THE IMAGINAL EXPERIENCE THAT TRANSFORMS

by

KATHRYN ANNE HARCOURT

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Counselling Psychology

The University of British Columbia
2075 Wesbrook Place
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1W5

Date: January, 1986
Abstract

The vivid imaginal experience, as an instance of Maslow's (1968) peak-experience, was studied through the existential-phenomenological method of research. Data were gathered through interviews and examined using a protocol analysis (Colaizzi, 1978). The meaning of the experience was explicated through a description of the major themes which comprised the experience. It was found that the imaginal experience producing positive and lasting change involves a psychological process whereby the individual, whose focus is drawn by a problem, attempts to find a solution. In the search, one withdraws, lets go of control, and achieves a state of openness, during which a visual, auditory or kinesthetic experience occurs. After the experience, one feels resolved, changed, whole and integrated. One has a sense of having touched something higher in oneself and in the universe. The knowledge and perception gained from the experience draw one forward on a journey. One might experience difficulty as one's values change and at times seem in direct conflict with the values of society. Nevertheless, one feels one cannot go back to where one was, and continues searching for "the more in life."
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

There occur, in the lives of many individuals, seemingly spontaneous experiences that produce positive and lasting change, and give meaning to life. For disciplines whose primary goal is helping people change, it is vital that this naturally occurring phenomenon be understood in detail. The development of a model for change based on such research into human experience would be invaluable to counsellors and therapists. As well, resources and analogues to counselling might be developed to aid and enhance the individual's growth process.

While accounts of naturally occurring experiences are few, one of the most well-developed descriptions arises out of Maslow's (1968) study of peak-experience. Within the general range of experiences described by Maslow falls what has more recently been called the imaginal experience, but is known traditionally as the visionary experience. The focus of this study will be that experience. Throughout the study both terms will be used in referring to the experience, however judgment will be reserved as to their appropriateness. The imaginal experience occurs in the context of a life situation. An individual struggling with a problem will find himself or
herself within a vivid experience of imagery which might be auditory, visual, or kinesthetic in nature and which results in potent and lasting change.

The importance of the imagination is highlighted in the work of Singer (1968, 1975, 1978), Starker (1982), and Watkins (1976). The experiencing of the imaginal is seen as normal, healthy and necessary. Through the development of this imaginative capacity, it is believed one becomes a more fully-functioning human being.

Greeley (1975) found visionary experience to be more common than previously realized. According to his findings, 36% of all Americans have had such an experience (p. 58). In a call for further study he states, "It would be extremely important to study intensively the people who have . . . [these experiences], the nature and quality of the phenomena, and the impact the experiences have on all aspects of their lives" (p. 8).

The research method of traditional scientific psychology has followed a subject-object approach. To be studied, a subject must be quantifiable and measurable. The world is seen in terms of cause and effect and is measured by what is sensed through the five senses. The assumption of behavioural science is that "observable actions are the only legitimate data. As a result, inner experience has been reconciled to a scientific no-man's land" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. x). It
becomes a problem to be solved or managed, a stress to be eliminated, or an emotion to be dealt with, rather than an aspect of human experience with a meaning to be explored and understood. It is important to understand meaning, not to measure it. "The crucial locus of psychologic events is still the psyche; our thoughts and our feelings, not our 'objective' behavior give meaning to life" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. x). It is therefore important to study experience as lived rather than immediately going to causes and correlations.

It is the intention of this study to address the meaning of the imaginal experience that transforms through using the existential-phenomenological method of research. In this approach, research is conducted through dialoguing with other human beings called co-researchers, who are considered experts on their imaginal experiences. Through a disciplined reflection on these accounts, the researcher discovers the constant behind the variety of experiences. The results of this analysis are shared with the co-researchers for validation and further clarification of meaning (Giorgi, 1970; Valle & King, 1978).

The imaginal experience appears to hold a potent power that is able to transform. A study of this natural reorganization process might yield an answer to the questions of how people change and grow. What then is the meaning of the naturally occurring imaginal experience (auditory, visual,
or kinesthetic) which produces lasting change? The aim of this study is to provide a fundamental description of the experience which will address this question of meaning.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

In this review, a variety of studies which have attempted to identify significant features of the imaginal experience will be considered. The purpose of the review is to recount the descriptive characteristics that apply to this experience, as they have been explicated by authors in the field.

There appears in the literature to be three broad approaches taken to this phenomenon. The most recent, only decades old, is in the field of psychology, where researchers are probing into the nature of human consciousness. Such experts as Maslow (1968), Singer (1968, 1974, 1975), and Csikszentmihalyi (1975) are reporting from their research that human beings have a higher nature, and within that nature, capacities of imagination that take them beyond the realm of ordinary existence, where they experience a reality that is joyful, liberating and healing.

Traditionally visionary experience has fallen into the domain of religion and is equated with mysticism. Authors such as Underhill (1961), Zaehner (1957), and Stace (1960) describe a "Mystic Way" which is followed by the mystic, and
leads to imageless union with the Absolute, or to entering the Void, depending on to which school, culture or religious background the mystic belongs. "Visions" were lesser experiences the mystic might encounter along the way to attaining the Unitive Life. Since the turn of the century, "religious" experience and "visionary" experience have been secularized somewhat. The classical definition of mysticism has been extended and certain authors are recounting and theorizing about experiences occurring in the ordinary individual which are unsought, and seem to occur spontaneously, that is without the traditional tools and disciplines used by the mystics seeking out such experiences. James (1902) and Bucke (1901) were pioneers in recognizing these experiences, attempting to describe them, and theorizing about the nature of human consciousness.

The third major approach to the visionary experience occurs in the field of psychiatry. The world-view underlying The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition, of the American Psychiatric Association is that of the rational objectivity of behavioural science. The key assumption is that observable action provides the only legitimate data. This world-view does not allow for the existence of phenomena which cannot be quantified and empirically studied. The visionary experience is therefore considered to be a psychotic hallucination in the sick mind of
one who is unable to cope with the "real" world.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES**

**Peak Experience**

a) Background

Maslow (1968) pioneered work in the development of a health psychology, a psychology of the fully evolved and authentic self and its ways of being. He rejected the traditional distinction between sickness and health as far as surface symptoms were concerned, believing that health did not necessarily mean being symptom free, and that so-called "personality problems" might be loud protests against the crushing of one's internal nature. In fact, according to Maslow, it would be sick not to protest, and since many do not, they pay for it years later with neurotic and psychosomatic symptoms and never become aware that they've missed out on true fulfillment and happiness.

Maslow (1968) bases this point of view on a number of assumptions.

1. We have each of us an essential, biologically based inner nature, which is to some degree "natural," intrinsic, given, and in a certain limited sense, unchangeable, or, at least, unchanging.
2. Each person's inner nature is in part unique to himself and in part species-wide.

3. It is possible to study this inner nature scientifically and to discover what it is like.

4. This inner nature, as much as we know of it so far, seems not to be intrinsically or primarily or necessarily evil. . . . In fact it can be said that the possibilities of human nature have customarily been sold short.

5. Since this inner nature is good or neutral rather than bad it is best to bring it out and to encourage it rather than suppress it. If it is permitted to guide our life, we grow healthy, fruitful, and happy.

6. If this essential core of the person is denied or suppressed, he gets sick sometimes in obvious ways, sometimes in subtle ways, sometimes immediately, sometimes later. (pp. 3, 4)

b) Approach

Maslow (1968) entered upon his study with the desire to find out "what one really is like inside, deep down, as a member or the human species and as a particular individual" (p. 5). He believed that learning more about one's natural tendencies would give one more information on how to be happy, to be fruitful, to respect one's self, to love, and to fulfill one's highest potentialities.

The approach Maslow chose was existential-phenomenological in nature. From existential psychology he
saw the relevance of two main emphases: firstly, the stress on the concept of identity and the experience of identity as the sine qua non of human nature and of any philosophy or science of human nature, and secondly, the stress on starting from experiential knowledge rather than from systems of concepts or abstract categories. Existentialism rests on phenomenology in that it uses personal, subjective experience as the foundation upon which abstract knowledge is built.

Maslow's study included eighty personal interviews and one hundred and ninety written responses of college students to the following set of instructions.

I would like you to think of the most wonderful experience or experiences of your life; happiest moments, ecstatic moments, moments of rapture... First list these. And then try to tell me how you feel in such acute moments, how you feel differently from the way you feel at other times, how you are at that moment a different person in some ways. (p. 71)

From the results of the interviews and written accounts, Maslow formulated a single, composite description of some of the cognitive happenings found in "the B-love experience, the parental experience, the mystic, or oceanic, or nature experience, the aesthetic perception, the creative moment, the therapeutic or intellectual insight, the orgasmic experience, certain forms of athletic fulfillment" (p.73). He called these and other moments of highest happiness and fulfillment peak-experiences. Maslow called the special cognition occurring during these moments B-cognition or Cognition of
Being. The person with B-cognition is able to perceive realities others are unable to. In contrast is D-cognition, which is organized around the deficiency needs of the individual.


1. The whole universe is perceived as an integrated and unified whole. . . . [One has] a clear perception that the universe is all of a piece and that one has a place in it. One is a part of it, one belongs in it.

2. The percept is exclusively and fully attended to. That is, there is a tremendous concentration of a kind which does not normally occur. There is the truest and most total kind of visual perceiving, or listening, or feeling [which is] non-evaluating, non-comparing, or non-judging cognition.

3. In the peak-experiences, we become more detached, more objective . . . more readily able to look upon nature as if it were there in itself and for itself. . . . The perceiver . . . can see it in its own Being (as an end in itself). . . . The peak-experience seems to lift us to greater than normal heights so that we can see and perceive in a higher than usual way. We become larger, greater, stronger, bigger, taller people and tend to perceive accordingly.

4. Perception in the peak-experience can be relatively ego-transcending, self-forgetful, egoless, unselfish. . . . It becomes more object-centered than ego-centered.

5. The peak-experience is felt as a self-validating, self-justifying moment which carries its own intrinsic value with it. . . .
It is felt to be highly valuable . . . to make life worthwhile by their occasional occurrence . . . to give meaning to life itself.

6. [One recognizes] these experiences as end-experiences rather than means-experiences. . . . They are worthwhile in themselves.

7. There is a characteristic disorientation in time and space or even the lack of consciousness of time and space. Phrased positively this is like experiencing universality and eternity.

8. The world seen in the peak-experiences is seen only as beautiful, good, desirable, worthwhile, etc. and is never experienced as evil or undesirable. The world is accepted. People will say that then they understand it. . . . The bad things about life are accepted more totally than they are at other times. It is as if the peak-experience reconciled people to the presence of evil in the world.

9. It is another way of becoming "godlike" . . . [of seeing] the whole of Being, of understanding it, of seeing it as inevitably good and seeing "evil" as the product of limited or selfish vision and understanding.

10. Being-values are the described characteristics of the world as it is perceived in peak-experiences, or the irreducible, intrinsic values of this reality. [See below]

11. B-cognition in the peak-experience is much more passive and receptive, much more humble, than normal perception is. It is much more ready to listen and much more able to hear.

12. In the peak-experience, such emotions as wonder, awe, reverence, humility, surrender and even worship before the greatness of the experience are often reported . . . [and] a kind of reconciliation and acceptance of death.

13. In peak-experiences, the dichotomies, polarities, and conflicts of life tend to be transcended or resolved. . . . There tends to be a moving toward the perception of unity and
integration in the world. The person himself tends to move more toward fusion, integration, and unity and away from splitting, conflicts and oppositions.

14. There is a loss, even though transient, of fear, anxiety, inhibition, of defence and control, of perplexity, confusion, conflict, of delay and restraint.

15. Peak-experiences sometimes have immediate effects or after effects on the person. Sometimes their after effects are so profound . . . the person is forever after changed. Lesser effects could be called therapeutic.

16. The conception of heaven that emerges from the peak-experience is one which exists all the time all around us, always available to step into for a little while at least.

17. In peak-experiences, there is a tendency to move more closely to a perfect identity, or uniqueness, or to the idiosyncracy of the person, or to his real self, to have become more a real person.

18. The person feels more than at other times to be responsible, active, the creative centre of one's own activities and perceptions, more self-determined, more a free agent, with more "free will" than at other times.

19. It has also been discovered that precisely those persons who have the clearest and strongest identity are exactly the ones who are most able to transcend the ego or the self and to become selfless.

20. The peak-experiencer becomes more loving and more accepting, and so he becomes more spontaneous and honest and innocent.

21. He becomes less an object, less a thing, less a thing of the world living under the laws of the world, and he becomes more a psyche, more a person, more subject to the psychological laws, especially the laws of what people have called the "higher life."
22. Because he becomes more unmotivated, that is to say non-striving, non-needing, non-wishing, he asks less for himself in such moments. He is less selfish.

23. People during and after peak-experiences characteristically feel lucky, fortunate, graced. . . . A common consequence is a feeling of gratitude, in religious persons, to their God, in others, to fate or to nature or to just good fortune.

24. The dichotomy between humility and pride tends to be resolved . . . by fusing them into a single complex superordinate unity, that is by being proud (in a certain sense) and also humble (in a certain sense).

25. What has been called the "unitive consciousness" is often given in peak experiences, i.e., a sense of the sacred glimpsed in and through the particular instance of the momentary, the secular, the worldly. (pp. 59-68)

Being-Values (Maslow, 1970)

1. Truth; honesty; reality; (nakedness; simplicity; richness . . . beauty; pure; completeness).

2. Goodness: (rightness; desirability; oughtness; justice . . . honesty).

3. Beauty: (rightness; form; aliveness; simplicity; richness; wholeness; perfection; completion; uniqueness; honesty).

4. Wholeness: (unity; integration; tendency to oneness; interconnectedness; simplicity; organization; structure; order; not dissociated; synergy . . .).

4a. Dichotomy-transcendence: (acceptance, resolution, integration, or transcendence of dichotomies, polarities, opposites,
contradictions); synergy (i.e., transformation of oppositions into unities, of antagonists into collaborating or mutually enhancing partners).

5. Aliveness: (process; not-death; dynamic; eternal; flowing . . . spontaneity . . . full-functioning; changing yet remaining the same; expressing itself; never-ending).

6. Uniqueness: (idiosyncrasy; individuality . . .).

7. Perfection: (nothing superfluous; nothing lacking; everything in its right place . . . suitability; justice; nothing beyond . . .).

8. Completion: (ending; finality; no more changing of the Gestalt; fulfillment . . . totality . . . no striving . . . not pointing to anything beyond itself).

9. Justice: (lawfulness; rightness; regularity . . . perfectly arranged).

10. Simplicity: (honesty; nakedness; purity . . . elegance abstract . . . the heart of the matter; bluntness . . .).

11. Richness: (totality; differentiation; complexity; intricacy . . . all there . . .).

12. Effortlessness: (ease; lack of strain, striving or difficulty; grace; perfect and beautiful functioning).

13. Playfulness: (fun; joy; amusement; gaiety; humor; exuberance; effortlessness).

14. Self-sufficiency: (autonomy; independence; not needing anything other than itself in order to be itself. . . identity). (pp. 92-94)

As a result of the study, Maslow (1968) defined self-actualization as:

an episode or a spurt in which the powers of a person come together in a particularly efficient and intensely enjoyable way, and in which he is more
integrated and less split, more open for experience, more idiosyncratic, more perfectly expressive or spontaneous, or fully functioning, more creative, more humorous, more ego transcending, more independent of his lower needs, etc. He becomes in these episodes more truly himself, more perfectly actualizing his potentialities, closer to the core of his Being, more fully human. (p. 97)

Maslow found that these states or episodes could come at any time in life and that self-actualizing people seemed to have them more frequently and intensely than average people. To be self-actualizing then, is not an all or none affair, but a matter of degree and frequency.

Flow Experience

a) Background

Csikszentmihalyi (1975) concerns himself with the question of how the potential for enjoyment and play can be translated into actuality. He observed that man at play is at the peak of his freedom and dignity. He questioned why it was that some people (artists for example) are willing to give up material rewards for the elusive experience of performing enjoyable acts. What made play so liberating and rewarding? In answering this question Csikszentmihalyi hoped to learn something that would help us make everyday life more meaningful.
b) Approach

The goal of Csikszentmihalyi's study was to understand "enjoyment" here and now, and not as anything else. Instead of approaching it as something to be explained away in terms of conceptual categories, his aim was to try to look at it as an autonomous reality that had to be understood on its own terms. To that end, he did a series of interview and questionnaire studies using people who were having peak experiences, who were intrinsically motivated and were involved in play as well as real life activities. Activities included mountain-climbing, chess, surgery, and various forms of dance. The purpose was to detect similarities in their experience, their motivation, and the situations that produce enjoyment.

c) The Elements of Flow Experience

Csikszentmihalyi (1975) defines flow as "the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement" (p. 36). Action follows action according to an internal logic that seems to need no conscious intervention by the actor. There is a unified flowing from one moment to the next and little distinction between the self and the environment, the stimulus and the response or between past,
present, and future. The elements of flow are linked together and dependent on each other.

1. Flow experience is characterized by the merging of action and awareness. One is aware of actions, but not of awareness itself. When awareness is split and one perceives the activity from the "outside," flow is interrupted. Typically flow can occur only for a short period of time.

2. There is a centering of attention on a limited stimulus field.

3. The person in flow experiences a loss of ego, self forgetfulness, and a loss of self-consciousness. This does not mean a person loses touch with his own physical reality but that one becomes more intensely aware of internal process. "What is usually lost in flow is not awareness of one's body and one's function, but the self construct, the intermediary which one learns to interpose between stimulus and response" (p.43).

4. The individual in flow is both in control of his actions and of the environment. There is not active awareness of control but he is not worried about the possibility of lack of control. Flow experiences occur in activities where one can cope, at least theoretically, with all demands for action.

5. The activity contains coherent, noncontradictory demands for action and provides clear, unambiguous feedback. This is possible because awareness is limited to a restricted field of possibilities. Goals and means are logically ordered. One does not stop and evaluate feedback as one is too involved in the experience to reflect on it.

6. Flow activities are of an autotelic nature (auto=self; telic=purpose, goal). The participant appears to need no goals or rewards external to the activity itself. Flow experience is sought primarily for itself. "Achievement of a goal is important to mark one's performance but is not in itself
What keeps one going is the experience of acting outside the parameters of worry and boredom, the experience of flow" (p.38).

Whether or not flow occurs depends on the structure of the activity and the environmental conditions. Most people rely on external cues to get into the flow state and therefore need a structured system of action (i.e., games, art, rituals). Others have learned to restructure the environment so it will allow flow to occur. Poets, artists, scientists, and those who meditate have learned to use cognitive techniques to order symbols so they can "play" with them anytime anywhere, regardless of environmental conditions. Ideally, one can learn to carry inside oneself the tools of enjoyment. But whether the structure is internal or external, the steps remain the same: the process of delimiting reality, of controlling some aspect of it and then of responding to the feedback with a concentration that excludes anything else as irrelevant.

In his study of rock climbers, Csikszentmihalyi discusses another aspect of the flow experience, deep-flow. In reporting their experiences, some climbers used adjectives such as transcendent, religious, visionary and ecstatic. The deep-flow or visionary experience seems to occur in climbers at moments of relaxation, of letting go of tension, or at the final release. The deep-flow experience is "particle, wave
and source at the same time" where one experiences "oceanic feelings of the supreme sufficiency of the present . . . oceanic feelings of clarity, distance, union and oneness" (Robinson, 1969, pp.6,8 quoted in Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.81).

Imaginal Experience

a) Background

A basic duality in the nature of man has been a postulate of almost all religious, philosophical and psychological systems. There are said to be two types of personality that differ in the nature of their conscious experience (Bakan, 1978). This theory, based on the anatomical right and left hemispheres of the brain, suggests that man has two "qualitatively different kinds of thought or consciousness, mediated by the two hemispheres" (Bakan, 1978, p.179). Left brain functions involve language, mathematics, logical and analytical thought, and sequences over time. The right brain tasks involve imagery, creativity and holistic thinking.

Ericka Fromm (1978) describes primary process thinking as the first thinking process used by infants. This form of nonverbal imagery is the function of the right hemisphere of the brain. The secondary process develops as the child learns
more about the world around him. This logical, language oriented mode of functioning takes place in the left brain. These processes never totally dominate each other, but interact. "Human consciousness, the subtle interplay of fleeting images, perceptions of the immediate environment, memories of long gone events, and daydreams of future impossible prospects, all carried along the stream of thought . . . represent a true miracle of our experience of being" (Singer, 1974, p.1).

According to Fromm (1978) the primary process and secondary process range themselves along a continuum like a scale, where the primary process end is characterized by vivid imagery and the secondary process end by logic, reasoning and full reality orientation. In the altered states of consciousness (those other than the normal waking state) the prevalent mode of thought is imagic and there is greater access to subconscious and preconscious material.

b) Approach

Watkins (1976) describes a type of imagining which occurs between the waking and sleeping states. The body is relaxed until it is near sleep, but awareness is sustained. This state of consciousness is the intermediary state of the half-dream. It uses the ego to record and observe the
As the world of images appears, as if from dreams, they are recorded and remembered, and at times interacted with" (p.15). Watkins calls this conscious experiencing of images the waking dream.

According to Watkins, our awareness usually merges with our thoughts, feelings and actions and we become them. Thus no part of us remains to observe what is going on and we lose recognition of the experience. Experiencing the imaginal "requires a discipline in which the ability to be aware must be freed from its usual tendency to attach itself to the object of its awareness, thereby losing the ability to reflect on that object" (p. 19).

In a similar fashion, Deikman (1982) describes four domains of experience from which we derive our identity: the thinking self (planning, solving problems, worrying), the emotional self (anxious, joyous, angry, sad), the functioning self (acting, doing), and the observing self. This fourth self exists prior to thought, feeling and actions and is incapable of being objectified. It is awareness itself. Deikman believes that the development of self-observation is part of a journey that will lead us from "self-centeredness to a new realm of freedom and a new source of knowledge" (p. 118).

According to Watkins (1976) the difference between waking dreams and daydreaming is crucial and the two should not be
confused. In daydreaming, the ego's attention becomes attached to the imaginal contents in the same way it does to daily concerns. There is no awareness during it, whereas a waking dream involves aware participation in the imaginal. In daydreaming the imagination is used not in a disciplined search for the values of the imaginal, but as a relaxation from awareness, or perhaps to flee from difficulties, or to fill voids (p. 19). In their studies of daydreaming and fantastic thought, Singer (1968, 1974, 1975) and Starker (1982) discovered that the aspects of daydreaming that Watkins mentions have many positive qualities. These include helping the fantastic thinker to develop an internal locus of control, to increase ability to concentrate, and to have more control over daydreams and fantasies. These characteristics of the healthy and well-developed daydreamer suggest that he or she would have the qualities and discipline necessary to experience waking dreams.

c) The Characteristics of the Waking Dream

1. Waking dreams include many types of imaginings during which one is aware, conscious, and able to remember what has gone on.

2. One must observe one's mental flux without interfering in it or becoming attached to its contents (thereby losing awareness) and yet still be receptive to it.

3. When one tries to transform the ego by
separating its usual active, dominating, overwhelming aspect from its capacity to register and allow movement, one is first hindered by critical judgments, body restlessness, etc.

4. In trying to get in touch with the image one must refrain from trying to interpret it or figure it out.

5. It is impossible to predict what images will rise, or how one already chosen will change.

6. The body may at first assist if it is thoroughly relaxed. Later, the state of the body itself can be seen to hold many images which relaxation would obscure.

7. It is helpful to have an element to focus on to help separate out awareness, for example, an external object, the breath, the sound of waves or wind, etc. One can also facilitate the waking dream by placing oneself in an initial image (walking in a meadow, climbing a mountain, or taking an image from a nocturnal dream).

8. One must approach the image with curiosity and patience, giving it time and space, and allowing it to move and change if it desires.

9. One must pay attention to the details of each image to develop an imaginal perception, a sensitivity to the image's nature.

10. There are different media for experiencing imagery: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.

11. One may imagine in many ways. These might include observing the image, being within the image, being the image itself or communicating with it.

12. Each image has a particular nature unto itself. What it communicates is what it is. Our listening to it (in the ways that its nature, not our theory call for) develops a sensitivity in us towards the imaginal, so that its movements and echoes in life can be more readily and truly felt.
Waking dreams make us familiar with the imaginal. This allows us to recognize the activity of the psyche in our daily lives. To do this it is necessary to perceive differently, to remain with the image, to persevere, to return to it. We must deal with the image in an imaginal way and not try to translate it to the concreteness of everyday living. According to Watkins, the imaginal self, when we lend it our awareness, works a process of transformation.

RELIGIOUS APPROACHES

Classical Mysticism

There has been much debate in the literature over what truly is an accurate definition and description of the mystical experience. Writers have attempted to classify mystical experience according to a list of characteristics they have developed after studying the phenomenon. These lists vary according to the author, although some features remain in common.

i) Evelyn Underhill

Underhill (1961) set forth a widely accepted five-step analysis of the mystical life. Her classification was based
on studies of biographical and autobiographical material of scholars, saints, and mystics and the process of experience they described. Underhill calls these five stages the mystics pass through:

1. Awakening
2. Purgation
3. Illumination
4. Dark Night of the Soul
5. The Unitive Life

The true mystic is the person in whom such powers transcend the merely artistic and visionary stage, and are exalted to the point of genius: in whom the transcendental consciousness can dominate the normal consciousness, and who has definitely surrendered himself to the embrace of Reality. . . . Hence his mysticism is no isolated vision, no fugitive glimpse of reality, but a complete system of life carrying its own guarantees and obligations. (p. 76)

Underhill (1961) devises her own four rules or notes which she states may be applied to any given case which claims to be mystical experience.

1. True mysticism is active and practical, not passive and theoretical. It is an organic life-process, a something which the whole self does; not something as to which its intellect holds an opinion.

2. Its aims are wholly transcendental and spiritual. It is in no way concerned with adding to, exploring, re-arranging, or improving anything in the visible universe. The mystic brushes aside that universe, even in its supernormal manifestations. Though he does not, as his enemies declare, neglect his duty to the many, his heart is always set upon the changeless One.

3. This One is for the mystic, not merely the Reality of all that is, but also a living and
personal Object of Love; never an object of exploration. It draws his whole being homeward but always under the guidance of the heart.

4. Living union with this One—which is the term of his adventure—is a definite state or form of enhanced life. It is obtained neither from an intellectual realization of its delights, nor from the most acute emotional longings. Though these must be present, they are not enough. It is arrived at by an arduous psychological and spiritual process—the so-called Mystic Way—entailing the complete remaking of character and the liberation of a new, or rather latent form of consciousness; which imposes on the self the condition which is sometimes inaccurately called "ecstasy," but is better named the Unitive State. (p. 81)

Mysticism is the art of establishing a conscious relation to the Absolute. The moment of mystic consciousness is not a sudden admission to an overwhelming vision of Truth, although this can happen. It is rather an ordered mount to higher levels of reality, to ever closer identification with the Infinite. According to Underhill, in the early stages the mystic will feel the Absolute in opposition with the Self. As the journey continues, the sense of opposition will be abolished, and at term, the consciousness has a sense of a Being at the same time greater than the Self and yet identical with it.
Stace (1960) classifies mystical experience into two major types, these being alike in many ways, but also very different from each other, in that one is an experience of the world (extrovertive mysticism) and the other is an experience of unitary consciousness, in the absence of any contents of consciousness (introvertive mysticism). He derives a list of characteristics for each which shows how they are similar, but also different in important ways. As Stace says, they appear to be "two species of one genus" (p. 131).

**Extrovertive Mysticism**  
(nature mysticism)

| 1. The Unifying Vision—all things are One. |
| 2. The more concrete apprehension of the One as an inner subjectivity or life, in all things. |
| 3. Sense of objectivity or reality. |
| 4. Blessedness, peace, etc. |
| 5. Feelings of the holy, sacred or divine. |
| 6. Paradoxicality. |
| 7. Alleged by the mystic to be ineffable. |

**Introvertive Mysticism**

| 1. The Unitary Consciousness; the One, the Void; pure consciousness. |
| 2. Nonspatial, nontemporal |
| 3. Sense of objectivity or reality. |
| 4. Blessedness, peace, etc. |
| 5. Feelings of the holy, sacred or divine. |
| 6. Paradoxicality. |
| 7. Alleged by the mystic to be ineffable. |

( pp. 131-132)
It was Stace's belief that extrovertive, or nature mysticism was not a very deep or significant religious experience. In contrast was introvertive mysticism, which was long prepared for by religious and other exercises, and had long-lasting and profound effects on the life of the individual.

"Expanded" Mysticism

Many writers, studying various types of experience, have found it necessary to expand the definition of mysticism to include a broader range of experiences that are not "religious" in the classical sense, or mystical in the sense of the attainment of the Unitive Life through traditional contemplative methods. According to these writers "mystic" experience occurs in a bewildering variety of forms. Horne (1978) devised three scales of mystical experience upon which the various types of experience might fall. They range from serious to non-serious, from obtained to spontaneous, and from religious to nonreligious.

i) William James

In The Varieties of Religious Experience, James (1902) bases his discussions on a particular definition of religion,
"the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine" (p. 32).

James puts forth the argument that there is within the human consciousness "a sense of reality, of objective presence, a perception of what we may call 'something there,' more deep and more general than any of the special and particular 'senses' by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed" (p. 58).

According to James there are two ways for individuals to view life. There are the healthy-minded, whom he calls the "once-born," and the sick souls, who experience a discordancy or disunity and must be "twice-born" in order to be happy. He believes the union of the discordant selves may come gradually or occur abruptly, through various types of experiences. One of these experiences is the mystical experience.

James studied personal experience exclusively in his development of a description of mysticism. He discovered that the experience could be methodically cultivated or it could occur spontaneously in a variety of forms. He lists the following characteristics of mystical experience.

1. Ineffability. The experience defies expression. No adequate report can be given in words. It must be directly experienced and cannot be imparted or transferred to others.

2. Noetic Quality. The mystic experiences states of knowledge and insight into the depths of truth unplumbed by the intellect. He
experiences revelations and illuminations that are full of significance and importance and carry with them a sense of authority.

3. Transcienity. The experience cannot be sustained for long, one or two hours at the most. It can be reproduced in memory.

4. Passivity. During this type of consciousness, the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance and sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power. Memory of the content remains and a profound sense of its importance. (pp. 371-372)

It was James' belief that our normal waking consciousness is but one type of consciousness and that all about it lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We might go through life without being aware of them, until we apply the right stimulus and they appear in all their completeness. For James the keynote result of this occurrence was reconciliation. "It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity" (p. 379). Up until this point, the individual is conscious of his wrong part but also has a sense that there is a better part to him. When the solution arrives the individual identifies his real being with this germinal higher part of himself. "He becomes conscious that this higher part is conterminous and continuous with a MORE of the same quality, which is operative in the universe outside of him, and which he can keep in working touch with, and in a fashion get on board of and save himself when all his
lower being has gone to pieces in the wreck" (p.499).

ii) Richard Bucke

Bucke (1901) puts forth a theory that mysticism is a kind of salvation, in which members of the human race evolve to a new level of consciousness. He bases this on the fact that the history of man is simply the history of the evolution of new faculties one after the other. To other members of the race many of these might have seemed an impossibility or an absurdity before they were evolved. Bucke, therefore, believes that the attainment of cosmic consciousness awaits the whole race. At this stage of our evolution, there exist minds on all intermediate planes between self-consciousness and cosmic consciousness. This would explain the variety of types of experience. Bucke outlines the characteristics of the Cosmic Sense.

a) The subjective light.
b) The moral elevation.
c) The intellectual illumination.
d) The sense of immortality.
e) The loss of the fear of death.
f) The loss of the sense of sin.
g) The suddenness, instantaneousness, of the awakening.
h) The previous character of the man-intellectual, moral and physical.
i) The age of illumination.

j) The added charm to the personality so that men and women are always strongly attracted to the person.

k) The transfiguration of the subject of the change as seen by others when the cosmic sense is actually present. (p. 79)

Bucke compiled this list through studying his own experience, in which he felt himself wrapped around by a flame-coloured cloud, the experiences of friends and acquaintances, and of saints, mystics, poets, contemplatives and scholars found in the literature.

iii) M. Laski

As a result of her curiosity about ecstatic experience, Laski (1961) did an empirical investigation of ecstatic experience involving a questionnaire survey. Her respondents were from her personal network. As well as examining data from this questionnaire group, Laski collected texts for analysis from literary and religious sources. Data from the three groups were used in obtaining the results.

Laski chose to call the experience she was studying ecstasy because it "named a range of experience characterized by being joyful, transitory, unexpected, rare, valued, and extraordinary to the point of often seeming as if derived from a praeternatural source. . . . Ecstasy is applied to
experiences that are different from those we could expect in the normal course of events and different in seeming to lie outside the normal course of events" (pp. 5,6).

From the results of the analysis, Laski describes certain characteristics of the ecstatic experience.

1. Ecstasy is an experience which includes at least two of the following feelings of gain: "unity, eternity, heaven; new life, satisfaction, joy, salvation, perfection, glory; contact; new or mystical knowledge. . . . [The experience will also include at least one of the following:] loss of difference, time, place; of worldliness, of desire, sorrow, sin; of self; of words and/or images and/or sense; up feelings; inside feelings; light and/or heat feelings; enlargement and/or improvement feelings; liquidity feelings; feelings of calm, peace" (p. 42).

2. Ecstatic experience can be divided into two kinds according to the manner in which they are approached: withdrawal ecstasy (gradual loss of normal perception) and intensity ecstasy (momentary and tumescent).

3. Intensity experience can be divided into three kinds:
   i) adamic ecstasies: characterized by feelings of renewal, new life, another world, joy, salvation; a sense of both the self and the environment.

   ii) knowledge or knowledge/contact ecstasies: feelings of knowledge gained that can seem to dawn spontaneously or have been communicated by someone or something else.

   iii) contact/union ecstasies: feelings of union with someone or something else.

4. Intensity experience is almost always preceded by contact with a trigger (i.e., an object, event, idea).

5. Ecstatic experiences should not be valued for
the delight they give but for their beneficial results.

6. Ecstasy and the pursuit of ecstasy gives rise to values and ideals opposed to those usual in and even necessary for the social life of the community. These values are influential in contemporary social life.

7. Occurrence of physical events during ecstatic experience is frequently and consistently claimed.

8. The same person can have both withdrawal and intensity ecstasies. The same person may enjoy different kinds of intensity ecstasies.

Laski concludes that "ecstatic experiences must be treated as important outside religious contexts, as having important effects on people's mental and physical well-being, on their aesthetic preferences, their creativity, their beliefs and philosophies and on their conduct" (p.373).

iv) F. C. Happold

Happold (1963) defines mysticism in such a way as to extend the range of experiences beyond the advanced and rare state called Contemplation (The Unitive Life), attained by a few, to include a wide range of spiritual and aesthetic experiences which he maintains are of the same character and proceed from the same source. Happold believes a person may be a mystic who is not, and never could be called a contemplative. There come to many, sudden moments that reveal
new facets of reality with the more powerful, profound experiences happening perhaps once or twice in a lifetime. These experiences revolutionize an outlook or change a life. Although the individual might seem the same he is changed within himself and nothing can be the same again. These individuals might not call themselves mystics, but they are experiencing what the "Contemplatives" experience in a more intense and continuous form. Happold, therefore, accepts a wide range of experiences, not limiting his discussion to the rare "contemplative" type. He advances seven characteristics of mystical states.

1. Ineffability. It defies expression in terms which are fully intelligible to one who has not known some analogous experience. It thus resembles a state of feeling rather than a state of intellect.

2. States of Knowledge (Noetic Quality). They result in insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect, insights which carry with them a tremendous sense of authority. Things take on a new pattern. . . . Even though he may not be able to say, in the language of the intellect, what he knows, he . . . is convinced with absolute certainty that he knows.

3. Transcienity. They rarely last for any length of time. There is invariably a speedy return to normality. The following of a particular way of life can, however, increase their frequency [The Illuminative Life, The Mystic Way of St. John of the Cross; The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola] and it would seem make them more controllable.

4. Passivity. It is possible to prepare oneself for the reception of mystical experience [The Way of Purgation, The Spiritual Exercises], yet
when they occur they carry with them a feeling of something given . . . as if one were grasped and held by a power not his own.

5. A Consciousness of the Oneness of Everything. All creaturely existence is experienced as a unity, as All in One and One in All.

6. A Sense of Timelessness. [It is like one is in] a dimension other than clock time or any other sort of time . . . in a dimension where time is not.

7. The conviction that the familiar, phenomenal ego is not the real "I." There is another Self, the true Self, which is not affected by ordinary happenings . . . but is immortal, constant, unchanging and not bound by space-time. It is not only an individual self, it also has a universal quality. (pp. 46-48)

According to Happold, one does not go through this experience by choice.

No one chooses to be a mystic of his own volition. He must undergo some sort of experience which is of sufficient intensity to lead to an expansion of normal consciousness and perception, so that there comes to him a new vision of reality which dominates his life and thought. . . . The illumination may be gradual, almost imperceptible, or sudden and violent. If there is . . . a swift, overwhelming experience, it is usually preceded by and is the result of a long period of restlessness, uncertainty and mental stress. (p. 52)

v) James Horne

Horne (1978) describes mysticism as a process of personal transformation involving a visionary crisis, and occurring in a recognizable sequence in some lives. Horne understands the
serious mystic to be a person deeply involved with basic problems of a personal, religious or metaphysical nature. As a result, he goes through a "process of creative transformation of the personality, characterized by an intellectual, emotional or visionary illumination experience at its critical stage" (p. 37). This transformation is sought actively and does not just happen. This is true for both introvertive and extrovertive mysticism. In the case of the introvertive mystics, with their systematic methods of meditation and contemplation, the seeking is apparent. For the extrovertive mystics, the visionary experience seems to come unsought. There may be, however, "a considerable amount of deep personal preparation for an extrovertive experience, although it may be disorganized and unsystematic, and the mystic may not realize what he is doing" (p. 25). In both variations, extrovertive and introvertive, a recognizable process can be discerned, and it is this process which is for Horne the essential feature of mysticism. He suggests that there are actually three kinds of mystical experience: introvertive, induced extrovertive, and casual extrovertive, casual extrovertive referring to spontaneous experiences that have no effect on the life of the individual because they are unrelated to any of his problems and anxieties, or his attempts to cope with them.
Horne believes that mysticism is a frequently occurring process that can be recognized in ritual, in some kinds of psychotherapy, and in creative insights.

PSYCHIATRIC APPROACH

The Oxford Dictionary defines hallucination as "illusion; apparent perception of external objects not actually present." Random House Dictionary's definition states that hallucination is "a sensory experience of something that does not exist outside the mind . . . a false notion or impression."

In the fields of medicine and psychiatry, the presence of hallucinations in the individual has been considered a symptom of mental breakdown, drug and alcohol use, or organic illness. According to the Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Medicine, Nursing, and Allied Health, Third Edition (1983), a hallucination is "a sensory impression (sight, touch, sound, smell, or taste) that has no basis in external stimulation. Hallucinations can have psychologic causes, as in mental illness, or they can result from drugs, alcohol, organic illnesses, such as a brain tumor or senility, or exhaustion. When hallucinations have a psychologic origin, they usually represent a disguised form of repressed conflict" (p.483).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition [DSM III] (1980) of the American
Psychiatric Association sets out diagnostic criteria for the group of disorders commonly termed schizophrenia. It is stated that the illness will always involve, at some phase, delusions, hallucinations, or disturbances in the form of thought.

Diagnostic Criteria for a Schizophrenic Disorder

A. At least one of the following during a phase of the illness:

1) bizarre delusions (content is patently absurd and has no possible basis in fact), such as delusions of being controlled, thought broadcasting, thought insertion, or thought withdrawal.

2) somatic, grandiose, religious, nihilistic, or other delusions without persecutory or jealous content.

3) delusions with persecutory or jealous content if accompanied by hallucinations of any type.

4) auditory hallucinations in which either a voice keeps up a running commentary on the individual's behavior or thoughts, or two or more voices converse with each other.

5) auditory hallucinations on several occasions with content of more than one or two words, having no apparent relation to depression or elation.

6) incoherence, marked loosening of associations, markedly illogical thinking, or marked poverty of content of speech if associated with at least one of the following: a) blunted, flat, or inappropriate affect.
b) delusions or hallucinations.
c) catatonic or other grossly disorganized behavior.

B. Deterioration from a previous level of functioning in such areas as work, social, relations, and self-care.

C. Duration: continuous signs of the illness for at least six months at some time during the person's life, with some signs of illness at present. The six-month period must include an active phase during which there were symptoms from A, with or without a prodromal or residual phase, as defined below. . . .

Prodromal or Residual Symptoms

1) social isolation or withdrawal.

2) marked impairment in role functioning as wage-earner, student, or homemaker.

3) markedly peculiar behavior (e.g., collecting garbage, talking to self in public, or hoarding food).

4) marked impairment in personal hygiene and grooming.

5) blunted, flat or inappropriate affect.

6) digressive, vague, overelaborate, circumstantial or metaphorical speech.

7) odd or bizarre ideation, or magical thinking, e.g., superstitiousness, clairvoyance, telepathy, "sixth sense," "others can feel my feelings," overvalued ideas, ideas of reference.

8) unusual perceptual experiences, e.g., recurrent illusions, sensing the presence of a force or person not actually present.

D. The full depressive or manic syndrome. . . .

E. Onset of prodromal or active phase of illness before age 45.
SUMMARY OF APPROACHES AND DISCUSSION

Within the last 30 years there has developed, within Western Psychology, a "Third Force," which has emphasized developing a theory of human nature based on the study of experience. It concerns itself with "topics having little place in existing theories and systems; e.g., love, creativity, self, growth, organism, basic need-gratification, self-actualization, higher values, being, becoming, spontaneity, play, humor . . . ego-transcendence . . . meaning . . . transcendental experience, peak experience . . . and related concepts" (Maslow, 1970, p. 80).

Recognition of the vivid imaginal experience that transforms is a relatively recent development in Western psychology. Maslow (1968) takes a broad approach, looking at many experiences which are highlights in the human life, the visionary experience being one. From this group of experiences, he develops a list of characteristics of what he calls "peak-experiences" in human life. Maslow bases these characteristics on actual descriptions obtained from his subjects, believing that the starting point for obtaining knowledge rests on the personal, subjective experience of the
individual.

Maslow's description of the peak-experience opened up an area in psychology which led to a closer study of what it means to be human. Because he did not study the visionary experience in particular, its unique characteristics become part of a pot pourri of characteristics from many different types of experiences. The reality of this particular experience, with its many nuances and subtleties, and the impact it has on the life of the individual, is not brought into the open, made clear, and recognized as the important source of wholeness that it is.

In his study of "flow experience," Csikszentmihalyi (1975) was, like Maslow, attempting to isolate and discover the meaning of a human phenomenon that appeared very important to those who experienced it. Peak-experience and flow experience share many distinctive features, in fact, experiencing flow, for many, may be a peak-experience. Maslow gives a very detailed description of his subjects' inner experiences, whereas Csikszentmihalyi provides a more concrete explanation of what makes "flow" possible. The visionary experience is mentioned as an aspect of the flow experience, and is referred to as "deep-flow." It occurs in the "letting go" state after periods of flow. It would seem that flow and deep-flow are very different experiences. In flow, awareness and action are merged. During the letting go (relaxation)
state after flow, awareness returns and, in certain cases, this awareness is of a whole new Reality, that is, the visionary experience. It would seem appropriate that flow and deep-flow be studied separately.

In flow experience, action and awareness merge. One is aware of action, but not of awareness itself. According to Csikszentmihalyi, when awareness is split, and one perceives the activity from the outside, flow is interrupted. This is quite different from Watkins' (1976) approach to waking dreams and experiencing the imaginal. In this experience it is the very separating out of awareness that is required. One must become an observer of oneself (i.e., of one's mental flux), and then of the images that arise when one manages to still the mental activity and allow awareness to take over.

