

DEEP ENCOUNTER: LEARNING TO HEAL THROUGH MEETING

by

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to seek to explore and generate, an understanding of and an experience of, engagement with other beings in an open, present way that creates a space where healing, transformation and expansion can occur. This type of engagement is given the name Deep Encounter. A hermeneutical interpretation of the work of Martin Buber is used to generate an understanding of deep encounter and the healing possible in this process. Participants are asked to share their experience of opening to deep encounter with clients and their experience of moments of deep encounter with clients. As a researcher I also work to open to deep encounter with the participants in order to learn to open to deep encounter as a counsellor.

Narrative storying of the interviews is used to elucidate the experience of learning to open to deep encounter with others and barriers of opening that are experienced. Learnings are applied to the facilitation of a strong, healing, therapeutic relationship based in the process of deep encounter.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

This work is my starting on a path of engagement with life, with clients and others with whom I stand in relation, including you, the reader. I want to engage in a way that is open and authentic and that creates a space where the other can also come with his or her whole being and step into relation. I hope and believe that this place that is created in our relation is where healing, transformation and expansion can occur. This work is a commitment to live my life in a way that turns my attention constantly to relationship: that which is at the heart of my existence and the central core of my chosen life path as a therapist, a teacher and a spouse.

In this work I will tell the story of my experience of learning to engage with others and with life. I will tell the story of how I have committed myself to a life where the primary goal is to engage rather than master, to be rather than to seem and to intend to confirm others rather than to change them. I will also share what I have learnt about counselling in this process. The intention of this work is that this story becomes a vehicle for you the reader, in which you can explore the possibilities of deep encounter in your own life and work. My hope is that it will also be a place where you can experience the process of opening to deep encounter. I hope this may occur through my relationship to you the reader, through your experience of me as the writer and through your experience of the work itself as an emerging identity.

The writings and philosophy of Martin Buber are intrinsically woven through the tapestry of this work. Buber was a philosophical anthropologist; his life focus was the relationship between humans and their world, the relationship between human and

human, and humans and the divine. In other words, he believed that life was relationship. He wrote, spoke and lived this belief with his whole being for most of his life. His writings are many-layered and give a textured picture of the phenomenon of meeting between two people.

I began to read Buber at a time in my life when I was questioning all that had been firm and stable up until that point: my belief about truth and its accessibility, about God and religion, about who I was and who I wanted to be and about what I expected from the world. My solid rock foundation was melting into a fluid stream. When I met Buber, his words did not provide me with solid ground. However, through my engagement with his works I slowly began to learn how to swim and I found that I loved living in this fast flowing water of life.

Through Buber's philosophy I have created meaning in the process of life. Buber taught me to open to the world, to the other with whom I engage and to God in a new way. It is Buber who gave me words to describe the truth that I had always known: that "All real living is meeting" (Buber, 1957, p.11). Buber also taught me about the decision and commitment required to truly meet the other. He taught me that life requires of me that I choose to step into relationship, that I choose to be authentic, that I choose to be open to the other as separate from me, and that I choose to be aware of the signs of life and respond to them. He also taught me about grace, he taught me that I was not in control, that meeting occurred through grace and not just because of my decision. He taught me that life was a gift from a God to whom I could only relate and about whom I could know nothing.

I have had deep encounters with the writings of this man. There are many moments when I remember shivering inside at the truth that I discovered in our interaction. These moments of truth and of understanding have become an internal guiding energy in this thesis. Buber's writing evoked in me the desire to engage in deep encounter. His words were a guide as I sought to find my way into openness and engagement with life and as I sought to write what I learnt on my journey. His words and my relation to them held the light of possibility when the darkness of unknowing threatened to consume me. The light that gleamed in this darkness was the hope that deep encounter was real, and that a life of engagement was full of meaning and potentiality. This thesis is a story of my relationship with Buber's work.

I met with five therapists to learn about their experience of the process of moving towards deep encounter and their experience of moments of deep encounter in the context of a counselling relationship. The counselling relationship has unique characteristics which Buber's work does not explore in depth. Furthermore, Buber could only be met and understood through his written word. His voice, his direct being and his physical presence were not available to me. Therefore, in some ways I had been alone in my interactions with his words and my understandings of his ideas. I met with the therapists because they had voices, they were present in body and their being was alive in its fullness in our interaction. They challenged me in ways that Buber could not. My understanding was expanded through engagement with their otherness. Through my interaction with their thoughtful practice of this way of being in their work as counsellors, deep encounter became enlivened and the context of the counselling relationship was explored in depth.

In my meetings with the therapists I also had the opportunity to practice deep encounter in an environment where I had leadership responsibilities as the primary researcher and yet I was with people who intimately knew the journey on which we were embarking. This created a safe place to learn and to open to their otherness. In the interview, my desire was that we would meet in a deep way as we explored deep encounter together. In this way I tried to approach the co-researchers as both guides and fellow travellers on this journey. I desired to meet them as equals but I also longed for the opportunity to be the one to call them to deep encounter with me. I hoped that they would offer their unique perspective, allow me to step into relationship with their otherness and I hoped for the opportunity to call them to step into relationship with me. I learnt much from meeting with each participant, from their way of being and from the words that they gave me and that I reflected upon. In this way they contributed to this work by giving of themselves and of their experience.

This thesis is my journey towards opening. Each of the encounters with participants, my encounter with Buber and my encounter with myself have been vehicles on this journey.

### Significance of the Study

This research is important for several reasons. First, the relationship between clients and therapists is the central core of the therapeutic process. Relationships are also fundamental in our lives as human beings. As counsellors, I believe we need to develop a personal, working understanding of the therapeutic relationship. We need to focus our attention on the intricacies of it to be able to engage as fully as possible in the healing process with the client. Furthermore, by researching the process of and the moments of

deep encounter between client and therapist, the barriers to deep encounter become more obvious and therefore we can make more illuminated choices about our way of being.

I believe that it is especially important to attend to my part as a counsellor and as a human facilitator of this process. By paying attention to my role in the process of deep encounter I believe that I can come to know myself; my ways of centring and becoming present, my needs, my issues, my strengths, my closed places and my places of entry into life. I become increasingly aware through practicing my attending. This awareness allows me to engage with more of my being with the client and to give more of myself to the healing process. Furthermore, as I practice attending to myself I increase my ability to attend to the other with whom I engage. In this way I can also call more of their being into the relational engagement.

Finally, I believe that this research is important because it supports, explores and points to a way of looking at and engaging in the therapeutic relationship which recognizes, confirms and fosters the contribution of both the client and the therapist to the healing relationship. Instead of perceiving the counselling relationship as one where the therapist is viewed as a source and the client is seen as an empty, lacking or cracked vessel whom the therapist tries to mend and fill, this work attempts to look at how the relational energy created by the intimacy of two open beings who contribute of themselves can create a place of healing for the client.

In this way the client has ownership over his or her healing process. The client knows that she has been instrumental in her own healing because she has experienced opening, she has experienced her authentic being and she knows that she made the choice to engage in this way. Because the client's role and the unique being of both the client

and the therapist are valued, prized and developed in the healing process the client and the therapist stand on more equal footing. Though the therapist is still the leader in guiding the process, the therapist no longer strives to fix but rather to be with and it is no longer a process where an expert heals the client but a process where one human creates space for another and welcomes him to emerge.

### Stance

At the beginning of each interview, I asked the co-researcher to share with me his or her stance in life. I asked each participant, "Who are you and what is your intended work when you sit down with a client?" I asked this because I wanted to begin to understand the context in which their experience of deep encounter dwelt. I want to do the same for you, the reader. I want to paint a picture of me that may help you understand this larger work. I hope, as well, that this will help you to see me as other and allow you to read this text and dialogue with it from your own stance.

I came to the work of counselling as a very young woman. I loved to hear people's stories, to watch them open and see the beauty of their vulnerability. I have always been amazed at how people survive life's hardship and do not allow their spirits to be crushed. When I am allowed to witness those spirits I see something incredibly precious and gorgeous. I experience the opening of an other and I open to her and in our relation and I feel joy in the connection, I experience joy in her basic humanity and uniqueness and I feel wonder at the process of life. Therefore, I have chosen this work partly for the opportunity to witness people in their growth process and in many ways in their most beautiful basic being.

In my life I have also had people who have listened to my story and taken the time to see me as a unique being before them. I remember as a youth sitting with a counsellor whose full attention was captivated by the moment. The sun shone on us, I sat on the floor and he sat on a chair. He knew the dark parts of my childhood and he knew my dreams. We spoke about making meaning of suffering and he listened as I spoke in my childish way about my connection to God and my desire to serve others. As we spoke I felt the possibilities of life; I felt special, unique, whole and human. I felt held without touch. I remember the sensation of knowing that this person enjoyed my presence, this person did not want to be anywhere but where we were in that moment. I was related to in this ageless way as a spiritual being. There was no need for me to be anything. I was enough. Since childhood I have known the power of meeting and I have longed for it and loved it.

As an adult, I have met others who have listened to my doubt, my fear, my joy and my pain: those who have allowed themselves to enter into my story so much that I could see the pleasure or the pain that I felt reflected in their eyes. I know what it feels like to be confirmed in my uniqueness, to have people prize who I am without placing limitations or expectations on me. I know what it is to experience the humanity and the vulnerability of someone in a position of power over me and feel met by them as an equal, as a being worthy of his or her trust and attention. I have known the experience of deep encounter in a therapeutic setting and I have experienced its transforming and healing power. As a counsellor I want to give to clients the gifts that I have received.

However, I have found that counselling takes work and energy and in many ways is costly. Life as I have known it is full of suffering and pain. A client's darkness at times

added to my own creates a challenging, daunting and tiring path to tread in the counselling process. I have worked with many clients who did not allow their basic being to emerge; they put on thick, abrasive armour to shield themselves from pain and it was unpleasant and draining to be near them. This emotional cost of giving to others, especially those too afraid and hurt to open to the gift of another's care and attention, has been large for me. Results, progress, growth and transformation have been extremely hard if not impossible to measure in the counselling relationships in which I have engaged. The product of the relationship feels intangible and inaccessible to me.

I have watched people begin in this profession with idealism and soon end up feeling tired, listless and hopeless. I have felt that in myself and I have noticed how my ability to serve people lessens as my negativity grows. Therefore, still at the beginning of my career, I began to ask myself the question: How do I not get this way? How do I become a counsellor who is able to handle it all in stride? How do I become a wise woman who can flow through this without a hitch? I was seeking the answer to life and to suffering. I was looking for someone to make it easy to give of myself.

One day I was in a class espousing the possibilities of a thesis where I sat at wise therapists feet and asked them how they managed to live well-balanced, good, and enlightened lives. My professor looked at me and said, "How are you going to judge their goodness? What if they do not feel like they are well-balanced? I certainly wouldn't want to be put in that place." I stammered a response and felt sheepish. She looked at me in the eye and said very gently, but very firmly: "Kirsten, no one can tell you how to live well. It is your path." It took me days to process this moment; I was hurt and devastated, but something in what she said rang true for me. The question of suffering has no answer.

Even wise counsellors cannot fix life, and only I can discover my own path, and part of the journey is the mistakes I will make and have made.

Then I thought, why not focus on the positive, and spend my time looking closely at that. So I began to ask about nourishment in the counselling process. What do we gain from being in relationship this way, what are the gifts our clients give us I thought and still do think that being grateful and recognizing the wonderful parts of this work is helpful both for the client and for myself as a counsellor.

However, in looking closely at nourishment, I noticed several things. First, I noticed that I was still looking for an answer; a protective mechanism. I began to see the limitation of this type of study. One limitation is that if I try to protect myself from the difficult pieces and results of this work then I am running away from an intrinsic part of the reality of this work and I am only engaging with a part of the whole. I would rather engage the wholeness than never feel run down, confused and frustrated. I also realized that it was impossible to completely protect myself from the costs of this work. To do so would mean that I was not doing my job and that I was stepping away from engagement with the other rather than walking into relationship. I want to walk towards life and relationship, not away from it. Furthermore, I noticed that if I was seeking nourishment primarily I became dependent on the other. I was treading this very fine line. The purpose of counselling is not to meet the needs of the therapist. In placing my attention on the nourishment a therapist experienced in the counselling process, I was in danger of placing some expectation on the client to make this pleasant for me.

In the midst of all of this I noticed that nourishment seemed deeply rooted in relationship and in the moments of truly meeting someone. I also noticed that when I

began to turn my attention to this meeting with others, I felt liberated and energized. In this way I began my research on deep encounter. I believe that relationship is at the core of healing. I believe that deep encounter is not a guaranteed cure for burnout and that deep encounter cannot exist as a means to get nourishment as a counsellor. I believe that deep encounter cannot be aimed at for its own sake. Being with the other and knowing the other must be my motivation. However, deep encounter holds the possibility of healing and nourishment. When I turn my attention to deep encounter, I move from seeking an answer to engaging with a question; I move from seeking a product to living the process.

#### Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to explore and generate an understanding of and an experience of engagement with other beings in an open, present way that creates a space where healing, transformation and expansion can occur. I hope that you the reader will come away from reading this work with a basic understanding of Buber's philosophy of dialogue and meeting. I hope that you will have called to mind the ontological, physical, spiritual and emotional experiences of deep encounter in your own lives and be affected by these memories. I hope that you will become more aware of your own process of opening to others. I hope that you will know what I have learnt in the process of opening to life, Buber, the participants and the clients with whom I interact and be able to relate this knowing to your own process. I hope that you will feel engaged with and prized by me the writer. Finally, I hope that you will be more aware of the possibilities intrinsic in the process of opening to deep encounter.

## CHAPTER 2

### A Hermeneutical Interpretation of the Work of Martin Buber

Buber spent his life concerning himself with the relationships between human beings. He developed a rich, comprehensive picture of the inherent potentialities of these relationships. It is in his work that I first came to understand how we could enter into true, deep relationships with clients and with others in our lives. I believe that understanding his philosophy of dialogue can help us to understand some of the basic qualities of our lives as humans in relationship. Through his work we can also come to understand the act of relating to others and the nuances and subtleties of the experience of deep encounter with another being.

I begin this chapter by introducing Martin Buber as a person and a man of dialogue. Following this introduction, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is a survey of the elements of Buber's philosophy of dialogue. The second section will elucidate the processes that move us towards deep relationships with one another. Finally, the third section will highlight the qualities that Buber attributes to moments of true dialogue or deep encounter, as I have called them.

#### Martin Buber: The Man and His Work

Martin Buber was born to a Jewish family in 1878 in Vienna, Austria. When he was three his mother left the family and Martin was sent to live with his grandparents in the city of Lemberg, the capital of Austria's "crownland" Galicia at the time (Friedman, 1981). His grandfather was a wealthy businessman but it seems that Martin's grandmother conducted most of the business so that his grandfather was free to study the Torah. Martin was taught at home until the age of 10. His training was chiefly in

languages until this time because he had a natural flair for them and his grandmother believed that “language-centred humanism was the royal road to education” (Buber, 1973, p.21). At the age of nine he began to integrate more with his father, who, he says, was a great storyteller and who loved nature and cared deeply and richly for those with whom he engaged.

Most books about Buber and many that Buber wrote himself recount the story of a childhood memory which impacted his later thoughts and beliefs about the possibility for I-thou relations, both with nature and with other human beings. In this story, he identifies the distinction between the possibility of I-thou dialogical relations with other beings and the potential to use and turn inward in our relating creating monologue with ourselves instead of dialogue with the other. The story told is of how, as an 11-year-old boy, he often went and stroked the mane of a horse with whom he felt a deep connection.

When I stroked the mighty mane, sometimes marvelously smooth-combed, and other times just as astonishingly wild, and felt the life beneath my hand, it was though the element of vitality bordered on my skin, something that was not I, was certainly not akin to me, palpably the other, not just another, really the Other itself; and yet it let me approach, confided itself to me, placed itself elementally in relation of Thou and Thou with me. The horse, even when I had not begun by pouring oats for him in the manger, very gently raised his massive head, ears flicking... a signal meant to be recognizable only by his fellow-conspirator: and I was approved. But once—I do not know what came over the child, at any rate it was childlike enough—it struck me about the stroking, what fun it gave me and suddenly I became conscious of my hand. The game went on as before, but something had changed, it was no longer the same thing. And the next day,...when I stroked my friend’s head he did not raise his head. (Buber, 1973, p.27)

Buber, even at the age of 11, was becoming attuned to how his way of being affected his relationship with others.

At 21 Buber met and later married a woman named Paula Winkler. She was a year his senior, university-educated and a Catholic. This marriage lasted a lifetime and

those who knew the couple said that it was a relationship of true dialogue. Paula was definitely Other; she was known for her strength and her uniqueness from Buber. They related to each other as equals and worked together as partners. It was during his early marriage that Buber became an integral part of the Zionist movement, a movement aimed at creating a place for the Jews in Israel. Paula was supportive in this endeavor, she converted to Judaism, and became active with Martin in the cause (Friedman, 1982).

Paula is the one credited with supporting, directing and inspiring Martin not to get lost in the world of aesthetics but to go the “difficult way of work, of responsibility, of truth” (Friedman, 1982, p.339). It was she who taught him about the “call for personal wholeness and direction” (p.339) that is so prevalent in his belief system and in his work. It is said that there is a concealed dedication to Paula in the epigraph of his most famous and most fundamental work I and Thou (1958a).

Another important part of Buber’s life experience which had a very direct impact on his work was his choice to leave the path of the mystic and to turn to engage with the concrete world around him, to be present in it at every possible moment and to love the world with all his being. The story of his conversion to the world goes as follows: One day, after a morning of religious ecstasy a young man came to see him. Buber was kind and attentive to the man but was still lingering in his experiences of the morning. The young man asked him questions that Buber engaged with but did not take seriously. Several weeks later Buber inquired after the man to one of his colleagues. The colleague said that this man had died. Buber realized at that moment that the young man had come to him not with simple questions but with his questioning soul and that the decisions that he had made were life and death decisions. It was then that Buber decided to never again

engage in religious mysticism that took him away from the everyday but to engage with his whole being with what the world brought to him at every moment (Buber, 1947, Buber, 1973). Buber explains his transformation in this way:

Since then I have given up the “religious” which is nothing but the exception, extraction, exaltation, ecstasy; or it has given me up. I possess nothing but the everyday out of which I am never taken. The mystery is no longer disclosed, it has escaped or it has made its dwelling here where everything happens as it happens. I know no fulness but each mortal hour’s fulness of claim and responsibility. Though far from being equal to it, yet I know that in the claim I am claimed and may respond in responsibility, and know who speaks and demands a response. (Buber, 1947, p.14)

This idea of the incredible importance of presence in the moment and being with the world echoes throughout Buber’s work and is one of the foundation stones of his philosophy.

In 1920, Buber wrote his fundamental work I and Thou. He followed up this work with Between Man and Man in 1947. Over the years he wrote, taught and worked with political organizations for the betterment of life for the Jewish people. In 1938 Buber moved to Israel and began work as a professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He lived in Israel until his death in 1965. During this time he traveled all over the world teaching his philosophy of dialogue to philosophers, psychologists, political leaders and writers. When he died, the people of Israel mourned a great comrade and the world mourned a great teacher (Friedman, 1983). What Buber said of his friend Hans Trub is also true of him. I pray that I am one of those he talks about in this quote:

His foot can no longer push on but the path is broken. Surely there will not be wanting men (and women) like him—awake and daring, hazarding the economics of the vocation, not sparing and not withholding themselves, risking themselves—men who will find his path and extend it further (Buber, 1957c, p.97).

There are two reasons why I have included this biographical writing in this literature review. First, in this research I have asked each of my co-researchers to tell me who they are in relation to their work. I have asked Buber the same questions, seeking to understand the context in which he wrote and thought. It is these stories and this understanding of who he was as a man that brings his work to life. Secondly, it is important to me that Buber's ideas are possible to live out. If he could not live out his ideas then there is a sense of emptiness that descends upon his writing. The fact that he lived out his belief system with the person closest to him in his life is a testimony to the possibility for others to do the same.

Before reviewing Buber's thoughts on dialogue, a couple of things must be noted. First, Buber's ideas on dialogue were at the centre of his work as a whole. However, his writing crosses over many disciplines including politics, the arts, sociology, theology, philosophy, anthropology and psychology. Often, when reading his work, I had to pay careful attention to sections of books and articles that seemed off track of what I was looking for to find the seeds of his rooted understanding of dialogue. Therefore, many of the important subtleties of his thoughts will be missed in this brief review. Intellectuals like Maurice Friedman have spent their whole lives writing and seeking to understand Buber's thought. My work will necessarily fall short.

It is also important to note that my understanding of Buber's work grows each day. I am presenting his ideas filtered through my ability to understand and my worldview. Therefore, what is presented here is not a statement of fact about Buber's philosophy but rather the result of a dialogue between me and Buber's ideas. This

dialogue evolves every day. It is a constant challenge to engage with his work and allow it to transform me.

### Elements of Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue

To begin to understand Buber's philosophy we must start by painting a picture of what Buber considered the "principle of human life". Buber (1957a) proposes that there is a twofold principle that exists in humankind that does not exist in any other animal or life form. The first part of the principle is that we as humans have the capacity to distance ourselves and create distinction between our selves and the rest of the world. The second part of the principle is that because we are able to distance the world from ourselves and hold it as an independent opposite, we can choose to step into relationship with the world.

Martin Buber believes that all of life is centred in this relationship between humans and their world. Anything of importance happens in the in-between sphere, the space between the I and that with which he or she is interacting. Of importance for psychology is his belief that a "sick" person is not just internally ill and therefore can be helped to understand him or herself and get better. Rather, he believes that "sickness" happens between people and therefore it is the relationship between the client and the therapist and the relationship between the client and his world that needs to be worked with and that this is where healing necessarily takes place (Buber, 1957c, Buber, 1965).

Buber proposes that there are two realms in which we relate to the world: the realm of I-it and the realm of I-thou. I-it interactions are not relational; rather, they are distant. The I perceives the it as separate, catagorizable, usable, and as limited. The I (the perceiver) perceives the it (the object of her attention) as a thing; a he, a she, an animal,

and so on. The I perceiving in this way can only apprehend part of the object she is experiencing and never the whole, and the I never gives the whole of itself to the it either.

The I-thou relationship has at its heart the act of relating. When I relate to someone in an I-thou way I relate to him as a unique other being. Our relationship is characterized by “mutuality, directness, presentness, intensity and ineffability” (Friedman as cited in Buber, 1965, p.12). The person is an Other being-in-relation-to-me and in our relation exists the endless possibilities of his being and my being as well.

Buber’s belief is that both worlds are necessary. We cannot live at all times in the world of I-thou because to live solely in the Thou world would result in one’s burning oneself up in the white flame of the Thou. However, he proposes that if we never open ourselves to relation with a Thou we have not lived. Our responsibility is not to create I-thou relationships but to open ourselves to them and turn to the Other with whom we relate with our whole being (Buber, 1958a).

This section of the literature review will focus on explicating the “principle of human life”, as Buber calls it and developing a picture of the realms of I-it and I-thou relations.

#### Distancing and relationship

As human beings we are naturally able to set the world apart from us and become independent beings in the world. An example from Buber’s conceptual framework might help to understand this concept. Imagine a gorilla, reaching out and using a stick as a lever to open a fruit she wants to eat. To the gorilla this stick is an extension of herself. When she is finished using the stick she throws it down and does not recognize it as an existing thing outside of her realm of being. A human, on the other hand, uses the same

stick and fashions it into a lever and then lays it down (or puts it in her toolbox). This lever becomes an entity unto itself, we have a name for it and we keep it to use again to open other things. It becomes a tool that is separate and distinct from our own being.

A human has the ability to “detach the whole as a world from himself and to make it an opposite to himself, instead of cutting out with his senses the part he needs from it, as all other beings do and being content with that” (Buber, 1957a, p.99). This distancing allows us to exist as entities, to develop personalities and to be unique; only in our distancing are we able to step into relationship with something that we do not perceive as part of us but as other. In Buber’s philosophy one cannot be in relationship with something from which one is not separated.

Therefore, the second part of the principle is that because we are able to distance the world from ourselves and hold it as an independent opposite, we can now choose to step into relationship with the world. It is here in our relationship to the world that is over and against us that wholeness becomes possible.

He who turns to the realm which he has removed from himself, and which has been completed and transformed into a world he who turns to the world and looking upon it steps into relation with it, becomes aware of wholeness and unity in such a way that from then on he is able to grasp being as wholeness and a unity; the single being has received the character of wholeness and the unity which are perceived in it from the wholeness and unity perceived in the world. But man does not obtain this view simply from ‘setting at a distance’ and ‘making independent’. These would offer him the world only as an object, as which it is only an aggregate of qualities that can be added to at will, not a genuine wholeness and unity. Only the view of what is over and against me in the world in its full presence, with which I have set myself, present in my whole person, in relation—only this view gives me the world truly as whole and one. For only in such an opposition are the realm of man and what completes it in spirit, finally one (Buber, 1957a, p.99).

It is clear that in Buber’s philosophy entering into relation means entering into an I-thou relation. Yet the original state of human distance is not to be identified with the I-

I-it realm. The I-it realm is instead a product of a human's choice not to enter into relation and to stay at that place of distance (Friedman, 1955).

