

THE PATTERN OF LIFE MISSION DEVELOPMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

A multiple case study approach was used to investigate the pattern how a life mission evolves in lives. The participants were one man and two women who described themselves as having a meaningful career or a mission in life. The participants were chosen to portray different careers. The investigation produced three vibrant, detailed narrative accounts of how a life mission evolved. Each one is told from the perspective of the individual who experiences a life mission. The accounts were based on in-depth descriptions of the experience. Each account was reviewed and validated by the case study participant.

A comparison of the individual accounts exposed a pattern of experience that was common to all three cases of those who developed a life mission. It can be best portrayed as a six stage model, with each stage possessing unique characteristics and each subsequent stage building on the preceding one. Further, in each case, the development of a life mission exhibited a process that was more dialectical than lineal in nature.

Several theoretical implications emerge from this study. First, it supports those models that describe the development of meaning or mission in life from the standpoint of both a general pattern of experience and a general pattern of process. This combination was illustrated remarkably in Cochran's (1990) description of the phases of life for persons with a sense of vocation.

Furthermore, the current study's general pattern of process strongly followed Charmé's (1984) account of how meaning evolves in lives.

Second, the accounts suggest that the meaning of one's life mission can be discovered in a life issue that emerges early in a person's life. This life issue runs through the person's life guiding his or her engagement in activities and a career(s), until he or she transcends the life issue through the clarification of a mission in life.

Third, the accounts do not support the idea that a life mission or discovering what makes life meaningful is a nebulous, elusive and abstract endeavour. From a practical perspective, through integrating them, the general pattern of experience and the general pattern of process can serve as a guide for those who are searching for a mission or meaning in life and for those who counsel them.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

This study examined how a mission in life evolves over the course of a person's life. The purpose of the study was to provide counsellors and, in particular, career counsellors, with a theoretical understanding of and practical approach to helping people who are struggling to finding meaning in their lives. To accomplish this, the study generated comprehensive, vibrant narrative accounts of individuals with a mission in life. Each is told from the perspective of the individual living a meaningful life through a life mission. From the accounts, this study constructed a common plot or story line. This common story line could serve as a strategy for counselling practice and a foundation for further theoretical development on the topic of interest.

Research Problem

Researchers have agreed that individuals who experience a sense of meaning in career or life have life stories with a particular narrative plot or pattern that is coherent and comprehensible (e.g., Charne, 1984; Cochran, 1990; Csikzentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979; McAdams, 1993). Moreover, they have attempted to describe the narrative pattern that accompany life stories of individuals with a sense of meaning in career or life. However, it is not clear

which of these narrative patterns best describe how meaning in a career or life evolves. Because of the lack research evidence, counselling practice concerned with helping individuals to discover meaning in career or life remains unguided.

Rationale

There are several significant reasons for studying the stories of people who have a sense of meaning in career and life. First, several narrative patterns of the development of meaning in career or life have been posited. However, their applicability to the actual lives of people with a sense of meaning in life is unclear. Therefore, this study is an effort to discover which of one of these narrative patterns is most useful when applied to actual lives.

Second, meaning is a fundamental aspect of the lives of human beings, and also the key to understanding them (Bruner, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Sartre, 1956). Yet it is a concept not widely researched in counselling psychology (Cochran & Claspell, 1987). Thus, this study is an effort to increase the understanding of the role of meaning in the lives of individuals.

Third, this study examines the topic of meaning not from an abstract point of view, but from a concrete one. Through the use of narrative accounts, the understanding of meaning in life is grounded in the lived experience rather than philosophy (Van Manen, 1990). Therefore, the findings of this study may be more directly useful for the development of a

more realistic strategy of counselling practice (McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988).

Approach to the Study

A Case Study Approach

The study was designed to investigate intensively how meaning evolves over the course of a person's life. A case study research approach has several advantages. First, case study research allows for the holistic and meaningful aspects of real-life events to be retained (Yin, 1989). Thus, the advantage is that there is less need to be concerned with the applicability of findings to actual lives. This will contribute to the effective and accurate development of counselling practice strategy.

Second, narrative patterns of how a meaningful career or life evolves can be compared to narrative patterns posited by other theories and research (Cochran & Laub, 1994). For example, Charmé (1984) refers to the expression of fundamental project, Cochran (1990) refers to the pursuit of a sense of vocation, Csikzentmihalyi and Beattie (1979) refer to the living of a life theme and McAdams (1993) refers to the telling of personal myths as the way in which individuals establish meaning and coherence in their lives. Since one aim of this investigation is to examine the usefulness of these posited narrative patterns or rival theories, case study research is advantageous (Yin, 1989).

Third, case studies can be used to discover patterns of meaning development not yet articulated as well as assess and refine patterns already present in current theory and research (Cochran & Laub, 1994). For example, this study investigated individuals with a mission in life. Through examining and comparing the narrative accounts of concrete models of the topic, a common plot or pattern might be discovered. Thus, case study research is advantageous because it allows for exploratory development of patterns and theory-building of the role of meaning in individuals' lives (Cochran & Laub, 1994; Yin, 1989).

Notes

As a writing note, the masculine and feminine pronouns will be used alternately to avoid the use of sexist language and the awkwardness of using he/she, his/her, etc.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The question "What is the meaning of life?" assumes that there is a meaning to one's life, and the answer is not readily given or available to a person. This question can be asked over the entire length of one's life. Thus, one major function of a counselling psychologist is to help individuals understand, make decisions about and take actions in their lives so that they can live purposefully, harmoniously and meaningfully. For counsellors to be prepared and effective working with clients, they must be informed through adequate research. Currently, there are several conceptions of how meaning in life evolves that might be useful for counselling practice. However, these conceptions vary in the factors viewed as influential for lives. The aim of this chapter is to review these conceptions and their contributions to the understanding of how meaning and, specifically, a life mission evolves in a person's life.

Conceptions of How Meaning Evolves in Lives

According to McAdams (1993), meaning exists in the stories we tell. Stories bring a sense of unity and purpose to our lives. Through our stories or personal myths, "each of us discovers what is true and what is meaningful in life" (p. 11). Thus, from a scattered set of sometimes confusing and

seemingly unconnected experiences, we construct narratives that generate a sense of self-understanding and indeed identity.

In his book The Stories We Live By (1993), McAdams offers an alternative theory of human identity. His theory is based on the notion that individuals gain a sense of who he or she is through constructing "a heroic story of the self" (p. 11).

McAdams examines how individuals consciously and unconsciously compose personal myths. As with all stories, the personal myth has a beginning, middle and end, defined according to the development of plot and character. Using the psychosocial stages outlined by Erikson (1982), McAdams attempts to trace and describe the development of personal myths from infancy (the beginning) to old age (the end).

McAdams suggests that individuals in infancy and early childhood are unconsciously compiling material for "the self-defining story" to be composed in the future. For example, a child's initial bonding or attachment experience with his parents (whether it be positive or negative) in the first year of life may have a profound influence on the narrative tone of stories told in adulthood. This initial experience may also impact a child's play, learning and achievement from preschool to elementary school years. But, just as profoundly as the initial attachment experience, play and school experiences may also serve as a vital foundation for central themes in adult stories.

Finally, in adolescence, McAdams states that the individual begins "to see their lives in storied, historical terms" (p. 13). As a part of gaining this awareness, individuals become mythmakers or engage in a task of creating and recreating a life story, which helps them to understand who they are and how they fit into the adult world. In short, as mythmakers, individuals seek to compose an integrative life story.

In adulthood, McAdams suggests that individuals continue to revise personal myths and focus on fashioning and refining main characters within them. According to McAdams, main characters serve to symbolize an individual's desires for power and love. He indicates that main characters, or internalized "imagoes," may assume prototypical personas such as the warrior, the sage, the lover, the caregiver, the humanist, the healer, the survivor, and so on. The main characters scripted into an individual's self-defining story help determine the quality of identity. Difficulties experienced in early adult years may lead to problems scripting main characters and may influence the search for meaning.

In middle-adult years and beyond, McAdams proposes that individuals aspire to draw opposing aspects of their story together into a vitalizing and harmonious whole. Individuals also concern themselves with the anticipated ending of a life story and the emergence of a new one, which they may serve to generate through their work, family and community involvements.

McAdams calls personal myths arising during this point of individuals' lives "generativity scripts." Through these scripts, he states that individuals attempt to link their personal myths "to collective stories and myths of society as a whole and to the enterprise of promoting and improving human life and welfare from one generation to the next" (p. 14).

Although personal myths continue to develop and change throughout the adult years, this process is suspended by individuals in the last years of their lives. At this time, according to McAdams, individuals review the personal myth created over the course of a lifetime in order to find a sense of ego integrity. They find ego integrity when they judge their personal myths to be good, in spite of shortcomings and limitations. Like Erikson, McAdams indicates that individuals may look back upon life with a mixture of acceptance and rejection. However, what is critical for both researchers is that life becomes coherent and meaningful at its end for individuals.

Indeed, McAdams' theory on the development of human identity or personal myth provides a comprehensive description of how meaning evolves in life. He supports his theory with extensive data gathered through sound research methodology. For example, McAdams' past work, which serves as the foundation for the present theory, has been published in scientific journals and accepted by psychologists and social scientists.

However, it is not clear whether McAdams' theory also applies to the

development of a life mission, which seems to be a much more sharpened, embraced expression of a sense of meaning in life. McAdams does not give precedence to any specific activity (such as a career, socio-political cause, life task or, in general, life mission) that serves to focus an individual's sense of meaning and identity over the course of a life.

McAdams talks about the main characters of personal myths and how they may serve to promote identity development. Furthermore, he talks about the fact that individuals are mythmaking beings who create and recreate personal myths in order to develop a sense of self and meaning. But, he does not talk about the process of how individuals search for, discover and express a specific unifying activity or a life mission in their lives as the thrust of meaning-making and identity development.

However, if McAdams' theory also characterizes the development of a mission in life, then it would be expected to describe the life stories of individuals who actually have a mission in life. With its comprehensiveness and support in previous research, McAdams' theory could prove to be significant for theorists and practitioners if it were also shown to be applicable to actual cases of individuals with a life mission.

Like McAdams, earlier research by Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979) also focused on a life story approach to understanding how meaning evolves in a person's life. However, unlike McAdams, they investigated how the

evolution of meaning in the lives of individuals influences career choice, which points to a potential understanding of how life missions develop and is of primary interest to the present research.

For Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979), a life theme provides a person's life with meaning. They define a life theme as consisting of "a problem or set of problems which a person wishes to solve above everything else and the means the person finds to achieve solution" (p. 48). Using the pattern of development in life themes discovered in a study of artists (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976), Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979) examined whether this pattern existed in male blue and white collar workers. For instance, persons in the former category include plumbers, policemen and steelworkers, while persons in the latter category include professors, physicians and politicians.

The pattern of development for life themes consisted of four steps. In the first step, a person experiences and recognizes an existential stress in life. People are vastly different when recognizing configurations of stimuli as stressful. In addition to objective characteristics of the stimuli, Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie indicate that the pattern of affective and cognitive coding also influence recognition of existential stress. For example, two people may have been raised in an environment of poverty. However, one person may view economic hardships as stressful, while the other may

perceive social injustice and oppression as stressful.

In the second step, a person finds and shapes a problem. She uses "the available codes or discovers within the social environment new ones for coding the diffuse sources of stress with a label that identifies the problem"

(Csikszentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979, p. 49). For example, a central theme in a person's life may span from, "How do I get my next meal?" to, "What is the meaning in life?" Finding a label for the existential stress allows a person to comprehend the environment and her life events in a consistent and coherent way. Thus, seemingly unrelated phenomena coalesce into an orderly picture, along with causal explanations.

In the third step, a person states or expresses the problem in form of a solution. As emphasized by Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie, every problem suggests a path towards a solution. For example, a person attributing loneliness to lack of family closeness might choose to cultivate a close knit family in adulthood. However, another person attributing loneliness to differing world views between self and others might seek out a social group of like-minded individuals.

In the final step, a person strives to engage in a method that leads to the resolution of the existential problem. For example, a person whose problem is poverty might choose either to engage in criminal activities, to save money to develop a business, or to become a writer who in her novels reveals

the oppression of the poor. Further, Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie propose that the method chosen is a function of the skills a person can develop from her environment.

In their study on male blue and white workers, Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie found that indeed the participants displayed the pattern of life theme development discovered described above. Further, they discovered that white collar workers became aware of a personal stress. This personal stress was translated into a problem that affects other people or humanity as a whole. Blue collar workers had problems that were more self-centered.

Moreover, Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie found that the life themes of white collar workers are "discovered," while those of blue collar workers are "accepted." This suggested that white collar worker discovered a central theme, and thus a profession in their life, because they were generally interested in the process of personal development. Blue collar workers were concerned generally with personal survival on various different levels.

Finally, Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie suggested that "a cognitive transformation" leads to the discovery of a link between a participant's personal problem and a more general human condition. This cognitive transformation exists more frequently in white rather than blue collar workers. This is because white collar workers are responding to their whole experiential gestalt, while blue collar workers only respond to a narrow band of

experiences.

In summary, the significance of Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's study reinforced the existence of a pattern of development for life theme in lives of individuals. Moreover, it emphasized the importance of examining life theme in order to understand how individuals develop meaning in life and, possibly, how individuals develop a mission in life.

Although Cochran (1990) acknowledged the usefulness of Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's study for revealing the existence of patterns in lives, he had three important criticisms. First, Cochran suggested that a flaw in Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's study occurred in the selection of participants. If outstanding examples of white and blue collar workers were selected, the central themes between the two groups might have been more similar. Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie just selected outstanding white collar workers.

Second, Cochran suggested that Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's findings greatly diminishes the extensiveness and intensiveness of the struggle that leads a person to move through the stages. In particular, he took exception to the description of a simple cognitive transformation as the difference between blue and white collar workers. For example, a person who chooses to engage in saving money and to start a business to deal with childhood experiences of poverty is not likely to become an author who writes novels revealing the

oppression of the poor as a result of a simple cognitive transformation. It is more likely that such a transformation requires an extensive and intensive self-examination. Thus, with such a gross simplification, Cochran questions the usefulness of Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's model in understanding actual lives.

Third, Cochran suggested that many of the assumptions made by Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie, such as the impact of affect and cognition on life theme development, require clearer explanation. Without clear explanations of the key concepts, the usefulness of the model is questionable.

In his book A Sense of Vocation (1990), Cochran offered another model to illuminate the development of meaning in lives. Through studying over twenty life stories of persons who clearly had a mission in life, he generated "a common plot or story line" that exposed a pattern within lives. This pattern involves four phases of life: incompleteness, positioning, positing and completion.

According to Cochran, a person comes to experience a strong and unified sense of desire in the first phase. This desire is focused upon filling a gap in life or moving from an experience of incompleteness to one of completeness. In the beginning of Booker T. Washington's story, for example, there were two opposing dramas. On one hand, his life and activities as a slave enhanced a sense of fear, helplessness and dependence. On the other,

through a specific task he had as a slave, he saw education as means to become courageous, strong and independence. Until his desire to move for the latter and to escape from the former strengthens and unifies, Washington's life lacked meaning. In the first phase, meaning in life arises through the desire to move from incompleteness to completion or a clear sense of being incomplete.

In the second phase, meaning in life arises through taking actions or getting into a position to fill a gap or to become complete. Using Washington's story, again, once education was seen as a way to move away from being helpless and towards being strong, Washington pursued ways to become educated. In other words, being an educated person was not as significant for Washington as finding ways to become educated. Cochran emphasized that it is the pursuit of the path towards a position that is significant in this phase, not the position itself. Further, he suggested that a rise of agency is a central aspect of phase two.

Phase three is characterized by a central enactment of the position. Cochran suggested that there are seven levels of meaning in central enactment, ranging from practical to symbolic [see Cochran (1990) for a complete description these levels]. Moreover, he examined the difficulties of being in position. In general, being in position entails being authentic and being motivated intrinsically, while being out of position entails being

inauthentic and being motivated extrinsically. Through discussing the nature of a central enactment and the difficulties of being in position, Cochran emphasized that a person in phase three enacts the position or role that fills the gap or bridges incompleteness and completion. Moreover, this central enactment is the work or mission of life. For example, Washington uplifted the enslaved and oppressed through being an educator. Finally, this work of life leads to a recognition of one's sense of self and enactment of a role in "a dramatic vision of the world" (Cochran, 1990, p. 121).

In the final stage, meaning in life is derived from sensing the completion of the journey. A person recognizes a goal has been achieved through taking actions. Also, this person engages in a process of reviewing the path that led to the end, assessing its integrity on a cognitive and emotional level. However, there is also a recognition that actions transform into activities, which are meaningful for themselves and not because they lead towards a goal. For example, at the end of Washington's story, he was no longer striving to be an uplifter. Rather, he was an uplifter, a role in which he lived fully. Accordingly, Cochran suggested that in the final phase a person experiences a sense of flow, in which "a person can feel at one with the immediate or at one with all there is" (p. 164). And, above all, this person experiences completeness when engaged in meaningful activities that sum up a life.

In summary, the common pattern of life presented by Cochran, who studied those with a sense of vocation, is both comprehensive and illuminating. He showed in great detail how a sense of vocation began, how it was cultivated, how it was enacted through work and how it ended. Moreover, he exposed a depth of meaning in life stories that would not have been readily available without the formulation and an understanding of the common plot.

While the common plot described by Cochran clearly characterizes meaning development for individuals with a mission in life, one might wonder if this pattern is applicable to the understanding of other complex human experiences. Indeed, this concern was answered in Cochran and Laub's (1994) study of personal transformation and agency. They studied how people transformed themselves to live the plot of an agent rather than a patient in their lives, as a critical part of recovering from physical and psychological trauma. Thus, combining the studies by Cochran (1990) and Cochran and Laub (1994), it would seem that the common plot described in both is the most effective for illuminating how meaning evolves over a person's life.

However, in discussing models that describe the emergence of meaning in lives, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) offered another model. In the first stage, a person is concerned with issues of survival, comfort and pleasure. In the second stage, when the preservation of physical self is assured, a person

expands the focus of her meaning system to encompass the values of a community (including the family, the neighbourhood, a religious or ethnic group). Self becomes more complicated at this stage, even though obedience to conventional norms and standards persists. In the third stage, a person retreats to a position of reflective individualism, finding new values within the self. The main goal becomes the desire for growth, improvement and the actualization of potential. In the final stage, a person builds upon the previous ones. However, she turns away from the self and back toward an integration with other human beings and with universal values. Thus, reaching an individualized posture, a person is open to merging her interests with those of a greater whole.

Csikszentmihalyi characterizes the model of meaning development as an alternation of focus on self to others. He further emphasizes that not every person moves through the stages of this spiral pattern of ascending complexity. He indicates that few people ever have the opportunity to go beyond the first stage, because of their enormous struggles for physical survival. Although he believes the majority of people find themselves in stage two, Csikszentmihalyi believes that few ever reach the level of reflective individualism. He believes that even fewer reach a point of unifying self and universal interests. Csikszentmihalyi therefore considered the stages not a reflection of what does or will occur, but what can happen if a person is

successful in controlling consciousness.

The difference between Csikszentmihalyi's model and the pattern proposed by Cochran (1990) and Cochran and Laub (1994) is the way they utilize the concept of dialectical tension. Csikszentmihalyi suggests that the key aspect in models describing the emergence of meaning is the dialectic tension between differentiation (or development of self) and integration (or connecting with others). However, Cochran (1990) and Cochran and Laub (1994) described dialectical tension occurring on a variety of levels (e.g., between positive and negative dramas, different paths leading towards a position, being in or out of position, engaging in action or activity, etc.). They would consider the dialectic tension between differentiation and integration as just one factor that a model or pattern describing the emergence of meaning illustrates.

Yet, according to Charmé (1984), the dialectical process is the pattern by which meaning in life evolves and, specifically, "a fundamental project" is expressed. For Charmé, "a fundamental project" (the original projection of self) shapes and unifies a sense of meaning in a person's life. Moreover, a fundamental project unfolds slowly in the course of life and links a person's past, present and future into a coherent whole. Therefore, the life stories people tell through narratives clarify their project, which leads to an understanding of meaning in life and how it is evolving. Charmé indicates

that the most effective way to describe the evolution of meaning is to envision the dialectical process of preserving one's origins while transcending them to higher irreducible levels.

For Charme, childhood issues, experiences or factors are the bases upon which a fundamental project is constructed. Each new problem encountered in the external world provides an opportunity to reconstruct a larger unity on the foundation of childhood factors, although transcended, still reside within the developing whole. This is why Charme adheres also to the image of a three-dimensional spiral when describing the dialectical process and development of the fundamental project. This process involves moving farther and higher from the starting point in childhood through an infinite number of revolutions. A person never abandons the childhood centre of the spiral, yet the meaning and function of childhood characteristics are continually evolving, because each revolution imbues them with a richer, more differentiated and better integrated unity.

Charme's description of the idea of "totalization" is intimately related to his conception of the dialectical process. According to Charme, totalization does not imply a sense of wholistic stasis as the term totality connotes. Totalization refers to the fact that, at any singular moment, something is simultaneously complete and developing. For example, a person's meaning in life can be coherent and unified, and yet in a process of ongoing development

or being formed. Furthermore, totalization implies that fundamental polarities, such as being and nothingness or essence and existence or incompleteness and completeness, are each unstable in moments of a dialectical process and stable in moments of stasis rather than radical opposites.

Thus, for Charme, human development and indeed meaning in life consists of a cycle of totalizations, detotalizations and retotalizations. Initially, totalization involves a child's internalization of his family context and the subsequent externalization of it in the form of disposition, attitudes and actions. However, ensuing life experiences can cause a collapse or detotalization of a coherent system. A process of retotalization would thus follow varying based on the specific individual, his life stage, and the circumstances of the situation. Although a myriad of constantly emerging experiences and events threaten to unsettle a temporary stage of totalization, "any new stage of retotalization will nevertheless be guided and limited by certain structures of previous totalizations that are still preserved within each new stage of consciousness" (Charme, 1984, p. 63). Like a snowball rolling on itself and constantly becoming larger, individuals integrate new experiences into a greater meaning-making system and thereby expand the base upon which meaning is experienced and interpreted.

In sum, although more can be said about the nature of totalization, its

relationship with the dialectical process is clear. The dialectical process and totalization jointly describe the nature and pattern of the evolution of life and how meaning emerges within it. While totalization identifies the constituents and destination of the relationship, dialectics identifies the dynamics and movement of the relationship.

There are several reasons why Charmé's focus on dialectics in the study of lives is significant. First, Charmé's focus on dialectics is significant because it fills a void in the literature. In general, his focus on the dialectical process provides an understanding of the process as well as the pattern of how meaning in life evolves. The models or approaches described in the present literature review focus primarily on the patterns of how meaning evolves in lives and less on its process. This state of affairs perpetuates a bias in the understanding of and research on the topic. Thus, Charmé's study is a welcomed contrast to these models.

Second, and more specifically, Charmé's presentation of dialectics is important because he does not give precedence to identifying the constituents of the process of development. Rather, he presents an integrated picture of how the parts of the process and the process of meaning development are intimately intertwined. For example, a person is simultaneously constructing and living a personal myth, identifying a problem and working to solve it or living in a state of incompleteness and completeness. While in moments of a

dialectical process, these states are in constant flux, one giving rise to the other. But, when in moments of a temporary stasis, these states become apparent, indicating their positions relative to the other. In a sense, all models that seek to delineate the pattern of how meaning evolves give precedence to examining it in stasis rather than in process. The patterns arising during stasis may only provide a partial understanding of how meaning evolves in lives. Therefore, Charmé's emphasis on dialectics is an important theoretical contribution.

Third, by identifying dialectics as the nature of process, Charmé breaks away from the traditional mechanistic world view underlying research. Based on the world view that the world around us is fluid and in state of continual flux, dialectics is capable of capturing the complexity of how meaning evolves in the lives of individuals. For example, when contemplating and examining actual lives, the meaning of a person's life seems to be best understood as a developing totality that evolves from birth to death, with incompleteness and completeness intertwined. Meaning does not appear likely to emerge just through the step-wise progression from one stage of life to another as a result of resolving age-related psychosocial or existential conflicts. A mechanistic stance therefore leads to an inadequate intuitive understanding of the emergence of meaning in life when actual lives are considered. Thus, Charmé's study of meaning in lives represents a critical philosophical

alterative to models based on a mechanistic world view.

However, in spite of its potential contributions, Charmé's study of how the meaning of a person's life can be described and determined is clearly an abstract and philosophical exercise. His book, Meaning and Myth in the Study of Lives (1984), is meant to examine implications of the works by Jean-Paul Sartre in the study of human lives. Although it formulates concepts for understanding and methods for studying lives consistent with other researchers mentioned here, Charmé's study does not examine actual lives. For example, to illustrate the dialectical process in the study of lives, Charmé described Sartre's analysis of the lives of characters in novels. To assess the usefulness of Charmé's conception of the development of meaning in lives, it will have to be applied to the study of actual lives.

Defining Dialectics and Differentiating Its Forms

In examining models that describe the development of meaning, it seems clear that the concept of dialectics is critical. Therefore, it is necessary to offer a definition of dialectics and differentiate some its forms in order to clarify its usage in the models.

As indicated by many writers (Buss, 1979; Tolman, 1983; and others), dialectics has a long history and can be traced back to Presocratic Greek Philosophy. Ancient dialectics was considered "the art of conversation or debate, as used by *Zeno of Elea* (the inventor of dialectics according to

Aristotle), *Protagoras*, *Socrates*, *Plato*, *Aristotle*, and the later Aristotelean scholastic philosophers of the middle ages" (Tolman, 1983, p. 320). According to Hall (1967), these multiple incarnations of dialectics can be understood through the fact that it is "a [fundamental] method of seeking and sometimes arriving at the truth by reasoning" (p. 385).

Thus, whether dialectic occurs externally (in which case it would be a conversation between two individuals) or internally (in which case it would be a conversation occurring within one's self), there are fundamental aspects of dialectics. There is a movement from a state of ignorance, uncertainty and error (one state) to a state of knowledge, certainty and truth (a qualitatively different state) by means of conversation, debate and dialogue (a process) that is characterized by contradiction, refutation and negation (opposition) and governed by deduction and logic (an internal necessity) (Cornforth, 1953; Ilyenkov, 1977; Kharin, 1981; Tolman, 1983). From this general statement, then, the fundamentals of dialectics involve: qualitative transformation, process, opposition and internal necessity. It will be important here to expand on these concepts for further clarification.

Qualitative Transformation. When uncertainty becomes certainty, ignorance yields to knowledge and error shows the path to truth, the movements are not merely quantitative but are qualitative differentiations. For new states to emerge, old states must be negated. As a struggle of

opposite states occurs, the quantitative aspects of the struggle mount. Like the development of the fetus to the point of birth, ignorance changes through the accumulation of information. However, at birth, the qualitative state of the fetus changes not because it becomes a living creature, which it was since conception, but because it emerges into the world as a human being. This analogy can also be used to understand the change of a child's cognitive-developmental state as it gains object permanence (Piaget, 1960). From the time the child enters into the world, he begins to take in information from it. However, when he gains the knowledge that the world does not disappear after one closes one's eyes, he will never be 'truly alone again.'

Process. This refers to more than an interaction between the two participants in a conversation, for example. Process refers to the fact that the interaction between the two participants serve to mutually alter the other in such a way as to change the other's status irrevocably. This is not to say that interaction always results in irrevocable change. But, process always involves interactions that produces irrevocable change. Thus, the stress here is that there can be states of dynamic harmony, when there is consolidation and no upward movement; and, alternately, there can be states of much activity and upheaval, when very little stability exists and movement is sharply upward. However, what is not the case, or just an illusion, is a state of inertness or staticness. Of course, the opposition to process (life, development) is total

stillness (death, stagnation), which is in essence within all process.

Opposition. From the above discussion, it was implied that there exists a unity of the opposites or of process and stillness. When there is one, there exists the opposite. Through subjecting one's knowledge to debate with oneself or with another individual, one becomes aware of one's own ignorance. This implies that the existence of opposites necessarily involves interdependence. Yet, at the same time, it is possible for each state (knowledge or ignorance) to exist independently or to be distinguishable from each other -- if this were not so then there would be no need for dialogue. This is known as a dialectical contradiction or unity of opposites, which is distinguishable from mere difference or diversity (Hegel, 1975).

Internal Necessity. This indicates that the movement from the initial to the final state of the struggle between opposites has its origin within the process itself. Further, when initiated, it is presumed that no other results can emerge other than the one that emerges (Tolman, 1983). This reasoning process of logic and deduction would hold little interest for philosophers if this were not the case.

Thus, dialectics and dialectical concepts (qualitative transformation, process, opposition and logical necessity) were used by ancient philosophers in the art of debate. But, in addition to being crucial in the reasoning process, dialectics was also seen as a good framework to describe the nature of a

developmental process. From a historical retrospect, then, Tolman (1983) describes that there were two ways ancient thought articulated dialectics: first, as a subjective dialectics, it was used in the art of debate; and, second, as objective dialectics, it was used to describe and understand the world.

Many presocratic philosophers posited objective dialectics in one form or another, with *Heraclitus* the most notable champion. *Heraclitus* perceived the world as 'a unity in diversity' and in a continuous developmental motion involving a conflict between opposites, which he termed 'logos' (Kirk & Raven, 1957; Russell, 1959). Thus, the world, according to *Heraclitus*, possesses the same properties and operates under the same principles as the process of dialectical reasoning.

The history of modern dialectics has its roots in the Renaissance with *Nicholas von Kues* and *Giordano Bruno*, traverses through the works of *Spinoza*, *Descartes*, *Leibinz*, *Kant*, *Fichte*, and *Schelling*, and achieves its most systematic elaboration in the logic of *Hegel* (Tolman, 1983). Hegelian logic unifies the subjective dialectics of *Zeno* and objective dialectics of *Heraclitus* (for a complete treatment of Hegelian philosophy, see Hegel, 1967; Hegel, 1970; Stace, 1955). Because it is essentially developmental, nature must be comprehended by a method of reasoning that also shares this quality of developmentalism. Hegel believed that process ('a self-determining monism') is the only way in which the world evolves.

Modern dialectics flourished in the 19th century. It appeared not only in cosmology and philosophy, but also in anthropology, linguistics, history, psychology and sociology. In biology, *Darwin's* theory of the evolution of species and the origin of human beings was an example of dialectical thought at its finest. For example, his axiom of the survival of the fittest implied that when species (being) are confronted by potential extinction (nothingness) they were impelled (internal necessity) to evolve towards (process) a different state (qualitative transformation).

During the penetration of dialectics into the thought of 19th century intellectuals, *Marx* and *Engels* endeavoured to employ dialectics in the study of history, sociology and political economy. They espoused a form of dialectics that was grounded in *Hegel's* thought, but was framed from the standpoint of *materialism*. Materialism asserts, fundamentally, that "the concrete must precede the abstract: things and their relations are prior to their corresponding ideas, [not the reverse]" (Tolman, 1983, p. 323). As Tolman (1983) indicates when describing dialectical materialism,

. . . [t]his priority [of materialism] then governs our method of investigation, explanation and exposition. The change to materialism render[s] objective dialectics both more consistent with itself and with the aims and intentions of modern scientific practice -- without sacrificing anything of subjective reflection. (p. 323)

For *Marx* and *Engels*, dialectical materialism articulates the most fundamental aspect of being -- namely, the necessity of the process of struggle. They express the triadic dialectical formula of thesis-antithesis-synthesis in the following way: one, all things struggle to become other than what they are or were; two, all things struggle to avoid being overcome; and, three, all things struggle to overcome other things. Further, nothing remains the same nor are they self-sufficient, but exist always in relation to other things. And, therefore, there exists a necessary and rational interrelationship of all things in the universe -- or a unity. Knowing complete truth consists of knowing how it is related to all other things that exist or have existed in the universe (Angles, 1981).

From this examination, it is apparent that dialectics is much more complicated than just acknowledging the interplay between opposites or the triadic formula of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Often researchers (such as Cochran & Laub, 1994; Czikszentmihalyi, 1990; McAdams, 1993) use dialectics as a metaphor to describe the process of the struggle between and resolution of opposites in the lives of the individuals they study. For example, Cochran and Laub (1994) talk about how the dialectic process serves to create a relationship between a person's positive and negative life dramas, which yields a forward movement in that person. Czikszentmihalyi (1990) discusses the role of dialectical tension in an individual's differentiation and integration

of meaning over four stages of life. McAdams (1993) describes how paradoxical experiences of the passion of youth and the power of reason are resolved in mid-life by individuals enact a dialectical process. Thus, none of these researchers directly consider dialectics to be the process that underlies human development or meaning-making. Rather, dialectics is a convenient way to conceptualize the resolution of contradictions in life.