Although Watkins mentions the spontaneous visionary experience, her prime concern is with describing the process of experiencing the imaginal through the use of entry vehicles for the voluntary seeing of images in waking dreams. Beyond several brief references to the experience of the imaginal as transforming, Watkins does not discuss what the imaginal experience means to the individual. Her approach involves a description of how to experience waking dreams. Watkins gives the imaginal an important place, and sees the development of the "Third Force" in psychology as opening the doors to the acceptance of the imaginal in everyday life and in
psychotherapy. One could have an experience of the imaginal that could be called a peak-experience, but it would not be flow experience because awareness is maintained and of primary importance.

Although these three approaches within psychology have characteristics in common, as well as basic differences, none of them has taken the imaginal experience that results in transformation and looked at it in itself, for what it is and what it means to those who experience it.

Barely recognized in psychology, the visionary experience has, for the most part, been considered a part of the fields of religion and psychiatry. In western society, the vision and the hallucination are often considered synonymous. The hallucination is thought of in terms of psychopathology and degeneracy. In many other cultures, hallucinations are seen in a religious or spiritual context, and the ability to hallucinate is greatly respected (Starker, 1982). Perry (1977) suggests that "the attitude of society is in itself a decisive factor in the formation of the symptoms of psychopathology and also crucial to the probability that the person caught in the 'psychotically' altered states of consciousness will be regarded as saints or be sent downriver in the ship of fools, or be caged as beings regressed to the level of beasts or be held in awe as vessels of divine or demonic possession" (p. 12). In our western society, with its
rational, scientific world-view, it is more likely that visionary experience will be considered a psychotic rather than a spiritual experience. And even if it were considered a religious experience, it is questionable whether our culture would look on it with any less fear and distrust than it looks on the psychotic experiences.

Even to organized religion the visionary experience has been somewhat suspect. There is much attempt in the literature on mysticism to identify true mystics from "false" mystics. According to Underhill (1961), Zaehner (1959), and Stace (1960), the visionary experience is a lesser experience, perhaps occurring in the mystic on the way to the greater experience of attaining the Unitive Life. It might also occur spontaneously, in an isolated fashion, in the lives of individuals not seeking the Unitive Life in the disciplined fashion of the great mystics. Stace calls this experience "nature" mysticism or "extrovertive" mysticism and stresses that it is not as important as "introvertive" mysticism.

There has been an attempt made by various authors to extend the meaning of mysticism to include spontaneous experiences in individuals who are not on a disciplined search for the Unitive Life. The intent of these authors is to take the mystical experience out of the context of organized religion, and move it into the realms of small "r" religion and normal human psychological experience.
Through examining experiences, the authors establish lists of characteristics believed to be the basic criteria necessary to formulate a description of the experience. These lists tend to depend on the personal experience and beliefs of the author. For example, Bucke (1901) had a profound visionary experience which transformed his life. James (1902) did not experience this. As a result, James' list of four characteristics appears rather sparse compared to Bucke's eleven, which are dramatically coloured by his particular experience. Bucke felt himself to be wrapped in light, therefore he states that a characteristic of the Cosmic Sense is the experience of the subjective light. Happold (1963) bases a good portion of his list on James (1902). Characteristics on which all agree include a consciousness of the Oneness of everything, where all existence is experienced as a Unity, as All in One and One in All, and the attainment of a state of knowledge involving insight into the depths of truth not reached by the rational intellect. There is agreement that mystical experience (expanded definition) involves the experiencing of a state of consciousness, which allows the individual to see a different reality. This experience tends to be transforming in that individuals appear to gain tremendous insights that revolutionize their outlooks or change their lives in a way that might or might not be evident to others.
Horne (1978) also sees the necessity of seeing mysticism from a broader perspective. In looking at the classical definition of mysticism, he outlines the psychological process the mystic undergoes while following "The Mystic Way." After examining Stace's ideas of the two types of mysticism, introvertive and extrovertive, Horne continues to look more closely at extrovertive or spontaneous mysticism. He believes that serious people who have spontaneous visionary experience, are actually following the same psychological process as the introvertive mystics. That is, they experience very deeply a problem of life for which they are seeking a solution. The answer occurs with the visionary experience, after which the individual continues life with a profoundly transformed world-view.

Many of the studies of mysticism are tied to theoretical interpretation and are heavily couched in religious terms. These types of studies are one step removed from the experience itself, and concerned with interpreting it and classifying it into a particular type according to the religious background of the mystic. This approach looks at the experience from the outside and describes it in theoretical terms. The meaning of the experience seems to be irrelevant. Even those authors who attempt to describe mystical experience without interpretation, remove themselves from meaning. Their descriptions include lists of
characteristics of what the experience is, but ignore the meaning it holds for the individual.

The attempt to broaden the traditional definition of mysticism has helped move visionary experience from the domain of religion, into the realm of psychology, where it can be reclaimed as the human experience it is. The "Third Force" in psychology is only beginning to pay heed to and study the higher nature of human beings, that nature which is able to touch higher Realities and become more than what it was. This once "religious" experience is beginning to be seen as "human" experience. Although visionary experience is mentioned in several psychological studies, and forms a part of Maslow's important work, it has never been studied on its own. What happens to people when they have this experience? What meaning does it hold for them? This important source of transformation, growth and healing has yet to be studied from the point of view of those who experience it.

**THE EXISTENTIAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH**

What is needed is a fundamental description of the meaning of the vivid imaginal experience that results in positive and lasting transformation. To explore this human experience objectively requires a methodology that "remains with the experience as it is being experienced, one which
tries to sustain contact with experience as it is given" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 53). A reliable approach to the discovery of meaning is the existential-phenomenological method of description.

Existential-phenomenology looks at questions relating to human experience. It is a blend of two disciplines: existentialism, a philosophy which seeks to understand the human condition as it reveals itself in concrete, lived situations, and phenomenology, a methodology which allows contact with phenomena as they are actually lived out and experienced. Phenomenology is, therefore, an appropriate methodology for examining the content of existential philosophies.

The basic premise of existential-phenomenology is that the individual and his or her world co-constitute each other. One must have a context and it is through the context of the world that the meaning of one's existence emerges. The source of raw data for research is the "life-world." "By the 'life-world' phenomenologists mean the everyday world as it is lived by all of us prior to explanations and theoretical interpretations of any kind" (Giorgi, 1975, p. 99). This is the world as given in direct and immediate experience, the world as lived by the individual. There is nothing previous to one's direct experience of the world. It is, therefore, the basis of all knowledge.
Existential-phenomenology attempts to understand human life in a way that is as free as possible of cultural presuppositions. Because this aim of presuppositionless description is virtually impossible, the phenomenologist will explicate, as completely as possible, the assumptions that do exist. This will help him or her assume the vantage point of a transcendental attitude from which to view the data.

The goal of existential-phenomenology is to understand and explicate the structure of human experience and behaviour through descriptive techniques. The approach is concerned with understanding phenomena as they exist, and is not concerned with explaining, predicting or controlling. It asks the question "what?" and not "why?" The phenomenologist looks for the meaning of the experience by studying individual examples of that experience. The phenomenon reveals particular variations at different times, but has the same essential meaning when seen over time in many situations. The structure of a phenomenon is this commonality running through its many diverse appearances. "The task of the existential-phenomenological psychologist is one of disclosing the nature of structure in the form of meaning" (Valle & King, 1978, p. 17). The meaning is made explicit through disciplined reflection on the individual experiences and is disclosed through description.
Thematic analysis (Colaizzi, 1978) is a rigorous approach leading to a strong description of the meaning of a phenomenon. In this method, the phenomenologist becomes very familiar with the co-researcher's descriptions, called protocols. After he or she has acquired a sense of them, significant statements are extracted and a meaning is formulated for these statements. The phenomenologist must use creative insight to make explicit what is implicit in the data. The formulated meanings are organized into clusters of themes. An attempt is made to allow for the emergence of themes that are common to all of the protocols. The themes are validated by referring back to the protocols to ensure that all themes are implied in the original data. These results are written into an exhaustive description which describes the meaning of the experience in as complete a form as possible. A statement of the fundamental structure of the phenomenon is then formulated from the exhaustive description. The description is validated at various stages by returning to the co-researchers for verification and feedback.

The existential-phenomenological method involves "a refusal to tell the phenomenon what it is, but a respectful listening to what the phenomenon speaks of itself" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 52). This method is useful for understanding the meaning of a phenomenon as it exists in individual lives. As Colaizzi (1978) states, "Without thereby first disclosing the
foundations of a phenomenon, no progress whatsoever can be made concerning it, not even a first faltering step can be taken towards it, by silence or by any other kind of cognition" (p. 28).
In existential-phenomenological research, the subjects involved in the study are called co-researchers. The study of the phenomenon is viewed as a joint project where researcher and co-researcher collaborate to make sense out of the experience. This is based on the notion that the person who has had the experience is the expert. He or she is the cultural representative of the population of people who share that common experience.

Selection of co-researchers

To be selected for this study the co-researchers were required to meet a set of specific criteria. The co-researcher must have had a vivid imaginal experience that resulted in personal transformation. He or she has lived through the experience and has been able to reflect on its meaning. The co-researcher must be able to communicate this experience and must have enough distance from the experience to be able to talk coherently about it. All co-researchers
were required to be adults as opposed to children, as people who are adults have had more of an opportunity to experience the phenomenon. They also have more life experience and a greater vocabulary and are therefore more likely to be able to communicate their experience. The co-researchers were of a Western societal-cultural background as opposed to an Asian background. They were recruited through contacts within the researcher's personal and professional network.

Demographic information

This information was obtained after the interview process. It was not a basis for the selection of co-researchers.

The study began with five co-researchers, four females and one male. The analysis was completed using the protocols of only four of the five co-researchers interviewed. The fifth protocol, that of the male, was not used in the protocol analysis and the formulation of the themes.

B, who is presently 31, had a visionary experience when he was 13 years old. Although he is able to describe the experience factually, he has not reflected on the meaning the experience might have held for him. As an adult, he "resists thinking about it because [he has] problems believing that God is as loving as some people believe He is." He believes the
experience must have a special significance, but feels he's lost touch with that. "I don't feel that specialness anymore. . . . It's almost like I've forgotten how special it is, or lost touch with it. . . . I guess it's the meaning . . . what it must mean that I've lost. . . . I can attach an intellectual meaning to it . . . but it's like I've divorced my feelings from it." Because B was unable to capture the meaning of his experience, it was decided not to use his protocol in the analysis. It is included in the appendix.

When they had their experiences, the co-researchers ranged in age from 26 to 45 years. At the time of the interviews, the experiences had occurred from 1 year to 35 years earlier. All of the co-researchers had a college education. Their employment over the course of their lives included: editor, homemaker, travel consultant, therapist, teacher, researcher, arts consultant, economist. Two of the co-researchers come from the Jewish tradition, two from the Protestant tradition and one is Roman Catholic.

THE INTERVIEW

Each co-researcher was interviewed twice. The first interview elicited a description of the experience. The second was used to validate the themes that were extracted from the initial story.
The first interview

The co-researcher's story was gathered through interview. This method was chosen in order to access a detailed description of the experience as lived, and to gain a rich and vivid understanding of the experience.

The interview was unstructured to help elicit the story in a free, open and unbiased way. A preamble was read (see below) to the co-researcher, and then he or she was asked to describe the experience in the form of a story with a beginning, a middle and an end. The story was elicited with the aid of empathic responding, reflective listening, probing for meaning, paraphrasing, and asking for detail. The meaning of the experience was explored by staying close to the experience as described by the co-researcher and focusing on the meaning he or she gave to it. Information was also gathered by observing non-verbal behaviour. Additional research questions were asked, when necessary, to help elaborate the story further (see below). These questions were formulated from presuppositions of what the visionary experience is, uncovered during the review of the literature. Often the issues covered by these questions emerged spontaneously, therefore not all questions had to be asked.
Preamble

I am doing a study to understand the meaning of the vivid imaginal experience that is so powerful that it produces a lasting personal transformation. After this experience you are a different person and this difference stays with you. This visionary experience might be primarily visual, that is you see it, or auditory, you hear it, or kinesthetic, that is you feel it in your body. Because such an experience will occur in the context of a life situation, I would like you to think back to a time in your life when this happened, then describe the experience to me in as much detail as possible, as if you were telling me a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Be especially aware of your thoughts, your feelings, and your actions. You can begin where you are leading up to the experience.

Interview Questions

1. What was happening in your life at the time you had your experience?
2. What was your emotional state at the time?
3. Where did your experience occur? Was there anything special about this place?
4. Please describe your experience.
5. What did you do immediately after?
6. What about the experience made it special?
7. How did it make an impact on you? How were you different after?
8. Was your understanding immediate or delayed?
9. Did you share your experience with someone? Why? Why not?
10. How do you understand your experience now?

The Second Interview

The second interview was a validation interview, the purpose of which was to verify the themes extracted through the analysis of the protocols. The co-researcher had the opportunity to read the transcript of his or her first
interview and a description of the themes before the second interview. The co-researcher was asked if the transcript was accurate and if he or she wanted to add anything. Specific questions were asked to clarify and expand on meaning and to fill out the story as necessary. The rationale used in extracting the themes was explained. The co-researcher was asked to talk about each theme. During the ensuing dialogue, the co-researcher revealed how a description of a theme was true or not true to his or her particular experience. He or she was invited to suggest changes or additions that would make the theme more accurate and representative of the experience. The co-researcher was asked if anything that was an important aspect of his or her experience was missing.

PROCEDURE

The initial contact with the co-researchers was by telephone. The study was explained and an interview time arranged.

Before the interview, any questions the co-researcher had were answered and the consent form was signed. Some time was spent establishing rapport. The interview was audio-taped. The co-researcher was left to tell the story in his or her own way. Questions were asked when they seemed appropriate. The interviews were between one and two hours in length.
After the interview, the audio-tape was transcribed and put into typed copy. Confidentiality was maintained by using initials instead of names and erasing the tapes after the analysis was complete.

A protocol analysis was completed according to the Colaizzi method (1978).

Two weeks before the second interview, a description of the themes and a copy of the transcript were given to each co-researcher. The second interview was held for the purpose of validating the themes. These interviews were one to two hours in length. All occurred within 8 months of the initial interviews. Any changes or additions suggested by the co-researchers were incorporated into the description of the themes.

The themes were integrated into an exhaustive description of the experience. This was then summarized into a condensed structure to reveal the essential core of the experience.

ANALYSIS OF PROTOCOLS

The analysis of the protocols was done according to Colaizzi's method (1978, pp.59-62).

i) The transcripts were read and reread with the purpose of becoming very familiar with them, acquiring a feeling for them
and making sense of them.

ii) In each transcript, references pertaining directly to the experience were underlined. These significant statements were extracted from the transcript and written on index cards. When several protocols made the same or similar statements, the repetitions were eliminated.

iii) Meanings were formulated from each specific statement. This task involved making explicit what might be implied in the statement, moving beyond the statement, but remaining true to it. According to Colaizzi (1978), this involves "creative insight ... to leap from what subjects say to what they mean" (p. 59). This process of formulating meanings was repeated with each protocol. An attempt was made to use the co-researchers' words wherever possible.

Some meanings were already clear and explicit. The co-researchers made these statements while looking back at what their experiences had meant to them.

"And something I've held on to. In different times that always comes back to me very strongly."

"I find this [a mammogram] terrible and I remember that connection and just holding on to that."

"[It was] something I could hold on to ... something that would stay."

"I do dip into that experience as I would dip into a well, often."
The meaning here is clear. The experience remains a source of support that one can hold on to.

Other statements contained implied meanings. A certain amount of insight was required in deciding what meaning to attach to these significant statements. The co-researchers were describing what it was like for them just before their experiences.

"You're just lost."

"I was in a very peaceful state . . . as part of the meditation."

"I was just waiting . . . I was longing."

"[I had] a sense of being in unison with some whole natural process."

Although the descriptions were very different, the underlying meaning of the experience described appeared to be the same, a sense of openness and receptivity.

The cards containing significant statements with the same or similar meanings were filed together. An attempt was made to keep these groups in an order similar to their mention in the protocols.

iv) The groups of cards with common meanings were compared and similar meanings across groups were found. These groups were then collapsed down to one group, thus formulating similar meaning groups into clusters or themes that were common to all of the experiences. This was a further step in bringing forth
and making explicit what was implied in the data.

The following groupings of significant statements with similar meaning show the process of moving from groups of similar meaning to clustering these groups into a common theme.

**Group 1**

"The barriers are gone."

"What I have done is crashed through this barrier."

"I've cracked open a level in my own perception of what's real and what's possible."

**Group 2**

"That's one of the experiences in my life where I'm more open to believing the unbelievable."

"[I'm] more open to it happening."

"The difference now is that I know what the possibility is."

"I'm just as sure that there's some other level that I haven't seen yet."

**Group 3**

"That the here is much bigger, that reality is much greater than we usually are open to understanding."

"I have a deeper sense . . . my reality comes from a deeper lived experience of what the possibilities are for people."

"When you have this experience it's very uplifting and you get into a kind of transcendent perspective and that is very real."

**Group 4**

"I think that I'm more uncomfortable now with things that I might have accepted more easily before."
"It's for me worshipping graven images or sacred cows or anything other than the real thing."

"[I was] very very deeply pained seeing the logging up there... It felt like a physical scarring and I was pained by it personally and I found myself really sobbing."

The significant statements with similar meanings were placed into groups. These groups were compared to find a similar meaning across groups and then placed together in a cluster. All of the statements were studied and the meaning of the experience within that cluster was reflected on. In the example, the essence of the meaning of this theme seemed to be captured by the label "A sense of having gained a new level of perception."

When the clustering process was complete, the themes were described by drawing upon the significant statements and meaning groups within each cluster to formulate the description.

After the themes were formulated, they were validated by referring back to the original protocols. This was to ensure that the description was accurate and complete, not departing from the experience, nor leaving anything out. It was important to double check that the themes were common to all of the co-researchers' experiences.

v) The themes were organized into groups according to when they occurred in the experience and the meaning they held for
the co-researchers. Three groups were formed: Before the Experience, During the Experience, and After the Experience. The themes within each group were listed in approximate order of their occurrence. It was impossible to place themes in their exact order as many of them appear simultaneously during the experience.

**DESCRIBING THE EXPERIENCE**

**Exhaustive Description**

The themes were integrated into an exhaustive description of the experience. This description, which includes all of the themes, takes the form of a narrative, an abstract story which is true to all of the co-researchers' stories. The description follows the organization of the clusters of themes. The themes themselves were woven together into a whole to form a detailed account of the meaning of the experience. The description reveals the structure of the experience as fully and as clearly as possible.

**Essential Structure**

The exhaustive description was summarized to reveal the essential core or structure of the experience. This statement
directly addresses the question of meaning in as succinct and unequivocal a manner as possible.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

A SUMMARY OF THE CO-RESEARCHERS' EXPERIENCES

Case G

G was very pleased about being pregnant with her first child and was looking forward to the birth. She felt very involved with a natural process and spent much time during her pregnancy in nature. As she was having contractions during the delivery, she felt she was caught up in a cosmic rhythm and that she was involved in a huge contraction-expansion experience that was going on inside of her and outside of her. After a time this disappeared. The rest of the birth was a nightmare and the baby died. Even though everything went wrong, because of her experience of the cosmic rhythm, G felt she knew what childbirth really was, and felt supported by that during her grieving. Later in her life, G experienced depression and illness. After the assassination of President Kennedy, G supported her family and friends, but didn't take the time to deal with her own feelings. She spent several months confined to her bedroom where she often sat in a chair and looked at a dogwood tree outside her window. After a
time, she noticed she was looking at one branch of the tree. One day, she had the sense she could join in the life of the branch. She knew what it was like in all seasons. It was as if she was the branch. After this experience, G was able to begin living again. She wrote a series of stories which helped her uncover her pain and anguish.

Case C

For C, life had been difficult for many years. She lived a charade, pretending that problems didn't exist within her marriage. She felt she had to keep up the appearance of being a good wife and mother and that it was her responsibility to keep the family unit together. On the outside she lived a life of pretense, while her inner self cried out for help. The real person inside was thoroughly imprisoned. As the stress of keeping up the facade increased, C decided to attend a weekend workshop on meditation with several hundred people. While there and watching all of those animated, alive people, she felt she was looking in at an aquarium and that she wasn't a real person like the rest. A friend happened to say something that struck a nerve and C began to weep uncontrollably. A parade of past memories of painful situations passed before her eyes. This went on for several hours along with the terrific sobbing. She felt totally lost
and exhausted when she finally fell asleep. During the night C awoke and realized she was totally relaxed and very aware. Around her bed were standing nine men, four along the side and five grouped at the end. The four C recognized, her meditation instructor, Maharishi, Moses and Jesus. She didn't recognize the other five. C felt from them total love, acceptance and support. They were the ultimate in beauty and wisdom and the opposite of the artifice she'd been living. After a time, they disappeared and she slept a bit. C awoke feeling like she was totally new. She felt the union of her inner and outer selves, and now experienced life as real because she was doing the living of it and not pretending.

Case S

For S, several difficult events occurred at the same time in her life. Her husband, from whom she was separated, announced a decision to move east. As well, she had a painful disagreement with her advisor at university. It was the first anniversary of her father's death and the anniversary of a suicide attempt she'd made five years earlier. She was very aware of the spring and the Easter and Passover seasons. In the face of all this, S found herself withdrawing from everything and everybody. She felt tremendous alienation and disconnection and spent several weeks alone. During that
time, S found herself longing for a connection. She felt the need to go inside, to get away from the externals and to be spirit. She did a lot of crying that felt healing. After several weeks of this, S awoke during the night to feel a power and a presence in her room. She felt it in her body first, and then she saw the light. It was radiating from the ceiling and was extremely beautiful and powerful. She felt afraid of the power and asked for help not to be afraid. She felt a warmth and a peacefulness spread throughout her body. She dialogued with the light, forming questions in her mind. What she got was a tremendous feeling of affirmation going through her body, a feeling of being affirmed, blessed and loved. It was like an outpouring. The power was outside of her and inside her at the same time, and she felt enfolded in it. Tears of happiness poured out of her. At a certain point S felt she could get up. She didn't want to break the connection, but needed to go to the bathroom. In a matter of days, S was reconnecting with the people in her world. She experienced that summer a deep sense of wholeness and connection, even though there were difficult things happening.

Case H

Several months after the split of her marriage, H decided to go on a camping trip alone. One of her issues had been
never having or taking the time alone that she needed. Taking this trip was a way of proving to herself that she could be alone and that she could take care of herself. She journeyed into the mountains to a lodge, where she stayed in a cabin by herself. She played with the idea of taking a backpacking trip alone, but was afraid of bears. She turned down the opportunity of going with another woman and finally made a decision to do it alone. She found out what she could from the local people about how to handle herself in bear country. H set out on her trip using what she had learned. She walked as silently as she could and constantly scanned for potential danger. Every once in a while fear would rise up in her and grip her. Each time this happened she would move it through her by reading something in her book of psalms or by meditating on the Hebrew alphabet. The second day out, H had been hiking for several hours in this meditative, focused state. Somewhere in that time she heard music. She turned to see where it was coming from and realized that it was coming from the hills, from nature. She knew, in that moment, that music comes from the earth itself. Everything in the universe has its song. After a time the music faded and she continued with her hike. H doesn't remember living in a place of fear after that moment. She spent several days at the lake at the top of the mountain and then returned. On her return flight home, H found herself profoundly affected by the logging she
saw on the mountains. She felt physical pain for the scarring of nature.

THE INTERVIEWS

The initial interviews were between one and two hours in length. The co-researchers talked of the importance of sharing their experiences, and the importance of studies done in this field. They told their stories with a seriousness and an involvement that was portrayed in their voices and mannerisms. At times they were very alive, joyful and animated, showing delight in what they had experienced. At other times, their voices were quiet and quivered as they talked of a moving moment. There was often a struggle for words as they searched for an accurate description of their experiences.

The co-researchers, in their individual ways, relived the experience in the telling. They had joyful faces and glowing eyes as they talked. There were long silences as they focused inward and re-experienced their special moments.

For S, the reliving of her experience through the telling was powerful. She felt again the feelings in her body of pain, longing, and joy, and her tears were once again tears of release and happiness. S appeared to use the interview to contact her experience and again feel its healing. By the end
of the interview, she was calmer and was speaking in a stronger voice.

The validation interviews were between one and two hours in length. They occurred within eight months of the initial interviews. The co-researchers were given copies of their transcripts and the themes two weeks before the interview.

The co-researchers were excited by the second interview. They were very appreciative of the fact that others had sensed the same themes and felt a common bond with them. The air was one of cooperation and collaboration. There was on-going dialogue as the rationale used in arriving at the themes was explained. The process was one of clarification and expansion of the meaning of the experience. The co-researchers were relaxed, open, and willing to share. They seemed pleased to be involved in the validation process and were straightforward and helpful.

The validation interview with H was interrupted by an unhappy event. Her dog was hit by a car and killed. As we moved the dog into the yard, H, in tears, repeated several times that it was good we'd been talking about her experience and that this was how she used it, for strength and comfort at times like this. The interview was completed the following week.

G was very excited at the beginning of the second interview and began sharing her thoughts immediately. At the
end of the interview she brought out wine and cheese. For her, an important part of the process was a celebration of the sharing and of the work that was being done.

S was very anxious to talk about what the initial interview and reliving her experience had meant to her. What was important for her was sharing her journey, and, in so doing, further clarifying the meaning of her experience.

Changes were made according to the input received from the co-researchers as they discussed and elaborated on the themes. It was pointed out that the language used in the description of the context of the experience and the early themes did not allow for the more positive experiences, such as childbirth, or for freely chosen situations, even though these might also be difficult and painful experiences. These different possibilities were included in the final description of the themes.

When discussing the theme entitled "A sense of universality," some of the co-researchers felt that it was more than that, more than feeling the interconnectedness of the universe. It was a sense of having touched the Absolute. This was included in the description and the title of the theme was changed to "A sense of having touched something more."

There were discussions around the themes "Happiness," "Peacefulness" and "Beauty." It was decided that these themes
should encompass a range of feeling, as each one was experienced in a different way by each co-researcher. For example, "One feels a deep sense of peace" was changed to "Some will experience a quiet calm while others feel a deep sense of peace."

The final theme was originally entitled, "A sense of living with a duality," and described one as left oscillating between two worlds, the spiritual and the earthly, and struggling to bring the two together without sacrificing one for the other. This theme brought much discussion. Upon closer exploration with the co-researchers, during which they further described and clarified their experiences, it was discovered that there were actually two themes occurring. First of all, one finds oneself increasingly moving towards environments where one can feel free to be and to live out one's personal truth. This helps to eliminate the struggle that occurs when one finds oneself in nonreceptive environments and having to protect the experience. A theme, "A sense of the need for supportive environments" was formulated. The final theme became "A sense of life being more." One feels called or directed to bring more into perception, to realize more of the truth, and to live out this truth. One recognizes one's personal journey of discovery and lives in a state of openness and questioning.
All of the co-researchers verified each theme as being a part of their experience and further suggested the changes described above. These changes were incorporated into the final description of the themes.

THE THEMES

The themes were formulated through the process of a protocol analysis done according to Colaizzi's method. This process involved becoming very familiar with the individual stories (protocols) and, through disciplined reflection, extracting significant statements. These were written on file cards. A meaning was formulated for each significant statement. The implicit meanings were drawn out and made explicit. Cards with similar formulated meanings were grouped together. This grouping process was repeated and the groups of formulated meanings that were similar were clustered together to form a theme. This theme had to be true to all of the co-researchers' experiences. Each story might be likened to a variation of a theme. Underlying the differences is a common thread running across the stories.

The meaning of some significant statements was explicit and the theme easy to formulate.

"My net impression was one of the strength that's there to support you when you need it."

"I'm not alone here in the universe."
"Total acceptance, total understanding, love like I've never known."

"What I got was this tremendous sense of affirmation."

"I got strength."

In this case, the co-researchers felt supported, strengthened and affirmed. The formulated theme was "A sense of being supported and empowered."

Other themes were more difficult to formulate as the meaning was more implicit in the data.

"It's sort of like a maturing experience."

"It's changed me."

"I found my own growth and my own spontaneity."

The implication here is that as a result of the experience one changes, grows and matures. One becomes more than what one was.

"It acts more like getting born, like coming out of the uterus, the sickroom being a big uterus."

"For me it was quite totally new. It was like a rebirth experience, a coming out of the dark and becoming new."

"It's all new."

In these statements one experiences the world and oneself as new. One has a sense of beginning. The experience is like rebirth.

The essence of the meaning of these two groups of statements is similar. Because one has had an experience of touching something more, one feels that one is more than what
one was. This might involve either feelings of newness or maturing. The final formulation of the theme was "A sense of an elevation in one's nature."

The themes should be viewed as the common threads that run through the diverse experiences of the co-researchers. The experience, as a whole, has been broken into parts (themes), examined closely and described. However, the themes must not be looked on as separate unto themselves. They are parts of a whole and occur in the context of each other.

The themes are grouped into clusters that reveal the experience as clearly as possible. They are organized according to the meaning they hold for the co-researchers. An attempt was made to follow an order, but this varies with the individual experience. The themes often occur together or overlap each other. They are intimately related to each other, forming interconnected parts of a whole. The length and depth of involvement of a co-researcher with a theme will also vary according to the individual, but each theme accurately represents the experience of each of the co-researchers.

Clusters of Themes

Before the Experience

1. A sense of being consumed by the issue.
2. A sense of something more.
3. A sense of being drawn.
4. A sense of being in isolation.
5. A sense of being deeply involved and intent.
6. A sense of giving in to the full experience of one's feelings.
7. A sense of openness.

During the Experience
1. A recognition of being within the experience.
2. A sense of the involvement of one's total being.
3. A sense of intuitive understanding.
4. A sense of contact with something more.
5. A sense of awe and naturalness.
6. A sense of being supported and empowered.
7. A sense of happiness.
8. A sense of peacefulness.
10. A sense of the experience gradually fading.
11. A sense of ineffability.
12. A sense of being honoured and blessed.

After the Experience
1. A recognition of emerging from the experience changed.
2. A sense of having gained a new level of perception.
3. A sense of reconnecting with life at a deeper level.
4. A recognition that the experience becomes a lived out truth.
5. A sense of an elevation in one's nature.
6. A sense of opposition resolved.
7. A sense of the enduring quality of the experience.
8. A sense of the ultimate wisdom of the experience.
10. A sense that one must be protective of the experience.
11. A sense of the need for supportive environments.
12. A sense of life being more.
Description of the Themes

The Context of the Experience:

This experience occurs in the context of one facing a challenge of existence. For some people this challenge is a momentous turning point, a pivotal place, where one is undergoing a transition. This point of transition might involve a positive experience. For G, it was pregnancy and the birth of her first child. "I was very joyous at being pregnant. I felt quite confident in having the baby. And when I started having contractions I felt very good about that. I wasn't the least bit worried. In fact, I felt like I was doing what I was meant to do."

Another's situation might involve much emotional pain. C describes herself as being "imprisoned in concrete for so many years," her sense of stuckness was so complete. "Everything was as I had learned at my mother's knee, so to say. How to behave with people and what to say in the right situations, perfectly mannered and all the rest. Whereas the real person underneath this all was crying out . . . more than crying out. I mean I had sunk so low I was looking up at the bottom." C felt she was being torn apart. She could readily relate to a news story of the day describing how an astronaut on a space walk had been cut adrift. "[He was] floating in the universe,
until of course his body would just die. The despair that that man must have felt I can totally understand. . . . That was exactly how I felt, that death was imminent. . . . I was desperate and there was no light at the end of the tunnel."

Other people find themselves facing a major problem that life has thrust upon them, where their experience might be one of agonizing pain, intense fear, depression or alienation. At the breakup of her marriage, H made a decision to be gentle with herself and to trust her inner voice as to what she needed. "It was a big decision to take a camping trip on my own. . . . At times in my marriage and the split of my marriage, an ongoing issue for me had been never having or taking the kind of time and space to myself I felt I needed." H needed to know that she could be alone and be okay. "I needed to find out if I could be by myself and take care of myself." She explains that on the camping trip her fear to do this was "really embodied in the bear, which ultimately is death."

For S, several issues came together at once and she found herself overwhelmed. She mentions her father's death which had occurred the previous year, a suicide attempt she'd made several years earlier, Passover time and the rekindling of her Jewish heritage, a hurtful disagreement with her faculty advisor over her work, and a decision by her husband, from whom she was separated but still cared for, to move east. "I
was going through a real down time and I couldn't really understand what was happening to me. I'd never been through anything before exactly like that and I was feeling more and more down."

One might attempt to meet this challenge in many ways. One person might deny or ignore what is happening. Another might struggle desperately to maintain control, and yet another might attempt to remain rational and analytical and rise above the problem. C describes herself as "image-keeping." Her life was pretense. "[I was] pretending that the problems didn't exist in order to carry on what was expected of me as a wife, mother and citizen. . . . I was behaving in a manner that was expected of me, a presentation of behaviour patterns that I was to live up to."

Some might attempt to meet the issue head on. For H, it was a matter of developing her connection with herself. "I wanted to push the limits of my strength and test it more. . . . I wanted to take my existential challenge of existence and concretize it."

Another way one might deal with difficulty is to become ill. G describes her experience right after the assassination of President Kennedy. "I'd been very depressed. . . . I got sick and I just didn't seem to get well. All I had was a heavy sinus infection, but I kept running a fever, and I had to take antibiotics. . . . I couldn't seem to pull myself out
of it."

But no matter how one attempts to help oneself, or over what period of time, the struggle continues. At best, one can succeed only to a certain point and the essence of the problem remains. At worst, one feels hopelessly stuck and so overwhelmed by the problem that one feels one's very existence is threatened.

BEFORE THE EXPERIENCE

1. A sense of being consumed by the issue

The challenge or problem becomes intensified or heightened by some event and one becomes steeped in the issue. It is as if all facets converge and the problem is brought into overwhelming focus. For S, her sense of disconnection and alienation were heightened by the events of that spring. Even the time of year, the spring, brought associations with Passover and the Easter story which is "death and rebirth." S felt that her struggle was linked with that. "It seemed to me I was living out something like that . . . but it was almost like I was living it out in a very personal way." In the face of all of this, S felt lost. "I just didn't know who I was or where I was going anymore, and I came to a point where I just could not do anything."
The attempt C made to help herself was to attend a weekend retreat on meditation. "I had the sensation that everybody was normal but myself. Why were they able to laugh spontaneously and joke with each other? It was a very obvious non-pretense and I having done theatricals all my life . . . I was envious that people could feel as relaxed and animated. . . . All the negative feelings I was experiencing in reference to that especial weekend were almost heightened because the envy was at its peak." C was totally focused, totally consumed by this issue. "I could sort of feel myself crying inside, crying for this person that was imprisoned and yet this outer person who was going through all the outer manifestations of looking joyful . . . was just a wonderful performance, but I was not able to help the inner person."

Both S and C experienced a sense of stuckness, powerlessness and alienation that left them feeling unsupported and alone.

Some people might take a more active role and place themselves in a situation to heighten the issue purposefully, as H did. While on the camping trip, H decided to go backpacking alone. Her experience of fear was heightened even more by the hiking trip. "Every once in a while fear would just flare up inside." Everything she did was designed to deal with this fear. H was able to continue striving in her particular manner to meet the demands of the situation.
It is not whether one frames the issue in terms of stuckness and powerlessness, as opposed to striving that matters. In all cases one does what one is able to do or has to do, but the issue continues to dominate one's being and to consume one's energy and attention.

2. A sense of something more

In the midst of this issue, one desperately wants to rely on something else. One has the sense that one cannot do it all, that one cannot fix the problem directly. H tried to deal with her fear by meditating on the Hebrew letters and reading from her Book of Psalms. "I would take out my Book of Psalms whenever I wanted to. I didn't question myself about it, like this is stupid to be scared. And I'd let it fall open at random. It's sort of like an oracle. That's what I need to read right then. There would always be some very powerful message." To carry on with the hike, H used what strength she had and then looked elsewhere for more. "I was tuning in to the God within and using every tool I could to go beyond the smallness of my fear."

C was not able to help her inner self and in her desperation was crying out inside, "Dear God help me." In her exhaustion, after hours of crying, her sense of need for something more was at its height. "Oh my God I've blown it.
How could I have done this to myself? How did I get into this space? What do I do? Where will I go? I mean, who will I ask?"

For S, the need for something more was powerful. When she first began to feel overwhelmed she paid much attention to dreams. "I think what I was hoping for was some kind of dream that would give me a sense of direction. I did get that."


Out of this longing to rely on something other than oneself, one begins to think that there might be something more than is presently recognized and available in one's life.

3. A sense of being drawn

There comes a point where one can struggle no longer and one allows oneself to surrender control. S struggled with her work and her feelings without making any progress. "I found I wasn't able to work and I had to stop. I just came to a point where I could not do anything."

In the midst of the large social gathering, where C felt at the height of her struggle, she could no longer carry out her "charade" while she conversed with a friend. "She just made an observation, but as it passed me by it hit something
deep within and it was like an inner explosion. I just fell apart."

One has a sense of entering into a process, but does this without knowledge of the process and without effort. Entry is unplanned and involuntary. One stops struggling and begins to react as if instinctively, giving in to a natural inclination and going with one's feelings. For S, her inability to work and sense of withdrawal were disconcerting. "I couldn't really understand what was happening to me. I'd never been through anything before exactly like that."

During childbirth, G had a sense of being a part of a process. "I really didn't have any control over [the process], I just had to go with [it] . . . I don't know what it came out of. There's no way of knowing."

H worked hard at putting herself into an environment where she could experience being alone and facing the unknown. "[I did it] without knowing how that was going to happen, so in that sense, the expectations weren't sharply defined. If all I'd done was stayed in the woods and come back, knowing I'd cut my own wood for a week and painted some pictures, I'd have known I could be by myself and take care of myself. . . . It wasn't like I was trying to create that special experience. I was just trying to keep myself above fear."

It is as if one is being drawn or led into something else, and one does this without questioning, doing what one
has to do. While on her hike, H experienced her fear and dealt with it in several ways. "I didn't question myself about it, like this is stupid to be scared." H did what she had to do.

S also did what she had to do, in her case, withdrawing from everything and everybody. "At first it was instinctive. I just did not know what I was doing. I was led, just led, in a very kind of instinctive way."

4. A sense of being in isolation

One places oneself, either purposefully or unconsciously in isolation, removed from the mainstream of life. H actively sought time alone. "It was a big decision to take a camping trip on my own. . . . I went and stayed in a cabin by myself for four or five days." H took this even further when she turned down an opportunity to go backpacking with another woman. "I went through a big decision . . . and I thought about it and just didn't feel just right about going with her." She chose to face her ultimate fear, the bears, alone.

S also chose to isolate herself. "I wanted silence. I felt I had to be alone. . . . I guess I spent three weeks just being alone."

When G experienced depression after the assassination of Kennedy, she isolated herself by becoming ill. "I'd sit by my
bedroom window and look out of the window." She describes herself as being "confined physically, emotionally and mentally." During her childbirth experience, confinement was out of necessity. For G, "it was a very lonely experience" as she spent a long time alone in the labour room.

One experiences a sense of withdrawal from everything and everybody. This is characterized by focusing in and paying attention to one's inner world. For S, the sense of alienation and the need to focus were strong. "I wanted a connection because I was feeling so cut off and alienated... I felt I had to be alone. I had to be spirit and I had to get away from external things."

For C, the sense of isolation and alienation occurred in the midst of a large group of people. "I felt like someone looking in at an aquarium. I wasn't a participant in the body of people. I felt very much like an observer and that life was passing me as a parade. But these people were behaving like people, and I didn't feel like a people. I felt myself, the 'self,' had been imprisoned in concrete for so many years. ... I was incredibly alone." From this isolated position, C was powerfully aware of her inner world. "I could feel myself crying inside, crying for this person that was imprisoned and yet this outer person that was going through all the outer manifestations."
5. A sense of being deeply focused and intent

One is in an intent focused state which is maintained over a period of time. During her illness, G was confined to her bedroom. She spent many weeks sitting in a chair looking out of the window. "And I wasn't even aware at first really, of noticing this tree ... and then gradually, I realized I was looking at the branch of the tree."

It is as if one's senses or emotions are heightened and one is totally absorbed by this experience. For C, the weekend of the retreat filled her with envy, tension and fear. "All the negative feelings that I was experiencing in reference to that especial weekend were almost heightened because the envy was at its peak. ... I just kept getting worse and worse throughout the first day and a half." This depth of focus was intensified as C experienced the "inner explosion" where she fell apart. "The weeping went on for four and a half hours, so I let it happen. ... It's a total involvement. ... I was so involved with this implosion, where many of my past problems I could see passing before my eyes and dissipating." This letting go was not enough, however, and the focus was maintained. "And yet I recall too, going to bed still troubled."

H planned several ways of dealing with her fear on the backpacking trip. She walked silently. "You get your body .
very centered to walk like that." She was "always scanning visually and staying focused that way." To keep her from being scared she would meditate on the Hebrew alphabet. "I was very focused and intent. The whole thing was a real meditation for me. I must have been hiking in that space for at least a couple of hours."

S found her focus heightening over time. "At first it was a matter of just being there and focusing on it . . . then becoming more and more focused, focusing more closely as time went by and paying more and more attention to myself in a deep way."

6. A sense of giving in to the full experience of one's feelings

One gives in to the full experience of the problem. In this experience of letting go, feelings are expressed and vented. Emotion is allowed to grow to a fullness as one enters into and experiences one's feelings. This happened for C as she was talking to a friend. "While we chatted, something she remarked just happened to loosen up. It struck a nerve and I started to weep. I just fell apart. I was in such pain." C experienced a "parade of past memories, ugly experiences, hideous conversations, threatening situations" which went on for several hours. "The very shattering sobbing
continued, almost wondering if you'd be able to draw another
breath." C felt compassion for herself. "[I was] kind of
feeling sorry for the poor person that had been through that.
It was like watching a death of myself in those years. It was
like seeing that poor little thing die again and more of this
sobbing, a grieving kind of thing." C found this experience
strengthening. "It was really a purging. I was now able to
unite the two halves of myself just a little bit. Yet I
recall too going to bed still troubled. I recall the physical
position when I crawled into bed just all rolled up in fetal
position and still sobbing. And I dare say, I sobbed myself
to sleep."

For H, it was a matter of consciously putting herself
into a situation where she could experience the depth of her
feelings, in this case her fear. "I walked into the center of
my fear, putting myself into something that would provoke it
at a very deep level. And yet the exercise was of not giving
in to it totally because had I given in to it, I wouldn't have
gone out on the hike. I'd have turned around midway. So it
was an exercise in creating a new emotional experience so that
in some way I'd have mastery over it. . . . But I used tools
to help me. . . . So I would be for a moment paralyzed by that
fear, because I'd entered into it. I fully experienced it in
moments, then moved past it. Every time I felt that wave of
fear I'd read a psalm or move it through me."
S profoundly experienced her sense of disconnection from the important areas of her life. "I read something in T.S. Elliot and it was these lines in particular:

'Suffer me not to be separated and let my cry come unto thee.'

I wanted something so badly. It had to do with my father. It had to do with L's leaving. It had to do with my work. It had to do with . . . a sense of . . . reconnection with something. . . . I remember doing a whole lot of crying at this time, and it's not something that I do easily. It was sadness. And I think it was probably healing. It was just a lot of tears."

While in labour, during the delivery of her first child, G fully entered into the birth process. "I was very joyous at being pregnant. . . . I felt quite confident in having the baby and when I started having contractions I felt very good about that. I wasn't the least bit worried. In fact, I felt like I was doing what I was meant to do. I was doing the breathing that I'd learned to do. That was almost unconscious." Because G felt she was "in unison with some whole natural process," she was able to let go and fully experience giving birth.

