

EXPLORING PERSONAL MYTHOLOGY:  
A Meaning-Making Process for Counselling

by


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B.Sc.N., University of Toronto, 1970

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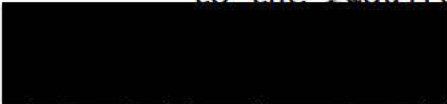
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EXPLORING PERSONAL MYTHOLOGY THROUGH GUIDED IMAGERY:

A Meaning-Making Process for Counselling

Supervisor: Vance Peavy

ABSTRACT

This study provided an interpretive-descriptive account of one woman's experience exploring personal mythology in counselling. This individual's experience was examined through the use of a naturalistic methodology which blended primarily qualitative and phenomenological approaches. The overriding task of this project was to construct a reflective-interpretive text which mirrored the essential significance and nature of this particular experience. There were three fundamental research questions addressed in this study: "What is it like for a client to explore personal mythology in counselling?" "What insights or awarenesses does the client gain through this experience?" "How does the client associate these insights with everyday life?"

The individual in this study--Pamela (a pseudonym) participated in four counselling sessions designed to explore personal mythology using a guided imagery process. These sessions took place approximately five days apart. Data was obtained from the guided imagery sessions and from interviews conducted after each

session, as well as from one follow-up interview which took place one week after completion of the final counselling session.

A thematic analysis seemed to indicate that the client's experience exploring her personal mythology was one in which she made important discoveries about significant life issues and relationships both with herself and others. The client seemed to gain a greater understanding about her inner and outer life and the relationship between her exploration in the sessions and her present and past life experiences. Overall, the client seemed to increase her awareness and insights, deepen her understanding, and create personal meaning regarding important life experiences and relationships.

This study illustrates a number of things: (a) an interpretive-reflective text which is an explication of the meaning structures of one woman's experience exploring personal mythology in counselling, (b) an application of mythmaking in counselling and therapy, (c) a potential meaning-making process for counselling, and (d) a methodological approach to research that shares many similarities to the process of counselling. Implications and indications for counselling regarding the particular process of exploring personal mythology designed for this study are discussed. Limitations of the present study and implications for future research are also addressed.

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated with love and appreciation to my daughter Emily whose creative nature continues to inspire me.

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People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. That's what it's all finally about, and that's what these clues (myths) help us to find within ourselves.

Joseph Campbell

## CHAPTER 1

### ESTABLISHING THE GROUND FOR THE QUESTION

#### My Experiential Context

The women move  
through the dark kitchen  
their heavy skirts  
bear them down  
like drowning men.

(Bly, 1988, p. 11)

Last year while reading these lines from Robert Bly's (1988) poem describing among other things the plight of women in a pilgrim village long ago, I was immediately transported back into a dream I had had a month or so before in which I was in a room very much like the dark kitchen of Bly's poem. The words immediately became an extension of the dream providing me with a missing piece I needed to gain a deeper understanding of the dream's message.

In my dream I was lifting women dressed like the pilgrim women, one at a time up over my head in an attempt to move them gently out of my way. They were like apparitions but strangely enough with substance. Although they were all dressed and looked exactly the same, I knew in the dream they were the actual generations of women in my family--my mother, grandmother, great grandmother each in turn.

### A Personal Myth Through the Window of a Dream

Reading the lines of Bly's poem crystallized the meaning of the dream for me. I began to realize that by lifting these figures up I was attempting to make a statement to them and to myself about my life at that moment. I was saying that I was not following in their footsteps, living their traditions, beliefs, and stories as they had, often *beared down* by them. I was carving out a different kind of life, and had made a conscious choice to discover what I could about my inner life--the beliefs, stories, and myths--by which I live. This dream seemed to affirm this choice in my life. In this process of discovery through dreamwork, I believed I had uncovered a personal myth.

### Mythmaking and My Self-Development Process

Although it is hard for me to recall the point at which I began to view my life mythically, as I look back over the years it would seem it began with the process of turning my focus "inward"--drawing Jungian mandalas, participating in personal "rituals" in an art therapy class, discovering imaginal or "inner" figures in dreams--(Watkins, 1976) as part of my personal quest to know more about myself. Some of this exploration took place within a counselling context; some was done on my own.

Over a number of years of working with these processes, I recall becoming aware of a gradual yet profound change in my attitude toward my life. I recognized it as a transformation in my consciousness from experiencing life's

inevitable transitions and crises with great unease, sometimes angst, to experiencing life as a creative process, an unfolding drama or a story filled with richness, challenge and deep meaning.

At some point during this time the word myth became part of my vocabulary for describing these experiences. I began to find through my explorations that the word myth was resonant with the experiences of my inner journeys. This seemed to happen in part through reading depth psychology literature and from hearing both teachers and colleagues speak about the use of myth in their work. It also came from the writings of people such as the well-known mythographer, Joseph Campbell. Campbell (1988) has said of myth that it has always been concerned with a transformation in consciousness. He has also explained how myth brings meaning into life: It gives "you a line to connect with that mystery which you are" (Campbell, 1988, p. 57). This, has been my experience with myth.

### Living Mythically: A Perspective for Personal Development

Living and perceiving my life mythically continues to be a creative process filled with meaning-making experiences. Such a perspective provides me with an ongoing sense of hope, destiny and contact with my creativity even in times of adversity. At some time during my personal exploration with these various processes I had gained a new perspective, a metaphor for understanding my personal development. I had been mythmaking--discovering my personal mythology.

### Myth and Meaning: My Work as a Counsellor

Once we have understood the importance of finding meaning, it ceases to be of primary importance whether we experience pleasure or pain as long as we grow toward finding or fulfilling the meaning of our existence.

(Weiskopf-Joelson cited in Valle & King, 1978, p. 280)

For some time I have been interested in understanding more about how I might be able to bring meaning to life experiences and concerns of my clients in my work as a counsellor. It has always been my belief and observation that when clients are able to find personal meaning through exploring their problems, their relationship to these concerns is transformed. In other words the client no longer *is* the problem, but *has* the problem. Carlsen (1988) has described this as a process of objectification where the client has "a new construction of reality of that problem" (p. 4). It has been my experience that when clients "create" personal meaning from their problems, they are often able to transcend them. They appear to be able to open up to themselves and to their problems in new ways. What seems to emerge is an ability to embrace the challenges they face in their lives as opposed to the tendency to avoid and become victimized by them.

My interest in personal meaning has led me to examine the relationship between myth and meaning. In that process I have discovered through reading, that writers on mythology associate myth with personal meaning (Ausband, 1983;

Campbell, 1988; Edinger, 1976; Larue, 1975; Pieracci, 1990). In the past few years my interest in this relationship has influenced my practice as a counsellor. Gradually, over time, I have begun to explore ways of bringing a mythic perspective to my work with clients.

**Exploring Personal Mythology: Wondering What it's Really  
Like for Clients**

Part of what I do in my work is attempt to help clients explore their personal mythologies through dreamwork, guided imagery, role play, active imagination and sometimes story. In doing this I have often found myself wondering just what it is like for a client to explore his or her own personal mythology. After taking time to reflect on both the literature and my own experiences with myth, my wondering eventually evolved into a number of specific questions: What is it really like for a client to live through the experience of exploring his or her own personal mythology? What insights do clients gain through the process? How do they associate their experiences with their everyday lives and concerns?

Although the counselling relationship often provides an opportunity for the counsellor to understand much about a client's experience, it does not allow the "seeing" or the understanding of the "whole" experience in all its depth and complexity. Many things happen so quickly during the counselling "hour," that it is difficult for the counsellor to keep track of all that occurs. Besides, much of what does occur within the client is often left unspoken. I

began to think that I might have the opportunity to see or gain an understanding of the depth and true nature of a client's experience of mythmaking by undertaking a disciplined inquiry designed to examine an individual's own perspective of that experience. It was also my hope that a research study would provide me with the opportunity to examine some of my questions.

### Searching for a Certain Kind of Understanding

What I believed I would be seeking by doing such an inquiry, was a kind of knowledge or understanding that would be somewhat like a "sightedness" which might help me to be more thoughtfully aware of, or attentive to someone exploring his or her own mythology. I envisioned this sightedness as something which might be a source of guidance in my work with clients--something that would allow me to be more thoughtfully aware of the uniqueness of the individual's experience and to respond to that uniqueness accordingly.

I have come to realize as perhaps we all have at times, the ease with which I can sometimes "forget" about the uniqueness of the client across from me and his or her own experience. It is the kind of forgetting that comes out of taking for granted that I *really* understand what clients are experiencing, or living through in their "worlds" or realities. I realize that what appears seemingly simple--apprehending someone's experience--is often shot full of complexity. Thus, any effort to understand the nature of that experience is not as simple as it at first may appear. I find myself continually searching ways to grasp--to

understand the nature of someones's experience in my work with clients. And thus, when I catch myself engaging in my forgetting, I also find myself looking for that "something" which will help put me back in touch with *experiencing* an individual's uniqueness.

---

**It is Rousseau who said that  
the heart often provides surer  
insight than reason.**

**(Van Manen, 1990, p. 139)**

---

Theoreticians and practitioners generally seem to agree that the counsellor-client relationship is important to the outcome of most or all therapeutic efforts (Gelso & Carter, 1985; Clarke, 1989). In other words, client change flows naturally from the relationship itself. A counsellor who possesses tact and sensitivity which comes from deeply understanding particular clients is able to bring these qualities to the counselling relationship. In all probability this sensitivity influences outcomes for clients.

Kegan (1982) has explained that conveying understanding to a client can be "crucial to the client surviving" (p. viii). That a client feels the therapist understands is thought to be a potent therapeutic ingredient (Clarke, 1989). In my work as a counsellor I realize how

important it is to convey understanding. It also seems equally important to not only convey my understanding but also to possess the kind of understanding that might enable me to do this. I have envisioned this understanding as a kind of "tactful thoughtfulness" or awareness. It is something that might arise more from the places of the heart than the head. My search for this kind of understanding was the primary impetus for my examination of the literature on myth and mythmaking in counselling. In this endeavour I was unable to find any research which could provide me with the kind of understanding I was looking for. It was for this reason, I decided to undertake the present study.

I had another purpose for examining the literature. As a counsellor relatively "new" to incorporating a mythic perspective in my work, I was interested in finding ways--examples of techniques and methods--which I could use that might be useful and applicable to my counselling practice. I wondered what applications of myth and mythmaking in counselling I would be able to locate through my search.

#### Explaining Personal Mythology: My Dilemma

There was hardly a soul who didn't ask me--colleagues, fellow students, friends as well as members of my research committee--to explain what personal mythology was, as I began this study. It was a question I frequently asked myself then, and in fact continue to ask. Trying to provide others, as well as myself with answers to this question was one of the ongoing challenges I encountered during this study.

For those readers unfamiliar with personal mythology, I thought that it would be important to discuss, if only in a brief way, what personal mythology is, and also, how myth relates to the field of counselling and psychology. Before doing this however, I wanted to offer a little more background about my attempts to respond to others' questions about mythmaking and a recent discovery I made about this endeavour. The discussion illustrates a dilemma I faced in providing answers for what seemed a rather straightforward question.

First, I found that many individuals who did ask me what personal mythology was, also inevitably attempted to answer their own questions when they saw me hesitate in my response, as I always did. They would often say things like, "Oh, I guess it has something to do with classical mythology--the Greek and Roman gods, right? Finding your own myth?"

My response to these further questions was inevitably, "Yes, but...." and then I would proceed to provide them (sometimes with a mutter) with some kind of definition, often as not, one from the literature. When I did this I always felt somewhat dissatisfied with my response. At the time I didn't really understand why.

#### Getting to the Bottom of my Dilemma

It was only at the beginning of one of the final writings of this study that I began to discover and understand the roots of this hesitancy and dissatisfaction, and thus, my dilemma. What I had been attempting to do in

my explanations was to express through words something that was essentially ineffable. I had been attempting to explain in a brief way an experience--one that I believed was deep, complex and personal. It had been for me.

I began to realize that my hesitation had come from knowing that somehow I wanted to convey to others something of my experience of exploring personal mythology, and had sensed the limitation of my words in doing this. I had been dissatisfied because I had not wanted to give people a concept, a definition or words. I had wanted to give them something of that experience. This something I wanted to leave them with was an "essence" of what it was like to "live through" the experience. It was only recently that I began to understand the root of my dilemma and how a brief conceptual explanation would not suffice to do this.

The reader can no doubt see that explaining personal mythology was not the simple task it might have seemed at first. My dilemma at the time I can only see clearly now. Would I provide an explanation from my *conceptual* or *experiential* framework? And indeed was it possible to really convey something of my experience? But my point here is that there are at least two ways of approaching an explanation or description of personal mythology. There is personal mythology as a *concept* and personal mythology as an *experience* that an individual can live through.

### What This Study Will Offer

In this study I plan to offer both kinds of explanations or descriptions of personal mythology. The

first will be conceptual. This will include first of all, a brief discussion on the "renaissance" of myth within today's "popular" culture, secondly, an examination of the historical significance of myth in human development particularly in psychotherapy, and thirdly, an overview of personal mythology from a conceptual or theoretical perspective in counselling and psychotherapy. These three sections I have made intentionally brief. My purpose in doing this is to provide a background and context for mythmaking in our lives, as well as in counselling, and to allow the second kind of description to stand as the main body of the study.

The reader should note at this time that mythmaking, conscious mythmaking, and exploring personal mythology are used interchangeably in this study as they are by other writers on myth in the literature (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988; Larsen, 1990).

#### Another Kind of Description: One Woman's Experience

The second kind of description I will offer will be of an individual's *experience* of exploring personal mythology. I will present one woman's experience of living through this process. It is an interpretive description of what this experience was like for Pamela, the subject in this study. It is also the focus of the study. It is my hope that this study may offer the reader an opportunity to gain an understanding about this essence I have previously referred to.

This study will also offer an illustration--an example of one application of myth and mythmaking in the context of counselling--one which was developed specifically for this study. At this point I'll move on to what I uncovered in my search of the literature on myth and mythmaking.

### **My Search Through the Literature on Myth: An Overview**

**Even when, as in modern civilization, myths multiply and separate and tend to become abstract so that the images themselves recede and fade, even then, they are still the essential substructure of all human activity.**

**(Murray, 1969, p. 357)**

### **Myth and Mythmaking in Today's Culture**

Myths are the stories people have told themselves to explain the world from the beginning of time. Although many people still associate myth and mythmaking with times of the past--the times of the great Greek and Roman empires and the stories of the "ancient gods"--myth is still alive, well, and struggling to "resurface" in North America.

There has been an overwhelming resurgence, perhaps a renaissance of myth and personal mythmaking within today's culture in North America, particularly in the past decade. Evidence of this has been seen throughout our culture in many areas such as literature, personal growth, counselling and self-help endeavours, as well as film, drama, and art, to name only a few. Before examining personal mythmaking in

counselling and psychotherapy, I will discuss briefly this rebirth of myth in today's culture by looking at two areas: literature and personal growth endeavours.

The first area where the renaissance is evident is literature. Numerous popular books and articles have been written on myth and mythmaking in the past decade. Perhaps the most prolific writer of books on myth was the late Joseph Campbell (1988) who devoted his life to searching for a commonality of themes among different cultures through examining the myths of different societies around the world. Campbell suggested from his experience with myth for over seven decades, that the task of creating new myths--one's private mythology--was the problem which faced every modern person who wished to find personal meaning in his or her own life (Campbell, 1988; Keen, 1971).

### Popular and Self-Help Books

Larsen (1990) and Feinstein & Krippner (1988) are among the many writers who have contributed recently to the variety of popular and "self-help" books available on myth. Both writers have spoken about conscious mythmaking and exploring personal mythology, as ways of bringing meaning, insight and a sense of control into the lives of people encountering the predictable conflicts and crises of life. They have explained that working mythically can help individuals to bring conflicts to consciousness. In doing this, they have indicated, people can avoid having to live out their conflicts in unconscious ways. "By bringing the process [meaning the conflict] to your awareness, you have a greater chance of working out the conflict as a drama in

your inner life rather than having to play it out on the rack of life" (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988, p. 37).

Feinstein & Krippner (1988, 1989) have chosen the word myth because unlike the terms script, attitude, or belief, myth "is able to encompass the archetypal dimension of the unconscious mind" (Feinstein and Krippner, 1988, p. 9). They believe as do many others "that myth is the language that most closely approximates the natural workings of the psyche" (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988, p. 8). In my own experience trying to come to grips with just what myth is, I have found that the word *itself* carries a certain power. Saying the word myth connects me to that sense of mystery within myself that Campbell has spoken about, something that terms like belief and script simply cannot do.

### Personal Growth Endeavours

The second kind of evidence of the presence of myth in our culture is the multitude of personal growth endeavours. Some examples are the self-help and personal growth groups which abound today. Robert Bly, Michael Meade and Sam Keen have been instrumental in both Canada and the United States in breathing life into the men's mythopoetic movement of the eighties through poetry, myth and ritual. These men's groups have turned to myth to explore their lives using among many things, poetry and traditional native Indian rituals such as "sweats," drumming, chanting, and excursions into the "wild." Personal growth groups of all kinds are flourishing using art, journal, drama, dreams, mandalas, and guided imagery in their mythmaking. Individuals are

embarking on their own self-exploration journeys using these same tools to tap the mythic consciousness.

**Myth in Human Development: Psychology and  
Psychotherapy**

In choosing the Oedipus myth, Freud told us less which myth was the psyche's essence than that the essence of the psyche is myth, that our work is mythic and ritual, that psychology is ultimately mythology, the study of the stories of the soul.

(Hillman, 1972, p. 16)

Mythology was introduced as a fundamental psychological idea early in the 20th century primarily through the work of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. It was the studies of both Freud and Jung on psychopathology, multiple personalities, hysterical associations, and hallucinations which led them to examine the "psyche's propensity to personify" (Hillman, 1975, p. 17)--to give life or personality to an object or idea. In this way, both men used personification to examine mythology as it related to human development.

When we personify, we are mythmaking. Hillman (1975) described the relationship between personification and myth: "To enter myth we must personify; to personify carries us into myth" (p. 16). According to Hillman, personification occurs through the individual's imagination. Through the imagination, using such things as guided imagery, active imagination, or simply daydreaming, the

individual can come into contact with imaginal persons within. This mode of being or living Hillman referred to as mythical consciousness.

### Freud, Mythical Thinking and the Oedipus Complex

At the beginning of this century Sigmund Freud wrestled within himself with two modes of thinking in his research in psychiatry: conceptual and mythical (Hillman, 1975). Freud was attempting to construct a scientific, conceptual psychology in his work, however he often ended up using mythical metaphors to present his psychological insights. He believed that "persons" in dreams were actually disguises for instinctual processes and tried to reduce the dream's natural personifying tendency to conceptual terms such as libido, wish-fulfillment, or sleep protection.

Many of Freud's conceptual terms however became mythical ones, his most famous being the Oedipus complex. Freud used the metaphor, Oedipus complex to describe the constellation of feelings, ideas and impulses, largely unconscious, which centre around a child's relationship with its parents. He had coined the term Oedipus complex, borrowing from the Greek Oedipal myth of ancient times, in an attempt to provide a concept which would elaborate and explain his ideas about this relationship (Bettelheim, 1982). Freud's science had turned "willy-nilly, into a mythology" (Hillman, 1975, p. 18). It was Freud himself who said, "The theory of instincts is, as it were, our mythology. The instincts are mythical beings, superb in their indefiniteness" (cited in Hillman, 1975, p. 18).

### Jung, Personification and Myth

Although Carl Jung is known for introducing the terms psychological complex and archetype into psychology, his main contribution is said to have been his personified or mythological formulation of terms such as Shadow, Old Wise Man, Great Mother, Anima, and Animus (Hillman, 1975). He wrote about these archetypes as if they were mythical persons or entities. Jung had discovered that complexes and archetypes were invested with feeling, intention, autonomy and believed they were independent "entities" or personalities that behaved as such (Hillman, 1975). Jung commented: "The fact that the unconscious spontaneously personifies...is the reason why I have taken over these personifications in my terminology and formulated them as names" (cited in Hillman, 1975, p. 20).

In his work Jung spent much time studying myths, for he considered them to be fundamental expressions of human nature (Fordham, 1953). He found parallels of human experience in dreams, works of art, and cultural myths which led to his lifelong investigation of the psychological relevance of mythology (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988). Jung believed that myths, which arose out of the collective unconscious were more than an individual's attempt to explain his world, but that they were also fundamental expressions of *how* people experience these things: "The rising of the sun then becomes the birth of the God-hero from the sea" (Fordham, 1953, p. 26).

Jung (1963) discussed his own life story as a personal myth in his autobiography. He believed his life was the story of his self-realization of his unconscious life and

that the personality was always seeking to evolve out of its unconscious conditions to experience its wholeness:

What we are to our inward vision, and what man appears to be, *sub specie aeternitatis* can only be expressed by way of myth. Myth is more personal and expresses life more precisely than does science...Thus it is, that I have now undertaken in my eighty-third year, to tell my personal myth. (p. 3)

### The Mythic Perspective: Rethinking Psychology

James Hillman (1972) proposed rethinking psychology and psychopathology by examining human behavior with a "mythical eye." He recommended that helping professionals listen to what clients say as "stories" and as "mythic tales." He suggested that practitioners return to studying classical mythology, to Greek and Roman mythology, "the classic roots of our culture" (p. 194) to provide insight "that [would] be essential for grasping the suffering of the human soul" (p. 194). Hillman (1975) has explained his perceptions on myth:

Mythical metaphors are not etiologies, causal explanations, or name tags. They are perspectives towards events which shift the experience of events; but they are not themselves events. They are a likeness to happenings, making them intelligible, but they do not themselves happen. They give an account of the archetypal story in the case history, the myth in a mess. (p. 101)

Hillman (1975) described the challenges and concerns that people encounter in their lives less as "forces" and "pressures" than as the "enactment of mythic scenarios" (p. 22). He has called depth psychology "today's form of

traditional mythology, the great carrier of the oral tradition, the telling of tall tales" (p. 20).

### An Inner Cast of Characters

Larsen (1990a) has suggested that individuals possess an "inner cast of characters" (p. 176) or subpersonalities as evidenced through some dream images. He has explained that the conflicts and struggles of these subpersonalities often "mirror" not only the individual's personal mythology but that of the culture too. "In effect, the actual dynamics within our psyche often unfold as mythic drama" (p. 180). Larsen has recommended that labels such as manic-depressive or schizoid personality, from psychopathology, should be used sparingly, since these labels can present problems which in addition to carrying their own myths and metaphors "may influence an individual's personal myth to the exclusion of other possibilities" (p. 186). In addition Larsen suggests that clinicians remember:

**That our inner cast of characters represent archetypes--gods, goddesses, heroes, heroines, scoundrels, animals--who seem to be the best possible representations for powers and patterns for which we have no other symbol, we find ourselves not only with a renewed sense of meaning but belonging to a time-less drama. (p. 187)**

### Myth: Its Relevance Today

Joseph Campbell (1988) has explained that myth still has relevance for people today. He said that the functions which myths have traditionally served in ancient cultures

are still pertinent for individuals today: People still need to gain an understanding of natural phenomenon, find their place in the social order, proceed through life's stages in a consistent and orderly manner, and finally, address spiritual longings. Basically, he believed that myth helped people make sense of their world in all its complexities. Campbell (1988) summarized what he believed was the value of myth in our lives. "It puts us back in touch with the essential archetypology of our spiritual life...going through a ritual day after day keeps you on the line" (p. 97).

