to making the changes that were made. As well, the participants noted that after experiencing an unencumbered moment they were able to acknowledge they had previous knowledge of the actions necessary to alter their life circumstances. For example, Pam knew that she needed to stop drinking because she had been told many times by others, Jill had heard from a very young age

that she needed to leave South Africa, Bill learned many useful skills from the priests and nuns, but none followed through with applying this knowledge until much later. This is consistent with the subjects in the experiments of Mori (1996). Players did not use those moves that would bring them to the successful capture of their opponent's king, even though they acknowledged later that they in fact had the knowledge of these necessary moves. They simply did not think to use them. Perhaps this has something to do with Weisberg and Alba's (1981) explanation that people bring with them their unwarranted assumptions that present problems can be solved in the same way that past problems have been dealt with, so new approaches or different approaches even ones that are known are not applied until after every already known approach fails. Like those subjects who participated in the insight experiments designed by Weisberg and Alba (1981), my research participants had also, in the course of their lives, been provided with hints, even clear direction from others as to how their problems could be solved. But like Weisberg and Alba's subjects, my participants did not "read" these hints as useful, and did not apply them in their search for solutions. Thus, my participant's unwarranted assumptions anchored in their preconceived ideas about what will work may have hindered the application of other approaches than the ones they habitually used. It seems therefore, that people may not use different strategies until they have exhausted every known and previously tried strategy first, and that perhaps for some, it is not possible to step outside familiar approaches until they hit a brick wall or bottom out.

In the Alcoholic Anonymous literature (Tiebout, 1953) there are references to the experience of hitting an emotional bottom and facing suicide, insanity or death. One of the co-founders of the A.A. movement, Bill W., talked about how once one hits

emotional bottom there is only one way to go: up. Bill W. noted that his sense of self worth was so low that he had given up on life because as often as he tried to quit drinking alcohol or attempted to control the amount of alcohol he drank, he was unsuccessful. Each failure worsened his sense of himself until he felt so low that there was nowhere else to go but up. The alternative to not moving upward was to continue to drink alcohol. The inevitable outcome on this life course would have been suicide, insanity, death, or incarceration. In the current research project, when the participants acknowledged that distinct possibility and even in some cases made suicide attempts, they hit an emotional bottom. At the same time, they also admitted to themselves that the approaches and strategies they were applying did not and would not produce an end to their difficulties. It was only when they stopped doing what they were doing, in other words, surrendered, that new approaches became apparent. Becoming unencumbered seems to be somehow bound up in admitting that one's ways of being and doing are not working. Being able to admit that seems to be bound up in finding it no longer possible to use those ways of being and doing to survive because one comes face to face with the clear possibility that these approaches are no longer serving one's survival.

As the research participants told their life stories, each referred to times when s/he adapted to new situations or reacted to familiar situations through the factors that formed his or her identity. However, the research participants did not and could not see the life and personal barriers that they had set in place for themselves. Because each participant had formed an identity based on the events and circumstances of his or her early life, each participant could not be objective enough to see how her or his identity determined a life course. Because "role identity results in behavior that produces a match between

self-relevant meanings in the situation and the meanings and expectations held in the identity standard” (Cast & Burke, 2002, p. 1044), the research participants continued to act and react to the situations of life in the same way until they hit bottom in the midst of acting in the usual way and experienced an unencumbered moment.

Given what I have found in the stories of my participants, one could ask whether a negative self-perception is necessary if one is to experience an unencumbered moment. I’m not sure that I can make the claim, based on the stories of nine people, that only people who have difficult and chaotic lives, an early life within an family filled with problems and a negative self-concept, live in the conditions (internal and external) that create the possibility of an unencumbered moment. While my participants and I did struggle with such problems and were encumbered with negative self-concepts, what appears to have been central to our finding ourselves in an unencumbered moment was our persistence in approaching our lives in a certain way, our willingness to continue to look for a way out of our situations, our resistance to information that would or could have influenced us to look at things differently and finally our hitting bottom. We all pursued what Alice Miller’s (1986) describes as repetition compulsion, that is, a tendency to repeat traumatic events in order to deal with them.