### The world of I-It

“I-It is the primary word of experiencing and using. It takes place within a man and not between him and the world.” (Friedman as cited in Buber, 1965, p.12)

The world of I-it is necessary and important for our existence. It is our world of order, of use of concepts and of ascribing causality. The person interacting with the world as It “sets things in space and time in causal connexion, each with its own place and appointed course, its measurability and conditioned nature.” (Buber, 1958a, p.30)

We teach our children the world of It when we teach them scientific facts and facts about the world and its people. “Whether in knowing, feeling or acting, it is the typical subject-object relationship. It is always mediate and indirect, dealing with objects in terms of the categories and connections and hence is comprehensible and orderable.” (Friedman as cited in Buber, 1965, p.12) Therefore the world of I-it is an understandable realm that groups things according to their likeness to one another. The world of I-it allows the I to ascribe parameters, measurement and labels to that which she perceives. “Only It can be arranged in order.” (Buber, 1958, p.30)

In fact most Thous become Its at some point or another because we are people who need to make order for ourselves. This whole work of looking intensely at deep encounters between clients and therapists is an act of making that which was an I-thou relational moment into something understandable, grounded and symbolically based. Buber says “Every response binds up the Thou in the world of It. That is the melancholy of man, and his greatness. For that is how knowledge comes about, a work is achieved,

and image and symbol made, in the midst of beings.” (Buber, 1958a, p.40) However, the essential problem is not that we exist in the world of I-it and that we learn in this way.

The problem begins when we are no longer able to move into the world of I-thou relations.

All of these Thou's which have been changed into It's have it in their nature to change back again into presentness. But this fulfillment of their nature is thwarted by the man who has come to terms with the world of It. Instead of freeing he suppresses: instead of looking, he observes: instead of accepting, he turns it (to his own) account.” (Friedman, 1955, 62-63) (Section in parentheses Buber's (1958 p.39) original wording, which I think makes more sense than Friedman's “he turns it to account”)

Friedman echoes Buber's warning that our world is moving to a place where we are living purely in the world of I-it relations.

Our culture more than any other, abdicated before the world of It. This abdication makes impossible a life in the spirit since spirit is a response of man to his Thou. The evil which results takes the form of individual life in which institutions and feelings are separate province and of community life in which the state and the economy are cut off from the spirit, the will to enter relation. In both cases I-it is not evil in itself but only when it is allowed to have mastery and shut out all relation. (Friedman, 1955, p.62)

What happens when our world becomes consumed by the world of I-it relations?

Primarily, what occurs is that we become trapped in a fatalistic way of being.

It is this belief which threatens to engulf our modern world as a result of the quasi-biological and quasi-historical thought of the age. Survival of the fittest, the law of instincts and habits, social process, dialectical materialism, cultural cycles—all work together to form a more tenacious and oppressive belief in fate than has ever before existed, a fate which leaves man no possibility of liberation but only rebellious or submissive slavery. (Friedman, 1955, p.66)

If everything can be ascribed cause and effect then there is no room for unique outcomes or for free choice. Buber (1958a) states that “Causality has an unlimited reign in the world of It. Every ‘physical’ event that can be perceived by the senses, but also every

‘psychical’ event existing or discovered in self-experience is necessarily valid as being caused and as causing.” (p.51).

This limits our ability to respond with our whole being to another because we are always responding to the categorizable part of them, which limits us to our categorizable parts as well. From this ensues the development of the individualistic I in relation to its world rather than the I of a person in relation to a Thou. Let me explain. The individualistic I needs to differentiate from others. She is conscious of herself as an experiencer and user and believes herself to be ruled by the outside world that causes her to react in a certain way. The individual “makes its appearance through being differentiated from other individualities and is conscious of itself as a particular kind of being. It is concerned with its My—my kind, my race, my creation, my genius.” (Friedman, 1955, p.68) This obsession with sameness and identity and differentiation leads us away from a life of dialogue and leads us towards a life of monologue where we can no longer really relate to the other because we are always relating everything to ourselves and the categories of life that we have created.

### The world of I-Thou

If I face a human being as my Thou, and say the primary word I-thou to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things.

This human being is not He or She bounded from every other He or She, a specific point in space and time within the net of the world; nor is he a nature able to be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities. But with no neighbour, and whole in himself, he is Thou and fills the heavens. This does not mean that nothing exists except himself. But all else lives in his light.

Just as the melody is not made up of notes nor the verse of words nor the statue of lines, but they must be tugged and dragged till their unity has been scattered into these many pieces, so with the man to whom I say Thou. I can take out from him the colour of his hair or of his speech, or of his goodness. I must continually do this. But each time I do it he ceases to be Thou...

I do not experience the man to whom I say Thou. But I take my stand in relation to him, in the sanctity of the primary word. (Buber, 1958a, p.8-9)

The basic movement of the I-thou relation and a life of dialogue is one of turning towards the other. It is the difference between observing and relating, withholding and trusting, limiting and freeing. A person who turns to a Thou turns with his or her whole being and responds to the whole being of the Other. This Other is no longer a collection of characteristics that can be nailed down, labelled and ascribed causality. Rather the Other has become an entity, a being to be loved, related to and engaged with (Buber, 1947).

Buber talks extensively about the “loving man” who approaches the world in an I-thou way. This term “loving man” evokes in me feelings of tenderness, awe, a picture of a person gently moving through the world, touching, relating and soaking in every moment. Friedman (1955) summarizes Buber’s early teachings about the “loving man” in this way.

The loving man is one who takes up each thing unrelated to other things. For this hour no other lives than this thing which is alone loved in the world, filling it out and indistinguishably coinciding with it. Where a rationalist draws out the general qualities of a thing and places them in categories, the loving man sees what is unique in a thing, its self. This is the active side which the circle of world comprehensibility misses. In the beloved thing whose self he realizes, the loving man confirms the mysterious countenance of the all (p.49-50).

Thus the “loving one” moves from the comprehensible world of I-it to the world of the spirit where life is mysterious and incomprehensible.

This is the glorious paradox of our existence that all comprehensibility of the world is only a footstool of its incomprehensibility. But this incomprehensibility has a new, a wonderful secret to bestow...What the most learned and ingenious combination of concepts denies, the humble and faithful beholding, grasping, knowing of any situation bestows. The world is not comprehensible, but it is embraceable: through the embracing of one of its beings (Buber, 1957c, p.27).

This ability to embrace the mysterious opens the human to begin to relate to the Eternal Thou. This, too, is an intrinsic part of Buber's philosophy. He believes that every encounter with an earthly Thou leads us into relationship with the Ultimate Thou, the Eternal Thou. This Thou by nature can never become an It. It is in our embracing of the world with all of our capacities that we come into relationship with this being. "If only we love the real world, that will not let itself be extinguished, really in its horror, if only we venture to surround it with the arms of our spirit, our hand will meet the hands which held it fast." (Buber, 1958a, p.95)

Trapp (Buber, 1958b), in his artfully woven anthology of Buber's work, describes another characteristic of the I-thou event as follows: "This important event happens not 'within' the individual, as subjective experience, but 'between' person and person, where 'I' and 'thou' meet" (p.16). This idea of between is important to Buber. What differentiates I-thou from I-It relating is essentially the person's openness to relate, to live in and be wholly present in the interaction so that the interaction can take place as an entity unto itself between the two participants. The relationship therefore becomes unmediated, direct and mutual because the entities in relation have been freed to be this way.

This freedom also liberates the human from the bond of causality. "I and Thou freely confront each other in mutual effect, unconnected with causality" (Friedman, 1955, p.65). This is the paradox; by relating in an I-thou way we are truly free but yet it is here in this in-between place where we find who we are destined to be. This is the place where we can affect one another's core being and become a transformational force in another person's life. This quote by Buber (1947) speaks to the above in an obscure, poetic way

that seems to embody an understanding of what happens in this relationship between beings.

Now to our perception the world ceases to be an insignificant multiplicity of points to one, which we pay momentary attention. Rather it is a limitless tumult round a narrow breakwater, brightly outlined and able to bear heavy loads—limitless, but limited by the breakwater so that, though not engirdled, it has become finite in itself, been given form, released from its own indifference (p.22).

The unique, the possible and the spiritual are welcome in this realm. A person relating in an I-thou way “sees what is new and unique in each situation” (Friedman, 1955, p.67). In this way he or she becomes more truly a person and less of an individual. There is now less of a need to differentiate from one group of people and identify with another. There is less of a need to have ownership over what happens in our lives and to measure everything that happens in life against an individual boxed understanding of the world. This personal being “makes its appearance by entering into relation with other persons. Through relation the person shares in reality which neither belongs to him nor merely lies outside of him, a reality that cannot be appropriated but only shared” (Friedman, 1955, p.68).

The remainder of this review will focus in more depth on the possibilities present in and the characteristics of the I-thou relationship. The reality I attempt to hold as I focus my attention on that which is spirit, relational and deep is that in this twofold world of I-it and I-thou both realms are important. “Thus what is good is not pure spirit, any more than what is evil is matter. Good is the interpenetration of spirit into life, and evil is spirit separated from life, life untransformed by spirit” (Friedman, 1955, p.65).

## Qualities of the Movement Towards Dialogical Relationships

In this thesis work I have made a distinction between the process of deep encounter and the moments of deep encounter. The I (in this case the counsellor) has a lot more to do with the process of moving towards deep encounter than she does with the moment of, or occurrence of, that experience. The process is an act of will on the part of the counsellor and the client to engage in the act of turning towards an other and the moment is a natural gift of grace in the relationship. The next two sections of this work look separately at the qualities of moving towards dialogical relationships and the characteristics of moments of deep encounter in dialogical relationships. In this way, I hope to hold the tension between our responsibility in relationships and the gifts of grace that we receive.

### Presence

Presence is being fully in the moment with all of oneself. This means that we bring our full attention to the moment at hand. This is similar to the Buddhist concept of mindfulness, which states that presence is opening our awareness to just being there. Buber states, "The significance of the situation is that it is lived, and nothing but lived, continually, ever anew, without foresight, without forethought, without prescription, in the totality of its antinomy" (Buber, 1958a, p.95). When we open our selves to the moment we become aware of the signs that call to us and address us in life. People in relation to us call to us to respond. All that is asked of us in life is to be present and respond with our whole being (Buber, 1947).

Simple immediacy and togetherness, writes Buber, is the most effective form of action. More powerful and more holy than all writing is the presence of a man who is simply and directly there. Productivity is only true existence when it takes root in the immediacy of a lived life (Friedman, 1955, p.51).

### Being And Seeming

Presence also means standing and acting in one's authentic way of being. Buber distinguishes this Being from Seeming. He says that Being "proceeds from what one really is, the other [seeming] from what one wishes to seem" (Buber, 1957b, p.107). The seeming person is always trying to please or make an impression. She wears the appropriate mask in the appropriate situation. Her relations are premeditated and inauthentic. A counsellor trapped in a prescribed role and technique of interacting with clients and who values that role more highly than the relationship to her clients is "seeming".

The person who lives from his being relates spontaneously and genuinely. He gives of the essence of himself. He is not afraid to stand in his own belief system and speak his own truth. This person doesn't just let everything hang out in front of another but he "grants to the man to whom he communicates himself a share in his being" (Buber, 1957b, p.108). Counsellors who are genuine with their clients, who allow their clients to affect them, and those who instead of acting in a prescribed way allow their own personhood and character to emerge and engage with the client's personhood, are living from their being. Buber says that though no person ever lives completely in being and no person ever lives completely in seeming, it should be our goal that we move toward a genuine existence. He states that

If a presupposition of human life in primeval times is given in man's walking upright, the fulfillment of human life can only come through the soul's walking upright, through the great uprightness which is not tempted by any seeming, because it has conquered all semblance (Buber, 1957b, p.108).

We act in a seeming way because we are dependent on one another for confirmation of our being. Seeming deceptively pretends to offer us help towards this

end. Regretfully, when we are confirmed because we have put on a pleasing mask, this confirmation is empty and takes us away from authentic being rather than moving us towards authenticity (Buber, 1957b).

### Confirmation

This idea of confirmation is important in our turning towards the Other. We can be authentic because we recognize the Other as a different and unique being who like us deserves to be confirmed in her genuine being. When we place ourselves in relationship to the other in this way, we legitimize her and in doing so we legitimize ourselves.

The chief presupposition for the rise of genuine dialogue is that each should regard his partner as the very one he is. I become aware of him, aware that he is different, essentially different from myself, in the definite, unique way which is peculiar to him, and I accept whom I thus see, so that in full earnestness I can direct what I say to him as the person he is... I confirm him as creature and as creation, I confirm him who is opposed to me as him who is over against me. It is true that it now depends on the other whether genuine dialogue, mutuality in speech, arises between us. But if I thus give to the other who confronts me his legitimate standing as a man with whom I am ready to enter into dialogue then I may trust him and suppose him to be also ready to deal with me as his partner (Buber, 1957b, p.109).

Trust is fundamental in confirmation and an intrinsic part of the process of moving toward genuine dialogue. Friedman (1992) talks extensively about existential trust in his book Religion and Psychology: A Dialogical approach, which uses Buber's philosophy of dialogue to create a bridge between religion and psychology. He states that:

Trust must never be understood as trust that in this particular occasion I know that there will be a response [from the other]. Genuine trust is the exact opposite of this. It is a readiness to go forth on this occasion with such resources as you have, and, if you do not receive any response, to be ready another time to go out to the meeting (p.8).

This trust is not a trust in ourselves but a trust in relation. It is also not a trust in technique. Relation cannot be manufactured through the structuring of a facilitating environment. This does not mean that structuring the situation is not important but this structure must always have room for spontaneity because true dialogue is not created; it is only made “possible” by being courageous enough to respond to the moment (Friedman, 1992).

### Inclusion

Thus we stand on the threshold of dialogue. There is one more piece to this turning, but I am hesitant to put it in this section that emphasizes choices that we can make to open ourselves to the possibility of dialogue, because in this piece there is an element of grace that cannot be overlooked. Buber (1947, 1957a, 1957b, 1965) suggests that it is imperative in dialogue to make the other present to the self. Making the other present occurs through a process which Buber calls “inclusion” or “experiencing the other side”. Inclusion is defined as imagining quite concretely what another being is feeling, wishing, thinking and perceiving (Friedman, 1992). It is an extension of one’s own concreteness and the fulfillment of the actual situation in life. It includes three elements first, there is a relation between two persons. Second, there is an event that they experience in common in which at least one of them participates actively. Third, this person who participates, without sacrificing or losing any of the felt reality of her own activity, at the same time is able to live through the common event from the standpoint of the other.

According to Buber this concept is not to be compared with empathy in the narrow definition of this word. Empathy to Buber implies that we move with our own

feelings, thoughts and way of perceiving the world into the imagining of the other's experience, thereby losing our own sense of the concrete reality of our experience and our sense of the otherness of the other. When I empathize, I am imagining how I would feel in the other's situation. When I am "experiencing the other side", I am imagining the other's experience of the moment while also staying with my experience of my own concrete reality in the moment (Buber, 1947). This action requires the intense use of the energy of my being towards making the other present in his wholeness, uniqueness and unity. It means that I am able to perceive the dynamic centre of this person, the recognizable signs of his uniqueness that leaves its mark on all of his actions, speech and attitudes (Friedman, 1992).

When I am able to do this, I can fully confirm the other in her own being and I enter into a dialogical relationship with her. I do not get the impression that one has to be right in their imagining of the other's reality in Buber's philosophy. He actually says that we are often mistaken. Instead, I think it is the intention and the effort to "imagine the real" that is required to open up the possibilities for dialogue. Grace comes in here when we open ourselves in this way and through grace we can at times, as humans, understand another's experience.

#### Qualities of Moments of True Dialogue and Deep Encounter

So here we stand at the gate. We have opened ourselves to the world of the other's Thou and we call to the other trusting, that he will open himself to the world of I-thou relations with us. We both stand in this place open to the coming of grace that will allow us to meet each other in a deep place and give us the gift of deep encounter. What are the qualities of these moments of deep encounter? The content of the words spoken

and unspoken varies. However, the embodied experience of a moment of deep encounter seems to have qualities which are commonly experienced. These qualities are: a sense of increased mutuality in the moment, a heightened sense of a spiritual reality existing in the sphere between the two persons who are relating and an experience of the expansion of our knowing of the world that arises out of the moment of relation.

### Mutuality

Relation is mutual. My Thou affects me, as I affect it. We are moulded by our pupils and built up by our works... How we are educated by children and by animals! We live our lives inscrutably included within the streaming mutual life of the universe (Buber, 1958a, p.15-16).

An I-thou relation is mutual. Both parties reap the benefits of engaging with each other in this way. They learn from each other, are expanded by one another and experience the give and take of relationship. One of my most treasured elucidation of this concept comes from Carl Rogers, a humanistic psychologist who worked to open himself to the world of his client's thou.

I find that when I am able to let myself be congruent and genuine, it often helps the other person. When the other person is transparently real and congruent, it often helps me. In those rare moments when a deep realness in one meets a deep realness in the other, it is a memorable I-Thou relationship, as Buber would call it. Such a deep and mutual personal encounter is experienced by me as very growth enhancing. A person who is loved appreciatively, not possessively, blooms and develops his own unique self. The person who loves non-possessively is himself enriched. (1967, p. 18-19)

Though mutuality is possible between counsellors and clients, it is important to discuss some of the limitations of mutuality that exist in the therapeutic relationship and that are embedded in its nature. A healing relationship can be mutual with regard to its contact; both the client and the therapist can open themselves to the other's whole being. It can also be mutual in trust; each party can give the gift of trust to the other and in that

way be fully present in the meeting. Furthermore, there can be a sharing of a common problem; both the client and the therapist are concerned with every problem that is brought by the client as part of the whole communal reality in the relations between them. However, the one element of mutuality that cannot exist in therapeutic relationships according to Buber is mutuality of inclusion or experiencing the other side. The client cannot experience the perspective and experience of the therapist (Friedman, 1994).

Buber in his dialogue with Rogers in 1957 (Buber, 1965) spoke extensively on this subject. Rogers believed that full mutuality was possible between client and therapist. He said that he felt a sense of equality with the client in moments of deep encounter. Buber said that no matter how equal Rogers felt with his clients, the reality of equality was impossible because the client had come to the therapist for help and the therapist was there to help the client. Therefore, if the client was able to live the therapist's part in the common situation, the relationship would no longer be a therapeutic one based on the needs of the client, but rather a friendship between equals where both were able to attend to the other's well-being. Rogers conceded that if the client were ever able to imagine his reality, then the therapy would be almost complete (Buber, 1965).

### The Spirit

“The aim of relation is relation's own being, that is contact with the Thou. For through contact with every Thou we are stirred with a breath of the Thou, that is, of eternal life” (Buber, 1958a, p.63).

Buber proposes in I and Thou (1958a) that all relations to worldly Thou's lead us deeper into relationship with the divine Thou. In each moment of contact with a Thou, we experience the breath of the spirit in the in-between sphere between the two persons

relating. This experience of spirit may differ for each but something more than the sum of the two who are present exists as they relate.

The man who emerges from the act of pure relation that so involves his being has now in his being something more that has grown in him, of which he did not know before and whose origin he is not rightly able to indicate. (Buber 1958a, p.109)

This experience of spirit and the divine is ineffable and I am struggling to find words to communicate its meaning. What I am trying to say is that as we reach out to meet and we engage in the act of loving the other's thou, we are reaching out to the divine, who is more than the sum of the engagement yet who meets us in the engagement. "He who goes out with his whole being to meet his Thou and carries to it all being that is in the world, finds Him who cannot be sought" (Buber, 1958a, p.79).

### Knowing

He who turns to the realm which he has removed from himself, and which has been completed and transformed into a world. He who turns to the world and looking upon it steps into relation with it, becomes aware of wholeness and unity in such a way that from then on he is able to grasp being as wholeness and a unity; the single being has received the character of wholeness and the unity which are perceived in it from the wholeness and unity perceived in the world (Buber, 1957a, p.99).

When we relate to an Other's Thou we are expanded in our knowing of the world and of ourselves. "He who truly experiences a thing so that it springs up to meet him and embraces him of itself has in that thing known the world" (Buber, 1957c, p.27). This knowing is not knowledge. It is not an increased ability to comprehend how it all works. Rather it is an increased capacity to embrace the world and its beings. "The world is not comprehensible, but it is embraceable" (Buber, 1957c, p.27). As we embrace the world, we embrace ourselves more fully and we embrace the others with whom we engage more fully and this is the space where healing can take place.

## Conclusion

In this review I have synthesized my understanding of Buber's philosophy of dialogue as it relates to the experience of deep encounter. I have cycled downward, circling the concepts over and over in slightly different and deeper ways to create a multi-dimensional embodied understanding of this philosophy. To conclude I will leave you with one final quote that epitomizes for me the experience of deep encounter.

These meetings are not organized to make the world, but each is a sign of the world order. They are not linked up with one another, but each assures you of your solidarity with the world. The world which appears to you in this way is unreliable, for it takes on a continually new appearance; you cannot hold it to its word. It has no density, for everything in it penetrates everything else; no duration, for it comes even when it is not summoned, and vanishes even when it is tightly held. It cannot be surveyed and if you wish to make it capable of survey you lose it. It comes, and comes to bring you out; if it does not reach you, meet you, then it vanishes, but it comes back in another form. It is not outside you, it stirs in the depth of you; if you say "soul of my soul" you have not said too much. But guard against wishing to remove it into your soul—for then you annihilate it. It is your present; only while you have it do you have the present. You can make it into an object for yourself, to experience and to use you must continually do this—and as you do it you have no more present... You cannot make yourself understood with others concerning it, you are alone with it. But it teaches you to meet others, and to hold your ground when you meet them. Through the graciousness of its comings and the solemn sadness of its goings it leads you away to the Thou in which the parallel lines of relations meet. It does not help to sustain you in life, it only helps you to glimpse eternity (Buber, 1958a, p.32-33).

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

The intent of this chapter is to map out the path that I have followed as I have attempted to engage with deep encounter, and create and express its meanings. This process of engaging and creating meaning and understanding is multidimensional and weaves its way through all of the layers of the fabric of this work. The intent of this work is to look closely at deep encounter, open to the experience of it and call the reader to do the same. But all of these things (looking closely, opening to experience and calling to a partner in dialogue) are also pieces of the complex process of deep encounter. Therefore, in an active way the method of this work is to open myself to deep encounter with the co-researchers, with texts and with the beings that wrote them, with myself and with you, the reader. By approaching my work in this manner I have begun to approach the whole of life this way. I have begun to shed the armour that defends me against the signs of life. I am aware, and I am called to respond. I am transformed by engaging with deep encounter.

The method and the topic of this thesis seem to flow together constantly, despite my efforts to keep the two things separate and distinct from one another. It has been a long road to the place where I can understand that method and topic are inseparable. To help elucidate my methodology for this work I will begin by telling the story of this journey. I will share with you what I have gleaned on my travels from my engagement with phenomenological methodology and hermeneutic methodology. I will also share some of tools, which were vehicles for me on this path.

## A Journey towards Methodology

### Phenomenology.

When I began this study I believed it was a phenomenological study of the lived experience of deep encounter. I wanted to know and understand the essences of that experience. van Manen (1990) stated that phenomenological research is the study of essences. He said “Phenomenology asks for the very nature of the phenomenon, for that which makes some-‘thing’ what it is—and without which it could not be what it is” (p.10). He goes on to say that “phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structure, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience” (p.10). I wanted to write a work that helped elucidate an understanding of the phenomenon and was descriptive of moments of deep encounter. I was primarily interested in moments of connection and I wanted to explore the dimensions and textures of those moments. The process of getting to those moments was overshadowed by the experience itself. The process seemed to serve these moments of meeting. I wanted to do phenomenological research because it “seeks understanding for its own sake and addresses the question what not why” (Polkinghorn, 1989). I wanted to know what was going on in deep encounter and I wanted to spend my time focussed on that experience.

I longed to write a work that made the reader wonder about deep encounter. van Manen, in speaking about effective phenomenological writing, stated the following:

In his phenomenological description he must pull his reader into the question in such a way that the reader cannot help but wonder about the nature of the phenomenon in the way that the phenomenologist does. One might say that a phenomenological questioning teaches the reader to wonder, to question deeply the very thing which is being questioned by the question (1984, p. 46).

I wanted to write in a poetic way that tried an “incantative telling, evocative speaking, a primal telling wherein we aim to involve the voice into an original singing of the world” (1984, p.39). I wanted to sing the praise of deep encounter.

Coming from an interest in nourishment, I was still in a place where I wanted deep encounter to be an oasis, a source of energy, and a place of joy. I wanted to know that place and be very aware of it when it arrived in my life so that deep encounter would fuel me in the rest of my encounters. A phenomenological study, which looked closely at the lived experience of those moments, provided a way for me to do this.

#### Hermeneutics and the study of the work of Martin Buber.

To start this work, I read the writings of Martin Buber. I approached his texts in the pursuit of an understanding of the experience of deep meeting. Palmer (1969) states that understanding is linguistic, historical and ontological. I read Buber’s texts with all three of these elements in mind. I sought to understand the words that Buber used and the etymology of them to expand my ability to grasp his meaning. I created understanding through engagement with his concepts of presence, inclusivity, confirmation and being versus seeming. I reflected on how these concepts were experienced ontologically in my thought processes, in my body and in my lived moment-to-moment interactions.

