LIVING FROM THE HEART:

AN EXPLORATION OF THE LIVED MEANING OF SPIRITUALITY FOR COMMUNITY-DWELLING, OLDEST ELDERS; AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

by

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Abstract

My love and admiration for my mother and other vibrant elders kindled my desire to learn about the lived spirituality of community-dwelling, "oldest-old" persons (aged 85 years and older). I embraced an opportunity to celebrate two elder friends, Paul and Mel, who agreed to join me in an exploration of their spirituality by generously sharing their beliefs and experiences and their habits of an ordinary day. Interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology was used to discover how they made sense of their spirituality and experienced its benefits. Data was gathered through semistructured interviews and follow-up conversations and through my reflections of our friendship. I presented the research results in a thematic narration. Spirituality was imaged as the heart of the person from which three primary, interwoven themes emerged: Strong Personal Identity, Identity of Belonging, and Meaningful Belonging, within an overarching leitmotif of Belonging of which love was the centre. Paul and Mel believed that they had lived and continued to live meaningful lives for which they felt grateful. Their Habits of an Ordinary Day were steeped in their deeply held values and relationships that informed and enlivened a Meaningful Belonging. This rich and satisfying experience of belonging gave them That Good Feeling. My research with Paul and Mel suggests that the spiritual well-being of elders is supported when they feel connected and can share their authentic self and gifts in genuine, loving, and caring community with others. This vital experience of connection and belonging is captured in the themes of this study.

Dedication

To God whose grace makes all things possible (Matthew 19:26). “Every good and perfect gift comes from You” (John Barnett, “Father of Lights”).

I dedicate this research to the following people whom I hold in the locket of my heart.

The “lights” and deep blessings of my life: my children—Eric and Len Charles, and their beautiful partners, Lora and Kalie; and my grandchildren—Isaac, Zachary, Ben, Sebastian, Mia, and Freya. That they are here has made it all worthwhile.

In memory of my parents and dear friends: my dad, Charles (Chuck) Skinner, who was my hero as a child and whose love and fathering continue to be a deep source of strength; and my mum, Flo, whose encouragement and joy of life are always with me. They taught me to say grace and to never miss an opportunity to say “thank you.”

My grandmothers, Anabel and Mabel, each of whom “would give you the shirt off her back.”

My sister and brother, Shirley and Jim, who left us too soon. Their influence is throughout this work. I share my love and journey with you and for you.

In memory of “Paul,” soul-friend of more than 30 years and co-researcher. As we promised, “I’ll meet you at the pearly gates, my friend.” Paul’s children, who have loving hearts like their dad’s.

My loving Aunt Marj with whom I stroll the streets of long ago.

Colleen, Doug’s mom, who blesses us with her love and prayers and sense of fun.

Last, but not least, Doug, my best friend and husband, an angelman, and the wind beneath my wings.

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Chapter One: Background

> But I do believe it is possible to create, even without writing a word or painting a picture, by simply "molding" one's inner life. And that too is a deed.
>
> —Etty Hillesum, Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941–1943

Life is a gift—what shall we do with it? My mother encouraged, "Life is what you make it." I imagine a potter at the wheel in dynamic dialogue with the earthy life she works in her hands. In the creative process, her whole body is engaging the raw energy, holding it steadily to the centre of the spinning wheel. Wrapped and coaxed inside her hands, the clay is spinning upwards, yielding against the tension of her fingers, opening, emptying, becoming a vessel. All the while, her hands are listening, intuiting, shaping. So it seems, the life we "make" exists in possibility, always asking of and conversing with the artist's skill and creativity.

Creating a meaningful existence involves befriending and working with the raw material of our lives, bringing it artfully and lovingly from heart to hand (Moore, 1994). In the imaginal process of giving meaning to our lives, they become something of the substance of who we are, our presence in the world, sacramental vessels by which the world is enshrined (Himes, 1995; Mitchell, 1989; Sexson, 1992; van Manen, 2003). Sexson (1992) proposes this is "how the holy is made: from the ephemera and scraps of the ordinary world by means of metaphor" (p. 10). All that we reverently touch and hold dear—sacred objects, places, words, music, memories, and relationships—all we ordain as holy become instruments of the Divine (Sexson, 1992, p. 11). In the flux of "becoming," our inner life is always emerging through the meanings we make, weathering under organic and transcendent forces, transforming the landscape of our

being and our views of the horizon. Art therapist Pat Allen (1995) believes our imagination is our inner guide to this sacred terrain. She says, "Imagination is the deepest voice of the soul and can be heard clearly only through cultivation and careful attention" (Allen, 1995, p. 3). Allen proposes that in developing a "relationship with our imagination" (p. 3), we develop a relationship with our authentic self whereby we can "discern possibilities and options" (p. 3) within our lives.

Accomplished potters say the basic skills to make a pot can be learned fairly quickly, but to create "high-quality, aesthetically pleasing, well-proportioned pieces takes many years of experience over long hours of practice" (Lakeside Pottery, n.d., "Potter's Wheel"). This is the way of creative aging, the soul's artful journey in which we all apprentice (Carlsen, 1996; Moore, 1994). Crafting a life requires holy listening, Allen (1995) suggests, as we dwell within the imagery and lore of mentors that feed our souls and dreams (Moore, 2015). Elders' artful cultivation of long and well-spent lives can be rich sources of inspiration in shaping a life of one's own. Their lives offer timeless images that may be absorbed and transformed to become uniquely our own (Allen, 1995, p. 5). Lamentably, our tendency in Western culture is to separate ourselves from elder mentors, to see our elders as different from ourselves until we no longer recognize them as experienced companions at the "wheel." Hence despite good intentions, Carlsen (1996) states that researchers can neglect to study "old people as people" (p. 7) who can teach, mentor, and illuminate.

In this study of the lived spirituality of oldest elders (85 years and older), the reader is introduced to elders Paul and Mel who are practiced potters at the wheel perfecting their art. Our partnership is reflected in this work. When reviewing my

analysis with Paul, he described our collaboration as "digging new earth together." The voices of Mel and Paul lead the way. I hope to follow and join them in a synergism that honours them. The reader will hear their voices in words italicized within quotation marks in Chapter 4. My hope is for readers to come away feeling they have encountered the heart of Paul and Mel for themselves. The uniqueness of who they are is liberated and celebrated through their spirituality, and I believe the stereotypes of old age will evaporate in coming to know them.

To situate this research in its broader context for the reader, Chapter 1 introduces the following topics: Canada's aging population within a changing health care paradigm; spiritual diversity; approaches to aging; spirituality and health outcomes; spiritual well-being; and definitions of spirituality. The research question, my personal interest in the topic, and choice of methodology are included in Chapter 1 as well. Chapter 2 delves further into the spirituality and aging literature and research, highlighting common understandings of spirituality and developmental perspectives that emphasize older adults. Chapter 3 details the methodology and method undertaken to complete the study. Chapter 4 presents the research results in a narrative analysis. Chapter 5 discusses the results in light of the spirituality and aging literature and explores implications for psychotherapy. Chapter 6 summarizes the results and their impact and importance and suggests areas for further study.

Situating the Research

This section discusses the interplay of Canada's diverse and aging population within a changing health care paradigm. The traditional biomedical model of aging is contrasted with a wholistic perspective of aging that highlights spirituality and its health

benefits. Definitions of spirituality are then explored, and the need for an inclusive definition is identified.

Canada's aging population within a changing health care paradigm. Our Canadian population is aging. According to Statistics Canada (2015), there are now more adults aged 65 years and older than there are children aged 14 years and younger. By 2036, approximately 25% of the population is projected to be aged 65 and older (Statistics Canada, 2012). Canada's aging population is compounded by the fact that people are living longer (Statistics Canada, 2012). At one time, it was considered remarkable to live to the age of 85 with only about 10% of persons reaching 85 in 1931 (Legare, Decarie, Deslandes, & Carriere, 2015, p. 10). Today it is increasingly common to live into extreme old age. Based on 2001 mortality statistics, half of women and one third of men reached the age of 85 (Legare et al., 2015, p. 10). The cohort of our oldest-old (85 years and older) represents the fastest growing segment of our population (Legare et al., 2015, p. 9), a threshold that baby boomers will begin to cross in 2031 (Legare et al., 2015, p. 25).

These demographic trends have highlighted social and ethical issues of aging within a changing paradigm for public health care (Government of Manitoba, 2012a). In light of a more complete picture of health, the biomedical model of health care, which emphasizes objective measures of physical wellness, is giving way to a wholistic vision of health and care with an emphasis on subjective well-being (Johansson, 2003; Government of Manitoba, Health, 2012a). As part of this evolution, spirituality is increasingly recognized as a dimension of whole person health (Government of Manitoba, 2012a).

Spiritual diversity. Not only is the age demographic shifting as the population ages, but according to Andre Leonard (2012), Social Affairs Division spokesman, the spiritual landscape is also changing and becoming increasingly diverse. In his statistical review of *Canada's Aging Population and Public Policy,* Leonard (2012) states that the proportion of Canadians born in other countries has grown and "could be between 25% and 28% in 2031" (Section 2.3.1, para. 1). International immigration is enhancing Canada's sociocultural mosaic and is expected to contribute to increasing religious and spiritual diversity (Leonard, 2012). A study by the Pew Research Center (2012) found that those persons who are unaffiliated with a religious tradition make up the "third-largest religious group worldwide, behind Christians and Muslims" (para. 3). According to the Pew Research Center, persons in this group include "atheists, agnostics, and those who do not identify with any particular religion" ("The Religiously Unaffiliated," para. 1), yet many of whom possess religious or spiritual beliefs as indicated in surveys ("The Religiously Unaffiliated," para. 1). In a Focus Canada study, the Environics Institute (2011) reports that 26% of Canadians did not identify with a religious tradition (p. 39), and 79% of Canadians claimed a belief in God or a "universal spirit" (p. 41), whether they were associated with a religious tradition or not.

Approaches to aging. A wholistic view of persons has been absent from traditional aging research, which has been largely quantitative and based on a biomedical model defined by mind-body dualism and positivism (Johansson, 2003). In this paradigm, quality of life is assumed to be dependent on physical health and functioning, the perceived locus of "health" and the focus of therapeutic intervention (Johansson, 2003). With an emphasis on physical health, aging has been viewed as a downward trajectory

marked by decline after physical maturity in young adulthood (Johansson, 2003). Poon and Cohen-Mansfield (2011) state that dwindling vigour, personal resources, and social supports are inevitable with advancing age (p. 5) and would seem to portend a poorer quality of life in old age. Yet despite a confirmed link between these determinants and well-being (p. 5), Poon and Cohen-Mansfield report the perplexing evidence that "well-being remains high among the oldest old" (p. 6).

Human development theories offer a more complex and hopeful view of aging than traditional approaches. They give insight into the experience of well-being described by many older adults and the source of their vitality and resiliency. Lifespan theorists emphasize the potential for inner growth throughout life and view growing old as ripe with opportunities (Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Johansson, 2003, p. 240; Tornstam, 1997). From a lifespan perspective, late life can be an especially fertile time for personal growth due to the kind and concentration of losses and challenges with which elders must grapple and come to terms, engendering opportunities for transcendence over loss, increased maturity, and integrity (Erikson & Erikson, 1997; MacKinlay, 2001; Tornstam, 1997).

Developmental theory interweaves with spirituality. Spiritual growth can be nourished by everything one experiences and can flourish across a lifetime. Researchers have found that cherished values and inner process associated with spirituality tend to become increasingly important to people as they age (Atchley, 2009; Tornstam, 1997). The significance of spirituality in later life was borne out by the research of Atchley (2009) who found that spirituality is a source of connection, support, and satisfaction for many older adults. Spiritual values and commitments can form the basis for an

"existentially meaningful interpretation for life" (Ortiz & Langer, 2002, p. 9), which has been shown to be crucial to a sense of well-being in elder persons (MacKinlay, 2001; Moore, Metcalf, & Schow, 2000). For elders, navigating the high seas of old age with its parlous waves of uncertainty, joys, and burdens can produce gifts of wisdom, compassion, and breadth of vision by which they can nurture and inspire younger generations (Erikson & Erikson, 1997).

Spirituality and health outcomes. Within a milieu of population aging and postmodern health care and ethics, an interest in spirituality has gained momentum in caregiving professions (Johansson, 2003; Government of Manitoba, 2012a). Studies show that "positive religious involvement and positive spiritual understanding are closely linked with better health outcomes and longer life expectancy" (Government of Manitoba, 2012a, p. 3). From his review of the literature, Koenig (2013) reports, "During the past century, more than 3,000 studies (systematically identified through the beginning of 2010) have quantitatively examined relationships between religious/spiritual (R/S) involvement and health, with the majority finding a significant positive association" (p. 35).

Spirituality can be a central source of strength and solace during times of loss and illness. Many people turn to their spirituality as a natural response to their suffering and the confusion and changes it can bring (Astrow, Puchalski, & Sulmasy, 2001, p. 283). For persons living with chronic and life-threatening health conditions, their spirituality can help them cope with the challenges they face (de Jager Meezenbroek et al., 2010, para. 1). Religious commitment and involvement have been shown to help people adjust to illness and to predict recovery time from depression, especially in persons

experiencing long-term physical disability that has not improved with therapeutic intervention (Crowther, Parker, Achenbaum, Larimore, & Koenig, 2002, p. 616). In their summary of the health research, Crowther et al. (2002) propose that the positive association between religious involvement and immune functioning points to a relationship between religion and lowered psychological stress, with added implications for possible benefits to physical health (p. 616). Physical frailty can negatively impact psychological well-being (PWB); (Kirby, Coleman, & Daley, 2004). In their study of frail older adults, Kirby, Coleman, and Daley (2004) found that spirituality mitigated the adverse effects of frailty on PWB. Their research suggests that persons experiencing higher levels of frailty tend to rely on their spirituality as a resource (Kirby et al., 2004, p. 128). A religious orientation and practice can help persons cope and adapt to losses and changes that accompany aging (Atchley, 2009; Koenig, 1994). Spiritual belief and connection may support the integration of loss and illness into a larger spiritual meaning and lead to inner growth (Crowther et al., 2002), and may nurture inner peace, for example, when personal control is released to God (Koenig, 1994).

Yet spirituality is more than a means of enduring grievous times, insist Pargament, van Haitsma, and Ensing (1995, p. 51). Spirituality can be a path to renewal and enlightenment and a source of love, joy, meaning, peace, nurture, and empowerment (Ortiz & Langer, 2002; Perinotti-Molinatti, 2005; Tanyi, 2002). In providing a source of "ultimate meaning" (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 15), spirituality can be a wellspring of hope, inspiration, and purpose that both grounds and transcends self and life circumstances (Atchley, 2009; Koenig, 2013; MacKinlay, 2001). Koenig (1994) suggests that turning to religion in later life may help to counteract the despair of earlier disappointments and

restore meaning (p. 435). At any age, spirituality can infuse the goals of life with significance (Pargament, van Haitsma, & Ensing, 1995). Pargament et al. (1995) propose, "Through the process of spiritualization, a number of significant ends become invested with sacred status, from the search for meaning, comfort, and intimacy to the search for self and a better world" (p. 51).

Health and spiritual well-being. Koenig's (2001) review of the literature revealed that "religious beliefs and practices are consistently related to greater life satisfaction, happiness, positive affect, morale, and other indicators of well-being" (p. 99). In 1998, the World Health Organization endorsed the inclusion of the spiritual dimension as an essential component of health and wellness (Government of Manitoba, 2012a, p. 3). Canadian initiatives have followed its lead. In Canada's first spiritual health care plan, *Health and the Human Spirit,* the Government of Manitoba (2012a) proclaims spiritual health as integral to its health care ethics and practice. In a news release, the Government of Manitoba (2012b) reports, "Higher levels of spiritual well-being, along with a sense of inner meaning and inner peace, are associated with better health outcomes, lower levels of depression and anxiety, and a better quality of life" (para. 3). *Health and the Human Spirit* highlights a therapeutic approach to spiritual health care, which was summarized by Cobb and Robshaw as the "recovery of the patient as a person, upholding his or her beliefs and experiences and addressing matters of meaning and hope" (as cited in Government of Manitoba, 2102a, p. 4).

MacKinlay (2006) emphasizes the centrality of spirituality to well-being (p. 63) and the importance of relationship to spirituality (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 19). Although spiritual well-being is increasingly recognized as integral to whole person wellness,

MacKinlay (2001) observes that health care literature has emphasized a psychosocial approach and interventions (p. 19). Spiritual needs are basic human needs (MacKinlay, 2001, 2006). Atchley (2009) describes spiritual needs as "some of the most subjective, deeply private needs we have" (p. 117). MacKinlay (2001) insists that without assessing for spiritual needs, they are likely to be overlooked, and "vital and deep issues for people are denied existence" (p. 19). Canada's aging population urges us to learn more about how spirituality contributes to well-being in late life and how we can support the spiritual needs of long-lived persons. As Joan Erikson (1995) commented, we have "more and more old people" in North America, "and we know less and less about what to do for them and with them" (0:43). Bishop (2011) reports, "Gerontological examination of spiritual and religious connections in extreme old age has been limited" (p. 227).

Defining spirituality. Defining spirituality remains a contentious issue according to Mowatt and O'Neil (2013), one that is "problematic, disputed and evolving" (p. 3). A lack of consensus surrounding the meaning of "spiritual" and "religious" and the conflation of these terms hinder our understanding of spirituality and how it interacts with aging (Ortiz & Langer, 2002). Varied definitions of spirituality make it difficult to compare research results and to develop a coherent knowledge base (de Jager Meezenbroek et al., 2010; Ortiz & Langer, 2002).

Wink (1999) states that there was a time when the search for meaning and transcendence was normally mediated by the traditions of organized religion, with the effect that spirituality and religion were virtually synonymous (p. 75). With the expansion of secular culture in North America, this dissolution has altered patterns of belief, according to Taylor (2007). Taylor (2007) observes that in the 16th century it was almost

unthinkable not to believe in God (p. 25), whereas today, belief in God is one orientation among others in the search for meaning and the fullness of life (p. 3). Wink links the break between religion and spirituality to the large number of baby boomers who sought spiritual meaning apart from organized religion during the 1960s (pp. 75–76). Many boomers, he says, turned to "Jungian psychology, Eastern philosophies and practices, and a variety of self-help groups and manuals to satisfy their spiritual needs" (Wink, 1999, p. 76).

Koenig (1994) writes that spirituality is usually understood as a more inclusive term than religion and does not necessarily include faith in God or a supreme power (p. xxiv). In general, people tend to associate spirituality with private, inner experience and process, Atchley reports; whereas religion is more often associated with social experience and behaviour sanctioned by organized religion (pp. 14–16). Among the older participants in her study, for example, MacKinlay (2001) observed that religion was often equated with "going to church" (p. 51). The meaning people attach to spirituality and religion and the language used to assess spiritual needs may lead people to identify with one or the other, with both, or to reject these terms altogether (Atchley, 2009).

Koenig, who was cited in Atchley (2009, p. 15), observes that many spiritual assessment tools fail to capture the diversity of spirituality by measuring only religion, which suggests that definitions of spirituality can impact the assessment of spiritual needs and the provision of spiritual care. Atchley points out the difficulty in using standardized assessment tools to understand the personal nature of spirituality (p. 116). He emphasizes the importance of sensitive questioning and listening to the stories people tell about their spiritual journeys in his own research, which he believes can give insight into a person's

formation of self, lifestyle, and goals (Atchley, 2009, p. 70). MacKinlay (2010) alerts us to the changing nature of spiritual needs and growth across a lifetime and maintains that the spiritual care of older adults must be considered in relation to the unique conditions of late life (p. 77).

Many authors view spirituality as a complex, multifaceted concept influencing all aspects of self and functioning (Atchley, 2009; MacKinlay, 2001; Ortiz & Langer, 2002). From her review of the literature, Tanyi (2002) reports that spirituality has been described as "the core of human existence" (p. 507) and as "an energizing force that propels individuals to reach their optimal potential" (p. 502). MacKinlay (2001) conceives spirituality as the lifelong desire and search for relationship and meaning (p. 51). Perceptions of spirituality can differ among and within disciplines and between caregivers and persons receiving care. McSherry, Cash, and Ross (2004) found that "when comparing and contrasting nurses' definitions of spirituality with that of patients there appeared to be significant differences between the language, interpretation and understanding of the concept" (p. 937). The complex and various ways in which spirituality may be understood and experienced suggest that to understand the deepest self of another one needs to explore more than what a person believes (Baker, 2012).

Belief, whether based in religious doctrine or secular philosophy, does not account for the different ways people interpret and personalize their beliefs, even among those who share the same religious tradition (Baker, 2012, para. 2). Baker (2012) proposes that what we believe is not contained in a tidy dimension "but is enmeshed in [our] lives materially and metaphysically" (para. 2). To understand the power and potential of belief, we need to turn to everyday life. Atchley (2009) joins Baker in describing spirituality as

penetrating all aspects of the self and existence, which affirms the sacred potential of all "life experiences wherever they happen" (Atchley, 2009, p. 28). Atchley notes that academic definitions may not capture the lived reality of spirituality and the myriad ways that spirituality is elaborated in the lives of older adults. Fischer (1998), too, expresses the convolution of spirituality "with our very existence" (p. 13), which she describes as "a fabric as variously textured as aging itself" (p. 13). How spirituality interacts with the aging process is knitted into each unique journey. Kaufman (1986) urges that before we can support our elders' needs for vitality and meaning, we first need to understand how elders "view themselves, their lives and the nature of old age" (p. 4). We need to wonder and watch for how belief is transfigured into meaningful living if we are to grasp what it is that uplifts and satisfies in the closing years.

To understand every person as a spiritual being with spiritual needs requires a definition of spirituality broad enough to capture the diversity of meanings and experiences that exist (Atchley, 2009; MacKinlay, 2001). MacKinlay (2001) advocates for "a definition of spirituality that is inclusive of all religious groups and of the secular" (p. 51). An all-embracing definition of spirituality mends the dualism that fragments reality into what is either spiritual or secular and recognizes that the whole of life can be infused with sacred meaning (Atchley, 2009; Sexson 1992; Steindl-Rast, 1998). In keeping with this view, I have selected the definition that informs the spirituality model developed by the Methodist Homes for the Aged Care Group: "What gives continuing meaning and purpose to a person's life and nourishes their inner being" (as cited in Jewel, 2004, p. 22).

The Research Question

The following question guided this research: How do community-dwelling, oldest-old persons (85 and older) understand and experience their spirituality and its benefits? The understanding that each person is a spiritual being with lifelong potential for spiritual growth is one of the assumptions of this study (MacKinlay, 2001). The apostle Paul wrote of the imperishable nature of the spiritual life, which affirms our potential to mature and bear fruit until we die, despite our aging bodies. Paul described the fruit of the Spirit in Galations 5:22: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (English Standard Version [ESV]). I assumed a life-affirming spirituality would bear the kind of fruit Paul described—values and behaviour associated not only with Christianity but also with other major spiritual traditions and humanist or ethical frames of reference (Post, 2014; Smith, 1991). The fruit of the Spirit are the embodied values, which affirm and connect us in positive ways within ourselves, with others, with nature and, for many, with a Higher Being. These values guide, nourish, and strengthen our relationships and well-being. Whether grounded in a religious tradition or in secular philosophy and virtue, they represent ethical ideals that inspire us to work together to create an equitable and peaceful world.

I approached this research believing that the later years may reveal a matured spirituality, which is less likely earlier in life (Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Fischer, 1998; Tornstam, 1997). Saussy (1998) suggests that certain gifts ripen in late life, which include the relational virtues or "fruits of the Spirit" (p. 72) as identified by the apostle Paul. Similarly, Fischer (1998) identifies a special grace in old age, which she names "winter

grace" (p. 8). Winter grace suggests that there are "dimensions of the Gospel, aspects of love, courage, faith, and fidelity that only the old can sacramentalize for the human community" (Fischer, 1998, p. 19). Fischer believes the paradoxes of Christianity are most vividly revealed in our elders, for example: "That in losing our lives we somehow find them; that loss can be gain, and weakness, strength; that death is the path to life" (p. 19).

Paul said, "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16, ESV). The potential for spiritual growth and renewal throughout the whole of life is an exciting, hopeful prospect Paul observes. It inspired my ponderings: How is spiritual life and renewal vis-à-vis despair experienced by our oldest elders? What do we need to fan the flame as we approach the end of our earthly lives? What does it mean to finish strong? What hope and wisdom can we receive from our elders for ourselves as we age and how we care for one another? My belief that the spiritual dimension permeates all of who we are and every aspect of life, as Brother Steindl-Rast (1998) and others propose, guides my search for the extraordinary in the ordinary lives of the elders who participate in this study.

My Personal Interest in the Topic

My interest in learning more about late-life spirituality emerged from my observations of my mother and my conversations with her concerning her faith. My mother lived with an age-related health condition in her final years, yet she engaged in activities that enriched her days, gave her a raison d'être, and brought her joy. Spirituality has been characterized as a way of seeing and embracing the world that expresses the

uniqueness of each person (Tanyi, 2002). This description resonated with my understanding of my mother's spirituality.

My mother died a few years ago at the age of 91. I will always remember her as a bright light, a vital and joyful person whose spirituality was most obvious in her deeply kind way of being. One of her faithful routines was to feed the squirrels that would visit her balcony. She communed with them, even allowing them to sit on her lap and eat from her hand. My mother had a special relationship with one of her visitors whom she named and would watch for each day. Brother Steindl-Rast (1998) proposes, "Wherever we come alive, that is the area in which we are spiritual" (p. 66). The sparkle in my mother's eyes and her lively presence told me that feeding her friends was a meaningful and uplifting part of her day.

I was intrigued by my mother's experience of feeding the squirrels as a spiritual practice. She inspired my desire to learn about the spirituality of elders and to consider what might be viewed as nontraditional spiritual activities that enrich their daily lives. Boyle (1983) writes about the enduring sustenance and stability that spiritual routines can bring to our lives from childhood through elderhood (p. 30). She suggests, "Establishing spiritual grooves in which to relax and gather strength may well be the greatest need of our day" (Boyle, 1983, p. 30). As a social worker with a special interest in our elders, I hoped this research would deepen my understanding of late-life spirituality and the spiritual needs of this diverse and growing population. As an aging person, blessed with the friendship of Paul and Mel, I hoped to find wisdom for my own life and to share it with others.

Choice of Methodology

I chose interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore the lived spirituality of elders Mel and Paul. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) describe IPA as a qualitative research approach grounded in phenomenology (everyday lived experience) and hermeneutics (the study of interpretation). IPA is "idiographic" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 3) in that it examines in detail the particular experiences of one or more persons. Exploring individual experience has the potential to illuminate our common humanity and to bring us into empathic community (Smith et al., 2009; van Manen, 2003).

Phenomenology is "the study of lived or existential meanings" (van Manen, 2003, p. 11) and is described by van Manen (2003) as a desire to know the "fullness of living" (p. 12). Van Manen explains that when we engage with the world, we feel intrigue and a desire to understand our experience (p. 79). Desire, he tells us, is more than a feeling or a state of mind but a "state of being" (van Manen, 2003, p. 79) that arises from our vital involvement in the world and evokes our questions. Van Manen points out, "Without desire there is no real motivated question" (p. 79). When desire is missing, our questions will be half-hearted, desultory, and fleeting (van Manen, 2003, p. 79). In contrast, the phenomenological outlook, van Manen says, is characterized by a compelling wonder and questioning of "what is it like?" (p. 45) to have a particular experience. He likens our fascination to the allure of "a love I desire" (van Manen, 2003, p. 79), which beckons us again and again "to seek its meaning" (p. 79).

Van Manen (2003) describes phenomenological research as a "caring act" (p. 5) and references psychologists Buytendijk and Binswanger in establishing love and care as the requisite and foundation for human science research (p. 6). Van Manen tells us that

Buytendijk speaks of love as the basis for "all knowing of human existence" (p. 6), and Binswanger shows that "we can only understand something or someone for whom we care" (p. 6). Van Manen adds, "And if our love is strong enough, we not only will learn much about life, we also will come face to face with its mystery" (pp. 5–6).

My passion is to discover the living spirituality of our elders and the wisdom of life well-lived and to support these. It emerges from my desire to touch and care for "the good within" myself and others. My search for understanding is rooted in my love and intrigue, my concern and esteem for my friends who are elders, and extends to my desire to be part of a caring community, one which cares for the whole person throughout his or her entire journey.

Although IPA is a phenomenological approach to examining lived experience, its aim is not to identify and describe essential features of phenomena typical of descriptive phenomenology (Smith et al., 2009). Instead, IPA adopts the position of the philosopher Heidegger who believed that our experiences are made meaningful and are only accessible through our interpretations of them (as cited in Smith et al., 2009). Researchers, therefore, look to how people make sense of their experiences in relation to particular phenomena (Smith et al., 2009). IPA's stance that our reflections of experience are always interpretations is what makes it a hermeneutic approach. Smith et al. (2009) point out that researchers engage in a "double hermeneutic" (p. 35), or dual interpretation, in which they interpret what those immersed in their experience have interpreted in making sense of it.

In closing, I selected IPA methodology for its philosophic values and approach to understanding lived experience. IPA's focus on eliciting richly-textured accounts of

personal experience harmonized with the goal of this study (Smith et al., 2009, p. 56). Its whole-person emphasis helped to capture the complexity of the co-researchers' spirituality to include the "embodied, interpersonal, affective and moral nature" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 21) of their experiences. Overall, IPA supported an in-depth exploration of how elders Mel and Paul perceive and express what is deepest in their hearts and invited a caring dialogue with the wider community.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter casts light on spirituality and aging from theological, psychological, and sociological perspectives and within the applied fields of psychology, health care, and gerontology. I undertook a literature search on EBSCO, the University of Calgary Library site, and the Theses Canada page of the Library and Archives Canada website using the following keywords: oldest old, elderly, spirituality, aging, well-being, and quality of life. I, then, extended my search using the references from these sources.

The interplay of spirituality and aging is explored through the following themes:

- spirituality is the essence of the person;
- spirituality, wholism, and quality of life;
- spiritual well-being, wholeness, healing, and love;
- existential meaning—the search for the sacred;
- hope;
- and the lived reality.

Lastly, selected research and developmental theories are introduced, which offer the reader insightful lenses for contemplating the meaning of spirituality in late life. The voices of Christine Bryden and the late Joan Erikson are heard here as well. Bryden (2005), who is an advocate for persons with dementia and a person experiencing dementia, describes her spiritual self and needs. Writing in her 90s, Erikson (1903–1997) shares her experience of old age as it relates to developmental theory.

Spirituality is the Essence of the Person

Macquarrie (1992) describes spirit as "the most elusive and mysterious constituent of our human nature" (p. 43) and "the most distinctive constituent of

personhood" (p. 46). Despite our struggle to define it, spirituality is increasingly understood as a natural capacity within each person (Hay & Socha, 2005), penetrating all aspects of being and, potentially, all of life (MacKinlay, 2001; Steindl-Rast, 1998). In his approach to nursing care practice, McSherry (2006) affirms the indelible, spiritual impress on the human heart, describing the spiritual self as an enduring presence independent of personal awareness and cognitive processes and functioning (p. 90).

In his discussion of dementia and spirituality, Killick (2004), too, applies his belief in the entwine of person and spirit. Killick refers to Kitwood who underscores the the humanity and wholeness of persons experiencing dementia in his emphasis on "PERSON-with-dementia" (Killick, 2004, p. 144; Kitwood, 2012, p. 7). Kitwood (2012) defines *personhood* as a "standing or status that is bestowed upon one human being, by others, in the context of relationship and social being. It implies recognition, respect and trust" (p. 8). Killick adopts the definition of spirituality constructed by Froggatt and Moffitt (1997), which affirms the spiritual needs of all persons and includes emotion as an essential component:

> In this context we mean the search for that which gives zest, energy, meaning and identity to a person's life, in relation to all other people, and to the wider world. Spirituality can be experienced in feelings of awe or wonder, those moments of life, which take you beyond the mundane into a sacred place. (Froggatt & Moffitt, 1997, p. 225)

This definition of spirituality captures Kitwood's (2012) notion of personhood as relational, embodied, and unique (pp. 7–8). When discussing therapeutic approaches for

caring for persons with dementia, Killick (2004) highlights therapies that respect the dignity, uniqueness, and creativity of each person.

Christine Bryden, author and advocate for persons with dementia, joins McSherry (2006) in defining the spiritual self as the essential human identity and Killick (2004) in emphasizing personhood and emotion as a pathway for spiritual connection. Bryden (2005) was diagnosed with early dementia at 46 years of age (p. 9). In her book, *Dancing with Dementia*, she reminds the reader that disease processes do not extinguish the spiritual self even when they severely compromise and overwhelm the functioning of body or mind (Bryden, 2005). Bryden (2005) tells us,

> Beneath this increasingly jumbled layer of emotion is the true self that remains intact despite the ravages of dementia. This is my spiritual self or transcendent self. It is the 'me' that relates to the beauty of a garden, of the leaves or the flowers; it is the 'me' that relates to God; it is my spirit, the essence of me. (p. 159)

In writing about the forgetfulness that marks the disease, Bryden (2005) insists that memory loss need not impede the healing communication of the spirit and describes her spiritual need for affirmation and connection: "I need you to affirm my identity and walk alongside me. I may not be able to affirm you, to remember who you are or whether you visited me. But you have brought spiritual connection to me" (pp. 110–111). Bryden suggests that we can connect and communicate through the language of the senses and emotions in the present moment: "But this fact that we live in the present, with a depth of spirit and some tangled emotions, rather than cognition, means you can connect with us at a deep level through touch, eye contact, smiles" (p. 99). She conveys that when we

communicate spirit to spirit, we connect in our wholeness and affirm our unassailable worth and belonging (Bryden, 2005). Bryden describes what Henri Nouwen (1992) refers to as our *Belovedness*, which "expresses the core truth of our existence" (Nouwen, p. 33). The following scripture, written by the apostle Paul, affirms the fidelity of God's agape love and that God remembers us:

> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans: 8: 38–39, ESV)

Christine Bryden's insights are poignant, hopeful, and instructive in our relationships and caring for the dignity and spiritual well-being of older adults and all persons. According to the Alzheimer Society Calgary (n.d.), "1 in 3 Canadians over 80 years of age is living with dementia" ("Latest Statistics," para. 8). Studies reveal that the incidence of dementia spirals between the ages of 65 to 90 years, the risk doubling about every 5 years for persons in this age range (Corrada, Brookmeyer, Paganini-Hill, Berlau, & Kawas, 2010, Discussion, para. 5). In their own study of dementia in oldest old persons, Corrada, Brookmeyer, Paganini-Hill, Berlau, and Kawas (2010) observed a continuation of this trend in both men and women who were 90 years of age or more (Discussion, para. 1).