Through that repetition compulsion, each research participant (and I) maintained a persistence in trying to find a way to make things work in our worlds by using the strategies that in the first instance had helped us to survive, but were not actually functional in other conditions and over the long haul. Nor did these strategies actually provide us with the love, connections and safety that we were seeking. As well, as our

repeated attempts to solve our problems failed, these failures added to our seeing ourselves in an even worse light. This downward spiraling self-definition and the unsuccessful attempts at problem solving played a significant role in the participants and in my hitting bottom.

All of the research participants in this study had at least one failed attempt at suicide during their lives time prior to their experiencing an unencumbered moment. Although each participant had the experience of hitting bottom along with committing an act of desperation, such as, a suicide attempt, there is a reason all were unsuccessful in their efforts. One reason for the unsuccessful suicide attempt could be the level of tenacity in which the research participants, figuratively, held onto their life, their lifestyle, their old patterns of behavior, and their identity.

According to Lan and Repman (1995), the unsuccessful attempts at problem solving are the driving force behind the persistence needed to continue in the struggle to solve life problems. "Intrinsic motivation theorists have shown the intrinsically motivated people persist on tasks despite failure" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1978, as cited in Lan & Repman, p. 53). Defeat and the sense of giving up on a task seem to be linked with learned helplessness (Lan & Repman). However, if there are failures without the sense of giving up, then persistence comes to the foreground (Wortman & Brehm, 1975, as cited in Lan & Repman). "Persistence is one way people constructively respond to failure (p. 54). According to Fisher (1980, as cited in Lan & Repman), to continue to learn people must experience failure and with failure comes persistence and that persistence and failure are necessary if one is to learn (p. 54).

According to Shah, Friedman, and Kruglanski (2002), when an individual accesses an internal emotional state during the problem solving process it is more difficult for the individual to disengage from the problem, especially after failure. Further, all following attempts at problem solving the same problem resulted in a decreasing effort on the part of the individual. Lan and Repman (1995):

. . . propose that whether negative emotions ultimately prompt one to pick up the pace [in problem solving] or to find greener pastures may, in fact, depend on the type of the negative emotion one is experiencing and the type of goal one is pursuing.

Once an individual becomes frustrated or desperate through numerous unsuccessful attempts at problem solving, the individual is less likely to give up. The negative emotions of the research participants were their motivation to continue in their unsuccessful problem solving process. Unwilling and unable to stop their problem solving process, in combination with the unsuccessful attempts, pushed the research participants to take extreme measures to find a solution. Suicide appeared to be the permanent answer to their problem. But suicide was not the answer. Instead of dying, they found themselves in the midst of an unencumbered moment.

Unencumbered moments come after struggle and in a period of chaos, when, after an undetermined length of time during which an individual experiences the frustration and despair of unsuccessfully trying to find a solution to a life problem. Once it becomes evident that a solution is not forthcoming the problem solving process is terminated, sometimes by an attempt at suicide or a desire to succumb to insanity, or death. Then one

hits an emotional bottom where things could not possibly get any worse. It is at this point, when one surrenders and stops the fight that keeps him or her in control, that the unencumbered moment presents itself. At this point a solution is no longer being actively searched for or expected. The unencumbered moment comes into being in the chaos, the frustration and desperation, hitting bottom, and the letting go of control. Through the unencumbered moment comes an absolute understanding of the commitment needed to take the actions in one's life in order to save it. This absolute clarity presents itself without thinking. Further, the process of change once commenced, cannot be stopped and the process is clear and simple. After one has the experience of an unencumbered moment, there is a connection or a reconnection with a belief in an external higher power that provides the strength to execute the necessary actions needed for second-order life change and a shift in one's sense of self. With the support of the higher power and in the presence of individuals or groups who are there to help, change takes place in a clear and straight forward manner. That does not mean every new step is easy. It is just that the steps that must be taken are now self-evident. This certainty is what seems to have made possible the leaps of faith taken by all the participants in this study, leaps of faith that for a number of the people involved were almost like voluntary free fall into the unknown.

