

EXISTENTIAL FACTORS IN THERAPEUTIC WILDERNESS EXPOSURE

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ABSTRACT

The healing benefits of wilderness exposure have been documented for many decades. Wilderness therapy programs designed to take advantage of these benefits have been in existence for over a century and have been used with a number of at-risk populations

Most of the published research into the healing effects of the wilderness has been quantitative in nature and generally focused on the measurement of constructs such as self-esteem/efficacy, locus of control, and social interactions or on the measurement of recidivism rates (either re-offending or relapsing). The majority of these reports indicate some positive effects of wilderness therapy on the constructs studied with the effects lasting for up to one year. The limited number of qualitative studies published, and the myriad informal case studies that abound suggest that there are some deeper healing processes involved that are the result of an interaction with "Nature" at a fundamental level.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to attempt to illuminate those deeper healing processes. Five individuals who felt that they had derived some therapeutic benefit from exposure to the wilderness were interviewed in depth about their experiences. The data from the interviews was analyzed using Karlsson's five step protocol for producing a phenomenological reduction. This process illuminated a variety of themes in each individual's experience and comparison of these themes indicated a number of shared themes. These were: Reduction in stimulation; Simplicity; Facing Mortality; and Connection to something larger than self/Spirituality. The later three shared themes can be equated with the existential issues of Responsibility, Death, and Meaning.

The result of this study indicate that there are indeed deeper processes involved in the healing power of "Nature" than have been suggested in most of the research literature to date, that these processes are existential in nature and that being in wilderness environments can lead us to confrontation with, and resolution of, these issues. Application of this information to wilderness therapy programs could greatly improve their efficacy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Tables.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Dedication.....	vii
CHAPTER ONE Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER TWO Literature review.....	3
The healing effects of the wilderness.....	3
Wilderness therapy.....	12
The existential point of view.....	17
CHAPTER THREE Methodology.....	20
The research question.....	20
Participants.....	20
Procedure.....	21
Analysis.....	23
CHAPTER FOUR ..Results.....	24
Bracketing of self.....	24
Validation by the participants.....	24
Situated structures.....	24
General structure.....	44

CHAPTER FIVE	Discussion.....	48
	Limitations of the study.....	48
	The healing themes.....	48
	Relevance of these results to helping.....	54
REFERENCES.....		60
APPENDICES.....		63
	Appendix A: The interviews.....	63
	Appendix B: Summaries sent to the Participants.....	103
	Appendix C: Ethics Approval.....	109
	Appendix D: Recruitment Advertisement.....	110

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Themes from the participant's Situated Structures that have commonality among the participants.....	44
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my five courageous co-researchers. Without their courage, both during their wilderness experiences and while sharing their stories with a stranger, we could not have performed this piece of research. Thank you.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The healing benefits of wilderness exposure have been documented for many decades. Wilderness therapy programs designed to take advantage of these benefits have been in existence for over a century, though the most famous one, Outward Bound, has only been prominent since the 1950's. Wilderness therapy has been used with a number of at-risk populations including: people with serious and persistent mental illness, adolescent gang members, adolescent sexual offenders, adolescent alcohol/drug users, adolescents on probation, adult female survivors of sexual abuse, war veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, and has even been used for marital therapy.

The content of wilderness therapy programs can vary greatly but all include some outdoors adventure-type activity in a natural environment. This may be a series of daily outings into wild places, a week long series of adventure activities such as rock-climbing and kayaking or even three week long hiking/kayaking expeditions.

Most of the published research to date has been quantitative in nature generally using a pre/post test type format with control groups. These outcome studies are predominately focused on the measurement of constructs such as self-esteem/efficacy, locus of control, and social interactions or on the measurement of recidivism rates (either re-offending or relapsing). The majority of these reports indicate some positive effects of wilderness therapy on the constructs studied with the effects lasting for up to one year. A number of meta-analyses have also been published which confirm these effects over a broad range of studies.

While the improvement of self efficacy/esteem is undoubtedly an important part of the therapeutic process of wilderness therapy, the limited number of qualitative studies published, the myriad informal case studies that abound and my own experiences of healing in the wilderness suggest that there is some deeper healing process that goes beyond simple skills acquisition, and that this process is the result of an interaction with "Nature" at a fundamental level.

The purpose of this study was to attempt to help fill that gap in the research and explore the phenomenon of wilderness healing from the perspective of those who feel that they have actually experienced healing and thus gain an idea of what these other processes might be. Illumination of these processes, while interesting in its own right,

would also allow application of this knowledge to wilderness therapy programs thus hopefully increasing their efficacy.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The healing effects of the wilderness.

An introduction to the wilderness.

Canada has no legal definition of wilderness. For the purposes of this study I will consider a definition of wilderness that is close to that used in the American Wilderness Act (US Congress, 1964).

"...an area where earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain... retaining its primeval character and influence without permanent improvements or human habitation... with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable... has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation."

That is, a wilderness area is one in which there are no roads, where the natural ecology is still mostly intact and, most importantly, where the influences of industrialized society are not just around the corner.

It is important to realize that all of these criteria are socially constructed illusions. For example, most ocean kayakers consider a large part of Canada's west coast to be a wilderness, somewhere where they can get more in tune with nature's rhythms, yet this area has supported civilizations for millennia. This is true for most of the "wilderness" areas of North America. Many people carry high-tech communication devices so that if they get into trouble they might be able to call in a rescue. Almost all modern wilderness travelers carry equipment made of high-tech materials: nylon tents, metal pots, breathable waterproof jackets, petroleum-based fuels. Yet for many this list of equipment made by our modern society, the very thing many of us are trying to escape, hardly diminishes our wilderness experience.

The important factor seems to be that the participant feels they are in an area where nature is the most dominant force and that they must rely more on their own cognizance to survive rather than on society's physical constructs and safety nets.

Wilderness as a healing place.

When we talk about healing in the context of wilderness we are not referring to a process that deals just with our physical selves but that is holistic in nature and thus involves our physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions. This concept of healing has been present in the lay literature for centuries. It was a common theme in the works of John Muir (Miles, 1987) with quotes such as:

"cares will drop off like autumn leaves"

and:

"The galling harness of civilization drops off, and the wounds are healed ere we are aware."

Henry David Thoreau also felt that the wilderness was an antidote to the woes of civilization and describes his experience of living there in his book "Walden" (Thoreau, 1854). For me one quote describes it all:

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

Since that time the theme of finding some healing in the wilderness, in the holistic sense, has been a common theme in the lay literature but little has been done in terms of researching what the process of that healing involves. Some of that work is described in the following sections.

Research on the psychological benefits of wilderness exposure.

One of the longest studies on the effects of wilderness exposure was that conducted by the Kaplans in the 1970's and early 1980's using the "Outdoor Challenge Program" in Michigan (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989). The one hundred and seventy six participants in this study were high school students or adults from Upper Michigan, some of whom participated in the program and some of whom acted as controls. Participants were required to complete questionnaires before, during, and after the program as well as keep journals during the program. The program centred around a prolonged wilderness hike of up to two weeks in duration which included a forty-eight hour solo period. Results from the first few year's studies showed that the participants had higher levels of woodmanship skills than control groups (not surprisingly) as well as either higher levels of self-esteem or no apparent change. One interesting finding was that when asked if there was something about themselves that they would like to change, the participants mentioned physical changes significantly less often than control groups.

After the first few years the researchers focused their research question to try and figure out what made people feel more at home in this wilderness area. To this end they composed questionnaires to track five constructs over the course of the experience. These constructs were: how well they felt they knew different aspects of the setting; how much certain physical characteristics helped provide a sense of place; how much these characteristics were confusing; possible sources of worry; how much certain things contributed to being comfortable. Participants were required to fill out these questionnaires at different time points during the program.

The items in the knowing the setting questionnaire (layout of the land, other group members, plants and wildlife, water and food sources, compass, map) all showed significant increases with time. Of the sense of place items (stars and sky, islands, rock formations, ravines, roads, hills, streams, lakes, trails and swamps) only the last two showed an increase over the duration of the trip. However, swamps remained one of the most confusing items, along with hills and ravines, while islands and lakes became the least confusing. Of all the worry items (away from home, animals, getting sick, being alone, getting hurt, sore and tired, solo, getting lost, weather, and bugs) only the away from home score increased over the duration though it was by far the lowest score

at any point. All of the other worries tended to decrease with time with the weather ending up as the highest followed by solo, bugs and getting hurt. There were few changes in the constructs measured in the sources of comfort questionnaire, but the highest two scores were: peace and quiet of the woods; and feeling that nothing is in a big hurry.

While some aspects of the "Outdoor Challenge Program" have changed over time one thing that was always included was the forty-eight hour solo period. Initially this was very survival oriented as participants were given minimal equipment and no food. However, they found that this led to a predominance of thought about "making it" rather than to reflection so in later years they supplied a sleeping bag and minimal food. Comments from the participants about the solo included "being in tune with nature" and "thinking about the future and what's really important. Adults seemed to get more benefit from the experience than students, with the male students tending to find it more boring, less comfortable, and more worrisome than the other groups. The authors note that while many people, unsurprisingly, found the solo difficult (few of us are ever alone without modern distractions) what was more surprising was that the effects were so positive (from the concept of having "made it" to the sense of connectedness to nature and the chance for reflection).

In their conclusion, Kaplan and Kaplan state that the initial studies showed positive changes in self-esteem as a result of participating in the program but go on to say that the subsequent studies indicated that effects of the program were multidimensional. One of these dimensions was the simplicity of the backpacking experience, which led many participants to experience a "wholeness" or "oneness". Another dimension was that of self-discovery which varied from individual to individual. They also noted their surprise at the depth of the spiritual changes that could occur, comparing them to Thoreau's thoughts, but noting that the participants had a much shorter experience, in a different context and with a less intellectual outlook than Thoreau.

In an attempt to better understand the effects of the environment that may lead to an increase in spirituality as a result of wilderness experiences Fredrickson and Anderson (1999) conducted a qualitative study of twelve women who participated in two different, all-women, wilderness expeditions. The principal investigator accompanied the women on the expeditions and took extensive field notes. The participants also kept

journals. Analysis of the field notes and journals allowed the researchers to develop a general interview guide that they used in subsequent interviews with the participants. The interviews were analyzed using the "constant comparison method" to look for commonalities and distinctions between the data.

The researchers were working from the supposition that a "sense of place" bestows meaning on an individual and wanted to test whether an increase in spirituality was due to sharing personal thoughts with a group or from being in the wilderness (or both) and whether these meaningful experiences could be carried "off-site". As the researchers were also interested in discovering if the actual place makes a difference they used two groups of women, one group (of five) that went on a week-long canoe trip to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in northern Minnesota (a very green and biotically abundant place), and another group (of seven) that went backpacking across the inner plateau of the Grand Canyon for a week (a predominantly red and biotically sparse place).

Both trips were commercial trips run by Woodswomen, Inc. The trips were beginner level trips requiring no previous experience. Both trips were women only, thus allowing the participants to operate outside of the usual sex-role stereotypes resulting in increased bonding and self-exploration. The participants were also more inclined to explore the contemplative aspects of wilderness travel rather than focusing on skills acquisition thus making them ideal for this kind of research.

Analysis of the field observations indicated that most of the women seemed to experience a profound effect and this was reflected in the journals where the women commented on such things as: the benefits of all women trips; the level of support they received, the experience of some fear but mostly how peaceful it was; a sense of being whole; a sense of being "in-tune"; and a feeling of being enraptured. These results lead to the construction of the two questions that were used in the interviews: "Please recall the most meaningful aspects of your trip, and describe in as much detail as possible what actually occurred." and "Could you give me a brief description of the word spiritual as you understand and define it for yourself, as well as the word spirituality." Not surprisingly, analysis of the interview data showed a good deal of overlap between the answers to the two questions. However, two main themes did appear.

The first of these was the importance of being in an all women's group. This included the sub-themes of: Group trust and emotional safety, sharing common life

changes, and the noncompetitive atmosphere. This seemed to lead to the commonly held feeling that there was virtually no reason to be anyone but themselves.

"I think that the acceptance I felt overall from the other women played a major part in my experience because I was made to feel so comfortable early on. I think that had a lot to do with why I felt so clear and spiritually tuned-in the rest of the trip."

The other main theme was the importance of being in *bone fide* wilderness. This also contained a number of sub-themes:

Direct contact with nature: For many of the women this was their first experience of vast wilderness and many of them experienced a great sense of freedom and release just being there.

"I remember the way the moon rose up over the canyon wall and then cast shadows over the entire canyon floor. I loved just lying there and staring up at the stars...and being filled with this sense of infinitude."

Periods of solitude: Many of the women found that during periods of solitude they were able to contemplate some of life's deep questions and find a sense of rejuvenation. They also seemed to indicate that being in the wilderness was better for this than just being in nature close to home as it allowed a heightened sensory awareness, something that many of the women equated with being "spiritual".

"I felt more connected to myself and even to the other people on the trip after I took these momentary periods of solitude. The water and the trees became more beautiful when I was able to go off by myself and just sit, perched on a rock away from the rest of the group. Not that I didn't like the other women and all, it's just that when being alone is when I found my centre."

Inherent physical challenge: Both these trips were physically challenging and these enabled many of the participants a chance to re-experience their physicality and many

of them were empowered by the experience. Many of the women also equated being in touch with their bodies as part of being "spiritual".

"So it was a real survival thing for me. I cried a few times and just had to stop, and didn't know if I could go on. But the feeling when I finally reached the top was overwhelming! I mean, to know that I had succeeded was so empowering"

"I got the flame burning inside me again, and it's burning bright."

With regard to the question of spirituality, most of the participants related "spiritual" to "meaningful" and both locations were able to foster these feelings in the participants through a combination of physical qualities and group interactions. In general the participants felt that "spiritual" was getting in touch with something that was larger than themselves and that the wilderness was an ideal location in which to do this.

"I felt a complete merging with the surrounding environment. Instead of sitting back and observing it, it's like I was moving into it in some way, or rather it was moving into me. I couldn't deny its effect on me. I suppose what I was experiencing was transcendence, losing myself in my surroundings. It was expansive and at first I was afraid and then deeply comforted and filled with a sense of complete peace."

Andrews (Andrews, 1999) attempts to place the experiences of wilderness expeditions in an anthropological context. In particular he places them in the category of "rites of passage". In the introduction he expands on this concept citing works from the literature. He describes Arnold van Gennep's original idea that a rite of passage contains three phases: Separation from normal society; Transition, in which the participants experience different norms, usually in an intense manner; and Aggregation, where the participants re-enter society in a different state of being. van Gennep also calls these phases pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal (from the latin, Limen, meaning threshold).

Andrews then describes the work of Victor Turner in this area, with his emphasis being more on personal transformation than shifting social status and introduces the phrase "inwardly transformed and outwardly changed" which he uses as a focus for the rest of his work.

This introduction provides a good conceptual framework for the analysis of liminal experiences during wilderness expeditions, however it quotes only two authors thus possibly providing a somewhat limited view of the concepts involved. The author also does not place his study within any particular qualitative research tradition leaving the reader to decide whether it is an ethnography (most likely) or possibly a phenomenology.

In the analysis section Andrews briefly describes some of the "rituals" that occur on wilderness expeditions, and the meaning that he ascribes to them. These include the "weather check", a crack of dawn gathering to assess the weather, a ritual that he feels symbolizes a conscious effort to connect with the real world. Another ritual was "the circle" a format for group discussion that came to symbolize communication, equality, inclusion, affirmation, commitment, and community. He then goes on to explore the three main dimensions of liminality (as described by Turner): Sense of community, Sense of self, and sense of place. It is here that he supports these constructs with the words of expedition participants:

Sense of community:

"Out here you hang out with people you'd never hang out with at school. They'd belong to a different clique. Out here, what you wear, how you do in school, whether or not you're into drugs- none of that matters. There are no drugs, you all eat the same food, you all have to wear the same type of clothing for survival..."

Sense of self:

"For the first time in a long time, I had no role. I was nobody's wife and nobody's mother. I was nobody's boss and nobody's employee. I was just me. Being no one meant I could be anyone."

Sense of place:

"What I get from being here, having the mud squelch around my boots, seeing bears and hearing waterfalls, is some intuition of the wilderness within me-that dark unknowable, percolating beneath all the layers which education, culture, society have built up. Somewhere in me I have dimly lit forests, creeks, mud flats, bears, and wolves that I'll never completely know..."

He also goes on to provide supporting statements for some of Turner's minor dimensions (camaraderie, sacredness, humility, simplicity, nakedness, and an altered sense of time).

The participant's statements are well chosen and make interesting reading as well as illuminating the human side of the concepts of liminality. There is however no description of how these particular statements are chosen or how representative they are of all the statements collected. There is certainly no indication of any breakdown of the statements into conceptual categories as one might expect in a phenomenology.

Andrews concludes that the wilderness expedition functions as a personal rite of passage. He includes several quotes from participants that demonstrate significant changes to their lives as a result of the experiences of liminality (indeed many of the quotes in the previous sections also point to profound personal changes) and mentions that many participants have felt lasting changes as a result of these experiences.

"The trip was made up of a thousand tiny parts which didn't seem to add up to anything, but somehow changed my entire world. It's been like a domino effect. I am trying out for soccer and basketball. I started taking guitar lessons. I smile at my reflection in the mirror. I've had an incredible year and it was all started by the feelings I experienced on the trip."

"My life has changed a lot since Alaska. I've grown a lot and realized that I don't need drugs to fit in or be liked by people. I smoke pot now and then because I want to, but not so often and not because I need to anymore. I realized that the life I was leading wasn't what I wanted for myself and the

person I was (if that makes any sense). I can't really explain what it was about the experience that changed my life, but I know that it did. I am a much stronger person now than I was then."

While this paper certainly provides evidence for the important concept that wilderness expeditions do function as personal rites of passage for many of their participants, the lack of methodological information leaves much to be desired. Without this description it is impossible to replicate the study or know if the method is appropriate. No indication is given of how the sample was selected or what the demographics of the samples were and thus the generalizability of the results is severely limited. Also, while the study describes the concept of liminality during wilderness experience it does not attempt to describe the psychological processes underlying the changes experienced by the participants.

Wilderness therapy.

An introduction to Wilderness Therapy.

The healing benefits of wilderness exposure have been documented for many decades (Thoreau, 1854; Muir, 1911). Wilderness programs designed to take advantage of these benefits have been in existence for over a century, though the most famous one, Outward Bound, has only been prominent since the 1950's (Davis-Berman and Berman, 1994). Wilderness therapy has been used with a number of at-risk populations including: people with serious and persistent mental illness (Kelley, Coursey, and Selby, 1997), adolescent gang members (Harris, Fried, and Arana, 1995), adolescent sexual offenders (Lambie *et al*, 2000), adolescent alcohol/drug users (McPeake, Kennedy, Grossman, and Beaulieu, 1991), adolescents on probation (Castellano and Soderstrom 1992), adult female survivors of sexual abuse (Levine, 1994), war veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (Ragsdale, Cox, Finn, and Eisler, 1996) and even marital therapy (Hickmon, Protinsky, and Singh, 1997).

Wilderness therapy is a branch of adventure therapy, a form of therapy that involves participants in a wide range of physical activities from multi-week expeditions to

“games” in an indoor setting and including activities such as kayaking, climbing and ropes courses. Many of the principles of adventure therapy are based in the field of experiential education and have been outlined by Gass (Gass, 1993, pp3-10). These are:

1. *“The client becomes a participant rather than a spectator in therapy.*
2. *Therapeutic activities require client motivation in the form of energy, involvement, and responsibility.*
3. *Therapeutic activities are real and meaningful in terms of natural consequences for the client.*
4. *Reflection is a critical element of the therapeutic process.*
5. *Functional change must have present as well as future relevance for clients and their society.”*

Gass then describes seven rationales which underpin most of the adventure therapy programs in North America:

1. Action-centred therapy: During adventure therapy the clients are required (by the nature of the activities) to demonstrate their behaviours in addition to talking about them in an office. This allows both the client and therapist a more concrete example of how the client behaves both in terms of individual behaviour as well as interactions with other clients.
2. Unfamiliar environment: Taking clients out of familiar environments and placing them in new situations can have three advantages. It provides the client with an environment in which they possess few expectations and in which it is safe for them to explore problems. Also it often places them in a simplified environment which can limit the number of complicating side issues. Thirdly it provides a contrasting environment which may allow for a new perspective on their usual environment.
3. Climate of change: Adventure therapy uses the application of eustress to induce a state of adaptive dissonance. In this state the application of old, un-adaptive, behaviours has clear, real, neutral, consequences that are a reflection of those behaviours. This neutral feedback can then encourage the exploration of new, more adaptive, behaviours.

4. **Assessment capabilities:** Adventure therapy activities allow for the client to exhibit a range of behaviours. Careful observation of these behaviours gives the therapist a large amount of information with which to work.
5. **Small-group development/Genuine community:** Activities are often designed to induce discord within the group of participants that then requires positive group interaction to resolve.
6. **Focus on successful rather than dysfunctional behaviors:** As a result of focusing on the clients successes during the activities rather than on their history of failures the client is challenged to stretch their preconceived limits and client resistance can be avoided.
7. **Changes in role of therapist:** In adventure therapy the role of the therapist becomes more active as they design various challenges. The therapist also becomes more approachable as they share physical challenges with the clients.

While wilderness therapy is certainly a form of adventure therapy its focus is more on getting the participants immersed in a wilderness experience. While in the wilderness the participants may be involved in many adventure therapy type activities, but "nature" is always seen as an integral part of those experiences. This demarcation may be more two poles of a spectrum rather than two discrete groups.

Quantitative research on wilderness therapy programs.

Most of the published research to date has been quantitative in nature generally using a pre/post test type format with control groups. These outcome studies are predominately focused on the measurement of constructs such as self-esteem/efficacy, locus of control, and social interactions , or on the measurement of recidivism rates (either re-offending or relapsing).

Herbert (1998) describes the benefits of an adventure program on the self-esteem and locus of control of a group of thirty-six persons with severe disabilities from supported employment disability programs in Pennsylvania. The disabilities included schizophrenia, moderate mental retardation, personality disorders, and orthopedic disabilities. The constructs under investigation were measured with the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventories and the Internal Locus of Control Scale.

The instruments were applied before the program, immediately after the program and at three and twelve months post-program. The tests were also applied to a no-program control group (membership of control or program groups was randomly assigned from the test population). Records of the participant's work attendance were also obtained.

The program consisted of an initial stage during which the participants engaged in activities such as rock climbing, canoeing and ropes courses followed by a four day backpacking trip into the wilderness.

The results showed that the persons in the adventure therapy group showed increases in self-esteem that lasted for at least one year and similar changes in locus of control. There was no difference in the mean number of hours worked between the two groups, however one person in the test group was laid-up for two months as a result of surgery and another member was temporarily laid-off due to lack of work.

A report by Lambie, Hickling, Seymour, Simmonds, Robson, and Houlahan (2000) studied the effects of including an adventure component to a treatment program for adolescent sexual offenders in New Zealand. While there was no control group the study did show profound changes in the attitudes, behaviours, and re-offending rates of the participants. However, the main component of the program was an intensive series of psychodrama based interventions and it was suggested that the adventure component served mostly to increase self-esteem and group bonding thus allowing the youths to more easily participate in the emotionally difficult psychodrama work. It was also noted that before the introduction of the adventure component attendance was poor, therefore one might, cynically, suggest that the inclusion of enjoyable adventure activities had its major effect by giving the youth more incentive to attend.

In their 1992 report, Castellano and Soderstrom attempt to determine the effects of wilderness programs on juvenile recidivism rates. They looked at the recidivism rates for thirty-six delinquent youth from Illinois who took part in the "Spectrum" program. This is a thirty day program centred in Carbondale, Colorado. It involves a preliminary skills learning component followed by a two week expedition into a wilderness area. Towards the end of the expedition the youth have a three day solo experience which is believed to allow the youth to reflect on their successes and failures of the past thirty days. Recidivism rates of the test group were compared to a control group of youth

from the same probation department who matched the test group in demographic make-up.

The results were by no means stunning. Indeed, there seemed to be little change in the rate of arrests of the participants compared to the control group (though it should be noted that the participants had a higher initial rate of offending than the controls). There was however a decrease in the seriousness of the offences committed after the program compared to those committed before the program and in the control group. These effects were no longer apparent two years after participation in the program.

A number of meta-analyses have also been published (Wilson and Lipsey, 2000; Hans, 2000) which confirm the effects of wilderness/adventure programs over a broad range of studies.

Qualitative research on wilderness therapy.

There is little in the way of published qualitative research on the effects of wilderness therapy programs. In the only paper of note Russell and Miller attempted to shed some light on this question by examining the experience of a total of twelve participants from four wilderness programs (Russell and Miller, 2002). The researchers spent seven to ten days at each of the programs as participant-observers, observing the process of the randomly chosen clients, and interviewing them and the involved staff. The parents of the clients were also interviewed after the wilderness program had been completed.

Four themes emerged on how the wilderness therapy process helped effect change:

Relationship established with counsellors and leaders: Clients felt that the "staff" were more approachable than "normal" counsellors and the rapport that developed helped to remove some of the stigma associated with counselling and allowed the clients to just "sit and talk". The clients also felt that it was helpful when the counsellors used the wilderness to "provide metaphors relating to personal issues".

Peer dynamics: Clients reported that they felt more willing to talk about their experiences in group settings than they had been in other therapy settings and that the honest feedback they received was helpful and important.

Facilitated reflection on life through use of solo: Clients reported that this experience allowed them to gain a different perspective on their problems. This was due to this often being the first time that many of the clients had ever spent time alone, which now gave them time to think (especially as there is little else to do). Another important part of the solo experience was the way that it was framed by the staff beforehand, and debriefed afterwards.

Challenge and structure of the process: An important part of the process seemed to be the physical challenge of wilderness therapy. Clients mentioned needing to be uncomfortable to change, thus the adversity and challenge of hiking and camping was important. Clients also mentioned the self-confidence that emerges from completing the program.

The benefits that the clients mentioned could be divided into three themes:

A desire to change behaviour: Clients felt that participation in the program led them to a greater awareness of their behaviours and feelings and a desire to change them. There was a focus on improving their relationships with their families.

A desire for abstinence from substance use: The researchers reported that there was a lot of talk about this issue from clients who had been involved in this behaviour but they wondered whether this would translate into action. The researchers stressed the importance of follow-up counselling.

A desire to be a "better person": Clients reported that they wanted to achieve goals such as "respect others", be a "positive role model" be "open-minded" and "help out family more".

No follow-up research has been reported so it is not possible to know which of these desired changes has been achieved and maintained or which of the reported themes were helpful in maintaining the changes.

The Existential point of view.

Existential psychotherapy is a humanist approach. As such it views the human being in a positive light, believing that we have the innate ability to do "good" and live fruitful and meaningful lives. It also views the person holistically. That is, the person is a whole entity not just a series of drives and psychological constructs such as "id" and

"ego", that the behaviour of the person has a purpose as well as an origin, and, most importantly, that the person has the ability to take responsibility for that behaviour and can thus choose to change it. This ties into another important concept, that existential psychotherapy views the person as "being" in the present, and that as a "dynamic" entity (in the psychodynamic understanding of the term) the person is able to transcend both the past and the present to reach the future.

Within this context one of the major motivations of human behaviour is the formation of meaningful relationships, with other people, with the world, and with oneself. These motivations can be seen in the three existential modes of the person's world (May & Yalom, 1995): *Umwelt*, *Mitwelt*, and *Eigenwelt*. *Umwelt* ("world around") refers to the natural world around us and includes all of our biological needs and realities, including death. *Mitwelt* ("with-world") refers to our relationships with the people around us. *Eigenwelt* means "own-world" and presupposes self-awareness and self-relatedness.

Another core motivation for humans is the reduction of anxiety. This is a central area of existential psychotherapeutic theory and the one that differs from most traditional psychodynamic theories. One of the key differences is that in existential psychotherapy some anxiety is seen as not only an inevitable part of living but is also viewed as a positive experience that can foster growth. Existential psychotherapists distinguish between two forms of anxiety, normal and neurotic. Normal anxiety is proportionate to the situation, it does not require repression as we can come to terms with it, and it can be used creatively to find a solution to whatever situation caused it. Neurotic anxiety is not appropriate to the situation (it is an exaggeration), it is repressed (it is indeed often created by the continual repression of normal anxiety), and it is destructive rather than creative, tending to paralyze the person.