Bryden (2005) tells us, "What really remains throughout this journey is what is really important, and what disappears is what is not important. I think that if society could appreciate this, then people with dementia would be respected and treasured" (p. 159). She points out that, despite our human condition, the "true self" (Bryden, 2005,

p. 162) is present and awake, communicating our spiritual unity. Recognizing each person as a spiritual being emphasizes spiritual care as our obligation. To uphold and communicate the inherent value of each person is the crux and spiritual signature of our care and humanity, "care" being essential to what it means to be human, as Heidegger believes (as cited in Reich, 1995).

Johansson (2003) points out that elderly persons must often adjust to living with chronic disabilities, a likelihood that increases with age. At age 85, more than 50% of persons experience a disability of some type (Hyer, Yeager, & Scott, 2011, p. 333). Illness brings spiritual challenges. Spiritual growth, Johansson believes, can develop from being fully present to all our experiences, including those that we find difficult or painful (p. 242). Johansson maintains that professional caregivers involved in the everyday care of elders have a unique opportunity to support elders on their journeys through loss and adjustment (p. 242). Elders can be supported, he suggests, by acknowledging them as spiritual persons with spiritual needs, for example, by helping them to access spiritual resources and by encouraging personal practices that sustain their day-to-day well-being (Johansson, 2003, pp. 242–243).

Elders often face the double edge of discrimination as both "old" and "disabled." Fitzgerald (1997) asserts that the spiritual self and journey of persons with disabilities has been limited and oppressed by medical and bureaucratic labels of convenience, social stereotypes, and religious beliefs, which all function to alienate through their emphasis on difference (p. 409). "Growing old," too, is plagued by (ageist) stereotypes, the biomedical model of health, and social values exalting youth and productivity that exclude and devalue older persons and their spiritual gifts. So often, these negative views are

internalized and become a battle within, further wounding and alienating the self. Fitzgerald highlights how dominant social paradigms co-construct and undermine selfhood and advocates for an "integrated, interdependent and holistic view of self and society" (p. 407), one that "incorporates and integrates brokenness" (p. 407). She voices the cry in many of our hearts, those of us who are givers and receivers of care, all who are broken, aging, and vulnerable.

Spirituality, Wholism, and Quality of Life

McSherry (2006) affirms that spirituality is developed and expressed through the entire person and his or her interactions with the world throughout life. He refers to his 2004 research results which, he says, suggest that many professional caregivers and some patients view spirituality as a transcendent, integrating "force that brings unity and harmony" (McSherry, 2006, p. 85) within themselves, with others and the whole of existence and contributes to a meaningful and fulfilling life (p. 85). From his review of spirituality within the context of nursing and health care models, McSherry determines that spirituality is important to personal well-being and is an essential component of wholism (p. 91). To ignore the spiritual dimension, he states, is to overlook its influence on a person's experience of health and quality of life (McSherry, 2006, pp. 83–84). Although McSherry's research suggests that health care theory and models acknowledge the connection between spirituality and health and well-being (McSherry, 2006), some health care delivery models are reported by practitioners to neglect spirituality (McSherry, 2006, p. 92). McSherry insists that academic models need to be informed by those who deliver care if theory is to guide practice by which the total well-being of persons is to be addressed (p. 80). He believes that to understand spirituality within

wholistic care, the interdependency among spirituality and all other domains of being to include environmental and socio-political influences needs to be recognized (McSherry, 2006, p. 82). McSherry (2006) maintains that all systems influence one another and are involved in healing (p. 82).

An interest in the interchange between persons and environmental factors influencing subjective quality of life (QOL) has been the raison d'être of the Quality of Life Research Unit (QoLRU) since 1991 (Quality of Life Research Unit [QoLRU], n.d.a). The QoLRU was formed at the University of Toronto following a request by the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services for research and the development of an assessment tool to measure QOL among persons with developmental challenges (QoLRU, n.d.a, "Background"). The QOL instrumentation was later adapted for use with seniors and other populations. As the QoLRU (n.d.d) states, the leading purpose of its work is to support vulnerable persons in their choice to experience meaningful and pleasurable lives that reflect their priorities and that promote their well-being and development (para. 3).

QOL is defined in the model as "the degree to which a person enjoys the important possibilities of his or her life" (QoLRU, n.d.b, "Conceptual Framework," para. 1). What is possible reflects the interaction and harmony between a person's needs and goals and the opportunities and constraints of his or her environment. (QoLRU, n.d.b, "Conceptual Framework," para. 1). Enjoyment refers to the measure of satisfaction or attainment in areas of personal importance (QoLRU, n.d.b, "Conceptual Framework").

The QOL profile is divided into primary life domains of Being, Belonging, and Becoming (QoLRU, n.d.b). The domain of Being emphasizes, "who one is";

Belonging—"connections with one's environments"; and Becoming—"achieving personal goals, hope and aspirations" (QoLRU, n.d.b, "Conceptual Framework"). These domains are further divided into areas that capture physical, psychosocial, and spiritual dimensions; for example, in the domain of Being, Spiritual being is a subdomain that includes "personal values, personal standards of conduct, and spiritual beliefs" (QoLRU, n.d.b, "Conceptual Framework"). The environment is also assessed, although it is not part of the QOL profile, and provides interpretative data for QOL scores (QoLRU, n.d.b, "Decision-Making and Opportunities," para. 3). The quality of an environment is measured by how well the environment supports a person's basic needs and offers realistic opportunities for enjoyment and development characterized by "*control* and choice" (QoLRU, n.d.b, "Decision Making and Opportunities," para. 2).

As the QoLRU (n.d.c) states, its model and assessment tools can be applied to individuals or groups as part of program planning and evaluation, as a method of assessing public health priorities, and as a resource for community action ("Implications for Public Health"). The model and instrumentation capture the holistic nature of QOL through the dynamic interplay among inner and outer dimensions of being.

Erikson, Erikson, and Kivnick (1986) explain the reciprocity between person and environment as an interchange that coheres and reinforces our vital involvement with life. They describe our involvement as a natural capacity that we begin to express in the womb (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986, p. 33). Involvement is the fact of our aliveness, which naturally engages us with our environment and taps our potential to grow and develop (Erikson et al., 1986, p. 33). Vitality is shaped and nourished by "stimulating the 'environment' as it stimulates us; for as we become vitally involved, we

are also challenging the 'environment' to involve us in its convincing ways" (Erikson et al., 1986, p. 33). They describe vital involvement as synonymous with life and, therefore, as a lifelong need.

Spiritual Well-Being, Wholeness, Healing, and Love

In 1972, the National Interfaith Coalition on Aging (NICA) defined spiritual well-being as "the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community, and environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness" (as cited in Thorson & Cook, 1980, xiii). In their commentary, which was cited in Thorson and Cook (1980), NICA explains that to affirm life is to choose life, to value and accept the whole of life in its reality from the perspective of one's eternal destiny with God (according to the Judeo-Christian perspectives); it involves cherishing one's own life, the life of others, and all of life in our relationships with one another and with God (pp. xiii–xiv). MacKinlay (2001) refers to NICA's definition of spiritual well-being as dynamic and notional rather than as a state of perfection to be achieved (pp. 50- 51). She describes spiritual well-being as a "process and a continued movement towards wholeness that has the potential to continue throughout the human life" (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 51).

The notion of *wholeness* is illuminated by NICA, which points out its antithesis—"fragmentation and isolation" (as cited in Thorson & Cook, 1980, p. xiii). NICA defines wholeness as a goal or a destiny that is never fully realized (in this life) but is approached and nurtured through relationship with God, others, and the natural world (as cited in Thorson & Cook, 1980, p. xiv). In discussing spiritual well-being in a culturally-rich society, the Government of Manitoba (2012a) calls attention to the equivalency of the words "healing, whole and holy" (p. 17), which share the same etymology. The

Government of Manitoba reports that these are the words used in most cultures and faith traditions to describe "wellness, oneness, that which is 'hallowed' as sacred" (p. 17). Borg (2003) explains that the word "salvation" is also derived from the same Latin word meaning "wholeness or healing" (p. 175) and the English root meaning "helpful" (p. 175).

Borg (2003) believes that the Christian message of salvation is meant primarily for this world to promote wholeness and healing in this life (p. 175). Like NICA, Borg proposes, "The language of 'wholeness' points to a movement beyond fragmentation, and the language of 'healing' suggests being healed of the wounds of existence" (p. 175). Healing is the need of each person and the need of the world. Nouwen, McNeill, and Morrison (2006) describe our existential condition as the human condition we all share, which they state is one of "pilgrims on the way, sinners in need of grace" (p. 61). By recognizing our own pain and suffering, Nouwen et al. (2006) propose that we are brought into a "deeper solidarity with the brokenness of our fellow human beings" (p. 62). They pinpoint this recognition as the basis for the compassion that resides in true community, unlike sympathy or pity, which keep us separate from the suffering of others through categories of us and them (Nouwen et al., 2006). Poling insists that "care is an issue of power" (as cited in Lartey, 2003, Foreword, p. 11) and one of perspective. The ability to be with and care for others in their suffering (Nouwen et al., 2006) is born of I-Thou relationships (Buber, 1996). Buber (1996) names two basic ways that we meet one another; one, I–Thou, by which we recognize and relate to the other as a "whole being" (p. 54) like ourselves; and, alternately, I–It, whereby we experience the other in terms of our own needs and goals. In I–Thou relationships, our humility and holy regard

for the other invites radical trust and a true sense of relatedness and community characterized by love, compassion, reciprocity, and social justice.

The apostle Paul wrote about the centrality of love to our relationships with one another and to all of existence:

> *The Way of Love*. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.
>
> (1 Corinthians: 13:1–3, ESV)

Levin and Post (2010) speak of love as the vital energy of wholeness. In the absence of love, Clinebell (1992) states, "there can be no well being" (p. 4). In the Introduction of *Divine Love*, Levin claims that the fullness of God's love is not complete until it is revealed in our love for others (Levin & Post, 2010, p. 8). Our willingness to acknowledge the immanent Spirit within others, Levin suggests, enables us to love our neighbour as self (Levin & Post, 2010, p. 8). Similarly, in his prologue to Buber's (1996) book, Kaufmann points out Buber's emphasis on the interdependency of love of God and love of person in the way that I cannot encounter God without encountering You (p. 28). Clinebell (1992) declares, "Love is the heart of well being!" and names it "the power, the means, the meaning and the goal of wholeness" (p. 4). He maintains, "You are whole or have well being to the degree that the center of your life is integrated and energized by love and healthy spirituality" (Clinebell, 1992, p. 3). Although the spiritual intent of loving others is not for personal benefit, Post (2008) affirms,

> Those who frame their lives around genuine love for others understand that, as a by-product or indirect effect of such wide-ranging compassion, they will flourish emotionally, and, in the context of any healthy community, they will flourish socially as well. (p. 132)

Love and compassion are the sine qua nons of a life of faith in major world religions and the lingua franca of spiritual texts (Levin, 2010, p. 8; Smith 1991).

Existential Meaning: The Search for the Sacred

According to Clinebell (1992), the nourishing and flourishing of the dimensions of "physical, mental and interpersonal health" (p. 25) depend on the meeting of existential needs, which express our spiritual nature. Existential needs are linked to ontological questions in the search for identity, purpose, and direction (Brown, 1980, p. 76). O'Connell Killen and de Beer (2003) propose that the drive for meaning in the Christian tradition is understood "as the desire to know reality intimately, and ultimately to know God" (p. 27). We demonstrate the search for ultimate meaning whenever we ask questions such as the following: What is the meaning of my life? To whom do I belong? "Who am I?" (Brown, 1980, p. 76). These issues express the heart of our humanity and can take on greater urgency as we approach the boundary of life (Brown, 1980, p. 76).

Many authors identify spirituality as what gives supreme meaning in life: the source of greatest value by which all other meanings are joined and hope is derived (MacKinlay, 2001; Tanyi, 2002). The need to find meaning, MacKinlay (2001) proposes, is a fundamental human need and is "closely tied to hope" (p. 14). Viktor Frankl (2006) saw the search for meaning as necessary to existence, quoting Nietzsche who understood that "he who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*" (p. 104).

Hope

Hope

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

—Emily Dickinson, *Poems by Emily Dickinson, Three Series, Complete*

Emily Dickinson's poem captures the sweetness, persistence, and grace of hope—and our need for hope. I read in the news last night that a suicide occurs, somewhere in the world, every 40 seconds ("A Death by Suicide," 2014). Children in poor and war-torn countries continue to die of malnutrition and preventable diseases despite the relative wealth of the Western world and the tremendous medical and technological progress that has been made. In countries worldwide, violence and poverty destroy life and hope. Greed and alienation breed terrorism. The tears and horror of the innocent and their desperate cries for help flood our hearts and conscience on the nightly news. The United Nations reported that, by the end of 2015, 65.3 million persons were forced to flee their homes as a result of war and persecution, extreme poverty, human rights violations, and natural disasters—the largest number of displaced persons since World War II (Astor, 2016; Kotturan, 2016). About half of the 21.3 million refugees are reported to be

children, many of whom are separated from their parents or who are undertaking the risky voyage alone (Kotturan, 2016). Girls and women are at risk of sexual violence as they travel across borders (Kotturan, 2016). The prevalence of prostitution and slavery are reported to be widespread in the midst of war and natural disasters (Kotturan, 2016). Today, a glimmer of hope was inspired by the United Nation's summit to approve a declaration for a unified, compassionate response to the millions of refugees and migrants escaping terror and chaos (Kotturan, 2016). Desperate families cling to the hope that they will reach safety and find peace and welcome in a new homeland with a future for their children.

Hope has long been of interest to me because of its power to mediate healing and to transform people and lives in the most challenging circumstances. As a family worker, I have watched hope inspiring change that would heal relationships and turn crises into opportunities in the lives of the families with whom I have worked. I have observed hope bringing out the best in people, eliciting their strengths and determination in overcoming their histories and the negative prophesies of others. Hope cohabits with possibility. It brings light to the darkness and gives energy to the heartless. Hope has transformed my life. It is the mysterious force that has kept me moving toward what is beyond what I can see.

When I reflect on hope, a number of metaphors come to mind. I have experienced hope, for example, as a glowing ember that has sustained me during low times and as a bright flame lending energy and purpose to my projects. Hope has been a joyful, singing bird; the beauty of a weeping willow tree; a light at the end of the tunnel; and "the silver lining in the cloud" (my mother's expression). I notice hope in the stubborn life of my

garden weeds and in the grace of everything that grows. I have discovered hope buried in my deepest desires—in the wild blue yonder of my heart. Hope calls to me from the laughter of small children. I feel awash in it as I walk along the seashore.

In the wilderness places of life, messengers of hope have come to me in many forms, such as an understanding word, the quiet presence of a friend, a hearty laugh. In recent years, I have become aware of the steady hope that is nourished in faithful relationships with family and friends, in the open hearts of my grandchildren, and in memories of loved ones who have passed on but who are still close. I feel the hope that is part of forgiveness—the hope that I will be forgiven and the forgiveness that gives me hope.

The metaphor that best captures the essence of hope for me is one a colleague introduced to our family support team years ago. Based on her research and personal experience of hope, she suggested that hope is "the breath of life." The topic of hope had come up as a result of a question asked by a parent to a family worker on our team. A despairing parent had tearfully asked: "Do you think I'm beyond hope?" We pondered: What does it mean to be beyond hope? Is hope conditional? Is it tied to self-worth, circumstances, or belief? Does it have a beginning and an end? Where is hope when you feel unloved and unworthy or when you can't find the energy to get up in the morning? Can hope be fatally wounded? Where is hope when you lose everything that matters to you? In our sharing, we began to grasp the gravity of hope in our own lives and in the lives of those we hoped to support. As professional helpers, we realized how important it is to be bearers of hope, able to carry and kindle hope in others, listening alongside them to where hope may be leading.

In the hope research of Jevne and Miller (1999), they, too, have found that hope is "as essential as is breath to our physical existence" (p. 11). Writing about his imprisonment at Auschwitz, Victor Frankl (2006) said that he had watched people die who had lost all hope: "Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on. He was soon lost" (p. 76). My personal experience confirms hope as the energy of life. To live is to hope. Hope and life are inextricably linked.

Having a reason to live can nurture and protect hope through fierce winds and long spells of darkness and inspire courage to carry on. Despair exists in the possibility of meaninglessness (Frankl, 2006). In a study reported by Moody and Sasser (2012), a "loss of life purpose and boredom" (p. 34) were identified as the greatest threats to the well-being of older persons (p. 34). Frankl (2006) speaks of the indispensable role of meaning to hope. He tells how the meaning of life changed in the camp but never disappeared for those who survived. When there was only suffering, Frankl describes how he and his comrades found courage to live in the meaning they gave to their suffering. Frankl's story represents the transforming power of hope over misery and tragedy:

> In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious 'Yes' in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose. (p. 40)

Hope is the deep trust that life has meaning, which includes "suffering and death" (Frankl, 2006, p. 83).

The Lived Reality

MacKinlay (2001) tells us that the search for connection and meaning expresses our human nature, yet the way in which it is lived is a deeply personal matter. From Tanyi's (2002) review of the nursing literature, she distilled the following definition of spirituality that suggests the richness of its lived reality:

> Spirituality is a personal search for meaning and purpose in life, which may or may not be related to religion. It entails connection to self-chosen and or religious beliefs, values, and practices that give meaning to life, thereby inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve their optimal being. This connection brings faith, hope, peace, and empowerment. The results are joy, forgiveness of oneself and others, awareness and acceptance of hardship and mortality, a heightened sense of physical and emotional well-being, and the ability to transcend beyond the infirmities of existence. (p. 506)

Tanyi (2002) reports that positive spirituality is a meaningful way of relating to the world and engaging life, a way of being joyfully connected in an inspired process of becoming one's potential. Her research revealed that spirituality could be expressed through a variety of mediums, for example, music and meditation (Tanyi, 2002, p. 502). The findings of Tanyi (2002) speak to the writings of Brother Steindl-Rast (1998), who describes spirituality as a "vital awareness" (p. 66) imbuing all dimensions of being. Steindl–Rast declares, "To be vital, awake, aware, in all areas of our lives, is the task that is never accomplished, but it remains the goal" (p. 66). Ortiz and Langer (2002) write about the potential for spirituality to enliven everyday life. They suggest that spirituality can empower and give meaning to a person's life through everyday hobbies or activities,

such as “painting, gardening, or volunteering” (Ortiz & Langer, 2002, p. 6). They propose that when a person is “conscious of his or her own life themes, spirituality is played out through the ordinary and the everyday events of life and his or her existence is charged with meaning” (Ortiz & Langer, 2002, p. 6).

Atchley’s (2009) research suggests that spirituality and spiritual values become more important to people as they age (p. 148). Experiencing “a life worth living” can become increasingly challenging as valued social roles drop away. Time can feel empty, especially when poor health robs elders of familiar joys and satisfactions and the self-determination they once knew. One of our older relatives can no longer hear well, even with aids, and mourns the loss of the spontaneous conversations she once had with her family and friends. Voices are muffled and mumbled and, for her, going to church is not as satisfying. She enjoys the breeze but closes her balcony door to escape the screech of the traffic—yet the voices of her family seem so soft and indistinct; she gives up trying to follow conversation and sits by herself. A neighbour had a stroke and can no longer look after himself or the garden he enjoyed. With his wife gone, he worries about what will happen to him. In later life—illness, age-related changes, losses and loneliness, frailty, and the imminence of death—can intensify spiritual searching with the potential for spiritual development (Atchley, 2009; Erikson & Erikson, 1997; MacKinlay, 2001). Atchley (2009) reports that for many older adults, spirituality is a vital resource, a central source of meaning and satisfaction, identity, and connection.

Not all religious or spiritual experience is life-affirming and contributes to well-being. This is evident in historic and recent events that demonstrate the misuse and distortion of religion for personal and political gain. Some have lost faith in religion

while watching the divisions and hatred that it has fostered and that have resulted in a loss of life and harmony within persons and communities throughout the world. Religious doctrine can be interpreted and internalized in ways that negatively impact self-worth, spiritual development, and connection within the self and with others and can shape the image a person has of God (Armistead, 1995). Koenig (2001) points out that although most religions promote positive experience, some religious experience can have harmful effects on well-being. This can occur when religious belief is used to promote "guilt, shame, and fear or justify anger and aggression" (Koenig, 2001, p. 106) or when it insists on rigid, conditional standards of belonging and alienates those who do not conform (Koenig, 2001, p. 106). Vanier (2008) tells us that our desire for truth can lead to enlightenment and freedom, but not if we approach truth as something to possess, a means of superiority, or a weapon of destruction (pp. 15–16). Vanier reminds us, "The truth of religion and morality shows itself when they liberate us and give us a deep respect and compassion for others" (p. 16).

Spirituality is completely involved in life itself and is, therefore, complex and deeply personal as well as social and cultural. If we hope to hear the music of the sacred in late life—the rich interplay of melodies, harmonies, and rhythms, Atchley (2009) encourages us to ask our elders about their lives. We need to attend closely to the music, he says, to listen to "how those who have come into direct contact with the essence of spirituality experience their inner world" (Atchley, 2009, p. 26).

Aging Research and Developmental Theory

MacKinlay's (2001) research provides valuable cross-disciplinary knowledge and insight into spirituality and aging as they pertain to the well elderly and the frail elderly.

In one study, MacKinlay explored spirituality in "well older adults, living independently in the community" (p. 25). From her findings, she constructed a "model of spirituality in ageing" (MacKinley, 2001, p. 30). This, in turn, became the basis for her "model of spiritual tasks of ageing" (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 30), which she developed for clinical use in the fields of health care, ministry, and social work.

MacKinlay (2001) proposes that spirituality has both a general component, which expresses the search for meaning and relationship, and a specific component, which refers to the unique way each person embodies his or her spirituality (p. 51). She used the following definition of spirituality in her study of the well elderly:

> That which lies at the core of each person's being, an essential dimension which brings meaning to life. It is acknowledged that spirituality is not constituted only by religious practices, but must be understood more broadly, as relationship with God, however God or ultimate meaning is perceived by the person, and in relationship with other people (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 52)

MacKinlay (2001) charted the spirituality of older adults using a modified spiritual health inventory (p. 32). This inventory was completed by 75 informants "over the age of 65 years; mean age of 75.3, oldest 90" (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 36) who lived independently in Australian communities. From a subset of her research subjects, she engaged 24 persons in in-depth interviews that explored their spirituality (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 34). Six themes emerged from her interviews. The first two were "the deepest-held meaning for each person" (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 41) and "the individual's response to what is ultimate in their lives" (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 41). MacKinlay identified four other interrelated themes, which she said interact with and are determined

by the first two themes: “hope/fear; relationship/isolation; wisdom/final meanings; and self-sufficiency/vulnerability” (p. 41).

MacKinlay (2001) discovered a significant connection between her informants’ personal stories and their responses to what gave ultimate meaning in their lives (p. 107). MacKinlay states that a person’s awareness of what gives greatest meaning and his or her ability to respond to this is the “starting point for spiritual growth in ageing” (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 223). In addition to the two primary spiritual tasks of identifying “ultimate meaning” (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 223) and realizing ways to respond to this, MacKinlay identified four other tasks from the themes she uncovered in her research. These spiritual tasks are as follows: “to transcend disabilities, loss” (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 223); “to search for final meanings” (p. 223); “to find intimacy with God and/or others” (p. 223); and “to find hope” (p. 223). MacKinlay emphasizes the interplay of tasks and their unique content, which, she says, reflect one’s personal response to what gives ultimate meaning (p. 223).

MacKinlay’s (2004) research revealed a difference in what gave deepest meaning to “the independent living group” (p. 77) and to the “frail older nursing home residents” (p. 77). Many community-dwelling elders found their greatest source of meaning in human relationships, most commonly with their spouses, followed by their relationships with children and/or grandchildren (MacKinlay, 2004, p. 77). In her study of frail elders, however, the epicentre of meaning was more often God, and Jesus for elders of Christian faith (MacKinlay, 2004, p. 77).

According to continuity theory, Atchley (1995) proposes that people adapt to aging through their efforts to preserve a continuous sense of self, their values and goals,

and their connection with what gives meaning and satisfaction (pp. 70–71). Continuity theory provides a rationale for discovering what it is that affirms an elder's unique sense of self that might be encouraged to support an elder through loss and change (Atchley, 1995, p. 72). Spiritual identity is part of the "core of the personality" (Atchley, 1995, p. 70). An elder's spirituality can be an important source of meaning and hope and a primary resource in coping with loss and adjusting to change (Atchley, 1995, p. 70). Atchley suggests that to understand the nature and influence of a person's spirituality, one needs to discover how spirituality has been integrated into the themes, past and present, that a person has used in making sense of who he or she is, his or her journey, and life choices (Atchley, 1995, p. 70). According to continuity theory, significant personal themes would be expected to persist as adults age (Atchley, 1995, p. 70). On this basis, Atchley reasons that spiritual experience is less likely to be something that occurs spontaneously in late life and more often reflects spiritual involvement across a lifetime (p. 71).

Some theorists view late life as a unique opportunity for reflection and spiritual growth (Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Jung, 1933; Tornstam, 1997). Jung (1933) distinguishes the second half of life from the first in which he emphasizes the preoccupation with ego-driven tasks and social roles. Jung writes about the latter half of life as a time for the "illumination of the self" (p. 109), an opportunity to develop one's inner life. Through self-reflection, Jung proposes that all aspects of the self to include both hidden gifts and disavowed qualities can be consciously realized, accepted, and integrated toward wholeness.

The importance of integrating all life experiences into a meaningful whole is the central task of achieving integrity in old age, according to Erik Erikson (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Erikson devised a theory of personality development consisting of eight interrelated stages, each one characterized by a unique tension between two antithetical orientations (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). When the dialectics of each developmental tension are brought into balance, they produce a specific virtue or psychosocial strength (Erikson & Erikson, 1986). A summary of Erikson's life stages, tensions, and resulting strengths are shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Psychosocial Stages of Life

Stage	Tension	Strength
Infancy	Basic Trust vs. Mistrust	Hope
Early Childhood	Autonomy vs. Shame, Doubt	Will
Play Age	Initiative vs. Guilt	Purpose
School Age	Industry vs. Inferiority	Competence
Adolescence	Identity vs. Confusion	Fidelity
Young Adulthood	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love
Adulthood	Generativity vs. Self-Absorption	Care
Old Age	Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom

Note. Adapted from "Vital Involvement in Old Age," E. H. Erikson, J. M. Erikson, and H. Q. Kivnick, 1986, p. 36. Copyright 1986 by W. W. Norton.

In their shared reflections on old age, Erikson et al. (1986) propose that the ability to balance the poles of integrity and despair in old age is influenced by one's earlier success in resolving tensions, as well as by one's ability to rework and apply the strengths and resiliency one has gained to the conditions of late life (p. 40). Although earlier development is formative, Erikson et al. theorize that achieving integrity is not precluded

by previous development. The primary activity supporting ego-integrity in the eighth stage involves reviewing and making sense of one's life in a way that does not result in despair (Erikson et al., 1986, p. 40). The life review process brings past and present experience into a meaningful narrative that includes hope. Despair and integration are not new to old age, according to Erikson et al., but are part of balancing the tensions at every stage of life (p. 288). Koenig (1994) summarizes Erikson's view of despair in the final stage as a "loss of ego integration as manifested by a fear of death, a rejection of the contents of one's life" (p. 75). Erikson (1994) suggests that despair grows in the anguish over lost dreams and regrets and the awareness that there is not enough time to take a different path (pp. 104–105). Erikson et al. (1986) advise that persons need to gather up the wisdom they have gained throughout life to negotiate the vicissitudes and losses of old age (p. 288). Along with wisdom, they emphasize the importance of humility, humour, and resilience (Erikson et al., 1986, p. 289) to the ability to balance integrity with feelings of despair and to integrate all life experiences into a sustaining whole.

In her 90s, Joan Erikson added a final ninth stage to Erikson's theory of development in which she states, "We must now see and understand the final life cycle stages through late-eighty- and ninety-year old eyes" (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 105). She stresses the "new demands, re-evaluations and daily difficulties" (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 105) that emerge at this time of life and the unrelenting loss of bodily autonomy that affects "even the best cared for bodies" (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 105). From the vantage of her own experience, she writes: "Despair, which haunts the eighth stage, is a close companion in the ninth because it is almost impossible to know what emergencies and losses of physical ability are imminent" (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, pp. 105–106). In

the ninth stage, Erikson determines that all earlier tensions of the lifecycle converge and are revisited under the new circumstances of late life (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). To emphasize how the losses and challenges of old age predominate, she reverses the order of the polarities, placing the negative disposition first (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 106) —for example, *integrity versus despair* becomes *despair and disgust versus integrity* (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 112). Erikson maintains, however, that despite the losses and uncertainty that dominate old age, "It is important to remember that conflict and tension are sources of growth, strength, and commitment" (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 106) at all stages.

From qualitative interviews with older adults, Swedish gerontologist Lars Tornstam developed his theory of gerotranscendence. The emphasis of gerotranscendence on "change and development" (Tornstam, 1997, para. 3) distinguishes it from other theories of aging. Successful aging theory, for example, suggests that postretirement years can be a continuation of the productivity and social activity of the middle years, if good health is retained (Kahn, 2004, pp. 2–3), whereas disengagement theory proposes that people naturally withdraw from social roles and activities as they age (Koenig, 1994, p. 81). In contrast, Tornstam (1997) describes gerotranscendence as a birthing into transcendent meanings: "the final stage in a natural progression towards maturation and wisdom" (para. 3) that is marked by "a shift in meta-perspective, from a materialistic and pragmatic view of the world to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally accompanied by an increase in life satisfaction" (para. 2).

Gerotranscendent individuals experience "a redefinition of the self and relations to other people, as well as a new way of understanding existential questions" (Tornstam,

2011, p. 168). Shifts in perceptions may include less interest in material possessions; a deepening kinship or connection with others that extends to past and future generations and the cosmos as a whole; and a greater interest in solitary meditative activities (Tornstam, 1997, 2011). There is acceptance of the mysteries in life that cannot be reduced to scientific explanations (Tornstam, 2011, p. 170). Tornstam (2011) proposes that gerotranscendence is part of normative development for anyone living a long life, yet its formation can be impeded, for example, by cultural and personal expectations that keep one tied to midlife values (p. 176). In his discussion, Tornstam expresses development as a continuum, noting that only about 20% of people approach the full measure of gerotranscendence without encountering barriers to development (p. 176). For those persons noticing qualities of gerotranscendence in older adults, he writes that not all features will be evident in each person, nor will every dimension be expressed in the same way (Tornstam, 2011, p. 169).

Although spirituality is not explicit in Tornstam's theory, Jonson and Magnusson (2001) report that some researchers link gerotranscendence with the spiritual search and the "mystical dimensions of aging" (p. 321). Others may use Tornstam's theory as an extension of Erikson's psychosocial theory to create a framework for understanding older persons who display gerotranscendent behaviours (Jonson & Magnusson, 2001, p. 321). The enlarged vision of the gerotranscendent self as interconnected with all other persons and the web of life resonates with the possibilities inherent in Fowler's (1995) most evolved stage of faith development—Universalizing Faith (p. 199). Fowler suggests that only a small number of people exemplify this stage, which is characterized by "inclusiveness of community, of radical commitment to justice and love and of selfless

passion for a transformed world, a world made over not in *their* images, but in accordance with an intentionality both divine and transcendent" (p. 201).

Tornstam (2011) describes gerotranscendence as a mature phase of development that is expressed in three main dimensions: the Cosmic, the Self, and Social and Personal Relationships (pp. 168–169). Tornstam differentiated the "ego-integrity" in the dimension of the self from the ego-integrity of Erikson's eighth stage of psychosocial development: integrity versus despair. Integration in both theories includes a life review process occurring in late life. Achieving ego-integrity in Erikson's theory, Tornstam explains, mostly involves looking back over one's life and coming to terms with the life one has lived while retaining the same worldview (p. 172). In contrast, gerotranscendence "implies more of a forward or outward direction, including a redefinition of reality" (Tornstam, 2011, p. 172) that is characterized by an expansion and deepening of consciousness, connection, and identity. This change in consciousness may lead to a "transcendent everyday wisdom" (Tornstam, 2011, p. 173)—an appreciation for the complexity of moral life that may be revealed in an elder's unwillingness to offer advice and judge others and in the qualities of open-mindedness and acceptance (Tornstam, 2011, p. 173). The potential for spiritual growth in late life is captured in the theory of gerotranscendence.

In the last chapter of the extended version of *The Life Cycle Completed*, Joan Erikson discusses gerotranscendence and describes it as to "rise above, exceed, outdo, go beyond, independent of the universe and time" (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 127). Erikson suggests that if elder persons can reconcile the tensions of the ninth stage, they may make progress toward the kind of inner growth associated with gerotranscendence

(Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 114). Although gerotranscendent elders often desire more solitary contemplative time, Joan Erikson believes that "transcendence need not be limited solely to experiences of withdrawal" (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 127). She adds a lively twist to the notion of transcendence, proposing that "transcen*dance* may be a regaining of lost skills, including play, activity, joy, and song, and, above all, a major leap above and beyond the fear of death" (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 127). Erikson notes that gerontologists using the term gerotranscendence often fail to convey the "full account of those compensations that old age leaves behind. Nor do they sufficiently explore new and positive spiritual gifts" (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 127), which suggests that "perhaps they are just too young" (p. 127). Her observations affirm the need to hear from our elders if we are to grasp the tensions and the fullness of the spiritual journey in old age.

Joan Erikson points out that frailty, or the threat of frailty, and the closeness of death distinguishes the late 80s and 90s from previous ages (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Her comments are particularly salient for this study in which the co-researchers are over 90 years of age and live in their own residences in the community. Erikson's experience of old age suggests that community-dwelling elders may not fit neatly into *third age* and *fourth age* definitions of late life, which are based on the functional abilities of older adults (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 13). Finding meaning in life may be more of a compromise between the "doing" of the third age and the focus on "being" that defines the frail elderly of the fourth age (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 13). Current use of chronological categories of older adults includes "the young-old (approximately 65–74), the middle-old (ages 75–84), and the old-old (over age 85)" (Little, 2016, p. 402). In this study, I have

identified the co-researchers as *oldest-old* and *oldest elders* to avoid categories that presume function.