As I created this meaning for myself I strove to live out what I had integrated. I noticed moments of authenticity, moments where I opened to another’s thou, and moments when I experienced the spirit in the between. I went back to Buber’s writing with this experience and I dialogued with his words, letting them flow over me, infiltrate my being and affect my perceptions. I experienced aesthetic moments of revelation in my

interactions with Buber, moments when my whole way of being in the world was transformed. Palmer (1969) speaks of this experience:

When one encounters a great work of art, he finds the horizons of his own world, his way of seeing his world, his self understanding broadened; he sees "in a different light," sometimes as for the first time, but always in a more "experienced" way. This shows that the world in the work of art is not divorced from one's own; it is contiguous with it and illuminates self understanding even as one comes to understand it. In the encounter with a great work, one does not go into a foreign universe and step outside time and history; one does not finally separate aesthetic understanding from one's total understanding so as to leave the "nonaesthetic" behind and go into the "aesthetic" realm. Rather, one becomes more fully present to himself; when one understands a great work of literary art, he brings everything he has and is with him. (p.239)

I also read the texts of Buber interpreting his meanings both within the historical framework of his life and the present lived experience of my own. I stood in relation to him, imagined his reality and practiced inclusivity in my interactions with his words and being (Buber, 1947). I read about his life, his experiences and imagined the impact of the events of his history and his philosophy on him. I read other writers' perceptions of him and how his words had affected their way of being. I also brought to my readings an awareness of my own historical framework. I was aware of the impact that my postmodern cultural experience had on my readings of Buber's work. I noted how my Christian worldview affected my approach and my interpretations of this Jewish philosopher's ideas. I was also keenly aware of my femininity and Buber's masculinity as I read his words.

I came to "know" Buber in all of these ways. I lived with his words over and against me. I don't know if my 'knowing' is correct. I cannot know his reality. However, I know what it is to try to know him, to enter into relationship with his writings with my whole being. I know what it is to engage with Buber and I wrote the meanings that I

created in our engagement in the proceeding hermeneutical interpretation of his works. This knowing, noticing and creating meaning in the engagement was becoming the heart of my methodology.

### The Narrow Ridge

In this meaning-making process I noticed several things. First, Buber, no matter how much he wrote about the lived experience of deep encounter, always ended his stories and his poetizing with a warning. He said that an I-thou encounter “does not help sustain you in life, it only helps you glimpse eternity” (Buber, 1958 p.33). He also said that “You cannot make yourself understood with others concerning it, you are alone with it” (Buber, 1958 p.33). Furthermore, though Buber spoke more concretely about elements of the movement towards deep encounter, he lapsed into poetry and metaphor to describe moments of deep encounter. In reading his descriptions of the moments of deep encounter, I could feel what he was describing but I found it difficult if not impossible to express it concretely and categorically.

I asked myself what exactly I was trying to do. Is deep encounter too elusive and complex to find its essence? Would I be able to pin it down? Was the act of thematically pinning it down, categorizing it and labelling it not antithetical to the whole I-thou relation that I was trying to study? However, this questioning was balanced with a sense that, when I engaged with the process or moments of deep encounter, there was something knowable. And upon reflection my experience could be organized and there were elements that were distinguishable. In this process, I felt myself swing between the I-thou world and the I-it world.

In this way, studying deep encounter feels paradoxical, dangerous. I feel like I am standing in a very uncertain place and firm ground is sparse. However, I am still standing somewhere, there is ground here, but it is a very narrow strip of land. I know but I don't know. I understand but then I don't again. I understand only in moments of experience and engagement. I think I still believe that there is something to know but to engage fully with life I have to hold that knowing very loosely and it is always slipping away. However, I know that I am standing somewhere, I know that I exist and that I can engage and affect the world and that it can affect me. Buber describes his experience of the uncertainty and possibility of knowing in the following way. Though his experience and my own are different I relate to his description and his sensation of the place of knowing in the engagement with the other. Buber suggests that there is a narrow place created in the engagement with others and with the world where we meet our uniqueness and recognize our common ground (Hodes, 1973). Buber expresses this place beautifully.

I have occasionally described my standpoint to my friends as the 'narrow ridge'... I wanted by this to express that I did not rest on the broad upland of a system that includes a series of sure statements about the absolute, but on a narrow rocky ridge between the gulfs where there is no sureness of expressible knowledge but the certainty of meeting what remains undisclosed (Buber, as cited in Friedman, 1955).

What I have come to realize through this process is that the point is not primarily to create knowledge about deep encounter, to describe it and to be able to talk about the essence of deep encounter. The primary point is instead to engage in the process of making meaning by opening to that which is created in the engagement, by allowing it to emerge, by noticing it, by being aware of it and by allowing it to transform and enlarge us. With this in mind, I decided that to be true to the process of deep encounter, I could no longer look for the essence of deep encounter because I do not know if there is an

essence that can exist outside of yours or my moment-to-moment engagement with an other or with the world. I no longer believe that deep encounter exists as a pre reality outside of the engagement. I believe it is created in the process of engagement and exists in that between place.

It was at this point that I had to abandon the idea that this study was purely phenomenological. This study is not about the phenomenon of deep encounter that exists as a reality outside of relationship. Deep encounter exists only in the context of a relationship between beings who are opening themselves. In other words, deep encounter only exists as a reality between beings who are engaging in the process of deep encounter. Therefore, to study deep encounter, I must always be engaging in the process of deep encounter.

#### Interview process

With all that I had learnt in my interaction with Buber's texts and in my current life experience I was very uncertain as to how to proceed with the interviews and I did not know what I should do with the texts generated by our dialogues. Even though I was not looking for the essence of deep encounter, should I not still be looking to understand the moments of deep encounter and generate content, which described these moments in a way that would help others understand, or should my primary intent be to engage with the participant in dialogue and meet him or her? I knew that this meeting would have to occur in some way to facilitate the disclosure of their experience; they needed to feel my openness, my presence, and my ability to allow for their otherness to be able to speak deeply of their experience.

However, was my intent to be open to them so that I would get content and rich descriptions for this study or for the purpose of living what I was beginning to believe and practicing this way of being and learning from it? Again a tension between the I-it and the I-thou worlds existed. If I approached these beings to create content then I was trying to experience them for the sake of using them. This way of being seems antithetical to I-thou relations. However, I needed to use the participants to gain understanding and to create this work.

I believe this is a natural tension, one that I have not been able to avoid. I am doing a thesis. I need to write and learn about something and I need to create a product. I also need to come to the participant with a topic to dialogue about. The questions about deep encounter meant to generate content provided direction and context. Deep encounter was the place where we met. The problem is not that we spoke about deep encounter in order to gain understanding and make meaning. This is necessary to facilitate the process of this research. The problem occurs when I become more committed to the content and the generation of content than to the process of meeting the other. The problem occurs when the world of I-it, of knowledge, ordering, categorizing and finding themes takes precedence over the world of I-thou in which we move towards meeting for the sake of meeting. This tension has been the primary struggle in this study. I have moved far into the world of I-it in my pursuit of something concrete and knowable to write about and I have also learnt to come back, to let go and to open to the world of I-thou in my process.

In the actual interview processes, I vacillated between these two objectives of meeting for the sake of using and meeting for the sake of meeting. I did find that when I let go of content and practiced my “knowing” of Buber, when I engaged authentically

and opened myself to the participant, then meeting became primary and that experience and engagement was full of energy, life and learning. I was extremely fortunate to engage with people who had practiced the art of being present with an Other for a long time and therefore, when I went astray into the world of I-it, they often called me back with their way of being.

For this work I interviewed five therapists for between one to two hours each. I looked for people who worked in a holistic way considering mind, body and spirit in their approach to people. I also sought out people who had experience with deep encounter and who felt they could talk about those experiences with clarity. Letters were sent to several therapists telling them about the study and inviting them to participate. These therapists were suggested by my supervisor or were known to me. Each had been experienced by me or my supervisor in a way that demonstrated that they were open to deep encounter and things of a spiritual nature in their work and valued these things as a rich part of the texture of life. I then spoke to those who responded to the letter, often clarifying my intent and creating a plan for our meeting

N is a professor and runs a private practice. In her work she identifies herself as a companion and one who is committed to deep exploration. S works in private practice and teaches. She works primarily with those who have experienced trauma in their lives. She identifies herself as someone who listens deeply and brings her presence to create a sacred space in which the client can do her work. D is a professor and a coach (in a therapeutic sense) who identifies himself as a counsellor who tries to leave everyone with whom he comes in contact in a better place than they were before the interaction. J is a counsellor in private practice and identifies himself as a listener and says he works with

his presence and the Other's presence. E is a counsellor at a crisis centre. She identifies herself as bringing herself and her life experience to serve the client as they walk on their path. All five counsellors had been working in the field for over 10 years and all of them were in mid-life or beyond, I found this to be a helpful balance with my beginningness.

I began all of the interviews in approximately the following way:

My desire is to look at the lived experience of deep encounter between a client and a therapist. I am interested in both the process of going toward deep encounter: how one engages in that process or opens oneself to the other. And also the moments of deep encounter: moments when you have sensed that you have met a client in a deep way.

I am not looking at this as the pinnacle experience of the work of counselling or the best thing that could ever happen in a counselling relationship. What I would like to do is to look at: how does this play a role in the rest of this relationship? What does it show us about the rest of the relationship? What does it teach us? How does it affect us and transform us? That is really where my heart is. My desire is not to come to you as an expert and put me in the role of the questioner. I would like to come together and develop a dialogue.

The metaphor that helps me to explain my intent is to imagine a path. You have been walking on this path of counselling and working in this way for a long time and I have got new excitement and I am running along. What I'd like to dialogue about is this: What do you see on this path? What are the colours of the trees? What are the different hues that you notice? What are the different paths that you take that show you different things? I would like to talk about the different ways we see this path.

So the way I'd like to start is to create a context. I would like to know who you are as a counsellor when you meet with another person and what your intended work is. I believe this will help me develop an understanding of your perspective. I would also like to invite you to ask whatever questions you may have of me.

And then I would like to define these words together. The words "deep encounter" may mean something very different to you than they do to me and I would like to enlarge my definition, but I would like to also come to a mutual definition that we can work with. From there I would like to talk about deep encounter itself and your experience of it.

Before meeting with participants, I wrote a plan to keep me on track and to remind me of my intent. It listed several areas of interest emerging from my reading of Buber's work that I found important. I tried not to limit myself to the plan and instead I

worked to simply respond to the leading of the participant. My intent was that the plan be a help and not a guide. The plan went as follows:

### Interview Guide

#### Introduce Intention

##### What is my desire in this study?

- My desire is to understand the lived experience of a deep encounter with clients.
- I want to understand nuances, emotion, body sensations, thought, and whatever else is present in the moment.
- I understand that these moments are rare and subtle. My desire is not to hold up these moments as the pinnacle of the counselling experience. Rather I want to understand this lived experience as part of the whole and wonder about what these moments teach us about our daily, moment-to-moment encounters, and what they teach about the counselling experience as a whole.
- What does opening ourselves in this way do to us?

##### What is my desire in relation to the participant?

- Intention: not to place you in the expert seat and me in the questioner seat
- Desire: is to dialogue about this experience
- Walk down the path of deep encounter; together see what you see on this path and share our understandings

#### Interview layout

- Begin interview with trying to understand you and your context

- Move to a discussion of deep encounter and developing a mutual definition of the words used to describe the topic and perhaps find words that work with your understanding of what we are trying to explore
- Then I would like to talk about specific instances of deep encounter

### Areas To Seek Understanding About

#### Life as counsellors

- Listen and ask questions that will allow you to see their intended work
- Relate as a person; their spirit will be a part of this work, not just their words
- Is there anything I should know about them in this work?
- Anything they want to know about me?

#### Defining the words

- Looking for common understanding
- Symbols, metaphors that would enrich the words
- Feelings the words bring up for the interviewee
- Limitations of the words

#### The experience of the encounter

- What was their bodily experience? Consciousness in the moment? Affect in the moment?
- Locus of experience-in self-observable in other-between self and other (in the relation)
- Experience of self in the encounter-who were they-what were they aware of about their entity?
- Their experience of the other

- Experience of spirit in the encounter
- Moving out of a deep encounter
- How do these experiences interact, interplay and work with their life and relations to others?

This plan was helpful at times, and at others it was a hindrance because I followed it like an interview schedule and became rigidly focussed on content. There were many times, however, when the plan was forgotten and I interacted authentically with this being across from me, responding to him or her with my being. From these moments emerged some of the richest knowing.

#### Working with the interviews

After the interviews I wrote my experience of the interactions, noting physical sensation, moments of authenticity and depth, and the struggles that I felt in the process. I then listened to the tapes and became familiar with this new way of relating to this person and our experience. I then transcribed the tapes, still just listening and letting the interpretation wait. During this time I wrote about my experience of the days with the participants' voices. The writing helped me to talk through my resistances to their otherness and to notice the growth of my love for their words and for what their spirits had offered me.

After completing the transcription process I began to work with the interviews as texts. Pieces of hermeneutic and phenomenological methodology were used to facilitate this process. At the same time I incorporated a relational dialogical component, which I had learned from my interactions with Buber. From van Manen's (1984,1990) work I drew learnings about writing. He has taught me about using the "deep tonalities of

language” (van Manen, 1984, p.67) to invoke an embodied experience of the moment described. I have tried in this work to write poetically with the intention of evoking a visual, sensual experience in the reading. He has also taught me about “cultivating my own being in the process of writing” (p.37). I have filled several journals with my thoughts on the topic of deep encounter and through that process I have also found myself in this work.

Writing is one of the foundations of this work. Over time I have moved from skimming the surface to becoming more comfortable with the depths. I have gone over and over the same space but something more always emerges. I have also noticed that I have moved into a more dialogical form in my writing. At first I wrote what someone said and either left it alone or gave a very literal interpretation. Now, I find the dialogue flows more freely and my interpretations are much less literal and much more responsive.

A beautiful moment of this letting go of the literal in my life occurred when I attended a modern dance recital. In the past, when I have been at one of these events, I have constantly asked myself, “What are they saying? What does this mean? How does it all connect?” I tried desperately to find the creator’s intended meaning and usually I came out feeling frustrated, confused, as though I was missing something. However, this last time when I went to see the dance I tried to just notice, watch and let it flow over me. I asked different questions: what does this say to me? How does my body and soul respond to this? What is called to mind? What meaning do I make of this? For the first time I saw a modern dance and I left feeling touched, awakened to new metaphors and images and amazed at how learning to look helps you to see.

At this point in my work, I was also following van Manen's (1990) technical methodology, looking for thematic statements in the texts, and writing responsively to them. I was also using Palmer's (1969) theoretical framework and attempted to approach the texts to understand them. I considered their historicity, the context of the life and the work of the person who spoke them and the context of our relationship. I immersed myself in the language of the texts; seeking out the depths of the meanings of the words used and working with them from my own perspective. I also stood in relation to the text in an experiential way. I lived what I was learning and worked to expand the limitations of my understanding through engaging from a new perspective.

Initially, I looked at the interviews independently. I selected passages that spoke to me, dividing them into two broad categories: those which spoke to the process of moving towards deep encounter and those which spoke to the lived experience of a moment of deep encounter. For each passage, I responded with free writing connecting pieces to one another, to passages in Buber's work and passages in other works of literature. I also looked for an overarching metaphor for deep encounter that the participant had used in our interview. I worked with this metaphor to paint a picture of my understanding, using their metaphor as a medium to bring out their voice and my own. I worked with artistic pieces, which seemed to connect to their metaphors to expand upon them in an attempt to create an embodied knowing of their work. I worked to synthesize my response to and my understandings of each participant's contribution. I also worked with Buber's texts in relation to the participants, using each to stretch the other.

In this process I was still very focussed on trying to understand deep encounter. My commitment was to the creation of understanding and knowledge. The experiences of the interviews were being used to serve this understanding. The participants' words became texts, which I tried to interpret, order and categorize. What I believe was happening was that I was doing what Palmer (1969) warns against. I was substituting a conceptual analysis of the experience of deep encounter for the actual experiential understanding that was possible only when I moved away from a commitment to content into a commitment to process.

At this point I presented some of my work to my supervisory committee. They came back to me concerned that the interview writings added nothing to my writings of my interactions with Buber. It was as if I was replicating my study of Buber in my study of the interview texts and coming to the same conclusions. My work was not going any farther than a review and a support of Buber's philosophy of dialogue. As we explored this problem, we tried to discern where the energy really lay in this study. What could take this farther than a book on Buber? What was I trying to learn from this work anyway? What was I trying to teach with this work?

What came to surface was that my desire was to learn to open to deep encounter with another and to call clients and readers to open, as well. This sentence may sound the same as much of what I have said thus far but the difference is important. My desire was not just to learn about opening to deep encounter and moments of, but to learn to open to deep encounter. Consider the quote I used at the beginning of this chapter regarding phenomenology. "In his phenomenological description he must pull his reader into the question in such a way that the reader cannot help but wonder about the nature of the

phenomenon in the way that the phenomenologist does.” (van Manen, 1984, p.46) I no longer want to ask the reader to simply wonder about deep encounter as a phenomenon. I am much more interested now in actually moving towards deep encounter with the reader and inviting him or her to do the same.

I have had very little experience in this process of opening to others in an intentional way. I interviewed therapists who had more experience in this area partly because I really wanted to learn about how they opened to deep encounter but I also wanted to try to open to experience the intentionality and the process of moving towards deep encounter in myself in my relation to them. A shift occurred in this work at this moment, a shift from purely trying to understand and describe to experiencing and vicarious learning. The texts moved from texts back to moments of interaction and experience. Borowitz (1965) stated that “the I-thou relationship is simply ineffable. All this description and Buber’s own writing is not a substitute for it, but a gesture pointing to something you must find in your own life. Only in terms of your own experience can it make sense” (p.171). So this is what I have done; I have told of my own experience of opening to the I-thou realm.

At the end of this work I realize that in this study I chose to focus my energy on the knowing of engaging in the process instead of generating knowledge about deep encounter. I do not regret this, however I feel that the generation of knowledge is important and a study that incorporated both ways of knowing: knowledge and embodied experiencing in a more dynamic and less divided way, would be extremely powerful. However at this stage in my existence I needed to let go of trying to generate knowledge in order to engage in the process of knowing. This bifurcation created space for me to

engage without constantly placing knowledge up against my knowing in an antagonistic fashion. As I develop I hope that I will be able to hold the tension of knowledge and knowing and engage with it in a more fluid manner.

### Opening to the experience

It was at this time that I abandoned technical methodology and listened to Palmer's (1969) words:

Method is an effort to measure and control from the side of the interpreter; it is the opposite of letting the phenomenon lead. The openness of "experience" – which alters the interpreter himself from the side of the text—is antithetical to method. Thus method is in reality a form of dogmatism, separating the interpreter from the work, standing between it and him and barring him from experiencing the work in its fullness. Analytical seeing is blindness to experience; it is analytical blindness. (p.247)

My experience in relating to the participants, my process of opening, failing to open, embracing their otherness, failing to embrace their otherness, being present, being distracted, being authentic and hiding behind masks became the "data" of this study. In addition to this I looked at what I learnt both from the words of the participants and their way of being with me about how to deeply encounter clients.

This work comes from me and, as I see it, I am the exploration site, the vehicle through which this learning can come alive. The intention is not to tell you of my experience so that you will know who I am, though I expect that, through reading this work in an engaged way, you may come to "know" me in same way that I came to "know" Buber. However, the interviews, my experience, and my interpretations of Buber's work are all vehicles through which we can engage in deep encounter.

The modality through which I have expressed the story of my experience is narrative. I have written the story of each encounter, exploring my process, my

movement and my growth. I have gone beyond the encounter in most cases and shared with you the history of my relationship with the participant to provide context for the encounter. You will also hear in the narrative my after-the-encounter engagements with the words and ways of being of the therapists. In some instances, it took me months of immersing myself in the experience of my interaction with the other to open to deep encounter with them.

I hope that you, the reader, will vicariously learn through my process. I hope that as I take off my masks and stand before you as authentically as I can, you will have an experience of meeting and learn something of the process of opening in your engagement with me. In the concluding section of this work, I will draw on the interview narratives to describe how this work has affected my becoming process, how I am becoming a counsellor and how I am becoming a person in this process. I will draw together my learnings in a way that I hope will be helpful and tangible for you.

My journey towards method has been one of the most significant parts of this thesis work. Every time that I let go of something firm, doable and concrete, I felt very afraid and very exposed. It was as if I was being asked to walk into the darkness of unknowing over and over again. At each of these moments, I asked myself if I could not act authentically, being fully present and fully open to the unknown in this small piece of work, then how would I be able to live out my thesis of deep encounter in the rest of my life? I have not gone far enough but I believe that with this work I have engaged with you, the reader, with the participants, with myself and with the unknown.

## CHAPTER 4

### Interview Narratives

#### D: a Gentle Vision of Connection

##### Introduction

D has been my shepherd in this work, gently guiding me, allowing me freedom but calling me back in moments when I stray. I have had this quiet, gentle relationship with D. I feel trusted by him and constantly encouraged to be my best. At the same time I trust D to be real, affirming and helpful in all of our meetings. I know my edges. When I am with D, there are no threats to them. I never feel as if I have to impress him or change for him. I am very secure in my otherness and open to his otherness. I don't feel like our relationship is dramatic. D would never allow me to stand in awe of him. He seems to insist on his humanity and our equality. This is a great gift.

##### The Interview

When I met with D for this interview, there was no intentionality; it was all too sudden, too quick to prepare. He offered to do the interview and then we began. Suddenly we were in the midst of it and he was willing to meet me for me. At first it felt so stilted and fake with him. This was intended to be a practice interview, not a real one. I was committed to my questions and to my format more than I was to him or what he had to say. D, on the other hand, seemed unflustered. The transition between conversation and the interview was smooth; he gave me as much of himself in the interview as he had in our more personal informal conversation beforehand. D has taught me a lot about stability of self throughout our relationship. He speaks directly to this in the beginning of our interview. He says:

I try now and I have tried as consciously as possible, and as a result perhaps more unconsciously now, mindful but unconscious, that I approach them (clients, students and people who consult him) as D, not in a role as the counsellor, advisor, supervisor, teacher, whatever... What you get now in your interview is probably what you would get as a client, as a student.

When I am in a meeting with a person, to whatever degree I am capable of doing at that moment, I am being who I am, being that D I spoke of earlier, being as present as I possibly can and that goes together with being D. If I am not present then I am not being D either somebody else is there. So those are the mindful pieces. I am mindful of the communication that is going on. I am mindful of my own body and my senses and my feeling, and so on, and of my thoughts. I am mindful of that person that is across from me, Kirsten in this case, mainly your non-verbals, and so on. So all those are the mindful pieces.

D, being intentional, consistently authentic and consistently open to me has taught me something about feeling continuously prized. I don't feel when I meet with D that I have an hour of his time and then he will shut off to me and open up to another. I don't feel like our relationship will change when I walk out the door, that I will suddenly become a stranger. This way of being feels more real, less rigid. What is learned in the room between us feels more livable in the outside world if we can also relate authentically outside of a session.

I think this transfers into a counselling relationship as well. If I can be consistently real, consistently me with a client in every meeting with her no matter what capacity or what roles we play, then I teach the client and myself that authenticity is possible in all realms of life, not just in the safety of the counselling room. What does this mean for me? It means that my whole life and not just my counselling practice must be a living out of what I believe. I cannot turn off my love or my presence when I walk out of my office. This love, this presence needs to be part of every moment.

Buber (1957,1958a) is always saying that religion cannot be separated from the rest of life. He says it is not a lack of religion that is the problem in our society but rather

a bifurcation of life: religious life and worldly life. Life can only be redeemed when the two flow together, when the profane is made holy by our non-rejection of it and our entrance into it, to gather it into holiness. In the same way, if I embrace all of a being in the counselling room, open to his Thou, bring all of my presence to the moment and engage with him fully but close myself when I walk out of the counselling room, I am dividing life into two spheres and living inauthentically.

How do I live authentically, ready to engage with the world and with people not just in the safety of a counselling office, but in the rest of life? For me, part of it is being prepared. I need to have the inner resources to be able to meet people in and out of session, those whom I serve, my family and strangers. This means that I need to meditate and to centre myself. I need to pray to ask for help to be of service. I need to know myself, who I am, what I believe and how I am doing in the moment. I need also to be open to saying to those I hurt or am unreal with that I am sorry and be willing to try again. For me this is not about the content of my conversations with people outside of the counselling room. It is about a fundamental intention and attitude to try my best to engage authentically wherever I am. D teaches me this in his presentation and in his way of relating to me on a daily basis.

D and I walk on in our conversation. I am still so deeply tied to my questions and my study that I am putting them before my engagement with the moment. And then he helps me to understand something. He differentiates between the process of moving towards deep encounter and deep encounter as a moment; a destination. This is what he says.

If I was seeing the two words, “deep encounter”, placed in the context of a therapeutic relationship, I would say that if it was a process it would be a

process by which two or more, in this case, people, would come together so that both people are mindfully opening themselves up to one another in a very special and intimate way. If I was thinking of it as a destination then I would think of it as that moment in time, sometimes a too rare moment in time, where there is an interconnection between two parties. Even as I am saying that, I am finding a welling of emotion coming up for me because I recognize the significance of the felt experience that I have had. It's that special place and that special time and location when both people, for whatever reason, have mindfully offered themselves to one another and are both ready to participate as givers and receivers of that connectedness.

It is in this moment that I shift my allegiance from practicing the interview to really listening to what D is saying. He had opened my eyes to something that I have not seen before, something intrinsic to my understanding of deep encounter. I have always lumped process and moment into one. As he speaks, I realize how looking at these parts separately allows for so much more depth and richness. This new understanding also helps me make a clear distinction between that which is my responsibility, the process of turning, and that which is not in my control, moments of deep encounter.