It is in the source of these anxieties and their role in forming the personality of the individual that existential psychotherapy differs most from other psychodynamic theories. Rather than viewing the basic conflict as between the ego and instinctual drives or with important adults in the individual's early life, existential psychotherapy postulates that the conflict is between the individual and the "givens" of existence. These "givens", or "ultimate concerns" which are "easily" discovered upon deep reflection are Death, Freedom, Isolation, and Meaninglessness (Yalom, 1981).

Death: The knowledge of death, that is, the finiteness of life, is what drives us to engage in life and to be productive and balanced (however we wish to define those constructs).

Freedom: If we accept that an individual is essentially free to make choices then it follows that the individual is responsible for the choices they make. Thus the decision to change (if only an attitude) ultimately rests with the individual. Recognition of this fact allows the individual to be authentic in their life by being conscious of their decisions.

Isolation: The knowledge that we are ultimately alone, that no one else can share our experience of life allows us to become autonomous, self-reliant individuals who are then able to form meaningful relationships with other individuals. Failure to face this ultimate isolation drives us to merge with others, thus losing our independence.

Meaninglessness: Human beings are driven by meaning, yet we live in a universe devoid of any obvious meaning. We deal with this by finding our own meanings in the way we live our lives. Failure to do so leads to great distress and is a common cause of suicide. Meaning is most often derived from the sense of being part of something larger than one's self, rather than from self-gratification which frequently leads to a continued sense of meaninglessness.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The research question.

The question that is driving this research project is:

What are the processes involved in the perceived healing of self that can occur as a result of exposure to the wilderness?

As can be seen in Chapter Two there are many studies that analyze the changes that occur in the individual as a result of various wilderness programs or experiences. While some of these studies assume that changes in the construct studied result in an improvement in psychological health none of them address this issue directly. In an attempt to gain access to these healing processes I examined the experiences of individuals who felt that they had obtained healing as a result of their exposure to the wilderness.

Participants.

For the purposes of this study I used an opportunistic sample of individuals who felt that they had derived some therapeutic benefit (for whatever symptoms) from exposure to the wilderness. The term therapeutic was taken to mean a perceived sense of healing, either recovery from an inflicted emotional wound or the removal of a developmental block. Exposure to wilderness was taken to mean either participation in a prolonged (more than seven days), organized wilderness program such as Outward Bound, participation in one or more commercial wilderness expeditions, prolonged self-organized wilderness expeditions eg. hiking or kayaking trips, or short-term excursions into natural areas. None of the examined experiences involved motorized transportation except at the beginning or end of the trip.

These co-researchers participated in one-on-one in-depth interviews with myself in which they were asked to describe in as much detail as possible their experiences of healing as a result of wilderness exposure.

Brief description of the participants.

The five participants who were chosen all lived in the Lower Mainland. The participants were high functioning Caucasian adults in their thirties or forties. As well as having obtained some healing benefits from exposure to the wilderness, they were able not only to describe their experiences in depth but also to equate those experiences with the perceived process of healing that occurred for them. Participant 1 responded to an advertisement in the local ocean kayaking magazine "Wavelength" and was unknown to me prior to his interviews. Participant 2 responded to a request that I made at a meeting of the British Columbia Ocean Kayaking Association and was unknown to me prior to his interview. Participant 3 responded to a suggestion by a work colleague of mine and was also unknown to me prior to her interview. Participant 4 was a colleague of mine who approached me after hearing about my research project. Participant 5 responded to an advertisement at the Outside Edge Climbing Gym in North Vancouver as was known to me before the research project started.

Procedure.

In order to gain an understanding of the meaning of the participant's experiences, to access the essence of the lived experience, I used a phenomenological approach.

The concept of phenomenology as a method of rigorous qualitative inquiry was initially developed by Husserl, linked to the existential movement by Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, and developed into a psychological research tradition by the Duquesne group (see von Eckartsberg, 1998 for a detailed description of this history). Key concepts in phenomenology are; viewing the subjects as valued individuals with their own, unique, lived-world experiences; the suspension of the researchers personal biases during the interviews and data analysis; the careful examination of the data to determine the meanings inherent in the experiences; the comparison of the data from a number of participants in order to find the invariant core structure, the essence of the phenomenon.

The interview protocol was open-ended and non-directive. Before the co-researchers arrived they were informed as to the purpose and structure of the research

project which gave them an opportunity to decline to participate before they invested much time. At this time the participants were also given an idea of the exact area of interest and the questions that may be asked. At the commencement of the interviews the participants were informed of their right to decline to participate at any time during the process as well as their right to "pass" on any questions asked. They were also informed as to the extents of confidentiality. Before the interview proper commenced the co-researchers were required to sign an informed consent form confirming that they had been informed as to the purpose of the study and their various rights.

The question asked at the commencement of the interviews was:

"Can you tell me what it was about your wilderness experiences that you found to be healing and how it was healing?"

Follow-up questions were framed to allow the participants to expand on their statements as necessary and included, for example:

"What is it that you mean by "healing"?"

"Can you tell me more about the actual process of healing as facilitated by your wilderness experiences?"

"What set apart the wilderness healing process from other aspects of healing?"

The interviews were recorded digitally and then transcribed. Once they had been transcribed they were given to the participants, along with a short summary statement describing their experience, with the request that they check them to ensure that they did indeed represent their experience. Before data analysis commenced I attempted to bracket my own personal biases and experiences through a process of written self-examination thus allowing, as much as possible, for the co-researchers' own experiences to be described. The data was then analyzed using a slight modification of Karlsson's five step protocol for producing a phenomenological reduction (Karlsson, 1993).

During and after the study the interview files were kept in a secure location and no identifying names were kept with the transcribed or analyzed data in either print or computerized form.

Analysis.

The data was analyzed using a slight modification of Karlsson's five step protocol for producing a phenomenological reduction (Karlsson, 1993). This involved the following procedure:

1. Immersion in the data through careful and repeated reading until a sufficient level of understanding and familiarity was achieved.
2. Division of the text into "meaning units", that is, smaller units delineated by shifts in meaning.
3. The meaning units were separated into four broad categories, "Preceding conditions", "Experience", "Outcomes", and "Miscellaneous". The meaning units within each category were then analyzed for their inherent psychological meanings and further divided into themes. This was done on the basis of explicit statements relating to the theme and with a minimum of technical jargon in order to minimize the risk of situating the meanings within any pre-existing theory.
4. The meaning units were synthesized into a "situated structure". This involved situating the meaning units with similar inherent meanings into the co-researchers story.
5. A "general structure" was then determined through the comparison of the situated structures from all the co-researchers. This structure represented the essence of the phenomenon that are common to the situated structures.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Bracketing of self.

I am an epistemological relativist but an ontological positivist. That is, I believe how we interpret reality depends on where we stand, but that reality is what it is, independent of how we interpret it. A tree does not need a human observer to make wave-like movements of air molecules when it falls down. In terms of psychology I am aligned most strongly with the school of humanist psychology and existential psychology in particular. I have found great healing in natural areas and continue to do so on a regular basis. As a youth I gained much pleasure from hiking in England's green hills and fishing in its muddy waters. In Canada I learned to rock-climb and this greatly aided in my maturation. My most healing moments have come while kayaking on British Columbia's west coast in terms of developing a connection to the natural world that acted as an antidote to the ennui of living in a city and also in healing from great trauma.

Validation by the participants.

After each interview had been transcribed a copy was sent to the relevant participant along with a brief summary of their experience. The summary included a synopsis of their experience and the healing benefits that they gained and contained many of the themes that were made explicit by the analysis of the meaning units. Every participant confirmed that both the transcript and summary were accurate descriptions of their experience.

Situated structures.

The transcribed interviews were divided into meaning units. These meaning units were separated into large groups and then further divided into themes. The

themes were those that were explicitly stated by the participants. This was done to improve the objectivity of the analysis by bracketing the researcher. The situated structures are described below.

Situated structure; Participant 1.

History.

The participant reported that he was suffering from a variety of grief reactions following the suicide of his mother:

"I was numb, really numb with grief."

"I had punched holes in a couple of walls, that kind of thing."

He stated that he had arrived at a point where he realized that this wasn't working well for him and that he needed to get away.

"So you are lying there writhing around in pain after you have done that and you are going "OK, something is not working here."

"I just needed to get away from everything."

Themes from the wilderness experience.

The participant decided to go on a kayaking trip around Nelson Island on the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia. At one point during this trip he had to swim out into a bay to rescue his kayak in the middle of the night.

"It was floating in this cove, being bounced around. So I just jumped in the water, and it was the middle of the night, about 2-3 in the morning, so I jumped in and swam out to the middle of this inlet thing got it and dragged it back"

The next day he got caught in some rough seas and came close to dying.

"Anyways, I knew I had to get out of there, by this point I was turning hypothermic because I was soaked and the cockpit of my boat was getting full of water, so I basically made the decision just to bail and I pulled my boat up on this reef which was probably only about three or four feet high and dragged my boat, scrapped it up the barnacles."

"I got out my sleeping bag and there was this little crevice that I wedged myself into where it was protected from the wind and I just sat there inside my sleeping bag shaking for probably a couple of hours."

A number of themes were apparent in his narrative and these are described below.

Removal from distractions:

The participant stated that getting away from the city and all the things he had to deal with there and all the distractions that are part of our society allowed him to start to face what he was dealing with.

"You don't have all these distractions. I didn't have my powers of being an executor and all that crap I had to deal with there. I didn't have a TV to distract me. I didn't have a phone or computer or whatever, so you are forced to deal with it"

Simplicity/Being in the moment:

The simplicity of the daily routine and the tasks involved allowed him to be more in the moment.

"It becomes very simple, you pull your boat up, what are you going to do? Well, shelter, food. It becomes easier to do what you need to do and that is all that matters. It's kind of like being in that moment."

"I think that at the time you are in the moment, you're just paddling and doing all this. Maybe it is the solitude where you can just let something in to process. I wasn't actually sitting there on purpose like sitting on a rock meditating trying to put things into place. It just washes over you without thinking."

Being out of his element:

The participant stated that being in an unfamiliar environment was helpful.

"That was a trip where I was totally out of my element. I was forced to deal with things, physically, emotionally, mentally, in all sorts of ways."

Cleansing:

Another theme from the early part of the trip was one of cleansing. The participant used that term in reference to having to swim and retrieve his boat.

"It was part of the experience too, call it cleansing if you want to use that analogy."

Facing mortality:

The participant recalled that while he was sheltering on the rock he came face-to-face with the reality of his mortality.

"You have to look into that mirror of death and you have to look inside it and see your reflection. And you have to make it real to realize that's not what you want."

"You can keep going, but when you look in that mirror close enough and your like "No I don't want to..., I've got other choices, I've got a reason to go on."

"There is this part of you that is pissed off and says "Fuck it, I don't care, whatever". And you realize at some point that you do care, that there is something... You are saying all these things like "I don't care" and "Nobody cares about me, nobody understands what I am going through" and the whole self-pity thing that you go through and you feel like "Throw it all away" or whatever because there is a part of you that just absolutely wants to crumble. To drink yourself away or whatever. Because it is pain and you want to get away from it. And there is a part of you that just wants to be unraveled, but you still have life that you have to deal with. Those moments when you are sitting there it's like "OK, I really don't want to be this messed up." After lying there all shaking and shivering and teeth chattering, and turning blue and... It's a wake-up call. It's one of those layers being torn off and getting back to who you are and saying "Hey, lets just deal with yourself." And yeah you are in pain and you are pissed off at the world, but not so pissed off that you don't want to go on. It is kind of a self-acceptance, you kind of appreciate what life has thrown you, but you realize at that moment that you want to be something different or something better, or something else and the only way you can do that is just look at that mirror that is presented to you and say "I don't want that."

A sense of something larger than self:

Another facet of the experience that the participant stated was helpful was the sense of connecting to something larger than himself.

"I think the biggest thing that I am struck by is how humbling, how humbled you can feel in nature. You think you are all, look at my new paddle, look at my kayak, and then you realize you're at the mercy of powers way stronger than you. I think in our lives we always try and seek out control, and I think that is part of it too, understanding and

realizing that when you are on the ocean, you are just a little cork out there and a big wave could come and all that type of thing, so I think you do realize that, it puts perspective on your life. And you realize that there is something so much broader, like you said, spiritual, about it. Just the forces that are out there, you are at nature's whim."

Outcomes.

The participant reported a number of outcomes as a result of his experience.

While on the trip the participant stated that he felt more engaged in life:

"It is like the conversation you can have with your self about "Your life is really mundane, you should come out here more often, because, look at you, you are happy and you're engaged in life and you are not mad or angry.""

He also stated that the experience with "the mirror of death" caused him to take a good look at himself and where he wanted to go:

"This trip I did, it was an awakening, being forced to look at my self, at what had happened, where I want to go, what I want to do, and I don't think I would have thought so profoundly about it if I hadn't gone on that trip."

The participant stated that a key outcome was the acceptance of pain:

"And I think that that is what I did, probably, on that trip. To just accept that it is OK to be in pain."

The participant stated that as a result of the experience he felt that he was alive again:

"After that whole experience I went to the pub there, 'The Back Eddy' in Egmont, and, and I just felt alive, I felt alive. I felt alive for the first time in months, because I had done something that was mine."

The participant also stated that he felt connected with people again which enabled him to move further forward in his recovery from grief:

"I just felt more connected with people, not because of the people that were there but because I was more connected with myself and I didn't have those walls. It was like I'm talking about it now, it doesn't hurt you can talk about it and it doesn't make you well up, because you have thought about it you have processed it. So that experience enabled

me to deal with it on a number of levels. It's not like I just came back and everything was fine, that wasn't the case, but for me it was a breakthrough. That was a breakthrough where... I think it was after that that I hooked up with the group for suicide survivors and I probably would have avoided that before, but everything was more in place with me and I felt like I could talk about it... I felt more excited about life, and instead of just dwelling you could kind of put a line there where in the past I would just been dwelling but now I was more forward looking, like, lets just get on with this life thing."

Situated structure; Participant 2.

History.

The participant reported that he suffered from depression as a result of having grown up in an abusive environment. He stated that one way in which he dealt with his depression was to go on trips into wilderness areas.

"I grew up in a pretty rough family environment, my father was an alcoholic and abusive as well. That resulted in me having to deal with a whole bunch of issues throughout my life."

"But because I was in that really depressed state I just wanted to get away again and again."

Themes from the wilderness experience.

The participant described his experiences in general and focused on a couple of experiences in particular, one of which was an extended field trip to the Yukon and the other was a kayaking trip to the Haida Gwaii. The following themes were apparent in his narrative:

Decrease in stimulation.

The participant stated that it was calming to get away from the stimulation and stress of city life:

"So I find it a very calming experience."

"I can get away from all the noise and the stress and the TV and the news and the telephone ringing."

"In a very literal way just cutting off all the input from other people, from the business that I was running, from relationships, from everything that was very, very hard for me to cope with."

Getting into a natural rhythm/gaining control.

The participant stated that getting away from the city's stressors allowed him to get into a natural rhythm and feel some sense of control:

"and kind of reset my clock to a more natural rhythm."

"As I was saying, you get into these natural rhythms and start to mellow out and a lot of things just take care of themselves."

"The decisions you make are simple ones, it's about food, shelter, keeping warm."

"And that helped me when I went out into the bush because I kind of felt in control of things simply because there weren't that many things I had to control anymore, a lot of things tended to look after themselves."

Feeling safe.

Another part of his experience seemed to be a sense of safety, due to the lack of people around:

"But because of my upbringing it was a place of safety, because there were no people around."

Connection with nature/spirituality.

The participant stated that a large part of his present experience is a sense of connection with nature as something bigger than himself, which he sees as a spiritual experience. He stated that he didn't use to define it that way but can now see in retrospect that was part of his former experiences too:

"So for me, being in the wilderness is the closest I get to a spiritual experience that I've really ever had."

"For me its a place where I really feel, connected, part of a bigger picture."

"Now I see that spirituality in the present and I can look back past that divide, over that wall and see that, yeah, it was probably something I was feeling back there except that I wasn't recognizing it, or I wasn't conscious of it, or I didn't think of it in that kind of framework."

Dealing with mortality.

The participant stated that when he was in the wilderness he was a lot more aware of his mortality. This was both in a general way and also as the result of some specific incidents:

"When you're out in the wilderness especially when you are ocean kayaking, along this coast you are dealing with the North Pacific, and things are [such] in the ocean that if you are not careful it can do you in."

"And what happened was, that in addition to the conditions that were causing this clapotis, which was about three different sets of swells and their reflections, we had a Northwest wind coming in providing chop, but what made it really bad was that the current changed and the flood started flowing against us through this clapotis."

"I knew that if I got knocked over I was going to die."

Outcomes.

The participant reported a number of positive outcomes from his wilderness experiences.

An overarching theme was feeling less stressed and more human:

"I went there because it made me feel good, made me feel better about myself, I felt less stress, I felt more relaxed. I felt more human."

Another outcome was the development of meaningful relationships with his kayaking companions, something that he had found difficult to do back in the city:

"And I developed some quite strong friendships with those two people in particular."

"I hadn't made a whole lot of new, especially new men friends, male friends, during my adult years."

"There are some pretty strong bonds there that I thought wouldn't have happened except for the kayaking, or except for being out there in the wilderness."

"So when you go through an experience like that with one of your best buddies, I mean, we survived something that very few other kayakers have ever been confronted with, so it makes you feel pretty bonded, pretty tight with that other person."

Perhaps the most important outcome for this participant was that his wilderness experiences left him in a calm place which allowed him to deal with life back in the city for a while:

"I come back to a more peaceful and calm place."

"But I think the big value was that by being able to go out there I was able to get enough relief to keep me going."

"So I think I was healed by virtue of having those escapes but only on a very temporary basis."

"It worked quite well as a temporary fix. I would come back for a trip and I'd be more or less OK for a week or two."

It should be noted that these healing effects eventually stopped working and the participant found it necessary to undergo some intensive therapy to overcome his depression.

"I think the problems that I had psychologically from the way I was brought up were too deep and profound for me to have worked my way out of that permanently, in a real way, simply by going out into the wilderness."

"That was very scary, very frightening, when I knew that my refuge, going out to the wilderness, was longer doing what I wanted it to do."

Situated structure; Participant 3

History.

The participant reported that she had been suffering from depression as a result of some sexual abuse in her childhood. In the course of some therapy she had an opportunity to attend a "Women of Courage" program run by Outward Bound in Pemberton, British Columbia.

"I was going for individual counselling at North Shore Counselling Services to deal with a sexual abuse issue from childhood. I was experiencing some depression around that."

"About halfway through the 10 week group therapy she brought up this Outward Bound project. It was called "Women of Courage." It was an eight day program and it was fully funded and she asked if any of us would like to go."

Themes of the wilderness experience.

The participant described her experience during the "Women of Courage" program. The following themes were evident:

Bonding and sharing with group members.

The participant stated that a large part of the experience was being able to share with the other women in the group and also the support and encouragement that was received from them:

"Every night we had a round and we would all sit and talk and share our experience."

"We all really encouraged each other."

"I think it was the bonding experience with these other women. Not knowing them, and bonding with them, trusting them, being able to talk about your own experience, my own experience."

"I just remember that at the end we all had to say a little bit about each person, and it was really nice to hear the comments that people made about you, about your strength and things like that."

Removal from distractions.

The participant stated that a helpful aspect of being in the wilderness was being away from the distractions of daily life:

"It was just you, the wilderness, and these women you were with."

"You don't have the distractions that you do... I mean, I was coming from a husband and three children, a house and all the rest of it, and all those other influences, and here all that was taken away and you're free just to explore your feelings without dragging all that other stuff into play."

Facing and overcoming challenges.

A large part of the participant's experience was overcoming the various challenges that she was presented with during the course of the program and in particular overcoming her fears to successfully complete the "solo", a period of twenty four hours spent alone in the wilderness:

"It was quite an ordeal"

"Every day it was a new challenge."

"Part of that is the challenge of just actually being in the wilderness because you don't have any of the amenities."

"I really pushed myself a lot and felt good about doing it."

"I think one of the most helpful parts of the experience was... Every Outward Bound program you have to do a solo experience. We had to stay by ourselves for 24 hours."

"I think it was more the fear of the dark and the fear of getting eaten by a bear, and the fact that my tarp started leaking. It was more kind of dealing with that."

"For me there was a real sense of danger. I survived it."

"I knew from the beginning that that would be my biggest hurdle, the solo. So I guess that was the biggest accomplishment for me. Actually surviving the night, not getting eaten by anything. That was probably the most major hurdle that I accomplished."

Trust.

Another theme that the participant mentioned was trust, both of the people she was with and herself:

"When we got to the top we did this little Trust thing. You lay on the ground and made yourself really stiff and all the other women picked you up and raise you up over their heads. So you had to really trust them."

So it is like a trusting thing too. Trusting yourself and your ability to carry out this thing and actually survive and the people around you to actually be there for you."

"You are relying on yourself. You have to trust yourself that you can do these things."

A sense of freedom.

The participant also mentioned the concept of being free:

"You're free just to explore your feelings without dragging all that other stuff into play."

So you had to really trust them but it also felt like you were flying, like you were free."

"There were a lot of freeing kind of experiences, like rock climbing."

The importance of the lake.

When doing the solo the participant chose a site that reminded her of an image from a therapy session and which therefore had special significance for her:

"Later on I set up my little tarp and stuff and I was washing and I was sitting on this rock looking at the lake and then I realized it was kind of like during my hypnotherapy session. Here was this lake, and here I was by myself and it was all kind of coming together for me."

The participant quoted some material from the journal that she kept during the program:

"As I started to think about it more I remembered the rock that I had made in group that was shaped like a lake and was blue, and my going inside myself where a scared younger self would be sitting at the edge of a lake scared and crying. So now my spot seems very special to me."

Outcomes.

The participant described a number of positive effects from her experience, mostly as a result of an increase in self-confidence.

The participant stated that she felt like a new person:

"I felt like a totally new person. I felt totally changed because I had overcome all these challenges. Like rock climbing. Stuff that I never thought I would be able to do. It made me feel much stronger outside and inside."

The participant also stated that she felt empowered, with a new sense of inner strength:

"I felt really empowered by the whole thing. Facing a new challenge every day, overcoming it and feeling like I could do it. Even though it was tough, I did it anyway and survived."

"And I think like everything else that went along with that whole Outward Bound experience that gave me a lot of strength "Wow, I survived a night in the dark by myself. What could be worse than that?""

"It was just reinforcing that I had that strength within me, to deal with hurdles in my life."

The participant stated that she had made a lot of changes to her life that she felt would not have happened if she hadn't gone on the Outward Bound program. These included structural changes to her life as well as bringing the sexual abuse issue into the open:

"I pushed myself after that to do a lot of things that I never used to. I started running. I left a marriage of 20 something years. I decided to go back to school. I changed jobs. I honestly don't think I would've done a lot of those things if I hadn't done that Outward Bound program."

"I enjoy camping a lot more now too since I had my Outward Bound experience. I have taken up camping and things. I enjoy being outdoors."

"When I finished the Outward Bound program and the group was over, I actually confronted my brother, who was abusive to me as a child, and wrote letters to everybody in my family telling them about the abuse. It really gave me a lot of inner strength to do that. I don't know if that was coupled with the group therapy and the individual therapy but I don't think I would ever have got to that point as quickly if I hadn't done the Outward Bound program."

The participant stated that the depression that she had been experiencing was somewhat alleviated after her wilderness experience:

“and not so depressed, I had been going through some depression, I think my depression had lifted somewhat.”

Situated structure; Participant 4.

History.

The participant reported that she had suffered from depression since her teens but had started to seriously deal with it in the last few years. She also stated that she desired a “simple life”:

“I guess I have suffered from chronic depression since I was about 14.”

“Then for about the last two and a half years I have been seeing a clinical counsellor and taking medication.”

“I think that part of my depression is that my mind goes into overload and it needs to be stilled, you know? Or I need to reprogram it, is what I feel.”

“I have always wanted a simple life.”

Themes from the wilderness experience.

The participant described a variety of wilderness experiences but paid particular attention to a kayaking trip to Clayoquot Sound in British Columbia. Three themes were evident in her narrative.

Feeling part of/connecting to the Universe.

The participant stated that the most significant part of her experience in Clayoquot Sound was a sense of connection with the Universe that had been previously lacking:

“I think the first time that I really noticed a big effect on myself was when I did a three day trip with a friend of mine to Clayoquot Sound.”

"That whole experience really humbled me just in terms of my place in the Universe, I suppose, as part of Nature, and how small I was compared to everything else around me."

"But I do know that I felt a lot of peace, that joyful sort of feeling, that feeling of just being, just seeing myself as part of the Universe in a way that I hadn't seen myself before, or just being conscious of it perhaps."

The participant stated that it was a spiritual-type experience and that she felt humbled:

"I just felt humbled, but humbled in a good way."

"I wasn't looking to have an experience like that, looking to have a spiritual coming-to sort of thing. It just happened."

Simplicity.

Another large theme was the idea of simplicity, of only having to deal with the stuff that was necessary for daily survival, in contrast to life in the city:

"This last summer, in Alaska working, I just really got into catching fish in the morning then making a fire and smoking it all day and that being my sole purpose of the day was to cook my fish. I remembering saying to my co-worker "Wow, this is the best day I've had out here"."

"I just felt a lot of joy that day because it was just this simple, simple thing."

"Your whole goal of the day is to feed yourself, to clothe yourself, to keep yourself warm and dry, or to keep yourself out of the sun and hydrated, whatever it is. You are really taking care of your body and your basic needs."

"I noticed that a lot when I'm out on a trip, that it is OK to just sit still, to not do anything, or just go for walk or cook your food."

Danger.

The third theme was a sense of danger associated with these activities:

"But as I say that I'm also thinking that the decisions I make out there I could maybe lose my life or someone else's life..."

"I often think about "What if I slip and I fall ". If I slip and I fall and I break my leg or I hit my head, you are so far way, and that sort of thing..."

Outcomes.

A number of healing outcomes were apparent in the participant's narrative.

The participant felt that her sense of spirituality increased greatly as a result of her experience in Clayoquot Sound and that this left her feeling more peaceful:

"...really a good feeling of just being part of it all and just appreciating it all."

"And just like "Wow, there is something more powerful than myself out there.""

"Again I just felt humbled, but humbled in a good way."

"I do know that I felt a lot of peace, that joyful sort of feeling, that feeling of just being, just seeing myself as part of the Universe."

"And then after that I realized when I went out there I was starting to experience being outside in that sort of way and being more open to that side of my self which I think is for me a really positive thing."

As a result of this experience the participant felt that she had a better awareness of how her mental health could be altered by being in Nature:

"I definitely have been more conscious of the link that being outside has to do with my mental state."

The participant stated that she is now more able to allow herself to be quiet and peaceful and to find that simplicity that she desires:

"I noticed that a lot when I'm out on a trip, that it is OK to just sit still, to not do anything, or just go for walk or cook your food."

Situated structure; Participant 5

History.

The participant reported that he had lost a good friend through a misunderstanding and was feeling sad, detached, and withdrawn and that his thoughts

were spinning around and he was moping around. He also stated that he was having trouble sleeping and that he was feeling overwhelmed by city life:

"...because of a misunderstanding I had lost a good friend"

"...sad, and finding myself detached from things, withdrawn a bit, turning into myself. so my thoughts were spinning a around on it, just kind of moping around."

"I hadn't been sleeping so I was really tired."

"It felt a lot more like a bombardment, like it was too much. It was like I was becoming hypersensitive to everything around me."

Themes of the wilderness experience.

The participant described a healing experience that he had during a hike in the mountains of Vancouver's North Shore which involved a sensation of energy flowing through him from the trees to the ground. A number of themes were evident in the participant's narrative.

Pre-requisites for the experience.

The participant felt that there were a number of pre-requisite conditions that enabled the experience that included being open to external healing, having his barriers lowered which was aided by being short of sleep, and being in the present:

"I was trying to think very much about just letting myself not try to fix the problem in myself but sort of opening up to whatever healing might be there."

"I do remember that any time I have felt this there really is a sense of letting go. Letting go in terms of like, letting down boundaries or barriers."