In summary, it is generally agreed that all persons are spiritual beings with spiritual needs regardless of age, health, or belief. In her review of the literature in the field of caring, MacKinlay (2001) notes that the spiritual dimension is increasingly recognized as part of wholistic health and care, but the emphasis has been placed on "psychosocial" interventions (p. 19). MacKinlay insists that unless spiritual needs are addressed, "vital and deep issues for people are denied existence" (p. 19). MacKinlay (2001) describes human beings as seekers and creators of meaning. She states that "meaning in life is very much at the heart of what it is to be human" (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 14) and is "closely tied to hope" (p. 14).

The definition of spirituality and its relationship with religion continue to be debated; however, most authors concur that the core of spirituality involves a personal search for meaning and is inseparable from the deeply held values of each person and the human need for connection. Recognizing each person as inherently spiritual requires an inclusive definition of spirituality that captures the diversity of secular and theistic expressions of spirituality among persons in whatever life contexts they occur. When scholarly or professional definitions and assessments of spirituality fail to reflect the meaning and experience of persons seeking care, their spiritual needs are likely to be overlooked (Atchley, 2009; MacKinlay, 2001). Spirituality is completely involved in life itself and is, therefore, complex and deeply personal as well as social and cultural. Spirituality is entwined with our relationships and, therefore, our psychosocial

development and with the external environment to include the sociocultural, political, and economic realities that shape our lives and choices (Lartey, 2003; McSherry, 2006).

MacKinlay (2010) alerts us to the changing nature of spiritual needs and growth across a lifetime, stating that the spiritual care of older adults must be considered in relation to the unique conditions of late life (p. 77). Because spirituality and aging unfolds in the developing person in the context of their relationships and lifeworld, developmental theories help us to understand how spirituality is brought to life. Atchley (2009) tells us that if we hope to hear the music of the sacred in late life and the rich interplay of melodies, harmonies, and rhythms, we need to ask our elders about their experiences. We need to attend closely to the music, he says, to listen to "how those who have come into direct contact with the essence of spirituality experience their inner world" (Atchley, 2009, p. 26). Exploring the meaning of spirituality from the view of our oldest elders may lead to insights that broaden our notions of late-life spirituality and can enhance our understanding of the spiritual needs of older adults.

In closing, Hudson (2004) suggests that we focus on the "*meaning* of ageing" (p. 94) when planning for old age and that we reflect upon these questions: What do I need to nurture my soul as I age? (p. 94). What will give meaning and purpose to my life, not only as an individual but also as someone sharing life with others? (p. 94). This is the realm of spirituality (MacKinlay, 2001) or religion, as Smith (1991) proposes, when religion "is taken in its widest sense, as a way of life woven around a people's ultimate concerns" (p. 183). Who better to guide us than our long-lived elders who light up the road ahead as they work out the ultimate concerns that face us all? I am hopeful as I look to my friends: The night is not so dark with your light before me.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Method

> But because *truly* being here is so much; because everything here
> apparently needs us, this fleeting world, which in some strange way
> keeps calling to us. Us, the most fleeting of all.
> *Once* for each thing. Just once; no more and we too,
> just once. And never again. But to have been
> this once, completely, even if only once;
> to have been at one with the earth, seems beyond undoing.
>
> —Rilke, excerpt from the Ninth Elegy, 1989

In his introduction, Robert Hass interprets Rilke's words to suggest a wondrous wholeness in our relationship with the world and the fullness of earthly life, which rejoices in and through us with a significance that feels everlasting (Mitchell, 1989). It seems that to embrace life so completely, even to desire such an embrace, is to love. In this sense, van Manen (2003) tells us that "research is a caring act" (p. 5), a loving deed. When we love someone, he says, "We desire to truly know our loved one's very nature" (van Manen, 2003, p. 5) and we seek to know what will support their well-being (van Manen, 2003, p. 5). Van Manen insists, "To care is to serve and to share our being with the one we love" (p. 5). To do research, van Manen explains, is a profound way of belonging to the world, an "intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to *become* the world" (p. 5).

This chapter describes how interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology harmonizes with my exploration of the lived spirituality of two elders and the relationships that bring it to light. As well, the research method is detailed to include how the co-researchers were selected, how their privacy and well-being were protected, how data was gathered and interpreted, and how validity and trustworthiness were established.

Choosing a Phenomenological Approach

Van Manen (2003) is a human science research educator who tells us that the choice of methodology begins with the researcher's question (p. 1). It depends upon what the researcher hopes to understand and how she or he believes that understanding can be reached, which guides and narrows one's choices (van Manen, 2003). Van Manen proposes that how the question is asked and the researcher's preference for a certain approach are related in such a way as to inform and suggest the other (p. 2). Phenomenology is the "study of lived or existential meanings" (van Manen, 2003, p. 11); the everyday lived experience identified by philosopher Edmund Husserl as the *lifeworld* (as cited by Langdridge, 2007, p. 23). My turning to elder persons to understand how they experience their spirituality in their everyday worlds pointed to a phenomenological methodology. Van Manen advises that the research approach needs to harmonize with the passionate concern that first drew us to our chosen profession (p. 2). A phenomenological approach aligns with my personal and social work interests and values as they relate to issues of care and well-being, authority and power, human worth, dignity, and self-determination (Alberta College of Social Workers, 2005). It speaks to the way in which I engage with people as a social worker and seek to understand the careseeker's world.

Van Manen (2003) describes research as a desire to understand the meaning of a particular experience in which the individual is "studied as a 'person' in the full sense of that word, a person who is a flesh and blood sense-maker" (p. 14). Human science researchers view people as complex, integrated beings, whose physical, psychosocial, and spiritual dimensions uniquely come together in the developing person. A person is

understood as an embodied, relational being—in relationship with other persons and all the "things" that constitute the world, to which they give and receive meaning (van Manen, 2003, p. 14). Researchers seek to capture the full response of those they study in relation to the experiences that matter to them and to understand the meaning they give to their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Research is an intersubjective exploration that begins with the researcher's passion and develops in the liminal space of their relationships with the participants in their study. Van Manen (2003) suggests that investigating human experience is a genuine and wholehearted personal project in which researchers express their deep involvement with the world and those they care about (p. 2). In this sense, this study is a metaphor for my passion and pledge to the research question and, to borrow from Rilke, to my relationship with those persons who constitute the living questions.

In his treatise on human science research, van Manen (2003) describes methodology as a philosophic approach to "what it means to be human" (p. 27) and a way to understand human experience. He reminds us that knowledge in human science research is more than intellectual (p. 14), paraphrasing Bollnow to say, "But knowledge as understanding is *geistig*—a matter of the depth of the soul, spirit, embodied knowing and being" (p. 14). I experienced this kind of wholistic process in various ways throughout this research. When during the deep immersion of analyzing interview material, for example, I found myself carrying the words of the co-researchers around as if they were my own, even trying on their meaning; and during the writing process, there were times when I felt surprised by my words, as if I was reading another's notes, as well

as by the imagery evoked. Understanding seemed to percolate through layers of self in ways I find difficult to articulate.

Human science research is a "heuristic" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 17) project, which Moustakas (1994) explains as a process of discovery (p. 17), a creative personal journey in which understanding the other involves understanding myself in relation to the phenomenon (experience). In describing heuristic process, Moustakas points out how not only is the subject matter illuminated for the researcher but also so is the self through a "growing self-awareness and self-knowledge" (p. 17). In heuristic studies, the researcher's experience is the focus of investigation; in this study and other qualitative studies, the primary focus is the experience of others. Yet, the way in which research can touch and transform belongs to both. In all human science inquiry, there is a potential for what is learned to have value for others or even universal meaning (Moustakas, 1994, p. 17). It is unsurprising that our experiences can have transforming meaning for one another since, as human beings, we share the same nature and condition and many of the same hopes, desires, and fears in a journey that is ultimately shared and created together. Our personal experiences resonate with one another in sounds that call back and forth between the deep and unknown and the strangely familiar.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Smith et al. (2009) describe IPA as an interpretative phenomenological research approach informed by phenomenology (the study of lived experience) and hermeneutics (the study of interpretation). It is part of a larger ideological family of *qualitative* research, which is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry that "locates the observer in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 4). In their efforts to understand human experience,

qualitative researchers attempt to "make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 5). They seek to discover and capture the richness and meaning of lived experience in situated contexts in contrast with empirical methods "that seek to reduce phenomena to discrete variables in order to explain and predict" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 57).

IPA's focus on understanding the individual experience of persons immersed in a particular phenomenon (the experience being studied) makes it "idiographic" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). This differs from nomothetic research, which seeks general claims, for example, through population studies that are usually quantitative (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). One of the problems with using quantitative research in trying to understand human experience is that statistical averages do not (and do not intend to) represent and capture the flesh-and-blood experience of a real person (Smith et al., 2009, p. 30). Yet together these approaches can work hand-in-hand in our efforts to understand.

Phenomenology. IPA's emphasis on the everyday world of persons was the passion of philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), who is considered the founder of phenomenology (as cited in Langdridge, 2007). Husserl criticized the use of the scientific method as a means of inquiry for the human sciences (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 15). He believed ordinary lived experience, the *lifeworld*, should be the source of all human science knowledge informing theory, rather than the other way around (as cited in Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenological research maintains this relationship by emphasizing life experience as the basis for knowing, which then serves to inform theory and praxis as a result of reflection on that experience (van Manen, 2003, p. 15). In this sense, IPA concerns itself with understanding the unique experience of persons as they

describe it, before linking it with psychological theories or concepts and, then, only tentatively (Smith et al., 2009).

In his focus on experience, Husserl sidesteps the arguments associated with the theory of philosopher Descartes (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 21). Descartes's thesis is captured in his famous observation: "I think, therefore I am" (as cited in Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 21). Descartes's theory held that the mind was distinct from the body and the natural world, thereby inviting the following question: How do we relate to one another and the world? (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 21). A primary difference for Husserl was his belief that "all thinking is thinking about something" (as cited in Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 9) or a "consciousness *of* something" (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 13), whether that something is imagined, remembered, or apprehended by the senses (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13). Van Manen (2003) explains that to be conscious or aware is to be "already related to the world" (p. 9). Husserl names the relationship between the person and the object of their awareness: *intentionality* (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 13). Phenomenological research assumes intentionality, the fundamental bond that connects us to the world and makes the world accessible to us (van Manen, 2003, p. 5).

Husserl's emphasis on reflection is a hallmark of phenomenological research. To understand the nature of an experience, Husserl proposes that we need to set aside our ordinary habits of thinking, which he called the *natural attitude*, in order to reflect on experience itself (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 12). He describes the natural attitude as the everyday way that we encounter the world, as taken for granted as the air we breathe. Husserl believes that our unquestioned assumptions about the world obscure our

knowledge of experience on its own terms, as do abstract concepts and theories (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 15). To address this, he devised a reflexive method, which emphasized *bracketing* the natural attitude (as cited in Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) suggest that bracketing is something like the use of parentheses in mathematics (p. 13). By setting apart our usual way of thinking to systematically examine experience, Husserl maintains that one can identify the unchanging features of subjective experience (those qualities that make an experience what it is), which can then be extrapolated to the experience of others (as cited in Smith et al., 2009). Although IPA takes the position that it is impossible to bracket our foreknowledge as Husserl prescribes, the use of disciplined and sustained reflection helps researchers to remain open to, and focused on, understanding another's experience in its own right (Smith et al., 2009, p. 16).

Husserl's interest in describing the essential features of experience is known as descriptive phenomenology. In contrast, hermeneutic phenomenologists seek to understand the meaning people make of their experiences while staying "experience close" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 33). The idea that one could stand completely outside of the natural attitude was rejected by existential phenomenologists, who believe we are too involved with the world to do this (Langdridge, 2007, p. 25). One of those who strongly objected to the transcendental phenomenology he proposed was Heidegger (1889–1976), a former trainee of Husserl, who went on to develop an existential, hermeneutic phenomenology foundational to IPA (as cited in Langdridge, 2007, p. 24; as cited in Smith et al., 2009).

Hermeneutics. Heidegger highlights the nature of being human (ontology) and the meaning of being human. This marked an existential shift in phenomenological

philosophy, away from Husserl's focus on human beings as "knowers" (as cited in Laverty, 2003, "Hermeneutic Phenomenology," para. 2) to an emphasis on human beings as social beings who are deeply engaged with one another and the world (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, pp. 16–17). Heidegger's interpretative stance is based on his view that human beings are distinct beings he names *Dasein*, "there-being" (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 16), whose nature is to search for meaning in their experiences. Although he believes we encounter the world in an embodied, immediate way prior to reflecting about our experiences, Heidegger emphasizes that it is through language, the symbolic means by which reality is interpreted, that we can access and experience a meaningful world (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 16; as cited in Langdridge, 2007).

Heidegger views language as part of the pre-existent sociocultural and historically located world of meaning he proposed we are "thrown into" (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 18) at birth. He believes the circumstances of our lives (*facticity*) constrain our freedom to create ourselves, although not determining our choices (as cited in Langdridge, 2007, p. 30). A world already interpreted suggests the power structures and "patriarchal roots" (van Manen, 2003, p. xvii) implicit in the language (and silence) of dominant culture (van Manen, 2003). These issues are explored in gender and culture studies, which van Manen (2003) believes are compatible with phenomenology (p. xvii).

Van Manen (2003) tells us that phenomenologists recognize the great silence in what seems "self-evident" (p. 112), what we take for granted as part of our being cast into a world already entrenched in meaning. He suggests "silence makes human science research and writing both possible and necessary" (van Manen, 2003, p. 112). It is into this silence that phenomenological researchers bring their questions (van Manen, 2003).

Heidegger believes that phenomenology has the potential to reveal what is both apparent and yet to be discovered in our experience (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 24).

The assumption that our experiences can be communicated through language is the basis of phenomenological research and writing (van Manen, 2003). Some of the positive power of language resides in its ability to touch and connect us, to give voice to that which is hidden by our familiar way of going about the business of life (van Manen, 2003). Yet sometimes all words fail, as van Manen observes, and the best they can do is point to what is too great for words. Van Manen reminds us that "even in the most profound and eloquent poem it seems that the deep truth of the poem lies just beyond the words, on the other side of language" (p. 112).

Heidegger reframes Husserl's concept of intentionality by describing it in terms of the relational bond between Dasein and the lifeworld and the notion that individuals cannot be understood apart from it (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 17). His emphasis on the nature of being human and our concerns and involvement with the world distinguish him from Husserl, whose principal interest was to examine individual perceptions of experience (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, pp. 16–17). "Dasein" captures our intrinsic social nature and the intersubjectivity of our meaningmaking, which Heidegger calls *Mitsein*— "*being-with"* (as cited in Langdridge, 2007, p. 32; as cited in Smith et al. 2009). Langdridge (2007), interpreting Heidegger, tells us that Heidegger goes so far as to suggest that our humanity only comes into being through our relationships with others (p. 39). Heidegger's belief in our inescapable reciprocity with the world is described by Laverty (2003) as a dynamic relationship in which we are continually "constructed by the world while at the same time we are constructing this world from our own background

and experiences" ("Hermeneutic Phenomenology: Martin Heidegger," para. 4). This mutual and ongoing influence is recognized by hermeneutic phenomenologists who are explicit about how their interpretations are shaped by their sociocultural backgrounds and how their personal bias informs and contributes to research results (Creswell, 2007, p. 21).

Some of the ways I let readers know how I influence this research is to use my personal voice throughout the project and to state my assumptions directly, for example, as expressions of my Christian faith and social work background. My friendship with the co-researchers brings a perspective and privilege I make explicit by sharing personal anecdotes and my experience as part of the findings. As well, I integrate quotes from selected authors into the narrative analysis. The voices and words I choose reveal my response to the interview material, my values, and my emphasis and help make these transparent to the reader.

Smith et al. (2009), summarizing Heidegger, state that "our being-in-the world is always perspectival, always temporal, and always 'in relation-to' something" (p. 18). Like viewing mountain peaks, what you see and experience depends on where you stand and under what conditions. One's view is one perspective of many, and this view is always changing in relation to what appears before us. So it is with this research. My goal is not to establish truth or universality or to reduce complex experience. My hope is to share a narrative interpretation that is true and insightful in the sense that van Manen (2003) describes effective research as "true to our living sense of it" (p. 65). Like a photograph, this study is a still image in what is, in reality, a moving picture. It is captured through the eyes of the one who focuses the camera and, in turn, is interpreted

by the reader who contemplates the image. The hermeneutic circle expresses the way in which understanding comes to light between the researcher and the reader and between the researcher and the participants. It is axiomatic in human science research (Smith et al., 2009) and is described in greater detail in the following section.

The hermeneutic circle. The *hermeneutic circle* refers to the relationship between the parts of a text, as they reveal the meaning of the whole, and to the whole of the text as it confers meaning to the parts in a cycling process of sense-making (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 27–28). Although hermeneutics (the study of interpretation) is an ancient art once focused on the interpretation of religious text, hermeneutics has since been applied to an assortment of historical writing, literature, music, and visual arts (Laverty, 2003; Smith et al., 2009, p. 21). The hermeneutic circle is central to the way in which understanding occurs in hermeneutic phenomenological research.

The idea that all experience is interpreted acknowledges the intersubjectivity of IPA studies (Smith et al., 2009). Smith and Osborn, as cited by Smith et al. (2009), describe researchers as engaged in a "double hermeneutic" (p. 35) in which the researcher interprets the participant's interpretation of his or her experience (p. 35). The hermeneutic circle operates at a number of levels in the research process as stated by Smith et al. During interviewing, researchers focus on participants' understanding and experience of a phenomenon; when they analyze the verbatim data, they acknowledge their own experience interacting with the interview material through reflection and writing (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) discuss how researchers illuminate meaning through their exploration of the relationships between and among the parts and the whole of the interview material and at a number of levels to include the "descriptive" (p. 84),

"linguistic" (p. 88), and "conceptual" (p. 88) dimensions. They compare the cyclical process of bracketing to reading a book in the sense that we bring our background experience to the book; yet, as we attend closely to the author's experience, our understanding is changed by our encounter and becomes part of the experience that informs our reading (Smith, 2009, p. 26). The hermeneutic circle is a cycling, bidirectional, and evolving process that continually forms our understanding. It evokes for me how the tide washes up and reshapes the shoreline in its path to and from the sea. It was through this kind of organic, creative process that understanding was shaped with the co-researchers throughout this study.

The philosophies of Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer also influence IPA research (Smith et al., 2009). Each contributes a point of view toward a wholistic exploration of experience. For example, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes our bodies as the way we know and engage with the world as "body-subjects" (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 18). His focus, which highlights the unique, embodied relationship each person has with the world, reminds researchers to value and attend to what their bodies tell them about their experiences and the experiences of others, while suggesting the limits of empathy (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 19). Gadamer, following Heidegger, believes that understanding is a shared endeavour we realize through language and is inseparable from our sociocultural backgrounds and the time in which we live (as cited in Langdridge, 2007). Gadamer views our personal bias as positive bonds of meaning that both promote and restrict our understanding (as cited in Langdridge, 2007, p. 42). He explains that our different perspectives form the basis for conversation—the central and necessary process by which we come to shared understandings of one another and the world (Gadamer, as

cited in Langdridge, 2007, p. 42). Smith et al. (2009) describe our reading of interview text as "a Gadamerian dialogue" (p. 89). Gadamer suggests that respectful dialogue, in which we bring our questions to our desire to understand (rather than as a way to dismiss others and reinforce our own positions), can reveal a richer and more complete understanding that we reach together (as cited in Langdridge, 2007, p. 43). Gadamer calls this meeting of our worldviews: a "*fusion of horizons*" (as cited in Langdridge, 2007, p. 43). By engaging the reflections and questions of readers, for example, this study invites readers to a wider dialogue with their communities and the authors who bring issues of spirituality and aging to our attention.

Additional philosophers who shape IPA and add to our understanding of lived experience are Schleiermacher and Sartre (as cited in Smith et al., 2009). Schleiermacher proposes that the idiomatic use of language reflects not only its cultural meanings but expresses personal meanings that give insights into the uniqueness of the person as well as their experiences (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 22). Existential philosopher Sartre attunes us to a self that is unfinished and evolving; he points out that we are always becoming who we are through our engagement with the world (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 19). Sartre tells us that what we notice as missing (*nothingness*) is as significant as what we count as present in making sense of our experiences (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 19). His insight reminds researchers to pay attention to what participants identify as both present and absent in their descriptions (Smith et al., 2009, p. 20). All the ideas mentioned here are brought together in the researcher's attempt to explore and capture the richness and fullness of lived experience.

In closing, van Manen (2003) identifies the goal of phenomenological research as "the fulfillment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are" (p. 12). Research that seeks the "fullness of living" (van Manen, 2003, p. 12) is a spiritual (re)search for meaning. Implicit in this exploration of the spirituality of our oldest elders are questions that concern us throughout our adult lives: How shall I live meaningfully—a life that is uncertain and fleeting at every moment and every age? How do I live in community with others, in a way that cares for others and myself throughout life? What does it mean to care? This study has been carefully tended and designed to be conscientious and faithful to the co-researchers and the exploration of the topic; yet, it is a perspectival and incomplete sketch that is primarily meant to engage the reader in his or her own reflections, questions, and hope.

Ethics of Engagement

Selection of the co-researchers. The co-researchers were selected purposively and as a result of personal opportunities (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 48–49). I had hoped to interview two persons who were friends of mine. They were community-dwelling elders over 90 years of age. Both were literate, educated persons who expressed an interest in the project and a willingness to share their experiences. Their participation in the research was contingent on their informed consent and the ethics review process at St. Stephen's College.

Prospective co-researchers were contacted following approval of the proposal and ethics report submitted to the Ethics Committee at St. Stephen's College. An invitation to participate (see Appendix A) and a written informed consent (see Appendix B) were provided to the co-researchers by mail or in person. An information session was

scheduled with each co-researcher to review the invitation to participate and the consent form and to answer any questions. One of the co-researchers lived at a distance, and therefore, the information session was completed by telephone. A face-to-face meeting was arranged with the other co-researcher.

Informed consent. The consent process involved a thorough discussion with the co-researchers about the research process; their voluntary participation (which they could terminate for any reason and at any time without consequence); and the collection, storage, privacy, and destruction of data. A list of potential, but not exhaustive, questions was included in the consent form for their consideration and reflection (see Appendix B). Following the informed consent process, consent forms were signed and interviews were scheduled at the co-researchers' convenience.

Comfort and well-being. The co-researchers' experience of comfort, control, privacy, and well-being was foremost throughout the research. I was sensitive to signs of fatigue and discomfort and to the routines and commitments of the co-researchers when planning and during interviews and consultations. They were encouraged to state if they became tired or felt unwell and needed to end an interview early, choosing to reschedule the interview or to withdraw altogether. The co-researchers were contacted following interviews to assess their well-being.

Anonymity and privacy. The co-researchers' anonymity was protected by assigning pseudonyms to them and all other persons mentioned, as well as by altering or removing identifying information. The completed analysis was read to each co-researcher (their preference) for his careful consideration, feedback, changes, and approval. Privacy

and anonymity were also monitored by my thesis supervisor as part of protecting the best interests of the co-researchers.

Interview questions and interviewing. Interview questions were selected to elicit the meaning of spirituality for the co-researchers and their lived experience (see Appendix C). These included questions about meaning, peace, joy, and hope, which are concepts linked to spirituality and definitions of spirituality in the spirituality and aging literature (MacKinlay, 2001; Tanyi, 2002). In-depth, semistructured interviews with the co-researchers were scheduled and audio-recorded for later transcription and analysis. Five interviews of no more than one and a half hours each were carried out with one of the co-researchers; two of these were face-to-face interviews. Six phone interviews were carried out with the second co-researcher living at a distance, lasting no more than one and a half hours each. Interviews were spaced and scheduled to prioritize the co-researchers' preferences, routines, and well-being. The final interviews for both co-researchers occurred between 3 to 6 months after the others. The co-researchers agreed to continue the interview process as part of exploring their experience. Interviewing continued until the co-researchers were satisfied with what they had shared and I had come to a sufficient understanding of their experience.

Transcription. Transcription was completed by myself and a professional transcriber who signed an oath of confidentiality, which addressed the security of audio recordings and transcribed data. Following transcription, verbatim transcripts were offered to the co-researchers to review and to ensure their words were faithfully captured, while providing them an opportunity to add comments or request changes.

Method of Analysis

To clarify my method of analysis, I summarize the steps I followed as they were applied to both co-researchers. My analytic process reflected a general movement from the "particular to the shared, and from the descriptive to the interpretative" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79). The steps are presented in a linear fashion, but the process itself was a cyclical, back and forth movement between and among original material, commentary, and consultation with the co-researchers over several months in accordance with the hermeneutic circle. The following steps, based on the IPA method outlined by Smith et al. (2009, pp. 82–103), summarize my process of analysis:

1. Interviews were listened to while reading transcribed text, which was read several times.
2. Initial and exploratory comments were noted.
3. Connections were made among notes.
4. Emergent themes were identified and related to the original account.
5. Emergent themes were linked in the identification of superordinate themes that subsumed them.
6. A list of themes was developed.

Once themes were identified for the first co-researcher, this process was repeated for the second co-researcher. Themes were approved by the co-researchers. Following completion of the analysis for both co-researchers, a process of comparing and contrasting themes was undertaken and a list of master (group) themes was developed. I discussed my experience with my thesis supervisor as part of this process.

Van Manen (2003) and Smith et al. (2009) were my primary guides during the interpretative process. Data analysis began by listening to the audio recordings of each co-researcher's interviews while reading the written transcripts. By reading transcripts a number of times, I was able to immerse myself in their experiences as they described them (Smith et al., 2009, p. 82). As Smith et al. suggest, I could not bracket my experience, but I could draw closer to the co-researchers' experience by focusing on each one's experience in turn, allowing their words and images to penetrate my own while noting this process.

In the beginning, I read the interview material wholistically. At first, I highlighted and noted only that which evoked my strong response, whether it be a turn of phrase, a potent word, or the mood of an anecdote or whether it be my own feeling, memory, or wondering. A wholistic reading helped to ground me in the lifeworlds of the co-researchers, their worldviews (beliefs and values), and their emphasis on what was important in their lives—activities and people, past and present. At times, this involved returning to the co-researchers to identify or confirm words or to explain a concept, for example, "Catholic sacrament." Sometimes, I returned to the co-researchers to clarify the meaning of a word or a phrase that I had taken for granted, for example, the expression "hanging loose." This helped to me to understand the richness and uniqueness of their experiences. It also led to additional questions towards a fuller understanding of their spirituality. Noting my responses to the interview material and discussing these with my thesis supervisor were helpful in keeping my bias from becoming an unconscious influence (Smith et al., 2009).

The hermeneutic circle was central to my analysis. Smith et al. (2009) describe the hermeneutic circle as the dynamic process of interpreting text by analyzing the "relationship between the part and the whole, at a series of levels" (p. 28). In analyzing the interview material, I found van Manen's approach to gathering meaning helpful. Van Manen (2003) identifies three ways that can be used in "uncovering or isolating thematic aspects of a phenomenon in some text: 1) the wholistic or sententious approach; 2) the selective or highlighting approach; 3) the detailed or line-by-line approach" (pp. 92–93). Their contribution to the analysis is briefly described here.

In the wholistic approach, the researcher considers the entire text and looks for a phrase that seems to capture the core meaning of the experience that will form the basis of the interpretation (van Manen, 2003, p. 93). Considering the interview texts as a whole (in concert with the parts) facilitated my discovery of three interdependent themes within an overarching leitmotif of Belonging (see Appendix D).

The selective approach identifies statements or clusters of words that illumine the nature of the phenomenon (van Manen, 2003, p. 93). In speaking of their experience, the co-researchers expressed their faithfulness to certain values, beliefs, and activities and expressed a range of feelings associated with these. Their preference for certain words, phrases, and metaphors contributed to a coherency of meaning, and some of these captured significant themes and subthemes that added vibrant meaning to the whole. The co-researchers also used unique words or expressions that seemed to highlight the gravity of particular aspects of their experience, and these contributed to a fuller meaning.

In the line-by-line approach, each line is considered for its revelation of the topic or experience under study (van Manen, 2003, p. 93). Attending thoughtfully to each line

was particularly helpful to my giving attention to all data and not just what stood out initially as significant. Certain words and ideas were brought together using this approach, which added depth and complexity of meaning. As part of a conceptual exploration of the co-researchers' experience, I was attentive to the co-researchers' temporal use of language, for example, the way verb usage emphasized past, present, or future meaning.

In recognizing experience as embodied, I considered how experience was brought to life through the co-researchers' nonverbal communication including voice tone, rhythm and emphasis, facial expression, and body language as it applied to my contact with them. I also noted my own feelings, memories, and questions as they conversed with their experiences.

Following my initial noting of emerging themes for one co-researcher, I moved away from the original account to look for connections between and among the themes I had identified. One of the strategies I used, suggested by Smith et al. (2009), was to cut out the themes I had written on paper and then to physically manoeuvre them, tentatively relating them and grouping them in various ways. This process helped to bring significant aspects together in picturing the whole and in identifying superordinate and subthemes while revealing the overlapping, interdependent nature of all themes. Once this process was completed for one co-researcher, I did the same for the other. After identifying themes for each co-researcher, a meeting, or two if needed, was arranged with each co-researcher to review and discuss the identified themes for his feedback and approval.

After receiving the co-researchers' feedback and approval of themes, I compared individual themes in terms of their similarities and differences, and from this process, I

created a list of master themes (themes shared by the co-researchers). Master themes were expressed in unique ways by the co-researchers, and individual subthemes were identified. Master themes and their subthemes are tabled in Appendix E.

In conclusion, understanding involved a meditative process, a living relationship with the data over months. From a sustained exploration, themes were identified from the material and supporting verbatim extracts were selected for the narration. This process reminds me of the way children explore the seashore and sort their treasures into watery collections of moon snails, hermit crabs, and sea glass and select the most intriguing. Creswell (2007) describes the exhaustion of categories as *saturation*; this occurs when exploration of the interview material no longer reveals anything new (p. 240). Throughout the analytic process, I often returned to the original accounts, developing my understanding through writing and rewriting. I found understanding often emerged in relaxed states and solitary activities such as walking, showering, resting, and waking.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Smith et al. (2009) refer to Yardley's four principles for assessing the validity of qualitative research, which are as follows: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. In this section, I present each principle followed by examples of how it was implemented in my research based on the interpretation of Smith et al. (2009, pp. 180–183).

Sensitivity to context. According to Smith et al. (2009), this principle refers to the quality of the researcher's attention to the particular circumstances of the research, such as with the following examples: by choosing a methodology that supports the research goal; demonstrating familiarity with the topic; selecting a sample of persons who

share the experience to be explored; showing empathy and sensitivity to the co-researchers; and including sufficient verbatim extracts to support the researcher's interpretations, which allow the reader to validate claims and give the co-researchers a voice (pp. 180–181). This principle was applied as follows:

- IPA methodology was chosen for its compatibility with an in-depth exploration of the co-researchers' experience.
- A comprehensive literature review of the topic was undertaken and presented.
- The co-researchers were oldest elders living in the community and were selected for their interest and willingness to share their perspectives and experiences.
- Sensitivity to the co-researchers was demonstrated by my efforts to be attentive to the needs and well-being of the co-researchers and to create a relaxing interview atmosphere in which they felt comfortable to share their authentic selves and experiences (Smith et al., 2009).
- My friendship with the co-researchers enhanced the depth of their sharing and also enhanced my responsibility to protect their privacy and best interests. The co-researchers maintained authority over the research material and their involvement, for example, to add to or request changes to what they had shared or to withdraw from the study, at any time, without explanation.
- Substantial verbatim excerpts supported the narrative analysis, giving the co-researchers a strong voice in the research. The extent to which their voices are heard allows readers to come to know Mel and Paul for themselves and to

determine the validity of my interpretations in light of their own words (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 180–181)

Commitment and rigour. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that *commitment* can be shown through careful listening and attention to the co-researchers during interviewing and in the careful analysis of data (p. 181). *Rigour* refers to the "thoroughness of the study" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 181). It relates, for example, to the quality and depth of the exploration and analysis, which, according to Smith et al., needs to go beyond description to capture meaningful interpretations of experience for both individuals and the group (p. 181). This principle was applied as follows:

- An in-depth exploration and thematic analysis was undertaken. As part of the validation process, each individual analysis was discussed, theme-by-theme, with the corresponding co-researcher in a follow-up interview and during phone consultations. Thematic material was discussed with my thesis supervisor.
- The experience of co-researchers was interpreted through individual and shared themes.
- The final analysis was read to the co-researchers (their preference) who stated that it expressed their experience. Mel nodded his head in agreement to the analysis, stating that he would not change or add anything. His comments included the following: "Right on," and "You say it better than I could say it." Paul commented, "It's so true to me," and "You understand me."
- The time and care devoted to this project reflects the commitment of those involved.

Transparency and coherence. Smith et al. (2009) state that *transparency* refers the degree of clarity that the researcher communicates in describing the steps and process undertaken to complete the study (pp. 181–182). The authors suggest that *coherence* can be shown when themes illumine the intended phenomenon and when the study is in harmony with the values of the methodology (Smith et al., 2009). This principle was applied as follows:

- The research process and method were described in detail.
- Readers were informed of my personal and professional interest in the research project. I identified significant assumptions, values, and experience influencing the research. My friendship with participants was stated explicitly and contributed directly to the narrative analysis.
- Interview extracts from each co-researcher were selected in a balanced manner to evidence individual and common themes (Smith et al., 2009).
- The research and analysis reflected an interpretative phenonomenological approach and values. My interpretations were grounded in the accounts of the co-researchers, and this was validated by their approval of the final writing.

Impact and importance. This principle, according to Smith et al. (2009), refers to the reader's response to the study as a means of validation; for example, the reader will find the study "interesting, important or useful" (p. 183). This principle was applied as follows:

- This research has enriched my understanding of the importance of spirituality to personal well-being (my own and others) and has enhanced my sensitivity

to the spiritual needs of oldest elders. I hope that readers, too, will find this study insightful and beneficial both personally and professionally.

- In Chapter 5, I make tentative connections between the research results and the spirituality and aging literature and their implications for psychotherapy (Smith et al., 2009). Although this dialogue is not part of the original research, readers may find it of value according to their interests.
- Most importantly, this study celebrates our oldest elders and shares their voices and wisdom with readers.