When this light turns on I realize that D has something to teach me. This is not practice, this is life. If I treat this lightly and do not engage with him I will miss this understanding. I will miss the growth of me and this work. And so I join him not for practice, but for real. I feel with him the emotion of the moment and the precious quality of meeting people deeply.

We talk on, engaging with each other about a variety of issues. Our language is no longer formal and tight. We are exploring together. I still have moments when I act in a programmed way, parroting out my questions, but I sense that D is able to meet me even in my constrained moments, helping me open by his willingness to give whatever he can of himself. With me he engages the paradox of my responsibility to prepare, but yet my

lack of control over moments of deep encounter. In his description of his personal experience, D says:

I have mindfully, purposefully and intentionally readied myself, and I can't speak for the other person. I am not sure what has gone on for them in terms of their own mindfulness, but at some point they have readied themselves. So the setting is there, the context is there and then, if it happens, it happens. My experience is as much of being a passenger as it is of being a creator or in that vernacular the driver of the vehicle. So there are both of those, and I take ownership of being a driver, the driver or the co-driver and yet I am equally a passenger and then we get to that transformative energy or that other persona that enters.

Over the course of this work, I have become acutely aware of this experience of being the passenger and the driver and I struggle with balancing those two roles in tension, allowing and preparing, holding on and letting go. My focus has always been on action, on making something happen by questioning and controlling the environment. D is teaching me to turn my attention to listening, living mindfully, creating space, developing my awareness and opening. This process of preparation has qualities of letting go intrinsic to it. As I learn to be more responsively aware, more inactively attuned to life, life will happen and I will know intuitively how to move with it.

I ask D to tell me a story of deep encounter. In this storied time, we enter into a powerful reexperiencing of the moment. Here is his story:

The context was at Camoson College and it was late afternoon and I had been there, this was my third year working with them and I was the person that would come in and take over for the other counsellors for several months at a time sort of thing. So this is my way of being up here, too, have my outlet for doing formal counselling. So I am there. It's a late afternoon, maybe about 5 o'clock, they have a shift on a Wednesday that goes from about noon to 8. So it's about 5 o'clock. I think I am by myself. I get a phone call from one of the instructors or coordinators of a program saying that there is a First Nations young woman who is distraught and very fearful of seeking help. She has really strongly encouraged this young woman to come over to the counselling centre and is afraid that she won't come in. And so, you know, I felt this low grade anxiety. What am I going

to do with this? What's going on? Am I going to be able to be helpful? So I have that kind of awareness at the time.

So I went out of my office and went to the front doors and there was a tall thin First Nations person standing out in the alcove outside. You could see that she...you could feel the fear and you could feel her kind of push pull, you know that sort of "what am I going to do?" You could feel that kind of energy and so I remember opening the door this far and just looking out and meeting her gaze and just smiling at her and walking away, letting the door close and, walking away, went back to office. And then coming back again and opening the door and saying would she like to talk to me and at that point she came in and you could see her... there was still this fearful energy, but it had dissipated. There had been that little bit of contact and reassurance.

She came into the office and we had a long chat... let's not go into content because in a way it is peripheral but she was talking about her life situation, her context and her living condition and the volatility of it, and so on. And she was telling me story after story, this wonderful narrative of what was happening for her and some of her fears and how things had gotten out of hand and things were okay now but who knows what is going to happen next, and so on and so forth.

And I was just doing my 'being a good listener', stuff, and constantly asking myself, "how could I help this person?" Also, cognitively thinking, this is a First Nations person. I really want to be inviting and also be as open as possible to her experience of what was going on so there is that cognitive stuff going on. But I can remember this moment. I remember just being very mindfully open to what she was telling me and what my reactions were, and so on and so forth. And just supporting her perception and perspective of what was going on in her life and it was at one point where she talked about it being too much for her what was going on for her at the house at the given moment and she left and went to the porch, just to be. And I think I had said something like "what did you notice when you left that environment and you went outside on the porch? What did you notice?" And she said, "well there was an eagle flying overhead and that was really calming to me." And so I said, "what did that eagle say to you?"

And at that moment we both went to this place of connectedness where the question intuitively came. It didn't take a rocket scientist, but it came and at that point the question clearly resonated for her. I can remember that at that moment she opened her stance, she leaned forward, at which point I did the same thing and she told me about what the eagle had said. And in fact the eagle was representing the creator and the creator was telling her what she needed to do and who she needed to be at that moment and it was just this incredibly transformative moment for her. To be really validated by another being and to be actually able to articulate that which she had experienced, perhaps not in the same sense that she was articulating; it brought it to her awareness in a new way. And I felt that I had really transported myself to a different place to really meet her in that moment...

As I remembered that instance I also had a physiological, almost re-experiencing of the situation where I felt a rippling going from my lower chest out here right up through my neck and through my lips and my lips actually trembled or shuddered and I flushed up and through here. That's what happened for me

physiologically. When, in fact, this moment happened, I felt like this incredible, it was like a ripple going right up through my face and a trembling in my lips and a flushing in my face. I am not sure. I can't see myself so I am not sure if I turned particularly pink or anything, but it was a heated sensation and it was... the vibration... the vibratory effect was physiological and deeply emotional and very much alive, very much being in life.

As I listen to this story all 'interviewness' stops and I am enraptured in D's love for this being. I see every step of the interaction: the tall woman standing outside the building. I watch him go to the door. I see his smile spread across his face. I watch him leave and come back again, inviting her. I watch every moment as I listen. I notice how he allows his intuitions to guide, how he looks for beauty, how he loves her and seeks after her. I can see how he embraces her potentiality. It was as if she too were in the room and I am allowed to watch the space between them; to watch the energy crescendo and decrescendo as they speak, watch the transforming power of the moment and of the connection. As I imagine it now, I see D and my vision of this woman sitting across from each other. Between them and surrounding them is this light which they reach out to and touch with their words and actions.

I notice and learn from all of these things, not in an abstract theoretical way but rather in an embodied way. I feel what it must have felt like to sit in his chair and how it would feel to follow those intuitions. I see through his eyes as he looks for the beauty in her and embraces her potentiality. As I look, I see not only my vision of this woman before me but also all of the other women who have sat in front of me in this same way and I look and see their beauty, their potential. I feel his physical sensations, remembering them in relation to my own in similar moments. As I watch the progression of the ripple he described in his own body, I track it in my own. I am so involved in the

moment that I respond to his talking about the two of them leaning into each other by doing the same, as if we were moving closer to the betweenness of the story.

The power of narrative overwhelms me. I am able to be inclusive of both D and the woman of whom he speaks. Story and D's ability to drop down into the full experience of the moment have created an entrance into his reality. I imagine the possibilities of working with narrative in counselling. When I encourage clients to story their experience, I am more able to imagine their reality, to place myself in their perspective and learn to know their reality from their point of reference. I believe that we are somehow connected in our storying. Narratives are multidimensional; unlike talking about something in a flat way, stories enliven a moment, providing the texture of sight, feeling, physicality and relational tension. In my experience, stories have been the threshold of deep encounter. Narrative moves me into a realm where I can experience their reality on a multitude of dimensions. This opens up the possibility for connection in a deeper way.

I also believe that as we share stories, we relive them and we reinterpret them. If, as a counsellor in my relation to clients, I can open up new possibilities, new interpretations and new perspectives in their story, then the narrative can be expanded and, through the story, the teller is also expanded and possibilities for healing and the redemption of a moment and a being emerge. Narrative can also be a powerful tool with which to teach. This multidimensionality and the ability to create vicarious experience allows a client to learn in a non-threatening, powerful way. D has taught me his process of opening by allowing me to experience it. I, too, can help a client learn to be open by giving them experience through story.

The sacred energy of the story fills the room as we continue on our path. The eagle still flies overhead and I am sensitive to its call. I ask a question about D's sense of spirit in the room. D says my name in a fatherly way, stating that he always has a sense of spirit in the room and he explains to me how this is part of his constant reality and not particularly unique to the moment. Something about his tone makes me feel embarrassed and suddenly I put on a mask and grope to explain myself. D calms me, inviting me back to the moment by trying to answer my question as best he can. The mask comes down and we are together again. He then gives me the gift of a metaphor for spirit and the between.

So let's say energy was a colour, series of them like the northern lights and energy is always here and there is this kind of a... just a kind of a twilighty kind of 10-watt bulb of energy that is always there and you get used to the heat of it or the colour of it and the volume of it. In that moment it would have been, suddenly going to a 500-watt bulb. It would be a bright, bright resonating colour and then it would die away. So it's always there, spirit is always there, spirit energy, yet at those significant moments, there is this crescendo where everything is big.

In this moment I again imagine D and this woman. I look between the two of them and I see light dancing in varying shades of colour, intensifying as they speak and enveloping them in the moment of connection. Another dimension is opening for me. I can see the energy; the substance of the between. Before this moment this concept of the between had only been a concept, the space between the beings that were meeting was empty. I could not see. Given this metaphor my eyes are opened and I am able to feel, to visualize substance in the empty space. Somehow this brings me closer to a felt reality of spirit. My experience is no longer just a vague sensation that something is happening in this moment. I am able now to experience this moment on one more level, making it more whole.

D and I decrescendo into the end of our time together. We consider endings and the process of moving through. He leaves me with this final picture, one that gives me hope that I will become more fluent in moving with the natural process of meeting.

I can remember being in a master's program in counselling and being asked to do a five-minute workup with another student in front of a group of people. There were only eight of us in the program so there was myself and this other person working together and we were supposed to do this 10-minute role play and I can remember that within about two minutes... It wasn't a role-play. It was a situation that was current to him. In two minutes we just kind of went 'fummp'. And from whatever I had said, whatever words I had used, it had touched that place within him that moved him significantly and I felt absolutely moved, as well. It was just this incredible electrical 'zzzzt'. And then it was over. I can remember being absolutely stunned. He was stunned. I was stunned. The group was stunned at what had taken place. And it took me hours or even days to kind of come back to normal. It was a powerful electrical experience for me and to make sense of it and try to figure out what that was all about, to get back down to a normal energy.

So I am saying that because, when I think of more recent experience, it is much more of a gentle experience for me. It is much more a, "ahh this is what this is, okay, lovely"; it's just part of. Going back to gestalt again it becomes the field as long as it lasts and then it recedes. And yet what I carry with me is a felt memory...a remembered experience of that that continues to resonate. If I was talking from kind of a shamanic practice I would say, "we have invested each other with a part of our souls that we carry forward". There is certainly a recognition of the crescendo, but the decrescendo is not a volatile experience, it's much gentler and peaceful.

## N: an Experience of Flow

### Introduction

In my introduction to this work, I have told the story of how my life has gone from standing on solid ground to moving with the fluidity and flow of water. My ground of truth, reality and knowledge has crumbled and I am left in a sea of engagement and unknowing. In this process, N has been the one who has invited me to jump into the water and the one who has helped me learn how to swim and to scuba dive into the depths. She has introduced me to meditation and to the idea that there is no firm truth to

be found but rather that truth is created in relation and therefore is always transforming. She has invited me to let go of my narrow worldview and constantly open myself to the newness I encounter. She has invited all of me to emerge and play a role in my existence, not just the parts that fit nicely and properly into the way of being that is expected of me or that I expect of myself. I have also experienced her gentleness. She has encouraged me to allow this dissolution of solidity to occur at a pace that feels containable and comfortable for me. She has taught me that, when you learn to scuba dive, you slowly increase your tolerance for depth and that it is okay to have a limit as to how far you can go.

I remember so many moments when N turned her gaze to me, peered into my soul, and worked with what she saw there. I opened myself as much as I possibly could to her and to the life she called me to because I wanted to go where she invited me more than anything in life. I was scared but I wanted the liberation of which she demonstrated the possibility. She called to me of life, of possibility and of freedom and responsibility and with my whole heart I have tried to respond to that call.

On N's office door, there is a picture: a waterfall pours over rocks into a river. There is a bend in the river that you can see beyond the waterfall. The sun shines around this corner and you just get a glimpse of it. Something inside of me as I sit waiting for N outside her door knows that when that door opens, I will walk around the corner and see some new and glorious vista. This expectancy adds to our encounters. I walk into any meeting with her ready to go around that corner, to explore new ground. I have experienced the wonder of those moments and I am willing to abandon all fear and protective masks for the sake of the possibility.

There seems to be an expectancy in her too. She comes in, sits down and waits in silence. There is not a lot of introductory small talk. This silence is not closed or empty. It is pregnant with possibility, but I know that this moment is mine to birth. It is my moment. She will meet me, but I must first bring to her what it is I need to bring and want to learn. I do not feel like she tries to make me comfortable. She is just open as she waits for me to engage. At times, I rush in, letting the discomfort rule me and push me to move more quickly than I authentically want to go, but I am learning to stop and breathe and slowly bring myself to the moment with clarity and passion.

N has also taught me about breath. In my times with her, when I was escalated or rushing she would slow her breath and ground her self. I would see this and remember to stop and do the same. Sometimes, I felt as if she was breathing for me, providing space and wind in a fearful place. I was receptive and felt the grounding that the breath brought. Everything began to slow its pace and become manageable. It was with her that I learned to care for myself in this way. Now, I naturally react to overstimulation with breath. In my breath, I find my attention and my awareness and in the midst of a flurry of activity, I become grounded.

### The interview

I walk into my interview with N, aware of all of this learning. I have met with her often and I know that I can trust our relationship to birth something fruitful. I trust that no matter what is said, our meeting will be worthwhile. I trust that she knows me and my intention and that she believes that I am competent. When we begin our interview, there is no pregnant silence. I cannot feel her holding space for me. I sense that she is placing that responsibility on my shoulders this time. She is not caring for me in this moment.

She is allowing me to approach as an equal. I am the guide in this moment and she seems to enjoy the prospect of walking along the path on which I am inviting her.

This sense of trust allows me to open myself quickly to her and to my own inner sense of direction. I do not feel I need the security of an agenda or guide. I am committed to wherever our relation and our dialogue on this topic will take us. I don't look at my guide once throughout our time. There are moments when I become more concerned with technical understanding than allowing the moment and the relation to exist, but these are brief. Her words and our energy are much too enticing to allow for long periods of getting caught in technicalities.

I begin our meeting by telling her my intention for this work. I say to her that part of this study is for me to really meet with her and learn to open to deep encounter. As I write this, I realize that she is the only person to whom I stated that my intention was to meet with him or her. This is interesting to me and speaks of my priorities and my trust in our relation. I ask her to begin by telling me about who she is as a counsellor. She says:

I am a companion, and my job, who I am is people access me as a companion and they want me to ask them the hard questions, but they want me to ask them in a way that is done in context of caring and compassion knowing that we are on this journey together. And, if I don't go with them into it then I am not a companion. Right, so now I am on the outside hollering into the cave or something, so I am not that kind of person...

I have to ask the same questions of myself that I am asking someone else. I have to be willing to look and see that the answer is different today than it was when I asked it yesterday with somebody else.

When N describes herself, I can see a little bit of what being a companion means to her and I begin to think about what being a companion means to me. How do I walk with clients into their darkness? I have found in the past that I have a tendency to walk with clients and empathize deeply with them but then I become caught with them in the

mire of their trouble and I feel like I am flailing in the muck and I cannot find a way out for myself or for the client. I do not want to do this anymore. How do I not do this? The process and learning of this work has taught me that I must always be aware of my otherness, my distinction from the client. I become more able to relate deeply but as a distinct being to clients as I learn to stand grounded in my own being and imagine their reality, but not allow myself to merge into their reality.

When N says that she asks herself these questions, I am reminded that I too must know the answers to the questions I ask clients and stand in my own truth as I relate to them and their answers. Buber (1958a) said that "Healing like educating is only possible to the one who lies over and against the other and yet is detached" (p.133). What this means to me is that I must try as deeply as possible to understand and imagine the perspective and the reality that the other experiences, and at the same time I must hold in my awareness, my own perspective, my own reality so that I am always engaged with both myself and the other.

I am concerned by my lack of life experience. How can I be a companion to another's suffering when I have not experienced that suffering myself? It helps me to realize that I do not need to experience the specific life happening which the client shares with me, but rather I need to be open and aware that as a human it is possible for me to be in that same place, to experience trouble and to stumble.

Engaged with N and trying to process what she is sharing with me, I continue to listen. She talks about her commitment to living in a way that engages with every possibility for deep encounter:

I am someone who, like every one else, my belief is that life is a gift from God and I get to have an awareness that this gift is given. I get to have an

awareness that there is a time and a place in which I get to live this life, in which this life gets lived through me. And I get the gift of the awareness, the consciousness of that, and that's the task and that's the challenge. That is the ultimate encounter, and to engage that place with somebody else, I think is a very profound thing, the most profound thing. But, I also have to be able to go there myself and, no, it isn't about a specific other person. It isn't about me as a specific person, but it's an opportunity. It's there. It's a possibility for everybody. It's there in my solitariness and it's there in this moment with you and it's a choice always. Do I go in here, or not? Do I move towards that or not? Do we do that together or do we not?

As I am listening, something begins to stir. My energy begins to perk up and surge throughout my body. A resounding "yes" flows through me. Yes, life is such a gift, isn't it? Yes, I want to engage, I want to commit to this way of being. Yes, I want to move towards this possibility at all times. It is the same feeling that I felt when I first read Buber. It is as if I have been searching all my life for a belief system that I could live with, walk in, understand life through and commit to and finally, in these moments with Buber and with N, I feel the comradeship of walking along a path with others of like mind where I can find encouragement, guidance and inspiration.

In my life, I have always been concerned about doing things right, trying to fix people and make them better, using my time efficiently and obeying authority. Now in my engagements with Buber, with N and with this study, I am committing to a new way. Meeting and relating to people and to life has become my primary goal and all of these other concerns have become background. They no longer rule my life. Instead the possibilities of healing, wellness and goodness flow out of a primary commitment to engagement. As N speaks, my being surges with the truth that this is the most profound and beautiful way of living.

N and I begin to explore this idea of 'possibility' together. I ask her to tell me what she means when she says that there is a possibility with which we can engage. N

then uses a metaphor to describe what she means. She continues to use this metaphor throughout our time together. As I understand her, this 'possibility' is the possibility of connection, with each other, with the world and with God. I believe she is talking about the presence of spirit in life. If we see spirit as the between then, when through grace we meet, the spirit has come. The metaphor N uses is the metaphor of wind. She says:

You know it's like we're out walking in the trees. We're there and the wind blows. We both look. We see the wind. We feel the wind. We know that we're both feeling and seeing the wind and that the wind is of us. We're of the wind and then we have this moment.

This metaphor of wind is extremely important to me. I know wind; I am from the prairies. Suddenly, as she speaks, my experience with wind comes and makes every word more poignant and more important. I am finding it so difficult to describe how this metaphor moves me, how it shapes our interview. It feels like from this moment on in the interview, we engage with the wind, turn our faces into it and speak to each other of our love for it and our commitment to it. One of the most meaningful moments for me in this interview is when N expresses her love for being in the wind of possibility:

I am there because I want to be there. It's where I want to live. Park my tent at the edge of the cliff where the wind is howling, right? And once in a while, I go for some respite down in the valley. Hang out at the bottom of the tree. I think they (the clients) are there because life catalyzes them there and I keep imagining catalytic events that are going to create and shake me out of my complacency so that I look up at the trees, so that I look up and sense and feel it. I am looking for places to have it. And I choose then to have it be something that defines me. This is something that I desire in life almost more than anything else, and how does it happen?

As she says these words, I remember the day that I walked to the ocean in the wind. It pushed against me and I pushed back, pressing on. My cheeks reddened with the onslaught, my ears rang with the force; on my face, my smile widened. "I can feel you touching me; you are so close against me. You are the other, making yourself felt, you

are God being tangibly present in this moment.” I arrived at the ocean filled to the brim with the wind’s energy. As I turned to watch its effect on the water, I stood in awe. Not a peaceful awe but a rippling, surging awe. My soul responded to the energy of the other thrown against me. With all that was in me, I threw my body into the wind and watched it swirl. I yelled as loud as I could and I listened to my voice be carried away. I affected the wind. It did not pass through me. It ran into me. And the wind affected me. I exist, I am fully engaged, and there is power and energy and life and meaning in this engagement. This is only one experience of wind, of ‘possibility’ but I know that when I relate authentically, when I invite clients to do the same, to engage, there is possibility there, the possibility that we will be affected, transformed, energized and empowered.

The energy between N and me in this moment is like electricity. We are joined in this passion, this love of deep encounter. And then there is breath. I ground myself in the moment. I am aware of my presence and her presence. I do not feel lost or overtaken by the moment of connection. I can enjoy it while staying with my feet planted on the ground. This is new for me. We move on more slowly. N begins to speak about moments of deep encounter with clients. She talks about a moment when she is there to witness a client free herself of an old rule that has held her bound for years. She speaks of the connection she experiences with a client who has the courage to talk about her apprehensions in relation to N. She speaks of a client who has found joy and peace in a moment of nature. She tells me of the wonders of sharing these moments with clients:

And it was about the realness, the vulnerability and the truth of what she was saying in this moment, but it was in the context of our relationship and the trust that is there and the hope and the certainty that this is going to arrive at something profound for her. There is a liberation already happening that she is experiencing it and I am there to witness it. And that is a supreme honor but it’s a supreme necessity, too.

I have the sensation of holding a gift of the other's revelation, turning point, freedom and joy. As I look at these people free of bounds for a moment, liberated, alive and real, I feel this deep appreciation. This loving pulse undulates through my body and I lean into this being, eyes widening, smile breaking. I can feel the sensation of the weight of the impossibility of the situation which they have survived being thrown off. We stand together, N and I, looking at these beautiful beings. She says:

I have to let it in and let myself be moved and let myself feel her challenge, what it took for her to get there and to really know that place in myself and to know that there is a poignancy to it, too, in myself that I have to stay in touch with. The suffering and the loss that is immanent, it might be 20 years until she can't do this thing again. But in time, you know, life passes. And I have to always hold that and it is kind of a schema I use or a mantra I use to keep myself in a poignant place, to keep myself in this place where this is precious, this really matters. This isn't just another human being valuing tending the roses. I can't reduce it to that, I have to hold it and remind myself that there is an inner place I have to keep taking myself to that knows what it is to see a drop of dew on a rose in the early morning and just be ecstatic. I have to keep that alive in myself. It can't even be a long-distance memory. I have to have done it recently so that when she describes it I can feel the realness of it to me. Otherwise she came with this gift and I... "Oh, yeah, a dew drop on a rose, nice."

This appreciation, the feeling of joy and awe for this being in their moment is so important for the connection, for the client and for my own growth. N and I bask in the glory of watching growth happen. I feel the wonder of life, I feel the choice point and I make that choice to engage with the loveliness of humanity and all the ways we make meaning.

N and I continue to build with each other in this dialogue. There is a fluid quality to the way we move through the conversation. We talk about embracing suffering, as well as beauty. We talk about embracing the mundane, as well as moments of deep encounter. I can feel the way we balance each other. We have visited the edge of the cliff,

beautiful rose gardens, the darkness and suffering of life and the mundane of the everyday together in this hour. And in the end, N gives me the gift of also acknowledging our relationship and the beauty of the gifts we give each other, reminding each other of the meaning that is possible. She says:

And part of the job then is if you and I have a series of these moments is to always to keep reminding you that this is possible if you are struggling with your depression, or with your loss or with your life transitions or just your explorations, my job is to be someone who reminds you. Oh, these moments are possible, these accumulations of moments are possible and that is the gift we give each other, right? You know you remind me of that, too.

I am touched that I have the power to impact her life, as well. I feel cared for, appreciated and powerful. This teaches me that I too have to let clients know that they impact me, that they enhance my life with their existence, that they enlarge my worldview and my experience, that they remind me of the possibility of meaning and connection. I believe that they may have the same responses that I did. They might learn of their power and of their giftedness.

N takes this farther with me. We are talking about how, in moments of deep encounter, it is important that we let go of the roles we play and exist as humans in relation. She says:

Then I am out of my role. I am out of my chair, I am out of the need. I am just in this place with another human being. And we are both out of our isolation. We are both out of our suffering. We are both out of our desire for just the light. We're in there, and it doesn't really matter what the world calls us and who pays us for what. We are just two people in here. Separate from. All those things we leave behind when we die. We get to have those in life for a moment, that kind of freeness, you know what I mean, that kind of liberation for a moment in life. It doesn't matter if you are the student and I am the instructor.

In this moment she steps out of the protection of her role as my instructor and my co-researcher and she tells me specifically what it is like to be in relation to me. She says:

It's that place where we... It's the thing I laugh about you in class, right? Oops, I laughed. I came out of my role and laughed. There is Kirsten doing her totally enthusiastic "I am going to answer all the questions in the world" stuff. That meets me in this place exactly where I was. There is a hilarity to it that, that's where I was at 25. But separate from all of that, if I keep us stuck there and I don't give myself that effusive joyous moment right. There she is asking those questions. Her eyes are lighting up. Oh, there she goes. She is sitting back in her chair and she is about to respond. Ahh, if I don't let myself have that joy, right, then I am not going to connect with you.

I laugh with her in this moment. In the back of my throat there is an aching, tears are welling in my eyes. Thank you for seeing me, for having the courage to engage with me in this real moment, for letting me know that you like me, that you confirm me in my being. Thank you for having that effusive joyous moment. I will never forget it and I will remember it in my work and take courage in your vulnerability and allow myself to connect.