7. A sense of openness
As one gives up control and fully expresses one's feelings, one experiences a state of openness. One feels exposed or revealed and simply allows what is to be. S felt "opened up." It was like she was saying, "Here is all I am. Here is what I am. I can just be and not do anything else." In this vulnerable yet receptive state there is no longer any attempt to manage or cope. "I was aware of my incompleteness, my partialness, that my being depends on something else. That's part of the vulnerability. . . . I wanted something so badly. I was longing. I had a real sense of longing for a connection. . . . It was more than a prayer. It wasn't just a prayer. My whole life was that." One is undistracted and totally present. For S, what was important was "quietness and just allowing."

For C, the experience after hours of crying was one of being "emotionally and mentally fatigued . . . just a limp dishrag." Her feeling of being lost, uncertain and in need of help was intense. She was vulnerable and open. "What's going to become of me? What's going to happen to me next? Where do I go from here? What a waste my life has been. Can one begin again? I was at a transition point from being locked into concrete but not knowing how, what, where, why, when of my life . . . just, I've blown it. Is it possible to rebuild. . . . You're just lost. Here you are, this little bird that's been forced out of the nest and you don't know where to fly."
You're unsure you can fly. . . . Oh my God, I've blown it. What will I do? Who will I ask?"

As H was placing herself in her fear and moving it through her, she was aware of her vulnerability. "I was revealing myself to myself. There wasn't a lot of self-deceit. You're revealing who you are in all that vulnerability." H chose ways of dealing with her fear that allowed her to simply "be" within her environment. She was totally present. "I was already aware of how at one I was feeling. It was like that was really what I was doing. To conquer my fear of the bears and to be unobtrusive meant becoming as much in harmony with my environment as I could. That was my role, or my way of being there. . . . I was in a very peaceful state . . . as part of the meditation."

DURING THE EXPERIENCE

1. A recognition of being within the experience

There is a moment when the reality of what one is experiencing takes hold. As H was hiking in the mountains, she was maintaining her focused, meditative state. "And somewhere during that period I heard music. I can't remember the first instant of it. I remember the fullness of it. The most vivid part that I do remember is the moment where I
recognized the largeness of what I was experiencing. . . . It seemed like it was coming from outside of myself from the hills."

As G sat by her bedroom window, she gradually realized she was watching a particular branch of the dogwood tree. "And one day I had the sense . . . I could participate in the life of that branch. I knew what it was like in the spring, what it was like in the fall, and what it was like now, all through the year. It was as if I was the branch." The realization occurred gradually. "Gradually opening my eyes, and gradually focusing and gradually entering into life through that branch of the tree. . . . It's mainly visual imagery as I experience it."

It is as if one is observing or witnessing the experience as well as being involved within it, thus one might be absorbed by the experience and at the same time be aware of one's surroundings or the passage of time. S was both witness to and participant in her experience with light. "What I felt was a presence. It was outside of me. I could see the light outside me. I could feel the presence outside me. I could feel something going on inside me and outside me at the same time." Even though deeply involved, S was still aware of her basic needs. "It felt like it was going on for a long time. At a certain point I thought it's okay to get up. I needed to go to the bathroom. I really needed to go. I didn't want to
break this connection, but at a certain point, I thought I can get up."

C was also very much observing what was happening as well as participating in it. Her description of what was happening was very clear. "I remember waking, eyes wide open, just bang, but no startle. My mind was in the room and very aware that it was awake. But the body was flat out on its back, with a Cheshire grin on its face and my hands folded, like a pious saint, across my chest. I just had that quiet, put together feeling. And then of course I looked and there were these nine people, these bodies around my bed. Four of them I recognized and the five at the end of the bed, I didn't... It was the most marvelous feeling."

One has such a powerful sense of vividness and reality, that one would never doubt or deny the experience. S accepts her experience as fact. "I know this light, this experience with light was a reality. I could never deny that reality. It's a fact for me."

H felt the vividness of the experience. "I didn't doubt my experience. It was too vivid for me to doubt. It was very real. It didn't feel like I was imagining it. It didn't feel like I was dreaming it. It didn't feel like a waking hallucination."

For C, it was the owning of the experience that was important. "I knew it was mine and that it was real."
2. A sense of the involvement of one's total being

One's total being is involved, focused and absorbed in what is being experienced. H was "just too into it, like listening to it, to evaluate it. . . . It was so total."

For G, her "total consciousness is totally focused and absorbed."

One has the sense that all of one's self, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual, is captivated by the experience. For S, the experience came in a total way. "It came in a total way. . . . It was just going right through me, right through my whole mind, through my body, being blessed and affirmed and loved."

One is taken by the experience and can in no way manipulate it. C felt the power of the experience. "I had the feeling that there was another force in the universe. It was just beyond a control. It was mesmerizing. It was powerful. It was totally engrossing."

3. A sense of intuitive understanding

One intuitively understands what is happening, instinctively knowing in the depths of one's being what the experience is and means. S knew immediately what she was experiencing. "As soon as I felt it, I had a sense of knowing
what it was. I had a sense that this is . . . that whatever this is, it's what I was looking for. It's what I was waiting for."

For C, knowing took the form of an inner recognition. "It was a complete recognition of the reality, the zenith of truth in light, the zenith of wisdom, the zenith of beauty. More an inner experience than an outer observation."

For G, it was also an inner intuitive sense of knowing. "It's my consciousness that's feeling it. It's a consciousness that doesn't reproduce itself somatically. . . . I don't doubt my own intuition. If it doesn't make sense it doesn't matter. It doesn't have to come through the senses, in the sense of making sense visibly or audibly."

For H, the understanding was immediate and complete. "I understood intuitively, instinctively, immediately that the music was coming from nature and that the music was coming from the hills. . . . I understood in that moment when I was understanding whatever I was understanding, that music comes from everything."

4. A sense of contact with something more

One has a sense of making contact with something more. For some, this is a sense of universality, a sense of the inter-connectedness of the universe. For others, it is the
sense of having touched an Absolute power. For all, it is a sense of a breaking through and contacting a power that is Absolute and universe wide. One feels in unison with something bigger and that one belongs. For S, it was the sense of the Absolute. "That's what I knew, that that was an Absolute Power." S experienced the sense of becoming part of something bigger, through the breaking down of the concept of outside and inside. "It was outside of me. I could see the light outside of me. I could feel that presence outside of me. I could feel something going on inside me and outside me at the same time. Like I was inside, like I was within it, like I was just enfolded in it."

C also "had the feeling that there was another force in the universe" and felt she had touched this force. "I touched the universe. I touched the face of God. I touched the level of creation which lies below the atomic level."

While G was giving birth, she had "a sense of being in unison with some whole natural process . . . part of something bigger that was happening." As the child was being born, G felt a part of a huge contraction expansion experience. "There was this feeling of being caught in a cosmic rhythm . . . I felt like I was part of a cosmic rhythm. It's happening outside of me and inside of me . . . but the inside-outside were not distinguished. The inside-outside were together."
One experiences at profound depths the interconnectedness of the universe. For H, the experience was paradoxical. "There's the universal paradox in that . . . my seeking to be fully alone with myself. Of course as I was fully alone and present in the moment without anything else, I was totally connected. Totally not alone. The intensity of the completeness, the fullness of the truth of the universe being connected . . . the fullness of the experience of how connected the universe is."

This sense of universality and of the Absolute both transcends the self and is within the self. For S, the sense of connection was through the power that runs through everything. "The world becomes . . . instead of being fragmented, it's like creation. You're a part of it and it becomes a whole and you're partaking in it. The connection is not just with the wholeness of the world. That's part of it, but it's a connection with God if you want to use those terms, but with that Power. The Power is there and it's in everything and everybody. It's like a participation. It's like a connection with the Power and everything is connected."

For G, the sense of joining and universality occurred through transcending a barrier. "It was as though I was the branch. "Whether this experience occurred within her or outside of her held no meaning for G. "There's no sharp difference between inside-outside. The barriers are gone."
Inside-outside are not meaningful, like subject-object are not meaningful. The whole experience is the obliteration of subject-object. . . . We become identical to everything that is. The 'isness' is what's characteristic.

One is marked with the sense that this is a reality that exists always, that is simply there. C felt this reality was part of her. "It was just a very pleasant sight. You're pleased but you're neither surprised nor . . . because it's part of you. They are there, always there . . . having had that experience of seeing what exists all the time." It was as if they were around her bed saying, "We've not come to surprise you, or shock you, or encourage you, or be superior to you. It's just another fact of life and here we are."

H also felt the reality of her experience. "I was just witness to something that is a reality, that's always there . . . I believe it just tuned in and tuned out."

For G, this reality is always present but not always perceptible. "An experience would sort of draw me in to some functions or way that things are happening that aren't usually perceptible."

5. A sense of awe and of naturalness

One has a sense of awe, wonder and amazement at the richness and complexity of what is, and yet one also feels the
naturalness, the simplicity and the normalcy of this existence. For H, the feelings were of "the awesomeness of the universe" and amazement at the different music coming from different places. "The song emanating from creation is always present, so it is completely natural. That was natural. What was unusual was my ability to hear it. This was, in a sense the ultimate natural experience. It's the most natural, the most attuned to what is in actuality."

For C, it was a "wonderful, wonderful experience." But it was also very natural. "It was neither exhilarating nor frightening. It was very natural. It belonged. This is another fact of life."

6. A sense of being supported and empowered

One feels that one is supported, that one is not alone in the universe. This support is empowering in that one feels strengthened, affirmed, accepted, understood and loved. What C felt coming from the men around her bed was "total understanding, total acceptance." For C, these feelings were new. "Love like I have never known. They looked at me, and my feelings of that look were that I belonged, I was okay, I would make it, I had all the ingredients. They respected me. There was lots of space for everybody." C found this eased her movement between "dancing above the world" and depression.
"I felt heightened, but in the middle . . . an exquisite feeling that was strengthening in the middle of my polarities. This was strengthening where I wanted to live." The support C felt from the presence of these men gave her confidence. "They're looking out for me although I can't perceive them right here. They are there. . . . It's there for my support. So I can't go too far wrong. I'm going to get nudged by somebody."

For G, feeling a part of the cosmic rhythm gave her strength, especially when her baby died. "That gave me strength. I did have a terrible depression afterwards, but that feeling I remembered, and held on to that. . . . It's the result of that feeling that in a sense you're being supported by the entire cosmos. . . . My net impression was one of the strength that is there to support you when you need it."

For S, the support and affirmation came through her encounter with light. "It was an outpouring of love. . . . What I got was this tremendous sense of affirmation. . . . I got strength. I didn't need to be afraid of anything because there was a power that was so overwhelming and it was love."

From her experience of hearing the music of creation H felt support. "I'm not alone here in the universe. . . . In fully recognizing how unalone I was, there's a supportiveness in that." The availability of that support was strengthening to H. "Underneath or behind our fears and our suffering and
our single-mindedness is a universe that's quite magical and beautiful and that that's available to us."

7. A sense of happiness

For some this happiness takes the form of quiet contentment. For C, her experience brought "a very happy feeling . . . a happy feeling of contentment, more. It was all positive but not 'oh wow' . . . the tranquility and contentment, return to the womb feeling, no problems, life is wonderful."

For H, as she experienced hearing the music of the universe, the sense was one of a "deepness connected with good fortune."

Others might be moved to tears and experience great joy. The happiness S felt showed itself in tears. "I was talking to the light and the tears just poured out of me. It wasn't sadness. I felt this love. And I said I'm so happy and I cried. I cried and I said I'm happy."

G experienced "a tremendous sense of wonder, and a sense of joy" at entering into the life of the branch. Her joy spilled over into laughter. "And I laughed and said, 'I've fallen in love with a tree'."

8. A sense of peacefulness
Some will experience a quiet calm while others feel a deep sense of peace. C had "that quiet, put together feeling . . . that comforted feeling" during her experience.

For G, it was "a tremendous sense of peace, very peaceful," as she experienced life through the branch.

S felt the peacefulness in her body. "It was warmth. I could feel a sense of warmth in my arms and legs. It was like my blood moving through my body. It was a wonderful. . . . It was a peaceful feeling. It was very peaceful."

9. A sense of beauty

Some will be very moved by the beauty of the experience, while others experience a serene sense of beauty. For C, it was an "inner feeling of beauty, the ultimate in wisdom, and the ultimate in contentment and acceptance."

S was struck by the beauty of the light. "The light was very, very beautiful. I could see golden light." For S, the experience itself went beyond beauty to "glory. It's glorious. It's painful."

G experienced the beauty of joining with the branch. "It was as though I was the branch. And that was illogically very wonderful and beautiful. . . . It's most mysterious to me."

10. A sense of the experience gradually fading
One is aware that the experience gradually fades. As H listened to the music "after a time it faded."

G felt herself in the cosmic rhythm as she experienced contractions, but "this disappeared, unfortunately."

C experienced the people around her bed for a time. "They disappeared. I may have slept. I guess I did."

S was within her experience for what seemed like a long time. "At a certain point I thought it's okay to get up. I needed to go to the bathroom. . . . I went back to bed and I slept for a couple of hours."

In some instances, one might be aware of the measure of time and in others all sense of time is lost. In either case, one is not concerned with time during the experience. It is a special kind of time where the exquisiteness, not the length matters. H did not know "if the experience lasted seconds or minutes."

G did not know how long she experienced the sense of being caught in the cosmic rhythm. "I don't know. I really don't know. I think my whole sense of time was completely screwed up."

C also was not able to measure the time. "It could have been 20 minutes, it may have been 30 seconds. I didn't have a clock. I would say probably the shorter than the longer. It was the exquisiteness of the time, not the length of it that mattered."
For S, what seemed unusual was that she knew how long the experience lasted. "I know exactly how long. That's the strange thing. It felt like it was going on for a long time. I looked at my watch when I first woke up. It was 3:45. This was 5:30. . . . It was another kind of time."

11. A sense of ineffability

One might be able to describe the experience factually, but one has difficulty describing how one feels. The experience is beyond words. S had a difficult time talking about her experience. "I'm having a real struggle for words. It is hard. I'm left more with whatever it is that's inside me, the feeling, or the lived part and the words are hard to put to it."

For G, her feelings were "very hard to describe. It's almost inexplicable." G found she had difficulty finding words and had to use the language available to her. "I said, 'I've fallen in love with a tree,' but that's the closest I could come to saying how I felt."

Words don't seem to fit, and in a sense make judgements about the experience. G felt she lost something by talking about it. "It's hard to talk about in some ways. Probably you lose a lot about it. You gain intellectual insight but you lose some of the awesomeness of the experience. You bring
H felt amazement and spoke of a sense of being blessed, but was uncomfortable with those words. "I mean those are almost like judgements... The word beauty seems evaluative... I mean these words of intuitive, you're not thinking in that kind of logical way. I never evaluated it." Although she was concerned that this language would evoke preconceptions and judgements, H found herself using the language available to her, religious language, to describe the experience. "It's hard to talk about it in other than this religious, metaphorical language. It's lovely, beautiful, poetic language so it works to communicate the feeling. But in our contemporary world it's so easy to write that off with our contemporary understandings or misunderstandings of what a religious experience means, written off as religious fanatics. It [the language] isn't necessary. The experience would still be what it is even if I didn't have this language, this God and religious language. That's just convenient to me because it's apt. It's apt language because it's so metaphorical and it's associated with such big thought concepts."

For C, it was "more an inner experience that an outer observation... beyond description... a hard place to describe." C also had difficulty with language and evaluation. "But it wasn't an emotional language. It was the language of the universe. These are things. This is real.
So it wasn't to be traded by a culture to say, 'Because you're seeing this, it means that.' It was a complete recognition of the reality."

12. A sense of being honoured and blessed

One feels that one has been given a very special gift, something that is sacred, and so feels honoured and blessed. S felt she had been given something special. "I had that encounter and it was like a gift. I think it was something that was given to me. . . . It was just an incredible feeling of being blessed. It was just going right through me being blessed."

For G, it was a feeling that she had been made special. "You feel rare, chosen, enabled to experience things many people are not open to."

C had a similar experience. "I got a sense of being elected, selected, chosen, fingered. . . . It is a blissful feeling to think I was one of those who was given the opportunity to have universal knowledge."

H also felt her special experience had been a gift. "I knew it was a very special experience . . . like I have been privy to a very special experience . . . the feeling of having been honoured . . . blessed, that I was allowed that opportunity in my life. It was, you know, a gift. I was just
doing what I was doing and there it was, a surprise. So in that sense it's like a gift. It's a surprise, but I wasn't surprised. It was a surprise in the sense of an unexpected gift."

AFTER THE EXPERIENCE

1. A recognition of emerging from the experience changed

One emerges from the experience changed. One has a sense of being different, more resolved, integrated, and whole. After her experience, C both felt and looked changed. "I went to the mirror and I looked and there was all this beaming on my face, the eyes all upturned and this natural smile. . . . I didn't think anything about the night before. There was no negative. I just was brim full of good feelings, wonderful mind, wonderful set of emotions, happy, happy feelings." C felt more integrated and whole. "The union of the inner self and the outer self was a very happy marriage. . . . It was easier to be. It was easy. I just went on easily, being involved where I was, only now it was real. I loved my life."

S also felt and looked changed. "I remember looking in the mirror and seeing myself white, just like dead white and my eyes were just shining. I looked really changed. I felt very, very vulnerable. The first few days I felt a little bit
shaky." For S, the feeling of wholeness came through her new ability to reconnect. "I went for a walk in the park. During the walk I remember feeling much more connected. . . . This was a matter of days I was reconnecting with people. . . . I was able to reconnect with my direction in life again."

For G, the journey to resolution and wholeness was one of opening out. "It's opening out, if you can open up to anything . . . a branch of a tree is the beginning, then I can write again. I began to write down my pain and my sorrow and my anguish. I wrote a story about the assassination . . . and the experience was preliminary to being able to do that, to finally do something and pull myself out of that. And then I wrote a series of stories which helped me to uncover layers and layers of pain. It was using the short story form to transform the pain and the anger and the anxiety into something beautiful. I was working through a lot of anxiety about death and the stories helped me to do that, to transform death into life by writing."

For H, the experience of change was an inner one and didn't show outwardly. "Sometimes the most profound experience or changes don't show some apparent outward change." H became more who she was, more whole by expanding her limits and going into her fear. "My limits have been stretched. My stopping place, where I stop myself is expanded. I now know I can go farther than I thought. When
my fears come up, I sometimes definitely get stuck in them but
the edges of how I define myself are greater. When I make
myself out to be less able, less competent, less beautiful in
every sense of the word, I know that this is one of the
experiences I use to remind myself that that is an illusion.
This experience is truer and deeper than the beliefs that come
out of fear."

2. A sense of having gained a new level of perception

One has a sense of having broken through or been moved
through a barrier and of having opened up a new level of
perception that wasn't previously available. One senses that
reality is broader and deeper than is normally perceived and
one finds oneself more affected by this broader reality. For
G, seeing the larger reality was very exciting. "What I have
done is crashed through this barrier. . . . The here is much
bigger, reality is much greater than we usually are open to
understanding. . . . Once one has a glimpse of the bigger
reality, that's very exciting." For G, there was also the
realization that normal reality is very limited. "We have
these perceptive experiences of it that make us realize that
reality is normally very limited and narrow and that we
confine ourselves to a pretty small reality. . . . It's also
again this sense of reality . . . that I became aware of how
much by focusing on myself, I limit ... that if I would look at branches more often."

H also had the sense of opening up a new level of perception. "I've cracked open a level in my own perceptions of what's real and possible. ... I have a deeper sense, not just an intellectual belief ... my reality comes from a deeper lived experience of what the possibilities are for people."

For S, the experience gave her a transcendent perspective. "When you have this experience it's very uplifting and you get into a kind of transcendent perspective and that is very real."

Because one is more aware of these deeper levels, one is more open to experiencing at these levels. For H, it was believing there were other levels yet to be experienced. "I'm just as sure that there's some other level that I haven't seen yet. I believe that there's probably even something deeper than I've experienced here. ... That's one of the experiences in my life where I'm open to believing the unbelievable."

For S, this new openness was strengthening. "The difference now is that I know what the possibility is and so that's strengthening."

G felt she was "more open to it happening. ... The extent to which one can be open to this totality is the extent
to which one can obliterate the barriers."

Reality is perceived in a more heightened way. One has a richer, fuller experience which also leads one to be less comfortable with the way reality is normally perceived. What had been normal, accepted realities in C's life, she found intolerable after her experience. "My sense of priorities changed. My concepts of values altered. I felt there was too much preoccupation with tactile things, consumerism, attaining physical comforts, the pursuit of success. All of a sudden I wanted more of the more. I was uncomfortable for a while with the television, with the commercials, if you use this toothpaste your sex life is going to be great. I began to see a manipulation in the universe that unsettled me and I hadn't seen this before. I got offended by some people's conversation, people I loved, because it seemed so much twaddle."

S found herself unable to accept what she might have before her experience. "I think that I'm more uncomfortable now with things that I might have accepted more easily before. It's like for me worshipping graven images, or sacred cows or anything other than the real thing. I can't do that. I can't, having experienced that. I can't accept anything else as my reality. This is my reality."

As H returned by airplane from her camping trip, she observed the logging on the mountains. "[I was] very, very
deeply pained... seeing the logging. I really saw it. I felt it like a physical scarring and I was pained by it personally and I found myself really sobbing... Part of our shared humanity is our shared loss of connection with the earth, and those not just being words to me, but having experienced that, and that contrast from having heard the music of the earth and then seeing the scarring up there."

3. A sense of reconnecting with life at a deeper level

Shortly after the experience, one reconnects with life at a deeper level. One has the sense of life changing yet remaining the same. One is more aware and more involved with life. One has a sense of being more present, more potent, and more alive.

In the early morning after her experience, C found her senses dramatically heightened. "The birds, I mean it was like I hadn't heard birds before. The song was clearer, lovelier, hung in the air, clear and crystal. My ears seemed to be sharper. I looked at grass like I'd never seen green grass before. It was sharper green. The blades of grass all seemed so precious, so vivid." This heightened feeling of involvement with life continued for C. "I loved my life. Everything was a joy... The tone of life improved... I found deeper meaning in things I read... I found I was
addressing another level of person when I spoke to somebody. ..
.. I found the volunteer work I did, I was getting better at it. I found there was an overflow, a benefit to the family because I was feeling so contented. .. The quality of my life definitely improved because I was doing the living of it like all those other people I had watched."

The feeling of reconnection with life that S experienced was very meaningful to her. "The relationship with L changed. We were relating in a much more profound way. .. We had an absolutely wonderful summer. We were present together, in the present, and not all caught up with what was going to happen when he'd be away. .. It was such a sense of being connected that I'd had all summer with all the difficulties and struggles. It was so meaningful to me, a time where just everything was whole and connected. It made sense to me."

After G experienced life through the branch of the tree, she was more able to reconnect with her own life and deal with her suppressed feelings. "I began to write down my pain and my sorrow and my anguish .. to transform death into life by writing." G also found that her experience made her more present. "It makes me more here. That's part of the here. .. It makes the normal days happier too because they [the experiences] are always there."
4. A recognition that the experience becomes a lived truth

One appreciates and gives words to the experience. One takes on the experience as part of oneself, therefore one is able to speak from the place of a lived-out truth rather than an idea or concept. One senses within oneself a knowing, an understanding and an appreciating that is deeper and clearer. G found deeper understanding through her experience. "And it has helped me to understand. . . . We are members of the totality of what is. . . . We become identical to everything that is. The 'isness' is characteristic. If we can enter into 'isness,' if we can enter into the being of anyone or anything, we have entered into that and that into us, a mutual exchange of being."

For C, her beliefs were only words until she had her experience. "God, transcendental, universal, were words until I'd experienced it. It's fleshing out the framework of what an experience can be. This is living it, not just hearing about it. . . . It's part of you." C experienced a broader sense of understanding. "It really opened my eyes to my fellow man and an understanding of life. . . . It has given me tremendous insight into the creation of the world."

For S, her experience also became part of her. "I know from the inside. It is part of me. I know that who I am is connected with that in the deepest way." With the experience
came a deeper knowledge. "It was a knowing that was not deep enough or clear enough. I felt for the first time, in a sense, that here I was, knowing."

"Having been marked" by her experience, H felt "a shift in understanding and awareness." For H, concepts became personal truths. "When I'm working with people talking about our connectedness, I flash to that and it's real. My words are not just words. I speak those words as one of my truths from my own experience, and not from an abstract intellectual idea. That's one of the ways in which it changed me, is that something that had been a concept or an idea was a lived truth for me."

5. A sense of an elevation in one's nature

Through having this experience, one has a sense of being connected with something that is higher and deeper. Because one has touched something more, one feels that one is more than what one was, that one is higher. For some this is characterized by a sense of maturing and one feels more developed and riper. H felt her experience was "like a maturing experience." Another will experience the world and oneself as new, as one takes on this new level of awareness. One has a sense of beginning.
For G, her connection with life through the branch was like going through the birth process. "It acts more like getting born, like coming out of the uterus, the sickroom being a big uterus." Because of her sense of deeper connection she felt she was more. "You feel you're part of something that's much larger and more real than you imagined, more present in your daily life, not up there in heaven. I hate that idea that God is up there in heaven. For me it's the sense that God is all around and inside and operating all the time through the rhythms and the patterns and the usually imperceptible ripples that are always going on and that we happen into. We bump into God, more or less, and then that is part of us, so we are more than we were before, because we are now conscious of that."

For S, the experience was one of being reborn and feeling new. "For me it was quite totally new. It was like a rebirth experience, a coming out of the dark and becoming new. That was the way that I felt, that I was new... It's a sacredness of being affirmed as a spiritual being, of participating in spirit."

For C, her feelings of life before her experience and after could be likened to entering a black hole in space. "When you go in, what comes out is this singularity and then the math of it is reversed and then you go into a white hole and that's the rebirth. So metaphorically I've been through a
black hole." C experienced incredible newness and growth. "I felt I had come light years. I had a newer respect for the way I was made because I had this feeling that this is the way I was meant to be, that maybe I had been that when I was born and I'd got all bent out of shape. . . . I knew that I had climbed that mountain and could see the world for the first time from this wonderful level of integrity. . . . I felt mature, but I also felt fresh, new. But I had the wisdom. I felt opening out, rich in this marvelous life. I felt an expansion like an explosion."

6. A sense of opposition resolved

One has a sense that opposition is resolved. What was once in conflict is now harmonized. What was incompatible is now compatible. For some, it's as if a dichotomy has been transcended and it ceases to matter. One is now able to live with it. For others, the opposites become complementary. What was once characterized by disunity and polarization now works together and becomes a unity.

As G isolated herself through illness and depression, she "felt the need to deal with birth and death." For G, these opposites came to work together after her experience. "I thought a great deal about how I would like to die and came to the conclusion the way I'd like to die is to look back and say
I liked my life. I'm glad I lived the way I did. That's all I need to do. If I can accept my own life, I can let go and die. It became very simple. The tragedy of death became less tragic. It depended on the life."

For C, the struggle was between her polarized inner and outer selves, who seemed doomed to live separate lives. C was able to move beyond this. "When that poor little self that was set in concrete was released the union of the inner self and the outer self was a very happy marriage." C then knew she had a place. "Everything fit. There were no more questions. It all made sense. There was a place for me in the universe. I belonged. I felt like everything had fallen into place, like snow softly descending, quiet, beautiful, peaceful, easy, breathtakingly perfect. I couldn't believe I was the same person." At the resolution of this opposition, C felt a sense of release as would "a prisoner who has been unjustifiably imprisoned. The release must be such a melting thing, the blessing, free, moving, experiencing, naturally, with no restrictions, just like a branch waving in the air."

7. A sense of the enduring quality of the experience

When one recalls the experience one is moved. The experience is lasting and retrievable. It remains strengthgiving and a comfort, a thing of beauty one can hold
H found that the experience was with her often. "I can't even say when it comes to me, but often. It might be several times a week . . . when I need a reminder of that side of life." She recreates it easily. "I don't need to recreate the whole story in my mind's eye to do it. I just remind myself of the one picture I have just of looking out over the valley and of having the music come to me. . . . It still does move me. . . . I was starting to feel tearful as I thought of it. . . . I do dip into that experience as I would dip into a well, often."

C felt she finally had something she could hold on to. "It's a comfort. I have had that comfort around me all those days and it's always there . . . something that would stay . . . something that I could hold on to."

For G, re-experiencing the life of the branch was also easily done. "I can shut my eyes and I know exactly how that branch feels. . . . I can still recapture that feeling at any time. I've never lost it. It's very strong and something I've held on to. In difficult times that always comes back to me very strongly, the experience. . . . It was like a precious thing you could take out of the drawer and get strength from it again." G was also able to re-experience the peacefulness and joy. "It's just I'd re-experience it and I'd love it and think it's wonderful and I'd feel very peaceful. And I always
remember that and I feel great hope and joy."

Shortly after her experience, S had a second cancer scare and had to endure a series of tests. "I find this [the tests] terrible and I remember feeling that connection and just holding on to that. I got the strength that carried me through that time. It was just there . . . even though the light wasn't always there and I wasn't always aware say of that power out there, that tremendously powerful thing. It was inside me. I carried it with me." S was moved to tears by her experience as she spoke of it. "When I start to tell you about it now, I start . . . I'm reliving it. I feel very moved by the whole thing. Now it's overwhelming me. I'm feeling it as I'm talking about it. I'm just feeling my heart pounding."

One discovers that the meaning of the experience changes, richens, and deepens over time as subsequent experiences reinforce it and new threads are added and woven in.

For H, the experience deepened over time. "An experience like that ends up deepening and richening and growing over time . . . other threads . . . other subsequent experiences along those same lines that really just reinforced it. . . . Other things come into it over the years." H felt that her experience had served her well. "It was like, over the years so far, it's like realizing you don't need to have a lot of those experiences, as far as serving . . . as far as deepening
me as a person."

For G, the experience "helped form a web of experiential knowledge of God" and served as a reference point. "And that is just one element that I go back to in experiences I've had, sort of critical experiences in which I have some sense of the revealing of hidden forces at work. . . . It supported my growing interest in spiritual things, but spiritual things as part of a whole, not off by itself. It gave me the sense that spirituality had to be rooted in reality. But reality is much bigger than people think. I had a sense of how to use those experiences for growth, emotional, spiritual growth, all of it being a whole. . . . But I don't have these tremendously big experiences that often, but little experiences relate to that."

8. A sense of the ultimate wisdom of the experience

One realizes the inherent wisdom of the experience. There is a sense of order, a rightness about it. One has a sense of the complete suitability of the experience. One gets exactly what one needs and nothing else is needed. One has a sense of fulfillment and completion.

For S, the feelings of doubt, alienation and disconnection had been profound. Her experience brought her a deep sense of connection as she "dialogued with light." She
got the clarity and affirmation she needed. "I felt that I was getting the message that I was going the right way in my life, that the work that I was doing was important, that it was sacred. And that's really what I needed. I needed to know that." Her sense of knowing and completion was deep. "It's a knowing that this is right. . . . You couldn't have anything more complete than that."

As H placed herself in a situation where she could both experience being alone and experience her fear, she found courage to move through that fear. "Wherever there is fear there is a deeper truth. And that when fear seems all-consuming and all of that, there is even a deeper truth and that does guide me through a lot of things." H was left with a sense of completion. "That moment is very complete unto itself. The experience was just so full. There wasn't anything left dangling."

C experienced within herself feelings of utter aloneness and of being "locked in concrete." She hid this from the world through a charade of pretense. The acceptance and affirmation she felt from her visitors helped her to move beyond this artifice. "They were the epitomy of beauty and wisdom, the absence of artifice. . . . I think that was the first moment of my feeling that there was a place for me in the universe just as I was." For C, life was now real.
Following the assassination of President Kennedy, G became depressed and ill as she "worked through a lot of anxiety about death." She spent days watching a tree outside her window. "And one day I had the sense that I could participate in the life of that branch . . . gradually entering into life through the branch of that tree. . . . The experience was preliminary to me being able to pull myself out of that." G was then able to "transform death into life by writing." For G, this experience was a joining with wisdom. "Wisdom is calling us all. We all are called but it's only in moments of great difficulty, that we can forget about our ordinary preoccupations, do we respond to wisdom and suddenly we are wiser because we have responded. The veil has opened momentarily and we are with wisdom."

9. A sense of humility and of worthiness

One feels both humble and very special at being given this opportunity. One gains a sense of humility as one sees oneself as part of a greater whole, yet one also has a sense that one matters and that one has an important place in the whole. One feels one's uniqueness and individuality.

S felt both importance and humility. "It sounds arrogant. The sense that I got was that this was sacred work and that I would get the strength to finish and that this was
what I had to do. It was like a task I was called on to do. . . . I've gained a certain humility and that's important as well."

C felt special for having been given such an opportunity. "It's a blissful feeling to know you've been given the opportunity for universal knowledge. . . . I was so blessed." She also experienced feelings of humility. "If you have self-doubt and misunderstandings about yourself, this brings the necessary humility. It's a marvelous feeling to be humbled."

H felt her specialness had been acknowledged. "I have been privy to a very special experience . . . I was allowed that opportunity in my life." Before she left the mountain, H wanted to mark the event. "I felt like I ought to leave my mark too in some way and I went to the water's edge and I played just a couple of notes on my recorder, and I stopped because it didn't feel right. It felt too intrusive. But a couple of birds came swooping down. It was one of those things where I really felt like they were coming to acknowledge me." H felt the humility one feels at receiving a special gift. "It was a gift. I wasn't in an egotistical frame of mind that said this is a gift for me alone, the mountains are singing to H! I didn't think of it like that. . . . If there wasn't any humility there I couldn't define it as a gift. It would be like I was getting what I deserved. I
was getting what I worked for . . . taking the credit unto myself."

10. A sense that one must be protective of the experience

One discovers that these new realities are at times not compatible with the way others experience life. This can cause mild to extreme conflict as one struggles to live out a truth others might fear, distort, misinterpret or misunderstand. Difficulties might occur at both the societal and the personal level.

G found it difficult in our society to function in a state of openness. "You feel enabled to experience things that many people are not open to. That's difficult because everybody is, they just don't cultivate it. They draw back. I think everybody has some kind of peak experience at sometime in their life, but they don't want to name that or separate it out, probably because it would threaten their ability to function normally. They might find it a threat to their emotional stability. If you're a shaman or a contemplative nun you could do that because you'd have a whole ritualistic structure to support you." G did not find our society and culture supportive. "If you were intent on searching for wholeness, you'd be antagonizing a lot of people around you. People would be threatened by that. In our culture to search
for wholeness, it automatically makes you queer, odd." She found she could not share her experience often. "I can't share this with very many people, which is a pity, but their bothers and doubts and worries and conflicts about faith seem to be on an entirely different level than mine."

For H, what was evident was the lack of supportiveness of our culture and the narrowness of its ideas. "I think that we might have an over-romanticized misconception of the ancient mystics and that kind of thing, when we think that these special experiences are only open to some disciplined core or group specifically studying it. I think that reflects how far away from our own centres of wisdom we've come as individuals and as a culture. Because we have this idea of spirit and wisdom as belonging to a religion and religions have become so institutionalized. Probably a lot more people have religious experiences than even know it themselves because they wouldn't acknowledge it themselves because it's outside what would be considered acceptable religious practice. They're defined as crazy. They're skeptical and doubting of their own experience and are not attributing meaning to it."

The belief H holds of the misconception, in our culture, of the availability of special experiences only to an elite few is shown in C's attitude. "It must be very special but it's really very normal because I'm just an ordinary person and I'm not up there in a church preaching. I'm just doing my
thing. So the specialty was the experience, but the person was ordinary, so I felt chosen. So there was a specialty there. But I thought the specialty was for myself, not to be passed on to others. People started worshipping St. Theresa and others, but I didn't have this feeling that I had to go forward and teach the masses. I thought that this was for me, and someday I might tell somebody. But these people in the Bible, they were special in the first place. I was just ordinary."

The societal-cultural nonacceptance one feels might manifest itself as conflict in one's everyday life. This was true for S during the year after her experience. "This year I got psyched out by what other people call reality. I find it terrible. People are afraid of the sacred in themselves and others. It's too powerful or too much and so you need to tear it down. You need to make people into objects to kind of lessen the power or distance yourself in some way. I couldn't understand why people needed to tear me down. So I found I had to distance myself from them and I was alienating myself." S found the need to be protective of the experience saddening. "It's not the kind of thing you can talk about with most people. They think you're crazy. That saddens me. I don't like having to be careful. I'd like to be able to share something that important."
Even when she first had her experience, C was concerned about the judgements of others. "I didn't really want to divulge. I wanted to kind of treasure it. I thought, well I'm not going to tell anybody all of this, because I know what happened and I don't want anybody raining on my parade. Thank you very much." Later, C attempted to share her experience with her husband. "I was frustrated when I began to share it with my husband. He moved away from me. I was crushed that I'd had this beautiful experience and rather than drawing him towards me because of that, I almost had the feeling that he made up his mind at that point that he wanted a divorce. He couldn't handle it. It was devastating to me. It happened and he was not able to appreciate it. I sensed the iciness, which never really melted. There was a distance and the more experiences I had spiritually the more I couldn't share. He just wouldn't listen. I kept throwing myself on spikes."

When H returned from her trip she saw her father. "Well that would be the last person in the world I'd tell the truth to, that I would want to know, to bare myself in that way. His attitude is reflective of our society and our culture and typifies that loss of connection from the earth. To be so frightened himself of the possibility of being deeply affected and changed by time alone in the woods. If it didn't push some button for him he wouldn't have to mock it in that way. That was the first person I saw who clued me in to being
careful who I shared it with."

11. A sense of the need for supportive environments

Whether the experience fits easily into one's life, or whether it brings conflict, one finds oneself seeking environments where one can share and nurture one's beliefs and experiences and live with integrity.

G had difficulty with her husband's anger when she talked of her experience and she found herself seeking new friendships. "I can remember having a great difficulty adjusting for a while there. I was trying to decide how I could preserve myself. I suppose I have decided to live in a way very intensely that cuts me off. That's maybe why my spouse had to leave. He simply couldn't understand. That was later on. I felt relief after he left. I could be my own person and do what I wanted to do. Then I found myself increasingly meeting people who had had experiences too."

For C, the feeling was one of isolation as she stopped sharing her experience and withdrew. "So there was an isolation setting in. Where will I find people who have tasted the deeper levels? But one by one a door would open. I found my friendships changing. I was veering away from those people. It's kind of a feeling you don't cast pearls before swine." Finding an accepting environment was the
answer for C. "I found more support in my universe, more environments where that experience had a place. I'm involved in this study group. We've been trying to study this book for a couple of months, and we're still in chapter one because we get all caught up in our own experiences. It's marvelous. It's the answer, the sharing. There's a spontaneity now. It just has to be the right setting."

S found the sharing of her experience in the interview to be a very powerful tool through which she was able to reconnect with her experience and find direction again. "It's so good to be able to talk with you and it's so helpful. Having to hide something like that to protect it just doesn't seem right, because it isn't a selfish thing. It's the sort of experience that connects you with the universe and it's such a contradiction to have to hide it. It's wanting to find a way of connecting with others through that. This has been my whole struggle with all of that." S relived her experience through the telling of it and once again felt empowered. "I got insights from talking with you. I relived the experience. That was really helpful for me. It was very, very real. I also got a perspective. It really helped me to look at the last year and put it together and see it as a whole. It was very, very energizing and empowering. I felt alive and whole and opened up in a way I hadn't felt for a long time. And the main thing I saw was that I hadn't lost touch with Spirit. It
was still there. It helped me weave it into a whole. I felt renewed after the interview with you." S found the need to establish ritual in her life to keep her in touch with her experience. "The interview is like participating in sacred time. It's like a New Year ritual. It's like reliving sacred time to renew your life. I thought this should become an annual ritual, talking about a sacred experience. If you could do that every so often it would help you renew your life. It's making the past present. It was like participating again and reliving the experience."

Experiencing an accepting environment was important for S in keeping in touch with and nurturing her experience.

One senses a common direction with others who have had similar experiences. C felt a "common bond that all people in the study had sensed these same themes."

S felt the same. "It's wonderful to think other people have these same, similar kinds of things."

12. A sense of life being more

As a result of the experience, one carries new perceptions and attitudes to life. One has experienced a truth. One has a powerful sense of the primary importance of this truth in how one lives one's life, so although the experience was pertinent to a certain problem in one's life,
it somehow dwarfs the problem and poses a real issue.

One has a sense of life being more. It is as if one is being directed or called to realize more. One has a need to make real, to bring into perception, the fundamental truth, and then to live out this truth.

For C, "this awareness of the more in life couldn't be kept down. It had a power in itself pushing [her] to other things, to deeper levels, to new friends who had had a richer experience."

As S says, "This is more important to me than anything."

For H, "it's a different way of living and thinking."

It is as if one has embarked on a journey and one will never return to where one was before the experience. This was true for S. "I don't think I could ever go back to before that." Each responds to this call in a personal way. One is left in a state of openness, wondering about and questioning one's purpose in life, how one should live, and what else there might be to know and experience.

The realization of the journey was for S one of the factors that helped her to reconnect with her experience. S held the expectation that her story should be one of "experiencing light and going onward and upward," and feared the loss of connection she'd experienced during the past, difficult year would "screw up the study." As she told her story and relived it, she realized her experience was still
part of her. "It's a loss, or a turning away, or a being off centre, but it's not a not knowing. It isn't a total loss of meaning . . . just maybe the difficulty of the journey. . . . Now I see things as spiralling. The down parts are part of life. It doesn't have to mean a total loss of connection. . . . So I lose the thread and we put labels on things. Because that's part of living and it might be difficult, but the other is still there, and it's a possibility. It's like a way. It is a way." The struggle for S was how to live this out. "But what specific format it takes in one's everyday life, that's the question." S felt the journey was "like going in the dark and yet knowing that this is there." She retained a positive sense. "A way will open up whatever it is. I think that I have a kind of faith in something. I think that I will find the direction." S also felt that a responsibility on her part was an important aspect of her journey. "There is a responsibility on my side to have the right attitude, or have a kind of purity, or some sense of being. Somehow I have to have the right relationship to it."

G doesn't think one can always function on the level of connectedness one feels after a special experience. "I don't think you always function at that level of wisdom and insight. This is imposed by the fact that we live very crowded, pressured, urban lives. We can't retreat into our cave or hermitage long enough to digest the impact of so much
reality." For G, her age and experience with life are factors in her journey. "I don't any longer have those disturbed feelings of 'Where is God?' and doubts. I just say to myself, 'You're tired. You just need to go away,' or 'You just need a good night's sleep'. It's maybe just that I've outgrown that struggle. The wisdom, at my age anyway, is just letting go and letting reality happen to you. It's always there. You bump into it sooner or later if you let yourself. . . . When I've been away on retreat and I'm full of joy and calm, I don't want to come back to earth. So there is a moment of conflict there. But I'm trying increasingly not to resent coming back to earth because I know there are wonderful things that are going to happen if I just let them and not try to hold on to what's just happened. Let it go. Let it go." For G, one of the questions of life is "How do we integrate?" Her way of trying to integrate, her way of being on the journey is to reflect on how she feels and to live in the present. "I find myself not wanting to dwell on one thing as opposed to another, but enjoying all of experience. It's all good. It's all living. Do what you're doing right now and concentrate on that. What you're doing right now is sacred. We close ourselves off from so much experience by not doing that."