"I hadn't been sleeping so I was really tired. That is one thing I find, when I'm tired I am much more receptive than when I am not tired. I think it is because my conscious barriers or my filters, what ever, aren't blocking stuff as much."

"It is possible to open up to all of what nature has to offer if I can be more in the present."

A flow of energy.

The central part of the participant's experience was the sensation of a flow of energy from the surrounding trees, through his body into the ground:

"I had been hiking for a few hours and at a certain point I realized I hadn't been thinking about anything for about five to 10 minutes where I had simply been walking, and as soon as I came to the awareness that I wasn't thinking about anything there was a palpable rush of energy, it felt like healing energy coming in. I could actually feel it flowing through me and almost coming down through my feet like a flow through."

"...and a very, very strong sense of reassurance, nothing so conscious, but that things would be OK."

"It was actually very healing at that point, almost tears of joy, it was very powerful."

"That is one thing too, I remember, as the energy was flowing through I also felt very humbled by it."

"It was also very calming and nurturing at the same time."

"I could feel it moving through me and going out through my feet. Kind of coming into the top of my head and actually filling me and then coming down through my feet."

"It always seems to be going from trees into the earth there always seems to be that sense of flow like that."

"I get a sense of... the only word I can think of is a sense of song. It is not exactly the sound of the leaves in the wind, but it is that sort of thing. I get that impression with it. But again that is too literal."

A sense of flow and harmony.

The participant stated that part of his experience of being in Nature was getting a sense of flow and harmony:

"And being out in nature even if it is just a couple of hours to go and enjoy a walk by the beach, then there is a sense of the balance and harmony of everything working together like this beautiful delicate balanced machine that I can get a sense of, that I can get a sense of its flow and harmony and that helps to, has an effect on me, it helps to give me a sense of flow and harmony also."

Feeling humble/part of something bigger.

The participant stated that one of the effects of sensing the energy flow was feeling part of something bigger than himself and feeling humbled by that in a spiritual way:

"That is one thing too, I remember, as the energy was flowing through I also felt very humbled by it."

"I think that's a lot of, you know... that's kind of what I feel, that's kind of what I get a sense of, of renewing, when I'm in nature, it's this sense of being part of a very large thing."

"There's a sense of it being sacred. That it is spiritual in that sort of way."

A sense of compassion.

The participant felt that part of his sensation of the energy was also a sensation of compassion:

"One of the things that comes through too, as I remember, in that process, when I felt that healing, was that there was a very strong sense of compassion that came through with it, a very strong sense of understanding, that even though there was misunderstanding, there was compassion for myself and compassion for every and anything, like compassion for this other person."

Outcomes.

The participant stated that there were a number of positive outcomes as a result of his experience.

The participant stated that an almost immediate effect was that he no longer felt "upset" about the loss of his friend:

"And basically after that the whole situation with losing a friend didn't bother me. Of course I remembered it, but all of the upset about it was gone as though I had been purged of it, purged of the turning around in thoughts, all the bad feelings, all of the upset feeling."

"I found I didn't have the worry, or the hurt. Basically all of that seemed to be gone. It came back a little bit now and then but it was never overwhelming like it had been. I felt sadness as one would feel for a loss but it certainly wasn't overwhelming."

The participant stated that he felt much calmer after the experience:

"It is a very calming affect."

The participant reported that after his experience his sleep was improved:

"So I slept well after that."

The participant reported a renewed sense of internal balance as a result of a sense of connection to the flow and harmony of nature:

"...that I can get a sense of its flow and harmony and that helps to, has an effect on me, it helps to give me a sense of flow and harmony also."

"Things that bother me might bother me less, and I become a little bit more aware of how... that I am part of this harmony and balance that I'm not just... I don't exist independently, I exist in dependence of everything around me."

"That's kind of what I get a sense of, of renewing, when I'm in nature, it's this sense of being part of a very large thing."

"...and remembering that I am part of a very large whole, I'm part of the universe really."

The participant stated that he felt a renewed sense of compassion following his experience:

"But part of it too was being able to take that and remember my compassion, and getting it back into perspective, that it wasn't such a big thing, that stuff happens, remembering about the cycles of life and death."

The participant reported that as a result of his experience he felt a sense of re-awakening:

"It feels like I come back with better perspective."

"I think in a way it enabled the change, because it is what I learn from it, what I take from it and can put into my life is where the change happens."

"So I think what happened in terms of the change was that I had reached a point where I had simply forgotten all of the stuff that I knew before because I had dug myself into a hole. So it felt helpless, and a sense futility, and couldn't see any way out of it, but that

was because I wasn't open to, or receptive to alternatives. But the change that happened was more just saying "Oh yes I have dug myself into a hole, and of course I have alternatives, and there are ways to be that are far more constructive, and positive for me and everything else" so the change was a bit of a re-awakening, or remembering."

Each of these five situated structures is unique and valuable. There are a number of themes that are shared between them and these can be described in terms of a General structure. This is described in the next section.

General structure.

A comparison of the five situated structures shows that there are a number of themes that are shared by two or more of the participants. A summary of the shared themes can be seen in Table 1. These shared themes are described in more detail below.

Theme	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Removal from distractions. Decrease in stimulation	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Simplicity/Being in the moment:	Yes			Yes	
Facing mortality/Danger	Yes	Yes		Yes	
A sense of something larger than self. Connection with Nature/Spirituality	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes

Table 1. Themes from the participant's Situated Structures that have commonality among the participants.

Removal from distractions/Decrease in stimulation.

For three of the five participants this theme was part of their healing wilderness experience and that this removal from distraction or decrease in sensory stimulation allowed them, or even forced them, to explore their feelings at the time.

Participant 1:

"You don't have all these distractions. I didn't have my powers of being an executor and all that crap I had to deal with there. I didn't have a TV to distract me. I didn't have a phone or computer or whatever, so you are forced to deal with it"

Participant 2:

"I can get away from all the noise and the stress and the TV and the news and the telephone ringing."

Participant 3:

"You don't have the distractions that you do... I mean, I was coming from a husband and three children, a house and all the rest of it, and all those other influences, and here all that was taken away and you're free just to explore your feelings without dragging all that other stuff into play."

Simplicity/Being in the moment.

Two of the five participants stated that the simplicity of living in the wilderness allowed them to be more in the moment, which for them was healing.

Participant 1:

"It becomes very simple, you pull your boat up, what are you going to do? Well, shelter, food. It becomes easier to do what you need to do and that is all that matters. It's kind of like being in that moment."

Participant 4:

"I noticed that a lot when I'm out on a trip, that it is OK to just sit still, to not do anything, or just go for walk or cook your food."

Facing mortality/Danger.

For three of the participants the theme of mortality or danger was part of their experience, either in terms of a direct confrontation with mortality or an awareness of the issue. For two of the participants this was a central part of their healing experience in the wilderness.

Participant 1:

"You have to look into that mirror of death and you have to look inside it and see your reflection. And you have to make it real to realize that's not what you want."

Participant 2:

"I knew that if I got knocked over I was going to die."

Participant 4:

"But as I say that I'm also thinking that the decisions I make out there I could maybe lose my life or someone else's life..."

A sense of something larger than self/Connection with nature/Spirituality.

For four of the participants this theme was part of their healing experience in the wilderness.

Participant 1:

"I think the biggest thing that I am struck by is how humbling, how humbled you can feel in nature. You think you are all, look at my new paddle, look at my kayak, and then you realize you're at the mercy of powers way stronger than you. I think in our lives we always try and seek out control, and I think that is part of it too, understanding and realizing that when you are on the ocean, you are just a little cork out there and a big wave could come and all that type of thing, so I think you do realize that, it puts perspective on your life. And you realize that there is something so much broader, like you said, spiritual, about it. Just the forces that are out there, you are at nature's whim."

Participant 2:

"So for me, being in the wilderness is the closest I get to a spiritual experience that I've really ever had."

"For me its a place where I really feel, connected, part of a bigger picture."

Participant 4:

"But I do know that I felt a lot of peace, that joyful sort of feeling, that feeling of just being, just seeing myself as part of the Universe in a way that I hadn't seen myself before, or just being conscious of it perhaps."

"I wasn't looking to have an experience like that, looking to have a spiritual coming-to sort of thing. It just happened."

Participant 5:

"I think that's a lot of, you know... that's kind of what I feel, that's kind of what I get a sense of, of renewing, when I'm in nature, it's this sense of being part of a very large thing."

"There's a sense of it being sacred. That it is spiritual in that sort of way."

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Limitations of the study.

The results of this study must be interpreted with care as the study has a number of limitations. The participants can in no way be taken as representative of the general population as there were only five of them. The criteria for inclusion in this study included the sense of having experienced healing and the participants who chose to partake in this research are all reflective and self aware individuals. This is not the case with everyone and perhaps a person's experience of the wilderness differs with their degree of reflection. This in no way invalidates the experiences of the participants but rather means that the general structure that has been generated by the analysis of their statements must be taken as suggestive of the core experience of wilderness healing rather than as a positivistic statement of what wilderness healing "is". Another limitation is the possibility of researcher bias. While every effort was taken to reduce this bias the themes that I saw in the analysis are those that I saw and it is possible that another researcher would have found other themes. I believe that the themes delineated in the results are real but it is possible that I have missed some other themes. Undoubtedly the interpretation of those themes is a product of my experience and philosophy.

The healing themes.

It is clear from the five situated structures that were produced in the course of this study that the process of healing in the wilderness is a many faceted phenomenon. The experience of each of the participants was unique and added depth to our understanding of the processes involved. Each of the participants had a different set of problems that they were attempting to deal with and their own repertoire of strengths and insights. This spectrum of experience and individuality inevitably gave rise to many different themes upon analysis of the experiences. Given the variety of themes that were apparent in the individual situated structures it was not surprising that many of them were endemic to each individual. When the themes were compared across all of

the participants a number of themes were found to be shared between two or more of the participants. This was also not surprising given that all of their experiences occurred in wilderness environments where the dominant force, "Nature", applies itself in an equal and unbiased manner.

In constructing the situated structures the themes chosen were only those that were supported by explicit statements by the participant. This was done in an attempt to bracket the researcher and reduce any bias in the interpretation of the participant's experiences. Once the shared themes were extracted and formed into a general structure it seemed that a number of these themes were also imbedded in the experiences of those participants who had not explicitly stated them. As this observation was more due to the interpretation of the researcher the imbedded themes must be given less weight than those that were explicitly stated by the participants. These imbedded themes have been included in the discussion to suggest that the themes may be more commonly experienced than the explicit statements indicate.

Upon examination of the general structure it seemed clear that three of the four shared themes could be described as facing and dealing with existential givens (as described above). The other theme would seem to be a pre-requisite for deeper healing, though is healing in its own right. These shared themes are discussed in more detail below as is one theme from a situated structure that was not shared.

Reduction in stimulation:

The theme of "Reduction in stimulation" was explicit in the stated experience of three of the participants and seemed to be embedded in the experience of the other two participants. The participants stated that this reduction in stimulation either forced them to look at what was going on in their lives or allowed them to explore themselves more freely:

"You don't have all these distractions. I didn't have my powers of being an executor and all that crap I had to deal with there. I didn't have a TV to distract me. I didn't have a phone or computer or whatever, so you are forced to deal with it"

"You don't have the distractions that you do... I mean, I was coming from a husband and three children, a house and all the rest of it, and all those other influences, and here all

that was taken away and you're free just to explore your feelings without dragging all that other stuff into play."

This decrease in sensory stimulation has been recognized as an important part of the healing processes involved with the wilderness (Kaplan and Talbot, 1983). The reduction in the sensory overload that we experience in the city allows us to attend effortlessly to the environment we are in and also to what we are experiencing in our internal environments. It allows us to experience our feelings without tailoring them to other's expectations and it opens us to the other healing benefits of the wilderness environment. In this way it is analogous to the pre-liminal stage described by Andrews (Andrews, 1999) and would thus appear to be a pre-requisite that allows the other healing processes to occur.

Simplicity:

This theme was explicit in the experience of two of the participants and seemed to be imbedded in the experience of another participant. This theme related to the concept that what one had to deal with in the wilderness was pretty basic and frequently came down to no more than food and shelter and that this simplicity allows us to be more in the moment:

"It becomes very simple, you pull your boat up, what are you going to do? Well, shelter, food. It becomes easier to do what you need to do and that is all that matters. It's kind of like being in that moment."

In many ways this theme is the behavioural equivalent of the decrease in sensory stimulation seen in the previous theme. By only having to deal with the simple basics we give ourselves more space in which we can attend to other issues.

This theme also speaks to the existential issue of responsibility (Yalom, 1981). When we are in the wilderness we are responsible for our basic needs, for putting up our tents and tarps, for cooking our food and ensuring that our supplies are not taken by animals. Nature will be in our faces letting us know if we have made appropriate decisions and nature is indifferent to who we are when the rain comes or the wind blows. Many of us in today's world are impotent around choice. We either find ourselves frozen, unable to choose, unable to decide to take one option and therefore

not take the others, or we pretend that we are choosing by not choosing. The wilderness does not allow us these options. Leaving food unattended in bear (or raccoon) country will leave us hungry. Not paying attention to the set-up of our tents will leave us wet and cold. Fortunately the wilderness also makes it easier for us to learn how to take responsibility. The choices are simple and the feedback often swift and direct. By reducing the options it can enable us to see more easily which choices are going to work best for us and also show us what we need to survive both in the wilderness and the city.

Facing mortality/Danger:

This theme was explicit in the experience of three of the participants and seemed to be embedded in the experience of a fourth participant. For the participants who experienced this aspect of the wilderness the responses to it were varied. For one participant it was no more than an awareness of the hazards involved. For another a dangerous situation increased the bonding with a friend. For the third a direct confrontation with his mortality was the pivotal moment in his healing:

"You have to look into that mirror of death and you have to look inside it and see your reflection. And you have to make it real to realize that's not what you want."

An awareness of one's mortality is one of the central existential givens (Yalom, 1981). The realization of our finitude is what drives us to live a full and meaningful life, yet it is the source of much anxiety. Avoidance of the anxiety created by looking honestly at our mortality can lead us into a meaningless, anxiety driven, existence. In the wilderness death is obvious. We see dead animals and plants and we are surrounded by lethal hazards. One of the participants noted that while these hazards are around us in the city we are somehow shielded from them by the covers of civilization, but in the wilderness they are in our face. Sometimes frighteningly so. Yet this proximity is the very thing can provide a healing impetus, the shove we need to get us out of our stuckness.

Spirituality/Feeling connected to something larger than self:

This theme was explicit in the stated experience of four of the participants. The sense of being part of the Universe, and feeling connected to it was a central part of the healing experience of three of those participants:

"So for me, being in the wilderness is the closest I get to a spiritual experience that I've really ever had."

"For me its a place where I really feel, connected, part of a bigger picture."

"But I do know that I felt a lot of peace, that joyful sort of feeling, that feeling of just being, just seeing myself as part of the Universe in a way that I hadn't seen myself before, or just being conscious of it perhaps."

"I wasn't looking to have an experience like that, looking to have a spiritual coming-to sort of thing. It just happened."

"I think that's a lot of, you know... that's kind of what I feel, that's kind of what I get a sense of, of renewing, when I'm in nature, it's this sense of being part of a very large thing."

The participants used the term spirituality not in terms of religion but in terms of a sense of awe and wonder about the world around them and a sense that they were part of this huge wondrous construction. For the participants for whom this was a central part of their healing experience there seemed to be a sense of renewing of self and a lifting of ennui associated with this connection, a sense of returning or new-found meaning.

This need to find or create meaning in our lives is one of the key existential drives and is the result of the existential given of meaninglessness (Yalom, 1981). That is, that the universe is inherently devoid of meaning but that humans have an in-built need for meaning and must somehow create it for themselves. This sense of meaning is found when we notice that we are part of something larger than ourselves. This could be a family, a community, a religion, or in the case of these participants (and many other people), a connection to the natural world. This connection may start with trees and animals and oceans, but on a clear night it may extend to the universe itself. When our sense of connection extends to the natural world and we hold it in awe, then it becomes a spirituality. This also relates to the thoughts of Frankl (Frankl, 1959) who

states that meaning can come from (among other things) a relationship with something or someone and this would certainly apply to "Nature".

Existential philosophy (Yalom, 1981) often holds that we are truly alone in life, and not part of anything that we do not create. I would contend that that idea is not correct and that the office-bound proponents of that view need to get out more. We are part of nature, part of the universe and that realizing this and feeling that connection can alleviate some of our inevitable existential anxiety and leave us with an increased sense of meaning in our lives, as was the case with the majority of the participants in this study.

Fredrickson and Anderson (1999), found that many of their co-researchers, who participated in wilderness programs, developed an increased sense of spirituality as a result of being in the wilderness. This study certainly reflects their findings and illuminates the added dimension of the sense of healing that can come from that increased spirituality.

The themes of healing as a result of both "Establishing a Connection with Nature" and "Establishing a Spiritual Connection" was a key finding in a study of healing factors for Canadian First Nations people (McCormick, 1995). In this study "Establishing a Connection with Nature" was not necessarily seen as a spiritual thing, though it could be, but included how being in natural places could be calming or instructional. The results of the present study certainly echo those findings and demonstrate the importance of those factors in the healing of all peoples.

Aloneness:

The fourth existential given, aloneness (Yalom, 1981), was not explicitly mentioned by any of the participants. Aloneness is about the realization that we are ultimately alone. Once we realize and accept that we can become autonomous and self-reliant individuals who can then form meaningful relationships with other people. When we are alone in the wilderness we are by definition self-reliant.

The theme of aloneness seemed to be embedded in the experiences of a number of the participants:

The experience of participant one was during a solo kayaking trip, a time when the participant was solely responsible for his well being.

A large part of participant two's experience involved being by himself.

The central part of participant three's healing experience was during a twenty-four hour "solo" during which she was able to overcome some substantial fears.

The healing experience of participant five would only happen when he was alone.

The theme of aloneness is explicitly mentioned in the work of Fredrickson and Anderson (Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999) as one of the parts of the wilderness experience that their participants found helpful, in terms of reflecting on life and sensing their spirituality.

Overcoming challenges:

Only one of the participants mentioned this theme, but it was central to their healing experience.

"I felt like a totally new person. I felt totally changed because I had overcome all these challenges. Like rock climbing. Stuff that I never thought I would be able to do. It made me feel much stronger outside and inside."

The huge increase in self-esteem that this participant experienced as a result of her wilderness experience allowed her to make many positive changes in her life.

An examination of the literature indicates that this increase in self-esteem is a common phenomenon and is often seen as the desired outcome in and of itself. It is not, however, frequently linked to positive life changes, as was strongly done by this participant. This participant's experience clearly shows that it is not just feeling better about ourselves that is important but how we use that in our lives to make positive changes, something that most of the quantitative research literature misses.

Relevance of these results to helping:

Implications for practice.

The wilderness experiences described in this study were seen to be healing for a variety of symptoms. One participant was suffering from acute grief after the suicide of

his Mother, another from chronic depression arising from childhood physical abuse, the third from chronic depression arising from childhood sexual abuse, the fourth from chronic depression with an unknown etiology and the fifth was suffering from acute grief following the loss of a relationship. While these symptoms could be described as depression or grief it is important to recognize the range of symptomology within those categories and to also look at the differing underlying situations.

All of the co-researchers in this study participated because they felt that had experienced some amelioration of their symptoms as a result of their wilderness experiences:

"And I think that that is what I did, probably, on that trip. To just accept that it is OK to be in pain."

"After that whole experience I went to the pub there, 'The Back Eddy' in Egmont, and, and I just felt alive, I felt alive. I felt alive for the first time in months, because I had done something that was mine."

"I went there because it made me feel good, made me feel better about myself, I felt less stress, I felt more relaxed. I felt more human."

"But I think the big value was that by being able to go out there I was able to get enough relief to keep me going."

"I felt like a totally new person. I felt totally changed because I had overcome all these challenges. Like rock climbing. Stuff that I never thought I would be able to do. It made me feel much stronger outside and inside."

"I pushed myself after that to do a lot of things that I never used to. I started running. I left a marriage of 20 something years. I decided to go back to school. I changed jobs. I honestly don't think I would've done a lot of those things if I hadn't done that Outward Bound program."

"When I finished the Outward Bound program and the group was over, I actually confronted my brother, who was abusive to me as a child, and wrote letters to everybody in my family telling them about the abuse. It really gave me a lot of inner strength to do that. I don't know if that was coupled with the group therapy and the individual therapy but I don't think I would ever have got to that point as quickly if I hadn't done the Outward Bound program."

"I do know that I felt a lot of peace, that joyful sort of feeling, that feeling of just being, just seeing myself as part of the Universe."

"And then after that I realized when I went out there I was starting to experience being outside in that sort of way and being more open to that side of my self which I think is for me a really positive thing."

*"I found I didn't have the worry, or the hurt. Basically all of that seemed to be gone. It came back a little bit now and then but it was never overwhelming like it had been. I felt sadness as one would feel for a loss but it certainly wasn't overwhelming."
"But part of it too was being able to take that and remember my compassion, and getting it back into perspective, that it wasn't such a big thing, that stuff happens, remembering about the cycles of life and death."*

None of these healing outcomes occurred as the result of participation in "Wilderness therapy" programs. One did occur on a program that was deemed to be therapeutic but it has never been promoted as "therapy" and does not contain the necessary focus on process that defines a "therapy" program. These experiences thus fall under the classification of "Therapeutic adventure". This does not in any way reduce the value of these experiences, but rather demonstrates the innate healing properties of the wilderness. This is one of the benefits of "wilderness therapy" programs. Nature does the confronting work allowing the accompanying therapists to work on support, processing and application to life back in civilization.

It is important to note that only one of these healing outcomes was stated to have arisen as a result of increased self-esteem, the most commonly tested outcome in therapy programs, and that the healing themes from the other four participants were all existential in nature. This has implications for both general counselling practice and "wilderness therapy" programs.

In terms of general counselling practice these results first of all stress the importance of the existential givens in the healing process. An exploration of what gives meaning to an individual's life may be most beneficial as may a discussion on mortality and its implications for living. These results also suggest that bringing "Nature" into counselling sessions could be most beneficial. This could happen in a variety of ways. A visualization that involves a natural scene, especially one that has been experienced by the participant, could be used as a relaxation tool at the beginning of a session and taught to the client for use outside of counselling. It could also be beneficial to actually hold counselling sessions in natural areas, especially when the experience is debriefed by the counsellor with a focus on the existential issues. That experience would also allow the counsellor to use nature as a metaphor for various scenarios in the clients life. Exposure to natural areas, in an un-motorized way, could also be used as "homework" assignments for clients. This could also be combined with some form of meditation to deepen the process. One could also imagine an intensive residential-type treatment

centre where clients engage in both office based counselling, regular adventure-type activities in natural environments, and counsellor accompanied wilderness expeditions. This is, of course, really a form of “wilderness therapy”.

There are many “wilderness therapy” programs in existence and by definition they involve a focus on individual process. The research that has been done on the outcomes of these programs indicates that most of this focus has been on self-esteem, locus of control and inter-personal relations. All important topics for sure. The results of this study indicate that there are “deeper” processes involved in healing in wilderness areas and that these processes involve a connection with the existential givens. These existential issues could even be said to underlie locus of control and inter-personal relations. Including these topics in the process discussions during these programs could increase the efficacy of the programs and be most beneficial to the clients participating in them.

Implications for research.

The results of this study suggest a number of questions for further research:

Given the small number of participants in this study the first of these is how widespread are the themes that were seen here? Are the existential themes common to many individuals who experience healing in the wilderness? This question could be addressed by qualitative interviews with more individuals who feel that they have experienced healing in the wilderness as well as by a more quantitative approach with specific questionnaires aimed at participants of wilderness therapy programs.

Another question is what role does preceding symptomology play in the outcome of wilderness healing? The participants in this study were afflicted with either depression or grief (though with a wide range of underlying etiologies). Would similar outcomes be experienced and similar themes developed if the preceding symptomology was anxiety, or addiction, or an eating disorder? This question could be addressed by doing qualitative research with individuals who have experienced healing from other symptomologies in wilderness environments. It could also be addressed by running wilderness programs specifically for individuals afflicted by other symptomologies and tracking the results both qualitatively and quantitatively.

A number of the participants in this study had repeated exposure to the wilderness. It would therefore be interesting to track outcomes of individuals who have repeated exposures to the wilderness compared to those who have one exposure and then do not go back. This would help address the question of how effective a single exposure is in producing lasting changes compared to multiple exposures.

It would also be interesting to run wilderness therapy programs that stressed existential issues and follow the outcomes experienced by the participants of these programs compared to participants of more traditional programs. This might address the question of whether awareness and processing of these issues increases the efficacy of wilderness therapy programs.

Implications for counselling theory.

The results of this study have a number of implications for counselling theory:

This study indicates that exposure to the wilderness, to nature at its purest, can have profound healing effects in individuals. This is an area of counselling theory that has been largely ignored by traditionally office-bound therapists and academics even though it enlarges our concept of what is healing in therapy. These results indicate that inclusion of this concept in general counselling theory would expand our understanding of the healing processes that we as human beings can use. It might also suggest that part of what ails our society is a disconnection with the natural world, the very thing from which we spring and that a lack of attachment to this natural world can be as damaging as lack of attachment to our other parents.

Another implication for counselling theory is the importance of existential issues in general and the effects of spirituality in particular. Four out of the five participants in this study had major existential experiences and insights and the meaning that they made from these experiences was central to their healing processes. These results suggest that the existential givens are an important part of being human and that inclusion of existential concepts and practices is an important part of counselling theory.

For the majority of these participants, an increase in their sense of spirituality, their sense of awe and wonder at the natural world and, most importantly, their sense of connection to that world, their sense of belonging to it and being a part of it, and the meaning that they made of that connection, was a major factor in their subsequent

ability to heal from what ever symptomolgy was afflicting them. These results strongly suggest that spirituality and its role in both generating dysfunction and healing from it is an important part of counselling theory.

Another consideration is the use of the wilderness in normal development instead of just the remedial treatment of non-adaptive behaviour. Thus, if exposure to the wilderness and its various healing properties can ameliorate various ailments then exposure to these properties could be used to aid us in our development as fully functional human beings, to aid in our maturation and instill resilience in us that can help us to deal with the various challenges of adulthood. Thus development of attachment bonds to the natural world would provide us with a healthy sense of belonging that would aid us in our growth and also provide a much needed sense of care for the world around us. This is certainly not a foreign idea to many cultures in our world but seems to be one that has been lost by the dominant cultures that tend to view the wilderness as a place of fear that needs to be cultivated and tamed instead of the place that we come from that can guide us and heal us.

In conclusion this study has examined the wilderness induced healing experiences of five participants and found them to be profound. While each individual's experience was rich and unique there were some shared themes. Many of these shared themes were existential in nature. This study adds weight to the idea that exposure to the wilderness can provide significant benefits to the individuals involved and is a process that could benefit many in our society, a society that has mostly forgotten its roots in nature and is suffering from its lack of attachment to a fundamental source of healing, belonging, and meaning.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: The Interviews.

Participant 1.

Interview 1.

Interviewer I have kind of a broad question. "Can you tell me what it was about your wilderness experiences that you found to be healing or life altering, and how it was healing or life altering." So that is kind of the question, so I 'm wondering if you can fill me in. Perhaps if it helps you can start by describing what was going on for you beforehand.