The review of the literature described earlier in this document showed that a type of faith is often involved in problem solving, in that people engaged in problem solving frequently think that they know how to solve the puzzles or have the right answers to the problem questions. But the faith described in the studies on problem solving reviewed here (Wallas, 1926; Weisberg & Alba, 1981; Weisberg, 1986; Sapp, 1992; Mori, 1996) do not have the same intensity as the leaps of faith that come with needing to make

changes in one's life without knowing how to make those changes. The inability to get a right answer or successfully solve a puzzle pale in comparison to a mother of three leaving an abusive relationship with no where to go and no money to get there or a woman and her child leaving their native country to travel half way around the world to start life over. The stakes in problem and puzzle solving or even in scientific discovery, are not the same as the life and death stakes faced by the participants in this study. Their leaps of faith were based on willingness to cast themselves forward into a new life with no external guarantees but with absolute internal certainty.

Each participant spoke at length about making a leap of faith and how important that leap of faith was for him or her. Each time that participants described experiencing an unencumbered moment, they also described acting for extended periods of time solely on faith. Along with that faith, they also described experiencing the presence of a higher power although for many, prior to the experience of the unencumbered moment, there was a general lack of belief in such a power. In fact, most of the research participants spoke about having asked for help from God during their long struggles with the difficulties in their lives and felt they had received no such help. Some of the participants began to think of God as a punishing entity. Without a connection to God or a higher power the participants thought of themselves as being totally alone. This may be why none of my research participants believed that a higher power played a role in promoting their unencumbered moments. Although Miller and C' de Baca (2001) emphasize the ongoing presence of God in what they describe a quantum change, my participants describe this presence as coming to them at different times and in different ways and as being most strongly felt after an unencumbered moment had taken place.

The significance of the introduction of a higher power into their lives was that each participant went from feeling totally alone to having the knowledge that s/he belonged to something, was a part of something, and that s/he had the right to be. The participants then felt that no matter what would happen in their lives, from that day forward, they belonged. Without this connection to a higher power, the people in this study also believed that they would not have had the inner or emotional strength to perform the actions necessary to save their lives.

Also important to this new sense of connectedness was the presence in their lives of special people or groups that the participants described as being instrumental in their being able to make changes. Each person participating in this study had a family member, friend, or mentor who knew him or her before, during, and after their unencumbering experience. This special person provided the participant with an emotional anchor or a support regardless of the participant's life circumstances. Further, as the participant began the process of building and connecting to a new identity, the special person provided either encouragement, guidance, or advice on what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. The special person or group seemed to be necessary to each participant in solidifying the change process that began in the unencumbered moments and played crucial roles in helping the participants in constructing new identities. When the new identities were solidly in place and supported by ongoing positive action on the part of the participants and by a final laying to rest of the old identity, the participants, even if they had to go through the process more than once, seem to have completed the process of becoming unencumbered.

Implications for Practice

As I indicated in my findings chapter, although I began this study expecting to learn more about the unencumbered moment as a single life changing experience, I now believe that what I have uncovered is that unencumbered moments occur in the midst of a process of becoming unencumbered, and that all categories of this process are of importance to the whole enterprise of becoming unencumbered. As I consider this now, I believe that as we engage in the practice of helping with children, youth and their families, or for that matter with adults in any life stage, we have the opportunity to enter with them into any of the categories of experience that are a part of this process and do our best to assist them with engaging in the process of becoming unencumbered.

Given the importance of the self-concept to the process of becoming unencumbered and the central role that a negative self-concept seems to play in being encumbered, it seems to me that effective practice depends upon understanding at a fundamental level how the people we work with see themselves. We would therefore need to be able to find out from them how they describe themselves to themselves and who and what they believe themselves to be.

As I think about how to do this, I know that if someone had asked me to answer questions about my self-concept, I would probably have made up answers that I think would either have pleased the people who were asking me or made them angry with me so that they would leave me alone. I would certainly not have revealed myself in words to anyone I didn't like or have a connection with, and would probably not even have let someone I liked really know how unlovable and alone I believed I was.