Since her experience, C has found that she approaches life differently. "I listen differently. I listen to a lot in here, inside myself, my inner nature, my inner God,
whatever nomenclature. I listen to the pattern of events. I'm not rushing off in nine directions to find the pattern. I let the pattern evolve in front of my eyes and then I take the action. I listen for the promptings rather than speaking first and listening second. It's easier. I was doing the effort. I, the big S, the self, the ego, was doing the living during that long period of time. You can't. It's too hard. It's all pretense. Your being, the way you're made, it's dying, dying. And now I just am really alive. Every day is a gift." As C continues to live in the world, she is also aware of an ongoing inner search. "I'm wondering if we'll ever find peace in the world because it [the special experience] doesn't happen for everybody. I think I have a responsibility to keep my act clean, to keep reflecting that I've got something, but not necessarily to tell what it is, just to keep my space clean. A few of us have this experience. If we'd all have it, there would be world peace, so there must be something more than peace that God is after. I find that heavy. Why did God do it? What is this whole exercise? It is a conundrum." For C, having knowledge brings with it a responsibility. "I have a sense of responsibility, that while I've had this special experience and it's been terribly fulfilling, maybe there's a greater fulfillment even beyond that. Maybe it's a question of a certain amount of struggle so people can find the contact with God and co-exist with our
differences. I think part of it is that the learning is part of the exercise, that peace is only a by-product rather than the end result." C questions why this happened to her. "We have this influence and this responsibility to keep growing and this experience keeps supporting us. And maybe there's that growth and spreading of influence and changing of the universe and acceptance of differences. And maybe I'm one of God's handmaidens. Why does it happen to only some? It can't be spiritual monopoly." She is left with the question of how to live this out in the world. "What can I do? I find real meaning in letting my light shine where I am. I can just do my daily things, but I've got to keep that spiritual place pure and not get into somebody else's muck. But that's about all I can do, just be aware."

It would seem that whatever stage one is at on one's journey, one is questioning, opening, growing, changing, searching for "the more in life."

THE EXHAUSTIVE DESCRIPTION

The Context

The themes of the experience were integrated and woven into a whole to form a detailed account of the meaning of the experience. This description reveals the structure of the
experience as fully and as clearly as possible.

This narrative should be viewed as the description of a phenomenon. It is a non-linear experience as opposed to a fixed linear experience. Although the events occur in clusters of a fashion, they do not necessarily happen in exactly the order used in the account. They vary according to the individual experience, or perhaps occur at the same time. The themes weave together a tapestry, each theme not making sense if out of context of the others. They are separate aspects of the phenomenon, but interdependent and moving together.

The Description

The visionary experience that transforms occurs in the context of one facing a challenge of existence. This challenge can take many forms and might involve such diverse experiences as divorce, childbirth, or death, and a variety of accompanying emotions ranging from joy to deep despair. These events might be normal, expected passages of living, or unexpected difficulties that life has thrust upon one. They might be existential questions finding their roots deep within the individual, or the struggles of someone trying to break destructive behaviour patterns learned in childhood.
One might attempt to meet this challenge of existence in many ways. One person might deny or ignore what is happening. Another might struggle desperately to maintain control, and yet another might attempt to remain rational and rise above the problem. Some will attempt to meet the issue head on while others might become ill. But no matter how one attempts to help oneself, or over what period of time, the struggle continues. At best, one can succeed only to a certain point and the essence of the problem remains. At worst, one feels hopelessly stuck and so overwhelmed by the problem that one feels one's very existence is threatened.

The challenge or problem becomes intensified or heightened by some event and one becomes steeped in the issue. It is as if all facets converge and the problem is brought into overwhelming focus. These events might occur through one's attempts to help oneself in some way, or they might be events happening outside of oneself over which one has or feels no control. But it is not whether one frames the issue in terms of stuckness and powerlessness as opposed to striving that matters. In all cases, one does what one is able to do or has to do, but the issue continues to dominate one's being and to consume one's energy and attention.

One keeps trying, but eventually does not know what else to do. One has the sense that one cannot do it all, that one cannot fix the problem directly, and one wants desperately to
rely on something else. Out of this longing to rely on something other than oneself, one begins to think that there might be something more than is presently recognized and available in one's life. One senses other possibilities but does not know what these might be.

There comes a point where one can struggle no longer and one allows oneself to surrender control. One has the sense of entering into a process, but does this without knowledge of the process and without effort. Entry is unplanned and involuntary. It is as though one stops struggling and begins to react as if instinctively, giving in to a natural inclination and going with one's feelings and instincts. One feels as if one were being drawn or led into something else, and one does this without questioning, simply doing what one has to do.

One experiences a sense of withdrawal from everything and everybody, and places oneself, either purposefully or unconsciously in isolation, removed from the mainstream of life. This sense of isolation may be manifested by removing oneself either physically or emotionally from one's everyday existence. Here one experiences an intent focusing in and paying attention to one's inner world. This involvement is maintained over a period of time ranging from minutes, to hours, to days. It is as if one's senses or emotions are heightened and one is totally absorbed by the experience of
paying attention to oneself in a deep way. This focused attention might occur at the physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual levels or a combination thereof.

After a time, one gives in to the full emotional experience of the problem. In this experience of letting go, feelings are expressed and vented. Emotion is allowed to grow to a fullness, as one enters into and experiences one's feelings totally. One might fully experience, for example, one's fear, one's sadness, one's alienation, or one's pain, depending on the issue one is facing.

As one gives up control and fully expresses one's feelings, one experiences a state of openness. One feels exposed or revealed and simply allows what is to be. In this vulnerable yet receptive state there is no longer any attempt to manage or cope. One is open, undistracted, and totally present. There is a moment when the reality of what is occurring takes hold, and one realizes that one is experiencing a vision that might be auditory, visual, or kinesthetic in nature. For some the realization will be instantaneous, for others it will be gradual. It is as if one is observing or witnessing the experience as well as being involved in it, thus one might be absorbed by the experience and at the same time be aware of one's surroundings or the passage of time. One has such a powerful sense of vividness and reality that one would never doubt or deny the experience.
It is a fact, a reality to the one who experiences it.

While one is within this vision, one senses one's total person as involved, focused, and absorbed in what is being experienced. One has a sense that all of one's self, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual is captivated. One feels that one is taken by the experience. Because it is beyond one's control, one can in no way manipulate it.

One intuitively understands what is happening, instinctively knowing in the depths of one's being what the experience is and means. One has a sense of inner recognition and knowing that is immediate and complete. One senses that one has made contact with something more. For some, this is a sense of universality, a sense of the interconnectedness of the universe. For others, it is a sense of breaking through and contacting a power that is Absolute and universe wide. One feels in unison with something bigger and that one belongs. This sense of universality and of the Absolute both transcends the self and is within the self. It is as if this Absolute power is outside of one and within one at the same time. This sense of connection takes one beyond the dichotomies of outside and inside, and subject and object.

One is marked with the sense that this is a reality that exists always, that is simply there, and is part of oneself, although not always perceptible. One has a sense of awe, wonder and amazement at the richness and complexity of what
is, and yet one also feels the naturalness, the simplicity and the normalcy of this existence.

Because one has sensed one's connectedness with all of existence, one feels that one is supported, that one is not alone in the universe. This support is empowering in that one feels strengthened, affirmed, accepted, understood, and loved.

One feels a sense of happiness that might take the form of quiet contentment for some, while others might be moved to tears and experience great joy. One is permeated with a sense of peacefulness which might be described as quiet calm or deep peace. Some will be very moved by the beauty of the experience, while others experience a more serene sense of beauty. For some, the feelings of happiness, peacefulness and beauty will be a powerful part of the experience, while in others, they will occur more fully after the experience.

After a time one is aware that the experience gradually fades. In some instances, one might be aware of the measure of time, and in others all sense of time is lost. In either case, one is not concerned with time during the experience. It is a special kind of time or another kind of time, where the exquisiteness, not the length, matters.

After the experience, one might be able to describe what happened factually, but one has difficulty describing how one feels. One has a powerful inner sense of the experience but it is beyond words. It is as if the experience operates at a
level beyond our everyday world, and the words we use to
describe and make sense of this world do not work in making
sense of this new reality experienced. One has to use the
available language, but the words seem to evoke preconceptions
and judgements about the experience.

One feels that one has been given a very special gift
that is sacred. One feels honoured and blessed and has a
sense of being rare and chosen. One might feel fortunate, and
another might experience bliss at being given this special
opportunity.

One recognizes that one emerges from the experience
changed. One has a sense of being different, and feels more
resolved, integrated, and whole. For some, this change might
manifest itself physically, and one might look as well as feel
changed. This might last for a short period of time after the
experience, or it might be permanent. For others, the
experience of change will be within, and will not show itself
outwardly.

One has a sense of having broken through or been moved
through a barrier, and of having opened up a new level of
perception that wasn't previously available. One senses that
reality is broader and deeper than is normally perceived and
one finds oneself more affected by this broader reality.
Because one is more aware of these deeper levels, one is more
open to experiencing at these levels. This new openness is
strengthening and hopeful because one now knows what the possibility is.

One has a sense of perceiving reality in a more heightened way. One has a richer, fuller experience which also leads one to be less comfortable with the way reality is normally perceived. What was once tolerated, or accepted as a normal part of the everyday world, can no longer be.

Shortly after the experience, one reconnects with life at a deeper level. One has a sense of life changing yet remaining the same. It is as if one's approach or attitude or perception is different. One is more aware and more involved with life. One has a sense of being more present, more potent, and more alive. Some might feel their senses as dramatically heightened and experience the physical world in that way. Others might feel a profound connection in their relationships with other people, or experience new energy and confidence with which to continue life's tasks.

One appreciates and gives words to the experience, and tries to make sense of it. One takes on the experience as part of oneself, therefore one is able to speak from the place of a lived-out truth rather than an idea or concept. One senses within oneself a knowing, an understanding, and an appreciating that is deeper and clearer.

One has the sense of an elevation in one's nature. Through having this experience, one has a sense of being
connected with something that is higher and deeper. Because one has touched something more, one feels that one is more than what one was, that one is higher. For some, this is characterized by a sense of maturing and one feels more developed and riper. Another will experience the world and oneself as new and have a sense of beginning.

Before the experience, one felt in conflict. Now, one senses that opposition is resolved. What was in conflict is now harmonized. What was incompatible is now compatible. For some, it is like a dichotomy has been transcended and it ceases to matter. One is now able to live with it. For others, the opposites become complementary and what was once characterized by disunity and polarization now works together and becomes a unity.

One senses the enduring quality of the experience. It is lasting and retrievable and when one recalls it one is moved, often deeply. The experience remains strength-giving and a comfort, a thing of beauty one can hold on to. One discovers that the meaning of the experience changes, richens, and deepens over time as subsequent experiences reinforce it and new threads are added and woven in.

One realizes the ultimate wisdom of the experience. There is a sense of order, a rightness about it. One has a sense of its complete suitability. One gets exactly what one needs, in one's own unique way, and nothing else in needed.
One has a sense of fulfillment and completion. It is as if one experiences wisdom and is therefore wiser.

One feels both humble and very special at being given this opportunity. One gains a sense of humility as one sees oneself as part of a greater whole, yet one also has a sense that one matters and that one has an important place in the whole. One feels one's uniqueness and individuality.

One soon discovers that these new realities are at times not compatible with the way others experience life. This can cause mild to extreme conflict as one struggles to live out a truth others might fear, distort, misinterpret, or misunderstand. Difficulties might occur at both the societal and the personal levels. For some, the lack of supportiveness of our culture and the narrowness of its ideas are apparent. One might feel caught between being labelled as a religious fanatic or insane. For others, this societal-cultural nonacceptance manifests itself in one's everyday life as conflict in personal relationships. For all, there is a sense that one must be protective of the experience and be careful with whom one shares it.

Whether the experience fits easily into one's life, or whether it brings conflict, one finds oneself seeking environments where one can share and nurture one's beliefs and experiences and live with integrity. One might find oneself, either abruptly or gradually, changing one's relationships so
that one can share and live out one's experience without threat. One senses a common direction with others who have had similar experiences. For some, experiencing an accepting environment is a vital part of the process of integrating the experience into one's being and making it one's personal truth.

As a result of the experience, one carries new perceptions and attitudes to life. One has experienced a truth. One has a powerful sense of the primary importance of this truth in how one lives one's life, so although the experience was pertinent to a certain problem in one's life, it somehow dwarfs the problem and poses a real issue. One has a sense of life being more. It is as if one is being directed or called to realize more. One has a need to make real, to bring into perception, the fundamental truth, and then to live out this truth. It is as if one has embarked on a journey and one will never return to where one was before the experience. Each responds to this call in a personal way. One is left in a state of openness, wondering about and questioning one's purpose in life, how one should live, and what else there might be to know and experience. Whatever stage one is at on one's journey, one is questioning, opening, growing, changing, searching for "the more in life."

It would seem that this journey may be likened to a spiral moving ever higher. One begins at a place of
transition, where one feels conflict and opposition. Through the visionary experience, one senses the opening up of a new level of perception which reveals a different reality and a deeper truth. Although conflict drops away, the experience is not circular in that one now has the answers and continues with life as it was. A paradox exists in that one has a sense of completion and fulfillment existing along with a sense of openness and of being called to more. There are new questions to be answered, new possibilities to be experienced. One feels that one has set out on a journey and cannot turn back.

THE ESSENTIAL STRUCTURE

The Context

The essential structure is summarized from the exhaustive description and reveals the essential core or structure of the experience. It should be viewed as a statement which addresses the question of meaning in as concise a manner as possible.

The Structure

The visionary experience that transforms occurs in the context of one facing a challenge of existence. One does
one's utmost to meet the needs of the situation, but no matter how one attempts to help oneself, the struggle is not resolved.

The challenge or problem becomes intensified or heightened by some event. It is as if all facets converge and the problem is brought into overwhelming focus. One does what one is able to do or has to do, but the issue continues to dominate one's being and to consume one's energy and attention.

In the midst of this issue one desperately wants to rely on something else. One has the sense that one cannot do it all and begins to think that there might be something more than is presently recognized and available in one's life.

There comes a point where one allows oneself to surrender control. One stops struggling and begins to react as if instinctively, giving in to a natural inclination and going with one's feelings. It is as if one is being drawn or led into something else.

One places oneself, either purposefully or unconsciously, in isolation. One experiences a sense of withdrawal which is characterized by focusing in and paying attention to one's inner world. It is as if one's senses or emotions are heightened and one is totally absorbed by this experience. An intent, focused state is maintained over a period of time. One eventually gives in to the full experience of the problem.
Emotion is allowed to grow to a fullness as one enters into and experiences one's feelings. One feels exposed, or revealed, and in this state of openness simply allows what is to be.

There is a moment when one recognizes that one is in the midst of an auditory, visual, or kinesthetic experience. One's total being is involved, focused and absorbed in what is being experienced. One intuitively understands what is happening, instinctively knowing in the depths of one's being what the experience is and means.

One has a sense of making contact with something more, with an Absolute power that is universe wide. One feels the interconnectedness of the universe, that one is in unison with something bigger and that one belongs.

One has a sense of awe, wonder and amazement at the richness and complexity of what is, and yet one also feels the naturalness, the simplicity and the normalcy of this existence. One feels that one is not alone in the universe. This support is empowering in that one feels strengthened, affirmed, accepted, and loved. One is moved by the beauty of the experience and marked with a sense of happiness and peace.

One is aware that the experience gradually fades. One might be able to describe it factually, but one has difficulty describing how one feels. Words don't seem to fit, and in a sense make judgements about the experience. One feels that
one has been given a very special gift, something that is sacred, and so feels honoured and blessed.

One emerges from the experience changed, feeling different, more resolved, integrated and whole. One has a sense of having opened up a new level of perception that wasn't previously available. One senses that reality is broader and deeper than is normally perceived. Shortly after the experience, one reconnects with life at a deeper level. One has a sense of being more present, more potent, and more alive. One has a sense that opposition is resolved. What was once characterized by disunity and polarization now works together and becomes a unity.

One takes on the experience as part of oneself, therefore one is able to speak from the place of a lived-out truth. One senses within oneself a knowing and an understanding that is deeper and clearer. One senses an elevation in one's nature. Because one has touched something more, one feels that one is more than what one was, that one is higher.

The experience is lasting and retrievable. It remains strength-giving and a comfort, a thing of beauty one can hold on to. One discovers that the meaning of the experience changes, richens, and deepens over time. One gets exactly what one needs and nothing else is needed. One has a sense of fulfillment and completion. One feels both humble and very special at being given this opportunity.
As one discovers that these new realities are at times not compatible with the way others experience life, one has a sense that one must be protective of the experience. One senses a common direction with others who have had similar experiences, and finds oneself seeking environments where one can share and nurture one's beliefs and experiences and live with integrity.

As a result of the experience, one carries new perspectives and attitudes to life. One has a sense of life being more. It is as if one is being directed or called to realize more. One has a need to make real, to bring into perception, the fundamental truth, and then to live out this truth. At whatever stage one is at on this journey, one is questioning, opening, growing, changing, searching for "the more in life."
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

STATEMENT OF FINDINGS

The imaginal experience that transforms has been studied using the existential-phenomenological method of research. Through disciplined reflection on personal accounts of the imaginal experience, thirty-one themes which characterize the fundamental structure of the experience were formulated. The meaning of the experience is revealed through a description of these themes.

The imaginal experience does not occur in isolation, but as part of a psychological process the individual undergoes. Although one does not realize one is in this process, one finds oneself carrying out specific behaviours such as isolating oneself, focusing inward and allowing one's feelings to be. This process seems to well up from within, naturally, as if one instinctively knows how to move beyond a barrier to a higher level of functioning. The vision itself occurs as one lets go, thus achieving a state of openness where one simply allows what is to be. Through the experience, one glimpses a reality not normally perceived. As one's perceptions and knowledge expand, one's conflicts and problems
drop away. It is as if one transcends the problem by becoming aware of a greater truth. One feels that one has contacted something "more," something higher and in so doing one senses within oneself an elevation in one's nature. This is characterized by feelings of maturing and rebirth. One feels changed, complete, integrated and whole, more who one really is. Having touched something higher, one feels called upon to live in a certain manner, however the reality of everyday life does not readily allow this. One tends to be careful with whom one shares the experience, as others can misunderstand, be judgmental and feel threatened. In spite of this, the experience becomes a personal truth in one's life that cannot be denied or put down. One often has to choose new relationships and move to environments where one will feel recognized and accepted. The experience endures over time. It heals and renews as it did when first experienced, and it grows, changes and evolves, as one experiences more of life and gains in knowledge. One has a sense that one can never go back to where one was before the experience and so one continues life from a new level, with expanded awareness and openness to more. The process, therefore, begins with a question, which is resolved or dwarfed by the experience, and ends with a question asked at a higher level of functioning. The circle is never complete, but spirals upward to higher levels of perception, openness, awareness and knowledge. It
remains forever open-ended, a searching for the higher in oneself and in the universe.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The method of data collection used in this study is the self-report. There are limitations to this method in that the co-researcher is usually reporting an experience that occurred in the past. What is remembered, and how it is remembered will depend on the individual and on how long ago the experience took place. This could lead to relevant data being missed and will affect what parts of the story the co-researcher emphasizes.

The co-researcher is a member of a socio-cultural group and cannot be totally free of the assumptions and biases found in the views and belief systems of that group. One tends to view oneself and one's experiences through these cultural biases and to tie one's experiences to this belief system. By doing this, one moves away from the actual experience as it occurred and begins to speculate and theorize about it. Relevant data can be lost or confused with conjecture and supposition.

Because of the population sample used in the study, it is difficult to generalize the results to everyone. The findings are true for this particular group of co-researchers who
happen to be women of various ages, from a variety of religious backgrounds, and who have university educations. Questions arise as to whether the results would be similar for men, for people from other cultures, age groups, and socio-economic levels, or for those with less education or of different religious beliefs. More work needs to be done before these questions can be answered.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The Psychological Tradition

This study supports and adds to the growing body of knowledge in humanistic and transpersonal psychology. That such a powerful phenomenon exists, supports the increasing interest in and valuing of the imaginal in our lives. Singer, Starker and Watkins are only a few who are researching and writing about imaginal experience. As a result, such experience is becoming more widely accepted and we see an increase in the use of European psychotherapy techniques in North America, for example, Jung's active imagination, Assagioli's psychosynthesis, autogenic relaxation, fantasy and imagery techniques, dreamwork, meditation and hypnosis. This study of imaginal experience supports the value of continuing and increasing research in general in this area.
As part of this movement, Maslow (1968) and Csikszentmihalyi (1975) have focused on a psychology of health, researching the characteristics of positive, healthful, pleasurable human experiences. Csikszentmihalyi's flow experience only becomes visionary experience when a state of "deep-flow" is reached. His characteristics of flow experience, although similar in some areas to Maslow's description of peak-experience, do not fit the description of imaginal experience as found in this study.

The findings in this study support Maslow's description of peak-experience (see literature review). It would appear that the visionary experience is a peak-experience. However, a problem arises in placing all these peak-experiences together and looking at their combined characteristics. Maslow focuses on the positive results of the experiences. He does not look at the process which leads up to the experience, if indeed there is one for all types of peak-experience. In the visionary experience, the process one follows is fundamental to the experience. Maslow's treatment of the impact a peak-experience has on the individual's life seems incomplete in the light of the findings of this study. Maslow talks about people becoming self-actualized, more real, happier and healthier. He does not mention the repercussions this might have on a threatened society, nor does he mention the all-important journey one feels called to embark on.
Further research needs to be done in both these areas.

It has been important that the visionary experience be separated out from the group of peak-experiences and looked at in itself. In the same fashion, it would be valuable to look at other forms of peak-experience separately and examine their unique processes and results. The need for this becomes evident when looking at one of Maslow's (1970) characteristics of the peak-experience. "It has also been discovered that precisely those persons who have the clearest and strongest identity are exactly the ones who are most able to transcend the ego or the self and become selfless" (p.67). In the case of the visionary experience, individuals often seem to have lost a sense of themselves (or perhaps have never had one) and are on a quest for identity. After the experience, they feel more whole and closer to who they really are. Perhaps Maslow's finding is more true for other peak-experiences, while the visionary experience that transforms is, for some, a first step to achieving this clear and strong identity. Maslow also found that in self-actualized people peak-experiences occur more frequently and intensely. One of the strong feelings of the co-researchers in the study of visionary experience was that of hope, a feeling that life is easier and happier because one knows what the possibilities are. This state of openness was found to be a prerequisite to visionary experience and perhaps is also necessary to have
other peak-experiences.

The Religious Tradition

The visionary experience is not a mystical experience in the classical meaning of the term mysticism. The mystical experience as defined by Underhill (1961) and Stace (1960) is one of pure consciousness. It is a non-sensory experience, whereas the visionary experience is a sensory experience.

The visionary experience does fall under the categories of various "extended" definitions of mysticism, including Stace's term extrovertive or nature mysticism. According to Stace this is not a deep or significant experience. The opposite was found in the study of visionary experience, where the co-researchers' experiences were at such a profound level as to change the direction of their lives.

Other authors give more recognition to the importance of this "extended" mysticism and to visionary experience. William James acknowledges a variety of religious and mystical experiences which he says can be cultivated or can occur spontaneously. This study supports and extends James' findings of ineffability, noetic quality, transciency, and passivity. In particular a similarity is found between James' description of the "twice-born" and the sense of being reborn or more mature described by the co-researchers in the study of
visionary experience. James also talks about opposites and conflicts that "melted into Unity" (p. 379), as one becomes aware of a higher part of him that exists within "a MORE of the same quality" (p. 499). The study of visionary experience supports James' concept of "the higher." James also addresses the notion of openness to the phenomenon making it more available. "It may be that possibility and permission of this sort are all that our religious consciousness requires to live on" (p. 420). James summarizes his work with the following:

In this phenomenon something ideal, which in one sense is part of ourselves and in another sense is not ourselves, actually exerts an influence, raises our centre of personal energy, and produces regenerative effects unattainable in other ways. (p. 513)

The experiences of the co-researchers in the study of visionary experience bear out James' conclusions.

The visionary experience that transforms might be considered a case of cosmic consciousness, i.e., a sense of moral elevation, a sense of immortality, intellectual illumination, loss of fear of death, etc. But Bucke's study must be qualified by the fact that it is heavily biased by his own experience, by what literary texts were available to him, and by his cultural background. According to Bucke the experience must involve the subjective light. In the study of visionary experience the experience of light is one possibility of many types of experience. Bucke also concluded the experience occurred mostly in men at full maturity who
were highly developed, of good intellect, of superior physique, with high moral qualities. This study serves to generalize the experience from Bucke's limited view. Further research involving males and females of all ages and from all backgrounds is necessary to address the idea that the experience is possible only for an elite portion of the population. Bucke did imply that he had a sense of a process occurring when he stated that one must place oneself, perhaps not intentionally or consciously, in the right mental attitude. The study of visionary experience shows that the process of preparation and the attainment of openness are crucial.

Laski (1963) attempts to look at a range of experiences that "are different from those we could expect in the normal course of events and different in seeming to lie outside the normal course of events" (p. 6). Her definition of ecstasy is meant to apply to all experiences whether of religious content or not. Visionary experience appears to be an ecstatic experience involving feelings of gain and feelings of loss as outlined by Laski. She describes three types of intensity ecstasy: adamic ecstasy, characterized by feelings of renewal and new life, knowledge ecstasy, and contact/union ecstasy. In the study of visionary experience all of these characteristics appear in each co-researcher's experience. Laski does make the point that the pursuit of ecstasy gives
rise to values and ideals opposed to those usual in society, but that these values are influential in contemporary social life. This was one of the findings in the study of visionary experience. In her study, Laski looks at such a wide variety of experiences that the possibilities for each experience become confused. This makes clear the importance of studying separately various types of experience.

Happold's (1975) look at "extended" mysticism incorporates James' work and extends it. His characteristics are accurate for the visionary experience after it occurs. He fails to look at what leads up to the experience, making only a brief mention that one possibility, the swift-overwhelming experience, is usually the result of a long period "of restlessness, uncertainty and mental stress" (p. 52). The study of visionary experience serves to expand on this and to fill it out.

Horne addresses directly the notion of the individual who has a mystical experience going through a psychological process. He believes this is true for both the classic mystic seeking mystical experience and for the individual whose experience occurs "spontaneously." He feels that the individual who has a mystical (visionary) experience without actively seeking it, is actually doing much work to bring it about. The study of visionary experience supports this theory.
The Coming Together of Two Traditions

In looking at the various psychological and religious theories that are in existence, it seems that the description of the visionary experience can be found in bits and pieces, caught between traditions, and scattered throughout the literature. Each theory is more or less accurate in its own way, but only takes the experience to a certain point. It has been the attempt of this study to produce an accurate and comprehensive description of the visionary experience that goes beyond any existing theory and that transcends what has seemed to be two opposing traditions in psychology and religion.

An attempt has been made to look seriously at this division between the religious and the psychological traditions. According to Deikman (1982) certain sources of suffering cannot be dealt with in the Western framework because the traditional view of reality, based on a nineteenth century physical and psychological model, is too narrow to encompass human consciousness. "Western psychology in its often vain attempts to explain away the sense of meaninglessness and its attendant symptoms, may have much to learn from mysticism, which sees meaning as something real and accessible to consciousness provided the appropriate capacity has been developed" (p. 9). Perhaps the meaning and purpose
of life lie beyond the spectrum of ordinary consciousness. The results of the study of visionary experience suggest that this so.

One of the basic foundations of mystical teaching is that there is a fundamental reality underlying appearances that is not accessible to the senses, but is accessible through mystical intuition. Perception of it gives meaning to individual existence and does away with fear of death and self-centered desires that direct the lives of most people. This intuition of the nature of reality, according to Deikman (1982) and Bucke (1901), marks our transition to the next stage of evolutionary development.

It is important that we affirm this function of intuition as our intimations of a larger existence find no support and often opposition in our scientific culture. It is Deikman's hope that Western thinkers will come to accept the possibility of mystical science as a straightforward empirical process dealing with the development of a basic human capacity.

The mystical emphasis on self-development makes it consonant with modern psychotherapy. The mystical tradition has been concerned with the very problems that modern psychotherapy has been unable to resolve. It makes sense, therefore, to investigate mysticism with a view to dealing more effectively with those problems and gaining wisdom as human beings. (p. 4)

The co-researchers in the study of visionary experience found wholeness and meaning in life in a way that went beyond the traditional psychological and religious views and yet
contained elements of both. This would suggest that to be fully human, one cannot have one's being categorized according to theories and traditions, and that this, in fact, accomplishes the opposite, producing splits, fragmentation and a sense of meaninglessness. As long as we continue this fragmented view of the human being, it is unlikely we will produce healthy, integrated, meaning-full people.

Although mystical tradition is not a therapeutic system, one of its results is reduction of symptoms and healing. However, Deikman points out that the issue is greater than improving psychotherapy. At stake are the quality, the significance and the future of human life.

**The Psychiatric Tradition**

One of the results of our scientific world-view is the consideration that the imaginal experience or any other "unexplained" experience is the hallucination of mental illness, that is, a disguised form of repressed conflict. Many of the phrases used in the DSM III to describe schizophrenia might easily be taken out of context and used to judge the imaginal experience: delusions with absurd content with no possible basis in fact, grandiose or religious delusions, auditory experiences, vague, overelaborate or "magical" thinking, "sixth sense," overvalued ideas, unusual
perceptual experiences (sensing the presence of a force or a person not actually present), social isolation and withdrawal. The meaning of these terms depends on one's idea of what is fact and leaves no room for a different view of reality. The visionary experience might involve the experiencing of many of the characteristics listed above. However, the judgmental, value-laden quality of the description is obvious, for example, the decision as to what is fact and what is worth valuing, the idea that metaphorical speech is bad, that "sixth sense" does not exist, that social isolation and withdrawal are unhealthy, etc. The key differences between hallucination and the visionary experience are the contexts in which they occur and their outcomes. The individual who has hallucinations while undergoing a schizophrenic episode does not experience a sense of wholeness, integration, renewal, maturing, wisdom, deeper connection with life, etc. In contrast, the visionary becomes a healthier, more whole, integrated, vital, more alive individual as a result of the experience.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study of imaginal experience have a practical impact at three levels: the individual, the psychotherapeutic, and the societal.
The Individual

This study shows that individuals have an innate capacity for reorganization and change. Recognition of this ability by individuals and society, and active work at developing these internal resources, will empower us as our own change agents. We will learn to be open to the wisdom of our inner world and look to it as a guide. As we learn and become familiar with the language of our unconscious, and its processes, we become observers of our own personal system of internal functioning. Through it, we can promote our own growth, healing and transformation.

Beyond the implications this study holds for healing and change lies the greater picture of what it means to be human. The individual who has a visionary experience comes to know a reality that is not normally perceived. In doing this, one touches something higher and therefore senses an elevation in one's own nature, a feeling that one has become more who one really is. One has a profound sense of the connection of all that exists. This knowledge gives meaning and significance to life. One is able to move beyond everyday existence and be open to "the more" in life. One lives with a sense of hope and optimism, knowing the possibilities that exist for expanding awareness. In a world where individual life is often stripped of meaning, the visionary experience results in
one transcending the existential questions of life and death, loneliness and pain, and finding a meaning to existence.

Psychotherapy

The psychotherapeutic process is weighted in favor of the verbal, logical, rational modes of thought. From the results of the study of the imaginal experience, it is evident we must go beyond what we have now (contemporary psychodynamic theory and the scientific definition of reality), and be open to possibilities better communicated by the arts and other methods involving right brain thinking. This imaginative capacity might be of tremendous assistance to therapists. A more general use of interventions involving imagic thinking would develop this resource. Therapy could be a teaching process, where clients learn about their individual systems of change. Focus would be on the activation of the client's inner resources and bringing into awareness his or her inner wisdom to be used as a guide. This would put the responsibility for change squarely on the shoulders of the client and ensure an ongoing ability to cope and to grow outside of therapy.

Beyond the development of right brain modes of thinking is a more profound implication for the therapeutic process itself. The results of the study of visionary experience show
a natural human process leading to transformation. Knowing this process requires therapists to approach their clients differently. The therapist could act as a guide, helping the process along. It would be necessary to allow and actually encourage people to enter into the depths of their emotions, and to follow their natural inclinations, rather than fight them or give in to society's judgments and pressures. Allowing this process and believing in it would curtail the use of interventions designed to stop pain, stop negative thinking, cope, "deal with" problems, or eliminate feelings and behaviours. The therapist must believe that there is a potent reality underneath that is capable of changing with ease. As Deikman (1982) says, "The value of mysticism for psychotherapy is not in the application of technical devices to patients, as if those devices were a mental antibiotic or a superior tranquilizer, but the change it can bring about in the therapist's world-view and concept of the possibilities in human life" (p. 173).

Society

The activation of our inner resources and a confidence in our inner wisdom has profound implications at the societal level. A happier, healthier population is inevitable. Individuals will have touched the higher in themselves and
know, from personal experience, the connectedness of the universe. People who have visionary experience undergo a change in their values. Different things become important, and what was once tolerated as normal can no longer be accepted. This shift, occurring in individuals, will eventually create a shift in society. The results could mean incredible change, acceptance of different races and creeds, the end of war, a respect for the earth, transcendence of existential dilemmas.

In discussing the individual's task in a society which is currently far from the values mentioned above and far from accepting mystical experience, Deikman (1982) uses the metaphor of baking bread to illustrate the progressive stages of work that must be accomplished in the process.

First fields must be plowed, then the seed sown, and in due time the grain harvested. Next the grain is ground into flour, and the flour mixed with salt and yeast and placed in the oven to bake. Only then does one obtain a loaf of bread that will provide the nourishment to sustain and advance life. (p. 177)

According to Deikman these stages apply to entire civilizations as well as to individuals. Knowledge of the Self is not simply a product of the individual's effort or ability. The necessary base must be present in a culture. "At present our society is probably at the stage in which the field needs to be plowed or the grain sown" (p. 177). In this context, the role of individuals who have had visionary or
mystical experience "may be to assist in that process, even if the bread isn't baked until generations later" (p. 177).

This long range view of the development of our higher nature as a people is different from the popular perspective that enlightenment is "out there" like a prize to be won by the individual. It is a hopeful view for us as individuals and for humanity. "It allows people to be what they can be and to do what they, and only they can do" (p. 177). As C said, "What can I do? I can just do my daily things, but I've got to keep that spiritual place pure . . . . but that's about all I can do, just be aware." Deikman sees a developmental process which spans many generations.

We will have enough work to do to occupy our energies for a long time to come. There is no need to pursue the exotic, the alien. There is a need to make better use of what our sciences have taught us and to assimilate the knowledge and perspective of the mystical tradition into Western psychology and Western society. The harvest of our efforts will be a deeper understanding of human life and the capacity to further its evolution. (p. 178)

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

If more is to be known about this important phenomenon, further research needs to be undertaken. The following areas are possibilities for inquiry. One might
1. elicit the experiences of more people to make generalization more credible.

2. investigate variations of the experience.

3. investigate variations within the experience to find out what they say about the individual, the problem, or the experience.

4. investigate the effect of one's attitude on the experience. Do people with negative attitudes ever have the experience?

5. examine how society accepts the experience and how its view affects the experience. How does society accept the "Before the Experience" behaviours and does this have an impact on whether one follows through with one's natural inclinations?

6. investigate whether these experiences are available to all or only some. If so, what kinds of people with what specific qualities?

7. examine what pre-conditions are sufficient for the experience to occur. Are some pre-conditions more relevant to certain individuals and problems than others?

8. investigate whether certain cultural groups have certain types of experience.

9. investigate whether other peak-experiences, as described by Maslow, follow a psychological process similar to the vivid imaginal experience, or is there a special process
for each type of experience.
10. investigate what life is like for individuals in the aftermath of an imaginal experience.
11. create survey instruments.
12. devise and test programs which seek to induce imaginal experience.

SUMMARY

The vivid imaginal experience, as an instance of Maslow's (1968) peak-experience was studied through the existential-phenomenological method of research. Data were gathered through interviews and examined using a protocol Analysis (Colaizzi, 1978). The meaning of the experience was explicated through a description of the major themes which comprised the experience. It was found that the imaginal experience producing positive and lasting change involves a psychological process whereby the individual, whose focus is drawn by a problem, attempts to find a solution. In the search, one withdraws, lets go of control, and achieves a state of openness, during which a visual, auditory or kinesthetetic experience occurs. After the experience, one feels resolved, changed, whole and integrated. One has a sense of having touched something higher in oneself and in the universe. The knowledge and perception gained from the
experience draw one forward on a journey. One might experience difficulty as one's values change and at times seem in direct conflict with the values of society. Nevertheless, one feels one cannot go back to where one was, and continues searching for "the more in life."
REFERENCES


APPENDIX: Protocols
Transcript (Case C)

C: Well I would say that the first experience that I had was in the springtime of 1969. From about '63 to '69 life had been very difficult emotionally. I had been going through a lot of pretense in order to protect certain people that were in my life and I felt that it was necessary to keep the family unit together and so attempted to rise above these problems. However, the problems, as well as being hidden, supplied a foundation for increased problems during that period of time which of course meant that my body was under absolutely the worst strain. I wasn't functioning properly, either physically or mentally as well as emotionally.

K: Was this because you were doing a lot of pretending?

C: I think so. Image-keeping if you want to say that. Pretending that the problems didn't exist in order to carry on what was expected of me as a wife, mother and citizen. So the underlying reality of the unresolved problems was creating terrific tension and I wasn't sleeping properly. I wasn't relating properly to people. Everything was as I had learned at my mother's knee, so to say, how to behave with people and what to say in the right situations, perfectly mannered and all the rest, whereas the real person underneath this all was crying out . . . more than crying out. I mean I had sunk so low I was looking up at the bottom and I couldn't understand how I could either descend into hell from where I was or at best ever get up to a level where I could even contemplate heaven. But it was a very stressful time and with the pressures of being in a community and trying to support it and being in a family and feeling responsible, I began to drink. That sounds rather an excited thing to say from somebody with my background. I was having a sherry every night before dinner and I mean this is the way they tell you it starts. However, I had an opportunity of being away with a group of people on a retreat and I just kept getting worse and worse throughout the first day and a half of this particular period. Seeing other people laughing and apparently reacting with one another in a very normal situation, I still felt like someone looking in at an aquarium. But I wasn't a participant in the body of people. I felt very much like an observer and that life was passing me as a parade.

K: How did you get yourself to this retreat?
C: There were several of my friends that were interested in going on this retreat and had said that they had found it so beneficial in the times that they had gone that at best I would make a lot of progress and at worst it was just a day and a half or two days out of my life. And with that approach I thought that it certainly did make a lot of sense.

K: What was the retreat about?

C: Well, it was a retreat with perhaps 200 people out at the university. It was a class of people that I had met through meditation. It's supposed to be a very relaxing and rejuvenating type of weekend and it is recommended that people do this 2 or 3 times a year. I suppose I had been somewhat of a cynic over the years and had thought any of these couldn't possibly do what they are setting out to do. However, I felt so dreadfully and so in need of help and life was getting more and more difficult to live because of the artificial life I was living on the surface and the reality of the problems underneath, that I thought, "Well try it. You're not really going to lose." And that's exactly what took place. I remember vividly the evening of the second day we were gathered. We had an evening lecture and everybody was animated and laughing, but I still felt tense like a board. However during the course of the evening I was chatting with someone who kind of struck a nerve and while we chatted something she remarked just happened to loosen up. It struck a nerve and I started to weep. Well the weeping went on for about four and a half hours, so I let it happen. I recognized it was just a question of allowing this pent up emotion and unresolved anxiety and series of problems to just kind of dissipate and it really did pour out of me.

K: Would it be possible for you to describe a bit further your feelings when you were in that group of people and you couldn't participate.

C: Well, I had the sensation that everybody was normal but myself. Why were they able to laugh spontaneously and joke with each other. It was a very obvious non-pretense and I, having done theatricals all my life, I felt well-equipped to carry on and do what was expected of a citizen. But these people were behaving like people, and I didn't feel like a people. I just simply felt I was still behaving in a manner that was expected of me, a presentation of behaviour patterns that I was to live up to because they were presented to me by my
parents. Perhaps that's a damning thing to say of my parents. It may have been more self-imposed than parentally imposed.

K: How were you feeling?

C: Envious. Oh yes. I was envious that people could feel as relaxed and as animated. I felt myself, the "self" had been imprisoned in concrete for so many years that I was unaware as to how I could release that.

K: Were you aware of thinking that you were a prisoner?

C: Yes. I felt over the time that I had been behaving as an actor rather than a participant in life, that I was repressing all that I was on the inside and I was definitely aware of that. When I learned to meditate I was aware I was getting rid of levels of that on the outside and became more relaxed, but I was still aware I had a very hard nut to crack within myself. So again my observations of people were that life looked a lot easier to be lived than I was able to do. So I was anxious of my future. How was I going to develop? Would there be any development? I was tense. I was frightened of life. I felt that at some point someone was going to see through my charade and then I would be totally defenseless. At times I felt like I was just being held together by scotch tape and glue because my will power to keep this image was diminishing. You're not meant to be that by nature. So it had been a thorough imprisoning, we'll say self-inflicted, for whatever reasons. They were well-intended reasons, but it wasn't easy to relate to my husband. It was easier to be a mother, but it was more difficult to relate to my peers. So all the negative feelings that I was experiencing in reference to that especial weekend were almost heightened because the envy was at its peak. The feeling inside of "Dear God help me. Let me not go through one more day like this" was intense and I could sort of feel myself crying inside, crying for this person that was imprisoned and yet this outer person who was going through all the outer manifestations of looking joyful and being animated and seemingly adept at making good conversation was just a wonderful performance, but I was not able to help the inner person. I was being torn apart. It was a push me pull you situation. I used to look at nature thinking well, you know, the tree grows so innocently and so quietly and the leaves develop at the right time and there's a place for every leaf on the tree. No two leaves seem to overlap or stick together. Even the
changing grains of a mountain, it's all done so quietly and subtly and if mankind is given this brain, this intelligence, why on earth was my life so difficult. So obviously I was doing something that was wrong. Because nature I think is simple and it's quiet and changes take place quietly. I was struck by the, what shall I say, the metaphor of the butterfly and the cocoon. The caterpillar does its thing for a number of years and then in order to be truly liberated and free to do its thing in the universe it has to cocoon itself for how many days or nights, who knows. I'm sure that every cocoon bursts at a different time. But in that darkened state of immobility, from the outer appearance, the most dynamic change is going on, perhaps the most dynamic change to any creature in the universe. And then the cocoon bursts and there is this magnificent butterfly.

K: Were you carrying this image within you while you were going through this?

C: No, that's something that's come later. After this experience happened to me I was aware that that's where I had been. I was in a cocoon stage for a number of years. And maybe it wasn't all bad because then what was released with the new birth of this new person, there has been a freedom to enjoy and explore and be emancipated and understand that all the things I was doing in my new life were probably incubating during that cocoon period where I was desperate and there was no light at the end of the tunnel. I was incredibly alone. Rather I suppose like someone being stuck on the planet Mars all by themselves with no means of communication. Funnily enough, I remember, perhaps it was one of the Russians who had gone off on one of the space missions, maybe to the moon. The details of it are less important to what happened. But they had to cut him adrift and so he was floating in the universe, until of course his body would just die. The despair that that man must have felt I can totally understand. He would have no way of returning to earth and he would be assured of dying and that was exactly how I felt, that death was imminent. So it was a pretty heavy space. And interestingly enough, I took a course in astronomy after my butterfly had gotten free because I wanted to understand what was happening. And they do talk about black holes in the universe. They also say, they being the teachers, that nothing exists in the universe that doesn't exist within you. A black hole is an area in space where the energies are moving so quickly that they can't be seen. In other words, it's a different pace than the pace of light. If astronauts, or
anything, get sucked in to a black hole, I'll say for the most part it's game over. And the arithmetic of it all proves it, the physics of it. But there is what is known as a singularity, a funnel. You know what a funnel is in your kitchen. Well if you put things in the hopper end and it comes out the smaller end that is similar to a black hole. When you go in, what comes out is this singularity and then the mathematics of it are reversed and then you go into a white hole and that's the rebirth. So metaphorically I've been through a black hole.

K: You've used the metaphor of a cocoon, and you're wrapped in a cocoon. The energy is moving in you like in a black hole, it was so intense and so desperate. So on this weekend you're at that point when you began talking to this woman?