Chapter Four: Thematic Narrative Analysis

> This is the strange paradox of spiritual being—that precisely by going out and spending itself, it realizes itself. It grows not weaker but stronger. (MacQuarrie, 1992, p. 45)

This chapter presents the research findings in a thematic narration. The premise that spirituality is the heart of the person underpins this study. Three interdependent themes emerged—Strong Personal Identity, Identity of Belonging, and Meaningful Belonging—within an overarching leitmotif of Belonging of which love is the heart (see Appendix D). Master themes are divided into subthemes. Within subthemes, individual variations are identified for each co-researcher. All themes are tabled in Appendix E for the reader's reference and summary.

The words of the co-researchers Mel and Paul are the foundation and life of the analysis. I believe there is wisdom for the reader in their actual words. The voices of Paul and Mel are woven with my narration; their words are italicized to discern them from my own. This exploration is meant to invite a caring and thoughtful dialogue. I hope readers will join us on this gentle and reflective "souljourn" along the river of life in a boat we share.

Theme: Strong Personal Identity

> If you follow every dream,
> You might get lost.
>
> —Neil Young, "The Painter"

This theme introduces the reader to Mel and Paul and to what spirituality means to them. It emphasizes their personal beliefs and background.

Subtheme: The meaning of spirituality.

> Meaning is no thing. It is more like the light in which we see things.
>
> (Steindl-Rast, 1984, p. 34)

When I asked Mel to describe himself for this study, he said, *"I follow scientific thought because there is evidence to support things scientifically . . . when more evidence surfaces, we change our minds. So, it's an idea of things evolving. I think we all evolve in ways."* Mel contrasted the evolution of scientific ideas with religion's tendency to remain static in its beliefs and with its tradition of opposing science, especially in regard to the history of the universe and our significance within it.

Mel stated that his biggest puzzle is a recurring question that has been pondered throughout the ages and that, for him, marks a primary juncture at which science and religion part ways: *"We wonder where did we come from? And what is going to happen in the future?"* Mel said,

> *I have to side with science. Our sun is going to run out of fuel and that will be the end of life on Earth. And it's a question . . . Is there a beginning? That is the thing that perplexes me. Is there a beginning or an end? I think it is difficult to think. I think, ordinarily, we think that there are beginnings and ends.*

It was not long into the interview. Mel was visibly excited; his eyes were bright as he leaned toward me: *"And it is a real thought to think that . . . what if there was no beginning? I don't know. I don't know. But it makes me think about it."* The profundity of his musing jolted me. My first thought was, "Why it's barely noon, Mel." Mel had a knack for waking me up, startling me out of my complacency with his eager and fearless pursuance of ideas that as Mel aptly stated, *"makes me think about it."*

Mel's rhythm of speaking and pausing, looking and waiting, gently invited me to wake up and join him. I asked Mel what he thought happened to individual life. He said,

> *Well, I . . . I think it is a matter of consciousness. It's a real profound thought, this idea of consciousness . . . when you think that I am here, you know, and when a person passes on I think they have lost their ability to have this consciousness, at least it is not evident to me how there could be any consciousness. It's just a phase we go through . . . things live and they die. . . . Because, if there is something more after that, bring it out and show me, and I don't see any evidence of that.*

Thought-provoking ideas excited Mel. Mel enjoyed pondering cosmology and existential questions, alongside his enthusiasm for everyday puzzles and problem solving. He expressed a keen interest in many areas, including astronomy, history, geopolitics, mathematics, gardening, crossword puzzles, and sudoku. Some of the evidence of his interests lay on his kitchen table, next to where we sat, in a neat pile of newspapers and magazines to which he subscribed. Mel's alert energy, his lively curiosity, and genuine way of relating resonated in a wholehearted presence that I identified as uniquely Mel.

At 92, Mel is part of a cohort that has lived through the adversity of the Great Depression and the Second World War. He told me, *"I grew up in turbulent times."* Mel talked about his experience growing up in the Depression. As a young person, he worried about finding a job to support himself. Mel asked me if I had a favourite book, and he told me about his: *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck. He described it as a story about the exploitation of poor migrant workers by wealthy landowners during the drought and privation of the Dust Bowl years. At the time, the narrative helped him to understand

his own experience and raised his sociopolitical awareness. Mel emphasized the exploitation that occurred and the fact that *"it's still going on."*

Mel remembered working in his neighbourhood community garden with his parents as a child. He told me it was referred to as a Victory garden during World War I and World War II. Growing food was a way to support the war effort by extending food resources. Postwar, it continued as part of a larger social initiative aimed at providing fresh food to families while beautifying vacant city lots. Since his youth, Mel has worked in the same community garden—preparing the soil, planting, weeding, composting, and doing other tasks involved in maintaining the garden alongside friends and neighbours. He has been instrumental in keeping the garden going over the years and in securing its heritage status.

Mel described his physical health in terms of his same-age peers. He said, *"The only thing I can do is compare myself to other people, the majority of other people that are my age, you know . . . I think that I'm exceptional."* He told me, *"I'm slowing down."* When I asked him how he handled that, he said, *"I pace myself . . . work and take a rest."*

When World War II started, Mel joined the air force. After the war ended, he went to university, married, and began a family. Providing financial stability and comfort has been an important part of Mel's caring for his family. Mel expressed confidence and pride in his ability to take care of the bread-and-butter responsibilities of family life and to manage adversity in general.

Mel described a "survivorship" approach to life that prioritized his responsibilities. He related his desire to be prepared and his tendency to anticipate

"what's ahead." He said, *"And when you feel that way . . . you try to envision what things are going to happen, and . . . how are you going to deal with it."*

Mel spoke easily about his past, telling me of the inequity and injustice that he and his family experienced as persons belonging to an ethnic minority. He told me about his father, who because of his ethnicity, was treated as a potential *"enemy"* during wartime and had to report regularly to the authorities. Mel told me how others were forced to work in internment camps building local infrastructure. He expressed how it *"burns"* him to this day that there has been no apology from the government. Mel's awareness of discrimination started early. Mel remembered that as a child, he and his family were called by an offensive, contemptuous label based on their ethnicity. Mel shared a memory of watching a hockey game as a young person, when a fan next to him shouted an ethnic taunt at one of the players who was of the same background. He said, *"And that hurts."* As an adult, Mel described discrimination at his workplace that blocked his career advancement. These and other experiences seem to have contributed to his empathic stance for marginalized and oppressed persons, sensitizing him to social justice concerns. Mel described his personal and political views in terms of his values, for example, his belief in the importance of putting ourselves in *"other people's shoes and see what . . . how they view things"* and our obligation to help and care for one another.

Prior to Mel's involvement in this study, he did not consider himself to be a spiritual person. Mel does not have a religious background or affiliation, and he told me he was *"leaning to not believing in God."* Mel told me that although he does not identify with Christianity, he is familiar with some of its precepts, for example, the Ten

Commandments, which he suggested may have been an initial source of social values growing up.

Mel talked about religion. I asked him if he saw any difference between spirituality and religion. He said, *"Well, that's a kind of a nebulous idea because I think, if a person comes from a religious background, I think spirituality is their religion, the things that they believe."* Mel added, *"What does spirituality really mean? Is it the things that I believe in? I think that's about the closest that I can come to it."*

The things that you believe in would be your spirituality," I said. Mel responded:

> *Yeah. About the conduct of ordinary people, how they react to certain situations, and I would even extend it to the world, societies. How they think is spirituality. And, what they think should be going on. How the country should be governed.*

Mel continued: *"For me for spirituality. I think it is a background, the framework of what is wrong or what is right for, to help myself and for society to function and move on for the benefit of all."*

During our exploration of the meaning of spirituality, Mel explained how he understood the terms faith and spirituality: *"There's a kind of connection between spirituality and faith . . . it's, almost for me, it has the same meaning."* Mel added a caveat in using the word faith for himself because faith implies a belief in things unseen. In the following excerpt, Mel discerned between his understanding of faith and his evidence-based beliefs:

> *But for me, maybe faith is not the appropriate word to use because I base my decisions on the way I conduct myself when I look around at what is happening*

between other people in society and what-not . . . and I've got these standards in my mind, the way I would like other people to behave in the same manner.

I asked Mel if there would be a better word or term to which he could relate. He replied, *"Well 'standards' or 'code of conduct.'"* After uncovering the meaning of spirituality for Mel, we agreed that I would use the term spirituality and his *"code of conduct"* interchangeably for the purpose of this study.

Mel defined his spirituality as *"the things I believe in,"* his *"standards,"* and *"code of conduct."* He described his values as the standards of his conduct with others and the measure of his judgement. He described his code of conduct as the *"background"* and moral *"framework"* that guides and informs his actions and decision-making, expressing who he is, what he represents, and to what he is committed. Mel's *"code"* is his moral compass and a primary inner resource for him. With conviction in his voice, he told me, *"I think I find my strength in my moral values, and I stick to them."*

Mel reflected that he did not know who he would be without his moral values. His words revealed the inseparability of his identity from his ethical code. His strong identification with his core values reminded me of Armistead's (1995) definition of faith as "those deeply felt values without which the self cannot be the self" (p. xvi) and her belief that a "person's faith is the core of the self" (p. xvi). Mel's use of *"my"* to describe his moral values emphasized his personal conviction and his ownership of his code.

When I asked Paul to describe himself for this study, he responded:

I think an ordinary young man that was born 91 years ago and has a dream . . . that I would be able to give something to others and give some meaning to the life around me. So, that would be pretty well the sum total of my whole life.

Whether or not Paul intended, he seemed to describe an "ageless self" (Kaufman, 1986, p. 6): a *"young man"* who *"has a dream."* Paul's energy felt fresh and youthful; his dream *"to give something to others and give some meaning to the life around me"* seemed just as real for him today. I was struck by the simplicity and ease with which Paul gathered up the meaning of his life. His summary expressed his self-awareness and communicated an overall sense of integrity and peace with his life. I was reminded of Goethe's words: "He is the happiest man who can see the connection between the end and the beginning of his life" (as cited in Carlsen, 1996, p. 163).

Robert Hass, translating Rilke, states: "Singing *is* being. It creates our presence" (Mitchell, 1989, Introduction, p. xli). To me, Paul's voice *is* life in lavish abundance. Paul loves to sing, and I know him to sing heartily and often. He sings with family and friends, in church, and at weddings; his lively songs stream from car windows on road trips. Paul has been known to break into song while strolling for groceries. His nephew told me, "He has a vast repertoire of old standards from the 20s and 30s." Children (and adults) listen with rapt delight as he sings a ballad about "an old man and his pig," replete with snorts and whistles. Paul told me that he sang this robust song on the stage of his social work graduation at someone's request. Paul would sing to you if you asked him.

Paul grew up in a large family in an urban community. He described the strong influence of his parents and the pastor of his youth on his moral and faith development. After earning a bachelor's degree, Paul attended seminary training and then served as a Catholic priest for nearly 30 years within his own province and internationally. Following completion of his master's degree, Paul married, had a family, and continued his vocation as a community social worker. Paul described both his service as a priest and a social

worker as *"callings."* He said, *"I applied myself in the same way . . . so that each time there seemed to be something that I could do that was for the good of the people I was meeting on earth."*

Throughout his life, Paul has been a volunteer with various political and social justice groups. As a member of Amnesty International, Paul wrote letters on behalf of persons whose human rights had been violated. He ran as a candidate for a national political party in his 70s. Since his retirement and until recently, Paul volunteered at a soup kitchen. Today Paul continues to promote social justice and environmental issues through his involvement with the Council of Canadians (a social action organization). Paul is a long-standing member of a local community of L'Arche International. L'Arche is a grassroots initiative, founded by Jean Vanier, that establishes family homes for persons with disabilities in communities worldwide. Paul participates in L'Arche prayer groups and celebrations and is an actor in their plays, which share the message of Christ with the larger community.

At 91, Paul said that he feels well overall, despite his recent health crisis for which he was hospitalized briefly. Paul told me he expected to die at the time of his hospitalization. His subsequent diagnosis of a progressive illness came as a *"shock"* initially, and he told me that shifting back to living again was part of his adjustment upon returning home. At the time of interviewing, Paul was temporarily sharing his home with one of his children and grandchild.

Just as it was important for Mel to identify himself as a person who followed scientific thought and to emphasize his code or standards of conduct, Paul identified himself as *"a spiritual person,"* telling me, *"I am a Catholic and this matters."* Paul

emphasized that his commitment to Catholicism did not devalue his view of other religions. He said, *"The fact is that God is a God to all," and "God is all Spirit."*

Paul explained, *"I follow a Catholic faith"* and identified the Catholic sacraments as *"a good way to peg my life."* Paul described the Catholic sacraments as the tangible signs and means by which *"God shares His influence, His grace, His love to us."* He used the metaphor of a *"pipeline"* to convey how God nourishes him through the sacraments and how they flow through him.

Paul shared his understanding of the spiritual life: *"The spiritual life means the life within, that cannot be seen or touched . . . The spiritual life belongs in the spiritual work of God and the human to be for one purpose."* At another time, Paul identified *"the spiritual"* as *"the essence of life."* He spoke of the *"higher life"* and *"higher things"* often as he described his spiritual life and beliefs. I asked Paul what he meant by *"the higher things,"* and he answered: *"To increase the love that Jesus talked about and the right thinking and the right doing."* Paul expressed his desire to actively love others as Jesus did:

> *Love others as you would love yourself. And, when you see another person in want, either physical or even spiritual want, and you have the means by which you might be able to support that [person] into a better life . . . that is what I would call the higher things.*

Paul described his spirituality as the unifying centre of his being:

> *The inner life, it makes the whole outer life more understandable, more unified, and if you have a confused inner life, the possibility is then of . . . going off the track on the ordinary outside life, such as whether you live a good social life or*

whether you throw bombs at people . . . whether you shoot at people in order to get your way . . . these all are a result of a good inner life.

Paul spoke of the need to respect the freedom of others to choose and express their inner lives, to allow others *"the freedom of their own ways."* He referred to Gandhi and his compatriots who chose a nonviolent approach to their participation in the liberation of India from English domination. He said that*" this kind of thing"* is an example of *"an inner life of your own and responding clearly and personally to the way that you deal with God and the way you deal with each other."* Paul drew a parallel between the suppression and domination occurring in other countries and other times to the treatment of Indigenous people in our own country. Like Mel, Paul described the inner life as reflecting *"not only . . . the right rules of life, but the right politics and the right human government."*

Throughout the interview process, Paul moved fluidly back and forth in time, interlacing significant memories with the meaning of his life. He proved a lively raconteur, sharing anecdotes from his life to illustrate his experience. It was as if Paul was sharing his creative work—his life in the Spirit—and like a Jacquard tapestry or a richly detailed painting for the most part completed, it did not seem to matter where we began or lingered. Paul described a soulful depiction of *"keeping a beautiful rose in a beautiful garden,"* a metaphor he used at one point to symbolize his spiritual life. It was an image that captured the vitality of his spirituality and his attentive nurture of it.

From the artist's vantage, Paul reflected on his life, tracing the thread from which he had woven its meaning:

Well, looking back over my life, a full life, I can now trace a, sort of a thread . . . right from early years, I wouldn't know exactly when it began, but I became quite conscious of looking to the future. . . . in a sense that it always led to thinking of the spiritual within me and how to nourish the spiritual and how to use the sacraments . . . and I think this has been the major thing that has led me to the good things that I have always aimed for.

Paul described the commandment to *"love your neighbour as yourself"* as the all-embracing imperative of the spiritual life:

All the commandments are summed up with one rule, that is that "you should love your neighbour as yourself." In other words, treat your neighbour as if you were, you know, you were standing there in place of him. And, if you love your neighbour as yourself, this pretty well tells you all the things that you wouldn't do to your neighbour and all the things that you would hope to do with your neighbour.

Like Mel, Paul's spirituality was his moral lodestar, the guide he used in making decisions, what he referred to as his *"true north."* Paul said, *"And if it fits those two values, I show the love of God, and I show the love for the other person in what I am doing or saying, that to me is, you know, a good guide."*

For both co-researchers, supreme values guided their conduct and relationships with others and their sense of belonging. I found Paul's insightful observation, in the following excerpt, salient both in pointing out the similarity of his experience as a priest and social worker and in understanding the similarity between the spirituality of Paul and

Mel. I asked Paul how he would describe his spirituality in terms of his experience as a priest and a social worker. He explained:

> *Well, I don't know that I could really discern the difference between the spiritual life of a priest and the spiritual life of a social worker, because it seems to me that their motive is the crowning goal that they are using. The motive is the thing that binds the work into one purpose. And although, true enough, there is . . . you have a religious outlook in the priest, and you don't have a religious outlook, necessarily, in the social worker . . . but that is a distinction made by society itself . . . because a true social worker would have the same goal and motive that a priest would have, and that is the betterment of humanity. And the difference between one church and another isn't that great if you look at it in a sense of what are their motives . . . what are their reasons for working in the world.*

In Paul's view, all those affirming and working to benefit humanity can be understood as bound by the work into one purpose and, perhaps in this sense, one religion. Although at first glance, the secular spirituality of Mel contrasted strikingly with Paul's Catholic faith; upon closer look, as Paul reasoned, their spirituality was motivated by the same *"crowning goal"* and that was to contribute to *"the good of the people I was meeting on earth."*

Theme: Identity of Belonging

> The heart is at home in belonging. (Steindl-Rast, 1984, p. 200)

This theme reveals Belonging as the core of the spirituality of Paul and Mel. It speaks to the question: "To whom do I belong?"

According to van Manen (2003), what makes "a phenomenon what it is" (p. 107) are the essential qualities "without which the phenomenon could not be what it is" (p. 107). The co-researchers' sense of belonging emerged from the data as the essential characteristic, condition, and motivation for their lived spirituality. It was the bright thread running through their perceptions and descriptions of their experiences. Belonging and the need to belong were deeply woven into the identities of Mel and Paul and the ways in which they found and expressed personal meaning. They were inseparable from other aspects of their spirituality, for example, love, responsibility, joy, hope, harmony, and gratitude. Belonging motivated their habits, attitudes, and their interactions with others.

Paul avowed his ultimate belonging to God and described this belonging as uniting him in God's purposes and uniting him with all others. Paul's relationship with God was grounded in Divine love and acceptance, which was the source of his everlasting identity and meaning. Paul's strong conviction and thankfulness was apparent as he spoke:

> *I thank God that I was named and baptized in the life of Christ, and we hear in the scriptures that we could not have belonged to God unless He himself accepted us. He adopted us as His own children. That being said . . . we have a sense of belonging with Him because we have a sense of purpose with Him that endures the entire life and that is only the beginning.*

Like Mel, Paul described his spirituality as a deeply personal commitment and claim. At one point, he described God as *"my God,"* and I asked him what that meant to

him. He said, *"Well, the God I belong to is mine. It's like a marriage."* Paul's relational imagery captured his intimate sense of belonging and the fullness of his commitment.

When I reviewed my analysis of Paul's interview material with him, he confirmed that the theme of Belonging was essential to his experience. Paul added these words to what he said during interviews:

> *Yes, it is the need to belong and to be part of the belonging, to belong together with others. I belong to my God . . . or said another way, this is the way I am committed. This is the destiny where I belong. . . . It reminds me of a popular song not long ago.*

Paul sang sweetly: *"Everything I do I do for You, I belong to You. Or everything I am, I am for You. Everything I am belongs to You. You make me important. You make me a divine part of Yourself."* It was the song of the beloved.

The spirituality of Paul reflected an interdependent way of belonging with others, a wholeness that could only be experienced together. Paul told me, *"We are all disabled. We learned that from Jean Vanier. All of us have some weakness that marks us as being human."* Paul's sense of belonging was a wholistic way of understanding identity, community, and healing.

Paul shared some of his experiences as a priest involving tragedy and death in which he was called to administer the sacraments. His love and compassion for people emerged throughout his stories and his willingness to be close to others in their grief and loss. He described a *"very visible and hard experience"* in which he had to bury a mother and her child together—*"a very, very deeply touching and sad"* occasion. He told me of presiding over the funeral of a man who killed himself while he was on a holiday with his

wife. After he spoke of how these events had affected him, I reflected that it sounded very difficult emotionally to face and support. He explained:

> *You face it with people too because you are there with them and it becomes . . . you become part of them, and they become part of you, so there's a way that the Lord can draw us together. . . . He will bring them to Himself through others.*

Here Paul expressed the "profound moments of companionship" (Dass & Gorman, 2014, p. 20) that Dass and Gorman (2014) suggest occur "when we break through and meet in spirit behind our separateness" (p. 20).

That home feeling (Paul).

"Home" captured the feeling of belonging for Paul. Paul told me,

> *I'm sort of a community person and, when I went to study theology, some of my happiest days were in the community of the whole and joining in with others in the work or the play that we had to do at that time. I just felt . . . it was like home to me.*

Paul said that after his seminary training, he was *"willing to relinquish the home I was born in for a new birth in the communal life. And I often thought that I would have joined a group or religious order for that purpose, to maintain that home feeling."*

"That home feeling" seemed to encapsulate Paul's emotional response, his relational experience and felt perception of the places he had lived, and his yearning for his eternal home. Paul described the feeling of home in remembering a community that he eventually had to leave. With fondness, he stated, *"It was a simpler life, and it was a simpler relationship with good people."* In contrast, he spoke of the larger city that he had moved to for work as one in which people were *"too busy to be good to each other*

and kind to each other." He said, *"I preferred the slower kind of joyful, happy, friendly life"* that he had experienced in a smaller community.

When I asked Paul about changes that he had noticed in his spirituality over the years, he told me that *"looking back over 90 years,"* he had learned *"that each person is, sort of, sent with a destiny to build a community, and I put that on the level of the spiritual life."* I asked Paul what he saw as his personal destiny, to which he responded, *"Well, being a unifier of people. Bringing people together when they were allowing it, to rejoice, and to appreciate one another."* Paul expressed the quality of home in the relational values he emphasized such as gentle, understanding, considerate, kind, joyful, "giving and receiving" and in his reason for *"bringing people together, to rejoice and to appreciate one another."* In my observation, Paul carried *"that home feeling"* to others like a holy fragrance.

Paul characterized home as a harmony of belonging, a community of mutual regard and care in which people celebrate one another and life together. Heaven was the full realization of home, which Paul described as a *"harmony of spirit . . . total harmony"* without the conflict experienced on earth. Paul stated his longing for heaven, his *"eternal home,"* and his desire to meet and see his loved ones who had gone before him, telling me it was the life of heaven he looked forward to most now. Paul described heaven as *"God's house, God's presence."* When I asked Paul if he had had any experience that had given him a taste of heaven, it was *"loving people"* that captured the heart of his experience: *"Well, loving people dearly, deeply from the heart has certainly been my experience of harmony. And that would include all my friends, which would include you too."*

When exploring the ideal assisted living environment with Paul, he told me that, as a person now receiving care,

> *You would try to get along with your brother and try to get along with the caregivers and, as much as possible, be gentle, be giving and receiving in the way that you would have done had you been free outside of the care-giving situation. . . . And, there are different things . . . the ideal would be to have good companions, both in caring for you and also in living along with you, and who allow you to have freedom to be yourself and . . . to be happy to share life with others.*

Paul emphasized, *"You always have an obligation to belong to a community where you're placed in community."* Paul described an ideal community in which caregivers are also companions who are *"happy to share life"*—a harmonious milieu in which he would be free to be himself along with others. His description suggested the socio-spiritual vision and ethos of the L'Arche community homes in which "each one's gifts can be given and recognized" (L'Arche Canada, 2016, "The Inspiration," para. 1). Paul's experience of home seemed to capture his heart and well-being. It suggested that experiencing *"that home feeling"* would be important to his spiritual well-being should he ever need to move to an assisted living residence or care home.

Mel's code of conduct is a code of belonging that needs people to be expressed. He told me, *"You have to meet people in the way you conduct yourself . . . you have to encounter people."* One of the ways that Mel experienced belonging was in the camaraderie of the community garden where he has been involved since he was a child. Mel told me about the value of the community garden today:

I think it's [the community garden] is a thing that, I guess, people working together and you can achieve something if you work together. We seem to be all learning in there and we help each other out and that's the main purpose, I guess, of a community garden. There are things to be done together in order to keep the whole concept going.

In the truest sense, the "community" in community garden has been the most important aspect of the garden for Mel and a metaphor for the kind of belonging he valued. Mel has been involved for more than 70 years, and he told me that most of his friends are there. *"Helping each other out"* has involved cooperation and mutual dependency as gardeners share their knowledge, abilities and resources, including time and energy. Mel has been known to care for others' plantings as his own when members are unable to contribute. Over the years, he has introduced many new people to the garden community. Mel told me that *"bringing people together"* is something he likes to do. He summarized the central value of the garden: *"The main thing is that it's an idea of people working together to provide the betterment of the community."* For Mel, the community garden expressed a harmony of purpose and togetherness for the greater good.

Mel described a respectful and harmonious belonging that he valued in his family and community life. One of the ways he has lived his spiritual code has been through his everyday *"social conduct."* Social courtesy can be perfunctory; yet, as Mel reveals, when undertaken with heart, it has profound implications for healing our world. Mel's social conduct revealed his core values.

And when I do [encounter people] . . . well, I try to be polite, considerate of people and lots of times it's a thing that's just social conduct. . . . You try to be accommodating depending on what the situation is and try to be polite.

The online Cambridge dictionary defines polite (n.d.a) as "behaving in a way that is socially correct and shows understanding of and care for other people's feelings." Another definition states, "having or showing behaviour that is respectful and considerate of other people" (Polite, n.d.b). Respect, consideration, and care for other people's feelings characterized the quality of Mel's relationships and the heart of his belonging.

As with Paul, I asked Mel to describe the ideal environment to keep his spirit vital should he ever need to move into an assisted living residence. Mel's first response was to recognize a loss of his independence and the enormity of such a change:

I think, what you know of me, I think you'd realize that I'm kind of independent. I like to do things on my own . . . and going into a situation like that would be a big, big step for me. Very big step.

He stated his concern about his ability to access familiar resources that stimulated his interest and involvement, such as books and television documentaries.

Mel expressed his hope for the kind of belonging that he enjoyed living in the community: *"Well, I hope that I can get in there and talk to the other people who are in there and discuss things, you know. And talk about what is important in their minds."* When I reflected that people and relationships seemed important to him, he said,

Very important . . . Well, as you know, with my former residents, how many people do I know. . . . I like to meet people and talk about things. And it has

always been, when I talk with people, I never seem to get into any controversy or anything.

When I offered his respectful approach towards an explanation, Mel responded: *"Oh, maybe maybe . . . I don't know. I can't judge myself, only somebody else can judge me with respect to these kinds of ideas."*

Respect and harmony in his relationships were important to Mel. In his description of the ideal assisted living community, Mel expressed his need for self-determination and personal freedom. This environment emphasized the respectful, harmonious, and stimulating belonging and opportunities that he enjoyed living independently now. For both Mel and Paul, their descriptions revealed their awareness of their present needs and what nourished their well-being.

Both Mel and Paul identified themselves as community persons, *"bringing people together,"* each in his own way. Their supreme values and principles were brought to light through their identification of what was *"true," "good," "right,"* or *"proper."* They were indicative of the *"higher"* life or the ethics of belonging to which they were committed. These descriptors were ideals, values, and virtues—as opposed to rigid, prescriptive rules—that affirmed and benefited both themselves and others. They stood for *"the inner life,"* as Paul remarked, which *"brings it all together as being human."*

Theme: Meaningful Belonging

> Who *are* we to ourselves and to one another?—it will all come down to that. (Dass & Gorman, 2014, p. 15)

This theme portrays the unique and personally meaningful ways that Mel and Paul experienced belonging in relationship with God and/or others. The integration of their

inner values with their habits of an ordinary day gave them a strong sense of purpose and well-being. Both Paul and Mel revealed a magnanimous spirit amidst the joys and challenges of their daily lives.

Subtheme: Love is the heart of belonging and the centre of meaning.

> Love alone is capable of uniting living beings in such a way as to complete and fulfil them, for it alone takes them and joins them by what is deepest in themselves. This is a fact of daily experience. (Teilhard de Chardin, 2008, p. 265)

When I asked Mel what was most important to him, he replied, *"My wife."* I asked Mel if there was a picture, a word, or a symbol that would convey what is most significant to him. He said, *"Well, a heart maybe. Because it's love. We would never have gone this long if there wasn't a loving relationship between us."*

Mel's relationship with his wife, Mati, was the deepest source of intimacy and meaning for Mel. Mel has been married for more than 60 years. He told me, *"We've been happy."* Recently, Mati was diagnosed with a progressive illness. Mel's day-to-day activities expressed his love and care for her, his daily commitment to her health and well-being, and to maintaining the family life they had built together. Family love and togetherness appeared to be a rich and primary source of meaning, identity, and sustenance.

Family is a living whole (Mel).

> I can feel it as movement: the flowing veins around the sturdy, striving core, the sucking of the roots, the breathing of the leaves. (Buber, 1996, p. 57)

The following anecdote describes Mel's loving initiative on behalf of his family. It reveals his family values and his leadership. Mel demonstrated how as a grandparent he nurtured the love between generations and promoted healing and renewal in the life of his family.

Mel told me that his grandson, Joel, moved out of his parents' home during a time of family tension. After almost a year of no communication between parents and child, they were at an impasse. The emotional toll on the family was evident, and Mel decided to do something. Mel went to his grandson's workplace and invited him to his home for a family holiday dinner. He also invited Joel's parents and siblings, as well as my family. It was Mel's hope *"to bring them together,"* to see their relationships restored. Everyone agreed to come. Joel's dad was lead chef, so the parents were busily preparing dinner when the knocks came to the door.

Joel's mom and dad were the first to answer. Any hesitation or tension seemed to dissolve in their spontaneous hugs, the loving exchanges that followed, and in the "catching up" with one another around the table. By the end of the night, the family had already planned another time to be together. Joel's parents expressed their gratitude to Mel for what he had done, thanking him earnestly afterward. The door to their healing had been opened.

I was inspired to witness a love so appropriately bold and wise from the way in which Mel had approached his grandson to his choice of place and guests and the seeming timeliness of the occasion. Mel's love impressed me as a mature love that had ripened over a lifetime.

The metaphors Mel used in the following excerpt give insight into his understanding of his family as a living unity and his relationship to the whole:

> *Well, I see differences and what-not but what else can I do . . . I mean we are like a tree, you know . . . so you have to nourish it. . . . I was very pleased about the way things happened. I was able to influence [grandchild's name] to come . . . well, if we are not going to come together, then we are just going to drift away. There is nothing left then. This is the essential thing of all this. That's like going out and sawing off a branch.*

When I asked Mel about bringing his family together, what he would call what he was doing, he responded, *"Well, I am the bond, the glue that holds this together, hopefully."* When I reflected that it sounded like there was a strength in that, he replied, *"Yes . . . because the sap goes through all the branches. If you don't have the nourishment, it all falls apart . . . it withers."*

I felt encouraged by Mel's rich imagery capturing the life of his family and his healing influence. Mel was the loving "glue" binding the generations. He embodied the care that nourished their togetherness. Mel's close relationships with his children (the parents) and his grandson gave him the ability to influence and facilitate the healing of their relationship. His influence seemed to be a result of his many years of commitment to loving and caring for his family. I imagined him like a chef in his kitchen gently and faithfully stirring the sauce.

When I asked Paul if there was a picture, a symbol, or a word that would express what is most meaningful in his life, he said, *"Togetherness, union, love . . . I suppose*

ultimately love . . . but all those. When you are linked with others in a good project or a loving way, that seems to me to be the ultimate."

Throughout our interviews, Paul returned to love when talking about his faith and when describing his relationships with family and friends—to give and receive love, and especially to serve in love, was the hope and reason for his actions. Paul described love as the centre of his faith and the raison d'être of his existence. Paul identified loving others as the greatest value of the spiritual life and named God as the ultimate source of love and hope within him. He stated, *"The real value of Jesus Christ is 'to love others' . . . to love others as they would want to be loved."*

Paul's loving and joyful spirit radiated a vibrancy that others noticed. Paul told me his brother used to say to him, *"You're so full of love."* Strangers have felt his loving frequency. One morning, during this research project, I was at a church service with Paul when a woman, unknown to either of us, stood up in front of the congregation. She spoke to the church body about the despair she had been feeling, and then unexpectedly, she said, "But when I saw this man (pointing to Paul) come through the door with his cane this morning—and I don't know who he is—a strong feeling of hope came over me" (her words as I remember them). Paul was a light she could perceive after months of darkness.

Paul spoke passionately of his love for the Lord, his family, and friends and of his love to serve them. Serving others was a primary way that Paul expressed his love and faith. Loving and serving were two sides of the same coin, the inside–outside of the same reality. Paul expressed his desire to serve and his serving over the years as *"sort of like washing His feet . . . that kind of thing . . . doing things for Him and for His people."* After recuperating from his medical crisis, Paul told me, *"I've picked up my bow and*

arrows." He said, *"I'm not crazy to love in the exterior, but I'm crazy to love as the Lord loves."* Paul's loving relationships with God, family, and friends were his deepest sources of meaning and intimacy, and his love reached into his community to others through his everyday contacts and volunteerism.

Subtheme: Habits of an ordinary day. While exploring the day-to-day lives of Paul and Mel, I discovered that they had certain habits that were associated with their well-being. These habits appeared to be the building blocks, the "bricks and mortar," of their spirituality, uniting and consolidating *being* with *doing* in the context of belonging and community. They were the sonorous sounds of the ordinary reverberating throughout their lives.

Habits of their ordinary day nourished their relationships, and their relationships were the fabric of their well-being. In relationship, Mel and Paul seemed to tap and develop their unique gifts, their power and creativity, and a feeling of aliveness and connection within themselves, with others, nature, mystery and, for Paul, God.

Paul's inner life was nourished by his daily habits of prayer and participation in the Catholic Mass. Learning about these activities helped me to better understand Paul's spirituality and how his spiritual practice contributed to his well-being. Paul identified the Holy Communion or Eucharist, a principal liturgy of the Catholic Mass, as a central connection to his spiritual life. He told me that he had made a decision to *"follow the Eucharist"* when he was a teenager, and since then, for over 70 years, he has had a faithful habit of participating in Holy Communion. Paul described the Eucharist as the real presence of Christ in the host of bread and the consummate "thanksgiving." Paul elucidated its significance: *"Communion means sharing life with God and others."* His

participation in the Eucharist affirmed his spiritual union with Christ, which he described as a bond that could not be broken.

Paul described a deepening intimacy in his prayer life over the years:

> *My life with the Father and the Son and the Spirit have deepened. My life has deepened here, and I'm looking to see how God's word was said . . . in the "Our Father, give us this day our daily bread, forgive us and also lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."*

He explained his experience as *"a deepening of the obligation, the call, a deepening of the vocation to be one with God's creation."* Paul's words suggested his spiritual seeking and development and his thirst for the fullness of communion in his everyday life.