Unlike his fellow researchers and like the aforementioned philosophers and social scientists, Charmé (1984) considers dialectics critical for illuminating human development as well as his topic of interest. In fact, he proposes that the evolution of meaning, human development, and living a meaningful life through work is most accurately described and effectively understood as a dialectical process.

Thus, if it is to be considered a critical approach to understanding meaning-making, human development and how a mission in life (which is the primary of this research), then dialectics will have to be applied in the study of actual lives. Charmé's examination of dialectics in the study of meaning in lives provides no information as to its usefulness because symbolic lives (in novels) are examined and not actual ones. To assess whether a dialectical approach [as presented by Charmé (1984)] or any of the other approaches discussed above [namely, those presented by McAdams (1993), Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979), Cochran (1990) and Csikszentmihalyi

(1990)] provides an understanding of how a life mission evolves, a research study conducted on actual lives is necessary.

An Approach to the Study of Lives

Up to this point, the previous research on how meaning evolves in life has been examined to provide a theoretical framework for understanding how a life mission evolves. In this section, the aim is to describe and explain the research approach used in this study to examine lives in order to understand how a life mission evolves.

The research approach of interest for this study is a life story approach. The commonality between the primary research discussed in this literature review (represented by McAdams, 1993; Csikszentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979; Cochran, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Charne, 1984) involves more than their potential contribution to the understanding of how meaning and a life mission evolves in a person's life. Indeed, all the researchers of these studies emphasize that a biographical or life story is most effective in understanding human beings and their experiences. For example, McAdams (1993) states that "If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if *I* want to know *myself*, . . . the meanings of my own life, then I . . . must come to know my own story" (p. 11). Similarly, Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979) indicate that when a person's life is described and examined, either in an autobiography, a biography,

psychohistory or a clinical report, an assumption is made that this person's life has a sense coherence, a form and purpose that makes it different from another life. Cochran (1990) agrees with these researchers when he says, "We live experience as a story, aware of beginning, a middle and a striving for closure. We recount experience in a story form. We question and investigate using story as a way to make things intelligible" (p. 14). And, finally, from Charne's perspective,

[A]s we actually live through projects and actions minute by minute, they are uncertain and risky. Their final meaning is inescapably opaque. . . . When *telling* a story, however, we can examine an event and its meaning in every temporal direction. We are not constrained by the irreversibility of lived time. We can classify the past by what came later, evaluate enterprises by their results, or judge the sincerity of intentions by the consequences. We inevitably interpret events and experiences by taking into account results that were not foreseeable at the time the events occurred. (p. 12)

Clearly, these researchers believed that the life story approach to studying their topic of interest was compatible with a naturally occurring phenomenon in the individuals being studied. In other words, the life biographical or story approach was used to study how meaning evolved in lives because individuals come to understand the meaning in their lives through the stories they told.

Thus, understanding the life stories told by individuals provided the researchers with a potential idea of how meaning evolves in lives. This is the first reason why a life story approach is used for this study.

Using a life story approach in researching human experiences, such as meaning in life, falls under the broader category of research strategy of a case study design. According to Yin (1989), the need for case study research emerges out of the desire to comprehend complicated human and social phenomena. Moreover, he states that case study designs permits a research study "to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (p. 14). This suggests that the stories told by individuals are kept intact, in its natural form as individual cases for examination during research analysis. And, through this analysis, an understanding of the individual's experiences emerges.

The second reason why a life story approach is used in this study is to test and refine previously posited theoretical frameworks that lead to an understand of how a life mission evolves. As demonstrated by the literature review, there are several approaches that describe how meaning evolves in life. An important feature of cases study research is that rival theories can be compared and contrasted as to their usefulness in understanding the research phenomenon of interest (Yin, 1989). In this research study, to reiterate, the primary research theories to be compared and contrasted are those offered by

McAdams (1993), Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979), Cochran (1990), Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and Charne (1984). However, these rival theories may simply contribute to the understanding of an emergent theory that arises from the life stories told by the participants of this study.

The third reason why a life story approach is used in this study is to build a theoretical framework that leads to an understand of how a life mission evolves. If an individual participating in this study tells a story that has elements shared by another individual and then another, then a researcher can begin to develop a theory that illuminates the topic of interest. This is referred to as *the literal replication logic* of a multiple case study design (Yin, 1989). In a sense, each story or case represents an single experient. If three stories on a certain topic of interest, for example, are arranged effectively, demonstrating a replication of a pattern experience of meaning in life, then the stories would serve as compelling evidence for an initial set of propositions. For example, McAdams' (1993) pattern of development of personal myths and the making of the self is based on stories collected from real people, living and describing real lives, over a period of thirteen years. Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's (1979) pattern of development of life themes arose from life histories collected from thirty participants. And, Cochran's (1990) phases of life emerged from the examination of over twenty autobiographies of people who clearly had a mission in life. Thus, the stories

told by the participants (who have a mission in life) may serve to test and refine these theoretical frameworks or generate a new one. Indeed, Charmé's (1984) conception of the dialectical development of meaning in lives has yet to be tested through the study of actual lives.

In sum, the present research study considered a life story the unit of examination of the case study design. Thus, from the discussion of the reasons for using a life story approach, the advantages of a life story approach and case study design are essentially the same.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Case studies are particularly useful when the research phenomenon is complicated in nature. A person's experience of how they came to have a mission in life falls into such a category. This study developed narrative accounts of how a life mission evolved and searched for a consistent general pattern among them. Yin (1989) described this type of research strategy as a multiple case study design.

Data Gathering Procedures

Participants

Study participants were recruited through the researcher's personal and professional contacts. The letter of information used to recruit participants appears in Appendix A.

Three participants (one male and two females, ranging from forty-four to forty-seven years old) were selected for the study following a screening interview that lasted one to three hours. The interview served to introduce the candidate to the research topic and to assess the appropriateness of the candidate for the study. A sample of the questions asked in the screening interview appear in Appendix B.

An appropriate candidate for the study fulfilled the following criteria:

first, individuals identified that their career was intimately related to their life development; second, individuals indicated that they developed a greater sense of meaning in their life as their careers evolved; and, third, individuals were capable and willing to reflect and talk about their experiences in great detail. These criteria ensured that research could be conducted with adequate depth on the topic of interest. Upon being selected, the three candidates provided written consent to participate in the study. The consent form appears in Appendix C.

Life History Interviews

The research products or narrative accounts of individuals who had a mission in life were generated using in-depth life history interviews. Participants were encouraged to take an active and collaborative role in the interview process or, more accurately, take on the role of the story-teller, which was complemented by the interviewer taking on the role of the listener.

In the first life history interview, participants were asked to construct a lifeline. The purpose of creating the lifeline was to provide the framework or guide for the story-telling process to occur for both the story-teller and listener. The interviewer used the following questions to facilitate the participant's construction of his or her lifeline: If you were to consider or imagine your life as a story, what are the significant events within it?; What might the chapters of your life be?; What are the events that have focused

your life direction significantly?; What are the events that have shaped your sense of self and meaning in life? Once the lifeline had been constructed, the participant was encouraged to expound on the events identified, talking about how they were experienced and what they meant for him or her. A sample of the other questions asked in the life history interviews appear in Appendix D.

Each interview lasted between one to four hours (with breaks for a rest), and occurred at a location of convenience and comfort for the participant. We selected locations that were quiet, conducive for the intensive life history interview. Each interview was recorded by audiotape.

Following each interview session, the tapes were reviewed for the purposes of expanding and deepening the exploration of the participant's life-story in subsequent interviews. Notes were taken during the review of the tapes and formulated into questions that were asked in the next interview session. The process of interviewing the participant and reviewing the tapes continued until: the participant's life-story unfolded from the beginning to the end (or to the present) in a comprehensive manner and the interviewer clearly and fully understood the participant's life-story to the satisfaction of both the interviewer as well as the participant.

In other words, the conclusion of the life history interview phase of the research was dictated jointly through a dialogue between the participant and the interviewer. When story-teller and listener agreed that all the events

charted on the lifeline were examined in great depth and there was nothing more to emerge from the story-telling process, life history interview sessions were concluded. This decision illustrates the collaborative nature of the researcher and participant relationship in case study research.

When the life history interviews were completed, they were all transcribed verbatim. The lengths of interview transcriptions for the three participants were 62, 133, and 145 type written pages. Each of three participants required three interview sessions.

Narrative Accounts

The narrative accounts were constructed through synthesizing the information from the tapes and transcriptions as well as interview and tape review notes. The accounts were written from the participant's experiential point of view, using his or her words as much as possible. Each account was organized into a narrative form so that it represented a coherent story of career development told from the perspective of the person who experienced it.

The lifelines were used as a guide to the construction of the narratives as if they were "the table of contents" of the significant events of the participants' life-stories. As a consequence, they were referred to frequently during the construction of the narratives to ensure the participants' life-stories were accurate and comprehensive.

Narrative Account Review

The main research concern for the study was whether the narrative accounts were considered credible or plausible (Mischler, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988). This concern required ensuring the soundness and trustworthiness of the accounts. To accomplish this, the participants reviewed their own narrative accounts to assess accuracy.

Each participant was given a copy of his or her narrative account. He or she was asked to review it and assess whether it accurately portrayed what he or she intended to communicate and whether anything of significance was omitted or distorted. A sample of the questions asked in the participant review interview appear in Appendix E.

Following the review interview, the narratives were refined and returned to each of the participant for further review. This was done only if there were major changes to be made in the narratives that shifted its meaning for the participants. A summary of the participants' comments from the review interview appears at the end of each narrative account.

Analysis Procedures

The analysis proceeded by deeply examining the narrative accounts. This entailed reading the narratives over and over to develop the researcher's feeling for the flow of the story. When it was necessary, the audiotape recordings and transcriptions of the interviews were consulted to further

increase a feeling for the tone of the story as it was told by the narrator. The purpose of this initial phase was to identify a life mission statement in each of the accounts.

Establishing the life mission statement provided the researcher with a perspective or theme upon which to read and examine the rest of the account. For example, events can be viewed as moving the narrator toward a life where his or her mission is lived or not. Events can be viewed as forecasting the development of a life mission or a struggle to live it. However, from examining the events, the composition of the narrator's life mission is also refined and sharpened.

From the life mission statement, a series of significant experiences and events was charted. These were then phrased in a more abstract manner. For instance, after working for a year and a half as the youngest staff member in a residential correctional facility for boys, Derrick resigned and returned to University to pursue a degree in Social Work. Two critical aspects underlie his actions here: his experience of a significant activity and his decision to engage in this activity further.

To allow for comparison, this event in Derrick's life would not be expressed as simply a return to school, but an attempt to pursue an activity that was experienced as meaningful for him in some way. Unique details were either held in suspension or placed in the background to facilitate the

discovery of commonalities in the other accounts.

Once a series of significant events for a narrative account was charted and abstractly phrased, they were grouped together and more general descriptions were tentatively expressed for each group. These general descriptions were the bases upon which the general pattern was composed.

The general pattern was then checked against each of the narrative accounts in turn. With each comparison, the general pattern was revised. In addition, during comparisons, the events became even more generally and sharply phrased as a part of the pattern. Thus, the parts contributed to creation of the whole and the whole expanded the meaning of the parts.

The analysis procedure continued until the general pattern emerged clearly, crystallized, and required no further significant revisions. When the general pattern was compared to the three accounts, it portrayed each without strain. While this process diminishes and sacrifices the complexities of individual experiences, it exposes the significant experiences that are a part of a more general pattern.

CHAPTER IV
CAROLYN POLLARD
SELF-HEALING, SELF-TRANSFORMATION, AND
CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Carolyn Pollard is a counsellor at a community drug and alcohol rehabilitation clinic. She was born in the State of New York in 1950, the youngest of two children. She does not remember much of her childhood before the age of five. After five, she remembers that her family moved a lot. Her parents were both academics and moved the family around a lot during her childhood to pursue their educational careers.

I

Carolyn did not have a very pleasant childhood. Both of her parents were working, and she and her brother (who is four years older) were left with babysitters. From being left with others so early in her life, she experienced a strong sense of abandonment by her parents or by those who were there to nurture and love her.

Both of Carolyn's parents are doctors of education. Her father achieved his doctorate first. Her parents had decided that as the male and the "bread winner," he needed to reach the point of earning money in a career first. Regardless of this agreement, they competed with each other in terms

of their academic achievements. It put them in an adversarial relationship, which affected their children negatively.

Fragmentation of relationships within Carolyn's family occurred early. For example, Carolyn bonded with her father, and her brother bonded with his mother. This made relationships with the other parent and sibling difficult for each child. It created an "us-and-them" situation within the family. It also fostered triangulation. She described this as one person using another to influence and manipulate one's relationship with a third person.

Fragmentation of family dynamics was entrenched in her parents' family history. Her mother grew up with mental illness in her family. Carolyn's maternal grandmother was mentally ill. Two of her great aunts committed suicide due to depression. Her mother lost her own father at the age of sixteen. She was very close to him. Carolyn suspected that her mother married at the age of nineteen to get away from her own mother. It was only recently in Carolyn's life that she ever saw a picture of her grandfather. What this said to her was that her mother was uncomfortable or even ashamed of her family background. There was not a lot of sharing of family or childhood experiences on the part of her mother. If experiences were shared they focused usually on negative factors, except when it came to stories about Carolyn's maternal grandfather. Carolyn's mother distanced herself from her own mother several times in her life. As a result, Carolyn only saw her

maternal grandmother three or four times before she died.

Carolyn's father's family background was equally fragmented. Her paternal great grandmother was a very strong-willed woman, who lived to a ripe old age of ninety-two. Carolyn did not know her great grandmother, but remembered her being described as "a crotchety old woman" by other members of her family. Carolyn's paternal grandmother was also a very strong-willed woman, whom Carolyn remembered well and loved very much. Carolyn's mother and paternal grandmother never got along. They constantly fought. Carolyn lamented that there was much conflict and strife throughout her family background.

Carolyn's paternal grandfather was a gambler. The grandmother divorced him when Carolyn's father was very young. Carolyn felt that this was extraordinary given the social mores at the time. She pointed out that this occurred because the grandfather gambled away all the family money. However, she suspected that there were probably other contributing circumstances that led to her grandmother's course of action. Carolyn's grandmother ended up going into business by herself operating a successful flower shop.

Carolyn's father's background was filled with issues of control and oppression. He worked at his mother's shop from the age of eleven. For a long time there were just the two of them. His mother eventually married a

man who was very abusive both verbally and emotionally. Carolyn's father often bore the brunt of his step-father's cruelty. This man was viewed as a tyrant by almost all his family. However, to Carolyn's dismay, he liked her. When he visited, he brought her dolls and other gifts. Unfortunately, this put Carolyn in an awkward position. She was teased and ridiculed by her immediate family (her mother, father, brother, and even paternal grandmother) about being his only true relative. This led to a further sense of being rejected by her family.

In summarizing her parents' relationship, Carolyn felt that they were meant for each other in a perverse way. Her mother was a strong-willed, determined and extremely focused woman. She needed to be strongly focused on her goals in order to survive her family background. Carolyn's mother was also an amazingly brilliant person. She was the kind of person who might have discovered a cure for AIDS, had she been doing research in this area. On the other hand, Carolyn's father was passive, acquiescent, and often avoided conflicts because of the way he had been raised by his mother and later tormented by his step-father. However, he was bright, charming and debonair. He knew how to "get along with people."

When Carolyn's mother and father met, it was just a matter of each providing what the other was accustomed to in their own family relationships and history. Carolyn saw this situation as critical in the relative personality

development of both herself and her brother. For example, where her brother was meek and submissive, she was strong-willed and insolent. Thus, it was no wonder that she and her brother bonded with the opposite gendered parent. The relationships were a reenactment of both parents' family background.

Throughout her childhood and adolescence, Carolyn's parents' relationship was "stormy." A part of her father's life in academia resulted in numerous love affairs. As an adult, she suspected that the family was often moved around because he was getting caught in compromising relationships. The family had to move to get away from conflicts. She remembered the first time her mother caught her father in an affair. It led to her father being asked to leave the family. At the time, Carolyn recounted that she felt very confused and distraught that her father left the family. This situation was made more painful by the fact that she felt rejected by her mother and her brother. They rejected her because of the bond she had with her father. This accentuated her sense of aloneness. This situation was to be repeated several more times throughout her life until her parents finally divorced.

Because their parents were busy in the pursuit of their careers, Carolyn and her brother were often left to their own devices, even when their parents were home. She and her brother often had to unite their efforts to organize meals and do other chores in the household. For example, they had to learn

to cooperate and prepare dinner together at an early age or "starve." She also felt that, since she was four years younger than her brother, she was a burden for him, especially because of the way their parents expected their children to fend for themselves.

Carolyn did not get along with her brother. They had an estranged relationship. Their personalities were very different, with each taking qualities of the opposite sex parent. He felt that she was always in the way and resented having to look after his little sister. She felt that all she wanted to do was "to fit in" and to be a part of something. This was a part of the reason she was motivated to go into acting and the theatre. When Carolyn's brother became involved in the theatre, both acting and singing, she followed her brother's direction because she thought it could be a supportive, nurturing, and loving environment. She hoped it would be something that she could share with her brother. However, it turned out to generate an air of competition between the two of them. To some degree, this was a reenactment of their parents' sense of competition with each other. Again, Carolyn felt abandoned by a family member and, more significantly, she believed that she "just didn't fit in."

Carolyn felt very much abandoned by the people who were supposed to be encouraging, caring, and loving. She was rejected by her mother and her brother. This was in part because of the bonding they had and the alliance

she had with her often absent father. She was being indirectly rejected for her father's indiscretions. At the age of twelve, her father (someone she felt close to) left the family or had only a minimal role in it. As a result, she felt she had no one; she felt alone in the world.

II

One of the greatest impacts of Carolyn's family situation and the moves was that she never learned how to make friends. It was not until the age of thirteen that she developed a strong friendship with another individual. She had a good friend named Samantha. Carolyn and Sam hung out and listened to Beatles' records together and "went boy-crazy." She felt that she fit in and belonged. However, this was to be short lived since the family moved again. She rebelled, but it was to no avail.

The family moved to the deep south and the State of Alabama. It was again a move that was a part of her parents' academic careers. This was a significant move in Carolyn's life. She felt that the move tore her away from a situation where she belonged, had friends, and "fit in" for the first time. She felt that this move was an extremely abusive thing for her parents to do to her. Carolyn was extremely angry and bitter about the move to Alabama. The move was also significant because it was her first strong experience with racism and prejudice and with being associated with the outcasts of society.

Carolyn found herself making friends with "the outcasts of the

neighbourhood." She had both black and white friends. She also had friends whom the other youth in the neighbourhood considered to be "Fucked Up" or having problems. These friends were gay or lesbian, had eating problems and were overweight, or just looked different from everybody else. Carolyn belonged to a teen social action group called Association for Coloured Equity (ACE). As someone of a Jewish background, she was disparaged and the target of racism along with the black youth. She felt very committed to the cause supported by the group, even though they were often threatened with violence. For example, their meeting site in a church basement was frequently the target of bomb threats.

Carolyn's two year experience of living in Alabama produced conflicting sentiments. She felt that being a part of a group speaking out about social injustice was important. It was something that her parents encouraged her to do at an early age. However, it was contradictory to their position at home, where they had the last word and there was no sense of democracy.

As an adolescent wanting to date and be sociable, Carolyn found herself in another dilemma. Because she was included and made friends with a group of outcasts, she was unpopular with "the cool youths." She wanted to fit in with this group of "cool youths," but was also rebelling as one of the outcasts. She wanted to do what her parents felt was important, but wanted

also to fit in with a different social group.

Being involved with ACE put her in a contradictory position. On one hand, she wanted to comply with her parents and follow their values and gain their acceptance. On the other, she wanted to proceed in a way that allowed her to feel like she belonged to a group. Being a part of ACE meant she was an outcast according to other youths, but fulfilling her parents wishes. But she also realized that ultimately her parents were contradicting themselves. They often would say one thing and then act in the opposite way. For example, they suggested that she join a group like ACE, which spoke against racism and oppression; yet, they were often overly controlling of her behaviour, were at times emotionally cruel and abusive to her, and were oppressive in that they suppressed her attempts to find her own direction in life.

After two years in Alabama, Carolyn's parents moved the family to New Orleans. This was where she pursued her theatre involvement more intensely. It again became a very important aspect of her life, as it was earlier. She enjoyed it, and she was good at it. She was involved in a social network. She had her first boyfriend as a result of her involvement in the theatre. But, she had some ambivalence towards her theatre because it was something that her parents encouraged her to do. They promoted competition between her and her brother, which led to more difficulty

between the two of them. Carolyn was aware that many of her endeavours were associated with her "people pleasing desires" and her attempt to find a place where she could belong. Her involvement in theatre, as in ACE, was for the purposes of pleasing those she felt were going to validate her in some way -- namely, her brother and her parents, respectively.

While in New Orleans, Carolyn's mother completely distanced herself from her husband. Up to this point, she had always acquiesced to her husband's pleas for reconciliation after his affairs. She finally decided to legally separate from him when he revealed that he had been in several affairs during their marriage, not just the ones that she knew about. Carolyn was present during her father's confession to her mother at her father's request. Carolyn was sixteen at the time. Like her mother, Carolyn was devastated by his confession and shocked by the extent of his indiscretions. But she was also torn between supporting her mother in her time of need, on one side, and the life-long alliance she had with her father, on the other. Carolyn once again found herself caught in the middle. This was an example of the triangulation drama that was often enacted in Carolyn's early life.

After her parents' separation, Carolyn's mother wanted to move as far away as possible from New Orleans and her ex-husband. She was offered a position in the University of Toronto and accepted it. Before they left for Toronto Carolyn's parents were going through one more battle. She believed

that this was her parents' fight for custody of their daughter. However, it was actually a fight to see who was going to have to take care of Carolyn after the separation. In fact, neither parent wanted to assume the responsibility of caring for Carolyn.

Regardless, Carolyn was never consulted during this custody battle. At sixteen, she felt that her opinion was important in determining the outcome of the situation, but as always she was ignored. Instead, she was used as a pawn in their fight.

In an unusual move, Carolyn, her mother, and her brother (who was also escaping the draft for the Viet Nam War) left New Orleans for Toronto in the middle of the night in the midst of the custody battle. Much later, her mother told her that they did this to avoid a violent confrontation with her father. Also, her mother told her that her father never sent any child support. Carolyn suspected that this was an attempt to drive a wedge between her and her father. But, at the time, she did not challenge her mother. When she did attempt to clarify the situation through a phone call to her father, Carolyn realized that she had again been used by her parents to get at each other. However, she felt confounded by the situation and tried to "fix" the situation between her parents. She was "always trying to fix things so they would be better." As usual, it did not work, and Carolyn found herself not accepted by either parent and alienated by both.

Carolyn's life had been fairly unstable and filled with conflict. She struggled with balancing what seemed important to her and what was important for others. Because she never felt accepted by her parents in a genuine way, Carolyn felt that she always had to do something extra to please them, especially when they got into fights. She took on the role of the peace-maker. With all the turmoil in her life up to and including her stay in New Orleans, Carolyn's involvement in theatre emerged as a meaningful, fulfilling, and consistent aspect of her life. She made a lot of friends, including boyfriends. She was a good actress and became skilled as a director and in production aspects as well. Her sense of belonging was increased, and her sense of loneliness was abated.

Life seemed to be coming into focus for Carolyn at this time. More significantly, a sense of direction in life seemed to arise through her involvement in the theatre. Even when she moved from New Orleans to Toronto, her connection with the theatre remained. For example, she performed in summer stock productions in Scarborough.

Carolyn entered the University of Toronto in Fine Arts, the Department of Theatre and Film. Out of a difficult family situation Carolyn found a path in life, one that nurtured her and gave her an opportunity to expand her sense of self. She was feeling less the outsider and had more of a sense of belonging.

III

Carolyn's life at the University of Toronto was wonderful. She took courses in acting, directing, and theatre. She was active and busy with university life and socializing. She dated frequently and was actually engaged to a man at the age of nineteen. However, they broke up a year later, when she was twenty. She ended the relationship because she felt suffocated by it.

Carolyn continued to perform in summer stock while in university. She was very much focused on her involvements in her life. Parenthetically, her mother paid for Carolyn to live in the campus residence, which was only a short distance (ten minutes) from her mother's home. For Carolyn, this was an indication of how much they both did not want to live together.

After about two years in university, studying theatre, enjoying her life, a significant turn of events occurred for Carolyn. She went on a trip to England with her mother. Her mother paid for the trip, and Carolyn was extremely excited to go to England because it was the birth place of her idols: the Beatles. However, on a train ride through the English countryside, her mother told Carolyn to change her Major. She told her daughter that she did not have the talent or drive to pursue acting as a career. Moreover, she felt that Carolyn should go into education because this was a more secure career pursuit and one that was familiar to her own.

Carolyn was devastated by her mother's position. Carolyn felt she had

been doing very well in her first two years of her Fine Arts degree and equally well in her theatre involvements through summer stock. She felt that her mother did not understand that being involved in the theatre necessarily meant that one had to act and be on stage. Carolyn felt that she could also be back stage as a director or in production. She was deeply saddened that her mother was not at all supportive. In fact, Carolyn felt her mother was very oppressive and pejorative with many of her comments. Carolyn's mother was an extremely "shaming and negative" woman. Her favourite phrases were, "You should do this." or "I told you so!"

At that time, Carolyn did not feel she was in any position to go against her mother's wishes. But, not only was she devastated by her mother's posturing and lack of support, Carolyn was also shattered that she was not able to stand up to her mother. Carolyn berated herself for not believing in herself enough to say to her mother, "No, you are wrong. This is what I want to do, and I'm going to do this anyway!" Carolyn was saddened by the fact that she did not have the self-assurance to stand up for herself and what she wanted to do in life. She was afraid that if she failed she would get an "I told you so!" from her mother and all that came with it.

So, when they returned from England, Carolyn transferred to the Faculty of Education, with an English and Drama double major. Eventually, she became an English and Drama teacher in the public school system. She

taught for eight years altogether. It turned out that Carolyn was also a good teacher. But she ultimately left it to pursue another course in life, one that integrated and cultivated her sense of career and self. Before she reached this stage in her life, Carolyn went through much struggle, suffering, and anguish, both mental and physical.

IV

Carolyn finished her education degree and became a teacher. She taught her first year in Toronto and then became extremely ill. She developed an inflammatory bowel disease called Crohn's Disease. It changed her life profoundly. She was twenty-three years old at the time.

Carolyn believed that her Crohn's Disease might have been inherited from her mother. Her mother suffered from colitis, which was very similar to Crohn's. She felt that both she and her mother experienced the same type of psychological pressures and stress that might have brought on their respective illnesses.

Colitis inflicted Carolyn's mother when they were in Alabama. There was tremendous stress in her mother's life with the relationship difficulties with her husband and his affairs, not to mention her academic career. Carolyn suffered from the pressures of growing up in a family that was not nurturing or supportive. She struggled with her sense of belonging and self-esteem. The constant moving of her family from place to place was not

conducive for her to develop her ability to make friends and feel confident in herself as a person.

Further evidence and impact of Carolyn's struggle with her sense of belonging and self-confidence arose in her personal relationships, which subsequently exacerbated her Crohn's Disease. After several unsuccessful short term relationships and her persistent estranged relationship with her mother, Carolyn was not in the best emotional position to be involved in an intimate relationship. She was in a position of needing to be involved to fulfil her waning self-esteem. Moreover, the need for a relationship was also to satisfy her yearning for belonging. These two factors made her vulnerable to poor choices in relationships, which ultimately destroyed what she desired from them in the first place and further obliterated her sense of self.

At the time she was experiencing early symptoms of Crohn's Disease, Carolyn was "madly in love with" a man and wanted to marry him. It turned out that he was very abusive, and they had a very "co-dependent relationship." For Carolyn, this meant that she was putting all of his needs first and sacrificing her own. Furthermore, it meant that she was willing to do anything to maintain the relationship and win his love. They took a trip to Maryland to visit his parents. She was inflicted with a terrible case of diarrhea and stomach cramps and was violently ill. She did not understand why she was experiencing such difficulties, nor were the doctors able to diagnose her

illness. They in fact misdiagnosed her and gave her the wrong medication. It was a horrifying experience for Carolyn.

Carolyn's illness shattered her relationship with her boyfriend and left her stranded in Maryland with no money. Her mother helped her financially so that she could return to Toronto. Carolyn's mother expressed her standard "I told you so!" as a part of the aftermath of her daughter's situation, which further crushed Carolyn's self-esteem and deflated her self-confidence. Adding to her sense of worthlessness was the fact that her mother got Carolyn her first teaching position, through pulling strings as a Professor in the Education Department. With her life unfolding in such a disastrous fashion, Carolyn's sense of self spiralled downward into what seemed to be a bottomless pit of despair.

Carolyn's first year of teaching was a painful and dreadful experience. She lived in an apartment three blocks away from her school. To survive the school day, she went home at lunch time and took a nap to ensure she had enough energy for the afternoon. She did this all year and characterized her behaviour as part of her "over achieving" disposition. At the end of the school year, she decided to stop teaching for awhile because she was extremely "burnt out."

Carolyn chose to go for an extended vacation in Florida to visit her father "to just get away and relax." It was not a stress-free vacation since she

was confronted with several longstanding family issues associated with her father. Adding to her stress were enormous hospital bills that grew as a consequence of her illness. Although she had planned to live and work in Florida, she had to return to Canada because she could not afford the hospital and medical bills, which was a part of the difficulty of living in the United States.

During her time in Florida, however, Carolyn had an opportunity to explore a vocation other than teaching. Before returning to Canada, she worked for just under a year in an alcohol and drug treatment centre for youths. She enjoyed and felt an affinity for the kids she worked with. They reminded her of herself, of the needs she had sought as a young person from her parents: acceptance, love, and encouragement. She realized that her young clients' antisocial and self-destructive behaviours, which led them to the abuse of alcohol and drugs, were due to unmet needs in relationships with their parents.

V

Upon returning to Canada, Carolyn moved to Ottawa so she did not have to be with her mother nor to face their estranged relationship. She resumed her teaching career. She also got involved in acting again. She was doing well with both her vocational and avocational activities. However, on the negative side of her life, she continued to suffer greatly from her illness.

Also, she engaged in another destructive relationship that devastated her sense of self. In spite of all her struggles, Carolyn persisted in carrying on with her life, ensuring that she satisfied some unspoken drive to be perfect.

On another level, however, there were two additional aspects of Carolyn's life that became more critical in her life direction. They were her battles with alcohol and drug addiction and her search for and exploration of spirituality.

Carolyn's use of alcohol and drugs started because they were used in her social circle. Being in theatre groups, with people who were often older than she was, meant that she was exposed to things before she had a true understanding of them. She smoked and drank in bars when she was under aged. Regardless of the short or long term consequences, she was in a position to be involved in a group. She felt that she belonged and that it was a privilege to be included in spite of her age. The use of drugs was very common in her social group. They were just available.

For Carolyn, the use of both alcohol and drugs also became a way to deal with the psychological and physical problems she was experiencing. Coping with the pain associated with her feelings of being abandoned and excluded, as well as her troubled relationship with her parents and the break up of her relationships were major reasons Carolyn used alcohol and drugs. With each trauma in her life and the increasing physical pain, the use of both

alcohol and drugs (both pills and "pot") increased because they suppressed her pain.

By the time she was in Ottawa, Carolyn was heavily addicted to legal and illegal drugs. Although she realized this to some extent, Carolyn was not able to change her course. She had also been involved in substance abuse when she lived in Florida, but in both locations she felt their use did not adversely affect her ability to function and maintain a job. This belief continued for quite a while, until she succumbed to an emotional breakdown later in her life.

While in Ottawa, Carolyn addressed her struggle with her life issues through the study and practice of Japanese Buddhism. She wanted to explore her spirituality, which she did not have much awareness of. She was not very attached to her Jewish belief system, because her parents had very little attachment. She was not interested in Christianity, because it did not appeal to her needs. It was based on living "a good life" and the hope for an afterlife, which did not help her deal with her present situation. She needed to understand why her life unfolded as it did, and how she was going to cope with it. She wanted a way to move beyond the pain in her life.

In the process of exploring her spirituality, Carolyn discovered Nichirenshoshu Buddhism. The philosophy and practice of this Buddhism made sense to her theoretically and practically. The laws of cause and effect

gave a sense of meaning to her life. However, there were also negative aspects to the study and practice of this Buddhism. Carolyn found that it was dogmatic, patriarchal, and shame-based. The practice or ritual of chanting created a feeling that it was very "cult-like". She was told to chant more if she felt unhappy or upset rather than "feel the feeling" or feel bad. Through the chanting she was told one found enlightenment; and, if one was unhappy, it was because one was not chanting enough.