In ancient times individuals were wedded to the mythology of their culture. The survival of the tribe often depended on strict adherence to the prescribed mythic structures--rituals, beliefs, customs, etc.--by all members of the group. Cultural myths moved societies along, or held them back by setting the parameters on what was allowable and what was possible (Krippner, 1987).

#### Myths: How They Became Personal

In modern cultures there appears to be no single unifying mythology. We no longer sit around campfires to listen to myths passed on by a single story-teller. There are often no stories, customs, or rituals which hold individuals together in North American culture. According to Murray Bilmes, humanity suffers from "mythic deprivation" (cited in Valle & King, 1978, p. 291).

Joseph Campbell suggested that myth, no matter what the form--story, ritual, custom etc.--was no longer part of

a young person's experience growing up. Campbell believed that unlike cultures of the past, myth in these various forms was no longer available today as a source of guidance to help people adequately deal with and confront life's predictable challenges. "There are no longer any great myths to help young men and women relate to the world or to understand that world beyond what is seen" (Campbell, 1988, p. 8).

In the past, cultural myths guided individuals through predictable life "transitions" and crises. At the present time cultural rites have lost their efficacy and in many cases are no longer applicable to an individual's life circumstances (Campbell, 1988; Feinstein & Krippner, 1988). The modern world has become too complex for a single world-view to be acceptable to all individuals. People have become increasingly self-reflective, and thus more aware of their individual identities (Krippner, 1987).

Feinstein, Granger & Krippner (1988) have indicated that "rites of passage"--the ways in which individuals can make transitions in their lives--such as from childhood to puberty, need to be individually tailored if they are to be relevant to an individual's particular life circumstances. Often as not however, such rites of passage are no longer formally recognized or even part of an individual's life experience.

### A Personal Definition of Reality

Individuals in the present day, bombarded by a multitude of images, belief systems, and traditions, are inevitably left to make a personal choice within this

deluge. The responsibility for creating a personal definition of reality has come to rest increasingly in the hands of each individual. Feinstein (1979) has explained that individuals in the modern world wishing to carve out a meaningful existence must construct their own personal belief systems or mythologies themselves.

### **Personal Mythology: A Concept in Counselling and Psychotherapy**

Although the concept of myth has been part of depth psychology practice and literature for many years, in the field of counselling, personal mythology is a relatively new term. The concept personal mythology originally appeared in the scientific literature as a description of a defense mechanism encountered in psychotherapy (Kris, 1946).

It is only within the past decade that the term has become increasingly familiar in individual, couple and family counselling and therapy (Anderson & Bagarozzi, 1982, 1989; Atkinson, 1990; DeCosta, L., Buse, W., & Amdursky, A., 1986; Feinstein, 1985, 1990; Feinstein, Granger & Krippner, 1988; Feinstein & Krippner, 1988, 1989; Larsen, 1990a, 1990b; Pieracci, 1990; Spotts & Shontz, 1985). The term, *personal mythology* is explained in many different ways in the literature. What most explanations or definitions seem to have in common is a joint heritage with ancient mythological thought on the one hand, and current psychological theory and clinical practice on the other (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988).

### Personal Mythology: Some Definitions

In my search of the literature, I found a variety of explanations and definitions of both personal mythology and personal myth. They ran the gamut from the strictly conceptual to the poetic. A few brief examples follow.

First, Bagarozzi & Anderson (1982) whose work is primarily with couples and families, have explained personal mythologies using fairly conceptual language. They have described them as "complexes of symbolic and affectively laden themes consisting of three basic components: the self, the self-in-relation to significant others, and internalized cognitive ideals of significant others" (p. 168). They have explained that they believe that myths operate at both the conscious and unconscious levels of awareness.

Feinstein, Granger & Krippner (1988) who have written extensively on the subject of mythmaking, have offered explanations of both personal myth and personal mythology:

**A personal myth is a constellation of ideas, images and emotions. At its core is a central theme that serves as an inner model. Such a composite can be called a 'personal myth' when that theme addresses one of the domains within which mythology traditionally functions...A personal mythology may be thought of as a system of complementary and contradictory personal myths that organizes one's sense of reality and guides behavior. (p. 27)**

Lastly, Atkinson (1990) has described personal mythology using slightly more poetic terms. He has defined it as "the personally sacred story of one's beliefs and experiences that order, shape, and direct one's life which also link us to the collective story we all share" (p. 207). Atkinson refers to personal mythmaking as a process, one in which there is self-discovery adding "perspective, depth, and connectedness to one's sense of being" (p. 206).

### Personal Mythology: A Summary of the Literature

In my search of the literature on personal mythmaking I found information that seemed to fall primarily into three categories. The first were descriptions of the ways which counsellors work with clients to access their personal mythologies using guided imagery, dreams and free association, (Krippner, 1986); dreams, imagery, art, role rehearsal, journal, role play (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988); "personal mythmaking worksheets" (Atkinson, 1990). A few writers described their work using a mythic perspective with different groups of people or populations: professional actors (DeCosta, Buse & Amdursky, 1986), drug users, (Spotts & Shontz, 1985) and couples and families (Anderson & Bagarozzi, 1983, 1989; Feinstein & Krippner, 1988). Some of this information included brief case histories from the perspective of counsellors.

The second kind of information was anecdotal material. This information consisted of some detailed accounts of individuals describing their self-exploration processes in mythmaking. However these accounts were not within a counselling context (Krippner, 1986; Feinstein & Krippner,

1988). I did locate some personal accounts of individuals mythmaking in counselling. These accounts however, were brief descriptions--parts of case histories--and not research studies (Feinstein & Krippner, 1989; Feinstein, 1989). Finally, the third consisted of research studies pertaining to myth of which I found two: Drohan (1987) and Pieracci (1990).

In addition, as mentioned earlier, I was searching for ways to bring a mythic perspective to my counselling work--some straightforward information on techniques and methods--that did not require an extensive background and experience with depth psychology. I found considerable information in the self-help literature on techniques for individual and groups. The counselling literature however contained little information, in some cases only references to techniques developed for mythmaking such as Atkinson's (1990) "personal mythmaking worksheets."

### The Impetus for This Study

The purpose of my search of the literature had been primarily to find a particular kind of descriptive study of a client mythmaking in counselling. I was unable to uncover any studies of this nature. Of two studies I located pertaining to myth, neither contained the kind of descriptions I was seeking. I was also trying to locate techniques or applications of mythmaking in counselling. I found little information on methods for mythmaking which counsellors could apply in their work. Thus, what seemed to be missing from the literature was (a) any research describing from the client's perspective his or her

experience of exploring personal mythology and (b) sufficient examples of applications for mythmaking in counselling. The lack of information in both of these areas provided the impetus for this study.

### Organization of the Thesis

Chapter I has established the ground for the research question by discussing (a) my experiential context personally and professionally, and (b) my search through the literature on myth and mythmaking in counselling. Chapter II introduces the method or the way I attempted to understand one woman's experience of exploring her personal mythology. It outlines details of some of the steps in this method and the philosophy behind these steps.

Chapter III introduces the process which I undertook to set up this study. It also outlines step-by-step the methods and procedures I used, as well as the rationale for these. Chapter IV begins the thematic description of the participant's experience of exploring her personal mythology under the heading, About One Woman's Journey. This chapter starts with a description on how to "see" the essential themes in her experience and a descriptive account of the participant, Pamela. This portion of the description includes some of the "holistic" themes of her experience. Chapters V through X constitute the remainder of this thematic description and include Journeys One to Four, the Follow-up Interview, and More About Pamela's Experience.

With each aspect or component of the description there were a number of questions. Each question addresses the

pieces or components that are thematic of the experience and thus when put together contribute to understanding the process as a whole. Although there were numerous questions for each Journey, I have selected only a few key ones to illustrate the kinds of questions used. I chose to break down the description of Pamela's experience as follows:

Chapter V, Journey One: Remembering the Myths of Your Ancestors: How is exploring personal mythology like taking a journey? What is it like to start the journey mythmaking? What did time/space/body and relationships feel like for Pamela? What changes in Pamela seemed to emerge through her exploration?

Chapter VI, Journey Two: Accessing a Prevailing Myth-- Finding the Roots of Mythic Conflict in Your Past: What was the conflict? What were the roots of the conflict? How did it feel for Pamela to explore the conflict in terms of time/body/space and relationship? What did Pamela discover about her prevailing myth?

Chapter VII, Journey Three: Accessing a Countermyth-- Finding the Roots of Mythic Renewal in Your Past: What are these roots of renewal that Pamela uncovered? What did Pamela uncover about herself in that process? What meaning did she bring to her discoveries?

Chapter VIII, Journey Four--Bringing Your Conflicting Myths into Dialogue: What was it like for Pamela to bring these myths into dialogue? What did she discover about herself, her life? How does she envision that her experiences and discoveries will influence her life now and in the future?

Chapter IX The Follow-up Interview: This is a continuation of the interpretive description conducted one week after the final session. Chapter X, More About Pamela's Experience is the concluding portion of the description. Both of these chapters include more of the holistic themes of Pamela's experience.

Chapter XI, Evolving Tactfulness and Thought: How does reflective-interpretive experience lead to thoughtfulness and tact? This chapter also includes a brief discussion about theorizing, implications and indications of this study for counselling. Implications for future research are also addressed.

## CHAPTER II

### A WAY TO UNDERSTAND ONE WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE

We explain nature,  
but human life we  
must understand.

(Dilthey cited in Van Manen, 1990, p. 4)

#### Naturalistic Inquiry: A Way to Gain an Understanding of Human Experience

Naturalistic inquiry as an approach in research aims at gaining an understanding of human experience. Since the purpose of my study was to gain an understanding of an individual's experience mythmaking, a naturalistic methodology seemed to be an appropriate one to use. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985) understanding is not a case of finding causal linkages between human events but of creating a purposive structure which emerges from the interaction between the researcher and human experience. They explain: "Understanding results from an appreciation of the myriad mutual shapings that are synchronously ongoing and abstracting from that complexity, a sub-system that serves the investigator's needs" (p. 152).

### Positivistic and Naturalistic Paradigms

The assumptions which underlie naturalistic inquiry are different from those put forth by positivistic or the more traditional forms of inquiry. Lincoln & Guba (1985) describe the central tenets of the scientific positivistic paradigms:

1. There is a single tangible reality "out there" fragmented into independent variables and processes, any of which can be studied independently of the others; inquiry can converge onto that reality until, finally it can be predicted and controlled.

2. The inquirer and the object of inquiry are independent; the knower and the known constitute a discrete duality.

3. The aim of inquiry is to develop a nomothetic body of knowledge in the form of generalizations that are truth statements free from both time and context.

4. Each action can be explained as the result of a real cause that precedes the effect temporarily.

5. Inquiry is value-free and can be guaranteed to be so by virtue of the objective methodology employed. (pp. 37-38)

Colaizzi (1978) explains that traditional, positivistically oriented modes of inquiry based on quantification leave out the human being and thus human experience. He suggests that such methods which demand

measurable, observable, and duplicable specification seem to deny human experience as being worthy of study.

In contrast, modes of inquiry which come under the name of naturalistic, phenomenological, hermeneutic, qualitative, and human science--sometimes used interchangeably in the literature--value the study of human experience (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the characteristics of naturalistic inquiry:

1. There are multiple constructed realities that can be studied only holistically; inquiry into these multiple realities will inevitably diverge so that predictions and control are unlikely outcomes although some level of understanding can be achieved.

2. The inquirer and the "object" of inquiry interact to influence one another; knower and known are inseparable.

3. The aim of inquiry is to develop an idiographic body of knowledge in the form of "working hypotheses" that describe the individual case.

4. All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects.

5. Inquiry is value-bound. Inquiries are influenced by inquirer values as expressed in the choice of problem, evaluation, or policy option and in the framing, bounding and focussing of same. Inquiry is influenced by the choice of the paradigm that guides the investigation into the problem. (pp. 37-38)

### A Way of Analyzing Lived Experience

As previously mentioned, I was concerned in this study with gaining an understanding of a particular experience that people live through within the context of counselling. In order to approach my investigation, I drew primarily from methods and traditions of naturalistic inquiry. As well I relied on works of qualitative and phenomenological writers since these modes of inquiry are compatible with the naturalistic approach to research. All of these approaches to research concur primarily in two important ways. First, they share similar philosophical foundations and characteristics. And secondly, the ultimate purpose of these methods of research is to gain an understanding of human experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I relied primarily on the work of four writers as a way of approaching the analysis of the data generated in this study. First, I used Wertz' (1983) guidelines to reflect on the data itself. Wertz labels this reflection, "psychological reflection" (p. 198). He suggests five basic attitudes that researchers can adopt toward the description --the text--and eleven "operations" out of which psychological insights can emerge. Secondly, I used Van Manen's (1990) overall philosophical and methodological approach to the text itself.

Thirdly, I used Giorgi's (1987) writings to provide insights into approaching descriptions of imaginative experience, since some of the data in this study was from the imagination (from guided imagery exercises). And finally, I used Robert Romanyshyn's (1982) approach to the "recovery of psychological life" (p. xvi) to develop a

structure around which to "build" the description. The basic structure of my work became metaphorical. Romanyshyn, who is a phenomenologist proposes that "psychological experience is a living metaphor" (p. 172) in his book, Psychological Life: From Science to Metaphor. As such, Romanyshyn outlines the implications that regarding psychological life as metaphorical has for both "the craft of psychological studies" (p. 174) and the "attitude" (p. 174) of psychologists.

#### **A Starting Point in my Research: Identifying My Interest as a Lived Experience**

The starting point for me in this research had been a desire to examine an experience that I believed had profoundly affected both my personal and professional life. My interest in my personal experience with mythmaking had led me to examine myth in my work as a counsellor and to begin to wonder more about what that experience was like for clients. I recognized that exploring personal mythology was in fact an experience that people can, and *do* live through not only in the context of counselling but also in their personal growth endeavours on their own.

Max Van Manen's (1990) description of the starting point for someone beginning phenomenological research confirmed that I would be "launching" my study from an appropriate place. "This starting point of phenomenological research is largely a matter of identifying what it is that deeply interests you or me, and of identifying this interest as a true phenomenon, i.e.: as some experience that human beings live through" (p. 40).

### **Qualifying the Lived Experience in This Study**

Some writers of phenomenological inquiry describe lived experience as an experience that is "lived through" free of any pre-imposed conceptualization (A. Oberg, [personal communication] Nov. 18, 1991). Oberg has explained that a lived experience or a phenomenon is considered by some phenomenologists to be one which is universally experienced such as grieving, parenting or childbirth, and therefore free of any prior conceptualization.

In this study the context within which the experience occurred has a conceptual overlay or framework "imposed" on it. I, as the guide or counsellor take an individual through a series of guided imagery "Journeys" to explore personal mythology (see Chapter III). This conceptual "overlay" has implications for this study primarily in two ways. First, I am qualifying the way in which lived experience is used in this study. When I talk about lived experience I am referring to the experience that someone *lives through* within the context of exploring personal mythology. Thus, I do not necessarily refer to the lived experience as a phenomenon per se. Second, since the lived experience has this conceptual overlay, the findings need to be understood with this in mind.

#### **Wertz: The Activities and Attitudes of Psychological Reflection**

The first writer whose "work" I used in this study is Wertz. Wertz' (1983) four attitudes and eleven activities

were used for "psychological reflection" on the data (pp. 204-211). These attitudes and activities cannot really be separated since they overlap and deeply imply one another. However, they can be differentiated. Examples of these attitudes that Wertz has outlined are (a) empathic "immersement" in the world of description, (b) slowing down and dwelling, and (c) magnification and amplification of the situation. A few examples of the activities are (a) utilization of an existential baseline, (b) reflection on judgment, and (c) penetration of implicit horizons.

Wertz' (1983) guidelines helped me for example, to "slow down and dwell" on the experience and to look beyond what was immediately evident in the description itself. In one instance the slowing down and dwelling enabled me to see that in the process of mythmaking, Pamela "left" or "departed" from one perspective of reality to enter into another in her inner realm. Thus, *Departure* became an important or essential theme of her experience.

### **Van Manen: The Possibility of Insights**

The second writer whose work I relied on was Max Van Manen (1990). In conducting my research investigation I also followed the approach to human science research and writing that he has advocated. As a method, its aim is not to produce "results," theory, to prove anything, or to control any aspect of the world. It offers instead, the possibility of "insights" that can bring us into more direct contact with the world as it is experienced.

Phenomenology is the study of essences. Essences are not mystical "things" but according to Van Manen (1990), can be understood as linguistic constructions, descriptions of a phenomenon. These linguistic constructions are like threads which when woven together as a description, form or reveal the whole structure or "fabric" of a given lived experience. "The essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10).

Doing phenomenological research means making a commitment to practice an attentive and unwavering thoughtfulness to some aspect of the lived experience. "This commitment of never wavering from thinking a single thought more deeply is the practice of thoughtfulness, of fullness of thought" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 31). When we practice a deep thoughtfulness and reflection on a lived experience we are able to grasp--to understand what renders this or that particular experience its special significance. In turning to lived experience we are in a sense re-learning how to look at the world by "re-awakening" to the basic experiences of life (Van Manen, 1990).

#### **The Description: It's Only One Interpretation**

Van Manen (1990) has said that a phenomenological description is really only one interpretation of any given lived experience. No single interpretation can ever exhaust completely what may be possible with another complementary deeper or richer description. Van Manen (1990) claims that every phenomenological description is really only one

example that points to the "thing" that we are trying to describe.

I must recall the experience in such a way that the essential aspects, the meaning structures of this experience as lived through are brought back, as it were, and in such a way that we recognize this description as a possible experience, which means as a possible interpretation of that experience. This then is the task of the phenomenological research and writing: to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience. (p. 41)

Phenomenological research differs from traditional forms of research in many ways. Not only is it different in the kinds of questions that are asked, but also in the nature of the "results." It can be said that in phenomenological research there are no results, no conclusions, no "punchlines" (Van Manen, 1990). As it is inappropriate to expect a summary or conclusion in poetry or literature, the same applies to phenomenological research where the study as a whole is itself the result.

The way in which the results are intended to be used in phenomenological research is also different. "We note that traditional behavioral research leads to instrumental knowledge principles: useful techniques, managerial policies, and rules-for-acting. In contrast phenomenological research give us tactful thoughtfulness: situational perceptiveness, discernment and depthful understanding" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 156). Colaizzi (cited in Von Eckartsberg, 1986) has commented on the "job" of the researcher in phenomenological inquiry and has suggested how the results of such inquiry can be used:

All that an investigator can hope to accomplish is to articulate how a phenomena fundamentally is revealed to him from his finite perspective and submit this articulation to other concerned investigators who then reject it, modify it, complement or temporarily accept it, and so on. Thus, the endeavors of an individual investigator stimulates a dialogue between the results, a community of scholars and reality. (p. 53)

### It's Often Called the Theory of the Unique

Phenomenological research is often referred to as the theory of the "unique." By helping us to understand that life is always more complex than it seems, phenomenological research enables us to see--to have the sightedness for responding to each situation and each individual as unique. Thus, we become thoughtful practitioners and deliberative decision makers rather than rational decision makers (Van Manen, 1990). "Hermeneutic phenomenological reflection deepens thought and therefore radicalizes thinking and the acting that flows from it" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 154).

Phenomenological research is a "poetizing" activity. Poetizing is thinking or reflecting on original experience. Phenomenological research thus becomes a kind of "speaking" in a more primal sense through the description. The language used in the description is intentionally evocative and incantative: meant to provoke a dialogic response from the reader. But poetizing is not merely a type of poetry. In poetry the intention often is to leave the themes and meaning structures *implicit*. In phenomenological description however, the intention is to develop a narrative that *explicates* the themes while remaining true to the

essence of a certain kind of experience. "A description is a powerful one if it reawakens our basic experience of the phenomenon it describes, and in such a manner that we experience the more foundational grounds of the experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 122).

### The Creative Attempt to Produce a Reflective Text

The aim of phenomenology is to capture and transform the essence of a certain phenomenon or lived experience into a linguistic expression that is analytical, precise and unique while also being evocative and sensitive (Van Manen, 1990). This capturing should take place in such a way that "the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own experience" (p. 36). The purpose then is to make a creative attempt to write--to produce a text which reflects the lived experience like a mirror reflects what is in front of it. Writing then is not only central to the research process, it *is* the process.

### Writing: The Critical Process

Phenomenological research, sometimes referred to as human science research, is fundamentally a process of writing, re-writing, and re-writing. Writing--the production of a text--is in part a linguistic exercise. It is one in which we "fix" our thoughts on paper. "The object of human science research is essentially a linguistic project: to make some aspect of our lived world, of our

lived experience, reflectively understandable and intelligible" (Van Manen, 1989, 130). Putting our thoughts or reflections on paper allows us a certain kind of distance both from the lived experience we are focussing on, and our reflections about that experience. The text in a sense becomes the "mediator" between our thinking and our experience with a certain lived experience.

Through the process of writing we are able to discover what we know. It also shows us the limits of our "vision." "Writing exercises and makes empirically demonstrable our ability to 'see.' Writing shows that we can now see something and at the same time it shows the limits or boundaries of our sightedness" (Van Manen, 1989, p. 134).

At the same time writing paradoxically serves an opposite function. It reunites us with what we know. It helps us to get closer to what it is we are trying to make understandable. Reflecting on what we have written helps us to see how close and how far we may be from bringing what is "there" in lived experience to the "surface."

Language is central to phenomenological inquiry and writing. For this reason great care is taken in selecting the words and language that reflect what one is trying to explicate (Van Manen, 1990). In this endeavour I have tried to be mindful in my use of language. For example, I have often found myself returning to the etymological roots of some words by consulting a dictionary. This has often enabled me to get back in touch with the original meanings from which certain words have "sprung." Thus, in some

instances I have provided dictionary meanings of words and "blended" these in as part of the text.

### Constructing an Evocative and Animated Description

To attempt to do phenomenological research is to attempt the impossible, since there is always an element of the ineffable in any experience of life (Van Manen, 1990). It is however possible to reach a certain comprehension of an experience that was previously not within one's experience. Since the aim of phenomenology is to construct an animated and evocative description of human actions, behaviors, intentions, and experiences as we meet them in the life world, the human science researcher often turns to works of others to take these elements into consideration. "To this purpose the human scientist likes to make use of the works of poets, authors, artists, cinematographers-- because it is in this material that the human being can be found as a situated person, and it is in this work that the variety and possibility of human experience may be found in condensed and transcended forms" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 19).

With this in mind I have included literary works of others where appropriate, along with my own descriptions in this study. My purpose in doing this is to extend the meanings of the lived experience by adding strength and richness to the text and thereby address those elements of "living" that are ineffable. In doing this I am attempting to take into consideration that part of our lived experience that lies somewhere in the realm of the transcendent.