Paul had moved away from the formal written prayers of the Church in earlier years to the spontaneous, deeply personal prayer that he experienced now. In his 80s, Paul (personal communication, 2008) was introduced to Christian contemplative prayer or *"centering prayer,"* which he called *"the flower of the lifetime of trying to pray."* At that time, Paul (personal communication, 2008) told me,

> *I'm kind of loose . . . I allow God to have room in me to pray to the Father as He sees Father, Son, and Spirit abiding in oneself . . . speaks from the depth of my being . . . talking to Himself promoting in me a Spirit of prayer I never had before.*

Now, in his 90s, Paul described his prayer life as an abiding companionship, his *"walking and talking"* with God. He emphasized his *"deepening love and familiarity"* in his relationship with Jesus and Mary (Mother of Jesus). During his illness and recovery,

Paul expressed an intimate nurturing and inspiration in this spiritual companionship that helped him live day by day:

> *I live for the day and I live talking often to the Lord Jesus and His mother for the familiarity. I know this familiarity has grown in me and between me and the Lord. . . . And it has meant a lot to me to have more peace in my heart, more life in my daily walk.*

Paul's joy seemed to flow from his spirit of thanksgiving to suffuse his ordinary day with meaning. One morning at the start of an interview, I asked Paul: How are you? He told me he woke up feeling *"kind of disgruntled"* but quickly regained his perspective and joie de vivre—life was a gift to be enjoyed:

> *But it wasn't long before I came alive to the sun, and the world, and the goodness of God, and got out and got busy with the understanding that life is rich, life is helpful, and life is to be enjoyed on both a spiritual and physical level.*

In describing his volunteer activities, Paul told me, *"It is also a joy to meet others in the same community where I live . . . and you know, join with them in communal work."* He added,

> *We have different clubs and societies here in [name of city] and I try to belong to those . . . that serve humanity . . . there is another society called L'Arche. . . . At different times of the week I would be meeting with them to pray, and saying prayers on my own.*

When I asked Paul about his ordinary day, he said,

> *Oh, everyday . . . I take some time to read, sometime to walk, exercise, keep fit . . . all those have good meaning in the inner life too because if you just . . . if you stay*

healthy, you're going to stay active in your life of joining others in the peace of the Lord and relishing the gifts that He sends.

The rhythm of Paul's ordinary day was a balance of activities to include staying healthy through regular meals and exercise, reading, companionship, prayer, volunteer work, and a daily attitude and actions of loving-kindness. Paul saw value in all of these activities for his spiritual life and his ability to *"relish"* God's gifts.

Mel found meaning in his day-to-day responsibilities: *"Now, I . . . a lot of people think that they would like to travel and what-not. I have foregone those kinds of things and try to deal with daily things."* In exploring the meaning of spirituality for Mel, I asked him his view of the definition used in this study. He reflected,

But, in everyday life, the idea of "nourishment of spirituality" is maybe misplaced because I think we go through daily life where it's routine. We are going to have our meals and what-not and we don't really think of the deeper things in life. . . . I think that is what happens most of the time.

Mel told me the activities of his ordinary day were focused on *"what needed to be done."* His day included his routines of regular meals, family and household responsibilities, and exercise. As his neighbour, I would often see Mel walking briskly to the train station on his daily transit downtown to pick up the newspaper. Mel frequently spoke of the people he had met and the interesting conversations he had had. Many of Mel's responsibilities were, if not daily routines, regular habits of living. When I asked Mel what is the best part of the day, he said,

Boy that's a tough one [laughter]. Probably the beginning of the day because you are thinking about what you want to do for that day and you have set an agenda

for what you want to accomplish, so you are looking ahead here and thinking, well, I hope I can do this . . . I can do that . . . and that's why I like the early part of the day. . . . I look out the window and hope it's going to be a nice day so I can do these things [laughter].

Managing his finances to *"live comfortably"* was one of the ways Mel cared for his family. Mel believed, *"If you have your finances in order, I think you will come closer to doing the things that you want to do."* Mel, like many others in his generation, had known the financial hardships of the Great Depression. He viewed financial responsibility as an important way to provide and care for his family and to fulfill his values.

Mel spoke of his wife's illness, which he said, *"is becoming more evident every day."* He told me that more of his day involves caring for Mati and fulfilling household responsibilities. When I phoned Mel, he was making homemade soup from a recipe he had found on the side of a beef stock container. He joked about having to use a large magnifying glass to read the small print. He said it was the first time he had made soup from scratch, and he looked at it as a *"challenge."* When I called back later, he sounded pleased to tell me his soup had turned out *"pretty good."* Mel's positive, adaptive response to the challenges he and his wife faced spoke to me of his love and courage, his resourcefulness and resiliency, and his commitment to his values.

Mel described his ongoing involvement in the community garden as a *"hobby,"* which, until he moved, occupied him on almost a daily basis during the garden seasons. He said, *"What is the definition of a hobby? It is something you like to do all the time."* Later he said, *"I've been at it so long that it has become a, kind of a habit. But maybe a*

little more than that," referring to its community value and his desire to preserve *"the ideas behind it"* and *"the practices that we went through."* Living in his old neighbourhood, Mel walked to the garden. Now living at a distance, Mel drives to the garden or commutes by public transportation.

Mel's daily activities reflected a sense of responsibility and care that extended beyond himself to the community. When I asked Mel about his reputation as a good neighbour, he told me,

> *I don't know I think it's just inherent. It's nothing that I have to think about, it just happens. . . . Now that it's cold here, I think about the places that I used to shovel snow, you know, close to my place . . . that there are people going to use the sidewalk. So I get out there and shovel my place and lots of other places. I used to shovel it seems like a whole block of sidewalk [laughter].*

To Mel, shovelling the sidewalk was *"something that should be done,"* expressing his care and concern for others: *"There are people going to use the sidewalk."* His sense of community guided his actions.

Subtheme: The habit of doing good. Paul described his experience as a young person in which he intervened to help his sibling who had stepped off a ledge into deep water. Paul helped him *"back towards the shore"* out of concern for his sibling's safety and fear of drowning. Paul spoke of his response as *"sort of a habit that I, was built in me from doing good at other times."*

In telling me about his ordinary day, Paul explained that every day was not the same but his intention was:

And, my ordinary day isn't the same day by day but, overall, the meaning of my life would be to be in touch with people, to be there for them, and to hear what troubles they may have, and to help assist in giving something to that need.

I asked Paul if he would tell me about a recent experience. He told me about his interaction with his neighbour who was struggling financially. Looking dejected after he was unable to secure a bigger apartment for his family, his neighbour told Paul: *"Oh, I guess we're just poor, and we're going to be poor."* Paul said,

[I] felt moved by the cry of his heart . . . and I offered to him some vegetables and other things that we had here to help this family. . . . They were just small gifts of things that would help the family be well fed."

One of the ways Paul cares for this neighbour and his family is to share the bread he bakes each week with them.

Paul spoke of giving up his comfort *"for the sake of other people,"* which he emphasized as *"very small things . . . small things that make life worthwhile."* In the following anecdote, Paul told me about his encounter with another neighbour. His description revealed his attentive response to someone who was new to the neighbourhood and her need to belong:

This morning, when I was waiting to talk with you, a neighbour came by. She is a neighbour who recently moved in, so I was questioning how her moving in and getting settled in the neighbourhood was working out. . . . So, I had a conversation with her that very well pleased . . . obviously, she was pleased to be recognized, to be known as a person newly arrived who wants to get settled into the way of life and the neighbourhood.

Paul's natural and appropriate caring for his neighbour, his friendliness, alertness, and openness to her situation and need is an example of what Dass and Gorman (2014) describe as "the instinctive response of an open heart" (p. 5). They point out, "When we join together in this spirit, action comes more effortlessly, and everybody ends up nourished" (Dass & Gorman, 2014, p. 5). Paul's encounters with his neighbours are examples of how everyday caring actions can make a difference—how they can *"make life worthwhile"*—affirming and nurturing everyone involved.

Paul linked his sensitivity to people and his understanding of them to his training in psychology and sociology, his experience as a priest and a social worker, and his growth in self-understanding. Paul said, *"As you live more and as you live more in the inner self, I feel that you also understand the growth in others."* Together this had helped him

> *to understand people better so that I could actually see what was happening to them and I could reach out to comfort or to strengthen the good and help them to deal with the kind of hazards that they had in their life.*

Paul's background contributed to the uniquely personal way in which Paul expressed his spirituality.

"Whatever you do" expressed the potential for the whole of Paul's life to have meaning. Paul explained: *"This . . . God-life then is not simply being with God but it is also walking with God because whatever we do can be influenced through the good of the higher life."* He described how his spirituality was brought into his everyday life:

> *Any action that you do . . . any greeting that you have for others, or any kind of action that would accomplish a good thing in your daily life . . . that would be reinforced with the spiritual gifts of the pipeline.*

On another occasion, Paul told me: *"Whatever you do . . . if you answer the doorbell or if you lift a lawnmower and cut the grass, anything that means something to others will have its benefit."*

Paul had taken seriously his notion of lifting the mundane to the level of the spiritual. He demonstrated a way of being in the world, an intentional way of living that had the potential for his every greeting, word, and interaction to be energized with spiritual meaning (Ortiz & Langer, 2002). Paul described how the ordinary becomes the extraordinary through the meaning we give it.

> The geese have no intention to cast their reflections. The lake has no mind to receive their image. (fortune cookie, as cited in Dass & Gorman, 2014, p. 41)

Mel told me, *"I don't think about trying to be good. I just do it that's all."* I experienced Mel as humble and reticent to talk about the good he does. Here I include a few anecdotes as his friend and neighbour of 15 years, which are meant to give the reader a glimpse into the quality and extent of Mel's belonging.

In my experience, Mel has been an exemplar of what it means to be a loyal friend and neighbour. For example, on the street on which he spent most of his life, he adopted the responsibility for the care of an elder widow's property. Mel and his wife had been longtime friends with Rosa and her husband. Mel mowed Rosa's lawn and maintained her vegetable and flower garden for about fifteen years following her husband's death

and until she died—it was a garden she enjoyed immensely. With Mel's help, Rosa continued to enjoy her garden when she could no longer care for it on her own. Rosa took pleasure in giving garden tours and generously shared her flowers. I remember once swooning over her stunning patch of royal blue flowers, and before I had finished my gush of admiration, she had asked Mel to dig some up for me. When I objected to disfiguring her perfect oasis at its peak of beauty, she kindly complained that they were "spreading all over the place." Mel dug up a few plants, and she encouraged him to give me more. He nodded and dug further into her beautiful swath. Mel lifted the dense, sprawling clumps with his shovel into a bucket that was orange with rust. Carefully tucking the rambling roots inside, he offered to carry it to my home. Long after my garden reverie faded and the chill of fall took Rosa's blooms, remembering their kindness and their care for one another still inspires me.

Mel also pruned Rosa's trees. It was a big job and an annual event. Rosa told me her apple trees were almost as old as she was, which was 88. They still produced a bounty of purple-red apples every fall that made a joyful picture against the golden leaves of October and the bright blue prairie sky. Each year, Mel distributed the harvest to neighbours and to any community groups that would take them. Now one of Rosa's trees was a crabapple, and it was no easy giveaway. But Mel persisted, and most of us neighbours relented from time to time. It was hard to say no to Mel's goodhearted distribution of our neighbour's bounty. I remember he showed up on my doorstep one day offering me bags of crabapples from a stacked wheelbarrow behind him, the same colour as Rosa's apples. When I explained to Mel that I did not think I had time to do

anything with them, he suggested that I could cook the apples without peeling them. Mel's humour was never far from his sense of duty. And I learned he was right.

Mel's willingness to become involved in the lives of others characterized his belonging. What mattered to his neighbours mattered to Mel. I have a lasting image of Mel leaning on his shovel ready to help. It seemed that he was always digging something up for someone. I recall a neighbour who once found a struggling young tree where it would eventually be removed for development. Mel offered to dig it up in order to give it a chance to live and replanted it in our neighbour's garden, not far from the public walkway. Under this neighbour's attentive care, a few blossoms became a rosy flamboyance; their delicate fragrance, a wistful potpourri of water lily and honeysuckle, has heralded each spring since.

Mel had an eye for what was lovely. Across the years of our friendship, Mel has introduced me to the allure of deep yellow Persian roses and the dark and fragrant Sarah Sands lilac, a portion of which he dug up and brought to me; windflowers—pure white and luminous in the twilight like slips of the moon; and rosy-tongued wildflowers humming with bees—the beauty within our neighbourhood. From Mel, I learned valuable gardening tips, such as the best time to plant garlic and harvest their scapes and the knowledge that raspberries grow only on second-year wood. Most importantly, I learned the gentle art of leaning on my shovel to talk with passersby.

Mel had a reputation for connecting people and their resources, often interceding on behalf of another's need. Mel told me about his friends, a homeless couple who would rest on a bench in the park behind his house after collecting bottles. Mel kept their cart in his yard each night to protect their belongings from theft. I have also observed Mel to

welcome and befriend persons who were new immigrants living in the temporary housing in our neighbourhood. As I walked along the street, it was not unusual for Mel to enthusiastically introduce me to someone new whom he wanted me to meet. Mel seemed to really listen to and value others and their stories and enjoyed sharing his own. He was aware of and responsive to what was going on in the world, knowledgeable about its history, geography, and political events, and he cared about people.

The way Mel genuinely valued and welcomed others revealed his extraordinary gift of inviting others into the life of the neighbourhood, as he had with my family. As I wrote these anecdotes about Mel, I experienced afresh the goodness of Mel; a feeling of joy, thankfulness, and hope lifted my spirit. Perhaps when we appreciate the goodness of others, we connect with what is good in ourselves and are reminded that "the *good life* comes from what we care about" (May, 2007, p. 290).

The gift of a meaning and a purpose for the day (Paul). The following anecdote highlights the importance of meaning to well-being. Paul's experience of meaning and giving broke into the darkness and isolation he had been feeling during his recovery after his acute health crisis and as he adjusted to his diagnosis.

I was speaking with Paul late one morning. He told me: It was one *"dreary"* day. He said that he had awakened *"feeling kind of low and negative."* He did not feel like going to church. Paul said then that the telephone rang; it was a call from a friend at the soup kitchen where he had served for many years. While talking, they decided they would get together for a visit. Paul told me he was preparing to go to his friend's place later in the day, so he began making tea biscuits to bring as well as biscuits for his daughter and grandchild that he planned to deliver. This, he said, had brightened him, and

his heavy feeling lightened with what he perceived to be *"the gift of a meaning and a purpose for the day."*

As Paul recovered from his medical crisis, he expressed his need to experience a familiar and meaningful belonging. Paul sounded exuberant when he told me he had completed the security check and paperwork for a new volunteer position, saying, *"Now I'm waiting for the call to be turned into a volunteer for hospice."* Although Paul had *"a lot of training as a social worker and experience with the dying,"* he said, *"I am prepared to accept the simplest job, chopping onions or chopping potatoes for the kitchen. That's all I need, just something to do, to give to others what I have."* I asked Paul about his decision to volunteer with hospice. He explained: *"I think it's because physically I found myself hanging too much alone and, you know, missing the activity and the action, if you will, of being involved with a project, a meaning."* When I asked Paul what got him up in the morning, he iterated the importance of *"a meaningful purpose to doing things for others, to being with others in the name of the Lord."*

Paul expressed his spiritual need to be part of a meaningful belonging, which nourished his inner life and well-being. Paul's *"doing things for others"* and *"being with others in the name of the Lord"* was a spiritual companioning that enlivened him and brought God's love, care, and hope to others. It involved both a giving to and receiving from others. It was his meaning for rising from bed in the morning.

Subtheme: The good example. I heard a song on the radio recently that instructed, "We need to know what our hearts are made for before we can know paradise" (author and song unknown). Paul knew the raison d'être of his heart: *"It seems that there*

is a general thing, that all mankind will know, whether it is religion or not, the fact that the heart of man is made for good and that it is not made for doing evil."

Paul told me: *"Our heart is always looking for good."* He used the word *"good"* often in his description of the spiritual life. In his heart's search for good, one of the ways Paul spoke of doing good was to be a *"good example."* Paul believed,

> *If you live a good life in front of other people, there seems to be no question that it will give them a chance to decide in their mind either to not want a better life or to wish for a better life.*

Paul highlighted the importance of the good example in conveying the value of the spiritual life:

> *It may be kind of vain to think you're such a good example that other people would be improved . . . but, in another sense, that is basically where you are. That is what you are to do . . . to be. A person that is most directing his life in good.*

Being a good example to others, as Paul viewed it, is part of belonging and encouraging others to belong. Paul was respectful of others and their beliefs. He was unequivocally opposed to any attempts to commandeer the faith of others: *"I don't have to win over another person's faith. All I have to do, for sure, is to be convinced of my own and represent it."* In being a good example, Paul stated that it is possible to influence others in the search for good within themselves and their own lives. Attending to the good example of others was a way to see the possibilities in one's own life, to liberate one's own truth. Paul explained: *"To look at people and see the reflection of God's way in action makes your own experience, you know, real to you."* In the following anecdote, Paul's nephew reveals this truth in speaking of his uncle's good example:

My earliest memories of my uncle were of his visits to our house. My uncle was always bright and happy to see us. He was often involved in sociopolitical issues like unions or fair treatment for Indigenous people and other grassroots causes. One day he came to our house sporting a large colourful metal pin that proclaimed, "Don't Eat California Grapes." He was animated as he explained how these disenfranchised workers were being exploited by rich farm families who hired them. This was a big issue at the time (although I was not aware of it before his visit), and my uncle wanted to educate and engage people to help correct these inequities. My uncle was the first person to show me such a strong social conscience. I learned that there was much more to my generous, passionate, and boisterous uncle. I enjoyed his energy and his zest for life. He was always ready to laugh or sing, and he was ready to fight for what he believed too. He showed an honest, caring, and courageous heart that I respect—an example that I attempt to follow to this day.

Paul described the ongoing importance and influence of the good example to his own development. Paul spoke of the ideal of Jesus: *"To achieve what He [Jesus] did would be the ideal . . . to go for it and try to, in my own small way, attempt something of that kind."* He emphasized how the pastor of his youth had influenced his spiritual development. Paul described his pastor as *"a great friend to the poor. . . . He sacrificed his own life, as it were, daily life, for the good of serving the poor . . . helping them in whatever way he could."* At another time, Paul said, *"So, that this pastor, I would say, was a great influence in developing a consciousness of what the real value and meaning of the spiritual life was."* Paul told me this pastor continued to be an inspiration to him

because he remembered *"his words, his presence, his exposition upon the lives of the Saints."*

Paul described how he continued to hear and respond to the call of the Spirit through the example of his colleagues with whom he volunteered: *"And the people I'm involved with most now is with the L'Arche group . . . so these people that I'm involved with have given me a boost in terms of how to serve well, how to serve well."* I was surprised to learn that, at 91, Paul was still influenced by the example of others. It exposed my ageist assumption that as an exceptional elder of his age, he would be beyond learning from a good example and would simply *be* one.

Paul noticed and encouraged those around him. Paul encouraged me by telling me of my good example when I thanked him, in appreciation, at the end of an interview. He spontaneously described how he had received *"strength or wisdom"* from my example as a parent—*"your conduct with your family."* He told me,

> *[Names of children], you know, they're just tremendous kids. They've done good with their own families, they're doing good with their own lives. I feel it's your example that has been steady and persistent. . . . You are good. . . . You have proved the way that is good.*

In Paul's words and voice, I felt his love and encouragement. The way Paul noticed and valued others and his openness to learning from their example seemed part of his *"keeping a beautiful rose in a beautiful garden."* Paul recognized both the power of the good example in encouraging others to belong and in nurturing his own spiritual growth.

Paul was proud of how his daughter had found her own way to serve others: *"I'm proud too, of the way [child's name] has devised methods to give service to the*

community, too, and I speak of it often to her, how proud I am." Perhaps his good example was an inspiration for his daughter's community service.

According to Paul, living one's spiritual values was not about chronological age, but it was *"the choice of responding to the offer"* that activated the inner call, *"the choice of going deeper."* For Paul, the good example was an invitation to others to respond. To acknowledge the good example of others was to value their unique gifts and contributions and to celebrate the collective wealth of our belonging.

Paul continued to pursue his development, not only through his direct contact with others but also through his reading about *"great people."* Paul said,

> *Well, I've done some heavy reading on great people. Right now . . . David Suzuki's book, his own autobiography. . . . And I read Mahatma Gandhi twice. And I'm getting into people of great quality and wondering what makes them tick . . . and perhaps, there's something I can learn.*

Paul described his spiritual growth since his retirement at age 70: *"I found my attitudes are wider and more loving, although maybe generally speaking, being the same. I was also more relaxed, more comfortable with all of humanity."* Paul used the phrase *"hanging loose"* in describing his break from some of the strict rules, which he once thought were necessary, such as those passed down from the *"bishops or cardinals who governed the districts that are under their command."* Paul explained:

> *You see that those rules may be important for the moment or the time but, generally speaking, they may not be as apt to fit new times, new generations. So you begin, then, to widen your understanding about, oh let's say, the differences of church, Muslim or Brahmanism, or Hinduism . . . all those things that have*

so-called values for certain locations but not universal. Now, you are beginning to find that there are universal things about those values of human beings in other places that really fit in your time too. If they do, then there is no reason why you have to be so strict and rigid as before; you may understand that what is leading you is not the thought of man, but the thought of God . . . and so you can, as it were, waffle with it and not waffle with the basic spiritual core that is yourself.

Inherent in Mel's habit of doing good was his good example. Mel told me: *"I think you are influenced by the people that are around you. You see what other people do."* Like Paul, Mel spoke of his growing awareness of others' perspectives over time. His observations and reflections refined his inner code. Within an expanding self and world, Mel undertook greater commitment and responsibility for others in his life, for example, through his participation as a youth in the work of the garden and in the Second World War, his career, his marriage, his becoming a parent and a grandparent, and in his being a neighbour. The experiences of Mel and Paul suggested that the practical "doing" of their values in everyday life contributed to their personal growth and a deepening understanding and appreciation of their spiritual values. Mel told me that he did not think about doing good but just did it. Paul captured this, too, when he said,

You have nothing at all to gain from yourself, or from others until you begin to exercise . . . begin to do. And then, as you do that, as you grow in relationships with others and you grow your relationship with the meaning of the sacraments and the spiritual life.

The notion that doing is the beginning of understanding is also pointed out by Himes (1995), who states, "One has to *do* the doctrine before one can understand the doctrine" (Himes, 1995, p. 20).

Mel's good example was apparent in his care and commitment to his family. From what Mel told me, his middle-aged children were now demonstrating their own good example in the lives of their young adult children. Mel's everyday relationships were perhaps the most potent way he influenced and inspired others.

In exploring his experience as a neighbour, Mel contemplated:

> *I guess, you know, since we've been talking here . . . I guess it's an idea, it's the emergence of a leader, I guess . . . there are people that step forward, eh, and try to get things going."*

When I reflected that he was doing this in his own way, Mel said, *"Well, now that I kind of look back, I guess that's true, you know. . . . Because I'll do things, you know, and without actually thinking about it, I just do it. I don't know."* Mel's words expressed his integrity, as well as his modesty. Mel led by example. His helping and everyday care was a reflexive response. He told me, *"I don't really think about 'that I'm helping.'"* He added, *"I mean if I'm outside and I'm going some place. . . . I'm walking down the path, and there's a branch on the path. . . . I don't step over it, I move it to the side."*

Going beyond what others might consider his responsibility was a matter of course for Mel:

> *Oh, I've always done things beyond what would normally be thought of what I had to do . . . I'm willing to do more . . . because the people of the community are*

no different from me. So if I'm trying to do something for myself, I'm doing things for the rest of the community.

Mel's self-revelation reminded me of Dass and Gorman's (2014) view of helping as a natural response to understanding our interdependence (p. 49). From this perspective, they suggest that our caring is "not so much helping out, then, because it's 'me' needing to tend to 'you.' We're helping out because it's *'Us.'"* (Dass & Gorman, 2014, p. 49). Mel offered his experience earlier in the day as an example:

I was just thinking here this morning . . . I take the dog out [someone else's dog] and I don't know if you remember there's a path . . . yeah, you took that path to go to the river . . . It's not shovelled . . . I don't know if somebody's supposed to shovel it or not, but I thought if I had a shovel, I would shovel it, you know.

Mel's contribution to creating and maintaining a spirit of togetherness, care, and cooperation in the community were important ways in which he demonstrated his values and the good example he inspired in others.

Mel talked about his desire and ongoing efforts to preserve the tradition of the community garden:

I still want to make sure that things are going properly in the garden, that we don't falter and have the City maybe cancel it or something like that. So, if I can keep the people that are involved on their toes and thinking about this, that would please me very much.

Mel described his unique contribution and role in keeping the garden going. He told me about a time when interest in the garden had waned. Working alone, Mel voluntarily took on the responsibility for the care and maintenance of the garden. He said,

"I didn't want the garden to be . . . lie foul . . . so I planted a whole bunch of pumpkins because they take up a lot of space and that would reduce the amount of work that I had to do." Unfortunately, the pumpkins were stolen before harvest. The flourishing of the garden today has a lot to do with Mel's hard work and creativity over the years, his refusal to become discouraged, and his unfailing commitment to the values for which the garden stands.

Mel has led garden tours for schoolchildren on behalf of their teachers. He explained how the teachers

> *saw what was going on in the neighbourhood. They thought it would be a good idea to get the children on a tour. They asked for tours, you know, so they could, you know, learn something . . . that products don't come from [names of grocery stores], there's a history of going back to some farmer or whoever produces these agricultural products.*

Mel enthusiastically shared his idea to have a chicken coop in the garden, so children *"could learn about feeding and caring for chickens and collecting eggs."*

Mel was waiting for a phone call to schedule an interview that he had agreed to do about local history. I was aware that Mel had done a number of interviews in the past. I asked him about his involvement with the media and how it had started:

> *Mainly I think it started with the community garden. People walk by and you tell them how the garden started and the history of it and people go away and remember these things . . . and so you kind of build up a reputation. . . . Well, when it comes to the garden, I show them how, give them the background . . . the*

way the developments led with the garden, different stages, what happened and what we have today.

Mel pointed out how conversation about the garden would often lead to conversation about his *"personal background"* and the way things were when he was growing up: *"I try to show people exactly how life was when I was a child and the things that went down in the neighbourhood, and how life went down daily, what we had to do and so forth."* Mel passed along history, tradition, and a spirituality of belonging to younger persons, providing them with rich material from which to create and harvest their own meanings.

Mel and Paul can be described as "keepers of the neighbourhood" (Gilmore, as cited in Carlsen, 1996, p. 206), persons who preserve and enhance "the continuity, spirit, and well-being of those around them" (Carlsen, 1996, p. 206). The welcome and kindness of Mel and Paul impressed me as an unsung heroism. Kindness is a face of love. Kindness may be common when we are feeling moved or generous, but to live kindly each day speaks of something greater. For Mel and Paul, kindness did not appear as a feeling that fluctuated but a quality of being, a virtue of their hearts. I imagined Paul and Mel as "inns" at the side of the road, welcoming friends and weary travellers alike. As a friend, I have experienced the warmth and fidelity of their hearts in the kindness they have shown me over the years. It has inspired in me a feeling of thankfulness, my own good example, and my desire to live kindly. Dass and Gorman (2014) state that "when you feel yourself to be a vehicle of kindness, an instrument of love. There's more to the deed than the doer and what's been done. You yourself feel transformed and connected to a deeper sense of identity" (p. 39).

Subtheme: That good feeling: Joy, gratitude, aliveness, connectedness, wonder, awe, mystery.

> Everywhere in the world joy is the true expression of gratefulness. (Steindl-Rast, 1984, p. 18)

Feelings of gratefulness, joy, or en*joy*ment were associated with belonging and hope. Although the joys of Mel and Paul often conveyed happiness, I use joy broadly, here, in the way Himes (1995) discerns joy from happiness as something deeper and more stable: "Joy is the interior conviction that what one is doing is good even if it does not make one happy or content" (p. 57). Gratefulness, joy, and pleasure were expressed in the voices of Mel and Paul as they described their experience of family and friendship. Joy and thankfulness shaped what they looked forward to, their hope for their children and grandchildren, and their desire to see them happy and fulfill their goals. They were heard in the timbre of Paul's song of the beloved and "heart-felt" in the tender touch of Mel's fingers along Mati's forehead. Joy and harmony were the glorious attributes of heaven, the reward of the eternal presence of God, which Paul greatly anticipated. Gratefulness was the wholehearted response of Mel and Paul to the joy and pleasure of belonging.

Both Mel and Paul expressed their joy and pleasure in watching and supporting young people realize their goals and potential. When I asked Mel what gave him joy, he told me*:*

> *I think the biggest thing for me is, when I look at young people, I like to see that they progress and are able to do the things that they want to do that are really beneficial to them and all the things that they do is actually better for society.*

Paul described his joy:

> *Well, I have seen children with their parents on the bus or on the street and the children who are bright and lively. . . . It just helps me to understand the goodness of giving to them. The forms of happiness . . . the building of a child into manhood or to womanhood . . . that sort of thing makes me feel alive, makes me feel brighter and happier.*

Mel and Paul demonstrated a vital connection in their interactions with children and young people. For example, at a family gathering, Paul's hand was the hand our grandchild reached for while she practiced walking up and down the stairs. His attentive, twinkling eyes and dulcet voice seemed to delight her heart. Their attunement was a joy to observe.

When we first introduced Mel to our 5-year-old grandson, we were in the community garden together. Within a couple of minutes of their meeting, Mel had invited our grandson to join him in harvesting vegetables. What a pleasure to listen to their easy companionship and to watch them, side-by-side, pulling carrots out of the earth.

I have also observed Mel and Paul in conversation with young people in their teens and 20s. They revealed their joy and hope in these young people by their genuine interest in them, their questions about their lives, and their attentive listening and responsiveness. Both Mel and Paul enjoyed connection and friendship with people of all ages. It seems age does not matter in the heart of belonging.

Gratia agens (Paul).

> Through everything that becomes present to us, we gaze toward the train of the eternal You. (Buber, 1996, p. 150)

Paul identified his experiences of God's love and goodness all as *"gratia agens."* This Latin phrase overflows with relational meaning and intimacy, as Paul described it—a meaning that brings the giver and receiver together in an ongoing reciprocity of grace giving. Grace turned Paul's loving gaze to God and evoked his thankfulness, joy, and adoration—a return of grace to God that joined them in intimacy. Paul described this movement as steps in a Divine dance of gratia agens.

Paul described experiences of heightened intimacy and closeness to God. He described the beauty and action of nature as gift and the mystery of God's love and influence in his life. In the following passage, Paul's experience with his neighbour has a noetic quality:

> *And, while I was talking with her, the wind in this area being quite strong, I noticed that one seed from the dandelion . . . one little . . . you know how the dandelion has a big puff of seeds when it gets mature . . . And, one seed was coming out of the wind and beginning to settle on the ground and I said now that is how dandelions spread themselves and, you know, I said, now, what is the influence of the wind and God, in God`s mind, in order to have that particular seed land in that particular place? It didn't land where I expected. . . . It landed in a spot that I could see would be a proper place for it to begin to germinate. Now these little instances that, everyday instances, that happen, speak to me about the inner life, the spiritual life, the life of God as it influences my life.*
>
> Paul told me of another instance:
>
> *Looking out the window this morning . . . I saw how the trees were fully in bloom and rich, rich lush leafage, so, the trees had been so bare, so empty only a few*

weeks, earlier. Right now, they are rich with colour and with leaf and the wind was causing the trees to wave back and forth and I could almost imagine the trees bowing their head and saying "yes to the Lord . . . yes to the Lord," because the Lord was influencing them towards their full life. And this taught me . . . there are many influences from the Lord. I may not see them as I see the trees, but I do see . . . I see how He can influence human beings, me included, in the good life.

His poetic words communicated the mystery of God's perfect and loving influence towards the full potential of creation. Paul expressed other moments of grace in *"looking at the sky,"* at *"the sparkle of water,"* and in being *"forgiven."* These were colourful strands in the thick weave of grace that penetrated his life.

Paul described a recent experience that connected him to an experience of grace as a younger person. As Paul looked out his window at the sight of strawberry flowers outside his home, he remembered a time after playing tennis as a young man. Near the tennis court, he found a field of strawberry plants—ripe with fruit. He described how seeing the fruit brought him into the grace of the present moment: *"I found strawberries and they were plump, and rich, and sweet. And, I enjoyed them so much that I think of that whenever I see these little white flowers all over this land ."*

When I read Paul the analysis, he elucidated:

I found interest and consolation when I spotted the rich reward of the fruit of the strawberry. . . . It's all the grace of God in motion working through our senses and our lives for His purpose. The grace He meant for you and, or for me. Sometimes we are more conscious of it. He brings it to us, and to others, to each of us in our way.

Paul described his experience as *"the grace of God rewarding our lives for searching."* Nature lifted Paul's spirit:

> *And, just . . . the sparkle of water . . . I've always noticed it since, any time that I find a body of water, whether it is a lake or an ocean . . . It just seems to fascinate me and helps me to remember the joys of life, rather than the sorrows.*

Mystery penetrated the whole of existence. When I asked Paul directly if there were any mysteries for him, he said, *"I think the whole of life is a mystery."*

> *So, that everything tangible to me . . . everything touchable, visible . . . becomes a mystery because there is another meaning to all this beauty, to all this strength, to all the wind, the waves . . . you know, they are all, in a way, visible signs of something else that is happening around us. And, we can become enveloped with the mystery of one person loving another. The greater mystery would be what would the immense . . . un-needing God have for loving the small creature that He sees on Earth.*

Paul spoke of some of the rich symbolism and Catholic iconography that mediated his faith. The lit candles in the church, he told me, represented *"the life of Christ is always burning, burning for people to come."* He interpreted *"the sign of the cross,"* as it appears in its diverse contexts and interpretations, and explained the Catholic Sacraments as *"the visible, tangible sign of an inner flowing . . . that God pours His love and grace to the human heart."* All of these held rich meaning as holy containers of the Mystery.

When I asked Mel how he felt when he was in the garden, he described an experience of relaxation and enjoyment, an alert peacefulness:

Well, it's kind of relaxing because of the circumstances. I mean you're back in nature, you're not listening to somebody advertising something like on TV. Here you're working, you're bending over, you are cleaning out weeds or whatever and there's a tangible evidence of what you've done. If you've done it right, there is satisfaction.