Participant: I mean, I could pick a lot of experiences that I've had, but I guess I will talk about the one I mentioned to you, the kayaking one. This was after, this was in 1994. My Mum passed away, in fact she committed suicide, and, she was a chronic alcoholic, whatever, so, she did herself in. So...I mean, after that happened, I was expecting actually, I wasn't surprised by it, because she had had kind of a tail spin of a life. So I wasn't shocked, but still, it still hits you like a ton of bricks. So you know I went into my own little tailspin. I mean, nothing dramatic, some people take, you know, run away to Europe or take heroin, whatever. My thing was, I had always wanted to do kayaking, so with some of the inheritance money I said, "Oh, I'm going to go buy a kayak so what the hell. " right? We have a cabin up the Sunshine coast so, I just told my girlfriend, my wife now, "I'm going to take off, I need to get away, I just can't take it." I had punched holes in a couple of walls, that kind of thing, normal grief stuff right? But I said, "Forget it. I want to get away from all this." So I hopped in the kayak, and I had basically no experience, you know, I can swim, but... I did take a one day lesson, so I did have some experience. I just needed to get away from everything. Because I had been dealing with the will and all that, I was the executor of the will, so that was like a, you know, talking about grief, you are looking at it day after day after day. Dealing with all the people you have to deal with. so I buggered off. I had a tent and a stove and I just took off. I think that until that point I was numb, really numb with grief, and the only way I can describe it is, in order to tap into that grief you wanna somehow match the pain of the person who died. If that makes any sense. It's like, have you seen that movie, the Brad Pitt movie (4:00), the one where he is a soldier and his brother dies? "Legends of the fall". You should see it, because it's kinda related. Anyway, everyone is dying around him and he is left standing, similar to my experience, and there is this one scene where he is on his horse and he rides right up to the edge of a cliff and he stops, and he goes back and he rides up to the edge of the cliff and he stops again, just sort of toying with his emotions. Anyway, to me it's, like the analogy for him was he was trying to punch through. Because when somebody dies like that you have got all these layers, and you have got the pain, which is so strong but you can't get to it. And until you get to it, that is the only way you can heal, and so, whatever, Brad Pitt is kinda trying to get through those layers and that is kinda what I was doing too. Not that I set out to do that

Interviewer So to summarize, you obviously were in a lot of pain, but it was buried and you were basically feeling very numb and disconnected from the world.

Participant Disconnected? Yeah, I guess so, you could say that, maybe more, not from the world but from myself. If that makes any sense, you are not who you are, if that makes any sense. So I went off paddling. It wasn't a big deal, just a couple of nights and if I got into any trouble I could always flag down a sail boat or whatever. But I think it is kinda rare that people do things like that by themselves. It was just two nights and three days that I took off. I didn't have a watch or anything like that. I got up when the sun was up, at like 5 in the morning, and just kinda paddled. I didn't have a destination, I didn't know where I was going, I just... I was hoping to circumnavigate Nelson Island that was my plan, a vague plan. I didn't have a map or anything like that, and maybe that was by design, the point was just you know, a journey, to get out.

A couple of things that happened. I remember the first night I was stupid enough to bring food into my tent and I was tormented by a river otter who was there and kept trying to break into my tent. So I didn't sleep at all that night and was pissed off at the world the next day.(7:11) Anyway, I paddled probably for about eight hours and I pulled into this cove and it was probably about 3 in the afternoon and the wind started kicking up and I said "Ah, forget it, I'll just stay here." I don't think many people spend that much time by themselves, I don't know about you, but when was the last time you could say that you've been away from a city in the middle of nowhere, just by yourself. I think it is pretty rare, but I think it is.. You don't have all these distractions. I didn't have my powers of being an executor and all that crap I had to deal with there. I didn't have a TV to distract me. I didn't have a phone or computer or whatever, so you are forced to deal with it and maybe that is one thing that nature does, it actually, instead of focussing outwards you can focus inwards. That's one of the ways I think it is pretty powerful. That is probably why a lot of people do it. You are kind of doing something, but you are being forced to deal with yourself. Which can be daunting but refreshing too.

So anyway, that day I just decided to pack it in. It's funny, that night I was in this cove and I thought I had my kayak up high enough, up on these logs that were perched on this cliff. Anyway, I had this feeling. The wind started kicking up. It was gale force. This was in the summertime so it was still warm, but the wind was just howling, and I had this feeling "Oh shit, I don't think I brought my kayak up high enough." I climbed down to the rocks and logs and it was gone. "Oh shit!" But the moon was out and I was in this cove and the waves were all kinda crashing around, and I was looking around and I could see it. It was floating in this cove, being bounced around. So I just jumped in the water, and it was the middle of the night, about 2-3 in the morning, so I jumped in and swam out to the middle of this inlet thing got it and dragged it back. There was nothing particularly poignant about that, but it was part of the experience too, call it cleansing if you want to use that analogy.

The next morning I got up and the gale was intensifying, but I did tell my girlfriend that I was only going to be gone for two or three days so I knew I had to make a stab at getting back, so I got in and started paddling. Like I said I had no map, no real clue what I was doing, so I went out, and it is actually this notorious shipwreck place, around Cockburn Bay. It's totally exposed, it's Malaspina Strait, and the winds just funnel in. I got out there and it's like whitecaps and just crazy, there's 5,6,7 foot waves. I just had it in my mind "I gotta go, I gotta keep going this way." So I just forged ahead. I remember I had my hat on my head and the wind was blowing so hard it blew it off, and I looked behind me and it was already 20 ft behind me. In hindsight, having done other paddling trips there's no way I should have been out there. It was stupid. Anyway, I was right in it, right in the soup, I was determined, and it was going all around me and I was bracing and bracing and I could barely paddle. The waves were crashing into me and I started to get really cold. It was probably about 25 degrees out, but the wind was howling and I was getting soaked, so I was getting really cold. I had probably only been slogging out there for 30 or 40 minutes when I thought "Ah, I just can't take it." At one point there was a seal that popped up, about 4 to 5 feet away, and it popped it's head up and it's like one of those little snapshots when you look and he almost looked at me like "What the hell are you doing, are you crazy?" and he ducked back under. I've talked to other people who have lost people and this is out there, but, that little moment when the seal popped up, it was, to me it was almost like a reincarnation of my Mum, and I have had that experience several times. But I felt safe because the seal was there, because it was like it told me it was OK. Which makes absolutely no sense, but it did.

Anyways, I knew I had to get out of there, by this point I was turning hypothermic because I was soaked and the cockpit of my boat was getting full of water, so I basically made the decision just to bail and I pulled my boat up on this reef which was probably only about three or four feet high and dragged my boat, scrapped it up the barnacles. I was just freezing, I was sitting there shaking violently. I got out my sleeping bag and there was this little crevice that I wedged myself into where it was protected from the wind and I just sat there inside my sleeping bag shaking for probably a couple of hours. I did a lot of thinking then. Or maybe I didn't do a lot of thinking. Maybe I was just there in that moment. Maybe it gets back to that word you mentioned earlier, "Disconnected". When something traumatic happens to you, you are disconnected because who ever that person is who is dead or dying, or whatever, they are a part of you, and when they are gone, you loose a part of your identity, so you become kind of disjointed, kind of fragmented that way. I think that is a lot of what was going on. In a moment like that you are forced to... It's almost like a molding of clay and you've had a piece ripped out and in a moment like that you are forced to mold yourself back together on your own. Like a healing type of thing. Because you have to, because otherwise you are going to die. And also too, I think there is a part too where I'm like "Fuck it all, I don't care, I don't care if I die." Because you have just been through all this trauma, but then you come close to, not that I was close to dying, more stupid than anything, but you have to look into that mirror of death and you have to look inside it and see your reflection. And you have to make it real to

realize that's not what you want. So in a setting like that, with waves pounding around you, and you have choices, you have lots of choices: You can keep going, but when you look in that mirror close enough and your like "No I don't want to..., I've got other choices, I've got a reason to go on." So, yeah...I guess that is basically it. (16:00)

So after huddling in that nook that is all I did... It was like everything else is irrelevant, because all you're thinking about is "Oh my God, I've got to keep warm, I got to keep warm." Finally I got warm enough then I kept thinking "It will all calm down, it will all blow through." but it kept going. So my choice was to go farther around into the unknown or to go back the way I came and to slog back across the inlet thing. So I decided to slog it back and go back the same way I came. I think I paddled that day for about 10 hours to get all the way back around the island. After that whole experience I went to the pub there, 'The Back Eddy' in Egmont, and, and I just felt alive, I felt alive. I felt alive for the first time in months, because I had done something that was mine. I can handle nature tormenting me, that kind of a challenge. I think with nature you can win, and conquer, but with people and emotions you can never win. You can paddle from here to there and even though it is brutal you can make it, but if someone has dramatically impacted your life in a negative way you can't shake it, it will be forever a part of who you are, I think, in a negative way, can be in a positive way too.

You probably need to ask me some questions to guide me more.

Interviewer Something you just said, 'You did something that was yours'. Can you elaborate a bit more on that?

Participant What happened with me, I had my Dad, my Sister, who was in California, and my Dad was going through his own, facing his own demons, because they were divorced and all this kind of stuff, guilt and all this kind of stuff. I was left to pick up the pieces. I was the executor of the will and basically, even at my Mum's funeral they were too scared to say anything, just too terrified. So I was the guy totally overcompensating. I was the one who got up at the funeral and talked and I was the guy who dealt with lawyers and all that. So I hadn't been living for myself. I was the one who had to go up and clean up the blood and the vomit and that kind of stuff. It's not something I wanted to do, it was just something I did because noone else is going to do it. You choose to deal with things in different ways, and both my Sister and my Dad was complete denial "If we don't have to be involved in it then it never happened and lets put on a brave face and get on with it." I can't function that way. I couldn't function that way. I've never been able to function that way. If there is something that is bothering me I have to deal with it. It bothered me that no one would clean up her place or whatever. so I had to do that, but in doing the you are not living for yourself. You are doing it for the memory of that person who died, or because of the legalities, so you are forced to deal with it. Does that make sense, what were you asking?

Interviewer Just expanding on doing something that was yours.

Participant You can get totally lost. For three or four months I was absolutely immersed every day. I was still working and every day I would get home and have to deal with all this paperwork (21:30). She had a townhouse, which now belonged to my sister and me, I was in my early twenties, and it was a big responsibility. I wanted to sell it, "Lets get rid of it." but my sister wouldn't budge and she didn't want to sell it, even though she lived in California. So she is like "Well, you don't mind being the landlord" And I'm like "Fuck it, lets just sell the thing." and she is like "No, no Mum wouldn't have wanted it this way" and all this kind of stuff. So there were all these power struggles there and so I was living that, and I was trying to push through it and move on, but I was getting tugged back, by my Dad who refused to talk about it, and my Sister who just wanted to not deal with anything. Grief is one of those things that, if you don't deal with it it is poison and it seeps out in other ways. My sister, to this day, is a very poisonous person. She never had experiences where she was forced to deal with herself, like we were talking about. They are cleansing, you can't hide from yourself, you are forced to deal with yourself and all of your abilities or lack thereof. You are forced to galvanize from within. There is a point too were, and my girlfriend knew, I had to get out, get away, because it was just getting to me. Like I said, there were a couple of times when I literally couldn't take it anymore and I would punch holes in walls and that kind of thing. So you are lying there writhing around in pain after you have done that and you are going "OK, something is not working here". But again, even when you do things like that, it's an expression of that person lashing out, punching out, part of that is anger, but I think part of it is a motivation to get to that pit of grief and everything. That's what I said earlier about wanting to match the pain of what happened with self inflicted pain or whatever. I have always found that. It is still there within me, it will forever be who I am, and, oddly enough, I wouldn't change a thing because it has totally

changed who I am, I think, in a positive way. But it is still within me, and a perfect example, last night I was driving to this party, and a Christmas song comes on that my Mum used to listen to, and something like that, you hear it and it starts to pierce right through those layers. I remember, and I am rambling, I went to a grief counseling session, and you would be going around the room sharing your experiences, and you talk to one guy and he'd be like "Yeah, my Mum was 97 and she passed away", and he's really shook up,, and I'd tell my story and it would be like "Oh shit...". You can't help but compare what happened to you with what other people are going through and I started to realize I was actually coping pretty well. Then I went to one for suicide survivors and there were lots of people just messed up, and I was messed up in my own little way too, but I was like "Wow, I'm really coping, considering what happened and the lack of support I have, I'm coping pretty well." But I think the reason I was able to cope was doing things like that.

Interviewer So going to the groups was after the paddling experience?

Participant The paddling was after. (27:00)

Interviewer Close to the beginning of you trip you mentioned about being able to focus in on your self, can you tell me more about how that happened and what enabled that to happen?

Participant I can't remember what I was talking about.

Interviewer There was something about being outside that...

Participant I think it has something to do with the interaction that you have with nature. It gets back to that whole thing about being distracted. We are here in the city and we are all distracted and nothing matters. Nothing matters right now. If it is pouring rain right now it doesn't matter. if it is snowing right now it doesn't matter. If there is gale force wind out there it doesn't matter. But if you are in nature it matters. Because... You and I can focus right here and we don't have to worry about out there, but if we are out there in nature and it is pummeling you in any way, you have to focus, you have to channel all of your energies in order to combat it or survive, what ever you want to say. It is so easy where we are, in this city. You have constant distractions. Even driving a car it doesn't matter, really, what the weather is like outside, you just turn up the heat, then you turn on the radio. So you have all these things happening. Then you get home and you check your messages, then turn on the TV, turn on the computer. All of that is gone, it is out of the equation when you are in nature. I think that is why it is refreshing for one thing, because in nature you are actually allowed to process things because you don't have all those distractions. So you can process what has happened to you and probably make sense of it a lot... It facilitates that process, because all of the distractions are gone. Like I said earlier about the mirror. The mirror is constantly there but normally we don't have to deal with those types of issues, but you are forced to deal with a lot of adverse conditions, and rely on your own wits. Yeah, that is where the focusing comes from. (30:20)

Interviewer You mentioned that when you jumped in the cove it was kind of cleansing?

Participant That was kind of tongue in cheek, but in hindsight yeah. I think also too, that I didn't think about it, it was just one of those things you react and just do. You know, if I had sat there and thought about it, I might have thought "I might drown, the waves are, It's the middle of the night, and there is nobody around me for 10-20 kilometres" If I had actually thought about it...I guess it gets back to perception. In nature it is that whole mind over matter kind of thing, and sometimes there is something cleansing about just not thinking, and that is healing too. Just to be there and...I don't know...I'm loosing my thought. it is that whole premise of maybe not being rational and doing something that doesn't seem right but you just do it anyway. Like that whole trip. Rationally it was a stupid thing to do, but really that is not the point. Jumping in in the middle of the night, and swimming out across the inlet, well, is it really dangerous? Maybe not, you know what I mean? Maybe everything that happened to me wasn't really dangerous? Probably not when you really think about it. Ok, sure, something bad could have happened, but is it any different to driving my car or something like that? I've thought about that too on other trips, your sitting there, in your tent and you are scared, thinking "there are bears." You've got you bear spray, but there is no one around you. There's hundreds of kilometres of forest and trees and there is no connection to help or anything like that. Yet, you walk around downtown. Statistically you are so much safer there, you are safe. Nothing is going to get you out there, well, it could, but the probability is really

low. You pitch your tent down at Woodwards, down Hastings then you find trouble. It seems ironic when you think about it.

Interviewer Can you tell me a bit more about that perceived difference. I mean, any ideas why?

Participant Well, it is just conditioning. We have grown up in cities and that is comfortable, Nature is not comfortable. Maybe that gets back to going out into the uncomfortable and challenging yourself. It's like sandpaper. This gets back to the layers that I was talking about. Maybe you want to grind yourself over the sandpaper to scrape a layer off, wake up and feel alive again. It's like the guys who used to hunt whales on the west coast of Vancouver island. Days before the hunt would begin they would drag themselves across the barnacles, to make their bodies bleed, and all the scars would calcify, or whatever, so they would have really hard skin. It is kind of the same premise, you know what I mean? Because they were going to be embarking on a quest or a journey, and they would have to challenge themselves, so that was their way of harnessing all their energy in preparation for that, which is like... Not that we do that, but it is like us not showering for a week or like I didn't have any utensils so I used a stick to eat, and maybe that is part of it too. We are all hard wired to get back there to an extent. And for, well of course, I love doing that, getting back to that, I love not having the structure of a city life. It becomes very simple, you pull your boat up, what are you going to do? Well, shelter, food. It becomes easier to do what you need to do and that is all that matters. It's kind of like being in that moment (36:30). I think of this other trip that I did where you see the storm coming, you're cold and wet and hungry, and you know if you don't get it together pretty darn quick, to get a fire or whatever, you know the consequences, you are going to be hungrier than you are. Nature forces you to channel and prioritize what is most important. I think a lot of people are hard-wired, somewhere, maybe it gets back down to the pit of existence, who we are, I mean, that's where we came from, so maybe at some level there is a desire to get back to who we were and where we came from. I like to think so.

Interviewer Can you tell me a bit more about that scrapping off of layers to feel alive? (38:00)

Participant You look at your life and we have routines, we're all doing routines, work and all that, and your life become cloudy, foggy, because one day just blends into the next. If you are having an experience like this, like that trip I did for example, it's a pillar as opposed to the mundane, because it is significant because it is different, it's very different from what you have normally done. Once you have done something significant, that is out of the mundane, you are able to interpret what is going on down here in the mundane. You are talking about scrapping off layers, well, so much of what we end up doing does end up being like this thick fog. One day blends into the next, you get up and you do this and you get in your car and you drive around, and...

There are significant events but it takes something special to make you shake your head and say "Holy..., this is amazing" and look around me. Sometimes you have to be, kind of, not an out of body experience, but in order to understand what is going on in our world here you have to go somewhere else. And if you go somewhere else then it is kind of like looking at your normal world as a movie, and you're watching it going "Wow, you are really messed up." It is like the conversation you can have with your self about "Your life is really mundane, you should come out here more often, because, look at you, you are happy and you're engaged in life and you are not mad or angry." I think maybe that is another component too, that the whole thing about anger and grief, and all that, I can't remember when I have been really angry and pissed off at the world in a place like that, especially by myself because, and there are lots of reasons why, but one of them is that you are not dealing with people (41:09) in this experience. I'd get phone calls two or three months after the fact, somebody who hadn't been around for a couple of years and they'd be "How you doing, how's your Mum?" "er, she could be better" so... If you are here and you are surrounded by people they are like mirrors to you, so you are constantly... People know what you are going through, so they are kinda looking at you like this right, and you know they are looking at you and you know they see you differently. So you are bombarded with all of that, which can be very overwhelming because sometimes it is hard to process things when you have got all of those other influences. So get rid of all those other mirrors and you can just look at yourself when you are doing something like that. It's terrible, when I think about it, when I look back. You want things to be normal, but other people come up to you and say "So how are you doing?" Like 'Fuck off' "I'm doing fine, piss off and treat me like I don't have the plague." Suicide is contagious, or whatever right? Mind you, that is another issue, a lot of people didn't know why she died. In fact I didn't know for sure why she died. We didn't get an autopsy report until two months after the fact. I knew how she died, I knew the whole time

because she had already tried it once before. It was obvious to me. Everyone around me thought she had died of a heart attack, because that is what we said, because that is what the police initially said. It was two or three months before we got the autopsy results that said it wasn't that, she did herself in, although they wrote it as accidental, which was maybe to make me feel better. Like I said she was an alcoholic and she drank antifreeze. That's how she did it. So even being in the city, like every day, talk about triggers. I'd pull up into the gas station and I'd see all the bottles of antifreeze. That is almost like another mirror where you are reminded of it, or someone else calls.

That's why I think it is important to heal and cleanse and get away from it all. Like I said before, it is so hard to process things. Our world is complicated enough. All you have to do when you are doing something like that is food, shelter, and you become very focused that way. I think while you are doing those things you are processing what happened, those gears are still churning in your mind and it is starting to sift and pieces are starting to settle, whatever it is. Earlier I was saying about getting rid of all distractions but maybe that is a distraction in itself. But I think there is something about physically doing something as opposed to my Sister, a lawyer who buries herself in her work so she is distracting herself that way, but for me there is something about physically doing something that settles you down mentally (46:24). I play soccer, and for about 2 hrs I don't think, all I am doing is reacting. When I do a trip like that a lot of the time I am not thinking, I'm just reacting to what is happening around me. Just like when I jumped in to get my boat I wasn't thinking. I think that is totally powerful. sometimes you think too much, like I'm doing right now (laughs). If you think too much that can be a bad thing too right?, cos you are just sort of spinning your wheels. But if you are doing something like this, you are doing something that doesn't really distract you, yet you are processing at the same time, you are doing something physical which maybe makes room for processing something mentally, or emotionally rather. I always think of those two as the same (48:00).

Interviewer Can you tell me more about that mirror of death?

Participant "The mirror of death" sounds like a movie.

Interviewer It sounds like you were sitting on that rock in your sleeping bag and you said that there you very much had to be in the moment, and it sounded like that moment was face-to-face with death.

Participant There is this part of you that is pissed off and says "Fuck it, I don't care, whatever". And you realize at some point that you do care, that there is something... You are saying all these things like "I don't care" and "Nobody cares about me, nobody understands what I am going through" and the whole self-pity thing that you go through and you feel like "Throw it all away" or whatever because there is a part of you that just absolutely wants to crumble. To drink yourself away or whatever. Because it is pain and you want to get away from it. And there is a part of you that just wants to be unraveled, but you still have life that you have to deal with. Those moments when you are sitting there it's like "OK, I really don't want to be this messed up." After lying there all shaking and shivering and teeth chattering, and turning blue and... It's a wake-up call. It's one of those layers being torn off and getting back to who you are and saying "Hey, lets just deal with yourself" and yeah you are in pain and you are pissed off at the world, but not so pissed off that you don't want to go on. It is kind of a self acceptance, you kind of appreciate what life has thrown you, but you realize at that moment that you want to be something different or something better, or something else. (51:24) and the only way you can do that is just look at that mirror that is presented to you and say "I don't want that."

I keep comparing nature and city and there aren't those moments when you are forced to deal with yourself in a potentially life threatening way. There are moments like that, where you do look at things like that, but usually we don't create those moments, they are moments we don't choose. In nature, if you go out there you are trying to create that experience, that challenge, you kind of asked for it. You decide to circumnavigate an island with no map and no compass and no stove, whatever, well, "Deal with it" and maybe that's why a lot of people choose to do that. I keep talking about the fog or whatever, in our day-to-day lives, it is very predictable. It's part of letting go, to say "I don't know what is going to happen". To go from this island to that island, you really don't know what is going to be in-between. When I go to work I pretty much know what is going to happen, besides traffic. You know where you are going, there is not going to be much that is unpredictable. I think that is something that is energizing too. There is the monotony of our lives, there's what you do out there. Its different, it isn't predictable, you are at the mercy of something more powerful. It is not your boss giving you grief, it's pouring rain, and if you don't deal with it the consequences could be dire. (54:00). It is palpable, it's tangible, because you can

feel it, but when you are dealing with the grief your boss is putting on you or whatever, that's not tangible. There is something really tangible about if I go and take my axe and chop some wood I'll have a fire and get warm I'll feel better. It's fair, lets put it that way. To me it is more fair out there than it is in the city, because you have got people jerking your emotions or jerking your chain and they can be anonymous, they can prod you, they can drive by and give you the finger and get you really upset and you are left with that emotion, with that charge and nothing you can do about it. But in nature if you are dealing with a storm or whatever you can do something about it. You might be scared or nervous but you can actually do something physically about it and emotionally. Maybe the analogy is like what I was saying about hard-wired, we are all hard-wired at some point to be warriors or battlers and in nature you can create that for yourself, that battle, and it seems more fair, because when you are dealing with emotions and how different people can...

Getting back to my experience, it is very hard when people are forcing you to... "Oh you're not dealing with your grief properly". My dad, case in point, even said to me "The average grieving time is nine months, so I'm going to let it go now" (laughs). He is basically saying "The door is shut and I'm not talking about it anymore." With my Dad it was interesting because he is very old-school, grew up in the 40's and 50's, very stern man, and when it happened that his ex-wife died and everything, for a brief moment all his layers were broken down and he was this vulnerable, crying teenager in front of me, sharing a pint and saying "I can't believe what happened". He let that down, but as time has gone on he has built the fortress back up. So again, it is how you choose to deal with it. If you are going to have all those bricks around you you will never deal with it and it will poison your life and poison your relationships and your pain just builds up right? I'm a teacher, I deal with troubled teens, so you just see it, it is in front of you everyday. They have nothing against you but "Fuck you!" and all that stuff.

Interviewer You also mentioned something about choices, and I know some of this is repetitive, but is there any thing else you can say about choices and how that fed into your healing? (58:48)

Participant The choices you make in nature are very concrete very tangible. It makes you realize that "Hey, I don't have to be this way" or I can choose to do this, or I can choose to deal with it in another way. When you are out in nature you always have these moments of clarity. You are doing something kinetic, something physical, and you are in that moment of just... If you are doing something physical it saps you physically but it creates this whole vacuum for you to deal with things emotionally. Your mind is focussed, it is free of distraction. The only things that matter are my hands and how they paddle me. If you are doing that, on some level you are not worried about "Oh, so-and-so looked at me funny at work." and they were snickering and... All that stuff is irrelevant, it is gone. All that matters is you and your surroundings, your environment. You were talking about choices. It probably awakens you to your options and how you can choose to deal with things. But if you don't allow yourself to be in a situation like that then I think you are clouded, unless you are an amazing person who can somehow process things free of distraction. I don't know how that happens. I think an experience like this is how you cleanse. You just clear everything, there are moments of clarity. Not just this trip but other trips, those are little moments of clarity that you had here or there. "I saw the whale it swam under me." There is that moment when you think... I think it is good because you are forced to deal with your mortality. You think about it because you are in an uncomfortable position. In the city you are actually facing your mortality all the time (1:02:20) but you are conditioned not to think about it. But if you move to an uncomfortable or different environment... Even when you travel, you go to a different country and suddenly you are, "Oh no, I might not get passed this border crossing." or put into jail or whatever. But if you are out in crashing waves and all that stuff then that concept of mortality, it does hit you. And I think that is important too, because if it doesn't hit you then what are you living for here. If you are just going through life and "whatever, what does it matter and you are not thinking about it, life can be pretty mundane.(1:03:26). But if you are aware of your mortality and you think "I've got one kick at the can. I've got my 78 point whatever years I'm going to do the best I can. I want my life to be the most interesting it can be. I want to try all things." or whatever. If you are not aware of that then your life over here will be flat, because you are not living with any life, if you know what I mean.

Interviewer; Can you tell me a bit more, relating the mortality and your awareness of it to your specific instance there and is there a sense of how that really helped you heal. Was there a shift or something like that? (1:04:28)

Participant They always talk about closure. That was a trip where I was totally out of my element. I was forced to deal with things, physically, emotionally, mentally, in all sorts of ways. Er, can you repeat the question?

Interviewer Can you relate that awareness of mortality, that it sounds like you had, you mentioned crashing waves. Can you relate that in a specific sense to how that helped you heal at that particular point in time?

Participant I was forced to deal with it. If you are not forced to deal with anything, you won't heal. Your wound is permanently exposed and you will never... Here is a really weak analogy. If you get a cut and put a Band-Aid over it... I don't know where I am going with this. My comparison is...sometimes you have to... It's OK to be in pain, that's OK. It's OK to look at the ugliness and look at your mortality and look at the scar that is forming over your leg or over your soul, whatever you want to say, or over your heart, and to accept it. And I think that that is what I did, probably, on that trip. To just accept that it is OK to be in pain. I think that nature too, it's easier because you are not having all those people around you and you look from within and it is like a camera looking up into your soul, a camera within a camera, kinda thing, saying, if you want to move on you just have to accept who you are and this is who you are. It's not all pretty. It's a scar, it is disfiguring but it is also who you are so its self acceptance. If you don't go through that process then you are just an unclosed wound and you are bitter and you are poisoning to other people. This trip I did, it was an awakening, being forced to look at my self, at what had happened, where I want to go, what I want to do, and I don't think I would have thought so profoundly about it if I hadn't gone on that trip. Maybe if I was on a trip with 20 other people, like I have been on before, maybe that process wouldn't have occurred. I was using nature in a sense. Whether you realize it or not it is a tool, a healing tool. It's a cleansing tool. Nature is a facilitator. In a lot of ways it is one of the most powerful facilitators we have. Does everyone tap into it? No. would people benefit from it? Absolutely. But I think a lot of people are scared and that is...Well, you are forced to deal with your demons, and maybe on some level people don't want that. So they choose whatever is comfortable, whatever is safe, but there is something to be said for unpredictability, whether it is perceived or not. Lack of safety, and all of those issues, it grounds you. That is probably why I have a lot of friends and one of our interests is doing things like that and I think it is those kinds of people who do those kind of experiences, outside of their normal world, where they are going out and climbing a mountain or doing whatever, they are much more grounded. They are much more grounded because they have maybe given themselves a chance to heal in their own ways. (1:11:00)

Interview 2.

Interviewer: so you had a chance to go through the transcript and the brief presse of the thing, and that seemed like everything was right?

Participant: yes...