With that in mind, I suggest that what might be called “discovery work” is central to learning more about another person’s self-concept – work that brings us together in a relationship in activities that allow the self-concept to be revealed in conversations and actions. In such a relationship, we can observe how a young person acts within the context of his or her world and witness first-hand the strategies the youth incorporates into his or her daily living that promote or sustain the negative self-image. Once we grasp a young person’s view of him or herself it is possible to be selective in finding the opportunities to challenge the behaviors being used to promote or sustain a negative self-image. I believe that as we do this, we need to keep in mind that the young people we work with may well be protecting their negative images at all costs because they believe that they *are* the feelings they have experienced, and that persistence, struggle and resistance may well feel to them as being vital to their survival and that therefore, persistence struggling and resistance must be part of their way of dealing with us.

If persistence, struggling and resistance are the key to achieving an unencumbered moment as seems to be indicated by what I have found in this study, it does become vital to examine such behavior as we encounter it and to challenge the destructive aspects of this behavior in ways that allow people to discover these actions as unworkable and futile while also preserving the underlying determination that fuels these people and drives them on in their repetition compulsion. In my own experience, the best time for me to talk to a youth about this sort of thing is just after they have experienced a major emotional outburst, which can be a kind of hitting bottom.

Our challenge as child and youth care workers is to walk the razor’s edge of somehow provoking the moment when someone hit’s bottom with respect to coming

face-to-face with experiencing the futility of carrying on with self-destructive behaviors while also working with everything we have to prevent the kind of bottoming out that was described in the stories of the participants in this study. I take my hope for child and youth care work from Paul's story. He hit bottom at eighteen while attending a workshop and engaging in an exercise that put him directly in touch with his own pain and the source of that pain, while also providing him with support and a way forward. Although many times in our work we encounter young people after they hit bottom, when they have already attempted suicide or survived a drug overdose, a high speed car chase or deadly accident, we also have the opportunity to creatively challenge the youth we work with and do so in a safe context.

We often encounter young people in that emotional bottom, when they have expelled a great deal of emotional energy, and there is a window of opportunity to make the connection and become the persons described here as the special person. That role seems to me to be the most accessible role for us. It fits our job description well and comes with the territory that we claim for child and youth care work. In order to play the role well, I think we need to be especially observant in the way we look on the behaviors of the children and youth we work with and be willing to read their ways of doing and being as messages to us about their assumptions about themselves, their worlds and about us. We are in a position to create hope and with hope the willingness to support leaps of faith.

The biggest challenge that I see in terms of our being able to use what it is possible to learn from this study is creating the space for the children and youth we work with for a possible connection to a higher power. The experience of the higher power

that my participants talked about was one that has so far eluded me, although now that they have brought it to my attention, I am prepared to leave room for this when I go about my daily work with the young men who live in my group home. The experience of the higher power was clearly vital to my participants' solidifying their leaps of faith, feeling connected to themselves and others and to constructing new and strong identities. This does imply that a well-rounded understanding of young peoples' spiritual lives and an understanding of how to support spirituality in children could play an important role to our being able to assist children and youth with becoming unencumbered and experiencing unencumbered moments.

Directions for Further Research

Although this research project shed new light on unencumbered moments, becoming unencumbered and second-order change, it is still not clear from my perspective or from the data what truly "lights the wick" that starts the process that leads to second-order life change. Especially unclear is why a particular experience becomes the hitting bottom experience. Each participant described with great clarity the experience of hitting bottom, but what strikes me as I reflect on each of these hitting bottom experiences is that none were very different from many similar moments in my participants' lives. Why this or that moment of extreme abuse and pain suddenly becomes an experience of hitting bottom and the threshold for the unencumbered moment is still a mystery that requires further investigation.