Nature provided soulful pleasure, an experience of rest and renewal that rewarded his being in the garden. Mel expressed satisfaction in the *"tangible evidence"* of what he accomplished in bringing his hands and body into harmonious relationship with nature. In his garden experience, nature refreshed and collaborated with the heart of Mel. Mel's sensory style was an important way Mel approached and enjoyed life.

It's got to be a new thing (Mel). When I asked Mel about times when he has felt or feels fully alive, *"new"* was a word he used each time in describing his experiences. For example, after the Second World War ended, he told me:

Ah, well, I think the period after I got out of the air force. . . . The war was finally over and we didn't have to deal with people dying and it was a new era. Hopefully, we thought that well, we're over that and now we can do things that we like to do.

When he married, Mel explained,

So this is a new thing for a person. You have to think of things that you are going to do . . . a lot of things . . . your life is changing . . . you're not just thinking of yourself. You're thinking of new things, you look at people, what they're doing, and you try to pick up on favourable things and do those things for yourself.

Change brought new challenges that seemed to enliven Mel, appearing at times to bring relief, hope, and a fresh sense of freedom and expansion—new beginnings and fresh opportunities that would ask something more of him. When I asked Mel if he would tell me about a recent experience in which he felt fully alive, he described his experience of the natural disaster that had led to his decision to move to a new home and community. Mel told me:

> *We had to pull ourselves out of this muck and think about what are we going to do. It's got to be a new thing. So, we started to think of what we were going to do so we got into the [type of dwelling], which is a completely new idea, and I am still trying to get used to it . . . but, overall, I think it was a good move and . . . I think things are going to be alright. . . . We decided we should sell and move on. And that is just what we did.*

His view of the change as a *"good move,"* and his statement, *"I think things are going to be alright"* suggested his ability to manage and *"move on"* despite the stress and upheaval he described. Mel emphasized that the decision to move and the choice of location, which was near to his children, was a family decision. It spoke to me of his closeness with his family and his trust in his family as an important source of support. Mel's children took the lead in organizing their move and in setting up their new home. Mel described a give-and-take exchange among family members of which he sounded proud. Mel told me, for example, that his son and grandchild had helped him set up his new computer, and his son was helping him learn to manage his personal business online. I was impressed with Mel's interest and ability to undertake the new technology.

Mel enjoyed people. He valued his friendships and his connections with others. Mel was known for talking with people wherever he went. He said,

> *Well, I don't think there are many things now. I mean, we are in the period of our lives where things are winding down so you're not going to be embarking on something new that you haven't done before. So, essentially, I think you are just biding your time now. I go out with friends and, I'm gregarious, I try to talk to people. I think it is my nature that people, when they see me, are . . . they are usually friendly and happy to see me and I'm happy to see them.*

Mel's words *"just biding your time now"* seemed to echo his peace and satisfaction with his life and his acceptance of its finitude; at the same time, they contrasted sharply with his bright countenance as he spoke of his friends and of the mutually *"friendly and happy"* interactions he experienced. Perhaps Mel's friendships, all of whom were younger persons now, and his regular encounters with new people ignited a feeling of aliveness and connection that invigorated him. Mel's most important generative efforts were focused on his children and grandchildren who were engaged with the excitement and challenges of younger adulthood. Mel found meaning and satisfaction in helping them to fulfill their dreams. It seemed that Mel was in no hurry to board the bus (to eternity); he was having a great time at the station.

As I reviewed my own writing, I noticed my repetition of the word fresh. Mel has reminded me of my own need for refreshment as part of nourishing my spirit and the good feeling that comes from being vitally connected with life. And yet "new" is not simply novelty, the new must be meaningful, as it was for Mel, to enliven and invite

something from me. As I reflected, I realized that feeling alive is the nub of my experience of being with Mel.

Mel's curiosity in everyday life was a signpost and aspect of his aliveness. Mel told me he recently discovered an objet trouvé, which he found buried in the community garden while he was digging. It displayed an obscure symbol, which no one had been able to explain. Mel had done some investigation, but its source and history remained unsolved. Mel told me,*" There's an answer to all this."* He told me he was considering bringing this puzzle to public radio while he continued his own research: *"And if I can stir up some interest . . . leave a kind of an intriguing question for them . . . Get them thinking."* I could hear his excitement.

One of the primary ways that Mel appeared to approach mystery was through his questions. When I asked Mel if there were any mysteries about life for him, he answered, *"I think the biggest question for me is our existence on the planet."* Near the end of our interview, Mel sat beside me at his dining table holding a closed compass (a two-armed drawing instrument) that he had removed from a drawer. Using the compass as an analogue, he opened an arm. Widening its angle, he explained how we are exploring light years into the expansion of the universe, but can we explore as far in the other direction to *"the beginnings of things"*? he asked. Mel marvelled, *"There's no means of measuring it when you are very close to the start of the angle. If you go way out . . . and it's just limitless. It's amazing."* He explained, *"So the vertex is just like the origin."* At one point, Mel said, *"There's a limit to our senses. I wonder what's the range that we don't . . . that we can't sense?"* Mel postulated, *"Maybe there are ideas that are even beyond our minds."* Mel spoke to me about quantum physics and the properties of light. He

questioned, *"How far does the light ray go? Does it continue on forever?"* Mel talked spontaneously and passionately, and when he finished, he said, *"Here's another idea."*

Mel's experience of wonder and curiosity enlivened him; his curiosity fuelled his search for answers and kept him interested in life: *"Oh, so many questions. I wish I could live long enough to see some of the results . . . maybe some understanding can be cast on some of these things."* Mel expressed a profound engagement with the meaning of life that was grounded in the vernacular and reached out to the stars. It seemed his questions were the sacred containers for the mystery he experienced.

Subtheme: Accepting it all, peace, and satisfaction.

> When we are crushed like grapes, we cannot think of the wine we will become. (Nouwen, 2006, p. 54)

Paul told me that although his life had turned out differently than he had once imagined, generally, he felt satisfied with the choices he had made: *"And, yet, now that I am here, having done it, I can look back and say that I have done a satisfactory job."* I asked him what he had found satisfactory. He told me,

> *Ah, loving people, number one. Loving people and being mutually . . . mutually agreeable, I guess I'd say. Not thinking that they necessarily love me, but hoping that they would. But giving out love was, and being sort of a server . . . being a person who dealt with serving others . . . that was my main satisfaction.*

His memories of a rich and meaningful belonging were associated with feelings of peace and satisfaction and seemed to contribute to his spiritual well-being.

Paul described what gave him a sense of peace: *"Well, a sense of peace for me is in communion with my God . . . so that when I know that I am in accord with the*

Creator." When he is in accord with God, Paul told me, he is in accord with everything else. Paul experienced peace when he was in harmony with the life and words of Christ in what he did or attempted to do and with the messengers of God, such as the spiritual leaders.

I asked Paul if he would tell me about a specific time when he experienced communion with God. He told me about two significant events; one of these was his ordination to the priesthood:

> *When I was ordained in the priestly work, there was a very strong feeling that I was on the right road . . . one of the major peaceful times of my existence on Earth.*

Paul described a second experience when, as a youth, he felt peace, joy and renewal in the forgiveness of God through the Sacrament of Confession: *"I had the feeling of brightness, lightness, of joy, of wanting to start again."* Paul added, *"That peaceful feeling, is that you have done a good job,"* which evoked feelings of harmony, satisfaction, and esteem. Paul told me that he felt peaceful when *"helping others"* as a priest and as a social worker. He described ongoing experiences of closeness to God: *"I have moments of what would you call reflection . . . moments even longer periods of the presence of God in my life . . . It brings me a closer communion."*

Paul reflected, *"I feel that I have grown in the spiritual life, become mature and discerning,"* and added, *"You become more peaceful about oppositions."* Yet, he said, *"You could still have regrets. Sometimes they burn and twist inside you."* Healing is our natural response to the deep bruisings of life. Paul spoke of the importance of forgiveness to healing and of the Sacrament of Forgiveness and said, *"If you know you have made*

mistakes and have not healed . . . with God's help if you forgive yourself and you forgive others in the same breath."

Paul gave an account of an earlier career goal in his life, which was thwarted but led to *"growth in other areas."*

> *So, it is funny how some things work and others things don't. I guess you have to accept the fact that your limits are in certain areas and your growth is in other areas. It is . . . it's attached in a way to your spiritual outlook because you have to accept your failures as well as accept what other people have achieved as good.*

Paul described his experience overall:

> *So, that is kind of like my experience in the spiritual life and at various events. Sad things and difficult things, and then good things too. . . . If you're a winner, it is good but you must also be understanding of the losing aspect of your life too . . . accepting it all, that is right.*

When I asked Mel what gave him a sense of peace, he told me:

> *So this often is what I think is the main thing that gives me a sense of peace that "I'm going to deal with it, I'll handle it" . . . and the time will come when this will all be straightened around and we'll move on.*

When I asked Mel if he would tell me about a specific time that he had felt peaceful, he responded:

> *I don't think there's any particular time that I can say that things are more peaceful at any particular time than any other time. I think problems come up and I try to deal with them and so, maybe momentarily it's not so peaceful but, generally, things are okay. I'm satisfied with things.*

For Mel, finding his *"strength in my moral values"* and living close to his code seemed to have contributed to his peace and satisfaction with his life. Aligned with the values of his code, his personal goals and decisions had proved to be rewarding. Mel indicated that although he experienced some regret looking back over his life, for the most part, he felt satisfied and confident about the choices he had made, *"I think the things that we [he and his wife] believed in and the things we did were the best things for us."* Among other things, they were decisions that appeared to support the happiness of their marriage and the cultivation of close relationships with their children and grandchildren.

Mel expressed acceptance and gratefulness for his life as it flowed from the past into the present. When I asked Mel how he saw his spirituality as benefiting him in his everyday life, he replied: *"I conduct myself in such a manner that I think is the proper way of doing it. I am . . . my conscience is clear. . . . I'm not feeling guilty about anything."* Living close to his values and *"staying the course"* had led to life choices that had nourished his happiness and gratitude. Feelings of love, joy and enjoyment, satisfaction and peace (to include an absence of guilt) suggested an overall experience of well-being, even as Mel and his wife faced her failing health. Mel stressed the need to be flexible:

> *You try to take steps to reach a certain objective and if you can do it . . . fine and dandy but there's lots of things that happen in life that are things that you would think that they just happen and you have no control of them . . . so you need to be flexible too.*

Mel and Paul identified their conscience as the voice of their ultimate values, the conductor on the train keeping watch over the integrity of their journey. Paul explained, *"The spiritual is supreme and the conscience would be supreme as part of that spirit."* Although Paul and Mel were not without regrets, overall, they felt satisfied and at peace with the choices they had made.

Subtheme: Flexibility, adaptability, and resilience. Paul and Mel both demonstrated flexibility and resilience in their ability to flow with the changes and the challenges of their lives, which they conveyed in the stories they told. They appeared open to life—listening, responding, and adapting to where their lives were leading. *"Move on"* was a phrase they both spoke or suggested that signalled movement in their lives. Paul used this phrase in describing his belief that the physical body dies but the spirit *"moves on."* Paul also expressed this in his willingness to surrender to God and to others what he could no longer do for himself. The notion of moving on was inherent in the process of letting go and *"hanging loose"* that spoke of flexibility, discernment, and spiritual growth. It was apparent in Mel's courageous choices and actions as he faced the challenges of his life and and as he coped with loss and change. The ability of Paul and Mel to avoid becoming stuck at points, places, and feelings seemed to keep them in the flow of life, undistracted ultimately from the meaning of their lives.

Subtheme: Hope—trust in belonging.

Magnified and sanctified
Be Thy Holy Name
Vilified and crucified
In the human frame

A million candles burning
For the love that never came
You want it darker
We kill the flame

—Leonard Cohen, "You Want It Darker"

Some might describe the world as a place of tremendous darkness, alienation and violence, sorrow, and despair. Yet in the face of world conditions, past and present, and the trials and tribulations of their own lives, Paul and Mel chose hope, turning to those places where they found light and could share their light.

Hope is trust, Paul told me:

> *Hope is the same, to me, as trust. If you trust a person and that trust is realized, even in a look or a simple action. . . . That would be the beginnings of hope for me and, then, when you build that to a larger scope with other human beings with the generality of humanity, then I would find that hope increases in me.*

Mel revealed his core values of belonging that captured his hope for humanity. His use of the word "should" indicated ideals that represented ultimate values or principles. I asked Mel what gives him hope. He described his hope in humanity's dawning realization *"that we are all in this together"*:

> *I think the thing that gives me hope is that, I think, globally, of all the people, that I think as we go along in life . . . the people will realize the way we should all live. Eventually, I think everybody is going to realize that we can't have biases, think negatively about certain things, look at other people and think that they are inferior . . . but, eventually, they will realize that we are all in this together. If we work together, we are going to have an environment that's good for us and, if you can use the word "environment" for human relations, that we will progress and leave all the rivalries behind. I think, slowly we are coming to that.*

Mel told me that apart from *"closer friends,"* he does not *"really trust anybody."* He said, *"I can't really say that there's one person or government, or what-not, that I would give my full confidence to,"* pointing out the failed promises of elections, political leadership, institutions, and religious wars fighting over differences in ideology. He spoke of his *"wariness of everything that goes around me."* Yet without optimism, Mel commented,

> *You become cynical and say the heck with it, I'm not going to think about it. . . . I don't think I would find life very enjoyable if I didn't have a feeling of optimism that things are improving.*

Mel chose to be hopeful. He continued to give, to reach out to help and encourage others, to cast his vote, to promote social and spiritual values through his trustworthy example, and to collaborate with others for the benefit of the community.

Mel expressed his hope for his loved ones. When I asked Mel what he looked forward to, he said,

> *Well, personally, with relatives, what I look forward to . . . I hope things turn out well for my [children], [their]marriage, and the grandchildren, that they are happy and are able to do the sorts of things that are important in their life. Because, if you do the things that are important in your life, well, that goes a long way to keep you happy.*

Mel spoke of his hope to help his family. Despite his recognition of the poor prognosis for his wife's condition, Mel hoped that he could help Mati and demonstrated his love and hope through his everyday care and support of her. He also expressed his hope for the *"friendly and happy"* interactions and companionship he enjoyed with

others and the Meaningful Belonging he experienced in the community garden. Hope travelled with trust. Hope seemed to flow from his experiences in which trust was upheld. Mel's experience of self-trust, his faithfulness to his word and commitments, fortified his hope.

The experience of helping and of being trusted by his new neighbour was a good feeling that Mel described in the following encounter:

> *I met a tenant in the parking area and he said he was going to leave on a holiday, that he had plants, you know, that had to be looked after for 10 days or something. And I said, well, if you're going away, I'll take care of them for you, and it seems that they are trusting me and I hardly know them. But I intend to do what I said I was going to do. So, I've got access to their place and they placed trust in me.*

I asked Mel how he felt about his neighbour trusting him. He replied:

> *I feel kind of good about it because I apparently projected a good . . . my attitude is probably good, you know, as far as they're concerned. So, they left this morning and are on their way and they left me a schedule of what to do and I'm going to do it.*

Paul told me that his hope can be discouraged by the *"wars and killing, and hatred, and destruction . . . and anything like that, you know . . . at least, takes the shine off my hope."* He described how he responded to discouragement: *"But then you have to turn to more prayer or more kindness and look to the places such as the L'Arche or [name of soup kitchen] as examples of where humanity is still active and good."*

Paul strengthened his hope with renewed faith. Rather than becoming despondent and giving up, Paul became more resolute, doubling down his efforts, turning to *"more prayer or more kindness"* and participating in projects *"where humanity is still active and good."* When he perceived the darkness, he held his candle higher. He said,

> *Anything that man has done to decrease his fellow man, already starts a need to build higher hopes . . . to build a stronger wish to find the people who are going to be companions in a better world.*

Human *"frailties and weaknesses"* that lead to greed, corruption, and the abuse of power were reasons Paul named as to *"why you wouldn't want to put your hope too much in human beings but more in the work of God and the wisdom of the spiritual leaders."*

Paul found hope in serving others:

> *I have a hope that I will be able to serve. I do this a lot for [name] . . . How can I help you? I love to serve people, particularly my family, and particularly my grandchild. More especially, I want to serve the whole community in ways.*

When Paul described his conception of the ideal assisted living environment, he talked about how he would adapt to his new circumstances:

> *Well, I used to go to the local soup kitchen and care for people who were hungry. . . . Because of that, I saw value in it and I did it. If I find my own health receding, then I have to accept the fact that my body is not equal to the task anymore and I have to give up the responsibility of caring for the hungry up to my prayer life, rather than in my active life.*

When the time came, Paul was ready to entrust to others what he could no longer physically do while continuing to care for others in his prayer life. His readiness to

surrender his *doing* to embrace *being* while retaining his vital caring for the world is an example of his spiritual integrity. It also indicated his resiliency and serenity. In the same spirit, Paul told me if he could no longer care for his own needs, *"Then it rests with another person who has the ability and the promptitude to do what I can't do. So that we're all responsible for each other."* Paul suggests how we carry one another's hope and fulfill hope together.

Paul and Mel nurtured hope through what they and others could contribute to bettering the world. By sowing seeds of hope, they harvested hope. To watch their children and grandchildren develop, and through their efforts to help them, they were de facto witnesses to their own purpose and hope, in some part, fulfilled. When I asked Paul if he would tell me about a recent time in which he felt hopeful, he said:

> *Well, I think that when my [child] came to live with me and to bring my grandson . . . there was a great feeling of hope in that because I saw the generations after me coming alive and with the hope that, not only would they serve their purpose, but give me encouragement in having served my purpose.*

Subtheme: Passing on that good feeling and good objective. Paul and Mel expressed gratitude for the life they had lived and for the love they experienced. Like a waterfall, gratitude enlivened the river of their hope for their children and grandchildren.

When I asked Paul what was most important to him now, he said it was to pass on to his children what he had received from his family: *"The same good feeling and good objective . . . good purpose in life. . . . That being good to others as I see Christ was to his companions."* Paul expressed his hope to pass on *"the religious or spiritual example, the spiritual living interior, and then the meaning of family and togetherness in family."* It

was Paul's deep prayer that his children would experience their own joy and fulfillment, *"that good feeling,"* by contributing their own gifts to *"the good purpose in life."*

As Paul talked about his faith, he spontaneously described some of the benefits of spirituality that he had experienced and, in so doing, some of what he hoped for his loved ones. Paul told me he felt *"particularly blessed and happy"* for the guidance, example, and inspiration —the *"lead"* he had been given in pursuing the spiritual life. He described the spiritual life as *"worthwhile"* and added,

> *It's something that makes sense. It's something that gives you happiness, security, indifference to the troubles and the temptations of the world, and it leads you to expect a better life after this one . . . where the whole existence will be a kind of a spiritual elevation.*

Mel told me, *"I'm grateful for what has happened."* When I asked him for what he felt grateful, he responded: *"Well, we have had good relationships with our grandchildren."* Mel's gratitude for his life and his good relationships was linked to his hope to influence his grandchildren towards their own happiness and fulfillment:

> *We think about them [grandchildren] and now, since they've gone through their early years and they are becoming adults, and now they're going on their own, we hope that we've been influential in maybe leaving some ideas with them as to what's the best way to go in life.*

In describing *"the best way to go,"* I understood Mel to be speaking of his spiritual code. When I asked him what he meant, he said, *"Well, I think the biggest thing to know in life is to realize that you are going to be dealing with people. You've got to treat them properly."* Mel emphasized the need for boundaries: *"There are certain things*

that will lead you astray, and you have to keep a rigid boundary and keep within that boundary in the things that you do." When I reflected, "sort of be true to yourself," Mel stated, *"Oh, yes, be true to yourself and I think there is an inherent belief in all of us. I think we know what is true and what is false."* I asked Mel how he came to know this in himself. He answered,

> *Well, I think it's because I've, when I look back over my life, I think there are certain things that I would have changed when I look, in retrospect, and hopefully these things would have changed things for me but, in general, I think the things that we believed in and the things we did were the best things for us. Otherwise, we would have been in some sort of crisis and we are not in that position.*

Mel connected the purpose of his life now with his feeling of gratitude and his desire to help his children and grandchildren: *"Well, I'm grateful for everything that's happened. I want to do things that will help different offspring so that they have a happy life."* Mel reflected,

> *When I think of the things people go through in life . . . the obstacles that come up, the things you should do and the things you shouldn't do . . . it's a kind of a code of things you should do and hopefully, if you follow these rules, things will turn out in such a way that you'll be happy in your life.*

It seemed to be a legacy of the values of belonging that Mel hoped to leave. It was *"a kind of a code"* that his children and grandchildren would need to decipher for themselves on their own spiritual quests.

Subtheme: Tensions. For Paul and Mel, maintaining a meaning-full belonging has become challenging at this time in their lives. A relatively abrupt change in health

status (self or spouse) has significantly increased the uncertainty in their lives and has disrupted, or threatened to disrupt, familiar rhythms and routines, comforts and satisfactions, and the balance within their lives that contributes to their well-being.

Uncertainty (Mel). Uncertainty captured the mood of the concerns Mel expressed. Mati's illness has led to changes in their familiar roles and companionship and hinted at more change to come in the way the wind picks up before the weather changes. Mel described his experience as *"you've come to a corner and you've gone around that corner . . . and that's a new thing in front of you completely."*

Mel expressed his love and concern for Mati and his desire to help her. He told me,

> *I hope that we can do something that helps her to get through her crisis, and I am not quite certain that this will happen because it seems like there is no evidence that, once a person gets into this, that they really ever get out of it.*

He conveyed his feeling of helplessness and his courage: *"You don't have any control. If there was something that could be done, I would do it. But I'm not aware of what I could do to change anything. I just have to adapt to what occurs."*

Mati's declining health and her medical prognosis are losses that have affected all aspects of their lives and their anticipation of the future. Mel wondered about their ability to remain in their new home: *"And here we get into this pretty ritzy place and maybe the situation is going to change, you know."*

Mel expressed his concern about his ability to continue to care for Mati on his own. His uncertainty concerned not only Mati's health but also his own. He told me: *"Well when you look at what's happening to other people . . . it seems like it's inevitable*

that you are going to wind up in a situation like that." Mel said, *"Well, right now I think I can handle it, you know, but who knows what can happen in the future. I could be in the same situation."*

As Mati's primary caregiver, Mel recognized the possibility of becoming isolated should the demands of caregiving prevent him from meeting with friends and participating in the work and camaraderie of the community garden. The community garden was a centre of meaning and connection and a place where he experienced relaxation and refreshment.

In the face of change and uncertainty, Mel has revealed inner strengths, for example, his strong sense of self and clear values, love and courage, openness, intelligence, flexibility, and resourcefulness. Along with his present good health and his strong family involvement and support, he brings exceptional resources to facing whatever challenges lie ahead. For now, Mel seemed to take things day by day, saying: *"I'm alright. I keep going."*

Holding the tension between heaven and earth (Paul). When I asked Paul about a time when he felt peaceful, he told me:

> *One of the important moments that made me feel peaceful was when I knew that there was an illness in my body that couldn't be cured. And so, I said, "Well, I am happy . . . I have had enough . . . I have had enough of life . . . I have had many years of it and that's enough . . . I am ready to go and I am happy to go."*

Paul accepted his death. He did not expect to survive his recent, acute health crisis. Although the acute illness passed, Paul was diagnosed with a life-threatening condition before he left the hospital.

Paul gradually recovered at home and returned to the ordinary routines of his life while he felt himself to be in death's waiting room and *"just one step away"* from the life of heaven. In view of his expectation and readiness to die, he experienced his recovery as a disappointment; it represented the loss of heaven that he had been ready to embrace. Until I grasped this, I felt confused about his response to his recovery, which I had experienced as hopeful.

His health crisis evoked spiritual questioning: *"I had to then settle in myself, you know, what was I going to do about myself in view of the illness."* His adjustment to what was a rapid turn of events, as well as the inherent tension that he experienced, hung in his words: *"The step is there, just one step away [heaven]."* Until that time, he told me, *"I'm going to have to do what I do and do it well . . . the way the Lord wants."* His illness and diagnosis appeared to crystallize the tension between his desire and readiness to move on to the life of heaven after *"a full life"* and to embrace his life on earth until then.

Paul's illness had disrupted his experience of a familiar and Meaningful Belonging, and in light of his diagnosis, the condition of his health remained a threat to his well-being and his view of the time he had left. During Paul's convalescence, he experienced low mood, at times, as he grappled with the meaning and isolation of his illness and felt his loss and grief. When mostly bed-ridden and housebound, Paul contrasted the life of heaven with the meaninglessness he felt in *"staying around here with no bigger objective than just to have dinner and sleep."*

Paul drew closer to God in his suffering, deepening his relationship and communication in the Spirit, which he said gave *"more peace in my heart, more life in my daily walk"* and added *"to live out the days."* His adaptive response during his crisis

was observed in his choosing to turn wholeheartedly to Christ and Mary and to surrender his situation and his future to God, despite standing on ground that was still shaking from the quake. Paul had experienced his diagnosis as a *"shock,"* the tremors of loss and uncertainty still rumbling, upheaving, and challenging the meaning and everyday rhythms of his life.

Paul's willingness to turn everything over to God revealed the integrity of his spirit and his trust in God. God was the source of his belonging, the eternal relationship and destiny for which he had spent a lifetime preparing and cultivating. Paul's cohesive identity, which reflected longstanding attitudes and habits, together with his strong family support, suggested Paul's ability to navigate and weather whatever awaits him on his journey home.

Final hope, gifts, and words. I asked Paul and Mel the following question: If a friend wrote a book about you, what do you think they would say? Their answers expressed the meaning of their lives and the humility of their hearts. Mel said,

> *Well, I hope they would say that he was a man that was open, treated everybody properly, did not do something that antagonized anybody, and just blended into society with . . . and did the proper things.*

Mel's use of past tense suggested being remembered after he was gone. He added in a matter-of-fact tone of voice that he did not think

> *they are going to put anything on my tombstone because . . . I would like to be cremated or have my body go to a university for a study. . . . Yeah. Knowledge. If I am a specimen, that's good enough for me.*

His words indicated his acceptance and preparation for death. Mel's desire to give his body for scientific study so that others might be helped seemed a fitting final gift.

Paul stated his hope that a friend might write of him, *"He's someone who wants to help others."* It captured the meaning of his life and his present desire.

When I asked Paul what he looked forward to, he expressed his theological hope:

> *At this point in life, I look for my death and the life after death because I sincerely, firmly believe that there is a continual life after the life of the body has gone. There is still the life of the spirit that will move on. And, that is what I would, at this point, most . . . number one . . . I would look forward to.*

Paul's response was a wholehearted trust in the ongoing life of the spirit. Beholding the mystery, his voice full of awe, Paul said, *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard what remains for man when he achieves heaven."* Desire was almost palpable in the psalm of Paul's heart.

Paul described the "*secondary things*" he looked forward to until then:

> *That would be helping others, my family, to be consoled in their sorrow, to be encouraged in their joy, and just generally speaking to friends, to family and to neighbours. . . . to sense that maybe another person has a hard time or may be sliding into depression.*

Spirituality is the Heart of the Person

In summary, Steindl-Rast (1984) proposes that "when we discover that spot where our life holds together, we discover the heart" (p. 27), the centre of being "where intellect and will and feelings, mind and body, past and future come together" (p. 27). The heart is the place of our inmost self, the authentic self, where we discover what matters most in

life (Steindl-Rast, 1984). Steindl-Rast describes the heart as "the taproot of the whole person" (p. 27). He suggests that we can understand this in something of the same way in which we know that when we pull up the taproot of the dandelion, "we know that we have taken hold of the whole plant" (Steindl-Rast, 1984, p. 27).

For the co-researchers Paul and Mel, the heart revealed itself as the core of their identities, where and how they found belonging and existential meaning. It was the sacred centre of what was of ultimate value to them, by which their lives came together and were held together (Steindl-Rast, 1984, p. 27). The "capacity to hold together" (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 8) is what Erikson and Erikson (1997) describe as "integrity" (p. 8). Erikson and Erikson clarify, "Integrity has the function of promoting contact with the world, with things, and, above all, with people. It is a tactile and tangible way to live" (p. 8). The spirituality of Mel and Paul functioned as "the chariot on which one rides," the "original metaphor of career" (as cited by Carlsen, 1996, p. 146), which psychologist Mary Baird Carlsen (1996) states "has to do with personal meaning, with personal direction, with organizing principles for the ordering of life" (p. 146). Paul and Mel indicated that listening to their inner voice helped them to live in harmony with their Source.

The spiritual well-being that Paul and Mel experienced flowed from their strong sense of identity and belonging. Paul and Mel lived from the heart of their true selves in genuine community with others. Their Habits of an Ordinary Day were steeped in their deeply held values and relationships that informed and enlivened their experience of Meaningful Belonging, and which emphasized helping others. This rich and satisfying

experience of belonging gave them That Good Feeling. Their remarkable ability to bring people together was the shared spirit of their belonging.

In closing, I share the thoughtful words of Mel and Paul. I asked Mel and Paul what advice they would give to younger persons hoping to live to their age; although they were reluctant to give advice, they offered these words. Mel said,

> *Don't smoke, don't get into drugs. . . . Get involved with the things that are going around in society and think about what do you think should be done to improve things. Get new ideas, talk amongst yourselves. . . . I think one of the main reasons to go into university is to get an education and you should be thinking about what you can contribute to society. There have to be new ideas, so we are not static. There may be some things that we have not even discussed now that are not on the table but, in the future, maybe something will turn up and you have to start thinking about what are you going to do about this. . . . It is new ideas . . . maybe they're too lofty, maybe not, but you have to start thinking about them. Curiosity. . . . Explore, explore . . . Keep exploring.*

Mel encouraged, *"You are doing the exploring . . . good for you."* Paul's response:

> *And those who are aiming for 90 . . . my advice would be to know your own heart and follow your own heart. Be true to yourself. To thine own self be true . . . thou canst not then deceive any man. . . . We are distracted in our present day. We are distracted so much that we see the distraction as the purpose, rather than the side issue of life . . . We are taken with so many ways to entertain ourselves and allow ourselves not to think more seriously of the deeper things. And, that deeper thing*

would be to be true to yourself I guess, and true to others and allow others to be true to themselves.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Psychotherapy

> As the bees bring in the honey, so do we fetch the sweetest out of everything and build Him.
>
> —Rilke, *Letters to A Young Poet*

In this chapter, I consider the research findings in light of literature that opens a space to where psychology, spirituality, and aging meet. From this perspective, I explore the implications of this study for the practice of psychotherapy. Moore (1994) proposes that psychology and spirituality need to be understood as a whole, and this union, he says, necessitates developing a "new language, and new traditions . . . on which to base our theory and practice" (p. xv). Moore unites spirituality and psychology with everyday living in what he refers to as the ancient and sacred art of "care of the soul" (p. xv). He describes how soul can ground and mediate spirituality in our everyday lives, threading the inner mystery with the weave of earthly existence (Moore, 1994). Moore describes soul as the interchange of the religious and the secular, spiritual and sensual, and body and mind. Soul reminds us that our search for wholeness involves reconciling our ideal and shadow selves, the spiritual with the political, and the notion that our well-being can exist apart from others. Wholeness is the sacred ground of soul profoundly imaged by a Navajo medicine man who was asked to define what it means to be a human being, as told by Erik Erikson: "Indicating the figure of a cross, he said that a person was most human where the (vertical) connection between the ground of creation and the Great Spirit met the (horizontal) one between the individual and all other human beings" (as cited in Hoare, 2009, p. 190).

Moore (1994) says we cannot merely think our way out of entrenched schisms because "thinking itself is part of the problem" (p. xiii). Soul prefers the humility of symbols that arouse our imagination and expand our vision (Moore, 1994, p. xi). Moore's language of the soul resonates with the lived spirituality of Mel and Paul and the *spirituality of belonging* they share.

A spirituality of belonging speaks to Lartey's (2003) description of spirituality as a relational concept that goes beyond personal and interpersonal definitions to express our communal bond and care. Lartey paraphrases Taylor who points out that what makes us spiritual is "our capacity to relate" (p. 141), suggesting that belonging is implicitly spiritual. Lartey conceives spirituality as an internal dynamic that gives both "strength and direction" (p. 142) and is expressed in various lifestyles and degrees of personal commitment, identification, and sacrifice. He associates spirituality with metaphors of movement and orientation, such as "travel, journey, search, quest, purpose or goal" (Lartey, 2003, p. 142). An understanding of spirituality as what ultimately binds us together, integrates, animates, and gives meaning and direction is echoed in this study's findings. Three overlapping, interdependent themes were identified within an overarching leitmotif of Belonging: a Strong Personal Identity, an Identity of Belonging, and Meaningful Belonging of which love is the heart. These constitutive themes capture the lived spirituality of co-researchers and are summarized below:

- Strong Personal Identity: a strong sense of self and belonging brought together and held fast by their Source of ultimate meaning (spiritual identity)
- Identity of Belonging: an identity that emphasizes belonging—characterized by interdependency among self, family, friends, neighbours and community,

the natural and social world, and cosmos; a wholeness and destiny that for Paul was ultimately sourced in his relationship with God and for Mel in his belonging with others

- Meaningful Belonging: refers to the creative and adaptive ways in which Mel and Paul embodied their supreme values in everyday life as "one who belongs"

These interwoven themes expressed the meaning and experience of spirituality for Mel and Paul and what they believed to have been and to be a life worth living. Both Mel and Paul revealed a Strong Personal Identity. What makes it strong? For Mel and Paul, it was more than having strong beliefs and clear values that emphasized belonging but what appeared to be their profound trust in what gave ultimate meaning and to which they surrendered. Faithfulness to their Source inspired and empowered them to "walk the walk." Their Habits of an Ordinary Day were steeped in their supreme values and relationships, which informed and enlivened a Meaningful Belonging. This rich and satisfying experience of belonging gave them That Good Feeling. Their inner values nourished their relationships, and these relationships were the fabric of their well-being. In relationship, Mel and Paul seemed to tap and develop their unique gifts; their power and creativity; and a feeling of aliveness and connection within themselves, with others, nature, mystery and, for Paul, God. Love was the centre of meaning, connecting Mel and Paul to others and to their inmost selves (Teilhard de Chardin, 2008), which evoked feelings of gratitude, joy, and hope.