### S: Learning to Open to Otherness

#### Introduction

My relationship with S began a couple of months before I actually met her. I was seeking a counsellor to walk me through one of the darkest times in my life. Several people whom I respected suggested S as a good match for me. "She is deeply spiritual," they said, "and she will meet that part of you". So I approached her to work with me. We were unable to meet for several weeks. During this time of waiting, I had imaginary conversations with my imagined S. These consisted of me telling her of my deep existential struggles, my feelings that life was meaningless, and my inability to make sense of all of the thoughts that were running through my mind. The conversations were all very dramatic and deeply intellectual. Finally the day came for my appointment. I had

two agendas, one to ask this brilliant woman to be a part of this thesis work and the other to start the counselling process.

As S and I began to talk, she would often stop me and ask me to consider what I was experiencing in my body at that moment. I tried to listen but at the same time tried desperately to shut out my sensations. "This is not about my body," I thought. "My problems are deeply intellectual. Buber never talks about listening to his body, nor did Nietzsche. This is serious life questioning. Listen to me and let me show you how brilliantly depressed I am."

I never was able to convince her to stay with me on this level; gently she would lead me back to my body, back to quiet, back to listening. Despite my resistance, I did begin to listen to my body, to attune to it, to let things flow a little more naturally rather than taking every experience and analyzing it to death. However, I still went home from sessions unhappy. I didn't want to just listen to myself and have her listen to me for my sake. I wanted her to love me, to know me, to think well of me. There was a tension between all that I was learning and getting to know in myself, assisted by her way of creating space for me to listen to myself and my desire to be met as a person and not just to be given space. I have written of my desires humorously, but I need to acknowledge that I was disappointed. Whether that disappointment was related to something unhealthy in me that needs work or whether it was related to an authentic part of me, I am unsure.

In the midst of our work together we scheduled an interview. I do not regret combining these two roles; it added a flavor and a struggle to this study that has taught me more than I could have ever imagined. This study is not about clean, uncomplex moments with strangers. This study is about relationship and relationships are not simple.

They are rich, real and fettered by all sorts of personal issues. I struggled for days before the interview, wondering if I could do it. I was vulnerable and a little angry at this woman. She was not the woman I had had the long conversations with in my head. That she was other was dreadfully disappointing. At the same time I knew in this interview that I had to be able to open myself to her, to listen and to learn. I wondered if I could. Torn inside, I struggled. I wanted to be authentic with S and I wondered if I should tell her of my struggles. I decided to let it be and move with whatever opportunities arose. I would try to be as open as possible and, if we came to talk about our relationship, I would be honest.

Another issue that played into the dynamics of this interview was S's emphasis on boundaries, which emerged from the nature of her work. S states that her primary work is with people who have experienced trauma. Trauma work is extremely intense. It seems to be about providing a safe, contained atmosphere where clients can go deeply into themselves and allow their body to process and work through their experiences. Often clients are in deep, troubled places, and therefore the therapist must be able to maintain a safe environment and excellent boundaries. For this reason, as I understand it there is less mutuality in trauma work than in other types of work, the client is more self-focussed as they generate energy for healing and the therapist's focus seems to be on holding space for the client.

My intention was not to interview people whose focus was on trauma. However, even though it has been difficult to wade through this different way of thinking and working, I am glad that E and S, who focus on crisis and trauma, were part of the study. The problem for me was that I wanted to talk about the wonders of deep encounter,

acknowledging limits, practicalities and boundaries but not focussing on them. However, S does not work that way and so she did not speak that way. In working with people in trauma she made it very clear that presence for the other, boundaries, containment and not allowing her needs to get in the way were her primary concern. Within that context, deep encounters could happen because space and safety existed. For this reason, as the interview progressed, I felt constantly like I was attempting to adjust my way of thinking to allow for what S was focussing on. S shared primarily about boundaries, otherness and the limits of the experience.

My understanding of the importance of S's interview to the whole of this study has developed over time. In the interview itself, there was a gentle struggle going on. At first I held tightly to my agenda; it was my life preserver in a sea of confusion, unknowing and uncertainty. When, in half an hour, I had gone through all of my questions which normally took an hour and a half, I realized what I was doing and I began to let go. I tried to follow S a little more but, when my misunderstandings grew too large, I would run to another topic. I would try a couple of times to understand what she was trying to teach me but, when I couldn't, I would just go on. However, I did loop back to these hard areas when I had become settled and grounded and when my understanding had grown.

S was patient with me, aware of the duality of her roles. I could sense that she allowed herself some freedom but she also kept strong boundaries. I wonder a little bit whether she didn't purposefully try to shatter my boxed understanding of deep encounter. She was gentle but she called me to a new perspective that I would have never looked at had she not forced me to. The interview has a thoughtful, mindful feel of making large

circles in an attempt to understand. I did listen and begin to open in this interview but I did not come through all the walls that lay between us. This process of opening took much longer.

When I returned to this interview to write about it, I was still blocked. I again had to circle through things over and over, opening just a crack more every time. I listened to the interview and felt embarrassed at my narrowness, but I still couldn't make sense of her emphasis on boundaries and limits and her experience of deep encounter. She just didn't seem to fit with my Buberian worldview. I wrote my supervisor of these concerns and he replied:

I sense you are at some level working toward a consistency - why does there need to be a consistency? Consistency... divergence... it is what it is. You are merely the vehicle. Does an artist wipe out a stroke because it appears to work against the rest of the painting? (I guess some would) But, I'll say no, because the stroke was an honest motion, which was beyond awareness and could be a gift of imperfection. (D. de Rosenroll, personal communication, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2001)

I pondered this while I trudged onward. Slowly I was opening to the possibility that something new and beautiful could emerge from my interview with S. Because my ultimate opening to S did not happen during the interview and because my process in relation to her developed over time and was deeply connected to my post-interview reflections, the writing of this piece is slightly different. There are few moments where I will immerse you fully into the experience of the interview. Instead you will be immersed into my process of reflection and working through.

#### The Interview and Working Through

I walk in the bright sunshine to her home. I am aware of my tenseness, my questioning. I am aware of the beauty of the day, the lightness and its contrast to my spirit. I am as focussed as I am able to be at this time in my life on opening, breathing and

centring myself. I walk through the door into a different space than our regular counselling spot. Gentle fall winds pour through the window. S is welcoming and warm and makes tea for us. Something about S's home, her welcoming me into a different space, CBC playing in the background calms me.

We begin by talking about S's intended work as a counsellor. Right away, she begins to make clear statements about her role as the boundary creator in the relationship with clients. She says:

I think that I have learned over the years how to do that more and more. And that it is really important to be there fully as person but to bracket the details of what that means. The essence of who I am is there but perhaps dynamics of what I might be living at the current time are not particularly needed or useful in the therapeutic session.

I am thinking of a distinction I make in therapy between two kinds of connecting with people and one of the kinds of connecting that I try to avoid is what I call merging. Which is another kind of maybe deep encounter in a... the kind I try to strive for is more of a joining that I think that you were alluding to in the walk through the forest; that we each have our separate realities and that we can join and then we will separate. If we merge there is too much of an imprint on each other's lives. And that my issues have the danger of becoming yours and your issues have the danger of becoming mine. So that deep encounter for me is a kind of a joining, of attunement and "rhythming".

I am surprised that she is talking about limits so early in our conversation. It is not that I don't see her point. I completely agree with her. However, it is the emphasis, the continual focus on these limits throughout our time together that throws me off balance. But the words "attunement" and "rhythming" provide me an entrance point in the midst of this disequilibrium. I am drawn in by their metaphorical qualities. It is in this moment that S gives me one of her great gifts of metaphor. Here is her metaphor:

S. The symbol in my mind, the metaphor, is of a cello. When I sit with someone and their truth or their reality becomes like a note or a melody or a passage of music played within me that as they go on with their life, then I become clear.

K. So you, in a sense, are the cello and they are the music.

S. So I resonate and just let them hear their music.

K. And when you play it, what effect does it have on you as the instrument?

S. Hopefully, it seasons me and ages me. Maybe using that same metaphor that I ripen with age. I ripen with age, I ripen with stories, I ripen with people's lives so that with each person I become more able to do that work.

In the end it was her metaphors which, months after the interview, provided a door through which I could find entrance into her perspective and develop understandings about what her way could teach me. Metaphor allows me to let go of all of the details, personal issues and questions that I have and consider the pictures created by her words as entities unto themselves. When I do this, when I allow my imagination to run free with these pictures, the power of the images envelops me. Standing in this place I can look at S's words in a whole new way. Through the metaphor, I understand the details of what she has said. I understand the importance of delineating boundaries and acting extremely intentionally and consciously. I see why this strictness in her way of being must precede deep encounter. Attunement and rhythming are intricate processes that require an amazing attention to detail. They require deep concentration.

I let my imagination run wild. I imagine that the client starts to talk. S is listening carefully and deeply, trying to pick out the base note of the client's existence, the tonic of this being's melody of life. She focuses with her body, mind and spirit to attune to that note and she draws the bow across the strings and begins to play. I can hear the sound of cello; rich and textured reverberations ring in the room. The other who hears what she has created and what S has heard begins to resonate with it. Sound moves through the core of her being, aligning the soul and the spirit. Time has been given for the sound of

her existence to emerge and S has brought her presence and attention to the task. Slight adjustments in tuning are made and the whole room fills with this one note. S says:

I have got this sense where each of us has an indescribable, indelible soul and that soul is our uniqueness, and the soul is very much present in the body wisdom. And so our soul wants to live and it lives very grounded in our body. It likes earthly pleasures, soul food and soul music, likes to be fully alive in the body. And spirit is this part of us that we share in divine connection and we share with each other. We share in a kind of streaming way. As my spirit or my focus, focuses on soul that connection between the spirit and the soul happens. And so, as someone else's spirit supports me, then my spirit and my soul come to life fully. They are not separate.

I asked her to explain the streaming.

The streaming came in a dream once. The vision is that, as a person becomes very connected with their soul and their spirit, the energy bursts forth and it's there not just for their own healing but for the healing around them. It comes in an energetic form that just streams out into the world in waves of healing.

I imagine the being coming fully to life. Emerging from a connection to the basic tonic of his existence, the essence of his being, a song streams forth, a song that fills the room and echoes out into the rest of his life. A song of existence, of healing, of authenticity and of breath. S has brought her presence so completely for the client that in their connection this has taken place. I close my eyes and let the sound of the metaphor work in me. I feel my throat begin to ache with joy, my eyes release a flood of appreciation for the beauty of the endless possibility of beings liberated into song.

I understand now that clients who have experienced trauma have likely never heard the sound of their melody sung alone or the melody has been long forgotten in the cacophony of their experience. They have been robbed of that opportunity. When you learn to sing, you must first learn to hold your own line before you can sing in harmony. In other types of therapy, client and therapist may spend time singing harmony together,

allowing for more mutuality. A client who has never before heard her own melody cannot sing in harmony. She is thrown off by the sound of the therapist's line. Before a person can stand in relation, she needs to have a sense of self.

S is showing me how she must clear herself to allow the other to exist for the first time. I see now why creating space, holding that space and directing all energy towards the client becomes primary and deep encounter becomes secondary. I need to remember in counselling what S has taught me. I am choosing in my work to be with people for their benefit. Therefore I have certain responsibilities for the maintenance of boundaries and for creating a cleared space not cluttered with my needs and agendas. These responsibilities must be held as a reality even in the beautiful moments of deep encounter. As a client becomes more self-knowing and develops a sense of their song, the relationship may mature and the work may mindfully become one of more shared responsibility. I believe that the counsellor must still maintain ultimate responsibility. However, there may be a more relaxed sense because trust has been developed.

I notice that, as is usual in my life, I want to skip right to this mature, harmonic relationship with clients that seems to have more freedom. S reminds me to slow down and ensure that the client is safe and able to sing before I ask too much of her and allow her to be hurt. She also reminds me that I need to have a place outside the counselling relationship where my needs can be met. She emphasizes spiritual work, meditation, prayer, writing, and relating to family and friends. This self-care cannot be forgotten. No matter how wonderful this work is, it is still draining. As S says of the work:

In many, many ways it energizes my energy. But it still is work and there is a level that it is energizing but on another level it is discipline. I find if I (and I have tried this) can just go on the other person's energy and those encounters that come that way on that energy, I tend to merge more. And I find that not ethical,

and so to be there and do the work of joining for me takes work and energy... more than I receive.

When I ask S to tell me a story of deep encounter, I am overwhelmed by her narrative. The experience she shares with me is beyond my realm of understanding and I am taken aback in my unknowing. S tells me the following:

I think the most, maybe the deepest encounters I have with people when I am doing trauma work is in what I call the near death experiences. For example, a man that I worked with who had, at the age of three or four, fallen out of a car that his mom was driving and dragged along the street and then he went into a lifetime of chronic trauma but as we worked back... We worked for over two to three years. There was a moment when he began to go back into the experience or lived experience of this trauma and he went into what's called a near death state. And being present with someone in that near death state, just to be able to be there with them and let them be there at a near death state with you and that they will trust you to stay there. And then the moment that it begins to rumble, the life regenerating, that is for me the deepest encounter. And then to be there as that new life starts to course through their bodies and changes everything.

I can feel my eyes widen and my mouth gets dry. I know nothing of this experience and I feel afraid of this unknown spiritual state that teeters on the brink of life and death. I am also unable to understand at first how this is a deep encounter. This being is totally consumed in self at this moment. I cannot imagine how this is an I-thou relational moment for him or for the therapist. Frozen momentarily I look down at my interview plan. "Save me", I ask it, "show me where to go next". I ask: "And what is the sensation in your body as you sit there with this other? What is going on for you inside?" S says calmly and nonchalantly: "When they are going through the near death? And then just being there dead?" Gulping down my fear and discomfort with the words she speaks so casually, I say "Yes". She answers, "Deep peace, deep, deep, deep peace." These words affect me, like a soft wind that caresses my face they calm me. I pause and breathe. "That is quite amazing to be feeling peace at that moment." She goes on, "Yeah, I so trust

life that, when that death is fully encountered, that life will emerge and so it's just knowing that life will come. I know." We go on talking, I am proceeding very slowly, still unsure of what to do with this experience. I ask her to tell me about her experience of self in the moment. We have the following dialogue:

S. It is almost an altered state where, maybe this word will fit...the essence of the other person and my essence is all that needs to be. We don't need the content or the details or the ordinary things, we can just be there. And sometimes that waiting can last a while, a good half-hour or so or longer maybe, and just to be there in that, there is a timelessness and a flow and the very subtleties and just kind of like watching and waiting.

K. How have you in your life brought yourself to the position where you can wait like that? What has brought you there?

S. 58 years I think, being older... also maybe having known also what it is like to be in that dead place. And having the gift of people that will wait for me and I have been there and you learn by being there.

We sit in silence for a moment. I am awed by her courage, her ability to hold the silence. In our conversation, we continue to speak of elements of this experience.

However, unlike other interviews where I have walked very deeply with the participant into the moment and stayed in the moment to explore the elements of experience, I make a clear effort to move into a more conceptual discussion of elements of the moment and to leave behind the experiential story she has given me. Half an hour later, I feel safe enough to return to the narrative. I ask her very directly about my concerns about the other's presence:

K. Is the other able to be present to that moment? If they are in this near death place, they are there but...explain to me that... I don't completely understand it in terms of their presence. Are they able to be attuned to the fact that this is happening? Or is it you sitting there witnessing that is more aware of it?

S. Well, they know that things have gone really dead, and ordinarily they would be terrified and start getting really busy and doing something, but if I can hold that space and that presence, then they can stay there too and we can stay there

together. But they are very wrapped up in their own process... their sense is whether I am safe enough or not to hold that and they will intuitively know that.

Still nothing is fitting into my box. We continue to speak about the details of the experience but nothing really beyond a conceptual level. I am unable to enter this experience. I am closed. I cannot see it in my imagination or sense the feelings that she might experience. My vision of moment is flat and one-dimensional. This does not change throughout the interview: where I was able to open to her otherness and her focus on trauma, I was unable to open to this description.

A few months later, I was still wrestling with my inability to understand and I told my mother of my frustrations. She told me that one of the deepest encounters she had ever had was with a woman in a coma. Enticed and longing for some break-through, I asked her to tell me the story. I knew because this was my mother that I would be able to trust her experience in a different way. This is the story she told me. When she was training to be a chaplain she was assigned to work on the Intensive Care Unit. This was her most difficult job experience because there was nothing to do to make things better. Patients were often unable to respond to her. Dialogue was not possible. All she could do for these people was to be with them. One day she was called to a woman who was in a coma. Awkward and unsure of what to do, she went to this woman and she just sat with her. She said she brought as much of her presence to the moment as she could and she prayed, inviting God to come into the room. As she sat praying, she began to sense this woman's response. She, too, in her involuntary silence seemed to release herself to the moment. My mother said that she sensed the most profound communion in the room

between herself, this woman and God. Never before had she sensed this type of connection.

As I sat listening to my mother, I had a revelation. Deep encounter is not always about dialogue or about turning your attention to the other. It can happen when each person is authentic and fully present. A person who allows herself to be open and present enough in S's presence to let herself experience the vulnerability of a near death place is truly opening to deep encounter. She is releasing herself to S, allowing herself to be in her essential being, trusting that in this relation she is safe and welcome. S, by not running away from such depth and such proximity to the abyss of death, is also embracing this being, confirming her trust in her and in the process of life. She too is bringing her whole presence to the experience.

To aid my openness and understanding I find a passage in Buber (1947) which tells of this same "Silence which is communication."

Imagine two men sitting beside one another in any kind of solitude of the world. They do not speak with one another, they do not look at one another, not once have they turned to one another. They are not in one another's confidence, the one knows nothing of the other's career, early that morning they got to know one another in the course of their travels. In this moment neither is thinking of the other; we do not need to know what their thoughts are. The one is sitting on the common seat obviously after his usual manner, calm, hospitably disposed to everything that may come. His being seems to say it is too little to be ready, one must also be really there. The other, whose attitude does not betray him, is a man who holds himself in reserve, withholds himself. But if we know about him we know that a childhood's spell is laid on him, that his withholding of himself is something other than an attitude, behind all attitude is entrenched the impenetrable inability to communicate himself. And now—let us imagine that this is one of the hours, which succeed in bursting asunder the seven iron bands about our heart—imperceptibly the spell is lifted. But even now the man does not speak a word, does not stir a finger. Yet he does something. The lifting of the spell has happened to him—no matter from where—without his doing. But this is what he does now: he releases in himself a reserve over which only he himself has power. Unreservedly communication streams from him, and the silence bears it to his neighbour. Indeed it was intended for him, and he receives it unreservedly as he

receives all genuine destiny that meets him. He will be able to tell no one, not even himself, what he has experienced. What does he "know" of the other? No more knowing is needed. For where unreserve has ruled, even wordlessly, between men, the word of dialogue has happened sacramentally. (p. 3-4)

In this understanding I begin to open myself to S, her words and her work. I

realize now what it takes to engage with an other in this way. I remember trying to teach a client a deep relaxation technique. It required that we sit in silence for five minutes together. I panicked as we began this time, just silence, no words to make us comfortable. I asked myself, "Is he comfortable? Is he getting anything from this?" I felt like this was an incredibly inefficient use of our time. At exactly four minutes and 55 seconds, we stopped, breathing a breath of relief. In those moments, my inability to hold the silence peacefully was harmful to the client. But my fear held me captive.

I continue to struggle with this. I know that I must be able to stand in silence with myself to be able to stand in silence with another. As S teaches me, I need to stay grounded in my body and not flail in an unhealthy betweenness.

I, consciously, when I sit with someone will be very, very grounded in my own body, and I know if I can stay grounded in my own body then there is much less of a danger that I will go into merge. If I lose the sense of my own grounding then I have found that I can go into merging and it is not helpful. I get caught into a wave or into a story, that is not helpful and that is the other person's energy and it is really important for me to just be able to stay grounded and reflect that rather than get caught into it. So the process I use is to always keep tuning in to see if I am grounded and I do that in a very physical sense, you know, checking how the chair is feeling on my body, checking to see where my level of my belly is and where my heart is, what is happening in my eyes and face, just checking in.

Silence is an indispensable gift that I need to be able to give clients. Part of what I need to learn is that counselling is not about being comfortable. Even deep encounter is not about comfort. Being over and against a being brings incredible reward, but these rewards are not about comfort but about connection and meeting.

In the moment of our interview so much was lost in my fear, but there was also gain. As a client, I began to understand why S worked with me the way she did and I began to open myself to the power of that work. In the end of the interview, S asked me how having heard about her work affected me as a client. My opportunity for honesty had come. I answered with all of my authentic being, expressing my discomfort, my desire to be known and not just given space. S received my questioning. She talked of how she missed doing other types of work and we explored the joys of the different ways of being. In this moment of honesty we met in a new way. I felt like I learnt something about presence, even uncomfortable presence, and that I had acted on the world in this learning. We met for a final session and I was able to open to her and her way and my life was transformed.

## J: Experiencing the Real

### Introduction

My meeting with J began with our first encounter over the phone two weeks before we ever met each other face to face. He was the first person to call me back about doing an interview. I was excited and fearful. Once we had gotten past the pleasantries, he said that he had some questions for me. Nervous in my unknowing, I invited him to ask them. J said that the experience that I was looking to understand was rare and subtle and he asked me how I was going to create a relationship with him and an environment in which the experience could be looked at and shared. J had an immediate intuitive knowing about the complexity, subtlety and intensity of this work. He seemed to know long before I did that this work was about our process of meeting primarily and that the content generated would be secondary, flowing out of the relationship we developed.

Reflecting on this question now, I see how it characterizes J as a person. To be able to describe an experience, J seemed to need to place himself in an imaginary re-creation of an experience and he would describe it from that place of re-experience. He asked of me that we walk along the path of deep encounter as we talked about it, instead of talking about it from the outside.

This small moment sent me deep into questioning and exploration. This was a pivotal moment in this work, a moment which marked the beginning of one of the major transformations of my methodology. I have spoken of this in more detail in the methodology section. For the first time, I asked myself whether this study was about understanding the lived experience of moments of deep encounter or whether it was about learning to open myself to deep encounter. To find an answer to this question, I tried to explain to myself why I had chosen to do this work in the first place. In a journal entry that day, I wrote the following:

I have chosen to focus on I-thou relations and encounters because they are transforming. Not because we can hold onto them and take from them. Not because they fill us up. I have chosen to focus on them because I must let go of all of this to come to them. In turn when they happen I cannot hold on to them but I must allow them to flow through in their transforming way. How do I hold this paradox? I am still looking all the time for a solution to my question of how to live well in the world. However, I am consciously choosing a topic that demands that I let go. This topic requires of me that I serve the moment and that I be in the moment. It asks that I engage not to get something but for the sake of engagement. It teaches me to trust. I sit in this tension. I want to know this experience! I want to know something! But the process of entering into the I-Thou way of living requires that I let go of my knowing and that I simply be.

On this day I committed to an engagement with this tension. Still today as I write this I want to know something of the world, deep encounter, myself, how to live life and ultimately I want to know about God. I want to be able to hold onto some truth, own it, and know it. However, I am learning slowly what Buber teaches me, that:

Truth in the world of man is not to be found as the content of knowledge, but only as human existence. One does not reflect upon it, one does not express it, one does not perceive it, but one lives it and receives it as life. (Buber, 1966, p.89)

### The Interview

When finally I meet with J, he has been with me for a while in the form of his question. I am very intentional in my approach to the interview. I centre myself before arriving. I bring all of the available me. My awareness is expanded by my presence. I sit in the parlor as J makes us tea and notice a pine tree outside of his window. On its branches hang tiny droplets of dew in long rows; each branch holds its row in perfect order. The sun shines through them transforming them into sparkling opals. Throughout our meeting they remain, holding on to the crystallized light captured in their half-fallen state, millions of droplets.

Despite the spiritual conditions, the interview begins haltingly. My agenda and my nervous questions hold us back in the world of formal conversation. I notice in this, as in most of the other interviews, that my agenda to produce and create content to fit into my idea of what this work should look like never helps the interview the way I think it will. I remember the thoughts that grip me, "Oh no, we are getting off track! Oh no, we have nothing to talk about! Oh no, I am not in control!" Inside of me these thoughts create a panic. I get stiff and loud as if the crescendo in my being will tame the beasts of fear emerging. Only when I let go, follow the natural flow, allow what is present to emerge and trust the process does the sacred occur.

In practical ways, I am making an effort to let this happen. I am trying to learn to breathe before I speak, to speak mantras of peace to myself, to wait for the other, to hold silence more peacefully and to respond instead of fishing for what to say. I am beginning

to be more aware of when I am being motivated by fear so that I can work with it instead of being ruled by it. Throughout all of my interviews, there were beautiful entry points that I missed because I was distracted by my agenda. As I learn to listen more attentively and slowly, I believe I will enter into these moments.

The first thing that strikes me about J is his focus on presence. He defines himself as someone who “works with his presence and the other’s presence”. His idea of presence has physicality to it. Maybe this is why I am so in tune with my senses in our meeting. He keeps calling my attention to my sensory experience of the moment. He defines presence as a sense of full body, full him, a state of active receptivity. As he says the words, I can feel myself touching that fullness in me. I feel my edges, the skin covering my muscles and flesh. I feel my insides, the blood flowing through me. Within this physicality, my emotions weave themselves, excitement tensing my muscles and playing with my voice box, nervousness creating this tingle in my skin. It is as if all parts of me have awakened and they are coming to the edges of me to be present for whatever is going to happen.