C: Yes, yes. A lady I had known for a short period of time, maybe 5 or 6 years. I guess that indicates that I'm older when I say 5 or 6 years is a short time. Anyway, she was, I think, perhaps destined to be in my life at that point and she could see my difficult period. Perhaps it was reflected in my face, some sort of intense look. I'm not sure. But anyway, she was sweet and loving and gentle and kind, rather like one would experience in the womb. I felt terribly comforted in her presence. She could have read me the telephone book and I still would have felt comforted. So she and I were talking. I've forgotten at the moment what specific problem was passing through my mind. But I do recall something of intense wisdom she happened to say, but I think she said it in complete innocence, just like she'd say, "It's ten o'clock at night." She just made an observation, but as it passed me by it hit something deep within me and it was like an inner explosion. I just fell apart. It was wonderful, although it didn't seem wonderful at the time. I was in such pain, with this explosion going off within me. I know people go through that sort of thing perhaps at a less painful level when you go to a movie and something happens and you identify with it and boo hoo hoo hoo. You hope they don't turn the lights of the theatre on because you're still weeping and not able to pull yourself out of the experience. It's a total involvement. Well it was like that for me. I was so involved with this implosion, if I can use the word, where many of the past problems I could see passing before my eyes and dissipating. I mean I remembered ugly experiences, hideous conversations, threatening people, or perhaps threatening situation, not the people. I heard them in a threatening way. It all just, not
exactly vanished, because vanished is instantaneous, but like fireworks, you know. There's an explosion and gently things fall. The fire goes out. I could see the pattern of what was happening to me, or experience that.

K: Were you still standing with her?

C: No this was ... she finally left after a couple of hours when she realized I was able to be left, but this parade of past memory continued for another couple of hours.

K: Were you still in this room with everybody?

C: No. We had retreated to my own bedroom because I was making such a fool of myself sobbing and carrying on.

K: So you both went to your bedroom together. Did you tell her about these things?

C: Oh yes. I kept saying oh M this and oh M that.

K: As the fireworks were exploding, you were telling her what was going on?

C: Yes, that's right. Because as each firework light came before my eyes, again with a memory of this or that, or this injustice, or oh poor me, all those things. She just sat there and smiled and was gentle and calming to me, "Oh C that's all just past now," you know, "You have today," and so forth and so on.

K: How did you feel in her presence? You had all this pain going on.

C: Oh just great. But I was now able to unite the two halves of myself just a little bit. At points when she'd speak with me, I'd say, "Of course, you're right." And I could see that I was no longer harboring negative feelings about the memory. That the memory was coming, I was bringing it forward, looking at it and like the Wicked Witch of the East saying, "Begone," so that she was some kind of a catalyst to that for me. And then after she realized I was in a space wherein should these memories go on a bit more I was in control, could handle it, could see the process and could help it vanish on my own. To a greater or less degree that is what happened, except that that very shattering sobbing continued, almost wondering if you'd be able to draw another breath, continued and the memories continued and the sobbing, and
kind of feeling sorry for that poor person that had been through that in a situation where she could not see where to go. There apparently was no help at hand and it was like watching a death of myself in those years, thinking, "You poor little dear. You worked so hard to get through that and you just didn't have the tools to solve that." So it was like seeing that poor little thing die again and more of this sobbing, a grieving kind of feeling. And yet an instant jump again to the reality of it's gone. I was aware that my mind was in a pretty good state even though I was experiencing negatives, wow was the mind ever working. And as each memory released, the more I was aware, "I have a terrific mind."

K: So there was a building. As one thing let go, others built up?

C: Absolutely, absolutely. It was a strengthening because . . . well if you put mud in a glass of water, in a few hours or a day the mud settles out and you've got more pure water. That was exactly what was happening. The mud in my mind was dissipating and the clarity of the water was what I was experiencing in that I realized my mind was clearing and that it was a good mind. It could do all this. It was all happening. It was really a purging and yet I recall too going to bed still troubled and tired because it was a very tiring experience.

K: It wasn't over when you went to bed?

C: No, I thought, "Well, we'll take this up in the morning."

K: But you had already moved to a very different place when you went to sleep?

C: Yes. Yes.

K: Can you say more about how that place was different from before?

C: Well I was tired like I had been running for 15 miles, just a physical experience of being tired, of course emotionally drained, mentally fatigued. And I got into bed just . . . of course it was into the morning. It was about a quarter to two in the morning. So that, plus having gone through a busy day, I was really just a limp dishrag. But I recall the physical position when I crawled into bed just all rolled up in the fetal position and still sobbing. And I dare say I sobbed myself to
sleep.

K: Did you have any thoughts while you were sobbing and going to sleep?

C: Ya. What's going to become of me? What's going to happen next? Where do I go from here? Gosh I'm 35, or whatever age I was. What a waste my life has been. Can one begin again? So in a sense I was at a transition point between being locked into concrete but not knowing how, where, why, when of my life . . . just, you know, I've blown it. Is it possible to rebuild? Because, you know, if you've never been through a rebirth you don't know. You're just lost. Here you are, this little bird who's been forced out of the nest and you don't know where to fly. You're unsure you can fly. But I was too tired to really be too concerned about it that night. But that was my feeling, just being, "Oh my God, I've blown it. How could I have done this to myself? How did I get into this space? What will I do? Where do I go? I mean, who will I ask? Well, I can't worry about it right now. Sob, sob, sob." And I don't remember any especially dreaming state, although dreams are supposed to go on and I do dream every night and can recall dreams when I get up. In contrary to a lot of people I dream in color. But I don't recall . . . I think I was just too tired. I think I just went zonk. But I wakened and it was kind of . . . well, I don't just know what wakened me because it wasn't a noise, but I remember waking, eyes wide open, just bang, but no startle, just as if you answer a telephone, the bell stops ringing when you answer. I opened my eyes and the sleeping stopped. I was wide awake whereas quite often I open my eyes normally and I'm still sleeping. That dream state is still there and I'm still kind of semi-involved although, I see my walls and room and the plants and so forth, but the mind is still engaged in the night time activity. This was different. The mind was in the room and very aware that it was awake. But the body was flat out on it's back, with a Cheshire grin on it's face and my hands folded, like a pious saint, across my chest and I felt someone was about to throw holy water. I mean, I just had that quiet, put together feeling. And then of course I looked, and there were these nine people, these bodies around my bed. Four of them I recognized and the five at the end of the bed, I didn't. I'd never seen them. There was no cognition at all. But it was the most marvelous feeling. It was neither exhilarating nor frightening. It was very natural, a very happy feeling, but not happy like you just won a car, a happy feeling of
contentment, more. But it was . . . I want to say extraordinary, but it wasn't. I mean it's kind of a hard space to describe. I don't think I've described it to myself before, but I . . . if I say I was amazed, that's wrong too. It was just a very pleasant sight like going to an art gallery and seeing a very beautiful painting. You're pleased, but you're neither surprised nor . . . because it's part of you perhaps. You know, they say beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so if you find a painting that's beautiful, it's an inner feeling and then maybe you recognize the artist's talent.

K: So your first overall impression was an inner feeling of . . .

C: Of beauty perhaps and contentment and oh yes, I've heard about this, like you'd heard about a famous painting or something and then you saw it and you were pleased, but it belonged.

K: Did you have feelings of calm and peace and the smile on your face before you looked up and saw these people?

C: Yes. Yes. When I opened my eyes . . . of course one thing was almost on top of the other, but my eyes were open and I was in this wonderful space, and you know, your peripheral vision, you don't have to turn. Your peripheral vision catches this. But the first experience when I awakened was that the mind was awake and then the eyes saw. And of course your peripheral vision, and I sort of was aware that the eyes did move and I looked and I recognized S, who was the teacher, at that weekend, and Maharishi, who has brought this teaching to the world, and Jesus, who is extraordinarily handsome, but not in a Paul Newman way. I mean, it's a truth and beauty kind of handsome, and Moses, who is . . . Moses was very old, white hair, lovely lines, Jesus has no lines, much more oily skin. Moses is pink and white, beautiful skin as well, but Jesus' skin is more Middle Eastern in colour. Maharishi and S of course are Indian so that their skin again has that Indian tone . . . nature to it.

K: Were those four beside you?

C: Yes, those four were beside me, but then there were three standing across the end of the bed. This was a single bed, by the way, and there were two people looking in between the shoulders of the three. I . . . I mean that was 1969 and I still have not had any revelation, if you will, as to who they were.
K: How were they dressed?

C: Well all these people were in white. Now whether that is a symbolic thing, or whether it was an actual dress, an actual set of robes, I have no idea.

K: Where were their hands?

C: Their hands were just hanging beside their sides. There was no sort of prayerful position or anything. They were just to all intents and purposes, normal people standing, looking at something, except their focus was myself.

K: Did you get a feeling from them?

C: Oh absolutely. When you're standing beside, shall we say, someone you love, and I put it that way because if I were to say, when you're standing beside your mother, that doesn't necessarily always mean you have a loving relationship. Some people don't. But when you're standing beside someone that . . . a dear, dear close friend, it could be a mother because she could be a dear close friend, but that wonderful feeling that . . . well the other side of it is you can wear an expression which bespeaks that you've just lost your best friend, so in other words that tie or bonding that goes on between someone you dearly love is exactly how I felt with these people, especially the four. Because I knew of them and I had of course been in S's class the previous day. I had heard of astral travel, but I had never done it nor had I been visited before, so it certainly was not anywhere like I'd thought of being visited by a ghost as a youngster, but it was all positive, but not "Oh wow." It was more like looking at a beautiful sunset or a beautiful sunrise, the tranquility and contentment, return to the womb feeling, no problems, life is wonderful.

K: And what you felt emanating from them was love?

C: Love like I have never known. Total acceptance. Total understanding. Do you remember I used a few moments ago, the leaves on the tree, you know, one not taking up anyone else's space, there's a space for every leaf. I think that was the first moment of my feeling that there was a place for me in the universe, just as I was. These people looked at me with this feeling. Or at least they looked at me and my feelings of that look were that I belonged, I was okay, I would make it, I had all
the ingredients, they respected me. It's okay C. But there was not the okay C like a condescension, just something between it's okay C and what's your problem? Because that begs the question on both sides. It was just, "Well we're here and we're all together and nothing is out tune. Nothing is out of order. We're here and you'll be fine and there's nothing to worry about." But when you say there's nothing to worry about, that kind of implies condescension. There was none of that. If I can just take a few seconds, maybe there are other words. It's rather like looking at a picture of a man on a book. The picture is inanimate so you can look at it and there's no negative or positive that this person is reflecting. The person in the picture is simply a reflection of the real thing and so there's no emotion in the image, in the picture, about how you are, or what you are. It's just . . . the picture is there and you're there. I think when I looked at these people it was kind of like that. There was lots of space for everybody. It was . . . you know, "We've not come to surprise you, or shock you, or encourage you, or be superior to you. It's just . . . this is another fact of life and here we are." But they were the epitomy of beauty and wisdom, the absence of artifice. For example if you go to a symphony and something strikes you as incredibly beautiful, you feel that in the interior. It is beyond description. That was that experience. I knew it was the ultimate in beauty, the ultimate in wisdom, the ultimate in contentment and acceptance. But it wasn't an emotional language. It was a language of the universe. These are things. This is real. So it wasn't to be traded by a culture to say, "Oh well, because you're seeing this, it means that . . . " It was a complete recognition of the reality, the zenith of truth in light, the zenith of wisdom, the zenith of beauty. More an inner experience than an outer observation. But I don't know who these 5 people were, but I hope before I die that I find out.

K: Did they look like they were from the past?

C: You see, I just . . . I don't have anything to attach them to. I don't know. The next afternoon when I went to see S he said, "Were you aware of my presence?" I said yes and he kind of laughed, you know, and said something totally unrelated. He said, "Have you always had freckles?" Only he called them "freggles." So he was aware he was there.

K: Did they stay around your bed for a while?
C: It could have been 20 minutes, it may have been 30 seconds, because I am told that in an experience like that there is no time measure and I didn't have a clock.

K: And during your experience you couldn't measure the time?

C: I couldn't. I would say probably the shorter than the longer. But by the same token I remember having a conversation once with a person when my eyes were closed and when I opened my eyes 25 minutes had gone by and it seemed like maybe 5 or 10. So it was the exquisiteness of the time, not the length of it, that mattered. But it was long enough for me to be able to see S and thinking, "Well you darling person that you cared this much." I remember seeing that and then recognizing that Maharishi had come and then Jesus and then Moses and who knows. Maybe Buddha was one of them except I ... my concept of Buddha on this plane was that he was kind of tubby. But none of these five was particularly tubby.

K: You laid there for that length of time, feeling at a very deep level. Can you say any more about that feeling?

C: I felt heightened, but heightened in the middle, if that makes any sense. I had this exquisite feeling ... but an exquisite feeling that was strengthening in the middle of my set of polarities. Because I am one to get very ... or have been up until maybe 4 or 5 years ago, could go down and feel a heightened feeling at the depth. "Wow, I'm really suffering," you know and like a manic-depressive, go up to the manic phase where I was just dancing above the world. But this was strengthening where I wanted to live, something that I could hold on to and something that would stay. I think back over time, that that may be one of the things that has been added to my life to get me out of this manic-depressive state, or whatever I was in. Because we're all inclined to one or the other of these states and they say when you go crazy you just follow your natural bent. So as I have matured I have held onto the these basics in the middle, the strengths in the middle of the polarities. The polarities have tended to shrink and there's more of me that's solid, in the middle.

K: Did the people visiting you just disappear and you go back to sleep?

C: No, they disappeared. I may have slept for a moment
or two. That I don't really . . . yes, I guess I did. Because I remember getting out of the bed when they weren't there, going to the window, looking out the window like I had just come from Mars, and had just landed on planet Earth, and looked at grass like I had never seen green grass before. It was sharper green.

K: Was this in the morning by then?

C: Yes. It was, I would assume . . . well this was in late May so it could have been 6:00 or 6:15 because it's light then. The blades of grass all just seemed to be so precious, so vivid. The birds . . . I mean it was like I hadn't heard birds before. The song was clearer, lovelier, hung in the sir, clear and crystal. My ears seemed to be sharper perhaps. I remember turning away from the window and looking at the room and experiencing a memory in my childhood of thinking what a wonderful world it is. What a marvelous thing this is to be alive. But strangely, and this is the first time I realized that, I didn't think anything about the night before. There was no negative. I just realized that this very moment. It was all new.

K: Do you mean the pain no longer existed?

C: Apparently. Because it certainly wasn't there. I've had memories since then. But at that moment, I realize, I turned and I thought, "Oh isn't this wonderful to be alive." I just was brim full of good feelings, wonderful mind, wonderful set of emotions, happy, happy feeling. I went to the mirror and I looked and there was all this beaming on my face, the eyes all upturned and this natural smile. I remember sort of floating into breakfast, "M, hello. How are you this morning?" And she was looking very concerned. "Did you sleep?" "Oh M, I've had this wonderful experience. Bla, bla, bla," just brimming. And then I remember we were all to go down to a lecture at 11:00 at the centre, and somebody had a convertible . . . my God. It was me. Isn't that funny. I still have that car. But indeed, you see I was more like a passenger in my own car. But I remember driving from the university downtown and there were three people sitting on the back part. You know, you put the top down and here are the seats. And on the top of the back of the second seat there were three people just quietly sitting sort of experiencing, I guess, the scene. Wow, this is V. Look at the mountains. And I guess the car seemed to be driven because I realize I was more a passenger than the driver. But experiencing V. like I'd
just arrived, but I obviously knew where I was going and stopped at the stop lights and so forth.

K: Did you tell your friend about your experience?

C: No. I think I told her enough at breakfast time for her to realize she left at the right time, that I was launched and she could get on with her own life and sometime I would share the experience, but that I said, "It was fabulous," and she could tell, because I mean with 14 at breakfast you can't tell her. I didn't really want to divulge. I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do with all this experience. I wanted to kind of treasure it and figure out, you know, "C, did you really experience that or were you asleep?" Because people had always said to me, "You know C, you have such a lively imagination that maybe such and so just didn't happen." And I thought, "Well, I'm not going to tell anybody all of this, because I know what happened and I don't want anybody raining on my parade. Thank-you very much." So it took a time to sort of savour and digest and find out. However I did have an opportunity of speaking with S that morning and I told him and he said, "Oh yes," perfectly naturally. So I knew it was mine and that it was real. But then, just because I do have rather an inquiring mind, I kind of liked to know why it happened. A lot of people would just say fantastic. Isn't that wonderful that it happened to me. But I don't know. I just kind of wanted to find out, so as further experiences began to happen to me I wanted to know if the answer did lie in physics or arithmetic or whatever discipline. And I found a lot of answers, the connection of the human being to the universe at large.

K: Is that what you felt like you touched?

C: I touched the universe. I touched the face of God. I touched the level of creation which lies below the atomic level. That's where it comes from. It is a blissful feeling to think I was one of those who was given the opportunity to have universal knowledge. Now that sounds very grand, because there's much I don't understand and I can't even balance my bank book. There's a lot to be learned. But if we put it this way. If you can understand the tree of life, you understand how every tree grows. It isn't to say you know every bark and every leaf and every flower of every tree, but you understand the life of the tree. And that was what I felt I was able to touch, the creation of the stars, the animals, the universe, an African violet, a baboon, and
myself, my fellow man, an Ethiopian, an Indian. It has
given me a tremendous insight into the creation of the
world. Wonderful, wonderful experience. Also, if you
have self-doubt and misunderstandings about yourself,
this brings the necessary humility ... a friend of mine
said to me the other day she has a friend who is proud of
her humility, and I wondered if that wasn't myself
because I was pretending for so many years that I really
began to believe my own act. And then when all that was
crumbled and I found out who I was, it is just wonderful.
But it makes me understand everybody else and the
problems they go through and there's kind of an instant
rapport. It's a marvelous feeling to be humbled. Maybe
you don't always stay down there, but it's a wonderful
place to start from, I think, in your growth. It brings
a more stabilizing factor into your life, or it has for
me. Maybe it depends where you get on this ferris wheel
of life. Maybe I started at the top and had to get off.
Maybe some people start at the bottom and then rise. But
I had the feeling I was a young girl in a hurry and maybe
I caused a lot of my own disasters because I didn't
understand enough about life, so I learned the wrong
things, all of which were well intended and when this
poor little self, that was set in concrete was released,
the union of the inner self and the outer self was a very
happy marriage. And it really opened my eyes to my
fellow man and an understanding of life, why there are
poor, why there are sick, why there are needy, why there
are happy, why there are deformed, why there are
freckled. It's where that energy impulse comes into
life. I just found it, looking back over time, since
this experience, any of the downs I kind of got into, I
remembered that moment when all those guys were in my
room and I think I'm not going to go down there. I
haven't got the time to get back up. You just know
you're going to get through it, so game over. I kind of
put the emotional garbage out at night and went on more
joyfully the next day saying I've only got today to live
so I'm going to maximize on that. So I think I have
tended to put a better quality of attitude into my days
and let the other kind of work itself out. I seconded
the worry to the joy of the day. Feeling the joy was
more important.

K: When you think of those men and their existence in
your life, what is it that they do for you?

C: Well now, I tell you, it's not only a psychological
support knowing that if they're that close at hand, if I
can sense their presence, if they're looking out for me
although I can't perceive them right here. They are there. Because that level of light exists by Einstein's theory. It exists all the time, all the time.

K: Are you saying that they're always there for support for you?

C: Yes. Always there. Having had that experience of seeing what exists all the time. Everything that we don't perceive, because the eye only perceives a certain octave, if I can use that term, a certain octave of vibration, it isn't to say there aren't other vibrations there. I'm told that what we perceive with the human eye is only one-half of one-billionth of all that is around us to be perceived. So okay, I know, through the experience, but I've also had it supported through the mental collaboration, that it's there for my support. So I can't go too far wrong. I'm going to get nudged by somebody. But on the other level, knowing that whatever I'm asked to go through is going to turn out for my benefit. So I may have doubts and I may be a bit depressed and I may withdraw. Funnily enough, I don't use the word depressed, because depressed implies a going down below and yet when you examine what's going on in a depression you are withdrawing and you're cocooning a bit and you're being quiet and you're thinking and you're kind of getting rid of some negativity and when you've resolved it you come up with more energy. So I kind of like to say withdraw because, in a sense, what I see in my own mind going on is similar to an archer who has the bow in one hand and he takes the string and arrow in another and withdraws and in so doing is gathering fifty times, a hundred times more power to release the arrow than if he'd thrown the arrow with his hand. And so I've found in my experiences of withdrawing that once I got rid of the negativity I was incredibly much more powerful afterwards. My action was more dynamic. My happiness was more acute. My understanding of what I had gone through was clearer.

K: Were you able to take those new feelings you had after your experience and act within your family situation... whatever was causing your pain?

C: Yes. I remember going back home and having dinner that evening. Of course I walked into this absolutely beautiful house. I mean it was beautiful, but I had grown numb, I suppose. So I saw the wallpaper and my paintings and my lovely possessions anew. And then when the family came running and we sat down at dinner, I
remember looking into the faces of my children and thinking, "My God, aren't you beautiful!" I just had again this similar feeling to the morning of looking at the grass and seeing each blade . . . thinking over time that I had looked at grass in a mass and now I was looking at the blades. And when I looked at my children I knew who they were, but I could see the beauty of their eyes and their eyelashes and the shine on their faces. I could see more of their soul. I could see the quality of their skin. It wasn't just a blob. I think I had numbed my perception because I was in such a dreadful space before. So I had been given new eyes. The windows of my perception had been washed. The dust and grit that had clouded the panes of glass which were my eyes were cleansed. It was a feeling of, "How had I missed all this beautiful face before? Aren't you absolutely lovely, and my goodness, you're mine." It was just a more heightened feeling than the morning. It kind of grew throughout the day like yeast slowly rising in bread, that it takes two hours for the dough to come up. Well, it took the yeast of this experience to let the dough of my perception heighten to that point in the day where I could see these marvelous people. It was just wonderful. But it wasn't heightened to the point of physical adrenalin. Maybe there was some adrenalin but it wasn't that heightened feeling that you get after you've played tennis, or after you've run and the body feels wonderful. It was that feeling without the adrenalin pumping. The body was calm, but the mind and emotions were very receptive.

K: What happened to everyday life?

C: Well, I guess things looked much better. I'd say I was on a gentle high for maybe six months. I found deeper meaning in things that I read. I found I was addressing another level of person when I spoke to somebody. I felt I understood more from people who were perhaps saying the same things. But I heard things differently. I understood things differently. My daily life seemed more joyful. From the sublime to the ridiculous, I found just in cleaning a toilet, it was nothing. I didn't have any attachment or any feelings of "Oh gosh I have to do this toilet again." It was just like brushing your teeth. You just do it. The tone of life improved. The ironing, the dish washing, not that I did dishes because I had a dishwasher, the mundane things seemed less mundane. There was no emotion attached to them. They were done. My mind seemed then to have more time to think about more important things. So to the
point now where in the days here we are with fabric
softeners and no iron clothing, I use the iron. I use a
lot of my bridal things, all these years old, because I
like them and time is getting short and why use paper
when I have all these beautiful linens, and it takes
maybe half an hour to iron serviettes and place mats, but
it's a non-physical thing and I think some of my most
lucid thoughts while I'm ironing. It's a vehicle. So in
other words, I don't find any of my housework boring. I
don't find it repetitious. It's a question of not
feeling emotionally involved and that my life is boring
and that's all I can do. Because since that
experience and since these mundane things have become a
nonattachment to me, I have found the energies to do
diverse things. So I have been able to expand my life on
the creative level. I started to pot and I'm good at it.
I haven't done any for a couple of years, but I used to
sell in three stores. But that's irrelevant. I found
that I could do it. And I would go down to my workshop
to pot for an hour and a half and five hours would have
gone by. And that's lovely, in the middle of the day
when your children are off at school to find that you
have this beautiful life to live, and your beautiful soul
to be with and your beautiful mind to be with. And here
I never thought. I could do anything creative, I mean
knitting and crocheting which is lovely, but this is
more. So I found I could do that well and then started
to play the recorder. And again that's something I could
do on my own. I took lessons, did it enough wherein I
could practise everyday and get great pleasure out of my
own time. But I found that there was, I've forgotten the
term, I'll say overflow, but there was a benefit to the
family because I was feeling contented. I loved my life.
I found the volunteer work that I did, I was getting
better at it. My ability to speak. I was more content
you see in my role as president or membership secretary.

K: Was it like you were doing the same things, but they
weren't a charade anymore?

C: Right. It was real. It was like . . . you know in
the summertime you have the hose out and you bend the
hose and the water doesn't come from the bend to the
spout, so that when you move it you can unkink the hose
and the water rushes out again. I think that was myself.
Over time there was a kink and just because you and I are
chatting, I'll say I imposed it, I won't say society
imposed it. But I was not able to fit into society as I
thought I was expected. So whatever these restrictions
were, were like the kink in the hose. But way back
there, coming from the source were talents and abilities and potential which were being stopped at the kink. When I let the kink go it just ran out the spout. So it was easy. I just went on, easily, being involved where I was, Meals on Wheels, courses at the university, playing with my children, going skiing, going sailing. Everything was a joy. Well then into the bargain as I grew . . . that was kind of a release so it was beautiful . . . but once the release came and all that backlog, then I began to be a bit more selective because the mind was sharpened as well and my growth was now fully in front of my mind and I began to feel a little bit like a whirling dirvish, that I wanted to do this and that, this and that. And then I grew tired so I had to select. So I began to realize that my life is more in my control, that I could do this and choose not to do that for a while. Or I really wanted to do something else, take French, or heaven knows, write a book. I haven't got it published but I've got it started. So the quality of my life definitely improved because I was doing the living of it like all those other people I had watched. They were being real, they were being spontaneous and that was what I found. I found my own spontaneity and my own growth. I'm madly in love with life. Someone said in the church with me about last July, "You glow." But I think, you see, this is all because I had all that growing to do. I'd stopped at that kink. Even the people that were in my life around which this kink occurred . . . I have so much better a relationship now. I haven't damned them. I was bitter about things before, but now I think my gosh, they were just human beings. I mean they made a mistake. Look at all the mistakes you've made. It's changed me. But it's a comfort, you see. I . . . maybe like people who haven't had that kind of experience . . . I have had that comfort around me all those days and it's always there. I don't have to get down and call out for it. It's there. I listen differently. I listen to a lot in here, inside myself, my inner nature, my inner God, whatever nomenclature. I listen to the pattern of events. I'm not rushing off in nine directions trying to find the pattern. I let the pattern evolve in front of my eyes and then I take the action. I listen for the promptings rather than speaking first and thinking second. It's easier. I was doing the effort. I, the big "S," the self, the ego was doing the living during that long period of time. You can't. It's too hard. It's all pretense. Your being, the way you're made, it's dying, dying. And now I just am really alive. Every day is a gift.
K: Do you have anything else that you need to add that might be important to you?

C: I have had four revelations since that experience which again have tended to underscore that original experience and so again I feel this inner strength in the middle of me.

K: So you've had things that have built on and expanded on that first experience you had, that have allowed more growth and more understanding of who you are?

C: Yes. Yes. These visions weren't like the first. They were internal visions. For example, when you are remembering something, like you remember having gone to see "Amadeus" three or four days ago and you remember the actors and the colours of the costumes, the scenery and the music and so forth. An internal vision is very similar and it's just as real because it's not imagination or hallucination. It's a replay of something in the deep regions of memory, but it is you. You know that. It's almost a tactile sensation. It's instant recognition and you know you're the central character and you don't identify with anybody else. You know who you are in that scenario. So these helped explain why various of these unhappy experiences leading up to the kink in the hose took place. I recognized that that lesson, before the kink, had to be learned by me in this lifetime, because I had done such and so a thing and that had been revealed to me in the revelation ... that now there's a debt you have to pay. You did x and y and so this person is brought into your life so you can pay that debt and get rid of it. So it gave me part of my identity and released me from some hang-ups. I'm sure I still have a lot of hang-ups because isn't that part of our life, to try to be pure. Someone once said to me, "You've such a wonderful power of articulation and your vocabulary is so extensive. What are you hiding underneath all that perfection?" So you see, this in itself may still be part of the garbage that's sticking to me. But that is their problem. I like what I've got now and I didn't before. So how I come on to somebody ... you can't please everybody, but I please a heck of a lot more people. I've got the best friends in Christendom, as they say. But I mean obviously you're not going to strike everyone the same way, but I strike me a nice way. I didn't strike me a nice way for years ... for years. And I think of all that wasted life, when you drag yourself around ... you must be your own best friend. I like who I drag around.
Transcript (Case G)

G: Well the first time is the most isolated and brief. It doesn't have a great setting around it of things that had happened. It was part of a childbirth experience. It was my first pregnancy and I was very joyous at being pregnant. The pregnancy had gone on quite long. I was very, very heavy and I was several weeks overdue. The doctor was a bit worried, but I wasn't. I felt quite confident in having the baby. When I started having contractions I felt very good about that. I wasn't the least bit worried. In fact, I felt like I was doing what I was meant to do. I went to the hospital feeling very good. My husband couldn't stay with me because they didn't have provisions then for husbands to stay with you. I had, as the contractions got heavier and heavier, a tremendous sense of the whole universe pulsing and contracting in and out in a wonderful rhythm. It was just fantastic. I felt like I was a part of the cosmic rhythm, and that I really didn't have any control over, that I just had to go with it. I was doing the breathing that I'd learned to do, but that was almost unconscious. This disappeared unfortunately. The rest of the childbirth was a nightmare. The doctor had not measured me and the baby's head was too big. The baby got stuck and they had to use high forceps and they had to knock me out with general anaesthetic. The baby died, and it was an awful nightmare. But I held on to this memory of what it had been like until the time when the baby got stuck. That was so wonderful and I never forgot that. I've always believed that there is a cosmic rhythm. It's not as obvious most of the time as it was to me then. But that our breathing, the thump, thump, thumps of our hearts, the rhythms of the tides and the movements of the planets, and all this stuff, fits in some way into a cosmic contraction-expansion-contraction. And in our interior lives there's that rhythm of contraction-expansion. Reality tends to contract sometimes. You feel reality is limited. You can't go in any direction. And at other times everything is opening up for you. That's the interior contraction-expansion. That's helped me a lot in my own sense of what life is all about, the sense of rhythms.

K: Just before you got that feeling in labour, what was happening? Were you in severe pain and feeling alone? How were you feeling just before that?

G: Well I was just working very hard. I was just working very hard. You know it was before . . . there was a lot
of loneliness later because the two nurses who were in the labour room were talking about their Saturday night dates and when they left there was just a drip, drip, drip someplace from a faucet. It was a very lonely experience. But until I got into the situation of the inability of the child to go any further, being blocked, and the terrible, unbearable pain from that, I was aware of all that. I was conscious and feeling good about myself, angry about what was going on. I was angry at the way this whole thing was going.

K: You mean the nurses and how they treated you?

G: Ya. The way labour was handled in those days. The whole experience made me angry. I felt the hospital goofed, the doctor goofed, everybody goofed.

K: But your feeling about yourself was good?

G: Ya.

K: Out of that good feeling came this feeling of expansion and contraction.

G: Well, I don't know what it came out of. There's no way of knowing. There was just this feeling of being caught in a cosmic rhythm, that I was part of something bigger that was happening and I can't be more specific than that.

K: Was it a sense of euphoria?

G: No. It was a sense of joy and strength. That gave me strength, and still does. The memory of it makes me feel . . . strength is the thing that comes mainly to my mind. It's the result of that feeling that in a sense you're being supported by the entire cosmos.

K: The strength you felt then was something that helped you through the rest of it?

G: Ya. The rest was so awful and I did have a terrible depression afterwards. But that feeling I remembered, and held on to that. That that's the way it should have been. That that is the way birth is, and the fact that my birth hadn't turned out well didn't vitiate the beauty and the wonder and the joy of what it usually is, what a normal birth is like. I couldn't have a normal birth and I had cesareans afterwards. But that was very joyful too. I had a spinal anaesthetic with the second one so I
was conscious, in a lot of pain and everything, but also
great joy and a great sense of strength of what the body
is capable of. The body can undergo tremendous pain and
then the next day nurse the baby. So my net impression
was one of the strength that is there to support you
when you need it, if you're open to that. So it goes
wrong once in a while, because statistically things don't
always go right. That did help me to accept what
happened.

K: So it's like you were open to support from other than
the nurses or whatever was around you?

G: That's right.

K: You had a sense of being open to that before you went
into labour?

G: Ya. Ya. And a sense of being, you know, sort of in
unison with some . . . some whole natural process, which
I'd had all through my pregnancy too.

K: So you had an awareness of a process happening within
you, that was at a different level from the ordinary?

G: Uh huh. Uh huh. Most of the things that go wrong
with pregnancies and in childbirth go wrong because of
the way we handle them. People don't have enough
information. We should have known that baby should have
been a cesarean to begin with. He didn't realize the
baby was that big. I should have had more information
too. I didn't realize when I was pregnant the first time
how many things can go wrong. I really felt nothing
could go wrong. I just couldn't believe that, so it was
a real shock.

K: Up until the point that something did go wrong, you
were still feeling good about your part?

G: I had only good anticipation.

K: Feeling good about your part of the process of
something that was outside of you?

G: Uh huh. Well, inside-outside were not distinguished.
The inside-outside were together.

K: Was it a . . . when you said that you were open . . .
you felt open to some type of support from elsewhere, can
you say anything more about that?
G: Well it just . . . I think my usual attitude is to be open to whatever is around me and to be sensitive to getting vibrations from around me, either threatening or supportive. Only when I myself am very tired and very distracted and anxious do I not clue into that. Then I will maybe have an accident or something, or I'll get sick or whatever. Sickness and health and accidents and so on usually come when I'm not in that openness.

K: Was that openness something that was characteristic of you, or is that something that has been a result of having an experience of being one with?

G: No, it was characteristic of me then. I'd had a psychoanalysis not long before. That had been just one long process of opening up, opening up to pain and opening up to long suppressed anxieties and fears and what not. But opening up to a person, opening up to people, and then opening up to God. I hadn't believed in God before. And it came to me in a sort of surprise one day that since I now believed in love, maybe I could believe in God, because maybe that's what God was, the source of love. And that was an opening up. I was able then to love someone else, get married and you know, all that opening process. And I really very much identified with the natural world. I had increasingly come to love the country, the trees and fresh air. Even though I was living right in the heart of N.Y., I managed to get away many weekends and structure some time up in the country. I spent a lot of time in my last few weeks of pregnancy in Central Park.

K: Being very aware of the naturalness?


K: I'd like to talk a bit more of exactly what happened with you when you were in labour. Did the sense of oneness just happen suddenly as the pain got to a certain place?

G: No. I think it was just when the contractions got very hard and very frequent. I probably had moments of semi-consciousness or unconsciousness and that might have been during those moments. It's all kind of hazy . . . all kind of hazy. Just the sense of . . . the kinesthetic sense of being involved in a huge contraction-expansion experience. It's happening outside of me and inside of me.
K: Was your experience with that calming?


K: You weren't lying in fearful wait for the next contraction?

G: No. No. Not at all. I was just anxious to get on with it.

K: Did you feel any kind of a presence or that there was something else or someone else there?

G: No, I didn't. But I had a strong sense of God in my whole life at that time. And I felt that God was present in whatever was happening. If you stop and look at anything long enough and really see it you also see God, I think. So any experience that's very strong is really an experience of God's presence. The whole universe is a manifestation of God.

K: And when it got too bad, the rhythm stopped?

G: Ya. There was a long drawn out, hours and hours, because it was a very long labour, before they decided to intervene. And you know, it was a long time there when I thought I wasn't going to make it. I did nearly die, and I had that sense, that I maybe was not going to make it.

K: The rhythm part, was it over a short time, or was it over a period of hours?

G: I don't know. I really don't know. I think my whole sense of time was completely screwed up. Because after the very great pain started, they gave me a lot of dope, so my time was . . .

K: And when you woke up, you found out that the baby had died?

G: Ya. They just . . . that was an unforgettable moment. The doctor was looking down and he had this light on his head, and all the people seemed to be standing around in a circle looking at me with great concern and he said, "Mrs. G., your baby died." Or something like that. "Mrs. G., your baby has died." He said the baby died after birth, 3 minutes after. I talked to him later about it. I think . . . my analyst, who was also an M.D., thought the baby probably died before, but he didn't want it on his record. He was very proud of
having the best record in N.Y. state, and never having stillbirths, of having live births and he wanted a live birth. He had a lot of power in that hospital and they'd do anything he said. But my own sense of it was that the baby died before, strangled to death inside. But the shock was just terrible, just terrible.

K: Did everything just stop for you at that moment?

G: Yes. I didn't really quite take it in. I was in a state of shock, bodily too because it was a day or two before I felt anything. My body was totally numb. And then all the pain started a day or two later. I was just really numb. When they took me out, my husband had gone home to change his clothes. He'd been there for 24 hours and he was tired and sweaty. The priest of the Anglican church that we belonged to was there, a very sweet man, I just loved him, Canadian. And he came over to me and he too had this terribly concerned look and I said, "My baby died," and he said, "I know." He bent down and kissed me. And that was so wonderful. It was also a kind of . . . it brought me back to being part of the human race again. And he made the sign of the cross over me and I made the sign of the cross, which was all I could do. I couldn't have said a word. But that was a good experience, that exchange between us was. That has always been my model for hospital ministry every since on how to conduct yourself.

K: Because it was so helpful to you?

G: Ya. Just responding to whatever is happening to the patient and not holding back. If they need to be kissed, or they need to be embraced, if they need to be prayed for or whatever they need, you just do it.

K: When the pain started coming back and the realization started happening is that when you remembered your experience and you felt the beauty of childbirth?

G: I don't know when that started. I don't think I lost that really ever. Maybe, you know, after the drugs wore off. It would have been a while before the drugs wore off and my mind wouldn't have been clear.

K: In particular moments of pain about the death of your baby, you'd cling to that feeling of expansion and contraction?

K: Did that happen a lot?

G: No. Well, I tend to reflect a good deal about how I feel. We are related to creation and to God and God to us. And that is just one element that I go back to in experiences I've had, sort of critical experiences in which I have some sense of the revealing of hidden forces at work. That's one I would go back to, as I say the earliest and most isolated one I can pin down.

K: That's the first in your mind then?

G. Ya.

K: And since then you've had more of an unfolding?

G: Well, there have been different times, yes, at which an experience would sort of draw me in to some functions or way that things are happening that aren't usually perceptible. The second time, that I remember very clearly, I'd been very depressed. It was right after the assassination of President Kennedy in the United States. That was the beginning of a long rather dreary period in American history. I got sick and I just didn't seem to get well. All I had was a heavy sinus infection, but I kept running a fever, and I had to take antibiotics to cure it, and I had a lot of pain in my head. I was aware of the fact that my family was worried about me, and my friends were worried about me. I couldn't seem to pull myself out of it. I'd sit by my bedroom window and look out the window. There was a very beautiful dogwood tree there. It was November, the end of November, beginning of December, so there were hardly any leaves left on it. I wasn't even aware, at first really, of noticing this tree. I'm always aware of the trees around us, but I was too sunk in my own pain and difficulty. Then gradually I realized I was looking at one branch of that tree. And one day I had the sense that... it's almost inexplicable... but, I could participate in the life of that branch. I knew what it was like in the spring, what it was like in the fall, and what it was like now, all through the year. It was all... it was as though I was the branch. That was illogically very wonderful and beautiful. I mean there's no reason, logic like, why it should be so wonderful to feel like a branch of a tree. But it was, because it's wonderful to enter into the life of something other than yourself, no matter what. And I laughed and said, "I've fallen in love with a tree." But that was the closest I could come to saying how I felt, that I had so loved that branch that I had
entered into its life. And I can still recapture that feeling at any time. I can still recapture that feeling. It's most mysterious to me.

K: What was the feeling? Can you describe it?

G: No, excepting that I shut my eyes and I know exactly how that branch feels, what's happening to it at any part of its cycle. The feeling is probably less strong now than it was then, but it's still recoverable. It's still recoverable, but very hard to describe.

K: And what did that open you to?

G: The oneness of things. Of course, again it's opening out, if you open up to anything. A branch of a tree is the beginning, and then I can write again. I began to write down my pain and my sorrow and my anguish. I wrote a story about the assassination, but the assassination was oblique to the experience of my child, my oldest daughter who suffered and was very upset and so on. So I tried to do it through her eyes. The experience was the preliminary to being able to do that, to finally do something and pull myself out of that.

K: So once again it was an opening up and then a strengthening?

G: Yes. That's right. That's right. And something I've held on to. In difficult times that always comes back to me very strongly, the experience.

K: Which one? The one of the tree?

G: Ya. Ya. I've never lost it. It's very strong. It has helped me to understand. I've only recently understood that to "know" the other in the Biblical sense of to enter into. The Hebrew "know" is to sleep with, to have sexual intercourse with. To know something that intimately is very rare and very difficult and it does then open you entirely. Because to know anything other than yourself is to know God, because God is the Other. It is rare that that happens to us that we're able and willing. We're so sunk in our . . . in some crisis, that it happens without our conscious. Normally we are so preoccupied by the daily necessities of experiences in our lives that we don't take time to open ourselves to that type of experience. How many other times am I going to sit in front of a window and look at a branch of a tree for months?
K: So for both of those occasions it was a time when you had nothing to do but focus on where you were and what was happening to you?

G: That's right, ya. Your total consciousness is totally focused and absorbed. That's helpful to say that. Ya. Ya. And that's basically what writing is. It helped me to understand the writing process too.

K: So after the branch, you were able to move out and let go of some of your pain?

G: Ya, express it in the story. Then I wrote a series of stories which helped me to uncover layers and layers of pain. It wasn't a psychoanalytical type of thing. It was more by using the short story form of being able to transform the pain and the anger and the anxiety into something beautiful. I was also working through a lot of anxiety about death and the stories helped me to do that, to transform death into life by writing.

K: And you transformed death into life by remembering the good part of the birth?

G: Ya. Ya. And my older daughter transforms her anxieties, her death feeling, by doing pictures. I had a lot of anxiety about her. That was always part of my pain because she was a dyslexic child and she had some brain unbalance.

K: Let's see. I'd like to summarize what you've said and pull it together in my own mind. So these experiences have come out of painful times.


K: When you've been in a situation where you've had no choice but to focus.


K: So you're feeling physically weak and ill also, in both of them?

G: Ya. I'm isolating myself. In the first experience I have to be in the labour room, but in the second one, I'm retreating from people and from my daily life and from the usual sort of things.

K: Experiences of isolation?
G: Uh huh. The second time it's really my own doing. The first time it's necessity.

K: And then the second time there seemed to be a longer process of awareness happening.

G: Ya. It acts more like getting born, like coming out of the uterus, the sickroom being a kind of big uterus, you know, and gradually opening my eyes, and gradually focusing and gradually entering into life through that branch of the tree.

K: And you had no idea when that occurred? It was just a process?

G: No, no. It wasn't really a sharp moment, suddenly.

K: Was it over a period of days or weeks?

G: Over a period of weeks.

K: Did you have any type of feelings in your body?

G: No. It's an internal kind of thing which I ... I feel it. But I can't say that it's my body feeling it. It's my consciousness that's feeling it. It's a consciousness which doesn't reproduce itself somatically.

K: So you would hardly describe it as a kinesthetic experience.

G: It's mainly visual imagery as I experience it though. And yet it seems to come from the inside out.

K: The inside of the branch out?


K: But as you experience it you see the branch from the inside?

G: Ya, inside and outside.

K: So you see rings. You see bark.

G: Ya. Ya. And There's darkness inside and light outside. (long silence)

K: Were you there?
G: Yes.

K: Is there a different feeling from being on the inside as to being on the outside of it?

G: Ya. But there's no sharp difference between inside-outside. It's mainly . . . well, inside-outside are not meaningful. Like object-subject are not meaningful. The whole experience is the obliteration of object-subject.

K: So you're not the watcher and it's not the thing that's being watched?

G: That's right.

K: So in a way you're saying that you enter into its life and it also enters into your life.

G: The barriers are gone. And that's what's so fantastic.

K: And by being open to that happening, it's a strengthening, a focusing?