Moore's (1994) description of soul portrays the richly nuanced spirituality of belonging expressed by Paul and Mel, which when tended to and lived can be understood

as "soulful living" (p. xii) or living from the heart. To live from the heart is to become the sacred vision that inspires one's heart (Moore, 2015). Moore (2015) tells us that what is sacred to us communes with and nourishes our souls (p. 4). Moore (1994) does not define soul in precise terms; as he points out, soul is beyond intellectual knowing (p. xi). "Soul," he says, "is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart, and personal substance" (Moore, 1994, p. 5). Our intellects want to pin down the elusive butterflies to empirically study and categorize. For example, we want answers to the following questions: What is soul? What is spirit? What is the difference between and among spirituality, religiosity, and soulful living? Yet the nature of who we are is pure mystery, according to Himes (1995), and requires our reverence as we seek to understand our depth and complexity in regard to who we are and to whom we belong.

Himes (1995) uses the analogue of Alice's conversation with the Caterpillar in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* to make this point. He describes the exacting insistence of the Caterpillar who is poised on a mushroom puffing on a hookah when they encounter one another (Himes, 1995, p. 7). The Caterpillar asks Alice—"Who are *you*?" (p. 7). The Caterpillar becomes increasingly scornful and impatient when Alice tries to explain why she does not know, referring to herself as "I" and "me" and "myself" as she does; yet, failing to answer what would seem to be a straightforward question about her identity—"Who are *you*?" (p. 7). Alice attributes her confusion to the changes she has experienced and her inability to remember the words of a familiar rhyme (Himes, 1995).

Himes (1995) explains that when we answer questions about who we are with information about ourselves—for example, our names and where we are from, what we

do or believe, or who we love—we are simply giving descriptions and do not answer the question of "Who are *you*?" (p. 8). The difficulty, Himes asserts, is that "we don't know" (p. 8). In the act of giving an answer, Himes says, we become greater than the answer we give, and so our answers are always incorrect (p. 8). The truth, then, he states, lies beyond all our answers, all our knowing, remembering, and imagining. Himes extends his argument to elucidate why we struggle with defining God, who is "so closely interwoven into who we are that it becomes impossible to answer" (p. 8), as unanswerable a question as "Who am I?" (p. 8). Although he tells us these are by no means empty questions, Himes cautions us to remember that God is "absolute mystery" (p. 9), and even our most reverent images of God risk sacrilege if we confuse our images with who God *is* (p. 9). I believe that remembering the mystery of who we are and who God is (what is ultimately sacred) is the beginning of caring for our souls and the souls of others (Himes, 1995; Moore, 1994; 2015).

> Nothing is more important than bringing soul to everything we do. But there can be no soul without a vivid sense of the sacred. (Moore, 2015, p. 2)

Soul: The Entwine of Identity, Belonging, and Meaning

Moore (1994) suggests that we intuitively grasp what soul means when we experience music, poetry and art, persons, animals, and the natural world in a way that moves us in the depths of our being (p. xi). Many of us have encountered genuine, wise people of exceptional depth and presence who we identify as "old souls," a quality of being not attached to a certain age or religious tradition. Moore suggests that soul is engaged in the ordinariness of life, simple living such as "good food, satisfying conversation, genuine friends, and experiences that stay in the memory and touch the

heart. Soul is revealed in attachment, love, and community, as well as in retreat on behalf of inner communing and intimacy" (pp. xi–xii). Soul reminds us of the wholeness of our human nature: earthly creatures, who according to Christian scripture were made "a little lower than the angels and crowned [them] with glory and honour" (Psalm 8: 5, ESV). In his old age, King Solomon wrote about the sacredness of the soulful life:

> I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man. (Ecclesiastes 3: 12–13, ESV)

Life is a gift to be enjoyed. Paul and Mel appreciated the simple pleasures of life. Mel experienced a feeling of well-being in the communal spirit of the garden and a feeling of refreshment and harmony in his connection with the earth. Paul's senses carried the love letters of the Holy Spirit, and his whole being *"relished"* God's gifts. After a poor night's sleep, Paul told me,

> *But it wasn't long before I came alive to the sun, and the world, and the goodness of God, and got out and got busy with the understanding that life is rich, life is helpful, and life is to be enjoyed on both a spiritual and physical level.*

Both Paul and Mel expressed their care and belonging in the *"small things that make life worthwhile"* (Paul), the everyday blessings of life.

Commitment defined their belonging. Paul told me it was God to whom he ultimately belonged, and to belong to God was to belong to others. He described his belonging as *"this is the way I am committed."* Mel, too, expressed his everyday commitment to others. To belong in ways that are personally meaningful and enlivening is the basis of a soulful life—a magnanimous life that seeks the good of others (Himes,

1995; Macquarrie, 1992). In Erikson's (1994) terms, to live soulfully is about claiming the *one* life you have been given (p. 104).

Hayes and Porter wrote a popular song entitled "Soul Man," inspired by the Detroit riots in 1967, a song that spoke of knowing and claiming one's true value and of an overcoming spirit (Songfacts, n.d.). Jesus has been reverently described as a "Soul Man" in a song sung by Hank Williams Jr. and others. Some might associate soul with the Dalai Lama; others may think of the courageous Malala Yousafzai who was the youngest person to win the Nobel Peace Prize for her advocacy for the education of girls. Whenever I read Jean Vanier's books, the depth of his love and his vision of belonging inspire me. Other persons of great soul and commitment come to mind: Mother Theresa, St. Francis of Assisi, Rosa Parks, Dr. Jane Goodall, Carl Jung, Canada's first female Indigenous surgeon Dr. Nadine Caron, Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, Nelsen Mandela, and Christine Bryden. These are examples of people with soul with whom many of us are familiar. Yet there are countless others who, like Mel and Paul, live soulful lives in their communities that go unnoticed by the rest of the world. They are the ordinary heroes whose lives resonate with a deep sense of community and caring and who can teach us much about living from the heart so that we may also.

Paul and Mel expressed a profound belonging and connection with others. Their well-being was sourced in an Identity of Belonging and was fulfilled in relationships that were energized by love, kindness, and regard for others as self. In their daily encounters, Paul and Mel emphasized giving and helping, which Paul understood theologically as serving. These were significant life themes by which they responded to what was of ultimate value and meaning to them (Atchley, 2009; MacKinlay, 2001).

The caring connection that Paul and Mel had with others was a primary source of their life satisfaction. It was in those relationships in which they had invested the most that they experienced the greatest fulfillment and for which they expressed gratitude. Family members—and in particular their children and grandchildren, and for Mel his wife, Mati—were the most important human relationships. The family relationships of Mel and Paul were characterized by mutual love and care. Mel and Paul spoke proudly of the special talents, skills, and help given by their children and grandchildren. These genuine give-and-take relationships gave joy, pleasure, esteem, comfort, meaning, and hope for living. Generative care and hope for loved ones were also expressed in their desire to leave a legacy of spiritual and family values through their example. For Paul, God was the ultimate source and relationship of love, meaning, and hope. Death opened the door to the fullness of belonging.

Through the Eriksons' developmental lens, giving and helping can be understood as the "vital strength of *care*" (Erikson et al., 1986, p. 37) resulting from balancing the tension of "generativity and stagnation" (Erikson et al., 1986, p. 73). Care operates in concert with the strength of *fidelity* (identity vs. confusion), which Erikson and Erikson (1997) conceive as an evolved form of "basic trust" in oneself and others (p. 60). Fidelity is fulfilled in one's ability to be loyal and trustworthy (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 60) and is associated with the strength and capacity for *love* (intimacy vs. isolation). As noted by Erikson and Erikson (1997), the strengths of "hope, fidelity and care" (p. 58) are echoed in the universal ideals of "hope, faith, and charity" (p. 58). Erikson et al. (1986) describe generativity as caring for what one has "procreated, produced, and created" (p. 37), for example, one's children and the cherished values and projects of one's life.

In old age, Erikson et al. (1986) identify a shift to grand-generativity when elders are no longer directly responsible for managing the affairs of society and parenting children, yet they continue to show their care for future generations and the world (p. 74). Despite declining health and responsibility, Erikson et al. (1986) emphasize the importance for elders to remain creative and generative if they are to maintain their vital involvement with life. Erik Erikson tells the story about his inquiry into the Hindu word for "care" in preparation for one of his international lectures. Erikson shares the response of Sudhir Kakar who told him there was no one-word equivalent for care in his language, but the meaning of care might be considered through the adult duties of "practicing Dama (Restraint), Dana (Charity), and Daya (Compassion)" (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 58). Erikson loosely translated these sacred practices to mean "'to be care-ful,' 'to take care of,' and 'to care for'" (Erikson, as cited in Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 59). Erikson et al. (1986) suggest that elders need to balance caring for others with caring for oneself. They emphasize the need for elders to receive care in a gracious and caring way (a point made by Paul as well) that will nurture the strength of care in younger persons (p. 74).

Erikson et al. (1986) suggest that elders may continue their vital involvement with life through creative activities and participation in evolving family and cross-generational roles, for example, as parent and grandparent; "old friend, consultant, adviser, and mentor" (Erikson et al., 1986, p. 74); and, potentially, as a spiritual elder or sage in welcoming cultures. Mel and Paul continued to embrace a vital and meaningful belonging as parents, grandparents, friends, and neighbours. They were "good examples," guardians, and storytellers of the values, history, and traditions of their families and communities. Both Paul and Mel stated their pleasure in *"bringing people together,"*

which Paul described as his *"destiny."* Paul and Mel continued to be creative and active by sharing their natural gifts and interests and bringing these to their participation in community projects. They continued to make a difference, adapting their pace as they were *"slowing down"* (Mel).

Caring was fulfilled in highly personal ways in the lives of Mel and Paul. Their personalities, personal interests and history, and their creativity and gifts were uniquely expressed in their helping and caring for others. Their involvements represented long-standing commitments and themes that affirm Atchley's (2009) continuity theory, which highlights our desire to preserve preferred patterns, core values, and goals through renewal and adaptation. For example, Mel's personal background, his outgoing personality and skills, and his love of learning (Mel told me if he could choose his career now, he would be a teacher) came together in the community garden. His volunteer work in the garden was both a hobby and a personal commitment to the betterment of the community. Mel's love of his family was central to his caring activities, and his curiosity and care for people reached into the world wherever he went. Paul's passion for social justice and advocacy was expressed through his volunteer work with Amnesty international, L'Arche, and the Council of Canadians. His training and experience as a priest and social worker were apparent in the breadth of his care for others. He was alert to his neighbours' feelings, their financial and social situations, and their psychospiritual health and physical welfare. His care for people was apparent in his giving to his neighbours, for example, by sharing the bread he baked each week and by offering emotional support. In my experience, Paul has been a deeply loving, devoted father and

friend. The care and concern Paul and Mel had for others expressed their passion for life and for people—the joy of their belonging.

Care expresses our human nature, as Heidegger writes (as cited in Reich, 1995), and without opportunities to care for others and to feel cared for, our humanity and well-being withers. Dass and Gorman (2014) suggest that when we give and care for others as part of belonging together we "feel transformed and connected to a deeper sense of identity" (p. 39). Giving was identified as a spiritual need in Dalby's (2011) research with persons experiencing dementia (p. 67). Many of the informants of his study (all of whom were former helping professionals) experienced their inability to give and help others in familiar ways as an intense loss (Dalby, 2011, p. 68). In his landmark study, *The Study of Adult Development*, Vaillant (2003) found that caring for others—*generativity*—was the key to "successful old age" (p. 113). In his study of elder informants, most of whom were 70 years and older, Vaillant found that "hope and love" (p. 259) were most strongly linked with "maturity of defenses, with successful aging, and with Generativity" (p. 259). Vaillant reflected: "When we are old, our lives become the sum of all whom we have loved" (p. 103). His findings suggest that loving and caring for others is central to well-being in old age and to successful community life overall.

The ways in which Mel and Paul embodied their spirituality showed that the meaning they made was both deeply communal and their own. Their transcendent focus on belonging expressed something of the unity of vision and connection described by Tornstam in his theory of gerotranscendence and by Fowler in his descriptions of the later stages of faith development. The lived spirituality of Paul and Mel seemed to be a deeply

meaningful and satisfying way of being in relationship that, as Paul observed, "*brings it all together as being human*."

Moore (1994) compares the lifelong endeavour of cultivating our souls to the attentive care that a farmer gives to his field. Caring for one's soul involves tending to the needs of the soul through the growing cycles and seasons. This involves nourishing and tilling the soil of our lives, planting seeds, watering, weeding, and trusting that the cycles of change and rest and all manner of abundance and lack will contribute something to the harvest. Moore explains that the purpose of soul work is to develop authentic, meaningful connections in our lives—a harvest of belonging that does not necessarily reflect cultural standards of health and well-being. Moore (1994) writes,

> The aim of soul work, therefore, is not adjustment to accepted norms or to an image of the statistically healthy individual. Rather, the goal is a richly elaborated life, connected to society and nature, woven into the culture of family, nation, and globe. The idea is not to be superficially adjusted, but to be profoundly connected in the heart to ancestors and to living brothers and sisters in all the many communities that claim our hearts. (pp. xvii–xviii)

Himes (1995), too, lifts the veil of separation between the sacred and the secular. Himes is a Catholic priest who professes the Christian view that God's agape love has brought the universe into existence and sustains it. Himes states that everything exists as the gift of God's unconditional love and, therefore, nothing is unloved or it would not be (p. 103). He declares, "There is no secular realm, if by 'secular' we mean 'ungraced' or 'unrelated to the *agape* of God'" (Himes, 1995, p. 103). The sacredness of the whole of life was the potential expressed in the lived spirituality of Paul and Mel. The supreme

values to which they were committed unified and infused their lives with vibrant meaning. Paul suggested the linking of heaven and earth when he said, *"whatever you do"* can express the love of God. This is the action and meaning of sacrament, according to Himes. Sacraments are the tangible symbols of the mystery. Himes tells us that a sacrament points inward to reveal "the grace in which its existence is rooted" (p. 108) and "makes what it signifies real" (p. 107). Himes suggests a sacrament functions as the dial that turns up the volume on the music that is always there (p. 107).

Himes (1995) tells us that there are potentially as many sacraments as imagined by as many people, and if we are receptive, we will glimpse the sacramental in the whole of life. Himes reminds us of the sacrament we all possess, which is the key, he says, to seeing everyone and everything else as sacramental—and that is the "self" (p. 108). Himes notes that it can take a lifetime to value ourselves this way because we are so entwined with everything we have experienced over the course of our lives, and beginning before we can remember. The result of regarding ourselves as sacraments, Himes says, is love: a love that gives itself unselfishly to the world (p. 109). The love he speaks of is more than sentiment. Himes paraphrases St. Thomas Aquinas in describing love as the "willing [of] the good of the other person and acting to make that good real for him or her" (p. 110).

The Trinity of Love, Trust, and Hope

> While the source of our spirit lies beyond our human capacity to know and understand, *the mystery is enfleshed in the way we relate to one another* [emphasis added]. (Hudson, 2010, p. 158)

In this section, I review the general process of psychotherapy. I then turn to therapy with elders, explore the unique circumstances of late life, and link some of the learnings from this study: for example, the interplay of trust, regard for others, and love and caring. Trust, hope, and love are closely related. Erikson et al. (1986) state that trust is "basic for all relationships. Hope is yet another basic foundation for all community living and for survival itself, from infancy to old age" (p. 332). This study affirmed the importance of belonging—and the importance of love to belonging. These findings suggest why it can cut so deeply when a person feels rejected or loses a love.

> It has often been noted that most, if not all, problems brought to therapists are issues of love. It makes sense then that the cure is also love. (Moore, 1994, p. 14)

Pastoral therapist Armistead (1995) refers to therapists as *caregivers* and clients as *careseekers*. To emphasize the relational care that defines the therapeutic relationship, and for consistency herein, I will use these terms as well. Suffering comes in many forms, Nouwen (1992) says, and points out the suffering he encounters most often,

> The suffering of which I am most aware on a day-to-day basis is the suffering of the broken heart. . . . In the Western world, the suffering that seems to be the most painful is that of feeling rejected, ignored, despised, and left alone. (p. 89)

Beth Hedva (2001) noticed the theme of betrayal in the stories careseekers' brought to therapy and that their symptoms were connected to this core wound (p. vii). Most of us have known the heartache of betrayal, the unfaithfulness of others, and the agonizing self-betrayals, which disconnect us from our souls. To a certain extent, we have all experienced ruptures in trust, the misery of disillusionment in our relationships and, for

some of us, serious betrayals and trauma as we travel our earthly journeys. People we love let us down, sometimes in meeting our basic needs early in life when we are unable to meet our own and always in our search for the perfect human love to redeem and complete us.

Trust is the cornerstone of all relationships, the sacred ground of love and intimacy. Without trust, there can be no love. Paul and Mel revealed profound trust in their inner Source and faithfulness in their love and care for others. MacDougall (personal communication, November, 2006) points out that many of the issues clients bring to therapy relate to trust. Trust misgivings and anxiety may show up as problems of attachment and intimacy, addictions, self-denial, self-rejection, and overresponsibility; and in attitudes and defences of aloofness, cynicism, helplessness, excessive independence, and intellectualism (MacDougall, personal communication, November, 2006). Paradoxically, Hedva (2001) explains that the very betrayals that shatter our well-being and stall our development (both personally and communally) can be the springboards to inner growth and wholeness, from which hope can emerge (MacDougall, personal communication, November, 2006). MacDougall (2006) points out that psychotherapy often involves core soul work that explores: "What can I trust to be true about me?" (personal communication; Hedva, 2001). As clients search inwardly, they may realize there is a Source of help within that can be trusted, however this Source is conceived and named (Hedva, 2001, p. 44; MacDougall, personal communication, November, 2006).

The struggle to love and the meaning of soul work. As Erskine, Moursund, and Trautmann (1999) write, "The desire to be understood—truly and deeply

understood—is a universal yearning. It is part of our human hunger for contact and for relationship" (p. 46). Paul and Mel expressed their desire to be understood for who they are, to be free to be their inner selves.

Dayringer (1998) says, "One of a person's basic needs is for a responsive encounter" (p. 16). The experience of feeling understood and valued "just the way I am" is what Schlauch (1995) and others (Dayringer, 1998; Rogers, 1995, p. 152) suggest is the healing energy of therapy and what makes therapy a spiritual practice. The therapeutic alliance is a significant, intimate relationship that transmits the careseeker's core goodness and worth through the caregiver's loving regard and acceptance, at the same time change is pursued.

Armistead (1995) writes about the mirroring that occurs in the therapeutic relationship:

> We can never know who we really are without seeing our reflection in another's eyes, because we are easily blinded by our own fears and pain. . . . They [careseekers] need the caregiver to redirect and refocus what is of ultimate worth and value to the self. (pp. 32–33)

Armistead says, "When someone feels shattered, torn apart, wounded 'to the quick,' only another person will do" (p. xvii). She proposes that "entry into a careseeker's world can be understood theologically as a manifestation of hope" (Armistead, 1995, p. 23). Carlsen (1996) suggests, "To introduce hope, or love, or caring, into one's life is to transform one's images of life and self" (p. 47) and is a counterweight in the conundrum of "integrity and despair" (p. 47). Carlsen's observations reflect the meaning and value of the good example of Paul and Mel and the reliability of their love and caring, which

nurtured hope in others. Paul and Mel responded empathically to others and gave generously of themselves. Their ability to recognize and mirror the true value of others revealed their firm sense of belonging and well-being.

The key to entering a careseeker's world, Armistead (1995) writes, is empathy, the embodied sensing and attuning to the movements and meanings of another's emotional world (Armistead, 1995, p. 9; Finlay, 2016, p. 47; Rogers, 1995, p. 142). One of the effects of empathy is increased trust and hope (Armistead, 1995). Carl Rogers (1995) points out that empathy is a powerful "process" (p. 142) and quality of the therapeutic relationship that is foundational to careseekers feeling understood and to their self-discovery and healing (p. 142, pp. 150–156). This emotional resonance communicates the desire and ability of the caregiver to be a faithful companion throughout the careseeker's exploration and journey (Armistead, 1995; Schlauch, 1995) and contributes to the careseeker's feeling of safety. The careseeker's experience of empathy early on, according to Rogers, is associated with therapy that is "successful" (p. 147).

Rogers (1995) identifies three positive ways that empathy impacts careseekers. He first points out how empathy supports the careseeker's experience of feeling "valued, cared for, accepted" (Rogers, 1995, p. 152), which enhances the possibility that the careseeker will grow to accept, value, and care for her or himself (Rogers, p. 153). Here Rogers directly links empathy with the caring regard of the caregiver, stating that it is impossible to empathize with someone if one does not genuinely value and care about them (p. 152). Secondly, Rogers suggests that empathy is a powerful experience of connection that penetrates and dispels the deep loneliness of alienation (p. 151), the

feeling of being disconnected from oneself and others, and encourages a felt sense of belonging. Lastly, Rogers states that empathy shows an authentic interest in the other and what matters to them, and in this way, the other's existence is made visible and affirmed (pp. 154–155). Laing, as cited by Rogers, points out the profound human need to be "known" (p. 155) by another, the need for a trustworthy witness to validate the reality of the self, in order to claim a true "sense of identity" (as cited in Rogers, 1995, p. 155).

In the following passage, relational integrative therapist Linda Finlay (2016) shares her transpersonal experience of "empathic attunement" (p. 57). She describes it as a letting go of "Being" to "Be-with" (p. 57):

> Tuning in to the Other and to me, I also tune in to the between. It is as if I am listening intently and with all of me for a tune that is all of us (me, other and us). I listen to the tune being sung by the Other. . . . It feels like being grounded in a repose of lightness that is yet full and deep and open and present with myself and the Other in a spirit of acceptance and compassion. (Finlay & Evans, as cited by Finlay, 2016, p. 57)

This spiritual connection, Finlay suggests, comes through receptiveness to the Other, which allows caregivers "to be touched" (p. 57) by the Other with the potential for both the careseeker and the caregiver to experience growth and healing.

The therapeutic relationship is a sanctuary of presence, safety, and trust supporting the careseeker's inner exploration and growth (Finlay, 2016; MacDougall, personal communication, November, 2006; Rogers, 1995). The therapeutic alliance is what paediatrician and psychoanalyst Winnicott imaged as a relational *holding* akin to the safety and comfort of the caregiver-infant relationship (as cited in Finlay, 2016, p. 65).

Armistead (1995) states that the caregiver does what the careseeker cannot do on his or her own. This is to accept the careseeker's conflicting and rejected aspects of the self and to gently hold the careseeker's anguish and the extreme vulnerability that contact with these parts can evoke (p. 30).

The caregiver's ability to hold the careseeker's feelings and projections and to gently give these back to the careseeker in such a way that he or she can reflect upon allows the careseeker to grow in self-awareness and deepen his or her exploration (Finlay, 2016, p. 64). In this way, careseekers can gradually integrate the disowned aspects of themselves, begin to trust their inner process, and learn to hold their own and others' intense feelings (Armistead, 1995; Finlay, 2016). Therapeutic body work around boundaries can support the careseeker's core self to grow, increasing his or her capacity for trust and intimacy by addressing relational fears, for example, of feeling "swallowed up," rejected, or abandoned by others (MacDougall, personal communication, November, 2006). The therapeutic relationship is a context by which careseekers can experience respectful boundaries and loosen the rigidity of protective defences and distancing (Finlay, 2016).

Another crucial aspect of holding, discussed by Finlay (2016), is the need for caregivers to hold their own feelings and to process their subjectivity so that the therapeutic alliance and interventions remain focused on the careseeker's needs and goals (pp. 71–72). Examples of ways that a caregiver's awareness can be supported and expanded include the following: meeting regularly with a clinical supervisor (Finlay, 2016, p. 72); exploring his or her own spirituality (MacKinlay, 2010, p. 79); reading about major religious traditions (MacKinlay, 2010); and learning from careseekers about

their values and traditions and the communities to which they belong. Boundaries contribute to the safety and well-being of both the careseeker and caregiver. They include "legal, moral, emotional, relational, and professional boundaries" (Finlay, 2016, p. 60) that are sensitive to the cultural, generational, and spiritual values of the client (Finlay, 2016; MacKinlay, 2010).

Psychospiritual development is a journey of relationships toward "becoming a person in the fullest sense" (Macquarrie, 1992, p. 40; see also Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Groeschel, 2003; Rogers, 1995). Hay and Nye (2006) define spirituality as "*relational consciousness*" (p. 109). In their research, they found that children expressed their spirituality in the dimensions of I-Self, I-Others, I-World, and I-God (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 109). The foundational work of therapy, MacDougall (2006) says, is for careseekers to realize their deep value (belovedness) as they experience their suffering and conflicts; otherwise, as Nouwen (1992) gently points out, our suffering can confirm our worst fears about ourselves and impede development (p. 96). The healing path, Schlauch (1995) tells us, is one of "gaining contact, making connections, restoring relationships with others and oneself" (p. 141) and involves removing the obstacles to growth. Through the restoration of trust and hope in our relationships, the "wellspring of what we have been given" (MacDougall, personal communication, November, 2006) can begin to flow.

As a Christian pastoral caregiver, the therapeutic alliance is a covenant relationship with the careseeker and the Holy Spirit, who is present and active and who guides (Dayringer, 1998; Schlauch, 1995). Armistead (1995) describes the therapeutic relationship as a portal—"the gateway through which holy ground *might* be entered" (p. 33). She defines holy ground as the "intimate point of contact between persons and

their God" (Armistead, 1995, p. 32) or that which is held as sacred. It is here that one encounters the soul's deepest desires and hopes and the failures of love and its wounds.

> The first step to healing is not a step away from the pain, but a step toward it. (Nouwen, 1992, p. 93)

Befriending the beast. Through his telling of the myth of the minotaur, Moore (1994) conveys how the beasts that symbolize our wounds and brokenness need to be listened to and held for they contain beauty and wisdom to transform our lives. Moore writes,

> The Greeks told the story of the minotaur, the bull-headed flesh-eating man who lived in the center of the labyrinth. He was a threatening beast, and yet his name was Asterion—Star. I often think of this paradox as I sit with someone with tears in her eyes, searching for some way to deal with a death, a divorce, or a depression. It is a beast, this thing that stirs in the core of her being, but it is also the star of her innermost nature. We have to care for this suffering with extreme reverence so that, in our fear and anger at the beast, we do not overlook the star. (p. 21)

This paradox of the minotaur resonates with my work with families experiencing crisis: crisis was the potential "beast" that often revealed their inner strengths and hope. My work with one family stands out in particular (names and identifying information are changed or omitted). As an intern play therapist, I was asked to work with a young boy and his family. This boy, who I will call Ever, had experienced a traumatic incident about two years before as a result of roughhousing with his teenaged brother. Ever frequently felt rejected by his brother and reported bullying when his parents were out of sight. Ever

began to speak of this incident to his parents and began telling his teachers and other children about it; he was sleeping poorly, and he was struggling at school. His parents were concerned and requested children's therapy. The incident itself was hazy in the memory of his parents, its significance downplayed, and his brother had no memory of it. It occurred at a time when the parents had separated, a separation Ever was still grieving.

It was this frightening memory, this disruptive, raging monster that would not go away that eventually brought healing to Ever and his family by focusing the family's love and concern on the boy and his suffering. Helping Ever to heal from his traumatic experience became the focus of the family, bringing unity and harmony to family relationships that had been fragmented by blaming and shaming. When I met Ever's brother, whom I will call Ian; his love for his brother was apparent in his empathy for Ever and his responsiveness. Ian told me he was ready to do anything he could to help his brother. My involvement with Ian included preparing for a play therapy session with his brother. In this meeting, we explored how he might engage with Ever and how Ever might respond. During the joint session, I felt privileged to witness the forgiveness and seeds of healing that took place between brothers, the budding of a new relationship based on caring and trust. Through individual and play therapy sessions, the parents learned more about what Ever needed from them and this led to their commitment to parent cooperatively. For me it was a powerful example of the paradox of the minotaur whose name revealed its sacred nature. By listening to this beast and attending reverently to its voice, it revealed its star nature to Ever and his family—one of love, forgiveness, and transformation.

Armistead (1995) tells us that each one's development shapes a personal image of God, which expresses his or her individual journey in relationship with self and others (p. xvii). She suggests that God images may be unconventional, not necessarily based on the God of religious traditions (p. 115), and states that even those who do not believe in God have an image associated with their denial (Armistead, 1995, p. 1). Armistead maintains that a person's image of God represents "the ultimate worth and value of self and others" (p. 115). MacKinlay (2001), too, affirms the meaning and power of God images, stating that intimacy with God can be affected by "judgemental or punitive" (p. 225) images. The triune God of whom Paul spoke was a compassionate God who was faithful and nurturing—a living presence and ultimate companion Paul experienced in his growing intimacy with Jesus and Mary. Paul's relationships with other people were also warm, loving, and inviting, which reflected his image of God. My research with Paul and Mel supports the value of exploring the inner journey of careseekers through their God images.

Armistead (1995) proposes that our images of God help to preserve a stable sense of self and well-being. They reveal our attempt to make sense of the world and ourselves (Armistead, 1995, p. 124). Armistead explains that God images emerge from our early relationships with caregivers (p. xvii). Early relational patterns form the templates for relationship with God and others and are encoded in implicit memory outside of our awareness (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 122). These patterns shape our experience and expectations of relationships; influence the extent to which we can feel pleasure and connection with others (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 122); and fashion our images of God (Armistead, 1995).

Armistead (1995) describes how our images of God, others, and ourselves reveal and mirror one another (Himes, 1995; Schlauch, 1995). These core images can be so potent and terrifying that we run from what they might expose (Armistead, 1995, p. 116). Armistead discusses her therapeutic work with a woman who felt unworthy in the presence of her formidable God (p. 52) and whose God image reflected her inability to feel close with her and with others in her life. As this careseeker explored her relationship with God and significant others, in the light of the acceptance and empathy of her relationship with the caregiver, she developed greater understanding and empathy toward herself and her needs. She became less anxious, and more open and vulnerable with others, and was able to experience greater intimacy (Armistead, 1995).

Armistead (1995) tells us that the empathy of the caregiver has the potential to shift the careseeker's image of God (p. 57). For some careseekers, the here-and-now of the caregiving relationship can symbolize the self in relationship with God, and the therapeutic alliance can become the context for exploring this relationship and for healing (Armistead, 1995, pp. 100–101). Armistead states that "as the self's relationships undergo transformation, so too will that person's relationship with God" (p. 57). Armistead suggests that, despite the human and perceived shortcomings of the caregiver, an empathic and deepening therapeutic bond "will bring a careseeker closer to what is holy" (p. 57) and therefore to "greater wholeness" (p. 57).

Therapy with Elders

The principles and process of caring for the soul are similar for older and younger adults, although the circumstances of late life are unique (Kivnick & Kavka, 1999; Kraus, 2012). Magniant (2004) tells us that older adults share many of the same psychodynamic

issues as those who are younger, only they may have struggled with them for many more years (p. 56). Kivnick and Kavka (1999) suggest that older adults may feel an increasing urgency and readiness to resolve their conflicts as they approach the end of their lives (p. 128). They point out that the tendency of elders to greater "interiority" can prepare them for the self-reflection and life review that are part of the reworking of thematic material in late life (Kivnick & Kavka, 1999, p. 114). Research shows that elders can benefit as much from psychotherapy as younger adults (Atiq, 2006). Yet despite the potential value of therapy for older adults and a growing elder population, Geropsychologist George Kraus (2012) observes that there are not many psychotherapists working with older adults. He considers the stereotypes and myths of old age to explain their stark numbers. Kraus points out that the images of older adults in Western culture are usually devalued images, and yet stereotypes can also be idealized distortions that depersonalize and dehumanize. He describes how these pervasive images have been internalized by many of us exposed to mainstream values, including professional caregivers (Kraus, 2012).

Kraus (2012) suggests that one of the obstacles to working with elders is the myth that therapy is not worthwhile for elders who are approaching the end of their lives and have limited time to reap its potential benefits (p. 2). Kraus challenges the underlying assumptions of this appraisal that measures the possibility of greater life satisfaction in terms of how long a person has to live (p. 2). He shares the words of an elder who was asked why she sought therapy and who responded, "It's simple; all I have left is my future" (Kraus, 2012, p. 2).

A second myth Kraus (2012) observes is the belief that elders are so overwhelmed with losses, for which they may have few resources to cope, that it would seem naïve to think that psychotherapy could help (p. 3). Kraus states that through his work with older adults, he realized that his concerns about the helplessness and burdens of elders were projections of his own "fears and frustrations" (p. 3).

Finally, Kraus discusses the myth that elders are set in their ways, obstinate and not open to change (p. 4). He says that stubbornness can be interpreted positively as courage and determination—commonly admired as grit or mettle—and can be used to support the therapeutic process in the same way that this energy is harnessed in younger careseekers (Kraus, 2012, p. 4). Kraus emphasizes that the language used to describe elders can magnify limitations and convey stereotypes that overlook the strengths of long-lived persons. He names a few of the qualities that develop and ripen with age, for example, "appreciation, authenticity, desire to help, maturity, patience" (Kraus, 2012, p. 4). Through my research and friendship with Mel and Paul, I would add qualities and strengths that overlap with those of Kraus: the ability to see different points of view, empathy, generosity, creativity, gratefulness, wisdom, and humour. Kraus also points out that viewing older persons as set in their ways may reveal more about the "patience, optimism, and confidence" (p. 5) of the caregivers than the elders they serve.

Kraus (2012) points out the special circumstances that are unique to late life and therapy with elders. Many elders are well acquainted with the leave-taking and sorrow that can accompany the closing years (Kraus, 2012; Scogin, 2000). Loss, grief, and bereavement are common issues elders bring to therapy and these issues are often connected with profound lifestyle changes (Qualls & Knight, 2006; Scogin, 2000). As

elders approach the end of life, they confront issues of death, disability, and dying, their own and that of their spouses, and this may include caring for an ill partner, as was the case with Mel. A task elders face is to make peace with the life they have lived and the uncertainty that hovers over the time they have remaining (Kivnick & Kavka, 1999; MacKinlay, 2001). At 94, our elder neighbour once looked me in the eye and said, "Growing old is not for wimps, you know." I think of her often as the years go by and as I try to cultivate her pluck in me. Kivnick & Katva (1999) point out that maintaining one's identity in the face of tremendous loss and change is no small task (p. 124). As an elder, most of us will need to grapple with '"who I've always been' with 'who I am now'" (Kivnick & Katva, 1999, p. 124).