Carolyn found the use of "shame" as a tactic to control a practitioner's behaviour very disturbing. It reminded her of her family's tactics. However, she was not fully aware of the problems with Nichirenshoshu Buddhism at the time she was studying and practising it. She was more concerned with being a part of something that had a family quality to it, and something that had a philosophical and value base that she could connect with. She continued her study and practice of this Buddhism for eight years.

It seemed apparent to Carolyn that she was seeking different ways to cope with her life. It may not be that they can be labelled as negative or positive, because there were elements of both in each endeavour. For example, drinking alcohol and using drugs in certain circumstances meant that she was like everybody else, a part of a group. The use of alcohol and drugs was also a means to deal with her physical pain. Correspondingly, the study and practice of Nichirenshoshu Buddhism meant that she was a part of a

larger collective of people who had similar beliefs and values. The study and practice of this Buddhism was also a means to deal with her psychological and physical pain. Through gaining a spiritual understanding of her pains, she could learn to cope and transcend them. In spite of the benefits of these endeavours, there were obvious negative and questionable qualities to them. The masking of what her psychological and physical pain meant to her, through the use of substances or the study and practice of Buddhism, prevented Carolyn from getting to the root of her issues.

VI

Carolyn chose to become a teacher because it was something her mother wanted her to be. Satisfying her mother meant that she would be accepted and not abandoned or excluded. Being abandoned and excluded led to loneliness, which was too painful to cope with. So Carolyn struggled to uphold her job as a teacher at the expense of her own psychological and physical health. This changed dramatically when she decided to quit her teaching job in Ottawa to move to Vancouver.

Carolyn's experience of working in Florida in an alcohol and drug treatment centre for youths and her own experiences as a child never left her. She was acutely aware of how incredibly cruel children could be toward each other. She developed programs for her grade seven English classes that involved teaching them about interpersonal and communication skills, conflict

resolution, group dynamics, and peer pressure. In 1981, while still in Ottawa, she was encouraged by her mother to write a proposal to do a presentation to the Canadian Conference of Teachers of English on the programs she had developed for her students. The proposal was accepted, and she was on her way to Vancouver to present a workshop for the Conference.

Carolyn decided soon after she arrived for the Conference that she wanted to move to Vancouver. She was attracted to the beauty of the city and its environment. She returned to Ottawa, submitted her letter of resignation, wrote to the Vancouver School Board for teaching positions, secured employment, and moved to Vancouver in the summer. Carolyn taught for a year in a Vancouver suburb, then decided to leave teaching in the public school system permanently.

Carolyn was exasperated with the fact that teachers appeared to serve as no more than "babysitters" for the students. She did not want to spend her time disciplining students in class, but instead she wanted to facilitate their development of self-awareness and self-esteem. Rather than disciplining students for acting out, she wanted to help them become aware of the reasons why they were acting out.

Another part of the reason Carolyn quit teaching was that she became extremely ill and needed surgery. She realized that her career as a teacher was at odds with what she wanted to do with her life. She wanted to help

people become aware of, understand, and resolve their problems in their lives. Carolyn had only a slight sense of what this meant to her at the time. But she was strongly aware that, although she was not happy with teaching, she was happy working in situations where she helped young people. She left teaching without having another job to move into, and with only an inkling of what she wanted to do. It made her feel good that she was able to walk away from teaching without a clear plan as to another career direction. It meant that she was clear that teaching was not for her, and that she had no immediate ties to it. Moreover, it meant that she was becoming free of her mother's imposed career direction for her.

Following her surgery, Carolyn sought out positions that gave her the opportunity to be a helper or to do some sort of counselling. She started work as a childcare counsellor for a variety of youth treatment organizations. But she realized that she was in no position to be a counsellor for the youths, as she also needed counselling at the time. She was using drugs more heavily than ever and her life was continuing to fall apart in a variety of ways. She was involved with a man who was married and expecting his third child. This was devastating to her as she found herself in the role of "the other woman." With her father's history of affairs, which had fragmented her family, she did not want to be in a similar role. Yet here she was in that very role. Carolyn was miserable, lonely and severely depressed. She was distraught about the

state of her life. She reached a point of being suicidal.

Carolyn's breaking point occurred while working a night shift at the youth treatment centre. She had returned to work after being off on sick leave. She found out that one of the youths she worked with had committed suicide. This was "the beginning of the end" for Carolyn. She came to realize that she did not know what was important anymore, that there was nothing she believed in anymore, that this suicide made no sense to her from any perspective that she held, and that there was no more room inside herself to hold in her feelings.

On subsequent midnight shifts, Carolyn had begun to use drugs while she was working. This scared her because she was responsible for the youths in the treatment centre. If something happened to any of them, she would be held accountable. At some level, she cared about her clients. At another, she had lost all sense of the meaning of life. She thought, "What is the point? Why bother?" She felt totally empty and devoid of any sense of self.

Four months after the suicide of the youth, Carolyn was still profoundly overcome by the sense of meaninglessness she was experiencing. She began to plan her own suicide. She had enough pills for an overdose. Because she lived alone in a secured high rise building, no one would be able to find her in time. However, when the time came to carry out her plan, Carolyn felt that a part of her still wanted to live. She called a crisis line and

talked to a phone counsellor, who helped her deal with her immediate feelings and connected her with a suicide prevention service. She ended up in the psychiatric unit of a hospital for three and a half weeks. Following this period, Carolyn made some significant decisions about her life.

VII

The first decision Carolyn made was to work on her alcohol and drug abuse. The second was to have surgery to alleviate her suffering from Crohn's Disease. She started attending Alcoholics' Anonymous and Narcotics' Anonymous meetings. After nine months of not drinking or using drugs, she decided that she would have the major surgery for the Crohn's Disease, in which a portion of her small intestine and colon was removed. This was a difficult decision for her as there was no guarantee of success, and that certainly the surgery was going result in a lot of pain. One thing that was certain was that she would continue to be incapacitated by her pain and the illness.

While recovering in the hospital after the surgery, Carolyn decided that she was going to make a further critical change in her lifestyle. She had already begun to do so by addressing her alcohol and drug addictions. She felt that a part of coping with her Crohn's Disease was to be more proactive than reactive in her life and to take control of her life rather than just responding to its random forces. Following the recommendations of

nutritionists and doing her own research, Carolyn discovered that eating properly was an important step that helped minimize the exacerbation of the Crohn's Disease after the surgery. She decided to become a vegetarian. This process began a series of events that led Carolyn to refocus on herself and to view herself as a worthwhile human being. The meaning of her actions, such as addressing her addictions with alcohol and drugs and changing her eating habits, was that she came to believe she was an important person, who was worthy of being cared for and nurtured. Carolyn then took this realization into the framing of her career direction.

Carolyn felt that her desire to pursue counselling as a career was deeper than she initially thought. She had wanted to be a childcare counsellor in order to help adolescents who needed the same kind of nurturing, understanding, and love that she never got as a child. However, she realized that what was important for her was the need to do something she felt was valuable. She felt that much of her struggle in life had been with the issue of acceptance and being valued. Her endeavours had been to please others so that she would be accepted. This was why she had gone into teaching, and, to some degree, why she had pursued theatre. Doing things that were unacceptable to others meant that she might be excluded from the group, and might find herself abandoned and alone.

In pursuing counselling as a career, Carolyn began to comprehend that

a part of the skills of being a counsellor were related to how she interacted with her parents. Although she had always tried to appease her parents in many ways, Carolyn also realized that she probably reflected their weakness as individuals. She struggled with her sense of self as a child because her parents did not support her. But, if they had, she might potentially have moved beyond them, and they might not have been able to control her. Therefore, they never truly encouraged her to find her own sense of self.

Carolyn did not feel she had any sense of self-concept and self-esteem when she was growing up and as an adult. However, this mirrored her parents' struggle with their lack of self-concept and self-esteem. They were able to achieve high status in their careers, but what did it mean to them and what price did they have to pay to get there?

Carolyn was no longer willing to pay the price of following a path in life that was going to detrimentally affect her self-esteem and self-concept. More importantly, she wanted to pursue a course in life that promoted self-exploration and self-development. She conducted her personal life with these goals, and now she wanted to conduct her professional life in the same manner. She left the youth treatment centre and attained a position as counsellor in a community drug and alcohol rehabilitation clinic. Carolyn began to enact and apply many of her personal discoveries, experiences, and values in her new position as a counsellor.

Carolyn felt the counselling process was like a mirror clients held up to their face. They then gained a sense of self-awareness upon looking at that image. If it was difficult to look at that image, then it was the counsellor's role to support the person to do so. If that person resisted looking at the image or chose only to look at parts of it, then it was the counsellor's role to challenge and confront the person gently, with compassion. She felt that she, in some way, had been doing this all her life in some way with her parents. The only thing was that she was not aware of what she had been doing, nor did they appreciate or value what she had been doing.

Working as a counsellor, Carolyn was appreciated and valued by clients for taking on that role of the mirror. As she put it, "I get paid to call people on their bullshit, to help people explore their own denial systems, and to encourage people to go on the wonderful journey of self-discovery." She became increasingly aware that her self-concept and life role matched her work role. Carolyn lamented that she was not accepted by her parents because this was the role she played in their lives. However, she also realized that there was a place where she was valued for playing this role. She made every attempt to find environments that allowed her to articulate this role, which was why her position with the community alcohol and drug rehabilitation clinic was so meaningful for her.

Carolyn felt that the counselling process was also an opportunity for

her to grow as a person. For her to be an effective mirror for her clients, she had to be aware of her own issues. This meant that she was not able to hide behind her own "defense mechanisms." She chose to challenge herself to deal with her parental and family relationships, abandonment, loneliness, emptiness, and need for acceptance, especially as they related to her relationships with men. This process of self-examination recently led her to end an intimate relationship (with a man named Mikhail) that appeared to be a reenactment of the relationship with her parents. She found it difficult to give up her relationship with Mikhail, but realized that it was contradictory to her personal and professional values. This was significant for her because it was the last of a series of "co-dependent relationships."

Carolyn was cognizant of the fact that throughout her life she got involved in relationships that became ill-fated, because she needed to feel accepted by someone. However, her behaviour in these relationships required her to compromise her sense of self and to sacrifice who she was as a person. She often found herself "taking care of the needs of the other person" and ignoring her own, which meant she did not see herself as very important. The end of her relationship with Mikhail meant that she was developing a sense of self-worth. Her self-worth was not associated with being involved with a man. Carolyn realized that self-worth was related to her ability to remain true to her own values. She came to value her solitude, to appreciate herself in a

genuine way as well as engage in authentic relationships.

Carolyn extended the self-awareness she gained from breaking the cycle of "co-dependent relationships" to resolve for herself the relationships she had with her parents and brother. She felt that she could not take care of their needs anymore. For example, she could not be the mediator for her parents' disputes. She did not want to be used as a pawn for them to get back at each other. In short, she was not willing to take on the role of "the people-pleaser," one who was willing to change her personality like a chameleon to ensure that she was accepted and belonged. Her self-worth was strong and developed enough for her to allow time to heal her relationships with her parents.

As for her brother, Carolyn believed that she needed to let him find his own way out of his issues and his relationship with her. All that she could do was to be open to clear and honest communication with her brother. She had an indication of a possible change in their relationship in a recent visit.

Carolyn believed that she could not impose her own self-awareness, gained through her counselling position and self-development work, to directly resolve her relationship with her family members. She had to learn to allow them to come to their own self-awareness of the family dynamics issues. After all, as a mirror, one could only serve to reflect the issues not to affect them.

VIII

Carolyn's decisions about her life were attempts to heal herself of the psychological and physical pain she had endured throughout her life. Through her self-healing activities associated with her decisions affecting her career, lifestyle, and relationships, Carolyn transformed herself. No longer was she living to satisfy others, afraid to be alone, experiencing a sense of meaninglessness, feeling empty inside, lacking self-esteem, or confused about who she was as a person. Retaining the most integral part of her Buddhist belief system, Carolyn felt that her life was "about finishing up in this life time what you need to finish before you can pass on."

Carolyn believed that "We made the choice to come back here again and go through what we go through this time around [in our lives]. We chose our bodies, our parents, our race and religion, and our experiences, [both difficult and joyous]." Moreover, she believed that "We are not human beings who are trying to be spiritual, but that we are spiritual beings trying to be human." Finally, as spiritual beings, "We choose the life we live before our [corporeal] life begins."

Carolyn believed that when our lives begin, "It is as if a curtain rises." Life's journey is then about learning and relearning what we returned to this life time to learn. As one grows towards the end of one's life, "The curtains start going down. However, we get entrenched in our lives and we forget that

we are here to learn. Further, we become ego-focused rather than ego-free." This was how she viewed her life before she began her journey towards self-healing.

From her decisions to not commit suicide and to attend Twelve-Step Programs, to her decisions to not be involved in co-dependent relationships and to pursue a career as a counsellor, Carolyn transformed herself from being a pained, lonely and frightened person to one who was self-accepting, self-assured, and self-aware. Her life has become integrated and focused, her career an expression of her journey towards self-healing and self-transformation.

For Carolyn, the pursuit of a career in counselling was a part of her lot in life, a part of how she expressed herself as a child, and a part of what she returned to this life time to do. In fulfilling her career, Carolyn felt that she was doing exactly what she was supposed to do in her life. A part of what was important in her life was becoming aware of, learning, and relearning this fact again as a spiritual being seeking to be human.

Study Participant's Self-Review of Narrative Account

I think you did a really good job! It's been very therapeutic to [participate in the research]. I was really impressed with how you were able to take all of that information and get it into this [narrative account]. I thought you did a really good job!

CHAPTER V
DERRICK SLOANE
TRANSGENERATIONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND
SELF-CONSTRUCTION

Derrick Sloane is the executive director of a community social service agency. He was born in 1950. But, his career story begins much before his birth. It begins with his parents' work life, and how they met, fell in love, married, and started their life together in Canada. Although he always knew what he wanted to do and be very early on in his life, Derrick did not really understand his mission in life until he started to live it. His career is one that connects his parents' work to his. But, most importantly, it connects him to his father and his work. Through this connection, Derrick was not only able to carry on his father's work, but he was also able to construct his sense of self.

I

Derrick's father was born and raised in Victoria. He was the Director of the Boys' Club in Victoria before he was drafted into the army and went to Europe for the Second World War. He worked, at quite a young age, as a Boys' Club guidance counsellor and social worker. Derrick's father's job was guaranteed to him upon his return from the war. So, going off to war did not

jeopardize his position.

Derrick's mother was "a land army girl" in England. When the men went to war the women took over the farms and the factories. She drove a tractor, worked on a farm, and performed other tasks usually considered for men. Derrick's mother, like many other English women, had never worked before. Certainly, she had never been left alone to tend the farms. She decided to be a farm worker to support the war efforts, which had many implications for her life to come.

The family myth or story about how Derrick's parents met goes as follows. It was a story that Derrick's mother loved to tell. Derrick's father sustained a leg injury in Holland. He was sent to a Canadian hospital in England. Further along the road where the hospital was situated, there were three pubs. The soldiers went down the road towards the pub and, as they did, chatted with the women or the "land army girls" working on the farms. This was how Derrick's parents met. One day, as his father hobbled down the road, he struck a conversation with a woman who was to be his future wife. He asked this woman if she would have a drink with him when he was able to walk to the third pub. The whole idea of the hospital was to use the pubs as an incentive for rehabilitating the soldiers. If they could make it to the first pub they were doing well, to the second pub they were on their way to recovery, and to the third they were ready to go back to action. The woman

agreed to have a drink with Derrick's father, and a week later they were married. But, she really did not know him well.

Derrick's mother left for Canada before the end of the war. She was the first one in her family to immigrate and took pride in this fact, because in those days one did not travel such distances. She was a woman with an adventuresome spirit. Upon arriving in Canada she traveled across the country in a train, and eventually ended up in Victoria, arriving well before her husband. She fell in love with the place and began to make her life there. She developed a network of friends and settled into a comfortable lifestyle. She was very caught up in the romantic life story she was living.

Derrick's father returned to Canada to carry on with his life. He was reunited with his wife and proceeded to continue his career.

Once he returned from the war, Derrick's father never talked about it again. He felt ambivalent about his involvement in the war. It was an aberration in his life. He did it as a part of his sense of duty. But, he never joined a Legion or did anything that reminded him of the war. For example, he had earned a Purple Heart, but it sat in a drawer. He was more concerned about returning to the life he had before the war.

Derrick's father continued his job as the Director of Oak Bay Boys' and Girls' Club. In fact, he and his wife lived in the basement of the Club's building.

In the summer Derrick's father was the Director of Camp Shawanagan, a Boys' Club camp. Another myth that permeated Derrick's family was that both he and his brother Dean, who was born in 1947, three years older than Derrick, were conceived at Camp Shawanagan. Derrick was born to do the work he chose in more ways than one.

In 1953, tragedy struck Derrick's family. Derrick's father died of polio. This was a very significant milestone for Derrick, even though he was only three at the time. There was a huge polio epidemic at that time. His father (a social worker) had caught the disease from one of his clients and had died very quickly. This left Derrick's mother totally bereft, because the great love of her life had died.

Derrick's mother had several crucial decisions to make. With two children and on her own, she had to decide whether or not to return to England. There was great pressure from her family, with whom she was very close, to return from Canada. Derrick's mother had been away from home for eight years at that time. She decided to stay in Canada. Her sons were born in Canada, and she wanted to raise them as Canadians rather than British.

Derrick's mother also decided to go the University of Victoria to complete her degree. Her life was not easy. She had two young children at that time. She worked in the summer to support herself. In fact, she worked

at Camp Athena, one of the camps that was a part of the agency her husband worked for.

Derrick's father worked for the Association of Community Houses at the time of his death. They named a Community House, Griffin Community House in the Cedar Hill District of Victoria, after him. Derrick's father's name was Walter Griffin.

II

Derrick's mother eventually remarried. She married Johnathan Sloane, who adopted Derrick and his brother Dean. Derrick's mother felt that her sons should take their new father's name to show respect. She felt that it was important for her sons to start a new life with a new father. Further, she thought it was disloyal to have the memory of her first husband, their biological father, affect this.

Derrick and Dean were not happy with this as they grew up. They did not like the whole idea of having a step-parent. However, they resolved some of the concerns by referring to their step-father as "dad," and their biological or "real father" as father.

Derrick was very much interested in discovering what kind of man his father was. He understood from the accounts of others that his father, Walter or Walt, was a person very much liked. But, his mother did not talk much about him. In part, this was due to her desire to be true to her second

husband, but also to hide from her unresolved grief and sorrow for her loss. Therefore, Derrick has very little memory of his father.

Although his step-dad, Johnathan Sloane, was a really nice man, Derrick always felt that he was a very strange man. He was one of the most eccentric men Derrick had ever met. The ironic factor in Derrick's mother's remarriage was that she had hoped to provide her sons with a male role model and influence. Derrick's step-father turned out to be bisexual and had been gay for years. He came "out of the closet" only in recent years. Derrick always remembered his "step-dad" having an ambiguous sexuality. His step-dad was not "a bad person," he was just a "very odd, eccentric sort of person, which made for a very unstable family life."

Johnathan Sloane was an Educational Psychologist. He worked for the Ministry of Education and school systems. He was not a very ambitious person, but was competent. He worked his way up from District Supervisor to School Board Trustee to Chairperson of the School Board, and finally to Deputy Minister of Education. In his work, Johnathan worked with a lot of children and youth having difficulty functioning in, at risk of failing in, and dropping out of the prevailing school system.

Johnathan Sloane did psychometric and educational testing and designed alternative education curricula for students who were unable to function in the regular school system. Many of the students he worked with

came from broken homes, came from unstable family backgrounds, and were emotionally troubled. Others were mentally challenged and required specialized educational environments. Derrick's step-dad was an advocate of and authority in educational reform.

Derrick felt that his step-dad's approach to his work compromised his family's life. Derrick's family was extremely large and was unique in composition. In addition to Derrick and his brother Dean, Derrick's mother had three children with Johnathan Sloane. Derrick's parents also adopted children and served as foster parents for others. Derrick's step-dad brought home the youths he worked with, especially if they were wards of the courts or did not have a family. Some of the foster children, as well as those brought home by Derrick's step-dad, never left and became a part of the family. On occasion, his step-dad would bring home a child and say, "This is a boy from school this morning; and, 'Oh yes,' keep him away from the matches. By the way, he's going to sleep in your room."

Derrick did not grow up in a family that was like "Ozzie and Harriet." However, his parents tried to foster an atmosphere of belonging and togetherness in their family. There was an understanding that no distinction was to be made between the children of the family as to who was adopted and who was not. In spite of his parents' views, Derrick felt that the relationships among the children varied. In some cases, the relationships were quite good,

in others they were rather estranged. For example, Derrick was closer to some of his adopted siblings, depending on the permanence of their stay and how they entered the family, than to his biological siblings.

Because there were never any distinctions made between the origin of the children in his family, many people did not know Derrick and his brother Dean were not his step-dad's children. Moreover, one of Derrick's adopted brother's, a Chinese boy, named Jimmy, was more similar in personality to his mother and step-dad than any of the so-called biological children. Although people thought he had come from Hong Kong, Jimmy had been living in a group home. Derrick's step-dad decided that this was a terrible place for a young boy to live and adopted him. Thus, the household was always in a state of uncertainty and flux, where one did not know who was going to stay and for how long, nor why they were there, nor what kind of relationship one was to have with them.

Derrick's step-dad had "a big heart," but members of his family "paid the price" for it. An example of this was that Derrick caught hepatitis from one of the children his step-dad brought home. He lost most of his liver and spent several weeks in the hospital. Derrick was very angry and bitter about this and other incidents where his step-dad sacrificed his family for his own sense of social responsibility. He felt that his step-dad did not really care for his brother Dean and himself or any other members of his family as people.

Derrick felt that his step-dad was just acting the role of a humanitarian and "the good guy" for people to see. It was not genuine. Derrick felt that his step-dad went too far to fulfill his social responsibility.

Derrick's early life was filled with upheaval and ambiguity. This was to change in 1959 when his family moved to the Royal Oak District of Victoria. The family experienced a sense of stability that it never had before, because of the frequent moves to accommodate Derrick's step-dad's work. Derrick's family experienced a real sense of permanence when they moved to their second house in Royal Oak four years later. The house was very old and large. It had many rooms and was designed in a grand traditional English style.

In addition to the experience of permanence, this second home was significant for Derrick because he had his own room for the first time in his life. It provided him with a sense of space and privacy, which was not possible with all the people who were coming in and out of his life.

The career direction provided by Derrick's parents (father, mother, and step-father) was clear. His mother, father Walter, and step-dad Johnathan all influenced Derrick in his desire to work with people and to be a social worker. While he was influenced positively by his father and mother, he was influenced negatively by his step-dad. Despite not knowing him very well, Derrick was particularly impacted by the work his father did and, more

importantly, by his philosophy of social and moral responsibility. This influence grew as he progressed in his life. However, it was always subtle, unspoken, and expected that Derrick was going to grow up to do "good work."

Derrick was similarly inspired by his mother. He had great admiration for how she was able to continue to do the work she was doing (at the community houses), go to school, and raise two boys alone after losing her husband.

In contrast, Derrick had a negative reaction to his step-dad. Although he felt that his actions and work appeared humanitarian, he felt that his step-dad was motivated by selfish, egocentric reasons. Derrick was motivated in his life and career direction as much by a desire to follow in his father and mother's "footsteps" as to show that he was able to do things in a different way than his step-dad. Derrick hoped to transcend his step-dad's vision of helping people.

Along with his parents, Derrick was also influenced by his family dynamics and his siblings. He found that he was inherently and genuinely interested and curious in all the stories of his adopted and foster siblings. In fact, people said to him, "You would make a good social worker." He also discovered that he had the knack for interacting and "getting along with everybody." Derrick admitted that he was probably living out the role of a

second child.

Derrick was recognized by his siblings as being able to mediate between people when there were conflicts. He was "the conciliator" and "the mediator" of the family, which gave him a lot of status. Derrick had a strong investment in his role in his family.

It seemed that Derrick's social and people skills were very developed at an early age. These skills and his childhood experiences, as well as his parents' work, all combined to translate into an awareness of a mission in life.

III

To a large degree, Derrick's family life and childhood shaped his sense of self and career direction. Derrick thought that he was probably an obnoxious and arrogant person in high school, because he was so sure of what he wanted to do in his life. Not only did he know what he wanted to do, Derrick was sure that he was going to do "good things," that he was going to do "wonderful things," because he was going to help people.

Derrick was the choice of all the parents to be the dates for their daughters, because he listened and brought them home before their curfew, with his curfew being earlier than theirs. He was also given the nickname "God" by his peers. This was due to his self-assured quality and his desire to do good things. Derrick's focus in life and self-image became forged through his late adolescence. He had a strong self-investment in the role he was

enacting.

In general, however, high school was very self-confirming for Derrick. He knew his direction in life, and high school was a very stable and stress-free part of his life. This was in contrast to his childhood that was filled with a lack of stability, ambiguity, and identity diffusion, which was due to the death of his father and the unusual reconstitution of the family structure. Significant for him during his high school years was that he met and became involved with a young woman who eventually became his wife. Derrick's life was in a period of calm, a somewhat welcomed intermission in his life. Although this was to change shortly, his focus in life did not.

IV

Following high school Derrick went to the University of Victoria. However, he dropped out after his second year. At the time that Derrick was going to university, he did volunteer work with kids, working part-time as a youth/activity worker at Glanford Boy's Club and Cordova Bay Community House, and other community servicing agencies. All of this was to test whether or not he wanted to be a social worker. Dropping out of university allowed him to further test his commitment to this vocation.

Another important aspect of Derrick's life after leaving UVIC was that he got married. He pursued and gained experience working with people. He attained a part-time position at Royal Oak Community House, which was

close to his home and neighbourhood.

Derrick eventually got a full-time position at Broughton River Boys' School in Colwood as a child care worker. He was the youngest staff person at the school. He met and worked with a number of individuals who went on to important administrative government and community social service positions. Many of these individuals also became good friends as well as colleagues of Derrick's. Being a staff member at this facility was the training ground for future work in the field, because it was such a difficult and challenging place to work.

Derrick's position at Broughton River was important for two other reasons. First, Derrick was able to follow the trail blazed by his step-dad, who was the first director of the facility. It gave Derrick the opportunity to transcend his step-dad's vision of helping youth and crystallize his own. Second, Derrick was profoundly affected by the fact that the work he revered, which embodied his philosophy of life and shaped his sense of self, actually mistreated, denigrated, and dehumanized people.

In fact, the field of social work did more to inflict human suffering rather than to eradicate it, tended to be heartless rather than to be benevolent, tended to be inhumane than to be compassionate, and tended to ignore people in need rather than help them. For example, it was clear to Derrick that the Broughton River facility was just "warehousing kids," there

was no treatment or care provided to the youths. This was contrary to his approach in dealing with the youths. At least, he spoke to them, tried to get to know them, and helped them to talk about their issues.

The work of Broughton River was also contrary to what Derrick thought social work was all about in light of the approach his father took in working with people. There appeared to be no professional standards maintained to ensure the facility was providing the service it purported. All these experiences propelled Derrick back to school with the thought, "We've got to do something better!" After working for a year and a half at Broughton River, he enrolled in the Social Work Department at the University of British Columbia. Derrick completed his Bachelor and Master's Degrees in Social Work. He then proceeded into the Ministry of Human Resources as a Social Worker.

V

Derrick went into his career with a strong set of values. One of these values emphasized "doing good work, in order to live in a community, you have to give back to the community." This was modelled in Derrick's childhood by his parents through their active work as volunteers on various community boards, in any charities that came along, and in many fund raising efforts. For example, he remembered feeling very proud of his mother's involvement with her work as the area chairperson for a major charity,

because her picture was always in the papers and the phone was constantly ringing for her. But, one did not get involved for personal rewards, rather, it was just something one did as a matter of course.

Another value imparted to Derrick by his parents was social justice or social equity. Both his parents were socialists. They believed that one shared one's resources in a variety of ways to support causes. For example, his parents contributed regularly on a financial basis to environmental, human rights, and social-political groups as well as offering their home as a meeting place. He thought that this value also may have been a part of the reason behind adopting and fostering so many children; however, he was not sure.

Derrick's parents' values often filled him with a sense of confusion and bitterness. As children, he and his siblings were left alone and often they ate cold meals because his parents were often busy running off to meetings after dinner. He found it ironic that their activities, which were meant to benefit people, also had an adverse affect on the family. What made the situation more difficult for the family was that there were no discussions of values.

There were debates at the dinner table on issues, but never on deeper personal convictions and feelings. In fact, expression of both personal convictions and feelings by their children were actively discouraged by Derrick's parents. Derrick felt that this was because both of his parents were English, and they had that "English reticence." So, in fact, he adopted values

that were never really questioned. Essentially, he felt that his parents' acts spoke for themselves. He just followed in their footsteps. Yet, Derrick experienced a distinct duality -- one did "good work" and used one's resources to help others but one sacrificed one's own personal comfort level to help others.

The lack of communication between his parents and their children led Derrick down a career path that was misguided in spite of its apparent virtuousness. From very early on in his life he wanted to be a social worker, because it was important to do "good work." As a young adult, he volunteered and worked in community service agencies in the poorer area of Victoria to help people. Derrick remembered thinking, "How terrible for these kids, they have no malls or parks to play where they live! We can help them have what we have." After his experience at Broughton River Boy's School he thought, "We've got to do something better! They deserve to have what we have."

VI

Derrick proceeded into government social services as a social worker after going to UBC. His thoughts were, "We as social workers have the power to help people, and to change their lives." He moved from position to position in government social services, each being more prominent than the previous, and each giving him more power to help people who were

impoverished.

Derrick moved from Social Worker I to Social Worker II in very short order. His move was motivated by a desire to be able to do more for his clients and to achieve a higher status for himself. When the opportunity to achieve another level arose, he took it. At the Social Worker III level he served as the Coordinator of Special Services. It felt like a liberation for him within government social services. Instead of just reading and following the policy manuals when working with clients, he was able to travel to different areas of British Columbia and to work with people in deciding and planning programs that satisfied their needs. He was no longer a bureaucrat who towed party line and wielded his powers indiscriminately based on a narrow and biased value system. He was able to create a dialogue with the people he served and to work with them in their context and with their values taken into account. He found this position touched a deeper sense of what he believed social work was all about. Using a quotation from Max Weber, Derrick echoed the sentiment in his work, "The best exercise of power is to give it away." However, his desire for prestige and to do more for his clients led to another position change. He became a District Supervisor, one of the youngest at that time in government social services. Unfortunately, this move proved to be ill-fated and Derrick's last one. His career climb in government social services came to an abrupt halt.

Derrick ended up returning to the role of a bureaucrat as District Supervisor, one that he disdained and one that he felt he did not perform very well. It felt like he was moving away from his emerging values and his desire to be an authentic professional. Not all his work as District Supervisor was confined to the office and working just with professionals. He was able to engage in community development work, in networking with the people, and in advocating for clients. However, simultaneously, he found himself frequently cast in the role of "the enemy." Derrick was not prepared for this. This changed his attitudes toward social work dramatically.

Clients came into the government social service office with the thought that the staff was the enemy. And, on the other side, the staff viewed the clients as the enemy. Derrick was appalled by the prevailing "fortress mentality" that existed in his office. The absolute disrespect the staff showed for their clients and the employer shocked him. He became aware of how dehumanizing government social services were. Not only was it dehumanizing for the clients, but it was also dehumanizing for the staff. When a staff person felt dehumanized and devalued, they hid behind policy and legislation. And, if this failed, then they hid behind sarcasm. Derrick vowed that this system, which fostered this kind of environment and gave rise to these types of attitudes, would not corrupt him.

Derrick purposely avoided his co-workers. He took walks at lunch

around the neighbourhood where he worked. He wanted to get to know the community and people his government social services office was supposed to serve. When dealing with complaints from clients about one of his staff, he tried to bend the policies to ensure that some aspect of the client's needs were served. However, this alienated him further from his staff, as they saw him undermining their authority and power. He, on the other hand, abhorred their use of financial resources and policy to subvert and oppress people's inherent desire to take control of their lives. Derrick's time with government social services was fast approaching its end.

The last three years of Derrick's work with the government were difficult. Fortunately, he had a Regional Manager who was understanding and sensitive. This individual supported Derrick's style of work as a District Supervisor and, ultimately, supported his desire to leave government social services. It was clear to Derrick that he was experiencing a conflict of values and in his sense of self, both as a professional and as a person. No longer could he profess to be "this good guy who wanted to do good work, who came in and made everything right." If he worked for the government, he certainly did not do this. In fact, he was a dismal failure.