### Thematic Analysis

Themes are the tools that we use for "getting at" the meaning of an experience. "Metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 90). Although themes can never fully "unlock" the meanings within a lived experience, they can serve as reference points or attempts to uncover what is there. In a sense they can give "shape" to something which appears to have no form. "Themes are the stars that make up the universes of meaning we live through. By the light of these themes we can navigate and explore such universes" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 90). Themes then, as reference points, help us to go "into" the experience, to "look around," and to examine what is there from different "angles." Themes serve as structural entities around which the phenomenological description can be facilitated.

Locating and uncovering themes is not the simple task it may appear. A disciplined and steadfast commitment to "tilling the soil" of the lived experience is needed to uncover what lies within each layer of the phenomenon. Since there are always layers of meaning within layers of meaning in any lived experience, the researcher needs to resist the temptation to "name" a theme too early in the analysis. Thus, "finding" themes takes patience and an ability to tolerate ambiguity since there is always an inclination to "close down" and name themes before one has fully examined what is really there.

Any lived experience description is an appropriate source for uncovering thematic aspects of the phenomenon it

describes (Van Manen, 1990). The thematic analysis in this study was accomplished by blending the methods and thoughts of primarily the four writers which I have already mentioned: Wertz, Giorgi, Van Manen and Romanynshyn. Methods and techniques suggested by these writers were used for both identifying and reflecting on themes of the lived experience.

### Van Manen and Thematic Analysis

I used all three approaches that Van Manen (1990) has suggested for isolating thematic elements: (1) the holistic or sententious approach, (2) the selective or highlighting approach, and (3) the detailed or line-by-line approach (pp. 87-96). In summary, this approach involves attending to the "parts" and "whole" of the experience by asking the lived experience the following questions respectively: What does this sentence reveal about the phenomenon? What phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole?

Because any lived experience has so many "layers" of meanings and is so fundamentally complex, I felt I needed some kind of structure to use for guiding my reflection and eliciting themes. I used Van Manen's (1990) four "existentials" or elements (p. 101) of spatiality, corporeality, temporality and relationality as guides in this process (Van Manen, 1990, pp. 101-106).

### The Four Existentials

**Spatiality** (lived space) is concerned with the way that the space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel, think and act. **Corporeality** (lived body) refers to our bodily presence in the world and the ways in which an experience influences, or is influenced by our physical being. **Temporality** (lived time) is our subjective experience of time as influenced by the situation we find ourselves in. This may refer to the way we live as children or in old, or middle age. It may also refer to dimensions of time: past, present and future. **Relationality** (lived other) is the relationship we maintain with others-- interpersonal and communal, or within ourselves-- intrapersonal.

### Searching for Essential Themes

In phenomenological analysis, it is important to distinguish between themes which are "incidental" and those that are "essential," since not all meanings that may be encountered in reflection of a certain lived experience are specific to that experience. A method called *free imaginative variation* is used to locate those themes that are essential to a phenomenon. I did this by asking the following questions: Is the experience still the same if I change or delete this theme? Without this theme does the experience lose its fundamental meaning? I also used this process to generate themes (Van Manen, 1990).

### **Giorgi: The Analysis of Imaginative Experience**

I used Giorgi's (1987) writings on the psychological phenomenological approach to the analysis of imaginal data to gain insights into the structure of the experience of exploring personal mythology. Since this experience takes place in part through an individual's imagination (the guided imagery experience), Giorgi's suggestions into approaching the analysis of imaginal data were applicable and useful for the purposes of this study. Giorgi has suggested that the experimental approach itself is "inadequate for attaining proper access to the realm of the imagination" (p. 43). He has recommended the phenomenological approach to data analysis, explaining that "the life of the imagination can only be understood in terms of its actually lived complexities" (p. 43).

### **Romanyshyn: The Metaphorical Character of Psychological Life**

**A metaphor is a play upon words, and psychological life as a metaphorical reality is a play upon the world. It is a dramatic tale.**

**(Romanyshyn, 1982, p. 174)**

Romanyshyn (1982) suggests that human psychological life is not the "events" or "conditions" of a person's life but something which is given through them "as a reflection" (p. xvi). He says that such human events are the "mirrors" through which psychological life appears and changes.

Romanyshyn proposes that this mirroring or reflection is a reality somewhere between the material and the mental reality. This "somewhere," he refers to as metaphorical reality. As such, Romanyshyn states that the recovery of psychological life is a "work of metaphoring" (p. 144):

**If we are to awaken to psychological life, then we must recover the place which the imaginal --the image, the reflection--has in our lives. We must recover that domain of reality and that mode of understanding which lie between the divisions of fact and fiction, the empirically real and the rationally ideal. (p. 89)**

Romanyshyn (1982) suggests that the metaphorical character of psychological life has implications for the craft of psychological studies. Romanyshyn regards psychological life as something always in need of being recovered because he contends "it reveals itself only by concealing itself" (p. 174):

**More specifically psychological life tends to cover itself in the habitual tasks of daily life, in those taken-for-granted, literalizing attitudes and perceptions of everyday living. As such, therefore, we may say that psychological craft consists in bearing witness for what lies forgotten beneath the literalizing attitudes of daily and scientific life. In this regard the psychologist is not so much a discoverer in search of new truths or stories, or a creator of fresh ideas or tales, but, on the contrary, a witness whose work embodies the unheard [of] stories of an age in the sense of that which an age most desires to forget. (p. 174)**

Romanyshyn (1982) also states that the metaphorical character of psychological life has implications for the "psychological attitude" (p. 174). He suggests that the psychologist can only "bear witness" to what is elusive

since the indirection of metaphor means that psychological life is elusive. He recommends that the psychologist speak through the mode of story, not "prophesize," not make direct statements with "the seal of certainty," (p. 174) and hence only point to and not define what appears indirectly in psychological experience.

### **Evaluation of the Study**

An evaluation for a naturalistic study is undertaken in a different manner than that of a traditional or positivistic one. Traditional scientific inquiry uses criteria of internal and external validity of design and reliability and validity of instruments. These criteria are not useful for evaluating a naturalistic design since they are based on principles and assumptions outlined earlier (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Different writers propose alternative criteria for judging the worth of a naturalistic study.

Colaizzi (1978) speaking about descriptive phenomenology has stated that the work should be measured only "against the standard of its fruitfulness in accomplishing its own aims" (p. 54). Van Manen (1990) who has spoken about how the strength and rigor of human science text is evaluated, also contends, "A strong and rigorous human science text distinguishes itself by its courage and resolve to stand up for the uniqueness and significance of the notion to which it has dedicated itself" (p. 18). What he seems to mean here is that the text itself should be a true and honest reflection of the phenomenon or lived experience under examination.

And finally, Lincoln & Guba (1985) recommend that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability be used to establish trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry in place of the conventional use of truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality for ensuring the rigor of a naturalistic inquiry. They suggest that establishing trustworthiness has to do with the researcher's ability to convince the reader that the findings are "worth paying attention to, worth taking account of" (p. 290).

In this study criteria were set up to ensure trustworthiness of the study by:

1. Creating an outline of my personal and theoretical beliefs by "bracketing" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 47) them. This was accomplished by keeping an ongoing written list and using it as a reference, particularly during the analysis phase;

2. Providing a clear, vivid description and interpretation that accurately reflected the participant's lived experience and perceptions through the use of verbatim quotes and transcripts;

3. Consistently adhering to the principles of qualitative interviews (Patton, 1990) wherein only myself as the researcher, interacted and conducted the interviews. The questions during the interviews were developed for the purposes of clarifying intended meanings and to elicit greater detail of descriptions;

4. Accurately and carefully describing the context of the study by providing "a thick description" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 125) of all procedures for participant selection, and generation, collection, and analysis of the data;

5. Creating an ongoing dialogue with friends, colleagues, and consultants with the intention of creating an opportunity to have them point out "blind spots" and thus to expand my ability to (a) understand more deeply my chosen methodological approach, (b) gain a greater understanding of the role of myth in counselling and psychotherapy, and (c) see what was really "there" in the participant's experience and express "it" through my writing (Ferguson, 1990); and

6. Keeping a "reflexive journal" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 327) a diary used on a daily or as needed basis which is a record of both myself and the method. It consisted primarily of two parts: (a) a personal diary, which provided an opportunity for catharsis, for reflection of what was happening in terms of my own values and interests, and for speculation about growing insights, and (b) a methodological log in which methodological decisions and rationales were recorded.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE PROCESS OF UNDERSTANDING ONE WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE

The research process I used in this study proceeded through a number of interrelated stages: (a) examining my beliefs about mythmaking; (b) finding a way to access someone's mythmaking; (c) conducting a pilot study; (d) establishing criteria for participants; (e) finding prospective participants; (f) conducting an initial interview, an "orientation," and developing the participant profile; (g) collecting and preparing the data for analysis, and (h) developing interview questions and interviewing. These procedures and methods are described following the order outlined above. The rationale for each stage is also included.

#### Examining my Beliefs about Mythmaking

The problem with human science inquiry is not that we know too little about a phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we already think we know too much. Put another way, the problem is that our "common sense" knowledge about things often predisposes us to interpret things before we have an opportunity to fully examine what they really are. If we are to systematically uncover the nature and essence of a particular phenomenon or lived experience, we need a way of putting aside all of our presuppositions or beliefs about this phenomenon so that they don't get in the way of our seeing what's there. One way of suspending these

beliefs is to bracket them. Husserl (cited in Van Manen, 1990) used the term bracketing to describe how one must take hold of the phenomenon and then place outside of it one's knowledge about the phenomenon. Bracketing takes a certain willingness, discipline and diligence to bring beliefs "up to the surface" of one's consciousness and then to put them aside. I used bracketing throughout the study on an ongoing basis, and thus attempted to make a conscious effort to put these beliefs in a sense "on a shelf" throughout the study.

One way in which I used bracketing was to make a record of my beliefs about mythmaking by writing them down. A few examples follow: (a) We are always in myth; some of our myths are conscious; some are unconscious; (b) some myths are functional and useful; others can, and do, become outmoded or problematic; (c) the language of the psyche is myth; in other words, our inner selves "speak" imaginatively through an inner cast of characters through dreams, guided imagery, and in our everyday conversations; (d) using a mythic perspective to explore life can help individuals shift their perspectives toward their problems and allow them new insights and meaning; and (e) through mythmaking people discover their creativity and sense of wonder about themselves and their lives.

### **Finding a Way to Access Someone's Experience of Mythmaking**

Before I could begin to examine someone's experience of mythmaking in counselling, my task was to find a way to access that experience. Since I did not believe that it would be appropriate or ethical to contact clients already

in counselling about their experiences, I realized I would need to find, or develop a process from the counselling literature and "take" someone through the process myself. Since I was not able to find a counselling process within the literature that was "do-able" for the purposes of a research study, I made a decision to "create" one myself. Because of my interest and experience with guided imagery both personally and professionally, I decided to use it as the counselling process for this study.

I adapted four guided imagery exercises--personal rituals from a self-help book by Feinstein & Krippner (1988) Personal Mythology: The Psychology of Your Evolving Self. I felt qualified to adapt these because of my background with guided imagery. I have worked with guided imagery both in my own personal development process, and in my work as a counsellor over the past few years. However, even with this experience I thought it was important to discuss my research with other professionals. Therefore, I consulted a "specialist" in guided imagery about adapting the self-help personal rituals to a counselling context. I also filled in the gaps in my knowledge on guided imagery by reviewing and reading pertinent literature.

#### The Journeys: Four Guided Imagery Exercises

The four guided imagery exercises in this study which I refer to as Journeys, can be found in Appendices E, G, H and I. I adapted these to a counselling context using the work of Feinstein & Krippner (1988) and Feinstein, Granger & Krippner (1988) about how myths develop within the individual, and from the studies of Farr (1987) and Gendlin

& Olsen (1970) on guided imagery. A brief examination both about guided imagery as a technique in counselling and the theory on how myths develop is pertinent here to provide a background for the reader in apprehending the terms and language used to describe the Journeys that the participant undertook in mythmaking.

Guided imagery is a very effective technique to use to uncover and explore issues and feelings that may be beyond intellectual examination. It is also an effective technique if deep exploration of certain issues is desired (Farr, 1988). Although imagery or images alone are powerful in formation of specific feelings, it is verbal processing--using words during an imagery process, which seems to be influential in obtaining a release or experiential shift from specific feelings (Gendlin & Olsen, 1970).

Feinstein, Granger & Krippner (1988) have described the way myths develop, change, and evolve in individuals as being based on Hegel's dialectical model of cognition. This model emphasizes the natural tendency of an antithesis to emerge and oppose a prevailing thesis, eventually leading to an synthesis at a higher level of organization. Thus two opposing myths tend to follow a dialectic pattern. A prevailing myth (thesis) is opposed by a countermyth (antithesis), eventually leading to a "new" myth (synthesis). The synthesis develops as the dialectic involves assimilation and accommodation between the opposing myths.

### How Myths Grow and Change: The Theory

Piaget (cited in Feinstein, Granger & Krippner, 1988, p. 31) used the term assimilation to describe the filtering or modification of input. He used the term accommodation to describe the modification of internal schemes to fit new experiences. Thus, a woman torn between a career in the world and a career parenting her children at home may be dealing with two conflicting myths or mythic structures within herself: the old or prevailing myth--to stay at home, and the new countermyth--a desire to move out into the world into a different kind of career. A synthesis between these two myths can begin to be worked out through a dialectic between the two myths: the existing or prevailing myth, and the countermyth (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988).

### A Counselling Intervention to Engage the Mythic Plane

The preoperational level of thought is a natural focus of counselling "interventions" (such as guided imagery) that engage the mythic plane or mythic level of consciousness (Feinstein, Granger & Krippner, 1988). It was Piaget (cited in Feinstein, Granger & Krippner, 1988) who observed this type of thinking as highly intuitive, free-floating, and filled with images and fantasies. Since Feinstein, Granger & Krippner (1988) have explained that interventions into people's mythologies generally delve into material from this preoperational level of thought through techniques such as guided imagery as well as other "cathartic" methods, I thought that a guided imagery process would be an appropriate way to tap into this mythic consciousness.

Since guided imagery is usually used in conjunction with relaxation (Farr, 1987), an adaptation of a relaxation script developed by Farr (1987) was used at the beginning of each Journey "to help eliminate motor responses, thoughts, and external stimuli" (p. 9).

### Explanation of the Guided Imagery Exercises: The Journeys

The four guided imagery exercises called Journeys in the study, were selected to demonstrate the dialectic pattern which myths develop and change. They include the following:

1. JOURNEY ONE, REMEMBERING THE MYTHS OF YOUR ANCESTORS; it was selected to provide a context and introduction for the process of exploring personal mythology by looking at the lives of family members through the generations. The participant was asked to complete the CONFLICT SURVEY in between JOURNEYS ONE and TWO. It was used to help the individual reflect on a conflict which she might wish to explore in JOURNEY TWO. The next three Journeys were intended to replicate to some extent the natural dialectic process inherent in mythic development as previously discussed.

2. JOURNEY TWO, ACCESSING A PREVAILING MYTH: FINDING THE ROOTS OF MYTHIC CONFLICT IN YOUR PAST; the purpose of this Journey was to attempt to access an existing or prevailing myth (thesis).

3. JOURNEY THREE, ACCESSING A COUNTERMYTH: FINDING THE ROOTS OF MYTHIC RENEWAL IN YOUR PAST; the purpose of this Journey was to attempt to access a countermyth (the antithesis).

4. JOURNEY FOUR, BRINGING YOUR CONFLICTING MYTHS INTO DIALOGUE: A DRAMA; the purpose of this Journey was to move toward a new myth (the synthesis) by bringing the prevailing myth and the countermyth into dialogue.

### **The Pilot Study**

Pilot studies provide "additional knowledge that leads to improved research" (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 77). In order to ensure that the research process would run "smoothly," one individual participant was taken through the four Journeys and one follow-up interview. The pilot process helped to develop ease and flow in the guided imagery and interview processes. Overall, this process helped to evaluate whether interview questions and research procedures were effective in accessing and obtaining the information needed to gain an understanding of an individual's experience in mythmaking.

After the pilot study was completed there were some minor changes made in the guided imagery exercises for the purpose of facilitating a deepened experience for the participant. It was my hope that if the experience was richer and deeper for the client, this might be evident in the participant's description of her experience.

### **Establishing Criteria for the Participants**

In order to select the participants for my study I planned on using a "purpose sampling" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 102) method. Thus, I had in mind certain criteria for selecting someone: (a) I wanted female participants because of my personal interest in women's psychological development and issues; (b) I wanted someone with an openness and familiarity with self-awareness exploration, and willingness and ability to express herself and communicate openly; it was my hope that an articulate person would provide me with a rich and detailed description; (c) since the counselling process in this study made use of guided imagery, a stated ability to image was a pre-requisite (Farr, 1988); (d) the counselling processes in this study involved exploration of personal issues, feelings, and experiences; since this could be upsetting to a participant, I wanted the participant to have some kind of support system available; and finally, (e) I wanted to make certain that the individual had a strong commitment and interest in participating in the process. I believed that I could establish the strength of an individual's commitment and interest through speaking with her during an interview.

### **Finding Prospective Participants**

Originally I planned to examine the experiences of 3-5 individuals in this study. With this in mind, I had decided the best way to obtain prospective participants was to advertise in local newspapers and publications in Victoria. After completing the pilot study, I reassessed the practicality of doing this and recognized that due to

restrictions on time and resources I would limit this study to one individual's experience.

In realizing this, I changed my method for finding participants. I decided to use a "word of mouth" process. Since the research topic for my study was known to many of my colleagues and friends, I thought my task would be relatively simple. Several women expressed interest in participating and being interviewed for the study. The first two that I interviewed met the criteria outlined and thus became the participants in this study--one as the "pilot," and the other as the individual whose experience is described in this study.

#### **An Initial Interview, Orientation and Participant Profile**

After the prospective participants expressed an interest in taking part in the study, a time was set up for an initial interview. Each individual was interviewed separately. I started off by giving her the Information Sheet (see Appendix A) and a brief orientation to the study. The orientation consisted of a brief description of the study, its purpose, time commitment and some other details in an informal conversation. Next, I had the prospective participants fill out a Participant Profile (see Appendix B). The Participant Profile served two purposes. First, it provided me with information to assess an individual's appropriateness for the study through examining written responses to the questions. And secondly, it provided me with an opportunity to discuss the study further, to respond to questions related to the study and to determine the woman's interest, commitment and ability to express herself

verbally. Both the Information Sheet and the Participant Profile were adapted from those used by Farr (1988).

Each participant was asked to sign a Consent Form (see Appendix C) once her suitability for the study had been determined and she had been officially invited by me to participate. The Consent Form was a formal agreement which offered among other things, written assurance on confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time.

### **Collecting and Preparing the Data for Analysis**

The process of obtaining data for the study took place using the following steps:

1. The personal mythology process consisted of four individual one hour sessions (Journeys) about 4 to 5 days apart. An interview took place at the end of each session and also, one follow-up interview about one week after the final session. The Journeys were "conducted" by me in the role of counsellor or guide. The interviews were conducted by me in the role of researcher. Thus, the researcher and guide were the same person in this study.

2. Each session consisted of a separate and different Journey following from #1 through to #4 as described earlier.

3. Sessions were conducted in the researcher's home in a quiet room, on the floor with a blanket and pillow. Sessions were audiotaped.

4. The role of the guide was to present each Journey as scripted (15-20 minutes). The researcher then interviewed the participant at the end of each session. This interview time allowed the participant to ask questions or state any concerns.

5. Counselling responses during the Journeys followed Egan's (1986) model to assist participants to deepen and enhance experiences using skills such as focussing, encouragers, closed questions, basic and advanced empathy as suggested by Farr (1988).

6. Once all of the description had been completed on audiotapes, I listened to each tape to acquire a familiarity with the participant's expressed or implied meanings, to sensitize to the tonality of the language and the way in which the participant spoke.

7. After each audiotape was transcribed verbatim, the written descriptions were read through and analyzed using the methods outlined in Chapter II. This method was not as straightforward as it may seem. The transcriptions went through many "transformations" before they "became" the final form as seen in the description. Themes were put on cards, visual "maps," clustered, and reclustered until they emerged and evolved into the final form as the text.

#### **Developing the Interview Questions and Interviewing**

The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is going on inside individuals--their unique perspective. An underlying assumption of qualitative interviewing is that

"the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (Patton, 1990, p. 278). Open-ended interviewing purports to access the perspective of the person being interviewed (Patton, 1990).

I conducted open-ended interviews after each of the four Journeys to examine the individual's experience of each session. One week after the final session, a follow-up, in-depth interview was conducted in order to discover what the whole experience (four sessions) was like for the participant. An interview one month after the completion of the study was planned. However, the participant decided to withdraw from the study just prior to this interview and it did not take place.

All interviews followed the guidelines for qualitative interviews as outlined by Colaizzi (1978) and Patton (1990). These guidelines enabled respondents to "express their own understanding in their own terms" (Patton, 1990, p. 290). An interview "path" based on the guidelines of Patton (1990) was developed. It was non-directive within a structured format and followed closely the interview questions. The participant was able to use the interview questions as guidelines but also had the freedom to take her own direction in the interview. The length of interviews varied but usually lasted 30 to 45 minutes depending on the time it took for the participant to fully describe her experience.

#### **Researcher's Approach During Interviews**

The researcher's approach during the interview process was to present the interview questions and to use probes "to

elicit greater detail--filling out the descriptive picture" (Patton, 1990, p. 294). In addition the researcher's approach included the following assumptions outlined by Colaizzi (1978) for the dialogic interview:

1. The researcher realizes the participant is more than a source of data. She is exquisitely a person.

2. The researcher makes contact with the verbalized experiences of the participant only when listening with her total being and entirety of personality.

### Interview Questions

The following interview questions served as a guide or interview path for the purpose of accessing participants' experiences of exploring personal mythology. Colaizzi's (1978) method of interrogating the researcher's presuppositions about the phenomena was used in part to generate questions. Patton's (1990) guide for developing qualitative research questions was also used to improve the overall quality of the questions. Some of the interview questions developed for this study were an adaptation of those used by Farr (1988) in her research on guided imagery:

1. Tell me as much as you can about this process of taking part in exploring your personal mythology in this (these) Journey(s). Please describe your feelings, thoughts, and any sensations.

2. What changes or differences did you notice (if any) between the first, second, third, fourth sessions?

3. How would you say this process was different from

other types of personal growth experiences you have had?  
(i.e.: what made it more or less valuable?)

4. What surprised you most?

5. What was the most positive aspect of this process?

What was the most difficult?

6. Describe any difficulties you had with the process.

7. In what ways was this experience valuable to you?

8. In what ways did this process and these sessions help you to gain an understanding of the issue/conflict you wanted to explore?

9. In what ways did these sessions and this process enable you to explore new alternatives about the issue?

10. How were these sessions valuable in helping you to gain awarenesses or insights about yourself in your life?

11. What relationship do you see between your experiences in this process and your personal life?  
(relationships, experiences, issues, etc.)