Interviewer: so what I have here is a list of a few points that I would like to clear up. So what I would like to do is focus more on your particular experience rather than philosophy. blah blah blah

Participant: OK

Interviewer: so the first question is: you wanted to get away, you needed to get away from what was going on, what made you pick a wilderness trip has opposed to say going down to Vegas?

Participant: well, for one thing I already have a comfort in doing things in nature, but I think one of the biggest things was to get away from people in general. If I went to Vegas you'd be kind of stimulated, like bombarded with electricity and you couldn't think but if you were back in nature you don't have that stimulation(3:19)

Interviewer: So for you, you personally had a need for solitude, and for that sort of peace and quiet

Participant: that is something I can kind of talk about in hindsight but at the time it was just "oh whatever I'm gonna do this and see what happens." The other thing too is if I was in Vegas there's all those people and there's the chance that they would probably bring it up and talk about what just happened. You don't have that opportunity in nature. So I think that probably brings down your anxiety right there. also there is the getting away from the probate stuff that I told you about previously that you don't have to deal with in Nature. so I guess intuitively that is why I would go there as opposed to Vegas

Interviewer: so it wasn't a conscious choice that was just what automatically came up for you? (5:00)

Participant: I guess there is just fight or flight or something like that. and probably also that I knew I was poisonous at that time so to be around other people, I knew it wasn't a good thing. it was probably a protective mechanism to get myself away from all of that too. knowing that I wouldn't lash out at people. there is really no one to lash out at in nature, I mean, you can throw rocks and things... that is one thing, I have never been outdoors and camping or hiking or kayaking I don't really get angry if I'm by myself, but if other people are around you you are forced to deal with things not on your own terms. maybe that is what it is with nature, you can process things on your own terms and you can just let it all sift in instead of people forcing your hand.

Interviewer: you said that you thought it is rare for people to go out on their own, is this true for you or is this something that you do fairly often?

Participant: no it is something I do. when I say rare, lots of people do it, but statistically... I thought of that when I was climbing the Lions once, I looked down there is 2 million people but how many have actually done this. it's not a lot.

Interviewer: So for you, going out alone is not a rare or unusual thing to do it's something you're comfortable doing(7:00)

Participant: Yeah, it's something I'm comfortable doing but I would definitely say I was more driven to do it during that period of time. It wasn't just the kayaking trip it was also hiking. I got into that whole legends of the fall thing that I was talking about last time, where you are feeling all this pain and you just want to inflict pain upon yourself. I don't know why. partly I think it is because you just feel so numb, and part of it is just trying to sort of slap yourself in the face to wake up and get out of this depression or whatever that you are in.

Interviewer: so you go out there and the distractions are gone so you're able to focus more on what is inside you, is that right. On that particular trip?

Participant: you're doing something, right, like a kayaking trip, and you are processing...

Interviewer: so if I can bring you the back to that particular experience, that particular trip what was happening for you. So you were out there and you are able to process it because there weren't these other distractions.

Participant: yes, absolutely. Though I can only say that looking back now. I think that at the time you are in the moment, you're just paddling and doing all this. maybe it is the solitude where you can just let something in to process. I wasn't actually sitting there on purpose like sitting on a rock meditating trying to put things into place. it just washes over you without thinking.

Interviewer: so it really sounds like there was an intuitive sense in you of what you needed to do to get some healing even if that wasn't consciously at the front of your mind.

Participant: yes, absolutely, there was just the desire to get out. It is still there now. If you've grown up doing things like that it's in your nature to say "I've got to get out I've got to get out on the ocean or up in the mountains ". I don't know, it just gives you a place to think. in a sense it forces you to think too, I alluded to this before, so many distractions here, but on the water there is just a rhythm, it enables you to think more clearly. (10:38)

Interviewer: so when you're out there, personally, those thoughts came up for you more clearly.

Participant: I think so yes definitely. And in spiritual vein, that whole notion of seeing the person who is out of your life, I mentioned the seal that I saw, but I also saw it in the birds. it is like a presence, and it is comforting too. I don't have reminders of that in the city, but if I go out in to nature, I guess it is the peace and solitude, just something in nature, it talks to me.

Interviewer: so there is that sense of connection with something

Participant: yes

Interviewer: is it specifically your mom?

Participant: no. like I said I did this before. but it is a part of that now. It is part of thinking outside of the box, the city is the box. but it is not that I'm out there fretting, hung up on it. it probably has something to do with the fact the you're out of your routine, doing something novel, so there is a little bit of an edge, in the sense that. that is part of why on this trip... I really like logistics and I like planning my route, and I like planning food, and how am I going to make my Fire. it just becomes very simple, what you're doing is about. but when you're out there paddling, doing about three hours at a time, your kind of out there in the middle of nowhere, and I think there is something too, I kind of thought about this when we last talked, I ran back from here, and I kept thinking about rhythm, about paddling or running or anything like that where there is a steady motion. I don't know if it is a mantra, or whatever, but there is something about that. I think we are all hard wired to have that, we have been like that for thousands of years. sorry, I guess I'm getting philosophical... there is something to that, when your on the ocean, there is the rhythm of the waves, and the rhythm of the tides, and you are paddling, and yet you have that anxiety about what's happening with the waves and the water and the weather. so I think your senses are heightened in a way that they are not normally. and I think what it does, it is novel, if I did that every day it wouldn't be novel, but that is not a part of my regular day. So I think that is part of why on this trip thinking becomes a lot more crystallized and focused because there is a new environment.(15:00)

Interviewer: so can you tell me a bit more about that connection you felt with something else when you are out there? you mentioned the seals and the birds... it sounded like you felt there was a connection with something other than you.

Participant: for sure. there's a part of you that is in denial, a part of you that hopes it didn't happen that it is just a bad dream or something like that. when this person that is and Integral part of your life, like your mom, for good or bad or whatever but they are there, they are connected. when that is cut out, and your rational part knows that, I think it searches for a sign or a signal or some way of making that connection again. and for me, and it's not like I seek it out, but when I'm on the water it's like a presence and it is comforting. it just feels right. it doesn't really make any sense because when I think about my mom, she didn't even like the water, and wasn't a good swimmer. mind you she did like birds, so they're always birds... whenever I see a Robin it makes me think of her because she used to whistle like the birds. so maybe it that is part of like the echoes that I hear in the wilderness, part of that connection on some level.(17:28)

Interviewer: is there a sense of connection to something that is bigger than you when you're out in nature, kind of a spiritual thing.

Participant: absolutely. I think the biggest thing that I am struck by is how humbling, how humbled you can feel in nature. you think you are all, look at my new paddle, look at my kayak, and then you realize you're at the mercy of powers way stronger than you. I think in our lives we always try and seek out control, and I think that is part of it too, understanding and realizing that when you are on the ocean, you are just a little cork out there and a big wave could come and all that type of thing, so I think you do realize that, it puts perspective on your life. and you realize that there is something so much broader, like you said, spiritual, about it. just the forces that are out there, you are at natures whim. and I think that is part of it too, I mentioned that heightened anxiety that you have about a trip, there is kind of that edge. you know, when you are on a hiking trip and you want to go out this ledge, but it looks like the weather is socking in, and let's go for it. it kind of galvanizes your focus, because you do realize how you are... because if you don't galvanize your forces it could be dangerous for you. so there is that self reflection about death itself that nature gives us that we don't have in the city. I was on the bus this morning and I

wasn't too concerned about my survival... but on the water you can't help but think about it. not that you obsess about that but it is there. I have gone paddling before on the west coast of Vancouver Island and the whales are out there and and you think and you think about it " was that a wave, a swell, or was it a gray whale?" so yes, there is something bigger out there, and I am often in awe of what is out there, the sky the mountains the sea,(20:26)

Interviewer: is it an important part of the experience for you to feel that sense of connection to something bigger?

Participant: I think so yes. for me solitude is an important component of that. I went camping with my Boys up at Porteau Cove and I didn't really get a sense of the awe of nature. you look across and see the pulp mill. Although it was in nature and was fun for them, I think there is something to be said for doing something that relatively few people are doing, and going some place that is unexplored. for me that is part of the draw.(21:23) because in a provincial campground I don't get that sense of "ah, this is nature and we are connected here." which I guess really proves that it is about solitude and being away from people where I can actually take it in. I guess that is when I feel connected. if there are all these other people around... I go to the grouse grind, I do it for exercise, it is not a spiritual quest, especially when you get up to the top (22:05)

Interviewer: it sounded as though as the distractions go the self awareness increases. are you aware of a process of that happening or... does it take a little time for that to happen or is it almost as soon as you head out?

Participant: can you say that again?

Interviewer: for you, when you went out, there was the decrease in distractions that allowed this other awareness to come up. do find that there there are stages in that, or do you find that you get to the put in and you slide off and almost immediately it happens

Participant: yes it is almost immediately, but it is frame of mind too, you have it in your mind that " OK, now I am off", even if you have a ferry dock behind you, in your mind you are already off on your journey. but I think it is not linear, it's not like your awareness grows the longer it goes on, I think it comes in waves too. things will happen... I think on trips like this, it is when you stop thinking about things that you can process it, that is when you think about it more. You're making kindling or something like that and it will just hit you... what just happened and what you have been going through. I do remember going out to rock and thinking " this would be a good time to think about it". but all I did was look at the barnacles. I was trying to force myself to think about it and it wouldn't work. because I knew I wanted to deal with this, process it, which is why I think nature is a good facilitator. people want to deal with it but the process takes time, there are so many levels... again there is the whole denial thing, and I mentioned this before, how many layers there are to just kind of dig away at, to get at that core, that pit, of what it is, the essence of what is eating at you. it sounds obvious I guess, but I really wanted to look into that abyss, that black hole,(25:20)

Interviewer: you talked about molding yourself back together, can you tell me a bit more about that process, what it was like for you?

Participant: I think, what I was talking about there, er?...

Interviewer: he said it felt like a piece had been ripped out of you and you had to mold yourself back together.

Participant: well, your mother is an integral part of the life, for better or worse, and just realizing that she's not going to be there. I think it is an incredible kick in the pants at any age, but the younger you are the more impact it has. as think there is an incredible amount of responsibility in realizing how these people propped you up. realizing that there are all those gaps and you're going to have to fix them yourself. and knowing that they're not going to be there anymore and that the onus is on you...(28:00)

Interviewer: you mentioned about feeling engaged in life, when you were in the wilderness. can you tell me a bit more specifically about what that was like for you?

Participant: I think there is something really tangible about it, a real sense of accomplishment, especially when... if I worked with my hands and built things for a living I think that I would have more of the sense of that. as a teacher he of planting seeds but you never see them to fruition. so I think you want to look at your life and see things that you have actually done so you can say I've accomplished this it was a task and I was able... I was out in the wilderness, in the middle of nowhere, and I wasn't too sure what was going to happen but I was able to pull it off by myself. so you just feel way more live. and again I think it is partly due to that edge, to doing things that are not necessarily safe or anything like that and getting through to the other side, and looking back and saying " Woh, I did that!" I think use that as a barometer for your own life. you say " wow, I did that there, I could do better over here too." though it doesn't always last that long. I think the engagement part... for me at that time, what I was going through, I wasn't feeling... I was feeling very flat and disengaged and just questioned life and all that sort of thing, and I wasn't doing anything for myself, and I think that is how you feel alive. you don't really feel alive living for other people, doing things for other people, I mean, you do need to do things for yourself. you look back, of what do you remember about the past year, you don't remember driving to work and stuff like that, it is always those unique experiences to make you feel more alive and engaged. (32:18)

Interviewer: how did your experiences on this trip making focus on the essentials of life?

Participant: I think about the time when I went out in water that I shouldn't have, and going out there, and I would never do that now,.... I mentioned before about that whole feeling of " I don't care, death doesn't bother me, bring it on, let's go to it" and you just have this whole victim thing, life is hell, and your probably willing to take more risks, but then you realize that " wow, I don't really want to die". or "this is really important, I've got to start thinking with my head "

Interviewer: so those were the thoughts that were going through your mind?

Participant: yes. Until that moment, when I paddled through that, as a paddler now I would never go through that, it was moronic, it was crazy, but it woke me up. it was just half an hour of pure hell to get to the reef and jump up, and sit there and violently shivering, but at the same time it was the first time that I felt alive. it was a real wake-up call, that life isn't so bad, that it's not that terrible and you don't really feel that " what's the point of going on ". it made me realize that I don't want to end up down that road that I don't want to die or anything like that, or more importantly better really do care, I do care about life, and how the hell am I gonna get back now. but up to that point I didn't really care, it was reckless. people do all sorts of reckless things, like drugs, because it's the same feeling " it doesn't matter, nobody cares about me, what does it matter, I'll take this and it will blunt the pain". going out into nature can be a bit addictive too.

Interviewer: but it doesn't blunt the pain

Participant: No it doesn't. exercise itself, and I was rambling about this earlier, you want to match the intensity of what happened, liked not caring if you are exhausted and just wanting to push yourself to the point of breaking. (37:00)

Interviewer: there is a passage in a previous interview, and it is kind of third person, but I had the sense that this was your experience, that this is what you were thinking and feeling, and I just wanted to check that out with you. perhaps you could read that...

Participant: yes, absolutely. That is my internal dialogue.

Interviewer: you also said that when you're out in nature you have these moments of clarity. can you tell me a bit more about that, though I think it might be running over stuff you have already said?

Participant: when we are in the city it is very different to nature. I think there're so many things that we do, on purpose, whether we realize it or not, to distract ourselves

Interviewer: that you do?

Participant: yes I meant I did. telephones and computers and all those types of things, and I do it all the time. by removing those options and forcing yourself to not have those options it just gives you clarity. can you imagine what we would all feel like if there was no TV and radio, no cell phones, I'm sure we would find other ways to distract our thoughts, (40:30) but it would be a lot more difficult. it's really easy to have things that we should be processing but don't, but if we are in the cockpit of a kayak there is really not too much else to do. there is what is going on around you, and what you're doing kinetically, but your mind is free, free to wander and make connections. I used this before, the idea of a mirror or reflection, to make you think about things, but it is only because you are allowing things in. I wouldn't and feel that way if I was surrounded by a lot of people and it is probably something to do with that it is on your own terms too, it is at your own pace. I think a lot of people would think about things on a deeper level if they were allowed to it, or allowed themselves to.

Interviewer: so for you, part of that clarity comes from being allowed to go at your own pace

Participant: that is probably true. and part of it too is not being afraid to look at all the muck, and realizing that you need to, that it is not particularly healthy to be punching holes in walls and yelling at people... I think too that, when there are other people around and you're dealing with a death it is always on other people's terms that your thinking about it and processing it. I think it just hardens you. you get to the point where you don't want to talk about anything, because it may come back to the death of somebody, so I think you just start shutting down. I remember even doing that, I would avoid people because what if it is mother's Day and we stop talking about that and it comes up... it's a protective mechanism, you do it around people, and that makes it even harder to process because all you're doing, is your just blocking, putting up all these walls. " no-no, you're not going to get in, I don't want you to judge me."...

Interviewer: so it sounds like for you, clarity is letting those walls down

Participant: yes, that is fair to say. we do it all the time, looking at other people wondering what they're thinking, what they are thinking about us. that's me that's what I'm like. remove that and it does become a lot more focused and clear about your own life and you're not caught up in wondering what other people are thinking, and your defenses are down, and you're just sort of open. it makes me want to go on a kayaking trip speaking about it all...

Interviewer: you talked about an awareness of mortality, of having one kick at the can. can you relate that to specific instances on this trip, like when you're sitting on that rock, and also if you have an awareness of how that has been helpful? (46:00)

Participant: another time was when the tide came up and swept my boat out... doing things you wouldn't normally do, and putting yourself in situations... it is all perception to, it seems unsafe but is it really? 3:00 in the morning swimming around trying to get your kayak with waves pounding around you... it is one of those things where your senses are woken and you are live. it is kind of a bombardment the senses when you think about it too, the cold of the water, the feel of the wind and the sound of the waves. it is like an awakening to. you do something like that where you could've died, you're just more aware of it, being alone too. this trip wouldn't be interesting if there were 12 other people and we were all in double kayaks and a guide ushering us through, or something like that. the fact the you are on your own and dealing with stuff on your own, it makes you realize that you've got one kick at the can and makes you feel that life is worth living.

Interviewer: did it make you feel that having one kick at the can means you have to live it?

Participant: yes, absolutely. But probably more so that it is useless to be in misery or be a victim because there is no point. what is the point of that? if you only have one life then who wants to be the miserable person, about how unfair it all is. doing a trip like that makes you think, it makes you realize where you're at, and recognizing that you don't like that, that I don't want to be that person. I don't want to act like that, I want to be more alive and less and less of a victim, and just not be a victim.

Interviewer: you mentioned also that nature is a facilitator. what do you think is the most important thing that it did for you on this trip as a facilitator.(50:00)

Participant: Nature is a facilitator, but you choose to be there. I don't know if it is something of that Nature has given. Nature is just there, it's doing what it's always done, you are choosing to go into it.

Interviewer: right, but of the things that it is doing, that it has always been doing, what was the most useful for you? or was it a whole series of things?

Participant: it was probably the series of things, but I guess one thing when you think about it, is space, and that is pretty important, whether it's physical or emotional, it provides that. so in that, it provides solitude, and also it is an environment where there aren't distractions which works on a number of levels. that is how it acts as a facilitator it definitely does allow you to process things in a different way than you would normally

Interviewer: so you think that the most important thing on that trip was the sense of solitude and peace and getting away rather than perhaps being faced with your mortality. or are they all lumped together?

Participant: I think it is all connected

Interviewer: the closeness to your mortality wouldn't have been so useful to you if you hadn't had the chance to be on your own and lose some of those distractions first,

Participant: yes I agree. I could have been faced with my mortality in the city but the way I would of process it would have been totally different because I would've gone to the hospital and got stitched up or something like that, and then gone home and watched TV or something in like that. so again it is that environment, it forces you to look inwards. and just do that intuitively. so I can't really say is just one thing other than just Nature itself and getting out on your own.

Interviewer: OK, last question. when you paddle back to Egmont, and you felt alive, can you tell me a bit more about feeling alive again, how that continued?

Participant: I remember that I was really excited. I remember specifically that I want to tell people what I had just done. it was interesting for me and it was exciting for me. considering what I had been like in the previous months sort of "yeah, whatever", now I was more "hey, how ya doing...", probably because I wanted to tell them my harrowing tale... I ended up sitting with this guy who was from Nova Scotia, he was in his 70s and really drunk, and he was pointing up to the mountains and saying " its July and looked there's still snow up there can you believe it this is God's country" but I was totally with him, like "yeah I hear you ". I just felt more connected with people, not because of the people that were there but because I was more connected with myself and I didn't have those walls. it was like I'm talking about it now, it doesn't hurt you can talk about it and it doesn't make you well up, because you have thought about it you have processed it. so that experience enabled me to deal with it on a number of levels. it's not like I just came back and everything was fine, that wasn't the case, but for me it was a breakthrough. that was a breakthrough where... I think it was after that that I hooked up with the group for suicide survivors and I probably would have avoided that before, but everything was more in place with me and I felt like I could talk about it... I felt more excited about life, and instead of just dwelling you could kind of put a line there where in the past I would just been dwelling but now I was more forward looking, like, lets just get on with this life thing.(58:58)

Interviewer: OK, that is all the questions I have. Is anything you need to add?

Participant: was I did was unique for me, and why I'm doing this now is a I know it is helpful for me to think about it and deal with it again. I think it is important to just dump in their and dusted it off and wonder " what was that all about ". it makes you realize a lot of things about what you're thinking today because it is all connected to what you went through...

Participant 2.

Participant 2 interview.

Interviewer: What I'm looking for are the experiences that helped you get over, or heal, or change your life, from whatever was happening for you.

Participant: OK.

Interviewer: Can give me an idea of what was hapenning for you before these changes happened

Participant : I grew up in a pretty rough family environment, my father was an alcoholic and abusive as well. That resulted in me having to deal with a whole bunch of issues throughout my life that did not really get finally resolved until about 5 or 6 years ago. So ever since I was a young kid one of the places I was able to find some relative tranquillity and peace was going into the bush. I grew up quite far outside the city, we had kind of a country estate, so from the age when I was four or five I would go off on little expeditions on my own. It would drive my mother crazy. And I think I established that pattern pretty early on in my life. I chose a career as a geologist because it would get me out into the wilderness. Most of my recreational activities are outdoor activities, particularly kayaking, which is something I do an awful lot of. And so that's kind of the general picture. So even today whenever I go out into the wilderness. Typically what I'd do now is go out for up to three weeks at a time. I've long since quit being a geologist so it's no longer for up to 3 or 4 months at a time, just one to three weeks. So I find it a very calming experience. I can get away from all the noise and the stress and the TV and the news and the telephone ringing and kind of reset my clock to a more natural rythm. So when I come back from a trip like that I really feel like I've reset my circadian rhythms or something. I come back to a more peaceful and calm place. That something has been episodic for me I've done over and over. In a broader time frame it is kind of like taking an aspirin for a headache except that I go out into the bush for while and feel better when I come back. Once I start feeling like things are getting a bit too much again, I usually do the same thing over.

Interviewer: So it's kind of an escape?.

Participant: I think very much so. I really hit the wall about 5 or 6 years ago. I had a really serious bout of depression. which I had a few times before but probably didn't know it. As you probably know, each episode depression gets more intense and the intervals between them get shorter and shorter and then one really gets you. So there were a couple of years there where I was really trying to work through this and I found myself going out into the bush more and more. There were about three summers in a row where I spent about six weeks kayaking. Which is a really fantastic way to get out into wilderness especially on the British Columbia coastline. There is no question that this was an escape. I was just running away from all the crap I was putting up with back home with my job my financial situation it was just a way to get away, from everything, to cut all that other stuff off rather than deal with it. (6:00) It worked quite well as a temporary fix. I would come back for a trip and I'd be more or less OK for a week or two. But because I was in that really depressed state I just wanted to get away again and again. So I think i was healed by virtue of having those escapes but only on a very temporary basis. I wasn't really dealing with the underlying problems I was just cutting off the stimulus that was stressing me.

Interviewer: So a release from the negative stimulus.

Participant. In a very literal way just cutting off all the input from other people, from the business that I was running, from relationships, from everything that was very very hard for me to cope with. I could go out there with no telephones, no people, well, most trips I did were with other people but when you are out there you can control your environment a lot more easily. You get up when the sun comes up and go to sleep when it gets dark and eat when you are hungry. If there is anything that times you during the day it is the tides. If you wanna go somewhere and have to wait for current you kind of let the tides determine where you can paddle and where you can't. It always takes me back into a much more natural rhythm, as opposed to living in the city where a kind of lose control over what you can do as you always have to respond to events and respond to other people. It was also a way of getting back some control, because

during this time when most depressed I was really having a hard time coping because there was so much going on and people always get stressed when they don't have control of things, at least I did. So by going out into the wilderness I found that it was easier for me to kind of control things because it wasn't so much to control. As I was saying, you get into these natural rhythms and start to mellow out and a lot of things just take care of themselves. The decisions you make are simple ones, it's about food, shelter, keeping warm. For me this was a much more manageable scenario Rather than hanging out in town where I had a business to run and all these relationships that were more difficult and newspapers and TV.

Interviewer: So a sense of having less to control therefore life was easier. The only thing you had to do was meet basic needs.

Participants: More control when I was out there.

Interviewer : Right more control as there were fewer things that you needed to control. (9:35)

Participant: Which put me in a more comfortable place. Given the way I grew up and the things that I had to deal with as a young kid, You couldn't control anything, you couldn't count on anything, we had a pretty slim safety net. So I think that makes one react in such a way that you like to be... I never think of myself as a control freak, but I like to be able to have some control over of managing the situation whether it is a person or a relationship or a business or an activity. And that helped me when I went out into the bush because I kind of felt in control of things simply because there weren't that many things I had to control anymore, a lot of things tended to look after themselves

Interviewer: Is there a sense then that there are actually a lot of things out there that you can't control. That you know you can't so you just go with it? Like, you can't control the tides, you can't control the currents. (10:55)

Participant: That's right. They take care of themselves and so the only decision to make is whether you're gonna go with it or not. So if I kayaked somewhere, I would get up in the morning make a cup of coffee and watch the sun come up, and plan my day without any responsibility to anyone else or to any commitments that I made. I might say "Maybe I should move along, go up the coast ten miles and find another spot. Yeah the tides going well, whatever, maybe I should do that, or maybe I should wait for the next tide. It's a much more simple world to deal with because again you go back to those very basic things, and food, shelter and for me I just find that very... I don't think everyone's like that, a lot of people go into the bush and just totally panic, but for me getting back to the more elemental lifestyle has always been very comforting for me it's kind of like a refuge.

Interviewer: It's a comfortable place for you.

Participant: Very, very. To the point where I've gone out for long periods of time. One of the happiest times I had was when I was working on my master's thesis in geology in a mountain range in the Yukon territory. I was in this area in the Kluane ranges and I could just look up towards Mount Logan which is Canada's highest mountain. Nobody else for miles around. I was in there for three weeks on my own. That was one of the happiest, most spiritual times I've had in my life. I was about 27 years old, and I just revelled in it. To the point where when I met my boss after three weeks he said "You didn't really get that much done did you?". I would just sit there for hours looking at the scenery and there were all kinds of animals around, grizzly bears, foxes, Caribou and Dall sheep and golden eagles and wolves. I thought I'd died and gone to heaven.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about that experience? (13:30)

Participant: More about the reason why I was there?

Interviewer: No, more about how it felt.

Participant: Like I've described, I've always had a very strong bond with animals. I've two younger sisters who felt much the same way. As we grew-up in an abusive environment we learned at a very young age that animals could be trusted more often humans could be. And I'm talking about my father

here. Because of him we knew there was potential danger in just about any human relationship because we transferred our fathers abusive behavior on to other people. Because if he's that way and then other people could be this way. So we learned early on that if you developed a relationship with an animal you never had to worry, they gave you back what you gave them. If you treated them kindly they treated you that way, they showed love for you. So we were bringing home, you name any critter that was around, we lived in Ontario. Between the three of us we brought home everything, probably about 40 different pets over the years. Not just dogs and cats. Raccoons, snakes, squirrel (15:30) chipmunks, frogs on and on and on. All of us has carried this forward. One of my sisters is very involved with horses and she has a couple of dogs. Another sister, she is the most urban one, but she's always had a dog. I have a cat, I've always had a cat or dog in my adult life. I've always really, really enjoyed seeing animals in the wilderness. When I'm walking on the beach somewhere and see a bear, my concept is, that I look at that bear as something that could be a potential friend if I could get close to it. Where as people who believe all of the bear myths probably think "it's gonna kill me". So in this one particular place, there were all these animals around. I was camped quite high up on the mountainside, looking south. It was beautiful terrain. There was a plateau, called the Burwash plateau, down below and in front of me and a series of rising mountain ranges behind that right back to Mount Logan and the St. Elias range in the distance. I had this whole panorama. Each day it was like a new animal. Just round the hill from where I was camped there was a herd of Dall sheep. I could get quite close to them. There were Caribou just a little bit further over. There was a little Red Fox which kept coming to camp every morning looking for anything I might have left behind to eat. There were golden eagles which would fly over me or the tent. Sometimes they would fly right in front at eye level, about a hundred feet off you could see them looking at you. There was a family of wolves that I could watch. Right at the the bottom of the mountain were I was camped there was a river valley and across the river valley there was a family of wolves that I could see quite clearly with my binoculars. There were about three adults and about four little pups. (18:06) It was just like the best movie I'd ever been to. I could see bears walking on the Burwash Plateau. And all kinds of other little critters. It was like this one special place that was made for me. My boss was right, I got about half the work done I should of got done. Because I would quite literally sit for two to three hours at a time. Time would just fly.

Interviewer: . There was a real sense of belonging.

Participant: It was quite a place of safety for me because of the way I was brought up. Maybe quiet the opposite from how other people would react they might panick being out there by themselves. But because of my upbringing it was a place of safety, because there were no people around. I was feeling totally at ease, totally comfortable, totally relaxed. And totally irresponsible, not getting my work done.

Interviewer: You mentioned spirituality with regards to that, can you tell me a bit more about that experience.