Derrick's idea behind "doing good work" also came under fire. He questioned why it was important for him to do "good work." Was it to serve the needs of people, to assist them in taking power of their lives; or, on the

contrary, was it to fulfil his need for power and the self-image of "a good person," one in which he had such a strong investment ever since he was a child. As the middle child, he had played the role of the "mediator" and the "thoughtful one." Derrick became aware that, as a social worker, he was not living out the image of his father, one that he and others revered and valued. But, rather, as a social worker, he was living out the image of his step-dad, one that he despised because it was just a persona that people accepted without question and was inauthentic.

Derrick believed that he went into social work for all the wrong reasons. He wanted to do good work, to do good for people, to help them find or live this middle-class life that he valued. This was a part of the inherent philosophy of his training in the School of Social Work. He lamented that they (as students) were never asked why they wanted to go into social work. He admitted that most of the people (including himself) who went into the school were probably doing it for egotistical reasons. People who came from middle-class backgrounds thought that there was something wrong with being poor and wanted to help people "live the middle-class dream." He felt that the government social services work was a place where the middle-class values could be articulated.

Social Workers working for the government had the power to change people and affect their lives. They had more power than the police, for

instance. They had the power to go into a home that was filthy and to say: "This is not a healthy place to raise children!" and take children away from families. All of these abilities were based on policies built around their middle-class value system on what a good home should be.

Government social services work was also recognized as a valued place to work, because it meant prestige as well as stability. For example, government social workers made a good living and had good pensions. One had a job for life because one was not fired. All of these beliefs about social work collided with Derrick's emerging personal values and sense of self, and they reminded him of what he despised in his step-dad. It also reminded Derrick of his true desire to be in social work, which was to relive his father's life and to pay homage to his memory.

VII

As he was not ready or able to explore his values through his work, Derrick did so in his personal life. As a professional, he saw himself as someone who empowered others to achieve their potentials and sense of self in a creative and respectful way. On a personal level, he began to explore what this meant, especially in spiritual terms. In 1980, he joined a church. This was not a Christian church. It was a church where people, like himself, were striving to develop their own spirituality outside of the mainstream religious institutions. Derrick never considered himself a Christian when he

was growing up, in fact he never liked Christmas or Easter as a child. He always found himself sick or had some sort of psychosomatic illness. But, this church was different for him. It allowed him to build his own personal theology around his spiritual journey, which interrelated with his value exploration around work.

The values Derrick began to articulate included viewing people not as a class, but as individuals, with a unique set of needs, with a unique set of experiences, and with something to offer others. He also emphasized an individualized approach to working with people so that they could be empowered to find more effective ways of conducting their lives, and became less dependent on the social welfare system. In addition, he believed in social justice, respect for the individual, democracy, tolerance, and treating people in a holistic manner. Although he did not believe in a God or life after death, he did believe that there was some kind of life force, that all human beings were a part of the interdependent web, that we gave as much attention to the environment and the earth as they did to each other. He did not just hold onto values such as social justice without a sense of what they meant to him or because others held them, as he did when he was young. For example, social justice meant that everyone should have access to resources that were made available by society, and everybody should have the right to a voice in decisions made about them. No longer were the poor to be helped to achieve

the middle-class dream. Derrick had regular dialogues with friends about his emerging spirituality and the books he was reading. He spoke with colleagues about how his spirituality impacted his work life.

Some of Derrick's colleagues thought he was "out of [his] mind!" Some of them supported him at varying levels, others totally disagreed, and others walked away in stunned disbelief. However, through 1981 and 1982, Derrick was able to impart some of the values he held to his staff. He felt that after a difficult trial period they adopted and shared many of the values. He felt they were an amazingly creative group of social workers, who were intensely client-centred and hard working. He felt proud to be associated with them, and felt good that he was able to foster the kind of atmosphere that allowed them to do such tremendous work. For example, although their apprehension of children was lower than other districts, Derrick felt that it was due to the fact that the staff worked more closely and creatively with the resources of their clients (families) in order to discover solutions to situations.

Ultimely, Derrick began to reconcile some of the value differences he had with people he worked with, the people he served, and the work he was doing. He realized that there were a myriad of value systems that existed (personal and professional), which were based on a person's context. Although not anyone was true or right, one must be true to his or her own value system in terms of his personal and family life, professional life, and

spiritual life. For example, he had two boys at this time, and was not proud of the values he was upholding in his professional life. His work took him away from his family too much. He did not want to repeat the pattern of his step-dad, who constantly allowed his work to interfere with family life. He preferred that his work and family life be more integrated. So, in striving to articulate and to become more aligned with his emerging personal values, which were transforming his professional values, Derrick left his position with the government social services in 1983.

Derrick's move from his government position allowed him to move towards a greater sense of congruency between his professional, family and spiritual values. However, it was also clear to him that certain value differences between his personal and professional life were not going to be reconciled. He wanted to find a work environment that was congruent with his emerging professional value system around the field of social work, one that was also congruent with his personal and spiritual values. So, in spite of his professional ambitions and career stability, he moved from government social services to being the executive director of a non-profit community servicing agency.

VIII

Derrick's career change was not met with unequivocal acceptance from his family, especially his wife. In addition, his value shift was at odds with his

family. His family resisted it, because he felt they had a lot invested in him being "this guy being a bureaucrat in government, that everybody understood, that worked in government, that had this job and everybody understood what you did." Derrick's emerging sense of self was displacing the image or concept others had of him, one that existed since his childhood. They found it difficult contending with this. Why would he give up a position of prestige, which involved helping people and was stable (financially and long-term), to go into a position that was less stable, less highly regarded, and less rewarding when it comes to helping people?

Derrick encountered the most opposition in leaving government social services from his wife. He and his wife had a "real rough patch there for a while." He was not very effective talking about the changes he was experiencing and wanted to make in his life. For example, during this period, he took long trips across Canada by himself "to break loose," which almost destroyed his relationship with his wife.

Derrick admitted that some of his actions were irresponsible. However, he was in the process of reconstructing himself and his world-view through his actions and activities in the community. His wife found this difficult to accept. She had been married to this man for twelve years. They had three children together and a house surrounded by a white picket fence in a middle-class neighbourhood, with a camper in the driveway. They were

happy. So, why were these changes occurring in her husband? It seemed that Derrick's change of values was confronting his wife's values.

Derrick's wife came from a very strong Roman Catholic background. She went to a Roman Catholic school. She came from a lower middle-class background, with lots of alcoholism in her family and a fair bit of instability. Therefore, she valued a much more traditional lifestyle, with a sense of continuity and predictability. She valued quiet, passive resolution of issues with little display of emotions rather than loud, aggressive confrontations with great emotional outbursts. She was extremely threatened by great displays of emotion, which was a part of her background living with alcoholics.

Derrick's wife was also very threatened by the changes he was going through. She had a strong investment in her husband being in a government job, because it was wonderfully stable, it was a noble endeavour, one never got fired, one got a pay cheque regularly, and one got a good pension when one retired. From her background, a government job was highly valued.

When Derrick tried to explain his reasons for leaving government and going into community work for a non-profit society, she could not understand. She could not understand why he wanted to give up all his seniority, an intelligible career track, and a job that was constant day-after-day. However, the answer laid in the fact that they were both undergoing an exploration of their values, spirituality, and sense of self.

It was ironic to Derrick that it was his wife that got him involved in the Unitarian Church, which contributed to his reexamination of his values and spirituality. She moved away from her own set of beliefs, her own Christianity, to a set of beliefs and values expressed by the Unitarian Church. She found that the latter was much more congruent with her sense of self. Involvement with the Unitarian Church also afforded her the opportunity to be involved with other people with whom she felt a common bond. She found herself connecting with people who were working through similar questions and in the process of developing their own spirituality as she was. Yet, there existed a dissonance within her.

Even though she found something critical and meaningful in her spiritual awakening and journey, Derrick's wife still had remnants of her old belief system. She valued the stability of her husband's government job, and the security it brought her family. However, this gave way over the years, and she became supportive of her husband's career change. This was mirrored by her own career exploration and development. In fact, her involvement expanded to the point where she became a Sunday school teacher and church administrator.

IX

It was clear to Derrick that his career move was not only meaningful for him but also for his family. Derrick's move from government social

services took him to the Royal Oak Community House. Derrick felt that his career story was one of returning to places. For example, his employment as the Executive Director of Royal Oak Community House was a return to a place of work where he spent his formative years working as a prospective social worker.

Derrick's return to Royal Oak Community House was also in a neighbourhood where he grew up. For example, he went to the afterschool daycare programs as a child at Royal Oak Community House. It was a place where he learned how to swim and had his first cigarette at a dance. So, in a sense, it was "like going home." This feeling was extremely important for him in taking the stance of a community-based social worker, who located himself in the community, rather than in a government-based position. He thought there was no better place than in his own community, for which he felt a strong connection and commitment, to articulate his professional value-base.

Working for Royal Oak Community House was an opportunity for Derrick to test whether his values as an individual and his values as a community social worker were synchronized. He wanted to live his values and did not want to put them aside for work. He did not want to feel uncomfortable because he was living out two contradictory value systems. He did not want to feel like he hated work and go through the motions. Derrick wanted to operate professionally from a value base that focused on the

principles of valuing and respecting the individual, of democracy, of social action, of working holistically within systems, and of interdependence and connectedness with the community and the environment. However, it was not easy for Derrick to articulate and actualize these values in his new position.

In the first six months of his tenure, Derrick had to work with the Board of Directors of the agency to decide whether or not to close it. They missed two payrolls because there was not enough money. Some staff members were fired. The funds of the agency were frozen because of a labour relation problem.

In dealing with the labour relation issue, Derrick's values were really put to the test. He believed that the employees had the right to collective action and to form a trade union, and they had the right to negotiate and to bargain with the employer. But, the employer had the responsibility and obligation to represent the community in any negotiation and to ensure that the negotiations did not detrimentally affect servicing the community. He had to balance the rights of employees to determine their own destiny with the assurance that the community was effectively served.

Another issue associated with the labour relation problem was the use of volunteers in service delivery. He believed that people have a multitude of experiences and talents that can be offered to others. Yet, it was not fair to use volunteers to displace an employee of a job. He was able to work out an

agreement where staff and volunteers were able to co-exist. Derrick was pleased that he was able to deal with difficult issues at Royal Oak Community House from a value base that was consistent with his personal value system.

Derrick was equally pleased with the programs that were developed at Royal Oak Community House to empower people to take more control of their lives. For example, a woodworking program was developed for mentally ill patients who made and sold small wood furniture for daycare and afterschool facilities. The money they made contributed to their disability pensions. Derrick was also instrumental in starting a food bank that operated out of his facility. Another program established was a community garden for social assistance recipients. The vegetables grown were sold to supplement their assistance cheques, with the extra crop donated to the community house food bank.

Derrick believed that people deserved an opportunity to access resources that were available to them as citizens of a society, especially food. He felt that people, who had the resources to support themselves, were also willing to share their resources as citizens of a society. These values allowed the citizens of the community to effectively set up a food bank that was operated by the citizens to serve the citizens of their community. The belief of social equity came alive for him in this program.

Derrick learned a tremendous amount in his work at Royal Oak

Community House about himself as a person and as a professional. He was deeply satisfied that he was able to articulate and actualize his values through his work. The ability to work cooperatively in partnership with people (such as, members of a volunteer Board of Directors, a volunteer committee, a staff team, and a community he served) was extremely significant for him, because it meant he was community-minded and not power-oriented. He was working with people not for himself. He was less ambitious personally and more ambitious for the community he served. He trusted and believed in the process of growth and became less impatient with it. He worked with groups but made sure the needs of the individual were served. Derrick saw himself as being a transformational leader, one who facilitated change and growth in people and the community.

In a sense, the work Derrick was doing mirrored his internal transformation. He gave himself up to a process rather than trying to control it. Social work was about working with people, not trying to control them in any way through the use of power or one's good intentions. Instead of saying, "I'm the Director or I know what's good for you.", he stated, "I'm here to work with you, how can we work out the situation so that it is best for all concerned." Letting go of the need to impose his values and allowing the values of people to mesh through the process of working together were very important ways to remain true to his greater value system. He was no longer

the middle-class social worker trying to force his value system upon those who needed to be helped.

Derrick felt good about being able to include his family in his work life without having it be intrusive to them. He was not proud of his association with the government and the values he was holding. In contrast, he felt very good about the fact that he was able to have the same values in his professional and family life. He was grateful that his place of employment was in his home neighbourhood, and that his children were able to go to work with him and enjoy themselves in activities and programs offered by Royal Oak Community House. He was pleased that, for example, "[his] sons and [he] were able to ride [their] bikes to Royal Oak Community House in the summer, they would be in the summer playground programs while [he] worked, and [they] would all ride home in the evening when [he] finished work." What this meant to Derrick was that he was able to offer his children the kind of experience he had as a child growing up, when he was involved in the work environment of his parents. He wanted to pass onto his children the enriching experiencing he treasured so much as a child, which influenced his life so significantly.

After five years as Executive Director, Derrick left Royal Oak Community House. He left because he felt that his work in trying to reestablish the community-based focus at Royal Oak Community House was

completed. He was satisfied with the job he did in stabilizing the agency, which focused on bringing people together to make their community a better place to live. The next developmental step for Royal Oak Community House required the facility to be rebuilt in such a way as to reflect its new philosophy and vision for the community. This entailed conducting a capital campaign, which did not interest him. So, Derrick moved onto a different challenge. He was more interested in further expressing his emerging approach to social work in a new arena.

X

Derrick was recruited by the Canadian Multiple Sclerosis Association (CMSA) to be their new Executive Director. He was extremely honoured and excited by the opportunity. His sense of ambition, which was still there, motivated him to take this position. He was only to be in this position for two years, but it was significant for him.

What became clear for Derrick in his work for CMSA was that there was a division between those who worked for the organization and those were served by the organization. A major part of his work involved putting a human face to the organization, making it accessible to people inflicted with multiple sclerosis (MS) and their families, and fostering a community-based focus to servicing. For Derrick, CMSA was more interested in fund raising and maintaining a corporate image than serving people who suffered from

MS.

Derrick's work involved redesigning the organization so that it resembled a network of community houses. This allowed the needs of people inflicted with MS to be met more effectively and individuals servicing those needs to be more responsive. Essentially, what Derrick perceived to be the needs of individuals suffering from MS included: peer support to maintain emotional well-being, physical activity to maintain muscular control, and nutritional counselling to maintain energy level. All of these needs could best be serviced by maintaining a community-based focus, not a corporate one.

Derrick agreed that fund raising for research and resources required a corporate organizational structure. But, the funds raised could best be used by ensuring that the people inflicted were served, not by maintaining large corporate headquarters downtown in large Canadian cities. Derrick's goal was again to foster a sense of community focus in servicing, self-empowerment among people inflicted with MS, and an integrated (community-corporate) approach to fund raising rather emphasizing an expert (corporate) approach. His position with CMSA was significant because he continued to express his values through his work. But, what was equally important was that he was able to express them in a different arena than he was used to, ie., social services. What this said to him was that his value system had a sense of integrity, and that meant that he had a sense of integrity as a person.

XI

Derrick decided to leave CMSA when he was offered a chance to become the Executive Director of the Association of Community Houses. This is an umbrella organization that oversees all the general administration of local community houses in Victoria. His decision to leave CMSA was not so much that he was not able to express his values professionally, but that he compromised his family values. He was away from home a week every month because the head office of CMSA was in Ontario. With three children at this time (ages thirteen, ten, and seven), Derrick felt himself pulled by his need for personal and professional integration. He did not want his professional life and ambitions to overshadow his personal life. He wanted to integrate both aspects of his life.

The most important aspect of his employment as the Executive Director of the Association of Community Houses was that he felt "It was an opportunity to complete the work started by [his] father." For most of his life Derrick was pursuing a career in social work. He had initially done so for the purpose of "doing good work." The activities of social work -- that is, being interested in and listening to the life stories of people -- was also a good fit with his personality and his role and place within his family structure. He developed his self-concept around the vocation of social work.

However, as he pursued his career, social work did not always match

Derrick's self-concept and, more significantly, it did not match his values. A strong part of Derrick's career story had been focused around his drive and disposition to maintain a sense of integrity of his personal and professional values. But, for what end or purpose was all this activity moving him towards?

When he was interviewed for the position of Executive Director of the Association of Community Houses, Derrick recalled that he declared, "I can't imagine you not giving me the job! Maybe I'm arrogant, but I can't imagine not being given this job, because no one in this province knows the Community House System as well as I do, no one has as strong and long a background as well as an emotional and professional connection as I do!" Indeed, his employment as the Executive Director of the Association of Community Houses was more than just continuing "the family business," as he facetiously puts it, with his father, mother, and step-father all being either professionally or/and avocationally involved in social services. For Derrick, "It was like closing the circle!"

In hindsight, Derrick realized that the crisis he experienced around the time he left government social services was not just a struggle with value differences. As 1983 approached, he realized that he was going to out live his father. This produced an awakening in him. As he put it, "It's a strange feeling knowing that I am out living my father." If he was to live out his life

meaningfully, he would have to be doing something that reconnected him and paid homage to his father's legacy. This legacy was his father's work, the value system that underscored his father's work, and his father's commitment to his work and community.

What Derrick revered so much about social work and his father's work had been tied into egotistical needs. But, the crisis he experienced illuminated what drove him to pursue social work and the incessant call to a field of work that was so much a part of his entire life. This call was for him to finish the noble work started by his father, which was cut short by a tragic set of events in the line of work. World War II was not enough to stop and sway his father from his work, but the desire to be in service to others and his community did. This ironic twist in fate that had befallen his father destined Derrick to his career journey and mission in life.

Throughout Derrick's life he was attempting to construct a portrait of his father's life and to reconstruct his career story through his own career journey. He and his brother were told that they were the splitting image of their father. Moreover, individually they articulated both aspects of their father's skills. Whereas his brother took on his father's skills to work with his hands and to build things, Derrick took on his father's skills to work with people and the commitment to be in service to the community.

Thus, from Derrick's work as a young man volunteering at community

houses, to his enrolment in university (after a sobering experience at Broughton Boys' School), from his career journey through government social services, to his employment as the Executive Director of Royal Oak Community Houses and the Association of Community Houses, Derrick was reconstructing his father's career story through his own. Moreover, he was writing the end of his father's story through his own. And, in a most profound way, it was as if the career of his father bridged the gap of a son who never got a chance to know his father.

For Derrick never knew his father. He was three years old when his father died. His mother was too bereft and too filled with sorrow and grief to speak about her loss. It was only as an adult in his forties that she was able to speak to her son about her first husband and her first love. She hid behind conventions of loyalty to Derrick's step-father, her second husband, as the reason why she was not willing to talk of his father, her first husband. Although he understood this, he was nevertheless disappointed about not knowing him. But, more importantly, he was frustrated and angry with his mother for not allowing him to know his father.

For Derrick, a part of the reconstruction process of his father transpired through his brother, other family members, and his father's friends, many of whom were, and are still, in community social services. One particular person who was significant in Derrick's reconstruction of his father's

life was his father's best friend, Gregory Williams. Gregory was not able to talk to Derrick without getting emotionally affected by the memory of his friend. He felt that his friend was taken away in the prime of his life, and they were not able to carry out the great plans they had made together as young men.

Derrick engaged Gregory in many conversations about the man who impacted their lives so greatly. These conversations were usually opportunities for Gregory to reminisce about his friend, the work that they had done, and the plans that they had made. And, in some sense, it was also an opportunity for him to reconcile his feelings about the loss of his friend. For Derrick, these conversations were a way to get to know his father as a man, his work, his values and beliefs, and his life. Although he never felt grief for the loss of his father, Derrick certainly expressed a certain amount of sorrow for not having known his father. It was this emotional tone that provided the drama and meaning of Derrick's career and life story.

It was not just that Derrick needed to reconcile his feelings for the loss of or not having had the opportunity to know his father. But, also, he needed to understand the feelings he felt for his work, the passion that spurred him to evaluate and reevaluate his values and convictions in life. The sorrow for what could have been and what was lost, and the need to understand what it meant "to do good work," motivated Derrick to pursue his career and to

construct and reconstruct his life.

XII

In his position as Executive Director for the Association of Community Houses, Derrick approached his work with the same set of values he took into his two previous positions. These values included: equity, justice, empowerment, democracy, respect for an individual's right to self-determination, respect for the individual, multiculturalism, and so forth. Just as significant, on a personal level, he took into his work a sense of meaning that transcended himself, which linked him to his past and to his father. From his perspective, he believes that the organization he presently works for plays a very important role in delivering services to and serving the needs of the community. Furthermore, he (as executive director) is also in one of the best positions to facilitate this. Although these expectations have not been completely fulfilled yet, he has worked tirelessly towards them. He has continued in his stance of being a transformational leader, where he is empowering the people of his organization to take control of their destiny and facilitating the opportunity for them to work creatively on behalf of their communities. Sometimes he is cast in the role of a "messiah" by people of his organization, but he is quick to dismiss this. Derrick believes that no one person is bigger than the organization one works for or the people one serves.

Derrick continues to be devoutly committed to his family as he is to his

career. Both he and his wife try to keep their work life in perspective with their family life through communicating with each other and their children. Derrick feels that he married a woman who was very critical in his writing of his life and career story. Although it was difficult at times, she contributed greatly through a shared vision that one explored, defined and redefined oneself in one's involvements, work and family alike.

Derrick's career story is meaningful for him in the sense that he was able to live out the career and life of his father. From this standpoint, his career story has a transgenerational quality to it. However, it is more than this. Through this process of living out the career of his father, Derrick has constructed and reconstructed himself. From this standpoint, his career story is one of self-construction.

Study Participant's Self-Review of Narrative Account

I think [the narrative account] is very interesting. It was fascinating to read [the account]. I thought it was really good! I thought it captured the whole idea of changing values, changing the use of the self ... I hope that's the way I'm moving.

I think what has happened for me [going through the research process] is ... you've allowed me, you've put into context for me and assisted me to try to understand my experience [of my career and my life]. I've really appreciated [the process] ... you've provided me with the opportunity to get to ... to practice some self-analysis. I've really gained a lot from this process.

CHAPTER VI

MERIDITH ROYCE-SIMMONS

ART MAKING, SELF-DISCOVERY, AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Meridith Royce-Simmons is an artist and a teacher of art. She was born in a small town in Northern Quebec on October 31, 1947. She was the product of a home birth, which was significant from her standpoint because she felt it was probably a more positive start to life than being born in a hospital. What was also positive for Meridith was being born in a place where she was able to be outside and to commune with nature.

Meridith's father was a Queen's Graduate engineer. In the thirties, during the depression, the only work he was able to get was in small mining towns. During a summer work position, he met his future wife. He met her at the boarding house he was staying in, which was operated by Meridith's maternal grandmother. They courted and married. Meridith's mother was nineteen and had just come out of high school when she married. She never had any more formal education, although she did try to educate herself through reading and literary clubs over the course of her life. Meridith felt that her mother's self-esteem was fragile in this area of her life.

Meridith was the fourth child of seven. She viewed herself as, and believed that she was, "somewhat marginalized" early on as a child. Meridith

had the sense that her mother was already overwhelmed by her circumstances, not wanting to have more children. This feeling of being inconvenient and not wanted was confirmed by Meridith in conversations with her mother later in their life.

I

With her pervading feelings that she was inconvenient, not wanted, and marginalized, Meridith felt she was thrown back to her own resources. However, juxtaposed to these feelings was her awareness very early on in her life that she was special and had a special calling. Although not traceable in terms of actual dates, Meridith recalled having dreams about this calling as early as age three. These dreams recurred throughout her life. She described the dream in the following way. "I would be sleeping on a bed in the corner of the room. The door would be open just a crack, and there would be a voice calling me from the corner of the door. It would just keep calling my name! Sometimes I would answer it, it was a bit scary, but it wasn't super threatening. Ultimately, my curiosity was greater than my fear, so sometimes I would answer it, but nobody answered. However, there was a presence."

Meridith's impression of the dream was that it was something or someone/somebody calling her: something or someone had her in mind for something, or there was something for her to do in her life. She thought that, through going to Sunday School and being exposed to religion, the dream was

an experience connected with God. God was calling her to action! Although this feeling persisted, it faded in significance after awhile. What emerged for Meredith, though, was that she began to experience and cultivate a private life, a life that was not capable of being easily revealed to others. She started to explore her private life through art and creative endeavours as a child.

Without much special cultivation, Meredith found herself drawing continually by the age of four or five. She drew drawings on old blueprints that her father brought home from work. She was too small to sit up at the table or reach into the centre of the large blueprint. She drew along the edges of them, one to another to another. This was a peaceful, all absorbing activity for Meredith. It seemed natural, from the point of view of a recreation, and it occurred without any coaching. By the time she was in the first year of school, at age five, she was already receiving recognition for her drawing.

Meredith's ability to translate her observations into her drawings accurately was rare for a child at her age. For example, she was able to see how a knee joint worked and was able to demonstrate how it worked through a drawing. In other words, she connected with a deeper level of functioning and understanding, and expressed it in a way that was credible and deft.

With this talent and initial awareness of its significance, art making had all sorts of functional implications for Meredith. It was a way to interact with

playmates. For example, she drew pictures for her friends, who often just enjoyed watching her draw. This was tremendously affirming and validating for Meredith. Also significant for her were the continuing accolades she received from adults, such as teachers and friends of her parents. Meredith believed that recognition was a critical factor in encouraging her to continue her artistic activities, because she was not receiving enough clear, immediate encouragement from her family. Although her parents were supportive, like her father providing her with material in which she could create art, Meredith felt that throughout her childhood her parents were much less forthcoming with their encouragement, attention, and praise than other adults. She felt that this was possibly because her parents just did not have the personal energy to devote to relating to their children other than ensuring their creature needs. After all, they were responsible for the feeding, clothing, and housing of four children at that time and seven all together.

So, as a child, Meredith was able to use art as a way of expressing inner feelings and thoughts she could not and was not able to articulate verbally. For example, she created a piece of art work that garnered much praise from her teachers and other adults, including her mother's friends. She was in grade seven at the time. However, it was not received well by her mother. This piece of work was a portrait of a woman, who was wearing black. This woman had an extraordinary face -- she looked like she was mad, but she also

looked ecstatic. It was an image that came up many times for Meridith in her work. It was an image of a person who projected the many sides of people and life, especially the darker side and death. Her mother could not look at it, or dismissed it as being not a valid portrayal of her way of viewing the world or something within it. With many experiences such as this at a young age with her mother and other adults, Meridith struggled with a sense of self-validation and the ability to communicate on a deep meaningful level with people.

Drawing and painting were and still are touchstones in Meridith's life, to which she continually returned. It had been an activity and, indeed, a place where she could examine, understand and resolve issues. Essentially, art making (drawing and painting) was a means by which her private, inner life could be cultivated -- an inner life that she could not always express in conventional ways to others, especially adults. Thus, for Meridith art emerged as a significant aspect of her life from a very early age, even before she entered school.

II

At age eleven, a critical event occurred in Meridith's life -- this was the death of her younger brother (he was two and a half at the time) and the youngest of the seven children in her family. He died of leukaemia. This event created "a big glitch" in her family dynamics and turned her mind to the

issue of death and trying to understand it. Likely the painting of the "mad" woman related to this event. She had significant dreams during this time in her life. One particular dream that recurred was about the end of the world.

Meridith had no one in her family to talk to about her feelings or her dreams, and indeed her inner, psychological experiences. Her mother could not and did not want to talk about the death of her youngest child, which set the tone for everybody else in the family. So, along with an intense dream life, there was an unfolding family drama that was occurring for Meridith. This drama was one of being unwillingly silenced. The silencing drama suggested to Meridith that her mother had a fear of addressing painful experiences, the death of one of her children, and her own grief. However, the significance of this drama for Meridith was not just that there was a silencing, but that she being thrown back to her own resources again.

In the meantime, as a child, Meridith was also consciously aware of the continuing importance of self-cultivation in her life. This connected her with involvement in athletics and physical training, which persisted throughout her life. With interested and committed teachers at her school, both Meridith and one of her older sisters got involved in track and field. They trained approximately two to four hours daily, which started in the fall and winter and culminated in the spring and summer with meets. They traveled to meets to compete with the Atlantic Provinces as well as to Ontario for the

Commonwealth Games.

Meridith's intense involvement in physical training, from age nine to fifteen, was for more than just fun. It served to foster family togetherness in a positive and exciting way. Arising out of a feeling of being inconvenient as a child, she strove for achievement and recognition in any way she could. Track and field served as a means to this end. However, just as important, it cultivated self-understanding, strengthening of mind and body, and honing of will that evolved from "the gradual coming into control and tuning of the physical." Thus, it was an intrinsic as well as an extrinsic activity for Meridith. That is, it was a source of pleasure, but it was also a source of pride when it changed the way people treated her. For example, competing in athletics made her a heroine.

III

Upon approaching her high school graduation at the age of sixteen, Meridith's parents decided to move from Quebec to Newfoundland to follow her father's work. Without any consultation or agreement from Meridith, her parents decided she should stay in Quebec and move in with friends of the family and complete her education. This was a traumatic experience for Meridith.

Although Meridith did not know and was not able to understand at the time, this family was "really Fucked Up" or dysfunctional. She could feel it,

but did not have a way of examining the situation to come up with any understanding. Although she got along well with the children of this family, Meridith had a difficult time with the parents. The father, of European descent, was very strict, patriarchal, dominating, and very demanding. He emphasized competition, striving for excellence, and exercising intellectual prowess. This created continual stress among the members of the family. Although she did not remember much about the mother, Meridith felt that she was someone who tried to control everyone through intellectual and rational argumentation. The relationship between these two people (the parents) was not very harmonious. Meridith felt she should have been appreciative of the fact that she had a place to stay while finishing her education, but she was troubled deeply by it. She felt rejected, abandoned, and left to her own devices with this troubled family by her own family.

Experiencing a great deal of uncertainty in her life, such as moving in with this family as well as going to a new school, Meridith made a conscious, critical decision that affected her life in a profound and extensive way. At this time, toward the end of the school year after matriculation, she decided to put time and energy into the study of art on a deeper level. To a great extent, this decision was made because she became aware that "the only place of comfort or the best place to be was doing art." In addition, the recognition she was receiving from the art teacher at high school, who regarded her as

working practically at a genius level (which she herself questions), was tremendously validating. In retrospect, the whole experience of art making was extremely therapeutic and promoted self-confidence and self-assurance. So, in spite of much advice to the contrary from several sources (most significantly her parents), Meridith made a decision to continue this vital aspect of her life. She decided to go for a Bachelor of Fine Arts rather than to go for a Bachelor of Arts Degree. Her decision was one of an emotional choice over a rational choice. While those around her were trying to coerce her with reason, she was making a decision based on deeper emotional needs -- one based on the need for comfort and security.

For Meridith, the whole situation surrounding her decision to study was fraught with irony and significance. The arguments she kept hearing for not going to art school were, "You'll never make a living as an artist! You can't expect to make a living as an artist! You can't make a living as an artist! You'll never make it as an artist! Well, you'll have to put that aside now and think about your future and your career." Making a living was not the comfort and security sought in striving for a career as an artist. Meridith strove for a career as an artist because it brought her closer to a place that she felt comfortable and secure as a person. In short, it was a place that she had been experiencing all her life, and one that reflected her sense of whom she was as a person. Besides, she felt that she could do both simultaneously -

- make a living and be in a place that allowed her to be and develop herself.

Ultimately, Meridith's parents left the decision up to her. It was not as if her parents were not supportive and encouraging of her involvements, such as with athletics or art. But, for them "It was as if a door closes at a certain time in [her] life, and [she should] leave certain things behind." Although her self-assurance wavered under the pressure of all the feedback given to her from significant people in her life and self-doubt began to set in, Meridith stuck with her decision to study art. Somewhere in her being, she realized that it was an expression of her sense of self and was moved inextricably to continue this act of art making, and indeed self-creation.

IV

At the age of fifteen going on sixteen, Meridith went into first year university. University was significant for a number of reasons. However, it was initially significant because this was the first time she was thrown together with "like-minded people." She socialized and lived with people who shared similar values and world-views.

Meridith's studies included a variety of academic courses (such as, philosophy of religion, history of art, literature, and so on) and studio courses. She was challenged and inspired by some of her teachers. She felt that it was fortunate that she was in art school at this time as many of the professors were sessional, bringing with them many new and creative ways to conceive of

art making. There was a sense of adventure and wide-open possibilities. They opened her mind to different ways of viewing the world and creating art.