12. How do you anticipate your experiences in this process might influence your personal life?

13. Would you like to add anything else?

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FINDINGS

Themes, as previously stated, are tools for getting at the meaning of an experience. Although themes can never fully "present" all of the meanings in a lived experience, they can serve as reference points for the purpose of describing and "laying bare" the essential structure of an experience. As such, themes which are uncovered are a creative attempt to reflect and to make visible what is "there" in any lived experience.

The essential themes of the experience of exploring personal mythology are provided in the text that follows. These themes as previously mentioned, need to be seen through the conceptual overlay or context within which this experience takes place. This context has already been outlined in Chapter III. The essential themes which are encountered in this interpretive-description of Pamela's experience, are a blend of (a) the unique context in which the experience takes place, and (b) Pamela's unique lived experience in relation to that context with all of its intricacies and complexities.

#### A Metaphor for Capturing Essential Themes

A metaphor came to mind which for me captures this particular lived experience. It is the metaphor of an

individual who is taken on a journey by a guide. The guide provides both maps for the individual to follow and guidance along the way. The guide leads the traveller to the edge of a dark forest and then inside. All that the journeyer encounters both along the way and in the dark forest with the guide, are part of the individual's experience. Thus, the essential themes for the individual's experience emerge out of all that the journeyer encounters in this experience.

### How to See the Essential Themes

The essential themes are indicated by the use of "bolded" headings, for example, Living as the Inner Mother. In the text the essential themes appear much like a title which would introduce the content of a paragraph. The theme then, which looks much like a heading, precedes a more detailed description of the theme itself. Quotes from other literary sources and chapter headings are also bolded.

Human experience cannot be separated or broken down into component parts without taking a certain life or breath out of a description of that lived experience. For this reason I have not provided a list of the essential themes of Pamela's experience. Rather I have left themes within the text to speak for themselves as they appear, "woven" into the fabric of the whole experience. Thus, themes are there to serve as reference points or knots in the web of Pamela's experience and not as "pieces" to be separated from the whole.

Some themes for example, such as Reflection are repeated frequently in the description since it is the

nature of this experience that Reflection is an ongoing and essential theme of this particular lived experience. Reflection as a theme appears within each Journey. As a theme it takes on many different "forms" as is demonstrated in the variety of descriptions of Reflection which are presented.

One essential theme common to all four of Pamela's Journeys, The Imaginal Landscape: Its Presence, is discussed however only in Journey Two. This theme refers to the "environment" that Pamela enters and explores in each Journey. To avoid redundancy, I have chosen not to describe this theme in each of the other three Journeys.

Some of the essential themes such as Unearthing the Old Story and Authoring the New, are "overarching" or more holistic themes encompassing the overall experience of exploring personal mythology. Some of these particular holistic themes are included in the Follow-up Interview. Others have been incorporated into the text in Chapter IV, under the title, About One Woman's Journey, and in Chapter X, More About Pamela's Experience.

### **Explanation of the Description**

Pamela took four inner Journeys during this experience of exploring her personal mythology. What follows is an interpretive-descriptive account of Pamela's exploration in her inner world during the four Journeys. The description includes Pamela's explorations with the researcher when she returned to her "usual" reality to talk about her inner Journeys during the interview time. Included in this

description is the Follow-up Interview which took place one week after the final session. Each description of Pamela's exploration is preceded by a "Map"--a description of the guided imagery process that she was "taken on" by the guide.

### **The Initial Interview: A Descriptive Account of the Participant**

Pamela is an energetic and articulate 39 year old woman. She came to Canada from her native Holland a number of years ago. Her English remains strongly accented with her original language. Pamela has been a teacher by profession and has taught at the university level. Pamela is about to start graduate school where she will be working towards a Masters degree in the helping professions. She is divorced and a single parent with a twelve year old daughter. Although Pamela's father is no longer living, her mother and other relatives still live in Holland.

For a number of years Pamela has devoted considerable energy to counselling and self-discovery endeavors. When Pamela filled out the Participant Profile for this study she said she had attended a number of groups, some professional, some self-help: family therapy, women's support, Adult Children of Alcoholics and Overeaters Anonymous. Pamela also said that she had had some experience as a client in counselling and was familiar with Gestalt therapy, psychodrama, and the usual "talking" therapies. Pamela indicated that in addition to having done personal counselling, she had also taken some counselling with her former husband and her daughter.

From the moment I met Pamela and we began to talk about the study, I was impressed by her enthusiasm. She spoke animatedly about looking forward to having an opportunity to try a new way to explore herself and her life. Her eyes sparkled as she smiled, while speaking about this experience she would be undertaking exploring her personal mythology. She seemed to have many unanswered questions about her life and was eager to find some answers.

#### Self-Exploration has Become a Life-Long Quest

Pamela explained that she wanted to participate in the study for two reasons. First, she said she had little experience with either guided imagery or personal mythology, and was interested in learning more about both. Secondly, Pamela said she had another goal: her personal growth. She indicated that she had limited resources for counselling at the present time and saw this study, as an opportunity to explore some of her personal issues in a new way. There were a number of concerns she thought she might like to examine: her family, primarily parents, her first sexual relationship and perhaps her relationship with her daughter. Pamela explained that her previous experiences with guided imagery had been positive, and she felt ready to do more. Pamela's description of her life seemed to indicate that finding new ways to explore herself and her life had become a life-long quest.

### About One Woman's Journey

The heroine crosses the threshold, leaves the safety of her parents' home, and goes in search of herself. She journeys up hills and down valleys, wades in rivers and streams, crosses dry deserts and dark forest, and enters the labyrinth to find what is at the centre of herself. She needs a lamp, and a lot of thread, and all of her wits about her to make this journey. She is alone at night metaphorically, wandering the road of trials to discover her strengths and abilities and uncover and overcome her weaknesses.

(Murdock, 1990, p. 46)

### Exploration and Journeying: It Takes Place in Two Worlds

Pamela's exploration of her personal mythology took place through journeying in "two worlds." At the beginning of each session after a short period of relaxation, Pamela would "leave" her usual reality and enter into another reality, an inner or imaginal world of images through a guided imagery process. Pamela's exploration in this imaginal world was facilitated by myself as guide through questions, prompts and other counselling responses. This "inner world" as Pamela referred to it, was the "place" where she began the process of exploring her personal mythology in each session.

### **Exploration in the Outer World**

The "other" world in which Pamela's exploration took place was her outer, her usual reality. Each time Pamela "returned" from an inner Journey to her usual waking consciousness, she continued her exploration and journeying. Sometimes Pamela's exploration was at home, alone with her own thoughts. Primarily however, Pamela continued to explore what she had encountered on her inner Journeys in the interviews after each session with the researcher. In a sense this was another kind of Journey. Pamela described what she "saw," felt, and thought. As the researcher, I again provided prompts and questions to elicit greater detail from Pamela about her experience. The process of obtaining Pamela's description of her experience became an extension of Pamela's exploration.

### **Initiation: Exploration in Two Worlds**

There was a way in which Pamela began this process of exploration, sometimes focussing on and dwelling in her inner realm that was an *initiation*. To undergo an initiation is to begin, to start something; to enter in upon something new. In Webster's (1986) the Latin *initiare* means to enter upon; to bring into practice or use. In inner work, initiation means entering into something new with oneself through looking within. Although Pamela said she had done some guided imagery before, this Journey was in a way "new territory" that she was covering. All that she did, saw and experienced was new for her. Going "inside" with someone to guide her in this particular kind of experience and exploring her experience with a researcher

afterward was new. It was a new way to explore her life--an initiation experience.

### **The Presence of the Guide**

As the guide, I facilitated Pamela's exploration through speaking with her, through my language outlining each Journey to be taken and helping her with her exploration along the way. As the researcher, I facilitated Pamela's exploration and reflection on her Journeys. The language was always dialogical in nature. Language comes from the Latin *lingua*, the expression or communication of thoughts and feelings by means of vocal sound, and combinations of such sounds, to which meaning is attributed; human speech; the ability to express or communicate by this means.

Pamela embarked on this Journey with a guide through sharing more than words. As the guide/therapist I was there providing through my presence a safe, "contained" environment in which Pamela could take her Journeys. I was there with my skills, experience as a counsellor and presence as a person familiar with inner Journeys. I was someone who could respond to and guide Pamela during her explorations.

### **Reflection**

Both during and after each Journey Pamela spent time thinking about her experiences. She reflected on them. She thought deeply about them. The interview time after each of

Pamela's Journeys became a time of reflection--of contemplation--on her experiences in her inner realm.

**Dwelling: Living With Her Whole Being in the Inner Realm**

Pamela seemed to live or *dwell* in her imaginal world in the same way she does in her "usual" world with her thoughts, emotions, body sensations, and intuition--with her whole being. There was a vividness, an intensity, an "as if" quality to her dwelling or living there, that echoed the reality of her outer world. Dwelling or living was an aspect inherent in all of Pamela's Journeys in her imaginal realm. In the imagery, dwelling meant more than simply living in, or occupying the body of an inner figure with feelings, body sensations etc. It meant living--taking on the *life* of that inner figure.

## CHAPTER V

### REMEMBERING THE MYTHS OF YOUR ANCESTORS

#### THE MAP FOR JOURNEY ONE

At the beginning of this session it was explained to Pamela that in this first Journey, she would be invited to step into the bodies and lives of some of the women in her family: her mother, her grandmother and her great-grandmother. She would also be asked to imagine assuming "physical postures" that they might have had in their lives, and to consider while living as these figures each in turn, four key questions about their lives (see Appendix E). An example would be, "What are your major concerns?" The guide would present each question. Pamela's responses in this Journey would not be spoken aloud.

Near the end of the Journey Pamela would be asked to make a statement which she believed her own life might be expressing. The guide would then take Pamela back to her "usual waking consciousness" and ask Pamela to describe in an interview what she had experienced.

#### JOURNEY ONE: THE EXPLORATION

The focus of this Journey was Pamela's exploration of the lives of the female ancestors of her imaginal world--their concerns, limitations, and beliefs. In the imagery

Pamela "stepped back" into the bodies of generations of women in her family. She started with her mother's body and stopped at the body of her great-grandmother. After stopping in the great-grandmother's body, Pamela spent time exploring what life was like for her imaginal great-grandmother in the 19th century. Then, Pamela continued to "move back" through each figure in turn, from the great-grandmother to the grandmother, mother and finally back into her "own," inner body.

Although Pamela's exploration seemed to take place primarily through her imagination, she also seemed to use or to "draw on" her memories to fill out the imagery that she created. In this process, Pamela made many discoveries. These discoveries were not only those about the lives of the ancestral figures in her imagery, but also about the lives of members of her family, including her own.

### **The Journey Begins: Departure and Entry Into the Inner Realm**

**We begin by taking our minds off the external world around us and focusing on the imagination. We direct our inner eye to a place inside us, then wait to see who will show up.**

**(Johnson, 1986, p. 165)**

Pamela started the session lying on a mat in the study room and going through a relaxation exercise. Then, as

Pamela was being led on the Journey, she appeared to take her "focus" from her usual reality--a world where she was distracted by the noise of cars on the street outside and thoughts about her studies--to her inner reality. Her Journey had thus begun as all journeys do, with an act of leaving. Leaving here meant departing from her usual reality and entering into another. Pamela appeared to do this in part by taking her mind "off" her outer world, directing her focus inward, and calling upon her imagination.

There seemed to be a "threshold" over which Pamela crossed to take her leave and gain entry into this inner realm. It was not a visible one which Pamela spoke about, yet it was there. When Pamela left her outer realm to enter into her inner realm it was as if she had moved through an entryway.

#### **Inner Exploration: Questing and Journeying in Another World**

Inner exploration is like taking a journey in another world or reality. When someone takes a journey to his or her inner world, there is an implication that the individual is on an adventure somewhat like a hunter or a seeker. He or she is in pursuit of something "within" self. Quest comes from the Latin *quaesitus*, pp. of *quaerere*, to seek, ask, inquire. Webster's (1986) defines quest as: a seeking; hunt; pursuit; a journey in search of adventure. Pamela was someone in search of answers about her life. She entered her inner world like someone on a quest.

**Dwelling: Stepping Into the Bodies of Inner Ancestors**

At the beginning of the Journey, I asked Pamela to imagine standing where she could "move about" in her imagination. The first thing that Pamela said she did in the imagery was recall the house where she lived as child in Holland. She spoke about what she could see in her "mind's eye." She indicated she became aware of birds, children and animals playing. And then Pamela stated she imagined putting herself into the scene and then "stepping" into her mother's body:

*And I recalled and I saw the house where I lived in my childhood and it was quite, very nice, very beautiful with flowers, wild flowers and grass and we played there as children and I imagined myself there. And that's what I saw. And when I started to step back, I easily stepped inside my mother's body.*

Although Pamela seemed to have to make the effort at first to "recall" the house in order to create the image, the rest of the landscape imagery that she saw seemed to appear spontaneously. Once the scene or landscape was in "place," Pamela said that she again used her imagination to "put" herself into the scene and then into her mother's body. Pamela seemed to be able to go to this inner landscape with her whole being--her "body," her senses, her emotions and her thoughts. There seemed to be another body or self, an inner or imaginal one distinguishable to Pamela from her real or "lived" body, that was able to go to and move about in this inner realm.

It was this inner body that Pamela used next to step into the figure of her imaginal mother. Pamela said she did

this with ease. She said she saw the inner mother as someone around her own present age of forty, who was "quite obese." Pamela compared herself to the inner mother saying that she was "fatter" than she herself was at the present time. At the same time as Pamela stepped into her mother's body to "become" her, there also seemed to be a part of her that was separate and able to look at the inner mother.

From here Pamela moved out of the body of her inner mother and into the body of her inner grandmother. Pamela said she also did this with ease. She saw this figure as "older" but "somehow less obese" than her mother. What seemed to help Pamela to do this was recalling a photograph that her mother had had of the grandmother. Pamela seemed to create this image at least in part by reminiscing--bringing forth her memories from the past.

#### **Dwelling: Becoming an Inner Figure--The Great-Grandmother**

The final figure that Pamela stepped back into was that of her inner great-grandmother. She moved out of the grandmother's body and into the figure of her great-grandmother. Pamela said that this was much "more difficult" for her to do. First, there were no photographs Pamela could recall ever having seen of her. And secondly, Pamela said she had never even met her real great-grandmother. "And I just started to imagine someone whom I never knew. So I imagined the great-grandmother even thinner, in some way thinner. It was in the 19th century and I remember my grandmother said they came from a poor countryside background. And they had a regime similar to slaves. An owner could buy and sell them." What Pamela

seemed to do to create the image of her inner great-grandmother was to use both her memories of what she had heard about her great-grandmother's past, and her imagination.

**Dwelling: Living as an Inner Figure--The Great-Grandmother**

During this part of the Journey, Pamela spent some time living the life of the inner great-grandmother. In the interview, she recounted this experience and speculated on the life of her own real great-grandmother who had lived under a system that was very much like slavery. *"She didn't belong to herself because she could be bought and sold and her children might be taken away."* Pamela also stated that she imagined her main concern in life was feeding her children and family. Pamela saw the inner great-grandmother as someone who had no privileges and whose life was so concerned with survival that she lived *"like a working machine nothing else."* In the process of living as the inner great-grandmother, Pamela seemed to begin to associate the great-grandmother of her imagery, with her own real great-grandmother. She began to speak about the inner great-grandmother as if she were her real great-grandmother. Through reminiscing about the past and using her imagination, Pamela seemed to be able to continue to build on the imagery of her inner great-grandmother's life.

**Dwelling: Becoming an Inner Figure--The Grandmother**

After having spent time living as the figure of her inner great-grandmother, Pamela started her "walk" back

through the generations of women in her family. Pamela noted that she moved forward from the great-grandmother's figure into that of the inner grandmother. Doing this seemed to evoke memories from the past. Pamela explained in the interview that she remembered thinking at this point that her grandmother had been a *"very important person"* in her life, although she had never quite understood why. It also seemed to evoke questions within Pamela. Pamela stated she found herself wondering what influences her grandmother might have had on her life.

During the interview Pamela's reflection on this part of the imagery also evoked feelings within Pamela. Pamela's voice was soft with sadness as she spoke about believing that her real grandmother had been the only person who had really cared about and accepted her. As she talked about her grandmother, Pamela also spoke about feelings of love she had had for her.

As Pamela continued to live as the inner grandmother, she continued to *"fill in the picture"* of the inner grandmother's life. Pamela commented during the interview that her real grandmother was a person who always had *"everything under her control,"* an *"introverted person"* who did not speak out, yell or force people to do things. Pamela continued to describe the inner grandmother as someone who in fact couldn't control everyone to the degree she wanted and as a result *"suffered inside"* and felt *"very disappointed,"* like a *"victim."*

**Reflection: Understanding and Making Connections With Her  
Real Grandmother**

In the interview Pamela explained that she had felt some tremendous forces within her own body while she was living as the inner grandmother. Pamela remarked she thought that these forces represented not only the inner grandmother's need to control others, but also her own real grandmother's need to control. Pamela said she had not been aware of knowing these things about her grandmother before--her feelings of disappointment and victimization, and her need to control. It was new information to her:

*I don't have any facts; I don't have any knowledge. It was some small things she said [meaning her mother], my grandmother's posture and how I felt within her body when I had this imagery and I felt she had a huge amount of forces within her and a desire to control. I just sense [the rightness] of what I'm saying now.*

In reflecting about this particular part of the Journey, Pamela seemed to sense intuitively a similarity between the personality of her inner grandmother and her own real grandmother. She seemed to come to this realization in part through living as the inner figure--through her posture--and in part from memories of the things her mother had related to Pamela about her grandmother.

**Reflection: Understanding and Making Connections  
With Herself**

Pamela made connections not only about the women in her family, but also about herself from her imagery experience. In the interview Pamela remarked that she now believed that she herself had become a controlling person by picking it up from her grandmother. Pamela indicated that her experience in the imagery seemed to have helped her comprehend this. *"It helps me to understand that she [grandmother] was a real controller and that I 'picked it up' from her."*

Pamela noted in the interview that it was both her *"interpretation"* and her *"subjective feelings"* that had led her to believe that the grandmother of her imagery was very much like her own, real grandmother. Pamela also remarked that she thought that the imagery had *"very much [to do] with reality."* Pamela said she had now come to realize that contrary to what she had always believed, her grandmother had influenced her life in a major way.

Pamela explained that for many years she had been struggling with her own control issues. Pamela had always wondered why control had been such an issue for her. Since Pamela believed that neither of her parents were *"controllers"* she found herself wondering often where it had *"come from."* She had seen herself in the past as a *"very judgmental person"* both toward herself and the world, always believing that there was a *"right way to do things and a wrong way."* Pamela said she didn't like being that way. It had caused her a great amount of *"distress"* in her relationships with family and friends.

Pamela stated that much of her therapy in the past had been devoted to understanding her need to control. Although Pamela believed that she had made great progress, there were still times when she said she struggled with her controlling nature. Pamela commented that she recognized she still sometimes tried to control others. Pamela noted that she was much better now at catching herself when she was doing it. *"I'm not a controller the way I was."*

**Reflection: Finding Deeper Meaning and Hope**

Finding out that she had picked this trait up from her grandmother apparently had an even deeper meaning for Pamela. Pamela revealed in the interview she believed that finding an explanation for this issue might be another significant step toward resolving her own need to control others. *"Once I understand the reason why for a kind of behavior, the behavior disappears many times."* Discovering that she had picked up this trait from her grandmother, seemed to leave Pamela feeling illuminated and hopeful. Pamela regarded it as something vital that she had learned that might help her to become *"less controlling"* in the future:

*Enlightening! It's just wonderful. I'm the kind of person who likes to find a logical explanation to many things. Before I couldn't explain it. I wonder maybe this connection I made it will help me to become less controlling without any effort. I mean the natural way because I know where it's coming from.*

**Dwelling: Living as the Inner Mother--Seeing a Pattern  
and Deepening Understanding**

**Psychologically considered, the first step of conscious recognition enables the seeing of the pattern. Conscious naming is the first step of freedom from the negative structure.**

**(Leonard, 1982, p. 55)**

In the interview Pamela explained that the next thing she did in the Journey was move into her mother's body. During this time of reflection in the interview, Pamela made a connection between her own real mother and the mother of her imagery. Pamela spoke about how she remembered feeling as the inner mother. She described herself as someone who was a "100% helper" whose life was a "real sacrifice" because she was always helping and accommodating everyone around her. Pamela also described her own real mother as someone who had worked all the time, sometimes holding down three jobs at once. Pamela noted that her imagery experience had helped her to understand that her mother was not only someone who worked hard but also someone who did this with the purpose of trying to please and accommodate other people. Pamela said she had never before been aware of this dimension of her mother's personality.

At this point Pamela connected this pattern she saw in her mother to her own self. She remarked that she too was someone who was always trying to please other people often

to the expense of herself. With this realization, Pamela took her understanding to an even deeper level. Pamela remarked that she now recognized that her own need to please others has always been a way of controlling them:

*On the other hand the way to make my life better was to work like she did and at the same time to try to control people around me by pleasing them. That's incredible. I just tried to control everyone around by pleasing them, by trying to please them, the way my mother did and it didn't work. It certainly does not work!*

Pamela had never before been able to make a connection between her need to control others and her desire to always please people. She seemed relieved and regarded it as "a revelation" now that she had finally been able to "make some connection between these two parts and to see clearly where they [were] coming from."

#### **Dwelling: Moving Back Into Her Own Inner Body and Goals for the Future**

In the final part of this Journey Pamela explained in the interview that she moved from the inner mother's body back into her own inner body. While in this body, Pamela related some of the "statements" she believed her own life was expressing:

*I want to live my life. I want to enjoy my life I don't want to please people. I don't want to control people. I want to enjoy my life but not the way my mother does, not the compulsive way overworking, overeating. I want to have some balance in my life.*

Moving back into her own inner body seemed to bring out Pamela's determination to live her life in a way that would be different from her mother. There were goals that Pamela had identified for herself.

**Reflection: Acknowledging Insights, Hope for the Future  
and Empowerment**

In the interview Pamela summed up how she thought her insights from this experience might apply to her life. Pamela said she felt hopeful that what she had learned might help her to make changes in herself and to *"work it [all] out in an easier way."* In addition, Pamela explained she saw this session and what she had learned as an impetus to *"re-think"* many things about herself and her family. Pamela's voice in her closing remarks seemed to reveal the sense of hope, empowerment, and determination that she was feeling. *"Maybe I could take charge of my life the way I want, in a balanced way."*

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Even 'making up' a whole alternative life-time can be a powerful experience. Important symbolic themes may be found in these experiences that also connect to meaningful themes in one's ordinary life...Inevitably we learn through changing our perspectives.

(Larsen, 1990b, p. 142)

### A Summary of Journey One

It would seem that Pamela had been able to recognize themes and patterns in the lives of the figures that she created in the imaginal world of her ancestors that related to those in her own life and her family: a need to control, and a need to please others. It appeared the insights that Pamela uncovered through her exploration, had also enabled her to gain a new perspective about herself and her family.