He then touches on another truth that I have begun to know but could not yet verbalize. Throughout this work I have become more aware of the multidimensionality of life and I have begun to pay attention to my capacity to see and perceive these dimensions. When J begins to speak about the word ‘deep’, he describes this textured feel to the moment beautifully. He says:

There is something about the feltness of the moment. As though there are multiple layers to it. It is not just about some profound thing. It could also be about the colour of the grass, but there is a sense of multiple layers I would call it, of metaphoricalness, that it holds something. So when I am encountered with something in this context that is deep, there is a sense of unboundedness and uncontainedness like we are just doing this.

I ask him to go on and tell me more about unboundedness and uncontainedness. He says:

Let's use another metaphor. Say someone comes to me and wants to talk about what a bad person their spouse is... So we can talk about that in a fairly limited way, and we obviously would be talking about their experience of it but it could also be a place... I am thinking of a specific example in fact where the person says just "I am stuck" and then there is in that moment of saying that there is a kind of... it is not just limited to some narrow definition of I am stuck it's kind of like the human condition that I am stuck. And so there is an unboundedness about it. By unboundedness I don't mean without any boundaries or anything. There is kind of intimacy that is possible between that person and me or that person and their partner. I mean nothing has changed, we are still stuck. But in that place, there is a richness. That is what I meant by sort of a multilayeredness.

As I listen to him, the dimensions open up. I can feel that feeling of being stuck; the heaviness of it. In my mind's eye, I see all of humanity fallen under this huge rock. As I write this, I see the image of a sculpture crafted by Rodin: Imagine buildings with large columns in front of them. Majestically huge and stately they stand. On these columns are the sculpted bodies of women draped in cloth. These women reach toward the heavens to hold up the roof of the building. These figures are called caryatids. Rodin sculpted one of these figures fallen under the weight of her load. On her shoulder rests the top of the pillar that she was supposed to stand and support. She is bent but not broken and you can see that she is still trying to lift the heavy rock but she cannot make it budge. I remember reading once that it was quite unfair to ask women to bear such heavy loads and it was to their honor that they kept on trying to struggle to lift the rock that held them down (Heinlein, 1961).

When I stood in front of that sculpture for the first time, on my back I could feel the weight of the stone she carried. I sensed the muscles in my legs strain to push the rock upwards. I also had this incredible urge to reach out and help her push off her rock even though I had this awareness that I too was under a heavy burden. I felt this commonality

in our humanity, this connection in our struggle, in our endurance and in our failure to break through. This is a place where we can be intimate, connected in that place of basic humanity. Stuck.

As J speaks of this, I enter into that common, intimate space. I notice in our relation a movement to a deeper level. As we both feel the impact of these images, we begin to enter into a sacred space. It is as if we were standing on the street in front of a beautiful cathedral talking about it and, in this moment of silence, we enter the cathedral and feel the hush of holiness surround us. Being that J is new to me, I am not yet comfortable with long silences. We cannot stay long in the cathedral. I feel the tension of needing to talk, needing to ask. However, I know somewhere in a place beyond this tension that I want to move with him into this sacred space.

So back out in front of the cathedral, due to my continued questioning, we begin to talk about the word 'encounter'. He explains how for him encounter has a confrontational connotation. He is uncomfortable with its charge. We discuss possible other words that could describe what I mean by deep encounter. However, I somehow need to tell him that there is a part of me that likes the energy of the charge that comes with the confrontational quality. Something undeniably personal is emerging in our dialogue. I say:

I have used the word 'meeting' but one of the reasons why I didn't choose that word is because there is something... Because of its charge, 'encounter' has something that 'meeting' doesn't have in a sense. And that gets people to start to think. When you think 'deep meeting', it seemed that people were able to stay more on a certain level but, when you start to say 'deep encounter' there was just more of a richness even though it had that confrontational tone, too. So I struggled with that and I still do struggle with that difference between 'meeting' and 'encounter' and how to carry it through and how important language is in the way that we convey things. But I am definitely willing to shift to that word 'meeting' as we talk about it.

In this moment, something happens. J lets go of his interviewee role and follows his curiosity. He says:

So what I would think is this that... see, my curiosity would go to I wonder how for you the word encounter works better than the word meeting. Now we are in different roles just at the moment and you have your thesis and your piece of paper and your future and God knows what in mind but something in all of that plus you or multiplied by you has you leaning forward in your chair and thinking of good questions. Now if I were doing that, that would have more of an encounter quality because there is a certain element of push, aggression is way too strong a word, but it is about leaning into it. But I am not, my feet are curled up on the couch and I am sitting back. So that is partly role but that is partly probably also character. So I would go either way but it raises curiosity for me for what those words mean for you and not just as an intellectual exercise.

This moves me. I have known this man for less than an hour and yet he is seeing me, noticing and acknowledging me. I feel like he is confirming me in my otherness. A smile spreads across my face. I begin to feel welcome and free to be me. I have this upwelling of gratitude to him for taking the time to notice and enjoy our differences. By saying this, I feel like he is choosing to walk deeper into relationship with me. I like that he is not just answering my questions but he is acknowledging the person behind them.

In our conversation, J begins to speak of his affection for his clients. I ask him if clients evoke that affection in him or if he brings it to them. He says:

It is brought to them by me, but it is allowed by them. If they are highly constrained in who they allow themselves to be or show themselves to be in my office then I can't bring that. I can't bring a gift to somebody who keeps their arms folded up. I can't hand it to them. So I bring it for sure but it is interactive. It doesn't... it's something that to some significant degree requires an opening.

This makes sense to me, I see the give and take process and I imagine how he takes the time to help the client open by letting his curiosity and intuitive noticing guide him. I have just experienced this skill of his when he let his curiosity lead him to ask me questions about my interest in the word "encounter". I felt this opening towards him as he

demonstrated that he was noticing my unique personhood. I could tell in this small engagement that he liked the person he saw and that he was allowing that affection to flow through him towards me. I was open and receptive.

At this point in the interview, we begin to flow into a deeper dialogue about opening. He shares with me more specifically how he leads clients to a place of deeper awareness and openness by encouraging them to notice what is going on for them, not just in their thought processes but also in their bodies. He leads me into understanding experientially in this way. Just as I am taking a sip of tea, he begins to talk about how the tea might feel in my mouth and the warmth I might feel as it moves to my stomach. He is calling me to notice what is going on for me. Inside of my skin, I allow myself to notice as he speaks. I can feel the tea in my mouth. It is warm and full of taste. I feel it in my belly as it settles. Suddenly, I am aware of a memory from my childhood. I am sitting on the porch having a tea party with my stuffed animals. My mother has given me loose tea to use. I keep the packet with my china tea set. Then and only then have I ever tasted this blend of tea. This tea that I drink, as he calls me to notice, is the same tea. I smile at this remembrance and ponder while he speaks. "Was there something in my way of drinking the tea that brought this flow of thought to his consciousness?"

As a counsellor, this way of calling clients to notice their physical experience in the moment as a means of expanding their awareness of what is going on for them is new for me. It seems to be an incredibly helpful tool. I sense that it must help clients to touch rich, textured deep places in ways that working solely on a cognitive level cannot. If, in this one small moment, I was able to make such a vivid connection, imagine the

possibilities for others. J is teaching me by providing me with a sentient experience of the power of this tool. He is teaching me in our relation to each other.

We continue on this discovery of process. I ask him to begin to speak of how he prepares himself to meet clients in this way, how he prepares himself to open to them.

This is what he says:

I'll pause before I meet with them. I'll pause, stop, I will do some things to clear away what was there before, open a window, let in some fresh air, shift my focus. Something that clears it away. Then I will go to another spot internally which is more prayerful and create a prayer: help me to do the best I can for this person, something like that. Some question that is posed internally. Help me and help them to be open. Something of that nature, of that quality.

I am struck by the prayer. The humility of asking for help. It is as if, before he opens to the client, he must first open himself to The Source. In a sense in the prayer he is stating his desire, his commitment to openness. I hear a longing to be of service.

One day this spring, I was readying myself to do a presentation. I was anxious and afraid. I ran circles in my head until somewhere inside of me there arose this prayer. Help me, help me teach what they need to learn, help them to be open, help me to be my best in service to them. A sense of calm washed over me and I felt relief as I handed over the weight of my anxiety to something larger than myself. I felt like I was trusting a being who would help and who was worthy of my trust. Lately, whenever I have been readying myself to serve another in some way, and I feel anxious and unsure, I have been offering up this same prayer. The prayer reminds me of my intention to be there for the other, not for self-glorification or to create some product. This intentionality has begun to stay with me in the process of serving.

J and I move on in our talk. Perhaps because I am thinking of J's asking for help, his subtle acknowledgement of trusting a larger outside force, I feel the need to ask him

about whether he is in control of whether or not a deep encounter happens. I believe I know his answer but I cannot find another way to encourage him to talk about the unwilling part of this moment. We have the following dialogue:

K. Can you make a deep encounter happen?

J. No; I can set the stage but... Well two things, first and simply, part of that depends on you. Your interest or willingness. I can do any prep I want but you are sitting there in the waiting room, doing whatever you are doing. So that is one piece and an obvious piece. But the other piece would be that there is an element of spontaneity. So while I can set the stage for spontaneity, it's still spontaneity, so if I have it programmed out ahead, I have thought about that, I am probably actually not there, so no.

K. You have to be free of it to be able to be present to it, and it's spontaneous. That spontaneity, does it have any other qualities other than your freedom from it? Does it have any other essences unto itself that are different from just your intention?

J. Yes, it does, it has its own openness, it is different from my intention or my person that is its own, and a willingness, a willingness to be touched. I think that those things are different. That they exist independently of me in a certain way. There is some kind of willingness, or field. It's not just... Well, I have decided to be open.

I have struggled since the beginning of my relationship with Buber's work to make sense of why one could not will a deep encounter. Intrinsically I understood that the ability to will a deep encounter would fundamentally oppose the essence of the moment in some way but I could not verbalize why. J's explanation, his use of the word spontaneity, helps me to make sense of it. Like in the prayer, there is an element of surrender here, letting go of control. I feel a spark of excitement at this understanding. I want that spontaneity, that gifting. I don't want to control this moment. I want to live this moment.

I am also drawn in by his recognition of a separate entity in the relation, a field. I love this field, what Buber calls the between. I want to know of it. Burgeoning from my

soul comes the question: "Can you tell me what you know of that field?" I speak in hushed tones, the air is thick with heavy expectancy. I am leaning forward in my chair. For a long time, J is silent, thinking. He then begins to wade through his thoughts out loud looking for words to describe this field, this between place. As soon as he begins to speak, I realize that I have asked an unanswerable question. I honor his willingness to try to express the ineffable. In the end, he gives me the most wonderful gift. He does not really tell me of the field, but of his feeling response to it.

It's like this held space between us that feels precious on both sides. It's not simply you and me. There is an actual felt feeling between us. It's always felt preciously. The essence would be preciousness. It is a quality of that field. What is felt is this sense of heart opening, expansion into that shared space.

I am silent for a long time holding that preciousness. We are again in that cathedral; an unspeakable sacredness surrounds us. In this place I ask him to tell me a story of an experience of deep encounter with a client.

J tells his story beautifully. My imagination perked, I watch the story unfold in my mind's eye. He tells of a woman client whom he has seen on and off over the last dozen years. He has walked with her through marriages, divorces, children, no children, jobs and on and on. He says that sometimes she comes to see him just to talk, to be with him. He says that he has come to know her so well that in moments of deep connection, he can tell what is going on for her by the undulations in her face. He doesn't claim that he can read her mind, but he says he believes there is a fair bit of common ground.

From my brief experience with him and his reactions to me, I imagine how he must approach her, how his enjoyment of her must show in his face and in his posture. I can see them over time as he cries with her, laughs with her. I can see him waiting for her to work through things. I also imagine what it must feel like for the client to be known so

well. J and I acknowledge together the loveliness of this kind of relationship and we express sadness that these deep relationships occur so rarely outside of the counselling room.

As J begins to describe moments of deep encounter with this woman, he talks of his affection for her. This affection is a palpable reality in the room. It seems to be the foundation, the centre of all of the energy present in the story. He tells me of the moments of deep encounter:

And there would come, that particular time and there have been other times. We are still in the context of doing her work, you know, boundaries and stuff, but in a way that drops away; in a way, we are just really here. And she is very much there in her vulnerability, expanding. Not in a negative kind of vulnerability but in an expanding vulnerability and so am I. I am still aware that I am working. I am not totally everything gone. I don't think you want everything gone but by this stage, it has dropped very far and we are just two people sitting there. Two people talking, two people very moved by whatever has just been said, something that I have said or something that she has said. So it is as though we are both in that field that we were just talking about, perhaps dropping through some layers of that. She says something, I say something so that we both have tears running down our faces. The primary part is just that contact, that is the primary thing.

I watch him as he speaks. I can see him moving back into that moment with her. I am allowed to enter in. We speak in hushed tones, following his energy. I have by now learned that being aware and expressing his physical sensations allows him to walk deeper into his experience and so I ask him to tell me his embodied experience of the moment. He says, "As I am recalling it to myself right now there is great warmth, in my belly or chest, a sense of dissolving. A kind of sturdiness in my back, an upwelling." We are silent for a long time feeling these sensations. Gently, I ask what he is conscious of in these moments and he responds with tears in his eyes, "I am conscious of, I just love this woman. She is just fine. I am conscious of how much I like that spot."

I feel incredibly grateful, grateful that he has allowed me to witness his love of another, grateful that he has been vulnerable in this way. I feel this sense of communion with him in this moment. In the Anglican Church, there is a tradition of liturgy. The cantor or leader will say or sing a line of a psalm or a line from the Book of Common Prayer and then the congregation will respond. In this moment, I feel like J is the cantor singing some beautiful image of truth. In me, the desire arises to sing back as part of the larger body of humanity my response, my echo of the truth.

Regrettably, in this incredible moment, I am distracted by some theoretical, technical detail. I think I am afraid of staying in this depthful place, afraid of the vulnerability in the room. Is it that this place of sacredness is hard to maintain with a stranger? It is as if every few minutes after being in this deep place, I realize that we are there and I get embarrassed, uncomfortable and I want to jump out. I can almost feel myself blushing in those moments. I guess part of this is human and part of it is Kirsten. The human part is this natural swing between the world of I-thou and the world of I-it. We naturally move in and out of the depthful places into more grounded concrete places. We need breathers. I am reminded of the biblical story of Adam and Eve. I wonder if, before they ate of the tree in this story, they were able to live all the time in the I-thou realm, unashamed in their nakedness and vulnerability before each other and before God. After they ate of the tree, I wonder if they had this sudden awareness of their nakedness and needed to hide.

However, J, N, D and S seemed to have all learned to be able to stay longer in this place. They seem less afraid than I am and often in this context they have been more vulnerable. It is as if they have learned to be more at peace with the uncontrolled nature

of this moment, with this depthful place. I know as I become more centred, more at peace, more able to be fully present and aware, I too will be able to stay longer in these times. I believe this is imperative in my work with clients. If it is me who needs to move out of the depth because I am uncomfortable, then I will be limiting them in their growth. I have heard in my life that you cannot go farther with anyone than you have gone yourself. Part of my task then is to learn to stay peacefully in that vulnerable place.

In the interview, I do realize what I have done and I change my tone, my pace, my questioning and attempt to move back into the sacredness. J joins me quickly. We have come to a place where moving in and out has become less jarring, more seamless. We are nearing the end of the interview. By this time, I trust J more and I have let go of the reins of the conversation. I know it will be rich if I let go and make room. I begin to ask J about his experience of spirit in deep encounter. Just as J struggled in speaking of the field between, he struggles when he attempts to speak of spirit:

I am a bit troubled by the idea of spirit. I am not sure that it leads us into territory that we can talk about or that we can relate on that much. And so the words spirit and spirituality have been quite heavily used in the last while, very very heavily used, and I don't know what to say. I think that is what it comes down to. I do not really know what to say about it. Because I keep looping in my own mind towards soulfulness and particularity... That which has to do with the particular and the essential of this person or me or this situation and to me that is really rich, and immediate and immanent in the definition of the word, the nearness of it. And those things interest me a lot and the word, 'spirit', I just can't use it well at the moment. Because, I don't know why, partly because I am rebellious and it is used too much and so I have to go away from it a little bit and find a different ground, but it has an awayness in it to me and a transcendentness to me and I am not at this moment very interested in transcendentness. I am more interested in the hereness, nearness, those things have connotations of soul and soulfulness and embodiedness and nature and particularity.

I have come to a place in our discussion now where my theory, my questions and my agenda are becoming a distant second to my interest in being with J and following his

lead. I can also sense that we are on the cusp of something much more important than a simple answer to my question. We are now agendaless, wading through his deep questioning. J is not speaking lightly. I can see that this is current for him, a place of tension. He seems to be trying to make a decision between a focus on soul or on spirit. I feel like it is the same choice that Buber made between engaging in the mystical or engaging with the world. I don't feel either of these men are saying that they are uninterested in the spiritual realm, but they are expressing some belief that the only way to reach the spiritual is through the world. As Buber (1958a) said:

If only we love the real world, that will not let itself be extinguished, really in its horror, if only we venture to surround it with the arms of our spirit, our hands will meet the hands which held it fast. (p.95)

I too feel constantly faced with this decision. We are here in this moment on very common ground. It is a place of energy and unknowing. Yet there is also this deep knowing rooted in the longing to be, to engage, to love the world. I am resonating with him and in the midst of this reverberation, he turns to our relation to teach me again. I ask him to speak about soul and particularity and he says the following:

I am quite interested in who you are. And that is different from all the other folks that I am interested in, as well. I am interested in the way you put your thoughts and questions together. I am interested in the light that is in you around them and various other things I could name on for hours. That's particular to me. That is here and immediate to me and like you say, through that, after diving through that particular water, we might emerge in some mystical and transcendent place. But that is not of primary interest to me. That would be secondary, very much secondary to me to that, to the nearness, and then that to me has a lot of therapeutic power. Theory being that I am trying to cure somebody with what I do. It has a lot of value because I do not want us or them to go away. Frankly, it is lovely. I would rather be here. From the point of view of the therapist, I see lots of opportunities for me to go away or for people to go away to the spiritual realm. So I struggle with that. What is genuinely of interest rather than just to do work is that presence of the other. So it has wholeness and a texture to it. So, at this moment, as soon as I say these things I am not there but, like I said before, I am both aware of the texture of my voice in my chest and throat. I am aware of the

atmosphere around us. My attention shifts among these things, but there is a wholeness of us being here. And then, if I speak to that wholeness, then I feel, I feel tears rising in my eyes. I feel emotional. I feel a spaciousness—a spread in my chest and that has to do with just being. The simplicity of reaching another.

Again J has invited me to be on the receiving end of his greatest gift, his presence.

I am warm inside, my cheeks are red. My back straightens, my eyes brim. This stranger notices me. He wants to sit with me. For him it is more important than being in a spiritual place. He is choosing to be with me over transcendence. In the middle of all of these feelings, he points out how this way of being is incredibly therapeutic. I know the truth of this on all levels in that moment because I am experiencing it.

His wanting and committing to being with me in that moment and me knowing this commitment and wanting heals something in me. I learn about being worthwhile, being part of God rather than separate from, being full of potential rather than empty. Rooted in this I want to step back into relation with this being with all of this potentiality and beauty and, as I do, I am all of my beauty and particularity and I know this and I know I can be in the world like this.

I am overjoyed in this moment. I have been met. In my effusiveness, I say, “Oh I want to live in deep encounters; I want to be in relation this way all the time.” I ask him: “How do you live with the possibility of deep encounter in every moment of your life? How do you live soulfully in the everyday and in those moments?” J turns to me and gives me his final gift.

I don't live soulfully in every moment of my life. Sometimes I am just your basic grumpy guy. However, it seems to me that with sufficient time, that I come back to myself and then there is that possibility and it rises again. Or I am just here. For instance here at home, I kind of am aware of being just this body walking around. There is a sense of presence, sense of here. I am just being here, being here in this body. This is nothing fancy. There is nothing exciting about this body. So then that quality that sets the stage for deep encounters is presence: it's

presence. I don't know if that is answering your question. It's not an all the time thing. I don't even want it to be.

He has brought me to earth again, helping me remember balance and the natural undulations of life. I tell him how grateful I am for our meeting and he says that he believes me. A strangely beautiful ending.

### E: Just Being in the Moment

#### Introduction

I have known E longer than all of the other participants. She was with me at the beginning stages of my work as a counsellor. She has taught me primarily through action and deed. My first experience with E was an important moment in my life. She was acting as my supervisor on the crisis lines. I was on a very intense call where the caller was threatening to commit suicide. E was helping me, but I felt overwhelmed by her help and unable to listen to the client, or stand in my own skin in relation to the client. The caller ended up alive and there was some resolution but I got off the call feeling flustered and overstimulated. Another supervisor who had seen this noted my reaction and encouraged me to talk to E about it.

At this time in my life, I would never have fathomed sharing with a supervisor that I had not been helped by her supervision. Questioning an authority was not in my repertoire at the time. However, because I had been encouraged by another supervisor to do this, I felt empowered to follow through. I went to E and told her how I felt. I was very afraid of her response but she received my questioning respectfully and she apologized. There was no feeling of anger in the air; in fact I felt the opposite. I felt closer to her, I respected her more and I felt like she respected me, too. I was in awe; I

could have a voice. I could be other, express that otherness, and be respected and cared for.

My relationship with E has grown from that time forward. She was one of the first people that I came to really love as other than me. She and I are not alike. I don't love her because we are affiliated. Whenever we talk, we are not focussed on our common ground but rather the unique experience that each of us brings. I love her because she is "E" and she allows me to be me. I work well under her guidance. I feel empowered and motivated to be my best.

I asked E to participate precisely because she is different. She is from a different province than all of the other participants. She works primarily with people in crisis in a community agency whereas most of the other participants do long-term, private practice work and she has had a different way of educating herself. Furthermore, she seems to love her uniqueness. E is unique in this work in another way. Whereas all the other participants seemed to enjoy talking about their experiences of deep encounter, E seemed to resist talking about them, especially moments of deep encounter. She emphasized that what was important was to be, not to analyze or talk about how one was.

This resistance taught me. It reminded me again of my otherness. I love looking closely at the how of things. I love to talk about beautiful moments. I think through everything that I have done carefully and intensely. This is a part of who I am. This is a part of why I chose this thesis. I want to spend as much time as possible talking about, thinking about and being in deep encounter. This is okay. I did not feel ashamed of this difference in my relation to E. I did not feel either that she had to want to think about deep encounter and look closely at this experience. She agreed to work with me and so I

hoped that she would be willing to explore with me but most of the time I also honored her difference.

This resistance also reminded me that thinking about deep encounter, looking closely at deep encounter, spending all my time considering deep encounter is not deeply encountering someone. Just because I have read Buber, talked with people and written this thesis does not mean that I open to others, that I embrace their Thou and that I live on "The Narrow Ridge". I need to act on the world in this way. I need to be this way. I believe that this way of writing this work can be an action on the world, a non-analysis, an experiencing, but I must always hold the tension that this work is not fully living. It is only a very small part of the beginnings of my journey.

E was my last interview and was done several weeks after the others. I had already begun to immerse myself in the memory and sound of the other interviews. My awareness had grown over time. I was more able to notice lapses in attention and presence, desires to fit the participant's words into my neat box. I was more able to work with these things and act intentionally. Walking into my time with E, I also felt knowledgeable. In some ways this was helpful and, in other ways, distracting. I found that at times I added my thoughts in too forcefully, as though I was an expert, rather than an equal. Will I ever find balance between being a student and a teacher? Why do I hide in these roles? When will I learn to speak my truth as just mine and that's it? I did not find that balance in this interview but I was aware of the tension in a new way.

I also came to E knowing her better than I knew the others. I knew that she didn't like intellectualism. She would not tolerate it if I was cognitive and thinking-oriented especially about this subject matter. I knew I had much to learn from her natural way of

being, but I also knew that she didn't like to explain herself. So I approached E differently than the others, more willing to go with her energy instead of seeking content. I had this sense that direct questioning which expected an answer would shut her down. Again I was conscious of this, but often failed to act on this consciousness, holding too tightly to my desire for content in this work instead of committing myself to being with E.

### The Interview

I begin as usual by my asking E who she is as a counsellor. Right away she speaks her truth with clarity:

The first thing that comes to mind is that I am E. I bring myself not in any magical way, just me. Partly, because I believe in the process having gone through the process with a counsellor myself: I think, you know, in many ways she became very much a role model to me. Some of the things I really loved about her was that I felt that she was just her. She didn't need to have magic answers for my life. In fact, I didn't want anybody to have magic answers for my life. It was kind of the first time I wanted to know who I was and what made me tick and what did I need. And prior to going into counselling I knew that I needed to answer those questions. Others had answered them for me and I didn't want that anymore. So I think because of that experience I just want... You know, I bring me. Knowing that whoever I see I don't have the answers for them. I see my role as just helping them get to their answers. So that is the best I bring. I bring some knowledge from my own studies, from my own work, from my ongoing reading, my ongoing learning. But the best thing I bring is just me.

I love her answer and sit smiling, enjoying her presence. Like D, E is the same in and out of the counselling room; she is warm, open, real and straight-shooting. I can feel the constant unmasked quality of E being there, standing in her own skin. This is probably one of my weakest places, as a counsellor and in the rest of my life. I find it incredibly difficult to stand in my own skin. I feel like I have only recently met my skin and I am just getting to know it. Meeting with E and feeling the power of her presence reinforces for me how important it is that I practice this.