In her first and second years of art school, Meridith had a particularly influential teacher. He taught a course on the Zen of art making, or the use of Zen in art. Meridith found that this was the first person she encountered that married the act of art making with the process of revealing an inner experience or the inner world. His teaching emphasized that art making was an unfolding process to be experienced. One entered art school to engage in the process of art making, not to generate products of art.

Art making was an integrative activity that involved exploring and connecting with one's inner experiences. This approach to art making was extremely validating for Meridith as this was how she approached art making up to this point in her life. This approach validated her pursuit for an understanding of her inner life that was intimately connected with art making. For the first time in her life, she was making connections with other people (both her teacher and her colleagues), sharing similar experiences of art making. She was no longer making art by herself and alone, but was a part of a collective of people. She found herself in an environment or world that was receptive to, encouraged, and cultivated the process of exploring one's inner world through art. Art making had a place in the world. Thus, Meridith's sense of being marginalized as a person and thrown back to her own

resources was attenuated.

With advancements there were also set backs. Meridith had an abortion for an untimely pregnancy in the summer prior to her fourth year of university. For Meridith, the situation represented the development of a critical awareness of the dichotomies of life, of the schism between the real and the ideal, and of the compromise that seemed necessary in life but, on a spiritual plain, it was extremely wrenching. The decision was very difficult for her not only based on the social mores of the times, but also painful on a personal and emotional level. She kept this whole situation from her parents for fear that they would be terribly disappointed and hurt. Utmost she was afraid of losing their respect. But, there was also a sense that she was responsible for protecting them from the disappointment and shame they would experience. Meridith was disturbed by her own behaviour as it appeared that she was reliving her mother's behaviour in the silencing drama. Ultimately, Meridith was very disappointed in herself.

In the year following her abortion, her graduating year, Meridith became involved with one of her painting teachers, her thesis supervisor, who was married and had a three year old child. This eventually led to a living arrangement Meridith characterized as "menage a quatre," as she had a significant relationship with not only the adults but also with the child. Since her supervisor's wife was also involved with art, Meridith felt that she was

again surrounded by like-minded people, which enhanced her sense of validation as a person as well as an artist. The relationship with the child was equally validating as it was bathed in the freedom of playfulness, unconditional trust, acceptance, and love. She felt that these factors were critically associated with creativity and being creative as an artist.

The relationship with all three members of this family signalled tremendous sharing and learning. It challenged all of them in the realm of the potentials of human relating. For Meridith, in particular, she felt that the relationship challenged some of the issues of her past, such as those behind her decision to go to art school and to have an abortion. These issues included a commitment to self-cultivation, balancing the realities of a prevailing situation with personal goals, ideals and needs, open communication, self-trust and trust in others, courage, commitment to relationships, and confronting self-doubt and fears.

Meridith lived with this family for close to a year. Over the year she and this family moved from Quebec to Alberta. For a number of reasons the living arrangement did not work out. Meridith then moved onto Vancouver. However, she and this family maintained contact with each other periodically through phone calls and visits.

Upon leaving this family, Meridith realized that certain emotional needs of hers were not met. They were not met, in part, because she was not

able to articulate her needs. This was a reminder of early days as a child when she found it difficult to articulate her needs around significant emotional issue to her parents, such as her feelings around the death of her brother and the dreams she had. Although her supervisor's wife was very sensitive and supportive, there was still a block in the communication between Meridith and her.

There was another way the relationship with this family reminded Meridith of past issues in her life. As her classmates moved on with their respective lives and careers, she moved in with her thesis supervisor and his family. She was sure that the department and others were aware of the situation. But, it would be scandalous if it ever got out. So, there was a sense of covering up the relationship, a sense of deception -- especially when it came to having her parents know. Again, there was a sense that she was enacting the silencing drama, which she disdained.

V

Vancouver was the first time Meridith found herself alone as an adult. She was twenty-one and had to earn a living. Meridith had taught an art history course to adults, painting and drawing courses to both adults and children, worked as a print maker, and artist in Alberta. She had studio space as well when living with her supervisor, which allowed her to continue to exercise her artist skills. Meridith was starting with very little in Vancouver.

Meridith taught art and modeled. Her options were limited because she could not teach art in school with a Bachelor's of Fine Arts. She needed an Education Degree to do this. She began to live out the foretelling of her parents' warning, "You'll never make living as an artist! You can't expect to make a living as an artist! You'll never make it as an artist!", and so on. She admitted that it was all coming to pass.

However, Meridith was defiant of her situation in Vancouver. She never went into art to make money or to be wealthy. She persisted with living from "a hand-to-mouth existence" in spite of the stress it caused her, such as not knowing if she could pay the rent or have enough money for food. She taught art and continued to make art, which was most important to her. Besides, life was an adventure for her, and there were so many interesting things yet to experience.

For Meridith, the period of her life from the time of 1970 to 1978 in Vancouver was very formative. She invested a lot of energy into personal and professional relationships. She hung out primarily with people in the visual arts, movie-making, photography, the dance and movement medium, and so on. They persisted with integrity in making art their career and life. Some of them had achieved success with a lot of recognition and others were just getting by. Meridith had some showings of her work in galleries. However, fame and money were still a secondary concern. Primary for her was art

making. She was intensely involved in artistic endeavours. Yet, Meridith was constantly aware of both aspects of her life as an artist. That is, on one hand, art was a career like any other in which one strove for recognition and to make money, and, on the other hand, art was an endeavour in which one strove to express oneself and cultivate a sense of self.

There were two main issues that confronted Meridith as she pursued her life as an artist in Vancouver. The first was that Vancouver was a very small centre for people working in and promoting art. So, even though people wanted to talk about their work and the struggles that confronted them as artists, the competition for financial support from the Canada Council was intense. There was a core group of thirty or forty artists who wanted to share ideas and resources, but no one could afford to do so. The second issue that confronted Meridith as an artist, as many others like her, was in dealing with the politics of the art world and Canada Council. She realized that the community that supported the arts was based on a structure of elitism. She was introduced to and got a sense of "the scene." She learned who needed to be "stroked," as well as how and when it should be done.

Although she did not really know and understand the politics in depth, Meridith was becoming aware of some of its workings. She was clear, however, that male energy predominated, that it was male artists who had the ear of adjudicators, that it was male artists that were respected and

appreciated, and that women artists came in as secondary in almost all aspects. This experience was in stark contrast for her upon coming out of university, where she was always at the top of her class. Further, she always felt that people regarded each other as peers in university, where everybody was there just to work together. This was certainly not the case in the harsh reality of the art world.

Meridith recognized that relationships, sexuality, and the politics of the art community were all enmeshed. She was not clear on why there was an apparent inequity of treatment for female versus male artists and, certainly, was not feeling this way because she was not a clear-thinking feminist. She lamented that the art world was full of blinds and conditions and, worst of all, many of them were unspoken. This was all reminiscent of her home life as a child.

Meridith acknowledged that over this period her work might not have been mature enough to deserve the recognition that would garner financial support from Canada Council. She was not self-serving enough to think that she deserved recognition that was not due. However, she also did not really expect the recognition or demand it as an artist. This was because her self-esteem and sense of self as an artist was marginal, which was intertwined with her family issues.

Meridith's struggles at this time in her life reflected an inner dynamic

within herself as an artist and a person. It represented her yearning for recognition and reward from the establishment in the same way that she experienced as a child in her home environment. When recognition was not forth coming from her mother, cynicism arose as well as self-doubt. She appreciated that maturing as a person involved accepting the paradoxes that existed in life without being mired in cynicism and being resigned to the hypocrisy in society. Further, the maturing process involved developing self-confidence and a sense of commitment to one's directions in life. Meridith was careful not to get caught into the cynicism because it could lead her to self-sabotage and to make less than whole-hearted commitments.

VI

In 1978, Meridith's career as an artist and indeed her life took a very different turn. Up to 1978, Meridith taught art in several different situations and to different groups, had showings of her work across Canada, was gaining more and more exposure of her work, was developing a larger professional network, and, in turn, was moving towards achieving the level of recognition that would lead to Canada Council grants. Whether it was naivete, an omission in her training, or self-sabotage, Meridith decided to move to the West Indies with a man (named Jeremy) she was involved with, who was a theatre director and a boat builder.

Meridith and Jeremy had been involved for seven years. At the time

they decided to move to the West Indies, they were looking for a way to enliven their lives. They had built a boat and had done a lot of sailing throughout the Queen Charlottes and around Vancouver Island. When they were sailing, Meredith experienced a sense that the molecules of her being were altered. This was due to the intense vigilance that was required to engage in this kind of venture. It was an extremely powerful, significant experience for her. Meredith had a similar experience living in the West Indies, immersed in a vastly different culture, and living in a manner that engaged a very different aspect of her being.

Both in her sailing experience and in the move to the West Indies, Meredith felt as if the environmental conditions generated a sense that "normal civilization" drops away -- "It was like crossing over to another planet." All her senses were energized. The whole vibrational quality and ambience of life changed. Meredith confessed that for the first year and a half she lived in the West Indies she never really had her feet on the ground. Her relationship with Jeremy did not survive. He moved back to Canada. She stayed in the West Indies and began to establish a life there. She met a West Indian man, ten years her junior, fell in love, and married.

Meredith lived in the West Indies for four and a half years. During the time she was there she lived "a hand-to-mouth existence." She was not permitted to work and earn any money as a temporary residence. However,

she was able to earn some money through selling her art work to other expatriots. She also designed batik shirts and bags and sold them to some of the local West Indians. Meridith was sure that the Immigration Department knew what she was doing, but probably they felt that she really was in no competition with products "the locals" were creating. In addition, she had friends in government, and they were probably willing to overlook what she was doing. Meridith had begun the process of attaining permanent residency. But, life threw her another twist, and she returned to Canada, never going back to the West Indies, a land that had so fully entranced her spirit.

Meridith felt that her life took many different turns. She did not feel that the different courses detracted her from what she wanted to achieve in life. As she stated: "It seems divergent, but I would say that the kind of enlivening that occurs in those experiences is similar to what happens around the possible risk-taking that occurs in art, where you actually move out of whatever it is that you're holding onto. Sometimes you crash or you never get off the ground or any of those things, but what is compelling about what you do, from time-to-time in experiences, is that it has something of the same qualities of energizing and enlivening." Although she wondered if maybe the move to the West Indies was an attempt to sabotage her art career, Meridith was also clear that it was an attempt to extend and challenge herself.

VII

Meridith's return from the West Indies was prompted by the concern for her mother's health after an operation and, in general, the concern for the physical health of both her parents. Her mother recuperated, but Meridith began to undergo severe and critical growth over the next period of her life. Meridith's response to her parents' physical health problems involved a larger issue than just the obvious. A hint of this arose from another incident that happened in 1974.

In 1974 Meridith's father had a car accident that created a physical condition (Osteomyelitis) that caused his physical condition and memory to deteriorate quickly over the years. This was the first time she had the sense that her father was vulnerable as a human being, on both a physical and mental level. Her father, in some ways, was the torch-bearer of the values, beliefs, and philosophy that shaped her life and choice of career. Whether it was an accepting and adopting of or reacting and struggling against her father's views on life, she was unequivocally shaped by them. For example, much of his statements to her around being able to make a living as an artist, or more capitalistic concerns, were antithetical to his inherent socialist-Marxist philosophy, which emphasized upholding the notion of social justice, being socially conscious, and cultivating self-awareness, albeit on an intellectual level. While her issues with her mother existed on the interpersonal,

emotional, psychological plain, Meridith's issues with her father persisted on an intellectual, cognitive, philosophical level.

Therefore, upon returning to Canada Meridith was confronted with several issues, aside from the concern for her parents' health. The first issue was her personal adjustment to the change of cultures. She experienced "culture shock" readjusting to Canadian culture. Whether it was how one related to the environment and how one perceived time and space, or how one lived one's life in terms of goals and objectives and how one conducted one's life on a daily bases, Meridith felt out of sorts in Canada. The second issue was her relationship with her parents. She was concerned not only with their physical health, but her relationship with them. She was also concerned about how her relationship with them might affect their feelings about her marriage and her husband. And the third issue was the reestablishment of her career. Was she going to be able and did she want to carry on with her career as an artist as she had left it four and a half years ago in 1978?

The return to Canada was a culture shock for Meridith. The move to the West Indies was, on one level, an experience of a molecular change in her being. It was not easy to revert to any state prior to the move. Living in this exotic land changed her sense of what existence was all about. It was about survival, being vigilant to both the beauty and harshness of the environment. It was about the nobility and corruptness of individuals within society, and

connecting with the physicality and sensority of existence.

The pace of life was less frantic in the West Indies than that in Canada. It was much more concerned with physical survival. Farming and fishing were the main industries in the West Indies. Although there was a veneer of modernism, much of the work was done in a traditional manner. For example, farming was done with by hoe and donkey, and fishing was done by hand. Life was physically engaging and much less cognitively focused. Meridith read one book over the four and a half years she was there, which was extremely contrary to her voracious reading habits in Canada. People were much more auditory rather than visually focused, and information was transmitted by word of mouth and music rather than through textual material. On a societal level, literacy and poverty was a concern as well as the ill treatment of women and children. Corruptness abounded in the government.

In readjusting to life in Canada, Meridith tried to reconcile her view of Canadian culture and its values with those she experienced in the West Indies. She became aware of the waste in Canadian society. On a more personal level, she was aware of being pushed by time, the frantic emphasis on striving, and the unhealthy nature of this type of existence. This was related to her attempt to reestablish her career and, indeed, just to find a way to make a living. Meridith did not anticipate that she was going to encounter such as great struggle in reestablishing her career. She returned to Canada in the

middle of a recession and opportunities were dramatically different than when she had left in 1978.

Meridith returned to Canada with her husband. Added pressure was placed on her to support them both, as he was unable to work given his recent immigration status. Not only had she returned during a recession, which made job opportunities scarce, she had also lost most of the professional connections she had made as an artist. She knew this could happen when she left Vancouver, but it became brutally clear upon her return. Meridith was reluctant to reaccess her art network given the rejection she was experiencing with her parents and family. Not yet elucidated, her thoughts were, "What if they [my colleagues] were to reject me too, then I would be really isolated, alienated, and devastated." She was not sure if her sense of self could survive such a situation. So, she proceeded to look for work teaching and took up whatever opportunity came her way. This was an extremely depressing time for Meridith.

Of all her adjustments, the most difficult and significant one was reconnecting with her parents and her family. The scope of Meridith's conflicts with her family penetrated her very sense of whom she was as well as what she was doing with her life. Meridith's life had been an attempt to reconcile, on one hand, the conflict of values that underlied her decision to pursue her life as an artist and, on the other, the pursuit of art as a means

towards self-awareness, exploring of an inner (psychological) world, self-expression, interrelating and communicating with others, and self-cultivation.

While in the West Indies, Meridith's parents visited her for three months. They initially found it very difficult to adjust to the vastly different lifestyle. But, they did and were very much involved in the community. They were tremendously concerned about Meridith's involvement with a black West Indian man who was ten years younger, her ability to make a living, and her career as an artist. All these concerns appeared to fade for them. They seemed to gain an appreciation for their daughter's lifestyle and the philosophy behind it. They found it hard to leave the West Indies.

Upon returning to Canada, Meridith's father wrote his daughter a letter to say he was supportive of her and hopeful that she was going to discover a way to achieve what she wanted to do in life. She felt that the letter demonstrated a shift in her father's point of view. For the first time, she felt that her parents understood her lifestyle and life choices from the point of view that life was not about having to make a living, having to take a certain appearance, and having to get ahead. She felt extremely validated by what they were communicating to her in their letter.

The shock for Meridith, then, was not just the adjustment to life in Canada, but her parents' apparent reversion to a previous stance in their value system. To Meridith's dismay, they had not only reverted, but began to

express a clear sense that they did not approve of her marriage to her husband. This was expressed by other members of her family as well, most notably her older sister who also lived in Vancouver. Meridith believed that the personal values that she held were shared by everyone in her family, and that prejudice was not something that existed within their belief system. She was extremely disappointed that this was not the case.

In fact, there appeared to be overt and covert attempts to exclude Meridith's husband from family and social situations. Disclaimers were used by Meridith's mother and other family members to hide the shame of having a mixed marriage in the family. For example, Meridith's father described Meridith's husband as a friend of his daughter's to a neighbour. On another occasion, he was not invited to dinner at her sister's home. Meridith felt that acts such as these represented an obvious rejection of him and the marriage. When she brought up her concerns to her parents and other family members, they did not want to talk about the situation. It was a reminder to Meridith of her parents' continuing rejection of her value system, the choices that she had made in her life, and ultimately who she was as a person.

On another level, it was another replay of the silencing drama, which was so familiar to Meridith. There was no attempt to communicate about the issues at hand. Instead, there were acts of subversion that served to invalidate a situation that was not acceptable or led to confrontation. Or, similarly,

there were attempts to envelop a situation under a cloak of secrecy so as to hide the real nature of a story. Meridith saw the situation with her husband as a recurrent drama. One that included herself and other members of her family acting out scenes where a situation or an individual was invalidated, silenced, recast, or hidden to avoid and diminish the potential difficulty, confrontation, and pain that arose.

VIII

The period of 1982 to 1985 was a very dark period in Meridith's life. Meridith's marriage did not survive the strain of the difficulties they encountered. She and her husband divorced in 1984. Meridith also encountered physical problems, which were the result of a pregnancy and miscarriage. Over this period, Meridith was also exploring different ways of earning a living. She had reached a crucial time in her life regarding a decision around what she was going to do to make money. Career direction was not much of a consideration at this point. Her marriage ended; her relationship with her parents and family was on very shaky ground; she had no immediate, viable connections that facilitated the resumption of her career as an artist; she was physically ill; she was emotionally overwrought with the status of her life; and she needed money to pay the rent and to live.

In 1982, Meridith worked for eight months as a waitress, which she despised. Then, she started teaching again. She taught painting on silk and

fabric, which were close to her training background and her aesthetic interests. In 1984, she had emergency surgery that resulted in a partial hysterectomy. Following her surgery, Meridith reflected on her life and financial struggles over the previous three years and asked herself, "Alright, now what am I going to do with my life?" It was at this point she decided to start her own business creating hand painted, designer hats. The business venture was a struggle, but an important learning experience for her.

Meridith wrote her parents and asked for a loan. To her surprise she got a reply, within three days, of an unconditional "Yes." She had little or no experience in business and subsequently found herself struggling. She realized that after twenty years as an artist that she could not expect to be a competent business person in just a few months. So, she continued the business of hat making and fabric design for a couple of years, as well as teaching.

In 1987, Meridith found herself with very little money and going to the government for social assistance. It was there she saw an advertisement for a business course. She signed up for the course. The course assisted the student in writing a business plan for a bank loan. Meridith was successful in gaining the bank loan. This was a high point in her life. For Meridith, it was like "a meteor going off to stardom."

IX

The events of gaining the bank loan and starting her business were significant in Meridith's life for two crucial reasons. First, it represented an achievement that she was told she could never do by her father, and others -- namely, that she could not make a living as an artist. She was on the verge of doing just that by going into business. Unlike her initial experience with art as a career where she was just concerned with the aesthetics of art and money-making was secondary, she was now willing and able to combine the two through her business. Second, to gain the bank loan, she had to raise a matching amount of money independently. This required her to convince the people she was raising money from and the loan's officer that she was committed to the venture she was proposing.

Commitment or the inability to commit was a significant issue for Meridith. In fact, "... [it's been] the story of [her] life!" Meridith suspected that a part of the reason she left Vancouver just as she was beginning to develop her career as an artist was an act of self-sabotage. Just prior to leaving for the West Indies, she had an opportunity to study martial arts with a renowned and respected instructor as a select student, which would have also afforded her an opportunity to teach. She decided that she was not ready for the commitment and chose to pursue another adventure. For Meridith, this was indicative of her inability to make a genuine commitment in her life.

She thought that this is a recurrent theme that arose in her life over and over, in her relationships as well as in her work.

Meridith's inability to make a commitment evolved from a message communicated by her mother. It was not only the message communicated through the experience of being marginalized and not wanted as a child, but also through her mother's feelings about her relationship with her husband. For Meridith, not being wanted as a child generated a perception of her mother's parental commitment as obligatory and not genuine. She felt that her mother's nurturing and love were conditional and based on a forced role to be played, rather than unconditional and based on a freedom of choice and genuine role to be embraced. Also, as a young woman inquiring about advice about relationships and marriage from her mother, Meridith was given a startling message. Meridith's mother stated that she never genuinely committed to her husband throughout their life together of fifty-three years. And, as a consequence, she should be very careful in getting involved. In fact, Meridith's mother counselled all her daughters to live with someone before getting married, so as to avoid getting into situations that they might regret. Although she recognized that this was a possible indication of how her mother felt about her husband, Meridith was also cognizant of how this affected her approach to relationships and, more significantly, making a commitment. One should not make a commitment unless one was sure of its repercussions.

Otherwise, one might ended up getting trapped in the situation.

Therefore, the act of raising a matching amount of money for her bank loan, convincing the loan's officer to authorize it, had much more meaning for Meredith than she suspected. Making a commitment to pursue her business and her art career not only meant just making a commitment to herself, but also to others. She had not been able to do this throughout her life. Art was a skill and tool she possessed as a child to bridge the communication and interpersonal gap between herself and her inner world -- one that she was not able to verbalize -- with others and the outer world. However, when adults (like her parents) rejected, invalidated, discounted, or misinterpreted her repeated attempts as a child to communicate through her art describing it as entertaining, precocious or unacceptable, then she (as a child) had little alternative but to turn that tool and skill inwards for the purposes of building self-awareness and cultivating the self.

For Meredith, going into business as an artist was a move outward to connect with the community and people. She lamented that Vancouver, as an art market, was small and very conservative. Consequently, some of her creations were not purchased because they were too "avant garde." It was not that people did not like them, but that they could not see themselves wearing her creation. The people who did purchase and wear her works were other artists, such as musicians. There seemed to be some inherent validation and

poetry in this fact for Meridith. Although she really enjoyed her work, threw herself into it, and was often totally self-absorbed in it, Meridith found that she had to recommit to her business every year. This was also true for her work as an art teacher and indeed her career as an artist.

Meridith continued to engage in all three aspects of her work (her teaching, her art business, and her own art making) until 1990. They formed a full-time pursuit. But, this ended in 1990. Meridith was in a relationship with a man who was ostensibly to become her business partner. He had had some experience in business, but he was not a business person. It was the understanding and expectation that they would share the responsibilities for the business side of the venture. She would definitely take care of the creative side. They had an agreement where the business was a part of their relationship.

The establishment of her business was of utmost importance to Meridith. It was a pushing forward of her desire to make a strong commitment to her art career. She did not feel she had the time and energy to commit to a relationship, and if he wanted to be involved with her he had to be involved in her professional life. This led to a conflict in her relationship. While he was committed to the relationship, he was not strongly committed to the business. This situation impacted Meridith critically.

Meridith clarified for herself, in witnessing the disparity of this person's

commitment, where her own sense of commitment as well as struggles lay. Her ability to integrate her personal relationships and life with her art making pursuit was at odds. She could not make a commitment to one without compromising the other. This was a reflection of her experiences throughout her life, especially her family relationships. When her relationship with this man ended, she found herself and her business short of funds. It was necessary for her to find part-time work again to continue to pay back her bank loan. She ended up working at a retail clothing store.

After eight months of misery, Meridith quit her job in the retail clothing store. Around the same time, after several phone conversations with her parents, it became clear that her father was gravely ill. He would have had to end a birthday call she made to him because he was in too much pain to talk. Concerned for his welfare, she volunteered to go home and help her mother take care of him. Two days after she got home, he died. While she was home, she got a call from a friend who was picking up her mail and screening her phone messages. The call concerned a possible teaching post at a prestigious art school. She had put in an application for a post as an assistant instructor just before she left to be with her father. However, they wanted to interview her for an instructor's post.

X

The events surrounding and following the death of Meridith's father

released a tremendous amount of energy and creativity in her. She found that it generated a different sort of awareness and consciousness within her that altered her view on her life. She found making decisions easier and was able to put a very pure and intense energy into the endeavours she chose to engage in.

Meridith father's death was an event that tore the fabric of her life wide open. She had had no previous rehearsal of the death of a loved one as an adult. However, at the same time, she was not exactly ill prepared on an emotional and psychological level to deal with the situation. Three months prior to his death, Meridith had a dream where she and her father were lovers. She did not interpret this dream as a desire for a sexual relationship with her father, but rather as a desire for a union of souls. She had had dreams about her father throughout her life where she was needing his understanding, needing his approval through bringing him gifts (often of artwork), and attempting to bridge the gap of communication between the two of them. The latest dream saw all of these desires satisfied and their relationship reaching a harmonious culmination. It meant, in her mind, that she was able to go be with her father without any agenda, except to be with him. However, this stance was toppled by the reaction she encountered from the rest of her family.

The events leading to the eventual death of Meridith's father were a

repeat of past family dramas. Members of the family fought and were not able to come together in the time of need. Communication was strained and self-serving. This was particularly true between Meridith and one of her sisters. Meridith felt that the way the family and the hospital staff were treating her father was inappropriate, as it demonstrated a lack of respect for him as a person in spite of his condition. One of Meridith's sisters accused Meridith of being too concerned with her own emotions and needs, and of not being concerned enough about the difficult situation at hand.

Meridith was severely affected by the contrasting state she took into and actually experienced with the events surrounding her father's death. Like her experience as a child, she felt thrown back on her own resources to deal with the deeply painful issues of death. This led to a process of critical self-exploration through her artwork. It was the only place where she was able to explore her issues and inner experiences.

Meridith did a series of three paintings of her experiences surrounding the death of her father. The first one was done within two to three months of his death, the second was done within eight months of the first, and the third was done within eight months of the second. Doing the paintings provided Meridith with an opportunity to examine her inability to accept the pain her father was experiencing during the last days of his life. It was not his death or the estranged family communications that was difficult for her. Meridith's

difficulty was that she could not cope with how her father's pain was affecting her, which subsequently affected her ability to communicate to others, namely, her family.

Thus, for Meridith it turned out that the insight she gained from doing the paintings and the paintings themselves served to facilitate a conversation with her sister (the one she had the conflict with during the episode of their father's death). Meridith was able to communicate her feelings to her sister through the paintings. Meridith could not communicate these feelings before. Her sister was able to understand, in part, Meridith's concerns about the family and their father. For Meridith, her art was continuing to be the avenue by which she was able to deal with so many difficult and different aspects of her life.

The release of energy and creativity coming from the self-exploration around her father's death translated critically into Meridith's work as an art teacher. Meridith had been teaching art throughout her career life. However, it seemed that the opportunity from the art school came up at the right time. Teaching, for Meridith, was a very satisfying activity because it accelerated her own learning about and understanding of herself. But, it was also a way to connect, commit, and contribute to her community in a way that she had not been involved up to that point in her life. Most of her art activity had been in isolation. Teaching was an opportunity to relate to people. However, in

earlier years, teaching was a struggle because she always wondered if she was "good enough." But, this feeling gave way to a new spirit in her latest teaching post.

The experience of teaching for Meridith was much like what she experienced when she was engaged in athletics. In both activities she felt a strong sense of commitment, of being compelled, and of being whole-hearted, where she was willing to go beyond the limits of her training without reservation. She emphasized that this was not a matter of choice, but rather that it was just a matter of course. "I never had questions about whether or not I wanted to pursue it (teaching), because there was so much transformation and change and development that was going on. So, there it is again, it's like stretching yourself. The self-discovery is huge." The teaching of art involved a creativity that was also in the making of art. As an artist, she appreciated the art of teaching.

Moreover, teaching afforded Meridith the opportunity to work with children. She enjoyed working with them because they were much more free, spontaneous, honest, open, and supportive with their communication and actions. This allowed her to access her own innate sense of playfulness and child-like qualities as an adult. She felt that these were missing in most adults, and quite vital for artists if they were going to exercise their creativity through their work. She was able to transmit these beliefs to the children she

taught as well as to the parents of the children.

Sometimes the parents were concerned that their children were not performing as expected in Meridith's classes. Meridith was able to educate and illuminate the parents on the importance of allowing the creative spirit within their children to flow freely without any censorship or evaluation. It is through this process that their children learned about their world, their skills, and themselves. This ability to formulate and articulate her beliefs in a public manner was critical for Meridith, in that it allowed her to enact a drama that confronted her in childhood. She felt that the opportunity to confront the parents of her students allowed her to express what she always wanted to say to her own parents. That is, her art was an attempt to communicate to them and, at the same time, an expression of her sense of self.

And, finally, what Meridith found significant about teaching children art was that she was able to create an atmosphere where the children felt comfortable and supported in freely expressing themselves, and that genuine communication could occur regarding each others' work. As Meridith stated, "I know as an artist how exciting and meaningful it is to have someone really look at your work and go, "Ok, I see this, or that makes me feel . . . " or whatever." As a teacher, Meridith was encouraging a process that she did not experience very much from her own parents as a child when making art -- a process that served to validate the individual's making of art. This validation

was crucial in the individual's development of a sense of self.

For Meridith, the most significant aspect of her role as a teacher was that she felt like she belonged to a community. She never felt this way in her family or as an artist in the art community. As a teacher, she felt that she contributed something worthwhile to her community. She was appreciated by both the children she taught and their parents. In some way, she catalysed or facilitated a level of communication between children and their parents, and vice versa, that transcended the gap of communication that might adversely affect their relationship. Through her role as a teacher, Meridith was able to expand the horizons of the children she worked with and those of their parents.

XI

Meridith's life as an artist had taken her on a journey of struggle and self-discovery. It started in childhood and traversed through her adolescence and adulthood. Art had been a touchstone in her life. In as much as it had given rise to many career directions, it had also been an integral part of her self-development. It had been the means by which she was able to examine issues in life: the experience of being marginalized, the struggle to find a means to communicate feelings deep from within the psyche, the struggle to make a commitment, and the struggle for a sense of belonging. Art had been the unifying aspect of Meridith's life. It had provided her with her career

direction and a sense of self. It would be difficult to imagine Meredith's story without art. For it is through art that she had evolved as a person and will continue to evolve. For Meredith, her life was captured metaphorically through her art work. As she stated, "It [my life and indeed career] would resemble every painting or drawing that I've ever done, or will do [in the future]!" It is for this reason that Meredith experiences making art as meaningful, and her life as an artist is meaningful.

Study Participant's Self-Review of Narrative Account

I would say, generally speaking, [the narrative account] is a good read for me, and it was a really interesting [account of my life]. I felt like your interpretation was benevolent, in the sense that ... to hear someone else tell my story and to interpret it, as you did, in a sympathetic way, was ... it was interesting and it was warming, really! And, it made me feel more benevolent towards myself too!

I think I would make the links and the connections [that you've made]; and the viewpoints or, at least, the interpretations [that you've made] would be very similar to my interpretations.

CHAPTER VII

ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE PATTERN

The aim of this narrative analysis is to formulate a general pattern of the development of a life mission that is common to all three accounts.

Although the analysis is not an attempt to focus on idiosyncratic or unique themes in each of the accounts, it will nevertheless contribute to an understanding of individual experiences in them.

The pattern of how a life mission develops involves six stages. Although the stages have distinctive qualities, the boundaries are permeable and not delineated by fixed parameters such as age, resolved psychosocial issues, or the accomplishment of developmental tasks.

Each stage of the development of a life mission builds upon the previous one but the progression is not necessarily linear. The stages are points on a forward, upwardly moving spiral. As a person moves forward and upward, he can also move backward and downward. This explains the similarities and differences between the stages, such as stages two and four, or stages three and five. Thus, a person can return to stages or experiences that are reminiscent of a previous stage of the pattern.

However, life is a process that is inexorably progressive. Accordingly, a person can never return to previous stages of life. Emergence of the next

successive stage, though not assured, is based on the individual's continuing struggle for personal growth, for self-cultivation, and to express a life mission.

The General Narrative Pattern

In the following discussion, I will provide an overview of the general pattern. I will then describe the unique qualities of the six stages and also the connections between stages. Thus, through combining these approaches, I will present a comprehensive description of the pattern.

As an overview, how a life mission development assumes the following general pattern. Stages one through three represent the first cycle of the spiral pattern. In stage one, a person becomes aware of a life issue. In stage two, a person engages in a myriad of activities with the purpose of exploring solutions to the life issue. In stage three, a person commits to and engages in an activity perceived as significant in the struggle to resolve the life issue.