G: Oh ya. It's a tremendous sense of wonder and a sense of joy and peace, very peaceful. And later on, only much later, years and years later, does it become also rationally satisfying because I realize that this is the subject-object barrier broken down. This I don't articulate at all for many, many years. It's just I'd re-experience it and I'd love it and think it's wonderful and I'd feel very peaceful. I always remember that and I feel great hope and joy, all the good feelings. But then many years later, when I'm writing about this experience in connection with some other experiences, I realize, "Oh ya. Now I understand. What I have done is crashed through this . . . this barrier." And whenever we crash through a barrier, whether it's a time barrier, or a space barrier, or an object-subject barrier, there is a great sense of triumph, because it is a triumphant experience . . . that we have gone beyond our normal limitations. We have stretched our wings.

K: And stretching those wings makes it easier to be here?

G: Well it makes me more here, ya. That's part of the here. That the here is much bigger, that reality is much greater than we usually are open to understanding. And that understanding reality is understanding God. Or not
understanding, we don't understand reality, but we have these perceptive experiences of it, that make us realize that reality is ordinarily very limited and narrow, that we confine ourselves to a pretty small reality, and once one has had a glimpse of the bigger reality, that's very exciting. It makes the normal days happier too because they're always there.

K: Because you can carry them with you?

G: Ya. Ya. And they can happen again, in different ways.

K: And once you'd experienced that, did you find it happened more often or that you were more open to it happening?

G: More open to it happening. But I don't have these tremendously big experiences that often. But little experiences relate to that. Well I guess seeing things as they are. It's also again this sense of reality, that I became aware of how much by focusing on myself I limit, that if I would look at branches more often, you know. And that's been a great joy to me. I have most of my happiest moments outdoors and this sense of the wonder of the whole universe does come on me whenever I walk by the sea, or go in the woods. That's a just never failing source of strength.

K: Do you ever find yourself . . . what do you do now when you're depressed?

G: Go in the woods or go by the sea.

K: And do you feel like that's a direct result of experiences that came from the environment?

G: Ya, experiences I've had by the sea and in the woods.

K: Do you find yourself yearning for more of what you've had?

G: Well I do. Once in a while I go and I just stay a day, a week, a month, two months by myself in the country. I do that, because when I find I'm getting tired or anxious or just not experiencing life in a really uplifted way, then I do that. That's my way of going on retreat. I go to a friend's cottage, or I go over to F. where we have a place in the country by the sea and just spend a lot of time. And I always, again,
have this tremendous sense, as soon as I manage to shuffle off all the daily anxieties and preoccupations, this tremendous sense of, "oh, there's God again." God just enter in through everything. Everything around me becomes so beautiful and so real. God is so present then in every little experience, in every little thing I'm doing and seeing and hearing.

K: And when you say, "There's God again," what is that for you, outside of you or inside of you?

G: Both. Again you just get rid of this outside-inside thing. I think God is always in me. But a great deal of the time I'm closing off that awareness by being very preoccupied, or tired. Fatigue will do it. If my senses are used and my energy is gone. I don't any longer have those disturbed feelings of "Where is God?" and doubts. I just say to myself, "You're tired. You just need to go away, or you just need a good night's sleep."

K: What happens to your sense of yourself as far as your esteem or your self-image when you have these experiences?

G: I have a lot of self-esteem. So, you know, there will be times ... it tends to go very far down is when I'm tired, I guess. My sense of self is gone.

K: So your sense of self being wiped out is the same as your sense of God or other. You become subject-object again?

G: Right. And I become aware of my body as an object which hurts and the leg muscles don't function too well, and the eyes being too tired and no energy. Then that turns me into an object for myself.

K: Would you summarize what you've learned from your experiences about the subject-object, the rational understanding that you came to years later.

G: Well, I think we are not separate from God or separate from each other, or separate from creation, that we are members of one another, we are members of the totality of what is. We sense our identification and our energy is high and we're happy in the sense that reality is expanding and the totality is good and wonderful and our potentialities are great and we're feeling positive about everything and everybody. That's on its most elementary level. And when we're physically tired and mentally
depressed and it's all closing in and we don't feel good about ourselves or good about God or about anything around us. There are relationships between that. I can open myself and close myself off to that, but there are objective factors too. I think the realities of a contracting economy and a discouraged people and a world very anxious about whether it's going to survive or not also affects me. I'm affected by that part of the totality too. And I suspect God is affected by it too. God as our source of energy and being, also has some kind of... is not always the same either. The extent to which one can be open to this totality is the extent to which one can obliterate the barriers. That, I think, usually happens in a specific way. You don't usually say, "Oh, there's totality." It happens with a specific person or object. I think it very often happens in making love. When two people have made love, really love, it's sort of a physical, spiritual, mental, emotional experience. It's a total experience. Then the barriers come down, and God is terribly present to them. And I've often experienced that, almost overwhelmingly. . . overwhelmingly. And I suppose it's like being... when you're experiencing any one thing that leads us to this breaking down of subject-object. The same as love. You totally give yourself to that, spiritually, mentally, every other way. It's like making love. It's more then the physical satisfaction. There is no more him or me, but we have become each other and we have become something bigger than that also. We become identical to everything that is. The "isness" is what's characteristic. If we can enter into "isness," if we can enter into the act of being anyone or anything, we have entered into that, and that into us, a mutual exchange of being.

K: And that's happened for you at times when...

G: Once it happened and hit me totally by surprise. I wasn't depressed or upset or anything. I was going in a plane quite a long time ago from Y. to L. and they used to fly much closer to the North Pole than they do now. And we left here in June, during the sunset. The sky was all red and orange and gorgeous and beautiful. Since we were flying through the sunset all the way, I didn't go to sleep. I kept watching it. It was so beautiful. I just sat there and watched it. And again I'm confined. There's no place I can go. Everybody else in the whole plane was asleep. And it must have been about three or four in the morning and the sunset is less red now and more purple and pink and violet, but still very
beautiful. And all of a sudden . . . I'd seen down there all these white . . . I don't know whether they're icebergs or glaciers or what, but something to do with that Arctic region, and that the colours reflected like that. And I see also a huge red object and I look at that and I thing, "What is that?" It's just a fiery ball. And then it hit me. It was the sum rising in the middle of the sunset. Well I just . . . well my breath was just . . . you know . . . I wanted to wake everybody up and jump up and down and dance it was so beautiful to see the sun coming up in the sunset. And the beauty of it was also, as I contemplated the impossibility of this happening, was that the only thing that's impossible is our notion that the sun does set. It doesn't. The sun is always there and we're always thinking it's setting and rising and our whole point of view is crazy. And it just totally reversed my whole . . . and ever since then I tend to think, "The sun hasn't gone down. It's there. It's just the people in Japan are seeing it now," and I have a whole different sense of the world. The sun never goes down. And I need to know that. It gives me a very good sense of my own unimportance, transitoriness. You know, that the sun is circling, or not . . . the sun isn't circling, we are circling around on this earth, and from our point of view all of these things seem to be happening but they're really not. Which I find very funny. It makes me very happy. And it was very beautiful, just fantastic to see. So that quite took me by surprise.

K: Did you have the sense of your transitoriness in the other experiences thast you had, the two you told me about?

G: No, no.

K: It was a oneness with what is, here and now?

G: Yes.
H: It happened about in the spring of 1981, as much as I can... I'm terrible at chronology. I was going on a camping trip. It was maybe 2 or 3 months after I'd split up from a marriage. It was not a long marriage, as marriages go, two and a half years. It was in the spring. I'd taken half a dozen weekend camping trips before that. This is important because it was a big decision to take a camping trip on my own and there were at times in my marriage... and the split of my marriage because an on-going issue for me had been never having or taking the kind of time and space to myself that I felt that I needed. I'd done a lot of camping as a kid and some as a teenager but always with my family and groups and I'd never gone camping by myself. I was up in T. Park near B., a very large, almost completely wilderness park, and I'd heard that there was a S. club lodge there. So I was kind of playing it safe. I'd arranged to have... I don't remember now if it was a week or two weeks, but that chunk of time, where you could have a cabin, either stay in this 10-person lodge or a cabin in the middle of a wilderness park. I have in the back of my head that maybe I'd go backpacking but it was going to be a big enough experience for me to have a week alone in a cabin in the woods. And yet I wouldn't be a hundred per cent isolated because the S. club lodge which had a nature kind of focus. It's like the sort of thing that all my friends basically would understand and support me and sympathize with, but my family would think I was looney-tune for. I didn't even tell them I was thinking of going backpacking alone. I didn't tell them I was staying in a cabin. I told them I was staying in the lodge with 10 people. You bus up there to W. and then over the C. country. There's lots of legs of the journey and you go deeper in and then you bus over the C. It's a very long dirt road. I was thinking of going backpacking on my own, but I was real scattered about it. I didn't bring backpacking equipment and it was just like... well if it's meant to be I'll figure out how... I'll borrow from people up there, or I'll buy... like... out of fear too, not really wanting to commit myself. If I organized myself to really get everything together for backpacking, I'd feel very committed to doing it. So I went and stayed in my cabin by myself for 4 or 5 days. I kind of lost track of time. It might have been 3 or 6. I'd brought my flute recorder and my paints and books and I really didn't do any of that stuff. For days I didn't even go on a day hike. I sat on my porch and looked at the birds from my porch and you know, put a
lot of time into cooking up my rice, things like that. Then I started gradually going on ... it took me several days before I even went out on any day walks and then day hikes which were wonderful and magical in themselves, some of the experiences I had, some of the wild life I saw alone, in the woods. They were powerful in themselves. Kind of informally, well, something happened. The second day I was there, there was another single woman up in the region, and she heard I was there. She wanted to go backpacking and she came and found me and asked if I wanted to go with her. I went through a big decision. It was like you know, if I don't go with her, what's the likelihood of another single woman coming up to me to go backpacking together in the next space of time. If I say no to her and I still want to go, that means I'm going to have to go on my own. And I thought about it and just didn't feel just right about going with her. Informally ... in retrospect, you know, seeing it that way ... I spent a week doing the research, collecting research to prepare myself to go backpacking. I wasn't consciously preparing. But the end result of several days ... it was almost systematic the way I was doing it. It was like everybody that I did come across ... the people who ran the lodge ... it was just kind of casual. The scary thing about it was that it's grizzly bear country, and it's early spring. I was going to be the first person on the trail, except for the single woman, who as it turns out came back early. She didn't get half way up the mountain even and something happened to ... there was a log across ... so she got discouraged very early, so she came back. So I was going to be the first person up the trail. It's grizzly bear country. Grizzlies do ... are more dangerous etc. etc.

K: You decided later on in the week you would go on your own and you just sort of accumulated things throughout the week?

H: Well it wasn't consciously. Well, it wasn't like ... I'm going to go. I'd better find out what it's going to take. It was like I was playing with the possibility.

K: And all of a sudden you found yourself prepared to go?

H: Ya. Well it wasn't all of a sudden. It was like I was working at preparing in an unconscious way. It was like I'd ask people, if I were to go which were the trails to go on. But you know mentally I'm evaluating it but always leaving the option to not go. If I were to go, what's your advice about dealing with grizzlies?
That was the main research . . . asking everyone about grizzlies. I hitch hiked into B. a couple of times for supplies and to see the town. The people I'd meet, they'd say, what are you doing and I'd say well I'm staying in this cabin and I'm thinking of going backpacking. Everyone . . . it started, like it was unsolicited. They gave me their grizzly bear story. Everyone has a grizzly bear story. Everyone's been mauled or molested by a grizzly bear or their brother has. So everyone's got one. And they're all like . . . it happened in the back yard, it happened on a fishing trip. Everyone has got different advice about how you avoid them, or how you deal with them, and it's conflicting advice. Somewhere in that period of time I guess, I switched from playing with it to pretty much deciding to go. I don't remember when this change occurred. I had to decide who's opinion to take. I gave weight to the man who worked in the lodge there. I gave his more weight. He had a different view from almost everyone else. Instinctively it made more sense to me. Most people's view was you make as much noise as you possibly could. You might ring a bell, or hit a can while you're walking to keep . . . to let them know you're coming, so you alert them and stuff like that. There were other things like, well if you do meet them, which kinds of trees do you climb and how high up do you have to go to be safe from them because they can climb. And to run downhill instead of uphill and why you do that, and different things like that. So actually I learned a lot from the man who . . . there was a couple living in this lodge. They lived there year round and in the summer they'd take groups hiking. He majored in psychology, in animal behaviour, majoring in the grizzly bear. How's that for specializations! I mean those were impressive credentials. His view made more sense to me instinctively, and also his whole manner. He was unassuming, whereas other people were, you know, oh, you've got to do it this way, and he just sort of said his peace. His thing was . . . the basic thing was . . . and this was important to the whole experience. It was . . . it's their . . . that's their domain. You're the guest. You're the visitor and you make yourself as unobtrusive as possible. You don't make noise, and in fact you walk as quietly as possible. I mean, I maybe took it further than . . . I don't know if he said those specifics, but he said basically make yourself as unobtrusive as possible, so you don't threaten them, or startle them or whatever. That's part of hanging your bag of food up and stuff, not just so they don't smell the scent, but so that you're not even smelling up their
area. I read books. I mean I'm not much of a reader actually, but I skim books and there was one book about the way Indians walk. When we were little kids we used to play Indians and stuff. Well, I learned what was behind that and I maybe put it together in my own mind. But you know how we used to . . . well I don't know if you did, but you know how Indians . . . you know, walk single file like Indians, and stuff like that. Also there's a certain amount of regalness or something. This is what the books said . . . it showed the footprints, instead of one foot in front of the other . . . you know we normally walk like this . . . there's two sets of footprints. They're side by side. Well the book was talking about how it was like this. Where one foot is in front of the other, which is what we do when we're on tip-toe. Well you try doing that not for 4 minutes but for hours on end. You have to be physically balanced and centered to do it. So I would walk around and practise it. Well not only that, you're doing it trying to be as unobtrusive as possible. Because you know, you hear about how animals can hear, and bears don't have good vision. They have good ears and they hear from the ground, so you really want to be quiet, because you don't want to scare those grizzlies because you're hiking along in the woods. And you don't climb trees . . . you've never climbed a tree in your life. When I left to go on the backpack trip I told the people who ran the lodge. You know you tell someone, like if you don't show up in three days send up the Red Cross or whatever. I wanted the freedom to . . . maybe I'd get up to the lake and I'd love it and I'd be going swimming and I'd want to stay there longer. I didn't want to startle people. I took a risk and told them give me six days before you start looking for me . . . or whatever, an extra amount of time. So you've got hiking boots on, heavy hiking boots, and a backpack, like a 60 or 70 pound backpack trying to walk quietly like an Indian in moccasins. I was very successful at it. I mean the whole thing was a real meditation for me. Also you don't want to walk super, super slow because it's going to take forever. So you just get into it. You get your body . . . and it's very centered to walk like that. It's like walking on a tightrope. And with the weight. So there was a physical, in a sense you could say, a physical meditation. I didn't use that word or think of it in that way and that wasn't the purpose of it, but that was part of what happened. Then what I would do when I got scared, like I'd be walking along and every once in a while fear would just flare up inside me. I would . . . well there were two things I was doing. One is I had a
book of psalms a friend of mine had given me . . . a little tiny one and I kept it right in my pocket all the time. I would take it out whenever I wanted to. I didn't question myself about it . . . like this is stupid to be scared or something like that. I would let it fall open at random and it was always . . . I've always been that way about it. Wherever it falls open, it's sort of like an oracle, that's what I need to read right then. There would always be some very powerful message in whatever was coming. So I had my little book of psalms with the pretty cover and I'd open it up when I was hiking, and whenever fear would rise in me I would take it out and read it and put it back in. Usually it just helped me to center for a minute. It's in Hebrew and English and I'd try to read the Hebrew too, which is a very ancient language and very beautiful to look at, and has a lot of meaning to it, the language itself. The other thing that I did . . . this thing I had planned, that whenever I got scared . . . no, no, no . . . I just decided that to keep me from being scared I was going to meditate on the Hebrew letters. The letters in themselves have a lot of . . . it's different than in English. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet has stories upon stories of meaning just for the letters themselves. So I would visualize the letters and just say them and just keep going through them, the Hebrew alphabet. I didn't start that meditation. The first day of the hike was fairly easy. I'm not up in the mountain yet where the bears are. So I'm not into all this yet.

K: The first day you concentrated on walking and keeping your physical self centered?

H: Right. Using the first day to practise the walking. But the first night's experience was also one of dealing with the fear because I was at the base of the mountain and on this beautiful, beautiful lake. The moon is shining. It's a full moon and it's silvery on the lake, and there's bird calls calling out. Here I am, you know, pretty much isolated in the woods, on my own, my first night. Scared. Now what am I going to do? It's a beautiful night. It would be a wonderful thing to have a campfire and sit and look at the moon all night, but I'm not used to doing all that stuff by myself. I went to bed right after I'd eaten dinner. I had a tent. I don't know what time it was. And I decided . . . the first few minutes . . . you know, everytime there was a crack of twigs or something, I'd just, you know, freeze and tense up and get scared. Because it's at the edge of the woods, it could have been anything. I decided then, it's
like, you know, applied psychology here and I've used it lots with clients. It's just a hypnotic suggestion but I used it on myself without thinking of it in those terms. I said I can't afford this. I have to be rested for tomorrow. It was like I . . . there was never . . . once I did it I was going to do it, the hike. I'll never sleep if I let myself get scared like this. You have to take a fatalist attitude. If you're going to go in the woods in grizzly bear country on your own you're either going to do it and survive whatever happens to you or you're not. So I said next time I hear a crack of a twig or a crackle . . . everytime I hear something, instead of getting tense I'm going to use it as a cue to go into a deeper state of relaxation. I think I heard 5 crackles and was deeply asleep. So having had such a rich success with mastering fear that night then I started the next day's hike which was up the mountain. You had to start early because it was very steep, so you want to do the steep part before the sun gets high. So then I'm into the hike. I've had the one night out. I've mastered that little bit of fear. I've had my practice at walking Indian silently. But it's the whole thing . . . like you're also . . . some people might think, going off and having an experience like that is sort of stimulus reduction. Going camping in the woods alone . . . you know, it's away from society, away from people, away from sound. But it's almost the reverse because, you know, I have a heightened body awareness because of really being very conscious about my movements and my meditation, my walk as a meditation. Also being visually very alert because you're constantly scanning around you . . . I was, as part of my training for this . . . for signs of animal movement. The other thing that you're always doing, or I was as part of my training, is also always scanning the trees, because the kind of tree that . . . that was part of the instructions, to always have one eye out for a possible escape route if you come up to a bear. There aren't many of the right kind of trees to climb around there, so you're always looking. Well if I did come up to a bear what would I do? Um . . . I wasn't laughing about it then. I was very focused and intent. So always scanning visually and staying focused that way and that's when I . . . and I would take out my book of psalms and read it whenever I needed to. That's when I was meditating on the Hebrew letters. It was . . . I couldn't tell you the time span, if I was doing that for a half an hour, for 40 minutes, for two and a half hours. I don't remember. But I think even at the time, I must have been hiking for at least a couple of hours in that space, and it was in the middle of that, that . . . oh,
and sometimes I would sing, mostly Hebrew songs, but never out loud. Even though I love to sing, in the shower type thing, I didn't ever consciously decide I'm not going to sing out loud, but it just fit with the whole meditative thing. You don't want to draw attention to yourself, have the animals come out of curiosity. So I would just occasionally sing a song in my head. And somewhere during that period I heard music and it was . . . like . . . I can't remember the first instant of it. You know, I remember the fullness of it. I don't remember now if I gradually became aware of it or if it was all of a sudden. The most vivid part that I do remember is the moment where I recognized the largeness of what I was experiencing.

K: You say the largeness. Can you tell me more about that?

H: Well, I mean, because it was like I heard music and at some point I think I turned. It sounded like it was coming from over there and I turned around, and like that can't be. It's like, you know, it's hills and forest and you know, it's the kind of vista where you can see the different hills folding into each other and stuff like that. And it's like . . . oh, you're hearing things, out of fear or something.

K: Did you feel afraid of it when you realized it?

H: No. Uh,uh. I don't think these kind of thoughts went through my mind at the time. It was just trying to assess what was going on. But the one thing I do remember I did was to . . . I did some kind of check . . . body scan or something. It seemed like it was coming from outside of myself, like from the hills. So I checked, you know that cavity in your head, when you have a song buzzing around in your head. I sort of did a mental check to go into that cavity. No it wasn't coming from in me. And I got the confirmation and it was like . . . then the logical thought . . . it can't possibly be coming from you. You don't know this music. It was like classical music and stuff like that. I mean . . . I . . . I don't listen to much classical music. I don't play an instrument. You know . . . things like . . . I mean it wasn't like a folk song, or Appalatian Blues or something like that. And all that, the doubting and the body checking was just very brief, you know, within milliseconds probably. I just felt . . . I mean it was . . . I was already aware before it happened, at how at one I was feeling, although I didn't use those words. It was
like that was really what I was doing. To conquer my fear of the bears and to be unobtrusive meant becoming as much in harmony with my environment as I could. I realized . . . these were not conscious thoughts . . . it was all . . . I understood intuitively, instinctively, immediately that . . . that the music was coming from nature, that the music was coming from the hills. And I heard different music. There was . . . like from the valley where the hills were folding into each other, once I turned around and paid attention to it and looked out. It was like . . . there was classical music and there would be different strains of it, different pieces and then I heard jazz and I heard even rock and roll, and I thought . . . and I kind of laughed to myself . . . it was like . . . oh yes everybody thinks of angelic music as the harps and everything, well, rock and roll is there too. I mean, it was like . . . mostly it was classical, what we call classical music and then there was some jazz. But there was one strain of . . . I mean they were in sequence, they weren't all at the same time.

K: Were you turning around?

H: No. I was looking out, away from . . . you know, you're hiking and the mountains are on one side . . . so looking out . . . it's not just a valley. There are lots of hills. I sort of understood . . . I never evaluated it this way . . . but I understood that the different musics were coming from different places. Maybe that piece was coming from that hill and that piece was coming from that hill or that fold in the hill and it was that intuitive. I mean, these words of intuitive, you're not thinking in that kind of logical way.

K: Do you remember what your body was feeling like? Were you just really surprised or shocked?

H: I don't have a memory of being shocked in that negative sense or tense or anything. It was like awed. You see I was in a very peaceful state . . . through . . . you know as part of the meditation and everything. I think awed would be the best word . . . awed and you know, what you might think of as honored, although I didn't think of words then. It was just like . . . blessed . . . like I'd been . . . I mean . . . I knew it was a very special experience. That's putting it mildly. I knew as I was hearing it, like this is the music of the universe. All that stuff, like things you know in your head, or that I do, or believe so, or attitudes, or things you've heard or read, or stuff that poetry is made
of, was that I was experiencing that. That all of creation is alive, in more . . . because it wasn't just, you know, this was the trees. It was everything. It was coming from the earth itself. You could call it the vibrations of the earth or something. So when musicians often talk about . . . In times since I've often heard different musicians say or they're quoted in newspapers as saying that often the songs they write they don't feel like it's coming from them. Some of them say it very honestly and humbly. It's just coming through them. I understand that, they're tuned in, I mean because of having experienced that. Some part of them is tuned in to whatever channel . . . that music exists in the universe, as it emanates from creation, or from things, or from the life of creation and they are channels for it. At least that's how I understand it. And that stuff isn't esoteric poetry to me because of having experienced that. You could generalize that to other kinds of . . . any creative channelling be it an artist, painter, or a therapist who's a powerful healer, or a healer who heals physically through hands on. That concept of people being channels for a life force or a creative energy or whatever. That's one of the ways in which it changed me, is that something that had been a concept, or an idea, was a lived truth for me. If I never have another experience like that, auditory or visual, or of that profundity, I'll never doubt having had that experience. It was so total.

K: Can you say more about "total"?

H: I don't know. It was just like . . . I mean I'm a very heady person, very intellectual and all that stuff, besides having a creative streak. So it would be very easy to . . . whatever doubt I had about is this really happening in the way that it seems to be happening, you know, I must be making this up. And I can go to all my psychological theories about defence mechanisms and bla bla bla bla bla, and sensory deprivation creates this and bla bla bla. But I did some kind of a body scan, or checked it, and recognized it wasn't coming from within my inner cavity, in my ear drums or whatever, and believed my inner . . . you know, I believed it. I didn't doubt my experience. I don't know what I can say about the totalness of it. Just that it was very real. It wasn't . . . it didn't feel like I was imagining it. It didn't feel like I was dreaming it. It didn't feel like a waking hallucination.

K: So all of you was right there?
H: Ya. I mean I was clearly... I was hearing it the way I could hear a bird. Oh another thing that I thought it was that... another check that I did, the skeptic in me. I remember this now, as I was saying, I didn't. .. I could hear it the way I could hear a bird, or a brook going by. I thought to myself... you know the way... something like a babbling brook can have a certain musicality and you know, a lack of conversation with people, or something. Maybe I'm twisting the gurgling, burgling of the river down below, into organized sound form. And I rejected or vetoed that possibility because the musical strains were complex and complete, pieces in the sense of western music as we know it. When I was hearing strains of music that I did not recognize, I didn't remember, I mean, I don't listen to classical radio. I used to listen to classical music as a kid when my parents had it on on Sunday dinner. And I might have stored it and stuff like that. But it was too vivid for me to doubt.

K: So what happened once you had accepted that this was really happening?

H: After a time it faded. It didn't take me long to accept it. All that doubting and checking was in a matter of moments and I don't know if they were seconds or minutes. I don't know if the experience lasted seconds or minutes. I don't... and I didn't know then. I was too into it to evaluate it. And after a while it just... the sound died down.

K: And you were totally unaware of anything but the sense of awe and the sense of being blessed?

H: I don't even know if during it I was thinking about that awe, or being blessed. I think I was just too into it, like listening to it, first doubting it and checking it out and then accepting it and listening to it. It would be amazement or something, like the different music coming from different places. It's like there's probably that sense of being blessed or whatever. I mean those are almost like judgements. Like I have been privy to a very special experience. There's the feeling that you want to mark the event in some way. I ought to... and I don't remember at this point what I did. I wouldn't... I mean I can remember that feeling. I don't know if I... I don't know. I don't know. I'm sure I did something. But I don't remember. If I said a blessing. I mean that might have been what I would have done at that point. Or it might have been just a real silent
thing. But I was on a sloping hillside between nowhere and nowhere. I mean I couldn't stay there. And I had to go on, I couldn't just stay there and meditate on the spot because you had to get through this steep part of the hill before the sun got too high. So . . .

K: It faded?

H: Ya.

K: And you continued?

H: Ya. I mean, having . . . it wasn't like . . . I continued life as normal, which in this case was very unnormal, you know, completed the hiking trip. This was just a couple of hours into it.

K: Did you have any thoughts as you started up again . . . started walking?

H: This is several years ago, and I don't . . . I'm sure that I did, but I don't remember what they were. What I'm telling you is what has stayed with me. Whereas the actual experience . . . I no longer remember the particular strains of music even. But I have sort of a visual, physical sense. It's like I know that the jazz came from that part. I can see it in my mind's eye, this spread, this vista. The jazz came from that area and the rock came from that area, so maybe it shifted as it got further away . . . and the different strains of classical. But it was like . . . well, I guess the thoughts are some of the things I've been telling you. Because I know as it's happening, I would have been too amazed to think all these things. It was like, now I know what's meant by, "And all the earth shall sing God's praises," or all those kinds of things, all those kinds of things that I had been reading in the psalms.

K: Had you come across those types of phrases in the psalms on the way up?

H: I don't remember. I haven't looked at my book of psalms in a long time. I don't think . . . the psalms are more heavy duty like, black, you know. There aren't a lot of really beautific phrases in the psalms like that. But there is some of that stuff I might have . . . we'll just see. I'll look for an example. Well here you go. The page I opened to is about singing and playing on instruments and the maiden playing on trimballs in assemblies, God is blessed and da da da da. "Kingdoms of
the earth sing unto God. Sing praises unto the Lord."

K: When you were walking up the hill before this happened, the type of meditating, the type of thoughts that you were having, did have to do with God and spiritual things?

H: Uh huh, uh huh. And I was meditating on the Hebrew alphabet which is a very spiritual . . .

K: I'm not familiar with that, so I'm wondering what types of things the Hebrew alphabet symbolizes?

H: Well, I'll tell you one thing. Well, sure this stuff was an influence in that sense, but one of the shifts . . . it's a shift in understanding or awareness. I'm sure that before that I never had that imagery. I never understood, be it in the psalms or in poetry or whatever, that my . . . it would have been understood as even more metaphorical, but even here, where there is talk about singing or music, it's usually like different instruments are named, that kind of thing. But any expression of . . . I don't know if that is in the psalms, but . . . any expression of . . . I probably more would have understood it like the way the babbling brook had its own song and every person, the way we live our lives, in a certain sense is a song. But I wouldn't have understood it so literally that you actually emanate a certain vibration which in itself is a piece of music. If I had that ear, that level of consciousness, or that dimension of consciousness all the time I could hear the song that emanates from you, or that you generate.

K: And that was your understanding after?

H: Ya. That music comes from . . . that's literally the orchestration of the universe. That there's the rock sitting on the mountain side and the grass and the tree and the hill and the way the hills fold together and the way the sky meets the hill and all that stuff. Each thing has its own note, and together it makes an orchestra.

K: And that included you?

H: Uh huh.

K: Because you were talking about it including me.

H: Oh ya. That . . . I mean I didn't . . . I don't know.
You see an experience like that . . . I mean this will be an interesting thing that will come up in your study and how recently the experiences are that people have had. I would say if anything its impact or meaning has deepened. In some ways the emotionality of it is less. I couldn't tell this without crying before, as recently as 2 years ago when I told it to L. And there's something about . . . actually as I was sitting here thinking about you coming, I was starting to feel tearful as I thought about it. So there is that thing of, you know, I'm being conscious of, you know, my mind is working trying to reach back the details. But it still does move me. I don't remember, maybe I cried then. I don't remember. Another thing I could do before you come back for another interview. I had . . . I kept a . . . I shouldn't say I kept a journal. I didn't keep a daily journal at all but I always have a journal on hand if I want to write stuff. And I had it on that trip with me. It's very possible that I didn't write down a thing about it because I wouldn't know what to say. Because to say it in this exact . . . in a sense scientific way . . . there's a value in that . . . I'm not objecting to that at all. It's just I wanted to communicate . . . what I wanted to communicate to people afterwards about it was what I understood why or what happened . . . how it is I became a channel in a sense or tuned in to the universe at that level, was more than just the backpacking on my own or just being alone. It was the conquering of fear. That's like a very archetypal kind of fear. Here is . . . forget it, it's not even man against the bear. This is woman versus the bear. And for whatever reasons I pit myself in that situation, and you know, my research about it was . . . unconscious, I mean ultimately . . . and I kept saying how conscious these thoughts were at that time, but this is why I say that partly it's deepened and enriched because other things come into it over the years. It's not like I once had an interesting dream. You know other threads . . . like when I said I understand now what musicians are talking about and any artists or creative people are talking about when they experience themselves as channels. Or when I'm doing counselling or therapeutic work with someone and I know that I have a deeper sense, not just an intellectual belief, but a deeper . . . my reality comes from a deeper lived experience of what the possibilities are for people, that they also can be channels, that fears can be mastered . . . all that kind of stuff or that underneath or behind our fears and our suffering and our single-mindedness is a universe that is quite magical and beautiful and that that's available to us. I don't think
you have to be out in the woods to have that experience or have to be meditating. But for me what it is about... how I think it happened, and this might have been... what I was thinking about was because I'd just spent several hours in focused physical, visual, meditation all with the purpose of mastering fear, of overcoming, or coming to terms with, because you can't just mask the fear. It's not like you can squash it down. So it's like I suppose what would happen... you see I would read the psalm and it would actually... when I would read the psalm I would actually feel more peaceful for a moment, or for a while until I needed one again. It would be like during the moments of reading the psalm I would let go of a little piece of fear. That's right. You know I'm not alone here in the universe.

K: There was a struggle against the sense of alone and pitted against the whole wide world, and then you'd let go of a little of that and you'd feel more...

H: Ya. It was really... well the fear against the whole wide world was really embodied in the bear, which ultimately is death. Because what's the fear of? The fear is of... I'm sure that was somewhat conscious, the thing of death. Because in the days before thinking about it, I mean what was I really afraid of? If a bear attacks you, you get mauled and bla bla bla. And what it's all about or what it all represents is death, or the possibility of death. There's also the possibility of being mangled and living through it. Except if you were mangled, depending on how badly and you were out there alone, the chances are you're going to die because you're not going to get back down. You can attitudinally or intellectually have a fatalistic attitude which is what I had to do to go into it. I'll either make it or I won't. But having decided that, I hadn't totally dealt with the fear. If I didn't deal with the fear, I would have been stopped. I wouldn't have been able to keep progressing, literally to keep going on this path. It's the kind of fear that can paralyze you. But I never even got to the point of feeling paralysis because every time I felt that wave of fear I would read a psalm, or move it through me.

K: You moved along. You dealt with each fear as it came up, and you became calmer?

H: I'm not certain about this, but I had a feeling that I didn't have any fear after that. My memory of... now looking back on that trip, I have a picture of myself taking my book of psalms out and that kind of thing. I
can see myself on certain slopes on the mountain doing that. And once I was past that point . . .

K: You don't remember reading it?

H: I think that I didn't. I think that that was . . . I mean I know once I was up there . . . I know for a fact that once I was at the top of the mountain, and I'd say that this was maybe half way up . . . once I was at the top and then once I was at the lake, I was still in bear country. I had to put my food up and that kind of thing, but I didn't . . . I wasn't living in that place of fear. There were other survival issues like I was freezing to death. But just when I think back on my memory of the trip, it's like I see all the preparation for the trip, that night at the lake. I see myself how I got into the meditative walk and I remember using my psalm book, and then I have that experience. The next leg of the trip is somewhat of a blank to me. I don't have any specific memory of it. I might have just been processing the whole thing or thinking about it.

K: Was it like you were an observer or an audience to this orchestral music, or that you were part of it all?

H: Well I was an audience in the sense that I was hearing it and it was coming from over there. It was like even though I heard it coming from over there, I understood in that moment when I was understanding whatever I was understanding, that that music comes from everything. And the other part, besides my meditative state was, it was like that was a good amphitheatre. The acoustics were good there. It was a combination. So it was clearly not coming from the side of the mountain I was on or from my physical being in that sense, but I didn't feel like a voyeur, like . . . like I'm sneaking a peek at something I haven't a right to or something like that. That's probably that sense of being awed or the feeling of having been blessed was that, the fact that I was allowed that opportunity in my life, or that I created that opportunity, however you see it. It was, you know, a gift. I wasn't in an egotistical frame of mind or something that said this was a gift just for me alone sort of thing. The mountains are singing to H! I didn't think of it like that. It was just like . . . I guess maybe witness would be actually better. Because it's . . . well that's like it being an audience but I was just witness to something that is a reality.

K: For a moment you were part of something . . .
H: That's always there.

K: That's always there, but we're not aware of?


K: That it's always there and for a moment you were there with it?

H: That's right. That's right. And . . . I can tell you other things. I mean the rest of the trip had other . . . you know, the hiking trip, there were other experiences that were part of that hiking trip. That was clearly . . . that was the . . . you know, like I came back . . . I'll tell you two different experiences that come to mind. I don't know which . . . then at the lake there were all kinds of survival issues. I'd gotten real chilled on the mountain top with sweat and everything and had a hard time warming up. It was quite cold and rainy and I spent several days just dealing with the cold and rain and stuff. When I went to leave the mountain top and I went out and looked at the lake and I'd spent . . . all those days I'd had my recorder with me and I hadn't played it because I didn't want to draw attention. I felt like I ought to, you know, to leave my mark too in some way. I went to the water's edge and I played just a couple notes on my recorder and I stopped because it didn't feel right. It felt too intrusive. But a couple of birds came down, came swooping down. I just . . . it was one of those things where I really felt like they were coming to acknowledge me.

K: So you really experienced being part of the natural setting and the existence of that music?

H: The most profound moment was that moment without a doubt. I was definitely part of it when you're really up there in the cold and wet dealing with the elements.

K: And also trying to be as unobtrusive as you can and trying to fit in as well as you can.

H: Yes. And that was the core of it. That was . . . if I thought about anything . . . that was my role or my way of being there, what the whole hike was about. And, that's what I said, doing that little research on the bears or how to deal with bears . . . that's why it was an important part of the story. Because the man's advice who I took was the guy who reminded me that I'm a visitor
there. It's the bears' territory. Literally the bear and metaphorically, it's a wild kingdom and I'm a civilized, quote civilized, human and the woods is not my home anymore. In that sense I'm a guest. They have a real clear balance worked out and I could disrupt that and being very conscious not to, or as little as possible. And that was a real big focus for me. I took it seriously. So I understood it at many levels, in terms of way of walking, not making vocalizations, and everything. When I left the whole area, when I left B. I flew back to V. in one of those little tiny planes. I saw as we fly further and further south where the logging starts and more logging and more logging and it wasn't. .. again this was .. I, I can't say it's because of "that" experience. It's the whole time I had up there in the woods and everything, but that was the most profound part of it, where my sense of connection to the earth and nature was very profound. So when I was flying back down, I remember being very, very deeply pained by .. it was very hard for me to understand too in my head, seeing the logging. I really saw it. I felt it, kinesthetically, bodily. I really felt it as a scarring. It looked like scarring and I felt it and I've never been big, involved in the ecology movement or anything like that. I'm aware of it. My family, we were camping ever since I was young, but I've never been like an activist in the ecology movement. When people would talk about the rape of the earth and that sort of stuff it never really rang for me. It was just dramatic language of the activist to catch people's attention. But I really felt it. It felt like a physical scarring and I was pained by it personally and I found myself really sobbing. That's another shift that occurred, or another consequence is a deepened respect for the earth. I can't even say it's .. I wouldn't say it hasn't to do with that experience, not just with having gone camping and appreciated .. because I've camped all my life. I've always loved nature and all that stuff. But you know, it's sort of like a maturing experience .. having been marked by that here, more profoundly seeing the unity of creation, or of experiencing it. So the flip side of that, being more profoundly affected by the abuse of the physical planet and I believe that as we sit here in our living rooms in the city that that physical scarring of our planet in all forms, whether it be logging or pollution or the concrete world that we've built and all that stuff is a part of the pain and brokeness of our own spirit and souls. And I would trace that directly to that experience and other subsequent experiences along those same lines that really just reinforced it. Where it's
not just the intellectual ideal to me. And that's a radical shift. I've been in the healing business all of my life. My working life has been 12 years or something. I grew up in a household of therapists and healers, both my parents and the people around them. One of the shifts that's occurred, which actually also deepens and grows over time rather than lessens is . . . I used to think it's no good sitting here as a counsellor or a social worker saying things like or believing or being focused on . . . like this world is no good and it's really fucked up, you know. It's all in the individual way you handle it and you know . . . your perceptions and that sort of thing because that's all we have to work with etc. Well, I guess the shift is that at one level you're working with your individual self, your perception and the way you handle it, and all that stuff is still a focus for me, whether I'm doing therapy or not, because I do a lot of other work these days besides therapy. But that's . . . my orientation in the world is as a therapist regardless of the work I'm doing. You know in personal relationships and that kind of thing. But recognizing that the pain and suffering in people's hearts and souls and minds and beings is deeper and more profound than their personal experience of their families and the things that have happened to them in their lives. But of us and part of our shared humanity in that sense, is our shared loss of the connection with the earth and . . . and those not just being words to me . . . but having experienced that, and that contrast from having heard the music of the earth and then seeing the scarring up there. I have to admit it was really very powerful. So that's one thing. And the other thing, when I said to you on the phone that sometimes the most profound experience or changes or whatever don't show some apparent outward change or something like that. My father picked me up at the bus station, or I saw him the next week, I don't remember. He would be the person in my world who would be the most ridiculing of the whole thing. He didn't say anything beforehand. He said something . . . "So did you have,' . . . like, sort of realizing the fantasies I had had about going off into the woods to find myself. Which there was nothing overt or clear, it's just that I wanted the experience of having time to myself alone. He said, "So, did you discover any great" . . . no . . . "Has it changed your life in some profound way to have had that time in the woods alone?" And saying it in a totally mocking way. Well that would be the last person in the world I'd tell the truth to, that I would expect to understand, that I would want to know, to bare myself in that way. I mean it's a different way of living and
thinking. And of course the very first thing I thought of was that experience. Like, "Yes. Yes. Yes." And I said no. And it was like . . . I mean in a sense...I mean that's part of the whole thing too . . . just part of my growing or deepening as a person . . . knowing that, you know, you can . . . I doubt that that was the first experience like that . . . but just yet another experience . . . well, I'll tell you what it is, which I didn't think of at that time. His attitude is reflective of our society and our culture, and typifies that loss of connection from the earth, to be so frightened himself of the possibility of being deeply affected and changed by time alone in the woods. If it didn't push some button for him, he wouldn't have to mock it in that way. That was the first person I saw that clued me in to being careful who I shared it with. I don't remember. I told my massage therapist, who I'd been going to for several years and I just knew would understand somehow. He said, and I didn't understand what he said at the time, he said that . . . he's 15 years older than me or something . . . someone that I would consider to be somewhat of a shaman in that his healing capacity goes beyond any particular technique, that has to do with the person he is, and that he is a channel. And he said, well . . . you know, I was feeling all sad and remorseful about how it was such an ephemeral experience, and like . . . big deal I had that. When's it ever going to happen again? Something like that . . . along those lines. He said something like, "It'll serve you for a long, long, long time." And it was like over the years so far, in between, it's like realizing you don't need to have a lot of those experiences . . . as far as serving . . . as far as deepening me as a person. I do dip into that experience as I would dip into a well or something . . . often. I don't need to recreate the whole story in my mind's eye to do it. I just remind myself of the one picture I have . . . just of looking out over the valley and having the music come to me. At times of, I can't even say when it comes to me, but often. It might be several times a week. I couldn't say what kind of times.

K: When you're afraid?

H: I don't know. I think it's when I need a reminder of that side of life. Sometimes it will pop up spontaneously.

K: When you get all caught up in the society part that your Dad typifies?
H: Uh huh. Uh huh. Or when I'm working with people or when I'm saying words like, you know, talking about our connectedness to the earth, or our connectedness or da da da da de da. I flash to that and it's real. My words are not just words. When I think about . . . or when I talk to people, friends or myself or clients about nature and putting themselves in nature, like physically in nature as a very human experience, like, "Get thee down to K. beach," is as valid and profound, well maybe more so, than getting your husband in here for a second session. That kind of stuff. I have other experiences in my repertoire of profound life experiences that I draw from and that's certainly one of them and one that comes up a lot. Or when other people share things with me, or hint at things that are . . . "You wouldn't believe what happened to me." That's one of the experiences in my life where I'm open to believing the unbelievable. That changes how you are with people, what you're open to. But the biggest, seeing that relationship between fear and how you deal with fear, and sort of coming through to the other side of fear. That fear being an overlay on our perceptions, or an opaque gel or something . . . then going through it to the other side. Which is an image I use constantly in work with people, the image of going through fear. I tried writing a story about it. There's a section of the service in Judaism, the High Holiday Service . . . I can't remember where we fit it in . . . but it came out . . . I didn't know which part of the story to tell or what the point was. It came out like a poem more than a narrative and the core of it was about facing fear and going through fear and being more present to the gifts of the universe as a result.

K: What do you do with your fear now?

H: I probably do the whole range of things that everybody does. Sometimes I ignore it and push it away and it grows. Probably more than many people, that attitude of going through, of meeting a fear. Even that in itself is what got me up to the woods. Before even the hike and the grizzly bears and all that, wanting or feeling the need for time alone with myself, and never doing that, and maybe blaming my husband for that or, even though he did make it difficult and all that, not just insisting, "I want this," or "I must have this," out of my own fear of that. So even just going up there at all to the cabin, was in itself a process of going into the thing I am afraid of. Which I often do.

K: Have you developed a better way to handle fear?
H: I don't know about a better way. I mean I don't know if I had such a bad way before. I don't know about this. That was a pretty good way.

K: Are you less afraid of fear?