Participant: Thats a very hard one for me to describe. I've never been much of a person for organized religion. We were brought up in the Protestant faith, but my parents didn't really practice it. At the age of about 10 my sisters and I got totally difficult about going to church every Sunday so my parents gave up on it. So, particularly today I don't belong to any organized religion, particularly not Christianity. So for me, being in the wilderness is the closest I get to a spiritual experience that I've really ever had. For me its a place where I really feel, connected, part of a bigger picture. It's very easy for me to feel empathic with native religions because they are so focused on their ancestors, and have creation myths, like Christianity, they are all related to the world that they see around them. I always have had an understanding of what that means. From feeling the way I feel when I'm out there, peaceful, that you belong, part of something and connected to a bigger picture. I really get a sense of this when I'm kayaking. When you're paddling along on the ocean and you are just a little thing bobbing along on top of the water and you can see for immense distances. And there are much bigger creatures around, whales and bears, and none of them are out to get you or anything they are just part of nature. That's about as well as I can describe it, it's more a feeling for me more than anything. (22:10)

It really is something I feel quite deeply inside deep. I can feel that even when I'm on a kayaking trip and I have a bunch of other people around which is often the case. I can go off around the point and sit on a rock. It is very accessible for me. Definitely. Even if it's only for half an hour I can connect and reset my clock. Even though I live in a place I like, there are other people there and if there are other people around they can be very distracting because they require you to interact with them.

I had a very interesting experience a couple of months ago. There was a fellow, a very well known mountain climber that I had met a few times, though I didn't know him well. He passed away from cancer. He was quite closely connected to the Squamish nation. So they had the first memorial service for him at the recreation center in North Van. Probably two to 300 people showed up for. In the beginning, a couple of Christian ministers got up, one was a Catholic Minister but I don't know who the other one was. I remember feeling very cynical about this. I remember sitting there thinking this is nothing to do with who John was, or what he was about. The priest from the Catholic Church made the claim that the spirituality that John expressed after spending so much time in the wilderness came from the Catholic Church. The point is that fortunately those two disappeared very quickly and the native band took over the rest of the ceremony which was fortunately about 95% of it. This was the first time that I had been in any kind of ceremony that was conducted by natives. And I have never been so moved in a ceremony like that whether in a wedding or a funeral or whatever as I was in that particular one. Because the things they talked about, making references back to the Creator and for them the spirituality just comes so naturally. Once you know that you can really understand why they are so different from us and understand the trouble they have integrating with our way of looking at things. I was sitting there thinking that this is what I have believed for most of my life. (25:35) I was quite taken aback by that for the next couple of days after, the way that... One guy in particular, Gene Kerrigan, did most of the talking, I was still thinking about that days later, he wasn't standing up there presenting any dogma he was just talking in a very natural open way about things that seemed very obvious to him and the other natives listening. This guy expressed it much better than I was ever able to, but that is the same spirituality that I feel when I'm out there.

Interviewer: So this really resonated with you.

Participant: . Absolutely. literally for days afterward, I kept thinking, "Boy was that ever a profound experience for me".

Interviewer: Do you see any ways that this experience of spirituality when you are in the wilderness has aided you in your recovery from the past.

Participant: That is a harder connection to make. I was only able to eventually get out of my depression by going through some really intense therapy including medications. By intense I mean... Have you ever run into a guy called Hasan Asseem he is a psychiatrist on the North Shore. He was running a program in a psychiatric clinic. By intense I mean 18 weeks long and we were in sessions for about four hours, four days a week. It was gut-wrenching, the most terrifying thing I've ever done in my life. It was group therapy. To be honest I don't remember during that time feeling very spiritual about things. It was difficult for me to make the connection with the wilderness during that time, partly because of the time of year, it started in December and finished in March so it wasn't a time when I was doing a lot of outdoors stuff, which was typically in the summer. It is only in the last year or so that I have got into more winter things. (29:00) I don't remember having an obvious connection to the wilderness during that tightly defined period of recovery unless it was something more sub-conscious or subliminal. But this program was so intense that it didn't leave much room or at least in my case it didn't leave much room for spiritual considerations, I was just terrified most of the time. But since I got through that and I finally was able to put all the things that I had been experiencing since childhood into some context and some perspective and realized that it wasn't my fault what happened when I was a kid. When I went back out to the wilderness again after that session, I think I actually felt even more peaceful out there. Because the difference was that after I got through that program I could cope with things here back in town. So when I went out to the wilderness I think I was able to appreciate it more in a spiritual way because I knew I wasn't out there running away from something, escaping, getting the sense that now I had I shrunk my world up I could control it, so I think I was able to appreciate it more for what it was. It has made my wilderness experience somewhat more spiritual. I don't have all that garbage that I was trying to shove to the back, the furthest most corners of my mind, it's just not there anymore (31:25)

Interviewer: In the past these trips to a wilderness were kind of what kept you going but they didn't bring any large shifts, apart from obviously keeping you alive

Participant: Yeah, which was a huge thing for me. Yes I think that's right I think the problems that I had psychologically from the way I was brought up were too deep and profound for me to have worked my way out of that permanently, in a real way, simply by going out into the wilderness. But I think the big

value was that by being able to go out there I was able to get enough relief to keep me going. And I was able to do that for a long, long long time. So I think it saved me in that sense, that it gave me a refuge which I could go to which had a relaxing and calming effect on me so that I could come back and when I got wired up and depress again I knew where to go and what to do, and I knew the effect it would have. So it was something I could count on, just as I could count on an aspirin to relieve a headache I could always count on going out to the wilderness for a while, and it would work. Until the very end when I finally hit the wall, one September and I knew I had to get some help. It took me a long time to come to that point. I spent at least six weeks out kayaking that summer. But by that time it was barely enough, it just wasn't quite doing it any more. The last few trips I made I was even bothered when I was out there, I couldn't get into that relaxed mode. It had kind of stopped working for me. At the end of that summer I can back from a trip I did in August and within a couple of weeks I was going downhill so fast that I panicked and got some help. So it wasn't working for me in the end. (34:00)

Interviewer: That must have been very scary

Participant: I was terrified. Especially, for someone like me who was used to being in charge and managing my own affairs, very self-reliant and independent and to realize that I couldn't do it on my own anymore. That was very scary very frightening when I knew that my refuge, going out to the wilderness, was longer doing what I wanted it to do. It was like I was going down hill fast and I had no where to turn. I no longer had that pill that I could rely on, that was going to work for me. So I was some scared. (34:58)

Interviewer: So, just to reiterate a bit, the benefit you got from going into the wilderness, which you did when things started feel overwhelming for you back in town was, a: that you were able to get away from what was going on, you no longer felt that you needed to control all those things. The only things you really needed to do where basic life things like to stay warm and fed and safe and at the same time you felt relief because it connected you with your spirituality that sense of being part of something bigger so that in itself was very healing of the immediate effects that you were suffering before you came out.

Participant: Except that during that period prior to hitting the wall, I don't think I thought about spirituality then as much as I did after I went through that program. I went there because it made me feel good, made me feel better about myself, I felt less stress, I felt more relaxed, I felt more human. I think I had just kind of skirted around the idea of spirituality in my mind. I don't think I really made kind of a direct connection with that, I think I just went there because it made me feel better, it was a refuge to go to, a safe haven. It was only after I went through that program that then I started to get an interest in those things. So somewhere or other, going through that program and resolving a lot of these issues that I had, getting them out of the way allowed me then to make this connection with the spiritual aspect of going out into the wilderness. Other than that it was just a place to go to get fixed

Interviewer: So during that experience in the Yukon were you aware of the spirituality or was that a lens that you kind of put on it afterwards. Say "I think the reason I felt so at peace there was because I was connecting with this." even though you weren't consciously aware of it

Participant: I see it in hindsight. At the time I was reveling in the sensory input of being there, but I can't recall thinking of spirituality. So I think those are all things I have realized in hindsight having come through this crisis.

Interviewer: That gave you the ability to look back on those experiences.

Participant: Yes, and realize there is a long continuum there of and those kinds of experiences for me which I can now recognize were partly spiritual. But I didn't realize that spiritual dimension up until I hit the wall, and then after I hit the wall and came through the other side. Now I see that spirituality in the present and I can look back past that divide, over that wall and see that, yeah, it was probably something I was feeling back there except that I wasn't recognizing it, or I wasn't conscious of it, or I didn't think of it in that kind of framework. (39:00)

Interviewer: You said that you would go out and you would feel better about yourself, feel more human. Can you tell me a bit more about those experiences?

Participant: I had some friends that I used to paddle with a lot throughout the 1990's, two other fellows that I originally met on a kayaking trip. And at the same time I belonged to the Sea Kayaking Association of B.C., since the late 80's. We did trips together a lot, the three of us, other people would come along with us, but they sort of changed, there was always the core three of us. And I developed some quite strong friendships with those two people in particular. Which I found a little bit remarkable because most of the friends I had the time were friends that I'd made a long time ago, that go way back. I hadn't made a whole lot of new, especially new men friends, male friends during my adult years. Being out there in the wilderness with Tony and Earl, and being part of that shared experience of having these adventures together, and working through some pretty dangerous physical stuff too. There are some pretty strong bonds there that I thought wouldn't have happened except for the kayaking, or except for being out there in the wilderness. It was kind of the Outward Bound concept I guess. I felt much more relaxed and at ease with those people and with other kayakers I met too than I did with say a person I might meet here in an urban setting. Because we had those shared experiences and to a large extent we had similar values, and it was easy to communicate and relate and go out there and have adventures and tell the stories after, and the mythology kind of built up and we would sit around campfires and joke about something that happened eight years ago. So that's what I mean about making me feel more human, that I was better able to relate and connect with people. Although it was kind of a struggle, it wasn't always easy, but there was kind of a mechanism, an avenue there that I could try and make that work. When I was away from the wilderness setting relationships were always difficult for me, for reasons to go back to my childhood, my up-bringing, letting someone get close to you, trusting other people. (42:30)

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about some of those experiences brought you together. Do you have any more insight on that?

Participant: Erm.

Interviewer: OK, let me re-phrase that, that was kind of a vague question. What was it about the fact that those experiences were in the wilderness as opposed to hanging out in town that made easier?

Participant: I think the reason for that is pretty clear. Because when we are living here in town, in an urban setting like this you don't have very many life threatening situations that you know about. You might get creamed by a car or whatever, but it is over before you know it. You never really have to plan how you are going to do something safely. When you're out in the wilderness with especially when you are ocean kayaking, along this coast you are dealing with the North Pacific, and things are in the ocean that if you are not careful it can do you in. So what brought us closer, and strengthened those bonds was working through difficult situations together. The wilderness presented you with the kind of decisions you had to make to be safe and stay alive that you would never have to make here in town. So when you work together and have brought each other through some difficult situations, you're caught in a bad storm or someone's dumped in the water or something, when you've worked through those things together it really does build up some strong bonds. In a crude analogy it's kind of like team work. I think the wilderness experience can really bring out of the best in people or the worst in people. At least for our group it brought out the best. Because we had some pretty hairy situations that we dealt with, Earl and I came within a hairs breath of dying up in the Queen Charlottes on one trip, and we had a lot of luck surviving it.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about that experience? (45:45)

Participant: This was a trip in the summer of '96 that I did up in the Queen Charlottes with Tony and the Earl and some other paddlers. Earl and I had gone up early before the rest of the group arrived. We spent a week there by ourselves before the rest of the group was going to arrive. We had a planned trip. Earl and I were going to do the circumnavigation the southernmost island in the Queen Charlottes, Kunghit Island. We decided to paddle it counterclockwise. So we started off our trip paddling down the West Coast of Kunghit so it was the side facing the open ocean. We got caught in an extremely dangerous water condition, called a Clapotis, basically it is a confused sea. This was an extremely bad clapotis situation. Every stroke we were making was a bracing stroke just trying to keep our kayaks upright. It was just bang, bang, bang, and you couldn't take your eyes off what you were doing, because big pyramidal waves would pop up here and a hole there and another wave here. So it was kind of bang, bang, stroke,stroke, bang, bang, stroke,stroke. And what happened was, that in addition to the

conditions that were causing this clapotis, which was about three different sets of swells and their reflections, we had a northwest wind coming in providing chop, but what made it really bad was that the current changed and the flood started flowing against us through this clapotis. So we were struggling away and struggling away and I remember looking over at the shore and realizing that we hadn't moved in about 20 minutes, we had just stayed in one single spot. so we were fighting to stay upright and not making any progress. I finally yelled over to Earl and said we have to paddle harder. There was no way to go back as it had all formed back behind us as far as we could see and there was no refuge in going further out to sea because it was just as rough. So we had to crank it on and just start paddling harder. Of course the harder you paddle in a clapotis the harder you hit the pyrimidal waves and the more you are getting bounced around. So we were in that stuff for a little over an hour, just fighting. If one of us had gone over there was nothing the other could have done to help the other person, because both of us were just fighting to stay upright. I knew that if I had got knocked over I was going to die. I didn't have my wetsuit on, though Earl did. I don't think I have ever been in a situation like that before. I've been in a lot of situations that were life-threatening but they were almost over in an instant, before you had time to do anything about them. But this situation was a fight for survival that lasted that long.

Interviewer: So you were face to face with death for an hour. (49:15)

Participant: Yeah, quite literally. So we finally worked our way through that and around a point into a bay and we were just physically exhausted. we couldn't even speak to one another. There was so much adrenalin still going through our bodies that it took a whole hour on shore to get calmed down again. So when you go through an experience like that with one of your best buddies, I mean, we survived something that very few other kayakers have ever been confronted with, so it makes you feel pretty bonded, pretty tight with that other person. We still talk about it from time to time, not a lot, but... That was probably the worst one but there were others as well that we had to work through. I know that made Earl and I feel, I mean we were already pretty close friends but that made us feel quite a bit closer. It is something we shared, I mean, we describe it to other people but we were never able to convey the feeling that both of us felt, that particular unique feeling that only two people in the world share, me and Earl, about that particular place and time. (50:45)

Interviewer: That must of been very intense, not only were you facing your own death, but you knew the same thing could happen to Earl.

Participant: Yes. he couldn't have helped me if I had gone over and I couldnt have helped him. The reason there was so much clapotis there was that we were up against a big rock cliff, there were no beaches in it so we would have just eventually been picked up by the waves and slammed into the sharp rocks. No place to climb out, no place to swim to, no way out, except to do what we did.

Interviewer: What was it like, face-to-face to death for that long?

Participant: Well, who was it? Samuel Johnson said, "Being on death row concentrates your mind wonderfully". It was kind of like that because I was just thinking about one thing and one thing only. I sure as hell wasn't thinking about all my problems back home. We went there for a whole hour, where we were quite literally not only living in the moment but living in the second. For a whole hour. Think how many times in your life you have done that. Normally during a day we have all kinds of thoughts coming and going. We just thought about one thing and one thing only, for one hour. My brain was 100% focused on that second. Staying up, staying up, stay up and survive, nothing else. I couldn't even turn my head to see where Earl was. If I couldn't see him I didn't worry about it. I couldn't take my eyes off what was happening as these waves were so completely irregularly you couldn't get a rythm they were so chaotic. so how did it feel? It was incredibly intense, incredibly intense and frightening. If there was a way to measure adrenalin in the blood I'm sure we were right at the max. At the top of the scale. We were just pumping.

Interviewer: There was something about that experience that really brought you together with Earl. And similar experiences that helped build friendships that you otherwise wouldn't have developed. Just being in the city in that kind of environment... I'm guessing from what you said that you had at the time no friends, or friendships of that depth that developed in the city.

Participant: Yes, other than the ones I had developed from a long time ago, when I was in my teens and twenties. I still have old friends from that period. But from the time I was in my late twenties until I got into kayaking when I was forty years old, I didn't really develop any new male friends during that period. So the wilderness and kayaking, for me, created some relationships that wouldn't have been there otherwise. or would have been very difficult for me to make given my mindset and my psychological frame of reference that I had at the time. The barriers were just too many. Being in the wilderness kind of broke, kind of allowed me to break through all that crap that I got stuck with when I was a kid, and develop these relationships through these heightened experiences that you wouldn't typically find in a city setting.

Interviewer: I notice that we have been talking now for almost an hour. Before we wrap-up for now is there anything else you'd like to add ?

Participant: I don't think so. (55:25)

Participant 3.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about the experience that you had in the wilderness?

Participant3: How it all started was I was going for individual counselling at North Shore Counselling Services to deal with a sexual abuse issue from childhood. I was experiencing some depression around that. My therapist at the time got me involved with a group. So I was going to that once a week, and about halfway through the 10 week group therapy she brought up this Outward Bound project. It was called "Women of Courage" It was an eight day program and it was fully funded and she asked if any of us would like to go. We had to fill out an application and say why we felt that we should be picked to go. There were about 10 women in my group and about half of us ended up going. It was funded through some corporations in Vancouver I think. It was quite an expensive thing, so it was kind of neat that I was chosen to go. It was in the summertime so I said "Sure I would love to go". I was on leave from work at the time, a medical leave, so it worked out well. One day a bus ticket arrived in the mail and all the itinerary for the group. It was in Pemberton and I was living in Squamish at time so that was kind of handy as well.

I've brought my Journal as it was a while ago. It was September 98 that I went. There were 27 women all together in the program, but we were broken up into groups of about nine women with two leaders per group. None of the women in my group knew each other so I wasn't put in a group with any of the other women from my (therapy) group, which was probably a good thing. I was quite nervous about the whole thing because I didn't know any of these women. The ages were quite varied. I think the youngest woman in the group was about 23 and the oldest woman was about 54 so it was quite mixed. (3:20)

It was quite an ordeal. I didn't really know what to expect. I was fairly fit at the time, but it was quite a struggle for a lot of the women. We had to carry all of our own stuff. We were carrying 35 to 40 lb. packs. They supplied all the gear, hiking boots and all that stuff. We didn't have very far to go the first day, and we camped out the first night. The next day we just started progressively moving on. There wasn't a lot of therapy involved. The Outward Bound leaders were not like therapists, but they had obviously done this for quite awhile. Every night we had a round and we would all sit and talk and share our experience. Plus we were partnered up in sleeping arrangements, there were four of us in each tent, so we all shared our individual experiences with each other as well. (4:40) Every day we did something different. Every day it was a new challenge. Everything was new to me. I had never done any serious hiking before. We did some ice climbing. Every day we had a new goal set for us. All of us ended up doing everything. We all really encouraged each other. I think it was the bonding experience with these other women. Not knowing them, and bonding with them, trusting them, being able to talk about your own experience, my own experience.

I think one of the most helpful parts of the experience was... Every Outward Bound program you have to do a solo experience. We had to stay by ourselves for 24 hours. For me that was quite an ordeal because at the time I was married and had three children and it had been a very long time since I had been totally on my own. Plus, at that time I had a little bit of a fear of the dark (6:05). I think the scariest part for me was having to stay by myself overnight out in the wilderness. We got to choose our own spots and they were quite close to where the main camp was. I'll just backtrack a bit. During the group we had one night where we made stuff out of "Femo", it's a clay stuff, and we were supposed to make something that really symbolized, that really meant something to us. I was just playing around with the stuff and I made this little round, oval shaped, blue stone is what it looked like, and I realized what that symbolized for me. I had been for a therapy session with a counsellor once, and she kind of took me back to this place, and I could see my young self sitting by a lake under a tree, and I was crying, and she talked me through some stuff, and then this lake became a really peaceful symbol for me, which I think is why I made that little blue stone. So I took that stone with me on my hiking trip. So when it was time for us to pick the place to do a solo we came around this corner and there was this tiny little lake there with a rock sitting beside it and it was really nice. I was kind of looking around not thinking too much and I said " Oh, I want this place, this is where want to do mine." and she said " Okay, that's fine " (8:00). Later on I set up my little tarp and stuff and I was washing and I was sitting on this rock looking at the lake and then I realized it was kind of like during my hypnotherapy session. Here was this lake, and here I was by myself and it was all kind of coming together for me. So that actually ended up being pretty empowering for me to do that overnight and have that lake just kind of appear out of nowhere.

I mean, the whole thing, there was just so much encouragement from the two leaders and from the other women, when it was over I came back, came home, and everyone was saying "Oh my God, you look so good." and stuff like that. I had a bit of a tan, and I felt really fit and everything, but I felt like a totally new person. I felt totally changed because I had overcome all these challenges. Like rock climbing. Stuff that I never thought I would be able to do. It made me feel much stronger outside and inside. It was pretty cool because the very last day, like, you are living on dried food for the whole time that you are hiking. The last day we came down and had a good dinner that night and the next morning at 6:00 they came and woke everybody up and we had to do either a five or a 10 kilometer run. This younger woman and I decided "Hey a we can do this 10 km run." So we went out, I think I had run a few times, but we went out and ran this 10 km run. God, I don't think I ever would have attempted that two years previous. It really gave me a lot of strength it was a really neat experience and I would like to go do it again sometime. I don't know if I could ever afford it, but I think it is a really good thing for people to do. (10:24)

Interviewer: So a lot of it for you was the overcoming of these challenges?

Participant3: Yes. I think overcoming the challenges and realizing that... I think I put a lot of things into perspective after that. When I finished the Outward Bound program and the group was over, I actually confronted my brother, who was abusive to me as a child, and wrote letters to everybody in my family telling them about the abuse. It really gave me a lot of inner strength to do that. I don't know if that was coupled with the group therapy and the individual therapy but I don't think I would ever have got to that point as quickly if I hadn't done the outward bound program. I think it kind of just reinforced that I did have that inner strength to be able to do that.

Interviewer: Was there anything about the fact that it was in a wilderness or natural environment?

Participant3: I think it totally had to do that, because you didn't have anything else around you. You didn't have any amenities. You didn't have any interruptions. It was just you, the wilderness, and these women you were with. So you were totally dependent on each other, and yourself, to get you through this ordeal. I believe in counselling and all that stuff, but I think that people really have a lot of inner strength, and if you are put in a situation like I was, I mean I opted to go, I wasn't forced to go, but if you put yourself in that situation you will push yourself as hard as you need to deal with it. Being out there with these women, there is nothing around to influence you. You're spending 24 hours a day either by yourself or with these other women (12:49). And we shared stuff like friends, like we had known each other for a long time, but we hadn't. It was really easy to share your experiences with each other. I found that really helpful too. I wouldn't want to go into the wilderness by myself. I don't think it would have been as therapeutic for me as going out with this group.

Interviewer: So there was something about being in the wilderness that made it work.

Participant3: Oh definitely. Part of that is the challenge of just actually being in the wilderness because you don't have any of the amenities, you don't have the distractions that you do... I mean, I was coming from a husband and three children, a house and all the rest of it, and all those other influences, and here all that was taken away and you're free just to explore your feelings without dragging all that other stuff into play.

Interviewer: So getting away from the daily stuff was freeing for you in that way?

Participant3: Oh definitely, definitely.

Interviewer: And also just the daily challenge of living in that environment.

Participant3: Yes. like I said, I developed a lot of strength from that, from just that kind of survival instinct. Having to do these things. Here we are, we've got no lights, no toilet, you've got to dig your own toilet. You've got nowhere to bathe. It's putting yourself out there.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit more about the solo experience?

Participant3: Can I read this to you? (participant reads from notes made at that time).

"This was day four, and we had talked about that that was going to be the day for our solo experience. So we all prepared our packs to head out for our solo experience. We were only given two liters of water and some juice crystals and some GORP, (Good Old Raisins and Peanuts), and that was it for the whole time that we were gone. We talked about why Outward Bound does solos on their courses. If I recall it is just like an inner strength thing, to face your own fears and stuff. My solo spot is fairly close to base camp and right beside a lake, a small lake or a large pond I don't know which it is. The water didn't seem that significant of first except for washing up which felt great. As I started to think about it more I remembered the rock that I had made in group that was shaped like a lake and was blue, and my going inside myself where a scared younger self would be sitting at the edge of a lake scared and crying. So now my spot seems very special to me. I have set up my tarp and dug my latrine and washed up and done my hair and had a snack and I'm now airing my clothes and it is great to have his chance to catch up on my journal writing. It was great until I knew it would be dark soon, but I made myself comfortable and settled in for the night. It rained. My tarp leaked and I fixed it with my moleskin. I spent a restless night tossing and turning and didn't get a lot of sleep, but I survived and felt really good about myself in the morning. I packed up when Suzanne gave me the okay to head back."

like I say, for me, a lot of it started out, it was facing the fear of being afraid of the dark that was my biggest challenge at the time. and I thought "oh my God, how am I going to do this ,there are going to be wild animals out there, and here I am all by myself". even though you're not far from where the base camp was I still had all these thoughts running through my mind like "what if a bear comes?" or we had had mice in our little tent one night and I'm this big baby "oh my God, there's a mouse!" I was kind of freaked out by the Wildlife situation, thinking "what was I going to do?" I just really rationalized with myself "OK, if that happens all you have to do is yell and someone's going to hear you" we're up on top of this mountain there was nobody up there apart from us women and the two leaders, so if you yelled, someone would hear you and come. so I just kind of rationalized with myself that everyone else who was ever done a solo with outward bound has survived and you will too. but like I say, it was a pretty restless night but I felt really empowered the next day. I got over that hurdle. I didn't dwell a lot on my sexual abuse issues except for the significance of the Lake. but I don't recall during my solo experience thinking about my sexual abuse issues and how I was dealing with that and where I was at with my recovery. think it was more of the fear of the dark and the fear of getting eaten by a Bear, and the fact that my tarp started leaking. it was more kind of dealing with that(19:30).

Interviewer: so there was a real sense of danger?

Participant3: 0 yes, definitely for me. I don't know for other women... we didn't talk a lot about our solo experiences afterwards. but for me there was a real sense of danger. I survived it and I think like everything else that went along with that whole outward bound experience that gave me a lot of strength "wow, I survived a night in the dark by myself. what could be worse than that?" it was just reinforcing that I had that strength within me, to deal with hurdles in my life. I think since then I have done a lot of things in life that I probably wouldn't have done, like even now going back to school, and leaving a relationship, and moved to Vancouver. I've done a lot of things that I don't think I would have done if I had not had such an empowering experience(20:55)

Interviewer: was there a sense of connection with the wilderness at all, or was it just a setting for the group dynamics?

Participant3: certain things I felt pretty connected with the wilderness. one day we did a hike up a particularly difficult, steep incline. when we got to the top we did this little Trust thing. you laid on the ground and made yourself really stiff and all the other women picked you up and raise you up over their heads. so you had to really trust them but it also felt like you were flying, like you were free. that was pretty cool, but don't know if that was because we were on this mountaintop or whether that would have worked elsewhere. I think we did things that you wouldn't do in day to day life. so in a way that was the connection with being in the wilderness, normally you wouldn't do those kinds of things. there were a lot of freeing a kind of experiences, like rock climbing. I had never done it before. I don't have a real fear of heights but it was kind of weird going up and then you get to the top and she tells you to jump over the edge and it is like "sure, OK". so it is like a trusting thing too. trusting yourself and your ability to carry out this thing and actually survive and the people around you to actually be there for you. (23:05)

Interviewer: so it puts you in situations that you wouldn't have been in otherwise.

Participant3: Oh definitely. I enjoy camping a lot more now too since I had my outward bound experience. I have taken up camping and things. I enjoy being outdoors.

Interviewer: it sounds like a wonderful program

Participant3: it was it was great and it was amazing that it was all paid for. I wouldn't exactly call it a holiday. to me it was such a worthwhile experience. I don't know how many times I have told people about it and then it is like " oh well for my 50th birthday lets go and do outward bound again, " I think I would like to do that again as I am at a different stage of my life now and have worked through a lot of my issues. I think it would still be a really empowering experience to go and do it again. just from this different aspect of where I am in my life right now. it wouldn't hurt anyway.

Interviewer: it sounds like the lake was very important. (24:45)

Participant3: it was . it was really symbolic. in fact it amazed me when I came around the corner and saw the lake. I felt really at peace with it and thought " this is where I want my spot to be". I knew right away that was where I wanted my spot to be. and that Little Rock I made in the group, if I'm having, not a traumatic experience, but like... when I started school we had to bring something that was a symbol for us and I brought my rock because it kind of gives me a sense of, not really security, but sense of peace with myself. and I know what it means but not necessarily everybody else knows what it means. for me it is a real symbol of how far I have come. like where I was when I made that and where I am now in my life. it is kind of neat to have that and think back to why I made it and the things I was going through at the time. So the lake was really neat, yeah, it was like an added bonus.