Stages four through six represent the next cycle of the spiral. In stage four, a person becomes disillusioned with a significant activity because it does not completely resolve the life issue. She then explores other activities that lead to the resolution of the life issue. In stage five, a person reformulates her life issue so that it is viewed as a problem confronting all human beings. As a broader issue concerning humanity, a person then commits to and engages in a life mission that contributes to the resolution of the issue for other people. In stage six, a person develops a new critical awareness that

leads to the revision of a life mission. In revising her life mission, a person becomes aware that expressing a life mission is an endless process.

The first stage involves **the emergence of a life issue**. A life issue is a pervasive experience that influences a person's thoughts, feelings, and values about the world. This world view compels him to take actions to resolve the life issue.

In this sense, a life issue is similar to what Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979) describe as "a life theme." They describe a life theme as "consisting of a problem or set of problems which a person wishes to solve above everything else and the means the person finds to achieve solution" (p. 48). [Refer to Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979) for a more complete description of a life theme.]

A life issue originates as a dilemma or problem a person encounters in his life, such as a sense of lack, loss, contradiction, or the like. When this dilemma continues to attract the attention of a person (eventually becoming pervasive in his life) and increases his awareness of a need for action, a life issue emerges. Although no immediate action is taken in regards to the life issue, a person is aware that he is compelled to act.

The second stage involves a person's **early struggles with and endurance of a life issue**. In this stage, a person moves from being a spectator on the life issue to being a participant in the solution. [See Britton

(1970) for a detailed description of the terms "spectator" and "participant."]

As a result, a person engages in a myriad of activities in order to resolve her life issue.

From engaging in the myriad of activities, a person is likely to discover that some are effective and worthwhile while others are ineffective and pointless. Although a person is not likely to overcome her life issue in this stage, she is aware that every successful and unsuccessful action taken contributes cumulatively towards her struggle.

Therefore, a critical aspect of stage two is that a person becomes aware that her experiences and actions form a meaningful direction in life. She realizes that, through her activities, freedom from her life issue is possible.

The third stage involves a person **experiencing or engaging in a significant activity**. Having engaged in a myriad of activities that are meaningful in the struggle against a life issue, a person discovers that there is one that is preferred and most effective. A person then commits to a pursuit of this activity as a direction in life, with the hopes of freeing himself from his life issue.

Thus, significant activity is one that draws a person's attention and commitment. For example, as Alan struggles with a life issue of oppression, he may discover that the path to freedom lies in education. This is because Alan believes that the root oppression lies in being ignorant or uneducated.

Although other paths leading him away from his experience of oppression may present themselves, such as becoming powerful or being rich, they are not viewed with the same sense of meaning as the activity perceived as significant.

Although not always, often a significant activity takes the form of a career decision. For example, because he believes an education is important, Alan enters into institutions of higher education. As a part of becoming educated, he also pursues a career as an educator. As Alan continues his career, he extends it in assuming the role of an educational reformer. Thus, becoming aware of it, a person commits himself to and pursues a significant activity. The significant activity becomes a part of the person's life course as he endeavours to move away from his life issue.

Successful roles shape a person's sense of self. For example, a person who educates also shapes an identity as an educator; a person who creates works of art also shapes an identity as an artist; and a person who liberates also shapes an identity as a liberator. Thus, a significant activity, which was chosen as a way to free a person from his life issue, becomes a means to define and develop a sense of self. A person defines self through the roles he enacts.

The fourth stage involves **the struggle to extend and live a significant experience**. The process of engaging in a significant activity inevitably leads to a sense of disillusionment. A person realizes that the significant activity is not

completely effective in the struggle to overcome the life issue. Moreover, she realizes that there are other activities that lead her towards a resolution of her life issue. As a consequence, a person struggles to extend and live a significant experience that occurs through exploring these other activities.

Given the spiralling nature of the pattern of how a life mission develops, stage four is reminiscent of stage two. In both, a person is in a mode of exploration. A person is exploring ways to cope with her life issue and constructing a sense of self.

However, because life is inexorably progressive and the stages build upon each other, a person never returns to previous stages. Thus, stages two and four are different because the latter encompasses the experiences not available to the former -- namely, the experience of committing to a path in life and becoming disillusioned. A person in the latter stage not only approaches the process of exploration with vigilance but also more wisdom.

The fifth stage involves **a struggle to clarify a life mission**. A life mission is different than a significant activity. A person engaging in the latter is operating from an egocentric stance, while a person engaging in the former is operating with a broader vision of the human condition. A person chooses a significant activity because she wants freedom from her own life issue. Through becoming aware that her life issue is a shared, broader, human issue, a person chooses an activity that has broader implications for humanity.

Thus, a person clarifying a life mission reformulates her life issue to act or work on behalf of other human beings. For example, Anna initially engaged in a career as teacher because it represented a desire to escape the oppression that occurred with her own ignorance. However, through self-reflection, she realized that it was also a way to transport those individuals she taught from a state of being ignorant to a state of being knowledgeable. For Anna, providing knowledge empowered people to discover means to free themselves from the state of being oppressed.

Therefore, a critical aspect for a person clarifying a life mission is that her actions are not a reaction to her egocentric needs, which is associated with a life issue. Rather, a person's life mission focuses on the broader needs of humanity. A person with a life mission acts more pro-actively than reactively. Rather than having her actions compelled by a life issue, she makes choices that clearly focus her actions.

The sixth stage involves **the emergence of a new critical awareness**. This leads to **the revising of a life mission**. In stage six, a new critical awareness emerges for a person because he questions his life mission. A person's rising concerns not only lead to the revision of the life mission, but a realization that expressing a life mission has limitless potentials.

The concern raised in stage six about a person's life mission is whether or not it is free from the influences of a life issue. A person is likely to ask

himself critical questions: Is my life mission truly non-ego based?; and Am I truly acting or working for humanity for humanity's sake or am I acting and working for humanity for my own sake?

For example, in answering critical questions, Anna might further revise her life mission. She might decide that oppression is no longer the impetus for being a teacher. Rather, the significance of being a teacher lies in the role of being a teacher. A teacher is not only one who provides knowledge, but also one who teaches people. Eventually, a life mission both connects humanity to a person and connects a person to humanity.

Finally, a person becomes aware that his choices are genuine and no longer compelled by a life issue or egocentricity. A person engages in self-development (or in a process of constructing and cultivating a sense of self) with a sense of a freedom to act and not a desire for freedom from a life issue.

With the sense of a freedom to act, a person's expression of a life mission is limitless. As a result, a person's relationship with humanity is also limitless. At this point, the relationship between a person and humanity interpenetrate and becomes seamless, where influences are mutually experienced and enhancing.

Although a person's life mission becomes seamless with humanity, he is not necessarily aware of this state of being. A person in stage six simply

experiences a sense of flow in life, where work, a sense of self, and humanity form a whole. A person feels fulfilled with his life, yet is open to new opportunities and experiences.

Illustrations of the General Narrative Pattern

Up to this point in this analysis, the general narrative pattern of how a life mission develops has been discussed conceptually. The goal of this section is to illustrate the pattern using the narrative accounts.

Carolyn Pollard's Narrative

Emergence of a Life Issue

Early in her life, Carolyn became intensely aware that her family lacked a sense of closeness and togetherness. Instead, her family was filled with strife and a lack of harmony. These issues existed in both her parents' family background, which were brought into their relationships with each other and their children. As a consequence, Carolyn's relationships with her parents and her brother were constantly estranged. This was a particularly difficult experience for her to cope with as a young child. Carolyn felt that she was in an extended battle against being misappropriated in one form or another by her family. She was a very desperate and unhappy child.

In addition to the family fragmentation, Carolyn also experienced a lack of stability in her childhood and adolescence. This occurred because her parents moved frequently to allow both her parents to pursue their academic

careers. Never being in one place for a very long time, Carolyn never learned how to make friends as a child. This added to her experience of stress as a child. Not only did she feel alienated by her family, it seemed to her at first that there was no immediate escape from her situation through making friends and establishing her own social network.

Yet Carolyn knew that her only salvation from her life of misery was to find ways to fit in and belong. Although she did not know what this entailed, she knew that she did not want to be alone or abandoned. Being alone and abandoned was totally unacceptable for her because it meant that she could be ridiculed, hurt, and abused by others. Belonging or fitting into a group meant that she was safe, nurtured, and loved.

In summary, the first stage of Carolyn's life issue focused around the problem of being alone and not fitting in. Her awareness of the issue compelled her to act in ways that allowed her escape her issue, or more specifically to find ways and a place that she could belong.

Early Struggles with and Endurance of a Life Issue

Confronted by her life issue, Carolyn sought different ways to belong. One way Carolyn discovered to fit in was her involvement with theatre. Carolyn observed that it was a supportive, nurturing, and loving environment for the individuals involved with it, especially her brother. Thus, she got involved in the theatre too.

Initially, Carolyn got involved in theatre because she hoped that it would provide a means for her to establish a genuine relationship with her brother. But, this was not to be the case. Instead, it generated a sense of competition between, and their relationship suffered further.

For Carolyn, the disappointment of failing to establish a relationship with her brother was balanced out by the fact that she discovered a place where she felt she fit in. She enjoyed and had an affinity for the theatre. More importantly, it also provided her with a way of connecting with people. It made life tolerable for Carolyn, as she found herself moved about by her parents' career pursuits. She was able to make friends even in difficult and hostile situations, such as being in Alabama, where she was considered an outcast or someone who just did not belong.

Another way Carolyn sought to belong or to get accepted by people was to assume the role of "a people-pleaser." For example, she often tried to resolve arguments and relationship difficulties between her parents. She tried "to please them by fixing their problems." However, her intentions were frequently misinterpreted or backfired and were used against her. Although her people-pleasing role worked with peers, it did not work with her parents. This resulted in Carolyn feeling more alienated and alone than ever.

Thus, in the second stage, the two major actions taken by Carolyn in her early life to resolve her life issue were to get involved in theatre and to

enact the role of the people-pleaser. Although both yielded negative experiences, they also increased her ability to cope with her life issue. Both these activities served to connect Carolyn with people and increased her sense of belonging.

Experiencing or Engaging in a Significant Activity

For Carolyn, her theatre involvement was particularly important, because it provided her with a means to connect with people. She made friends and established intimate personal relationships. This was not available to her through her family. But, just as important, Carolyn felt that the theatre was an aspect of her life that was consistent. Even if she had to surrender an important relationship and move to a new place (eg., her move away from her friend Samantha to Alabama), she had a means to connect with a new group of people.

Indeed, Carolyn discovered a significant activity through her theatre involvement. But, it was important not just because it was a means to resolve her life issue. Carolyn's significant activity also provided her a direction in life. She wanted to study theatre and be an actress. For example, while in New Orleans, she performed in summer stock productions and contributed significantly as a member of the production team. Upon moving to Toronto with her mother, Carolyn entered into the University of Toronto to pursue a Fine Arts Degree in Theatre and Film. Thus, theatre, as a significant activity,

became the central focus of Carolyn's life.

On many levels, theatre was moving beyond a means to resolve a life issue for Carolyn. The decision to study theatre and pursue it as a career was emerging as a means to cultivate her sense of self. No longer was she a desperate child looking for a place to belong, but she was a creative person who was a part of the theatre community. She was happy with the state of her life and excited by its prospects.

Struggle to Extend and Live a Significant Experience

Engaging in a significant activity was no guarantee of permanent happiness for Carolyn. There were many challenges to her ability to engage in her significant activity. These challenges represented the continuing impact of her life issue. Aware of the pervasive influence of her life issue, Carolyn became disillusioned. Disillusionment arose for her not only because the significant activity did not free her from the life issue, but, also because she did not have the personal resolve at the time to commit strongly enough to the significant activity.

After her second year of university, Carolyn changed her Major from Theatre and Film to Education. Carolyn did this to please her mother who felt that her daughter did not have the talent to achieve a career as an actress or in theatre. Carolyn was crushed and saddened by her mother's lack of support. Simultaneously, Carolyn was angry at herself for not having the self-

confidence and self-esteem to stand up against her mother.

Carolyn realized that her people-pleaser role was coming to the forefront in her life. She realized that her need for belonging was intimately tied to her need to please people, especially her mother. This became clear to her when she gave up her aspiration to be in theatre to be a teacher, like her mother.

As a teacher, Carolyn also performed her people-pleasing role to perfection. She went through enormous lengths daily to teach classes in spite of her deteriorating battle with Crohn's Disease. For example, she went home everyday during lunch to take a nap so that she could survive the rest of her afternoon schedule. She did not want to let anybody in the school know that she was not able to live up to her obligations.

Carolyn's people-pleasing role also emerged in her personal relationships. She found herself sacrificing her own needs in relationships to satisfy the needs of her lovers or friends. After numerous failed relationships, Carolyn became angry and disillusioned with herself for playing the role of a people-pleaser. Yet she was unable to stop herself from getting involved in these relationships, which she described as "co-dependent relationships."

Although she was disillusioned with herself, Carolyn continued gallantly to explore other activities to resolve her life issue. Through grappling with a myriad of activities, one particularly significant incident occurred for Carolyn.

Because it is so exemplary of Carolyn's struggle to extend and live a significant experience, this incident will be highlighted in greater detail than others.

To take a break from her struggle with her career and indeed her life issue, Carolyn decided to take an extended vacation in Florida. The break provided her an opportunity for self-reflection and exploration.

From her experiences as a youth worker at a drug and alcohol treatment centre, Carolyn experienced an inkling that there was another career path that she wanted to pursue. She felt that the youths she worked with mirrored her own struggles in life. They sought the same things in life that she sought desperately from her parents. These were the need for acceptance, love, encouragement and belonging. Thus, through sharing her own experiences as a troubled youth, Carolyn felt that she could help youths who were travelling down a road to self-destruction.

Although she did not immediately act on her awareness and experience gained through working as a youth worker, Carolyn's career and life was significantly influenced. Using her experiences gained as a youth worker, Carolyn realized that she could approach her teaching career differently. For example, she taught units of communication skills, conflict resolution, and group dynamics. She felt that she could help her students express themselves more effectively to express their needs, and perhaps avoid

the kinds of difficulties she encountered as a youth.

Thus, Carolyn no longer perceived her career as a teacher just a way to please her mother. She was transforming her work as a teacher into an activity that could help others deal with their own issues. In short, the meaning of her career was changing from being focused on her own needs to a focus on the broader, human needs.

From a struggle to extend and live a significant experience, Carolyn not only moved away from her life issue, but she reframed the meaning of her career. Teaching became a way to improve the lives of other.

Yet Carolyn was not satisfied. She felt that there was another avenue to improve the lives. She perceived teaching to be a large babysitting profession. The educational system did not value the student as individuals with unique needs, but rather objects to be controlled.

Carolyn's desire to leave teaching was not just a move away from the issue of needing to please her mother, but a desire to move away from a dissatisfying profession. Rather than just responding to her life issue, she wanted to act authentically with her emerging awareness of a mission in life. This mission in life was connected with the helping profession.

To summarize, Carolyn experienced a sense of disillusionment at the start of this stage. While in the middle, she engaged in a period of exploration. Finally, in the end, she had a strong awareness of a life mission.

Struggling to Clarify a Life Mission

In this stage, Carolyn followed up her awareness of an emerging life mission by attaining a position as a child care worker. However, in admitting that she needed as much counselling as the youths she worked with, Carolyn was aware that her mission was not yet fulfilled or being lived. As much as she felt happy that she acting authentically in her professional life, she was still acted inauthentically in her personal life. For example, she was in "co-dependent relationships" and abusing drugs and alcohol. Both sets of behaviours moved her away from the person she wanted to be. Living an authentic life was intimately associated with a person in the helping profession and her mission in life.

Carolyn's desire to live authentically led to changes in her life. This culminated in the suicide of one of the young people she worked with as a child care worker. It magnified the sense of meaninglessness of her life. Not only was her personal life in ruins, her professional life appeared to be a failure. She saw no purpose or value in her work or life.

Carolyn became very depressed about her life and became suicidal. She went to the point of planning her suicide. However, when she was about to complete the deed, Carolyn had a change of heart. Following a stay in a hospital psychiatric unit, her emerging sense of a mission in life became more focused. She began to look at her life long struggle to belong, to be accepted,

and to be honoured from the deeper perspective of being of value and playing a valuable role in the lives of others.

Although she had a sense of a life mission, Carolyn struggled to clarify it. This struggle led her to live life authentically, which included being critically aware of her decisions and actions. Thus, being aware of the process of living a life was as important as clarifying a mission in life.

Emergence of a Critical Awareness and Revising a Life Mission

In this stage, an emerging self-awareness gave way to a revised mission in life for Carolyn. Carolyn understood that enacting the role of a person in the helping profession meant that she had to value herself. If she did not value herself in some genuine way, then those she helped would be suspicious of her role. For example, she could not be of value to clients as a counsellor if she did not value herself as a person. Using drugs and alcohol, being involved in co-dependent relationships, not tending to her physical illness (Crohn's Disease) were all indications to her that she did not value herself. If she valued herself, she would not allow herself to be destroyed like this.

In the process of conceiving herself as a worthwhile person, Carolyn made significant changes in her life. Giving up the use of drugs and alcohol, attending Twelve- Step Programs, having an operation to alleviate the deleterious effects of Crohn's Disease, becoming a vegetarian were all symbolic actions that indicated she felt she was worthy of being nurtured and

loved. In short, she was valuing herself through her actions. And, thus, for Carolyn valuing herself meant that she was being authentic to the role of a counsellor.

Carolyn's realization that she needed to learn to value herself became a cornerstone in revising her mission in life. Being a counsellor meant that she was able to translate her experiences -- both good and bad, happy and sad, enjoyable and painful, and so on -- into something that was helpful and valuable for others in their struggle with issues similar to her own. The role she assumed was of value because of who she was and not who she pretended to be to please others. Therefore, learning who she was as a person and how to value herself became an integral part of her mission in life as a counsellor.

Revising her mission in life infused Carolyn's life and career as a counsellor with a sense of meaning and concreteness. She was no longer living the role of the people-pleaser, but rather one of the mirror that reflected the issues and souls of others. She reflected the relationship between good and bad, happiness and sadness, and heaven and hell in the lives of people. This role was valuable for others and contributed to the quality of their lives.

At the same time, however, Carolyn's life mission provided her with a way to further develop her own awareness. Indeed, she acknowledged that an inherent aspect of her life was an ongoing learning process, which

undoubtedly involved an ever-expanding awareness. Living a life mission and indeed a life for Carolyn was one in the same thing, as both entailed being self-aware, authentic, and contributing to the lives of others. Thus, in the end, her life mission possessed a seamlessness to it. Her mission in life is an integral part of life and will continue to be so until her life's end. Although this can be considered the end of the story of how Carolyn's life mission evolved, her life mission is endless.

Derrick Sloane's Narrative

Emergence of a Life Issue

Derrick grew up in a situation where there was a lot of instability around family life. At the age of three, Derrick's life was profoundly affected by the death of his father. His mother remarried a man to provide a male role model for her sons and reestablish a conventional family structure. However, this was not the case.

Derrick's step-father created an atmosphere of instability by bringing troubled youths (who he encountered through his work) home into the family. In addition to these youths, Derrick's parents adopted and fostered many children. All this created a very unusual and, at times, estranged set of family dynamics.

Moreover, both Derrick's mother and step-father were intensely involved in helping others, charities, and community volunteer work. Their

philosophy was that one contributed to the community where one lived through one's own resources. This often meant sacrificing one's own sense of personal comfort.

Derrick's parents' heavy involvement in their avocational activities left Derrick and some of his siblings feeling ignored and unimportant. For example, family meals were often thrown together quickly so that Derrick's mother or step-father could get to an evening meeting.

Another more severe example of sacrifice occurred when Derrick caught hepatitis from one of the children his step-father brought home from work. Derrick lost most of his liver from the illness and spent many weeks in the hospital. He felt very angry and bitter about the situation.

The death of Derrick's father was more than a loss of an important person in his life. It was a loss of a normal life that included personal comfort, parents who were stable and consistent with their behaviours, and family certainty and stability.

Throughout the first stage of his life, Derrick was struggling with the instability of family life caused by the philosophy of community responsibility and being altruistic. He experienced a sense of hypocrisy in both his parents' beliefs and actions, especially his step-father's actions.

Derrick's life issue essentially surrounded the hypocrisy of doing good work. Although his parents' philosophy of and desire to do good work

contributed to the welfare of others and was noble, it also created instability and hardship for the family.

Derrick asked himself: Why was it appropriate for one to be more concerned with the welfare of others than the welfare of one's own family? Why was the sacrifice of one's own personal comfort and family for others a more noble act than ensuring one's own family was nurtured and loved? What does it mean to do good work and to be a good person? Questions such as these pervaded Derrick's childhood and compelled him to seek answers.

Early Struggles with and Endurance of a Life Issue

On one hand, Derrick was expected to do good work. His parents expected him to carry out their philosophy of contributing to the welfare of others in the community. Derrick could have assumed this philosophy and this path in life without question. It was a noble way to be and was also a way to pay homage to his dead father, who also spent his life helping to improve the lives of people. Derrick would be carrying on his family's legacy.

On the other hand, it was clear that Derrick was searching for answers. He wanted to understand why it was important to do good work, even if this meant sacrificing one's personal comfort and resources. Further, he wanted to challenge the hypocrisy of doing good work. Although he might not always admit it to himself, Derrick was seeking a sense of meaning and retribution

for the pain he endured as a child.

To resolve his life issue, Derrick assumed a role of a helper or one of "someone who did good work." In enacting the role of a helper and a good person, Derrick was actively involved in volunteer work as a young adult. For example, he ran after school programs at community agencies in poor neighbourhoods in Victoria. It gave him an idea of the hardships of being poor, and why it was important for individuals to share resources (eg., time or money) with those less fortunate. Derrick's understanding of his parents' philosophy and his desire to do good work grew.

In addition, as he enacted the role of a helper and a good person, Derrick's sense of identity also grew. He was reinforced for enacting the role of a good person. For example, Derrick was viewed by his siblings as the person who got along with everybody. He was the one they looked towards to solve their conflicts. Further, in high school, Derrick was nicknamed "God" by his friends, because he was so sure of himself and his desire to perform good deeds. He was the choice of parents as their daughter's date. Thus, for Derrick, it became clearer why it was important to do good work. Doing good work was not only a way to help others, but it also gave him a sense of identity.

However, Derrick still had no real sense of his parents' values around doing good work. In spite of many discussions at the dinner table, Derrick

was never able to establish a conversation about his parents' values. For Derrick, this perpetuated the emotional distance between himself and his parents. He was angry that he and the rest of the family had to suffer hardships based on some unspoken need for his parents to do good work. But, he was never able to communicate his feelings to his parents, because they frowned upon discussions on values or feelings. Thus, Derrick's resentment for his parents stance on doing good work grew.

In summary, this stage of Derrick's life was filled with activities which attempted to resolve his life issue. Enacting the role of a helper and a good person enabled Derrick to establish for himself why it was important to do good work. Yet, he was unsuccessful in closing the emotional and communication gap between his parents and himself. Derrick was left with a more intense struggle with his life issue.

Experiencing or Engaging in a Significant Activity

Even though Derrick was abundantly aware that his goal in life was to do good work, he did not know what this entailed on a practical or philosophical level. He was still groping for a direction in life. The ambiguity of his parents' values and the apparent hypocrisy of their actions made Derrick cautious about how he was going to do good work.

To further explore how he was going to do good work, Derrick attained positions in community organizations working with youths. Some of

these community organizations were located in very poor and deprived areas of Victoria, with youths who were very troubled and oppressed. In another position, he served as a child care worker at Broughton River Boys' School (a boys' residential correctional institution). Derrick's experience in both these areas of work emphasized that the disadvantaged should be helped and empowered to care for themselves.

However, Derrick's experience at Broughton Boys' School was most critical. He felt that the social workers he encountered there contradicted his sense of doing good work for the welfare of others. It seemed to him that the workers in this institution simply contributed to the miserable life of the youths, rather than supporting and helping them. In general, the institution seemed to display the hypocrisy within the helping profession that was demonstrated by Derrick's step-father, who only appeared to be sincere about helping others.

Derrick's outrage of the hypocrisy within the helping profession gave him an impetus to pursue his Bachelor and Masters' Degrees in Social Work. Through achieving these qualifications, he felt he could get into a position to improve the lives of people in a genuine and effective way. But, more importantly, he felt that he could change the hypocrisy that pervaded the helping profession.

Thus, in this stage of his life Derrick experienced a new sense of

meaning in his goal to do good work. Doing good work was not just a way to contribute to the lives of others. It was also a way to confront the hypocrisy of the social work profession and individuals who pretended to do good work.

In Derrick's struggle with his life issue, he was able to further clarify his career path. Although his goal might have always been to be a social worker, his struggle with his life issue served to refine the way in which he wanted to enact the role. Derrick wanted to express the role of a social worker with integrity. He did not want to fall into the trap of hypocrisy that he observed in his step-father and others in the helping profession or those who wanted to do good work.

Struggling to Extend and Live a Significant Experience

Indeed, upon completing his education, Derrick was able to enter into the field of social work. Further, he was able to achieve a very prominent and powerful position in government social work very quickly. This meant to him that he should have the capacity to help people and confront hypocrisy within the system.

However, Derrick eventually discovered that he was not going to realize his goal as a social worker, at least not as a government social worker. Not only did it appear as if social workers did little to contribute to the lives of people, they were also very hypocritical about their work. But, more importantly for him, Derrick discovered that he was powerless to change his

colleagues or the system to better serve people.

For example, Derrick discovered that he and other social workers bore "the face of the enemy" as a government social worker. He and the rest of his colleagues were not cast in the role of the helper, the good person, or one who contributed to the well-being of people. Rather, they were cast in the role of the enemy, the opposition, or one who people fought to ensure their sense of survival.

In struggling to alter this situation as a District Supervisor, Derrick attempted to bend policies upheld by his staff to help clients. However, this alienated him from his staff, who viewed him as an authority figure undermining their power over their clients. Thus, not only did he have to battle the image imposed upon him by the clients, Derrick fought value differences he had with his staff. While he wanted to use his power to help the clients, his staff were using their power to subvert them. Indeed, Derrick was struggling to extend and live his role of a social worker with integrity.

Eventually, Derrick became disillusioned with his career as a government social worker, and he simply found ways to cope with his situation. For example, he distanced himself from the staff in his office by not socializing with them during lunch or after work. He took walks in the neighbourhood he worked in to reestablish a feeling for and get to know the people he was supposed to be helping. He sought the advice of his Regional

Manager, who shared a similar personal and professional philosophy.

However, Derrick's attempt to cope were only marginally successful.

While away from work, Derrick coped with his sense of disillusionment by reading books on spirituality and joining the Unitarian Church. In these activities, he was hoping to find people who were on a spiritual journey similar to his own and to develop an understanding for his lot in life. Derrick felt comforted that there were people on a spiritual quest like his own, and that he was experiencing another way to express his career and his life.

This stage of Derrick's life again was marked by intense exploration. It was a reminder for him of the experience that he encountered while he was clarifying his desire to go into social work. Except this time, Derrick was confronting his own sincerity for the work and not others.

When Derrick realized that he could not act sincerely about his work in the government social work system, he decided to leave it. Derrick felt that he could best express his approach to social work as the executive director of a non-profit community serving agency (at Royal Oak Community House).

However, Derrick's career change did not bode well with his wife. Derrick's wife was upset that her husband was willing to sacrifice the stability of her life and the lives of their children for a career change. To her, Derrick's career change was an unfounded need to satisfy some abstract need for integrity. She felt that it was unfair that he inflicted hardship on the

family by changing his vocation, taking a cut in pay, giving up his seniority and pension, and taking actions as the executive director for a non-profit agency that was unpopular in the community.

Derrick found himself unable and sometimes unwilling to communicate his changing values to his wife. He took long trips across Canada to be alone in his process of self-exploration. His wife could not understand his behaviour. Their marriage was under great strain. But, this did not matter to Derrick. What was more important for him was that he broke the image that he was doing good work to achieve some selfish, inauthentic goal, which included doing a job just to bring in a paycheque.

It seemed that Derrick's need to be authentic was greater than his desire not to cause difficulty for his family. He felt that he could not let his children (of which he had two at this time) see their father act inauthentically. Derrick felt he could not live with himself if he compromised his integrity, which would ultimately affect them.

Thus, Derrick's disillusionment with his career, his attempt to cope with it, his spiritual quest, and his career change were all attempts to reestablish a sense of authenticity. He felt that if he was not authentic in his career, then he was no better than any of the hypocritical social workers he struggled against and vowed not to become.

In summary, Derrick's struggle to extend and live a significant

experience was connected with his desire to be authentic or live authentically. It was not easy for him to do this. He did not receive validation or support for his actions from his family, co-workers, or the community he wished to serve. Validation and support was fleeting. He often felt as if he was alone in his struggle. Yet he persisted onward with his life, believing he was making the right choices, because above all else he was starting with the stance of being authentic.

Struggle to Clarify a Life Mission

Ultimately, as he reached his thirty-third birthday, Derrick's struggle to live life authentically led him to discover a deeper meaning for going into social work. From a very early point in his life, Derrick had the desire to pay homage to his father by pursuing a career as a social worker. He was going to fulfil this role with integrity and confront those who performed it with insincerity.

To some degree, Derrick wanted to complete the work of his father through his own career. When he was not able to do this as a government social worker, Derrick became disillusioned and changed his career. He hoped that his career change was an expression of his desire to maintain a sense of integrity as a social worker.

Throughout his struggles to live authentically as a social worker or a person who did good work, Derrick ignored who he was doing the good work

for. Lost in his philosophical struggles about being authentic, his desire to complete his father's work as a social worker, and his reaction to his step-father's (and other people's) hypocrisy was a broader meaning of being a social worker.

Through his role as a director of a non-profit agency, Derrick came to realize that social work was about serving the community. As a social worker, he could not ignore his place in the community as one of its members, or the collective nature of the change process in a community. Derrick felt disenchanted with his role as a District Supervisor not just because his colleagues acted hypocritically, but because as a District Supervisor he could not affect change in the system to improve the lives of people.

Derrick realized that to affect change in a community everybody must be a part of the change process. He could not impose the solution on the community, or force his colleagues to enact the solution. In his role as the director of Royal Oak Community House, Derrick assumed the stance of a transformational leader. It was one in which he facilitated the creation of a solution through working with people and not one in which he was to find the solution.

Derrick realized that he was a part of "an interdependent web," which bonded people together. This meant that no one part was greater than the whole. Thus, in clarifying his mission in life, Derrick aspired to be a

transformational leader, one who emphasized a community-based approach to social work, and one who was a part of the process of change in a community or the lives of people.

Emergence of a Critical Awareness and
Revising a Life Mission

Derrick departed from his executive director position at Royal Oak Community House (ROH) and assumed a similar one at Canadian Multiple Sclerosis Association (CMSA). He left because he felt his work there was done. Derrick's move to CMSA provided him a further challenge of expressing his life mission in a different type of community servicing environment. Whereas the ROH was a social services agency, CMSA was a health services agency. But, Derrick did not see any difference between the two other than this fact.

Derrick felt that the lack of a community-based approach in servicing the individuals suffering from MS was detrimental to their ability to cope with the illness and their well-being. Indeed, as he did with ROH, Derrick sought to transform CMSA into a service that better served individuals suffering from MS. He accomplished this by encouraging and increasing the involvement of individuals suffering from MS and their families in the design of the service provided by CMSA. In a sense, he turned the CMSA (which previously operated in an institution-like manner) into a network of community houses.

Thus, in spite of his move from ROH to CMSA, Derrick was able to

express his life mission as a transformational leader. He was able to involve people in improving the provision of services to a community of people.

However, Derrick experienced a loss of connection with his family in his position as executive director of CMSA. Derrick had to do a lot of travelling in this position. Although he felt his need for prestige was overcome when he resigned as District Supervisor, he admitted that he was attracted to his CMSA position for egotistical reasons. In short, even though his life mission was focused on improving the lives of people, Derrick became aware that he was not acting in a completely authentic way.

To act authentically, Derrick felt that he had to integrate his career of being a transformational leader with a commitment to his family. The commitment to his family not only included his wife and children, but also his father.

When he was hired as the executive director of the Association of Community Houses (ACH), Derrick realized that his career had come full circle. He had acknowledged that his goal in being a social worker was to complete the work started by his father. However, he never thought he would find himself in a position that began with his father.

Derrick's father worked for the ACH at the time he died of polio. But, before he died, he was instrumental in developing the community house services network that existed in Victoria. In fact, many of the community

houses that Derrick worked, from his days doing volunteer work or later as a director, bore some tribute to his father's work.

Derrick was extremely honoured to be in a position to carry on his father's work. He felt that his mission in life of being a transformational leader fit perfectly with his role as the executive director of the ACH. Not only was he able to work with people in the community, but he was also able to work with people in the position of providing services to the community. Derrick felt this combination promoted the best possible outcome for the community.