H: Less afraid of fear . . . that's an interesting question. Less afraid of fear. I don't know. These are a little abstract for me at the moment. I have all these understandings of fear. I see it as an overlay. There's a deeper truth. Wherever there is fear, there is a deeper truth. When fear seems all consuming and all of that, there is even a deeper truth and that does guide me through a lot of things. I still get stuck in my fear lots of times. I don't know. I can't say if my present understanding of fear has to do with that experience alone. I think probably I had that in my orientation somewhat to start with as it was. That's part of the getting up there to the forest in the first place. I'm a person who goes after the thing that they fear, often, not always. But certainly that experience has contributed to that attitude. I mean again, the truth for me that there is something deeper underneath fear, there's a deeper truth underneath there, always. Certainly that experience stands as one of the very basic stones or whatever. I speak those words as one of my truths from my own experience, and not from an abstract intellectual idea that under fear is love and da da da. And again, I mean, it's always in which an experience like that ends up deepening and richening and growing over time. I do a kind of therapy now called rebirthing in which you're actually evoking, or giving room for a lot of your fear to surface. When people come with all this stuff about, "What's going to happen?" and da da da, I mean a lot of the pain and suffering some people go through comes down to some fears, some belief that whatever they see as the reality is the only reality. Then if that's the way it is then they're in a real bind. But this is all getting head stuff and I didn't have these thoughts at the time. I mean my own work as a therapist hadn't evolved to the extent that it has now or in the same way it has now. But certainly that experience is one that goes into my being able to speak from a place of a lived out truth, rather than an idea, or a concept, and that makes a difference.

K: You came closer to an intellectual understanding of it after?

H: Ya, whereas maybe before ideas like that rang true for
me, or they made sense, but this was . . . you sort of have an inkling . . . you even think that you know what you're talking about. And it's to the point that I believe that there's probably even something deeper than what I experienced there. If I know that I've cracked open a level in my own perceptions of what's real and what's possible, I'm just as sure that there's some other level that I haven't even seen yet.

K: You said something before that I was curious about. Did you go through a time of feeling kind of depressed? You said you went to your massage therapist and you told him about it and you were what? Sad because you thought this will never happen again?

H: Ya. I didn't stay with that a long time. That's one of my ways of fucking myself up. It's like maybe I'll buy some flowers down at the corner store and the same moment I am enjoying them I'll go, "Why don't I do this more often?" A lot of people do that. And he just said, "No." Like, "Look." There's something funny. Here's this deep personal experience, and I wrote that poem and the Rabbi at the service where I did it, the Rabbi just loved it. He was asking me to do it different years. I never even kept a copy of it for myself. I have journals and journals and books and books full of stuff that I write and here's this thing of this profound experience and I didn't even keep a copy of the poem. Every year he says, "You know you really ought to have a copy for yourself." Because it's a very moving thing and because it came from such a deep place. And every year I say I really ought to and I don't get a copy of it. I probably will some time, but it's like . . . I mean that's kind of an interesting thing. I wrote it up on a big sheet of paper the first time, like a piece of art, but it's almost like, I don't need that poem to remember the experience. Another interesting thing when I wrote it down, or what some of the essence of it was for me. Two years later he asked me to read it again and I hadn't seen it even and it was the day of the service, the once a year High Holiday Service. He just called me up to read. He has it in his book of accumulated liturgy and on the spot I changed the wording of some of it. Like the way the meaning of an experience can even change over time. I think . . . I don't remember specifically, but I made it . . . I think what I did was make it more present tense. It's almost like going the full cycle now of understanding it metaphorically again. That was a flesh and blood, kinesthetic, auditory, visual experience but the profoundness of it is that it applies to everything
in life. The going into the forest, and the metaphorical understanding of entering the forest, the facing of the bears, the facing of your fears, whatever they are and all that stuff.
Transcript (Case S)

S: I've been trying to recall this and I remember very clearly that for two weeks before I had the experience I was going through a real down time and I couldn't really understand what was happening to me. I'd never been through anything before exactly like that and I was feeling more and more down and it wasn't like a depression. It wasn't like despair.

K: Was it like you were sinking?

S: Sinking, like really sinking down. I was trying to keep working on my thesis and having a difficult time because I was writing off the top of my head and it just wasn't working. I found I wasn't able to work and I had to stop. I was trying to finish by the spring. I wanted to graduate in the spring. I just thought, "No way," because I was pushing really hard to do that. It was last April. I remember it was around . . . close to Passover time. I'm Jewish and I'd not been keeping the religion. I was brought up Orthodox Jewish. I went away from that and I don't have a traditional religion but I guess that time of year things come back to you. It was also a year before that my father died. So it was an anniversary. Dad's death was in April and at that time I didn't go home.

K: When he died?

S: I didn't go home to his funeral. I was doing my practicum at the university. I had just been a week into my practicum and I got the word there. I just got back from lunch and I was told. The message was given to me and he was being buried the next day.

K: Where did he die?

S: This was in F. I could have made it, but I just thought there's no point in going home. I wouldn't be seeing my father. It would just be being with a bunch of relatives and hearing a lot of talk and I just didn't want that. And so I didn't go back. And . . . so that was part of it. I think maybe that was part of it but it wasn't the whole thing. The other thing that was happening was the person I loved, I had heard around that time that he was going to leave V. We had been married a long time. We had been separated several years but there was still that sense that we were important to each other. We had been seeing each other. We weren't
getting anywhere in this relationship but he was important to me. So when I heard he was going to be leaving I had a lot of feelings of sadness. So that was another thing. The other thing was that in terms of the work with the thesis, something happened around that. I had loved my research. It was a wonderful experience, talking to people, going back for the second interviews. It was just wonderful. And the writing of it was very exciting. I was very very much caught up with it. I could work for hours and hours and hours. I could work all night. It was that kind of tremendous excitement that I felt. And . . . I lost that, I lost that sense of connection. The thesis was almost done in a way, like I had finished chapter three, four, and five. I had drafted chapter two. I had a lot written. I didn't feel it was solid. I felt I had to solidify it. I had just given chapter one to P. and he had sent it back with . . . that I had to change the style. There were too many "I's." I thought, "Oh boy, you're writing off the top of your head," which I was. I'd also felt I'd made changes in my fifth chapter that I found really hard to make. I had come up with a whole lot of implications for counselling which were really important. I felt they were important. I was real gung ho about what I wanted to do with the results in counselling and he said, "Cut it out. All this is irrelevant." So I cut it out and I rewrote the chapter. It was like an acceptance of his authority without really understanding it and it was hurtful. I found it very hurtful. I couldn't talk with him about it. I felt I can't talk with him about the way that I feel. I felt I just couldn't communicate with him. So there I had all these feelings that I was trying to keep down and just keep going. And I came to a point where I just could not do anything. And so, what I found myself doing is just withdrawing. It wasn't a planned thing. I just withdrew from everything and everybody. I unplugged my phone. I . . . I just didn't want to talk with anyone. I wanted silence. I knew I just wanted to get away from pressures and hassles and a whole lot of talk and it seemed to me that there was a whole lot of babble going around. I just didn't know who I was or where I was going anymore. And so I guess I spent a couple of . . . I guess it must have been three weeks just being alone and my friends were worried about me. I was getting little notes outside my door because when I unplug the phone I don't hear the door outside either. People were sticking notes on the outside door of the apartment building. So I got to my friends and I told them I was okay and I just wanted to be alone by myself. I found that I wasn't able to work. I did things like
walking. I did a whole lot of walking. I walked in the park. I just went into book stores and I just browsed around. I had that real heavy feeling like I had a feeling of loss of energy and a real kind of heaviness, weighted down.

K: Was it a physical heaviness as well as emotional?

S: Oh yes. Oh yes, very much so, very intense. And I remember the walking part. I was doing things like sewing which I hardly ever do, like I never do. I made a cloth racoon. It was just something that I did. I paid attention to dreams. This was something I do anyway. I was paying particular attention to dreams and I think that what I was hoping for was some kind of dream that would give me a sense of direction. And I did get a dream like that. On Easter Sunday I had a dream and I recalled it and that was about a week before this other experience that I'm going to talk about. The dream that I had was an image of a set of keys on a ring. One of the keys is in the lock of a door. The door is closed. The set of keys are shining, illuminated. I hear words, "Part of the process." Before I saw the keys and heard the words there was a struggle going on but I can't remember. I did a drawing of it. It was the shining of light which really struck me. I just didn't know what to make of it, about the locked door and the key and whether I was inside the door or whether I was outside the door. I just didn't know. But it seemed as though there was some indication of hope or something in the feeling with that light. So I did this drawing and I put it up on the cabinet which is right across from my bed where I could look at it.

K: So basically you lived with it?

S: Yes. I tried to . . . I guess, feel my way through that and tried to understand what it meant. I remember going into . . . being . . . you know I couldn't afford any of these books on dream symbols, but looking up keys and stuff and trying to figure out . . . It seemed to me that it had to do with spirit and I was being given the keys to heaven, things like that. But I just really didn't know what to do with that. In the week after that, like the week between having that dream and the other, I found myself picking books off the shelf. Things sort of came off the shelf for me. The night before I had that experience I was reading a mythology. It's different goddess myths. It's a book I love and I was reading it for about the second or third time. I
think I was reading things that were kind of comforting and had a personal feeling. This one is about death and rebirth. I was longing. I had a real sense of longing for a connection. I wanted a connection because I was feeling so cut off and alienated.

K: A connection with?

S: With . . . it was "good," I think. That's the word, that's what I would use. And I just didn't have it. I felt really alienated from everything and everybody.

K: So it wasn't a connection that you wanted through other people?

S: No, no. I felt I had to be alone. I had to be spirit and I had to get away from external things. At a certain point I realized what I was doing. It was more instinctive. When I look back at the journal, I was incubating, kind of incubating and waiting for what I thought was the turning point, something like that, some kind of message, some kind of direction. I was just waiting. I read something in T. S. Elliot and it was these lines in particular:

"Suffer me not to be separated And let my cry come unto thee."

I put this up on my filing cabinet. I wanted something so badly. And it had to do with all these things. It had to do with my father. It had to do with L's calling. It had to do with my work. It had to do with . . . with just a sense of . . . whatever, a reconnection with something. I did cry. I remember doing a whole lot of crying at this time. And it's not something that I do easily. I just don't tend to cry. And it was probably important that I do it because when I was trying to work I remember feeling this pain in my eyes.

K: What kind of crying was it?

S: I think it was sadness. It was sadness. And I think it was probably healing. But . . . it was just a lot of tears. I'm wondering . . . I'm probably missing a whole lot. (consults journal) Ya . . . April 24. Yes. I drew my dream Easter Sunday. That seemed to help me. Oh . . . "Last night I awoke. I heard something fall. I turned on the light. The little mouse holding the picture to my filing cabinet had fallen down and the picture was flapping as though the door was opening. There did not seem to be a wind coming, like from outside . . . I still feel that I don't want to talk to anyone
from school or about school. What do I want? A connection with spirit. That's what I want. Nothing else really matters." When I had the experience it was about . . . it was on . . . early Sunday morning a week later, after the dream.

K: You spent that week in the same type of isolation as before?

S: Yes. I saw . . . the only people that I saw, at that time, was my dream group. I went there once. But that was not in that week. It was the week before that. And I was seeing this friend of mine, who was an old lady who lives in this part of town. She's a very special friend. But I don't think it was during that week. I don't remember seeing people. Would you like me to read this?

K: I think I'd like you to tell me about it.

S: Can I just leave this on my lap?

K: Sure.

S: Okay. I remember I woke up. I was awakened in the middle of the night. It was 3:45. There was a noise outside. And I was trying to remember a dream. I couldn't remember it. I wasn't sure if I drifted back to sleep or not. Then I felt . . . what I felt was a presence. I felt a presence in the room. And it was like a sense of power. And as soon as I felt it, I had that sense of knowing what it was, because I had been waiting for something to happen. And it was in my mind. My mind became focused on . . . it was a sense of presence. I felt it in my body. When I start to tell you about it now, I start . . . I'm reliving it. I feel very moved by the whole thing.

K: What do you feel in your body?

S: A quickened heart beat. My heart speeded up so much that I was afraid I was going to die. It was that kind of thing.

K: Were your eyes still closed?

S: No. My breath slowed down. I had at that point . . . I thought I could get up. I could call someone. I could break this. Like, you know, I don't have to stay here and have this happen. I was scared. I thought, "I'm really scared." Because that power was so overwhelming.
And I thought, "I don't want to," you know. I don't want to stop this.

K: So you made a conscious decision to go with what was going on?

S: Yes. To stay and to experience this. What I said was, "Help me not to be afraid."

K: Did you say it out loud?

S: Yes. Well, quiet, I guess. But I said it. And I was trembling. It was at that point that I saw a light. I felt it first in my body. I felt the power and presence first, and then I saw the light. The light was coming from a point in the ceiling and radiating. It was radiating down and spreading around. It was... I was following it, and as I was following the light I could feel the power and I could feel changes in my body. It was like moment to moment changes that were taking place in my body. It was warmth. I could feel a sense of warmth in my arms and legs. It was like my blood, moving through my body. It was a wonderful... it was a peaceful feeling. It was very peaceful. I had a sense that this was God. I've never experienced anything like that in my whole life. It was just incredible, just incredible. I guess that I wanted answers so much that... you know, I just wanted to dialogue. I wanted to talk. I had a sense that this is... that whatever this is, it's what I was looking for. It's what I was waiting for and I would like to just know directions. What I got...

K: Did you ask questions?

S: Yes. I asked questions.

K: In your mind? Out loud?

S: It was in my mind I think. I don't think that I spoke them out loud. I think that I formed them. I remember, what I got was this tremendous sense of affirmation. It was just an incredible feeling of being blessed. It was just going right through me, right through my whole mind, through my body, being blessed and affirmed, and loved. I've just never had that before. It was just like an outpouring. What I felt was... it was outside me. I could see the light outside me. I could feel that presence outside me. I could feel something going on inside me. So it was as though that power was inside me.
and outside me at the same time. Like I was inside, like I was within it, like I was just enfolded in it. It was wonderful. And it was love, you know. It was an outpouring of love. It was so strong. It was so strong that I got scared again. It was so powerful that I went through the fear thing several times.

K: So would you feel afraid and then feel the love again and then feel afraid and then the love?

S: Yes. Yes. I could hear my teeth chattering, my palms were sweating. I could feel my body trembling. It was... you could say an anxiety attack. I mean that's the way it was. And I kept saying I'm afraid. Help me not to be afraid. And the fear went. It was just incredible. It was just an incredible experience. I'm just feeling it. When I'm talking about it, I'm feeling it now. I'm just feeling my heart pounding. (silence)

K: Can you tell me what you're feeling right now?

S: I'm not even sure. (silence)

K: Don't feel rushed. Take the time you need S.

S: Ya. I've been really... again suffering, going through a time of separation, so it's good to talk. What I was feeling was this pounding in my heart...

K: Fear, also?

S: No, no. It was just coming back. This crying... I did a lot of crying in... I was talking to the light and the tears just poured out of me. They just poured out. And it wasn't sadness. I felt this love. And I said I'm so happy and I cried. I cried and I said I'm happy and I cried. That's the way it went. I felt a pain in the right side of my chest, under my right arm. I felt that several times and this is where I'd had the surgery for breast cancer, my mastectomy. And I felt that several times in the course of this dialogue, or whatever. I felt that this was part of some kind of message, that this was dealing with my work. The message that I felt that I was getting... I felt that I was getting the message that I was going the right way in my life. That the work that I was doing was important, that it was sacred, that staying with that was the way for me to go. And that's really what I needed. I needed to know that. Part of it was that the people I loved were
going to be taken care of. And they were two people in particular. One was L, my husband, and the other was V, this old woman. I asked about those two. But the sense of the right direction was the main message I got.

K: And how did you get that message?

S: It came in a total way. It was like . . . it came through this outpouring of love and affirmation that I felt. That's the way it was. I would ask it and I would get it and would have that sense of peace. It was like almost a physical kind of sensation I would get. But it was like a knowing that came from this total . . . the way that I felt.

K: So you somehow, within your body, knew?

S: Yes. I'm wondering if I'm saying it. I did believe this. That I knew I would get the strength to finish my work because it was . . . you know, it sounds arrogant. Like I can't talk about this to people. I can't talk about this to anyone, because they'd think I was crazy and I was arrogant. I could say this to you. And the sense that I got was that this was sacred work and that I would get the strength to finish and that this was what I had to do. It was like a task that I was called on to do. And I had that, a kind of an intuition about that. I'd had a sense that this is important to do but I hadn't had it affirmed. What I needed was this kind of real clear affirmation of what I had been doing, that I didn't need to be afraid of anything. I didn't have to be afraid of anything because here was a power that was so overwhelming and it was love. This was the only thing that was to be feared, that power and I was being helped not to be afraid of it. What I was feeling was love and I had this sense that I didn't need to be afraid.

K: Do you have any idea how long this lasted?

S: Yes. I know exactly how long. That's the strange thing. It felt like it was going on for a long time. At a certain point I thought it's okay to get up. I needed to go to the bathroom. I really needed to go. I didn't want to break this connection but at a certain point I thought I can get up. When I got up I felt the presence was still there. I felt it was in the apartment. When I walked from the bedroom out to the bathroom I had that sense of density, like there was a real density I was walking through.
K: A physical density?

S: Ya. I could feel it. There was a denseness. It was hard to walk. It was hard to walk. When I turned on the light in the bathroom my watch said 5:30. It was 3:45 when I turned on . . . I think before . . . I looked at my watch when I first woke up. It was 3:45. This was 5:30 and I went back to bed and I slept for a couple of hours. That day I found out, like later that day, that the time was supposed to change and I had not changed my clock that night. I had not put it forward an hour and so it was like a time out of time almost. That really freaked me out . . . that we were supposed to lose an hour during the night because of the time change at the end of April, and here I had spoken with spirit or dialogued with spirit for over an hour. It was like a time out of time. It seemed very symbolic to me, that it was another kind of time.

K: Did you have a sense of not wanting to break the connection when you went to the bathroom?

S: Ya. I waited for a time when it seemed okay. I remember lying there for a while and there's a time where I felt it's okay now. I've received the message, or whatever, and it's okay for me to go.

K: So there came a point where you knew what you needed to know, where you had what you needed?

S: Uh huh. I had three other experiences after that, not nearly so powerful, but similar. Two of them were within the next week or two, shortly after this. They were similar. I could feel that coming on and I would go and lie down and I could see the light and I would feel the presence again. It wasn't like a whole lot of dialoguing or anything else. It was like an experiencing of presence.

K: How did you feel it come on?

S: It was like a sense of excitement. I think I somehow . . . I don't think that I . . . I was working on a dream. I was sitting here at the table working on a dream. It was a dream I'd had in 1976. I'd had a dream about a rainbow. The night before I'd had another dream about a rainbow and I just could feel the connection. They were two dreams, eight years apart and the first one had meant a lot to me and I'd done a drawing and written a poem. It was to me a dream that had to do with spirit.
And I'd had another rainbow dream and I was working on that. I went back and reread the journal in which I'd recorded the first dream. It was just like a sense again of feeling presence. I could feel this coming, feel it coming. I laid down and it was like another encounter with light only it was much gentler. It wasn't as powerful. It was a gentler kind of connection. This was fairly close in time.

K: So the fear wasn't there this time?

S: No. I didn't have the fear. The last time was in July. This was really surprising when this came. I just did not expect it at all. What was going on at that time . . . it was the last time, about two and a half months after this. I was having problems with the word processing and it was like a draggy, draggy thing. They were making so many mistakes and it was costing so much money. I had spent a whole lot of time proof reading and I had to take it back to the word processor the next day. There weren't any buses running and it was a real crummy time. At midnight I turned out the light and there it was. There it was, you know, July 16. I guess it would have been the night of the fifteenth. There it was and it was a demand. What I felt at that time was not just the blessing part. It was like a demand. Something was different. I remember closing my eyes and trying to get back to sleep and I couldn't. That light was there and it was demanding my attention. I had to look at it. I had to focus, to concentrate fully on it, all of me, as long as that light was there. It was like more commitment, more work being demanded of me. At this time, the light was very, very beautiful. I could see, like petals of flowers, golden light. The first time it came it was more like white, more a kind of whitish radiance. It was golden and very, very beautiful. I felt myself getting pulled back. I drifted off and I'd get pulled back again and again. My ears felt strange, like I was in an airplane. You know when you're in an airplane, you're rising and descending. I had that funny strange feeling in my ears. It was again, quite an incredible experience. It was a demand. It was this power, warmth, beauty, the radiance, the love, but it was a demand for commitment. And that was the last message that I got. This is what I wrote. When I read it now I cry. "God will give me the strength to do His work. I'll suffer, I will also experience glory as I already have done. God will accept no half measures. He demands full commitment." That's the way I felt. Now it's overwhelming me because there's just so much that's
happened. I've come to the point with the doctoral program I'll have to leave it. I've been there for a year and I've come to a decision that I'll have to leave it because I'm not able to be the way I need to be there. It's just not the right way for me to go and I had interpreted that too narrowly. I had interpreted that.

.. oh, this was another thing I didn't mention to you before when I was going through this down time. One of the things that had happened was that I'd gotten this scholarship to the doctoral program. So I wanted to do that. I took this affirmation as being this is the right way to go. And with L. going back east, this is not my right way. My right way is staying here. I saw this as a continuation of my work, going on with the doctoral program, continuing this kind of research and everything seemed right to me. It seemed all of a piece. And I thought with L., well maybe we'll get together again some day, maybe we won't. But this was at the time. There's more I have to say to you about that. But right where I am is having to leave the doctoral program and I'm planning to go back east this summer. The only way that I feel like I can be on the right track is to get away from here, because I've been off center. I've been really off center. It's not been right, and it's been a real struggle to accept that, be real clear about it. I knew it pretty well at Christmas. I stayed through the whole academic year to be sure. I didn't want any regrets. I wanted to be real clear.

K: So you taking this direction was one way you'd interpreted your experience?

S: Ya. I thought that going on academically was the right way for me to go, because I was getting the affirmation for the work that I'd already done. I was still in the process of doing the master's thesis. I took it to mean that going into the doctoral program, I would continue doing the same sort of work. I wanted to do this bad. It was the whole meaning in my life, pretty well. I have to find another way of doing it. This is not a place where I can do it, you know, things as they are. I can't be myself there. It's just been really clear for me. It's almost like .. . I mean this would seem like an extreme statement in any other context, but it's like for me, worshipping graven images or sacred cows or anything other than the real thing. I can't do that. I can't. Having experienced that, I can't accept anything else as my reality. This is my reality. And so I haven't had another experience like that. I think I look for it all the time. I've had dreams that have been
important for me. So it's like making decisions almost in the dark. It's as though I'm back in the mundane world again and having to make decisions in that way, which has been hard. But I know what's right. I have a sense of what's not the way, and that a way will open up whatever it is.

K: Is that something you take from your experience, a sense that you will have an answer?

S: Yes, I think so. I think that I have to have that trust going into something that's really unknown. I'm going back east. I'm going to . . . well, part of what happened . . . to try and clarify things for you. There are a number of things that happened as a result of this. A number of things. The biggest thing was that I got strength and clarity and this didn't take long. This was a matter of days that I was reconnecting with people.

K: What did you do within the first few days? You said the first thing you did after the experience was go to the bathroom. What was your feeling there?

S: I remember looking in the mirror and seeing myself white, just like dead white and my eyes were just shining. I looked really changed. I looked changed. The first few days I felt a little bit shaky. I felt very, very vulnerable because it was like coming back to earth again after having experienced something so profound. It was hard. There was a bit of unreality. I plugged in my phone that night and it was too soon because I got a call from someone who had applied for the doctoral program. She's someone from out of town. She'd been given my name and she wanted to talk with me and I was in a very strange space. She was a very assertive woman, and for us to communicate with each other was very hard. I think she found me very strange and she got more and more assertive with me and I was backing off more and more. She wanted me to try to . . . she said what's your schedule. Well I didn't have a schedule. I was trying to come back to earth again after having had this experience. So we finally . . . it was just not a time where I could talk to her with any sense about the whole situation. So I just wasn't ready. The next day, what I did Monday, I went up to the university. I went to the library at the school of theology, which is a place I like. I go there and browse around when I have the time sometimes. But I wanted to find something on mystical experiences because I thought that's what I've had. I want to find out about it. I found a little book by
Hathel on mystical experience and I loved it. I brought it home and I was reading and it just really hit home for me and I thought gosh this feels . . . this sounds like what I've been through. I wanted to understand it. I wanted to try to understand this experience I'd had. So that was Monday. Tuesday I went for a walk in the park. During the walk I remember feeling much more connected, seeing some people I knew and just talking a little bit with them, coming home and calling P. That night I called P. I also had a dream. I had a dream that indicated to me I could talk with him, that it would be possible. I called him Tuesday night and I saw him on Wednesday for an hour and a half. We had a wonderful talk. It was incredible. Before I couldn't communicate with him at all. I felt that it was just impossible. I talked to him. I told him about this experience. I felt complete understanding. I talked to him about the way I felt about the changes to my thesis. I had an understanding about his point of view that I hadn't before. I think I came to understand from this experience. I came to understand the results of the study in a different way, and it was a much more profound way, and that I had been interpreting it too narrowly. So this became clear to me. I could understand his perspective as I couldn't before, and I felt like I was understood by him. I had that sense of here is something real going on. It was at a level of spirit that I hadn't really . . . I had sensed it. I thought I knew it. I thought I knew what I was doing, but I didn't really know. It was a knowing that was not deep enough or clear enough. I felt for the first time, in a sense, that here I was, knowing what I was doing with this thesis. P. said to me that he didn't think that I had changed all that much. He said I think that you're more solid and more grounded. But it's as though you're back to where you always were. You were back to yourself again . . . the way that he saw me. But for me it was quite totally new. It was almost like a . . . it was like a rebirth experience, a coming out of the dark and becoming new. That was the way that I felt, that I was new. So the relationship with him has been really different. I felt ever since that time that I could talk with him and I had that trust. So that was a really big thing. I got back to work on my thesis. I kept with it and I stayed with it. That part was fine. The relationship with L. changed. We had been stuck. What happened over the summer . . . I knew he was going to be going, but we had a wonderful summer. We had an absolutely wonderful summer. We hadn't had a time like that since I don't know when. We were kind of present . . . we were present
together, in the present and not all caught up with what was going to happen when he'd be away. We really were together that summer. We were relating to each other in a much more profound way. We had our closeness. We became very close and it was hard when he left. That part was hard because it was a wrenching away. We'd gained a real closeness and it was different from before because it was based on a lot of this that had happened to me. I felt that he was accepting this more. I felt like he was accepting. I talked with him about it and told him about this, that he was accepting who I was and what was important to me in a way that he never had before. He was really supportive. It had been such a battle. I'd had to leave that marriage in order to go into counselling and begin to do what was important to me. But we were connecting in this way that he was understanding. It was incredible. And so that was part of it, this summer. I was working on the thesis. I had the relationship with L. and I had the sense of real connection with spirit. There were hard things going on. I had another cancer scare. I had that in June, three weeks of testing. They found a lump in my other breast. I was scared. I really was scared and I thought this time it was it. The thing that scared me most was that I thought I wouldn't be able to finish my thesis. And I thought whatever happens I'm finishing. I had that sense of commitment, that this is so important that no matter what I'm going to finish it. I had a biopsy and it turned out it was benign. But at the same time that that was going on I got a turn down from the doctoral program, the same time as the cancer testing. That hit me hard. They put me on a waiting list, and I thought, how can I be turned down from this doctoral program when I've got a doctoral fellowship from the university. It didn't make any sense to me. So I was working through all of this stuff. But what was incredible to me was here I was sitting at that typewriter continuing to work on my thesis with all this turmoil going on. I found L. really supportive, but it was the sense of connection with spirit that really kept me going. It kept me going.

K: How did it keep you going? How did you tap into it?

S: It was just there. It was there. It was there . . . even though the light wasn't always there and I wasn't always aware of say that power out there . . . that tremendously powerful thing. It was inside me and through dreams. I was having incredible dreams at this time.
K: Was it something you carried with you all the time?

S: Yes. I carried it with me. I carried it with me. I remember at these times that were really really terrible for me. One of the things I find most terrible is going for a mammogram. I find it a terrible experience. It is the most debasing and dehumanizing. It is just a terrible, terrible dehumanizing experience, being in a doctor's office and waiting, being in a radiology department, being at the hospital, there waiting for the biopsy. This whole thing. I find this terrible and I remember feeling that connection and I was just holding on to that. I got the strength that carried me through that time. And I just kept on working. I just kept on with work until it was finished. It was just like such a sense of being connected that I'd had all summer, with all the difficulties and the struggles. It was so meaningful to me, just the whole thing. I can't remember a time in my life. I can remember other times that were good. But a time where just everything was whole and connected. It made sense to me. Everything seemed resolved at once. Within a couple of days I found out I didn't have cancer. I found out I was accepted into the program. All of these things. My money was low. I thought what am I going to do. I'm running out of money and then things. You know, it came, like relatives, totally out of the blue. I got loans and people caring, being supportive. This is important to you and I want to help you because.

K: Did you go after that?

S: No, no. It came. I don't remember going after things. It was as though things were coming. This connection with people in the dream group was just so important to me. And then, it all changed. I finished the thesis and I thought everything was moving up toward that. Finishing and completing and I did that. I had such a sense of. When I got it to the library, it wasn't until I got it into the library that it just didn't seem real. I'd been there and there it was. But at that point things started going downhill. It was as though. I don't really know. I'm not clear. It's as though I had that sense of clarity right up until the point of that, the completing of the work. And from that point on, it's as though it was right downhill. I've gotten the strength, like somehow or other I've gotten through, like when I'm talking to you about this stuff. I've gotten strength to get through a very difficult year. One of the really hard things has been
the separation from L., having him on the other side of
the country, having been real close. I've gotten through
that. I don't have that sense of connection with meaning
and purpose like I'd had when I was doing this work.
I've lost that. I've not regained it. The separation
from that was a hard separation. I've found that other
things I've been doing in the program I don't feel
connected with at all. I think that this is probably a
time that I have to go through. I think my sense is that
it's not a once and for all thing, these illuminations,
or encounters with spirit. I think it's a process. I
think that I experienced part of that and that dark times
come and go. I think that this whole year has been like
a dark time for me. But it's not the way that it was
last spring. It's not that kind of real pulling down.
It's been a time when I've coped. I've coped. I've
continued to go to classes. I've continued to do my
work.

K: So it's different from the time before?


K: Do you think it's different because of your
experience?

S: Ya, I think probably. I think it's like going in the
dark and yet I know that this is there. I know this
light, this experience with light was a reality. I could
never deny that reality. It's a fact for me.

K: Are you hopeful?

S: I suppose. It's . . . I think hope is too strong. I
think hope is too strong a word. I think I have faith.
I think that's a better word. Faith is a better word
than hope. I think hope is too strong. I think that I
have a kind of faith in something, in spirit and in life
and in . . . I think that I will find the direction. I
think that I will find it again. It has to do with the
work. It has to do with the work in relation to cancer.
I think it probably has to do with writing. Writing
about this, maybe writing about the research or something
like that. Or putting it to use. Putting it to some
kind of use. I don't think that doctoral work is . . .
that's the way I feel right now . . . I don't think I'm
an academic person so much as maybe creative. There are
aspects of me that I feel are really cut off . . . one is
imagination. And creativity. I don't find an outlet for
that in the program. I don't find an outlet for spirit.
Spirit is not part of academia, not at the doctoral level. And this is more important to me than anything. One of the things that I've continued to do this year... like I've continued to go to my dream group. It's part of the Jung Society and this is a reality for me. I can work on my dreams. I can talk with people who are involved with their own dreams. This is like group work that had been ongoing and I've kept on with those contacts and that's real for me. Friendships with people have been really important and friendships in terms of connections on spirit level. So that has kept me going, and people who share that. Whether they've experienced a vision or not, however they've experienced it... what is real for me is real for them. I've had that. I have had a context outside of school.

K: You said to me that you wanted to tell me about this, because in a way it would be helpful for you in this time now.

S: Yes, I really felt... like when you called, I thought the synchronicity is incredible. Yes, you were bringing some important stuff up for me. I've been sick a lot this winter. I've been sick more than I have since I was six years old, my first year of school. I think I found school very hard. When I first started I had every childhood illness going. I remember spending an awful lot of time just home in bed doing things like drawing and reading and listening to the radio, talking to my grandmother, my great grandmother. I remember that this winter I got the flu December 29 and I had it on and off six times until about a week ago. And I'm keeping my fingers crossed that I'm over and done with it. But I've never had a time like that. It's not like cancer. That business, I was up and going, you know. But I've never had this recurring over and over. What is wrong with me? And I've had that since... this is connected with being in the wrong direction in my life. And again, I was looking for healing dreams. I got a dream message about three weeks ago, I guess. And what it said was... I said how can I protect myself against all this? And it said follow the pattern, follow the model or pattern. Have it with you always, or come back to it. Be nurtured by this and nothing else. I mean, I could hear these words. And I thought this was the pattern for me. So this is what I did. I wrote these things down small, and folded them up and tucked it into my wallet and carried it around with me. It was a kind of protective thing. But I had a number of dreams in the past few weeks that have indicated to me that that is the direction to go.
Like a recentering . . . it's like a bringing me back to the importance of that work again. I'm doing some work for P's course, and I started working on dreams, doing a paper on dreams. I found myself coming back again to the healing. My interest is that. So that's been going on. So when you called last Monday . . . I think I'd had a dream the night before and I can't remember exactly what it was . . . but the synchronicity was so strong. It seemed to me it was a part of the . . . you know, out of the blue, here you call and want me to talk about this experience and it's as though I'm being drawn back to the importance and meaning of what I was doing last summer.

K: What does reliving this experience today do for you?

S: It's making it very, very real again. I could feel it physically and I'm feeling it as I'm talking about it. It's not off the top of my head you know. It's pulling it together for me. It's like pulling together where I am now, weaving it together with where I was then, enabling me to see this year as . . . like, I can't see it yet. I think it will take me a while to see it clearly . . . as part of a whole . . . maybe a bigger pattern in which this year is a part. And it seems as though it's a turning away but maybe it's a weaving into, I'm not sure. But it's knitting it. It's like a kind of knitting or sewing or something of strands together, and integrating them. That's what I'm feeling. It's like an integrating experience to talk about it. And it's not the kind of thing you can talk about with most people. They think you're crazy.

K: Do you often feel the feelings you had today of being in that experience?

S: No. No, I haven't. You mean that sense of power and presence, the feelings in my body?

K: The emotion you felt today that went along with it.

S: No . . . I wish that I did. I guess you don't live on that level all the time. I'd like to find a way in which I could maintain it more. I would like to find a way of maintaining a connection of spirit in terms of daily living and I think if I would have a goal in life that would be my goal. I'm not very good at it.

K: What happens in the course of daily living when you think about that experience?
S: It's as though I've been living on a level where I couldn't reach it. Right now I'm feeling tingling in my body. I'm feeling a vibrating right to my feet. It's very incredible. I'm really getting back. I've been living at a level that has been superficial and it's as though parts of me, the most important part of me, is just not there. I don't think you can force spirit. You can't contain it. You can't force it. You can't make it stay. It comes and goes. That's been my experience. It comes and goes. But what I did last spring was I prepared myself. I know that. I prepared myself for a couple of weeks to have that happen. It was silence. It was quiet time. It was introversion and allowing that to be. When we're constantly under stress and meeting expectations of other people we're not in that space. I think maybe getting sick over and over, for me, has been an attempt at getting away from externals, but it hasn't worked all that well. Maybe a little bit, but not enough. But for me it's like a total getting away from all the other pressures and going inside me, inside myself and just allowing. I don't think you can force it. I don't think the attitude to life of controlling, or being on top of things, or being positive, or any of that . . . I don't think that's the answer. I think it's quietness and just allowing.

K: When you isolated yourself for that few weeks, you used the word preparing. Were you consciously preparing?

S: No. At first it was instinctive. At first I just . . . I didn't know what I was doing. I just did not know what I was doing. I was led, just led in a very kind of instinctive way. Just getting outdoors, just getting by the water, being in the park . . . wow . . . (long pause). It's very instinctive and I think I became more and more aware of what was happening. It was more towards just before it happened. I had the dream and I was trying to understand it and I think I became more aware that I was incubating . . . and the books that I was reading . . . that I was waiting. It seemed right to me. Ash Wednesday I read the *Four Quartets*. It seemed to speak to me. It wasn't a cerebral thing, but it spoke to me at a very deep level of pain. It spoke to me at a level of not even emotion. Emotion's a part of it. But it was a level of being that poetry spoke to me. Things were speaking to me.

K: You mentioned death in *Four Quartets*. Did that have any special significance?
S: Yes. My father's death and since it was Passover, the time of year, that time of year, spring. I'd had a suicide attempt in May, the spring of 1980. But that time of year, it seems, and I don't know if this is something that we just happen to be involved in. The whole Easter story is death and rebirth. It seemed to me I was living out something like that, when I thought about it later, but it was almost like I was living it out in a very personal way, that kind of thing, that kind of experience.

K: Dealing with your own death?

S: In some ways. In some way. And I was thinking about my father. And I had a sense . . . what also that I gained I think, was that sense of connection with Dad. I have that. I feel that strongly. I've had it in dreams and I feel it very strongly. I have a sense of connection of spirit with my Dad. I was close to him always. I found it hard to relate to him. My mother . . . well the difficulty I had as an adult relating to him was that my mother found it hard when I would go home to visit. She just seemed to always be in the middle and not want us to talk. Going home was not a time that seemed particularly good. I have that sense of connection with Dad. Dad was not a person who had any faith at all. He was Jewish. He followed the forms, but I guess he was pretty much of an agnostic, a very intelligent man, very, very intelligent, very rational. But the last part of his life, the last visit I had home he wanted to talk to me about his dreams and my Mom was laughing and saying what a fool you are, what a fool you are. And I remember feeling that I would like to talk to Dad about a lot of things and I just wasn't able to, not that much. But I do have a sense of things being all right with Dad. I have a sense of real strong . . . when I'm in a a place where I should be in . . . I think I'm there right now, you know, I really feel right. It's coming back. I have that sense of connection with spirit and it just is that connection and I don't say that one person or another person or whatever . . . it's just real.

K: Is that connection with spirit with all things?

S: With people. It's all part of the same thing. I have that sense. And that's where I'd like to stay. That's the only way that I can feel whole. My counselling's gone to pot this year. It's just gone right to pot. It's the only way I can really be in my life . . .
writing and counselling. Relationships with people is right with that. That is my reality. If nothing else, that is my reality.

K: Does nature have something to do with it too?

S: Ya. A connection with nature is really important. It's a sense of . . . I experience it in a physical way, but it's also spiritual. I have that with water . . . last summer swimming in the ocean just about everyday with L. I was working on my thesis and we'd go for a swim just before supper every day. I have that sense of presence in nature. I've gotten away from it, but it's really important to me.

K: Is this interconnectedness really with all things at all levels?

S: Yes. With people. It's people, with humanity. You see one thing that disturbs me, disturbs me very much . . . political divisions between people and getting on a side of one group of people against another group of people. A lot of this is going on at school. I find this very hard and this is what is there. This is what is considered real, the real world. I find it very hard to be in that kind of context. I mean that's reality for most people. I have to somehow find a way of connecting this other, the experience with light with this other stuff. I haven't found a way of doing it. Like, I don't know. I can't retreat from the world altogether. Sure at times I wish that I could. I would like to. I think maybe I should go join a nunnery. I don't think that would suit me, but there's a side of me that I wish that I never had to have anything to do with what is called the real world.

K: In a way, it made a difference to you, in the months following, with how you lived in the world, until you finished your thesis.

S: Ya. Until I finished my thesis. And then what happened to me is that I felt myself pulled down into all this strife.

K: Is it like you experienced a bunch of losses again, and that's what happened before?

S: Ya. I experienced the losses. I experienced the loss of finishing the work. I experienced the loss of L. leaving. Those were losses. I also found myself in the
context where it seemed to me what was real was this level of strife . . . politics, whatever, and that you take a theory and you go with that theory of counselling and that's what's real. And it was as though everything was chopped up and fragmented. And that's where I've been. It's like trying to restore a kind of wholeness and I think how do I do that. It was just like chopped up, fragmented strife. That's the way I felt.

K: Did you see things as being chopped and fragmented before you had that experience? Do you think you have a shift in awareness as to what chopped up and fragmented is?

S: Ya. I think that . . . ya I do. I think that I'm more uncomfortable now with things that I might have accepted more easily before. But I'm not quite sure yet what to do with it. I think if I were really integrated I could take things in my stride more, that I could maintain my wholeness in situations that are fragmented. You know, when I think about it, I think ideally this is what I should do. I'm not able to do it. I can't do it. I'm not able to do it yet. Maybe at some point I will. But I haven't been able to. I don't see this year that I've done very well. That's not my view of myself.

K: You're looking for a way to take this experience and make it what? More enduring?

S: Ya. Ya. I think that part of it is . . . it was very much connected with my work. My work is very important to me. My work and my relationship with L, those two things are important. I have to find a way of bringing all that together in my life. But what you just asked me about making it more permanent. Is that what you said?

K: I used the word enduring. I don't know if it fits for you.

S: Making myself more aware. I think it is enduring. I think it is enduring. But I think it's awareness of it and my connection with it, that somehow I have to have the right relationship.

K: Are you saying that it's still there and you still carry it?

S: I'm carrying it. I think it's there implicitly but I think I don't always recognize it. I think I get drawn away from it. I think I have to find a way where I
maintain that. I was trying to put things together. I think that I've completed the work that I had to do here. I had the sense that . . . the thesis was . . . that's completed . . . but that isn't the completion of my work, but that is the completion of the work that I've had to do here. I'm clear about that now. I had a struggle with that. I'm clear about that and I think that I may continue it in another context. I hope that I'm not fouling up your results with my story, because it's not a story of going onwards and upwards, having experienced light and going onward and upward. It's having experienced it, having gained a strength that enabled me to complete my work, having had changes that were really important to me, and going through another struggle which followed and then a kind of separateness from it.

K: I hear you talking about having changes that were very important for you and I think I also hear you saying that those changes have continued with you.

S: I think so. The things that struck me at the time were the finishing of that work, which I did, and the relationship with P, which is very important to me, to be able to be clear about that. What I'm gaining from him is important, you know, from his teaching and him as a person. That's important. The relationship with L, that's really important. The strengthening, I think that I got strength. I think if I hadn't had that, that probably I just wouldn't have been able to get through this year. This year is so hard.

K: So you have used it?

S: Oh, I think so. Oh, you know, that is there, that awareness is there. It's just that I'm not in the space where I'd like to be.

K: So is it like something you move into and move out of and move into and move out of?

S: Yes, yes. That's the way it seems to go. For sure.

K: Is it something you want on a more ongoing basis and something you can strive towards?

S: Ya. Ya. I think it was something that was given to me. I think on the other hand, there is a responsibility on my side to have the right attitude or maintain . . . have a kind of purity or some sense of being. One of the things I've been doing lately is reconnecting with people
I've been alienated from. I've been really trying to do that. I've done it with a couple of people in the last week and actually I had done it when you called. I think it came in the middle between two reconnections. One was last Saturday and then I talked to you on Monday morning and the other was Monday afternoon. The disconnection came as the result of a lot of . . . well all this stuff, this whole year.

K: So you'd already started the process of reconnection?

S: Yes. I felt that this was important to do and part of my being in the right frame of mind is this, with people, not letting myself get cut off and just feeling self-righteous in my own position and seeing other people as enemies . . . or being hurt by them and thinking well they've hurt me and I don't want anything more to do with them. It's like cutting off from them in spirit and it's a fault I have.

K: Is it like you're recycling this experience once again so you can experience some of the connectedness and healing from it again?