## CHAPTER VI

### ACCESSING A PREVAILING MYTH: FINDING THE ROOTS OF THE CONFLICT IN THE PAST

#### THE MAP FOR JOURNEY TWO

Prior to the beginning of this session Pamela was given the Conflict Survey (see Appendix F) and was asked to choose a conflict she would like to explore. It was explained to her that she would be exploring the roots of this conflict on this particular Journey. It was also explained to her that doing this might uncover some aspects of a prevailing myth--the thoughts, images and feelings related to her conflict.

The guide would start by asking Pamela to focus on her conflict. Then Pamela should allow a symbol to emerge out of her body's response to the conflict. After this symbol emerged, she would be asked to allow a feeling(s) to surface from the symbol. The guide then would ask her to let the feeling(s) become clearer and to allow it to take her back to an earlier time in her life. Pamela would then be asked to create the image of a river, to think of her feeling(s) as the river, and to float back on a boat to a time when she first imagined she experienced the feeling(s).

The guide would then ask Pamela to see herself on the bank of the river in a scene in which she may have experienced this feeling(s). At this point the guide would ask her to describe what she saw while in the imagery. And

from this point on in the imagery Pamela would enter into a dialogue with the guide to explore this inner realm.

#### JOURNEY TWO: THE EXPLORATION

Pamela's exploration in this second Journey centred around looking into her past for the roots of a particular conflict which she chose to focus on. Pamela referred to the conflict she selected as her "*eating disorder*." What Pamela uncovered in her imagery experience could be considered part of a prevailing myth in her life.

In the imagery, Pamela lived through a frightening experience as a "*teeny, pink baby*" in a crib. She saw herself alone, abandoned except for the occasional feeding of milk from a bottle given by her grandmother. The inner baby choked on the milk, terrified. Pamela explored the life of the inner baby both through living as the baby and through interacting *with* the baby. She also explored the inner landscape in which the baby found herself. In the interview afterward Pamela examined the roots of a number of important personal issues: her "*eating disorder*," the fear she has lived with throughout her life, and the critical attitude that she has had both toward her parents and herself.

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...the first image that you see in a fantasy or imagery experience is a condensed image of your own immediate statement of consciousness, a glimpse of your own face in a dewdrop.

(Larsen, 1990b, p. 51)

**Dwelling: Sensual Vividness--Surrounded by a Thick,  
Brown Smoke**

In the interview, Pamela explained what she did as she started her exploration in this Journey. She said that after I asked her to focus on her feelings about her conflict, the first image that emerged out of these feelings was a huge amount of thick, brown smoke:

*When you asked me to image, to visualize what kind of conflict, the scene became like smoke you know, smoke from fire, but [a] huge amount of smoke, very brown, brown and dense, and so dense and taking me like inside this brown smoke. It had no smell or taste or nothing, just a heavy something from hell. I felt, I'm going to know something important.*

It appeared that Pamela's conflict had become a huge amount of brown smoke. It surrounded her. She felt "movement" as if she was being taken inside the smoke. It happened to her. Her stance here was passive. Her senses were alive. Pamela said she detected neither taste nor smell from the smoke, indicating that she was aware of these senses in her imagery. As she was being engulfed by the smoke, Pamela said she felt tension and heaviness in her body, particularly in her head. Finally, Pamela seemed to sense things on an intuitive level: first, that the smoke had an ominous quality, and secondly, that she was about to know something important. There appeared to be a sensual vividness to Pamela's description of her experience.

**Dwelling: In Two Different Bodies Simultaneously and  
Feeling Pushed**

Pamela explained in the interview what happened next when she took the yellow boat into the past, moving as the river with the feelings that represented her conflict. Pamela said she felt as if she were in two "different" bodies, one as the observer watching the scene, and the other as the inner figure in the boat. She noted she had also experienced herself simultaneously in the past and present. In addition, Pamela explained that while she was in the boat on the river, she felt as if she were being moved to the past by something "external" to her:

*I was, I mean a part of me was detached and looking at the scene and a part was moving back to the past on this boat on this river. It was like some external forces pushing, pushing me toward the past.*

**Dwelling: An Experience of the Body--Emotions,  
Sensations and Intensity**

In the interview, Pamela described the sensations she had had in her head throughout this Journey. *"The tension was always present in my head. It was almost like [my] head is just crushed and jaw, and my face especially."* Pamela also mentioned that she recognized that the "tension" in her head was the "extreme frustration" she had had about her overeating because she was realizing at the time in the imagery how it had been taking her life "away" from her. She felt cheated and victimized by it. Pamela went on to explain that mixed in with this frustration was a feeling of

"anger" and "impotence" because she realized that she had been unable to control her overeating. It was a problem that was controlling her. The theme of *control* had again surfaced for Pamela. In the previous Journey, Pamela recognized her need to control others in her relationships. In this Journey, Pamela's need to control surfaced in her relationship to food and eating.

**Dwelling: Spontaneous Imagery--Looking From Up and  
Becoming the Baby**

In the interview Pamela stated that immediately after feeling the sensation of being "*pushed*" into the past, the "scene" changed spontaneously. Pamela said that she became aware of seeing herself in a room "*from up*" looking at a tiny baby in a crib. Then, no sooner was she looking at this scene, than she discovered that she had become the baby in the imagery. This too appeared to happen spontaneously without her conscious effort.

**Dwelling: Feeling Separate, Feeling Fused--Past and  
Present Come Together**

Pamela explained in the interview that although she had become the inner baby, she could still "*feel*" herself on the mat as the observer somewhat detached. Pamela indicated that at the same time as she was feeling the separateness of these two "*selves*," she was also feeling "*fused*"--almost like being two people at once. Past and present time appeared to come together for Pamela. In addition, Pamela thought that she was in some kind of altered state:

*I know almost I was hypnotized by the experience. My head, my body and everything became completely immersed within the experience. And it was just fusion, fusion of two people there and I was still me, but I was also in that time and at the same time I could analyze, a part of myself could analyze and be detached.*

### **Dwelling: Living as an Imaginal Figure--The Baby**

In the imagery, Pamela began to live in the inner world as the baby. She began to cry with intensity, in a quiet, controlled voice. She described how *"cold and hungry"* she was and how she *"couldn't breathe"* because the milk that she was drinking from a bottle was coming out too fast. The nipple was too big. She felt as if she was choking. In the interview Pamela explained that when this happened she began to feel *"terrorized."* *"I couldn't breathe because the milk was coming so fast. I tried to drink the milk, more, more. I mean, I'm scared and terrorized!"*

In the interview afterward Pamela remarked that she now understood the meaning of *"blind terror."* She said she had just lived through it in her imagery. Pamela explained that while in the imagery, outside of her body, *"everywhere"* she could feel *"just terror, despair and impotence."*

### **Dwelling: Interacting With an Inner Figure--The Baby**

I then asked Pamela during the imagery to respond to the inner baby. She began to engage the infant by talking with her. Pamela spoke to the baby without any apparent

feelings of resistance. Pamela's voice was gentle. Her words seemed to be offering comfort to the imaginal baby. *"You will struggle with those fears and terror to be killed by food and [at] the same time be calmed by food. That's the only way you could survive through food, through fear."* Each time Pamela interacted with the baby she offered her reassurance, both with her manner and her words.

#### **Dwelling: Pamela and The Inner Landscape--A Relationship**

During the imagery, Pamela appeared to be moving back and forth between exploring the inner environment as the infant and recalling memories from that time. Pamela mentioned recalling that she was *"born in winter"* and that it *"was like December, very cold outside."* She described the wall as white in the room where she found herself as the infant; the room was empty except for the bed in which she was lying. She could see, and feel the coldness of the winter outside the window. There was only a bit of warm sunlight that streamed in across her face.

Then, on her own without my direction, Pamela began to speak as the inner baby. *"I never had my mother's milk, my mother never had milk and I never had my mother's warmth or father's warmth, and I was abandoned there."* Her mom and dad weren't there. There was no one around most of the time in that room. Only her grandmother came to feed her from a bottle because her mother didn't have breast milk. Pamela found words to express the absence of people in that landscape. She said she felt alone--*"abandoned."*

In the interview afterward, Pamela explained that as the infant in the imagery she had had to work hard drinking the milk without choking. When she was finally able to drink the milk, Pamela noted that she could feel her fear subsiding. The milk had calmed her and her effort had exhausted her. She said she finally fell asleep "*exhausted.*"

#### **Dwelling: The Inner Landscape--Its Presence**

In the imagery, the room that was empty and cold, where there were no people to provide warmth for the baby seemed to echo the absence of people and of love. The infant, part of that landscape, also appeared to reflect the character of the room. The infant with her feelings of abandonment seemed to feel the absence of both. Pamela as the infant, did not appear to be separate from the landscape nor the landscape separate from her. There appeared to be a relationship between Pamela and the landscape. The relationship was somewhat like that between a mirror and what stands before it; they reflected one another. The imaginal landscape seemed to be a visible and powerful presence for Pamela.

#### **Reflection: Making Connections Between Overeating and Fear**

**Frequently clients are very relieved to see current response shaped by early survival experiences of the child, and often they find insight into ways they can change, or ways they can accept and handle the learned responses of an early age.**

**(Carlsen, 1988, p. 97)**

During the interview Pamela made a number of connections between her experiences as the baby in the imagery and what she imagined her own life had been like as an infant. The first connection she made linked both her fear and her overeating. Pamela seemed to come to the conclusion that her overeating and fear were current responses linked to her early survival as an infant.

Pamela explained in the interview that she had been trying to get to the roots of her overeating for a long time. She indicated that she had previously explored this issue in therapy. Pamela stated that she believed she had not been "*sexually abused*" like other women with eating problems had been. She also mentioned that she'd "*read a lot*" trying to find answers. Yet with all this previous exploration in counselling, Pamela thought she had made very little headway in understanding what her overeating was about.

In the interview, Pamela remarked she thought she might have finally found some answers about her overeating. She said that in reflecting on her experience as the baby, she was able to now see that the milk in the imagery had had two different meanings for the baby. On the one hand, obtaining the milk was a frightening experience. She always choked on it. It terrorized her. On the other hand, it calmed her. It soothed her hunger and feelings of abandonment. Pamela identified what this meant to her as the imaginal baby. "*And it is a dangerous link because food for me was a danger, and at the same time [it] took away danger, in an unhealthy way.*"

And then, Pamela made a connection between the inner baby's experiences and her own life. Pamela stated that she believed that she, like the baby, had developed the same kind of relationship to food. She also has used food to calm her fears and at the same time has felt tremendous anxiety when eating. In identifying herself with the inner baby, Pamela believed that she had discovered where her overeating and fear had started. " *I think it [her imagery experience] has a really important meaning in my life. It's a discovery of what started this eating disorder and why I have felt so afraid all my life.*"

#### **Reflection: Other Possible Roots of Her Fear**

In this same interview Pamela mentioned that she believed she had uncovered what she thought were further sources of her lifelong fears. Pamela noted that she was now able to realize that her fear had been a response to her environment learned early in her life in the same way as her overeating had been learned. Pamela mentioned she came to this conclusion when she had begun to reflect on how the baby felt in danger all the time in the imagery. She also recalled from the imagery that no one was around except her grandmother who came to feed her. And this left her feeling alone and abandoned. She often choked, terror-stricken, on the milk that she needed to relieve her hunger. Pamela explained she also recalled having been told that she had received injections for pneumonia that she had had at that time. She remarked that she believed this had been painful and frightening for her as an infant. Pamela indicated that when she put this all together, she was able to understand

that like the inner baby, she too had likely *"learned terror because she didn't understand what was going on"* around her.

**Reflection: Uncovering the Roots of Her Critical Attitude  
Toward Herself and Her Parents**

There were two final connections Pamela made during this interview: one concerned her relationship with her parents, the other, her relationship with herself. In the interview Pamela mentioned that although she never understood why, she'd always blamed her parents, especially her father, for both the fear and the lack of support she'd felt all her life. Pamela explained that in reflecting about the life of the infant in her imagery she was able to see how the infant might have blamed the parents when she saw no one around. *"No one was there so she blamed them all."* Pamela stated she thought that as an infant she had likely done the same thing: blamed her parents for not being there.

In addition, Pamela also indicated that she thought that she had gained some insight into her own critical attitude toward herself. Pamela said she realized now that she had always felt guilt and anger toward herself because from as far back as she could remember she had always *"hated"* her parents. She believed that living with hating them had always left her feeling badly about herself because she explained, *"Good girls don't hate their parents."*

**Reflection: Deeper Meanings--Feeling Safe and Hope  
for Inner Peace**

As the interview drew to a close Pamela continued to find some even deeper meanings. Pamela commented that she believed she might now be able to see the world as a "safer place." She said she could understand now that it had been herself as an infant who had always been afraid. Pamela noted that now that she was an adult, she could see that she no longer needed to feel afraid. The frightening experiences of her early years had long ago passed by. She seemed to be hopeful that now that she had gained this insight, she might no longer experience the fear she has lived with for so long.

Pamela also expressed hope for the future in her relationship with her parents. Pamela seemed to feel encouraged by what she had discovered, not only about her own life, but also about the life of her parents. Pamela believed that this knowledge and understanding might bring about some "peace" in her relationship with them:

*I have blamed them all my life. I mean this experience [the imagery] may help me to make peace with them. I don't think they did it intentionally. My mom worked 24 hours a day and she had no idea how difficult it was for that baby. She didn't know that.*

**Summary: Uncovering a Prevailing Myth**

To some extent in this Journey, Pamela began to uncover some of the roots of her conflict--her overeating--through her explorations. Pamela made discoveries from the

imagery which she came to believe might possibly have occurred in her life as an infant related to this conflict: sources of her feelings of fear and abandonment, the development of a "unhealthy" relationship to food, and the roots of her critical attitude toward herself and her parents. All of these discoveries that Pamela made during this Journey could be considered elements of her prevailing myth--the images, beliefs, ideas, and feelings associated with this exploration of her conflict. Through exploring her life both in the imagery and afterward in the interview, Pamela had made discoveries about herself which seemed to have provided her with a new awareness about her life.

## CHAPTER VII

### ACCESSING A COUNTERMYTH: FINDING THE ROOTS OF MYTHIC RENEWAL FROM THE PAST

#### THE MAP FOR JOURNEY THREE

It was explained to Pamela just before starting this Journey that she would be exploring her past to find sources of renewal regarding a resolution of her conflict by connecting present, more affirming feelings to past experiences. She was also told that the "course" of this Journey had similarities to the previous one.

At the beginning of the Journey Pamela would be asked to identify affirming feelings, images and thoughts which she believed were moving toward a more self-affirming scenario than that associated with her conflict. Once she identified a feeling(s) associated with this scenario, she would be asked to use this feeling(s) to create an image or symbol. She would then be asked to allow the feeling(s) which emerged from this symbol to become a river and to float on a boat back to a time in which she first recalled having this feeling(s). Pamela would be asked to see herself on the bank of a river in a scene in which she may have experienced this feeling(s). She would then be asked to describe the scene aloud. From this point on Pamela would enter into a dialogue with the guide to explore her inner realm.

### JOURNEY THREE: THE EXPLORATION

In this Journey Pamela explored her past in the imagery both as a "child" and as an "adult," in her search for roots of an undiscovered myth within herself. This Journey could be considered to encompass some aspects of her countermyth--the feelings, ideas and images that might be moving toward a more positive scenario in her life than those associated with her conflict and prevailing myth.

Most of Pamela's time in the imagery was spent exploring scenes from her life as an adult in Hawaii, and then as a child seven years of age in Holland. Pamela's imagery started at a time in her past as an adult when she lived in Hawaii teaching at the University. Pamela explained in the interview that after this scene, she went back in the imagery to a time when she was an infant. She said she searched from the time of infancy up through her childhood years, finally stopping at the age of seven. In her searching she said, she was trying hard "*to find something happy.*" In the imagery, Pamela explored two scenes at the age of seven: one in wintertime with some playmates and animals, and another, in summertime in a special hideaway where she had kept some starving kittens.

The overall focus of this session was Pamela's concern over her relationships with people, both men and women alike. In the interview Pamela explained that she had been in a "*transition*" period lately, wondering whether she should attempt to establish close relationships or seek out more platonic ones. Finding herself in some abusive relationships in the past had left Pamela feeling indecisive about how she would approach her relationships in the

future. What seemed to come out of Pamela's exploration in this journey was the conflict in her fundamental beliefs about her ability to establish close and intimate relationships. The elements which might help Pamela move toward a more positive scenario in her life than that presented by her prevailing myth emerged from her exploration.

**Dwelling: A Sensual Experience That is "Lighter"**

Pamela described the first image that appeared to her as the Journey started. She noted that this time instead of dark brown smoke appearing when she imagined the river, a "lighter" image appeared. *"Water, certainly but water a similar colour to the air. It was fresh with some wonderful smells of flowers and sounds of birds."*

In the interview Pamela gave a detailed description of the sensations in her body as she started this Journey, comparing them with those in the previous Journey. Again, there appeared to be a sensual vividness to Pamela's experience not only evident in her description of the sounds and smells of the water and air, but also in her body:

*I felt my body was opening up and it was light, I felt light, very light and my chest was. I felt in the chest, my chest was moving very freely and light and open and like a metaphor, very open and very light in my chest. The negative, my head. The positive, my chest.*

In the follow-up interview, Pamela's description revealed even more about the sensual richness of this portion of the Journey. Pamela described what she

remembered about the inner landscape just before going down the river with her feelings in the bright yellow boat. *"I recalled how it smelled. You know when you go out and the air is fresh and you feel your body, like feeling fresh and clean."*

### **Dwelling: Searching for Something Happy**

As Pamela moved further along in this Journey beyond the river imagery, she explained in the interview that she found herself looking around *"trying to find something happy"* from her past. In the interview Pamela also mentioned that the first scene that came into focus from her looking around was from a time when she lived in Hawaii. She was about 29 or 30 years of age and teaching at the University. Pamela's description was richly detailed: the clean fresh air, the smells of the *"tropical forest,"* the walk she would take from her house to the bus, the landscape and housing around the University, and her feelings of *"love"* for one of her young students.

In the interview, Pamela mentioned that during the imagery as she was walking to the bus, she could actually *"feel"* the love she had had for one of her young students. Pamela explained that although her relationship with the young student had only reached the *"platonic"* stage, she had loved him. She said that he had been *"a source of energy"* for her during that time. Pamela said she associated this *"energy"* with the sensation of lightness she could feel in her chest during the imagery.

**Dwelling Through Movement: "Down, Down, Down and Far,  
Far, Far Away"**

Pamela said that the next image she had was of herself as a child. This scene came to her, she said, through searching and going back to the time when she was an infant. Pamela described this process in the interview as seeing her spirit go "down, down, down, and far, far, far away" and then into the bodies of figures in her imagery. Pamela said that in the imagery, she lived in the infant's body 3 or 4 weeks of age and then went to 4 and 5 years of age. She explained she finally stopped at seven years of age noting that she couldn't find any "joyful experience" until then.

**Dwelling: Time Changes--"And Then I Was Seven"**

In the imagery Pamela began her description living as her imaginal self at seven years of age, playing outside in the fields near her home in Holland. It was winter time. The following is a short excerpt of her long and detailed account of herself in that winter scene during the imagery:

*I guess I'm seven years old and it's like ah winter, and it's a really dry winter and snow is everywhere. My chest is light, my breath is clear, my head is fresh and I am so, I sense the life with my skin and with each single cell, my head is singing, and my heart is singing and there's no wind around.*

This portion of Pamela's Journey appeared to be again an indication of the vividness of Pamela's experience on a sensual level. Pamela's senses were alive. Each single cell seemed to feel alive to her.

As Pamela looked around in this scene she saw a young boy she used to play with. When I asked her to look at the boy and find out what she was aware of, Pamela said that she could feel that there was trust between them. When Pamela became the snow through my direction, she said she felt happy being with the little girl Pamela.

**Dwelling: Awareness--Feeling No Connections  
With Anyone**

**When the image speaks, it is with one  
of our own inner voices. When we answer  
back, it is the unseen inner part of our  
own self that listens and registers.**

**(Johnson, 1886, p. 25)**

Next, I asked Pamela to look around the landscape and tell me what she could see in the imagery. She said she spotted a few dogs nearby. Pamela explained she felt a connection with one particular "brown-eyed" dog. Pamela said she could feel some caring, love and joy between them. In reflecting on the children during the imagery, Pamela explained that she felt "no connection with them at all." When I asked her during the imagery what this experience had reminded her of, Pamela replied, "I guess that I could have joy and life and support from myself or from animals, but not from people."

Then, Pamela spoke with sadness in her voice. She said that she could not recall ever having had anyone in her life with whom she had felt "closeness." At this point during the imagery, there appeared to be another "part" of Pamela--perhaps an observer--who had listened and registered all that had transpired in this portion of the imagery experience. This part had responded in sadness with a belief that there had never been any closeness with anyone in Pamela's life.

**Dwelling: Time Changes--"And Then it Was Summertime"**

Next, the scene changed spontaneously in Pamela's imagery from winter to summertime. Pamela said she found herself in her special hideaway in the woods--a place where she often spent time as a child. In the imagery, Pamela cried as she recounted the story about finding two abandoned kittens and taking them to her hideaway. Afraid to take them home at first, Pamela said she eventually did. *"I guess it's very sad, I feel a great deal of guilt about it. I felt I could have saved them and rescued them. They died."* Since her childhood Pamela said she had carried the guilt and responsibility for the death of the orphaned kittens. I asked Pamela during the imagery to respond to the kittens. She spoke to them. She cried as she did this. *"I don't know who's fault [it was], but it wasn't mine."*

**Reflection: Beliefs are Revealed--"It's My Destiny  
to be Alone"**

In the interview Pamela started to put together in her mind all that she had learned during this Journey. First, Pamela explained she thought that it was her "destiny" to be alone. Pamela believed that to some extent this had been determined by her family life where she thought she had never developed "bonds" with anyone. She thought her experience in the imagery confirmed this belief. Secondly, Pamela stated that because she had not "bonded" with anyone, she thought she had never really learned how to be close to people.

**Reflection: Ambivalence About Her Relationships--  
Conflicting Beliefs About Intimacy**

In the interview, Pamela explained that realizing that she might not have the ability within herself to develop closeness to others, had implications for her relationships with friends in the future. Pamela said that for some time she had been in a "transition" phase about her friendships. She had been trying to make up her mind whether she should continue to look for close, intimate relationships with people, or seek platonic ones.