Indeed, in fulfilling his role as the director of ACH, Derrick revised his mission in life. Whereas he was only able to do it symbolically before, Derrick was able to say that he was truly completing the work of his father through his own work. Derrick's life mission and indeed his life was free of his life issue.

After years of grappling with it, Derrick reached a point where he was no longer struggling to resolve his life issue. As the director of ACH, he was completing the work of his father. However, it was not just a simple matter of being hired for the position. For Derrick, being hired for the position was infused meaningful because it also represented years of struggling to clarify for himself the role of a social worker.

In conclusion, Derrick's story illustrates the tremendous struggle

involved in the development of a life mission. But, more profoundly, it illustrates the boundlessness of a life mission, which brings together and integrates the lives of a father and a son.

Meridith Royce-Simmons' Narrative

Emergence of a Life Issue

Meridith was aware of two contrasting aspects of her life at very early age. On one hand, she felt that she was not wanted and was an inconvenience for her mother. This was because there were already three other children in the family and the situation was very overwhelming. Meridith felt that she was thrown to her own resources as a child.

On the other hand, Meridith also realized that she was special. This was because she born with a special gift. This gift was her artistic ability. It provided her with a significant way to connect with the world. For example, she was able to see in a way and grasp an understanding of the world that other children could not. Further, she created a special atmosphere that enchanted her peers (other children) through her drawings. They enjoyed being with her because they just like watching her draw.

Meridith had similar positive experiences with adults in her life, such as teachers and friends of her mother's. She impressed and captivated them by her art making. Thus, Meridith felt validated as a person through her art making.

Finally, Meridith's artistic ability opened up a path to her inner self. She used her art making to cultivate a sense of self-awareness and an inner world. Moreover, it provided her with a means to explore feelings and thoughts. Ultimately, her art making provided her a place of sanctuary, a place where she felt safe to express herself openly and freely, and a place where she could be what she wanted to be.

In contrast, Meridith's relationship with her parents, especially her mother, was opposite to her experiences with her art making. With her parents, she felt that she was unimportant and not special. She felt that they were not open to her perceptions of the world. Nor were they open to discussing the inner world she cultivated through her art making. Her art was a threat to them and kept them away from her.

Thus, Meridith's life issue formed around her sense of being rejected by her parents. In spite of being born with a special gift and being treated in a special way by others, she did not feel her parents valued her. Meridith felt she was thrown to her own resources.

Meridith's life was compelled to find a way to connect with her parents. Also, she was compelled to find a place where she was appreciated and nurtured, and not thrown to her own resources. And, finally, she was compelled to explore her inner self through her art.

Early Struggles with and Endurance of a Life Struggle

The death of Meredith's younger brother increased her sense that her mother was not willing to explore feelings and thoughts and alternative points of view. Meredith felt confused, invalidated, and alone. She only had her art making as a means to reconcile her experiences and issues that emerged from her brother's untimely death. She felt thrown to her own resources. Thus, Meredith's life issue became magnified.

However, Meredith sought ways to gain her parents' approval, which also served to cultivate herself. As an adolescent, Meredith and her sister got into athletics, specifically track and field. The activity brought her family closer together. She was pleased with this. However, this was short lived.

Meredith's parents rejected their daughter's involvements in athletics as they rejected her art making. They did not appreciate that these activities were the means by which Meredith attempted to gain their approval. Further, they did not realize that these activities were their daughter's way of dealing with a lack of parental communication.

Meredith struggled with and endured her life issue of a lack of communication from her parents and feeling thrown to her own resources throughout her early life. She tried to reconcile her contradictory experiences of being special and invalidated. However, she was not successful. Indeed, Meredith's struggle with a life issue persisted.

Experiencing or Engaging in a Significant Activity

Meridith sense of not being wanted and being inconvenient was amplified when she was left in the care of friends as the rest of the family moved. This was a very traumatic, hellish experience for her. However, this experience led her to make a critical decision about her life direction. Meridith decided to pursue a life of art making. She decided to attend art school in spite of the discouragement of many people in her life.

From a struggle of two opposite aspects of her life, Meridith experienced and engaged in a significant activity. Her significant activity was to pursue art as a way of life and, through it, find a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Meridith's commitment to a significant activity was both clear and unclear to her. She was clear that her significant activity would provide her a sense of comfort and self-validation. However, she was unclear as to other future implications of her significant activity. For example, she was not sure how she would make a living through art making. Yet, Meridith was willing to go forth with her significant activity. She was willing to risk the uncertainty of traversing this path in searching for a more heavenly existence. Anything was better than remaining in the hellish existence of being thrown to her own resources.

Struggle to Extend and Live a Significant Experience

Meridith found that art school was an extremely validating experience as she found herself among "like-minded people." The inner world she was cultivating through her art making was nourished and cultivated by her teachers and her fellow students.

Following her graduation, Meridith developed an intimate relationship with her supervisor and his family. This served to extend her experience of a supportive, heavenly environment with people who had a shared philosophy and significant activity.

Meridith's heavenly environment became hellish as circumstances in her life evolved. Her relationship ended with her supervisor, who was also her lover. She was left to embark on her career in art making without much support. Through heroic struggles, she persevered with her significant activity. However, her existence seemed to fluctuate from heaven to hell.

Success and struggle in Meridith's career seemed to interpenetrate. For example, she was getting an opportunity to show her work in galleries. But, at the same time, she was not getting the recognition that meant garnering financial support from the Canada Council.

Meridith was among a collective of "like-minded people." However, because of the competition for funds, individuals in the artists' community could not afford to share resources. They could not act supportively towards

each other as professionals for fear of losing funds. This led to a sense of isolation for Meridith and a clear reminder of being thrown to her own resources.

Meridith became disillusioned with her career as an artist. She decided to suspend the pursuit of her significant activity. Instead, she was more interested in exploring and discovering a sense of self. She felt there were parts of herself yet to be uncovered. This was why art making was always so important for Meridith as a child growing up. Art making was a way to cultivate her sense of self, which freed her from feeling that she did not belong and was thrown to her own resources.

Thus, for Meridith, her desire to live in the West Indies was also a part of her continuing efforts to cultivate self and resolve her life issue. She wanted to live in an environment that was more congruent with the cultivating of self or, in a sense, the extending and living of a significant experience.

While in the West Indies, Meridith was confronted by her concerns for her ailing parents. She returned to Canada to care for them. In doing so, she gave up an environment that nurtured her journey of self-discovery and reentered the hellish existence of her previous life. Engaging in a process of self-cultivation became the least of her concerns. Indeed, Meridith was struggling to extend and live a significant experience.

The years following Meridith's return to Canada were filled with

struggles to reconcile personal and career issues. On a personal level, her marriage with the man she met and fell in love with in the West Indies ended, because of the stress involved in the adjustment to life in Canada. Her relationship with her family continued to be estranged as issues around open, honest communication were still unresolved. In fact, this contributed to the break up of Meridith's marriage.

On a career level, Meridith lost her connections with the community of artists that fostered a sense of belonging for her. She grappled to find any type of work that was available, such as being a waitress or a retail clothing salesperson. It was extremely difficult for her to work in environments that did not foster a sense of belonging and were so far removed from how she was wanted to live her life.

In addition to all of her other struggles, a physical illness disrupted Meridith's attempt to get her life back on course. She needed surgery to remedy the condition. Meridith felt alone and powerless during this episode. She did not have the support of any friends or family.

However, out of her experience of recovering from her surgery, Meridith made a conscious decision to take control over and establish a firm direction in her life. This meant making a personal commitment to art making as the central focus in her life. She expressed this commitment in a practical way by developing a business using her artistic abilities. From her

decision to commit herself to art making and to start a business, Meridith began to reestablish a process of self-cultivation. For if she did not take control over her life, no one was going to do it for her. She was reminded that it was only through art making that she was able to overcome her sense of being thrown to her own resources.

However, Meridith's desire to start her art making business was no guarantee that she was going to overcome her life issue. For example, a loss of financial support, from a person who was her business partner and lover, pushed Meridith back into the hell of finding others means to survive financially. Her desire to engage in a process of self-cultivation through her work was put off course by a lack of support from another person. Again, Meridith felt that she was thrown to her own resources.

Indeed, art making was a means for Meridith to transport herself away from a life issue. However, this significant activity was not always successful. Meridith explored other ways to overcome her life issue. A part of this also involved reshaping her commitment to her art making. For Meridith, the process of self-cultivation was critical in overcoming her life issue, and she needed to infuse this process cultivating self in her art making career. The struggle to infuse the process of self-cultivation or extend a significant experience was indeed intensive for Meridith.

Struggle to Clarify a Life Mission

Meridith's struggle to extend and live a significant experience escalated during the events surrounding the death of her father. These events magnified the issues she had with her family and the importance of art making in her life. Consequently, Meridith experienced a profound shift in her life.

Using art making, Meridith was able to clarify her experiences around her father's death and how they related to her issues with her family. Through this process of reconciling family issues, she was able to approach her art making career, specifically the teaching component, with a sense of increased self-understanding. Meridith began to see a mission in life.

Meridith became aware that re-approaching the teaching component of her art making career represented a growth in self-confidence and an increased maturity. Although she had taught throughout her career life, Meridith never considered it as anything more than a way to make a living. However, teaching art became important for her at this time in her life because it was a means to contribute to the lives of others. Contributing to the lives of others was a means to heal her own wounds, to keep from being marginalized and thrown to her own resources. Through the process of teaching art she healed the child inside that was never genuinely nurtured and supported for expressing herself.

Meridith found that teaching children was important for her because

she continued to learn about and develop herself and to contribute to the learning and development of others. She felt that teaching children art helped them to increase self-understanding, to open their minds to expanding possibilities, and to connect and communicate with other people (their peers as well as adults). Indeed, Meridith found a mission in life.

Meridith's life mission allowed her to help children learn and develop in a way that she did not experience in her childhood. In addition, it also allowed her to focus on her life issue in such a way that moved it beyond herself. She was facilitating a process that was muted in her life. Thus, in taking on her life mission, Meridith was enhancing the lives of others as well as healing herself.

Emergence of Critical Awareness and Revising a Life Mission

Teaching art was also a means for Meridith to expand the capacity of people (especially children and parents) to communicate about the deeper issues and experiences of the inner self. It was no longer an activity that was just used to validate herself and to find a place to belong. To belong and to be valid, she assumed the role of focusing on others and not herself. Through working selflessly to facilitate the self-development in others, she gained a sense of herself. Her mission in life arose from a struggle for sense of self and moved towards being an agent of communication for others. Teaching art making and sense of self came together for Meridith.

Meridith's life mission evolved from a struggle with her life issue. Just as her life issue gave way to a process of continuing self-cultivation and growth through teaching art making, Meridith's life mission will likely evolve and be revised as a part of this process.

Art making was a significant activity in Meridith's life as a process of self-cultivation. Although she found a sense of belonging through contributing to the community as a teacher of art, Meridith still experienced a sense of isolation as an artist. She accepted that this might be an inherent part of life as an artist. However, Meridith was also aware that as an artist she will continue to develop as a person. From this perspective, her contribution to her community as a person and artist has yet to be realized fully. Thus, Meridith's expression of her life mission can be viewed as a continuing process that is intimately tied to her self-cultivation process.

The story of the evolution of Meridith's life mission illustrated an intensive struggle with a life issue. In using art making to overcome her life issue and engage in a process of self-cultivation, Meridith was able to also express a life mission. However, given that the self-cultivation process can be boundless, Meridith's life mission can be expected to also evolve endlessly.

Critical Commentary on the Pattern

This chapter concludes with a commentary on the general narrative pattern. The goal here is to bring the analyses of the narrative accounts

together in discussing the general pattern.

Emergence of a Life Issue. The emergence of a life issue occurred early in the lives of all three participants in this study. For Carolyn and Meridith, a life issue emerged within the first five years of their lives. Moreover, the issue was intimately connected with relationships with their parents, most notably their mothers. Several comments can be made as to why their relationships with their mothers generated a life issue. However, this is beyond the scope of this research. It is sufficient to indicate that a life issue emerged for both women.

For Derrick, a life issue emerged further into his childhood than the women in this study. Derrick's life issue was veiled in social and cultural mores of the times. The loss of his father was significant in Derrick's life. But, it was not until his mother remarried that it emerged. Yet it was not the remarriage or the loss of his father that generated Derrick's life issue. It was his inability to contend with the instability brought upon his life by his step-father that led to the emergence of Derrick's life issue. Again, in spite of the complicated nature of the issues within his life, a life issue emerged to critically frame it.

To summarize, all three participants experienced a strong life issue early in their lives. From the emergence of a life issue, all three were compelled to and engaged in a course of action. This signalled a move into

the next stage in their lives.

Early Struggles with and Endurance of a Life Issue. Struggling with and enduring a life issue early in their lives was an intense experience for all of the participants. From the point of being aware that they were impacted by a life issue, all the participants were actively engaged in their struggle.

Derrick and Meridith engaged in activities that later translated directly into career paths. For instance, the former was involved in volunteering and worked at community agencies and institutions, respectively, working with troubled youths, whereas the latter was involved in art making. While Derrick did not do this until he was of an appropriate age, there was never any real doubt that he was going to travel down the path of working with people. Meridith engaged in an activity that was present and available to her very early in her life.

Carolyn spent most of her childhood and adolescence grappling to find an activity that helped her cope with her life issue. Even though she engaged in theatre fairly early on in her life, she clearly wavered about her involvement with it. She thought there was something else she could be doing to deal with her life issue. Indeed, she spent much of her early life enacting the role of a people-pleaser, attempting to please people and fix the relationship difficulties she had with them.

It should be pointed out that both Derrick and Meridith had roles that

they were also enacting. For example, Derrick enacted the role of a good person in his struggle with a life issue, while Meridith enacted the role of an achiever in her struggle. Derrick and Carolyn carried their roles into the next stage of their lives, whereas Meridith spent most her time reacting against the role she enacted to cope with her life issue. In fact, Meridith seemed to sabotage any semblance of achieving success she was having with her life. This could be seen in her art career as well as her involvement in martial arts. She moved away from both as her success was growing.

Indeed, all three participants struggled with and endured a life issue in their lives. They were not deterred by their failures and empowered by their successes. This established the framework for the next stage in their lives, which was experiencing or engaging in a significant activity. But, in finishing the commentary on it, it appears that stage two is associated with childhood and adolescence for all three participants.

Experiencing or Engaging in a Significant Activity. As indicated in the commentary on the previous stage, all three participants discovered activities that helped them cope with a life issue. Carolyn became involved in the theatre, Derrick volunteered to work with troubled youths, and Meridith intensified her art making activities. For all three participants in this study, activities used to cope with a life issue were experienced as significant and were transformed into a significant activity. And, as a significant activity, they

focused their efforts upon it.

In focusing their efforts, all three participants embarked in university programs. Their goal was to establish careers connected with a significant activity. They experienced a sense of liberation during this time in their lives as they felt they were freeing themselves from the grips of a life issue. They experienced joy and excitement as their lives became focused in a clear, concrete direction.

Although a significant activity need not be attached to an educational or career choice, it was the case for all three participants. It seemed that an important quality of a significant activity was that it served to focus a person's life and enhance his or her ability to overcome a life issue.

Struggling to Extend and Live a Significant Experience. Engaging in a significant activity was not a guarantee for permanent happiness or an unhindered path away from a life issue. All three participants struggled tremendously to extend and live an activity that was experienced as significant.

Both Derrick and Meridith were able to complete their university educations in their chosen fields and embark in careers. However, Carolyn was not able to do so. She changed her Major because she wanted to satisfy her mother. Her career path coincided with this change. Thus, Carolyn enacted the role of a people-pleaser, which helped her cope with her life issue, rather than engage in her significant activity. Her significant activity

was reexamined and experienced through other activities as a way to understand her life issue.

Although not as immediate as Carolyn, Derrick and Meridith were also forced to reexamine their engagement in a significant activity. Derrick and Meridith were confronted by a variety of circumstances as they pursued their careers. Both became frustrated and disillusioned. They began to look for alternative activities that yielded an understanding of their life issue.

The life issue of all the participants greatly affected their engagement in a significant activity. For example, career change was very much evident for all the participants in this stage. Carolyn left teaching and became a child care worker. Derrick left his position as a social worker and became the executive director of a non-profit community agency. Meridith put her career as an artist on hold and engaged in different art related activities to make a living, such as teaching art and starting a business that sold worn art.

Another feature of the struggle to extend and live a significant experience was a suspension or pause in the process. Both Carolyn and Meridith talked about such a pause in their lives during this stage. For Carolyn, the pause to go to Florida provided her an insight into a potential life mission. For Meridith, the pause to go to the West Indies provided her a chance to escape from her struggle. Derrick did not discuss such a clear pause in his life. But, he talked about suspending his career climb to explore

his professional and personal values. Struggling to extend and live a significant experience for all participants was again a response to the life issue. However, unlike their early struggles, participants were not just focusing on themselves. They were viewing their life issue from a broader perspective as a human condition, which also impacted others. For example, Carolyn saw her struggle to belong in the youths she worked with at the treatment centre and classroom; Derrick saw his struggle to be authentic as a helping professional in the clients and co-workers; and Meridith saw her struggle to communicate in her students.

Through their struggles, all participants developed an awareness of a life mission. Their life mission was not just an attempt to deal with their own life issue, but also to contribute in a positive way to the struggles experienced by others.

Struggle to Clarify a Life Mission. As the awareness for a life mission emerged, all three participants struggled to clarify it. Clarifying a life mission involved searching for and enacting a role that contributed to the welfare and lives of others.

For Carolyn, it was enacting the role of a counsellor who helped others feel like they belong. For Derrick, it was enacting the role of a community social worker who contributed to the well-being of people through being the executive director of a non-profit community agency. For Meridith, it was

enacting the role of a teacher who enriched the lives of people through teaching them the process of art making.

Thus, for all three participants clarifying a life mission involved a process of examining the meaning of goals and actions. It involved becoming self-aware and acting authentically, rather than acting out unexamined conventions and egotistical motives. It meant expanding the struggle with a life issue beyond themselves towards contributing to the lives of others.

Emergence of Critical Awareness and Revising a Life Mission. In the last of stage of how a life mission evolves, all three participants became aware that a life mission was not permanent. They acknowledged that as they grew as individuals and self-awareness expanded their life missions were revised.

For Carolyn, clarifying a life mission meant helping others feel of value and to value themselves. It was not just to help others feel like they belong. For Derrick, clarifying a life mission meant enacting the role of a selfless agent of the people, who acted from a position of virtue. It was not just enacting the role of a good person who did good work. Indeed, the latter can still be corrupted by the nature of the goal (of being a good person), while the former remains genuine because of an emphasis on process. For Meridith, clarifying a life mission meant expanding deep, genuine communication through art and creative means. It was not just enriching the lives of people through teaching them the process of art making.

Persons with a mission in life live "an examined life" that were in a constant process of evolution. Defining or framing a life mission was less important than being in a process of living it. They live with the knowledge that their mortality brings an added sense of meaning to a life mission, and that within their life span a life mission grows infinitely.

Summary. This chapter has attempted to present and illustrate a general pattern of how a mission in life evolves. Although the pattern emerged out of the analysis of the narrative accounts, the pattern came alive when applied to the narratives. Through applying the general pattern back to narrative accounts, there seemed to be no lack of consistency between the former and the latter. In other words, general pattern made sense when applied back to the narrative accounts, even though only some of the specific and unique details of each were highlighted. Finally, a further illustration of the applicability of the general pattern occurred when the narrative accounts were collapsed together. What became apparent was that the general story of how a life mission evolved for distinctive persons was remarkably consistent. And, consequently, the general pattern seemed to be an efficacious way to conceive of and understand the process of how a life mission evolves.

Other critical aspects of the general pattern that made it particularly applicable to the narrative accounts were: one, the emphasis of process within the pattern; two, the emphasis that the pattern is flexible and fluid; three, the

emphasis that the pattern has distinctive stages that flow and blend together, with each building upon the previous; and four, the emphasis that the pattern acknowledges both the finite and infinite nature of a life.

CHAPTER VIII

DISCUSSION

The aim of this last chapter is to discuss the implications of the general narrative pattern extracted from the narrative accounts. The implications will be discussed on several levels: General, Theoretical, Practical, and Research. The limitations of this study will also be examined.

General Implications

From an analysis of the narratives accounts collected, a general pattern of a how life mission evolves was identified. This general pattern consisted of six stages. Moreover, on relational level, the stages formed a pattern best described as a forward, upwardly moving spiral. Explicit in the pattern is movement or process. However, what is implicit, or more subtle, is the nature of the process within it.

Before discussing nature of process within the narrative pattern, it is necessary to briefly review this pattern. In the first stage, an individual experiences the emergence of a life issue, often occurring in childhood. In the second stage, the person engages in early struggles with and endures her life issues through exploring and participating in a variety of activities. In the third stage, through exploring and participating in a myriad of activities, the individual experiences and selects an activity that is significant in the struggle

against her life issue.

Following Gestalt principles of figural organization and considering them as if they were points on a page, the first three stages of the evolution of a life mission forms a pattern. This pattern assumes the appearance of a circle, with stage one giving rise to stage two, which then leads back towards a similar but different point or stage three. However, continuing to follow Gestalt principles, the pattern needs to be extended to include the next three stages or another three points.

To include the next three stages, the pattern would not simply be one circle upon another circle, but two joined distinctive circles. The pattern, therefore, assumes the appearance of a spiral, with stage three giving rise to stage four and so on. Thus, in the fourth stage, a person struggles to extend and live the essence or meaning of the significant activity, after being confronted by external circumstances (ie., value differences between others and self, the environment and self, and so on) and inner experiences (ie., confusion, disillusionment, resolution and enlightenment). In the fifth stage, emerging out of reexamining the life issue and searching for the essence behind the significant activity, the individual finds herself struggling to clarify a life mission. Finally, in the sixth stage, a person experiences a new critical awareness that propels her to revise a life mission. In addition, this person realizes that expressing a life mission is an endless process and is associated

with the cultivation of a sense of self.

The process that impels a person through the general pattern seems to be dialectical in nature (which is most basically described in the triadic formula of thesis-antithesis-synthesis). A person internalized experiences encountered in childhood (representing the formation of one state) that led to the experience of a conflict as other experiences were encountered (representing the formation of another state experienced as opposing). The person strove to resolve this conflict by exploring and engaging in activities (or through a process). The consequence of this period of activity was that the conflict was, in essence, reconstructed into a new form that focalized the person's activities, such as career and life direction, (or the transformation of the opposing states towards a qualitatively different state). The conflict was no longer an experience within the person that motivated his thought, feelings and actions at a more or less implicit or conscious level. Indeed, the person was imbued with a sense of meaning and vitality, whereas previously he was aimless and impotent. More importantly, however, the person was infused with a sense of self-awareness.

Unfortunately, with the emergence of self-awareness, the person began to question his career and life direction (or the presiding state) as new experiences from a myriad of sources (or an opposing emergent state) became crystallized and incorporated into his self-awareness. Again, the person found

himself in state of conflict. However, the conflict was now between two opposing states of the self -- the one that developed out of the childhood conflict and the other that grew through the influence of external factors. And, again, the person engaged in the struggle to resolve his conflict (or a process).

From the struggle to resolve the internal conflict, the person began to clarify and shape another focalizing activity in his life. However, this activity in the person's life arose not because the person focused his attention on resolving his inner conflict. Rather, this activity arose through examining the inner conflict from the context of others or the human condition. The inner conflict was transformed into an activity or mission in the person's life that contributed to the well-being of others in society (or a qualitatively different state).

But, once again, as a new level of awareness emerged, the person experienced contrary levels of commitment to his mission in life (or opposing states). Upon this experience, the person sought ways to resolve the conflict (or engaged in a process), which led to the revision of the life mission (or a qualitatively different state). Although the appearance might not have changed, the person's experience of his mission in life had changed. And, finally, associated with this revision of a mission in life, the person acknowledged wholeheartedly that the process of expressing a mission in life

continued endlessly (in other words, the dialectical process was in constant motion).

In examining the narrative pattern and the process underlying it, the first three stages resemble the components of the dialectical process. Or, more precisely, the dialectical process cycles through the first three stages (with opposing states emerging in stage one, process enacted through stage two and a qualitative resolution of the opposites occurring in stage three). In contrast, the dialectical process cycles through stages four and five (with opposing states emerging in stage four, process enacted through stages four and five and a qualitative resolution of the opposites occurring in stage five). Finally, the dialectical process cycles completely within stage six. This explains why a person experiences a sense of endlessness in stage six. Since the dialectical process is potentially endless, with new opposing states always conceivable, stage six is also potentially endless or, more likely, open-ended. Indeed, stage six represents the dialectical aspect of human development, which is endless save for human mortality.

Thus, by illustrating how a dialectical process cycles through the narrative pattern identified in this study, a clear implication is that a theoretical framework must provide an understanding of both the pattern of experience and the process underlying it to be effective. Another implication is that there exists two intertwined general patterns within the narrative

accounts: a general pattern of experiences and a general pattern of process, which is dialectical in nature. These implications are critical in terms of theory-building. In addition, these implications are key in examining, whether or not the primary research theories on how meaning evolves in lives contribute to an understanding of how a life mission develops? And, if so, then how does the theory or how do the theories contribute to an understanding of how a life mission develops?

Theoretical Implications

The general pattern of experience extracted from the narrative accounts are relevant to the primary research theories describing how meaning evolves in life. Further, the present study provides a way to understand how a life mission evolves through assessing these primary research theories and comparing them to this study's narrative accounts and general pattern.

The accounts provide support for a research theory or model that describes both the stages of how a life mission (or, generally, meaning) evolves and the dialectical process guiding an individual through the stages. Although they vary in the stages described, the primary research theories (McAdams, 1993; Csikszentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979; Cochran, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Charne, 1984), more significantly, vary in the way they emphasize and describe the dialectical process that implicitly underlies their theories. As Csikszentmihalyi (1990) states,

The number of steps [models for describing the emergence of meaning delineate along a gradient of complexity] is irrelevant; what counts is that most theories recognize the importance of [the] dialectical tension . . . (p. 222-223)

Indeed, McAdams' (1993) theory on personal mythmaking is fraught with examples of the dialectical process. For example, his emphasis on dialectical process is clear in his discussions on the tension between experiences of trust and mistrust in infancy, the formation and reformation of identity through mythmaking in adolescence, agentic and communal characters in the stories of adults, stories that trap individuals in malaise and stories that heal them, experiences of the passion of youth and the power of reason in mid-life and experiences of integrity and despair in review life stories as lives approach an end. This is not surprising since McAdams bases much of his theory of personal mythmaking on Erikson's work. Indeed, because he conceived development as a product of interaction and conflict, Erikson's conception is dialectical in nature (Riegel, 1975a; 1975b). However, McAdams seems to acknowledge dialectical process as an accepted and implicit aspect of personal myth and mean-making. If it is to be more effective, McAdams' theory will have to include a more extensive description of the role of dialectical process or the general pattern of process.

While he is clearly negligent in his description of dialectics, McAdams

is exemplary in his endeavour to outline the process of how meaning evolves in lives. Although their theoretical foundations are different, McAdams' model and the narrative pattern identified in the current study share certain important commonalities. The implication that childhood and early life experiences influence the narrative tones of stories composed in adulthood is shared by the two models. Indeed, stage one in the development of life mission emphasizes the impact of a life issue in propelling a person forward in their life course.

Moreover, stage two's emphasis on a person's early struggle with and endurance of a life issue through exploring activities is similar to McAdams' emphasis that the way children hear, learn and play is influenced by emotionally laden imagery of developing personal myths. Although significantly different in that McAdams focuses on identity formation and stage three focuses on a person's experience of a significant activity, the two models are similar in that the person experiences a sense of focus in life. While McAdams' model states that a person focuses on identity formation through mythmaking, stage three proposes that an individual focuses on the resolution of a life issue through transforming it into a career or life course.

Stage four very much emphasizes the cycle of constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing of self that pervades a person's adult life as a consequence of struggling to live a significant experience. McAdams

discusses this very process through his delineation of main characters, or internalized "imagoes," and how they are scripted into self-defining stories. The clarification of a life mission in stage five, or the transforming of a life issue into an activity that contributes to the well-being others, is clearly parallel to McAdams' description of the "generativity script" in mid-life.

And, finally, by proposing that a person becomes aware of the endless process involved in expressing a life mission, stage six departs from McAdams emphasizes that mythmaking ceases as a person approaches the last years of life. Although he suggests that life stories are never final and things can always change, McAdams indicates that ego integrity is based on a sense of self-acceptance, where a person can acknowledge both the strengths and limitations of his personal myth. For at the end of a life, there is not much opportunity to relive a life and generate a new personal myth. In addition, as a consequence of this point, it is not clear whether the critical awareness that emerges in stage six is the same as the awareness that comes with ego integrity according to McAdams. In fact, it is the emergence of this critical awareness that fosters a person's sense that expressing a life mission is an endless process. While McAdams emphasizes consolidation, stage six emphasizes a continuing cycle of differentiation and integration. The difference between the models at this point is based on that fact the McAdams' model is tied to the biological influence of human meaning-

making, while the model presented in the current study is based on a perspective that human meaning transcends corporeal existence.

Indeed, after comparing the two models, it is clear that a significant link can be drawn between the six stage model of life mission development with McAdams' model of personal mythmaking. Although there are differences, it seems that McAdams' model on personal mythmaking can contribute to the understanding of how a life mission evolves. That is, a person's expression of a life mission can be understood from the standpoint of personal mythmaking.

Two cautionary notes, however, must be kept in mind. First, because McAdams' model offers an inadequate description of the dialectical process, one may wonder what is the exact nature of the process that impels a person through the stages of myth or meaning-making. Second, because McAdams' model is connected to the biological influence of human meaning, one may wonder if a person can establish meaning in life that truly transcends mere physical existence, or does a person merely reshape stories of the struggle for physical survival into more elaborate ones. These point will need to be addressed if McAdams' model is to be more seriously considered.

Unlike McAdams' (1993) research, Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979) investigated how meaning evolves in life, paying specific attention to how this influenced career choice. Since life missions appear often to emerge out of

career development, Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's (1979) results were of particular interest to the current study. In other words, it was possible that the pattern of development of life themes they proposed could illuminate how a life mission evolves.

Although their four phase pattern provided some critical support for the six stage model emerging from the current study, Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's research provide little understanding of the process that guided a person moving through the pattern. Most certainly the process did not appear dialectical in nature.

The foundation of Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's four phase pattern revolves around their definition of a life theme. They define a life theme as "consisting of a problem or set of problems which a person wishes to solve above everything else and the means the person finds to achieve a solution" (p. 48). This is very similar to definition used by the current study to define a life issue. A life issue is a pervasive experience that influences a person's thoughts, feelings and values about the world and, in turn, compels the person to resolve the life issue. In essence, both definitions centre on an impactful aspect of a person's life that generates a set of purposeful actions.

The first phase of Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's pattern of development of life themes involves the *recognition of an existential stress* in one's life. They indicate that a set of circumstances is recognized as stressful

through a combination of its objective characteristics as well as the pattern of "affective and cognitive coding" available to a person. The second phase of the pattern involves *finding the problem*. This refers to the person's attempt use available codes to interpret his experiences of the world, indicating which are stressful and discovering its source or finding the problem. The third phase involves *stating the problem in a form that will allow for solution*. This refers to the fact a person's actions become directed based on his formation of the problem.

The combination of these three phase resemble stage one of the six stage model presented in the current study. For example, a person encounters a set of circumstances that results in a problem that draws his attention, becomes pervasive in his life, and increase his awareness of a need for action to resolve it (the problem). Although stage one can capture the essence of the first three phases of Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's pattern, the former lacks some of the specificity of the latter. This specificity would be important for an investigation on a set of research participants with a diverse demographic background. For example, to understand how people of diverse socio-econmonic and cultural backgrounds come to choose the same method to solve a life issue, Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's first three phases would be effective.

The last phase of Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's pattern involves

attempting a method of solution for the main existential problem. It resembles stages two through five in the six stage model of the current study, when white collar workers are considered. However, if blue collar workers are considered, it only resembles stages two through three.

Indeed, in stage two, the activities a person engages in are for the purposes of enduring a life issue. While in stage three, the activity a person engages in represents a unifying of his previously diverse activities towards the resolution of his life issue. For example, a person may work at several trades before discovering that being a plumber affords him with a enough financial stability to overcome concerns of being poor and thus resolving his existential problem.