Another of the findings that fascinates me is the concept of the higher power. Each individual that participated in this project, when asked where or how they obtained the strength and power to do the things that they needed to do, assigned the origin of their

strength to an external source or someone or something that they believed to be outside themselves, that is, their higher power and whatever that meant for them. Some of the individuals chose to call their higher power God, some Jesus, some love, the forces of the universe, and one person called his deceased grandfather his higher power. Because I found this concept of gaining personal strength through an external source to be so interesting I looked briefly into some literature in this area and talked to people to see what their beliefs were in with regard to gaining strength from the concept of an external higher power. One opinion was that a higher power, per say, was not a being or external force but simply the connection to an experience. With the connection to an experience comes clarity and with clarity comes a lack of fear that promotes an individual to take an action that potentially leads to a second-order life change. Others believe that the concept of a higher power is just testimony to how well one lives one's life and one's ability to be self-aware that allows one to take action based on what one believes to be best suited for one's life course. Regardless, further research in the area of taking leaps of faith and/or believing in a higher power might shed some light on why people believe that in their darkest moments of their lives the saving force comes from outside themselves.

Finally, by conducting this study I now have a greater appreciation and understanding of how our youth confront today's issues. What I once thought of as defiance and resistance, I now see as their coping strategies and their problem solving techniques. This study has been a learning experience and a testimony to the importance of relationships, professional, academic, or personal. By continuing to push for ways to promote the onset of the unencumbered moment, and being a special person to someone,

I will be doing my part in the life of a child.

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APPENDIX A – CONSENT FORMS

CONSENT FORM

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled, “What are the Conditions Necessary That Allows One to Experience a Moment of Unencumbered Hearing?” that is being conducted by Kevin Murray. Kevin Murray is a Graduate Student in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria and you may contact him if you have further questions by calling 604-321-4390.

As a GRADUATE student, this research is part of the requirements for a degree in Doctor of Philosophy in Child and Youth Care and it is being conducted under the supervision of Sibylle Artz. You may contact the supervisor at 250-721-6472.

The purpose of this project is to understand the circumstances that precede a moment of “unencumbered hearing,” i.e., a moment during which insight occurs to such a degree that significant behavioral change immediately follows. The question I hope to answer is “what are the barriers or what promotes and facilitates unencumbered hearing that allows an individual to hear an intended meaning in a given message?” As an example, I think of youth who do not want to fail the school year, want to get good grades so s/he can secure a great job when s/he finishes school, yet does not attend school on a regular basis. The message that s/he must attend school on a regular basis has been put forth by school counselors, parents, probation officers, social workers, and police yet, the meaning of the message seems to be unheard by the youth. Then one day s/he hears the same basic message presented previously numerous times, yet the youth understands the meaning within the message at a deep emotional level and begins to attend school regularly. The positive change in behavior promotes and allows him or her to make the positive life change that results in their attaining good grades that significantly increases his or her chances of securing more profitable employment.

The objective of the research is to understand the process that leads up to that moment in time of unencumbered hearing when hearing and learning takes place and life change is the result. In particular, I want to understand this process in relation to youth.

This research is important because it will outline the conditions necessary to experience that moment of unencumbered hearing that leads to a positive life change. By documenting the process that leads to positive life changes in youth through the conditions that promote insight, learning, change, and, understanding of moments of unencumbered hearing; I intend to contribute to the application of this knowledge to the design and implementation of more effective service approaches and interventions with hard to serve youth.

The participants will be asked to take part in a taped interview during which the interviewer will ask four open-ended questions. Depending on interviewee responses to

those four questions other questions will be asked in the hope of obtaining as much information as possible that will be pertinent to the scope of the research project.

If you agree to participate in this research, your participation will include a one to two hours audio taped interview. Your total time commitment to this project should not exceed three to five hours. I may also contact you once I have transcribed your interview to ask you for clarification of anything I may not understand. If you wish, you will have the opportunity to read over your transcript and provide me with additional feedback. Again, I expect that your total time commitment for this study will not exceed three to five hours. At the beginning of all subsequent meetings you as the research participant will be orally reminded of your right to withdraw from the project without consequence.