S: Yes, I think so. I think it's all part of a whole me. Just like this experience and the work, the pattern that came out of that study, it's all connected for me . . . my dreams, this vision. It's all a part, to me, of living a life that's real, in terms of the way I view reality. I've gained a certain humility, and I think that's important as well. When you have this kind of experience it's very uplifting and you get into a kind of transcendent perspective and that is very real. The other is the day to day stuff. We're not just pure spirit. There are other aspects to us too. I have to see myself as both. I have to see myself as a spiritual being. This is what I am, but I'm also a person who . . . I'm struggling. I'm striving. And both are true. I'm not God. I'm not light. I had that encounter and it was like a gift and I felt that I was connected with it. It was within me, but I'm not that. But I would like to have more of that clarity. I would like to live with more golden light of clarity. But I'm aware, I think, of falling short.

K: I'm not sure what you mean by falling short.

S: I'm aware of not being clear a lot of the time. I'm aware of being muddy, I'm aware of being confused. I'm aware of almost the opposite of that light, of that sense
of connection and truth and warmth and radiance. I mean, I'm not like that. I think I'm aware of what it could be like and what I'm not like.

K: What kind of a difference does it make during your muddy times?

S: I think I know the difference. The difference between me now and last spring, the difference now is that I know what the possibility is and so that's strengthening and it's also frustrating. I would like to be more towards that. But it's not . . . it isn't really that I have no direction, not really. It's a loss or a turning away or a being off center, but it's not a not knowing. It isn't a total loss of meaning. It's not that. And I'm talking to you . . . I'm becoming more clear that it was a turning away, or a knowledge of the way not to go, or having side-tracked or something. Or just maybe part of the difficulty of the journey. That's what it could be. I had a dream in November in which . . . it had to do with being alone and a time of transition and walking up and down hills over very rough terrain and a guide appearing, a guide who was a stranger and just following her and coming to a point of being alone and stopping and flowering. It had to do with that kind of thing taking place. But there was that difficulty of the journey. And it could be that just what I've gone through this year has been a difficulty, and it's just part of an ongoing struggle. It hasn't been dark despair. I wouldn't call it that, because the possibilities are there. The reconnection, with L, the work, I know that that's something I can reconnect with. This other is just there. It's undeniable. I've experienced it. If I never experience it again like that, I have experienced it and it's real. It's part of me. And so I don't think I could ever go back to before that. It's just been a difficult time. And now I think I'm more clear about that. One of the hard things is that we don't dialogue like this with people. If I could dialogue like this with people on an ongoing basis, I think that I could keep a perspective on myself. But we can't talk about these things. We just don't have the room. And so I lose the thread, and we put labels on things. Because it's part of living and it might be difficult but . . . the other is still there and it's a possibility. It's like a way. It is a way. That sounds maybe like a Christian term, "I'm the way, the truth and the light." I'm not a Christian but I think that's true. I think that is true. But what specific format it takes in one's ordinary life, that's the question.
K: Is it like the human struggle you're grappling with... the human side of the Godly side or the spiritual side?

S: Exactly. And being human... you know, means being connected with that and disconnected. And maybe wanting a total connection is wanting too much... I'm just not sure, I'm not sure... if you're not a saint or something like that. I don't know whether people maintain connections or if it comes and goes.
Transcript (Case B)

B: The experience took place when I was, I think, 13 and it had a lot to do with my church background. I was raised in a very fundamentalist Baptist church and . . .

K: What is fundamentalist Baptist?

B: Okay. Well I look at it now as being very culture bound. My earliest experience of preaching, or a preacher was someone who was pounding the pulpit and yelling and screaming hellfire and brimstone at us and the wrath of God and you better watch what you do. Children found it very guilt inducing like if you swear you'd better wash your mouth out with soap, that kind of thing. Very negative and the experience in the church . . . is very much say the born again type thing, you get saved from the wrath of God. And so you do that through a conversion experience or believing in Christ.

K: And that had an effect on you?

B: Ya. Especially the wrath of God was the thing that really impressed me and I'm working out of that now and it's taken this long.

K: In what ways did it . . . ?

B: Because I don't . . . because I've had a hard time believing God's a very loving God. Ya. So I tend to think that whatever I do he's going to get me for. I can never seem to let myself go and believe that I'm loved by God. That it's more conditional. So I sort of search for confirmation out of circumstances that let me know that God loves me, like finding a nice place to live or whatever. And I sort of hang on to those as the evidence of God's love. But when those aren't there, that sort of fades and I believe that He's after me again or whatever. And it's things like forgiveness. It's something that's a really hard concept. Part of the other thing about the up-bringing is that there are various . . . it's very cultural in that you can't dance, you can't go to movies, can't read any books that aren't Christian. Very legalistic, very oppressive, and not too much concern, well, no concern really for social issues, which was always a conflict for me, more in my teenage years as I started to become aware of problems like people needing money to pay their rent and drunk Indians wandering into the church and nobody talking to them and stuff like that. And also, I don't know that this had anything to
do with being fundamentalist and Baptist but in this particular church as I was growing up there was a fair amount of jealousy and some back biting and gossip, and people trying to get ahead by having their kids on the stage and doing something like playing the recorder or whatever. It sort of gave them a sense of worth. And there was competitiveness.

K: Was that within the church or within the community?

B: Within the church. So there was a lot of cultural aspects which I don't connect any longer to Christianity. But that's the setting that I grew up in and that's important because that was the hub of activity for me and largely for my family. That's the reference point out of which everything happened.

K: Where was this?

B: This was in H. So it was a small community as well and the first... well we had moved there when I was about five and we lived across from this minister who used to pound the pulpit and yell and scream literally and point his finger as if you were looking into a fireplace and really seeing the flames. So there was a very negative kind of thing. You always had to watch out for what you were doing. And my family reinforced... well my parents reinforced it in terms of what would the neighbours think, so there was a lot of pressure that way. But anyways, there was about, oh there might have been about six kids around my age and I guess it was the second minister we had. He was quite a kind person. He was an older man and he wasn't hellfire and brimstone at all. I can't remember anything about his sermons. I just remember more about his character. That he was very mellow. He seemed to be very wise and had experienced a lot. When I was getting on 12 or 13 this whole family of girls who were all around my age and had been playmates when I was younger decided they were going to get baptized, because in the Baptist church you're not baptized as an infant. You're baptized when you profess a faith. It's more like a confirmation experience. And it was very strange because I can remember feeling if they get baptized and I don't what's that going to say about me? So I felt some pressure in a sense that this was what I had to do, a cultural mandate that I had to fulfill in order to prove that I was one of the people in the church that fit in.

K: Can you tell me more about that pressure?
B: I haven't really thought about it. It's always puzzled me. And what's puzzled me more is when I went to speak to the minister about it. It was after church and after lunch one Sunday afternoon, and I went to tell him that I wanted to be baptized and I broke down and I was crying a lot and I didn't know why I was crying. And I can't remember anything of the conversation. I found it was very strange that I was doing that. I think a lot of the feeling was confusion. I didn't really know why I was doing this exactly except I knew that it was something the church said had to be done and also it said in scripture somewhere that if you wanted to make it in God's books you had to get baptized. It was around the age of 13, 12 or 13, and that's sort of the age of initiation in most cultures as well, I mean if there's something in that regard. I think it's more that I didn't want people to think poorly of me. I wanted them to look at me as a good little Christian boy. The year before, I got baptized when I was in grade 7, and the year before... no grade 8... I don't know. The last year of elementary school, I remember I was quite traumatized and it was a very difficult year and I had a nervous breakdown. And I don't really know what it was all about except I was feeling a lot of pressure from one of the teachers who was giving us reams of homework on Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, pages and pages of questions and I took it seriously.

K: This was the year after you were baptized?

B: The year before. This was the year before, so I'm trying to give you some kind of context from maybe where the pressure was coming from. I took it very seriously, and I would stay up very late at night and would be working on this and my parents would tell me to go to bed and I would start crying and say well, I have to do this otherwise the teacher's going to be in a huff. So I think I was eventually put on tranquilizers and I think my Dad talked to the teacher. I don't know for sure. There was also another traumatic event in school where in one class most of the kids had cheated on a test and they all got the same marks and there were about five of us who hadn't cheated. I was very righteous you see, and I was very disturbed by the fact that they had all got these high marks and I got a low mark. I was disturbed too that there had been this mass cheating. So I told my Dad about it and he told the teacher, and the teacher I'm sure figured out what had gone on anyways because everybody had the same mark, but I didn't understand that then. So the kids finally narrowed it down that I had
been the fink and so they used to chase me after school and stuff. So that was very hard because I had lost any credibility or favour. So that was an extremely difficult time and it was the year after that I decided to become baptized. I can remember my best friend was quite excited about this, although he wasn't part of the church.

K: That you were being baptized?

B: He was quite excited about this and he was talking quite openly about it.

K: Did you maintain a best friend throughout those troubled years?

B: Ya. He had been my best friend since grade 1 and had remained that way until grade 12, I guess. He was talking about it in the hall, and I can remember being very, very ashamed and I didn't want anybody to know. I just wanted the church to know and to be accepted within the church. But it wasn't something I felt proud of necessarily, obviously because I . . . I guess in some ways I thought of it being strange or sissy-like or something and I didn't want the guys to know about this. So that might have been some of the confusion and some of the pressure I was feeling . . . the tension between my secular schooling and my church background, trying to put these two things together. Ya, I think it always was a tension. It was either/or and I never could integrate the two. I tended to use religion as a defense when all these kids were attacking me. You know, "God's going to get you," because that was the only thing I could say to them. I couldn't beat them up because they were stronger than I was.

K: But you'd say that to them?

B: Ya . . . "God saw what you did. He'll punish you." That was my comeback. The other thing in terms of what I've thought of that led to the nervous breakdown was not the school work so much as some of the family dynamics. A brother who was quite religious and was my hero had left that year or the year before, to go to Bible school. He was my father figure because my Dad wasn't around very much.

K: He's quite a bit older than you?

B: Ya, eight years. And he left and he seemed to be the
one who bore a lot of the burden for the family for raising me and my brother.

K: Where was your father then?

B: He was in the C. program so in the summer time he was at university and he would even drive from H. to university for evening classes. And then the rest of the time he was holed up in his study doing his teacher work, marking . . .

K: He was a teacher?

B: Ya. So he wasn't home very often. So Mom was left with the burden of raising us and my brother sort of assumed the authority figure. He was the father. So when my mother would have difficulty with us, it was my brother who would deal with the problems. He also seemed to generate tension in the family and absorb the tension in my parents whenever it was there. I wasn't necessarily aware of tension between my parents. I was aware of tension between him and my mother. And when he left I think what happened is that I assumed that responsibility. I became the scapegoat or the burden bearer of tension in the family.

K: Were you next in line?

B: No, I was the youngest. There was a middle brother who, the way he dealt with the tension was he was never home.

K: There were 3 boys?

B: Ya and he was 6 years older. So he would go out and have a good time all the time, whereas my oldest brother was very responsible. He would stay home a lot and was very serious and I sort of fell between the two in terms of characteristics.

K: What was being the tension bearer in the family? What did that mean for you?

B: I don't know exactly at that time. When disagreements came up, my Mom always had to win. And there was usually a fight, a verbal fight, and my Dad would go away with his tail between his legs and mumbling and feeling very defeated. My brother would scream at my Mom sometimes. I don't know about what, but I have a very vivid picture of him even jumping up from the table and giving her a
terrible tongue lashing. Part of the tension too was that she was having a lot of problems with her menstrual cycle and wouldn't allow my Dad to explain that, so she was bitchy all the time until she had an operation.

K: And you didn't know about that?

B: We didn't know about it, so we just saw her as being very bitchy and had no understanding of what she was going through. I don't know exactly at that time . . . I mean I didn't think of myself as being a burden bearer or anything. I guess I felt, I know I felt responsible. And there's another image that came up in therapy recently, in terms of bearing responsibility for my parents arguments. Subconsciously what I was doing was, I was . . . Well this came up in therapy two years ago where my therapist asked if I felt responsible for my parents any longer cause we talked about that, and immediately what flashed into my head was just this image of being in eternity. There was just sort of this void. There was nothing, no stars, nothing, just blackness. My parents were in one corner, and it was like a boxing ring and as soon as I became aware that we were in eternity and my parents were in one corner, I felt God was in the other corner. I just had this strong sense of Him being there. And he was just really angry with them. And I threw myself, I ran across this thing and threw myself between God and my parents. So obviously, I was a brooder. I mean this image just sort of hit me. I mean that was a transforming thing because it showed me how strongly I was responsible, I was bearing responsibility for them. So those might have been some of the things that were happening. That would have happened once my brother left. It was like there was this vacuum and he was off at Bible School. He was my hero. So I was sort of becoming very religious myself, and there was the tension between . . .

K: Was it you patterning that after him?

B: Ya, probably I was because I remember we were asked when I was in grade 4 who our hero was in life and it was my brother. And part of it was because he was so serious and religious and responsible. So here all of a sudden were these kids who decided that they were all going to get baptized. And I guess because my brother was very religious and must have been baptized by that time I felt that that was the route to go and I felt pressure to conform and I guess that it wasn't so much coming from me, that I was feeling this was something I wanted to do,
but that this was something that was imposed, and it was expected of me. Because I was embarrassed by it. So I talked to the minister and he agreed to baptize me. And then some of the pressure that came on at that point was . . . I had to make sure I was saved. In their terminology it means that you allow Christ to take away your sins and you tell Him you're sorry and then you're in good standing with God.

K: This was information you got from the minister?

B: This was what had been pounded into me from earliest times on. I mean I sort of knew what their plan of salvation was.

K: Well how did . . . what did the minister say to you when you had that talk with him?

B: I have no idea.

K: You don't know. You just know that he would baptize you?

B: Ya. I know that I broke down. I didn't know why I was crying. It was very emotional for me. So the day came. I can remember I wanted to make sure that I was saved, because the order is that you get saved and then you get baptized. So the night finally came and my brother came from V. from Bible school with his girlfriend. I felt quite honored that he was there for this special event. He was also the one who helped me deal with this problem with grade 6 or 7 kids that were against me. He basically gave me some good advice which helped me deal with that and pretty soon I was friends with a lot of these kids again. I felt quite honored that he was there. And I got dunked. Afterwards . . .

K: You got?

B: Dunked.

K: Oh. Baptized.

B: Afterwards this is where the experience came in. I was sitting in the living room with my parents and my brother and his girlfriend.

K: But you didn't say anything about the need to be saved before that. You said that there was the order, you had to be saved and then you got back to the pressure you
felt.

B: Ya. No I did pray a prayer that would make sure I would get saved and I felt some relief that I was finally part of God's kingdom. But I couldn't... I couldn't... I felt embarrassed by it. I didn't want to tell. I wanted to tell my brother. But I didn't want to tell my parents because it was assumed... well you said you wanted to get baptized so obviously you've already done that at some point.

K: Is it a standard prayer, or is it something that you do on your own?

B: Well, usually they have standard prayers.

K: So it's a private ceremony that you go through. It's something you do with yourself.

B: Ya. It had always been encouraged in church. There were all these alter call type things, these Billy Graham alter calls where you raise your hand and confess your sins and you accept Christ into your heart and ta daa, everything's wonderful. So ya, I had done that on my own, but this was after I'd talked to the minister. It wasn't before. It was sort of an insurance policy in a sense, to make sure I was doing things correctly. And I had figured it out on my own too. In terms of what I'd been taught. After church, this was in an evening service. Everybody of course was very happy that all these young teenagers... we weren't teenagers, we were children, had done this, so there was a real sense of approval from everybody I guess. We went home with my brother and his girlfriend and my parents and we were all sitting in the living room. My brother left and my parents and I started praying. We had done this before. Often at Christmas or something we would have family prayers. It's not a liturgical thing where you read prayers from a book. You invent your own. I can remember the experience quite clearly because there was a couch against one wall and then there was a chair over here. No, the couch was over here and the chair was here and I was sitting on the chair and it was quite a large one. It was a half sofa and my parents were sitting on the couch over here. They prayed their prayers and I don't remember if it was before or after I prayed, but I became very conscious that in the middle of the room somebody was standing there. Besides my parents and I mean there was nobody else in the house. There was just a very clear sense of a presence, a being.
K: How did you sense that?

B: I don't know how I sensed it. It was like ... I had my eyes closed. I don't know how I felt it but I just sort of knew there was somebody there. It was almost like a power. It wasn't a magnetism because I felt that afterwards, where I felt there was somebody almost drawing me to the centre of the room. But there was a sense of someone standing there and I was somewhat scared. I was afraid to open my eyes to see who it was, because I knew that it wasn't a human being because nobody had come in any of the doors and I didn't hear anybody walking. It was just there and I was really fearful. I knew if I opened my eyes I would see this person and I didn't want to do that because I was scared. But I didn't, I didn't ... it was funny. I was scared and yet I wasn't nervous or anxious. It was more of a curiosity type of thing. I was curious about it and my parents were busy carrying on praying. And then what was very strange was that I felt this person walking towards me and sitting down on the couch. I literally felt the couch go down where somebody would sit. You know how somebody sits, there's an indentation and I could feel that. Where the couch under my bum sort of went down. I felt this being sit down and put their hand on my shoulder, their arm around me and their hand on my shoulder. That lasted for about, I don't know, 30 seconds, maybe, a minute.

K: And your eyes were still closed?

B: Ya. I don't recall ... I didn't feel any sense of being overwhelmed by love or any kind of emotion. It was more curious like this is really strange that this is happening to me. It was totally out of the ordinary. I'd never heard of anything like this happening before, although I might have heard of people picking up hitchhikers and the hitchhiker telling them that God's kingdom was coming soon and then they'd disappear, like vanish into thin air. I might have heard of stories like that, before that time but I don't know. But it was something that was totally unexpected. I wasn't dreaming it up. I didn't want it to happen. I didn't know that those things happened. I was a Baptist and anything that touched on charismatic type things ... charismatic hadn't even been invented at that point. About 6 or 7 years later people started talking about that kind of thing. There were no visions of Christ, or speaking in tongues, or any of those kinds of things. Even when that happened, when that sort of thing started becoming
popular, my church said those things don't happen. It might have happened in the first century but they don't happen any longer. It's of the devil. So I had no teaching or expectation that those kinds of things could happen. The only other thing I can think of is my grandfather dying before that time, which I'm not sure he did. He had some kind of vision of heaven just before he died. So it was very strange to me. I didn't share it with my parents. I thought if I did they'd probably think that this was very strange. It would . . . they'd probably deny it, or say I was stupid, or whatever. There was a sense of wonder I guess. And I don't feel . . . as I said, there wasn't that sense of overpowering love or anything, so it didn't really change me in any kind of way. I probably was still embarrassed about being baptized. I didn't want the news to spread around high school. I didn't want to be laughed at. There was no sense of . . . it just happened and then I guess I forgot about it for a while. I didn't feel at that time that it had changed me. It was very strong, very strong. I think what . . .

K: Can you put more words to that "strong"?

B: Well strong in that it stayed with me and I go back to that as a means of reassurance when I'm feeling down sometimes. What was so powerful about it was, in terms of describing the experience, the sense of the presence in the middle of the room was so strong I just knew it was there. I knew I wasn't dreaming it up. I knew it wasn't science fiction. It was very definite. But what really clinched it was, I mean, I could imagine feeling something on my shoulder, I mean you walk around and you might feel sudden warmth . . . I mean it might be the wind, it might be who knows what. But what really clinched it for me was that that couch really did indent. I mean I couldn't have been dreaming that. It was so kinesthetic and not . . . in that sense, I guess that's what I mean by strong. That it left an impression. I guess in a sense for me at the time it was a confirmation too that I had done the right thing. I attributed this being to being Christ. It was like I had done the right thing and He approved of me, so I felt happy. I felt I had done the right thing in getting baptized and maybe what that did is that it reinforced my religious bent. Because what that did, I became very religious as a teenager and I was really active in the young people's groups and stuff like that. It was about three years later, when I . . . I finally got a hold of a Bible and it was paraphrased and I could understand the words. It
wasn't all the thees and thous and I started to understand what it was saying and I got really excited about it. That was quite transforming, but there was no auditory, visual or anything. It was more a mental understanding and I got quite excited about it. I became a mini-evangelist in a sense, because I was telling people about it. At that time I was no longer embarrassed about being a Christian and I was quite bold and I was selling Christian newspapers from the States on streetcorners and stuff. So that's how people remember me, as being this religious prude. During that time I can't remember ever thinking about this experience.

K: So at the time, when it happened . . .

B: It was a sense of approval. But then it didn't mean anything to me anymore. I just didn't think about it. Where I started to think about it . . .

K: It was like you were okay then with what you had done, whereas before you weren't?

B: Ya. I guess I felt . . . it probably gave me a sense of being okay, that it might have taken away some of the confusion that I was feeling, or the sense of trauma about the whole thing. There was a sense in which . . . you see when I say the church was all happy that I'd done this, I mean I'm reading into what I would think when I've seen them being happy about other people getting baptized. But I haven't . . . I can't really remember feeling that, I'm just reporting that's what I expected had happened. So this experience seemed to have taken precedence over that. That that's what stood out. The sense of being honored that my brother was there stands out. I prayed with my parents because my parents suggested it and I didn't want to say no because then you don't look religious. It wasn't me that suggested the praying. My heart wasn't really in it. I just wanted I guess, to go to bed or something. But I thought, you know, I'll do this. I'm trying to get a feel for what that was like and I think it's . . . I find it hard to get into that experience and in some ways, maybe one of the reasons I try to forget . . . not try to forget about it, but haven't thought about it was because it was kind of strange and it's not ordinary and a daily occurrence or anything. But when I try to get in touch with that kid of 13, I'm assuming, and I sort of feel like it made him very happy. There was a contented happiness. It wasn't an exuberant kind of thing. But I think what I felt most was reassured, comforted. There was a sense of
comfort and peace. I think peace, peace was the greatest and I just felt very mellow. I just calmed down. And I think there was an inner happiness that came with that peace. Because there wasn't a sense where this was really exciting, I'll go tell everybody, because I haven't told very many people at all. I might have, I don't know, maybe told 2 people. There was a sense of specialness I guess.

K: That you were special?

B: The event was special. I've relied on it when I haven't been feeling great about myself to feel special. Although I haven't let it perculate within me, but it's just been an intellectual thing. Well this happened so I must be okay. I can remember when about, how long was that maybe about 3 . . . . 4 years later when the charismatic thing did hit, I became a follower. By that time I was very disgusted with my church, and I was amazed at one charismatic church in V. that just seemed to emanate love. I started getting involved in that and they talked about, they added one extra step to this thing. First you get saved, then you get baptized. That was the limits of the Baptist Church. Then you have your fire insurance, you know, against hell. You were going to get to heaven for sure. The third step the charismatics added was a baptism in the spirit. As I was reading the Acts of the Apostles it talks about that sort of progression. You believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be baptized and then receive the Holy Spirit. So then when I looked at my experiences on baptism I looked at that and I saw that I had done that, that it all happened in that weekend. I prayed for God to forgive me and come into my life and then I was baptized that Sunday. It was like I equated that presence in that person sitting down with me with being baptized in the spirit. And so I felt really good. I felt like I'd done everything right and God had done everything right and life was pretty wonderful. But it was sort of a confirmation. During my teenage years especially when I started reading the Bible and was really excited about it and was going out trying to convert everybody. I was very happy and this added to that. It was extra confirmation that I was in with God, that He accepted me, that He wanted good things to happen for me. I was extremely happy. I think it was the happiest time of my life. When I left H. and came to V., it was very traumatic because I was suddenly all alone. I didn't really know too many people. In fact there were two high school students, a woman who had gone to university with my Dad and a guy who had gone to Bible
school with my brother. Those were the only people I knew in V. And then I had a brother who was in V. too but I never connected with him that much. It was a fairly traumatic time because I was starting to go through leaving home things, being on my own. All of a sudden things were sort of scary, living in a big city, taking buses, all that kind of stuff, and feeling alienation, I think. Because in a small town you don't feel that. Everybody knows you, unfortunately, and the gossip flies quite freely. But here nobody knows you. You don't seem to make a difference to anybody . . . just getting to know people. I was also to starting to face some very difficult things in myself. I think some of the trauma of having left home and being responsible for my parents. I think some of that was starting to come up although I wasn't really aware of that. Forging my identity, who am I? I would get very depressed at times and think what's the point of living. I didn't . . . I wasn't suicidal so much, but I was very despairing and I guess I felt very misplaced. My role in town had been established. I felt very good about it but it didn't seem to fit any longer in this great huge place. I can remember feeling a fair amount of despair. One thing that got me through that, and not this experience, although I started adding the two of them together, was an experience that my mother had gone through and I happened to hear, sort of eavesdropped on this conversation she was having with someone, where she had an auditory experience. She was told before she had kids, by the doctor, that she was not supposed to have kids and he wanted to give her a hysterectomy. He had left the room for her to think about it and she heard a voice in the room say, "Don't do it." It was outside of herself. And she thought that that was a message from an angel. And so she didn't, she had the three of us. And that experience, or hearing of her experience made me believe that I was meant to live and then I put it together with this experience that I went through in baptism, and that that was confirmed, that I was accepted, that there was some reason for me to be here. I saw it as a message and I often went back to that. It didn't necessarily change my feelings so much as just give me a little bit of hope to hold on to as I struggled with all these feelings as I started to find my identity and a new group of people and that sort of thing. But whenever . . . you know, it's interesting because when I moved to a new place and established myself as a teacher, that was a new environment too. I didn't know anybody. That was a very hard time, first year of teaching. And I started to go through a lot of the same things.
K: Same things. When you started teaching it was a similar set of circumstances?

B: I was in a new environment. I was doing a new task, and things were expected of me. And I lived on my own. It was the first time I'd ever lived on my own. I started going through some of these same feelings and what I would always go back to was my mother's experience and my experience. Those two things sort of were things that I held on to as giving me meaning and purpose, even though I couldn't see it at the time. I would rely on those two things. What had reinforced that too was that I had gone away to this place where . . . it looked more at the intellectual aspects of Christianity and they looked at Christianity from a very rational point of view and showed how rational it was, and stuff like that. And so in times when I felt like I didn't want to believe in God anymore, I couldn't because I had too much evidence to prove that he did exist. That also presented a problem because sometimes I didn't want to believe in God. Because sometimes I felt it was conflicting with what, with what I thought He wanted me to do. I think in terms of the despair factor, I think it was the experience at baptism that I went to for reassurance. And I still look at that, although not as much as my Mom's experience, because what also happened when my Mom was carrying me was that she almost miscarried me in the first couple of months and somehow a chiropractor was able to do something to her that meant that I stayed in the womb. I've always looked at that experience, perhaps more than the kinesthetic one that I had as being I'm meant to live. Twice I could have become totally . . . or never come to existence. I guess I haven't looked at that experience as strongly as the one my Mom went through because I didn't feel in the experience any great overpowering sense of love. There wasn't any strong emotion, just a subtle kind of peacefulness. I tend to go for the dramatic, and what seems to be exciting, dramatic, stand out, strong experiences. It's interesting because the only other time I've had that kind of, well, I have had the kinesthetic sense . . . one time it was more a visual sort of thing . . . sometimes I've had visual sense, but I see it more as sort of an active imagination sometimes. But the only other time I've had a kinesthetic experience like that, has been when I was in B. I would sometimes go to a mid-week Quaker meeting. There would be maybe 5 or 6 of us. We were sitting in a very comfortable room in a very nice house, a really old house probably built, I don't know, when, 1700's maybe 1800's. There was a fireplace in it,
a piano, and comfortable chairs that you just sort of sunk into. And in Quaker worship there is a silence, usually for a whole half hour before any dare speak and it was strange because I felt . . . I felt again . . . like we sat around in a circle and it was quite a large circle. Even though there were just a few of us we weren't tightly together or anything. There was a spaciousness about it. I felt that standing in the circle was a presence. It was very strong because I felt, it was almost as if I felt something pulling from my head into the middle of the room. It was like something from me being drawn to it or it was almost like it was sucking from me, something from my head. I wanted to resist that because I didn't know if this was a good force or a bad force so it felt like it might be taking something very valuable from me, taking it away. But somehow, I don't recall how, I decided that it was a good being and this sense of being pulled, I mean there was still a pull there, but there was no sense of anything being taken away from me. All of a sudden this presence was just here with us and guiding us. I can't remember, ah I do, I do actually remember. It was a very interesting Quaker meeting because often what happens in Quaker meetings is like it's a collective unconscious that comes to the fore and people start speaking about the same things. Somebody will start speaking about what I've been thinking. Just very strange. And that happened. Somebody brought up a certain topic and I had been reading someplace in one of the gospels something the night before and it dealt specifically with what this person was talking about. I felt I had to speak just what I'd read, although I resisted that for a long time because in Quaker meetings you don't want to speak from yourself, just what you're saying. You want to speak what you feel the spirit is giving you to speak. So I finally . . . and you don't want to speak out of any sense of pride or drawing attention to yourself. So once I had dealt with that, I spoke. So there was a very strong sense of presence, of a being being there. In Quaker meetings you often have a sense, a very peaceful sense of a presence, but it's sort of, just sort of vague and over everything, within everything. But this was sort of concentrated and again I didn't open my eyes or maybe I did open my eyes. I can't remember. I didn't see anything, but I could just feel something, someone there, some kind of embodiment, a spiritual embodiment. That too was . . . I mean I didn't get all excited about it, it was just . . . I didn't get relieved by it . . . it was just reassuring, comforting, peaceful. Whereas charismatic experiences, they are . . . well for me in
the past have been more drummed up, where we sing songs and you get emotions all worked up, and you feel all these wonderful feelings which last for a little while and then dissipate. Whereas this was more of a quiet experience, just more of a carrying through, a mellowing out that just helps you continue with life in a calm way.

K: And is that similar to your other experience?

B: It's only similar in that there was a sense of a spiritual embodiment and it was very strong. There was more of a pull from me. The reason I think I was scared of that pull was because one time when I started seeing a naturopath who will remain nameless, I went to see him and I knew he was involved with Scientology or something and people had complained about feeling him taking over their minds. I had gone to see him nonetheless because I wanted to find out if I was hypoglycemic and the doctor I was seeing didn't believe in such a thing and this guy did. The day when I saw him I woke up in the middle of the night and I felt him standing at the end of my bed and it was as if there was a sheet inside me that sort of followed my body or whatever. He had taken from the toes the tip of the sheet and was pulling from outside my body. I could feel it going down from inside of my head all the way down. It was something being pulled outside, out of me. It was like he was taking control of that. It was like a draining experience. So when I felt this pull into the center of the room sort of coming from the top of my head, it was similar and so that's why I was scared of it. I didn't want to give myself to that. But once I kind of sensed that it was a presence of Christ or a spirit of God, I let go and I could see God working again in this sort of collective unconscious.

K: How do you look back on that experience you had when you were 13? How do you understand it now?

B: Generally I don't look back to it much, meaning there's some sort of an intellectual consent to it. I still believe it was very real, that it happened. I don't believe I was imagining it especially because of feeling this person sitting down and feeling the indentation. That was what threw me. And I still look at it as being Christ. I still feel it was a spiritual embodiment kind of thing of Christ being there and sitting down. I think the reason I must resist thinking about it is because I still have problems believing that God is as loving as some people believe He is. And I still resist that. I can't believe that. There has to
be some strings attached. That's one thing I'm working through now. I still believe in God. I still believe in orthodox Christianity. I've thrown out the cultural aspects that came along with that. I'm very angry that it was so restrictive in my church upbringing. I'm angry about this minister who yelled and screamed. But I'm just starting now to allow myself to believe that maybe just maybe God's love is as wonderful as I've sometimes intellectually said it is. It's accepting it for myself. So it's almost like this experience happened but it's like I can't fully accept that because that would be a real demonstration of God's love to me. So I can't really take that in. I can't fully believe that. It's almost like it happened so long ago too that there's some distance to it. It's not like I question it, I don't question it at all. There is a sense of... I can't get into the feelings of it. I find it very difficult to re-feel that. I find it hard. Perhaps there's just a division in me. There's a sense in which I resist going back into my past too much, although I'm trying to figure it out. It's like I've divorced myself from this kid and I think largely because the teenage, later teenage years were so happy and in a sense unrealistic because I wasn't dealing with a lot of teenage issues like sexuality and dating and those kinds of things and it was like day and night. Here I went from being a very happy person all the time. Nothing bothered me. I had appendicitis and it didn't bother me. I didn't worry about it.

K: That happened after this experience?

B: Ya. The happy period. That started especially when I started reading scripture and understanding. Ot understanding it for myself. So the chronology, just to clarify, is: I grew up in this church with all this back-biting and all that kind of stuff, the minister yelling and screaming. The new minister came along. These kids all decided to get baptized. I felt the pressure. I went to see him. I cried a lot. It was also a year after my nervous breakdown and all these things that had happened like the cheating in school. I decided to get baptized but I was still embarrassed by that. I got baptized. My brother was there and I had this experience. And then I just sort of went through life. Nothing dramatic or undramatic happened until I got a hold of this paraphrased Bible and I started reading it and I just got really excited. That was I guess, when I was maybe 15. So that was from about 15 to say about 18. I was extremely happy, very content, just very excited by life, very optimistic and then the
contrast when I went to university. It was the complete opposite. I became very cynical. I picked up a lot of cynicism from university. But the despair in trying to find my place in life and dealing with . . .

K: And that's when you spoke of that experience and thought of it as being your reference point?

B: Ya. It was more spawned I think . . . I didn't think about it until I heard my Mom talking about her experience and then I thought oh yah, and this is something that happened to me. I have something similar that happened to me. That's when it became something that I hung on to. It was a hanging on to because I was still feeling a lot of the despair. Then over time things just sort of stabilized more. And once I went through the trauma of teaching. It's interesting because in terms of the kinesthetic stuff like when I started doing meditation, it wasn't TM or anything, just quieting myself. I would meditate on the cross. This was about 4 years ago. I would find often just by sitting still, like if I was in a flap about something, if I just calmed myself down and would sit still, I would often become aware of kinesthetic senses around my body. I would feel, for example, like there would be, I don't know if it's an aura or an energy field or whatever, but I would feel a split, especially above my head and it was like one half of my body was higher than the other half. Although physically my bone structure and everything was still in tact. It was like . . . spiritual in a sense. There was sensation that there was sort of a pull. It was a struggle, a split between, and so I would struggle to try to bring those two in line, those two halves. Eventually just by sitting still that would happen on it's own. So I'm also . . . more often feel like two polarities. I often feel sensations around my hands. I'm very aware of something there, some kind of force around my hands. The other experience, in terms of my body and feeling that kind of thing was when I was 14 and I was burned and they were doing a skin graft. I went under anaesthetic and when I went under anaesthetic I felt a tingling going all around the edge of my body. It moved very rapidly. It went up and down each of my fingers and down my arms and down and all up my legs, down and all around my middle. So it seems that kinesthetic things are more real for me than auditory stuff. Visual stuff, well I tend to think of that as just my imagination.

K: Do you pay a lot of attention to these types of
experience?

B: Well I have come to recently. I guess the meditation thing happened maybe about six months after I'd felt this naturopath in my room. Since that time I guess I have started paying attention to more of what goes on with that. As I become familiar with holistic medicine and polarity and all those kinds of things, I'm just more conscious of it. When people have done polarity on me I've felt incredible sensations throughout my body. You know somebody just holds their hands over my head, to the sides of my head, not touching my body at all, I can feel. It's as if there were hands, and they were moving back and forth like this, massaging me. And yet this guy was just holding his hands very still. He wasn't moving them at all. So ya, I guess I do pay a lot of attention.

K: Now?

B: Now, and because I'm interested in doing polarity therapy and being a polarity therapist and I'll do that kind of work with people. I'm conscious of these things happening. But I mean at 13 I never knew about any of this stuff. I never would have dreamed about these things happening, or auras I probably would have thought were from the devil. It's still something that you don't pay attention to, something that is not really real. Now I just see it as part of a person's body. It is something, it's a force around a person's body. I guess the other thing ... I don't pay a lot of attention to it, but I'm aware of it happening a lot. I'm conscious of someone. I start thinking about somebody. I might have a dream about them being in trouble and I'll call them up two days later and two days before they were in fact in trouble. It happens a lot with people especially with people I feel a strong connection to or affection. It doesn't matter how far the miles. I've even had a dream about a favourite dog of mine having trouble with child, not childbirth, puppy birth, and going ... I dreamed that this dog was going to a ravine, a ditch, to a ditch to have these babies. One of the kids in the family who owns the dog, well they were trying to help it, because one of the puppies wasn't coming out. I saw the family two months later and there were all these little puppies wandering about and I said, "When did Shalom have her puppies?" They said such and such a date and that was the day I'd had the dream. I wrote it down because it was very dramatic. I woke up from the dream and felt very concerned about the dog and praying for it. It had in fact been going to the ravine next to the house
to have its puppies and then they brought it in. I know it had problems. I do pay attention to those kinds of things because I find them so amazing. But I don't look for them. I don't actively seek them. Sometimes I start thinking about a friend or something like that and I've thought, you know, I wonder how this person is doing, and they've phoned me at the end of the week that a sister had died. So I think I should pay attention when I notice I've had thoughts of people, especially people I haven't thought of for a while and I should phone them or write them. I get a lot of . . . I mean when I do polarity, I can feel things happening with people and they can feel stuff coming out of their bodies and I feel it going into my hands. My hands begin to feel really dense. It's like the mass of them somehow intensifies and my hands start to feel like lead. I mean just opening them now I can feel the wind blowing through here. I can feel activity. When I do Tai Chi I can feel that.

K: That awareness has built up over the years for you then?

B: Ya. I can remember reading *The Chrysalids* in . . . when did it come on the B.C. curriculum? Grade 8? Are you familiar with it?

K: I haven't read it but I know of it.

B: It's after the nuclear war. There's survivors and some of these are . . . come out with six fingers and E.S.P. They'd be destroyed so they'd keep quiet about it, but they'd build up this network of E.S.P. And that always fascinated me. I just thought of that now after talking about it, how that fascinated me. I never thought much about it after that. I almost wondered if that kind of stuff does occur. I can remember in university when they were doing E.S.P. experiments and you know, that's the influence of evil spirits, just influencing people's minds. Sometimes I wonder if that's not true. I don't know, you know. I don't know that. I believe in a spiritual world and there's spiritual beings. So, I don't know.

K: Is there anything further you would like to add about that experience that feels undone or not said?

B: Only I think that I'd like to explore it more. I'd like to somehow be able to do a regression with a therapist or something and get into the feeling of that,
to try to understand it more, or just to re-experience what I experienced then. Get in touch with that 13 year old kid. Reclaim it. I don't... there isn't anything I haven't described of what led up to it or what followed. In some ways what followed was just nondescript in the immediate years after that. It's not dramatic.

K: How would it be for you to re-experience it with someone?

B: I wouldn't want anybody to trample on it. They can question it. I mean I'm not going to find it threatening. I won't doubt it, that it happened. But it was... I guess it was special and I guess one of the things that I found difficult here was describing all of this and saying, "I don't feel that specialness anymore." Something like that happened. It is very special. And why... and it's almost like I've forgotten how special it is, or lost touch with it and so I guess I want to somehow get in touch with it again. It's pretty wild when you think about it because it isn't something that happens every day and you know it must convey some kind of meaning. I guess it's the meaning... the sense of meaning... what it must mean, that I've lost. I can give an intellectual meaning. I can attach an intellectual meaning to it. But I guess I would like to re-experience the emotional kind of meaning. I'm into experiential therapy. I don't believe in cognitive stuff. That was something pretty special. Ya. I'd like to somehow recapture that. It's like I've divorced my feelings from it, my feelings about it. Why would something like that happen? And why would it be important for it to happen then? Perhaps, you know, perhaps it was because I was feeling a lot of pull and tearing at the time as a kid, a lot of trauma and tension and maybe that did calm me down. You see I can't remember too much what happened. I can remember when I got burned I wasn't upset about getting burned. In fact I was quite pleased that I got out of school for a month. That was even before I started my scripture reading period. I can't remember anything really significant happening. Maybe because everything was just sort of mellow. I don't know. Maybe I'm blocking. I don't think so. But it will be interesting to explore. I will be exploring some of that doing regression work, to find out what happened between the time I got baptized and experienced that, to the time I started reading scripture and getting really fired up.
K: And right now you have a sense of it being mellow?

B: Quiet. I don't recall anything really about that time. I remember grade 8 was a hard time. I mean that was a new experience. I'd just entered high school and there were all these senior high people that were fairly intimidating. Maybe that was part of my sense of embarrassment, because I wasn't sure enough about myself. I was this little tiny grade 8 kid, wandering around the halls where people were twice my size. I didn't want those guys to know about it. I'd feel intimidated if they laughed at me . . . maybe . . . I don't know.

K: About that experience?

B: No, the baptism. The experience, I didn't want to share. I had no compunction to share that with anyone.

K: Were you baptized already, into grade 8, or the summer between 7 and 8?

B: No it was during grade 8. And I think probably the fall, because I remember it was dark out at night. You see I don't have it recorded. My parents might have it recorded. The only thing that makes me connect it with grade 8 is that I can remember going to library period and my friend talking about it. He wanted to come and he wanted to bring others and I told him, "No, don't do that." And that would have been grade 8. Because I'm sure it was grade 9 that I got burned. And that was before that. That was for sure. I think if I allowed myself somehow . . . more than just intellectually . . . to get into that, but explore it from a more feeling place, I'd probably cry. I don't know why.

K: What would your tears say?

B: Probably it would be that I was admitting that God loved me. That I would finally believe it for myself. And I wouldn't be struggling with it anymore. Because a lot . . . I've come to realize that a lot of my life is a struggle against my church upbringing, all those attitudes and the social concerns and all that kind of stuff, the hypocrisy. It's been a struggle against, it hasn't been a moving for something else. So rather than forward looking, it's a past reaction type thing. I don't know . . . somehow, maybe, allowing myself to be impacted by it. I guess that's what's never happened apart from the mellowness of it maybe, or the peacefulness I felt at the time. But allowing myself to
be impacted, it would be like admitting that . . . God really loves me, that he hasn't abandoned me. Maybe it's been a feeling of that, of abandonment, when I started university and felt all on my own and was going through all these heavies that I hadn't faced as a teenager. So that put a chasm between my teenage years and my present experience. I've always looked back to the happy time as a teenager and thought wouldn't it be nice to somehow recapture that and be that kind of person again. Because I was very outgoing. I mean just . . . I loved everybody. And . . . and somehow I'd like to be able to recapture that freedom, maybe not the teenage intensity of it, but the freedom to just be. Whereas it seems like through adulthood I've gotten caught up with my own cares, other people's cares, seeing, I guess, things that I hadn't seen as a teenager that have weighed me down. There's sort of that, a chasm between that experience, and I think I need to reconnect to that, reclaim it.

K: You said you had a sense of if you did get back to it you'd want to cry.

B: Ya, and I don't want to do that right now.

K: Ya, I understand.

B: Ya. I think because I'd allow myself to feel that love that was there. It was almost like at the time that I . . . I couldn't deny it was happening to me . . . but I couldn't quite believe it either. I couldn't. It was just too strange, and certainly unheard of. I hadn't really heard of anybody talking about that. I didn't question that it had happened to me. I didn't want to know if it happened to other people though, either. For some reason, I just . . . it was significant and yet it wasn't. I just accepted it and I didn't question it and I didn't want to explore it. In a sense it was sort of like a teddy bear, I guess. I carried it around for a while. I don't know.

K: Tell me something about that.

B: Well just in that I hadn't talked about it. It was . . .

K: Well my sense of having a teddy bear is something that's . . .

B: It's warm and it's comforting and it's not necessarily something you want to talk about to others. It's
special. Some people might think it's silly to have a teddy bear.

K: Did you have that teddy bear again, when you used that as a reference point?

B: Only . . . it was all intellectual. I really divorced my feelings. It was like I didn't want to feel my feelings anymore. So it's like . . . ya, this happened and so it must mean that I am special or that I'm meant to be. I didn't use it to necessarily nurture myself or comfort myself in that kind of feeling way. It was more . . . it helped me put up a stiff upper lip, to grin and bear it. But it didn't . . . I didn't get in touch with the feelings of it.