Kraus (2012) highlights the exceptional courage, the bold spirit it takes to "dare to live" (p. 5), and the great privilege it is to be part of another's journey. Through our empathic connection with careseekers, Kraus emphasizes that we participate in their transcendence and we, too, are transformed (p. 5). He tells us that "with the elderly client the metamorphosis is no less exalting, no less divine" (Kraus, 2012, p. 5). Kraus says the healing he witnessed in his work with elders was less about cognitive insight and process and more about "emotional reconciliation" (p. 7)—the renewal of hope and trust in themselves and others (p. 7). No matter the age of those we serve, Kraus reminds caregivers that "it is your empathy that eases their suffering" (p. 7) and "it is the relationship that can heal" (p. 7).

Kraus (2012) shares an inspiring story of his therapeutic work with a woman, Estelle, who was referred to him because of her conflictual relationships and her depressed mood. Estelle experienced vascular dementia, which affected her memory and

language ability, and she was taking a number of prescribed medications. Estelle wrestled with every word in order to communicate due to the aphasia she suffered from a severe stroke. Her health issues were tangled with her experience of childhood abuse and a deep sense of alienation and loneliness in her life in a nursing home. Kraus writes that Estelle's struggle to express herself meant that she could take up to a minute to finish a sentence. In the following excerpt, Kraus shares his experience as her therapist:

> Take a minute and think about her, though—grinding out each sentence—me wondering where in the world it was going to go—waiting almost interminably for each idea to unveil itself—and to eventually experience just how wondrous it was to witness such life-revealing self-reflection. How could a therapist not marvel at the human capability that was co-existing with such daunting a physical disability!" (p. 3)

The emotional work of therapy, Kraus says, led to a greater wholeness that Estelle described as being able to "see the good inside me now. . . . I'm not quite proud yet. . . . I'm on my way" (p. 3).

Estelle's life-changing health challenges remind me of the unforeseen changes in the health of Paul and Mati. They underscore the uncertainty of later life and the fluid boundary between the third and fourth age.

MacKinlay's (2001) "model of spirituality in ageing" (p. 222) provides a rich and valuable framework for supporting the inner growth and healing of elders who face the challenge of balancing despair with integrity. Spirituality can be a stable source of identity, strength, and meaning for many elders as it was for Paul and Mel. The therapeutic alliance can be the context for exploring the careseeker's relationship with the

sacred and those issues that impede the fulfillment of spiritual tasks (MacKinlay, 2001). MacKinlay proposes that a person's awareness of what gives ultimate meaning and his or her ability to respond to this is the beginning of spiritual growth (p. 223). In addition to the primary tasks of becoming aware of and responding to ultimate meaning, MacKinlay (2001) identified the following additional tasks: "to transcend disabilities, loss" (p. 223); "to search for final meanings" (p. 223); "to find intimacy with God and/or others" (p. 223); "to find hope" (p. 223). These tasks can be particularly daunting in late life when losses mount and loved ones die, leaving gaping holes in the meaning and intimacy one once knew.

From her interviews with the respondents of her study, MacKinlay (2001) says she realized "the importance of each person's story" (p. 228) to them. It seems unsurprising that MacKinlay's research results affirm the value and meaning of one's personal story (p. 228). In my research, a Strong Personal Identity and Meaningful Belonging nourished the well-being that was expressed by Paul and Mel. MacKinlay points out that "our life story is our identity" (p. 228) and narrates the way we make sense of our journey (p. 228). For Paul and Mel, who they are and hoped to be and what was important to them were revealed in their personal stories. Through the process of listening to and valuing their stories, we grew closer as friends. I was reminded of how genuine listening can bring hope, connection, and healing. Deep listening can affirm the other's value as someone who matters and belongs. As MacKinlay states, we *are* our stories and this explains the unbearable pain we can feel when our stories are ignored or devalued.

Life review therapy can be an opportunity for elders to reconsider their life experiences in the light of their belovedness and the wisdom they have today. The therapeutic relationship can be used toward removing barriers to inner peace and increasing one's capacity for care and intimacy. MacKinlay (2001) points out that life review from a psychosocial perspective differs from a "spiritual life review" (p. 74) in which a person's relationship with God is the focus (p. 74). MacKinlay suggests a spiritual life review may reveal needs and opportunities for "forgiveness and reconciliation" (p. 228) that may contribute to inner healing.

Moore (2015) says, "Sometimes your emotions may be so strong that you can't find a complete story. All you have are images and episodes, impressions and fragments of memory" (p. 94). The therapeutic use of art can help elders express "experiences, thoughts and feelings that are difficult to verbalize, or lie outside present awareness" (Magnuson, 2015, p. 1) as they emerge naturally in created images. These external representations offer a safe way to explore intense emotions and experience (Weiss, 1999). Creative activity allows the creator control, does not judge or exclude, and "accepts the person as he or she is" (Weiss, 1999, p. 187). In his work with elders, Kraus (2012) notices that the feelings accompanying late life losses and changes can go underground and surface in symptoms that hide their origin (p. 5). Art can be a way to "feel within ourselves, who we are" (Messman, 2004, p. 188) and to tenderly hold and be with our grief and suffering from which hope may emerge. Moon (2001) suggests that making art can be a healing prayer, "a laying claim to who we are in order that we might come to understand the possibility lying dormant in our strong, frail, hurting, hurtful, fearful, courageous selves" (p. 32). Magnuson (2015) writes about the movement from

what is unknown within ourselves to the knowing that can occur through participation in the arts: "Creativity begins with 'not-knowing,' moving into a liminal phase of consciousness where symbolic language develops, then the eventual connection with the image, and a sense of calm as the image is completed and 'known'" (p. 1).

Creating art can contribute to feelings of satisfaction and aliveness, enhance self-esteem and personal growth, and provide a sense of purpose and connection (Buchalter, 2011; Magnuson, 2015). Elders may want to give their completed art as gifts, providing them opportunities to feel the joy of giving. Artmaking can be a meaningful way for elders to remember and value their lives and themselves and, perhaps, leave a legacy (Magniant, 2004; Weiss, 1999). I met a woman, Viola, at a seniors' residence who invited me into her home to see her paintings. She proudly told me her children and grandchildren displayed her art in their homes. She described several paintings in warm detail: each painting was a memory from her life. Viola shared her story. As a child, she was told she could not draw. With the encouragement of a friend, Viola took art classes as an older adult, and now she cannot keep up with requests for her artwork.

Art therapy groups for older adults can enhance self-awareness, give pleasure, and support empathic connections with others. My participation in an art therapy workshop for older adults gave me a first-hand experience of the pleasure and value in making and sharing art with others. As I observed my painting on the wall alongside the art of others, I was surprised to see and feel my silent longing so clearly revealed. My longing flowed from the words that emerged and fell into place in a poem I then wrote and shared, as we were encouraged to do. In turn, we shared our inner process, closely listening to each other. The group appeared fully involved and engaged: nodding, mirroring, clapping, and

otherwise resonating with one another's feelings and experiences. I remember the relaxed and smiling faces as we danced together in celebration at the close. Although this group met on a regular basis to participate in activities, it was through creating and sharing their art that some participants said, while others nodded in agreement, that they felt a deeper connection with one another. When we share our feelings, we share our joys and burdens and the blessing of being alive.

In summary, the spirituality of Mel and Paul suggested that their well-being was linked to their profound trust in their inner Source (source of ultimate meaning) as the solid ground to guide their lives—resulting in a Strong Personal Identity. Their gratitude, joy, and hope was a consequence of their close and genuine connection with God and/or others—an Identity of Belonging—and was part of a Meaningful Belonging marked by giving, helping, and caring for others and their connection with the natural world. The quality and vitality of their belonging appeared related to their habit of regarding others as themselves and to their pleasure in bringing people together. The benefits of their spirituality were a meaningful life and the good feeling that flowed from a life worth living.

I believe that honouring the mystery of who we are and who God is (source of ultimate meaning) is the basis of caring for our souls and the souls of others, as suggested in the writings of Himes (1995) and Moore (1994, 2015). As Hudson (2010) tells us, "While the source of our spirit" (p. 158) is beyond human knowing, "the mystery is enfleshed in the way we relate to one another" (p. 158). Our fundamental spirituality is that of belonging (Lartey, 2006; Vanier, 2008). Nurturing belonging relies on our ability to value others, which builds trust and our capacity for fidelity and love. Himes (1995)

suggests that in order to value others and everything else as sacred, we need to accept our own deep value, which Nouwen (1992) calls our Belovedness. Himes tells us that the result of seeing this way is a love that reaches beyond ourselves into the world (Macquarrie, 1992, p. 47). As we care for one another, we are keepers of this sacred vision, which Nouwen so richly elucidates. Nouwen (1992) tell us that we are called to bless one another with the gift of our Belovedness. He says, "A blessing touches the original goodness of the other and calls forth his or her Belovedness" (Nouwen, 1992, p. 69). As both caregivers and careseekers, when we "hear the deep gentle voice that blesses us, we can walk through life with a stable sense of well-being and true belonging" (Nouwen, 1992, p. 73).

Chapter Six: Summary and Impact

> Kindle within me a love for you in all things. (Newell, 1997, p. 44)

This chapter provides summary thoughts about the research findings, their impact and importance, and offers suggestions for further research. Paul and Mel lived a spirituality of belonging—a deep connection between themselves and others expressed in genuine and caring relationships. They lived in authentic communities that supported and valued their unique selves and gifts. The lives of Mel and Paul suggest a relationship between what Paul described as "that good feeling" and spiritual well-being, which is pointed out by Hammond (2011) in his discussion of the "The Holistic Care of Older People in Care Homes." Hammond's words resonate with the general findings of this study. Hammond links spirituality with identity and suggests that a spiritual need is met whenever a person feels connected with his or her true self:

> Spiritual well-being can be described as the 'good feeling' brought about by a life lived in relationship with family, friends, community, the natural world and God. If a person's spirituality is linked to their sense of identity, then a spiritual need is being met when a person feels encouraged to be their 'real inner self,' despite the outward changes of ageing, increased physical and mental frailty. (p. 112)

Faith is the name Armistead (1995) gives to one's "real inner self" (Hammond, 2011, p. 112), including those values and beliefs that are most sacred, central, and necessary for the self to be the self (Armistead, 1995, p. xvi). To live faithfully, elders (like all of us) need supportive communities to express their inmost identity and values through participation in relationships and activities in which they feel alive and truly themselves (Carlsen, 1996; Kivnick, 1993; Kivnick & Kavka, 1999; Steindl-Rast, 1998).

Steindl-Rast (1998) suggests that the more integrated our spirituality is with the life we live, the greater our sense of wholeness.

Spiritual wellness is the fruit of genuine connection with others and with God, or however one names and experiences ultimate meaning: to love and feel loved; to touch and be touched for reasons of loving, not simply to fulfill the mechanics of care (Johnson, 2013; King, 2004); to be visible and valued; and to value and make visible the sacred within and around us (King, 2004; Moore, 1994, 2015). The life we make is a life we make together. This may be no more important than near the end of life as we become increasingly frail and dependent upon the compassion and assistance of others. As Himes (1995) points out, no one can know the mysterious depths of another and their suffering. I believe it is only by love that we can be with and for one another in our darkest nights, in our deepest misery, and in facing the unknown. For Mel and Paul, love was the ground of their journey through the changes, challenges, and decisions they faced.

Hoare (2000) reviewed Erik Erikson's ideas about wisdom and integrity and charted the shifts in Erikson's perspective as he aged. In later life, Erikson was increasingly humbled by the misery and hardships one can meet near the end of life, something he could never have imagined until he arrived (Hoare, 2000). By the time he reached his 80s, Hoare said Erikson gave leeway to elders who displayed "childish" (Hoare, 2000, p. 90) instead of "childlike" (p. 90) behaviour, some of whom were handed a full measure of despair: a tangled and unimaginable existence marked by marginalization and loneliness, poverty and prejudice, and a knot of mental and physical health challenges. This would seem a hostile barrier to integrity and the contented close of a meaningful life we would like to imagine for ourselves. In later life, Hoare tells us,

Erikson saw faith as "integrity's companion" (p. 90), which was realized in an existential or spiritual identity. Erikson expanded his notion of wisdom in old age to the wisdom developed through the senses, alternative ways of knowing, pleasure, and discovery captured by Joan Erikson in her book, *Wisdom and the Senses* (Hoare, 2000, p. 90).

Society's devaluation and rejection of elders today sadly reflects the same reality that Erikson noted more than 30 years ago (Hoare, 2000). The empathic and authentic look at old age through the writings of Erikson et al. (1986) and others (Johnson, 2013; Applewhite, 2016; Erikson & Erikson, 1997) resonates deeply with me. I wonder how without cultivating a spirituality of belonging and an active approach against ageism can we possibly be what we need to be for one another? (See Applewhite's book *This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism.*) As Mel said, spirituality is the way we treat one another and function as a society. Hudson (2004) also states this: "Spirituality is not merely one dimension of a person. Spirituality lives and flourishes in the way we care for one another" (p. 93). Johnson (2013) reminds us of our common humanity. He tells us that most oldest elders long for what people of any age desire, that is "to have regular, reliable human contact" (Johnson, 2013, p. 14); to feel cared for, valued, and connected to life; and "to have the pleasure of human warmth" (p. 14). As the lives of Paul and Mel suggest, the line between the third and fourth age is watery—between independence and dependence—and the truth and hope is in our interdependence.

Albans (2013) observes that many oldest elders report fairly good health and remain engaged with life, often experiencing severe limitations for only a brief time, if at all (p. 26). The spirit, resiliency, and resourcefulness of oldest elders are apparent in the high level of well-being reported (Poon & Cohen-Mansfield, 2011). Albans cautions

against either an idealistic or pessimistic picture of aging because both are misleading (p. 26). The everyday reality of long-lived elders is more likely to reflect a balance of "despair and disgust vs. integrity" (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 112) moderated by considerable acceptance of one's limitations (Albans, 2013, p. 26). It is through the real life stories of our elders that we see portrayed the complexity of a long life. Their stories reveal the grappling with uncertainty, tensions, and limitations in light of an unchangeable past and a restricted future, as well as the gifts and blessings, and the unspeakable joys of old age (Albans & Johnson, 2013; Erikson & Erikson, 1997).

It seems to me that planning is not the first step in our hand-wringing about the growing number of elders we fear will overwhelm our health care and social services. Instead, we can begin by valuing our elders as ourselves, people with whom we need to include, listen alongside, and consult. We will then, perhaps, be in a better position to know how to use our resources wisely (Kaufman, 1986). I wonder what prevents us from knowing the great privilege and comfort it is to share life together, leaning on one another in love? To grasp this, I believe as Woodward (2013) proposes, that we must first see the elder within us and learn to love our inner elder who walks steadily toward us with hope in his or her eyes. When we open our heart to our inner elder, we are gently led into reality we might otherwise avoid, which includes our part in the suffering and alienation of elders that occurs when we run from our fears of growing old and blindly take up the myths of old age.

Paul said *"whatever you do"* could express your spirituality and therefore have meaning. Yet even within the context of a spirituality as fully integrated as his words imply, *"whatever you do"* needs a welcome, as Paul suggests: it has to *mean* something

to someone. Without a response—a valued response—it would seem joyless and impossible to sustain one's spirituality for most of us. As Lartey (2003) points out, spirituality is relational. The self is relational—the self is the continual "unfolding, transforming relationships" that we experience (Schlauch, 1995, p. 65). We need to be visible and valued by at least one other, to feel we have a meaningful impact on the world by our being here. Without anyone to feel close to, we may "fail to thrive," as MacKinlay (2004, p. 82) writes, and die like infants whose physical needs are looked after but are not loved (p. 82). Mowat (2004) states that an essential spiritual task of professional caregivers involved with elders is to "provide a setting whereby continuity of self and self in relationship with God can be maintained" (p. 51). Mel and Paul expressed their hope that they could continue to realize what is important to them and to live meaningful lives should they need to move into a care home. For Paul and Mel, their habits of an ordinary day expressed their spiritual values, their unique gifts, and their meaningful participation in family and community life that sustained their well-being.

Paul and Mel are exemplars of living from the heart—a lively metaphor for the "moving, changing, flowing," which Emoto (2005) says, "life is all about" (p. xvi). Moore (1994, 2015) elucidates this rich imagery in his writings about soul and soul's care. Soul thrives on the holy ground of everyday life transfigured by values and vision that transcend our self-centredness and that inspire and connect us to the world. As I reflect on Moore's message, I remember the sound of Mel's voice. At a gathering of a small group of friends I attended recently, I heard Mel as he turned to Mati and said with deep pleasure in his voice, "Isn't it great to have company, Mati!" It was the unmistakable sound of "Isn't it great to be alive!" I hear a deep love of life resonating in

Paul's voice as he sings, "Suzanne is a funny old man" that echoes a joyful resound in my own. I think of the woman in the church who felt "something" radiating from Paul and upon seeing him felt "hope" break through her despair. My mother has always loved music and loved to dance; in her last years, she could not stand erect, but she continued to respond to music as she could, and her lively spirit still danced in her eyes when she fed the squirrels. When I told her my husband and I were heading out to ride our bikes in another city, I can still hear her enthusiastic response: "Now, that's what I call living!" I have often wondered what it is about Paul and Mel, my mother, and other elders that makes them uplifting and delightful companions. When I think of my Uncle Harry throughout his 90s, I cannot recall a single telephone conversation that was not elevated by his laughter, our laughter, and the enjoyment of our connection. He was 96 when my husband and I received our last Christmas card from him. It was handwritten and addressed "To our best friends" and ended with an expression of his love for us. What makes these elders stand out? Perhaps it has something to do with the ageless "frequency" they carry that radiates a joy of life, generosity, genuine welcome and warmth, love, harmony, and gratitude—the sweet sounds of belonging.

The notion that we carry frequencies is validated by the work of Masaru Emoto (2005). Emoto reminds us that for much of our lives "we exist mostly as water" (p. xv); the average adult, he says, is about 70% water (p. xv), and this water within us carries our energy (p. xvii). He tells us that everything consists of atoms containing electrons whirling around a nucleus and is in perpetual motion and vibrating—everything in the cosmos (Emoto, 2005, p. 40). Each one of us is vibrating "at a unique frequency" (Emoto, 2005, p. 41) and "creating sound" (p. 42). Emoto's research involved taking

photographs of ice crystals formed from different water sources and while exposed to various types of music and written words. His results revealed the profound effect we have on each other and the world has on us. Water, for example, exposed to "violent heavy-metal music" (Emoto, 2005, p. xxiv) and to negative words such as "fool" (p. xxv) formed crystals that were broken and distorted. Classical music formed exquisite crystals that appeared to mirror the qualities of the particular piece of music (p. xxiv). Emoto described the most beautiful crystal that appeared after exposing water to the words love and gratitude:

> It was as if the water had rejoiced and celebrated by creating a flower in bloom. It was so beautiful that I can say that it actually changed my life from that moment on. Water had taught me the delicacy of the human soul and the impact that "love and gratitude" can have on the world. (p. xxvi)

Emoto's research shows that the images we carry resonate within us and affect our own and others' souls and all living things. Emoto says that in Japanese culture, "Words of the soul reside in a spirit called *kotodama*, or the *spirit of words*, and the act of speaking words has the power to change the world" (p. xxvi). His findings resonate with my Christian understanding of words to have the power to create what they speak, for example: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host" (Psalm 33: 6, ESV) and "Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body" (Proverbs 16: 24, ESV). Emoto tells us: "The message of water is love and gratitude" (p. 134), and these are fundamental to life and to spiritual well-being.

The Need for Further Research

> The Hindus greet each other by bowing with folded hands against the breastbone. This miniceremony means: 'I salute the divinity within you.' (Cowan, as cited in Brussat & Brussat, 1996, p. 319)

I believe the voices of our elders need to inform spirituality and aging discourse and theory, as well as inform those alongside our elders who are intimately involved in their care and concerns. This study is based on a small sample of two unique oldest elders living in Canadian communities, and although the findings are insightful, they cannot be generalized. Ongoing research is needed to build a basis for understanding the meaning and possibilities of spirituality in very late life. We need to hear from both men and women and consider gender differences and orientation, from persons representing the rich diversity of backgrounds and faith traditions, and from those who are guided by their inner spirituality apart from organized religion. MacKinlay (2001) states, "There is no time within the human life cycle where there is greater variability between individuals than there is in ageing" (p. 63) and in our personal responses to joy and suffering (p. 63). Although embedded in community, the meaning we make is deeply personal and our own (MacKinlay, 2001, p. 63). A Meaningful Belonging rivals the "terror of old age" (Woodward, 2013, p. 62), which Woodward (2013) says is "pointlessness and boredom" (p. 62). Woodward questions if this insidious form of despair is any different from "what some of us struggle with in middle age" (p. 62).

This research leaves me wondering what it is like to experience the letting go in the movement toward greater being—the eventual fact of organic aging (MacKinlay, 2001). As the lives of Paul and Mel revealed, the line between the third and fourth age is

blurry and is more of a continuum than a distinct phase of aging, and one's quality of life in the movement has a lot to do with access to resources and social support. In this study, Paul and Mel were asked to consider what they would need to keep their spirits vital should they need to move from an independent lifestyle in the community to supported living in a care home. How is spiritual well-being sustained as we live closer to being, the ground of all our doing? And how can we prepare for what is inevitable if we live long enough? Only by reverent listening to elders' testimonies of their lived experience can we begin to grasp the interplay of spirituality and aging in the joys and struggles of growing old in Canadian society, and within our global village, and to support our deepest human needs throughout life. Himes (1995) reminds us that our "knowledge depends on love. We do not know and then love what we know, we love and then are able to know" (p. 109).

In closing, the following excerpt from an anecdote shared by van Manen (2003) thoroughly describes my experience of the research process and co-researchers Paul and Mel: "A present can make friendship, but love and friendship make gifts, even the smallest ones possible" (Langeveld, as cited in van Manen, 2003, p. 115). Paraphrasing Langeveld, van Manen writes, "But whoever gives a gift (and not just a mere present) gives himself or herself" (p. 115).

Paul told me he experienced a "boost" in giving to this project and to me personally. He felt uplifted as he listened to what was sacred in his own heart read back to him during our consultations. Paul's response to his own words suggests that what is personally sacred is the soul's refreshment, deepest connection to life, and greatest resource. Mel said he felt closer to me in completing this project together. He was visibly

pleased and affirmative in response to the final reading of the narration and conveyed his pleasure in being offered a copy of the completed thesis for himself and his family. Mel told me he was glad his participation was helpful in terms of the project itself and also hoped that it had been helpful for my "true" life. I felt the entire experience to be a gift of understanding and of deepening relationships for which I am profoundly grateful. Paul told me that spiritual wisdom has been scattered like diamonds across the earth and whoever finds one has a treasure for his or her life. I have been given much, and I hope you, the reader, will have found some sparkling treasure for yourself.

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APPENDIX A

Invitation to Participate

Hello! My name is Cate Dauphinee and I am completing a Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality (MPS) program at St. Stephen's College in Edmonton, Alberta. One of my program requirements is to research and write a thesis; a thesis is a formal written report based on research exploring a particular area of interest.

My research interest is to explore how persons who are 85 years of age or older understand and experience their spirituality in their day-to-day lives and perceive its benefits.

The specific research question I will be investigating is:

How do persons who are 85+ years of age, and who live in their own residences in the community, understand and experience their spirituality in their day-to-day lives and perceive its benefits?

Definition of spirituality to be used in the study

For the purpose of this study, spirituality is defined as:

"What gives continuing meaning and purpose to a person's life and nourishes their inner being" (Methodist Homes for the Aged (MHA) Care Group, cited in Jewell, 2004, p. 22)

The methodology used in this study will be Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In this approach to research, the researcher interprets and analyzes participant accounts of their experiences in order to draw out or highlight participant meanings. As a participant, you will be asked to confirm that the researcher's summary account accurately reflects your experience.

You will be contacted in the next two weeks to confirm your interest in participating in this study. At that time, I will arrange with you to review this form (Invitation to Participate) and the Consent Form. You are encouraged to ask questions and express any concerns you may have. If you would like to invite a family member or friend to the review meeting, you are welcome to do so. You will be asked to sign the Consent Form to confirm your understanding of the research project and your decision to participate in the study.

After signing the Consent Form, a one-to-one interview(s) will be arranged with you at your convenience. Interviews will be audio-recorded. A quiet, private place will be determined by you and the researcher to complete the interviews. Interviewing will be completed in 1 or 2 sessions of approximately 1 to1 ½ hour duration each in which the following potential questions will be asked:

Possible Interview Questions

- How would you describe yourself?
- Would you tell me about an ordinary day for you?
- Would you tell me about important values or beliefs you have that guide
- your day-to-day actions and decisions?
- What would you say is most important to you in life?
- What kinds of things do you look forward to?
- Can you tell me about a time when you felt fully alive or awake to life?
- What kinds of things do you worry about or regret?
- What or who helps you cope with difficult times or decisions?
- What gives you a sense of peace? Can you tell me about a time when you
- felt peaceful?
- What gives you hope?
- What, if any, are "mysteries" of life for you?
- Would there be a picture, symbol or word that expresses what is most meaningful in your life
- What does "spirituality" mean to you?
- How does your spirituality benefit you?
- How may you have answered these questions differently in the past?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to decline to answer a question without explanation. You also have the right to withdraw entirely from the study at any time during the research process without explanation or consequence.

Following transcription, you will be asked to review the interview material to ensure you are satisfied that the transcription captures your statements and experiences faithfully. After data analysis, the researcher will ask you to meet with her for a follow-up interview to determine if you feel your experience was accurately captured by the researcher's account. Your privacy and anonymity will be respected and is outlined in the consent form.

Whether you decide to participate or not, I thank you for your time and your consideration of my research project.

Cate Dauphinee,
[telephone number]
[email address]

About Cate Dauphinee:
In addition to working toward the completion of a Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality degree, I am a registered social worker. I have an undergraduate degree in education and am a certified human service counsellor.

APPENDIX B

Letter of Consent

Purpose of the Study

I agree to participate in this research study, which explores spirituality in aging from the point of view of persons who are 85 years of age or older and reside in their own homes in the community.

Definition of spirituality to used in the study

The following definition of spirituality will be used for the purpose of this research:

"What gives continuing meaning and purpose to a person's life and nourishes their inner being" (MHA Care Group, cited in Jewell, 2004, p. 22)

The Interview Process

1. My involvement will consist of 1 or 2 interviews (1-1 ½ hours each), which will focus on exploring my perceptions and experiences of spirituality in response to the potential interview questions provided to me. The researcher and myself will determine a comfortable, quiet and private location for the interview(s).
2. Interviews will be audio-recorded. Non-identifying, descriptive information about me such as my age will be recorded as part of the research data. Interviews will be transcribed to text.
3. I will be provided a copy of the descriptive account of my person and a copy of the interview text to review for accuracy. The researcher will contact me by telephone for my feedback. I will have the opportunity to request changes to ensure that the written account accurately reflects my statements and experience.
4. The full interview transcript will not be included in the thesis. Excerpts or quotes will be included in the thesis and/or future publications without identifying me, unless I request otherwise.

Access to Research Data, Use and Storage of Research Data

1. The researcher and her thesis supervisor will have full access to the research data. The professional transcriber will have access to the audio-recording for the purpose of transcription. The transcriber will be required to sign an oath of confidentiality.
2. Interview results will be part of the researcher's Master's thesis and have the potential to be included in scholarly reports or presentations.
3. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for one year after the thesis is completed, at which time, the audio-recording and interview transcript will be destroyed.

Conditions of My Participation

1. Voluntary Participation

My participation in this study is fully voluntary. I am aware that I can choose to decline to answer any questions and/or voluntarily withdraw my participation for any reason and without consequence to me at any time during the research process. I understand that I am encouraged to share only that personal information with which I feel comfortable to share. If I choose to opt out of the study, my interview transcription will be returned to me and recorded data will be destroyed.

2. Anonymity

My identity will be protected and measures will be taken to ensure my anonymity, unless I request to be identified. For the purpose of this thesis and any other scholarly presentation, a pseudonym will be used in place of my name and the community in which I live will not be identified.

3. Potential Risks

Due to the personal nature of the study, I understand that the interview process poses the risk of triggering intense emotions and memories that may be stimulating, painful or discomforting to some participants.

If my health or well-being is jeopardized as determined by the researcher or myself, my participation in this study will be withdrawn. The researcher will contact me within 48 hours following each interview to assess the effect of the interview on my health and well-being.

The researcher will be available by phone throughout the interview and research process to discuss any concerns I may have.

4. Confidentiality and Limits to Confidentiality

I understand that my confidentiality will be respected throughout the research process; however, if I disclose to the researcher that my safety is at risk or the safety of another person, I understand that the researcher is legally obligated to report this disclosure to the appropriate authority.

Signing this form indicates the following:

1. You understand the information you have been provided concerning your participation in this study.
2. You agree to voluntarily participate in this study.
3. You understand that you can withdraw from this study at any time and for any reason during the research process if you so desire.
4. You have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

_____

Participant's Name (please print)

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____

Cate Dauphinee

Researcher's Signature

If you have any questions regarding this research and/or your participation, please feel free to contact me or my thesis supervisor:

Cate Dauphinee – Researcher

Phone: [phone number]

Email address: [email address]

Dr. Leslie Gardner – Thesis Supervisor

Phone: [phone number]

Email address: [email address]

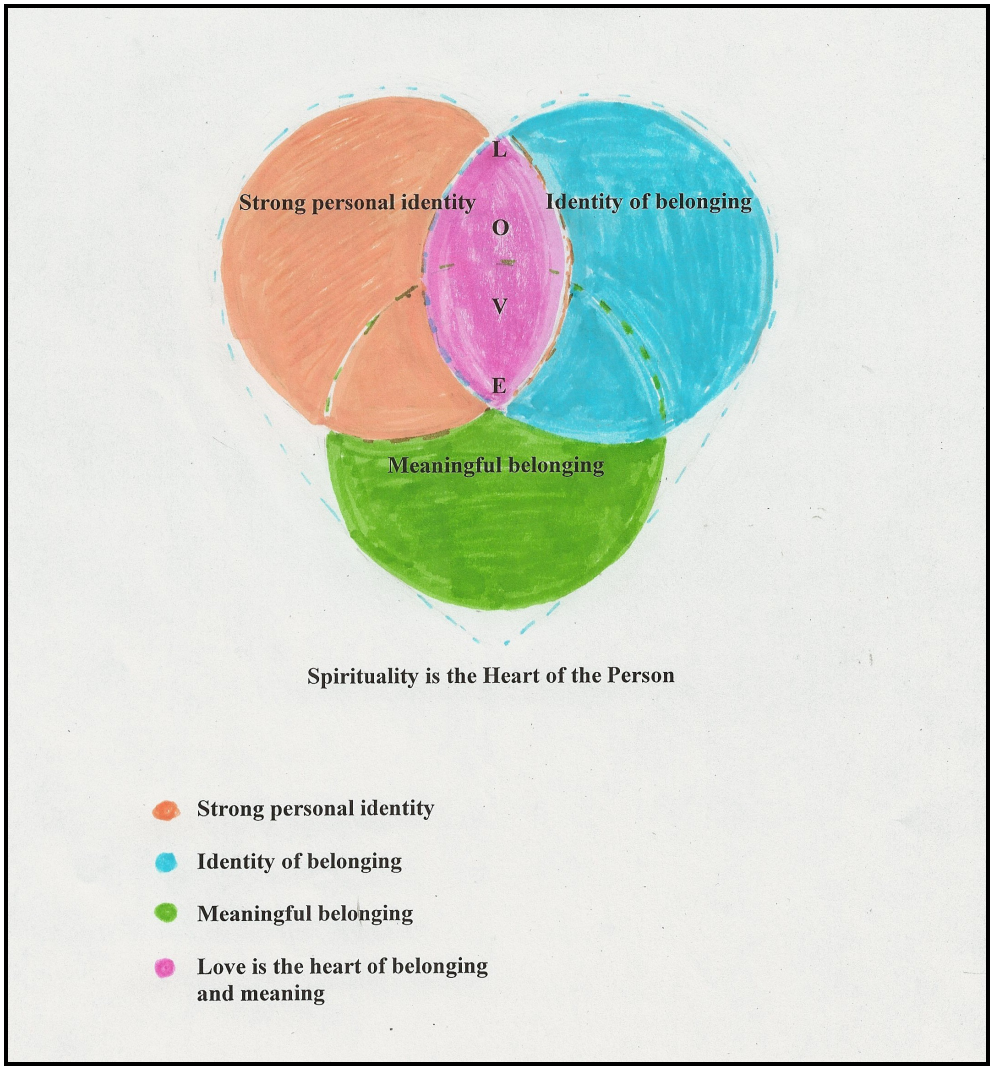
APPENDIX C

Primary Interview Questions

1. How would you describe yourself?
2. What does the word "spirituality" mean to you?
3. What gives your life meaning and purpose?
4. Would you tell me about important values and beliefs you have that guide your day-to-day actions and decisions?
5. Would there be a most important value to you?
6. Would you tell me about how your values developed?
7. What, if any, changes in your spirituality have you noticed, especially in the past 5-10 years?
8. Would you tell me about an ordinary day for you?
9. What gets you up in the morning? What is the best part of a day for you?
10. Would there be a picture, a word or a symbol that captures what is most meaningful in your life?
11. What is most important to you right now in your life?
12. What kinds of things do you look forward to?
13. What gives you a feeling of joy?
14. Can you tell me about a time when you felt fully alive or awake to life?
15. What gives you hope?
16. What, if any, are "mysteries" of life for you?
17. What or who helps you cope with difficult times or decisions?
18. Where do you find your strength?
19. What do you put your trust in?
20. How do you see your spirituality as benefiting you?
21. What kinds of things do you worry about or regret?
22. What gives you a feeling of peace? Can you tell me about a time when you felt peaceful?
23. Would you describe the ideal "assisted living" environment to keep your spirit vital?
24. If a friend wrote a book about you, what do you think they would say?
25. What advice would you give to those hoping to live to your age?

APPENDIX D

Spirituality of Belonging



APPENDIX E

Research Findings

Themes			
		Individual Subthemes	
Master Themes	**Subthemes**	**Paul**	**Mel**
Strong Personal Identity	The meaning of spirituality		
Identity of Belonging		That home feeling	
Meaningful Belonging	Love is the heart of belonging and the centre of meaning		Family is a living whole
	Habits of an ordinary day		
	The habit of doing good		
		The gift of a meaning and a purpose for the day	
	The good example		
	That good feeling . . .		
		Gratia agens	It's got to be a new thing
	Accepting it all, peace and satisfaction		
	Flexibility, adaptability, resilience		
	Hope– trust in belonging		
	Passing on that good feeling and good objective		
	Tensions	Holding the tension between heaven and earth	Uncertainty
	Final hope, gifts and words		