I do not believe there will be any negative affect experienced by the youth being interviewed. However, there may be some positive psychological and emotional feelings that result from interviewed about how well they have addressed certain areas of their lives. Should any adverse reaction occur I will stop the interview process and go to problem solving with the youth to attempt to determine the problem that brought on the adverse affect. If needed I will then contact the parents or make a referral to a community professional to assist the youth in addressing the issue. I will ask the youth if s/he would like to continue with their commitment with the project and if yes, I would reschedule the interview for another time. If no, I will drop the youth and the data collected to date from the project. At this point it is unclear if there will be sufficient funds being provided through the project to cover such costs or if you as the participant will have to cover the cost if community resources need to be accessed on your behalf. Another potential inconvenience is the time the participants will be asked to dedicate to the fulfillment of their commitment to participate in the research project. There are no known or anticipated physical risks to you by participating in this research.

If the mental, emotional, social, or psychological processes that lead to the moment of unencumbered hearing (i.e., really knowing and realizing life changing information) can be isolated and understood by readers of the final writing product that results from this study, then the potential is there to produce materials, e.g., curriculums and programs that would help professional youth workers in connecting with youth and promoting or fostering that moment of unencumbered hearing. Further, many of our youth struggle with drug or alcohol use, coping with the pressures of living in today's society, peer pressure, and countless other obstacles. Your participation in this project, through the information you provide, may be instrumental in establishing a duplicable process that leads to a moment of enlightenment and learning for those struggling in our society.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you can answer only those questions you feel comfortable in answering and you may withdraw your participation from this study at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be either sent back to you or it will be destroyed at your request. Regardless the tapes will be destroyed within two years of being accepted as data for this research project.

This research may have the potential to lead to a product or service that will enhance service to youth. One possible result could be a book or manual for Child and Youth Care professionals who work with hard to service youth.

In terms of protecting your confidentiality all research participants' data will be analyzed without specific referencing to the source of that information. During the writing phase of this project all names of research participants will be changed so no reference can be made to those who provided research information. At no time will the researcher use a participants' real name. Further, any identifying characteristics will also be altered. It is, however necessary for you as a research participant to understand that this consent form provides the researcher with your permission to use any disclosed information in writing about this study.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by numbering all tapes, changing the names of the research participant, keeping the information in a locked container with only the researcher having access to the information, having all identifying characteristics altered.

Data from this study will be disposed of by the erasing of all audio taped material. Any written material obtained as a result of the taped material will be destroyed via a paper shredder within a two-year period of accepting the data.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways.

Each participant will be given a copy of the final draft of the data analysis section of the dissertation. Complete copies of the dissertation will be made available to the participants.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher [and, if applicable, the supervisor] at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice President Research at the University of Victoria (250-721-7968).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

Participant Signature

Date

A COPY OF THIS CONSENT WILL BE LEFT WITH YOU, AND A COPY WILL BE

TAKEN BY THE RESEARCHER.

Can you please return a signed copy of the consent form to either:

Sibylle Artz, Director of the School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria,
Victoria, BC.

Or

Kevin Murray, 3312 Austrey Ave, Vancouver, BC, V5R 4N9

APPENDIX B – RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Please take your time and use as much information as possible. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Any information you can supply will be helpful in meeting the goals of the research project.

Thank you in advance for participating in this important study.

- 1. Given the nature and goals of the research project, as given in the consent form, you recently had something happen to you that allowed you to make a positive life change. Can you tell in as much detail as possible about the change and the things that led up to you making such a change?**
- 2. What were some of the feelings you experienced before you made this decision to change your life? Further, what was your thinking focused on just prior to your making this positive life change?**
- 3. Did you make the decision to change your life in a split second decision or was it something you thought about for a period of time? If it was a split second decision what if anything did you hear, see, smell, think, or feel that promoted you making the decision at that time?**
- 4. If you thought about making a life change for a longer period of time but found that you could not make that life change, what were the kinds of things that prevented you from making the desired change?**

**THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR PATIENCE AND DILIGENCE IN
ANSWERING THESE QUESTIONS.**