Pamela wondered in fact whether it was even "realistic" for her to hope to have intimate relationships, particularly since she believed she had never had any close ties with anyone. She wondered whether she should give up the "hope" of ever being "intimate" with anyone. Pamela noted that in the past she'd been almost "obsessed" with

finding people to be close to. She commented that doing this had resulted in her getting herself into some *"abusive relationships with friends."*

Pamela's statements in this interview seemed to reveal the conflict in her beliefs about her ability to develop intimacy with people. On the one hand, Pamela said she didn't think she was capable of being close to others given her past, as well as her experience in the imagery. She believed she had never really *"bonded"* with anyone and questioned if it was even possible for her to learn how to be close. She thought that her family life experiences had *"condemned"* her *"by destiny"* to be alone. *"If I've never had even with my grandma and parents. If I didn't have any bonds, how could I seek them now?"* On the other hand, Pamela also indicated she thought that perhaps it still might be possible for her to be close to people. She thought that she might be able to learn intimacy *"little by little."*

In this session Pamela did seem to come to a decision at least temporarily about how to approach her relationships. In the future she said she would be looking for friendships on a *"platonic"* rather than an intimate level. Pamela indicated that for now she would *"give up the hope to be intimate."*

#### **Reflection: Rediscovering What Nourishes Her Soul**

In the interview Pamela noted that this session had also *"proven"* to her that she was happy and could be happy *"being on [her] own."* Pamela indicated that in the imagery

experience she got back in touch with the simple happiness and contentment that she has felt within herself in the past, reading a book, being with animals and by being outside "under a tree" in nature. Pamela commented she thought that it would be important for her to remember that these activities were sources she could use to nurture herself, particularly in times of stress. Pamela explained that in the future she would rely more on these two things for support: her own self and nature--a place where she always felt "unity" and "joy."

**Reflection: The Positive and the Negative--Feeling  
Embraced and Feeling Pressed**

In the interview afterward, Pamela compared this Journey to the last one. Pamela said that although she had felt a little less focussed in this Journey, she thought she had never lost the images or the feelings during the imagery. She noted that this session felt somehow more "positive." It had felt "larger but lighter." Pamela thought that the previous session had been "negative and sharper and focused and painful." In addition, this time Pamela mentioned she felt involved, but "gently" so. Whereas the terror from the last session had "pressed" her, she stated the "lightness" this time had "embraced" her.

Summary: Accessing a Countermyth

In this Journey, Pamela searched for sources of renewal from her past which might be moving toward a more positive scenario than that of her conflict and prevailing

myth. It seemed that Pamela's exploration brought forth a number of things which could be considered elements of her countermyth. First, Pamela made a decision about how to approach her relationships, and secondly, she seemed to make a rediscovery of those things that nourish and support her. At least for now, Pamela would be approaching her relationships on a platonic level. Although Pamela had made this decision, it seemed evident that she was still struggling with conflicting beliefs about her ability to develop intimacy with others. Pamela hoped her decision would help her avoid getting into any more abusive relationships in the future.

Pamela also rediscovered some things from her past that had always been sources of nourishment and support for her: time alone in nature, reading books, animals, and being alone. It would appear that these things from Pamela's past might allow her to move toward a more positive scenario in her life than those from the prevailing myth--her fear and need to control--which she had explored in Journey Two.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BRINGING THE CONFLICTING MYTHS INTO DIALOGUE:

#### A DRAMA

#### THE MAP OF JOURNEY FOUR

It was explained to Pamela that this session would be an attempt to begin a resolution between her old myth and the countermyth by bringing the two together to dialogue in a fantasy or imaginary drama. Pamela would first be asked to bring feelings back that she associated with her conflict and to place them in one of her hands. She would then be asked to allow an image or symbol to emerge from these feelings. It could be a new, or the same symbol from an earlier session. Next, she would be asked to bring back feelings associated with resolving her conflict, something which might represent her countermyth, and to allow a symbol to emerge from these feelings and place this symbol, in her other hand.

Finally, Pamela would be asked to place these two symbols in a "setting" and to allow them to become animated and to describe what she saw during the imagery. From this point on Pamela would enter into a dialogue with the guide to explore this interaction and her inner realm.

#### JOURNEY FOUR: THE EXPLORATION

The focus of this session was a fantasy or drama that Pamela "staged" between two symbols--a python-like snake and a blue shiny ball--which represented for her respectively, her prevailing myth and countermyth. As Pamela "played the parts" of these symbols or inner figures in the imagery, the relationships between Pamela and these figures appeared to develop and change. In the interview, Pamela said that at the outset of the imagery she viewed the inner figures and symbols as something separate from herself. As the session ended Pamela said she began to regard these as more than "*external things*" engaged in an inner drama. Pamela said that she had begun to see that they were really parts of herself. And as Pamela grew to accept these inner characters, she also grew to accept them as parts of herself.

#### Dwelling: A Symbol of the Prevailing Myth--A Snake Appears Spontaneously

In the interview Pamela spoke about what she did at the very beginning of the imagery session. Pamela stated that when I asked her to imagine her conflict again, she "*intentionally*" started off by taking herself back to the feelings and the scene as the "*baby*" in Journey Two, accessing her prevailing myth. When she did this Pamela explained, she could feel the "*body feelings*" of terror "*on her skin*" and tension in her head, neck and shoulders. She saw the same brown smoke. It was all around her. When I asked Pamela during the imagery session to put this image

and the feelings into her hand, she explained in the interview later what happened:

*When I tried this, [the] body sensations and feelings went to the left hand. I mean the tension and heaviness and all those terrible sensations and feelings. They went, and the smoke around, and somehow they formed into a snake. And it was funny I thought, 'What's this snake?'*

During the imagery Pamela described the snake. It was like a very big python--"long and cold"--with yellow-brown eyes and a long pink tongue. In the interview afterward, Pamela commented that the snake seemed "restless" and "somehow violent." She referred to it as "the image or symbol of the terror" that she had lived through as a child.

**Dwelling: Symbol of the Countermyth--"And in My Right Hand a Magic, Blue Ball"**

Next, during the imagery, I asked Pamela to put the image representing her countermyth into her right hand. She described it as a "magic, shiny ball." She noted that it was bright and "not cold, but warm and somehow fluid." "It is some material that doesn't exist on earth, I think, something between air and water." In the interview, she explained that it shone like a "crystal ball" and could also change shape by becoming bigger or smaller. In addition, Pamela commented that she saw the ball as "something desirable and wonderful that [she] possessed."

**Dwelling: Creating a Place for the Symbols to  
Interact--An Inner Stage**

In the imagery, Pamela described what she saw and did when I asked her to create a place in which she could imagine a setting for the fantasy or drama for her two mythic symbols. Pamela indicated that she found herself underground, in a safe place somewhat like a cave. All around she could see vegetation. There were numerous large stones scattered about. One stone in particular, she described as being similar to an "altar"--black, warm and shiny. It was here that Pamela explained she placed her two symbols.

**Dwelling: Sensations in the Body and the Two Symbols**

In the interview Pamela expanded on her description of the body sensations that she had experienced in relation to each symbol as each one formed. She noted that she became aware of a small amount of tension in her right hand (countermyth). Next, this same hand became numb. Then Pamela stated she noticed the numbness in her left arm (prevailing myth). This was much more intense. She explained that it went all the way from her hand up to and including her shoulders.

There was surprise in Pamela's voice when she talked about the sensations in her body, particularly those in her arms. Pamela said that the numbness that occurred when the symbols formed had continued to be present in her hands and arms throughout the entire imagery process. In the

interview afterward Pamela mentioned that she was still feeling the numbness in her upper limbs. "My hands were very much numb. Look I cannot move them! Do you believe that? I was never, never a person who could image!"

**Dwelling: Being Present With the Inner Figures--It's  
a Magical World**

**...the unfoldment of mental or  
affective imagery often seems  
to imply a magically plastic  
dimension.**

**(Larsen, 1990b, p. 219)**

Next, Pamela spoke during the imagery about what happened once she had placed the symbols in the setting on the altar. Pamela said that she saw the ball directly opposite to the snake "flying" or floating just above the altar. The snake, she commented, was at first sitting and looking around on the upper part of its body with its tongue going in and out. In the interview, Pamela explained that when I asked her during the imagery to become the snake and dialogue with the ball, she saw the snake move closer and then get on top of the ball and lay there. As this occurred, Pamela explained she noticed that the snake had become much smaller in relation to the ball. She stated that it was still the same python-like snake--"a big, gorgeous snake, fat, very fat and lazy." Pamela's reaction to the snake apparently shrinking in size, was revealed

through the surprise expressed in her voice. *"But it became somehow smaller, like in a magical world."*

### **Dwelling: Living as the Imaginal Figures**

When I asked Pamela during the imagery to become the snake and describe herself, she identified herself using rather ominous words. *"I'm a snake, I'm darkness, I'm coldness, I'm poison, I'm terror, I'm dangerous, I'm death."* When I asked her to address the ball as the snake in the imagery she spoke about her relationship to the baby Pamela. *"I leap into that child and I will remain forever as a part of that child who is a grown adult right now. I will be there and nobody can kill me. I still am there."*

Next, I asked Pamela to respond as the ball to what the snake had just said. Pamela described herself as the ball. *"I am a magic ball and I'm blue shiny and light, I'm life, I'm health, I'm love, I'm acceptance, I'm security, I'm eternal. I will never die. I'm life."* Again on her own, in the imagery, Pamela spoke about her relationship to the baby. *"I'm part of that baby who is grown up and I'm here, I'm present and nobody can kill me. I've survived and I'm happiness and hope."*

During the imagery, Pamela stated that she noticed that when the snake crawled on top of the ball, she found herself thinking that she thought the snake was *"less dangerous."* She said that she thought that it could even be *"tamed."* It would appear after observing this interaction between the snake and the ball, that Pamela's relationship

with the snake had undergone a change. She was now seeing the snake as much less threatening.

**Dwelling: Relationship Development Through Interaction--**

**A Drama Unfolds**

In the imagery the interaction and dialogue continued between Pamela, the ball, the snake and myself. The ball started off by talking to the snake in a rather antagonistic manner. *"You're not my friend. I'll take care of the baby's life."* The snake responded next. It said that it wouldn't bother people anymore. Its voice sounded as if it felt somewhat intimidated by the ball. Then the snake piped up again. *"I'm glad you know I exist."* The snake seemed pleased that its existence had at last been acknowledged by Pamela.

When I asked Pamela what the snake reminded her of she replied, *"Somehow this snake doesn't threaten me this time."* Then, when I asked her to respond to the snake she addressed it and told it with a rather emphatic voice that she would no longer let it direct her life. Besides, she remarked, she wasn't going to accept it as part of her.

Then, I asked the snake to respond to Pamela's comments. In a plaintive voice the snake replied, telling Pamela how tired, exhausted and sad it was and how it had never chosen to be part of Pamela. *"I don't like the role I play but I'm a nice snake."* All of this had been done without its consent. It would really have preferred to live in a nice "cellar" somewhere.

I asked Pamela to respond to the snake again. Her voice was soft. *"I understand what you mean. You are here and I am here and I guess I will accept you."* Although there appeared to be some reservation in her voice, Pamela seemed to have begun to move toward an acceptance of the snake.

I asked Pamela to respond to the snake speaking as the ball. The ball then began to speak to the snake with some kind of acceptance. *"You are welcome to stay."* It seemed that the ball's antagonistic stance toward the snake was gone. The ball then quickly pointed out its position in relationship to the baby remarking that it was *"the real essence of the baby grown-up."* The conflict over who was in control of Pamela's life was continuing although there appeared to be some level of acceptance developing between Pamela, the ball and the snake.

### **Dwelling: Absorbing Inner Figures**

Then, I asked Pamela to be the ball again. I asked her what she would like to say to Pamela. In the interview afterward Pamela told me what happened when I asked her to do this. Pamela explained that as the ball she found that without her conscious will, she had moved closer to the inner Pamela. When this happened Pamela stated, she felt the ball come into her real body. It appeared to happen spontaneously. Pamela noted that as the ball came into her she felt *"very, very energetic and younger and potent and happy."* Pamela described how this happened:

*So it [the ball] went inside, like through--very interesting--the ball didn't come through one specific part [of my body]. It became more like. It was something between air and water--like an energy when the sun comes through. I was illuminated by this ball. And that energy became part of me.*

Next, I asked Pamela in her imagination to walk over to the bed where the snake lay. She did this and then on her own initiative, Pamela noted that she picked up the snake. She held the snake in her hand describing it as "cold, quiet, and calm." Its mouth was closed. She remarked now that the snake seemed even less frightening than before. "I know it is quiet, it is not dangerous." In the interview Pamela mentioned that the snake then spontaneously disappeared through her left hand and into her body. Pamela compared this experience with that of the ball. "The energy from the ball came through my whole body and at the same time the snake through the same left hand--like a piece of ice-cream and became absorbed by my skin."

**Dwelling: Beginning to Accept the Past and Acknowledging  
a Need to Grieve**

At this point in the imagery, I asked Pamela what this reminded her of. She said, "It means I can't change my past. I am a whole person although I do have some fears [that] are left from my childhood. But I understand they are in the past." Then, Pamela remarked she now recognized that she could not leave the snake "behind" somewhere although at first she thought she could. Pamela indicated she was beginning to accept it's presence in her life. At this point Pamela stated she felt she had no choice since it

was there in her and she believed it would not go away. At this point Pamela's voice changed. There was sadness in it. Pamela remarked she thought that she would probably need to do some grieving about her childhood and all that had occurred back then.

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Sadness lies at the very core of being.  
Lay the heart bare of every other feeling  
and inevitably you will come upon sadness,  
ready, like the quickened seed, to put  
forth it's green leaf.

(Murdock, 1990, p. 122)

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As the imagery session drew to an end Pamela saw herself lying on the bed where the snake had been. She had moved back into her inner body. Pamela described this as her "very safe place" where she could rest and daydream. As Pamela lay there she sensed movement in the air, in the plants and trees--all around her. In the final moments I asked Pamela to become the bed. As the bed Pamela expressed that she felt as though she was very much a part of nature. Then the bed left Pamela with a message. *"I can recognize that you are very much a part of nature too. I'm glad you are. It's a wonderful way to fulfill yourself."* Another inner figure had left Pamela with a message about how she could give support to herself.

**Reflection: Deepening Personal Meaning--Greater  
Awareness, Self-Acceptance, and Hope**

During the interview Pamela deepened her understanding about a number of the areas which she had already explored in the imagery. First, she discovered further dimensions to her fear and how this was related to the considerable risks she has always taken in her life. Secondly, Pamela made further steps toward accepting her fear as part of herself. She began to understand how her fear had "helped" her survive early, frightening life experiences as a baby.

Thirdly, Pamela made connections between her self-criticalness and her inability to accept parts of herself. In the imagery, she seemed to have begun to accept and develop compassion toward the inner characters. And in turn, she appeared to have begun a process of accepting herself. Finally, Pamela described some of the changes in her awareness concerning her overeating. Pamela believed that this experience was the beginning of a process of healing for her.

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**Meaning is formed in the interaction  
of experiencing and something that  
functions as a symbol.**

**(Gendlin, 1962, p. 8)**

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**Reflection: Understanding Her Fear--It was a Fear  
of Dying**

Pamela started off the interview by explaining that she had made a discovery about the baby's fear of the snake in relation to her own fears. Pamela noted that when she was in the imagery in the presence of the snake she could "feel" the baby's fear of it. Pamela indicated she recognized that the baby's fear was really a fear of dying. Pamela mentioned that she was afraid of being squeezed to death by the python-like snake. Although she hadn't realized it before, Pamela remarked, this experience had helped her to recognize that her fear all her life has been a fear of dying.

At the same time Pamela stated in the interview that this Journey as well as the "others," had helped her to get in touch with both the immensity and the depth of her fears. Pamela said she had never felt her fear with as much intensity as she had in the imagery. Pamela remarked she had realized that through not being aware of what her fear was, and not being able to accept it, she had always been afraid of her fear. Pamela believed that for this reason her fear had become even "larger" than it really was. Pamela related this experience with her fear to the risks she has seen herself take all her life. Pamela indicated she has always risked her health, her jobs, "everything" to prove to others and to herself that she wasn't afraid of anything.

**Reflection: Accepting the Snake, Accepting Herself  
and Her Fear**

In the interview Pamela mentioned that she had had a great "*revelation*" once the snake had entered her body. She explained that when the ball came into her body she felt "*alive*." But when the snake entered her body she had recognized it as something that had in a sense transformed her youthful enthusiasm and aliveness into the "*wisdom*" of an adult. *The "feeling"* of the snake coming into her, Pamela explained, was like watching the pain and terror of her childhood become part of her. Although she had always known intellectually that she could not change her past, Pamela noted that this experience had facilitated her understanding on the "*level of feelings*." She thought that through "*feeling*" this happen, she was finally beginning to be able to accept not only her fear, but also all that had happened to her as a child. Pamela referred to it as "*a real wise understanding*."

Pamela's acceptance of the snake seemed to happen slowly--in stages. At the beginning of the imagery, she saw the snake as dangerous. When Pamela had an opportunity to speak with the snake she regarded it as less threatening. She also seemed to listen to what it had to say. When Pamela held the snake in her hand and then when the snake entered her body, her feelings toward and acceptance of the snake appeared to deepen. As Pamela's acceptance of the snake occurred, Pamela's acceptance not only of her fear, but of her own life, seemed to deepen as well.

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What was once an affect, a symptom,  
an obsession, is now a figure with  
whom I can talk.

(Hillman, 1977, p. 34)

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Reflection: Accepting the Inner Figures--*"They're  
Parts of Myself"*

During the interview Pamela mentioned that when she started the sessions she regarded the figures and images as something "external"--not really parts of her. To some extent Pamela said she had hoped that she might be able to "get away" from or avoid these parts of herself, particularly the snake. She mentioned she could now see that they were really parts of herself. In the interview, Pamela summed up how she understood the process of acceptance and integration had come about:

*I think the fear, terror and light and energy  
they were created and they went out of my self  
and they. I looked at them outside of me and I  
could integrate them within and my level of aware-  
ness and my consciousness is very different about  
myself and how I can live a healthier life.*

**Reflection: Awareness, Acceptance and Healing--"They  
Helped Me Survive"**

It is just the same with elements from the unconscious that we dislike and which we feel are very uncongenial to us. If we can accept them for what they are and be friendly towards them, we often find they are not so bad after all.

(Hannah, 1981, p. 7)

Pamela also mentioned during the interview that she was aware of feeling more accepting toward both her fear and her overeating. She said she had recognized from the imagery that her fear and overeating were really reactions that had helped the baby survive. Pamela explained that after she made a connection between these reactions and the baby's experiences in the imagery, she realized that she didn't want to "hate" or "punish" these parts of herself anymore. Pamela mentioned that in the past she had considered these reactions somewhat like people within her that she hadn't liked. Pamela indicated she was hopeful she might be able to loosen her hold on her own self-condemnation, now that she no longer wanted to punish these parts of herself.

**Reflection: Linking Present Anxiety With Hunger and  
a Process of Healing**

In the interview, Pamela said that she noticed a change in herself regarding her eating. She thought that

her awareness had become "*sharper, deeper, and larger*" around her eating. In the past few days since the previous Journey, Pamela explained, she was able to recognize a link between her hunger, when she felt anxious, and why she felt anxious.

Also, Pamela mentioned that she thought her life had been enriched through this whole experience. Pamela remarked that she hoped these sessions were the beginning of a process that could heal her relationship with herself. Pamela explained that she had noticed a significant change in her attitude toward herself. She felt much more accepting of herself. She said that she liked herself a lot more.

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How special that moment when we stop pushing it all away. Here is the moment of truth: the fear, the vulnerability, the doubt, the helplessness - that's what's going on, that's what we're feeling. We're alone on the corner. But the moment we accept it we're not running anymore. We've turned the corner and can finally say, "Now what's next?"

(Dass and Gorman, 1987, p. 146)

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Summary: A Dialogue Between Two Myths

In the imagery during this Journey, Pamela began a process of dialogue in an attempt to begin a resolution between her two myths--her prevailing myth and her countermyth. Pamela started this session by creating two images, one which represented her prevailing myth--the python snake--and the other which represented her countermyth--a magic, blue ball. During the imagery, Pamela, the guide, and the two symbols interacted through dialoguing and "changes in physical relationship" to one another. In this process the relationships among this "cast of characters," inner and outer, appeared to develop and change. The changes in the relationships among the characters seemed to become a reflection of the changes that occurred within Pamela as she began to see these figures as parts of herself and not something external to her. Pamela's changes in herself were demonstrated through her words both in the imagery and the interview. And in the end, Pamela seemed to have begun to accept parts of herself that she had in the past disliked and rejected. As the Journey ended Pamela said she regarded her experience as a healing process.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

This final interview took place one week after the fourth Journey. The purpose of this interview was to have Pamela describe what the whole experience of mythmaking had been like for her. It was my hope that one week would provide Pamela with an opportunity to do more reflecting and to gain a greater understanding about what she had learned from the exploration in her Journeys.

During this interview Pamela spoke more about the changes in the way she saw her life. She reflected on the changes she could "feel" within herself. Pamela's description in this final interview focussed on her relationship with family members--her mother, grandmother and father--her "eating" and her self-image. In addition, Pamela talked about the future and how she could envision exploring other personal issues using a similar kind of process.

#### **Reflection: Perceptions and Beliefs Continue to Change**

Pamela explained that she had taken some time over the past week since the final Journey to reflect about her family, particularly her parents and grandmother. Pamela believed that her perceptions and beliefs about her family had undergone some changes. Pamela seemed to think that she now had a much clearer picture of the different family

members, and how they had individually used their power within the family. What Pamela believed was that she had developed a new understanding about her mother. Pamela compared the way her mother had controlled others to the way her grandmother had controlled. On the one hand, Pamela believed her mother had tried to control others *"by totally taking care of them."* And on the other hand, Pamela thought that her grandmother had controlled others by trying to influence or withdraw from them.

Pamela said that when she reflected back on the imagery experience she had gained another insight about herself from living in the body of the inner mother. She noted she remembered imagining and feeling herself as someone who was very compulsive. As the inner mother she felt herself working and playing very hard--doing everything in a very compulsive way. At first Pamela connected this compulsive feeling to her own real mother's compulsive ways. And then she made the connection with herself.

Pamela cited instances of her own compulsive nature from her life: needing to control other people, overeating, and working and playing too hard. Pamela mentioned for example, that she believed the way she sometimes used her leisure time was *"compulsive."* Pamela said there were times in her life when she found herself unable to put down a book that she was involved in. She recalled staying up all night to finish it and ignoring some of her basic needs such as sleep.

**Reflection: A New Perspective on Her Relationship  
With Her Father**

Pamela took some time in this interview to reexamine her relationship with her father, particularly the anger she has always harboured toward him. Pamela remarked that she has never really understood why she has always "hated" her father so much. Pamela explained that she didn't believe her father had ever really done anything to explain her having these feelings. At this point, Pamela mentioned that over the past week she had continued to think about the imagery and how it had helped her understand how her anger had developed toward those that abandoned her in Journey Two. Pamela said when she did this, she began to recognize that she had directed most of her anger about that abandonment toward her father.

Pamela indicated that she believed she had done this because she thought that it would not have been acceptable for her to hate her mother and grandmother who were always such "saints." She imagined that her father had likely been the "safest" person to hate in the family because her mother and her grandmother had always been loving, self-sacrificing and supportive toward her. And besides Pamela said, she disliked her father's "sloppy, cold" and distant approach to life. He had also been the only one who had ever struck her. Pamela explained that she now realized that her father, like her mother and grandmother, had always done the best he could for her. Pamela thought that she might now be able to let go of "hating" him so much. She stated that she could now recognize that he had not been the sole person responsible for all that had happened to her as a child. Pamela's hate for her father seemed to lessen as she began

to realize that he had been the "safest" one with whom to be angry in the family.