For white collar worker, a search for a method of solution may propel them to question their existential problem from the standpoint of a larger human problem. Careers and lives are shaped and reshaped during this period of self-examination. Indeed, this resembles the struggle to live a significant experience in stage four and the clarification of a life mission in stage five of the six stage model of the current study. However, Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's pattern makes no provision for experiences captured in stage six.

The concern with Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's pattern of development of life themes is not whether the phase of the pattern matches

the stages of this study's model. Rather, their pattern does not provide an understanding of the process that guides a person through the phases. A key example of this weakness is their description of how a person's existential stress is formulated into one that affects other people, or humanity as a whole. Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979) describe this situation as "nothing [more than] a cognitive transformation . . . that appears to have powerful consequences" (p. 53). They do not explain the nature of the transformation. Later, Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979) describe the cognitive transformation as occurring "with dramatic suddenness" (p. 57), but do not explain the process that leads to this occurrence.

To offer a meaningful proposition to answer the concerns with the pattern proposed Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie, a dialectical process can be interfaced with it. As consequence, a cognitive transformation can then be understood as the result of a dialectical process that transforms a person's opposing experiences (often with dramatic suddenness) to a qualitative different state. For example, using a participant's stories from Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's study, Max's existential problem was that he felt himself to be an outsider (one state). He wanted desperately to find a place where he felt a sense of belonging (an opposing state). Through reading two history books (a process), he found a way to view his life that gave him a broader sense of belonging (a qualitatively different state), which

on a larger context was associated with "a place on the stage of history" (p. 57).

Thus, it is clear that Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's pattern possesses serious shortcomings. These were discussed by Cochran (1990) and identified in the literature review of the current study. However, the main concern here is that Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's pattern can be significantly strengthened through describing the process that propels a person through the pattern. The current study advocates for a dialectical process.

In sum, Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's four phase pattern of development of life themes significantly supports the nature of the six stage model proposed by the current study. This indicates that the development of a life mission can be understood in part from the pattern describing the development of life themes. Moreover, because of their omission, Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's study illustrated: firstly, the need for an integration of pattern and process in models describing the emergence of meaning, and secondly, the efficacy of integrating the pattern with the dialectical process.

Of the primary research theories on how meaning evolves in lives contribute to an understanding of how a life mission develops, Cochran's (1990) study is most congruent with the aims of the current one. He investigated life stories of individuals with a mission in life or a sense of

vocation. Emerging from his study was a common story line that described a pattern of life for individuals with a sense of vocation. This pattern consisted of four phases, "describing how a sense of vocation begins, how it is cultivated, how it is enacted in a life's work, and how it ends" (p. vii). Indeed, these are also the aims of the current study.

Therefore, according to the logic of multiple-case study design, the current study is, on a broad level, *a literal replication* (Yin, 1989). It is reasonable to expect that the stories of three participants who have a life mission will reveal a pattern of life similar to that described by Cochran (1990). If it does, then the pattern revealed in the current study can be compared with the one constructed by Cochran for the purposes of using each to further understand and refine the other.

Indeed, the pattern revealed in the current study not only differed from Cochran's in terms of the number of phase or stages, but also with respect to emphasis on the process that compels a person to move through the stages. Thus, the goals in comparing the two patterns are clear. Two guiding question can be asked to facilitate the comparison. Are the differences a matter stylistic expression of the pattern and process? Or, are the differences a matter of theoretical significance?

Although he does not name the process directly, Cochran (1990) talks about aspects of the dialectical process quite directly. For example, at the

beginning of a story for person's with a sense of vocation, "a gap" is experienced. This gap can be characterized as "a disequilibrium, an upset or a disruption" (p. 17). Moreover, from the standpoint of the pattern, a gap defines or connects a state of incompleteness with a state of completeness, what is with what ought to be, or the beginning with the end. Further, he states that "If a story does not involve opposition, the story is incoherent, not really a story" (p. 19). Indeed, what Cochran identifies is the inherent importance of opposition in the stories of individuals with a sense of vocation. Opposition is a fundamental aspect of the dialectical process.

Next, Cochran (1990) states that "the actual end is not necessarily the projected end" (p. 19). Further, he indicates that "the tension of a story is maintained by the convergence and divergence of two lines of movement, the movement between a beginning and projected end, and the movement between beginning and actual end" (p. 20). These two quotations imply that Cochran does not believe a simple movement towards an opposite state is the solution to a sense of incompleteness, for example. Although incompleteness is bounded by completion, he implies that completion is more than just the opposite of incompleteness. When completion is reached, a person is transformed and is more than what she was before or just being complete. Cochran (1990) describes this elegantly in his discussion of different experiences of *ends* in the completion phase of a life story. In general, taken

together, the sentiment expressed by Cochran is that the resolution of opposites entails a qualitative transformation. Qualitative transformation is critical aspect of a dialectical process.

Finally, Cochran (1990) clearly emphasizes the importance of process and understanding its nature. For example, he states, "given a story, we are not interested in explaining the beginning alone, nor the end alone, but the change of a subject from the beginning to the end" (p. 23). Furthermore, Cochran (1990) emphasizes that in completion "flow emerges as a potentially dominant quality of life" (p. 166). Although it seems self-evident, process is key in dialectics as opposed to equilibrium.

After examining the implicit dialectical process underlying Cochran's pattern of life for those with a sense of vocation, the next task is to compare it to the six stage model arising from the current study. In incompleteness, Cochran (1990) states that as time passes, situations repeat to the degree that a person can discerns patterns and develop expectations. A person becomes aware of "what is not, what did not happen, or what should have happened to fulfil an expected pattern. . . . As patterns develop, time perspective increases, and it is here that inconsistency begins to create difficulties" (p. 38). Moreover, he indicates that "incompleteness concerns how desire is transformed into a realizable possibility" (p. 39). Taken together, these aspects of incompleteness resemble the emergence of a life issue and the priming of a

person to find a solution that occurs in stage one of the model identified by the current study.

Next, positioning encompasses or, more precisely, various aspects of positioning can be seen in stages two through four of the current study's model. According to Cochran (1990), positioning involves a person getting into position or shaping herself to fulfil the gap. This is similar to a person in stage two struggling to find ways to endure and, if possible, overcome her life issue even on temporary bases. Moreover, Cochran (1990) suggests that, "In positioning, persons might engage in various ostensive roles, but the role of significance is only superficially ostensive" (p. 79). This is similar to the nature of a person's experience of and engagement in a significant activity at stage three of the current model, only to finding herself disillusioned and in a struggle to extend and live a significant experience at stage four. Exemplary examples of this occurred for all the participants in the current study.

The participants committed to an activity that was perceived as self-defining, only to discover that this activity pointed to a deeper, more meaningful activity and drama associated with resolving the life issue. For example, Carolyn was committed to her decision to be in the theatre; Derrick was committed to his calling to be a social worker; and Meridith was committed to her desire to be an artist. These individuals were just like Cochran's description of Menuhin. Cochran (1990) described Menuhin's

situation in the following way:

[Menuhin] might have happily have an ostensive role that grounds the future, but it is still secondary to the dramatic role being formed in one enactment after the other, binding more and more meaning into it as one progresses. In the practice of a prototypical enactment, a person develops a mastery of a particular dramatic role within a particular type of drama, one that has emerged from the core dilemma of existence during the phase of incompleteness. (p.79)

When he refers to "the practice of a prototypical enactment," there is a sense that Cochran could easily have been talking about a person struggling to live a significant experience and finding herself becoming aware and on the verge of forming a life mission.

Indeed, in the positing phase of life, Cochran (1990) states that a person is "concerned with enactment of position. To act from position is to posit something to the world and to actualize the spirit or tenor of one's being" (p. 40). The above statement is very close to the description of how a person comes to clarify a life mission in stage five. For example, a person clarifies a life mission as a part of the struggle that results in this person reformulating a life issue to act or work on behalf other human beings or the greater human cause. By way of comparison, Cochran (1990) describes the enactment of a vocation in positing in the following way:

A vocation . . . is experienced as progressing, developing, and expanding. . . . Over and over in diverse contexts, one exercises mastery of one's dramatic role in life and validates one's worth as a powerful human agent regarding the work of life. In the work of vocation, one enacts a dramatic position, infusing one's being with vitality and diffusing it without. . . . There is a sense of inevitability to a vocation, as if one is destined for the role adopted. Partially, this sense of inevitability emerges from the exactness with a central enactment reflects one's life story, relating somewhat like microcosm to macrocosm. (p. 110-111)

What one does, avows, stands for, is not unique, but an essential part of the larger drama of human nature. . . . In central enactment, one reenacts the very nature of the world. In this way, the personal is elevated to the cosmic and one's vocation is a particular expression of a universal. (p. 111)

Indeed, the participants' stories in the current study fit Cochran's rendering of a person enacting a vocation in positing. Other than the expansionary aspect of a work of vocation, most notable for all the participants was the sense of inevitability associated with it. For example, in fulfilling her career as a counsellor, Carolyn felt that she was doing exactly what she was suppose to do in her life.

Finally, in completion, Cochran (1990) indicated that a person "posits from a certain fullness within" (p. 42). Moreover, they "feel at one with the immediate or at one with all there is" (Cochran, 1990, p. 164). And, further, the person experiences completeness through reviewing the meaningful activities that has composed a life. The implication here is that at completion a person acts from an elevated state of consciousness as well as experiences a sense of wholeness. This is a critical part of stage six as a person realizes that their actions are longer compelled by a life issue (or incompleteness), rather their actions represent an ongoing expression of self-cultivation and personal integrity. Thus, life missions are revised as a matter of course, and not a matter of necessity.

The combination of an emerging critical awareness and the revision of a life mission implies that, as an activity, a life mission is a ceaselessly emerging phenomenon. However, this does not imply it is unstable, elusiveness or nebulous. For it becomes ceaselessly emerging only because it is grounded in an achieved state of wholeness. Cochran (1990) concurs with the above sentiments by stating,

During the completion phase of life, a person progressively transforms acts into activities. . . . There is no dominant gap between what is and what ought to be in activity that shapes purpose; it has become the ground from which one engages in activity. The temporal becomes

replaced by a sense of timelessness. Activity is open, without end.

One engages in it, fully present to the moment without attending to a distant attainment. For those near the end, there is no more future, only the past and the present. One simply abides in activities until external cuts them away. (p. 166)

Accordingly, completion and stage six of the current study's general pattern are associated with experiences of timelessness, endless and boundlessness. A person simply exists in process as these phase or stages of life are reached.

Summarizing, the sixth stage pattern of the current study closely matches and is supported by Cochran's pattern of experience in life for individuals with a sense of vocation. The differences between the two appear more to do with a stylistic expression of the pattern than of theoretical significance. Therefore, the two studies can be considered as linked and can serve to extend and refine each other, especially regarding the characteristics of the phases or stages of how a life mission evolves.

Moreover, it appears clear that Cochran's pattern and its underlying process is dialectical in nature, even though he does not state it directly. Thus, it would be useful to recast his pattern and describe the dialectical process within it more explicitly. This may serve to refine its effectiveness, which is remarkable. This is a task for a future study and outside the scope of the current one.

In contrast with Cochran's (1990) pattern of life experiences, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) presented a model describing the emergence of meaning along a gradient of complexity that demonstrates an integration of a general pattern of experience and a general pattern of process that also was dialectical in nature. His general pattern of experience has four steps and is built upon a premise that a person's focus alternates from self to other in an increasingly complex and meaningful way.

In the first step, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) suggests that a person's concern focus on physical survival, with "psychic order is equivalent to pleasure" (p. 222). Once these concerns are met, in the next step, a person concerns himself with the goals of the community and what is meaningful to groups values, such as religion, patriotism, and the acceptance and respect of other people, which are the parameters for inner order (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). These steps seem too general with respect to the stages of the pattern for how a life mission evolves. There is no sense of a conflict that propels a person towards action (stage one), a struggle to endure a conflict (stage two) and the experience of and engagement in a significant activity (stage three), which also be focused could on others as well as self.

Moreover, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) implies that dialectical process is simply a move from one aspect of life to another or from biological, physical needs to interpersonal, social needs. This is a very superficial rendering of the

nature of the dialectical process. Csikszentmihalyi does not discuss the fact that opposites emerge and can co-exist, creating a state of confrontation. From this state, the opposites are integrated and transformed into a qualitatively different state through a struggle and a process.

In the third step, the dialectical process brings a person to focus on himself again (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Having made a connection with the larger society, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) indicates that the person is now impelled by the desire for growth, improvement and the actualization of potentials. A person explores and develops different skills, ideas and aspects of the self. The person is guided by intrinsic motivations. However, because the person has become "a seeker or reflective individual", he may also "encounter a midlife crisis, a career change, and an increasingly desperate straining against the limitations of individual capability" (p. 222)

Again, Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) description offers only a minor delineation of experiences that were evident in stage three (the engagement in a significant activity) and stage four (the struggle to extend a significant experience). For example, engaging in a significant activity was for the purpose of self-expansion, but this was not always for intrinsic reasons. Indeed, a person's engagement in a significant activity is for the egocentric purposes of overcoming his life issue. The first part of Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) description of the third step partially resembles stage five (the

clarification of a life mission) in that it emphasizes intrinsically motivated activities. However, this description pales when actual experiences of clarifying a life mission are examined.

Finally, according to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), the dialectical process redirects a person's focus to integrate with other people and with universal values. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) indicates that "in the final stage the extremely individualized person . . . willingly merges his interests with those of a larger whole" (p. 222). This certainly concurs with the description of a life mission. Further, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) suggests that very few people reach the third step of *reflective individualism* and only a rare breed venture forth "to forge a unity with universal values" (p. 222). Indeed, this statement implies that not many people reach stage five (clarifying a life mission), let alone stage six (the emergence of a critical awareness that results in a revision of a life mission and the experience of the endlessness of activity). In fact, judging from his model, Csikszentmihalyi probably does not believe that many mortals ever achieve stage six, which he may reserve for those "on the verge of achieving high levels of spiritual enlightenment."

In sum, there is no guarantee that a model describing the emergence of meaning will be effective just because it integrates a general pattern of experience and a general pattern of process. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) model demonstrated a very superficial understanding of the nature of a dialectical

process.

Furthermore, Csikszentmihalyi's model describing the emergence of meaning is inadequately conceived for the purposes of understand how a life mission evolves. This is because he appears to base his model on biological rather psychological-spiritual influences of human meaning-making. This issue was also encountered in McAdams' model, which was mentioned above. Although Csikszentmihalyi's model appears to be based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and McAdams' model appears to be based on Erikson's model of psychosocial development, the inadequacy of the models of interest presented by Csikszentmihalyi and McAdams may lie in their use of human development models to understand how meaning evolves in life. However, this concern is beyond the scope of the current study. But, the suggestion here is human development models may not be the most effective in understanding human meaning-making or, specifically, how a life mission evolves.

Charme's (1984) study on the meaning of lives represents the last of the primary research theories to be discussed in Theoretical Implications section of this chapter. In the General Implications section, a dialectical conception of how meaning evolves in lives was integrated with the current study's conception of how a life mission evolves. The dialectical conception was, in fact, based on Charme's (1984) conception of meaning-making and the conception of other dialectical thinkers. It was shown that a dialectical

process cycles through the narrative pattern identified. It was then proposed that: *a theoretical framework of how meaning evolves must provide an understanding of both the pattern of experience and the process underlying it to be effective*. Further, it proposed that there exists two intertwined general patterns within the narrative accounts or stories of how a life mission evolved: a general pattern of experiences and a general pattern of process, which is dialectical in nature. (To gain a more complete description of the results of integrating Charmé's conception of how meaning evolves and the current study's conception of how a life mission evolves in lives, please refer to the General Implications section.)

As discussed in the literature review, the concern with Charmé's (1984) conception of how meaning evolves was that he did not use it to examine actual lives. When actual lives were examined, as accomplished in the current study, a pattern of experience emerged, as illustrated by the six stages. Not only was the general pattern of experiences from the stories augmented through integration with the general dialectical pattern of process, but the general dialectical pattern of process was enlivened and infused with meaning through integration with the general pattern of experiences. For example, the thesis of the triadic formula is not just the formation of a state, and the antithesis just the formation of another state. Rather, it was embedded in the story of an emerging life issue (or realization). Process is not just an implicit

part of the triadic formula. Rather, it was the story of the initial struggle with and endurance of the life issue (or exploration). Synthesis or a qualitative transformation of the opposites is not just the third part of the triadic equation. But, it was the story of experiencing or engaging in a significant activity (or achievement). The repeat of the triadic dialectical cycle is not just a matter of course. But, it was the continuation of a life story.

The reemergence of the opposites is not just the next dialectical cycle. Rather, it was the story of the struggle to extend and live a significant experience (or disillusionment). Process, in the second cycle, is not just an accepted aspect of the formula. Rather, it was the story of life being lived (or struggle). A second qualitative transformation of the opposites is not just the completion of the formula. Rather, it was the story of expressing a life mission (or nurturance). The emergence of a third dialectical cycle is not a matter of logic. Rather, it was the story of an awareness of an endless process (or personhood). Thus, from an abstract conception, Charmé's dialectical conception of how meaning evolved in lives became concrete and indeed comprehensible through stories.

From a broader perspective, through examining Charmé's (1984) study, it is possible to propose that what is critical to understanding how meaning evolves in lives involve: developing and discerning general patterns of process; integrating a general pattern of process with a general pattern of

experiences so that each refines and extends the other; and conduct research on actual lives to assess the effectiveness of integrated patterns [or as Cochran (1990) calls them, *metapatterns*]. In some sense, the current study was an attempt to develop a metapattern of life development through examining how a life mission evolves. The current study's metapattern is an integration of a six stage pattern of experiences and a pattern of process based on dialectics.

To summarize, through comparing the metapattern developed by the current study with the primary research theories, it is clear that the metapattern of the current study is supported both on the levels of the general pattern of experiences and pattern of process. On the level of the general pattern of experiences, Cochran's phases of life for individuals with a sense of vocation most strongly supports the metapattern. On the level of the general pattern of process, Charne's conception of how meaning evolves in lives most strongly supports the metapattern. In terms of theory-building, the metapattern represents an integration of the primary research on how meaning and life mission evolves in life.

Practical Implications

The current study has several practical implications. The general narrative pattern of experiences that arose from the individual life stories can serve as a psychological guide for those exploring meaning in their lives, for those in search of a meaningful activity or career in life, and for those who

counsel them. The life stories can provide examples of the diversity that exist within the general pattern.

For individuals in an initial or advanced struggle to discover and express meaning in their lives, the pattern can be a critical source of information and validation. It allows an individual to feel comforted and fathom what she is experiencing. But, because they lack the richness of details, the pattern loses some of its impact for individuals. The life stories expand understanding because they represent actual experiences that were lived by real people.

The participants of this study greatly appreciated the opportunity to talk about their life stories and their search for and expression of meaning in life. Often the questions of, "What is the meaning of life?" or "What is the meaning of your life?", are treated in a cavalier manner and with a lack of seriousness. Participants welcomed the opportunity talk about and process aspects of their life in a some genuine way, where they were respected. None of the participants had ever told their entire life story to any one before. They reported that the experience of telling their story allowed them to reconfirm and gain some new insights into their decisions to pursue a life course that was meaningful.

From a counselling perspective, the life stories can serve as a guide for practice. Counsellors often work with people in varying degrees of awareness

of the fact that they are in the process of searching for meaning in life. When individuals seek counselling, they are either stuck or seeking direction on how to proceed. They are likely grappling to create some understanding of their situation. The stories render the search for meaning and a life mission intelligible for the counsellor. The general pattern allows the counsellor to follow an individual's story as she attempts to express a life mission. It can aid the counsellor's in understanding what the individual searching for meaning or a life mission is experiencing.

The general pattern of experience that emerged from the individual life stories can also be used as a framework for assessing individuals who require help in their search for meaning. A different set of experiences predominated each of the stages of the process. The description of the general pattern of experience provides a basis for assessing where the person is in their search for meaning, and what might be the most effective way to work with the client. For example, a person who has not experienced a struggle to overcome their life issue through exploring activities may find activities typically associated with a life mission overwhelming. If they did not healed old wounds resulting from a life issue, individuals may give up activities that are meaningful but occurring out of time. Thus, Carolyn was not ready to be a counsellor until she enacted the role of the teacher once more as a way of overcoming her issue with her mother, who was also a teacher.

It is critical for the counsellor to understand that, when helping a person searching for meaning in life, a general pattern of process is intertwined with a general pattern of experience. This general pattern of process is dialectical in nature. For example, what this implies is that a person may appear to be mired in a struggle with a life issue but she is actually moving forward. Moreover, the person may appear have achieved a state of success and happiness only to become disillusioned and reenter a search for meaning. Dialectical process suggests that the triadic formula of thesis-antithesis-synthesis continues ceaselessly, with each synthesis being qualitatively different than the previous one as well as the immediate set of opposites that led to the qualitative transformation. Thus, the stages of the pattern of experiences can be considered points on a forward, upwardly moving spiral.

Finally, this study suggests that the search for, discovery of and expression of meaning and indeed a life mission is endless. However, it is endless not because there is a need to be met. Rather, a person reaches a point of living in process and being a developing whole or "totalization."

Limitations

There are some limitations to the current study. First, there were only three participants in the study. Moreover, they were all Caucasians, from English speaking western countries and university educated. This occurred as

a result of the participant selection procedures. This limits the study by race and the dominant culture norms within which the process of meaning in life emerges.

Second, the study only used one method of gathering data, which was through the narrative interview. Other studies similar to the current one (eg., Cochran & Laub, 1994) use multiple lines of inquiry (ie., through using interviews, Q-sorts on the experiences of interest and elaboration interviews on Q-sort results) to ensure soundness of the data. Moreover, the data was only reviewed by one source (the study participant) to assess trustworthiness of the narrative accounts. Again, other similar studies (eg., Cochran & Laub, 1994) used a multiple review process [ie., through researcher review, independent reviewer(s) review(s), and study participant review) to ensure trustworthiness of the accounts. These shortcomings occurred because of limits in time and resources. These limitations of the data makes it premature to propose that the general pattern of experiences and the general pattern of process fully describe how meaning and a life mission evolves for all individuals.

Third, the study is also limited because study participants possessed a somewhat narrow type of life mission. All three participants had life missions that involved paid work. There appears to be many different ways to express meaning in life. To expand the implications of this study, it is important to

include participants who have life missions that did not involve pay and/or were based on a social, political, religious or cultural causes.

Research Implications

In terms of future research, the most critical task is to explore the degree to which the pattern of experience and pattern of process that emerged in the current study apply to a larger, more diverse group of participants. For example, individuals originating from different socio-cultural groups may have different experiences of meaning-making based on different socio-cultural norms. As a result, the pattern of experience may be vastly different in character because they define a life mission differently. However, it would be interesting if individuals from different groups defined a life mission in a similar way. This would point, in a sense, to the universality of the experience of a life mission, even though the pattern of experience for developing it is distinctive and idiographic. Thus, these conjectures attest to the need for future research that is socially and culturally more diverse and sensitive.

Also, it would be worthwhile to explore whether the pattern of experience applies to individuals engaged in unpaid work. Indeed, the participant Meridith often spoke of the dialectical tension between pursuing meaning in life through her artistic endeavours when she was paid and unpaid. Her account illustrates that meaning and a mission in life is possible through

both situations. Thus, expanding the number of participants with a life mission in the category of unpaid work may serve to extend and refine the general pattern of experience identified in the current study.

Moreover, in the current study, all the participants had very troubled and torturous childhoods. It might be interesting to speculate whether or not a person with a happy and content background would also go through the pattern of experiences of expressing a life mission described here. Future research on this point may lead to an understanding of whether or not the experience of struggle and pain is more important than the experience of happiness and contentment in propelling a person to search for meaning in life and the expression of a life mission.

As part of exploring the nature of the process within the general pattern of experience, further exploring Charmé's (1984) study of dialectics within lives may be prudent. The current study responded to some of the concerns regarding his study by integrating a pattern of experience with dialectical process. Certainly, more research is required if dialectical process is to be considered as the pattern of process underlying actual lives.

Regardless, Cochran's (1990) study and the current one support the need to more do research on generating and integrating general patterns of experience and process. Indeed, research theories and models are inadequate if they do not describe the process that impels a person through the patterns

of experiences. Such a case was illustrated in the discussion of McAdam's (1993) model.

Finally, for the general patterns of experience and process to be considered sound and trustworthy, future research will be required to correct the methodological shortcomings of the current study. In other words, multiple lines of inquiry (ie., through using interviews, Q-sorts on the experiences of interest and elaboration interviews on Q-sort results) should be used to ensure the soundness of the accounts. To ensure the trustworthiness of the accounts, future research should employ a multiple review process [ie., through researcher review, independent reviewer(s) review(s), and study participant review)].

Summary

A multiple case study approach was used to investigate the pattern how a life mission evolves in lives. The participants were one man and two women who described themselves as having a meaningful career or a mission in life. The participants were chosen to portray different careers. The investigation produced three vibrant, detailed narrative accounts of how a life mission evolved. Each one is told from the perspective of the individual who experiences a life mission. The accounts were based on in-depth descriptions of the experience. Each account was reviewed and validated by the case study participant.

A comparison of the individual accounts exposed a pattern of experience that was common to all three cases of those who developed a life mission. It can be best portrayed as a six stage model, with each stage possessing unique characteristics and each subsequent stage building on the preceding one. Further, in each case, the development of a life mission exhibited a process that was more dialectical than lineal in nature.

Several theoretical implications emerge from this study. First, it supports those models that describe the development of meaning or mission in life from the standpoint of both a general pattern of experience and a general pattern of process. This combination was illustrated remarkably in Cochran's (1990) description of the phases of life for persons with a sense of vocation. Furthermore, the current study's general pattern of process strongly followed Charne's (1984) account of how meaning evolves in lives.

Second, the accounts suggest that the meaning of one's life mission can be discovered in a life issue that emerges early in a person's life. This life issue runs through the person's life guiding his or her engagement in activities and a career(s), until he or she transcends the life issue through the clarification of a mission in life.

Third, the accounts do not support the idea that a life mission or discovering what makes life meaningful is a nebulous, elusive and abstract endeavour. From a practical perspective, through integrating them, the

general pattern of experience and the general pattern of process can serve as a guide for those who are searching for a mission or meaning in life and for those who counsel them.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

APPENDIX A



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LETTER OF INFORMATION

Wayne Kong-Ming Wong
Department of Counselling Psychology
University of British Columbia
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I am conducting a study examining how individuals seek, find, experience, and express meaning in career and work. This project is being conducted as a Masters Thesis research study, under the supervision of Dr. L. Cochran, in the Department of Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. The purpose of the study is to generate vibrant, comprehensive life histories of how individuals pursue and articulate meaning in career and work. For this reason, I am looking for individuals who are presently in career and work paths and pursuits that they feel are infused with a sense of meaning, and are willing to talk about it in great depth.

The individuals I am seeking may be at varying degrees of development or accomplishment in their career or work pursuits. They need not have achieved presently (or during the point they are involved in the research) the highest status in their career and work fields. However, they must be fully aware of what led to their decision to engage in their career and work fields; experience a strong sense of meaningfulness in their chosen career and work fields; and be willing and able to describe and discuss in extensive details how all this arose.

Participation in this study will involve both narrative-biographical and review interviews. Narrative-biographical interviews will serve to generate the life histories of the participants. Review interviews will serve to assess the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the life histories generated. Interview sessions will last between one to three hours. The total number of interview sessions will be between four to eight (or between a minimum of four to a maximum of eighteen hours).

Involvement in the study will provide participants with the opportunity to reflect upon their careers and, indeed, their lives; the opportunity to discuss and examine both in great detail; and the opportunity to generate a written account or biography of their lives. We hope that individuals involved in this study will find it illuminating, educational, uplifting, and affirming.

Individuals wishing more information about this study and/or interested in participating may call Wayne K.-M. Wong at (604) 736-4723 [h] or (604) 251-2141 [w]. If I am not available, please leave your name, phone number, and when you can be reached, and I will return your call as soon as possible. Thank-You!

APPENDIX B

Screening Interview Questions

- * How would you describe your commitment to your work?
- * What motivates you to pursue this work?
- * What makes you want to continue to do this work?
- * Can you describe how you came to pursue this work?
- * Could you tell me how you happened to come to have this work?
- * Can you describe the factors that or individuals who influenced you to pursue your work?
- * Could you tell me what made you or who may have influenced you to decide on this type of work?
- * Can you describe how and when this happened in your life?
- * Could you tell me how and when this happened in your life?
- * Can you describe how and if your decision to pursue your work relates to other aspects of your life at this time?
- * Could you tell me how and if your decision to do this work relates to other parts of your life at this time?
- * Can you describe the sense of meaning you experience and gain from your pursuit of your work?
- * Could you tell me the sense of meaning you experience and gain from your pursuit of your work?

APPENDIX C



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CONSENT FORM

Research Project - Meaning in Career and Work: A Narrative-Biographical Investigation

This project is being completed as a Masters Thesis research by Wayne K-M Wong (736-4723), under the supervision of Dr. L. Cochran (822-6139) in the Department of Counselling Psychology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., Canada. The Project is an examination of how individuals express and articulate a sense of meaning in career and work. Participation will involve a series of 4 to 8 interviews, each lasting between 1 to 3 hours, for the purposes of generating a narrative and biography of the Participant's life as it leads to their involvement in a meaningful career and work life. There are three types of interviews: the screening/introductory interview, the life history/biographical interviews, and the evaluation/validation interviews. All sessions are audiotaped. Tapes will be erased at the end of the project. Interview material will be transcribed and all identifying information will be deleted in order to ensure confidentiality and to protect the Participants' privacy unless they consent through written permission. Participants are free to ask any questions concerning the project and may withdraw at any time without jeopardy of any kind.

I acknowledge receipt of a copy of this consent form, which I have read and understood, and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Name (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

All identifying information will be deleted in order to ensure confidentiality and protect the Participants' privacy unless they consent through written permission. Participants are free to ask any questions concerning the project and may withdraw at any time, without jeopardy of any kind.

Sincerely,

Wayne Kong-Mong Wong (251-2141 [w]/736-4723 [h])
Masters of Art Student
Dept. of Counselling Psychology
University of British Columbia

Dr. L. Cochran
Professor
Dept. of Counselling Psychology
University of British Columbia

APPENDIX D

Life History Interview Questions

- * What were the circumstances that first led you to experience a sense of meaning in your pursuit of your work?
- * What were the events that first led you to experience a sense of meaning in your pursuit of your work?
- * In what way is this sense of meaning in your work different than your previous experiences of work?
- * How did you decide to pursue your work?
- * What factors and/or who influenced you in your decision to pursue your work? In what way were you influenced?
- * What made you or who influenced you in your decision to pursue your work? In what way were you influenced?
- * How did you feel about this individual's affect on you?
- * Why? Could you tell me a bit more?
- * How did you feel about this situation's affect on you?
- * Could you tell me a bit more?
- * Do you feel your sense of meaning in your work affected your relationship with significant people in your life?
- * How do you think it did? Could you tell me a bit more?
- * In what way do you feel they (the relationships) were affected?
- * Could you tell me a bit more?
- * How did you communicate this experience of meaning in your work to others?

- * Do you feel your sense of meaning in your work affected your life and your sense of yourself? If so, in what way?
- * How did you first become aware of this?

APPENDIX E

Participant Review Interview Questions

- * When reading this written account of your life history, do you feel it is accurate and comprehensive?
- * When reading this written account of your life history, how do you feel about it? (pause) Do you feel it is accurate and comprehensive?
- * If not, what are the inaccuracies and omissions?
- * If not, what are the inaccuracies and things left out?
- * What part or parts of this account should be expanded or decreased in emphasis?
- * What needs to be added to or subtracted from this account?
- * What should be added to or subtracted from this account?
- * Are there other ways to interpret the events, situations, and outcomes of your life history you originally provided? If so, what might they be?
- * Are there other ways to interpret the events, situations, and outcomes of your life history you originally provided? If so, what are they?
- * Are there any leading questions, biases, and in general inappropriate influences during the interview that you feel affected the life history account you provided? If so, what might they be?
- * Are there any leading questions, biases, and in general inappropriate influences during the interview that you feel affected the life history account you provided? If so, what are they? How could they be lessened or changed?
- * Are there any distortions in the written account of your life history? If so, what might they be?
- * Are there any misinterpretations in the written account of your life history? If so, what are they? How could they be lessened or

changed?

- * Did the written life historical account accurately portray what you intended to communicate? If not, how would you change it or what changes would you make to it?
- * Did the written life historical account accurately present what you intended to communicate? If not, how would you change it or what changes would you make to it?
- * Was anything of significance omitted from the account? If so, what might these omissions be?
- * Were there any important details left out of the account? If so, what are they? How could and where would you add them to this account?