Imagine with me a shape shifter that transforms into anything you as other seem to want it to be in that moment. That being can never really be known as anything solid. Sometimes I feel myself being drawn out of my skin, I feel myself contorting my being into that which I think is being requested of me. It used to be that I only felt this vague sense of nervous energy when this happened. Now I am very aware when this is happening. At times I panic and revert to this old way but at times I feel myself willing that energy back into me, I feel it moving in me and I feel my fleshiness, my solidity. That is where I want to stay.

There is another thing I notice, too, in what E says. It is her immediate connection to her experience as client. She has been in the counselling field for 10 years but still she relates constantly to her client experience before this. She seems to never forget how it felt to be on the other side. I sense that she constantly reminds herself of this in order to ensure that she treats the other with the respect she wanted and received. In her way of being I find epitomized the scripture "Do unto others as you would have then do unto you."

Buber (1947) described this way of being as inclusivity. There is an element that E does not talk about in inclusivity that I think is important. That is not just imagining how your actions applied to you would feel for you but how they might feel for this other being in their uniqueness. I don't think that E would disagree with this, though she might say that she cannot know that reality. Buber (1947) said:

It is not enough for him to imagine the child's individuality, nor to experience him directly as a spiritual person and then to acknowledge him. Only when he catches himself "from over there", and feels how it affects one, how it affects this other human being, does he recognize the real limit, baptize his self-will in Reality and make it true will, and renew his paradoxical legitimacy.  
(p.100)

So I wonder as I sit here, how can I practically remind myself to always hold that vision, that other side? I do not want to forget and go plowing onward in arbitrariness, teaching what I feel needs to be taught, leading where I think we need to go. One way, I believe, is to always ask the other, check it out; does this work for you? I can also be instrumental in creating an environment where the client feels okay to challenge me, and to tell me when something is not working. E created this environment at the start of our relationship when she accepted my questioning so graciously. I need to let the client know right from the start that I can be wrong and that they are the ones who know themselves best. I can also pause, breathe and imagine, always holding the reality of the impact of what I do.

E and I walk on in our conversation. I am nervous that my questions will seem repetitive and similar but they are important to me and they look at different angles of experience. One of my monsters begins to rear its head. I launch into a long pontification about how we will be cycling through things, and things will seem to be repetitive. E responds to this long explanation by looking at me in the eye and saying, "I trust the process."

In the moment I rush on asking my questions. But now as I sit here considering this response, I hear her message to me in that moment and throughout our relationship. I hear her saying, "I trust you, I trust life, I am okay, just be." Like N's deep breaths that ground me, this line helps me plant my feet in the ground and exist. By her example, she also shows me how I can be with clients, trusting, believing their ability to chart their own course. It isn't just a trust in the client, however; it is a trust in life, in the flow of life. If I am present and open, if I confirm the other and the flow of their being, then I can

believe that life will take its course, that this being will find the way she needs to go. It is like D's image of being the passenger and the driver; responsible, yet simply part of the flow.

Do I trust life? Out from the depths of my soul there does not resound a "Yes!". Instead I feel this slight anxious knot. Maybe I am too western to trust life, too Christian, and too young. I am naturally a person who likes to be in control and who in youth would have loved to be able to save people and to fix them. Now I can recognize this need to control and I am learning to enjoy letting go, watching and being. I want wellness for people but I don't want to be the fixer or the saviour anymore. I think my limited solutions would make for a boring world. I am learning to be in the flow of life, to let it take its course, to watch and to move with it.

I feel this tension between responsibility and trust. When do I act? When do I not act? When am I called to respond to take responsibility and when am I called to let it flow? In my relation to clients, this also plays a role. If I trust the process, how much of my work is non-directive, non-action, and when do I take action? Trusting life for me would be to know this balance, to be able to sense it within myself. I do not know enough in relation to the course of life to trust it but, as I grow, as I experience, I begin to find this balance.

As E continues to describe her intended work with clients, she expresses her desire:

To hear well, just to really be there and listen and to hear them and because I feel that if I hear them... and again it is from my own experience: the gift of having been heard. It just changes how you are with people or how I am with people. You know, to me, that is just such a wonderful gift. So because of that, that is what I want. I want to really, really listen, to hear and then to be in rapport with them, knowing that this is their journey and the journey is just so

important and I don't in any way want to block anybody. And I think, by listening, I will hear well. I trust that. I have learnt certainly not to assume things, so also not be afraid to ask questions so I can clarify and really be in rapport with them.

As she speaks of not wanting to block anybody, tears well up in her eyes. In the room I can feel her passion and commitment to this way of being. It is not a theoretical issue for her. It is a heartfelt longing to be a help and never a hindrance. I am awed by her love of the journey and her way of prizing the client's uniqueness.

Do I respect the journey of the other that much? Do I take it seriously enough when I block people by imposing my agenda on them and not allowing them to be other? Do I impose my own issues on them and act in fear instead of trust? No, I don't take it seriously enough yet. But I will take E's tears with me in a little jar and store them close to my heart to remind me of the preciousness of the unique journey of the other. I will let them remind me of the importance of not blocking the flow of a being. One day this awareness will become so much a part of me that my own tears will flow in a desire to never block.

E follows this statement of her belief with practical ways of implementation. She says that she comes into sessions agendaless, working to listen to the client's agenda. She waits until the client has spoken and seems to ask few questions to start. She allows her intuition to lead and she says, "Sometimes I don't have a clue why we got to where we got, but we got there and that seems to be the right place." This is her way. It may not be yours or mine but it does seem to emphasize the importance of being present over creating a direction. (After reading a copy of this narrative E said that she noticed that she did have agendas with clients at times, loose agendas of calling the client back to an issue

that seemed important, and following up on homework that the client had been working with.)

As I begin to consider letting go of a strong directive path, my insides begin to churn with panic. What if we don't get anywhere? What if I am working for an organization that wants results, progress? Again I am confronted with my lack of trust in the process. I am aware of these fears now. I have not triumphed over them. As I write this, I realize another piece of the puzzle. When I am not ruled by these fears, when I am acting authentically, not driven out of some other motivation, then I will be able to truly step into relationship with a client and be helpful. My action or non-action may not be what is important but rather the motivation for that stance. Is it fear or responsiveness?

As we continue to talk, E shares how she also brings her own vulnerability to her work with clients. We have the following dialogue:

K. So the gifts you have said that you give your clients, in a sense, is that gift of hearing and that gift of openness. And you come with that.

E. That is right, and even with my own vulnerability. Because certainly now as I am grieving the loss of my mom that is there. I think it is there in an appropriate way. But it means that things touch me easily. I don't see that as bad.

In this moment E again allows the tears to brim in her eyes and allows her voice to crack. I am totally engaged with her at this moment. I have felt in my interactions with E that her ability to be vulnerable yet strong is one of her greatest gifts. One I don't understand. Somehow, when she tears up about her loss, I don't feel like I need to comfort her. I sense that she is okay. She is not reaching out with her tears for sympathy or comfort. She is just allowing her humanity to exist, to have room. Her grief does not

feel imposed. It feels real and whole. I often feel honored when she lets herself be this way with me and I imagine that clients do, too. She is giving of herself in the moment.

E shows me that she is affected by life, yet she does not seem weak to me. I am often unwilling to let anyone see how life is affecting me. My own grief over life is very private. Though I do not feel that I need to try to be more open about my own life with clients for their benefit, I do believe that E teaches me to allow room for that which is naturally human to emerge wherever I am. Again she reminds me in her way of being not to put on a mask of strength and stoic perfection but rather to live and engage with my whole self, even my weak parts. I can feel the reality of this moment in the room, the lack of masks and walls between us. I feel like E's equal when she allows me to see her this way. I sense her respect for me as a person. I can handle someone else grieving as well. We are both humans, not just me in all my frailty. It must feel good as a client to receive this gift.

There is a liberation of being in reality. The fullness of one's being can bloom. Wholeness and completeness reign. Reality has a thickness about it. Rough edges and imperfections are more obvious but they are also more beautiful. I am thinking of the paintings of Renoir. The women he painted were never skinny and perfectly proportioned like the women we now see on television and in magazines, the women who are labelled by the media as having the "perfect body". These women were real. They had curves, small breasts or huge hips or thick arms and they were gorgeous. When we embrace vulnerability, weakness and blemish in the world, we begin to see the incredible variation of hues and forms that are created in this reality. The world becomes so much more full, lovely and inspiring.

As E begins to speak more directly to specific experiences with clients, I am drawn in by her gratitude for the gifts of uniqueness that they bring. She speaks of the gifts of their stories, their openness, and their willingness to strive to find and walk their path. She tells me this story:

Yesterday I did an intake with a woman who had lost someone through suicide and we spent close to two hours together and she told me her story and a bit about her history. In talking she was wanting to know what I thought and so I kind of reframed things back to her in terms of what she thought she needed. And she looked at me and she said, "You know, I think I am doing fine" and I said, "You know, I think you are really doing fine, too" and then we left it there. You know, I even said to my son yesterday, "You know, I saw this wonderful, wonderful lady and somehow I know my life has been changed and I don't know how or why or what it was but I just know it was a gift." And I still have that sense today. It is quite nice, you know, and chances are I will have no further contact with her but she has gifted my life.

As I listen I can feel her gratitude from the inside. I see all of the "wonderful, wonderful ladies" that I have met in my work and I remember how much their strength and survival has taught me. Every day as my worldview expands, I see more of what it took for each one of them to make it and be the beautiful beings that they are. James Bugental (1965) expresses this gratitude eloquently. I was so struck by his words that I pasted them all over to remind me of how blessed I am to do this work.

But when I come to write a word to you who have honored me by being my patients, I find I have a very special set of feelings. You have given me of your thoughts, your emotions, and your living experiences. More than that, you have given me of your trust and your hope. I know a guilt and regret that I could never be all that you hoped. I know a pride and happiness that for some of you I could be what you needed. And to each of you I feel a gratitude for what you have taught me out of the living stuff of your being. (p.xv)

I believe that it is my responsibility to let clients know that they give to me and that I am touched by them, not in a shallow way but from the deep authentic place that knows and touches the wonder of that connection. I believe that this can be an incredibly

powerful healing tool for both the client and the therapist. The client learns that they affect others positively, even those who are helping them, and I learn about humility, connection, and that when I sit with another's suffering I also sitting with another's strength.

I have struggled to express for myself the lived experience of this gratitude. I lapse into metaphor and poetry to elucidate this feeling. I need to tell you how much this means to me. So let me try:

I stand before a being as I stand before a rising moon. Alert and full of anticipation I watch the coloured newness emerge from the darkness. I know that you were only resting there, hidden from the world's view, not yet invited. Now that it is dark and suffering has surrounded you, you are pushed by the natural circles of time and balance to emerge. Here I stand watching, my feet are planted firmly on the sand. I feel every inch of my body. I am pregnant, full with this moment. Aching and joyous, I breathe in your presence all it means for you and for me and for the universe, all you mean to creation and to the creator. All I see is your light and your uniqueness. You infiltrate every part of this moment, I see the waves of life in your light, the trees in your shadow, the sand sparkling your diamonds back to you. I hold my arms up as if I could hold you but when I relax again all I feel is gratitude. Thankyou for being, thankyou for emerging. Your unveiling is a gift to my life, so full of potentiality, so connected, so necessary to the whole and that you have allowed it to be is my gain, the world's gain.

E and I are silent for a moment letting the gratitude wash over us. "It's amazing sometimes," I say. "It's amazing! It's really amazing," she responds.

We move on, sharing the joy of loving this work. She tells me of how she chose to be a counsellor through her own client experience. She talks about how she learned of the joy of being with people even in suffering in her engagement with the woman who walked with her in her own sorrow. She says:

And I had asked her; at times; how do you do what you do with all this sadness, people coming with all this sadness? And she'd tell me that there were great gifts in it and now I know, I mean it is just the best. That is not saying that at times it doesn't hurt and I think if we do the work with an open heart it hurts. But

then we need to know what we need to do for ourselves so that we don't get bogged down with the pain. It is not ours to carry.

I move on and ask her to define what the words 'deep encounter' mean for her.

She says:

I guess a deep encounter is something spiritual that is hard to define. It is just kind of like this beautiful lady yesterday. For me that is a deep encounter because she touched my life in ways I don't know what that was about. I am just enjoying it. I am not analyzing it. But recognizing that, because of that, my life is changed.

I am struggling with her reluctance to talk about it. I want her to. I try summarizing what she has said to help her go on:

- K. So there is this piece of when I meet some one deeply, it is spiritual and my life changes.
- E. I don't know that I am always... I don't know that I am that aware of it. I certainly am aware when people touch me deeply, I don't stop that often to analyze whether it was their story? Was it the trust, or was it a connection on what level? I don't know, I don't know, I just don't know.

I again push that she does know something but I quickly check myself and allow movement back to an area of comfort and we begin to talk about her process of opening to a client. I feel a struggle between us. Do I allow E enough freedom 'not to know' in order for her to leave moments of deep encounter just as an experience? She is much more willing to talk about her process of opening than to talk of moments of deep encounter. They seem sacred in their un-analyzed state.

We move for a long time into an exploration of her process of opening. Her practical way again grounds me and teaches me. She speaks of how sometimes she doesn't feel connected to clients and she even feels resistance to them. She gives herself space for this and seeks out opportunities to work through her feelings. She says she often goes to a supervisor or coworker and tells them of this resistance. This acknowledgement,

allowing the feeling to become conscious, helps. I appreciate this practical reminder and learning. Often as I soar with the beauty of the possibility of deep encounter I forget these realities of our humanity. They too are part of what needs to be embraced.

I then try to move gently back into questions of her experience of the moment. I try to paint a context for her in which she might discover the experience. She meets me and tries very hard to express that which for her resists expression. This is our dialogue:

- K. So as you sit there in that moment, in that moment with that woman yesterday. What do you experience in your body as you come to this place of deep encounter with someone where there is this connection? What is going on in you, like what is your sense?
- E. What is my sense? You know, again, it's something I don't analyze when it's happening. There is just this moment in time that just disappears. I think time becomes something that... you know with this lady yesterday. She was the last person, so I didn't have to be aware of time. But also thinking of other times is that it's a moment in time. But you are not aware of time. It's just a place of being. And I don't know if I am aware of anything but that person. It's just of us. Not just of them but of me. It's just two people together. There is magic in it. How that is, I don't know. Like, after she left, in my ride home and recognizing that my life had been touched. Why? How? I am not sure. It's just there, it's still there. I am always in awe. You know, I think it's just this place of recognizing; you know, I get to see the human spirit in all that it has endured in its encounters. Yet how the spirit shines and then, you know, that always touches me deeply. I know often when I feel that deep encounter and somebody has shared their story or part of their story and I come away feeling, "Wow, I am so, I am so in awe."

I am moved by her overriding love of the process of being human and the joy of witnessing someone's journey. Her love is contagious. My whole insides rise to meet it. A smile spreads on my face. Enticed by her words, I try to encourage her to tell me more. E's expressions of joy and sorrow on her face and in her brimming eyes have always been one of the starting places of my communion with her. Her physical expression of the moment is so rich and I long for her to speak of it. I enter in a new way trying to express my longings:

One of the rich things that I have experienced in our relationship is that I can see on your face when something touches you. I can see it in your eyes and I can hear it in your voice and I am wondering, where in your body does that start, if you feel comfortable telling me? When you get to this place and this gift is given to you, how does that feel inside? What makes you, what comes up inside of your body that feels that way, that expresses it?

She says she is comfortable speaking of this but finds it challenging to answer what she feels is a thinking question about an emotional experience. This resistance and my desire to hear leads me into a new place. I think, "If I tell you my experience, maybe you will be able to verbalize your own." I release myself to the moment:

When I come to that place, when I know, "Oh, here we are", I feel my face get red. I can feel my cheeks because I feel the energy going and usually I am forward in my chair because I have got this energy pulsing me forward. And I can almost feel, from the tips of my toes to the top of my head, I can feel the electricity in my body. And I can feel it and it is almost like I am being pulled towards the person who I am having that moment with. And in my stomach I can feel a perking up. So that is my experience as I lean forward. I feel excited. And that is my experience... I am excited. I get easily excited. I also start to feel my vulnerability. I can feel how precious this is to me. So that's my experience of it.

This is the first time that I have vocalized my physical experience in moments of deep encounter. I had been tracking them for months but I had never actually described them out loud. This feeling washes over me as I speak, I am in that experience, feeling that energy. The power of touching the embodied experience overwhelms me again. At the same time, I know the moment that I have stopped speaking that my description is incomplete. I have only related half of the experience. There is also a restfulness in me when the energy begins to integrate, the sensation of being bathed in sunlight and resting in its warmth. This precious warm feeling stays in my belly, sending bubbles of contentedness and joy to my face. As my body unwinds from this passion, I feel the peaceful sensation of swimming slowly through cool water. E hears my call and responds in kind.

I think mine starts in my tummy. That is kind of where I carry things initially and if I were to think of the route it takes, it would start there and then move up into my body and into my whole being. I think I am more aware of it in terms of in the trunk of myself in my... I think it is expressed through my eyes. Tears are always something that, you know, I recognize. I have them when there is pain, I recognize I have them with joy and deep encounters. I mean you just get so... so I feel it in my body. It's just this whole total experience. It's yeah, I think it is when my mind, body and spirit are really aligned. You know, that place of being congruent within.

In hushed tones, I ask, "And how does that congruence feel?"

Intense, it's intense. I don't know. There certainly isn't a judgement in terms of good or bad. It's just intense, it's interesting. I think we used to use the word in growing up in a religious house. There was that word 'grace', and what does that mean? And certainly I think it is a moment of grace and what that means I am not sure. Other than that is what I equate it with. I don't know if there are really words for it other than intense and full and grace.

We spend the next while exploring the experience of grace together. There is a beautiful peacefulness in the room. The push and pull of our relation has dissipated and we work in unity and concord. E then gifts me with the most beautiful illustration.

I remember one time in my son's class, he was in a Catholic school and the teacher for religious purposes had this great big rock. I am always very connected to rocks, shells, and things of nature. And she had this big rock in the front of the classroom. And she had given every child a little rock and she got them to be creative with their rock and colour and paint it and do everything that they wanted with it just to make it their own special rock. And then, in certain times, they would bring their little rock beside the big rock and to me that is kind of what it is like. That feeling that I am part of something bigger. But it is also recognizing at the same time the uniqueness of my part or someone else's part. I can see my son holding his beautiful little rock, how he grabbed it in his little hands and how he has coloured it with such soft, soft colours and it's kind of like that. Being part of something bigger than that moment.

I see little hands with a pale rock. I see my own hands and the hands of women, men and children with whom I have interacted, each holding their unique rock. We are all walking to the front of the class to place our rocks near the huge boulder. I want to reach out in this moment to touch and embrace this monument of strength and stability. We

stand together in communion, all of those she has loved, those that have touched my life,  
E and I.

E and I pause and slowly continue to share other metaphors for this experience, communing with each other in the presence of the great rock. All of this gentle energy seems to flow towards another metaphor, which moves us towards the end of our moment together, and the end of the interview. E says:

I remember being at the symphony and they were playing Beethoven's Ninth Ode to Joy. They had a choir of 250 and I remember just taking a deep breath and wanting to capture and remember this moment. But I couldn't capture it. I needed to breathe through it, you know, and I started to breathe and I thought, you know, I will remember. Then again it is allowing that movement, that movement. Movement is part of it, too. Not to hold rigidly to but just to be open to that moment in time.

Movement, breath, letting go of the moment. I am amazed at how this ending piece just naturally emerges. Deep encounters seem to come and naturally move through us to completion. If I listen I will sense it, I will hear the sound of the wave undulating through our lives. The process in its naturalness seems trustworthy.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusions

The purpose of this research for me is to learn to heal through learning to engage in deep encounter. I have strayed off this course often, as you will have gleaned from your readings, but each of these diversions has brought me back to my starting point. I want to be, I want to meet and I want to heal. I have shared the story of my journey with you because I believe that, by engaging with my story and with me, you too may experience the process of opening and meeting and I hope that you too will begin to think about healing through the process of deep encounter. In this final chapter, I will share with you some of my felt themes. I will reiterate some of the learnings that have threaded their way through this work and have affected the colouring of the tapestry in a significant way. These felt themes relate to my becoming a counsellor and my becoming a person.

### Becoming a counsellor

I have learned much about being a counsellor in the process of this thesis. This learning has occurred on several levels. Primarily, I have learned through engagement with this work as a whole. As I have struggled to allow this thesis to come into being, I have experienced the process of opening, letting go, being faithful, engaging with my whole being in an authentic way and being present to whatever emerged and to unknowing. All of these experiences have affected my becoming as a counsellor. I have also developed as a counsellor through engagement with self. I have learned to be gentle with the woman who is writing this work. I have written things here that feel slightly embarrassing at times but I have learned to embrace the wholeness of my being, not just

the parts that are refined and easy to deal with. I have let go of the need to sound intelligent and the need to present as wise counsellor. I have chosen rather to speak authentically. I believe I will be more able to give to others what I have given to myself.

Engagement with the therapists who participated in this process has also been a huge place of learning for me. I have developed and my awareness has been expanded as I have sat across from each one of these beings. I have put into practice what I am coming to believe. I have had the opportunity to spend weeks reflecting on my way of being with them and theirs with me and I have learned more than I could have ever possibly imagined from this process. I have also grown through my engagement with the therapists' words and the words of Buber. I have vicariously experienced their perspectives and approaches and I have let their words expand my worldview. Here are some of the learnings about counselling that have cycled through me over and over again in this process.

### Intentionality

I believe that intentionality is incredibly important in the counselling process. It affects how I prepare to meet clients and how I interact with the persons with whom I engage. If I am not intentional it is much easier to become distracted and shallow. I more often become inauthentic and try to fix and save rather than engage when I am not keenly aware of my intent. This thesis has found its course because I have been asked the question "what is your intent?" so many times and on so many levels. So many sections have been written and rewritten because I found myself straying off course.

The first time that I was engaged by questions of intent was as I struggled to find a thesis topic. I had been doing a study on nourishment in the counselling relationship. I

used Buber's words to show how there were these incredible moments of beauty and connection that were possible in the counselling relationship and that this relationship had the potential to enhance the life of the client and the therapist. Life as a counsellor could be good. It did not have to lead to burnout. When I allowed Buber to lead me beyond my knowing, I began to realize that life being good and easy was not the point. I-thou moments are not moments of sustenance but of transformation and expansion, and there are elements of suffering, letting go and intangibility in them. In this awareness, I asked myself the question "Is my intent to look for nourishment or to meet clients?" The answer was that my intent was to focus on meeting. This meant that my focus could no longer be the wonder and nourishment flowing out of moments of deep encounter, but my commitment must be to deep encounter in and of itself.

I faced the issue of intentionality again when doing the interviews. As I sat with the participants, I was constantly choosing whether my intent was primarily to learn from them about deep encounter, or whether my intent was first and foremost to open myself to deep encounter with them. I have written extensively about this process of choosing in the Methods chapter. Engaging this choice point has developed in me an awareness of the struggle. I no longer proceed blindly without knowing my motivation. I have listened to the interviews so many times that I can hear in my voice which intention I had committed to at that moment. To know this, to notice it in my bearing and in my tone, helps me as a counsellor to also know when I am sitting with a client if I am seeking information from that person or engaging with her being.

Each of the participants spoke of intentionality in the counselling process and the movement towards deep encounter. D spoke of his commitment to being himself and not

a role and giving of himself in any situation where he was engaging another. N spoke about how she intentionally asks herself the same questions that she asks clients and engages her varying answers. She intentionally walks with clients into the darkness they face and does not stay distant from it. S spoke extensively about intentionality and the importance of it in the counselling process. She said that she is very conscious about the way she engages people. She brings her full presence and she welcomes theirs but she is careful to keep strong boundaries and safeties in place so that clients join in the process of healing but they do not merge with her in an unhealthy way. J spoke about how he prepares himself to bring as much of his presence as possible to the client. E spoke about her intentional lack of agenda and her focus on not imposing her needs on the client.

The question of intention came up again when I was working to create something from my interview processes. I asked myself in a new way: "Is my commitment to generate knowledge about deep encounter so that others can understand deep encounter or is my intention to engage in deep encounter, to move towards it and to invite the reader to do the same in whatever I am doing for this thesis?" I committed myself primarily to the process of deep encounter in this work and this has been my intention as I have written it. In my work as a counsellor my primary intention is to engage with the other for the purpose of providing opportunities for him to heal.

What does this mean in practice? For me, along with making a conscious decision about my intent, being intentional means a commitment to the work of preparation. To be intentional, I must be centered and not distracted by a host of other motivating forces. For me, intentionality is not simply an overarching mission; it requires my constant attention. Preparation means that I take the time to work through the issues that create barriers for

me in my work. An example of this emerged as I worked with the interviews. I needed to work through what counsellors would commonly call my “transference” issues with S in order to open myself to her. My inability to do so in the interview process created a barrier to deep encounter. I had the privilege of time and of being primarily the client in this situation but, as a counsellor, this is an issue that I need to engage with whenever it occurs.