**Reflection: Awareness--"I Eat Differently"**

Pamela also reflected on the changes in both her attitude and behavior around eating. She said she had noticed not only that her level of anxiety was lower when she was about to eat, but also that she also had more "consciousness" when she was eating. She indicated that in the past few weeks since the beginning of the study she had become aware that she was eating differently. *"But still I mean I certainly eat and still it's a...I don't think I eat the way I did. I don't think I do, Jesus!"*

Pamela also seemed to have a somewhat different perspective about her overeating. She explained that now she saw her overeating as a kind of "aggression" toward herself. She indicated that she recognized her eating as a way of reducing her anxiety. Pamela remarked she saw her overeating now as a "mechanism" and "symptom" that she had used throughout her life to cope with her fears and frustrations.

The words Pamela used to describe her overeating seemed to reflect a new relationship she had to her overeating. Through living as the infant in her imagery Pamela appeared to have been able to "step beyond" her usual way of seeing her life. Her experience in the imagery seemed to have allowed her to see her overeating from a different vantage point. Temporarily, she had seen her

overeating in her imagery from the point of view of a small baby who felt abandoned. She had associated the baby's life with her own. Now after the imagery experience, Pamela had a different perspective on her overeating. And it seemed to have new meaning for her.

Pamela seemed somewhat relieved to know that her overeating was something--a "*mechanism*" as she said--that had helped her cope with her fears. She seemed to realize that her overeating had been a response to her world as an infant that had helped her survive. At the same time, Pamela noted she was able to recognize that her overeating over the years had developed from that early time and had become a response she used when she was feeling anxiety and fear. Thus, Pamela appeared to have been able to get some distance from the problem and to see her problem as something more "separate" from herself. To some extent now Pamela appeared to be able to see herself as *having* the problem of overeating. *It* no longer seemed to have her.

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**As we step outside our systems of thinking and feeling we become more able to look into our problems from new vantage points. It is the shaking of old systems in the creation of the new. It is the experience of no longer being the problem, but having the problem.**

(Carlsen, 1988, p. 70)

**Reflection: Awareness--Feeling Better About Herself and a  
More Positive Self-Image**

Pamela also mentioned that she had begun to feel more positive about herself in the past few weeks since starting the study. In looking in the mirror over the past week, Pamela said she had found herself being able to say with genuineness that she thought she looked "OK." She had even liked the colour of her eyes. Pamela had never been able to say these things to herself before. Pamela explained that in the past she had always hated her face and felt "victimized" because she had looked so much like her father. At this point, Pamela stated she believed this change in attitude toward herself was "some kind of bridge toward acceptance." She seemed to think that this change in her "self-image" had been brought about by her more accepting attitude toward her father.

Pamela's Improved Self-Esteem and Her Exploration:

A Summary

It would seem that there might be other factors which were contributing toward Pamela's improved self-esteem. Over the past few weeks Pamela had deepened her understanding about a number of issues through her exploration in the study. She had greater insight into the roots of her overeating and fear and how these two were linked. She saw how her responses of fear and overeating had helped her to survive as an infant. And she had begun to let go of some of her criticalness both toward her parents and herself. Finally, Pamela had begun a process of

self-acceptance through beginning to accept parts of her that in the past she had always rejected.

**Awakening to the Inner World, Redeeming Parts of  
Herself and Celebration**

**Women find their way back to themselves  
not by moving up and out into the light  
like men, but by moving down into the  
depths of the ground of their being.**

**(Murdock, 1990, p. 89)**

During this interview Pamela reflected on the value of finding an inner "place" within herself. Pamela spoke about exploring this inner world and compared it to what she called *"talking therapy."* *"It's more painful, more involving, more exhausting, more. But I think it's more valuable because you get in touch with the whole inner world you have--past, present and future [with] body sensations and everything."*

There was an awakening that seemed to be taking place in Pamela. It was a gradual one in which Pamela appeared to discover parts of herself that she had previously been unfamiliar with. She seemed to have found an inner self and an inner world and to feel empowered by this discovery. Pamela welcomed and in some sense celebrated what she had found.

Pamela explained that she found the exploration process quite overwhelming at times. It was difficult she noted, to concentrate on events and concerns in her outer world during the course of the study. Even though Pamela said she could do what she called "external" activities, she said she felt somehow uninvolved in them. Pamela indicated that while participating in the study, her focus had been within. *"From when we started I just lived within my inner life."*

Pamela also reflected on the value of the interviews with the guide after each Journey. She described them as *"indispensable."* *"You make sense of what you felt, and what you thought and what image you had. [When] we say it out loud we learn everything in the communication process."* Pamela stated that she would not have wanted to be left *"with all the feelings"* and *"to struggle on [her] own."* Pamela seemed to feel a sense of security having the guide there to listen and help her make sense of her feelings and experiences.

#### **Reflection: Valuing, Hope and the Future**

Pamela spoke about the value she saw for herself by participating in this process. She said she regarded it as a *"healing"* process and was hopeful that all of the *"knowledge"* that she had gained would help her to have some kind of *"internal state of peace."* Pamela believed it had brought her to a deeper understanding of her life. She remarked that she now had the ability to see how her past was reflected in her present life circumstances. *"I mean each time we had a session I did have some deeper and wiser*

*understanding of my life and the relationship between my past, present feelings and thoughts and images."*

**Reflection: The Future--A Desire to Explore More Issues**

Pamela mentioned that she would like to examine other issues in the future by using a process similar to what she had undertaken in this study. Pamela indicated she thought she might like to do another 4 or 5 sessions over a span of a couple of weeks when she knew she would have the time and freedom to reflect and work through the feelings and experiences. Pamela explained that she thought she would not want to do this kind of "*therapy*" on an ongoing basis, because she found that the intense involvement had often left her quite exhausted. What Pamela liked most about this process was that it was "*devoted to personal discoveries, and feelings, and comfort of the person.*"

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First there is conflict; then comes the search for new data; out of this comes "aha" of the new insight; next there is a surging of energy as the individual, freeing self from the original conflict, moves to the final stage of a new integration of the old with the new.

(Carlsen, 1988, p. 12)

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### A Summary of Pamela's Four Journeys

Pamela embarked on four Journeys in the process of exploring her personal mythology hoping to examine a number of personal issues. She ended up selecting one important conflict to focus on: her overeating. Pamela was someone who was looking for answers about her life. Pamela's description of her experiences during the four sessions demonstrated that she made many discoveries in this search both about herself and her family. Throughout the Journeys Pamela spoke about the new understandings, insights, and sense of hope she was gaining not only about the conflict she chose, her overeating, but also about other important issues: her fear, her criticalness toward herself, her self-image, and her relationships with family and friends. Pamela seemed to have begun a process of "putting together" her old perceptions about herself and her life from the past, with new perceptions from her experiences in the imagery. Out of this a new story about her life appeared to be unfolding.

In this follow-up interview Pamela seemed to be looking toward the future with a sense of hope. Pamela was excited about having discovered her inner world. She appeared to feel confident that she might be able to call upon this inner world in the future to help her find more "answers" about her life.

## CHAPTER X

### MORE ABOUT PAMELA'S EXPERIENCE

#### Through Dialoguing a Story is Lived and Told

Telling one's story--to someone  
--seems to be necessary for each  
of us (and is an important ingredient  
in psychotherapy).

(Larsen, 1990, p. 141)

Pamela both *lived* her story, and also *told* her story to some extent through her words. Her words were a verbal documentation of her Journeys. Her words were the story of her Journeys. Each step of the way Pamela presented her experiences, her feelings, her images, her ideas, her memories, and her reflections through her words.

#### Dialoguing With Another

The language used in presenting her experiences was dialogical in nature. Dialogue comes from the Latin *dialogus* and from the Greek, *dialogos*. According to Webster's (1986) dialogue means a talking together; a conversation, an interchange and discussion of ideas especially when open and frank as in seeking mutual

understanding. There seemed to be always an element of a seeking of mutual understanding among the "players" who were part of this experience as they conversed. The players in Pamela's experience were herself, myself as guide and researcher, and the inner figures. All of these players participated in an ongoing "conversation" or dialogue with one another.

It seemed that the entire cast of players were always active participants in the dialogue even when they were not involved directly in a conversation. The inner figures in particular it appeared, were always watching and listening from the sidelines--if only with a silent voice but always with an open ear.

#### **Questing: Searching for Answers**

Pamela's energetic and questioning nature was a dynamic force guiding the course of each Journey. As Pamela explained in the initial interview, she had always been someone eager to understand herself and "the world around" her. Pamela's drive to know and understand was apparent in each Journey.

For example, in Journey Two, it appeared that there were questions embedded in Pamela's statements about her overeating:

*It's out of my control. I've read a lot and I know most people have been sexually abused and I was not. I've read some Freud and I remembered they say it can be related to some early abandonment, and still I did not know what kind of abandonment.*

Pamela had come to these sessions with questions already in her mind about her overeating although these were implicit: How do I get control over my eating? Did something happen in my life to bring it about? Was I abandoned? In what way? Pamela was looking for answers-- for some kind of way to understand what she was going through. She seemed to possess a driving curiosity to understand.

### Exploring Beliefs

Throughout all four Journeys Pamela continually questioned her beliefs about herself and her family. After being confronted with new experiences in her imagery, Pamela often came away with a new belief about herself or a family member. Her experiences seemed to provide her with an opportunity to examine and question her beliefs.

In the interviews afterward sometimes Pamela uncovered beliefs that she had not been aware of. For example, when Pamela examined her anger toward her parents in Journey Two, she discovered that underlying her self-criticalness was her belief that *"Good girls don't hate their parents."*

At other times, Pamela changed a belief or embraced a new one in light of her inner experiences. For example, in the interview after Journey One, Pamela began to recognize her mother as a person who had used her accommodating and self-sacrificing ways as a way of pleasing and controlling others. This appeared to be a new perception, a new belief, about a mother whom she'd always seen as self-sacrificing, hardworking and generous.

### **Reflection and Grasping the Experiences: Understanding, Deeper Understanding and the Creation of Meaning**

Pamela's reflection took place both during the imagery and as well, during the interviews after each Journey. From her reflections, Pamela seemed to deepen her understanding and to uncover further meaning about herself and her life. The ways in which Pamela's understanding of her experiences "came about" often seemed very different. The words she used during her reflection appeared indicative of the different ways and levels in which Pamela "grasped" her experiences: "*understanding,*" "*deeper understanding,*" "*meaning,*" "*deeper meaning,*" "*cognitive understanding,*" "*the level of body sensations,*" "*the level of feelings,*" "*connection,*" and so on. Pamela's words were always something which appeared to hint at and point to a process going on inside her.

### **Reflection: Weaving Together the Lived and Imaginal World Into a New Life Story**

Pamela's reflection seemed in part to be a process of weaving together threads from her imaginal world with those from her real or lived reality. It was as if there were two realities or stories that were being lived and told--an inner imagined one and an outer lived one. Pamela's imaginal world was her imagery experience. Pamela's lived reality was her memories and perceptions of her present life as well as her memories from the past. The weaving together of the threads from both realities became the new fabric of Pamela's life. It became the new story about her life.

## Unearthing the Old and Authoring the New Story

Everything is itself and  
at the same time many  
other things.

(Riegal, 1973, p. 351)

The experience of exploring personal mythology was a process in which Pamela appeared to unearth an old story and to author a new story about her life. As Pamela connected her experiences in the imaginal realm with those from her lived realm, an unearthing process of the old, or lived story took place. It was like a tilling of the soil of her past--a digging up of old beliefs, perceptions, memories and images about herself and her family. There was in a sense a "looking into the past" through reminiscing and remembering past life experiences.

For example, in Journey One Pamela "went back" through her memories to examine the life of her inner grandmother. She spoke about perceiving the grandmother that she had always known as a rather "impotent" and weak sort of person (lived story). Pamela's perception changed dramatically through her imagery experience. In the imagery, Pamela discovered her grandmother to be quite the opposite. She was a "powerful" person--someone who tried always to control other people (imagined story).

Pamela's old beliefs, images and memories of her grandmother evolved into new ones in light of her experiences in the imaginal realm. There seemed to be a synthesis between the old and the new story about her

grandmother taking place. Thus, on this Journey a new life story had begun to unfold out of the old. Pamela had a new perspective about her grandmother and her family, discovering that her grandmother was not only a controlling and powerful individual, but also "*the real centre of the family.*" Through unearthing the old story, Pamela began to create, or author a new one. The new story was the old one revised or revisited. It was in a sense both old and new at the same time.

#### One Woman's Journey: Departure, Initiation and Return <sup>1</sup>

**That's the basic motif of the universal hero's journey--leaving one condition and finding the source of life to bring you forth into a richer or mature condition.**

(Campbell, 1988, p. 124)

Pamela made an entry into her inner realm at the beginning of each Journey. She explored her inner world with the guide and then again with myself as the researcher when she returned to her usual reality. Exploring her life in this manner was new for Pamela--like an initiation process. And at the end of each Journey, Pamela returned with new perspectives of herself.

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<sup>1</sup> These stages of the hero's journey--Departure, Initiation and Return--have been previously described by Joseph Campbell (1988) and by numerous other writers on myth.

Put together, the entire four Journeys which Pamela undertook, could be seen as a whole in which there was a Departure, an Initiation and a Return. Pamela left or started her Journeys with a certain understanding of herself and her life story. She was initiated into her inner world and into new experiences there. Here, there were a variety of experiences which Pamela engaged in and explored. The interview process with the guide was a continuation of her exploration. And when the four Journeys and interviews ended, Pamela returned to a richer and deeper understanding about her life. Pamela had been on a quest. Her explorations had given her a new perspective about the story of her life. Through the process of exploring her personal mythology, Pamela had in a sense unlocked and opened new doors to herself--inner ones.

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It runs deep this quest to unwind the shroud  
that would bind the wound  
that would mark us with blood  
at the byetide of the red anemone  
this first Sunday after the first  
full moon of Spring  
that would call us back  
to the origin of things  
and would have us see  
in the turning point of time  
a reflection of the moon  
in the redemption of Love.

(Connor quoted in Murdock, 1990, p.30)

## CHAPTER X

## EVOLVING THOUGHTFULNESS AND TACT

We shall not cease from exploration  
and the end of all our exploring will  
be to arrive where we started and to  
know that place for the first time.

(Eliot, 1944, p. 43)

Bringing to language an understanding of the meaning structures of the lived experience of exploring personal mythology has been the central focus of this study. In this endeavour I have attempted to produce an interpretation of this particular lived experience in such a way that the description might awaken or demonstrate the lived quality and significance of that experience. In this attempt, I considered three central questions: What is it like for someone to explore personal mythology in counselling? What insights does an individual gain through this exploration? How does this individual associate her exploration experiences with her everyday life?

In examining Pamela's experience I have attempted to maintain an attentive thoughtfulness and mindful attunement to what it meant for her to live through such an experience. I knew at the beginning that I was attempting the impossible since words on paper can only ever be an attempt to capture what is essentially ineffable--a living experience in someone's life. Yet although the task has been arduous,

tortuous at times, it has been worthwhile since it has provided me with a deeper understanding of the richness, complexity and uniqueness of what it is like for an individual to live through this particular kind of human experience.

### Theorizing

The theoretical...is a place where in the midst of everyday life we find the possibility of contemplating, beholding, and presenting the good; and the possibility of thus having a transforming experience - an edifying sense of "inspiring," "making pure," "enlightening," and "uplifting spiritually."

(Van Manen, 1986, p. 44)

Traditionally we have developed theory as a way of informing us how to more rationally regulate or live our lives. We have often been looking for rules, guidelines and principles which might guide our actions or tell us what to do. It would seem that very often our theoretical guidelines do not often guide us or take us in directions that are necessarily edifying in human experience. In counselling, traditional theory has often left us not knowing the most tactful or edifying thing to do with clients. Although counselling knowledge of theory is important to become a good counsellor, possessing an ability to respond with tact and sensitivity is even more fundamental.

Max Van Manen (1990) proposes a new way of looking at theory. He speaks about theory more as something that comes about through a kind of enlightenment. "Rather than a body of knowledge...theory is a poetic bundle of illuminations, an edifying display of discourse to be sung rather than mathematized into hypothesizing relationships" (Van Manen, 1986, p. 47). To Van Manen, tact involves having sensitive perception from which emerges a keen sense of doing the "right" thing. Thus tact involves both the knowing and the doing. The right action comes from being in touch with what is true, real or essential in someone's experience. It is knowledge then that comes as much from the heart as it does from the head.

Thus, through undertaking this study I sense perhaps a new kind of tact in myself. True tact comes, I believe, from attuning oneself to the experience of another. Examining Pamela's experience became for me a process of attuning--of attempting to understand--in a way, to live through what she lived through. My attunement was for myself a kind of transformational experience. I am a different person for "getting inside," living, examining, and trying to make sense of Pamela's experience.

What I have presented is my interpretation or my description of Pamela's lived experience of exploring her personal mythology. It is knowledge in a form that does not present or offer to the reader any results or punchlines. What remains is for the reader to discover for him or herself the nature of the illumination which might emerge out of reading about Pamela's experience exploring her personal mythology.

Since this study required an intense involvement and depth of reflection that was new to me, I discovered a new appreciation for the value of deeply reflecting not only on the lived experience examined in this study, but all life experience. Being more thoughtfully aware of the depth and true nature of Pamela's lived experience has influenced me in a number of ways. First, it has influenced the way in which I do things with people--my actions. I find myself stopping and reflecting more about what clients relate to me about their experiences. I believe I possess a more delicate sensitivity than I had previously to what clients might be experiencing and responding more from that sensitivity.

The second way it seemed to have influenced me is I sense a greater ability to hear what clients, as well as other people in my life are relating about their experiences. Now that I have been able to see the themes--the meaning structures in Pamela's experience, I have begun to listen to and reflect on my clients' experiences in a new way as they speak, and I believe I am able to hear in a deeper way. I listen for the meaning, the themes. I feel more attuned to the mythological layer within their experiences: Which myth is being played? By whom? In addition, I also appreciate the intensity of an individual's experience in this particular kind of counselling technique. Pamela's ability to image during the sessions seemed powerful, sometimes intense. What she saw in her imagination and what she *felt* in her body seemed to come through to her on a very deep level. I have a new appreciation for the depth in which individuals can image and explore their inner lives. And, I believe my new ability to hear and appreciate this experience has

influenced how I respond to clients. I put more thoughtfulness into how, and when, I respond.

Thirdly, I believe I have developed more humility, perhaps reverence from examining Pamela's experience. It is difficult to articulate precisely what this humility is since it is only something that I have become aware of in the course of doing this study. I have noticed that I feel more humble, more in awe, when someone is experiencing something deeply in his or her exploration of self. Perhaps the humility comes from coming to grips with the realization that human experience is much more than it seems on the surface. Although I have always known this intellectually, my realization seems to have come through more on the level of feelings and "experience." And because it has come through this way, I believe I have an understanding of Pamela's experience on a deeper level than I did before undertaking the analysis of Pamela's experience. And it has left me being more thoughtfully aware in my work and relationships with others in my "world." It has, I believe made me a more "reflective practitioner" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 156). As a result, I believe I have returned to a place within myself where I listen and respond to clients in new ways, and that perhaps I know this place within myself for the first time.

### **Implications for Counselling**

Pamela's four Journeys were a living experience of mythmaking; she explored some of her personal myths. In doing this, Pamela appeared to be someone on a **quest**. During this experience Pamela articulated and reformulated

these myths with a guide who facilitated the process which allowed her to access these mythic elements and themes within herself. As Pamela moved through this process, she seemed to gain a number of things thematic of this experience: new perspectives about herself particularly regarding her conflict--her overeating--and new understandings about her relationships with family members and friends.

Pamela's new perspectives appeared to bring about changes in her relationship with herself. She seemed to grow in her understandings and wisdom about herself. She appeared much more **accepting** of her life and herself. She spoke about **hope** for her future, feeling better about herself, and believing that she might be able to gain a **sense of control** in her life. She appeared to feel **empowered** by the process.

Pamela also seemed to make sense out of or to create personal meaning from her experiences. She described this process using words such as "*meaning*" and "*wise understanding*." When Pamela changed her perspective on her relationship to her overeating, she began to see it as a mechanism that had helped her survive. It had new meaning for her. She also rediscovered ways to **nurture** herself. Overall, Pamela's experience was one in which she appeared to **create** personal meaning. And through her experiences she seemed to be left with a sense of **celebration** within herself.

Some of the findings--the themes--from Pamela's experiences exploring her personal mythology appear to be consistent with the findings of others who have written

about mythmaking with clients in the context of counselling and therapy (Themes similar to those found in Pamela's experience are bolded in the text which follows.). Krippner (1987) has described mythic themes as dialectic in nature as revealed by clients exploring personal mythology through dreams, free association, and reflection: **creation vs. destruction, nurturance vs. deprivation, achievement vs. failure, completion vs. fragmentation, acceptance vs. rejection, empowerment vs. debilitation, inspiritedness vs. nihilism, reconciliation vs. polarization, wisdom vs. ignorance, birth or rebirth vs. death, and questing vs. passivity.**

Feinstein (1979) has suggested that when people understand their mythologies that they are better able to "comprehend the processes that underlie conscious awareness and motivation, which enable them to exercise an increased sense of participation in shaping their destinies" (p. 199). In other words, the process of mythmaking enables people to feel a greater sense of being able to control and actively involve themselves in directing their lives. Other writers have explained that teaching individuals to articulate their myths either individually or in groups, provides a promising focus to facilitate personal growth and self-development (DeCosta, Buse, & Amdursky, 1986; Feinstein & Krippner, 1988).

Pieracci (1990) described mythic and "archetypal themes" (p. 215) revealed through the stories written by psychotherapy clients about their therapy experiences. These included creation vs. apocalypse, **nurturance vs. deprivation, achievement vs. failure, completion vs. fragmentation, affirmation vs. cynicism, acceptance vs.**

rejection, empowerment vs. debilitation, hope vs. despair, reconciliation vs. polarization, wisdom vs. ignorance, celebration vs. betrayal, rebirth vs. death, questing vs. passivity, and intimacy vs. separation. Pieracci has also linked mythmaking in psychotherapy with "sense-making" (p. 211) and the construction of meaning.

Meaning-making is cited as important in the treatment of various clinical problems such as posttraumatic stress disorder, addiction, depression, and marital problems (Clarke, 1989). However, to date there has been little specificity as to what meaning-making involves or how to facilitate it (Clarke, 1989). Since the mythmaking process developed for this study seemed to be one in which Pamela created personal meaning, counsellors wanting to provide their clients with meaning-making experiences in their work may wish to consider it for such purposes.