Interviewer: it was the right spot at the right time

Participant3: it was. it's kinda funny because I'm not even a swimmer or anything. I don't know why a lake. I guess it was from when I did that hypnotherapy with that counselor. and that is where I ended up.

Interviewer: was there a lake in the past, when you were younger

Participant3: not that had anything to do with my abuse. but yeah we used to go to the lake sometimes. not anything super significant. So I don't really know how that came to be.

Interviewer: so perhaps what was more significant was just surviving the night(27:15)

Participant3: 0 yes. definitely. overcoming that fear. and like I said, I felt really empowered by the whole thing. facing a new challenge every day, overcoming it and feeling like I could do it. even though it was tough, I did it anyway. and survived, yeah. I think it really helped with my healing from my sexual abuse.

Interviewer: is anything that you want to add on the role of the nature or the wilderness in that?

Participant3: I think that I am more at peace in nature now. I guess I have never really thought about it too much, but I enjoy being out in nature more now. especially when I was living in Squamish. I have two dogs and I would often go walking off into the bush with them. I don't really have that fear anymore, of being out there by myself. I think that is part of that whole strengthening process. I don't think that as a child, I grew up in Prince George which is a good-sized city, I don't remember having any nature or wilderness experiences as a child. and think that is why this is so significant for me, because I never really, because going out hiking and all that stuff was never really my cup of tea. there must be something very therapeutic about it because a lot of people do these programs. I don't know what significance it has for other people...

Interviewer: what about for you?

Participant3: for me, it made me feel like I was much stronger of a person, physically and mentally.

Interviewer: before hand you weren't that comfortable in that sort of area

Participant3: no I wasn't. I pushed myself after that to do a lot of things that I never used to. I started running. I left a marriage of 20 something years. I decided to go back to school. I changed jobs. I honestly don't think I would've done a lot of those things if I hadn't done that outward bound program. I felt like a new person when I came back. I felt really sure of myself. and not so depressed, I had been going through some depression, I think my depression had lifted somewhat. part of that is not being around the day to day dealing with the kids, the House, and all the rest of it. but I think, just being out by myself, being dealt this stuff and having to deal with it helped. (31:05)

Interviewer: because really it is down to you when you are out there.

Participant3: well yeah you are relying on yourself, you have to trust yourself that you can do these things.

Interviewer: so you have to trust yourself when you're just camping, you have to trust yourself when you're climbing

Participant3: Trust yourself when you're crossing creeks, walking on rocks with a 35 lb. pack and you are like " alright if I slip I'm gonna..." I really pushed myself a lot and felt good about doing it

Interviewer: if you slip you gonna do what?

Participant3: well your going to fall in the water get your clothes all wet, and you don't have any other clothes to put on, or you're going to hurt yourself.

Interviewer: so you have to face that challenge

Participant3: yeah, lots of challenges. At one time I thought it would be a pretty neat job to have to lead these wilderness programs. maybe if I was 20 years younger, but not meant to be.

Interviewer: it sounds like the whole experience has a lot of meaning for you.

Participant3: yes it does. it was definitely a positive experience, and like I said if I could do it again I would. maybe one day I will. we all traded addresses but none of us kept in touch with each other. it is kind of weird. I think we all went away with our own stuff to look at again.

Interviewer: so there was a momentary group thing...

Participant3: yes but very close. we became close very fast, and it was really painful when we parted. lots of tears and hugging, you know. and a lot of encouragement. I just remember that at the end we all had to say a little bit about each person, and it was really nice to hear the comments that people made about you, about your strength and things like that. it was really neat.

Interviewer: so it really accent's that inner strength that you have

Participant3: O yes, it just reaffirms the whole... The whole experience was reaffirmed by having these women tell you, offering support and encouragement, praise and stuff.

Interviewer: is there anything else that you would like to add?

Participant3: I don't know. is there anything else that you want to know? I think that is kind of everything. I think that pretty much sums up the experience.

Interviewer: just to focus on the solo, just to make sure that we get everything we can out of that As it sounds like it was a quite important part of it. there was that sense of peace...

Participant3: yes

Interviewer: at the lake. A sense of confronting your fears

Participant3: yes

Interviewer: and a real sense of achievement having survived the night and having faced those fears

Participant3: yes definitely.

Interviewer: is there anything else that was key there?

Participant3: I think just the significance of the lake for me as well. which at first I hadn't realized but then when I thought about it I realized what that significance was. I knew from the beginning that that would be my biggest hurdle, the solo. So I guess that was the biggest accomplishment for me. Actually surviving the night, not getting eaten by anything. That was probably the most major hurdle that I accomplished.

Interviewer: was there anything else about being alone?

Participant3: I don't think so, except for the fact that I haven't been alone for who knows since when before that. The big thing was the actual fear of being in the dark by myself.

Interviewer: OK. thank you very much

Participant 4.

Interviewer: so, why don't you tell me about some of your experiences?

Participant 4: do you want a history of where I'm coming from with this?

Interviewer: sure, coming from, experience, and the outcome, if that works for you

Participant 4: I guess I have suffered from chronic depression since I was about 14. I didn't start treating it until I was probably about 20. I started investigating treating it with some therapy that didn't last that long and then some medication that didn't last that long. Then for about the last two and a half years I have been seeing a clinical counselor and taking medication. so that is my history. at the same time that I started doing that I was applying for my position with NOLS, and not really knowing if that would hinder me from being accepted to the program. also just my ability to teach as it involved being out in the field for three or four weeks away from support systems. my biggest fear was that I would not be able to deal with myself or things that came up on course. that was my fear, that I just wasn't sure what would happen. I think the...

I grew up in an outdoor setting. I didn't do a lot of wilderness stuff as a kid except for car camping and that sort of thing but I was always outside playing. A big part of my growing up experience was being outside. but I wasn't one of those people who went to camp or got to be a counselor in camp or anything like that. So my professional experience was not until a couple of years ago when I was 31 or so. I guess of what I have realized in the past couple of years is that... I was working at a retail store and then teaching kayaking at night. I noticed that... first I didn't know if I would be any good at teaching and second I didn't know if I would enjoy it myself, it always seemed like such a hassle getting the boats ready and stuff like that. I would go to those lessons with a lot of anger and rage from the day at work, in a really bad mood you know, and I would leave those classes feeling a hundred percent in the opposite direction, filled with joy and hopefulness, and motivation. just from teaching somebody how to kayak. that was sort of a tip that I was heading in the right direction with the profession I was choosing. (3:56)
on a personal level I think the first time that I really noticed a big effect on myself was when I did a three day trip with a friend of mine to Clayoquot sound. he was a really spiritual person and very quiet and very mellow. I had never really considered myself spiritual, I sort of dissed religion and didn't want anything to do with it. I know that going out there was the first time where I really felt the spirit of the land. we were staying on Blunden island and there was an old native village site there. when we first landed we ended up on the village site, though we didn't know it, and my friend said "I don't think this is the right place to camp and I just have a weird feeling" so we got back in our boats. actually we hiked through the forest first and found the correct campsite, and we found out later that the first place that we had landed on was this ancient native town site. maybe that is why he felt weird, I don't know. I could definitely feel the spirit of people that had been there prior. I think that was the first time that I looked up at the trees. that whole experience really humbled me just in terms of my place in the universe, I suppose, as part of nature, and how small I was compared to everything else around me

Interviewer: what happened for you when you looked at the trees? (5:58)

Participant 4: I just felt... I come from Ontario originally, so part of it was seeing all of these old growth trees. I remember the first time going through cathedral grove on the island and being "oh my God these things are so big" and now when I drive through it is normal to see trees that big, or I'm "O these trees are not that big" but there it was just amazing, they were just so tall and powerful. Just knowing that they had been in there years and years before I ever set foot on this Earth, and different eyes had seen them in a way different setting than I was seeing them now, in a way different world and time and place. I don't know it was just... it was the first time in the wilderness that I really thought about what I was looking at and what had come before me. Again I just felt humbled, but humbled in a good way. I can't really put my finger on it, but really a good feeling of just being part of it all and just appreciating it all. I spent a lot of time just sitting on the beach running my hands through the rocks and just picking out little rocks that I found and making little collections. I wasn't going to keep them, but I could have sat there all day and done that. (7:35)
and then... I guess I had done another short trip now that I come to think of it, two months before that, just up Indian Arm, and the same thing... not having a lot of experience with tides, and I remember being up

there and sitting, and just watching the tide, not that I sat there for 12 hours or anything, just really noticing the tides, just being really fixated on "Wow, this is incredible". and it just felt good. I dunno, that's my answer... (laughs) (8:27)

Interviewer: how did the experience in Clayoquot affect how you felt, especially when you got back, but even when you were there?

Participant 4: I can't really recall it having a great effect on my state of mind at the time. I didn't really link the two together. I think now I'm more inclined to see the link between being out in the wilderness and the way that I respond when I'm back in the city. You know, the things that I have learned out there. So I don't think I really put anything together after that, but I do know that I felt a lot of peace, that joyful sort of feeling, that feeling of just being, just seeing myself as part of the universe in a way that I hadn't seem myself before, or just being conscious of it perhaps

Interviewer: that sense of being connected to the universe left you with a sense of peace?

Participant 4: yes, and just like "Wow, there is something more powerful than myself out there." Maybe it was partially because I was with somebody who is really in touch with the land and their spirituality and that. I witnessed that in him and started looking around with that vision. But I wasn't looking to have an experience like that, looking to have a spiritual coming-to sort of thing. It just happened. And then after that I realized when I went out there I was starting to experience being outside in that sort of way and being more open to that side of my self(10:42) which I think is for me a really positive thing.

Interviewer: you said that at the time you didn't really see the link but that looking back you can see the link. can you tell me a bit more about that?

Participant 4: well, since then I've done a lot more trips, I've done my training with NOLS, and that included... that was the longest trip I did before I had done their instructor training. I had been out for maybe four nights, and here I was going on this 20 day trip with a bunch of people I didn't know. That whole process of going through that experience and then subsequently teaching in that field... I definitely have been more conscious of the link that being outside has to do with my mental state, and also being quite astonished by my own ability to talk to other people about what can happen, or just people's experiences with the outdoors because a lot of people are coming on these trips because of things that they have going on in their lives. It's not a therapeutic program, not a rehabilitation program but a lot of people who are coming are looking for answers or to get away from the rush of the world and coming out and really appreciating not having TV, not having radio, not having newspapers not having all the luxuries that we have in the city and being scared to do without them. you know, not having alcohol or drugs and going out there and being like "Oh yeah, I can function out here and it is OK" (12:50)

When I look back at that experience in Clayoquot I just feel that it was the beginning of something, I don't really feel that it was a big, life changing... No, it was kind of. I will always look back at that experience, but it wasn't something that I, I don't know I'm not sure how to describe it...

Interviewer: so it wasn't the kind of experience where you had the experience and came back an obviously different person. It sounds like the kind of experience that was actually quite pivotal, and has changed the direction in which you have gone

Participant 4: yes I would agree with that.

Interviewer: is the idea of getting away from stuff part of the experience or part of your present experience?

Participant 4: it is definitely part of my present experience. I think that part of my depression is that my mind goes into overload and it needs to be stilled, you know? Or I need to reprogram it, is what I feel. I'm an analyzer and I'm very sensitive. I talk to people and then I walk away and that night I think "O God, did I offend them or did I say the wrong thing, or what did they think of me". But I also feel as though there is a lot of... I have always wanted a simple life, I have come from a background that was upper middle class. We definitely didn't want for anything. I wouldn't say that we were spoiled but when we wanted things or needed things there was money to get those things, within reason. But I'm not out to make a lot of money, I will never make a lot of money, if I do it will surprise me. So going out into the wilderness, I just

find a lot of... like this last summer, in Alaska working, I just really got into catching fish in the morning then making a fire and smoking it all day and that being my sole purpose of the day was to cook my fish. And remembering saying to my co-worker "wow this is the best day I've had out here". And thinking back to this is how people used to live, and I had a really amazing experience in the Charlottes last year too, visiting an Indian village, Native village there, and again feeling the Spirit of land. There were still poles, totem poles down on the ground and house posts, and the Wells in the ground. So being there and then seeing pictures of that village when it was actually working and thinking about how the women would typically spend the day cooking and sewing and making clothing and looking after the children and the men would be out hunting, but the link was "Wow this is what they used to do, sit around and take care of themselves". They didn't have all of the luxuries, so that a day's activity was to go out and smoke their fish or sew their clothing, or whatever. I just felt a lot of joy that day because it was just this simple, simple thing. It was like "why are we so far away from this. From this simple but hard Life?" I'm sure they had their problems too but I just feel that this city world is so cluttered... I come back to the city after being away on a trip and the cars are so big and so loud and there are so many of them, and everything is fake, everything is modified, everything is... it is getting so far away from nature that it is pretty mind-boggling. Coming from one extreme, having spent 28 days out, and some time in a very remote place, and then 28 days out again, and then coming back to some place like Vancouver, it really is weird. I notice something that doesn't seem quite right, and yet I love living in the city too, and now I feel as though I need this in my life. So that is how I feel when I... that is my long winded answer to your question. (laughs). (19:10)

Interviewer: So for you there is that real sense of connection to the bigger thing that is important. Also the sense of just getting away from the sensory overload that happens around the city.

Participant 4: yes, yes

Interviewer: Are there other things that happen for you when you're out in the natural environment?

Participant 4: I guess there is my personal time out there and there is my professional time out there. Most recently I have spent more professional time out there than personal time. Professionally I guess it is helping others see that you don't have to have all of that stuff to be happy, whatever that means. It's not like I go out there and am overjoyed every day, I definitely have my moments out there when I am not, more so when I'm working I suppose.

Interviewer: what times are they?

Participant 4: It is mostly early in morning, when I have to get up and it is dark and it is 4:00 in the morning in Baja, and I have to get up and work, be a role model, be positive. In some ways having to do that is helpful as I can't get away with... It's the same thing as going teaching after a hard day at work. I can't show up there and be a bitch. I have to turn it on, and having to turn it on helps, and the environment helps as well, just being outside and doing what I love to do, which is paddling, and teaching other people how to paddle and seeing the enjoyment they get out of doing something as simple as a wet exit, which they were totally fearful of doing. I have moments when I wake up during the night when I'm out on a course, when I just can't shut my mind off. There is a lot of responsibility, and I wake-up and I'm not sure why I'm there, or if I should be there. So my challenge is to still my mind in those moments, and I'm getting better at doing that, knowing that it is my mind churning and making up stories and blowing things out of proportion, you know, that treadmill, monkey brain or whatever it is. Just being able to still it. I guess really that has nothing to do with wilderness as that happens in the city too (23:00)

Interviewer: is this something about being in the wilderness the makes that easier to deal with?

Participant 4: well... one of the most challenging courses I had was the one this winter in Baja and that was the one thing where I said "I'm just going to do the best I can every day and that is all I can do, because there is only so much I can do about it out here and I can only do what I know how to do and that's going to have to be good enough". I think that is helpful because like "Well I'm dealing with it as it comes". I was good with myself on that course because... it was my first time courses leading because it was like "you're going to make mistakes but just do the best you can" and there was a lot of stuff coming at me, it was like triage. In this place that I work for they say "one of the great things about working outside is that the wilderness gives you instant feedback". If you screw up you know about it because

your upside down in your boat or... you know... it's the same thing with a lot of different things out there "if you do this that is the result" it's right there so it is instant (24:40)

Interviewer: so that is helpful?

Participant 4: yes, because then you can just deal with it, hopefully.

Personally, I want to spend more time out there as I want to be truly me. I say truly me, because when I'm working I have to up-hold the values of the organization that I work for, not that I disagree with them but there are certain things that I don't give away about myself, unless I'm asked directly and some people ask those questions and some people don't. But I want to be out and make decisions on my experience level and my mental state and my motivation and my goals and not based on a group of 10 people who have maybe never been out there before. I feel like a lot of what I'm talking about to you is more based on my professional experience. In some ways, being out there for 28 days, there's a lot of personal stuff in there because you're just living, you are out there, it is still life and when it is consistent like that it is not as if you're going home at the end of the day you have to deal with all your own issues and stuff. I think it is helpful sometimes because sometimes the only goal you have that day is getting from A to B. When you really look at it, when I'm having a hard day out there I sort of shake myself and I go "it's only camping, so what is really the stress, that the students are not going to show up on time?". When you put it into perspective it's like "What are we doing out here? we are just camping that's what we're doing and we're looking after ourselves and hopefully we are looking after each other" and I think that that would go on a personal trip as well like " what are your goals for the day ". well my goals are to feed myself and get safely from this place to that place. and although that comes with inherent stress it's not the same stress as " I'm going to screw up this stock thing and lose somebody's money". But as I say that I'm also thinking that the decisions I make out there I could maybe lose my life or someone else's life...

Interviewer: does that have an effect on how you see it, how you experience it out there? (28:12)

Participant 4: yes when I'm working it does because I feel very responsible for the people I'm with. It's different from guiding because I'm actually in a place where I'm teaching people how to do this and how to make good judgments and decisions so there is a fine line between letting them learn from their mistakes as long as they are safe mistakes and then reeling them back in. I feel a ton of responsibility and it is when I come out of the field when that is most heavy on me and I have a hard time making the transition from that world to this world. it is hard. In this past year I have been my most unhappy, my most unhappiest if I have had a challenging course where there is a lot going on, that transition from there to here is difficult. (29:30)

Interviewer: so when you're on a personal trip does that concept of life-and-death and responsibility come up for you at all?

Participant 4: yes it does because I have an overactive imagination and I think that my skill level is much higher than my fear level allows me to... I think my mind limits me more than my skill level. Which is possibly a good thing, I don't know? I have no control over the weather, I only have control over the decisions I make based on what I see and what I hear, so things can happen really quickly. I often think about "What if I slip and I fall ". If I slip and I fall and I break my leg or I hit my head, you are so far way, and that sort of thing...

Interviewer: is that a helpful part of the experience

Participant 4: I dunno if it is. I know that on a more daily basis if I go out to Tofino to go surfing or what ever its on my mind a lot even when I think "I don't think I'm in that big a danger" but I tend to think of the worst case scenario in the waves or whatever. And in that case, sometimes it is not helpful. I'm out in the waves doing something that I love to do and I'm absolutely miserable because I don't feel that I'm doing well enough, or I get down on myself for being too frightened or fearful.

Interviewer: Is there anything else about those original experiences that springs to mind?

Participant 4: I think the main thing I see with those experiences is that I see that there is a lot of stuff in this world and this city that makes me understand why there are a lot of people who are really fucked up.

Not that I see myself that way but I have my own issues and my own ways of dealing with them. I think that going out into that world and living a simple life makes me realize that we put a lot of, by all the technology and all the movement forward, and all the industrialization that we have been through in the last hundred years, I feel like this world is spinning out of control and that is how I feel when I get back. When I go out on a trip whether it is personal or professional, things slow down and there is time to... your whole goal of the day is to feed yourself, to clothe yourself, to keep yourself warm and dry, or to keep yourself out of the sun and hydrated, whatever it is. You already taking care of your body and your basic needs. When you come back to the city there are all these things like, money for instance. I don't deal with money when I'm out there, and there is no stress about it. I am amazed that when I come back to the city every day I go out of my door of my wallet is open to some degree. Then there's the making of the money, and the stresses of just living in the city and bill payments. Just all that that comes with city life, it makes me wonder if we're really moving forward or if we are just moving in a direction that is, I don't know. I feel a little bit hopeless but I also feel if more people could experience going out and living with less, and having that experience where your whole goal for the day is taking care of yourself, then I think more people's eyes would open. Some people's sole purpose in the world is shopping or whatever. And everybody is busy, they have to be busy or they don't feel productive. I noticed that a lot when I'm out on a trip, that it is OK to just sit still, to not do anything, or just go for walk or cook your food. Often times I will come back to the city and it is interesting because all I want to do when I come back is not go outside. I don't want to talk to anybody. People are like "How are you going to deal with going home and being inside?" and it is all that I want to do. And I find myself a lot just sitting and staring at the walls and thinking, and I start to beat myself up over it as I'm not productive or what ever. But what is wrong with just sitting here and thinking or sitting here and looking out of the window and sort of going off into space. Why do I have to be busy? (37:15). That is what I noticed about my experiences when I go out there and then come back. I have had a lot of good discussion with students when I'm out there about what is wilderness and how does it affect you, and that is something that I always tend to bring up, this feeling of why do we feel like we need to be entertained by some outside source all the time? Can we not just sit with ourselves?

Interviewer: So it sounds like going out puts you back into that simple place where the only things you need to deal with are your immediate concerns, food, shelter, warmth. Which allows you to slow down, calm down, and be at peace. But that conversely makes it a little harder to come back for a while.

Participant 4: Yes, for sure.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you want to add?

Participant 4: Not that I can think of right now.

Interviewer: Thank you. (39:00)

Participant 5.

Interviewer: can you tell me about your healing experience in the wilderness?

Participant: I have experienced a lot of positive healing experiences in the wilderness since I was a child, but the one I remember most, one that was quite strong, happened last summer. I had been going through a difficult period, some bad stuff had happened and I was feeling quite upset about it. so I usually go for hikes in the woods with my dogs anyway...

Interviewer: are you comfortable telling me what the bad stuff was?

Participant: sure. because of a misunderstanding and I had lost a good friend, so I was quite upset about that. it seemed to be pretty much irreparable, for no particular reason that I could tell, it just happened that way. I was quite upset about it, especially as it was a misunderstanding.

Interviewer: so what does upset mean?

Participant: sad, and finding myself detached from things, withdrawn a bit, turning into myself. so my thoughts were spinning a around on it, just kind of moping around. at the time too I was also reading about the idea of affirmations, like a mantra, to see if I could bring myself through it. so I went out for a walk with my dogs, and it was quite a warm day, a warm sunny day up in the mountains. it is always very refreshing, tiring and refreshing, to go for a good slog up a mountain, and just kind of wind my way down. while I was hiking I remembered that I was thinking... I was still thinking about this a lot and I just wasn't getting that refreshment or rejuvenation that I thought I would get. I was trying to think very much about just letting myself not try to fix the problem in myself but sort of opening up to whatever healing might be there. I don't know if it was an experiment or if I was going around in circles (3:00). I was trying to use an affirmation which was just " I open myself to what ever healing is there" or whatever can help, and just thinking about that. it was actually a really good hike and I remember physically feeling quite good. I had been hiking for a few hours and at a certain point I realized I hadn't been thinking about anything for about five to 10 minutes where I had simply been walking, and as soon as I came to the awareness that I wasn't thinking about anything there was a palpable rush of energy, it felt like healing energy coming in. I could actually feel it flowing through me and almost coming down through my feet like a flow through. and a very very strong sense of reassurance, nothing so conscious, but that things would be OK. it was actually very healing at that point, almost tears of joy, it was very powerful. it almost felt like an electric charge running through me. I had never felt anything that strong before. and basically after that the whole situation with losing a friend didn't bother me. of course I remembered it, but all of the upset about it was gone as though I had been purged of it, purged of the turning around in thoughts, all the bad feelings, all of the upset feeling. I have experienced healing things like that before, where I might be thinking about something and finding that I'm getting a little bit tied up in knots and then the same sort of thing where I drift away and then find myself becoming aware of the life around me, or the energy around me in the woods especially from plant life I think, in the woods there's not many animals that you see.

Interviewer: can you tell me more about that sensing of the energy around you? (5:37)

Participant: I have noticed that it definitely depends on my frame of mind. if I am just out for a walk or power hiking or something like that than I don't feel it at all. but if I'm open to it, it's almost like if I have a question and if I'm open to it instead of trying to find an answer in myself then I will start to notice the energy around me. it might be my imagination, I'm not sure, but as I walk through there seem to be areas that have more energy than other areas. it could even be something like negative ions collecting in one area or something like that and we're just sensitive to it, but some areas... this place where I felt this healing was very intensely that. it was almost as if I could feel myself moving through it. after about 30 seconds or so of walking along I had walked out of it but the residual effect was still with me and the cleansing had still happened but the Energy had faded. it felt a little bit like, if you can imagine like a weather system, having high pressure and moving to a low pressure, I could feel the energy dissipating as I moved through to another area. that could be my imagination, I can't tell, but I choose to believe... I try to trust my intuition on that. that is all I kind of have to go on. that is the one I remember best. (7:30) that was probably the most intense one as it was such a change afterwards, like " it's all good " and I

found that afterwards I had a much deeper appreciation... I think the body sort of remembers things like that, so for quite a long time after that whenever I went out into the woods I had like a memory of that feeling pass through me, though not as intensely. it was almost as if a replay passed of through me and I would feel very recharged by it. I think a large part of what had brought it about was that I had opened myself up to what ever might be there. because I was quite upset I think I was more sensitive and aware of what was around me, as opposed to when I'm just out for a hike where I'm lost in my thoughts thinking about work or something. I have had experiences like that, not as intense, over the years since I was a child. forested areas or lakes or streams or what ever have always been a place of refuge. the last few vacations I went on, a couple of them, went on winter vacations up to the Yukon, because it is very healing, standing out there in the middle of the night in minus 40 degree weather with a full moon and some northern lights is very humbling. that is one thing too, I remember, as the energy was flowing through I also felt very humbled by it. it was almost like a very... almost like a parental caring. I felt very small and humble compared to the energy that I felt flowing through me. it is the same thing in the Yukon with the snow around, it is very humbling and very... that humility is good I think.

Interviewer: do feel that the feeling humbled is part of the healing process? (10:40)

Participant: yes. it just made me think of something. I was doing some reading recently and now that I'm talking about I can see that one of the things that may have made a difference too... when I'm feeling down like that there is a little bit of a feeling of hopelessness and it is almost like that the hopelessness... I don't know if I can, this is going to be like rationalizing, if a person is hopeful then they are looking for being out of the situation they are in and in some better situation, there are hoping that they will win a lottery or something like that. but hopelessness means, in a way, a person is resigned to where they are and they are much more in the present, not looking for something outside, not hopeful of something better, but simply where they are. that is kind of the flip side of despairing, it's more being where they are. I think that feeling the sadness and feeling the humility, in a way there is a kind of hopelessness. I realize as I'm talking about it that that fits with what I was reading. the hopelessness, that is such a strong word I don't mean it quite like that, it's a little bit more about being in the present, humility is a bit more about being in the present not trying to be somewhere else, not trying to be in a different state of mind or not thinking about what is on TV, or what has to be done. it is very much aware of the present, and I think that is what happened with this energy that came through me, I suddenly became aware... I don't remember anything for about five or 10 minutes and probably, maybe, it was happening during that time and when I became aware of it I was very much in the present, there was nothing else, I wasn't thinking of what had happened or what will happen, just the present, and just the experience in the present. so I think that is a large part of it, it is possible to open up to all of what nature has to offer if I can be more in the present.

Interviewer: what do you mean by "what nature has to offer"? (13:15)

Participant: there is a harmony and balance to nature that is always there. and in our lives it is almost impossible to live in balance and being an out in nature even if it is just a couple of hours to go and enjoy a walk by the beach, then there is a sense of the balance and harmony of everything working together like this beautiful delicate balanced machine that I can get a sense of, that I can get a sense of its flow and harmony and that helps to, has an effect on me, it helps to give me a sense of flow and harmony also.

Interviewer: do you have an idea of what that effect is?

Participant: it is a very calming affect. it feels like I come back with better perspective. things that bother me might bother me less, and I become a little bit more aware of how... that I am part of this harmony and balance that I'm not just... I don't exist independently, I exist in dependence of everything around me. if all I have to do is watch, sit on a mountaintop or sit in the Woods I can watch how everything is dependent upon everything else. there is nothing that occurs independently. I think a lot of what we live through every day, pushes this notion that we are independent, independently existing. we have our drives and our ambitions and all of these things that we push ourselves to do, but the message that I get from Nature is that is that we are not independent that we are utterly dependent. you can call it humility but perhaps it is more like balance in comparison to how we normally live

Interviewer: it sounds like that for you humility is kind of a sense of belonging to something much bigger

Participant: yes, being a part of something much bigger. one of the things it does too, it is funny how this is coming back now, I haven't... as I talk about it the experience becomes a little clearer. one of the things that comes through too, as I remember in that process, when I felt that healing, was that there was a very strong sense of compassion that came through with it, a very strong sense of understanding, that even though there was misunderstanding, there was compassion for myself and compassion for every and anything, like compassion for this other person. it is a little bit like when I feel that sense of balance, feel that sense of being part of something quite a bit larger then it also helps me open up to understand how other people might feel. I think in our day-to-day lives that doesn't happen an awful lot. when we get into exchanges or arguments or what ever we quite often... there is not much understanding of how the other person might be feeling. that is why I don't get angry so easily or that I don't misunderstand quite so easily I think, because it becomes easier to appreciate how another person might feel. it doesn't really matter what the situation is. a soon as I can feel understanding for how another person has come to think or feel in a certain way then how can I react negatively to that if I understand it. all I can feel is compassion, or ignore it but I can't react to it. (18:25) I think thats a lot of, you know... thats kind of what I feel, thats kind of what I get a sense of, of renewing, when I'm in nature, it's this sense of being part of a very large thing.