Preparation also means a day-to-day spiritual practice which helps me to open myself to the mystical, the unknown and the suffering that I will face and keeps me grounded and able to be present. Before sessions I also need to prepare. As J said, I need to clear the space and come to an inner place of peace and offer a prayer: “Let me be helpful, help me to be open, help the client be able to be open, too.” This practice reaffirms my intentionality before every session. My choice and my purpose become very conscious in this process. Finally, within sessions I can check in with my awareness, stay grounded in my body, notice when I am being motivated by something other than my intention and take the time to breathe and centre again. We often stray from our intentions. I do, and I know I will in my work as a counsellor. Therefore, I also intend to be gentle with myself and remind myself that the point is to engage the struggle and not necessarily to do it right.

### Presence

Intentionality facilitates presence. Presence is the ability to bring all of my attention and being to the moment and the person with whom I am engaging. The theme of presence is another that has been part of my becoming in this work. If I am able to be present to clients, I can help clients to be present to themselves and to the moment. In that

place where we exist as whole beings the possibility for meeting and healing exists. My inability to be present at any time and to any part of the client's being creates a barrier to the healing process. If I am inattentive, distracted by my own needs and my own fears I will be unable to meet this being. If I am closed to a part of her being that offends me, incurs fear or discomfort in me, and if I am unable to stand in the presence of this sensation and I run away, then again the possibility for encounter between two whole beings is thwarted and healing is not facilitated.

This work as a whole has demanded my presence. Each sentence has been a practice in the art of giving all of myself to the moment and to the task at hand. Because I am new to the practice of presence, I find that any music, outside noise or any internal angst adversely affects my ability to work. I sit almost daily in front of this machine and breathe deeply, trying to come to a place of focus amidst the clamour of my being. van Manen in his beautiful book Researching Lived Experience (1990) quotes Heidegger: "To think is to confine yourself to a single thought that one day stands still like a star in the world's sky." This is a very challenging thing to do. This process has asked of me this kind of focussed attention. I have constantly had to work to stay present and committed to deep encounter in all its meanings.

In this process I have learnt about the energy required to stay here in this place. I have also learned to tolerate unknowing and be present to it. For long periods in this work, I have been very unsure of my course and every step has been cloaked in darkness. I could see the light of technical methodology, and of a straightforward statistical study waning behind me. I have learnt about waiting and being present to nothingness. I believe that this practice has helped me become as a counsellor. I am more willing to stay and

wait and not rush on. My attention span is longer and I can notice the shifts in my presence and the moments when I withdraw.

Engaging with the therapists, I was also very aware of my ability to be present. Over time, I became more able to keep my attention, and my awareness grew. Before my interaction with J, I had spent time meditating and centering. I walked into our meeting and I was flooded with sensory stimulation that I could absorb because more of me was available to the moment. Instead of engaging in a one-dimensional conversation where all I heard was the words, I was able to notice physical sensations, sights, sounds and nuances of energy and emotion. My ability to be present had expanded through practice. All of these dimensions enriched our experience immensely and we were able to meet in a very deep place. I believe that as a counsellor if I am aware of all of these realms, I can call clients to increase their awareness. I can also hold more of their wholeness, if I am present and able with my awareness to embrace them.

I also noticed my limitations in regards to presence in my interactions with the participants. I withdrew my presence when I could not grasp or deal with S's story of an engagement with a client near death. I became guarded and one-dimensional. Every other participant's story of deep encounter was an entry point for me. With the story I was able to engage with them in a deeper way. I could see it happening and enter into the experience with them. However, when S told me her story, I saw nothing. I could not be present to that experience. I could not enter in. My fear and unknowing created a barrier to meeting. With clients I must find a way to move past these barriers so that I can be present to the variety of experiences that they have had in life. I am especially aware of the tendency to want to withdraw when faced with immense suffering, supernatural

encounters, or issues surrounding death. I believe that increasing my ability to be present to these things is crucial to my ability to meet others and facilitate healing.

I am also aware that staying present in vulnerable situations such as times of deep encounter and silence is incredibly important to my work with clients. If I am unable to stay in a deep place because I feel vulnerable, I am again holding the client back in the healing process. In the past few months, I have become more able to “stand in my own skin”. In other words I am able to know the boundary between my energy and the other’s energy and I am more able to stay within my energy and not take on their discomfort or any other feelings that I perceive them to have. This ability has increased my tolerance to hold silence and sit in depthful places. Silence and depth have incredible healing qualities that are lost when I am unable to be present.

Presence is the ability to just be and give the gift of being. I believe it is facilitated by a spiritual practice, by expanded awareness, by focussing on nothing else but being and by staying grounded. Presence on the surface sounds very simple but, in the process of this work, I have found it to be one of the most challenging steps on the journey towards deep encounter.

### Authenticity

If I am unable to be present, I will be unable to be authentic. If I am inauthentic then I am not present. Someone else is. Being authentic means being myself beyond everything else, beyond being the counsellor, the good, nice person or the one who knows the answer. It means that I am motivated by my internal sense of right and wrong and by love, which emerges from within and not by rules imposed from without. This does not mean that rules are disregarded; rules and ethics are important. We can love

through abiding by the rules. They provide good fences and parameters. But when they become more important than meeting, loving and caring for another being, I believe we are not serving that being well. I do not make this statement lightly. I believe that there are some very difficult ambiguous situations that we face with this belief system. Abiding by the rules and living in love must be taken very seriously.

Buber (1957b) says that an authentic being “makes the contribution of his spirit without reduction and without shifting his ground” (p.112). This is an incredibly powerful statement. For me it does not mean that I cannot learn, bend or change in my engagement with others. It means rather that I bring all of me and stand in all of me as I relate and I do not shift because I want to seem nice or acquiescent. I shift because I have been moved.

Authenticity is “being” rather than “seeming”. My role as a counsellor becomes part of the whole, but I do not allow it to be a mask which I hide behind. Authenticity means that I know who I am and where my boundaries are and I am open to the other as separate and different from me and I engage with him without an expectation of likeness or that he will fit into some vision I have of well-adjustedness. Authenticity is consistency. I am not one person in a session and another when I walk out the door. An authentic commitment to deep encounter means a commitment not just in my life as a counsellor but also in the rest of my life.

In my engagement with this work I have had the opportunity to take the time to get to know Kirsten. If I was to become the site of this research, it was just as important for me to know Kirsten as it was to know Buber and to know deep encounter. It was more important. Through this process I have become consciously, intentionally authentic. I am

not saying that I have a stable set of characteristics, which I now know. I am saying that I have listened for a while now and I know how to distinguish my own voice from the clamour of scripts, patterns and desires to please others. I have also learned in this process that my genuine being is trustable. So many times in this work I have gone off track because I started to do what I thought I should do instead of letting my inner authentic voice lead me. When I did listen to this voice attentively, what was written was infused with energy and echoes of the truths of deep encounter.

A deciding moment for me in this shift between seeming to be something and being authentic occurred when I made the final move to experiential narrative writing in this work. I wanted to do phenomenology, to seek understanding. I wanted to create an intellectual work that was evocative of the beauty of deep encounter. When I shifted to experiential writing, I felt I was shedding a mask, one I really liked, the mask of the budding intellectual. This work seems a lot more simplistic than the one I wanted to write. However, to be authentic and to move towards deep encounter, I had to shed that mask.

With this knowing of self and practiced listening, I can approach clients more solidly. I am able to give of my self. I can also now embrace their authenticity, welcome it and call to it because I am not afraid that their existence will impose on my existence. Their being who they are, feeling their feelings, expressing their views does not impose on me because I am not afraid of their disapproval or concerned with the dissolution of my self. In fact, it is their unique being, their Thou, and their otherness that I am most interested in. I believe healing occurs when one becomes fully oneself, fully authentic, and I can only help others become this way if I am on this path as well.

In the interviews, I had several opportunities to be authentic, to stand over and against strong others and come into existence in those dialogues. I often felt awkward and unsure of myself in the process but there were moments when my authentic self stood tall, such as my honest interaction with S at the end of our interview. For one of the first times in my life, I expressed my honest feelings of discomfort about our relationship to a person in power and deeply encountered them in this place of friction. My interview with E was also a practice in authenticity. I did not take her not wanting to talk about deep encounter as criticism of my being but rather as another valid perspective. This provided space for something different and beautiful to emerge.

In the interviews, it was when I asked questions that emerged from the depths of my being that we moved into a place of deep encounter. I have found this to be true in all of my relationships. When I allow my being to emerge in its fullness and when I engage in this way, the other responds and brings the same intensity and in those moments we meet. In the course of this work, I have learnt that my authentic being is the greatest gift I can bring to another.

### Responsibility

Responsibility is another area of learning for me in this work. Buber (1958a) said that “love is responsibility of an I for a Thou” (p.15). Responsibility means to me that I am willing to do the work of opening myself to the other. I am willing to be present, to be authentic and to be intentional. It means that I do all of this without expecting the person to whom I give to give back to me. I am not trying to experience this being for my own pleasure. I am meeting for the sake of meeting, not to get something out of it. In this work, this again meant a shift from a focus on how I could be nourished by moments of

deep encounter to a focus on moving towards deep encounter for the sake of my belief in the power of meeting and for the sake of the other.

By practicing authenticity, presence and intentionality, I have also taken ownership of this work. I am aware that if I don't commit myself, this work isn't going to just happen. This work depends on me. However, I cannot will it to be. I must also serve it. It is the same in the counselling encounter. I must come open and ready to meet this being. I am responsible for my part in the meeting, but I cannot make the other come and therefore I cannot expect deep encounter to occur. I simply need to hold that space for the other being to enter into the possibility.

In my engagement with the therapists, I also felt this responsibility. I came to them and it was my job to create a space where we could explore deep encounter together and enter into it. A moment when this hit home for me was in my phone conversation with J before our meeting. He said, "How are you going to create an intimate space where we can explore this subtle experience together?" I trembled as he spoke these words. I knew then that I could not expect these interviews to just happen. I was responsible for the creation of the environment, I was responsible for its structure. But most importantly I needed to be fully present in these interviews.

I also noticed that my trust in the relationship between the participants and me affected our ability to meet. When I trusted the therapist with whom I was meeting I was much more willing to let go of control and follow the moment, opening to deep encounter. It is my responsibility as a therapist to create an atmosphere of trust. How is this done? I think a whole other thesis could be written on this subject but I will just mention a few learnings here. I think trust is created through safety. If others know that

they will not be judged and will not be taken where they are not ready to go, they will feel safer and more secure. My being authentic, transparent and real, admitting my shortcomings and taking responsibility for them is another way of establishing trust. Being genuinely interested in the other also affects the level of trust. I believe that a being who feels valued and worth spending time with will trust the relationship more. Finally, I believe that time can naturally increase the level of trust. As the client comes to know me over time, they hopefully will become more trusting of our relationship. Developing trust seems to require patience, attentiveness and gentleness.

The words and the ways of being of the therapists also reminded me of my responsibility. N spoke of how she had to be willing to be moved by the other in order to engage them in places of meaning. She spoke about how she needed to let the other affect her and how she needed to respond to the other out of that place of affectedness. N spoke about how it was her responsibility to keep engaging the poignancy and meaning in life so that she could embrace the other's experience of meaning and resonate with it. S also spoke extensively about responsibility. She said that it was her responsibility to hold the space and keep it sacred so that the other could flourish. It was her responsibility to guard the boundaries and make sure that the client was safe and not overwhelmed in the relation and in the intensity of the moment. As I listened to both of these women and as I reflected on their way of being with me throughout our relationships, I learned about what responsibility means as a therapist and how it provides space for the growth of the client.

This is my work. It is not always going to be fun. I will give more energy than I will have reciprocated to me. Clients will not always be open to meeting; there will be

barriers on their side that will hold them back. I cannot rush a client to a place of deep meeting. I am there to serve the client and for the client's well-being. To me this means that I must find other sources outside of the therapeutic encounter to make sure that my needs are met so that I can be responsible and not need the client to meet me for my sake. Practically, it also means that I must zealously guard our space and keep distractions low. If my ability to be present is affected by noise, both internal and external, the client will likely be affected as well. It is my responsibility to create an environment where the client can be as present as possible. Finally, it is my responsibility to attune to the client and pace our work so that he or she can grow and not become overwhelmed.

### Letting Go

Though I am responsible to clients and to this work I cannot control them. Love is not control. Love is not fixing, saving, or producing some result or some well-adjusted client. Love is engaging and often it involves letting go. Being responsible is knowing when to let go and follow the lead of the client, the lead of the participant, the lead of the moment and the lead of the emerging work. I have engaged the struggle of holding on and letting go over and over in this study.

The first thing I had to let go of in this study was the hope that I could do a study in which I would find out how to be a good counsellor and enjoy it. There was no "how to guide" to be found. The next thing I was confronted with was my need to let go of moments of deep encounter. They are not tangible; they are ineffable. They are not concrete; they are fluid. As soon as I think that I can hold on to the feeling or some knowledge about moments, that feeling or that knowing slips through my fingers and

goes on its way. I cannot know the essence of deep encounter. Deep encounter exists only as I engage and engaging requires that I let go.

In the interview process, I was still desperately trying to hold on to something concrete about deep encounter. I tried to generate some content that would lead me to an understanding of this experience. This was my agenda. However, as I engaged with the therapists, I found that it was my agenda that held us back from the experience of deep encounter. It was when I wanted to keep deep encounter within some knowable parameters that I was unable to meet the beings with whom I was dialoguing.

When I let go and began to follow their lead past my knowing, outside of my boxes, it was in this place that deep encounter occurred. When I was inactive and simply present and listening, when I entered into their reality, their stories, their experiencing and let them fill the room with the presence of their Thou nature, it was in this place that we met. There was also a letting go of self, letting myself be not a researcher, not a potential counsellor, but a being in relation that facilitated this process.

As a counsellor, I believe that holding space is my responsibility, being is my responsibility, but controlling and meeting an agenda is not facilitative of encounter. This does not mean that I will never be directive or use an agenda or a technique and follow through with it. I will use tools, questions, and methods in my work. It is not these vehicles in and of themselves that are the issue. These tools can serve the process as a whole. The issue is my motivation. Am I using the tools of agenda or of technique to serve the process of meeting or am I using them because I am afraid? Afraid that being with another will not fix them? Afraid that if I do not impose a direction the client will go the wrong way? Afraid that life and the client are not trustworthy? If fear is my

motivation, I am turning away from life and from the other and stopping the process of meeting.

When I let go of control and engage with my being, things happen. This work is becoming complete. I met and deeply encountered many of the therapists. I have met God and Spirit in a new way because I have engaged in the I-thou realm and I have learned to let go of the concrete knowledge and parameters available in the world of I-it. If I can let go and be with clients, I believe they will grow and blossom into who they are meant to be, not who I want them to be.

I have written this, but as I sit here and ponder my words I am not sure if I believe them in their fullness yet. I am not sure that I have said enough about the far-reaching implications of this way of being. What if someone is hurting herself or hurting someone else? I can engage authentically here and struggle with them and even against them to help them stop. Is meeting enough here? How do I impose boundaries, consequences and not become rule-bound? How do I work within a system that attempts to help but puts agenda first (for example, agendas that must be met to ensure funding)? I will leave these questions unanswered.

### Tools

In my engagement with this research and primarily in my engagement with the participants, I have noted several tools that seem to provide entry points to deep encounter. These tools are not static and they are not sure ways to move towards deep encounter. In fact I wonder if they are very personal. I felt that I moved towards deep encounter through these entry points. You may have very different places of entry. All of the tools are two-sided. They can be useful to invite clients to enter into a deeper place

and they are places where the therapist may enter into the client's perspective and become more inclusive and move to a deeper place of connection, as well.

The first tool I noted was story. When the participants told me their stories of deep encounter, I was able to enter in and imagine their reality. Our conversation was no longer limited to words. There were images, pictures of moments, that provided a richness of texture and a depth. When a participant shared their story, it was as if we stood before some beautiful piece of art, or some natural wonder together and there was a sacredness about it. I have always found narrative to be an entry point. When people story, I can see more. There is a movement beyond conceptual, linear thinking. The space for meeting is enlarged.

Practically, storying can be used with clients. I can ask clients to tell me stories to facilitate my ability to imagine their reality. If we are stuck in a linear, narrow discourse, I can ask clients to use narrative to expand our horizon together. We can walk together through their stories and I can perhaps help them to look from perspectives they have never tried before. We can look for strengths and unique outcomes together in stories and we can seek places where their basic being can be noticed and confirmed. Constructivist therapists like Neimeyer (1995) have written extensively about the use of story and narrative in the counselling process and their writings are excellent resources to access when considering the use of story and narrative in a counselling practice.

Stories can also be used by the counsellor to facilitate the opening process for clients. I often use this tool in my work as a counsellor. I will tell a story from my own history or even a story from literature that facilitates an entrance into another way of seeing things or helps the client to see another being's journey through the process of life.

This thesis is an example of the use of story to allow others to engage, try on new ways of thinking and learn vicariously.

Metaphor was another powerful place of entry for me in this work and I believe it can be a powerful tool in the counselling process. When a participant used a metaphor to facilitate my understanding of what they were saying, I felt as if my imagination was freed to run wild and to discover the multiple layers of knowing that were possible.

Metaphor allows one to see from varying angles, to feel the meaning and experience the meaning, not just to think about the meaning. Metaphor also welcomes mystery. It takes us beyond language to the inexpressible. N used the metaphor of wind to describe the spirit of the between which is present in deep encounter. I cannot tell you what wind is but I have so many different experiences of wind that help me understand and experience what N was trying to teach me. Metaphor takes one to a different level, a level where concrete knowing is no longer fundamental. In this place, one has let go of the concrete and one engages with the mystical. Meeting seems to become more possible.

Practically metaphor can be engaged from both sides with clients. Clients can be encouraged to share metaphors for their lives or for a situation and these can be explored with them to weave webs of meaning. We can walk beyond I-it knowing and expressing in this place. Clients can also be given a metaphor and this metaphor can be engaged with them. Metaphors seem to speak profoundly but gently; they linger in one's knowing after the session has ended. I was able to engage with S's metaphor of playing an other's song on the instrument of her being months after we had spoken and this allowed me to enter into her perspective and her way of being in a new way. I can give that gift to clients in careful and gentle ways.

Engaging the physical experience of the moment was another powerful entry point for me in the movement towards deep encounter. Again, when one moves out of the head and into the body, dimensions open up. The experience is felt more holistically. When J constantly called my awareness to the physical sensations that were present in the moment, I felt as if more of me became present to the experience. I also felt as if I could meet him not just through words but also through silence by experiencing the moment in all of its fullness. Our dialogue was embodied through our awareness of the physical. I also felt as if I came to know J in a deeper way because he shared with me his embodied experience of the moment. He became a multidimensional being. Our meetings were not simply intellectual. The head and the body were connected in the experience and deeper encounter occurred. I also noticed that, when participants spoke of the physical experience, they seemed to also connect to their emotional experience of the moment. It was in these engagements with the physical that tears welled up, that smiles spread across their faces.

Engaging the physical experience is an incredibly powerful tool. We store so much in our bodies. For this reason, I want to engage others in this place carefully and gently. If we call clients to notice their experience of their bodies, we call them to wholeness, to an integration of the conscious and the unconscious, to the emotional experience beyond cognition. We call them to a fuller awareness of the moment we ask them to be present with all of their beings, not just their heads. I believe that this needs to be done slowly and carefully. We can first call clients to be aware in safe neutral moments such as when J invited me to be aware of how the tea felt as it entered my body. I was not afraid to notice this because it was not intensely personal. Yet in this

experience, I began to recognize that I felt things, experienced moments not just in my thinking but also in my body. Once clients become aware that the body can be a source of information and experience and once they develop a vocabulary for sharing these experiences, they can be invited to connect with more emotional and charged bodily experiences and they can be helped to process these experiences in their bodies, not just with their heads.

S says that the body has a wisdom, a natural healing process that can be harnessed in the work of counselling. She says:

I have got this sense where each of us has an indescribable indelible soul and that soul is our uniqueness. We each have soul and the soul is very much present in the body wisdom. And so our soul wants to live and it lives very grounded in our body, it likes earthly pleasures, soul food and soul music, likes to be fully alive in the body. And spirit is this part of us that we share in divine connection and we share with each other. We share in a kind of streaming way. And as my spirit or my focus focuses on soul, that connection between the spirit and the soul happens. And so as someone else's spirit supports me, then my spirit and my soul come to life fully.

Though I am still quite unpracticed in this art of noticing my own physical experience and calling to the clients, I believe that this is a powerful tool in the process of meeting and healing. There are many authors who are beginning to write about Mind Body therapies such as Ron Kurtz (1990), the founder of Hakomi therapy. Peter Levine (1997) also writes extensively about working through mind-body connection with people who have experienced trauma. Bugental (1965) writes about calling to the awareness of the other. I believe that, as we learn to work more holistically, embracing the spiritual, physical, communal and ecological spheres of being human, meeting will become more possible.

There is one final theme and place of meeting that begs to be mentioned here. It is difficult to describe and it seems to cover a large spectrum of moments that occur in a variety of ways. Let us give it the name “engaging humanity’s basic being”. What I mean by this is that there are moments in encounters when we begin to talk about or engage with how we as humans make meaning in life, how we survive amidst suffering, how we are each unique and beautiful at our core, how we have the ability to connect to each other and to God and how life is just this gift of God. When we engage these basic human qualities we seem to walk into a sacred place, a place that is conducive to meeting because it is at this level that we are all connected.

J spoke about the commonality of being stuck. E spoke about the big rock at the front of the class and how each young child painted a smaller rock in a unique way and came and put their rock by the big rock. N spoke about a client who engaged the meaning and beauty in life when she noticed the loveliness of a dewdrop on a rose in the morning. D spoke of the woman who listened to the eagle, the representative of the creator and found hope and faith for a better life. All of these moments were moments when we stood before humanity in the full glory of her nakedness. And together we basked in his being.

I remember being in the huge statue room at the Louvre in Paris. It is my favorite room in the whole museum. Here humans stand in an abundance of positions, suffering, loving, killing and worshiping. They are not one-dimensional figures in a painting. You can see the tautness of their muscles, the anguish of their posture. When one gazes, one feels the strain or the tenderness that the body, the human in the sculpture, is experiencing. As I search for ways to describe the experience of a moment of engaging

humanity's basic being, I see the beauty of those statues before me. I remember how it felt to touch them, to feel their moments inside of me.

We can engage this place with clients by inviting them to talk about what is meaningful in their lives. By noticing in their stories and in their relation to us, moments of strength, uniqueness, survival and beauty, by pointing them out, and inviting the client to embrace them, we can engage their relation to the spiritual and to nature. We can stop and feel the common struggles of being human and facing pain and suffering and engage that place. Existentialist therapists are particularly strong in this way of being with clients. Yalom's (1981) excellent book on existential psychotherapy, provides many tools for inviting clients to the work of engaging our humanity.

This concludes the section on what I have learned about being a counsellor and through the process of becoming a counsellor through this work. There are many more nuances and learnings that have not been spoken of here. These themes are broad strokes. I hope that you will have noticed other details in your engagement with me over the course of your reading.

### Becoming a Person

Much of what I have learned about becoming a person I have spoken about already. I have learned to be more authentic, to be present, to act with intention and to let go. If I cannot live in these ways in the rest of my life, I will not be able to live in these ways as a counsellor. My being and my work are deeply woven together and the process of this work has tightened the bonds between all of the dimensions of my life.

Through out this work I have expressed what I know for myself as I have engaged in the process of deep encounter and created meaning for myself in this engagement. I

have used primarily first person language to communicate my ownership of the meaning made. At the end of this work as I engage the question of how I have become a person in this work I realize that in becoming a person I want to acknowledge that I know something that not only applies to me but also to all other people.

I know of a possibility and this possibility is not only personal, I know it exists for everyone. I do not claim to know what the process of engaging this possibility will be for you but I believe that the possibilities I put forward in the following paragraph exist and I must say this with the strength of my being and authentically speak my truth. Therefore in the final paragraphs of this work I have consciously changed my language to incorporate you the reader and wider humanity. I have used the word "We" instead of "I". In so doing I am engaging the connection between beings, the possibility that we are not only "I's" but we are also part of a larger "We" and that I contribute to the wholeness of that "We" by engaging with the fullness of my being.

At the end of this work what I know is this: I know that being human and walking the path of life is not about mastery; rather it is about engagement and relationship. Every moment of our lives we are given a choice. Will we step into relationship with life with all of our being or will we sit on the sidelines and let life go by, or block the flow of life with our need to control? I believe that all that is asked of us is that we open to life and step into relationship with whatever greets us on our path. All that is asked of us is that we open to the signs that bombard us in this world and that we respond with our being. I know we will fail, we will fall and we will suffer. If we engage authentically, we will be naked and exposed, and we will not know the future, there will be little firm ground beneath our feet. Truth and solidity will be fleeting in this way of being.

However, I know that we can meet each other, we can know each other, we can love and be loved. I know that we can heal each other in this meeting place. I know that we can have moments in our meeting when truth becomes clear in our connection. I believe that, if we engage with and “love the real world, that will not let itself be extinguished, really in its horror, if only we venture to surround it with the arms of our spirit, our hands will meet the hands which held it fast”(Buber 1958a, p.95). I believe this with all of my heart. I believe that a life lived this way is full of beauty, richness and possibility. I know I want to live this way.

### Deep Encounter

You have been with me throughout this work, you have been words, a concept, moments. You have been far away and you have been so close. You have been my topic and my method. I have known you intimately and yet you elude me. You do not exist because I now speak of you but you exist in my turning, in this last attempt to engage with the interconnectedness of this work. I started this work in love with you as a destination, now at the end I love you as a process.

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