The application of myth has not been well developed in counselling or psychotherapy (M. Pieracci, personal communication, November 20, 1990). The guided imagery techniques (Journeys) developed in this study demonstrate one example in which myth can be used in counselling. Although the literature in counselling and depth psychology contains an abundance of information on myth--case studies and references to techniques--little information appears to exist on specific methods which might assist and guide counsellors relatively unfamiliar with myth, to incorporate mythmaking into their practices. As such, the method developed in this study might provide an example of an application of myth in counselling for those counsellors interested in understanding how to "use" myth in their work.

Pamela explored her personal mythology in this study through a particular guided imagery process. The guided imagery process can be used effectively during therapy to uncover major issues or to break through a therapeutic impasse by moving beyond intellectual or analytical blocks (Farr, 1988). Counsellors working with individuals who reach an impasse in the counselling process might consider the use of the mythmaking process demonstrated in this study to assist clients to move beyond these intellectual or analytical blocks. Since guided imagery also seems to be effective when deeper exploration of an issue is desired (Farr, 1988), the process outlined in this study could be considered for clients wishing to examine particular issues in more depth.

### **Indications for Counselling**

Caution is recommended in using guided imagery with schizophrenics or seriously depressed clients. The tendency of any client to have difficulty differentiating between reality and imagination can present an obvious problem in the use of any guided imagery process (Farr, 1988).

Greene (1988) has suggested that in working with counselling interventions such as guided imagery, the therapist must first be mindful of establishing a safe "container" (p. 106) in which the process can take place. A safe container is established with the development of a bond of trust between the client and the therapist over time. Since working with guided imagery can often evoke powerful issues and strong feelings of transference within the client, a depthful and committed relationship between client

and therapist is required to sufficiently work through these things. For this reason, it is the recommendation of this researcher that the guided imagery processes used in this study should be used only after a bond of trust has been well established in the counselling relationship.

### **Limitations of This Study**

In this study I blended different methodological "techniques": phenomenological and qualitative. I believe that the primary limitation of this study is my experience using these methodologies. For example, one of my first challenges I dealt with for some time was trying to decide whether the lived experience of exploring personal mythology was in fact a phenomenon. I struggled with this for a long time unable to find any answers through my reading and continued to wonder if my methodology which I initially called "phenomenological" was appropriate for my study.

During this struggle I made some consultations about this issue and discovered that (a) a phenomenon as defined by some phenomenologists is lived experience that is universally experienced without prior conceptualizations (In the literature that I had read on phenomenology, I had not encountered this interpretation.) and (b) the phenomenologists that I consulted also had some doubt as to whether exploring personal mythology was a phenomenon (A. Giorgi, personal communication, August 20, 1991; A. Oberg, personal communication, November 18, 1991). After acknowledging that the particular lived experience in this study did in fact have a conceptual structure, I made the

decision to qualify the particular lived experience as such, and concluded I would not refer to it as a phenomenon *per se*. As a result of this, I changed the methodology in my study from calling it phenomenological to calling it naturalistic inquiry--one which drew on the work of phenomenologists.

Another ongoing challenge in this study was wondering whether or not my presuppositions about myth were influencing what I was seeing, finding, and interpreting. I continued to ask myself this question throughout the study: How do I make sure I'm not influenced by my presuppositions? I still don't know the answer to this question and can only say that I remained continually mindful of my presuppositions and continued to ask myself as I worked through my analysis if what I was finding was influenced by what I knew about mythmaking.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the interpretive process was trying to devise a way to describe and interpret Pamela's experience that was true to the meaning structures of her experience and blend this in such a way that I could tell the story of the experience as it happened to her. This process involved a lot of false starts and a great deal of rewriting only to discover that although I believed I had uncovered the themes, the "flow" of the story of Pamela's Journeys wasn't making sense because it did not follow chronologically as the experience had "occurred" for her. Finally, I "arrived" at the text that is written here, creating holistic and overarching themes, as well as themes that captured the process of her experience "over time" endeavouring in doing this to describe and interpret all that needed to be expressed about her experience.

### Implications for Future Research

This study examined one woman's experience exploring personal mythology through a particular guided imagery process in counselling. Since there appears to be no research in the literature describing an individual's experience of mythmaking in a counselling context, future studies involving men, other women and other modes of counselling--dreamwork, art, psychodrama etc.--might offer additional interpretations of this experience. This kind of research could contribute to a greater understanding of what it means to explore one's personal mythology in counselling. In addition, there seems to be little information in the literature on the application of myth in counselling. Future studies demonstrating the use of other counselling techniques could serve as additional illustrations for therapists wishing to incorporate a mythic perspective in their work.

It could also be mentioned at this point that this study illustrates the similarity between some of the elements of conducting this particular method of research--the interview process, the nature of reflection, and the dialogue between client and counsellor--and the way in which counselling and therapy take place.

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## APPENDIX A

## INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS

The following information will be given to applicants interested in this study during the first meeting:

"Thank you very much for your interest in my study. The purpose of this study is to explore your 'personal mythology'--the stories, themes or scripts by which you live your life through the use of a guided imagery process. I am interested in a number of things: What the experience is like for you? What awarenesses or insights you gain from these experiences? and How you anticipate these insights relate to your everyday life, for example, decisions you make, effect on relationships, etc."

"The study will consist of four counselling sessions, during which I will guide you through one 'Journey' which is a guided imagery process. In each of the four sessions, a different 'Journey' will be presented. These sessions will be audio-taped so that I can monitor the process. During these sessions I will help you explore any images or experiences using reflections or open questions, but I will not offer any interpretations."

"At the end of the four sessions we will meet again for another hour or more so that I can ask you a number of questions so that I can find out what that experience was like for you. Again, this session will be audiotaped. We will meet one final time so that I can check my interpretations of your responses to ensure that these match your perceptions of them. At this time you can add to any of your responses if you wish."

Participants will be chosen based on their experience with imaging and personal growth processes, their stated ability to form clear images, ability to articulate, willingness to participate and availability. If you are not chosen you will be notified in the next week. If you are chosen you will be notified and a time will be arranged to begin the sessions. However, you are under no obligation to do so, and may choose to withdraw from the study at that

time or at any time during the study itself with no negative effects. You will be asked to sign a consent form which guarantees your right to withdraw from the study, and also guarantees complete anonymity for you during your participation and afterwards. A pseudonym will be used for you in all data and no information will be used which could disclose your identity or that of anyone you mention in these sessions."

"Are there any questions?" (Questions will be answered).

"In order to determine your participation in this study, I would like you to fill out a questionnaire, called Participant Profile. This questionnaire is designed to provide me with important information such as your ability to image, experience with personal growth and as well your own interests and concerns you may have about the study."

## APPENDIX B

## PARTICIPANT PROFILE

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
 ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_  
 OCCUPATION \_\_\_\_\_ AGE \_\_\_\_\_  
 MARITAL STATUS \_\_\_\_\_ CHILDREN \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the following questions in the space provided:

1. Please describe your experience with the following:

a. Guided imagery, visualization, psychodrama, gestalt

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

2. Please rate your own vividness with imagery:

\_\_\_\_\_ a. Very vivid

\_\_\_\_\_ b. Average vividness

\_\_\_\_\_ c. Not very vivid

3. Have you taken part in any personal awareness groups,  
 individual growth work, or personal therapy?

Yes No

Please describe. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

4. If you have some life issues (conflicts, problems, etc.) that you would like to explore at the present time, please describe briefly.

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5. Are you willing to explore these in greater depth?

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6. Are you willing to have these sessions audiotaped?

Yes No

7. Some personal issues raised during these four sessions may be left unresolved. Please describe how you feel about this?

---

---

8. What are your reasons for wanting to take part in this study?

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9. Do you have any reservations about taking part in this study?

If so, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

---

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10. Do you have any questions? \_\_\_\_\_

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11. Are you available over the next five weeks? \_\_\_\_\_

---

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What is the best time(s) for us to meet? \_\_\_\_\_

---

## APPENDIX C

## CONSENT FORM

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to being part of this study which is an exploration of my 'personal mythology.'

I am aware that I will take part in four counselling sessions or 'Journeys' that combine relaxation and guided imagery which may access feelings and concerns about my everyday life, and that these sessions will be audio-taped. I am also aware that at the end of these sessions I will be asked questions about my experiences during this study after each session and then in an in-depth interview with the researcher approximately one week after the fourth session.

I understand that my involvement in this study will be kept in strictest confidence. In order to ensure this, resulting transcripts will not include any information that will reveal my identity (such as name, address, physical description, etc.) nor that of any of my relatives or friends.

I understand that I will be given a full description of the purpose of the study as well as opportunities to discuss any questions or concerns I have with the researcher.

I am aware that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without any unfavourable consequences.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

## RELAXATION EXERCISE

PART A:

"Close your eyes and begin to allow your body to relax. Feel your body lying or sitting on the floor, and become aware of any places of tension. Feel your body relaxing more and more with each breath. [Pause] As you exhale, feel your whole body relaxing more with each exhalation. [Pause] Letting any tension go...letting go more and more. [Pause] Now become aware of your feet and toes, and as you breathe out, allow any tension to leave your feet and toes with your breath, feel your feet and toes becoming warm and heavy and relaxed. [Pause] Now breathe out any tension in your ankles and calves, feel them becoming relaxed as you breathe out. Allow any tension to let go with your breath. [Pause] (Relaxation continues up the body with knees, thighs, pelvis, buttocks, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, neck and throat, head and face). Let your thoughts go with your breath, let your mind empty. [Pause] You are now relaxed, very relaxed. You are very, very deeply relaxed."

At this point the researcher presents each Journey to be used in the session #1, #2, #3, and #4 as outlined in Appendix E, G, H and I respectively.

At the end of the Journey the researcher continues with the following:

PART B:

"When you feel ready, take three deep breaths. [Pause] Begin to become aware of your body in the room. [Pause] Wiggle your feet and hands, move your body. When you feel you are ready, open your eyes."

## APPENDIX E

## JOURNEY ONE

## REMEMBERING THE MYTHS OF YOUR ANCESTORS

"This opening exercise will make it possible for you to understand the context of your forebears and the mythology they passed down to you. Even though it is unlikely that you will have access to the facts that would allow you to answer some of the questions in this process with certainty, the answers your ancestor gave them shaped your family's mythology and echo in your psyche. Assume that these echoes are registered deeply in your being and that the answers your intuition offers will, if not factually precise, be instructive as metaphors for further understanding your heritage."

(PART A of RELAXATION EXERCISE is presented here.)

"Imagine standing where you can move several feet in any direction. Find a comfortable posture and close your eyes. Take a backward step and imagine that you are stepping into the body and the being of your mother. (If you were adopted, make a choice between your biological parent and your adoptive parent for this experience). Then take a few moments to get a sense of what it must have felt like to be in this body and this personality."

"Take another step backward and step into the body and being of your parent's parent, your same-sex grandparent. After sensing this grandparent for a few moments, take another step backward and enter the body and being of your same-sex great-grandparent."

"Physically assume the posture that you imagine might have been a typical posture for your great-grandparent. Dramatize this posture until it begins to symbolize what you know and imagine about this person's life. You will be reflecting upon the person's perceptions of self, environment, and purpose."

"Consider the following questions as if you were your great grandparent:

1. What are your major concerns?
2. What are your primary sources of satisfaction?
  
3. How do you understand your position within your society--its limitations, privileges, and responsibilities?
4. If you look to a nonhuman authority to explain human destiny, what is its nature?"

"Now take a step forward and assume a posture that you imagine to be typical of your grandparent when she was your current age. Dramatize this posture until it begins to symbolize what you know and imagine about this person's life."

"Consider the same questions as if you were your grandparent:

1. What are your major concerns?
2. What are your primary sources of satisfaction?
3. How do you understand your position within your society--its limitations, privileges, and responsibilities?
4. If you look to a nonhuman authority to explain human destiny, what is its nature?"

"Now take a step forward and assume a posture that you imagine to be typical of your parent when he or she was your current age. Dramatize this posture until it begins to symbolize what you know and imagine about this person's life."

"Consider the same questions as if you were your parent:

1. What are your major concerns?
2. What are your primary sources of satisfaction?
3. How do you understand your position within your society--its limitations, privileges, and responsibilities?
4. If you look to a nonhuman authority to explain human destiny, what is its nature?"

"Now take a step forward into yourself. Find a posture that represents the statement your own life is making. Hear this statement as an actual phrase or sentence. Say it aloud in your thoughts."

"Let your posture become animated as you continue to repeat your statement. Explore and experiment with the movements and the statement. If you have a sense that you need a greater statement or expanded posture, stretch your movement or your words to represent this new statement."

"When you have explored the statement and the movements to your satisfaction, come to a resting point."

(PART B of RELAXATION EXERCISE is presented here.)

**APPENDIX F****CONFLICT SURVEY**

(Participants are given the Conflict Survey to take home after Journey #1 to use as a guide to consider a problem or conflict they would like to examine in the study.)

At some time over the next week I would like you to look at some area of conflict in your life you would like to examine. In our next session I will guide you on a Journey that will help you to explore this area. I have provided a few general categories for examining your conflicts which you might want to use as a guide:

1. Self-Defeating Behaviors,
2. Troublesome Feelings
3. Symbols of Conflict--This could be a symbol from a dream perhaps some troublesome physical problem for example, a back problem.

## APPENDIX G

## JOURNEY TWO

ACCESSING A PREVAILING MYTH: FINDING THE ROOTS OF  
MYTHIC CONFLICT IN YOUR PAST

"This exercise will deepen your understanding about the conflict that you have chosen to examine. In it, you will be guided to transform this conflict into an image or feelings. You will be guided back in time to an early experience that is related to this conflict and current difficulties in your life. By connecting present feelings to past experiences, you will gain a greater appreciation of the source of underlying conflict in your life story or your personal mythology."

"As you go back in time in this exercise remember that the images and details may not be and need not be factually precise. Simply allow the images to occur by suspending judgment and trusting your intuition. Now we will begin with the exercise."

(PART A of RELAXATION EXERCISE is presented here.)

"Bring to your awareness the area of conflict you have been thinking about. [Pause] Feel your body's response in your breathing, muscles, and temperature. Trace with your finger-tips or in your mind the shape of the part of your body that responds the most strongly. Note its color. [Pause] Explore its texture. [30 second pause] In a moment you will see or sense a symbol or image emerging out of the shapes and colors. Watch as an image appears that is pressing for resolution. [Pause] You may actually see it take form, or you may simply sense what it is. [Pause] It will further evolve over the next few moments." [30 second pause]

"Notice your feelings about this symbol or thought. [Pause] If there is more than one feeling, concentrate on the feeling that is the most dominant or uncomfortable. Identify the feeling if you can." [Pause]

"Keep in your awareness the feeling you have identified and notice the part of your body in which you experience it the most fully. Bring your attention to that part of your body. [Pause] If the feeling is vague, imagine yourself breathing into it and intensifying it. If the feeling is so strong that it is distracting, imagine that your next few exhalations are breathing out some of the intensity. As this feeling absorbs your attention, observe the way your body reacts to it. Feel your body's response in your breathing, your muscles, and your temperature. [Pause] Attempt to find a word that describes the feeling." [Pause]

"You will use this feeling now to lead you back to an earlier period of your life. Notice the flow of sensations that make up the feeling. Now create the image of a river as you continue to focus on your feeling. Think of your feeling as the river. Imagine yourself in a boat on that river. The river floats you back in time, safely and comfortably, to one of the first occasions on which you may have experienced the feeling you just identified."

"On the bank of the river you see, as if on a stage, yourself experiencing the same feeling, but in a scene that may have occurred very early in your life. [Pause] Remember to allow your intuition and imagination to take over if the images are unclear and trust it. Now enter the scene. [Pause] I would like you to describe this scene, what you see, feel, hear."

(PART B of RELAXATION EXERCISE is presented here.)

**APPENDIX H****JOURNEY THREE****ACCESSING A COUNTERMYTH: FINDING THE ROOTS OF MYTHIC  
RENEWAL IN YOUR PAST**

"This exercise will renew your connection with experiences from your past that gave you a reason to hope that your aspirations can bring you into a better world beyond your conflict. In this exercise you will be guided back in time to an early experience that is related to resolving the current conflict in your life. By connecting present feelings to past experiences, you will gain a greater appreciation of the source of renewal regarding resolving this underlying conflict in your life, your personal life story or mythology. Instead of starting with an uncomfortable experience associated with your conflict, you will begin by focusing on a positive feeling. You will follow this feeling back to events from your past that serve as underlying models when you envision more promising new directions."

"As you go back in time in this exercise remember that the images and details may not be and need not be factually precise. Simply allow the images to occur by suspending judgement and trusting your intuition."

(PART A of RELAXATION EXERCISE is presented here.)

"There are times when you have experienced affirming feelings, images, and thoughts in relation to your conflict that seem to be working toward a more self-affirming, more imaginative scenario in your life than that associated with your conflict from the previous exercise last week. [Pause] Allow your body to be suffused with energy and a particular pleasant feeling associated with this more affirming sense of yourself. Bask in these good feelings. Feel your body's response in your breathing, muscles, and temperature. Trace with your finger-tips or in your mind the shape of the part of your body that responds the most strongly. Note its color. [Pause] Explore its texture. [30 second pause] In a moment you will see or sense an image or symbol emerging

out of the shapes and colors. Watch as a symbol appears. [Pause] You may actually see it take form, or you may simply sense what it is. [Pause] Relax as it becomes increasingly clearer. Notice your feelings about this symbol or thought. [Pause] It will further evolve over the next few moments. [30 second pause] Discover the colors, textures, tastes, and scents. If you can, give a name to your feelings." [30 second pause]

"I want you to use these feelings to lead you back to an earlier period of your life. Notice the flow of sensations that make up the feelings. Now create the image of a river as you continue to focus on the feeling. [Pause] Think of your feeling as the river. Imagine yourself in a boat on that river. The river floats you back in time, safely and comfortably, to one of the first occasions in which you may have experienced this affirming feeling. On the bank of the river you see, as if on a stage, yourself enjoying the same feelings, but in a scene that may have occurred very early in your life. Enter the scene. I would like you to describe out loud this scene, what you see, feel and hear."

(PART B of RELAXATION EXERCISE is presented here.)

## APPENDIX I

## JOURNEY FOUR

BRINGING THE CONFLICTING MYTHS INTO DIALOGUE:  
A FANTASY

"The past two exercises have uncovered parts of your life story or personal mythology: one through exploring the feelings related to your conflict which are part of what can be called your present or prevailing myth, and the other through exploring more affirming feelings, thoughts, images etc. related to the particular conflicting issue which can be called the countermyth--providing a more positive or affirming scenario in your life. This exercise involves creating a dialogue between these two myths somewhat like a fantasy, or an imaginary play on a stage whose purpose is to begin to bring these two parts into dialogue."

(PART A of RELAXATION EXERCISE is presented here.)

"As you are laying on the floor I want you to bring back some of the feelings that are part of the conflict related to your prevailing myth from the first exercise. [30 second pause] Imagine that you are placing these feelings into one of your hands. These may be the same or different feelings about this conflict. Tune into the energy and sensations of that hand. [Pause] Out of these sensations in this hand, allow an inner image to begin to develop--perhaps it is only vague and shadowy or perhaps it is rich with color and distinct shapes. Allow all of the sensations and feelings from your hand to flow into this image. As you watch this image, you have an increasingly certain sense of a symbol that represents this part of your life story. It may be the same as the original symbol, perhaps a new one. Simply take what you get. [30 second pause] Allow this symbol to remain resting in your hand for now and you will be asked to return to it shortly."

"Now bring back the feelings that represent the more affirming feelings of yourself from last session. Again, these may be the same or different from that of last week's exercise. [30 second pause] Imagine you are placing these feelings from this myth in your other hand. Tune into the

energy and sensations in this hand. [Pause] Allow an image to develop from these sensations in your hand--perhaps it is only vague and shadowy, or perhaps it is rich with color and distinct shapes. Allow all of the sensations and feelings from your hand to flow into this image. As you watch this image, you have an increasingly certain sense of a symbol that represents this part of your life story. It may be the same as the original symbol, perhaps a new one. Simply take what you get." [30 second pause]

"Now that you have identified the two symbols or images, imagine a setting. Let the lights, colors, textures, and forms become as vivid as you can. [30 second pause] Next, place the two symbols into the setting. [Pause] The two symbols are about to become animated in some way. They are going to be characters in a fantasy or play. Allow the interaction to unfold into a story or dialogue. I would like you to describe what you see, hear or feel."

(PART B of RELAXATION EXERCISE is presented here.)

## APPENDIX J

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ARCHETYPE OR ARCHETYPES are considered contents of the collective unconscious in Analytical Psychology. Jung considered archetypes to be "typical [uniform and regularly recurring] modes of apprehension" (cited in Mattoon, 1981, p. 39) or modes of perception in the individual. Archetypes can be considered as predispositions to an image "that underlies and shapes a variety of specific images" (Mattoon, 1981, p. 39). Hillman (1975) describes the archetypal perspective:

The archetypal perspective provides a common connection between what goes on in any individual soul and what goes on in all people in all places in all times. It allows psychological understanding at a collective level. Archetypal, in other words means fundamentally human. (xiv)

An ARCHETYPE itself is not experienced, but rather, its effects. Jung sometimes used archetype to mean images and emotions but essentially distinguished between the archetype as separate from images, emotions, and other behaviors effected by the archetype (Mattoon, 1981). Examples of archetypes would be the Great Mother, the Anima, the Shadow.

THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS is a term used in Jungian or Analytical Psychology. Jung postulated a level of

primordial imagery in the unconscious common to all mankind he called the collective unconscious. Jung's use of "collective unconscious" implies "archetypes" (Mattoon, 1981). He described the primordial images as archetypes (Corsini, 1984). He believed that the underlying experience of the individual was the experience of the human race or the collective unconscious. Jung distinguished the collective unconscious from ego consciousness. The former he called the "objective psyche" (Mattoon, 1981, p. 30) because it was nonpersonal and because of its power to generate images and concepts, independent of consciousness. Ego consciousness he called subjective. The personal unconscious functions autonomously or independently of the ego, but is dependent on consciousness for its contents, which have been repressed.

A COMPLEX, according to Mattoon (1981) is an "interrelated cluster of unconscious contents which is part of the shadow" i.e.: part of the collective unconscious (p. 116). Jung felt that complexes were "strongly accentuated emotionally and...incompatible with the habitual attitude of consciousness" (cited in Mattoon, 1981, p. 116). A complex in addition to emotionality often has accompanying perceptual distortions. Complexes are characterized by a great degree of autonomy and cannot be controlled by conscious intentions. "We do not have complexes; they have us" (Mattoon, 1981, p. 117). When a complex is activated a person has a feeling of being out of control.

GUIDED IMAGERY is a term which refers to a process which makes use of relaxation and mental-visual exercises to facilitate and encourage exploration of an individual's response to certain themes through the generation of mental

images. While images may draw on previous memories, the mind appears to be able to combine previous experiences so as to produce the images as new content. The technique of guided imagery has been used increasingly to explore affective responses and inner processes as individuals seek to expand their self-understanding, their awarenesses, and their capacity to make positive changes in their lives (Farr, 1988).

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Title of Thesis Exploring Personal Mythology: A  
Meaning-Making Process for Counselling


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