I remember years ago of reading a book by Martin Buber called " I and thou ". the experience that he describes, I remember when I read it, it just made perfect sense to me. I think that might not be far from what I have experienced.

Interviewer: can you elaborate a little more on that?

Participant: one of the things about the " I and thou " was the dissolving of subject-object. that there is no point of distinction in this direct reception, between who I am and what I am receiving. the dualistic idea softens or disappears sometimes, where I simply feel a part of... it looks a little like looking at my skin and saying " where is the skin and where it's air ". there is no hard line that says this is skin and this is Air. so I see it as I am Air and I am skin, I'm all of these things. the atoms that I'm composed of have been around for billions of years...

Interviewer: it sounds like your experience of being part of everything almost diminishes yourself, you merge with that so that it is hard to tell where you end and everything else starts because you feel connected with everything.

Participant: yes. So it is a little bit of softening of the ego. I sort of see the ego as being a hard line between me and that. in a way it is some mechanism in everyone, I think, that reinforces that there is a subject and an object. so I think there is there a little bit of softening of the ego, or diminishing of ego, when I feel that connection. so i think that is part of what is happening. I am analyzing too much...

Interviewer: that experience of the energy, is that connected with a sense of being part of everything? (22:12) -

Participant: yes, very definitely. being very much in the present there is no point of distinction there is just experience. and it lasts for a very short time. there is no awareness... I think subject and object is something I think about, but when I was right there in the present I'm not thinking about it, just aware. so it was like a suspension of all the stuff that I think about, suspension of ego, suspension of thinking of the past, thinking of the future, all of that was gone. so I feel that to different degrees when I get out in nature. if I spend a lot of time out in nature, then it becomes quite strong. I become incredibly calm, and very aware of my surroundings. I feel very much in balance with it, or very much like moving not through it but with it in a way.

Interviewer: that is an interesting distinction between moving through it and moving with it. it sounds to me like that goes to the belonging.

Participant: yes. it's a bit like you can think of a path as cutting through something, but a path is actually a feature of where it is, and then by walking along it it is simply moving with the balance of what ever I am walking through. there is also a sense of trusting that it is benign, trusting that what ever I feel from nature is not going to harm me, there is absolutely nothing to be afraid of, there is nothing to say " oh man, I had better not let that touch me ". I have run into a few bears here and there but they don't scare

me. it's a little bit like " if it is time then it is time" and it is probably going to hurt, I guess that is just the way it is. but I'm not afraid of it as I don't see it as malevolent Energy, I don't see it as being something to destroy me, I see it as being part of this process of life and death, and the constant cycles, the constant seasons, " everything has its time "

Interviewer: it sounds very spiritual. do you frame it in that way?

Participant: yes. I believe that spirits are in everything. I don't think that there is one sort of great spirit that everything is part of, but I think that everything that is alive has its own spirit. in a way that is the flow of nature, that it is all of the spirits, it is the inter-play of all of the spirits as they flow together, as they exist in balance

Interviewer: so these moments for you then are reconnecting with that flow of spirit of Energy. (26:43)

Participant: yes. so I guess it is quite spiritual in that regard. yes that is quite true. I could go and exercise in a gym or swim lengths in a pool. it would be kind of the same physical exercise but it wouldn't have anywhere near the same effect that being out in nature would have.

Interviewer: so it is really important to be out in nature for that experience to happen?

Participant: yes. And if I don't get out there often I get really grumpy. I can't maintain balance, I start to lose perspective. so it is really important... recently I just moved to East Vancouver. I was living in North Vancouver so it was just a short drive and I'm off into the mountains and now it is not. now it is difficult. now it is a drive to get anywhere. so I'm finding it difficult to get out for hikes right now and I'm feeling it. I am getting grumpy. things that wouldn't bother me are bothering me now. I think I can attribute it directly to not spending enough time in the woods.

Interviewer: so this sense of connection with nature, this connection with the spirit of it, has a lot of meaning for you.

Participant: yes. There's a sense of it being sacred. that it is spiritual in that sort of way. that is one thing, I feel intensely sad, when I see what we are doing to our planet. I feel sad and I feel compassion also for the people who are making these decisions continue in their race to the bottom, they can't possibly see what they are doing they must be blinded by something. I feel sad for nature but I feel sad for them too. they have no idea of this sacred place, or if they did it is long gone. maybe I'd take it a bit too far as I won't consciously kill anything. like I won't kill a mosquito on my arm, I will blow it off. I won't consciously kill anything, if I have a choice.

Interviewer: so then the natural environment for you is really a very sacred place, that balances you, that rejuvenates your own energy, and leads you to a place of humility and belonging and calm that enables you to then deal with the rest of the world with more compassion and less pain (30:23)

Participant: yes. less pain I think. I find that some of my reading in Buddhism tends to mirror that quite well. but I think what I experience is a little bit different to what I have read in Buddhism, I'm not sure. Buddhism seems to be in some ways a little dispassionate, there is compassion but it seems a little dispassionate.

Interviewer: so it doesn't quite jive with your own experience?

Participant: yes, but it is quite close in describing how our perception of reality is illusion...

Interviewer: can you tell me a bit more about that experience of Energy, how it relates to other experiences or is that sense of energy the sense of connection or does it happen after the connection. how does that all inter-play?

Participant: I do remember last year when it happened that it caught me unawares, and when I became aware of it was almost like floodgates opening. and maybe it was happening anyway I'm not sure, but it was like floodgates opening. even though it was a warm day I suddenly went cold, not in a freezing way but the energy was cold. it was also very calming and nurturing at the same time. I could

feel it moving through me and going out through my feet. kind of coming into the top of my head and actually filling me and then coming down through my feet. it was palpable. I hadn't experienced it that intensely before. but whenever I have felt that energy it is in a place that I can recognize as being a good energy place. I have spoken to people who have said the same thing, that there are places in the forest where it is almost like the energy... there are focal points or something like that. maybe that is it. it always seems to be going from trees into the earth there always seems to be that sense of flow like that. if there is any affinity that I have it would seem to be with trees more so than with anything else. trees and the earth. (33:45).

interviewer: so you get that sense of energy more from trees than other plants, and from other plants more than animals, is that how it works?

participant: animals, I think it is just that there are not that many around, maybe I would if I saw more animals. I don't know if there are spiritual archetypes, a tree or an animal or a human will almost be these spiritual archetypes. I don't think a tree spirit can function in a human body... that is too literal but the kind of energy that I seem to feel from trees seems to be the kind of energy that is the most healing for me and maybe I would find that with other things too if I was to connect with some animals, I don't know.

I have taken some courses in animal communication and during these experiences I have had some amazing images from wild animals. I can recall those experiences like they happened yesterday. I can recall the impressions and the images that were conveyed to me like they happened yesterday. So I must feel some affinity... a couple of things that happened were really like... I had no idea.

interviewer: do you get these images when you allow yourself to feel open?

participant: I don't get images from trees. I get a sense of... the only word I can think of is a sense of song. it is not exactly the sound of the leaves in the wind, but it is that sort of thing. I get that impression with it. but again that is too literal. I can't say there is a sound as much as there were images when I tried this animal communication.

I do remember that any time I have felt this there really is a sense of letting go. letting go in terms of like, letting down boundaries or barriers. well that is one thing, that is right... when I went out on this hike last summer I hadn't been sleeping so I was really tired. that is one thing I find, when I'm tired I am much more receptive than when I am not tired. I think it is because my conscious barriers or my filters, what ever, aren't blocking stuff as much. so maybe sleep deprivation is a good thing, sometimes.

interviewer: how was your sleep after the experience? (38:19)

participant: It was much better. I found I didn't have the worry, or the hurt. basically all of that seemed to be gone. it came back a little bit now and then but it was never overwhelming like it had been. I felt sadness as one would feel for a loss but it certainly wasn't overwhelming. so I slept well after that.
you are trying to get more details about what happened?

interviewer: yes.

participant: one of the things then was that it happened towards the end of the hike when I was getting kind of tired too. maybe that is part of the letting go, the exhaustion, stopping putting up the barriers.

interviewer: so it sounds like part of the experience, or part of the lead up to the experience was your own boundaries and barriers to the rest of the world, were being reduced a bit by fatigue.

participant: it was a little different to that. in the workaday world, working in the city, I was a lot more withdrawn. I was much more observant, noticing more things, but I was much more withdrawn. it felt a lot more like a bombardment, like it was too much. it was like I was becoming hypersensitive to everything around me. yes it was too much. yes the barriers were coming down but I don't think I was connecting in a better way with my daily life because it is so out of balance.

interviewer: with your barriers down when you went into the natural environment did that allow you to connect more freely?

participant: yes, I really if think that was a large part of it. I remember that was one of the reasons I went for a hike, I was so tired, I just hadn't been sleeping, and I thought " Man, I have got to break out of this, I am just a mess". I am sure my barriers were already down. it was around 10 in the morning, I have been stumbling around for an hour or so before I headed out. I was talking about the hopelessness, in a way it is kind of like the exhaustion, like giving up, kind of a

Interviewer: Futility?

Participant: Yeah, futility. it is a little bit like, the trite analogy is if I'm banging my head against the wall long enough when I stop I will noticed that there is something else I can do (43:02). the harder you push against the wall the harder it pushes back. when you recognize the futility of that, when you get tired of that and you stop I think I just become aware of things around me. so pushing against the wall is a little obsessive, it is pretty focused. So recognizing the hopelessness of doing something like that, the futility. so I think that is a large part of it too. from that and other things too, I think I have come to understand that change can come about when I feel a sense of futility about things, a sense of hopelessness, when it feels like no direction works, that is when new paths open up, or new ideas can come through. that can only happen if I am open and receptive.

interviewer: is that experience of connecting, that experience of energy, is that the change or does that enable the change or do you have to be in that place for that to happen?

participant: "that place", what do you mean? (45:01)

interviewer: do you have to be in that place of futility to be open to the natural thing or is the natural... what I'm trying to ask, rather poorly, is, is that experience that you had, was that the change, or did that enable the change?

participant: I think in a way it enabled the change, because it is what I learn from it, what I take from it and can put into my life is where the change happens.

interviewer: So what would you have taken from it and put into your life then?

participant: one of the things was feeling very connected, I think at that point I was feeling very isolated, so feeling reconnected with everything and understanding that... or just remembering my compassion and remembering that I am part of a very large whole, I'm part of the universe really. part of the catalyst was remembering that and that could bring about the change of... well, part of it too was just getting like a flushing out, like " here is a dose of something to help you" kind of thing. but part of it too was being able to take that and remember my compassion, and getting it back into perspective, that it wasn't such a big thing, that stuff happens, remembering about the cycles of life and death. so I think what happened in terms of the change was that I had reached a point where I had simply forgotten all of the stuff that I knew before because I had dug myself into a hole. so It felt helpless, and a sense futility, and couldn't see any way out of it, but that was because I wasn't open to, or receptive to alternatives. but the change that happened was more just saying " oh yes I have dug myself into a hole, and of course I have alternatives, and there are ways to be that are far more constructive, and positive for me and everything else" so the change was a bit of a reawakening, or remembering.

interviewer: you mentioned this sense of bombardment being in the city, how much of the change do you think could be attributed to just getting away from the bombardment, just getting to somewhere quiet and how much of it could be due this experience or are they pretty much the same thing, or does one lead to the other?

participant: I don't think it was just getting to a quiet place, because I could go to my home and be quiet there.

interviewer: so it was a lot more than just peace and quiet?

participant: yes definitely. (49:23) in a way the bombardment was a distraction, so of was kind of helping me to not focus so much on the pain I was feeling, but when I was alone at home all of my thoughts about this would... I would feel overwhelmed by them. in a way being in a quiet place was

almost worse than being bombarded. the city is good for distraction, go to a movie or what ever and forget about what I'm feeling. actually that is one thing too that I remember. I had resigned myself to feeling, not resigned myself, but I had tried to view all the stuff that I was feeling as simply being, and trying not to make it more than it was, and not feeling sorry for myself, just sort of a " what am I feeling if, like physical sensation, what am I feeling here?" and not judge it. in a way I was trying to heal myself by not sort of spiraling downward on those feelings. so I think I may have been opening myself up to the healing anyway as I was doing a little bit of healing on my own. I think that's a large part of it too. I think part of the futility is when we judge stuff, when we judge our feelings " pain is bad and pleasurable feelings are good", I can see that when I judge my feelings that I get trapped in them, it is easy to become hopeful of not feeling pain, of feeling better. if I don't judge the feelings it brings me closer to being in the present, and it brings me closer to being receptive. so part of the futility is saying " what the fuck" with these feelings, and just becoming so frustrated, not frustrated but resigned to them, so that in a way of the feelings become almost like a drone. they are just there. I think that is really important too. I think that is true regardless of whether I am feeling really upset or in a good mood and I go out for a walk. if the feelings become like a drone, like they are just there, then I will become more receptive.

interviewer: more open to that connection with nature?

participant: yes. a think is really easy to aggrandize the importance of our feelings, it is pretty easy to make them bigger than they are.

interviewer: so I'm going to try and summarize the experience. it sounds like you felt yourself in a stuck place with your emotions around this instance of losing a friend. then you tried to do a bit of healing around, trying to accept your feelings rather than hope they would change and you feel that made you perhaps open to things. then you went for this hike because you needed to and in the process of that, because you were slightly open, the connection to the natural flow of the universe and through a sense of energy coming to you and through you from the trees in particular, which really helped you to accept just where you were as just part of life, without necessarily having to change how you felt about it or change your feelings or change the situation, but that you could just accepted it as, a thing, and you're just part of... your experience was just part of the much larger experience of the universe that you now felt connected to so it didn't seem so onerous and that enabled you to feel , calm and at peace, which then enabled you to move forwards.

is there anything you need to add to that?

participant: I want to add that I was exhausted .

interviewer: so the important part of that was the feeling connected, that sense of energies, connection with those energies, which enabled you to feel connected to the whole universe in pretty much a spiritual way, that really has a lot of meaning for you have how you choose to see life and live life?

participant: yes, I think that is a pretty good summary.

interviewer: is there anything else you want to add to that?

participant: no, I don't think so.

interviewer: OK. thank you very much. (56:20)

Appendix B: Summaries sent to the Participants

Participant 1.

The situation

The participant's mother had committed suicide. While this was not totally un-expected it did hit the participant "like a ton of bricks" and sent him into a "little tailspin". Due to the refusal of the rest of his family to help with anything the participant was left with all the legal and physical tasks involved with this situation. This did not allow the participant the time and space he needed to deal with his own grief. This led to the participant feeling "really numb with grief" and disconnected from himself, a sense of not being who he was. On occasion he would punch holes in walls in frustration. The participant felt that he was not living for himself and that he was "totally lost".

After a while he developed a strong desire to "get away from everything", especially as the city was full of triggers for his grief.

"I had to get out, get away, because it was just getting to me. Like I said, there were a couple of times when I literally couldn't take it anymore and I would punch holes in walls and that kind of thing. So you are lying there writhing around in pain after you have done that and you are going "OK, something is not working here.""

The participant had a strong belief that he had to deal with the situation or it would poison him forever.

The wilderness experience

The participant told his girlfriend "I'm going to take off, I need to get away, I just can't take it." So with little prior experience he set out on a multi-day kayaking trip along the sunshine coast in SW British Columbia. He had a vague plan to circumnavigate Nelson Island, but hadn't taken a chart. His main desire was "a journey, to get out". He had no set timetable, getting up with the sun and paddling until he was tired or conditions dictated a stop.

At his first campsite the participant took his food into his tent and was consequently kept awake all night by an otter attempting to get into the tent.

At his next campsite he didn't put his kayak high enough up the beach and when he checked in the middle of the night he found that it had been washed into the middle of the bay. The participant then jumped into the dark wavy water, swam out to his boat and pulled it back to shore. The participant described this as "cleansing".

The next morning it was very windy but the participant decided to keep going as he had told his girlfriend he would be back in two-to-three days. The conditions were very rough with "five, six, seven foot waves" which were breaking on him and so windy that it blew his hat off his head. Conditions were so rough that he could hardly paddle as he was constantly having to use support strokes to stay upright. He quickly became soaked and "really cold". While he soon realized that he had to get out of there he was also comforted by the appearance of a seal to which he felt some connection.

The participant dragged his boat up onto a small reef. "I was just freezing, I was sitting there shaking violently". He managed to get out his sleeping bag and got into it while sitting in a small crevice, sheltered from the wind. He sheltered there for a couple of hours during which time he was very focussed on the moment as well as doing a lot of thinking. Part of him was thinking "Fuck it all, I don't care, I don't care if I die" and "Nobody cares about me, nobody understands what I am going through".

At the same time, being in such a life threatening situation forced him to "look into that mirror of death and you have to look inside it and see your reflection". When he saw that reflection of himself he realised that "No I don't want to..., I've got other choices, I've got a reason to go on" as well as "OK, I really don't want to be this messed up". At that point he became totally focused on getting warm and getting back to safety. As the wind had not abated he decided to return the way he came instead of continuing into the unknown. The participant reported that upon returning to safety he "felt alive for the first time in months, because I had done something that was mine".

Healing factors

The participant described a number of factors that he experienced as being important to his healing process. The first of these was the lack of distractions: "You don't have all these distractions. I didn't have my powers of being an executor and all that crap I had to deal with there. I didn't have a TV to distract me. I didn't have a phone or computer or whatever, so you are forced to deal with it" Most likely this lack of distraction enabled the participant to be "engaged in life". Secondly there was the sense of having to deal with what was happening for him or suffer some severe consequences: "In a moment like that you are forced to... It's almost like a molding of clay and you've had a piece ripped out and in a moment like that you are forced to mold yourself back together on your own." This was as a result of having to face his own mortality: "look into that mirror of death and you have to look inside it and see your reflection". Thirdly, there was the acceptance of his pain: "And I think that that is what I did, probably, on that trip. To just accept that it is OK to be in pain." This led to an integration of the experience into his life: "It is still there within me, it will forever be who I am, and, oddly enough, I wouldn't change a thing because it has totally changed who I am, I think, in a positive way." Fourthly there was an opportunity/requirement for introspection: "This trip I did, it was an awakening, being forced to look at my self, at what had happened, where I want to go, what I want to do, and I don't think I would have thought so profoundly about it if I hadn't gone on that trip." Fifthly, there was a perceived sense of fairness and predictability in nature. An even playing field so to speak. The forces of nature don't care who you are, or even if you are there.

Participant 2.

History

4. Participant : I grew up in a pretty rough family environment, my father was an alcoholic and abusive as well.
5. That resulted in me having to deal with a whole bunch of issues throughout my life
- 32 But because I was in that really depressed state I just wanted to get away again and again.
- 72 And I'm talking about my father here. Because of him we knew there was potential danger in just about any human relationship because we transferred our fathers abusive behavior on to other people. Because if he's that way and then other people could be this way.

Facets of the experience

"I went there because it made me feel good, made me feel better about myself, I felt less stress, I felt more relaxed, I felt more human."

Decrease in stimulation:

So I find it a very calming experience.

17. I can get away from all the noise and the stress and the TV and the news and the telephone ringing

Getting away from stress:

36. In a very literal way just cutting off all the input from other people, from the business that I was running, from relationships, from everything that was very very hard for me to cope with.

Getting back to a natural rhythm:

18. and kind of reset my clock to a more natural rhythm.

39 It always takes me back into a much more natural rhythm, as opposed to living in the city where you kind of lose control over what you can do as you always have to respond to events and respond to other people.

42 As I was saying, you get into these natural rhythms and start to mellow out and a lot of things just take care of themselves.

Gaining control/ease of decision making:

41 So by going out into the wilderness I found that it was easier for me to kind of control things because it wasn't so much to control.

43 The decisions you make are simple ones, it's about food, shelter, keeping warm.

50 And that helped me when I went out into the bush because I kind of felt in control of things simply because there weren't that many things I had to control anymore, a lot of things tended to look after themselves

Being around animals/not around people:

59 One of the happiest times I had was when I was working on my master's thesis in geology in a mountain range in the Yukon territory. I was in this area in the Kluane ranges and I could just look up towards Mount Logan which is Canada's highest mountain.

62 That was one of the happiest, most spiritual times I've had in my life.

73 So we learned early on that if you developed a relationship with an animal you never had to worry, they gave you back what you gave them. If you treated them kindly they treated you that way, they showed love for you.

87 But because of my upbringing it was a place of safety, because there were no people around.

Connection with nature/spirituality:

93 So for me, being in the wilderness is the closest I get to a spiritual experience that I've really ever had.

94 For me it's a place where I really feel, connected, part of a bigger picture.

153 I don't think I thought about spirituality then as much as I did after I went through that program.

159 So somewhere or other, going through that program and resolving a lot of these issues that I had, getting them out of the way allowed me then to make this connection with the spiritual aspect of going out into the wilderness.

129 It has made my wilderness experience somewhat more spiritual.

163 At the time I was reveling in the sensory input of being there, but I can't recall thinking of spirituality.

164 So I think those are all things I have realized in hindsight having come through this crisis.

169 Now I see that spirituality in the present and I can look back past that divide, over that wall and see that, yeah, it was probably something I was feeling back there except that I wasn't recognizing it, or I wasn't conscious of it, or I didn't think of it in that kind of framework.

Feeling safe/comfortable:

87 But because of my upbringing it was a place of safety, because there were no people around.

Death is obvious:

191 Participant: I think the reason for that is pretty clear. Because when we are living here in town, in an urban setting like this you don't have very many life threatening situations that you know about. You might get creamed by a car or whatever, but it is over before you know it. You never really have to plan how you are going to do something safely.

192 When you're out in the wilderness with especially when you are ocean kayaking, along this coast you are dealing with the North Pacific, and things are in the ocean that if you are not careful it can do you in.

206 And what happened was, that in addition to the conditions that were causing this clapotis, which was about three different sets of swells and their reflections, we had a northwest wind coming in providing

chop, but what made it really bad was that the current changed and the flood started flowing against us through this clapotis.

212 I knew that if I had got knocked over I was going to die.

221 So when you go through an experience like that with one of your best buddies, I mean, we survived something that very few other kayakers have ever been confronted with, so it makes you feel pretty bonded, pretty tight with that other person.

Better connections with people:

154 I went there because it made me feel good, made me feel better about myself, I felt less stress, I felt more relaxed, I felt more human.

174 And I developed some quite strong friendships with those two people in particular.

175 Which I found a little bit remarkable because most of the friends I had the time were friends that I'd made a long time ago, that go way back.

176 I hadn't made a whole lot of new, especially new men friends, male friends during my adult years.

179 There are some pretty strong bonds there that I thought wouldn't have happened except for the kayaking, or except for being out there in the wilderness.

185 So that's what I mean about making me feel more human, that I was better able to relate and connect with people.

186 Although it was kind of a struggle, it wasn't always easy, but there was kind of a mechanism, an avenue there that I could try and make that work.

193 So what brought us closer, and strengthened those bonds was working through difficult situations together.

221 So when you go through an experience like that with one of your best buddies, I mean, we survived something that very few other kayakers have ever been confronted with, so it makes you feel pretty bonded, pretty tight with that other person.

246 Being in the wilderness kind of broke, kind of allowed me to break through all that crap that I got stuck with when I was a kid, and develop these relationships through these heightened experiences that you wouldn't typically find in a city setting.

Effects of the experience

20. I come back to a more peaceful and calm place.

31 It worked quite well as a temporary fix. I would come back for a trip and I'd be more or less OK for a week or two.

33 So I think I was healed by virtue of having those escapes but only on a very temporary basis.

133 Yes I think that's right I think the problems that I had psychologically from the way I was brought up were too deep and profound for me to have worked my way out of that permanently, in a real way, simply by going out into the wilderness.

134 But I think the big value was that by being able to go out there I was able to get enough relief to keep me going.

137 So it was something I could count on, just as I could count on an aspirin to relieve a headache I could always count on going out to the wilderness for a while, and it would work.

147 That was very scary very frightening when I knew that my refuge, going out to the wilderness, was longer doing what I wanted it to do.

154 I went there because it made me feel good, made me feel better about myself, I felt less stress, I felt more relaxed, I felt more human.

Participant 3.

The background.

The participant was experiencing depression as a result of some past sexual abuse by her Brother. During the course of some group counselling an opportunity to participate in an Outward Bound program called "Women of Courage" arose and the participant did so.

The experience.

The course was often an ordeal. Every day was a challenge with a new challenging activity to participate in. Just having to live day-to-day in the wilderness was also a challenge. In the evening there was a "round" during which all the participants could share their experiences and this sharing also occurred in the shared tents. One of the most significant challenges was the solo during which the participant had to spend a night alone under a tarp.

What was helpful.

There was a lot of bonding between the participants which enabled trust and sharing to occur. There was much encouragement from both the trip leaders and the other participants. Surviving the various activities was empowering. Surviving the daily challenge of living in the wilderness without amenities or distractions was empowering. Perhaps the most empowering activity was the solo, surviving a night alone in the wilderness and having to face a fear of the dark, a fear of wild animals, and a real sense of danger. This experience was made more powerful as the spot chosen resonated with an image from some previous therapy.

The results.

As a result of having overcome these challenges the participant felt "stronger inside and out". The solo experience reinforced the idea that she had the strength deal with scary situations. As a result of this strength the participant was able to confront her brother about the abuse and inform the rest of her family about it. The participant also felt less depressed. The participant was also able to leave a twenty year relationship, move, go back to school and also feel more at peace in natural environments. While it is possible that these changes were also as a result of her participation in other more traditional therapies the participant feels that she would certainly not have arrived at this point as quickly without her Outward Bound experience.

Participant 4.

Background.

The participant reported that she had suffered from chronic depression since she was 14 years old. For the last two and a half years she has been seeing a counsellor and taking medications. At the same time she applied to NOLS to take their leadership training program.

The experience.

The participant went on a three day kayaking trip in Clayoquot Sound and stayed on Blunden Island with a friend. She stated that this was the first time that she had felt the "spirit of the land" and that after looking up at some of the big trees on the island had felt humbled and small in relation to the universe/nature. This feeling was perhaps an extension of a sense of awe that she had felt while watching the tides during an earlier trip to Indian arm. The participant also stated that now while she is on trips she experiences a slowing down and simplifying of life where it is OK to just deal with life's immediate concerns (food, shelter) and that this is aided by the concept that the wilderness gives instant feedback.

The effects.

The participant stated that she felt peace and joy as a result of seeing herself as part of the Universe, part of something more powerful than herself and that she has started to feel this more often when she goes out kayaking. She also stated that being able to live a simple life while on trips helps to reduce the feelings of overload that she experiences while living in the city both while on the trip and upon her return.

Participant 5.

Background.

The participant reported that he had lost a good friend through a misunderstanding. He stated that as a result of this loss he was feeling withdrawn and detached from things as well as moping around and feeling exhausted from not sleeping well. He also stated that his thoughts were spinning around on the subject.

The experience.

In an attempt to find some healing the participant went for a hike in the mountains on Vancouver's North Shore. After hiking for a few hours he noticed that he hadn't been thinking about anything for about ten

minutes. At that point he felt a palpable flow of energy passing through him that seemed to originate from the surrounding trees. This was a sensation that he had experienced before but not as intensely. Following this the participant felt a sense of reassurance and a sense of being connected to something bigger than himself, of reconnecting to and being part of the flow and harmony of nature which left him with a sense of humility and of being very much in the present.

The effects.

The participant stated that as a result of this experience the upset that he had been experiencing seemed to be gone, that the sense of being part of nature's flow and harmony gave him a personal sense of flow and harmony that led to an acceptance of his situation and a sense of calm. He also stated that he was able to feel compassion for himself and his friend and that he slept better afterwards.